



ARTS

JAMIE SANIN'S CELEBRATE WOMXN 845 ASSAILS GENDER BARRIERS IN THE ARTS

WHEN JAMIE SANIN first came across hard statistics on women in the arts, she was shocked. Women, the 27-year-old New Paltz-based visual artist read, compose close to half of the working visual artists in America, but earn, on average, \$20,000 less a year than their male counterparts. According to a survey by the Public Library of Science, women comprised, out of 10,000 artists in 18 top art museums, a mere 13 percent. Representation in American art galleries is hardly better, composing, on average, 30 percent of total commercial representations. Of 2017's 20 most popular exhibitions worldwide, a grand total of one was headlined by a woman. (Statistics are from here: <https://nmwa.org/advocate/get-facts>.)

"The more I was in tune with those statistics," says Sanin, "I realized how much they rang true." Her own work focuses on "bodies and personalities" who are generally excluded from representation in fine art, but she turned that gaze on the world around her. She noticed that, in her own life, her male peers were both more likely to exhibit, as well as more likely to take up opportunities for exhibitions. She related to the numbers on a personal level: "I had to work, I had

to pay my bills.

And so she decided to do something about it. Sanin held her first "Celebration" art show, open only to women and women-identifying artists, at Beacon's Catalyst Gallery in January 2018. This fulfilled a desire of Sanin's: "I participate in a lot of art shows, so I wanted to try my hand at curating." But this personal project was a success, pairing more than two dozen visual and performance artists with semi-weekly performances, poetry readings, even a special tarot class, and achieving significant turnout: "I very much underestimated my own network in terms of turnout," says Sanin, "as well as the need." By providing a space for women and women-identifying artists that focused on their needs and goals rather than a specific theme, she had touched a nerve in the local artistic community.

This success left people asking: What's next? Her answer was with Celebrate Womxn 845, a one-woman organization dedicated to the promotion of all artists, whether woman-identifying, femme or non-binary, who are underrepresented in the region's gallery spaces and performing spaces. She describes the organization's mission as being "to organize, recognize and celebrate. 'Organize' is to create the space; 'recognize' is recognizing those statistics and who's out here attending, who's out here creating; and then 'celebrating,' to enjoy it and make the most of it and celebrate one another."

Though only a little over a year old, Celebrate has already held two Womxnifests, headlined by local bands like Guilt Mountain and Tiny Blue Ghost, and is planning to make its open mic at Snug's in New Paltz into a monthly event.

Sanin has also turned her big "Celebration" show into an annual event, exhibiting artists like Kat Farrell at New Paltz's Roost Gallery alongside performers, dancers and more. "Through my interdisciplinary arts experiences, I've found that there are these parameters that end up excluding people," she says, "and I don't think it's beneficial to keep those artists apart." To this end, she has begun to book a wider variety of events, from a dance party with female deejays to a September 24 slam poetry reading from Olivia Gatwood at Kingston's BSP space, bringing a sort of artist to the Hudson Valley who might otherwise end up overlooked.

Sanin says that the response from other artists has been very positive. "It's a ripe time," she says. "Women's issues are at the forefront."

- Rob Rubsam