

## Linda Nochlin

by [Deborah Kass](#)

In 1996 I was invited to speak about my work at the prestigious Institute of Fine Arts at NYU in front of a new generation of scholars, art historians working towards their Ph.D.s. It was the academic home of the great and revolutionary mind of Linda Nochlin.



Deborah Kass, *Orange Disaster (Linda Nochlin)* (1997). Silkscreen, ink, and acrylic on canvas. 120 × 150 inches (120 × 75 inches each canvas). Photo: Josh Nefsky. Courtesy the artist and Paul Kasmin Gallery.

At that point I was right in the middle of my eight-year-long Warhol project. A question was asked, I believe by Linda herself (I don't quite remember, only that I addressed my answer directly to her). "How do you decide who to paint?" The answer was easy and somewhat practiced, but this time there was an opportunity too delicious to pass up, if only I handled it with precision and stealth. My answer was the standard one I had given before. "Simple. They are my heroes." Seizing the moment I added, "Like you Linda. I would love to paint you. Would you consider sitting for me?" The answer was an immediate, and resounding, "Yes!"

And it was done. Linda came to my studio, accompanied by her Institute colleague, the art historian Robert Lubar, sat for her photograph, and a *giant* painting was born.

Because how else could one represent Nochlin, except as huge? As is often the case with my work, the name for the painting and the image came at once, in this case right there in the auditorium at the Institute for Fine Arts, immediately upon her agreeing to be painted.

This would be called *Orange Disaster (Linda Nochlin)*, because what else could you call the woman who changed art history as I and all before me had learned it? Who else had undermined the very ground upon which it had been built? Who, besides Linda Nochlin, struck the first and fiercest blow against the white male canon?

For art history as it had been written before her, Linda Nochlin was an Orange Disaster.

And here we stand forty years later. Nochlin entitled her historic essay, written during the height of second wave feminism, "Why Are There No Great Women

Artists?” knowing full well it was the most asked, and at the same time the entirely wrong, question. Instead she proposed that it is the culture, history, and societies themselves that produce the opportunities for art and artists, that it is the context within which art is produced that needs to be examined and questioned. She defined art as a product of its specific moment, another expression or representation of its time. If the times do not value women and do not see them as fully human, then there can be no “great women artists” or great women anything. The same goes for all those “othered” by the society to which they belong.

Nochlin’s question, unfortunately, remains pertinent for women and anyone considered “other” (or shall we just say the majority of the world?). What kind of world consistently and endlessly undervalues, disappears, and/or ignores women artists? And by “world” what do we really mean? It is men, who rule and define the world, who do not value women. Nochlin fired a cannon, as have many throughout time. What are women willing to do about it now?

## **CONTRIBUTOR**

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