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arms ache avid aeon: Nancy Brooks Brody / Joy Episalla / Zoe Leonard / Carrie Yamaoka: fierce pussy amplified: Chapter Eight

Curated by Jo-ey Tang

March 2 - May 11, 2025

Opening reception, Sunday, March 2, 5-7pm

New location

116 Elizabeth Street, floor one

NY NY 10013

bottom buzzer for entry

Hours

Wednesday-Sunday, noon-7pm

From March 2 - May 11, 2025, PARTICIPANT INC presents *arms ache avid aeon: Nancy Brooks Brody / Joy Episalla / Zoe Leonard / Carrie Yamaoka: fierce pussy amplified: Chapter Eight*, curated by Jo-ey Tang.

Chapter Eight is the latest exhibition chapter of an ongoing project that explores the resonances between the individual practices of the four artists, and in relation to their work as the queer art collective fierce pussy.

PARTICIPANT INC

116 Elizabeth Street, Floor One, NY, NY 10013

Originally formed in 1991 in New York City, fierce pussy began as a shifting cadre of activists who brought lesbian identity and visibility into the streets. Four of the original core members – Nancy Brooks Brody (1962-2023), Joy Episalla, Zoe Leonard, and Carrie Yamaoka – have continued to work together around issues of queer visibility and trans rights. In their individual practices across photography, drawing, painting, video, and sculpture, each of the artists shares an attention to the mutability of materials as an inquiry into relationships between subjectivity, perception, time, and history. *arms ache avid aeon: Nancy Brooks Brody / Joy Episalla / Zoe Leonard / Carrie Yamaoka: fierce pussy amplified* considers their expansive and resonant art practices in activating perceptual and political agencies.

The title “arms ache avid aeon” draws from Carrie Yamaoka’s artwork *A is for Angel* (1991), which features the four words gathered from typewriter correction ribbons collected from her day job and friends. By making visible these erasures, and by connecting to erasures upon our daily lives, culture, and society, the work stands as a fortifying paean to resistance and intimacy, through grief, desire, hope, and time.

The project was conceived by artist and curator Jo-ey Tang in collaboration with the artists in 2015, and has unfolded over multiple chapters, taking the form of exhibitions, a book, and expanded through performances, screenings, symposia, and conversations. Beginning with an open-ended process to convene the four core members of fierce pussy’s artistic practices in conversation for the first time, each chapter contains a non-chronological selection of artworks from the late 1980s to the present. Throughout the chapters, artworks re-appear to create ever-changing juxtapositions and proximities. This process is inspired by fierce pussy’s methodology of combining and remixing past works with new works, as well as the tactics of repetition that challenge chronology in each of the artists’ works.

Previous chapters have taken place at Beeler Gallery at Columbus College of Art & Design (Chapters One to Four, 2018-2019), Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (Chapter Five, 2019), and Palais de Tokyo, Paris (Chapter Seven, 2023), with a forthcoming book (Chapter Six, published in collaboration with Dancing Foxes Press). Contributors to the chapters include Mx Justin Vivian Bond, Jill H. Casid, Jonah Groeneboer, Alhena Katsof, Thomas (T.) J Lax, Elisabeth Lebovici, and Jeannine Tang.

For the PARTICIPANT INC exhibition, fierce pussy has conceived a new work, *I got all my sisters with me* (2025), as a collective call for solidarity in the current moment. The poster takes up a line from Sister Sledge’s 1979 disco anthem “We Are Family” written by Bernard Edwards and Nile Rodgers. For the Library of Congress entry on the song Tim Lawrence writes, “on the surface, the lyrics referred to the close relationship enjoyed by the four sisters who laid down the vocals. A little below, they expressed disco’s underlying ethos: to establish the dance floor as a social space that cut across the boundaries of class, creed, gender, nationality, race and sexuality.”

