Catalog Statement from the Director

Half the Sky: Intersections in Social Practice Art

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*Half the Sky: Intersections in Social Practice Art* is designed to include a diversity of women, art forms and perspectives. It leaves room for the unexpected, for the opening up of connections and perspectives between all individuals partici- pating in this project. In some small way, it may lead to a collective improvement in our larger communities and ripple out to regions, countries and the world as a whole. Getting the door open, through detente and diplomacy, can be an important first step towards evolution of thought on ALL sides of any question. We kept this tenet in mind when devel- oping this project.

More than a side by side showing of works of women artists from different countries, this project as a whole is social practice art. It is a collection of collaborations, interactions, dialogue, performance, working groups, and com- munity building that highlight social issues. It encompasses a delegation of U.S.-based artists and writers traveling to LuXun Academy of Fine Arts in Shenyang, China. It has interactive, participatory offerings created by these delegates to engage Chinese artists in ways that break through cultural and language differences. It is Chinese artists and the profes- sors and students at LuXun Academy illuminating their art practices and methods. And, it is a myriad collection of art forms – from the traditional to the new – which expresses the unique perceptions of inner and outer worlds.

Diversity is seen in the women involved — women from across the U.S., China, Korea, Iran and Taiwan. It is seen in how the work was presented: from collaborators, from a collective, from individual artists, from a non-profit activism organization, and in the forms of art: installations, social practice art documentation, video, photography, painting, drawing, performance documentation, and sculpture. And in the foci of the works: storytelling, gender violence, envi- ronment, science, safety, homelessness, identity, peace, and community building.

We are carefully documenting this project. Preserving the legacy of self-identified women artists is a key focus of the Women’s Caucus for Art. As some question the continued need for women-centric efforts, others agree that our media and museums still lack enough feminist content to inspire women to act; and that these efforts, and their documenta- tion, are critical to our future.

For years my work has focused on building relationships between the social and political worlds through development of art and correlating events that engage viewers to question, to consider, and to act. These provide opportunities for conversation as well as formation of connections. In my experience, each of us comes to these interactions with a history that colors the way we think. Given encouragement and support, we can recognize the socially embedded context with- in which each of us speaks, judges and acts. We can look for ways to see the desire for connection behind all of this and to leave room to identify with each other. As one of my participants shared with me, “It is ordinary women sharing their extraordinary wisdom that makes us stronger.” And that is how we, in this project, are holding up our half of the sky.

WCA is also an NGO (non-governmental organization) of the United Nations, which recognizes and encourages art that facilitates negotiation and that creates a sense that we all belong to the larger human community despite ethnic, cultural or religious differences. UN General Secretary, Ban Ki-Moon, and the former Head of UN Women, Michelle Bachelet, have supported the notion that we cannot succeed in global efforts to improve situations for all citizens until the

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wisdom and experiences of women are more largely included in our problem solving. We need to empower women and do it in ways that allow them to be effective in their own cultures. The UN sees art as an essential tool in this effort. This project is a manifestation of WCA’s response to these UN objectives.