

Curator's

S T A T E M E N T

2000 UN

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Progress is in the eye of the beholder. It can be positive or negative, backward or forward, small or large, linear or digital, visible or invisible, real or imagined. Progress is as infinitely conceived as are women themselves.

The **United Nations Special Session, Women 2000: Gender, Equality, Development and Progress for the 21st Century** in New York, June, 2000, is an opportunity for government delegates and non-governmental organizations alike to assess progress in concrete terms, and to look for ways to come up with precise measurements to assess achievements of women around the world during this decade.

This exhibition of women's art, *Progress of the World's Women* is meant to complement our real world challenges and at the same time propel us beyond them. We can enter realms of the senses, myth and imagination, feelings, dreams and desires. We can celebrate our human creativity. If "progress" suggests a journey upward and onward, these artistic statements also offer us symbolic truths about where women really are, what matters to them, and what kind of futures they envision.

The art exhibition, June 5 through June 27, is sponsored by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Museum of Women (IMOW), and represents a collection of works of art across many cultures, mediums and materials. Several of the artists have achieved international prominence, others are well known inside their own countries, and still others have not yet garnered recognition and need to be known. A few, even in this age, are still "anonymous".

Some of these works are defined as traditional, craft, avant-garde, abstract, conceptual and constructions using paint, photography, cloth, metal, straw and print mechanisms.

All of these works of art are meant to expand our understanding of our world. These works, created for the most part by women in the last five years, allow us to interpret what we see as a collective statement in bold artistic terms about the power of women at the beginning of the 21st century. The exhibition also honors the traditional powers of women from the earliest times to this century just past. There is evidence here of a new conception of leadership — designed by women around the planet — in which power is shared, violence is abhorred, and friends, children, elders and our earth are nurtured.

This exhibition provokes our sensibilities, touches our emotions, and inspires us to envision a world where the promises of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, have been fulfilled.

While the world's glaring needs stare us in the face through these artists' lens, the works of art also offer hope. *Glutton*, a print made by Bongile Mkhize of South Africa, shows us a woman who is surrounded by choice and plenty where so many others are deprived. *Fully Empowered*, a sculpture by Ella Tulin, of the United States, envisions a woman who has realized her deepest potential to overcome adversity and change the world. Sofia Kifle's *Ethiopian Whispers* makes us wonder what these powerful women could be telling us now about this country's latest tragedy. Sandra Ramos' *Cuba as a Woman* makes us laugh as it makes us cry. These works offer us the possibility of visual and perceptual transformation, expanding our consciousness through art. Looking carefully at these artists' visions can lead us to the world of our dreams.