

The Rebel Yell

FEATURES

Promoting Guerrilla warfare

International activist group coming to UNLV to combat sexual violence, proclaim gender equality

By: [Aisha O'Brien](#)

What started out as a protest against biased art galleries not showing works by women or people of color has turned into an internationally known activist group.

The Guerrilla Girls have been plastering posters all over New York City since 1985, demanding equality in the art world.

Their so-called "five-minute research" found that artists showcased in all of the major galleries and museums were overwhelmingly white men, with less than 10 percent being women or people of color. All they had to do was look down the list of proudly proclaimed exhibits at places like the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Rather than accept the status quo, the Guerrilla Girls started a campaign to embarrass the artistic elite for their exclusion of women and minorities. Their posters, dripping with sarcasm, gained notoriety and infamy. One poster poses the question: What do toilet stalls and the Tony Awards have in common? Answer: They only let in one woman at a time.

The group remains anonymous by naming themselves after famous dead female artists and wearing gorilla masks.

Why the anonymity?

"To put the focus on the issues instead of on our own personalities," says Aphra Behn, a renamed Guerrilla Girl. "No one can accuse us of doing this just to promote our own careers."

Other members include Josephine Baker, Coco Chanel and Julia Childs.

In 2001, they split into three groups: Guerrilla Girls, Inc., Guerrilla Girls Broadband and Guerrilla Girls on Tour.

Guerrilla Girls, Inc. maintains the original concept, protesting art galleries and museums. Among its projects are books titled, "The Guerrilla Girl's Art Museum Activity Book," and "Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art."

Guerrilla Girls Broadband provides interesting digital artwork to post around, sticker around and generally display.

Guerrilla Girls on Tour performs humorous dramatizations of how its movement began and gives workshops on how to become an activist. Their growth and universal message has led to an international following.

"We went to Poland where we collaborated with Polish women artists about a section of our show that would include women in Polish history," Behn said.

They also recently returned from Japan, where they collaborated with the only all-female kabuki troupe in Japan - Nagoya Musume Kabuki. It was the first time a woman has been on a kabuki stage in 200 years.

Invited by Juawana Grant, a rape prevention educator at UNLV's Jean Nidetch Women's Center, the girls will be performing their play "Silence is Violence."

"Silence is Violence" is about sexual assault and violence, a pertinent college issue being touted on campus lately by UNLV Police roundtable discussions, the Nidetch Women's Center, productions like the Vagina Monologues and occasional informational booths on campus. Though this still isn't enough, according to Grant and harrowing statistics.

The girls plan to educate audience members on statistics and solutions including a dramatization of a date rape scenario.

"Sexual assault is a serious epidemic," Grant said. "One in four women is sexually assaulted before the age of 18. Particularly on the UNLV campus, it's trickier to spread awareness. Most reports are not made to campus police, but to [the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department]."

It's an issue that the Women's Center hope the Guerrilla Girls can help others understand.

"We'll look at issues on campus, in the Vegas theater scene, domestic violence in the state of Nevada and other issues that affect women in Las Vegas and share what we find with the audience," Behn said.

In their workshop "From Attitude to Action" on Feb. 13, participants will learn hands-on skills like poster making, sticker campaigns and attitudes of activism. As a 20-year-old group, the Guerrilla Girls have a lot of experience to draw from and they say college campuses lend themselves to their kind of activism.

"College campuses usually contain many activist groups who appreciate our work. Also, students are so stressed out with the pressures of college work that they appreciate the chance to see a show by a bunch of funny feminists," Behn said.

And they do that well, plastering signs that read "The 'F' Word," "There's a tragedy on Broadway and it isn't Electra" and illustrations of President George W. Bush wedding the Pope above a

tagline that says "Who really wants to get married?"

When asked if they had ever been to Las Vegas, Behn replied, "Several of us were in the 'Folies B erg eres.' Just kidding."

Grant is hoping that a light approach will open up the discussion among students. So far, at least, she has received positive responses from the UNLV community.

"I am pleasantly surprised ... We've advertised as much as possible. Not just in places where you'd expect interest, but all over campus. Students have been calling with interest, professors are encouraging students. It's just a great opportunity for students to interact with activists who are so successful," Grant said.

This is the first time GGOT has been to UNLV. Grant wants to bring a variety of speakers and issues to the forefront, not limited to sexual assault. Earlier this year, acclaimed feminist writer Naomi Wolf spoke at the Defining Beauty Conference. Later in April, there will an art exhibit.

The Guerrilla Girls will hold their workshop on Feb. 13 at 5 p.m. in the Student Union Room 208, and "Silence is Violence" on Feb. 14 at 7 p.m. in the Student Union Theatre. For more information, contact the Jean Nidetch Women's Center at 895-4475. Both events are free.