During the exhibition, the poster will be available for the taking at art organizations across New York City, as a connector of public spaces of New York, where fierce pussy first began their collective work. Collaborating venues include: American Academy of Arts & Letters, Center for Art, Research and Alliances (CARA), Giorno Poetry Systems, Housing Works, KARMA Bookstore, The Kitchen, Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, Light Industry, MoMA PS1, Performance Space New York, Pratt

Institute's Photography Department, Printed Matter, and Triple Canopy (list in formation).

Chapter Eight is dedicated to Nancy Brooks Brody (1962-2023).

Related Public Programming

On Sunday, March 9, 2025, 5pm, Triple Canopy hosts a conversation with writer Lauren O'Neill-Butler and Thomas (T.) Jean Lax (Curator, Department of Media and Performance, Museum of Modern Art, NY).

Location: Triple Canopy, 264 Canal Street, 3W, New York

On Wednesday, April 23, 2025, 6:30pm Participant Inc hosts a talk with artists Joy Episalla, Zoe Leonard, Carrie Yamaoka, and curator Jo-ey Tang.

Location: Participant Inc, 116 Elizabeth Street, floor one, New York

On Monday, April 28, 2025, 7pm, the Museum of Modern Art's Modern Monday presents a screening of Joy Episalla's film *As long as there's you, As long as there's me* (2023). Special guest Mx Justin Vivian Bond, who appears in the film, will open the evening with a short musical performance. Following the screening, Episalla will be joined in conversation with Jo-ey Tang and Stuart Comer, MoMA's Lonti Ebers Chief Curator of Media and Performance.

Location: Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York

Biographies

Nancy Brooks Brody (1962-2023) worked mainly in painting, drawing and sculpture. Brody had solo exhibitions at Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery (2019, 2024); Fortnight Institute, New York (2018); Galerie Joseph Tang, Paris, curated by Jo-ey Tang (2015); Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York (2014); Virgil de Voldere Gallery, New York (2007, 2009); and New Math Gallery, New York (1984,1985). Their work was included in numerous group exhibitions, including Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard, Paris (2018); Josh Pazda Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston (2018, 2024); Galerie Christophe Gaillard, Brussels (2024); Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon, New Museum, New York (2017-18); Bortolami Gallery, New York (2017); Greater New York, MoMA PS1, New York (2015); Frac Haute-Normandie, France (2015); The Camera Club of New York (2015); and Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago (2015). Brody's first group exhibition was at Club 57, New York, curated by Keith Haring (1980). Their work is in the collections of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Centre Pompidou, Paris; FRAC Haute-Normandie, France; and Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris. In 2015, she co-curated (with Jonathan Berger), *David Nelson* at 80WSE Gallery, New York University.

Joy Episalla (b. 1957) lives in New York City and works at the intersection of photography, video, and sculpture. Episalla has had solo exhibitions and projects at Tibor De Nagy (2022); Galerie Joseph Tang, Paris (2018); International Center of Photography, New York (2016); Participant Inc, New York (2015); Carrie Secrist Gallery, Chicago (2006, 2008); Debs & Co., NYC (1998, 1999, 2002, 2004) and Mercer Union, Toronto (2000). Their work has been included in numerous group exhibitions at /(/), San Francisco (2023); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2020); Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, New York (2020); Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard, Paris (2018); Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York (2016); Greater New York, MoMA PS1, New York (2015); Baxter St at The Camera Club of New York (2015); Brooklyn Museum (2012); Artists Space, New York (2006); Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2005); Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut (2002); White Columns, New York (1994, 1997, 2010); Buffalo AKG, New York (1998); and The Victoria & Albert Museum, London (1996). Their work is included in the collections of Baltimore Museum of Art; Buffalo AKG, New York; The Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, TN; Prudential Insurance Collection, NJ; Rose Art Museum, MA.

Zoe Leonard (b. 1961) lives in New York City. An artist who works with photography, sculpture, and installation, Leonard has exhibited extensively since the late 1980s, including solo exhibitions at the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas (2024-25); Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (2024); Musée d'art Moderne de Paris (2022-2023); MUDAM - The Contemporary Art Museum of Luxembourg (2022); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2018); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2015); Camden Arts Centre, London (2012); Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna (2009); Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2009); Reina Sofia, Madrid (2008); Dia:Beacon, Beacon, New York (2008); The Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2007); Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland (2007); Philadelphia Museum of Art (1998); Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland (1997); Secession, Vienna (1997), and The Renaissance Society, Chicago (1993). Group exhibitions include Documenta IX (1992); Documenta XII (2007); and Whitney Biennials in 1993, 1997, and 2014.

