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Heavy Metal—Women to Watch 2018
National Museum of Women in the Arts | June 28–Sept. 16, 2018

Contemporary artists explore and expand on the qualities of metal

WASHINGTON—The National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) presents Heavy Metal—Women to Watch 2018, which highlights contemporary women artists working with a variety of metals and techniques to create artworks such as wall-size installations, exquisite jewelry and reinventions of familiar objects. On view June 28–Sept. 16, 2018, the exhibition features 20 artists and more than 50 works of art made from silver, copper, bronze, pewter, aluminum and more.

Inspired by NMWA’s collection of silverwork crafted by British and Irish women in the 18th and 19th centuries, Heavy Metal seeks to further disrupt the predominantly masculine narrative that surrounds metalworking despite women’s consistent presence in the field for centuries. This narrative is rooted, in part, in the gendered discourse surrounding the traditional distinctions between fine art, design, craft and decorative art. While large-scale bronze and steel sculptures (often made by men) are hailed as “fine” art, subtle and more delicate works in metal, towards which women have been historically encouraged, are frequently labeled as craft or “decorative” art.

“The idea that metalworking is too physically demanding for women to do is pervasive in historical as well as contemporary discourse,” said NMWA Director Susan Fisher Sterling. “The contemporary artists selected for the 2018 installment of Women to Watch—and NMWA’s own collection of 18th and 19th-century silver by women—contradict this archaic notion.”

Heavy Metal is the fifth installment in NMWA’s dynamic Women to Watch exhibition series, which is presented every two to three years. The series features emerging or underrepresented artists from the states and countries in which the museum has outreach committees. Twenty
participating committees worked with curators in their respective regions to create shortlists of artists working with metal. From these lists, NMWA curators selected the artists whose work is on view in Heavy Metal.

“Like modern-day alchemists, artists working in metal transform their materials into valuable and unique objects,” said NMWA Associate Curator Virginia Treanor. “Heavy Metal demonstrates that contemporary women artists carry on a vibrant legacy in metalwork.”

From the sleek Minimalist aluminum forms of Rana Begum to the rough-hewn quality of Alejandra Prieto’s iron pyrite sculptures, the featured artists delight in the physical properties of their chosen medium. Some artists revel in the manipulation and fabrication of the material, while others source their medium from existing, often discarded objects. Alice Hope arranges used aluminum can tabs and ball chains to create mesmerizing, large-scale installations. Paula Castillo also uses readily available materials, particularly industrial by-products. She fashions these pieces into sculptures by first modeling the forms using computer software and then welding individual components together. Carolina Sardi and Kelsey Wishik both manipulate steel to create their vastly different forms.

The durability of metal attracts artists who seek to encapsulate memory, either collective or personal. Leila Khoury creates industrial-looking works that serve as indelible monuments to places threatened or destroyed by war in Syria. The wearable art of Kerianne Quick is likewise inspired by the effects of war, particularly the objects carried by those who are forced to flee.

From the macrocosm of the universe to the microcosm of the molecular makeup of metal, the natural world provides fertile ground for inspiration. Blanca Muñoz explores phenomena of space and light through undulating forms, while Serena Porrati experiments with the properties of different metals and ponders the endless cycle of mining, smelting, use and re-use of the material. Charlotte Charbonnel finds beauty in the visualization of magnetic fields using ferrite filings, and Beverly Penn memorializes the transience of nature with botanically inspired forms.
Jewelers represented in *Heavy Metal* push the boundaries of the category with works ranging from the darkly fanciful pieces by Lola Brooks to the oceanic forms of Cheryl Eve Acosta. Petronella Eriksson also finds inspiration in nature, particularly the forests of her native Sweden. Susie Ganch uses her training as a jeweler to create large sculptures that retain the delicacy of ornamentation.

Some artists play with the masculine associations of metalwork to engage with ideas about traditional feminine roles. Holly Laws takes discarded wooden ironing boards and tops them with copper and bronze elements that transform these instruments of drudgery into something altogether more threatening and sinister. Venetia Dale works in pewter to evoke the colonial market for that material, particularly in the Boston area, and to examine the gendered market for household goods. Katherine Vetne also explores this market by using objects such as the crystal pitchers common to wedding registries, which she melts down and coats with silver nitrate. Through her wearable sculptures, Carolina Rieckhof Brommer considers the paradox of home as both haven and prison for women.

*Heavy Metal—Women to Watch 2018* is organized by the National Museum of Women in the Arts and sponsored by participating committees in Arkansas, Northern California, Southern California, Chile, Florida, France, Georgia, Italy, the Greater Kansas City Area, Massachusetts, the Mid-Atlantic Region, Mississippi, New Mexico, the Greater New York Area, Ohio, Peru, Spain, Sweden, Texas, and the United Kingdom. The exhibition is generously supported by the Clara M. Lovett Emerging Artists Fund, Share Fund, the Texas State Committee of NMWA, and the NMWA Advisory Board, with additional funding provided by the Sue J. Henry and Carter G. Phillips Exhibition Fund, Marisa and Vincent Boulard, Nellie Partow, Southern Copper Corporation, and Vhernier.

