

The tools women use: the Women’s Gallery, Suffrage 125 and contemporary feminist museology

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ABSTRACT: This article provides case studies of the Wellington Women’s Gallery and the Suffrage 125 commemorations at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and wider Wellington, thereby exploring the concept and implementation of feminist museology as it manifests in the capital city. Each case study investigates the various items, contributors and accompanying programmes that have been used to continue the struggle for gender equality, as practised within the galleries, libraries, archives and museums sector. By examining these exhibitions, their themes and their content, the article reflects on the tools that have been used in the history of feminism, and how – despite the progress of suffragism and feminism – gender inequality remains an ongoing issue. It concludes by stating that these two case studies were more than just commemorations of the struggle for gender equality, and should be understood as feminist acts in and of themselves.

KEYWORDS: Museum, feminism, Women’s Gallery, Wellington, Suffrage 125, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, gender equality, activism, Marian Evans.

Introduction: Wellington and feminist museology

These are tools women have used in their fight for positive change, and markers of their success. (Te Papa 2019)

Since the establishment of Wellington as the capital of Aotearoa New Zealand in 1865, the city has continued to evolve as a hub for politics, heritage and the arts. It is the setting for Parliament, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) and a smorgasbord of cultural sites, icons and practices. It has also been a city of activists. While there has been a long history of activist protest, from the ‘Battle of Featherston Street’ in 1913 to the recent rallies surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement, one of the key tools in the propagation of ideas and values is exhibitions.

This article will consider the practices and implications of two structurally antithetical museological institutions,

which share the common features of exploring feminist ideologies, commemorating the struggle for gender equality, and advocating female artistic and political empowerment. The first case study is the Women’s Gallery, which ran as an exhibition space in Wellington from 1980 to 1984, and then as an advocacy charity from the early 1990s to 2005. It functioned as a permanent gallery space that hosted a multitude of thematically diverse exhibitions (albeit still connected by the fundamental thread of female artists, designers and curators) over the four years it operated in this role. Conversely, the Suffrage 125 commemoration was an example of remarkable heritage content (in this case, a formative part of Aotearoa New Zealand’s history), prompting temporary anniversary exhibitions rather than an established ideological space. It was manifested both in Wellington and across the country in a range of events, exhibitions and celebrations. The anniversary commemoration was celebrated at Te Papa in the form of a small exhibition with an accompanying range of online content, and a dedicated book published by Te Papa Press.

The primary aim of this article is to investigate the similarities and differences between the two museological installations – the Women’s Gallery and the Suffrage 125 exhibition at Te Papa – and determine how they varied in their approaches to practice, exhibition and thematic activism, while maintaining a commitment to female-centric commemoration and advocacy.

The Women’s Gallery

In the 1970s, the New Zealand women’s art movement became a key feature of the Wellington cultural scene. One of the leading figures in initiating the movement was Joanna Paul (1945–2003), a Dunedin-based artist whose *A Season’s Diaries* (1977) was intended to highlight the domestic limitations placed on women and the everyday realities of their lives during this period, and to express these in a visual, artistic medium. Paul’s project included the contributions of six other women. After a failed attempt to establish a travelling exhibition of the project, three of these contributors decided to found the Women’s Gallery in Wellington, with the intention of disseminating Paul’s original message. Established as a functional gallery space in 1980, the Women’s Gallery aimed to revitalise the meaning of a public gallery in functioning as an accessible, open space to ‘bring together women who were working in isolation

and wanted a women’s context’, regardless of whether or not they were ‘consciously feminist’ (Evans 2019). The original founders of the gallery – Marian Evans, Bridie Lonie and Anna Keir – sought to establish an educational, inclusive and supportive environment for artists, ‘free from the obstacles which were perceived to prohibit women from displaying their work in mainstream art spaces’ (Baker 2016: ii). Furthermore, the gallery was intended to welcome contributions from women who did not necessarily identify as artists, in addition to professional designers, artists and authors, thereby acting as a source of validation for women who had been discouraged or prevented from pursuing the arts. Over time, the Women’s Gallery grew and accumulated a number of devoted artists and administrators (Fig. 1)

