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Oral history interview with Guerrilla Girls Frida Kahlo and Kathe Kollwitz, 2008 Jan. 19-Mar. 9

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview with Guerrilla Girls Frida Kahlo and Kathe Kollwitz on March 9, 2008. The interview took place at an undisclosed location in New York, New York, and was conducted by Judith Olch Richards for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. The text in curly brackets was added by the interviewees between 2008 and 2011.

Interview

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Kathe Kollwitz and Frida Kahlo of the Guerrilla Girls at one of their homes on Sunday, March 9, 2008, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc one.

FRIDA KAHLO: Okay, this is Frida.

KATHE KOLLWITZ: And Kathe.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, so why don't we begin? I'd like to ask various questions that each of you answer separately, but then, of course, there will be things that only one of you would like to answer. First of all, let's start at the beginning, and tell me what your first experience was, how you first were involved, and what were the Guerrilla Girls at that moment.

MS. KAHLO: Well, Kathe and I have been friends for a long time. We were artist colleagues before the Guerrilla Girls existed. And we long talked about what we could do to expose certain things about the art world that annoyed us and seemed unfair. I do recall meeting evenings in bars talking about it [Kollwitz laughs], and we would always make each other laugh, making fun of the art world in various ways. It coalesced and formalized around an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art [New York, NY] in 1984, '85, called "International Survey of [Recent] Painting and Sculpture" [May 17-August 19, 1984], which was the first show that the Museum of Modern Art did after one of their renovations.

And we noticed, because we were sensitizing each other to things in the art world that annoyed us, {there was a lack} of opportunity for women artists. And we didn't quite know how to attack it, and we didn't really understand it. We just knew it was there and it impacted our lives. So we did notice that in this exhibition there were only 17 women out of close to 200 artists. That {seemed} ridiculous{, especially since more than half my class in graduate school were women}. Then Kynaston McShine, the curator of the show, said to the press, "Anyone who's not in my show should rethink his career." That was the "aha" moment. It was like, Oh, he's not even thinking about us, {because} he doesn't even use the pronoun “she." So –

MS. KOLLWITZ: Can I pick it up?

MS. KAHLO: Sure.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Okay, so –

MS. RICHARDS: And this is Kathe speaking.

MS. KOLLWITZ: I'm Kathe. The Women's Caucus for Art called a demonstration. Because there were a lot of people pissed off about this show. They called –

MS. RICHARDS: Were either of you members of that?

MS. KOLLWITZ: No.

MS. KAHLO: Peripherally.

MS. KOLLWITZ: I wasn't. They called a demonstration, and there was a picket line outside the Museum of Modern Art and –

MS. RICHARDS: In those days, how did they call the demonstration? No e-mail?

MS. KOLLWITZ: I have no idea. I don't remember. But Frida –

MS. KAHLO: Phone numbers.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Who knows?

MS. KAHLO: And word of mouth.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Frida and I went to this demonstration. We were walking around in a circle {chanting}, “Museum unfair to women artists,” whatever. We noticed a few things. First of all, not one passerby refused to cross {our} picket line. {They walked right past us.}

So we started to understand a couple of things. First of all, maybe {this kind of demonstration} worked for the generation older than us, in the late '60s and early '70s, but now, in 1984, the old picket line wasn't working for this issue, number one. There had to be a more contemporary, different, better way to get this message across. We weren't convincing anybody at all. And we began to understand something we've revisited time and time again over the years: people think the art world is above it all. They don't think it's subject to the same – or should be subject to the same -- forces as other areas of society.

MS. KAHLO: Scrutiny. {No one scrutinized the art world. They just accepted it was the best it could possibly be.}

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes. So {compared to} fields that have changed immeasurably since second-wave feminism, the art world is way behind. Frida always had this phrase, “The art world isn't avant-garde; it's derriere.” So we started to realize these things at that moment, and there had to be a better way. So we had the idea to form a group, and {we} put up two posters on the street. We thought posters would be a great idea. And our first two posters –

MS. RICHARDS: Wait. Wait, back up.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So you decided, the two of you?

MS. KOLLWITZ: {Not exactly.} We invited {other} people to come to a meeting.

MS. RICHARDS: But you, the two –

MS. KOLLWITZ: We decided we needed a group.

MS. RICHARDS: – of you thought –

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: – let's start a group?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Let's start a group.

MS. RICHARDS: And then how did you –

MS. KOLLWITZ: We invited a small group of people. We met in {Frida’s} loft.

MS. RICHARDS: Who were all artists?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. KOLLWITZ: The first meeting was attended by a couple of people who never became part of the group. {The second meeting was attended by a few people who weren’t at the first meeting.}

MS. RICHARDS: And you were saying that you met in Frida's loft.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: But she wasn't - you weren't Frida at that time.

MS. KAHLO: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: You met in that loft.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes. We invited a few people, like Liubov Popova

MS. KAHLO: And they brought friends.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes. We invited a small group of people to come and we brought to the meeting the idea for the first poster{: “These Artists Allow their Work to be Shown in Galleries that Don’t Show Women”}. We didn't have all the research, but we had the idea. And at that meeting, we decided to do not one but two. We decided to do two versions of it, one pointing the finger at male artists and the other at galleries. And we passed the hat around, and we did the five-minute research that we used to do in those days.

MS. KAHLO: Well, we decided that we wanted to point the finger at male artists, our peers in the art world who participated in this system {that excluded us} by showing in galleries that didn't show women artists.

MS. KOLLWITZ: And didn't speak up.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you decide to start with pointing a finger at the male artists?

MS. KAHLO: They were our peers. They were the first people you expected{, or hoped,} not to behave that way.

MS. KOLLWITZ: We wanted – we felt everyone was responsible. It started with {male} artists. {We wanted to shame them, because they all thought they were so liberal and so enlightened.} {Then we went after the galleries.}

MS. KAHLO: So it was like two sides of the same issue. We asked, Well, where can we get this information? Well, we went to the Art in America annual that has, in one source, all this information.

MS. KOLLWITZ: It lists the galleries and all the shows of the year. So you could actually do the numbers, very quickly, just by using that {source. That was our five-minute research. It was so easy.}

MS. RICHARDS: What year was that?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Eighty –

MS. KAHLO: - five.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, it would have been the summer '84 annual. {Our first posters went up in May of '85.} The MoMA [Museum of Modern Art] show was in the summer of '84, I believe. It took us awhile.

MS. KAHLO: What we did was identify the worst galleries, that had either no women artists or fewer than 10 percent, and then we just started picking at random the most prominent male artists who showed in those galleries. And what was interesting is we came up with a lot of male artists who identified themselves with left-wing politics. And then the list kept growing, and we'd say, "Boy, these guys don't like each other. We're creating a club of artists who would never get along." And then the idea came, well, let's make it a club. What do they have in common?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. KAHLO: { We really} knew that a lot of them would argue with each other {if they were ever in the same room}. They would think they had nothing in common.

MS. KOLLWITZ: The headline was, "What do these artists have in common? They allow their work to be shown in galleries that show less than 10 percent women artists or none at all." And it was signed “Guerrilla Girls, Conscience of the Art World.” At the first meeting, we thought up the name, and we decided to be anonymous. And we did two posters, that and the gallery {poster}.

MS. KAHLO: We did the other side of {same information}–

MS. KOLLWITZ: Which was, “These Galleries Show Less Than 10 Percent Women Artists or None At All.”

MS. RICHARDS: Now, how –

MS. KAHLO: So it was two sides of the same issue. Once we got the guys, we also had their galleries. So in a way, they're two posters that go at either side of the same problem. And I remember arguing over the word "allow."

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. KAHLO: Yes, it's not, "These artists show their work." [Kollwitz laughs.] We wanted to make them feel guilty. We said, "They allow their work to be shown."

MS. KOLLWITZ: Right. Then we spun this out over every group in the art world. The idea was everyone is responsible for {the situation}. We were in a period of time when everyone was saying, "Oh, you can't change that. You can't do anything about that." There had been these gains from the second wave of feminism, and then it had all backslid. We could see that things had backslid, and that was {something}, as young artists, we were really pissed off about.

MS. RICHARDS: When you had that first meeting, did you have an idea how your group would function, how it would –

MS. KOLLWITZ: No

MS. RICHARDS: What kind of – how big it should get?

MS. KOLLWITZ: No.

MS. RICHARDS: Who should be allowed to be a member?

MS. KOLLWITZ: No.

MS. RICHARDS: So it was totally free-form.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Totally. {But we did make it clear that we wanted to be an action group, not a discussion group.}

MS. RICHARDS: And whoever showed up for the second meeting, how would they hear about it?

MS. KOLLWITZ: It wasn't {exactly} open. {We didn't advertise;} we just invited people. It has never been open. We invited a bunch of people, and we started this group. For the second meeting, a couple of people at the first meeting didn't show up, and {others came in their place}. But it was never an open membership, ever.

MS. RICHARDS: But how – it was friend of a friend?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Basically.

MS. KAHLO: Yes. We were always a little afraid, because we really thought that we were dealing with dangerous stuff, and if it were discovered who we were, it would be the end of our art careers. So we also had to invite people into the group who we could trust to protect our anonymity.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So how – tell me why you – of course, I've heard other artists talk, other Guerrilla Girls talk about this, but tell me what were the principles behind anonymity.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Okay, there weren't really principles. In the beginning, at the very outset, at that first meeting, we decided to be anonymous for purely self-serving reasons. We were afraid our careers would get hurt, and we thought we should be anonymous. Almost immediately, we realized that it was a fantastic part of what we did. Why? The art world was a small place. You couldn't discount what the Guerrilla Girls were saying because you didn't like someone in the Guerrilla Girls. It's such a backbiting little, tiny little world.

And also, it kept anyone from getting credit. And here we are still, to this day. Frida and I, with a few other people, we've been involved in almost every single project this group has done for 23 years, and it's still a labor of love. We don't get personal credit for it, although the work is so fantastic and interesting to do. {We get a lot of – a lot out of it, but it doesn't help our careers.}

MS. KAHLO: {I think a lot of the former members thought Kathe and I would out ourselves because we put so much into the work. But we never have. } It's never been a career strategy {for either of us}. It was nothing I ever planned. It just got so interesting, I could never leave it. And then it became a responsibility. We started something that I couldn't really leave. I've given up {lots of personal career} opportunities to continue this work because it's gotten so interesting.

Another thing is we really wanted to annoy people in the very beginning. The art world is such a clubby, little upper-middle-class place, and we always complained about how class-bound it was. And the {implication} that there had to be guerrillas, there had to be freedom fighters, in this {sophisticated social milieu, in order to change anything}, we knew that that would really annoy {and maybe scare} people, because it was so impolite; it was so in-your-face.

MS. KOLLWITZ: We also just wanted to announce that we were a different kind of group. That's partly where

the name came from, {Guerrilla Girls, which Frida came up with while we were brainstorming. We wanted to} use the word "girls" {instead of “women”}. That even {annoyed} some of the members, some maybe who you've interviewed, {who were a little older than us and preferred the politically correct term “women.” This was way before Girl Power or Riot Grrrls.}

MS. RICHARDS: How did it first start that you came up with "Guerrilla"?

MS. KAHLO: We were guerrillas before we were gorillas. We were the freedom fighters first.

MS. RICHARDS: And in these early posters, then, did it say “guerrillas”?

MS. KOLLWITZ: We named ourselves Guerrilla Girls at that first meeting. It just {clicked}.

I'll tell you something else. All those years ago, to actually do a poster was hugely difficult when it had words in it. {Because typography cost a fortune in those days, pre-computers –}

MS. RICHARDS: Who designed the graphic, the poster?

MS. KAHLO: She did {[pointing to Kathe]}.

{MS. KOLLWITZ: I designed the poster. Frida and I wrote the copy together.}

MS. RICHARDS: Because the graphic design is - well, there's a style to it, obviously, and you've maintained that. There's a kind of consistency, I think.

MS. KAHLO: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, the consistency is because –

MS. RICHARDS: Is that because one person was the graphic designer?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Maybe. I don’t think we should ever say that. Maybe.

{MS. KOLLWITZ: Okay, okay. I was the designer, and I have designed just about everything the Guerrilla Girls have ever done. }

{MS. KAHLO: That direction didn't come out of nowhere. You had experience in advertising. You understood how to construct a message and communicate it.

MS. RICHARDS:} And how did the masks with G-O-R –

MS. KOLLWITZ: But many members {gave suggestions and criticism and ideas, and the copy} writing has been a collaboration{, mostly between Frida and me. Especially in} our books, {particularly} in our books.

MS. RICHARDS: How did the masks come to be? How did it get changed into gorilla, G-O-R?

MS. KAHLO: After we put up the first few posters –

MS. RICHARDS: And you, obviously – how did you put those up?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Just put them up. {Wheat paste.}

MS. KAHLO: We put them up at night. We decided to go out at midnight on Friday nights, because many of us lived in SoHo, and we knew that people would go out to the galleries in the morning. So if we went out late at night, we'd be finished about 3:00 a.m.{, and posters would be on the walls when the galleries opened}.

MS. RICHARDS: And you focused on SoHo because that's where people –

MS. KAHLO: Yeah, we put the first couple of posters up without wearing the masks. We didn't even have the idea of the masks then. We were guerrillas. And then immediately we got a phone call from – who was that woman who wrote for the Village Voice?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Ellen Lubell.

MS. KAHLO: Yes, from the Village Voice.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes, Ellen Lubell.

MS. KAHLO: She called us up. I don't know how she got ahold of us.

MS. KOLLWITZ: She knew us. Come on.

MS. KAHLO: Well, anyway.

MS. KOLLWITZ: [Laughs] That's how.

MS. KAHLO: Anyway, she called us up and wanted to do photographs. She wanted to do an article for the Village Voice. And we thought, "Oh, God, we can't do that." And then we thought, "Well, maybe there's some way we can."

MS. KOLLWITZ: People didn't just want to talk to us on the phone. They wanted to {see} us.

MS. KAHLO: And they wanted photographs.

MS. KOLLWITZ: At first, we used to wear ski masks, all sorts of things. The gorilla masks didn't come right away. But it was divine intervention.

MS. KAHLO: It happened serendipitously. Some say it was because an early member misspelled "guerrilla" and wrote it "gorilla," and that gave us the idea. It was, like, "Wow." I remember going out and putting up posters. In the beginning, Kathe and I put a lot of those posters up. We went out every Friday night.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Covered with fucking wheat paste.

MS. KAHLO: [Laughs] I remember doing it once with a gorilla mask and coming back with glue all over the mask. And I realized we got more{, unwanted} attention wearing the masks.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Didn't we use someone's car? Was it your car?

