

Curator Jean McLaughlin proposed the following questions to the artists participation in the *Narrative, Abstraction, Iteration* exhibition.

2020 is the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote. As you think about the 19th amendment and the rights it stands for, what comes to mind? What has been made possible over the past 100 years that enables you to live as you do? What freedoms do you take for granted? What can we still make possible for those women and men who will follow us? What might we say or do for those women around the world without these freedoms?

Cathy Adelman:

“For this exhibition of women artists and their thoughts in relation to the 19th Amendment and the women’s movement, I have chosen three works that I hope will illustrate the kinds of things fine binders make as well as being expressions of my response to this great historic movement. The first is a binding of *Letter of Elizabeth*, a letter by the contemporary South African writer, J. M. Coetzee, purporting to be from an early seventeenth century English noblewoman. It is paired in my binding with a letter by the early twentieth century Austrian author and playwright Hugo von Hofmannsthal, purporting to be from Elizabeth’s husband, Lord Chandos. Both letters generally concern the two letter writer’s anguished loss of faith in the religious and philosophical foundations of their world and the impossibility of communicating the new reality they are beginning to see, interpreted here in the gloomy nonreflective black box in which the book is enclosed. However, Elizabeth’s letter in addition reflects J. M. Coetzee’s idea that, in that place and time, she would have been totally subservient to her husband and that indeed she would have been rapturously in love with him. ‘He alone is guide to me...’ she says, ‘Soul and body he speaks to me’ with ‘flaming swords.’ Her rapture is mirrored in the flame-red smooth box calf of the binding of the book itself.

From the complete subordination of women in the early modern world, as depicted in the Chandos letters, to the liberated life of Gertrude Stein is a long way. Much of the patriarchal world of the seventeenth century had been swept away by the economic and social movements of the nineteenth century and by the stresses of World War I. With the 19th Amendment, America had begun recognizing the equal position of women in its legal system. Nevertheless, change in American society and the traditional position of woman was happening too slowly for Stein, who after college and medical school, left to create a life as an independent avant-garde writer, collector and friend of artists in Paris in the first decades of the twentieth century. Her multifaceted talents and accomplishments were well described by herself in other books that had helped to make her famous. In her *Memoirs*, which is my second entry, she is more concerned with recounting the life of the French and herself in France. The prevailing mood is one of celebration. The difficulties and hardships associated with staking out and maintaining her independence and the threat of a new world war at the time of writing are not dwelled upon. My binding seeks to capture the mood of celebration, frivolity even, that pervades the *Memoirs*. Few other women of Stein’s generation were able to gain the social (including sexual) and economic freedoms for which she became famous. As the daughter of a wealthy and well-

traveled family, able and willing to support her in college, medical school and in Paris, she had advantages that became common only much later in twentieth century America.

I commemorate my own responses to the growing contemporary democratization of feminine freedom with my last entry, a tongue-in-cheek “fine” binding of five hundred of the boarding passes I have collected, many of which were obtained in my journeys to learn and teach bookbinding, at Penland and elsewhere, and to attend professional meetings and competitions. Its title, *A Million Miles on United She Who Flies the Most Gets the Best Seat*, says it all. While this entry uses materials and techniques of fine binding, it will readily be seen that is not. There is no book, for one thing, or none meant to be taken seriously, and books remain at the core of the art of fine binding.”

Ele Annand

“The 19th amendment is an interesting thing to ponder. Looking back on it now, it clearly gave white women the right to vote, but voting was still made difficult for many women of color. So while I am grateful for this step into the right direction, I think we need to expand how we talk about the 19th amendment to include the many further struggles that women went through to be able to vote.”

Georgia Deal

“Having grown up with the rights the 19th amendment secured for women, it is hard to know what life was like without them. Understanding today what the women’s vote actually means and how it impacts our current elections / representatives, etc., is very empowering. On the flip side, it was the women’s vote in my demographic that put Donald Trump in power, and that is sobering. Still, it is a hopeful time, as my daughter has a college friend who unseated a 28-year incumbent in a NJ town to become the mayor there - she was just 29 years old herself! Witnessing the number of women who entered Congress in 2019 is definitely encouraging, even if it took one hundred years since they were first given the right to vote. It seems there is much work to do in many third world countries with regards to women’s rights, but evidence of change appears every day and women’s collectives in countries such as India and Africa push women towards further independence. We must support these efforts in any small way we can - all women benefit when all women have a voice.”