During the four years in which the gallery served as an artistic display space, it mounted a range of exhibitions, all of which were concerned with contemporary realities for women at the time. These included, among others, *Maori Women’s Art*, *Women and the Environment* and *Self-Image* (all 1981). The exhibitions were usually accompanied by associated events and programmes, such as the seminars on women and justice that were part of *Women and Violence* (1980). While the Women’s Gallery was forced to close as an exhibition space in 1984 – largely due to the Department of Internal Affairs’ refusal to provide ongoing funding – the Women’s Gallery Incorporated was revived in the early



Fig. 1 Women’s Gallery collective, in front of Debra Bustin sign, 323 Willis Street, Wellington, 1982. Left to right: Celia Elizabeth, Linda Pearl, Linda Hardy, Barb McDonald (photo: Marian Evans).

1990s. This acted as a charity, advocating ‘projects which confronted discrimination against women artists or writers and enabled their work to reach a wider public’ (Evans 2019).

One of the most influential and provocative exhibitions held at the gallery was *Women and Violence*. It ran for two months in late 1980, and featured both the works of a range of passionate artists and an accompanying array of public programmes, sparking controversy and addressing a range of difficult subjects. The primary concern of the exhibition was the secrecy surrounding violence against women, both in the fact that instances of rape and/or domestic abuse were rarely reported, and were even more rarely listened to or taken seriously. The exhibition explored women’s experiences of violence publicly, and, in doing so, attempted to heal and reclaim autonomy and connection with other women. Heather McPherson (1942–2017), one of the contributing artists and coordinator of the exhibition, stated that: ‘Until we explore our experiences, until we can share and heal the assaults against us, we cannot protect and extend ourselves, we cannot take personal power in our lives, nor teach others to. Nor can we change the indirect violence against us ... If we refuse to admit their part in reinforcing the myth of the guilty victim’ (McPherson 1980).

In terms of the exhibition content and artworks, the contributors were determined to cover a wide range of both media and themes. Artist Bridie Lonie used the exhibition as a way of confronting ‘the domestic violence [she] had come to know’, sculpting a clay composition which was never fired (Fig. 2). At first glance it appears to be of a couple making love, but on closer inspection, it becomes clear that the male figure is strangling the female figure while she lies ‘acquiescent, even collusively’ beneath him (Lonie 1988: 169). The sculpture was originally set against a background

of photocopies featuring male and female hands, which were depicted in various stages between anger and affection. Other contributions to the exhibition included artworks dealing with incest, and ‘a birdcage filled with United Nations statistics sheets on wife-beating and cliterectomy’, an artwork that revealed the shocking victimisation of ‘up to thirty million women’ (McPherson 1988: 42).

Women and Violence further allowed for the participating artists to challenge themselves in terms of medium, display and art style. The exhibition brochure stated that one of the key aims of the Women’s Gallery was to provide support and encouragement to women ‘who wish to experiment with new forms and explore new content which reflects the reality of [their] experience’ (McPherson 1980). Accordingly, the exhibition was intended to act as an exploration via a multitude of different media, including the tangible and visual artworks on display within the gallery, and the accompanying films that were shown as part of the public programme. This had a number of significant consequences for visitors and artists alike, in addition to affecting the exhibition itself. Initially, the multimedia nature of the exhibition acted to empower the artists, allowing them to push their own artistic and creative boundaries in order to be creative. This artistic capacity and freedom within the Women’s Gallery implicitly reflected the institutional power structures and barriers that limited female artists from exploring artistic media within a mainstream context. Furthermore, the use of various methods of art, display and media allowed for more diverse – and consequently more immersive – content, which engaged and appealed to a broader visitor demographic. It enabled some women visiting the gallery to witness representations of experiences they themselves had been through.



Fig 2 *Man with hands around a woman's neck*, 1980, clay, 210 mm. (width) x 120 mm. (height) x 110 mm. (depth). Artist Bridie Lonie (photo: Marian Evans).