MS. KAHLO: My car, yes. I would drive.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Oh, God. Kills your car.

MS. KAHLO: {We also} drove to the East Village. And we would mix the glue up in my loft.

MS. KOLLWITZ: – two people, sometimes three or four people.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you get stopped by the police?

MS. KOLLWITZ: We were pretty lucky. {Frida and I never got stopped, but} other girls did. But also we were the worst poster putter-uppers. {Does our} reputation hinge on the fact that we were really good at postering all of SoHo? Hell, no. We just put up some posters, and then they'd get torn down the next day. That's it.

MS. KAHLO: Actually, I thought we were better than we give ourselves credit for. What we discovered is if you add a little bit of Elmer's Glue to the wheat paste and you use a squeegee, the poster would stay up for a long time. [Kollwitz laughs.] But anyway, one poster turned into another, turned into another. And what was {tantalizing} was SoHo was such a small little community that we could put posters up Friday night at midnight, and then the next afternoon go out and hang out by them and listen to people talk about them. I remember one day, not far from where I lived, I was hanging out around one of the posters {with my ears open}. Diane Brown, who owned a gallery, came walking down the street {where I was standing in front of the poster with her gallery name on it}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: And she was on it [laughs].

MS. KAHLO: Her little boy was with her, and he was just learning to read. And he's reading, "'These Galleries Show No More Than 10 Percent Women Artists or None At All. Diane Brown.' Mommy, what does that mean?" [Kahlo and Kollwitz laugh.] He saw his mother's name on the poster. And she sort of said, "Never mind, it's not important. It's not important." But it was a classic moment, because then we realized that people were embarrassed {to be named on our posters}–

MS. KOLLWITZ: {Yes. No one wanted to be on our lists.} And it was so delicious to go to parties where people would be talking about the Guerrilla Girls, both pro and con. I remember, as myself, having a meeting with the chief curator of a museum about an exhibition, and he says to me, about one of his under-curators, "She's a Guerrilla Girl." It was not true. And I say, "Oh, really? Why do you say that?" And he goes, "Because she's always counting." And I said to him, "Don't you realize all women count?" And it was just delicious to have this secret.

MS. RICHARDS: Let me ask you a follow-up question to that. Do you believe that your anonymity should be forever, and when you pass away and your art career is discussed, it should never be noted that you were a Guerrilla Girl?

MS. KOLLWITZ: I don't believe that at all, because I don't think it matters who the Guerrilla Girls are anymore. It's great to be anonymous –

MS. RICHARDS: You do stay anonymous now, but when your career is over, you think it's –

MS. KOLLWITZ: You mean, our life is over; I think it's absolutely fine. Why not?

MS. RICHARDS: So then you let people know, so that at some point, when your biography is written or –

MS. KOLLWITZ: Every Guerrilla Girl has told {someone} about her involvement. I've had people come up to me and say, "You're a Guerrilla Girl." I say, "No, absolutely not. How do you know that?" And they'll mention some former member. We had someone come up to us at a gig - we make appearances all over the place – just a couple weeks ago and said, "My girlfriend so-and-so was a Guerrilla Girl years ago." This, in a place miles away from New York. So people know. It's just not important. It's the least important thing.

MS. RICHARDS: But there is a difference of opinion, I think – among the Guerrilla Girls - about whether –

MS. KOLLWITZ: There are a few {former members} who don't want to {ever admit their involvement during their lifetimes because it could affect a lot of aspects of their lives and careers. But they have agreed to have it come out in their obituaries. I} don't see it as an issue.

MS. KAHLO: Everyone's opinions about things change over time. Nothing is constant. And Guerrilla Girl work isn't the same as it was 20 years ago. The art world isn't the same. Everything changes. And to hold onto some dogged idea forever is a little rigid {and maybe naive}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: {Former members should be able to decide whether they want to reveal their membership in the group.}

MS. KAHLO: But we're not telling you who we are.

MS. RICHARDS: So going back to the beginning of –

MS. KAHLO: But, here's an issue. The anonymity is great and fine, but when someone {, a former member who did not author Guerrilla Girl work,} claims credit for having done it {or appears in front of an audience as the presumed author of work she didn’t do} –

MS. KOLLWITZ: - that's different.

MS. KAHLO: The guise of anonymity {under those circumstances}, to me, is an ethical issue. And I think we do have to come down on it, because that's unfair and dishonest.

MS. RICHARDS: So you mean, saying to someone, saying publicly, "You were not a Guerrilla Girl"?

MS. KAHLO: No. {Lots of members did not participate in the work of making the posters or writing the books. If a former member implies publicly} to be the author of our books or posters and they did not write or design them, that is an ethical issue. {They just shouldn’t do it. It’s dishonest.}

MS. RICHARDS: Does that bring up –

MS. KOLLWITZ: One thing about this group, Judith. Everyone has their own opinion about everything, and they should, and they do. So they'll do it their way, and other people will do it their way. There's probably as many ways and opinions as there are people who were ever in this group. And remember, of the maybe 60 or 70 people who came in and out of this group all of these years, some were in for an hour, {some for a year,} some for a decade, some forever. Everyone has their own, different experience of it.

MS. RICHARDS: At the very beginning, or in the early years, how did the collaborative, this collaboration which you're talking about, or its common problems of collaboration – of people getting credit – how did it function?

MS. KOLLWITZ: There {was} no credit.

MS. RICHARDS: How did the work get divided? How did the responsibilities, how did the decisions get made, actions?

MS. KOLLWITZ: {We} would bring ideas to meetings, and if everybody thought it was okay, we would design them and print them up

MS. KAHLO: It {worked, with} a little bit of piss and vinegar. Whoever felt strongly enough about a project to make it happen, did it. And oftentimes the people who wanted to make it happen were the people had the idea in the first place. {If} you really believed in it{, you could find the time and energy to do it}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: {Frida and I brought a lot of ideas to meetings.} There would be a big discussion. It was exciting, especially in the beginning. There was a lot of give and take.

MS. KAHLO: It was a lot like rock bands. {You bring an idea to the group;} you improvise; you do something; it grows.

MS. KOLLWITZ: But we were all busy people, and not everyone was into the strategy of it, the way some of us{, like Frida and I,} were. Many people contributed, but anyone who has ever worked in a group knows that there's always some people willing to spend a lot of time, while others do {only} what they can. Some members came to meetings; they voiced an opinion that might, or might not, have an effect {on the evolution of the project}.

It was very easy, early on, {for us to go after different groups} in the art world. We {went after} artists, {then} galleries. Okay, {then} critics, {then} museums, {then} collectors. That was our early work.

MS. KAHLO: {We started by doing posters about} all the subgroups of the art world that, in one way or another, just passed the buck {about why so few women and artists of color were being shown}. When we first put up our early posters {that named names}, everyone started to get defensive, and the male artists would say, "Well, I can't influence what my dealer says." And then the dealers would say, "Well, I can't sell a work that collectors don't buy." And then collectors said, "I won't buy any work that doesn't get reviewed." And then the critics said, "Well, I can't review something that my editor doesn't tell me to review." And the editor says, "Well, I can't assign anything that's not in a {commercial gallery or} museum." So it kept going around and around and around. {They were all guilty and responsible for working to change discrimination within the system.}

So part of the idea was to put every little subgroup on call, on the block{, shame them into action}. And it got to the point where no one wanted to be on our posters. We thought that was really great. To think {powerful people in the art world} went to work every day and thought, "Well, what can I do today so that I don’t get put on a Guerrilla Girls poster?"

MS. KOLLWITZ: [Laughs] Some people perversely probably wanted to be on {one of those posters}.

MS. KAHLO: We wanted to make it part of their thinking. If they wanted to avoid being fingered by the Guerrilla Girls, maybe they'd start to think about women and artists of color. And as a result, we did get some interesting letters early on, apologies in fact, from a couple of people. Ida Panicelli wrote us an apology, and [art scholar] Thomas McEvilley.

MS. RICHARDS: When Ida wrote you the apology, what was her position?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Oh, editor of *Artforum*.

MS. RICHARDS: And who else did you say?

MS. KAHLO: And Thomas McEvilley wrote –

MS. KOLLWITZ: I thought [New York Times art critic] Roberta Smith also said that she wasn't really aware of how bad her coverage was.

MS. KAHLO: {She might have said that publicly or in print, but I don’t recall getting any correspondence from her.} But I remember getting a letter from Thomas McEvilley saying, "Thank you. I didn't realize that I haven't really paid much attention to women artists." That was kind of great to think that we actually could have a proactive effect.

MS. RICHARDS: So you had an address, a street address?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes. {We always put an address on the posters.} First it was a box in a post office {at Cooper Street Station}, and then it was 532 LaGuardia Place, which is a postal service. {Now it’s a post office box at Knickerbocker Station on East Broadway.}

MS. KAHLO: And we started getting unsolicited donations from people who would see our posters and really liked them. We got a letter once from a woman who said, "I work for so-and-so. He's on your poster. You're

right; he's really an asshole. Here's $25." All of a sudden, {there was the possibility that} people in the art world in positions of power {might be} afraid that their secretaries or assistants or coworkers were spying on them for us [laughs].

MS. KOLLWITZ: Which has been true. We have a lot of moles. Not just assistants and secretaries, but a lot of other people all over the place. Someone who worked {in the development office of} the Whitney Museum [of American Art, New York City] sneaked out a lot of information about the museum trustees that we used in our Clocktower Show, “Guerrilla Girls Review the Whitney” [1987]. {That information helped form our critique of the corruption of art museums.}

Also, I think very early on, we realized we had developed a voice with humor and {information}. And Frida is the world's most brilliant researcher, always figuring out a strategy, what to look for, how to think about it. We should tell them about that “Get Naked” thing later, but anyway, we realized pretty early on that we had developed a {distinct} voice. Obviously, we were a group of women who, even if we participated in the art world, we hated it. And we still do; {we love art, but} we hate the system. It's so unethical; it's such bullshit. Even if we benefited from {the art system, it’s a terrible way to make art history}. But we didn't want to only do things about art, so very early on {we decided to also look at issues beyond the art world}.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that unanimous?

MS. KOLLWITZ: No, it was never unanimous. But there were quite a few other people who wanted that, too.

MS. RICHARDS: And was there any diversity in the membership early on, in terms of even generations?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Let alone racial and ethnic –

MS. KOLLWITZ: That's how it really started. We had some second-wave feminists, some {veteran} feminist artists were in the group, and we had –

MS. KAHLO: {By our second year,} we were a very diverse group{, especially compared to the rest of the art world, which was practically all white male artists helped by white females [gallery owners,critics, curators and dealers]. We were young, old, lesbian, straight, and also artists of color. Our members of color always thought they were not enough, and that was a fair sentiment. But we did our best. We were miles ahead of the rest of the art word and other artist groups. Our first poster about black women artists came out in 1986, one year after we started. We were also at all levels of art world success: some well-known, some obscure}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Many different kinds of artists joined us, including many artists whose work was not anything like the Guerrilla Girls’ work. But they were committed to the ideas.

Anyway, so we {developed} this voice. It was based on facts and humor and never just pointing something, the way a lot of political art does, and saying, "This is bad." Our idea from the very beginning was, there's got to be a way to twist an issue around and present it differently, so it affects people who would never think about it otherwise. We didn't want to speak to the converted, even in the art world. We wanted to change people's minds. {We wanted to be transformative.} That's something we still feel very much. So we would always try to find the solution that could change people's opinions. And we wanted to try that voice out in politics and eventually in other areas of culture{, like reproductive rights, issues of war and peace, and, of course,} Hollywood. We've written a book about female stereotypes as well as {an art history book about women artists}.

MS. KAHLO: I look at these early posters - some of them aren’t particularly funny. We were always thought of as being funny, but they {aren’t really}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: They're in-your-face.

MS. KAHLO: And this is interesting, because I haven't thought about this one for a long time. As things developed and people responded to our work over the first two or three years, we realized that the art world really lagged behind the world at large. It lagged behind medical schools, the legal profession{, business}. There were efforts to include women in those fields. In the army, for sure. {But in the art world, nothing but excuses for why there were no women artists in galleries, museums, art history books.} The idea that the art world was behind, and also why it resisted being scrutinized like other fields, was tantalizing {to pursue in our critique, because we knew we were right and that the art world was biased and discriminatory. If liberals} demand that there be women in medical schools and in law schools, why can't they do it in the art world, too? Let's go after the art world. Well, why can't it be {examined sociologically? Most everyone, even the most radical artists and art thinkers,} thought at that point that the art world had its own independent history. {I

think} it was an outgrowth {of the absolutism of formalism}. Art had its own story to tell, and it deals with values that are apart and above the values of the rest of the world, and no one can monkey with them. {The essence of "artistic license."} But we wanted to monkey with it.

MS. KOLLWITZ: "Monkey," the operative word [laughs].

MS. KAHLO: Yep, monkey is the operative word. So we decided that it might be interesting to organize a panel discussion or a series of panel discussions where we invite critics and gallery owners to publicly speak on the issue to see if they might say ridiculous{, sexist, racist} things. So we organized two evenings at the Cooper Union. One was called "Hidden Agender," and it was an evening with art critics. We made sure we invited people who were both pro-feminist {and anti-feminist} –

MS. RICHARDS: It took place on April 28th in what year? And again on May 2nd.

MS. KAHLO: { April 28, 1986. A second panel with art dealers, "Passing the Bucks," was on May 2, 1986.}

MS. RICHARDS: Were these the first public events?

MS. KAHLO: No. {We curated} an exhibition at the Palladium in October of 1985. {For the Cooper Union panels,} we wanted to choose people who would be pro our position and anti our position, because we wanted to set up a fight. And what was interesting with the art critics, they all agreed with each other. They kept saying, "This is a terrible problem, but what can WE do about it?" So then we went after the dealers. We had Ronald Feldman, Gracie Mansion, Penny Pilkington, Tony Shafrazi, and Holly Solomon. At the last minute, Tony Shafrazi backed out because he said he didn't want to be on a panel talking about art with a lot of middle-aged women. {Bingo, we had our first catch of the evening–}

MS. KOLLWITZ: And isn't that still the case [laughs]?

MS. KAHLO: It was, "Whoa, he could say that and not be embarrassed?" {So it was announced that Tony Shafrazi would not on the panel because - and we repeated his comment.}

MS. KOLLWITZ: That's actionable.

MS. KAHLO: {Yes. Everyone was aghast. Then, in the middle of the discussion about what women could do to help their own careers,} Holly Solomon got up and said, "I don't know why women have to demand representation. Why don't they use our natural gifts? Why don't women use their breasts?" {And we do somewhere have the tape of that, and it's kind of interesting to listen to.}

MS. KAHLO: She said, "Use your breasts. Use what you were born with."

