

## ARTFORUM



**Marianne Wex, 1977**

### **MARIANNE WEX (1937–2020)**

Marianne Wex, whose short career as an artist yielded enduring contributions to women’s and gender studies as well as the field of conceptual photography, has died at age eighty-three in her native Germany.

Born in Hamburg in 1937, Wex studied at the Academies of Art Hamburg and Mexico City, originally focusing on painting. She became most known for her installation and book *Let’s Take Back Our Space*, a vast but rigorously organized taxonomy that collated hundreds of rephotographed images from mass media alongside thousands of her own street photographs—all shot with a Mamiya camera and intended as source material for her paintings—to probe the patriarchy’s impact on the human body. Assembling the work throughout the 1970s with imagery divided by masculine and feminine archetypes and spanning millennia, Wex analyzed—and

sometimes staged playful reversals of—the gendered nature of kinesics, in turn exposing how societal expectations shape the different ways men and women occupy space; the women featured are typically in contractive postures, the men in a more entitled, outspread fashion.

Adapted to a German-language book in 1979 and translated into English in 1984, *Let’s Take Back Our Space* is considered to be Wex’s lone surviving body of work: After exhibiting photo panels of the project at Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst in West Berlin (NGBK) in 1977, she was diagnosed with a serious illness, and traveled the world before embarking on a successful career in alternative medicine. Her work, celebrated upon its completion but underrecognized for decades, has recently enjoyed status as a precursor of the Pictures Generation and as a reference in recent discourses around “manspreading” and the feminist recuperation of public space.

In 2009, Mike Sperlinger organized a show at Focal Point Gallery in Essex, England, that saw *Let’s Take Back Our Space* exhibited for the first time since its unveiling. In 2012, portions traveled to Yale Union in Portland Oregon for its stateside debut. “Wex’s arrangements possess an unexpected aesthetic charge,” wrote John Motley in a review of the show for Artforum.com. “In the hundreds of black-and-white photographs, the artist’s meticulous sequencing creates a sense of animate motion.”

Presently, panels from the work are included in Barbican’s traveling exhibition “Masculinities: Liberation Through Photography,” now on view at Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin. Elements from *Let’s Take Back Our Space* will return to NGBK this month, forty-three years after its first appearance there. The work now belongs to the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

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