The Feminist School of Painting
Ad Minoliti

Exhibition
October 4–December 15, 2018

Public workshops
October 6–November 17, 2018, every Saturday

Website
fschool.kadist.org

Devon Bella and Amanda Nudelman, curators
The Feminist School of Painting began as a fantasy. A dream of an education that didn’t exist for artist Ad Minoliti, but one she very much wishes had. As a young artist, Minoliti attended the National School of Fine Arts Prilidiano Pueyrredón (now the National University of the Arts), the official art school in Buenos Aires, Argentina. From the beginning, she was disappointed by the conservative and traditional art history curriculum and limited art making instruction. The history lessons highlighted the practices of very few women and emphasized a predominantly Eurocentric point of view. Meanwhile, studio classes promoted classical methods like printmaking, drawing, painting, and sculpture, with little room for play and experimentation. As a consequence, for Ad, art schools never really felt – then and now – like places open to imagination and radical ideas.

Before she began her formal art studies, Minoliti understood painting not only as a way to make material objects, but also as a visual language to approach and engage with all sorts of ideas. As a means of developing her own visual vocabulary across painting, design, and installation, she began to incorporate geometric abstraction – simple forms like triangles, circles, and trapezoids – to serve as playful and open-minded substitutes for more straightforward depictions of the world. Her relationship with geometric abstraction grew from an interest in the paintings by a group of Argentinean painters active in the mid-twentieth century known as MADÍ. For these artists, the basic nature of the line, point, and geometric figure was unburdened by the responsibility of literal representation and thus provided infinite possibilities to imagine different realities.

While the MADÍ ethos offered an inspiring set of tools, Minoliti was still disillusioned by the typical absence of female artists in art history and its rejection of themes and issues traditionally understood as feminine: the sensible, the sweet, the pretty. She was troubled not only by the emphasis on men and masculinity, but by the way “male” and “female” (or nature and culture, and good and evil) were often positioned as binary and in opposition to one another, with one inevitably
being perceived as dominant or more valuable than the other. She started replacing natural forms with geometric characters in an attempt to break down the boundaries between genders, people and animals, nature and architecture, the body and the mind. Brightly colored body parts like arms, legs, and eyes joined circles, triangles, smiling trees, and napping cats, to create lush and exuberant visual scenes. These re-combinations illuminated a path for the artist to step outside familiar human-centric categories and represent a new, utopian reality.4

Minoliti’s willingness to be playful in concept and form has allowed her to break free from art historical conventions and to upturn established museum display methods. In contemporary art exhibitions, paintings are often presented as self-contained objects, hung flat and vertical on white walls. In contrast, Minoliti has installed paintings in corners, printed large digital collages on paper and laid them on platforms on the ground like a comforter on a bed, painted gallery walls in vibrant pinks, greens, and blues, on top of which she hangs more paintings. She has also used furniture and televisions to produce maximal and textured environments for the work. As she says, “I’m always trying to reconfigure art spaces, changing the ambience in rooms and galleries. Artworks are not autonomous or absolute truths; they’re devices or platforms for different ideas and concepts.”5 In other words, for Minoliti, the space of the gallery should shift and evolve to amplify the ideas in the work as much as possible. By upending the expectations of these exhibition spaces and allowing for different types of interactions, she hopes to release people from experiencing the work as passive viewers. She invites them instead to be part of and contribute to a collectively generated space, shifting the classic “usership” of galleries and museums.6

Her desire to find new ways to dissolve, blend, and transform has been bolstered by the inventive capacity of feminist and queer theorists. Work by scholars like Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, bell hooks, and Alison Kafer have offered her new prospects for imagining a society that turns away from the glorification of violence and machismo, and instead makes room for tenderness. Haraway’s
storytelling practice of “Speculative Fabulation,” for example, conjures new worlds in which animals, children, and other fanciful creatures – possibly imaginary – exist in tandem with serious adult narratives, similar to science fiction. These new “fabulations” are a kind of playful experiment: what happens when you bring together cyborgs, shrubs, kittens, dollhouses, and mutants? What sort of new and radical relationships can be made? Minoliti was also fortunate to receive alternative training from the Buenos Aires based artist Diana Aisenberg, for one year in 1996 and again from 2002 to 2007. Using a workshop format, Aisenberg’s non-formal style of teaching prioritizes the process of learning over achieving a specific outcome, which has informed Minoliti’s practice and the framework for *The Feminist School of Painting.*