MS. KOLLWITZ: Seduce them.

MS. RICHARDS: Did she – wait, did she –

MS. KAHLO: And these were [what] the {professionals artists} need to help them make careers? It was unbelievable{, so insulting}. I felt so empowered by that evening. And it filled up the Cooper Union. Everyone thought, oh, feminism and women artists, it's not an important issue. {No one will come.} But, it was {a} full {house}. Carrie Rickey, who was always a great supporter of ours – was working in Philadelphia – she agreed to be the moderator, and she was terrific.

MS. KOLLWITZ: The Palladium {show} was before that. The Palladium {at the time was} a bathroom coke scene {that used contemporary art as décor} - only they had all guy shows.

MS. KAHLO: Ian Schrager's [Palladium owner] girlfriend was a friend of one of the early members.

MS. KOLLWITZ: So he asked us, "Do you want to do an exhibit?" So we did an exhibit at the Palladium of, probably, {a hundred} women. But we realized that that exhibit was the worst possible thing we could ever do. It was kind of great because it changed that very male culture there, but it was horrible because we {had to leave lots of women} out. And we realized we will never, ever do an exhibition again. We will never be curators. We represent all women artists, not a selection of them. We don't ever want to be in a position of saying, "You, not you; you, not you."

MS. RICHARDS: Was there also a sense of a conflict of interest then, because people would be seen as using Guerrilla Girls for their career, having something on view?

{MS. KOLLWITZ: But we never said whether or not our members had work in the show.

MS. RICHARDS:} So the people you invited to be in the exhibit weren't members?

{MS. KAHLO: A small number were members, but the vast majority were not.

MS. RICHARDS:} But they were your selections, so that choosing –

MS. KAHLO: Yes, that's why we haven't done it since. We realized that was a mistake. {Because we wanted to overwhelm the place with art by women, we invited just about} everyone we knew. It was a mistake, but it was tantalizing to put {so many} women artists in that kind of fashionable setting. Up until then, shows of women artists were usually thought of as, well, ho hum, the Salon des Refuses. We didn't want that. {We wanted to invade the establishment,} invade the boys' club{, make a show of women artists sexy}. And, in fact, we did those little {street posters }– and the Palladium at the last minute realized that we were doing a lot of our own publicity for the show.

MS. KOLLWITZ: "{On Oct 17} the Palladium Will Apologize to Women Artists." We put this up all over town. It really pissed the Palladium off. {They called us up and chewed us out. We laughed all through the conversation and faked an apology.}

We still appear inside institutions and piss them off at the same time. {Maybe that's where it started.}

MS. RICHARDS: Can I ask you, each of you, how did you pick your names? And how did it come about that – was it the very first meeting you all decided to have a [pseudonym]?

MS. KOLLWITZ: No. This was later.

MS. RICHARDS: How did that come about, and how did you, individually, pick your names?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Eventually we realized that we needed {individual names within the Guerrilla Girls}. When we went places {in a group or in pairs}, we needed to be individuals in some way. So this idea came up to have dead women artists as pseudonyms, and it was {a useful} idea because art historians were re-finding and representing the work of a lot of women artists from history. Most of the pseudonyms that people took were {artists} they'd never heard of before they started {and only discovered when they} read up on women artists{, looking for a name}.

It's very personal for everybody. Kathe Kollwitz is not my {all-time} favorite artist, but she's a great {role} model. She was an activist as well as an artist. She didn't believe in the expensive, fancy art system. She did a lot of cheap prints that she gave and sold very cheaply. She did a lot of work about working people, about women and children, even work about sex. She was a fierce woman artist and activist who I really admire.

MS. KAHLO: She was also persecuted by the Nazis and survived them.

I chose Frida Kahlo because I had just finished Hayden Herrera's biography [Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo. New York: Harper Perennial, 1983] about the time {our group began}. There was an underground knowledge of Frida Kahlo, but she wasn't the icon that she is now. I was taken by how {defiant} and outspoken she was, and also she was a little crazy. So it was a no-brainer for me. Also, I think I'm a closet Latin, trapped in the body of a Northern European. [They laugh.] I go to Latin countries and turn into someone I hardly recognize, so I just thought I had to be a Latin{a}. [They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: And so from then on everyone took a name?

MS. KOLLWITZ: {Most} wanted to. Some members never had a name because they weren't really a part of it long {or couldn't make up their minds}. But, yes, the idea was everyone should choose a name. One early member -- who I think you interviewed – just decided to be GG1.

MS. KAHLO: When we {made phone calls for the group using our pseudonym}, it was really interesting {to see who would take the call immediately and who would chose to call back later.} I called Kirk Varnedoe at MoMA and got him on the phone {instantly}. People loved to talk to the Guerrilla Girls. {Or maybe they were afraid we were going to put them on a poster and maybe they could talk us out of it!}

MS. KOLLWITZ: It just became part of our shtick to have the pseudonyms.

MS. RICHARDS: In the early years, you were focused entirely in the art world. When did you –

MS. KOLLWITZ: No, we weren't.

MS. RICHARDS: No?

MS. KOLLWITZ: We did a lot of work about other things, too. {Starting in} the early 1990s. We did work about the Gulf War.

MS. KAHLO: We also {collaborated with residents of a} women's shelter. {Kathe did the poster layouts with Alice Neel.}

MS. KOLLWITZ: {Later} we did {posters} about rape and –

MS. RICHARDS: Was there a fairly unanimous feeling among the members in the early '90s that that was an appropriate direction?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Nothing's ever been unanimous.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, there was - it kept operating that if you had an interesting idea, people would say, "Just go for it"? Nobody objected.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes. And the Gulf War, a lot of people were really into that. We were so angry about it and – we {pushed} out a whole bunch of posters right away about that.

MS. KAHLO: But the {earliest art} posters were about information, and then we arrived at the point where we could ask rhetorical questions. "The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist." {There's nothing factual on that poster,} nothing that can be proved {or disproved. It was a summary of cultural attitudes about women artists }

MS. RICHARDS: When was that poster?

MS. KAHLO: Eighty-nine. {It was a summary of} what it was that held women back. Earlier we did the Whitney show at the Clocktower, which was great fun because that allowed us to focus {in depth} on the Whitney Museum. We started to notice that the [Whitney] Biennials were becoming more white and more male every year. So we thought, "Well, {isn't it time to do an exhibition} about a New York museum?" And we negotiated it with the Clocktower. I think Tom –

MS. RICHARDS: Finkelpearl?

MS. KAHLO: – Finkelpearl was there.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, he wanted us to do a show of women artists {who we thought should be in the Whitney Biennial that year}. There were some members in the group who wanted to do that and others of us were just totally against that. {We thought we had learned our lesson at the Palladium.} We pleaded, "Let's not do that. Let's do a critique {of the museum, a show that's not about art, a show about a museum's exhibition policy"}. We've always been, without thinking about it at the time, you know, our thing is institutional critique. And whether we take on the art world or Hollywood or the election or whatever, that's what we do. {We've always done institutional critique, even before there was a word for it.}

MS. KAHLO: But it was always with the attitude that we didn't want to just critique the institution; we wanted them to change. We wanted the institutions to change.

MS. KOLLWITZ: And to ridicule them, make fun of them.

MS. KAHLO: Shame them, yes.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes. And try something different.

MS. KAHLO: We loved to do that. But anyway, for this show –

MS. RICHARDS: What show are you pointing to?

MS. KOLLWITZ: The Clocktower. We said, "Give us the gallery."

MS. RICHARDS: What was the year of that?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Eighty-seven maybe.

MS. KAHLO: Eighty-seven. It's right here. {[Points to website.]}

MS. RICHARDS: So only two years into the –

MS. KAHLO: We said, "Give us the gallery as of a certain day, paint the walls black, and you'll have a show in a

week. We can't tell you what it will be about{; just trust us, it will be great}." So we did a ton of research in advance. We had a Deep Throat, deep in the bowels of the Whitney, who was able to smuggle out to us copies of all of the computer printouts about their trustees, so we were able to analyze {not just} the representation of women and artists of color in the Whitney Biennial shows {but also the power structure behind the museum}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: We did a critique of the Whitney Biennials. Frida, show the photos to Judith for a minute just so she has an idea. There were all these different walls and rooms. These are just a few of what we did. The chart about the trustees and what corporations and industries they worked for was really interesting.

MS. KAHLO: And it was interesting that as the American culture got larger and larger, you would think that the {Biennial} shows {at the Whitney} would get bigger and bigger. In fact, they got smaller and smaller and more exclusive. So all of a sudden, there were other forces at work {that filtered the work, made it scarce and precious and expensive}. And then we analyzed the galleries that the artists in the show came from, and we found that there was a pattern. Artists from the same {few} galleries were getting in the Whitney Biennial over and over again, and that has not changed to this day.

MS. RICHARDS: When did you – your primary focus is on women. What about African American women, Asian women, Latino women? How did that –

MS. KOLLWITZ: That happened pretty early on, too.

MS. KAHLO: By '87, that was really central, because the more we thought about exclusion, {the more we realized that sexism and racism can go hand in hand in a world of white male privilege}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: I think '86 was our "No Gallery Shows Black Women."

MS. KAHLO: {Sexism and racism} are parallel problems. You can compare them in some ways, but they're not at all the same. {But they're both symptoms inside the white male power structure.}

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes, '86. I guess that was the first actual poster we did {involving women artists of color}. And then gradually we started always, always doing the numbers, pretty much always doing the numbers on both artists of color and women artists.

MS. RICHARDS: I heard that at one point there was a splintering off of African American women artists, or Guerrilla Girls, to start their own –

MS. KAHLO: Pests. One of our members started Pests. She did that simultaneously and got more involved in it {and left Guerrilla Girls to do her own thing with Pests. I remember her asking me for advice about some of the projects they did}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: There was also Godzilla. Other groups {started to} do the kinds of things that we did.

MS. RICHARDS: So they weren't members of your –

MS. KAHLO: {Some were members of both groups; some left Guerrilla Girls to work exclusively with the other groups. It's hard to be an artist, have a day job, and do activism in your nonexistent spare time.}

MS. RICHARDS: You started off focused in New York, and your members were all in New York.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: How long did that last?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Forever. People have moved over the years [laughs].

MS. RICHARDS: But if new members joined, they were from New York?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Pretty much, yes. Maybe not so much now–

MS. RICHARDS: And if someone in Chicago wanted to form a group, they called you and said they wanted to be –

MS. KOLLWITZ: {At first we thought that might be a good idea, but quickly realized we had to discourage it.}

MS. RICHARDS: And what did you tell them?

MS. KOLLWITZ: We've always said, "Please do what we do. You can always put up our posters, download our stuff, do anything; use us as a model." But we also said, "Form your own group. Pick your own crazy name and

identity. The world needs more feminist masked avengers."

MS. KAHLO: Well, here's what happened. A group of women in San Francisco formed Guerrilla Girls West, and they started to do things {and sign them “Guerrilla Girls”}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Some of it was good, I think.

MS. KAHLO: Yes, their intentions were good, but their work wasn’t sharp or concise or well-crafted. It wasn’t persuasive – and it wasn’t what we would have done. And the press and critical community confused them with us. And they started getting gigs at schools that thought they were getting the authors of Guerrilla Girl posters and books. And being invited to be in exhibitions, too.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. KAHLO: We realized we shouldn’t confuse the public like that. It’s an issue of confusion; we had to take that back. I remember going out and talking to Guerrilla Girls West when we were in San Francisco, and I said, "Really, let's make it clear; you should do your own work, and we'll do our own work. And wouldn't it be great if there were another group of masked feminist avengers? {Museums, schools, students shouldn’t be confused about who they are inviting.} Why create confusion? {On a moral plane, it’s not right for you to pretend to be us and to pretend to have done the work we have done. It’s unethical for you to get gigs that are intended for us, for you not to tell a venue that you are a completely separate group from Guerrilla Girls.” That’s akin to plagiarism.}

MS. RICHARDS: So what did they do?

MS. KOLLWITZ: They still did it for a couple years [laughs]. But you have to understand that we get thousands of letters every year from all over the world, people from any country you can imagine, any age from 12-year-olds all the way up to {women in their} 80s. And a lot of them tell us, "I came across your work and it really means something to me. It changed how I feel about things. I want to do something like Guerrilla Girls do. I did this in my high school. I'm going to do this. Do you have any ideas of how I can do this?" And that's fabulous. That's what makes it all worthwhile. It's wonderful.

MS. RICHARDS: You mentioned early on that you received a few contributions. How has the financial aspect worked? Because you may have received more contributions, speaking fees. You sold posters, perhaps. There was money starting to come in. How did that change the group? How did you handle it? Who handled it? Was it a very positive force? Was it –

MS. KOLLWITZ: {Our first treasurer did a great job. She set up the bank account and even} signed the checks “Leo Castelli.” {When she left, another member took over for her and never gave reports, never made budgets, never presented any financial details to the group. When someone needed money to do something, she just gave it to them. It was never overseen by the group. At one point, we had money set aside from a book advance to pay for reproductions, which are a large part of the expense of visual books. But when it came time to pay for the images, the money was spent. She let it flow out of the treasury for who knows what.}

MS. RICHARDS: And was it in an account that was called “Guerrilla Girls”?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes, we always had bank account {named “Guerrilla Girls”}, and we still do. Yes.

MS. KAHLO: Actually, it got to the point – when the finances had to be straightened out.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. KAHLO: {It really got crucial. The books were such a mess. Years of tax returns were missing, and there was evidence that cash had disappeared from the account without any record. The treasurer at the time was the only person who had access to cash from the account, and she never reported the cash withdrawals. Large checks were written to her friends. It was painful, but we had to take the job of treasurer away from her and set things up correctly so we could continue to do GG work.}

We {decided} we had to incorporate in 1999 {to protect what we had accomplished over all those years. A couple of members opposed incorporation as some kind of sellout. They didn’t realize that even nonprofit organizations have to incorporate. An IRS audit would have been a stupid way to bring the GGs down.}

{The treasurer eventually admitted she borrowed money from the GG account without paying it back. At that point, Kathe and I decided we couldn’t work with her anymore. Eventually, we had to ask her to leave the group. The three of us were the only founding members still active in the group}

{About the same time, Lifetime TV started a program called “Guerrilla Girls,” and we told them to stop. They

did, and we were advised to trademark the name Guerrilla Girls to protect all the years of Guerrilla Girls work.}

MS. RICHARDS: How did you sell posters?