The exhibition's associated array of public programmes explored other methods of public engagement. Ranging from film screenings and public seminars to rallies and self-defence classes, they were devoted to raising awareness of the ill treatment of women, providing safe spaces for female discussion and connection, and equipping women with the tools to protect themselves, both emotionally and physically. Films shown alongside the exhibition included *Rape Culture* (1975), *Women of Halfway House* (n.d.), *In Moral Danger* (1977) and *Do I Have to Kill My Child?* (1976), while seminars presented an opportunity for women to meet and hear from female members of the police force, government and local council. Most notable was the organisers' inclusion of a two-day self-defence course, which was pitched in the public programme guide as follows: 'There are as many ways of coping with physical or mental rape as there are ways of not coping. Rapists cannot exist in a society where women refuse to be victims. This course deals with physical, mental, political SELF DEFENCE' (McPherson 1980).

As evidenced here, the public programmes supplemented the exhibits in mobilising feminist activism, and allowed the explicit articulation of gender-based issues while simultaneously demanding and facilitating change. In addition, they offered practical tools and techniques intended to empower women, on both a physical and emotional scale, and in a public or private basis. The various exhibitions and programmes held by the Women's Gallery, including the exhibition discussed here, display instances of the museological context being used as a tool for specific activist requirements and ideologies. Marian Evans stated that the 'most powerful communications at the Women's Gallery ... were about the relationships of the art shown there to women's daily lives: physical, spiritual, emotional, political' (Evans 1988: 229).

Te Papa and Suffrage 125

In contrast to the permanent structures of the Women's Gallery, the Suffrage 125 anniversary marked the 125th anniversary of women's suffrage in Aotearoa New Zealand. The year 2018 witnessed urgent feminist politics, both within New Zealand and internationally. The resurgence of the #MeToo movement, the strides taken by Jacinda Ardern as New Zealand's recently elected third female prime minister and the threat to gender equality presented by the then president of the United States – in addition to changing perceptions of the LGBTQ+ community – combined to

create a significant opportunity to reflect on the struggles and victories that have brought feminism and gender equality to where they are today. In 2018, museums, ministries, art galleries and a multitude of other establishments celebrated the anniversary of the Electoral Act 1893 – a milestone piece of legislation that granted New Zealand women the right to vote – with events, activities and exhibitions across the country (Manatū Taonga 2019). Suffrage 125, which was officially ranked as a Tier 1 Commemoration (an event/movement that significantly shifted the social, political and cultural landscape of New Zealand), was predominantly organised by Manatū Wāhine Ministry for Women, with support from Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage (Manatū Taonga 2020). Together, they established branding and social media platforms that facilitated connections between individual commemorative events and exhibitions, and were thereby able to curate a national programme. As described by Bronwyn Labrum, then Head of New Zealand and Pacific Cultures at Te Papa, the Suffrage 125 anniversary offered an opportunity for the nation to collaborate in the commemoration of 'the legacy of female suffrage', and to celebrate 'the milestones that have been fought for and won', while simultaneously acknowledging that inequality and discrimination still existed in our society (Te Papa 2018a).

The establishment of this programme, and of Suffrage 125 as a national commemoration, served a number of key functions. Most obviously, the exhibitions and events aimed to highlight the narratives and roles of New Zealand suffragists and gender activists, with a particular emphasis on the untold stories of Māori, Pacific and Chinese communities. In doing so, the commemoration intended to celebrate the diverse individuals 'who do extraordinary things to create positive social change for women and New Zealand'. The other main aim of Suffrage 125 was as a critical examination of Aotearoa New Zealand's future, and what might be learnt from the lessons of the past. In order to achieve this, the anniversary was intended to establish an open, polyvocal space for 'conversations about our future, and the importance of civic engagement and participation' (Manatū Taonga 2019). These objectives were eloquently explored in the proliferation of Suffrage 125-based exhibitions, events and programmes held in Wellington, and particularly in Te Papa.

In her 2016 MA thesis on the Women's Gallery as a liminal space in Aotearoa New Zealand's feminist art history, Kirsty Baker stated that in regard to the capital city, the 'proliferation



Fig. 3 *Doing It for Themselves: Women fight for equality* | *Te Tohe mō ngā Take Wāhine* exhibition, 2018 (photo: Michael O'Neill, Te Papa 114552).



