

1. // Elvis Richardson standing in front of *Televisuals: Do Not Tape Over*, 2015. Installation view, ArtSpace Realm, Maroondah City Council, Melbourne
PHOTO: SANDRA DAVIS.



44.

ELVIS RICHARDSON >

Feminism is both a conceptual and practical thread that has run through the length of **Elvis Richardson's** complex and diverse practice as an artist, curator, writer and academic. It's a practice that spans more than two decades and as she explains in describing its significance:

"It was good fortune for me that feminism was having a big moment when I was going through art school in the early 1990s. **The Geurilla Girls, Cindy Sherman, Louise Lawler, Barbara Kruger**, et al were the important artists. The Geurilla Girls instilled in me statistics training – observing and recording – which led to *Countess*."

While she has long been critically acclaimed as an artist and arts professional, it's her development of the persona of *The Countess* that has brought her national attention. Initially an anonymous blog, *The Countess* has developed into a go-to source for the sometimes-disturbing statistics on gender representation in contemporary art.

Why bother with such a feminist project now? Surely the political struggles of the women's

liberation movement have had their impacts on gender equality in a socially progressive realm such as the arts? Not according to Richardson: "My blog *Countess* proves that success in the art world is not merit-based. The blog is evidence of the obvious unconscious bias women artists experience." One solution Richardson proposes is, similarly to the implementation of forms of positive discrimination in relation to Indigenous art, "museums and public collections, collectors and benefactors could readdress the balance by establishing women-only budgets".

Richardson is currently undertaking *The Countess Report*, a data collection project of gender representation in the Australian visual art sector funded by the Cruthers Art Foundation. In early 2016, a website with interactive graphs and *Countess* commentary will be launched. As she says: "I hope that it will provide a benchmark with which to take stock and measure change over time."

Carrie Miller