

# A BEAUTEOUS TREE: MARGARET FULLER'S FEMALITY

## Curated by Jenessa Kenway

May 28, 2021–July 9, 2021 | Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art

The Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art and the UNLV Jean Nidetch CARE Center are proud to present *A Beauteous Tree: Margaret Fuller's Femality*. Curated by Jenessa Kenway, a doctoral candidate in Literature at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, this exhibition illuminates the under-studied nineteenth-century author Margaret Fuller's concept of "femality" by pairing artworks from the Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art's permanent collection with quotes from Fuller and other feminist writers. *A Beauteous Tree* includes work by Las Vegas artist Lolita Develay, along with a series of contemporary artists' self-portraits inspired by Fuller's writings. Visitors will be able to take part in an interactive activity that invites them to explore Fuller's expansive ideas about gender by visualizing themselves as trees.



Mary Cady Johnson. *Trees in Las Vegas*, 1957. (Detail)

"Misconceptions regarding gender roles and issues of gender inequality persist within society," says Kenway. "Considering gender in new ways will help us examine heterocentric norms while finding common ground. Fuller's feminist and transcendentalist notions of fluidity and transformation offer a path towards a more holistic perspective on gender and reconsideration of what constitutes masculine and feminine gender aesthetics."

Fuller addresses the issue of gender in her 1841 essay, "The Great Lawsuit," in which she urges equal rights for women and defines "femality": "Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman." Kenway curates excerpts from "The Great Lawsuit," and the works of other authors—including Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, and Donna Haraway—together with paintings, sculptures, and prints by a range of artists such as James Gobel, Harold Paris, Lance L. Smith, and Mary Warner, to create verbal-visual connections that provide a focal point for theory and story.

Local artists have been commissioned to create tree self-portraits to probe ideas that Fuller explores in her 1841 short story, "The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain." Here, tree imagery displaces traditional gender binaries and instead constructs identity from leaves, flowers, fruit, and branches. Visitors are invited to submit tree-portraits of their own, either digitally or in person at the Museum. The portraits will be compiled into a free virtual catalog—a "forest" family album that tells local stories of identity and transformation.

Kenway says, "The focal point of trees reflects upon gender, but also visually manifests new growth and the period of renewal occurring within our community, coinciding with springtime and feelings of hope as COVID-19 vaccinations become increasingly available. *A Beauteous Tree* is an opportunity to share positive gender representation and grow together as a community after the long winter of the pandemic lockdown."

*A Beauteous Tree* features artwork by Lolita Develay, James Gobel, Mary Cady Johnson, Holly Lay, Leeaux, Eric LoPresti, Zully Mejia, Amadeo Modigliani, Harold Paris, JK Russ, Lance L. Smith, Xiaomeng Tang, and Mary Warner.

*A Beauteous Tree: Margaret Fuller's Femality* runs from May 28 - July 9, 2021. Entry to the museum is free. Please see the Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art website to read our safety guidelines and make a timed reservation before you visit.

Jenessa Kenway would like to give thanks to the Nevada Humanities, The National Endowment for the Humanities, and Bobbie Ann Howell for their generous support; to Margaret Campe at the Jean Nidetch CARE Center for partnering with her and seeing the merit in her project and showing patience through every step of the process; to the Margaret Fuller Society for their exceptional support and encouragement; for the swift and helpful guidance of Michele Frankovich and Stephanie Paige at UNLV Office of Sponsored Programs; to all the participating artists for taking a chance on her tree portrait idea; to Dr. John Hay for introducing her to Margaret Fuller and nurturing her interest; to Dr. Beth Rosenberg for guiding her through feminist theory; to the wonderful staff of the Marjorie Barrick for believing in her exhibition concept and for their willingness to stop whatever they were doing and talk about the show with her whenever she needed.

Support for this exhibition is provided by the UNLV Jean Nidetch CARE Center, a Nevada Humanities Project Grant, The National Endowment for the Humanities, and the WESTAF Regional Arts Resilience Fund, a relief grant developed in partnership with The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support arts organizations in the 13-state western region during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **#TreeSelfPortraits Activity**

Digital submissions to the tree self-portrait activity can be posted to Instagram with the hashtag #TreeSelfPortraits or emailed to [barrick.museum@unlv.edu](mailto:barrick.museum@unlv.edu). Physical submissions can be dropped off at the front desk in the Barrick Museum lobby. Email submissions must be at least 300 dpi. Instagram submissions will not be included in the catalog. Now, imagine yourself as a tree. What would that tree look like? What kind of tree would you be? What kind of tree matches your life activities? Character? Who you are as a person? Were you one kind of tree when you started life and now feel that you have changed tree-types?

