



## Reflecting on women's access to vote

Central Library exhibit gives a modern twist to centennial celebration of women's suffrage

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Anahid Oshagan introduces seated artists April Bey, Erika Rothenberg, Joey Forsyte, Jess Castillo, and Lucia Torres (from right to left) with co-curator Ani Ohanessian seated beside her.

“Within history there are multiple perspectives, and some are told, and some are not,” said Anahid Oshagan as she introduced a brand-new exhibition about women’s suffrage at the Glendale Central Library’s ReflectSpace, which opened its newest exhibition, *Access: A Century After Women’s Right to Vote*. The exhibition’s opening was Jan. 31 and the exhibit will continue through March 15.

Curated by Ani Ohanessian and Ara and Anahid Oshagan, this showcase features art from community members and groups including April Bey, Kim Abeles, Joey Forsyte, Erika Rothenberg, and the Las Fotos Project. Each of these artists offers artwork that contributed to the question: Have women achieved empowerment and access to power with the right to vote?

Curious attendees, numbering about 50, were welcomed to enter and explore the space, which included several pieces of art related to women’s suffrage, a voting-registration area, and plaques describing artists and the type of work they do.

After the attendees were familiar with the works, they were invited to have a seat as the artists sat before them to answer questions Ohanessian presented to them, and also to engage in an open forum, allowing audience members to ask questions or make statements. This “Artist Talk” clarified each artist’s purpose and developed their persona.



“I do a very out-there, skewed portrait of America.”  
artist  
Erika

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Erika Rothenberg’s “The New! Star-Spangled Banner” is based on an exhibition she did at the New Museum in New York.

Rothenberg said. When asked about how her role as an artist affects making change in today's society, Rothenberg said, "Art can give a new way of looking at something and empower people to fight for the things they care about."

Regarding the same question, artist April Bey said, "It's not my responsibility to solve problems, but I can steer

questions in a way to make solutions possible. You should vote for things you need. Vote with a progressive mindset and don't be coerced into sentiment."

On the same topic, artist Joey Forsyte highlighted the importance of voting and the major effect it can create. "18 to 34 year-olds are 40 percent of eligible voters. If you all went out and voted, you could determine what the future of this country is," Forsyte said.

Associate Director of Las Fotos Project Lucia Torres had strong advice to young voters and delivered a message of activism. "Tear it up. Dismantle the systems of sexism and racism. Just tear it up," Torres said.

High school sophomores Essence and Elise, both of whom declined to disclose their last names, said they had come because of parental influence and blossoming interest in exhibitions. "I think it's cool that it's in the library because a lot of galleries are not in connection with the people," Elise said.

Glendale Central Library Director Gary Schaffer hopes that the youth of the City of Glendale and beyond will continue showing interest in the library's ReflectSpace. He also believes the library's ReflectSpace can contribute to an educated and aware community. "I think to stick one's head in the sand and pretend that none of this goes on is not the proper way to do it. Those who do not study history are doomed to repeat it," Schaffer said.

Co-curator Anahid Oshagan emphasized the appreciation she had for the fact that the artists were all female, since they can more accurately portray the sentiments that women throughout history have felt. "Women add a layer of flavor, empathy and depth," Oshagan said.

Co-curator Ara Oshagan delved into the specialty of the library's ReflectSpace. "There are some galleries that address [social justice and human rights issues] once in a while but this is completely dedicated to it, so it's a very unique space." Oshagan said. "We always approach things with a witness narrative. If we're dealing with women's

issues, women will curate it, bring art, and do everything about it. We allow the communities who are connected to that issue to present their work and their interpretations,” Oshagan said.

Perhaps one of the most eye-catching pieces was April Bey’s “Atlantica Archives (Earth’s Feminism) II,” which occupied almost the entire height of a wall. This mixed-media piece depicts two females with a sign that reads, “Votes for Women,” with Beyonce’s face

superimposed on top of both of the women’s original faces.

Rothenberg allowed for community input with her work, “The New! Star-Spangled Banner” that invited the audience to alter the lyrics of America’s national anthem. Two stacks of sheet music, a few pens, and an encouraging note from Rothenberg were presented to the attendees.

The pieces from Las Fotos Project were not in the ReflectSpace, but rather extended to another wall in the library across from the ReflectSpace. The organization state’s that its “mission is to elevate the voices of teenage girls from communities of color through photography and mentorship; empowering them to channel their creativity for

mentorship; empowering them to channel their creativity for the benefit of themselves, their community, and future careers.” These images portray teenage girls expressing themselves through many means, including their talents, objects and surroundings.



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April Bey’s “Atlantica Archives (Earth’s Feminism) II” was displayed on the wall directly across from the entrance to the ReflectSpace.