

ARTNEWS
January 18, 2017

ARTNEWS

Nasty Women: An Exhibition in Queens Takes on Trump

BY *Angela Brown* POSTED 01/18/17 10:00 AM

 Share 451  Tweet 70  Pin 8  Share 546



Installation view of "Nasty Women," 2017, at Knockdown Center, New York.

Seeing that racism and sexism are apparently permissible for a presidential platform, nearly 700 artists and activists banded together in opposition for "Nasty Women," a group exhibition at Knockdown Center that showcased work by females and gender-non-conformists in a hub of action, education, and solidarity. The sprawling event—housed beneath the high ceilings and wooden beams of what was previously a door factory in far out Maspeth, Queens—started with an online post in which Roxanne Jackson and Jessamyn Fiore asked if anyone might be interested in a "Nasty Women" group show. The post went viral, and the premise took on a model that could be easily replicated in other locations. (For related shows in the weeks and months to come, a running list of confirmed venues, nearly 30 so far, can be found [here](#)). Participating artists submit work to be sold for \$100 or less, and all proceeds go to organizations that protect women's rights. At the Knockdown Center between January 12 and 15, more than \$42,000 was raised for Planned Parenthood.

On Saturday, approaching the warm brick walls and towering smokestacks of the Knockdown Center, a visitor around mid-day would have heard roaring drums and cymbals sounding from within. Listed in a brochure as “Loud & Unapologetic,” this was one of four drum performances in which percussionists took to their instruments and filled the space while making their presences known. It felt like an invitation to scream, to get up and say who you were—to *do something*.

At 2 p.m., a crowd gathered in an adjacent room for “Power Share/Power Surge: A Panel Discussion on Activism, Aging, Art, Black Lives Matter, Civil Rights, Intersectional Feminisms, Sexuality, Trans Rights, and More.” Three panelists—Ashton Applewhite, Ayana Evans, and Pamela Sneed—convened to share their work and, in effect, their power. Sneed spoke about Octavia Butler’s science-fiction

novel *Parable of the Sower*, in which a 15-year-old black girl living in Southern California in the year 2024 invents her own religion. Reading about the heroine’s struggles and dreams, Sneed said, led her to the realization that “change is up to us.” Applewhite followed with a question that runs throughout her book *Cutting Loose: Why Women Who End Their Marriages Do So Well*. “How can we get old and stay powerful?” she asked. The answer is not important for older women alone, Applewhite explained—it pertains to everyone fighting against a habit of distancing themselves from those who are perceived as less-powerful. We become stronger if we learn to communicate across boundaries, she suggested. In Sneed’s words, we need to “build our awareness and push.”



Naoko Tadotsu, *The Nasty Woman*, 2016, acrylic on canvas.
COURTESY THE ARTIST



Evans responded through performance. She stood up, wearing a neon yellow tiger-print bodysuit, and slowly took the curlers out of her hair and put on lipstick to the sounds of Solange Knowles's song "Cranes in the Sky." Then she asked the audience to clear an aisle down the center of the space. Next: she jumped off the stage, ran full speed through the aisle and out of the room, then returned and asked a seated group to catch her as she jumped and fell. They braced themselves as Evans leapt into their arms, fearless. She repeated the action with other groups in the audience—they caught her each time.

When she sat down with the other panelists again, they all smiled. This was a testament to realities of the body as a subject of assumption and confrontation. It also reminded everyone of their shared responsibility as spectators, to art as well as interactions throughout an ordinary day. After a brief Q&A, the drummers started pounding again, and the group dispersed to print banners, look at artwork, and learn about resources. After nightfall, bands, comedians, and DJs set the scene as the Knockdown Center transitioned from a place of discourse to a place of celebration.