Fig. 4 *Doing It for Themselves: Women fight for equality* | *Te Tohe mō ngā Take Wāhine* exhibition, 2018 (photo: Maarten Holl, Te Papa 114969).

of creative spaces existing in such close proximity to the seat of political power, has resulted in an inextricable relationship between the cultural and the political' (Baker 2016: 1). As mentioned previously, Wellington serves as a hub for cultural and political intersection, and consequently acted as a key location for the Suffrage 125 agenda. As the national museum, the involvement of Te Papa in the Suffrage 125 programme was essential, and it rose to the occasion with the mini-exhibition *Doing It for Themselves: Women fight for equality | Te Tohe mō ngā Take Wāhine* (Figs 3 and 4).

The exhibition, which ran from 19 September 2018 to 13 October 2019, incorporated a range of both historical and contemporary objects, each of which had strong feminist symbolism and connotations, to reflect on the evolution of women's rights and gender equality over the past 125 years. These items included Britain's Women's Social and Political Union Medal for Valour (Fig. 5), awarded in 1912 to the suffragist Frances Parker (1875–1924) in 'Recognition of a Gallant Action, whereby through Endurance to the last Extremity of Hunger and Hardship, a Great Principle of Political Justice was Vindicated'. Parker, a New Zealand expatriate who became a prominent suffragist in Britain,



Fig. 5 Women's Social and Political Union Medal for Valour, 1912, silver, 42 mm. (width) × 85 mm. (depth) × 22 mm. (diameter). Artist Toye & Co. (purchased 2016. Te Papa GH024772).

may have been motivated to such passionate activism in a new country by the fact that voting rights had been granted to women in New Zealand almost 20 years before. The particular terminology of the medal's inscription not only acknowledges the appalling suffering of the recipient – imprisonment and forced-feeding – but 'explicitly evokes the Suffrage struggle as a military campaign', and likens the suffragists' valour to that expected of soldiers on active service (Te Papa 2016). Other items in the exhibition included a suit worn by Jenny Shipley in 1997 'on her first day in office as New Zealand's first-ever female Prime Minister', and a puletasi (two-piece dress) worn by Winnie Laban in 1999 when she delivered her maiden speech as New Zealand's first Pacific Island female Member of Parliament.

Another key item in the collection was a 1988 print by the Guerrilla Girls, entitled *The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist*. The artwork balances an effective combination of deep irony, humour and feminism to provide a glaring critique on the realities of living as a female artist in the 1980s. The Guerrilla Girls formed in 1985 as an anonymous collective of American-based 'feminist activist artists', whose core beliefs centred on fighting discrimination, supporting human rights and undermining the 'idea of a mainstream narrative by revealing the understory, the subtext, the overlooked and the downright unfair' (Guerrilla Girls n.d.). Anonymity has been a key part of the group's ideology, as it focuses on the issues at hand rather than on individual artists, and has been maintained through the donning of gorilla masks when undertaking interventions and the assumption of the names of dead female artists. The print displayed in Te Papa demonstrated the witty and withering irony prevalent in much of the group's oeuvre, and reflects on *The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist*, including the lines 'Working without the pressure of success', 'Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood' and 'Not having to choke on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits' (Whelan 2018: 140). When asked about this particular print, the Guerrilla Girl with the alias Frida Kahlo (one of the founding members of the group) said, 'In a way, if the only power you have to strike back is to ridicule, or to humiliate, it's very gratifying. The power of political satire is that it is claiming a certain kind of power against domination' (Whelan 2018: 148).

This print – along with a range of other works and items in the exhibition – was discussed in *Women Now: The Legacy of Female Suffrage* (2018), the first volume of a new series of Te Papa Press essay collections entitled 'Thinking about'.

Women Now brought together essays from 12 New Zealand authors, each of whom had been ‘given an object of significance to the history of New Zealand women from Te Papa’s collection and [was] asked to respond to the object in whatever way they chose’ (Labrum 2018: 10). The role of these various items was best summarised by Te Papa’s web page for the exhibition, which stated: ‘These are the tools women have used in their fight for positive change, and markers of their success’ (Te Papa 2019).

