


CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

**A PIECE OF THE**  
**PIE CHART AT THE**  
**LACMA ART + TECH LAB**

**Annina Rüst**



**A PIECE OF THE PIE CHART** at the LACMA Art+Tech Lab is a project I developed as part of a year-long Art+Tech grant period at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's (LACMA's) Art+Tech Lab from 2014-2015. It is an interactive robotic gallery installation that addresses gender inequity in art and tech workplaces using baked goods. 2014-15 was inaugural year of the new Art+Technology Program at LACMA, which according to the museum is "inspired by the spirit of LACMA's original Art and Technology Program (1967-1971)".

This program was notorious for its exclusion of women and minorities at the time and became the focus of feminist protest. In this chapter I introduce my project as well as the research I did in collaboration with LACMA's archivists and with artist and feminist activist Ann Isolde, linking my project to feminist protests that took place in the 1970s and 80s. The protesters of the 1970s were trailblazers whose persistence and protest techniques are still relevant and inspiring to feminist protest today.

*A Piece of the Pie Chart* is an interactive installation inspired by industrial production lines. It consists of a computer workstation and a food robot. It also tweets (Rüst, 2013). The food robot puts pie charts onto real, edible pies. The pie charts depict the gender gap in art and technology venues. Visitors use the robot to create pies using an automated assembly process.

In exhibitions the machine as well as a computer with keyboard and mouse are displayed on a pedestal with a vacuum cleaner suspended from the ceiling. A hose suspended from a vacuum cleaner reaches down to the surface of the pedestal where it is attached to a robotic arm. Once visitors have



**FIG. 1:** Viewers observe the robot during a demonstration of *A Piece of the Pie Chart* at the LACMA Art+Tech Lab in April 2015.

---

selected a pie depicting a gender ratio, the screen shows them instructions on how to place a pre-baked pie into the machine. They can find these pies next to the machine, ready to be used.

When the machine has verified that the pie has been correctly placed, it pushes the pie onto a conveyor belt. A heat gun subsequently heats up the chocolate cover of the pie until it becomes sticky. The pie is then transported to the robotic arm that guides a hose to the paper pie chart the visitor has previously chosen. Once the robot arm has found the diagram previously selected by the user, it places the hose over the pie chart. This causes the vacuum cleaner to switch on automatically.

While the vacuum cleaner is on, the diagram sticks to the hose. The robotic arm then places the selected paper diagram onto the warm chocolate surface of the pie so it sticks. Once this occurs, the vacuum cleaner is switched off and the robot arm returns to its initial position. The conveyor then moves the decorated pie under a webcam where a picture is taken and displayed on Twitter.

Visitors may then take the actual pies to their own workplace and use them to discuss gender equity with their colleagues. As part of the project, a mailing label is also printed. This allows visitors to mail the pies to the venues and workplaces where the data originated in order to remind those in charge how large or small the slice of the art and tech pie women can claim for themselves.

*A Piece of the Pie Chart* project was exhibited at the LACMA Art+Tech Lab in April 2015 (Rüst, 2015) and accompanied by a participatory workshop on feminist data collection and visualization (ibid). These events were a collaboration with artist Micol Hebron who is the director of Gallery Tally, a



**FIG. 2:** Artists Annina Rüst and Ann Isolde observe *A Piece of the Pie Chart* at the LACMA Art+Tech Lab in April 2015.

---

crowd-sourced, social engagement, feminist data visualization project initiated in 2011 that invites artists to create posters about ratios of male and female artists in top contemporary art galleries (Hebron *et al*, n.d.).

The version of *A Piece of the Pie Chart I* exhibited at the LACMA Art+Tech Lab was inspired by the original Art and Technology Program at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1967-1971). When I was applying to the new Art+Technology Program, I did some initial research into the original program. The program's co-curators Maurice Tuchman and Jane Livingston had paired artists such as Andy Warhol and Newton Harrison with technology companies such as RCA and IBM. The main source of information for the original program is a catalogue titled *1971 Report on the Art and Technology Program at LACMA*. I was shocked to find out that the program did not include any women artists. However, I later discovered that this was not for lack of interest on their part. The program actually did receive 78 unsolicited proposals from both men and women.

