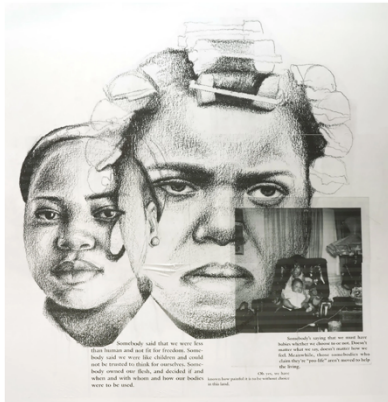


The New York Times

LAST CHANCE

A Show of Artists Galvanized by the Abortion Debate

“Abortion Is Normal” is the kind of exhibition that energizes supporters and upsets opponents. But it’s exciting for just being a good art show.



Tatyana Fazlalizadeh's "To Be Without Choice" (2019), graphite and photo collage, in the exhibition "Abortion Is Normal" at Arsenal Contemporary. Tatyana Fazlalizadeh; Coke O'Neal

By Jillian Steinhauer

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Its organizers call it an “emergency exhibition,” prompted by a series of challenges to abortion rights. The premise of the show, titled “[Abortion Is Normal](#),” is that a procedure that’s been subject to so much controversy should instead be accepted as an ordinary part of health care.

More than 60 artists contributed to the two-part exhibition (Part 1 was at [Galerie Eva Presenhuber](#) from Jan. 9 to 18; Part 2 continues at [Arsenal Contemporary](#) through Feb. 1). All the works are for sale, with proceeds going to political fund-raising groups focused on reproductive rights. And the range is impressive, with figurative and abstract pieces, obvious and subtle ones, those that are introspective and those that shout. In Part 1, Barbara Kruger’s 2011 print that reads “Who will write the history of tears?” seemed to cut to the heart of the matter.

One of the standouts of Part 2 is [Tatyana Fazlalizadeh's](#) “To Be Without Choice” (2019), which looms large physically and emotionally. Dominating the composition are the hand-drawn faces of two women who seem to stare at and past you. One wears her hair in curlers; collaged over her cheek is a family photo of another woman in a living room with a child in her lap. Below them are poetic, scorching texts about how black women’s bodies have been controlled and politicized in the United States.

The words come from the 1989 brochure [“We Remember: African-American Women Are for Reproductive Freedom”](#) — a historic [statement](#) advocating for women’s right to choose that was made by 16 black women activists, including Representative Maxine Waters of California. Three faces graced the cover of the original pamphlet, also penciled in shades of black and gray. Ms. Fazlalizadeh seems to offer both a reminder and an update. Whereas the original women looked like variations on the stereotypical “career woman,” the new figures suggest different socioeconomic backgrounds and generations. They may be symbols still, but they appear more real and, despite their scale, more intimate. They carry their history with them and yet choose to forge ahead.



Hayv Kahraman's "Barricade 1" (2018), via Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, Vielmetter, Los Angeles, and The Third Line, Dubai.

“Abortion Is Normal” was conceived by the curators Jasmine Wahi and Rebecca Jampol last May, when Alabama passed a near-total abortion ban. The pair, who run the Newark art nonprofit [Project for Empty Space](#), teamed up with four organizers, including the artists Marilyn Minter and Laurie Simmons, and put out a call for works. In the time it took them to plan the show, Republican-led states passed more abortion restrictions — [59 total](#) in 2019. Early this month, 207 members of [Congress signed a legal brief](#) urging the Supreme Court to consider overturning two landmark rulings that ensure abortion access.

The exhibition can't stop any of this, but it's an energizing rallying cry. It's also laudable for just being a good art show. It opens up a mainstream feminist conversation that's long prioritized cisgender white women to emphasize the voices of people of color and L.G.B.T.Q. folks, asking what true bodily autonomy could look like.

Abortion Is Normal

Through Feb. 1 at Arsenal Contemporary, 214 Bowery, Manhattan; 212-658-0017, abortionisnormal.org.

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