Artie Dixon

“Just 7 years after the ratification of the 19th amendment, Penland itself was founded by a woman who cared about the welfare of other women, The timing of this is most likely an extension of what was happening historically in the United States, a shift in consciousness concurrent with that new right to vote, It was a birth of sorts, a time for women to express their own talents and strengths, curtailed unfortunately for many years by the oncoming depression.

I myself don’t give much thought to voting relative to women per se in my daily life. The 19th amendment was ratified 2 years prior to my mother’s birth. I am a keen observer to the fact that my mother, today 97 (legally blind and hearing impaired but clear-headed,) takes her voting responsibilities very seriously. It’s easy to understand the perils of not doing it. She’s never missed the opportunity and is a great example to me.

As a first-generation American woman, I knew my immigrant parents, like others, swam upstream against many odds to succeed in what they did. I am able to explore almost anything I'd like, which can also be attributed to furthering my education beyond that of my parents. I transferred to UNC Chapel Hill in a year I wouldn't have been accepted as a woman, however. No matter my qualifications, had it not been for my recent marriage to Dail, who was also accepted that same year, I wouldn't have been allowed in!

So, things *have* changed for the better. Yet, there still remain differences between us and women in quite a few countries across the Atlantic, so I don't take my freedoms for granted. I look back on Penland's precedent, being founded by a woman to teach other women the art of craft demonstrates just how hardy a bunch we are as women."

Courtney Dodd

"My papa was born in 1919. When I think of the change he saw in a single lifetime, it is astounding. He was born into a world a year before the 19th Amendment was passed. As he grew, his world expanded and shifted more than any generation in history. He went from hopping trains for work as a teenager, through the Great Depression, WWII, and the Civil Rights Movement. Beginning in a world where a single stamp cost 3 cents, growing up to be a professional linotype man with his own newspaper, he passed away knowing how to correspond via emails. His idea of communication pivoted from ink on paper to an ethereal notion of instant ones and zeros. Ideas and thoughts that would have taken weeks to months before to reach others, now were immediate. The impact of an individual had transformed. Voices could be heard, promoting change. During my papa's lifetime, he saw many minorities, including women, gain access to rights. He saw the world transition, slowly beginning to validate those voices. I hope that in my lifetime, I learn to fully listen for the voices less heard and those who have not been given a platform to speak."

Marie Fornaro

"When I reflect on the protracted battle for women's suffrage, I both think and feel countless things. I think about how women have, in almost every world culture, been so deeply and thoroughly associated with the roles of helper and caretaker that considering us fully autonomous humans, or thinking agents with relevant ideas, was publicly laughable for over a century after the founding of this country. There were 144 years between the formation of the United States and the granting of citizen's rights to women. I feel aghast as I write this, because I'm only now realizing that means we've had the right to vote for less time than we didn't. In some ways, that is a comfort, because it puts into perspective my frustration, and sometimes rage, at the torpid pace of achieving gender equality in both the private and public realms. I think about how insidious the idea of women as helpmates is, how deeply ingrained this dynamic still is in our everyday interactions with the opposite sex. How it might just take another century to unravel this oppressive paradigm.

I also think about the complicated role that race plays in our country's past and present, and particularly in the fight for women's suffrage. The suffrage movement was predominantly led by and represented white women, even though one of the most poignant questions was put to us by Sojourner Truth- "Ain't I a woman?" I think about how the intersectional nature of gender,

class, and race was not understood in the early 20th century, and how acknowledging the complicated nature of those intersections must be prioritized in the fight for gender equality today. As a white woman, I feel a sense of responsibility to ensure that the effects of systemic racism are not left out of the conversation. This feels particularly important now, given our current political climate.

Finally, I think about an interview I recently read, of feminist artist Judy Chicago, reflecting upon her piece *Dinner Party* and the art world's outright rejection of it at the time of its creation. She was thrilled at how far we've come in her lifetime, and entirely hopeful for the future. It was a refreshing read, as I had become so bogged down in my feelings that things aren't changing fast enough that I had forgotten that optimism was even possible. Her words made me feel hopeful for the future.