Highlighting contemporary gender dynamics

While each of these items testified in their own right to the success of suffragism and the advancement of gender equality, further objects and artworks on display highlighted the colossal injustices and inequalities experienced by women and still prevalent in many parts of the world today. One such object was the memorable Pussyhat (Fig. 6), a bright pink knitted beanie with cat’s ears. This was the titular icon of the Pussyhat Project, a movement that was launched as a protest in response to the 2016 election of Donald Trump as president of the United States. The project was founded in preparation for the 2017 Women’s March on Washington and the accompanying sister marches that followed around



Fig. 6 Pussyhat, 2017, wool, 245 mm. (width) × 175 mm. (height) × 20 mm. (depth). Artist Kat Coyle, knitter Erin Kennedy (gift of Erin Kennedy, 2017. Te Papa GH018161).

the globe, with the intention of establishing a ‘sea of pink hats’ in order to create a ‘powerful visual statement of solidarity’ for gender equality and women’s rights (Pussyhat Project 2017).

The Pussyhat itself was intended to reclaim a ‘derogatory word for female genitalia’ (and one notoriously deployed by Trump), as well as to celebrate the traditionally female crafts of sewing, crochet and knitting (Te Papa 2017). The founders of the project argued that ‘wearing pink together is a powerful statement that we are unapologetically feminine and we unapologetically stand for women’s rights’ (Pussyhat Project 2017). The Pussyhat was also a key project of stitch and butch/stitch and bitch groups, a knitting group movement that has recently gained popularity as a way of reclaiming ‘women’s craft’ in contemporary feminist terms (Te Papa 2017).

Another similarly effective local item in *Doing It for Themselves* was the NOPE Tee, donated by Te Papa curator Matariki Williams and designed by the NopeSisters Clothing initiative. This group was founded as a method of fundraising for sexual abuse help in the Wellington region, and pursued the mission directive of designing ‘fashion for a cause, making a positive difference to real people, one tee at a time’ (NopeSisters 2016). The movement intended to use clothing as a public platform through which to address issues of gender inequality and discrimination, in addition to a range of ‘contemporary zeitgeist movements, including: sexual abuse and gender-based violence and the #metoo movement; period poverty and access to affordable and sustainable menstrual products; breast cancer awareness; mental health issues’ (Te Papa 2018b).

The NopeSisters Clothing group broadened its kaupapa (principles) after the 2019 Christchurch mosque terrorist attacks to include ideologies and items that were explicitly focused on an anti-racist directive (Te Papa 2018b). The specific T-shirt used in the exhibition highlighted crucial elements of unequal gender dynamics that still operate in Aotearoa New Zealand, and contemporary forms of feminist activism.

Within the exhibition itself, both the NOPE Tee and the Pussyhat acted as powerful symbols of the role of protest clothing, and illuminate the inherent links between gender equality, activism and politics in a society pervaded by sexual inequity. The exhibition included these specific items for two reasons. First, both highlight the ongoing necessity for activism and reforms to bring about gender equality. Second, they serve to demonstrate the role of clothing and textiles

(both typically seen as more ‘feminine’ items) in protests, and as an independent mode of activism. Clothing has the capacity to act as a uniform, as a statement and as a way to attach a memorable visual record to a movement. When dressed in similar colours, outfits or accessories, activists and protestors can have an enormous visual and psychological impact, drawing the attention of politicians, the media and the wider world. As demonstrated by both the Pussyhat and the NOPE Tee, ‘some of these garments gain lasting symbolic power’ (Te Papa 2017). Their inclusion not only commemorated the struggles and achievements of the suffragists, but also acted as a sharp reminder of the inequalities that still prevail in gender politics, and an acknowledgement that ‘the battle for equality is still ongoing’ (Te Papa 2018a).

Beyond feminist textiles and protest clothing, *Doing It for Themselves* provided an opportunity to explore the evolving relationship between the spheres of scientific and technological development, and the ongoing pursuit of feminism and gender equality. A key example of this in the Te Papa collection is a box containing the Anovlar 21 contraceptive pill (Fig. 7). Anovlar was introduced in 1961 as the first contraceptive pill to be used in Aotearoa New Zealand, and was initially intended for married women, as an aid to help ‘space their families’ or to ‘delay the timing of the first birth’ (Te Papa 2011). While many doctors supported the introduction of the contraceptive pill to New Zealand, conservative organisations such as the Branch Ethical Committee of New Zealand Medical Association remained wary. The committee argued against the prescription of the pill to both married and single women, stating in 1966 that ‘the supply of prescriptions by medical practitioners of contraceptives to unmarried persons, thereby facilitating extra-marital relationships, is not in keeping with the highest principles of the medical profession’ (Brookes 2016: 330).