### **Unfurling Taxonomies: Margaret Fuller's 'Femality' and the Magnolia Tree**

#### **A Virtual Talk by Dr. Christina Katopodis, PhD**

June 16, 2021, 12:00 p.m. PDT

Register at: <https://bit.ly/3fBIC1s>

Margaret Fuller (1810–1850) famously asserted that there is “no essential difference” between men and women. She believed that giving everyone equal opportunity would restore to society what it was so desperately lacking: the equal contributions of all its citizens. In this free virtual talk, Fuller scholar Dr. Christina Katopodis will draw on the image of the magnolia tree in Fuller’s short story, “The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain,” to outline comparisons between the unfurling taxonomies of plants and of gender(s), framing all attempts to categorize and classify as mere moments in a fluid, ever-evolving process of living and growing. The talk will take place on Wednesday, June 16th, at 12 p.m. PDT. Christina Katopodis, PhD, is the Executive Director at Transformative Learning in the Humanities at the City University of New York (CUNY). A scholar of environmental studies, sound studies, and American literature, she has written articles published in *ESQ: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture*, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, and *Profession*. Her book project, “Sound Ecologies: Listening to America’s Literary Vibrations from Emerson to Standing Rock,” argues that embodiment and relationality are key to understanding the American literary soundscape and examines both human and nonhuman sonic occupations of territory. Her work has been supported by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society and the National Science Foundation, and numerous grants from The Graduate Center, CUNY.

### **ABOUT THE CURATOR**

Jenessa Kenway, a doctoral candidate in Literature at the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV), examines connections between art and literature to explore the influence of visual aesthetics on literary meaning. Her dissertation focus is feminine aesthetics in literature from the 18th century to present. Her essay, “There is something in this scene”: Tracking Beauty and the Sublime in Two Men, Elizabeth Stoddard and the Tradition of Landscape Painting,” won the 2020 Brooks-Hudgins award. She won the Dorothy Mae Freischel scholarship for excellence in interdisciplinary scholarship, projects, and classroom instruction methods. She presented on the visual genealogy of Margaret Fuller at the 2018 conference for the Society for the Study of American Women Writers. Her essay “Talking with a Magnolia Tree: Margaret Fuller and American Transcendentalism” was published in the 2019 Norton UNLV

world literature handbook, Sing Goddess. Her presentation on feminist theory and sacred female language in Mary of Egypt was well received at February 2019 ACMRS and MAP Joint Conference. Her scholarly article discussing visual and literary realism and surrealism was published in January 2019 in the Penn State interdisciplinary journal Soundings. She has been writing about art in Las Vegas since 2009. Her discussions of Las Vegas art are published in KNPR's Desert Companion. She teaches courses in composition and world literature for UNLV.

## **ABOUT THE UNLV JEAN NIDETCH CARE CENTER**

The Jean Nidetch CARE Center is committed to creating a supportive and inclusive environment for all genders through programming, services, and advocacy for the UNLV community. The Care Center provides free and confidential support to members of the campus community who have been impacted by sexual assault, relationship abuse, family violence and/or stalking. It aims to end these forms of power-based personal violence by engaging the campus community in education, transformative action, and programming that includes holistic healing workshops, customizable trainings for UNLV departments, and the online Student's Guide to Radical Healing. Its services are available to people of all identities and regardless of status. The Center was founded in 1994 through a generous donation from Weight Watchers founder, Jean Nidetch. Get involved and donate at <https://www.unlv.edu/carecenter>

## **ABOUT THE MARJORIE BARRICK MUSEUM OF ART**

The Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art believes everyone deserves access to art that challenges our understanding of the present and inspires us to create a future that holds space for us all. Located on the campus of the most racially diverse university in the United States, we strive to create a nourishing environment for those who continue to be neglected by contemporary art museums, including BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ groups. As the only art museum in the city of Las Vegas, we commit ourselves to leveling barriers that limit access to the arts, especially for first-time visitors. To facilitate access for low-income guests we provide free entry to all our exhibitions, workshops, lectures, and community activities. Our collection of artworks offers an opportunity for researchers and scholars to develop a more extensive knowledge of contemporary art in Southern Nevada. The Barrick Museum is part of the College of Fine Arts at the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV).

## **ABOUT THE COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS**

Located on the main campus of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, the UNLV College of Fine Arts offers graduate degrees in Art, Architecture, Film, Music, Dance, Theatre, and Entertainment Engineering and Design, a unique discipline that combines engineering with technical theatre training. The College's facilities include theaters and contemporary art galleries as well as the Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art.

## **PRESS CONTACT**

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## **MAKE A RESERVATION**

Free Admission. The Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art believes everyone deserves access to the arts. To make an appointment visit Eventbrite (<https://bit.ly/2Dsz8Gv>). The Barrick Museum of Art is open to the public Wednesday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m., by appointment. Please reserve your spot to see one of our current exhibitions. Please note that for the safety of our community, all visitors are required to wear a face-covering and maintain social distance from others.

## FIND US

The Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art is located in the heart of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas campus. The museum is easily accessed from the west side of campus at the intersection of Harmon Avenue and University Center Drive. Drive east on East Harmon Ave until the road enters the campus and terminates in a parking lot. The Museum will be on your right, next to a desert landscape garden.

## PARKING

Visitors may park in metered, staff and student spots free of charge after 7 pm on weekdays, 1 pm on Fridays, and all day Saturday. Daily, weekly, or monthly permits can be purchased from Parking and Transportation Services. Metered parking spaces for visitors can be found in the parking lot outside the Barrick's entrance, along East Harmon Ave, and in the lot behind the Lied Library. Other metered green zones are available in the Cottage Grove Avenue Parking Garage and parking areas throughout campus.

## MUSEUM HOURS

Wednesday–Saturday: 10am–5pm. By appointment.

