

FALL 2015

**Create a poster instead of typing a hashtag - What I learned this Women's History Month.**

Dear Diary,

Happy Women's History Month! March 9, 2016 kicked off the official tour of my new talk: *Act Like a Feminist Artist: what no one told you about starting a grassroots organization*. The talk highlights passages from *UN/MASKED* my forthcoming memoir due out this October from Skyhorse. Monmouth University was the host of this inaugural event and the theatre was packed with students from various gender studies, art and humanities classes.

Introduced by Dean Mezey, I entered Pollack Theatre in the traditional Guerrilla Girls On Tour fashion - by throwing bananas. Since it was 1PM and lunch time, everyone was hungry. Going through my herstory as a Guerrilla Girl and Guerrilla Girl On Tour, I displayed slides of the Guerrilla Girls' foray into the theatre world and shared inside stories of our sticker campaigns, for example that time at the TKTS booth in Times Square where everyone thought we were members of The Lion King.

The students of MU did not disappoint in the Q and A. we talked about the Oscar snub, objectification of women in art, theatre in New Jersey and the important role of gender studies programs. The most interesting part of my time at Monmouth U was a discussion about just how hands off activism is these days - everyone wants to create the next hash tag that will blow up the internet but no one puts pen to paper anymore to make a sticker or a poster. Well, Guerrilla Girls On Tour has not given up on using markers and newsprint to think up our ideas. Try it and see how the physical act of creating something three dimensional will stimulate your activism.

My favorite part of the day was signing posters after the talk where I met the awesome feminist, Lennon. (Yes, if she had been born male her parents would have called her McCartney.) Thanks for being there, Lennon, and for introducing yourself.

I'll be back in New Jersey on Monday, at Seton Hall University in West Orange. And from there onto Seattle and Portland.

Love, Aphra Behn

**March 14, 2016**

**SETON HALL UNIVERSITY**

**Saint Patrick, pray for the activists.**

Dear Diary,

In 2004, Guerrilla Girls On Tour! appeared at John Carroll University - a private, coeducational, Jesuit Catholic university located in University Heights, Ohio. Weeks before our show the University received emails protesting our booking, namely because we were pro-choice co-sponsors of the *March For Women's Lives* held in Washington, D.C. the same year. John Carroll's PR department decided that in order to quell the protests they would issue a statement, explaining to concerned students and citizens that Guerrilla Girls On Tour! is "wholesome and fun, with a decidedly Christian message."

Guerrilla Girls On Tour's mission is to advocate for equality and justice, two basic principles of Christianity. Our message, however, is that reproductive rights are human rights. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church we are pro-choice and support Planned Parenthood.

So, what's a Guerrilla Girl On Tour! to do when booked, twelve years later, at another Catholic University (Seton Hall) and, four days before you are to appear, discover that the University has "lost" your paperwork and demands you sign a brand new contract with new stipulations which are impossible to follow? (They wanted, among other things, for us to provide our own insurance in the amount of three million dollars and to list Seton Hall as an additional insured).

Was the University playing politics? Did they wish to censor Aphra Behn's scheduled talk at Seton Hall entitled, "Act Like A Feminist Activist?" Was someone afraid of the "F" word?

Guerrilla Girl On Tour!, Aphra Behn's talk, is about her early work as a member of the Guerrilla Girls. In 1997 Aphra led the GG's foray into addressing gender parity in theatre. The contents of Aphra's talk would be deemed by any layperson, priest or nun to be anything but controversial.

Universities are supposedly institutions of free speech. Censorship is in direct opposition to the search for knowledge. What was going on at Seton Hall?

After summarizing and submitting the content of Aphra's talk to the

Dean she was able to proceed with her talk as scheduled. The students and faculty who attended were open to ideas. During the Q and A one student asked if Guerrilla Girls On Tour! believed in LGBTQ rights. Yes! Absolutely, we do. Another asked about transgender rights. Yes! Yes, again. Transgender people are discriminated against in all aspects of their lives and deserve equality on a range of issues.

In the end the Seton Hall talk was an eye opener. The search for knowledge continues, even in places with policies that attempt to thwart free speech. Our experiences as activists and artists and feminists teaches us that we are enriched as human beings by sharing our ideas. We are reminded that there are women and men on the front line of the fight for equality, working for the free and open exchange of concepts, even within the sacred walls of colleges and universities where ideas are supposed to flourish.

Yes, Guerrilla Girls On Tour! certainly are fun; some of us are even wholesome. Our message remains: the end of sexism will mark a more peaceful, just and equal world.

Love,  
The GGOT's

### **Spring tours to North Seattle and Reed College - a lesson in survival**

There are savvy students everywhere. Feminist students come to see me when I tour to colleges. I preach to the choir more often than not.

A commuter school, like North Seattle College, makes me smile. I know from experience that the students will be smart and ask good questions. From the moment I step onto campus I feel I am part of an open space where the exchange of ideas is encouraged.

At North Seattle College this week, I presented, "Act like a feminist artist – what no one told you about starting a grassroots organization." Organized by the Women's Center it was their most well attended event to date.

It is great to feel the audience right there with me – laughing, nodding in agreement, listening intently, taking notes and posing poignant questions at the end of it all.

After Seattle I headed south to Portland and Reed College to present

the same lecture. The week before I arrived a controversy erupted over one of Guerrilla Girls On Tour's posters - displayed on campus to promote my talk.

The poster, created in 2008, is entitled "Female By Birth..." and was inspired by a t-shirt we saw while on tour that read: "American by Birth, Christian by Choice." The spirit in which we wrote the words "female" and "feminist" was meant to be inclusive of any person who identifies as female and/or feminist.

This poster angered students at Reed College who felt it was transphobic. When I learned of this I wrote to Reed and said:

"...guilty as charged...but hopefully I can turn this into a discussion about how feminist groups are not perfect and what we do when we fail and how we can all help each other understand each other as well as how to look at older work in the context of when it was created. That poster is 8 years old - a great deal of awareness has happened since that time and again, the spirit we wrote it in was honest. BUT I would like to challenge the students at REED: Change and rework the GGOT poster "Female by Birth" so that is not Trans-phobic. I will accept any and all ideas to this email address and will happily display and discuss them in my talk. AND I also challenge the students to make posters that are pro-transgender and anti-transphobic and plaster them all over campus before I arrive - especially in my green room. Please send out the call!

The faculty sent the call out. They even provided tape in the green room to display responses. I kept checking my inbox for replies. None came.

I learned, sadly, that the students had created posters and responses but chose to share them privately, only among themselves. They did not let me or anyone on the faculty see their reactions.

I gave my talk. It was sold out. One student questioned me about the "Female by Birth..." poster and I repeated what I said above, reminding them of my challenge - extending it and hoping to have a further dialogue with the students about it.

Today, I visited a class made up of a number of art history, art studio and theatre students who gathered for an hour to have an informal dialogue with me. I loved talking with the students. Their questions were well thought out and honest. Yet, I sensed some of the

students were still very angry, suspicious and unwilling to engage with me.

After the class visit I learned every copy of the "Female By Birth" poster, which had been placed all around campus, had been taken down by students. An act of protest. Fine. But nothing had been put up in response. What offended them had been simply removed from sight.

Dear Reed College Students – you have to create an alternative message in order to change the world. Differing ideas and new experiences are what make college campuses incubators for the next generation of activists and artists. Just removing images, ideas, text which offend you, does nothing to change the status quo.

The world is full of discomfort and offense. It is up to us all to respond publically to it. If we act as passive bystanders and only share our outrage with our friends on facebook we limit ourselves. As feminists of different genders, classes, races, identities, we must engage with each other to survive.