Although the contraceptive pill would go on to become a vital symbol in feminist ideologies (in relation both to women’s autonomy within sexual intercourse and to the general control of women over their own bodies), its initial prescription for married women exposed a dimension in which it was of huge advantage to the husband. While contraception had already existed in the form of condoms, the introduction of the pill ‘offered a new peace of mind’, particularly for men, who no longer saw themselves as solely responsible for contraception. Furthermore, many women reported that ‘the use of condoms had “caused ill-feeling”

between [a woman] and her husband’, while the use of the pill increased a man’s ‘aesthetic appreciation’. Some married women even went so far as to suggest that the pill was a ‘prerequisite for a happy marriage’ (Brookes 2016: 330).

Initially, the pill also had negative consequences for single women, as the accessibility of easy contraception led men to believe that all women would now be ‘available’ for sex. However, within a few years of the pill’s introduction, the realities of intercourse outside marriage and of sexually active youth became more accepted, and the primary function of the Anovlar 21 pill became to protect unmarried women from unwanted pregnancies (Te Papa 2011). Within the next 15 years, use of the pill increased exponentially, and by 1974, half of all New Zealand women of reproductive age were on it. The life-changing promises of the pill held out, and the 1960s and 1970s saw a new generation of young women who were able to ‘invest in education and career training secure in the knowledge they could prevent pregnancy without having to practise abstinence’ (Brookes 2016: 330–331).

While the pill remains one of the most popular forms of contraception for women in Aotearoa New Zealand, it does present a number of risks and side effects. As described by the Ministry of Health website, the basic physical side effects of most contraceptive pills include



Fig. 7 Anovlar 21 contraceptive pill, c. 1965, paper, 173 mm. (width) x 55 mm. (height) x 15 mm. (depth). Manufacturer Schering AG. (gift of Dame Margaret Sparrow, 2011. Te Papa GH022147).

increased breast tenderness, headaches, mood changes and or/changes in one's skin (Ministry of Health 2017). Even in the best-case scenario, the pill is almost guaranteed to produce some undesirable physical effects. In addition to these, extended use of contraceptive medication can result in a range of side effects that vary from the unpleasant to the downright dangerous, 'including blood clots, strokes and heart attacks' (Te Papa n.d.). Similarly, the pill may, on occasion, be conducive to severe changes in mental health, which may include 'intolerable anxiety ... intolerable depression; or maybe both simultaneously' (Hill 2020). Through its development and propagation, the pill became an integral enabler in women's reclamation of their own bodies and sexual freedom, and the introduction of a contraceptive for women directly defied the historical orthodoxy that it was a woman's obligation to bear children. However, the often intense or debilitating negative effects that may accompany use of the pill suggest that this ought to be treated as a milestone in the medical development of effective contraception, and not as a utopian conclusion.

Another key example of the evolving dynamic between technological advancement and gender equality is the Unimom Allegro Electric Breast Pump (Fig. 8), which was also included in *Doing It for Themselves*. The pill and breast pump share a number of parallels in the history of their development, as both were developed as regulated medical devices that were then reclaimed for the purpose of female empowerment. Breast pumps were originally developed for

use by nursing mothers in order to 'express milk for infants who could not feed from the breast', and were historically used within hospitals and maternity homes. However, as the normalisation of women as full-time workers became increasingly prevalent throughout the twentieth century, breast pumps became a necessity for working mothers, allowing them to discreetly and hygienically express milk when required. Motorised pumps such as the one in the museum's collection came into production in the late twentieth century. As stated in the collection record for the device, the evolution of the breast pump illustrates 'the intersection between technology and biological processes' (Te Papa 2018c). Therefore, while the pill allowed freedom in the *prevention* of motherhood, the breast pump created a dimension of convenience and freedom *within* the historically limiting role of motherhood.