Carrie Yamaoka (b. 1957) lives in New York City. Her work traverses painting, drawing, photography and sculpture. She is a 2017 recipient of an Anonymous Was a Woman Award, and a 2019 Guggenheim Fellowship. Yamaoka has had solo exhibitions at Ulterior Gallery, New York (2019 and 2024); Kiang Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong (2024); Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles (2020 and 2023); Zilkha Gallery, Wesleyan University (2022); Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle (2019); Lucien Terras, New York (2015); Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York (2014); Debs & Co., New York (1997, 2000, 2002, and 2004); Robeson Art Gallery, Rutgers University, New Jersey (2000); and Swarthmore College (1990). She has participated in numerous group exhibitions, including 47 Canal, New York (2021); i8 Gallery, Reykjavik (2021); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2020); Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard, Paris (2018); Galerie Crèvecoeur, Marseille, France (2018); Greater New York, MoMA PS1, New York (2015); Baxter St at The Camera Club of New York (2015); Buffalo AKG, New York (2009); Artists Space (2006); Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2005); Mass MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts (2002); Victoria & Albert Museum, London (1996); and New Langton Arts, San Francisco (1991). Her work is included in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Buffalo AKG, New York; Dallas Museum of Art, Texas; and the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

fierce pussy

Formed in New York City in 1991 through their immersion in AIDS activism during a decade of increasing political mobilization around LGBT rights, fierce pussy brought queer identity and visibility directly into the streets. Low-tech and low-budget, the collective responded to the urgency of those years, using readily available resources: old typewriters, found photographs, their own baby pictures, and the printing supplies and equipment accessible in their day jobs. Originally fierce pussy was composed of a fluid and often shifting cadre of members. Four of the original core members—Nancy Brooks Brody (1962-2023), Joy Episalla, Zoe Leonard, and Carrie Yamaoka—continue to work together. fierce pussy has been included in group exhibitions at Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2023), Bronx Museum of Art, New York (2016), MoMA PS1, New York (2015), Daniel Buchholz Gallery, Cologne (2014), Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, New York (2012), White Columns, New York (2010), LaMama Gallery, New York (2009), and Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (2009). Solo exhibitions include *Between Bridges*, Berlin (2022), the *Lesbian Herstory Archives*, New York (2009) and *Printed Matter*, New York (2008). In June 2018, the collective debuted *AND SO ARE YOU*, a project for *Queer Power: the yearlong facade installation* at the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, New York.

Jo-ey Tang (b. 1978) is an artist, writer, and curator, who experiments with the formats of versions, repetitions, and iterations as an ongoing engagement with time and its potential. He has curated exhibitions at Centre Pompidou, Paris; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; Blaffer Art Museum, Houston; chi K11 Art Museum, Shanghai; and FUTURA Center for Contemporary Art, Prague. He has served as Director at KADIST San Francisco, curator at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, arts editor of *n+1*, and held roles at Denniston Hill, Woodridge, NY and Beeler Gallery at Columbus College of Art & Design. He is an advising committee member at / (Slash), San Francisco. His writing on art has appeared in *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Flash Art*, *Paper Monument*, and *artforum.com*, and for exhibitions and publications at Centre Pompidou, Wexner Center for the Arts, and West Den Haag. As an artist, he has

exhibited at Musée d'art contemporain de la Haute-Vienne; IAC - Institut d'art contemporain, Villeurbanne / Rhône-Alpes; Shimmer, Rotterdam; and Kunsthalle Zürich.