Reimagining the structure and expectations of an art school, *The Feminist School of Painting* embraces unconventional usership and converts KADIST’s gallery spaces into an active classroom. Forgoing canvas or frame, Minoliti covers the classroom walls in new murals of vibrantly colored silhouettes of shapes and animals, landscapes and geometrical forms that transform the minimal white rooms into a fantasyland. Mural painting has a long-established history of making culture more approachable by providing free access to art in outdoor public spaces – especially in San Francisco’s Mission District where KADIST is located. By engaging with and bringing this tradition inside the gallery, Minoliti works to overturn expectations that might be associated with experiencing contemporary art today: feeling intimidated, excluded, or somehow unwelcome to interact with it. In addition to the murals, other materials – a fanzine library, videos related to the workshop themes, and a coloring station for kids and adults – are provided to offer moments for individual creative production. The process of “making” both ideas and artworks is at the heart of the project, and coupled with these other access points embodies a DIY spirit of education that champions experience as a valuable form of knowledge.

The classroom is also the site of weekly workshops led by Minoliti in collaboration with a
group of interdisciplinary Bay Area artists, scholars, writers, and teachers. Open to intergenerational artists and non-artists alike, the free workshops promote accessibility and curiosity over any art-specific expertise. Each session uses a traditional painting genre as a starting point – landscape, portraiture, or still life – and, through discussion and studio painting instruction, aims to broadly reimagine the cultural and historical narratives associated with that category. For example, the Portraiture workshop led by Katie Gilmartin will ask students to produce portraits of real or imagined queer folks from history (or the future).\(^9\) Painted portraits have historically been commissioned to honor and preserve the legacy of figures deemed culturally important: royalty, politicians, or wealthy persons, among others. Engaging instead with often-marginalized people is a gesture that assigns the subjects value through the act of creation and deep consideration. With each collaborator drawing similarly on their respective fields of knowledge (biology, science-fiction, gender studies, technology, and more), the school aims to foster the creative possibilities inherent to interdisciplinary exchange.

The Feminist School of Painting is an exercise, experiment, and open-ended question. It’s a place where curiosity and the willingness to fail as often and openly as necessary is valued above all else. The School has many trappings of a traditional art institution: a teaching and student body, a syllabus that covers art history and painting techniques, and classroom spaces for workshops. Yet, it reimagines the educational setting to embrace playfulness over passive observation, downplay competitiveness in favor of collaboration, and elevate inquiry over expertise. Despite the endless march of history suggesting that it can’t be done, Ad Minoliti is trying to create an utopia. And she wants humans, cyborgs, monsters, and animals to help her make it.

–Amanda Nudelman
1. The name “MADI” is commonly understood as an acronym for Movimiento, Abstracción, Dimensión, Invención or Movement, Abstraction, Dimension, Invention.


6. The idea of “usership” in this context is connected to the Spanish term Sitio de Usos Multiples (S.U.M.) or Site of Multiple Uses. A multipurpose place found in many high schools in Buenos Aires, a S.U.M. can, as the name suggests, be transformed to accommodate a number of various activities.


9. Katie Gilmartin works with the Queer Ancestors Project in San Francisco, see biography in brochure.
La Escuela Feminista de Pintura es un experimento basado en las premisas del libro *MDA Apuntes para el aprendizaje del arte*, escrito por Diana Aisenberg en 2017. La publicación describe a profundidad el método de pedagogía artística de la conocida pintora, educadora, y mi profesora, y llamado “Método Diana Aisenberg” o “MDA.”

En el MDA, o Método Diana Aisenberg, el proceso y las preguntas son las bases del aprendizaje: el cuestionar es mucho más indispensable que el afirmar, que lo ya aprendido, o lo que se prejuzga. El ejercicio de poner en duda lo que se da por sentado es esencial en mi práctica y es uno que se ha afilado a partir de las teorías del feminismo queer. Esta forma de pensamiento curioso sirve para generar nuevas hipótesis que fundamentan cada una de mis obras, ideas y temas yuxtapuestos para interpelar las grandes ficciones detrás de conceptos como “naturaleza” e “historia.”