In addition to exploring the relationship between technology and feminism, however, the particular breast pump in the Te Papa collection connotes certain aspects of the 'gendered nature of parliamentary politics'. The pump was donated in 2018 by the former Green MP Holly Walker. Following the birth of her first child in 2013 and four months of parental leave, on her return to work Walker was required to express breast milk with the pump every couple of hours. Not only was this an exhausting and inconvenient necessity, but it led to her being required 'to leave caucus and select committee meetings at regular intervals'. From the outset of Walker's experience as a



Fig. 8 Unimom Allegro Electric Breast Pump, c. 2012, plastic, 90 mm. (width) x 220 mm. (height) x 300 mm. (depth). Manufacturer Unimom (gift of Holly Walker, 2018. Te Papa GH025334/1-14).

working mother, she encountered difficulties and challenges within the inherent structures of parliamentary processes. Initially, Walker's four months' leave was considered to be an abnormally generous allocation, the system having been 'predicated on the assumption that MPs would either be men or if they were women that they would not have children and require extended leave' (Te Papa 2018c).

These gendered expectations of parliamentary employment in regard to motherhood were again highlighted in critical contemporary reactions to Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern in her role as a working mother. Since giving birth in 2018, Ardern has been under scrutiny not just as a politician, but also as a mother. She has been subject to a range of sexist and invasive questions, including one reporter asking whether she felt any 'guilt' about balancing her roles as a mother and Prime Minister of New Zealand (Truman 2019). However, it is important to note that the reporter – ironically the normally liberal Victoria Derbyshire of BBC News – was widely derided for the reactionary question, which reflects the influence of feminism in shaping contemporary media content.

As experienced by both Ardern and Walker, gender inequity is still inherent within the current systems and culture of Parliament. A discrepancy between the medical expectations of motherhood and the economic pressures of the workplace also survives. Breast milk is commonly acknowledged as the ideal sustenance for infants and newborns, and consequently mothers are strongly encouraged to practise breastfeeding. As stated by the Employment Relations Amendment Act 2008, New Zealand employers are obligated to provide time and facilities in which mothers are able to breastfeed or express milk (Te Papa 2018c). However, as Walker's experience proved, the social and medical pressures to breastfeed are, to a certain extent, incompatible with the structures of a workplace, particularly a historically gendered sphere of work such as being a Member of Parliament. The inclusion of the Unimom breast pump in *Doing It for Themselves* and the personal experiences it connotes reinforce the theme of historical evolution of technology for the advance of gender equality, yet simultaneously highlight the tacit injustices still experienced by women in the workplace. As was sharply observed by the Guerrilla Girls, the advantages of being a woman working in a male-oriented society include 'Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood' (Whelan 2018: 140).

Suffrage 125 in Wellington

The Suffrage 125 commemoration was celebrated throughout the country by a range of different institutions, and through varied events and media. In addition to the Te Papa mini-exhibition, Wellington played host to a range of supporting commemorative events. Over the course of a week in mid-September 2018, the Wellington Parliament Buildings hosted NZ Parliament Celebrates Suffrage 125, including a range of seminars, crafts and festive activities. Among these was a speciality tour, relating to the Suffrage 125 anniversary and the history of women in New Zealand. It focused on 'historic events relating to women in Parliament' and incorporated key locations within the Parliamentary Buildings, such as the Women's Suffrage Room, a select committee meeting room. The event also incorporated a number of mini-exhibitions and displays, including a range of artworks by female artists and an assortment of suffrage-related memorabilia, such as an address from the English suffragists to New Zealand Premier Richard Seddon (1845–1906) and the silver and agate pen Seddon reportedly used to sign the Electoral Act in 1893. A range of fun and creative activities were organised for families, such as making paper camellias (an established national symbol of suffragism) and taking a 'suffrage-themed snap' in a photo booth (Eventfinda 2018a). The inclusion of activities for a range of ages enhanced the accessibility of the event and ensured that it was family-friendly.