MS. KOLLWITZ: We always sold posters when we did appearances{, which we also got paid for}. Now we sell posters on our website [guerrillagirls.com], too.

MS. RICHARDS: But the whole idea of the group as it matured, sometimes issues start developing because of your success. Were there issues that –

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes, there were a lot of issues.

MS. RICHARDS: And was money one of those issues?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Money was one of those issues.

MS. RICHARDS: Or who would do what? Who would perform; who would not perform?

MS. KOLLWITZ: At a certain point, people were paid for clerical work{, picking up the mail, answering letters, arranging gigs}. It was a low hourly pay.

MS. RICHARDS: Members?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes, and but no one was paid for the creative work of the group. And it was just very loose. There was no structure, no system, no nothing, which, in retrospect, maybe wasn't the best thing. It was certainly fine in the beginning. But it was just very loose, and no one ever knew what was going on, especially with money. No one had any idea what was coming in and out of the books.

{MS. KAHLO: Except our second treasurer. And we've already discussed that.}

{MS. KOLLWITZ: In retrospect, we should have demanded more information about the accounts.}

MS. RICHARDS: How did you decide who would speak publicly, do the public speaking?

MS. KOLLWITZ: It was who wanted to go.

MS. KAHLO: Yes.

MS. KOLLWITZ: A lot of members didn't want to and never went. Most never went.

MS. RICHARDS: Were the people who wanted to the best people to do it?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Maybe not at the beginning [laughs].

MS. KAHLO: No, we had a hard time. We had a hard time having quality control over that.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. KAHLO: I did gigs from the very beginning. I've probably done more gigs –

MS. KOLLWITZ: - than anybody, absolutely.

MS. KAHLO: – than anybody. And sometimes, if there was a prize gig, a European gig or whatever, we would have the group choose who they wanted to represent the group.

MS. RICHARDS: Wait; who would choose?

MS. KAHLO: The group.

MS. KOLLWITZ: The group. There were votes.

MS. KAHLO: We would have a meeting and say, "All right, we have this gig in Europe, and who would like to go? Okay, we have more people who want to go than can go. {So let's have a secret ballot"}. Some people couldn't go on gigs because they had family obligations or job obligations or whatever. Some members were not as good as others {at public speaking, and some weren't really familiar with all our work because they were less active}. So we had to figure out a way of, delicately, either helping them {prepare} or discouraging them {from volunteering}. But that's all inner workings of the group. Any artist group would have had those problems.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes, in any other group.

MS. KAHLO: What interests me most, in terms of a public record, is to talk about the ideas {behind} the work.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Right, because that's what's really different about us. If we were just a bunch of women who wore a costume {or mask in public}, believe me, this wouldn't still be going on. This is about the ideas {and the work we did to convey those ideas}.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you been tempted to redo the statistics of many of those old posters to see if there's been any change?

MS. KAHLO: We have.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Funny you should mention that. We have done some.

MS. RICHARDS: I suspect less than we would hope.

MS. KAHLO: It got better, and then it got worse. Right now, I think it's a no-brainer: it's not possible to present an accurate picture of our culture without all the voices of the people in the culture. So at the emerging level, you can't have a good survey art show without women and artists of color. {If there aren't enough, it sometimes gets noticed and commented on. But} as you go up the ladder of success in the art world, {to the level of solo museum retrospectives, monographs, inclusion in art history surveys,} there's a crushing glass ceiling. Women {and artists of color} only get so far. Maybe {one or two} tokens are allowed to go beyond that{, but critical and financial success are not available to women and artists of color the way it is available to white men}.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you looked at auction records?

MS. KAHLO: And there it's just the worst.

MS. KOLLWITZ: But what you have to understand about our group, we never were systematic. It wasn't that we were an official academic group that said, "We'll have to study this, study this, study this." We would get an idea {and follow it. "Do Women Have to be Naked to get into the Met. Museum?"} is a perfect example. We had an idea. Let's see what the number of women artists is at the Metropolitan [Museum of Art, New York City] compared to the number of naked {female} bodies in the paintings.

MS. KAHLO: Actually, it goes further than that. In one of my many adjunct teaching jobs, I remember taking my students to the Museum of Modern Art, and one of the female students came up to me and said, "There are all these naked women in the art. Where are the naked men for me?" And I thought, "Oh. {Good question.}"

MS. KOLLWITZ: One of your heterosexual students.

MS. KAHLO: So we went to the Metropolitan Museum {to count}. We went to the Metropolitan Museum one Sunday morning to conduct what we came to call the "weenie count," counting naked males versus naked females in the artworks. {It came out of an invitation} to do a billboard for the Public Art Fund.

There were three or four of us and scattered into the galleries with our little check pads. We went through the classical, the Roman and the Greek sculpture galleries, and most of the naked figures were male. That was the Greek aesthetic. Then we went through the Early Christian, and, of course, we couldn't find {much} flesh at all. We went through Baroque and Renaissance, and the only fully frontal naked figure that we could find was baby Jesus.

MS. RICHARDS: Adam and Eve?

MS. KAHLO: No, no. Baby Jesus. {Adam and Eve} are covered. They're covered {with their own hands} or fig leaves or whatever.

MS. KOLLWITZ: They have the fig leaf, although some of those were added later, that's true.

MS. KAHLO: Yes. And {the complete nudity of the baby Jesus} played into the humanity of Christ. It was important for painters to show that he had genitals. But when we got to the modern art section, {beginning in the 19th century when} sex replaced religion as the major preoccupation of European artists, did we get some {great} statistics! So then came the idea, {compare the number of women artists to the number of naked women in the paintings}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Then, how to do it? How to make that into {an effective statement}? Again, that's a perfect example of what we do. Okay, so we do a poster saying there are more naked female bodies than artists at the

Metropolitan Museum. Boring. Yucko. But we came up with this {headline}–"Do Women Have to be Naked to Get into the Metropolitan Museum?" And you can't forget it if you've seen it.

MS. KAHLO: Then, what image to use? I said, "Oh, let's try that Odalisque from [Jean-Auguste-Dominique] Ingres." [The Grand Odalisque, 1899.] And we had to {turn her into} -

MS. KOLLWITZ: - into a gorilla. Frida got the slide from the school where she was teaching.

MS. KAHLO: [Laughs] {Not sure if I ever returned it!}

MS. KOLLWITZ: And because this was before computers, we had to cut the whole thing out, cut the mask out, cut the picture out, print them up exactly the same size, collage it all together. It was insane.

MS. KAHLO: And then we presented {the mock-up} to the Public Art Fund. Immediately, they sent it back and said, "We think you should work on this a little bit more because the idea is not very clear."

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes. [They laugh.]

MS. KAHLO: But it was pretty clear to us that they were not prepared to attack a major institution. So we decided, to hell with them; we weren't going to be censored; we weren't going to redo it to make them {accept it}. So we said, "All right, we'll just withdraw it." So we rented advertising in the buses in Lower Manhattan, and it became a bus ad. And then we made it into a poster for the streets.

{But here's the rest of the story.} We got a lot of press about it, and after a month, we wanted to renew the contract. At that point, the MTA [Metro Transit Authority] said, "Sorry, we can't give it to you for another month." And we said, "What do you mean? We've got the money. Let's do it." It didn't cost very much. Their reply, "Well, we've had some complaints that the image is obscene." I said, "What do you mean it's obscene? {It's an image from art history.} There are underwear ads in the bus {that show a lot more}." And they said, "Well, it's not the naked figure that bothers us." And I said, "Well, what else is it?" And they said, "It's what she has in her hand."

MS. KOLLWITZ: Which was the handle of a fan.

MS. KAHLO: So I said, "It's a fan." And they said, "It doesn't look a fan to us." [Laughs.] They thought it was a {penis}!

MS. KOLLWITZ: A couple years ago we were writing this book, The Guerrilla Girls Art Museum Activity Book [New York: PrintedMatter, 2004] - which is designed to look like a book you might pick up for kids at an actual museum -- to teach children {to appreciate art - but this one encourages readers to criticize museums}. So we decided to go back to the Met and recount the naked women versus women artists. We thought, "Well, it's probably it's gotten a lot better." And what we found was less women artists and a few more naked males. So is that progress? I don't know. We were shocked.

MS. RICHARDS: Two things. Have you tried to do these numbers in Europe, where I imagine it would be even worse?

MS. KAHLO: The Tate [London] {has an early modern collection that would be great to target. It's all soft porn!}

MS KOLLWITZ: We're a not a group that does systematic studies. We're the group that takes a little kernel of information and turns it into something else. So the answer is, no, we haven't done any blanket studies of anything, but we did go {to London} – the Tate Modern has a room full of our posters, and they invited us to {make a presentation}. Let's see, it was after – was it after we did Venice that we went to the Tate? Yes, it was 2006. We did this huge installation at the Venice Biennale in 2005.

MS. RICHARDS: I saw it, yes. We'll go back and talk about that.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Okay, so then in 2006, the Tate had a room of our posters, and we went there to give a talk and do some workshops. In the process, they gave us all the stats for the Tate, and {do} the stats {ever} suck{!} They are really bad. What's in their collection, et cetera. I have them written down somewhere. I can't remember exactly what they were, but it was a percentage in the teens. MoMA, we just got their statistics a year ago. Same old, same old.

But what was interesting, after our talk at the Tate, at one point I turned to the chief curator and said, "Well, why did you invite us anyway?" And she is a very, very sharp person, and she said, "To try to whitewash our image," or something like that [laughs]. But anyway, they announced a couple of months, maybe six months later, that they were going to start a women's initiative, that they really hadn't done enough, and they are going to try to

do better. And MoMA, the same. And the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC - we just finished a big project for the Washington Post, about the National Gallery and other DC museums - the same lousy stats. So whether they'll change or not, we don't know. We will see.

MS. RICHARDS: And have you dealt at all with women art students and their chances for –

MS. KAHLO: {One year we got some stats from the College Art Association about women art students and women art professors. With them, we wrote up a funny but sad analysis of the chances of women job candidates getting jobs at the annual CAA convention interviewing sessions. We made the info into a flyer/handout. One side said, “Sorry, sweetie, you’ll never get a job at any of these schools,” and we had a chart of the major schools interviewing with the dismal stats of their high number of female students but low number of female faculty. On the other side was the good news for the guys. “Hey dude, way to go. You’re sure to get a job at one of these schools,” with the same schools, same stats, but from the point of view of men. So, 15 percent female faculty on one side of the handout became 85 percent male on the other.}

Did anyone talk to you about Hot Flashes?

MS. RICHARDS: No.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Let's do that later. We need to get further than 20 years ago. We're too far in the past. Maybe we can get back to that. We've got to move on past 1995.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, so you were doing posters, then, in the early '90s. Perhaps you were branching out into political issues.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Books also.

MS. RICHARDS: And books. And very soon you were asked to speak all over the world, different places.

MS. KOLLWITZ: No, we'd already been.

MS. RICHARDS: That's what, very soon after you were formed? Meantime, the group is staying about the same size, growing?

MS. KOLLWITZ: {Constantly changing.} Up, down, up, down.

MS. RICHARDS: And people joining, people leaving, new people joining.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: How long did you maintain that more or less initial formation of the group?

MS. KOLLWITZ: The initial formation, one meeting [laughs].

MS. KAHLO: It was changing all the time.

MS. KOLLWITZ: All the time.

MS. KAHLO: It was never {static}.

MS. RICHARDS: So it's been evolving.

MS. KAHLO: It's always been fluid. It's always been fluid, and it's always been changing, and it's always been jagged. There's no clear trajectory. There was no strategy, no plan, little organization. It was, it was - hormonal.

MS. RICHARDS: Now, when you talk about the fact you've just gone back and done this research but not a lot has changed, how does that make you feel about the effectiveness of your activities?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, one thing we've realized over the years – because we've done so much work about museums, museum ethics, the art system, et cetera – is that old ideas die hard. We've had thousands of years of women having almost no rights. Parts of the world are in a struggle toward very basic human rights for women, and most of the world isn't even there yet. And it's going to take a long time to change these attitudes. A lot of discrimination is unconscious. People just uphold the status quo because they always have. And another thing –

MS. KAHLO: It's two steps forward and one step back.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. KAHLO: And then three steps forward and two steps back. Millennia of patriarchy isn't going to be wiped away by 50 years or 150 years {of feminist pressure}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: A lot of things have gotten better.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you seen where you've redone statistics or done something new and actually found a very optimistic –

MS. KOLLWITZ: When we spoke at the Museum of Modern Art a year ago, they had one of the most diverse installations of their contemporary collection ever. It was 40-something percent, if not more, women, both white women and women of color. It had a lot of male artists of color also. That was something that they obviously did on purpose. However, when they gave us the {overall} statistics for their collections, they were really pathetic. It was 17 percent {women} in their painting and sculpture collection.

MS. RICHARDS: What if they gave you statistics on just the things that have entered the collection in the last 10 years; do you think it would have been different?

MS. KOLLWITZ: No, because they get a lot of stuff from the past. No, they wouldn't have been different because their – MoMA maybe is slightly different because they have more money than other institutions, but in {the rest of} the country museums are poor. They are totally beholden to wealthy collectors for acquisitions, and they almost all have cookie-cutter collections of greatest hits.

MS. KAHLO: And the boards of trustees can manipulate the value of their own private collections by being involved in the museum. {They know what the museum is planning to show and can influence what the museum buys.} In any other industry, they could go to jail for that kind of insider trading.

MS. KOLLWITZ: We just did a big project about the new Broad Contemporary Art Museum in Los Angeles, and it's a perfect example. Here's this guy, {Eli Broad,} big civic leader, and, oh, isn't he wonderful - he gives $56 million to have a new contemporary art building with his name, of course, on it as part of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. And what does he want to have for his first show? Of course, works from his own wonderful collection. Thirty artists, and {only} four are women, all white, and only one male artist of color. That's in a diverse city like Los Angeles in 2008. It's hard to be positive when things like that go on.

MS. KAHLO: But what has really changed is when we first started, we had to convince people that that situation was wrong. Now all we have to do is remind them –

MS. KOLLWITZ: - to do something.

MS. KAHLO: – to do it. We don't have to invent the wheel again by explaining why that's unacceptable. And I think that's the part of unconscious prejudice, is that they know {things are bad, but they have to be prodded to take action and change the situation}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: So many curators want to do that.

MS. KAHLO: They don't realize that they're stuck in their old habits.

