

ARTS

# INSPIRED WOMEN

One runs the Tate in gold Zaha Hadid shoes,  
another sees her hair as a piece of  
performance art... Feminism is taking on  
the art world in new and  
exciting ways

*Words by Bethan RYDER Photographs by Tereza CERVENOVA*



## The Trailblazer

*Maria Balshaw, director of Tate*

When Maria Balshaw was announced as Tate's first female director at the start of this year, it was her shoes – gold, lace-up boots she'd posted to Instagram – that somewhat stole the spotlight. Today, two months into the role when we meet and just back from Moscow where she viewed the pieces that will make up the Tate Modern's Russian-themed autumn exhibition, she's no less bold – clad in the vivacious prints of Duro Olowu and wearing golden

United Nude Nova platforms. 'They're the Zaha Hadid-designed version and a gift from the curator Jo Bloxham, who is a really old friend of mine,' she says.

It's unlikely such a conversation might have occurred with her quietly dressed predecessor Nicholas Serota, but Birmingham-born Balshaw enthuses about clothes. 'I love them,' she says. 'They say who we are in the world and I don't think that's trivial at all. Not even slightly.'

Balshaw joined Arts Council England in Birmingham before becoming director of Manchester's Whitworth Gallery in 2006, where she spearheaded its £17m renovation and was instrumental in reviving the city's cultural sector.

At Tate since June, Balshaw's advantage is that she can build on Serota's legacy of four thriving art institutions. 'The capital projects are complete, so we're able focus on the art and what we do with audiences,' she says.

Her autumn highlights include a 'powerful' retrospective of Rachel Whiteread, an artist Balshaw has long revered, but also the reopening of the newly expanded Tate St Ives. 'Architect Jamie Fobert has effectively doubled the exhibition space, with this beautiful extension channelled into the cliffside. So the roof becomes a garden that offers a glorious meander down to the beach.'

*Tate St Ives reopens on 14 October ([tate.org.uk](http://tate.org.uk))*



## The Curator

*Béatrice Saint-Laurent, founder of Galerie BSL*

'Sometimes you don't know what material they're made of, they're intriguing or disturbing, but I want them to amaze and enchant,' Béatrice Saint-Laurent says of how she selects works for her Saint-Germain-des-Prés gallery, Paris. 'They must talk to the heart as much as the intellect.'

Saint-Laurent has been at the forefront of the contemporary design collectables market since she launched Galerie BSL in 2010. The daughter of an architect, design has been ever-present in her life but it wasn't until the 2000s that it became more than a passion. 'It was an exciting time,' she recalls. 'There was PAD (the Pavilion of Art and Design) but there weren't many galleries exhibiting what we now call "functional sculpture", so I saw an opportunity.'

Saint-Laurent's inaugural show included works from Spanish designer Nacho Carbonell's debut *Evolution* collection of benches sprouting bulbous shelters. 'It was love at first sight,' she says of spotting them at Design Miami/Basel in 2009. She still represents Carbonell today. 'We take an active part in the creation of work and we invest a lot to commission pieces,' she says. Galerie BSL's portfolio is diverse: from Pia Maria Raedar's Sea Anemone furniture (pictured) to the semi-precious stone-and-brass creations of Taher Chemirik. But to Saint-Laurent the unifying criterion is that each piece should provoke wonder.

Next month, when PAD Fair opens, the standout pieces are likely to be the pink jade and brass JinShi collection by Studio MVW (on the wall, left). And as for how the gallerist herself will stand out? Her trademark high heels from Chanel, Valentino or Prada. 'Always heels,' she laughs, 'and always dressed in black. People have to be able to identify you immediately.' *PAD, 2-8 October, Berkeley Square, London (pad-fairs.com)*



## The Creative

*Julie Verhoeven, artist*

'I know I look like an unhinged, middle-aged art teacher, but in my head I feel more punk and sassy.' Illustrator, artist and provocateur Julie Verhoeven is candid when describing her style.

The 48-year-old is equally frank about how she balances independent artistic endeavours with commercial projects for major fashion houses including Marc Jacobs and Louis Vuitton. 'Ideally I'd just make work and survive, but I'm not prepared to make this sacrifice,' she says. Projects such as illustrating the Christmas packaging this year for British fragrance brand Miller Harris, 'always take me somewhere I wouldn't have ventured and keep me on my toes. My art responds to this world. I need to do both.'

Meanwhile, performance and video art are her current mediums of choice. Last year she transformed the Portaloos at Frieze with her subversive performance piece *The Toilet Attendant... Now Wash Your Hands* featuring vinyl and gingham outfits for Verhoeven and her 'staff', plus decoration from embroidered pools to plastic patchwork loo-seat covers.

'I'm loving the performance art trend - any excuse to dress up,' she says. 'It feels less political than it once was and I enjoy the sense of potential embarrassment that accompanies it.'

She views her madcap look, assembled from charity shop finds (Marimekko, Laura Ashley and Louis Feraud) and sprinkled with gifts from Peter Jensen and Emma Greenhill, as an extension of her art. Indeed, as she ages Verhoeven says her 'camouflage' is always evolving. 'My hair has become my substitute pet, thanks to hairdressers John Vial and Tracy Hayes. Hair really satisfies me creatively. Colour is such a catalyst to my emotions, well-being and creative output.'

*The Christmas Collection from Miller Harris with Julie Verhoeven is available from October*



## The Collector

*Valeria Napoleone, philanthropist and supporter of female artists*

Celebrated art collector and philanthropist Valeria Napoleone is currently between homes. She's living with her family in a rented house in London's Kensington, while her dream home is under construction. But while most might stick their belongings in storage, Napoleone has already torn down chandeliers to allow her female-only art collection to breathe. The living room is dominated by gallery-worthy pieces from Elaine Lustig Cohen to Michaela Eichwald.

'It's amazing what you amass over 20 years,' she says of her 300-strong collection. 'I want to create a choir of female voices in the art world. My life is about supporting artists through entertaining, so I need to host events at home.'

Early buys remind her of New York in the 1990s ('when I discovered contemporary art'); and although highly personal, it's a collection her 17-year-old son Federico and twins, Letizia and Gregorio, 14, appreciate. 'It was really

satisfying hearing one son ask me to hang a Vanessa Beecroft photograph in his room.'

Napoleone's eye was developed, in part, thanks to her upbringing in Italy. Her parents collected Renaissance objets d'art and gave her access to a personal tailor and jeweller to encourage her to develop a strong sense of style. 'Beautiful craftsmanship is what I look for in fashion and art,' she says. While she relies on Osman's flattering dresses and black Issey Miyake trousers for

work, she also adores Roksanda and Peter Pilotto, not least because they share inspiration with one of her favourite artists Francis Upritchard.

*Valeria Napoleone XX Contemporary Art Society is a joint initiative that aims to purchase and donate a work by a living female artist to a UK museum each year. This year A Pilot For A Show About Nowhere, 2015 by American artist Martine Syms will be unveiled at Leeds Art Gallery when it reopens on 13 October*