Mi carrera como pintora comenzó mezclando pintura metafísica y sexualidad en representaciones...
no-literales de historias de amor y erotismo surrealista. La pintura es un lenguaje más allá de la técnica, y con el tiempo comencé a incorporar a mi práctica otras narrativas y soportes como la escultura, el collage digital, y el video. Mis diferentes instalaciones abordan la historia del arte y la arquitectura moderna, y también reclamos feministas como derechos reproductivos, redes de afecto, maternidad e infancia, animalismo y la ficción especulativa.

La especulación es el dispositivo que utilizo para acoplar la teoría de género y sexualidad con la geometría. Nuestra concepción del mundo se refleja en la condición binaria del género: designamos lo que es masculino/femenino, pero también lo que es malo/bueno, natural/artificial, razón/sentimiento, falso/verdadero, asignando cualidades positivas y negativas arbitrariamente. La historia hegemónica del arte reproduce esta valorización y nos obliga a preguntarnos ¿qué pasa con todo lo que existe o se sitúa por fuera del binario? Considero que mi obra es política, metaphorical painting and sexuality in non-literal representations of love stories and surrealist eroticism. Painting is a language beyond technique, and my practice eventually incorporated other narratives and media like sculpture, digital collage, and video. My installations engage art history and modernist architecture, as well as feminist demands like reproductive rights, networks of affection, motherhood and childhood, animalism, and speculative fiction.

I use speculation to connect gender theory and sexuality with geometry. Our conception of the world is mirrored in the binary construction of gender. We designate what is masculine/feminine, but also what is good/bad, natural/artificial, reason/feeling, false/true, and assign positive or negative qualities to them arbitrarily. Art history reproduces these values and forces us to ask: what happens to everything and everyone that positions themselves outside of these binary distinctions? I believe my work is political, even if doesn’t operate in the same terms as canonical Latin American
aunque no lo sea en los términos del canon del arte-político latinoamericano. En mi dimensión alternativa, las geometrías y el collage son las herramientas ideales para representar heterotopías transhumanas, libres de las ataduras del género, en las que la teoría queer también puede ser una crítica pictórica contra el cubo blanco y la instrumentalización del arte. Quiero encontrar nuevas formas de cuestionar y transformar los espacios, los interiores de la cotidianidad, aunque sea en el plano de la fantasía pictórica.

El trabajo del artista también se pone en duda: el talento no es innato, el genio solitario nunca fue y los materiales y técnicas le pertenecen a todxs. El intercambio que ocurre entre la intención, la acción y la imagen fluye multi-direccionalmente, es deformé y se manifiesta como un circuito cíclico: hacemos, aprendemos y al mirar, producimos nuevas ideas. Para la experimentación no es necesario poseer un saber específico o dominar una técnica, en el taller no hay policía, solo tela y pintura.
La Escuela Feminista de Pintura es una performance que parte de preguntas abiertas: ¿qué pasaría si...? Y en cada sesión se especulan nuevas respuestas. No existen las respuestas incorrectas.

Creo que una pintura se disfruta más cuando se hace que cuando se mira. Cuando se revela la relación triangular entre los ojos, la mano y la materia, se detona un lugar de acción mucho más cercano al aprendizaje que al mero tacto. Se aprende con la mano, el pie, la boca, o lo que se use para pintar. Es un juego que comienza con las reglas trazadas por los grandes nombres de la historia de la pintura y cuyo único fin es romperlas: crear nuevos lenguajes e interpretaciones por fuera de la academia, desviarse para cruzar otras ciencias y fantasías.

La educación artística está en crisis, las instituciones aún resienten la caída de los valores estéticos tradicionales y en EEUU la extracción

The Feminist School of Painting is a performance that begins with open questions: What would happen if...? And tries to speculate new answers in every class session, there are no wrong answers.

I think a painting is way more enjoyable when it is being made than when being looked at. When the triangulation between the eyes, hand, and matter is revealed, the action becomes something closer to learning and experience than the mere sensation of touching brush to paint and canvas. It’s learning with your hand, your foot, your mouth, whatever you use to paint. Painting is a game that begins with rules written by the big names of art history and its only goal is breaking them: to create new languages and interpretations outside of academia, to deviate off course and crossover into other sciences and fantasies.

