

This Spring, Art's Elder Stateswomen Exhibit Their Extraordinary Talents



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"The world hasn't mellowed, so why would I?" New York-based multimedia artist Ida Applebroog tells Vogue. At 92-years-old, the feminist pioneer, known for her paintings and sculptures that frequently comment on sexuality, power and domestic violence, is the subject of a major career retrospective at Hauser & Wirth Somerset, open now until 2 May.

Born Ida Appelbaum to Orthodox Jewish immigrant parents in the Bronx, she named herself Ida Applebroog following a spell in hospital for depression in the late 1960s and burst on to the Manhattan art scene at the age of 45.

Since then, she has been the recipient of multiple honours, including a MacArthur Fellowship, or “Genius Grant”, in 1998, and her intimate, at times confessional work resides in the collections of many major institutions, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Guggenheim Museum. And still she is creating: this latest exhibition will not only span more than five decades, but will include new, unseen works made in 2021.

She is part of a coterie of female artists who have continued making vital, important work and exhibiting well into their eighties and beyond – a group that includes the 87-year-old conceptual artist Lorraine O’Grady, who had her first retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum last year; the 91-year-old artist and activist Faith Ringgold; and the 106-year-old painter Carmen Herrera, who in 2016, at the grand age of 101, celebrated her centenary with an exhibition of new work at the Whitney. In an era when the young and new are celebrated in the art world, these women embody a different, rarer kind of success: that of the artist who has ignored the prevailing trends of the day and never wavered from their singular vision. Take American artist Sheila Hicks, who this April, at the age of 87, will unveil a new site-specific commission at The Hepworth Wakefield in West Yorkshire alongside a retrospective. She may be in her ninth decade, but Hicks keeps the same routine as when she was an art student in the 1950s. Using a pocket loom that she carries around, she works every day making miniature weavings she calls “minimes”, which incorporate found objects among the threads. The monumental fabric-based sculptures that she creates in this way have inhabited the High Line in New York, the Palace of Versailles and the 2017 Venice Biennale.

Like Hicks, Applebroog remains defiantly experimental, with a rigorous work ethic. She may now get around on a scooter and have assistants to help place canvases, but she insists, “My age never factors into it, I merely adapted my approach. I just want to keep going and working as I’ve done before.”