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Ghada Amer – Photo courtesy Cheim & Reid, New York and Arts/Industry. Photographer Scott Seifert

INTERVIEW: Ghada Amer - 'Being a woman artist makes me sell for less money and closes doors for solo museum shows'

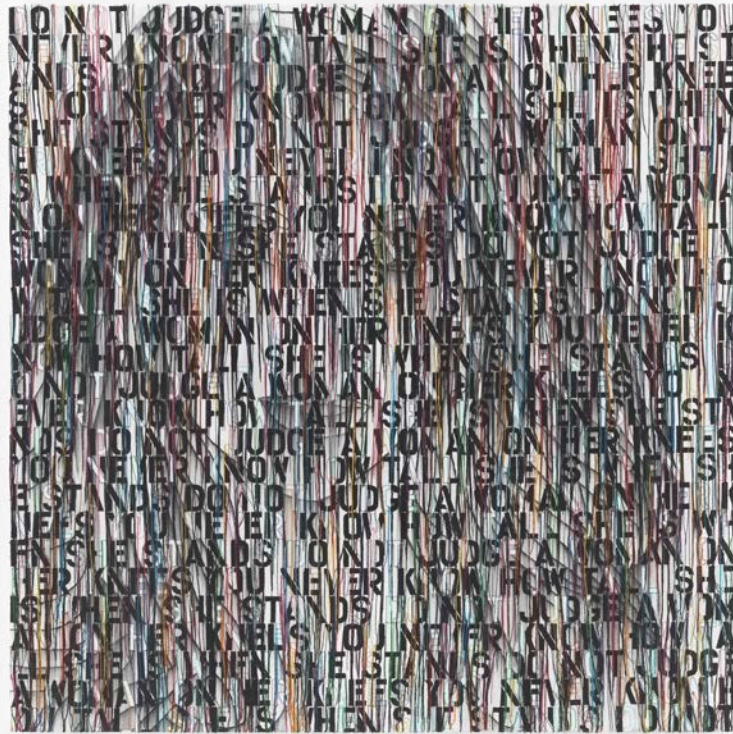
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Ghada Amer moved with her family from Egypt to France at the age of eleven, relocating to the United States in 1995. While studying art at the Villa Arson in Nice, France in the 1980s, she discovered that some painting classes were reserved for male students; this exclusion fuelled her interest in making work about gender and sexuality. Using sewing and embroidery, as well as ceramic, collage and drawing, her mixed-media paintings refer to representations of women in pornography. Amer's eroticized line drawings have both figurative and abstract elements, her subjects either exposed or obscured to varying degrees among layers of stitched lines.

Her images often contain feminist slogans, which are repeated over the work's surface. In *Portrait with One Earring* (below) a female face is partially obscured by overlaid text that reads 'Do not judge a woman on her knees, you never know how tall she is when she stands', a quote from *Where Pain Thrives* (2015) by poet Mie Hansson. This combination of provocative imagery and empowering language sees Amer subverting the idea that women in pornography are simply one-dimensional sexualized beings, but rather thinking subjects too, with inalienable dignity.

Here, the artist who's featured in our new book *Great Women Artists*, tells us we need to have more women collectors and directors of big art museums, the pivotal artwork so important to her career and why *Great Women Artists* is a 'beginning' and that normalisation will come soon.

What does it mean to you to be featured in *Great Women Artists*? Making a book about Women artists acknowledges the fact that Women artists have been erased from art history. This has always been my battleground, so I am happy. I appreciate this acknowledgement but in the same time it bothers me still that women are not just included as artists without any gender specification. I guess it is a beginning and I hope normalisation will come soon.



Ghada Amer, *Portrait with One Earring*, 2016 Acrylic, embroidery and gel medium on canvas 42 x 42 inches 106.7 x 106.7 cm

Can you describe one artwork or series from your oeuvre that you feel was pivotal in your career? There are many artworks that have been pivotal. "100 words of Love" is one of them because it made me fall in love with sculpture and because I did not need to use embroidery to express myself.

How has being a woman affected your career? It makes me sell for much less money than if I were a male (and white) and it closes all doors for solo museum shows.

What makes a great artist? Certainly not his gender.

Which other great woman artists inspire you and why? Egyptian singer Oum Kalthoum is my absolute female artist inspiration.

How has the art world's relationship to women artists changed since you began your career? How could it still improve? It has improved a little bit. We need to have more women collectors and directors of important art museums as well as more women patrons. We need to rewrite all the art history books to show that they have always needed great women artists. Women artists need to be celebrated on the same level as Rodin, Van Gogh, Picasso, Matisse and others.

What advice would you give to emerging female artists entering the art world? Do not say you are a woman. Pretend you are a man, act like one.