Artistic education is and has been in crisis. Institutions didn’t recover too well from the fall
inmoral de la deuda estudiantil es un síntoma que se corresponde con los recortes brutales que hace el gobierno argentino de derecha a la educación. Las universidades de arte venden una fantasía enfermiza de fama que se aleja mucho de la función del arte. El arte es necesario para los artistas y para la comunidad. El arte no-cooptado representa un peligro latente para el status quo: es un germen de pensamiento crítico. Cuando se concibe en alianza con los feminismos queer e interseccionales y con la crítica interdisciplinaria, conjura un poder revelador y contagioso. La comunidad entera se beneficia de la distribución igualitaria de herramientas críticas.

Quiero aprovechar mi residencia y los recursos en KADIST para aprender más sobre las teorías, activistas y artistas queer y feministas que existen y han existido en San Francisco. El lenguaje pictórico se construye mejor en movimiento, en debates y códigos mutantes. Todxs son bienvenidxs en La Escuela Feminista de Pintura y se promueve la circulación de la información por fuera de las of traditional aesthetic values. In the U.S., the immoral extractivism of student debt is a symptom that runs parallel to the right-leaning Argentinian government’s brutal cuts to education. Art universities sell a sickly fantasy of fame that is completely removed from art’s real purpose. Art is necessary for artists and for communities. Art that hasn’t been co-opted is a real danger to the status quo: it’s a breeding ground for critical thought. When it comes together with queer intersectional feminisms and multidisciplinary critique, it conjures an emancipatory and contagious power. The whole community benefits enormously from a fair and even distribution of critical tools.

I want to make the most of my time at KADIST to learn more about the queer theories, activists, and artists that live and have lived in San Francisco. The language of painting is better created in movement, through debate and mutating codes. Everyone is welcome in the The Feminist School of Painting, and we encourage the circulation of its contents outside of the KADIST space with video
sesiones en KADIST con una biblioteca y videos. Es un esfuerzo egoísta y generoso simultáneamente: la mejor forma de aprender es en grupo, con experiencias compartidas y convidadas.

–Ad Minoliti

resources and a library. It’s a simultaneously selfish and generous endeavor: the best way to learn is collectively, through shared experiences and togetherness.

–Ad Minoliti
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MYTHOLOGY PAINTING
with Sarah Hotchkiss  October 6, 1–3pm

Often figurative and large in size, mythological paintings take their inspiration from myths, fables, or historical legends. They are traditionally understood to be a veiled explanation for an historical event, a belief, or a phenomenon of the physical world.

In this session, we will draw parallels between mythological paintings and science fiction depictions. The latter often portrays life on other planets and imagines future scientific, technological, social, and environmental changes. We will invent myths, tales, and legends for these alternative universes and conceive speculative mythological paintings based on new stories, original scenarios, or our favorite movies.

Sarah Hotchkiss is a San Francisco-based artist and arts writer. She watches a lot of science fiction, which she reviews in the semi-regular publication Sci-Fi Sundays. She is the visual arts editor for KQED.
HISTORY PAINTING
with Megan Prelinger  October 13, 1–3pm

History paintings traditionally depicted scenes from the Bible, and Greek and Roman history and mythology, but were later used as a form of documentation. These paintings often told stories about events taking place across the world, for example about the activities of colonized territories to the empire. However, writing history is not neutral and often favors accounts of particular ideals and triumphs, never representing the complete story.

In this session, we will reassess key historical events that have defined the histories of the world as we teach and remember them and imagine new ones. Using the Space Race as a starting point, we will explore how images of historical events, such as in news reports and advertising campaigns, have shaped our understanding of the past.

Megan Prelinger is co-founder of the Prelinger Library in San Francisco, and a contributing archivist in the Prelinger Archives film collection. She is the author of several books, and is a frequent collaborator with museums, as well as a Bay Area naturalist.
PORTRAITURE
with Katie Gilmartin  October 20, 1–3pm

Portrait paintings represent a group of persons or an individual, and can be realistic or symbolic. Painted portraits have historically been commissioned to honor and preserve the legacy of figures deemed culturally important. Therefore the history of portrait paintings prominently encompasses a narrowly-defined group of people at the exclusion of others.

We will dedicate this session to honoring a queer person from the past to highlight folks from history who are often overlooked. In advance of the class, we invite participants to research and choose a queer ancestor they would like to create a portrait of. Research resources can be found at the public library, the Tenderloin museum, the GLBT museum, or the Queer Cultural Center’s website, among others.