So much has been made possible over the past 100 years- the right to work in whatever field I desire, the right to own property, to have my own bank account, to marry or divorce whomever I choose, to run for and serve in public office, to choose if and when to have children. If I'm being honest, I probably take for granted every right that I just listed. It is easy to forget just how novel, and in some cases tenuous, those rights actually are.

Thinking about the rights of women around the world poses a heavy question. I'm not sure how to answer it, other than to say we are listening, and are here to help. Only they know how best to work towards equality within their own cultures and settings. I think it can be a tricky line to walk, to make sure efforts towards women's rights worldwide are not plagued by Western imperialist perspectives. At the same time, it's important to acknowledge that culture isn't static. A place or society that considers sexism an inherent part of their unique culture today may look back on that same practice or tradition with regret tomorrow. I think it is our role to work as hard as we can to continue to advance women's rights in the US, to listen to those who need help worldwide, and to leverage our resources and power to help them should they ask."

Stacey Lane

"I am grateful beyond explanation for the sacrifices made so that my daughters and I can vote, receive good educations, live independently, and make decisions about our own futures. Supporting leaders who find these rights to be basic rights and dignities that every person should enjoy is so important in a country that yields such influence around the world. "

Janet Link

"As far back as I can remember voting was an important part of my family's life. My mother was a member of the League of Women Voters with whom she worked hard to register voters and she took me with her on many of these drives. When we were little my brother and I spent every election day at Fire Station 6 in Raleigh where my mother was a poll official. She always took us into the voting booth with her, let us draw the curtains, and pull the little levers with a satisfying click to cast her votes. This was the magical part of a very long day. At 84 she still works at the polls, and it's my privilege to deliver a decadent snack to her in the afternoon of voting day. That

we have a duty to participate in our democracy by voting was an article of faith in my family that I've never found a reason to question.

Reflecting on the 19th amendment, I realize that my maternal grandmother, my namesake, would have been 21 and eligible to vote in the first election after its ratification. I don't know her views on the struggle for women's suffrage, how she exercised her right to vote. I don't know if she had particularly feminist views – she mostly deferred to my grandfather's judgement, but I do know that she got a master's degree from Columbia in the 1920's and had a long career as a librarian. Her daughter certainly was a proud feminist who voted with that interest in mind and taught me to do the same. I confess that I've taken the rights I enjoy, fought hard for by others, for granted; however, the current state of political affairs in the world make me feel less certain about their security.

I've been focused lately on the efforts of the Florida legislature to circumvent the will of their electorate who voted to amend their constitution restoring the voting rights of Floridians who've served their sentence for a felony conviction. I've donated to We Got the Vote (wegotthevote.org), an organization that's working to make sure that these citizens can register to vote. Part of their effort is to pay the fines and fees that the legislature is using as a poll tax to hinder their access to the voting booth.”

Jeannine Marchand

“I am eternally indebted to the women who have sacrificed, fought, and even died in the struggle to gain a right that should have been equal to all, regardless of sex, race, or religion. I wear my fiery heart on my sleeve and it saddens and angers me that despite the centuries of struggle, married women in North Carolina had no legal recourse or protection until November 7, 2019 when Governor Cooper signed Senate Bill 199 into law. The fact that North Carolina became the last state in the U.S. to uphold withdrawal of consent shows that there's still much to be done and that we must always raise our voices.

What freedoms mean to me (a divorced, single mother of three children):

My name is mine.

I have shared custody of my children.

I have a voice and will make my own decisions.

I own my land and property.

My inheritance belongs to me.

The money earned through my hard work is mine.

My sons and daughter will have an equal chance to an education and she will have a voice.“

Courtney Martin

“Honestly, I take my rights for granted. They seem like rights no one should ever be without. I am grateful to the women who have come before us to make things like women's right to vote

possible. However, when I think about women's rights, I think about all the change that still needs to happen. The place our society is in now is not good enough. Women need to be paid more, have larger voices in institutions, not take a place of "other." My daughter (age 8) told me recently that she couldn't be the president. When we told her that she could, she pointed out that it never has happened before. And, I see her point completely. So far, women can't be president. When I was a kid, I feel like I always heard issues about equality were in the past and things were only getting better. And, now I am 40, and while there's improvement, we are still so far from having equality (wages, healthcare, representation.)"

Rachel Meginnes

"I find myself less focused on what has been made possible in the last 100 years to wondering why it originally took so long and continues to take so long for all peoples to receive the basic rights white men have had since the founding of our country.