One unsolicited proposal by a woman artist and technologist, Channa Horwitz (then Channa Davis) was eventually included in the catalogue (Tuchman, 1971: 81). When I was researching female participation in the Art and Technology Program with the help of LACMA archivists, we found a statement by Channa Horowitz saying that program co-curator Maurice Tuchman did not fund her artwork as part of the exhibition program because, "he did not feel it was appropriate for a woman to discuss an engineering project with the male industrial scientists involved with the show." (Rüst, 2014) This statement was later published in a catalogue of Channa

Horowitz's work at Solway Jones Gallery in Los Angeles in 2007. The original is in the LACMA archives.

Tuchman said in his essay in the Art and Technology Program catalogue that he aimed to include "as wide a range of artists as possible" when soliciting proposals from artists. During my grant period at LACMA, I found out that the irony of this statement did not escape women artists in Los Angeles at the time. They were incensed by their exclusion and decided to confront the museum and demand the development of more equitable policies and practices.

After all, LACMA was the "largest art museum erected in America since the National Gallery of Art opened its doors in Washington, D.C. in 1942 and the biggest ever built west of the Mississippi River" according to art writer Suzanne Muchnic (Muchnic, 2015 : 1). In addition, it was a nonprofit museum dedicated to the public good whose maintenance and operations were supported by tax dollars provided by the Los Angeles county Board of Supervisors.

Women artists who wanted to break through the glass ceiling began to organize and collect data on the permanent collection and changing exhibitions at LACMA and work with a group of women lawyers so they could address blatant gender and racial discrimination in a feminist manifesto recommending structural changes at the museum. The document titled *Los Angeles Council of Women Artists Report* was released on June 15, 1971 (Los Angeles Council of Women Artists, 1971). In response to Tuchman's assertion of having sought "as wide a range of artists as possible" (Tuchman, 1971: 17) they wrote, "...but in fact, they invited no Blacks, no Chicanos, no Asians, and no women" (Los Angeles Council of Women Artists, 1971: 2).

The report by the Los Angeles Council of Women Artists (LACWA) is a seven-page document that goes far beyond discussing the Art and Technology Program. Following the narrative part of the report, the group included an impressive appendix with a complete set of gender data on artists featured in both group and solo exhibitions at LACMA since the museum's inception.

In the introductory paragraphs of their report, the LACWA authors say, "As many women as men are enrolled in the art schools of this country, but the number of women who achieve recognition is negligible" (Los Angeles Council of Women Artists, 1971: 1). They found that 4% of the works in group-exhibitions until 1971 were by women and among 53 solo exhibitions, only one was dedicated to the work of a woman artist: *Dorothea Lange Photography* in 1968 (ibid).

After a thorough discussion of the data, they followed up with a list of twelve demands aimed at making the museum an egalitarian place on all levels within its hierarchy (Los Angeles Council of Women Artists, 1971: 5). This included the creation of a Museum Council for Women in Art that would ensure more exhibitions, purchase awards and new scholarships for women and the development of an educational program to research women artists and provide scholarships for female art historians and critics. They also requested that half of all jobs from the bottom up be awarded to women and that the job of docent be a paid position.

The group called on the LACMA Director and Board of Trustees to meet with them so they could negotiate their demands. When there was initially no response, members of LACWA decided to apply public pressure. They arranged radio





**FIG. 3:** *A Piece of the Pie Chart* at the LACMA Art+Tech Lab.

and television interviews, contacted the *Los Angeles Times* and some members even sat on the museum stairs passing out their manifesto to museum visitors (Isolde, 2016).

The publicity the group was able to generate forced LACMA director Ken Donahue and other Trustees to meet with some of their representatives (Otis College, 2011).

Following the meeting, they kept up the pressure on LACMA. In a video recounting the events, artist Bruria Finkel says that perseverance is “the secret of all activities” (ibid). The LACWA negotiations with the museum did not lead to the structural changes they demanded because the museum thought the requests were too radical and explained they did not have enough money to carry out the suggested proposals (Wilding, 1977: 18). However, the women were serious and indicated that, if negotiations failed, they were prepared to file a lawsuit through the Civil Rights Commission (Los Angeles Council of Women Artists, 1971: 3).

Finally, the museum promised to take some action as outlined in a March 1972 letter from the President of the Board of Trustees. They indicated that “plans are now underway to prepare an exhibition of the work of the foremost women artists since the Renaissance by 1975.” (Wilding, 1977: 18). This eventually resulted in the 1976 groundbreaking exhibition *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, curated by Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin (Harris & Nochlin, 1984).