MS. KOLLWITZ: And they want to {change the system}. We did a condemnation of the museums on the National Mall in Washington, DC, almost a year ago. It was a full page in the Washington Post. The Post gave us a full page and a researcher, and {the chief art critic} said, "Do what you want." When the Post called to fact-check the horrible statistics, the museums all said, "What?" Museums gave us the statistics, and they were shocked {when they realized what the statistics meant}. So, hopefully, that will change them.

MS. KAHLO: It was great to work with the Washington Post because their researchers did the research. We'd said, "We want to know how many women and artists of color are on exhibit right now at the museums on the mall." They did the research. They brought back the raw numbers{, most gleaned from the institutions themselves or their websites}. We converted the numbers into percentages, and somehow the percentages were more shocking than the numbers. At that moment there was not one work of art by an African American on exhibit at the National Gallery. That was a travesty, and we put that fact in our project.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Taxpayer-supported museums.

MS. KAHLO: Just days before it was to go to press, the Washington Post had to fact-check. The Post calls up the National Gallery and says, "Is it true, can you confirm that at this moment there is not one artwork by an artist of color on exhibit?" That sounds awful. And the National Gallery said, "We'll get back to you." Within hours they announce that they were reinstalling a Martin Puryear, as though one artist of color was better than none.

So that was a thrill to be able to use the power of the Washington Post, all because of one really committed art critic, {Blake Gopnik,} and then to shame the museum into {trying to make the situation better or at least less embarrassing}. Before {that call from the Post}, the National Gallery didn't realize {what they were doing and what it would look like publicly if it was pointed out. Until then, no one paid it any attention.} No one stopped to say, "We don't have a single art work by an African American right now."

MS. KOLLWITZ: We've done a couple of positive posters over the years, but it just doesn't work as well. For us, bad news is good news [laughs].

MS. RICHARDS: How many members are there now?

MS. KOLLWITZ: We never say. We've never, ever said how many members. Someone might have told you who was at the first meeting.

MS. RICHARDS: No, no. No, I just –

MS. KOLLWITZ: But at the second meeting - we never say how many.

MS. RICHARDS: No, nobody –

MS. KOLLWITZ: But I'll tell you one thing. We have always, almost always, except for one couple-of-months period in our entire history, been a fairly small group. There's no way you could do work like this with a big group.

MS. RICHARDS: And so the group is still meeting regularly?

MS. KOLLWITZ: We don't have to meet in the same way anymore.

MS. RICHARDS: E-mail?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Because there's e-mail, {and other ways of} sending things around. It's a different world now. It used to be the only way you could {collaborate} was to be in a room together.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you decide to do, attack, focus on Hollywood, among all the things that –

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes. Well, first of all, we started getting a lot of letters from women directors.

MS. RICHARDS: And when did you focus on Hollywood?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Around the beginning of the century{, end of the last}. I would say {1999, 2000}.

MS. KAHLO: That's the short story. I'll tell her the long story [laughs].

MS. KOLLWITZ: What do you mean?

MS. KAHLO: Go ahead.

MS. KOLLWITZ: What's your long story?

MS. KAHLO: No, no, you go ahead. Tell her the short story, and then I'll –

MS. KOLLWITZ: No, go ahead.

MS. KAHLO: No, I was just going to say that when we did the Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art [New York: Penguin Books, 1998], the art history book, we decided that we would compare stereotypes of artists. There was a male stereotype of an artist and a female stereotype. And we realized that if a woman {artist} behaved the way male artists behaved –

MS. RICHARDS: Stereotype in popular –

MS. KAHLO: Like Jackson Pollock, for example. If a woman behaved as Jackson Pollock did, she would have been institutionalized. So that led us to doing a book about female stereotypes [Bitches, Bimbos and Ballbreakers, The Guerrilla Girls' Illustrated Guide to Female Stereotypes. New York: Penguin Books, 2003]. And in the process of examining stereotypes, we realized that the media creates {most} stereotypes.

MS. KOLLWITZ: But, Frida, we did our film poster years before that book.

MS. KAHLO: Well, it was parallel. It was the same kind of thinking.

MS. KOLLWITZ: All right. Well, that's, okay, that's one thing. What I remember is we started meeting with a bunch of women film directors, some very well known; can't say who they are. And we'd done one work before about film that had been the idea of {one member}. It was about a particular year's list of {“best”} films.

MS. RICHARDS: You were meeting with them [women directors] in New York or in Los Angeles?

MS. KOLLWITZ: We never actually met with them [laughs]. We had conference calls and stuff like that. And they wanted to take a bunch of stickers to the Sundance Film Festival [Park City UT].

MS. RICHARDS: Excuse me. I'm going to change.

[END MD 01.]

This is disc two, Guerrilla Girls, March 9, 2008.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Okay, ready?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Okay. A few things happened, and actually, now it's all coming back to me, probably not totally accurately. And, of course, what Frida said {led up to it}–

MS. RICHARDS: We're still talking about Hollywood.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Talking about how we started the Hollywood thing.

Well, our interest in stereotypes led to {an idea for work on film}. And, of course, a lot of women are interested in how Hollywood portrays women, and we always have been, too. How can one be {a thinking person} in our society and {not see what} the media does? But in addition –

MS. RICHARDS: Actually, being Frida. [Referring to the movie Frida, 2002.]

MS. KAHLO: [Laughs] Yes.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes. In addition to that –

MS. KAHLO: The horrors that have been committed, the crimes that have been committed in my {pseudonym}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes. In addition to that, we were getting letters from these directors who wanted to do something at Sundance.

MS. RICHARDS: Women directors?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Women directors, yes. Some, very well known, wanted to {put up stickers} at Sundance. And in addition to that, I had moved to LA, and so I knew a lot of people. You run into a lot of people {from the film industry}. And I was thinking about these issues, and I'd had some bizarre interactions with male directors and show runners and all. Hollywood's a really bizarre place for women. And I also became acquainted with Martha Lauzen. She's a professor at San Diego State University [CA], and she does a yearly study that I first saw in the Hollywood Reporter. That's how I really found it. She does a yearly study of the percentage of women in the film industry behind the scenes - what percentage are producers, what percentage are editors. And she studies the top 200 grossing films in the United States – which is a pretty wide berth, because the bottom of that are films that made $50,000 or something – and she also studies the numbers of directors. {The numbers} are pathetic, really pathetic. So there was that{, and we used her stats}.

Back to the group of women who wanted to work with us, taking stickers, putting up stickers at the Sundance Film Festival. So the very first thing we did – and even before that, just a year or {so} before, was the project for The Nation [magazine].

The Nation had an annual film issue. And I don't know why they contacted us, and I can't even remember who called us, but The Nation asked, "Would you do something in The Nation?" So we did the first version of our “Anatomically Correct Oscar.” These are the stickers. {[Shows stickers.]} We did them in The Nation, the first version of that, I think in '99. And these were taken to Sundance in 2000. And after that, we had the idea to rent billboards in Hollywood. We've done three billboards where we've raised money and we put in money and we've {rented} a cheapo billboard right near where the Oscars are held during Oscar month in Hollywood. That's when we did this {[shows billboard]}.

MS. RICHARDS: When did you do that?

MS. KOLLWITZ: {Two thousand-two. The next one, done in 2003,} says, "Even the U.S. Senate is More Progressive than Hollywood. Female Senators: 14 Percent. Female Film Directors: 4 Percent."

MS. KAHLO: We put Trent Lott's head on the golden boy. Part of {our annoyance} was that Hollywood presents itself a bastion of liberal values. It's always connecting itself with fighting censorship and promoting liberal candidates for {office}. But if you really stop and look at the industry, it's unbelievably sexist; it's unbelievably racist. Women and people of color really don't get jobs beyond being actors. And it wasn't always that way {for women. There were lots of women in the early years of Hollywood, before the big studios.} If you go back 10 years, there were not very many African American {faces on the screen}. They were really very rare and unusual. So for us, Hollywood was an irresistible target of hypocrisy. And {especially because} films have such a huge effect on everyone's life. {By comparison,} the art world is quite small. And it was just tantalizing to take on a larger target and see what we could do with it.

MS. KOLLWITZ: And it was time for the film industry to step up, like {some} people had in the art world, and {make some} changes. The first thing we did in The Nation was a version of this. And then The Nation asked us –

MS. RICHARDS: Which is the –

MS. KOLLWITZ: - "The Anatomically Correct Oscar." He's white and male, just like the guys who win. And we redesigned the golden boy to look more like the guys who take them home. And, of course, we backed it up. We always back things up with stats. It was also a sticker, and then {we made it} a billboard in Hollywood at the time of the Oscars. And it states, "Best Director has never been awarded to a woman. Ninety-four percent of the writing awards have gone to men, and only three percent of the acting awards have gone to people of color." It started out in The Nation and then Bitch magazine and then a poster and a giant {banner} at the Venice Biennale. It was our thinking about how Hollywood depicts women as well as the issues of women in Hollywood. And this has become one of our most popular requests from all over the world.

{Then The Nation asked us to do another piece, and we did "The Birth of Feminism" movie poster. It later ran in Bitch magazine and was in the Venice Biennale. It's also one of our most popular posters.}

We've had some meetings over the years with film producers, and they say, "We want to make a movie about the history of feminism, Second Wave, '60s, '70s. Got any ideas?" Then we tell them our ideas, and they usually go away and never come back. So one day we were sitting around thinking, "What if Hollywood did make a movie about feminism?" And then {realized}, "Maybe we're lucky Hollywood hasn't made this movie." So we decided to do the poster for the movie that we hoped they {never} make{, The Birth of Feminism, and we cast it with three luscious babe actresses playing in the roles of iconic feminist leaders: Pamela Anderson as Gloria Steinem, Halle Berry as Florence Kennedy, and Catherine Zeta-Jones as Bella Abzug.}

And tell the Gloria Steinem story - we sent it to Gloria Steinem, who knows our work and has been supportive over the years.

MS. KAHLO: I ran into Gloria at a book signing. I was wearing my mask. She only recognizes us when we wear gorilla masks. And she said, "I have to tell you this story. You sent me that poster." And she said, "You didn't have a note with it, and when I opened it up and I saw it, I thought, 'Oh, my God, I've got to call my lawyer. Someone is doing an unauthorized story of my life.'" She actually believed it. And then she read down {the credits} and saw who did it and realized it was from us. Then she had a really good laugh.

MS. KOLLWITZ: She's got a great sense of humor. But not at first. We {want} to write a book about Hollywood, A Behind-the-Scenes Guide to Girls in the 'Wood.

MS. KAHLO: To deconstruct Hollywood the same way we've deconstructed the art world.

MS. KOLLWITZ: The art world and {the culture of} stereotypes.

MS. KAHLO: Speaking of stereotypes, when we first {decided to write} the stereotype book, I did a search, a bibliographical search, just to see what books existed out there on stereotypes. And there was only the dullest kind of sociological studies of{, for example,} stereotyping in high school or whatever. And I thought, "This is great{ - virgin territory}." It was so much fun to do, because we literally sat down and made a list of stereotypes {to work from}. And then we put them into categories, like stereotypes that follow you in different periods of your life {from cradle to grave}, sexual stereotypes, {occupational stereotypes,} and there are just so - and then we did sexual stereotypes{: good girls, bad girls}, lesbian stereotypes, transgender stereotypes.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you deal with your publishers and your editors and all those people? With your masks on?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, mostly through e-mail. But when we go to the publishing office, we always wear masks, like when we met the head of the publishing division {of HarperCollins}, et cetera. And that reminds me. I should just say a word about books in general because, obviously, our group has loved doing these posters. The poster, though, is always a quick shot. Headline, little bit of information, picture. It has to be a really, really, quick read. But over time we felt a desire to go deeper into the issues, and that led us first to do our newsletter, Hot Flashes, which explored specific subjects. We only did four issues of it, three actual paper versions. One {contained} two {volumes}. We now have a version of it online on our website.

We started to think the way to {really examine a subject was} to do a book, where you can talk about an issue or topic at length and in depth, and you can research it and think about it. And we also wanted to do it in our style where there's no such thing as the text here and the picture five pages later. It's all one thing. We developed a hybrid {book} style, where the images and the words are intertwined and you can't really have one without the other.

MS. KAHLO: We write the books and design them simultaneously. I think it drove our publisher a little crazy at first because we delivered the book finished. The manuscript was also a layout and a galley.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes. Now they're used to it.

MS. KAHLO: That came from new technologies, the fact you could {put together a book on a computer that you could research a book online}. And {standard} art history books just seemed so dull and deadly -

MS KOLLWITZ: And by the way, {our} books are used as textbooks in universities all over the world.

MS. RICHARDS: Could you describe which books you mean?

MS. KOLLWITZ: The Guerrilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art, Penguin Books, 1998, and Bitches, Bimbos and Ballbreakers: The Guerrilla Girls' Illustrated Guide to Female Stereotypes, Penguin Books, 2003. {Of course, we've done other books, too. But} those two are used in classrooms all over the world.

MS. KAHLO: We thought, "Wouldn't it be interesting to do an art history book that was fun to read, that made you laugh, that you couldn't put down?" [Laughs.]

MS. KOLLWITZ: And it has comics in it{, the comic book history of art}.

MS. KAHLO: You can read {Bedside} in one fell swoop and get the whole overview of it. When you read these big, dull textbooks, you only get this little chunk and that little chunk, and we wanted to do the whole {enchilada}, do it all in 96 pages.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes, and show what it was like for women at each era. This is something feminist art historians now, of course, are doing to contextualize the art and the lives of {women} artists. This is so important for the public, who have no idea of their stories. They think art springs from nowhere, just {one} genius {after another}, inventing a whole new way of doing something. And they don't really realize that artists are {special and} fantastic–but they are all tied to their times, and they're all the product of their times. In our book, at the beginning of each chapter, we have these quotes from great male minds - mostly great male minds - horrible, misogynist quotes, about what men thought of women.

MS. KAHLO: "The souls of women are so small that some believe they have none at all."
Samuel Butler.

MS. KOLLWITZ: We also have {short} charts of what women could {and couldn't} do in different eras of history. For example, people have this notion that Greek democracy was this wonderful thing. Well, that was true if you happened to be a male aristocrat.

MS. KAHLO: A free male. If you were a woman, {no matter what class,} you stayed home most of the time.

And for example, we went backwards into a lot of things. We started looking at the 18th century at the few women artists {who made it}, Elisabeth Vigee-Lebrun and Angelica Kauffmann, and how they did it. We realized women were not allowed to join academies, and then we realized that the academies had this stranglehold on art. And {we thought}, why don't we just {go} to the heart of it and examine their rules and {talk about how academies} set up rules to keep women out? And at that point I realized that that large question that was always asked, "Why have there been no great women artists?" was the wrong question. It's "What happened to all the great women artists?" Because there were rules, laws, obstacles set up to keep women out of art, {and there were a lot who} figured out ways to get around those rules.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, a few did. Most didn't. And that's why we're so adamant that today's {museums} must change, because 100 years from now, are people going to look back and just see one small version of our

culture, or are they really going to see a real example of the concerns of artists of our time? You have to have lots of different artists in there, not just 10 superstars of each generation.

