

This Artist Plastered the Facade of Austria's Most Prestigious Art School With a 56-Foot Feminist Manifesto

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You probably associate embroidery more with decorative pillows than monumental public art. But it is exactly this kind of gendered notion that Austrian artist Katharina Cibulka hopes to challenge with her ambitious public project.

Called “Solange” (which means “so long as” in German), the ongoing series, which began in 2016, consists of massive fabric text pieces the artist hangs from various august European institutions. Her banners quite literally cover up patriarchal venues with construction netting emblazoned with pink-threaded, cross-stitched messages. The results look as if a massive feminist spider made over a construction zone in the dead of night.

The artist unveiled her latest work in the series last week at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, the city’s most historic art school. It reads: “As long as the art market is a boys’ club, I will be a feminist.”

You cannot miss the massive installation: It’s 23 feet long and 56 feet high. When passing by the 19th-century building, the work is perfectly framed by trees and a sculpture of the German philosopher Friedrich Schiller, who famously said that “art is a

daughter of freedom.” The work will remain on view until 2020, while the school is under renovation.



Photo: Katharina Schiller.

“As a woman in the art world, you still have a tougher job, especially when you become a mother like me,” Cibulka, a visual and performance artist who graduated from the academy in 2004, tells artnet News. “As a middle-aged woman, you hardly stand a chance, especially if you have a family.”

Cibulka says she did not set out to criticize her alma mater, but rather to point out the disillusioning reality that confronted her after graduation. The problem, she says, is the gender balance that persists in the art world at large, where women make up between three to five percent of museum collections in the US and Europe and around 30 percent of artists represented by commercial galleries. (Indeed, a recent study co-authored by artnet Analytics found that gender parity among recent art-school graduates quickly evaporates as artists climb further up the career ladder.)

“It is a myth that the art market is not a boys’ club anymore,” Cilbuka says. “It’s just ridiculous to maintain that.”

Vienna’s revered Academy of Fine Arts—whose famous (albeit mostly male) alumni include the painter Egon Schiele—was enthusiastic to fund this chapter of the project. Recently, the school has made parity a priority, and its head, Eva Blimlinger, says it is the only university in Europe or the United States whose staff and student body is 50 percent female. Cilbuka’s project “helps raise awareness for the fact that the international art market itself is still pretty much dominated by men,” she says.

So far this year, Cibulka's nets have draped over four different sites, each with a slightly varied statement. "As long as gender equality stays a never-ending building site, I will be a feminist" was stitched on construction site in Innsbruck, Austria. The phrasing takes inspiration from artist Tracey Emin, who once said in an interview: "As long as any woman gets burned because she smiles at a man, as long as a teacher's hand gets chopped off because she educates girls how to read, I will be a feminist."

Next, Cibulka plans to drape a net over the Cathedral of St. James in Innsbruck. Executed in collaboration with Bishop Hermann Glettler, this latest work is perhaps the most controversial of them all. To be unveiled at the end of the month, it will read: "As long as god wears a beard, I will be a feminist."

See previous artworks in the series below.



"As long as power entices men to misuse women, I will be a feminist" (April 2018 at Schrofensteinstr. 10, Landeck, Austria.)



“As long as gender equality stays a never ending building site, I will be a feminist.” Currently on view at Reichenauer Str. 70, Innsbruck, Austria.



“As long as I talk about career and you understand family management, I will be a feminist.” (March 2018 at Bienerstrasse, Innsbruck, Austria).