Image: fierce pussy, *I got all my sisters with me*, 2025. *arms ache avid aeon*: Nancy Brooks Brody / Joy Episalla / Zoe Leonard / Carrie Yamaoka: *fierce pussy amplified: Chapter Eight*, Participant Inc, NYC

arms ache avid aeon: Nancy Brooks Brody / Joy Episalla / Zoe Leonard / Carrie Yamaoka: *fierce pussy amplified: Chapter Six* received publication grants from The Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts and Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation.

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Teiger Foundation



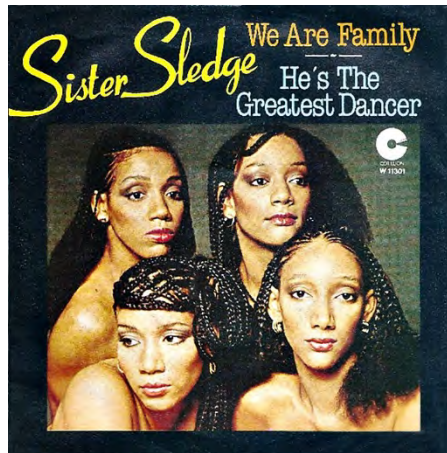
The Willem de Kooning Foundation

PARTICIPANT INC is located at 116 Elizabeth Street, floor one, between Broome and Grand Streets. The closest trains are the J/Z (Bowery) and the B/D (Grand); the closest wheelchair accessible stop is the 6 (Canal). Entry is on grade and the gallery is barrier free throughout with an all gender, wheelchair accessible bathroom. Service animals are welcome.

“We Are Family”--Sister Sledge (1979)

Added to the National Registry: 2016

Essay by Tim Lawrence (guest post)*



45rpm sleeve

Released on Atlantic in the spring of 1979, Sister Sledge's "We Are Family" captured disco's drive to integration. On the surface, the lyrics referred to the close relationship enjoyed by the four sisters who laid down the vocals. A little below, they expressed disco's underlying ethos: to establish the dance floor as a social space that cut across the boundaries of class, creed, gender, nationality, race and sexuality.

The goal to liberate and even unite marginalized groups took root through the work of the liberation movements of the 1950s and 1960s. When internal contradictions, overambitious goals and state repression precipitated the post-Woodstock decline of the countercultural movement and the rainbow alliance, the energy generated by the Civil Rights, gay liberation, feminist and anti-war movements needed somewhere to go. Opening at the beginning of 1970, David Mancuso's Loft and Seymour and Shelley's Sanctuary, the first weekly New York City dance parties to admit definitionally diverse crowds, became two of the most compelling if underreported destinations.

Born out of equally diverse music influences hunted down, absorbed and integrated by DJs, all of them in search for material to feed spiraling, insatiable dance crowds that contributed to the act of music-dance creation, disco broke through as the movement's dedicated genre when the Hues Corporation and George McCrae scored back-to-back number one hits during the summer of 1974. Although Nelson George alleges that disco was largely responsible for killing R&B, DJs and dancers understood that disco amounted to the latest reincarnation of R&B--one that continued to organize itself around the groove generated by the rhythm section while placing more emphasis on polyrhythm, syncopation, chanting, percussion breaks, crescendos and, following the breakthrough of a dedicated disco format, the 12-inch single, reedits and remixes.

Chic contributed to disco's reinvention of R&B thanks to the telepathic relationship cultivated by the band's rhythm section players--bassist Bernard Edwards, guitarist Nile Rodgers and drummer Tony Thompson--with vocals and orchestral flourishes introduced with such constrained efficiency that the result left the impression that every gesture fueled the shimmering groove. Released on Buddah and Atlantic in 1977, the year before disco's commercial peak, "Everybody Dance" and "Dance, Dance, Dance (Yowsah, Yowsah, Yowsah)" foregrounded a metronome rhythm section, tight instrumental phrases, smooth vocals, and lyrics that beckoned dancers to enter the transformative space of the dance floor. Released in 1978, "Le Freak" invited listeners to "*feel the rhythm / check the rhyme / come on along / and have a real good time,*" because, thanks to a new dance craze called "Le Freak," there was "*big fun to be had by everyone.*" Ironically, Edwards and

Rodgers wrote the song after being barred from Studio 54, one of the midtown venues that would corrode disco's original, inclusive imperative.