MS. KAHLO: When I started reading {the history of} the Bauhaus, I realized that Walter Gropius didn't allow women students in the painting studios. He made {his first} mistake when he said, "I want the Bauhaus to be open. It's not going to be like the academies and the universities." And then he got all these applications from women, who couldn't go to the other art schools in Germany. They all want to be painters. What does he do with them? Well, he created a textile workshop for them. And so that's what happened to all the women at the Bauhaus who wanted to be painters. {They had to become textile artists if they wanted to stay at the Bauhaus.} The Bauhaus was this big, important, modernist, utopian, social experiment, and it was sexist.

MS. KOLLWITZ: But what did they do? They reinvented textiles. They made huge innovations. Their textiles were like paintings, {but were tapestries, draperies,} rugs. They were incredibly {inventive}. But that was an example of what women artists had to do {to survive}.

MS. KAHLO: Despite the fact that in the '30s, [when] there were so many American artists who were {left-wing, even} Communists, {New York} art galleries had special hours for African Americans.

MS. RICHARDS: In New York?

MS. KAHLO: Yes. They were not welcome in art galleries during regular hours. That's shocking, absolutely shocking. {The art world has never been} a level playing field. And, of course, the history that we have as a result is a {partial,} skewed history,{ because it doesn't include the} visual culture that women and artists of color created. {In pursuit of a larger history,} isn't it time to go back and look at the art of women and artists of color?

MS. RICHARDS: Over the course of your 20 years or more going out and giving lectures and speaking at college campuses, have you noticed a change in the audience? A change in the response from the students?

MS. KAHLO: When we first went out {in the '80's}, we got lots of hostile questions –

MS. RICHARDS: From men and women?

MS. KAHLO: Yes, yes. "How dare you equate the work of this insignificant woman {artist} to this great {white male artist}–"

MS. KOLLWITZ: What about quality?

MS. KAHLO: Yes, quality. {Sometimes} we would set up an argument between people in the audience fighting with each other over this issue, the issue {of quality}. That was fun. {Like the Cooper Union panels.}

MS. KOLLWITZ: That's an easy question to debunk.

MS. KAHLO: But now our audience are no longer naysayers. They're usually on our side, cheering us on.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you notice more male students in the audience?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes. {Our gigs attract} a lot of men.

MS. KAHLO: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] There's progress.

MS. KOLLWITZ: There are a lot of male feminists. What we do notice is that there's still a lot of people, both men and women, who believe in the tenets of feminism who won't call themselves feminists, because of the unbelievably negative stereotype of what a feminist is, and they'll play it back to you instantly. But we get such interesting questions. People tell stories of {activism} they've done. We {try to} tailor our presentations to the audience, and often we speak to women's studies, as well as to more general audiences. You never know who is {going to come out to see feminists wearing gorilla masks}.

MS. RICHARDS: Right now you're planning on doing a book about Hollywood. What might be the next industry that you – have you thought about what –

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, we really want to do music.

MS. RICHARDS: Popular music?

MS. KOLLWITZ: We're not sure. All kinds. We get letters from women in every field of music.

MS. RICHARDS: I was thinking of fashion.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Oh, fashion, yes. Yes, that's –

MS. RICHARDS: There was an article in the New York Times about how very few top designers are women, but, just like art school, all the students were –

MS. KOLLWITZ: - females. Yes.

MS. KAHLO: And all the clothes are for {women} – well{, most of them} –

MS. KOLLWITZ: Project Runway. A guy just won.

MS. KAHLO: I would have to get more interested in fashion to be able to {do that}. I don't think I'm the researcher for that one.

MS. RICHARDS: It's so much in popular culture now, much more than it ever was, and connected to Hollywood and to the art world.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Art is so much about fashion now. We're living in a very interesting time in that way.

MS. KAHLO: Art is a fashion.

MS. RICHARDS: But music is the next –

MS. KOLLWITZ: Not the {absolute} next. We always have many balls in the air. We don't just do something to do it. We try to figure out something that will work, that's good enough. We're perfectionists.

MS. RICHARDS: I want to ask something a little different.

MS. KAHLO: What's interesting is that you can't separate these worlds. The art world falls over into stereotyping, and the stereotyping falls over into film.

MS. KOLLWITZ: That's so true.

MS. KAHLO: And the film world falls over into fashion. So it {becomes} all part of the same ball of wax.

MS. KOLLWITZ: {Our book will be} a portrait of pop culture. And porn and TV. There are so many different worlds in Hollywood.

MS. KAHLO: So we're chewing into one part of it and discovering all this other stuff. It's going to be impossible to deal with Hollywood without dealing with the body image that the media presents to women. Maybe {[George] Ballanchine} started it in the ballet, but it's permeated {the rest of culture}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, ballet was filled with cute bodies and sex before there were movies.

MS. KAHLO: Yes, but ballerinas were {big,} muscular. Then they became skinny. They became very skinny. {And models, too. }

MS. KOLLWITZ: In the past, there were guys who would be in love with these ballerinas and shower them with all sorts of stuff. It was {surrogate} sex before there was phone sex, I guess. [They laugh.]

MS. KAHLO: {See how we think up ideas to research from a conversational riff?} It's been so much fun doing these books.

MS. RICHARDS: How have your activities as a Guerrilla Girl affected your work as an artist and –

MS. KOLLWITZ: Or vice versa.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, for the two of you, and maybe if you perceive how it's affected other Guerrilla Girls.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, I can speak for what {other members} have told us. {Lots} have been really inspired by {working on GG projects and have begun to do work of their own influenced by the experience. As for me, my own work has always been similar to the GG work}. It's different {by degrees}, but there's a sensibility that you could definitely recognize. And as for the time issue –– it's been a huge time drain. It's an unbelievably huge time drain, but it's love. It's love. We love doing this work.

MS. KAHLO: It keeps getting more and more interesting.

MS. KOLLWITZ: We didn't expect to be here talking to you today{ – lifers in the GGs}. We expected to be like Liubov Popova, who was in for three or four years and occasionally would dip in other times. But here we are{, still at it}. There's always been something fascinating to do. The collaborative aspect is fantastic. The people, the letters, the connections we make with people - all over the world. It's been fabulous, great.

MS. KAHLO: I think when we first started {Guerrilla Girls}, I was taking a lot of things that were happening in my career personally. I would {apply} for something, I wouldn't get it, and I would {be devastated and feel inadequate, not realizing that it was so much harder for a woman to get anywhere in the art world in the '80s}. Analyzing the system, scrutinizing it, {criticizing it,} helped me detach from {my disappointments and not see them as a judgment of myself}. That was very empowering. Many are called {and trained}, but few are {anointed by the system}. The art world, as we know it, is set up to produce scarcity. It was very helpful for me to realize that the system was excluding by its very nature. I think that freed me to do what I wanted and not worry about whether the {gallery} world wanted it or not. {And it was important to learn about the defiance of women artists through history.}

I think we have empowered the masses of the art world, as opposed to the {power brokers}. You don't see too many collectors coming to our presentations, but you see lots of art students and artists. For a long time artists felt they had to suck up to dealers and collectors, not realizing the power of the art world really comes from the artists. You may not have a commercially successful {art career}, but if you love what you do, and you keep making work, you are part of the art community. You are part of the culture, that intellectual industry, that community that makes art happen. {You influence other artists, too. You're a knowledge worker in the field of art.}

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, there's so much wonderful work out there, but {collectors all} want the same thing. Everyone wants the same thing. Galleries and the museums are all set up to identify {a few} geniuses and masterpieces rather than to identify the visual character of an age. You need lots of {artists to tell the whole history}.

MS. KAHLO: {The art market} is an Olympic system, {with a tiny handful} of winners {who have almost everything} and {lots of} losers {who create the competition}. Art is far more complicated than that. History is far more complicated than that. {That system of created scarcity} comes out of {the concept of} connoisseurship, which was about how to identify {the great} geniuses of each age {so wealthy collectors could buy them as trophies and, eventually, investments}. That's a lousy way to write history. That [laughs] doesn't make any sense at all. So, I'm very proud of empowering artists as a mass, as a group{, to continue to work despite an art system that sucks}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: {We've become} a model for speaking up. Okay, we do it in our own insane way, with masks on. But, everyone has to speak up. Things don't just change. Things don't get handed to you. {Some} people we've talked to {insist, "Oh, just be patient.} Things will change." Well, things don't change {unless you pressure for change}. Fifty years ago there was one woman in this law school, one African American in that medical school. One whatever – and people said, "Oh, well, they weren't good enough to be doctors. They're not good enough to be lawyers." {It wasn't until people protested that professional schools changed their discriminatory ways.} Not that those fields are equitable now. It's a long haul. But there are certainly tons of female lawyers, tons of lawyers of color now. It's totally changed. And the art world needs to change that way, too.

MS. KAHLO: I realize that some of the former members have the idea that what {Kathe and I} have done{, especially since 2000,} has turned into a careerist {activity}, a career {for each of us. Maybe it has, but what's wrong with that? What's wrong with making activism a life's work? Who else was willing to take this really important activism on and really become part of art history?} I think that their thinking is a really narrow way of looking at {the Guerrilla Girls}.

MS. RICHARDS: Why do you think that's a negative? Why do you think it's spoken of as a negative? Do you feel you're sacrificing your work?

MS: KOLLWITZ: When you were talking about [the} time {it takes to do this work} and Frida was talking about the empowerment {it brings, it dawned on me that} I've always been a person just with so much energy and {so many} ideas that I just always thought, whatever comes up, I can do it all. I just always felt that way. And I think it took me until last year or something [laughs] to really realize that's not really true. We write a book. It takes a {couple of years}. It takes a huge amount of time. You have to do a huge {installation} in Venice or Istanbul. That takes a huge, huge amount of time. Now I understand that you can't do it all {at the same time. You can't do the Venice Biennale as a Guerrilla Girl and as yourself at the same time.}

MS. RICHARDS: How did your participation in the Venice Biennale begin, and how did you do it?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, first of all, Frida went to ARCO [International Contemporary Art Fair, Madrid, Spain] a few

years ago.

MS. KAHLO: Yes, {that's where the photos} of Guerrilla Girls wearing flamenco dresses {come from} [laughs].

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes, and they saw some of our recent work.

MS. RICHARDS: "They" who?

MS. KAHLO: It was Rosa Martinez, an international critic and curator from Barcelona. I met her there.

MS. RICHARDS: She hadn't been aware of your work before?

MS. KAHLO: Well, I'd say –

MS. KOLLWITZ: I don't know.

MS. KAHLO: The first sort of show of our work in Europe, which was maybe the first retrospective of our work, happened in Bilbao [Spain], and it was organized by a wonderful curator there, Xavier Arakistain. He was the head of a cultural center there, and he organized an exhibition of our posters. He's always –

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, at Bilbao but not Guggenheim [Guggenheim Museum Bilbao]?

MS. KAHLO: In Bilbao. And then he invited us to be on a panel at ARCO {about gender}– the idea of looking at gender in art in Europe {was a bit behind but Arakis[tain] was always looking forward}. Arakis invited me to participate in the panel at ARCO in Madrid, and I went. Within the first 10 minutes, I met Rosa Martinez, and I didn't even know who she was. And five minutes later, an artist shows up with a flamenco dress, so we went to the [Museo del] Prado in our flamenco outfits. And everyone wanted to know what we were doing, and we stood next to the statue of [Diego] Velásquez.

MS. RICHARDS: Wait, which artist are you talking about?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Pilar Albarracin. She was great. She was also in the {Venice} Biennale {in 2005}. She's wonderful.

MS. KAHLO: Pilar was {also} in the Global Feminism show ["Global Feminisms." Brooklyn Museum, March 23-July 1, 2007]. She had very funny videotapes. But anyway, Rosa immediately wanted to put a film {of our impromptu performance} in a show of Pilar's, and I had to write back and say, we really can't participate in other artists' careers. I didn't really know who Rosa was and it was.

MS. KOLLWITZ: We have this policy about not helping or criticizing the work of living women artists. That's why {all the artists in Bedside Companion are} all dead. If you die, we love you.

MS. KAHLO: Yes [laughs].

Two months later, Rosa was appointed {as one} of the directors of the Venice Biennale {and curator of the main exhibit in the Arsenale}. She wrote {us} and said, "How would you [like] to do this show?" Then she said, "They're really treating me badly, so I really need you to make some trouble."

MS. KOLLWITZ: She wanted us to do a work about {the Biennale}.

MS. RICHARDS: This was '05?

MS. KAHLO: Yes, in '05.

MS. KOLLWITZ: The thing was in '05, so this must have been '04.

MS. KAHLO: It was the year that Rob Storr was supposed to {curate the large international show} but then backed out at the last minute, and Maria de Coral {curated one international show in the Italian Pavilion}, and Rosa Martinez {curated} another in the Arsenale.

MS. RICHARDS: Rosa, from the very beginning was determined and succeeded in having a huge number, maybe 50 percent {women artists}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: It wasn't 50. It's in our work{: 38 percent}.

{MS. KAHLO: Not perfect, considering that more than 50 percent of the graduates of most American and European art schools have been female for decades.

MS. KOLLWITZ:} It's higher than it ever had been before {at the Venice Biennale}.

MS. KAHLO: Yes. I remember meeting with her at a hotel on the Upper East Side when she was in New York for the press conference and she was fuming. She said, "Can you believe that Davide Croft introduced me and Maria at the press conference as “the Spanish girls’?” She said, "Oh, Frida, you must make me some trouble. {He doesn’t get it.}"

MS. KOLLWITZ: She had an idea to {put some new work about the Biennale along with some older work} in the huge entry room that framed the entrance to the show in the Arsenale. It was really incredible. And we had just started doing these big billboards, just for a few years, these big billboards and stuff. So we had the idea to do these big banners, because that's something we can {digitally} send to Italy. They can print it up there, et cetera. Because shipping is a big mess. Anyway, so they gave us someone to help us and to do all this research about Venice. They gave us a lot of figures about 110 years of Biennales. We worked our magic on the figures. But in addition to that, Frida had the idea to look at all the museums in Venice, too. Let's do something about them. So we had someone go to all the museums, and that's when we realized that even almost all of these old historical museums in Venice –

MS. KAHLO: Except one.