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*Heavy Metal—Women to Watch 2018* Nominating Committees, Selected Artists and Curators: **Arkansas:** Artist Holly Laws; Curator Matthew Smith, Arkansas Art Center; **California (Northern):** Artist Katherine Vetne; Curator Jenny Gheith, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; **California (Southern):** Artist Kerianne Quick; Curator Bobbye Tigerman, Los Angeles County Museum of Art; **Chile:** Artist Alejandra Prieto; Curator Gloria Cortés Aliaga, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes;
Florida: Artist Carolina Sardi; Curator Diana Nawi, Pérez Art Museum Miami; France: Artist Charlotte Charbonnel; Curator Alicia Knock, Centre Pompidou; Georgia: Artist Lola Brooks; Curator Sarah Schleuning, Dallas Museum of Art (Formerly of the High Museum of Art); Italy: Artist Serena Porrati; Curator Iolanda Ratti, Museo del Novecento; Greater Kansas City Area: Artist Cheryl Eve Acosta; Curator Barbara O’Brien, Formerly of the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art; Massachusetts: Artist Venetia Dale; Curator Emily Zilber, editor, Metalsmith (Formerly of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston); Mid-Atlantic Region: Artist Susie Ganch; Curators Stefanie Fedor, Visual Arts Center of Richmond, and Megan Rook-Koepsel, independent curator; Mississippi: Artist Kelsey Wishik; Curator Pat Pinson, Mary C. O’Keefe Cultural Center; New Mexico: Artist Paula Castillo; Curator Laura Addison, Museum of International Folk Art; Greater New York Region: Artist Alice Hope; Curator Shannon Stratton, Museum of Arts and Design; Ohio: Artist Leila Khoury; Curators Reto Thüring, Cleveland Museum of Art, and Matt Distel, The Carnegie in Greater Cincinnati; Peru: Artist Carolina Rieckhoff Brommer; Curator Sharon Lerner, Museo de Arte de Lima; Spain: Artist Blanca Muñoz; Curator Lucia Ybarra, YGB Art and Factoña Cultural; Sweden: Artist Petronella Eriksson; Curator Inger Wästberg, independent curator; Texas: Artist Beverly Penn; Curator Virginia Treanor, National Museum of Women in the Arts; United Kingdom: Artist Rana Begum; Curator Caroline Douglas, Contemporary Art Society

CATALOGUE
Heavy Metal—Women to Watch 2018 will be accompanied by an illustrated catalogue featuring works from the exhibition, an introductory essay by NMWA curator Virginia Treanor and statements from each artist. The catalogue will be available in the Museum Shop and online at http://shop.nmwa.org/.

WOMEN TO WATCH
Women to Watch is an exhibition series held every two to three years, developed in conjunction with the museum’s national and international outreach committees. NMWA currently has outreach committees with more than 2,000 dedicated members throughout the United States and around the world. The museum’s committees play a critical role in bringing NMWA’s mission to regional audiences. The committees work with local museum directors and curators, education experts and business leaders to capitalize on their region’s artistic, financial, and educational strengths and resources in order to develop meaningful programming and build a bridge between their communities and the museum.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF WOMEN IN THE ARTS
The National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) is the only major museum in the world solely dedicated to championing women through the arts. With its collections, exhibitions, programs and online content, the museum seeks to inspire dynamic exchanges about art and ideas. NMWA advocates for better representation of women artists and serves as a vital center for thought leadership, community engagement and social change. NMWA addresses the gender imbalance in
the presentation of art by bringing to light important women artists of the past while promoting
great women artists working today. The collections highlight painting, sculpture, photography and
video by artists including Louise Bourgeois, Mary Cassatt, Judy Chicago, Frida Kahlo, Shirin
Neshat, Faith Ringgold, Pipilotti Rist, Amy Sherald and Élisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun.

NMWA is located at 1250 New York Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. It is open Mon.–Sat., 10 a.m.–5
p.m. and Sun, noon–5 p.m. Admission is $10 for adults, $8 for visitors 65 and over and students,
and free for NMWA members and youths 18 and under. Admission is free the first Sunday of each
month. For information, call 202-783-5000, visit nmwa.org, Broad Strokes Blog, Facebook, Twitter
or Instagram.

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IMAGES
Alice Hope, Untitled, 2016; Used Budweiser tabs, 6 ft. diameter; Private collection; Photo by Jenny Gorman

Paula Castillo, Tethered, 2014; Lock washers and hand-cut and twisted wire, 15 x 18 x 11 in.; Courtesy of the artist; ©
2017 Paula Castillo

Cheryl Eve Acosta, Fossilium, 2015; Collar with copper and organza, 4 x 11 x 13 in.; Courtesy of the artist; © Cheryl Eve
Acosta; Photo by Gene Starr