Another event took place at Te Papa as an accompaniment to the Suffrage 125 commemoration. This served the dual purpose of unveiling the museum's new exhibition, while also introducing the latest publication from Te Papa Press – *Women Now*, the aforementioned first publication in the 'Thinking about' series (Fig. 9). Bronwyn Labrum and her colleague Katie Cooper, the exhibition's curator, both stressed the necessity for the new publication and exhibition. As discussed above, *Women Now* collated a range of 'provocative, insightful and energetically argued essays by 12 leading New Zealand writers and thinkers', each of which was prompted by an item in Te Papa's collection (Eventfinda 2018b). The objects selected for the book focused on 'public campaigns, cultural forms and institutions, and conventional forms of advocacy (even if the content was never conventional)' (Labrum 2018: 11). At the event, Labrum discussed the book's origins, and the 'hugely satisfying process' of engaging a range

of leading writers in Aotearoa New Zealand. Through the use of collection items as prompts, the text served the dual purpose of showcasing the tools and techniques women have used in the fight for gender equality, while simultaneously exploring contemporary reactions to these prevailing issues. Cooper then explored the development and content of the exhibition, ‘sharing the stories of the objects and the process of curating the exhibition’ (Eventfinda 2018b).

While Suffrage 125 commemorations manifested in a diverse array of media and levels of intensity throughout the country, each event was intended to stimulate debate and accentuate the fact that gender equality is an ongoing issue. The employment of the range of techniques and media used to convey this message enhanced the accessibility of this concept, and ultimately ensured that the anniversary was more than just a commemoration of the struggle for gender equality, but also a feminist act in and of itself.

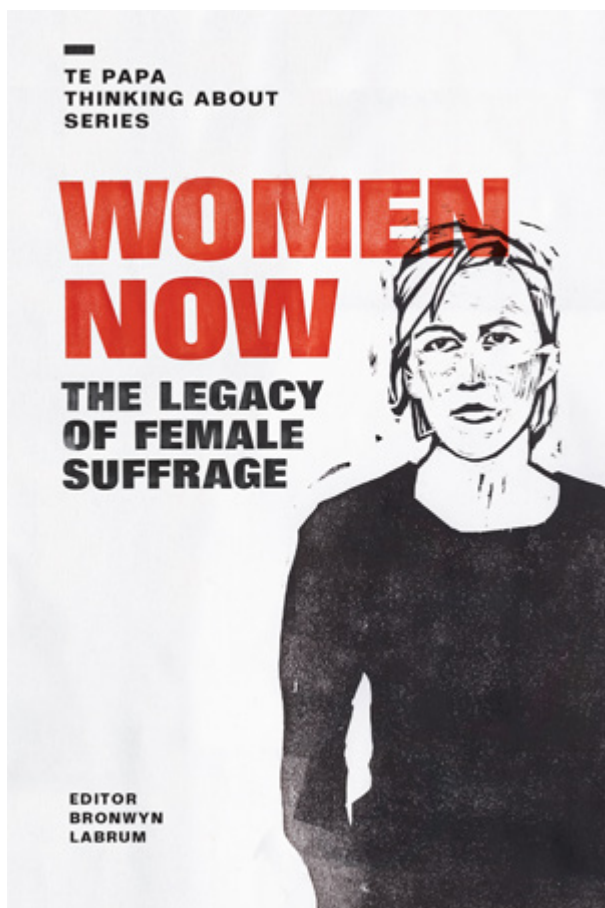


Fig. 9. *Women Now: The Legacy of Female Suffrage*, 2018, book cover. Designer Jo Bailey, artist Stefan Massam (photo: Te Papa Press).

Conclusion

As the cultural and political hub of Aotearoa New Zealand, Wellington provided a significant arena for gender activism and the women’s art movement of the 1970s. This was manifested first in the Women’s Gallery, an institution devoted to celebrating and exploring women’s art and publicising private spheres of injustice and abuse, and much later in the Suffrage 125 anniversary, a programme devoted to the commemoration of suffragism, but that also recognised the need for further change. In both instances, there was an evocative intermingling of past, present and future, and a relentlessly hopeful form of activism.

This article has demonstrated the various forms in which museological institutions can be employed as spaces for social justice and positive change, while also creating public spaces for polyvocal connection and community. Furthermore, it has explored how both the Women’s Gallery and the Suffrage 125 anniversary deployed a range of similar and yet simultaneously antithetical museological devices to propagate feminist ideologies, commemorate the struggle for gender equality, and advocate female artistic and political empowerment. The evolution between the two ‘museological stages’ of the Women’s Gallery and the Suffrage 125 commemoration – in other words, a female-centric artistic initiative orchestrated by women, as opposed to a state-funded national commemoration that was both recognised and celebrated by the Te Papa – indicates the historical progress in the continued struggle for gender equality.

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