MS. KOLLWITZ: – except one, owned work by women artists, Artemisia Gentileschi, {Maria Robusti,} et cetera. But they never – rarely, if ever, had it on the walls. It was all in storage.

MS. KAHLO: In the basements.

MS. KOLLWITZ: So that's what we did our whole piece about.

MS. KAHLO: The men were above the - on top of the women [laughs].

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes, and we –

MS. KAHLO: It was the sexual innuendo that we couldn’t pass up.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes. We asked people to go to the museums {of Venice} and {demand they} put women on top. Do you see that illustration of it?

MS. RICHARDS: “Where Are the Women Artists of Venice?”

MS. KOLLWITZ: “Where are the women artists of Venice? Underneath the Men.” That's the one about the museums of Venice. And for the Biennale itself, we decided – because of Maria Corales and Rosa Martinez - we decided to call it the first Feminist Biennale. At the very entryway –

MS. KAHLO: In their honor.

MS. KOLLWITZ: – there's this 17-foot-high {banner}, stating, pardon my horrible accent, but, “Benvenuti alla Biennale Femminista” - Welcome to the Feminist Biennale. And then it had some very sarcastic {statements, backed up by} statistics. But it was the best Biennale ever for women.

MS. RICHARDS: Did that installation get shown anywhere else?

MS. KAHLO: The following year Istanbul.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes, at the Istanbul Modern {Museum}.

MS. RICHARDS: So it wasn't the '05; it was '06?

MS. KOLLWITZ: - '05 was the Biennale.

MS. KAHLO: Istanbul was a year later.

MS. RICHARDS: So '06.

MS. KAHLO: This was reinstalled, and then we did {a new} project {about} Turkish women artists.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes, in '06.

MS. KAHLO: The Istanbul Modern invited us to come and speak with Turkish women artists and do a project. Because of the historical links between Venice and Istanbul, the Istanbul Modern wanted Rosa Martinez, who was also the curator at the Istanbul Modern, to bring a selection of {the Biennale} work to Istanbul and {present} it

as a {new} show. It was called “Venice to Istanbul.” That's when they redid some of our posters there and invited us to do a project about Turkish women artists, so we –

MS. RICHARDS: Redid. You mean reprinted?

MS. KAHLO: We redesigned {them to fit the installation}.

MS. RICHARDS: In Turkish?

MS. KOLLWITZ: There were Turkish translations. But we redesigned everything. And then we did this new piece, “The Future for Turkish Women Artists.”

MS. KAHLO: Here it is, right here.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that the first time you did a piece about women from a different – focusing on a country?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, no. We did that in Venice.

MS. RICHARDS: The second time?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Was it? I don't know. God, let's think about that. We did –

MS. KAHLO: Well, “It's Even Worse in Europe.”

MS. KOLLWITZ: “It's Even Worse in Europe,” early on, and we did a thing about documenta that some members took there {and distributed}.

MS. KAHLO: We also did some stuff in France, very offhand things. We went to Marseilles once and did some very quick things {about “La Leçon Française”}, a little funny thing about {gender and the French language}–

MS. RICHARDS: What's the difference between your reception, the reception from European audiences versus American audiences?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, I don't think you can generalize about any audiences. We've been talking about this a lot and - we've been faced with a dilemma the last few years. Suddenly the art world that we've spent our lives attacking has embraced us, but not in the U.S., where we actually attack {specific museums}. One reason we think we might be embraced in Europe is because we {criticize} the U.S.

MS. RICHARDS: You're not attacking Europeans enough.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, we have now, but when we originally –

MS. KAHLO: We didn’t know them as well {then}, but –

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes. We actually have now.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, because you're attacking the United States, they're embracing you.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, I'm just saying –

MS. KAHLO: Europeans love to criticize the U.S.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes, and I'm very self-critical, so you have to take it with a grain of salt. But that's one thing that we were thinking. But also it's a really unbelievable dilemma for us, because {we’re} outsiders, even though there may be parts of our lives and careers that aren't outsiders. But even in that part, we feel like outsiders. And {others who helped us invent} the Guerrilla Girls had that stance{, too}. Otherwise, we wouldn't have done it. Well, fast-forward all these years later, and suddenly people {love} us. They love us. We receive letters from all over the world, "Oh, I love you." Just the other day, at one of our gigs, we had a thousand people in Toronto and hundreds in other cities.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the venue in Toronto?

MS. KAHLO: The convention center [Metro Toronto Convention Center].

MS. KOLLWITZ: {Organized by} Ryerson University. But they {switched} us to a theater at the convention center, they had so many requests for tickets.

MS. KAHLO: {Eleven} hundred screaming people.

MS. KOLLWITZ: So suddenly, people come up {to us and say}, "Oh, I've wanted to meet you my whole life. Your work changed me." "I saw your poster so-and-so. I read your book." A lot of people come with a book. "I read this book when I was 14." Or conversely, "I want to get this book for my mother. She's an artist."

Suddenly, in the world, and in the art world, we have all of this respect, and they want us to be inside the walls instead of outside the walls. And it's been something we've really done a lot of soul-searching about because, although it's so much fun to criticize an institution on its own walls, you don't want to lose your edge. You don't want to get co-opted. You don't want to be afraid to do things. So it's been very interesting to think about. And we've decided to go along with these invitations because it's just irresistible. We're a group of artists. We like to work. We now have an opportunity to show our work to more and more and more people.

Honestly, these early posters that you've looked at {today}, except for maybe "Advantages" and "Get Naked," no one has ever even seen them. They went up for five minutes{, then disappeared}.

MS. KAHLO: We've become a kind of group that young women and young artists identify with.

MS. KOLLWITZ: And all ages.

MS. RICHARDS: But so go back to this challenge you're facing now. Not a crisis maybe, but a challenge. And how you're going along. You said you're –

MS. KOLLWITZ: We're participating. We're saying yes.

MS. KAHLO: Yes. How could you give it up?

MS. KOLLWITZ: You've got a huge audience. {Hundreds of} thousands of people {go to museums like} the Tate. We've gotten letters from all over the world from people who saw our work there. "I never heard this information. I didn't know this about museums." That's what we're in it for.

MS. RICHARDS: So it hasn't yielded any negative results? It hasn't impeded your –

MS. KOLLWITZ: I hope not.

MS. RICHARDS: You haven't sensed yet –

MS. KOLLWITZ: We hope not.

MS. KAHLO: Yes. Life is filled with little negative setbacks and {dilemmas}, but this work keeps getting {more and more interesting}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Is it better to be hated or loved? I don't know. In our line of work, I don't know what's better. It's something to think about.

MS. RICHARDS: There isn't anything that you did say no to because you felt it would compromise your independence and –

MS. KAHLO: Oh, sure. We said no to Rosa Martinez {at first}. We didn't want to be used in a catalogue to promote another artist's work. {But we did say yes to her at the Biennale.}

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. KOLLWITZ: But in terms of us doing our own work, Guerrilla Girls' work, in these big venues, no. This year, we did Athens [Greece]. We've done a bunch of stuff in Holland, {Mexico City [Mexico]}, Shanghai [China].

MS. KAHLO: I can imagine some circumstances that would be unacceptable to us, but so far we've always been able to figure out a way to {[do] what we want} without losing our edge.

MS. RICHARDS: This is a question that people often wonder about, I think. I do. How do you keep, stay, anonymous when you're going to the airport, you're going to dinner, you're walking into the place where you're going to speak? At some point, you have to put the mask on, and at some point you have to take the mask off.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. KAHLO: Yes. Well, look at Superman. He didn't dress as Superman all the time.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Who would know who we are without the masks? The anonymity isn't important anymore. What's important is the fact that it's not about identities, you know, that it's anonymous. That's still important {to us}, but it's not important {to the rest of the world}.

MS. RICHARDS: So you have to find a good place to put the mask on. I guess the fact that there is the Internet, and you can have a website now, must {expand your effectiveness}.

MS. KAHLO: Well, that's made a huge difference.

MS. KOLLWITZ: It's our friend. It's everyone's friend. Yes. Anyone who looks at the design of the early things realizes that they were made with press type. {Digital} technology has really multiplied what we're able to do.

MS. KAHLO: Overnight, you could get an instant e-mail from someone on the other side of the world.

MS. KOLLWITZ: And {immediately} send them a file that they can print up and put out on the street.

MS. RICHARDS: When did the website start, and how did that work?

MS. KOLLWITZ: I think it was –

MS. KAHLO: Ninety-four.

MS. KOLLWITZ: – '96

MS. RICHARDS: That's very early.

MS. KOLLWITZ: There was a company, Voyager.

MS. KAHLO: Yes. Voyager wanted to do a CD-ROM version of our art history book. For {lots of} reasons it didn't work out. {One being that Voyager never made any money from CD-ROMs. Eventually, they went out of business before we could make the book into interactive form.} But in the process they said, "Look, there's this thing called a website. Do you want {one}?"

MS. KOLLWITZ: They helped us set it up.

MS. KAHLO: And we had it through them as {a server} until they went bust.

MS. RICHARDS: And who does all the work to –

MS. KOLLWITZ: We {maintain it}.

MS. KAHLO: It's a lot of work.

MS. KOLLWITZ: We {do} everything. And what we don't do, we have so many friends and members to help us. But we {take care} of it.

MS. RICHARDS: And how do you handle the finances now that you're so much –

MS. KAHLO: Well, we have to be a lot more precise about that.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes, now –

MS. RICHARDS: Do you have one Guerrilla Girl who is in charge of it?

MS. KAHLO: No. We have some professional help{, a bookkeeper and an accountant}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Now it's all in the open. It's accessible by different {members of the group, not just one member like before}. It's a different system now. It's all good.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you have a different legal – are you a –

MS. KOLLWITZ: We're a corporation. We have been since 1999, so that's almost 10 years.

MS. KAHLO: At a certain point, every artist has to have a business. And {we have} a small business{, a Mom-and-Mom business}. We engage in small exchanges with people, {selling posters,} books, T-shirts, making appearances. We {operate} on a different economic paradigm than most visual artists{, who sell to rich collectors and raise their sales prices again and again as they become more and more established}. We've never really participated in the art market in {that} way. {We sell our work to everyone who has $20.} So it's a lot of work to sell {our small items. We're doing projects all over the world, but we're not making money on them. And we put almost everything back into the work.}

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, we {also do lectures and performances,} and when we speak, we get speaking fees.

MS. KAHLO: We've probably done 30, 35 appearances a year. It's a lot of work.

MS. KOLLWITZ: We probably could do 100. There's so much demand.

MS. RICHARDS: That's one more than every other week.

MS. KAHLO: Yes, but we usually gang them together, I'm doing 10 {over a two-week period this month}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: We've just finished four.

Starting last Wednesday, we did one every night until today. It's so fun. It's really fun.

MS. KAHLO: But it's exhausting.

MS. KOLLWITZ: It's {kind of} like being a stand up {comedian}. Usually it works really well. Some crowds are smaller and quieter but the questions are always fantastic. Some are more raucous and fun. But once in a while – only once really, did we have a real dud of a crowd. And I remember walking out of there, and we looked at each other, and we thought, "We need drugs." Now we understand rock and roll {groups}.

MS. KAHLO: We're getting a lot of invitations, a lot of invitations from universities, a lot of universities that use our books as textbooks, and a lot of places in the Midwest right now. There are movements -

MS. RICHARDS: Trends.

MS. KAHLO: Yes, trends. We were in Europe a lot the last three years. This year, it's a lot of domestic travel.

MS. KOLLWITZ: We like to shake them up. We really do. I think it often works [laughs].

MS. KAHLO: But, it's been a great ride. It's been nothing I ever expected, nothing I ever strategized about. I'm not even sure if I {ever had} a five-year plan for it. It's sort of following this galloping horse, just trying to keep it all together.

MS. KOLLWITZ: And making up something new to do {along the way}–

MS. KAHLO: And letting the world talk to us. We went back to the art world this year because the Broad Collection was so awful. We revisited the issue {of art collecting}, and we made {Eli Broad} royally angry. He gave $50 million to LACMA thinking, "Isn't that a wonderful gift; everyone should {kiss my feet}." When he got criticism {from us and when others agreed with our assessment that his collection was pathetically un-diverse, he got huffy}. "Fifty million dollars bought me this grief?" [Laughs.]

MS. KOLLWITZ: We received a great letter–it's on our website - from his curator, all full of excuses why the collection was the way it was. And our letter back to her is there, too.

MS. RICHARDS: Your work was noted by the critics who reviewed the show.

MS. KAHLO: Yes. It was interesting that just something as simple as putting {up our "Dear Eli" letter in the museum toilets at LACMA during the opening and sending out a mass e-mail}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: It became viral. People who received it sent it on.

MS. KAHLO: All of a sudden it turned into a lot of {coverage, in the New York Times, on the Internet, in lots of reviews of the opening}. It was fun to press so many buttons, all within a couple of days {of the opening}.

MS. RICHARDS: So right now you've talked about a couple of challenges, the challenge of maintaining your edge in the face of success.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, when I hear that back, it sounds horrible. No, I think we're hypercritical of what we do. We're just going to be watching ourselves, that's all. I don't think it's a challenge to maintain your edge, as long as you're a total maniac of a person who has that edge anyway. The challenge is to make sure that you're not being nice to the {institutions} who are giving you attention.

MS. RICHARDS: And do you try to pick and choose the audiences you spend your time with in order to reach certain groups?

MS. KAHLO: No. Most of our gigs come from our website. Schools will write to us. And increasingly, what's happening is that students are taking it upon themselves to organize our visits.

MS. KOLLWITZ: They're studying us, too.

MS. RICHARDS: What percentage of your talks are within the university –

MS. KAHLO: Almost all of them. {Occasionally,} we get {invitations from} art museums.

MS. RICHARDS: Has it always been that way?

MS. KAHLO: Yes. Actually, well, when we first started, no museum would have us. It's a relatively recent thing that museums have {invited} us, although the Baltimore Museum [of Art, Baltimore, MD] had us very early.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes, and the museum in Connecticut. The Wadsworth Atheneum [Hartford, CT].

MS. RICHARDS: Was that because there was a woman director?

MS. KAHLO: Yes.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Probably.

MS. KAHLO: Yes, and a curator. A very committed curator.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Also, let's face it, the education departments of museums are playing catch-up for what the museums themselves aren't doing. So, lots of times {it's those people inside the institutions who invite us} to speak.

MS. KAHLO: Well, there are {lots of} very well-intentioned people on the inside working for change, and sometimes it's easier for them to invite us to come and make trouble than it is for them to make the trouble themselves.