In looking back at the history of the amendment, it becomes clearer that the original dismissals of women's right to vote were closely tied to a concern that giving women the right to vote would only bolster and empower black people to vote as well. It destroys me to realize how white supremacist attitudes continue to be embedded in our country's laws and continue to create obstacles for women and black people denying that their voices truly be heard.

In a more direct answer to your question, I do know that I have benefited greatly from the passing of the 19th amendment. With these advantages, it is my hope that I am able to share our country's darker past and present in an effort to push for true equality in our country. Until we as a nation dissect and dismantle our own inequities and underlying racist systems can we hope to be a light for other nations and peoples."

Eleanor Richards

"Working in a field whose gender identity expectations have historically and experientially leaned towards another majority, I've been encouraged to find an even more distinct voice and approach. Communicating with this material in unconventional ways has been a personal act of resistance to established expectations; it has given me the ability to shape my environment with intention and challenge the entrenched notions of gender. It is a privilege, responsibility, and one of my life's guiding principles to continue engaging with this medium and the communities it sustains as thoughtfully and inclusively as possible. "

Gay Smith

"Seemingly, conflict, struggle, and sacrifice are required to create changes in ethics on a political or institutional level. Women's suffrage, the Emancipation Proclamation, Fair Labor Standards Act, unionization. My grandmother was 17 years old when the 19th amendment was passed. Although she could eventually vote, her best option was to marry well. My candelabra honor her, her fine aesthetics, her social skills, and her razor-sharp mind, a mind that in our

century would have opened her life to wide choices and options. What privilege I have inherited through the sacrifice of the suffragettes.

Their courage provided the gift of freedom, accrued bit by bit from 1920, to pursue my passion for working with clay. Yet, The World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Gender Gap Report predicts that gender equality is almost 100 years away.

(<https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>). I feel inadequate to the enormity of the task, and I find solace in holding a belief system, misguided and cowardly as it may well be, that it is enough to enact the privilege of living my life as a free woman and artist. My passion and fascination with making candelabra allows me to create vehicles to spread light in our world."

Jan Williams

"The first thing that comes to my mind is that my paternal grandmother, Caddy Jennings Williams would have been 29 the first time she could vote. My maternal grandmother Janie Sanderson Given would have been 24. Both of my grandmothers went to college, and became school teachers. And both quit teaching when they married and moved away from their families with their husbands to go where their husbands found work. Both were lucky that their husbands had essential work at home during the Great War and didn't have to go to fight in Europe. Both of my grandmothers had loving partnerships with their husbands, but other than jobs that they took on during WWII (one teaching, one nursing) they effectively worked in their home for the rest of their lives.

Although I didn't know my grandmother Caddy who died when I was two, I knew my grandmother Janie well. It wasn't until I was grown with a child of my own, and Grandma was over 80, that one day we sat down and discussed politics. Grandma said that she always had voted...always, once women could vote. She also said that living in West Virginia they were registered Republicans, but with a twinkle in her eye, she said, 'Yes, I was registered Republican, but you know, your Grandad never knew how I voted when I got inside that voting booth. Nobody did. He never knew I voted for Roosevelt. *He never knew I voted Democratic.*'

I thought about that secret, the amazing gift of the privacy of the voting booth. And I think how far we should have come in 100 years...how much women could have accomplished if they could have been in positions of power and government. Maybe our time is yet to come, but my mother, growing up in a time when women could always vote, left her job in New York City to marry my father. She followed him to Pennsylvania so that he could work in New Jersey. She stayed at home with us until we went off to college and then started a business of her own. She had told me that she grew up in a Republican household. (She too never knew about her mother secretly voting for Roosevelt...) In her late 80's mom grew restless. She voted for Al Gore for President, and then at 90 changed parties. If there is anything I can say about the past 100 years, I wonder how it was that things have moved so very slowly for women. How is it that we are so under-represented in government?"

Laura Wood

“I am forever grateful to American Woman Suffrage Association for the work they did to pass the 19th Amendment granting women equal voting rights. I grew up in a community and in a family that supported my dreams and encouraged me to pursue my goals. The acknowledgement of my voice has contributed greatly to my success. I am a business owner, a homeowner, proud feminist and supporter of human rights. I am empowered by the change this amendment put in place.”