I shared stories of the above protests because I see my participation in the first iteration of the new Art+Tech program at LACMA as connected to the work undertaken by the feminist movements present and past. When I set out on my research on feminist protest at LACMA, I only had a hazy idea about

what the protests against the Art & Technology Program in 1971 were like. However, I grew more and more inspired as my research revealed what had happened.

Forty years later, I wanted to know what the state of art and technology looks like in terms of gender. I collected gender ratios from tech-driven art (exhibition venues, festivals, grants and prizes) as well as high profile tech-centric events such as the Microsoft Ignite conference. Furthermore, I included data from tech workplaces such as Google, Facebook, and similar companies. While there were variances, most of the venues and workplaces had numbers of women that suggest they are included even though the representation is far from equal.

Many of the same cultural forces that the Los Angeles Council of Women Artists criticized in the 1970s and 80s are still present. Women technologists tend to receive less recognition for their work than male technologists (Hewlett *et al.*, 2008: 28). The same is true for women artists. Women have been graduating in equal numbers from art schools than men in the last forty years. However, woman artists are still under-represented in museum and gallery exhibitions as well as in museum collections (National Museum of Women in the Arts).

So despite the gains of feminist movements over time, there is still ample space for feminist outrage. My awe for the work of the Los Angeles Council of Women Artists still grows as I continue to learn about their achievements. I see my project as a small contribution to a larger set of feminist movements in art and tech that have been persistently chipping away at institutionalized discrimination with humour, creativity, and determination.

## REFERENCES

---

- Art Technology Lab. (n.d.) Retrieved February 09, 2017, from <http://www.lacma.org/lab>
- Los Angeles Council of Women Artists (1971, June 15) *Los Angeles Council of Women Artists Report*. Retrieved February 9, 2017, from <http://blogs.getty.edu/pacificstandardtime/explore-the-era/archives/i143/>
- Harris, A. S., & Nochlin, L. (1984) *Women artists, 1550-1950*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
- Hebron, M. et. al. (n.d.) *Gallery Tally: A call for gender equity in the Arts*. Retrieved February 9, 2017, from <http://gallerytally.tumblr.com/>
- Hewlett, S. A., et al. (2008) *The Athena Factor: Reversing the Brain Drain in Science, Engineering, and Technology*. HBR research report. Boston: Harvard Business School.
- Isolde, A. (2016) Personal interviews with Bruria Finkel and Gilah Hirsch.
- Muchnic, S. (2015) *LACMA SO FAR: Portrait of a Museum in the Making*. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens.
- National Museum of Women in the Arts, (n.d.) *Get the Facts*. Retrieved February 12, 2017, from <https://nmwa.org/advocate/get-facts>
- Otis College, (2011, September 16) *Otis Presents: Pioneers of the Feminist Art Movement: Bruria Finkel* [Video File]. Retrieved from: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_fM-8QCGgKc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fM-8QCGgKc)

- Otis College, (2011, October 7) *Otis Presents: Pioneers of the Feminist Art Movement: Joyce Kozloff* [Video File]. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9hCObXWwyA>
- Rüst, A. (2013, October 25) Retrieved February 12, 2017, from <http://twitter.com/piechartrobot>
- Rüst, A. (2014, July) *Data as Feminist Protest*. Retrieved February 9, 2017, from <http://unframed.lacma.org/2014/07/10/data-as-feminist-protest>
- Rüst, A. (2013-2017) *A Piece of the Pie Chart*. Retrieved February 09, 2017, from <http://www.anninaruest.com/pie/>
- Rüst, A. (2015, April 30) *At LACMA Art Tech Lab*. Retrieved February 9, 2017, from <http://www.anninaruest.com/pie/lacma-edition/>
- Rüst, A. (2015, May 25) *Pictures from the Feminist Data Collect-a-thon*. Retrieved February 9, 2017, from <http://www.anninaruest.com/pie/2015/05/pictures-from-the-feminist-data-collect-a-thon/>
- Tuchman, M. (1971) *A Report on the Art & Technology Program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967-1971*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
- Wilding, F. (1977) *By Our Own Hands: The Women Artists Movement Southern California 1970-1976*. Santa Monica, CA: Double X.