What happened at the National Gallery [of Art, Washington, DC] was kind of interesting. After the Washington Post project came out, we got a note from a group of curators, women curators, at the National Gallery, saying that they wanted to acquire some of our posters for their collection, because they realized the National Gallery was not doing what it could do. So they ended up taking a collection among themselves to buy the posters {for the permanent collection}. And they formed their own group, calling themselves the Gallery Girls and –

MS. KOLLWITZ: They all have pseudonyms. [Laughs.] Twenty of them.

MS. KAHLO: The intransigence of the National Gallery has, in fact, radicalized the curators.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Except it really pisses me off, I have to say. I'm glad they did that, but what the fuck were they waiting for? Why did we have to embarrass them in the full page of their newspaper? Why did it take that to get them to act when they could have acted before that?

MS. KAHLO: A lot of people need a wake-up call, and it was just a wake-up call.

MS. KOLLWITZ: They do, but it's still pathetic. That's what's wrong with the art world.

MS. KAHLO: Yes, but you have to allow people their own transformation. We just have to keep reminding them. The face of exclusion changes all the time, and every generation you have to go after a different thing. There was a time when people thought multiculturalism would solve everything, and that, in some cases, devolved into tokenism. And {we} had to ask the question:
Is tokenism is really a solution, or a continuation of the idea of exclusion? {We saw} the same {few} women and the same {few} artists of color over and over and over again, or one woman and one artist of color in a show to pay lip service to the idea of inclusion.

Who would have thought that tokenism would be the art world's first response to criticism about diversity? Who knows what {form exclusion will take} in the future? Right now {it's most visible} at art auctions. Women and artists of color do not come up at auction {often. When they do,} they don't get the same kind of prices as white men do. {How can women and artists of color keep producing significant work when they don't have access to the same means of art production?} If museum collecting patterns are going to be market driven, then what museums collect and preserve as our cultural history is not going to be accurate. Why, in this day and age, why should a few wealthy entrepreneurial art collectors {have the privilege} of telling us what our history is?

MS. RICHARDS: That's even a bigger problem.

MS. KAHLO: Yes, and as long as museums operate on the corporate model and are beholden to these people, then it's –

MS. RICHARDS: There's no acquisitions budget, as you said. Museums don't make the choices. The collectors –

MS. KOLLWITZ: But they also have these painting and sculpture committees or photography committees, where the collectors sit.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, that's what they're there for, to cultivate donors.

MS. KOLLWITZ: {A few years ago} there was a {newspaper} article about one particular investment banker guy who just started art collecting and how one of the Whitney curators was taking him all over town, introducing him to {important art} people, blah, blah, blah, and how he had just joined their painting and sculpture committee. And it happened to mention in the article - they were fawning over this guy - they never fawn over artists - that he had to donate $25,000 to the museum to be on this committee. Well, we knew you had to pay money. We didn't know it was that little. So we got excited. We thought, "Gee, maybe we could raise $25,000, and we could call the Whitney up and say, 'We're here. Have us.'" So we wrote them a letter, and we said, "We're working on raising the money, and as soon as we get it, we'll be there. We want to join this committee." But of course, then we went on to other things and never raised the money [laughs].

MS. KAHLO: We never heard back from them either. {No fawning letters from them!} They never said, "Dear Guerrilla Girls, We can't wait."

MS. RICHARDS: There was a division among the Guerrilla Girls in the beginning of the century, in the beginning of 2000.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did that play out? How did that change what you do or how did it change the Guerrilla Girls?

MS. KOLLWITZ: It didn't change what we do. Over time, groups go through so many different things. We've done lots of wonderful things and faced lots of issues over the years{, including a member taking funds out of our bank account, impacting our ability to produce our posters and books, and members trying to appropriate our name and reputation}. And there finally came a time when {a group of new people came into the group who didn't like the work we did, didn't approve of the humor, and wanted to change it. One new member even made off with some of the Guerrilla Girl gigs. They attempted to hijack the Guerrilla Girls from the women who authored the work. We refused to let that happen. It was eventually resolved when we allowed two separate groups to form, in addition to ours.} They can go out and do their own thing. Now everyone can do whatever they want.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there a fundamental difference of approach that you can talk about?

MS. KOLLWITZ: {Yes.}

{MS. KAHLO: We hashed out the terms of a settlement that legally defined each group and acknowledged the authorship of the past work. Our first agreement was with Guerrilla Girls On Tour, a theater group that wanted to do vaudevillian plays. We gave them a license allowing them to use that name. A second agreement was with GuerrillGirlsBroadband, Gertrude's group. They wanted to work on Internet issues. Our group continued as Guerrilla Girls. The split wasn't easy, and it's not perfect. Occasionally, there are instances of public confusion, when a school hires one group, thinking they've hired another.

There are some hard feelings about these events, particularly among early members who had left many years before the split and who didn't know firsthand what happened and formed opinions based on hearsay. Lots of misinformation has been passed among former members, as is evidenced in some of the other interviews.

But after 25 years, any organization, any relationship, any collaboration evolves, goes through growing pains and experiences difficult times and figures out how to continue. It's how the world works. We haven't lost our idealism or our drive, but we had to become pragmatic if the Guerrilla Girls' work was going to continue and if we were going to protect years of what we had accomplished. We're just so happy to be able to do the work of the Guerrilla Girls and expand it to new horizons. And also to know it won't be exploited in the future.}

MS. RICHARDS: I see. So there are now three different groups, but your group is the only one that's called the Guerrilla Girls?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Right.

MS. KAHLO: Yes. There was also this idea of integrity. There was a body of work that had to be protected and had to be {presented} ethically and honestly to the rest of the world. If schools and museums invite us to come and represent the Guerrilla Girls and the work that the Guerrilla Girls have done and are doing, it's got to be

presented by someone who knows how and why each Guerrilla Girls poster, book, action, et cetera, comes to be. Otherwise, everyone is misled.

MS. KOLLWITZ: It's just the way it was. It's good. It's all good.

MS. KAHLO: I don't think you could find a collaborative that has lasted that long that hasn't gone through some kind of kind of {disagreement and} negotiation. And we did it quite privately. We did it; we did it respectfully and –

MS. KOLLWITZ: Well, it's very difficult to go through things like that. It was incredibly difficult.

MS. RICHARDS: The archive of all the history of what you've done is –

MS. KOLLWITZ: The archive. Well, we had a storage room where certain things were put over a certain period of time, and as part of our agreement, we agreed that we would find a place for it. It was not everything. But there was a lot of stuff there, a lot of things.

MS. KAHLO: There's a lot of other stuff, too, that wasn't in that place at that time. {The agreement with GuerrillaGirlsBroadband called for the placement of the partial archive of the Guerrilla Girls - that had been in a certain storage room until 2000 - in a public collection. These items were a point of contention because, in 2001, a founder of GuerrillaGirlsBroadband changed the locks and threatened to sell the contents of the storage room without anyone's approval. At that point, the Guerrilla Girls changed the locks back. The legal agreement with GGBB set up a committee consisting of a present member of the Guerrilla Girls, a former member of the Guerrilla Girls, and a member of GuerrillaGirlsBroadband – Frida Kahlo, Alice Neel, and Gertrude Stein - to find a home for the material. After a long process, the committee sold the archive to the Getty Research Institute [Los Angeles, CA], and the proceeds were split equally among all the past members.}

{For some former members reading this interview, it might be the first time they have heard the whole story of the money problems, the split, and the archive sale, because most of them, including some who were interviewed for this series, were long out of the group when these events happened. Sadly, some former members listened to a lot of secondhand gossip and don't know what really transpired.}

MS. RICHARDS: Now, just a couple of more questions I have about your approach to the film industry. While you're not a part of the film industry as you are the art world as artists, you have 20 more years of experience doing this. Do you think that puts you in the same kind of position of understanding to approach a completely different field? You intuitively –

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: –and from your own experience knew the art world.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Okay, here's what's interesting. You put a poster like this or this {[points to posters about film industry]} up on the street. And what we get played back is just like when we started out in the art world years ago. It's information people have no idea about. Not only just people passing by on the street, but {the industry people as well}. It's shocking, shocking to them. It's a whole other {look [at]} a world {everybody is affected by}. So I think we use our basic strategy {to shock and then inform}. We show in public how bad {the film industry} is.

MS. RICHARDS: Connected with that question was another question. When you're focusing on Hollywood, I would assume that there would be new members joining the group from the Hollywood industry who are not coming from the art world to inform and to be part of the effort.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Right, but they don't necessarily have to be members. They could –

MS. KAHLO: They could, and there have been. There's never been anyone from the mainstream Hollywood industry {working with us}, but we've always worked with lots of people who aren't members. So if we want to find stuff out, we have moles. We've figured out –

MS. RICHARDS: But you're not reluctant to have a member, are you?

MS. KOLLWITZ: No, not at all.

MS. KAHLO: And what's interesting about the film world is that it's basically collaborative to begin with, so there are always different people working together. And we haven't really gotten into it that far. It might be fun to come back and talk to you once that book is done.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Once we've done this book, we'll really have a lot more information.

MS. KAHLO: Film is something that I'm not trained in, but movies have been a part of my life. It is a bit of a stretch, because I don't know the ins and outs quite the way I know the art world. It's a challenge.

MS. KOLLWITZ: I feel it's something I've been thinking about and studying for a really long time. I know a lot of people in the industry. When we take {an issue} on, we don't say, "Oh, we want to do something about war. Let's get a member who is a soldier." We talk to other people. Sometimes members bring in ideas, and sometimes the group reaches out to people {in other fields}.

One thing, however. This Hollywood stuff gets a huge bang for the buck because there's so much press set up to cover Hollywood. Much more than in the art world. You put a poster up, you get articles{, news coverage}. If you just saw the list of what websites and media coverage this stuff gets{, you'd understand}.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it also because it's incredibly fresh for Hollywood to see this? You've been working in the art world, but they have never experienced this.

MS. KOLLWITZ: It's a new story for them. Our decision was kind of haphazard, to {do a campaign about the} Oscars. We thought, "Let's put up a billboard during the Oscars. Let's just try it." The Oscars aren't the perfect way to talk about the film issue. There are so many other issues. But there's this huge press and huge interest in the Oscars. {Initially,} we didn't realize how well that would work to our advantage, and it really has. Some of what we do is just by chance {and good luck}.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you say that taking on Hollywood and the film industry is a much bigger and richer target than the art world?

MS. KAHLO: Don't know whether it's richer, but it's bigger. And it's more public.

MS. RICHARDS: It's a harder nut to crack than the art world?

MS. KAHLO: I think it is. Sure. It's harder to change. Because they're {huge }companies, there's just more infrastructure. {And the audience is humongous.} In the art world, we knew what our targets were. It was something that we were part of. The art world is more containable. It's smaller.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, maybe 20 years ago, Hollywood was smaller, too.

MS. KAHLO: And 20 years ago – yes. Yes, 20 years ago, the art world was smaller than it is today.

MS. KOLLWITZ: We could do a lot more. We want to do a lot more kinds of action stuff, too, and we have plans. {We've worked on global women's rights and other political issues, and we want to do more.}

MS. RICHARDS: I can imagine that maybe lots of college students who would love to be an intern and help you do this research.

MS. KOLLWITZ: We have ways of finding things out when we need to. We don't just {accumulate information}. Who has time for that? When we have an idea, we go look for what we can {use, and we find people to help us}.

MS. RICHARDS: And do you still approach the graphics in a similar way so that you maintain a kind of identity? Or is it evolving, changing?

MS. KOLLWITZ: I hope it's evolving, because we have so much more technological ability now.

MS. RICHARDS: It looks like this one, the movie poster, is designed in the mode of a movie poster.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Yes, mm-hm. We have the capability now, because printing has changed so much, to do just about anything we want to do. We always try to do a better job each time.

MS. RICHARDS: And when you talk about Hollywood, you're not talking about the television industry?

MS. KAHLO: We mean the entire entertainment industry. I guess that's the broadest word for the whole thing.

MS. KOLLWITZ: We just use the Hollywood term to cover it all.

MS. KAHLO: For example, voice-overs. Aren't voice-overs male? By and large, most of them are.

MS. KOLLWITZ: And especially in movie trailers. "In a world where people never talk to each other, one man decided to say something." There are two people who do all of those. And we heard the funniest story from someone who knows one of them. He was telling us the other day that this guy {who does all the voice-overs

for trailers} won't even go into the studio. He does the recording from his limo. He's such a big star now. Maybe you should have recorded us from our limo! {Only we don't have one!} Geez.

MS. RICHARDS: So is there anything else you'd like to say before we end this?

MS. KOLLWITZ: I think it's great that you're doing this and getting so many voices to talk about their experience in what has been an incredible {activist ride}.

MS. KAHLO: And it's not over yet. I hope you come back in another five years and do another interview to keep the record current.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to clarify one thing that I've heard from others I didn't actually say specifically. Other Guerrilla Girls have described their roles as different kinds of jobs, and it seems the two of you have focused on public speaking and performance.

MS. KOLLWITZ: No.

MS. RICHARDS: No. You've done everything?

MS. KOLLWITZ: Everything.

MS. KAHLO: We've done everything. {Strategizing, posters, stickers, billboards, gig and video scripts, writing and designing books, talks, hundreds of performances, workshops, research, administration, outreach - everything.}

MS. KOLLWITZ: We've been in it from the very beginning. We've done everything.

{MS. KAHLO: Well, you've talked to individuals who were members years ago, and their participation is over. But I'm not sure that you've talked to anyone else who is currently working with our group. Our conversation about the group is ongoing, open-ended, inconclusive. I think most of the people that you have already spoken to are not working with the group any longer, so for them it's a finished, definitive thing, a done deal.}

MS. RICHARDS: Right. They can look back and analyze.

{MS. KOLLWITZ: And some of them talked about things that happened long after they left the group. Their information is second- and thirdhand and, in some cases, sadly incorrect.}

MS. KAHLO: We're not ready to look back and make a final record yet.

MS. KOLLWITZ: {That's true, although} we've had a great time looking back with you. I know others have, too. We've heard from {some of the former members you've interviewed. For us,} it's brought back a lot of memories of those early, crazy years and the {constant} give and take. {Over the years, we've done amazing work that means something to people all over the world. Frida and I, Guerrilla Girls' founders, who have been involved with everything the group has done, will write our story someday, but until then, the Archives of American Art interviews will have to remain incomplete.}

MS. RICHARDS: That's okay.

MS. KAHLO: [Laughs] Otherwise, why would we continue? Part of our mystery in the world and part of our way of functioning in the world is the fact that a lot of that stuff is still inside ourselves{, waiting to be done}.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]