Simultaneous to recording "Le Freak," Edwards and Rodgers teamed up with Sister Sledge to record a track that epitomized disco's extended family values. The collaboration came about after the increasingly influential Rodgers told Atlantic president Jerry Greenberg that he and Edwards wanted to produce other artists, the duo having recently founded the Chic Organization as the vehicle through which they would spread their sound. Greenberg suggested the four-sister band from Philadelphia, signed to Atlantic since 1973. Chic historian Daryl Easlea recounts that when Edwards and Rodgers confirmed they knew of Sister Sledge, Greenberg added, "I love these girls; they're also like family to me." His comment struck a chord.

Debbie, Joni, Kathy and Kim Sledge (the sisters of Sister Sledge) were open to the collaboration, having scored only one hit to date. In the studio, Edwards and Rodgers took charge, laying down the kind of tight, unadorned, glistening track that had already come to define their work. For "We Are Family," lead singer Kathy Sledge recorded her vocals in one take while the chorus was appropriately sung in unison save for the outro words-- "*get up everybody and sing*"--which the sisters delivered in harmony. Their infectious presence persuaded Edwards and Rodgers to let the vocalists loosen Chic's established prism of studio perfection and sing with their hearts.

"We Are Family" became the standout hit single of the eponymous Sister Sledge album, reaching number one on the R&B chart, number two on the pop chart, and accumulating major international sales. "*We are family,*" ran the song's chorus, "*I got all my sisters with me / We are family / Get up everybody and sing.*" The record amounted to "the ultimate disco manifesto," argues Craig Werner, author of "A Change Is Going to Come: Music, Race and the Soul of America."

The record, however, was merely papering over a deepening national fault line. Anticipating the electoral shifts that would underpin Ronald Reagan's success in the November 1980 election, the Middle American electorate, looking for scapegoats as growth started to seep out of the US economy, turned on queers, people of color, women and intersectional subjects. Disco came to be targeted as the musical manifestation of the coalition of minority interests that was perceived to have made gains while self-designated "traditional American families" lost ground. It didn't help that the success of "Saturday Night Fever" had encouraged labels to start releasing increasing numbers of made-to-measure disco records. Disco became ubiquitous at the very moment its content emptied out, deigning to even outsell rock during 1978—another perceived assault on Middle America. An angry, populist, decentered movement started to gather around the slogan "disco sucks." In July 1979, just three months after the release of "We Are Family," a DJ detonated a pile of 40,000 disco records at an anti-disco rally in Chicago.

Chic and Sister Sledge struggled to ride the music industry's synchronized abandonment of disco. "When people started 'disco sucks' we started saying, 'we're proud to be a disco band,'" Rodgers told Marc Taylor, adding, "We were so angry that people would victimize an entire movement because it felt to us like black people were dominating the charts, the pop charts, the only charts that counted. We were ruling it, so the only way to get the rock guys back at the top of the charts was to say 'these guys suck' and 'let us have our charts back.'"

The movement that had started out as a radical socio-sonic expression of the rainbow coalition had been unceremoniously sidelined by the very people who were behind the drive to its commercialization. Yet the organic party culture that gave birth to disco's transformational ambitions didn't miss a beat. In downtown New York, the Loft was reaching its peak. Mancuso's party had also given birth to a series of satellite parties, one of which, the Paradise Garage, had even outgrown its parent.

As for Sister Sledge and Chic, they had recorded an anthem that would continue to receive play at the Loft, the Garage and successor parties around the world. With the fault line that contributed to the collapse of disco if anything deepening, a song that survived the late 1970s collapse in unity rings ever more forcefully today.

Tim Lawrence is the author of "Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture, 1970-79," "Hold on to Your Dreams: Arthur Russell and the Downtown Music Scene, 1973-92," and "Life and Death on the New York Dance Floor, 1980-83," all with Duke University Press. He is a Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of East London, and the co-founder of Lucky Cloud Sound System and All Our Friends.

*The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Library of Congress.