Katie Gilmartin is a printmaker, writer, and teacher. She runs the Queer Ancestors Project, devoted to forging sturdy relationships between young Queer & Trans artists and their ancestors.
STILL LIFE AND GENRE PAINTING
with Marcela Pardo Ariza  October 27, 1–3pm

Still life paintings depict inanimate subjects like food, flowers, vases, fabrics, and animals, which are often chosen to convey certain religious or symbolic meaning. Similarly, genre paintings portray scenes of ordinary life – from living rooms to picnics, and bars to markets. The people and places in these images are usually represented without any added drama or exaggeration. However, these paintings often communicate values that represent limited experiences of the world.

This workshop will consider the diverse customs and traditions of domestic life from other perspectives, cultures, bodies, and families. It will also shift the typical focus of these scenes to emphasize the daily life of other creatures, like animals. We will address how images of domestic life might change from culture to culture, from people to people, or from dog to dog.

Marcela Pardo Ariza is a Colombian visual artist and curator. Ariza explores the relationship of wry humor, queerness, and representation through color sets and prop-like objects.
SKETCH HERE!
LANDSCAPE
with Martha Kenney  November 3, 1–3pm

Landscape paintings focus on depicting the natural world around us. While mountains, gardens, rivers, and forests are often the main themes, landscapes may also feature subjects within them such as animals, people, and houses. Over the last 70 years, this genre has also begun to address more urban and industrial settings. Even though these paintings do not always feature humans, they are often produced from a human-centered perspective that sees nature as a thing to be controlled.

In this session, we will think about depicting landscapes from alternative viewpoints, as well as considering what our relationship with nature might look like if we thought about it as a partner. We will imagine landscapes from the position of other planets, from nonhuman species, and from other time periods when humans didn't exist.

Martha Kenney is Assistant Professor of Women and Gender Studies at San Francisco State University. Located in the tradition of feminist science studies, her work examines the poetics and politics of biological storytelling.
ANATOMY AND NUDES
with Maggs Dao  November 10, 1–3pm

Representations of unclothed figures have been central in Western art history, specifically in Ancient Greece and later during the Renaissance. Nudes have notably conveyed specific – and often biased and binary – ideals of male and female beauty, emotions, and energy. These kinds of paintings in particular have often failed to represent different kinds of bodies, physical abilities, and standards of beauty.

This session will challenge traditional beauty ideals by considering the various and complex anatomies and identities of the body. We will examine artworks made by fat activists, queer Latinx artists, and others that advocate for all types of bodies. We will also investigate the potential of collage and the avatar figure as possible tools for inventing and representing our identities as constantly changing.

Maggs Dao is a queer multimedia artist. Their work investigates hybridity and multiplicity of bodies and of the Self.
GEOMETRY AND ABSTRACTION
with Ad Minoliti  November 17, 1–3pm

Geometry and abstraction replace figurative forms with bold colors and simple shapes – like triangles, circles, and trapezoids – to represent the realities of life. Despite their seeming simplicity, they often symbolize religious figures, musical compositions, science, and nature.

Foregoing the male artists who typically dominate the history of geometry and abstraction, we will focus primarily on works by female artists from Latin America including Lygia Clark, Ines Raiteri, Yente, Silvia Gurfein, Mira Schendel, Scafati, Carmen Herrera, and others. Minoliti will also incorporate ideas and techniques from her own practice to imagine more open interpretations of geometric abstraction.

Ad Minoliti is a painter who combines the pictorial language of geometric abstraction with the perspective of queer theory. Her different experimental installations encompass art history, architecture, queer feminism, interior design, animalism, and speculative fiction.
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Megan Prelinger
Heidi Rabben
Emily Shallman
Jovanna Venegas

IMAGE CAPTIONS
(in order of appearance)
Play C, 2016, digital
collage printed on canvas,
40 x 55 in. Geo Sci fi, 2016,
ink & colored pencil on
paper, 12 x 9 in. GSFC.6,
2016, print on canvas,
59 x 42 in. Play G, 2016,
print on canvas, 55 x 36
in. Mom Painted, 2018,
acrylic on canvas, 34 x 27
in. Fantasy, 2017, acrylic,
ink and charcoal on canvas
paper, 16 x 12 in. Play G,
2014, print on canvas, 55 x
36 in. Figure, 2017, acrylic
on canvas, 27 x 16 in.
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