2014 International Art+Feminism Wikipedia Edit

On February 1st co-organizers of the the Art+Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon— Sian Evans, Dorothy Howard, Richard Knipel, Jacqueline Mabey, Michael Mandiberg and Laurel Ptak— began to close the well-documented gender gap on Wikipedia. Over the past three years, media outlets including Jezebel, the New York Times, The Atlantic, and even England's Daily Telegraph have pondered Wikipedia's unevenly gendered authorship: women currently make up less than 13% of all Wikipedia contributors—a massive gender gap on a site that otherwise promotes "open, democratic dialogue." The percentage of male editors online and in print—where women are also a minority—condition our expectations of what women can and should publicly contribute. The Art+Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon offered a platform for women to participate as a majority and gave a taste of what the experience would be if women's voices and presence on Wikipedia were to be sustained as a majority and ushered in a critical mass of women to begin working as Wikipedia editors.

The Edit-a-Thon's collective effort-- 31 satellite events with 600 participants-- bridged the distinction between Wikipedia's two distinct communities: Wikipedians, who write and edit most of the encyclopedia, and the much larger group of its regular readers. These two communities worked collaboratively to create new entries and improve existing articles on female artists and feminist art and cultural practices. The decision to schedule the event for simultaneous editing created a like-minded international community—linked online through a Google Hangouts, Tumblr, and Wikipedia registration—that could watch as entries were published. By removing the anonymity that is central to Wikipedia's modus operandi, the event created a social context for contributors to work together to gather and format Wikipedia entries. During the day, the network created over 100 new articles, and at least 90 existing entries were improved, expanded, or cleaned up.

One group of women originating from the U.S., England, Australia, and Italy met at Florence's Advancing Women Artists Foundation to create entries for female artists who have works in Florence's museums and churches. Graduate students from the University Wisconsin-Madison worked together on an entry for Helen White, the university's first female full professor. Heidi

Rabben from the California College of the Arts' Wattis Institute elected to focus on local San Franciscan artists, including Daria Martin, Clare Rojas, Alicia McCarthy, Lutz Bacher, Laurie Halsey Brown, and articles on Feminist Art Criticism, Feminist Aesthetics, and The Women's Building. Art Metropole— an archive, supporter, and hub of the Toronto arts community since the mid-seventies—served as a conductive resource and host for the Toronto event. Adelaide Tully Barnett at Flinders University in Australia worked with four participants that made a significant dent in the Wikipedia entries for Australian feminist art practices.

The additions made by the edit-a-thon both address and share the real life problems shared between Wikipedia and bricks-and-mortar cultural institutions—museums, art historical texts—that do not afford women artists the same attention and regard as their male counterparts. Conversations generated by the satellite meetings raised structural and social questions that moved beyond the confines of Wikipedia. After catching up on the functionality of Wikipedia, the group moved on to thinking critically through issues around the construction, references, review and patrolling of pages on Wikipedia. At the Brooklyn Museum, many researchers and educators studying women who have been occluded by dominant historical narratives attended. Working with experienced Wikipedians, these scholars were able to apply their studied knowledge to add new pages and correct inaccuracies in existing entries.

The primary reason for deletions on Wikipedia is cited as potential bias. In addition to "speedy deletions," disastrous revisions and reversions have helped make gender bias and cyber bullying common and acceptable qualities of the internet's go-to resource for quick and handy knowledge. Taking these underlying reasons for Wikipedia's overall gender bias in mind, the organizers of the edit-a-thon strategically garnered the support of expert Wikipedians at the sites to review new pages and contributions to existing entries, vetting material for potential bias and non-neutral perspectives. Given that one of the requisite criteria for a "notable" artist by the Wikipedia Foundation is that "[T]he person is regarded as an important figure or is widely cited by peers or successors," there is certainly significant space for debate.

This is another situation where women are met with internalized—"do I know enough to act as an authority?"— and externally imposed—"what is a woman doing here?"—cultural stigma once

they have been established as contributing editors on Wikipedia. As co-organizer Jacqueline Mabey told Non-Profit Quarterly: “We don’t raise young women to consider themselves authorities on anything. We raise them to doubt, constantly, their work and themselves. These are women with double masters degrees. I’m like, *yes, you can edit it*! The 18-year-old boy who doesn’t know anything is editing it, and he doesn’t even question it!” This recognition and support is key to facilitating, establishing and sustaining women’s voices and their presence on Wikipedia as much as it is in real life.

The pages which have been added, as well as the existing entries that were improved, expanded or cleaned up, constitute an evolving archive that is listed on the Art+Feminism 2014 Meetup page [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Meetup/ArtAndFeminism_2014]]. The list began with suggestions for new pages—crowdsourced by the organizers—and grew during the event to include site and subject specific entries from the different satellite events that were relevant and valuable for those communities.

There is clearly a need for more female editors and feminist contributors to develop the infrastructure of Wikipedia so that it more readily accommodates entries about women. Since new pages are more likely to be accepted if they contain intra-Wikipedia references to substantiate their claims, it is necessary to strategically build networks of articles that can reciprocally support one another. For the female editors on Wikipedia, this necessitates a vigilance and ongoing engagement with the lives of the articles as they develop and evolve over time--the formation of a requisite community and mutual support.

Inspired by the February 1 edit sprint, many of the sites from the Art+Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon have decided to plan subsequent collective events. According to Ella Dawn McGeough, one of the hosts of the Toronto Edit-a-thon, their team is planning monthly events at Toronto’s OCAD University and FAG Gallery. The community space and artist-run center Eastern Bloc in Montreal has begun a mailing list and Facebook page to announce and plan future connections. The School of the Institute of Art in Chicago, the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, and Alberta College of Art and Design each plan to turn their meetings into monthly or bi-monthly events.

In March The University of Dundee in Scotland will be hosting the Scottish Women in Contemporary Art Wikifest and Editathon. Unforgetting LA #3 will take place at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles on March 9th. On March 18th Columbia University will be hosting the Global Women Wikipedia Write-In (GWWI). And in honor of Women's History Month the National Museum of Women in the Arts will host Women in the Arts Meetup & Edit-a-thon on March 30th.

Media recognition of the Art+Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon is beginning to garner visibility and support outside the realm of Wikipedia-- this bolster for the community is a cross-media move to establish and sustain these pages in an online environment often antagonistic to women. As the Art+Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon gains support outside the realm of Wikipedia and the initial event, the community and network of citations referencing the entries will be validated and continue to generate more interest among contributors and editors to reverse the gender balances on Wikipedia, and beyond.

**This text was originally commissioned by Eriola Pira and Chelsea Haines for Guernica. On February 28th they wrote to explain that it was plagiarized: "Our editors have been fact checking your piece and noted a very high percentage of text that appears to be lifted from a paper at John Jay. Do you know why this would be the case? Obviously the material we publish at Guernica needs to be original, so please let us know." On March 4th they explained that the text plagiarized was the text itself: "Finally got to the bottom of this. The text had already been scanned for the previous issue where it was originally going to be published and thus showed up as a match when it was scanned again for the next issue."*