

Women that changed the landscape of Feminism

by: Fauziya Sani

Phenomenal- the one word that can sum up the grace, and glory of these fine women that I have chosen for this issue. Not only do they exude the talent and what it is to be human but they are versatile and phenomenal. These women are breaking boundaries and burning the bridges to a ridged structure of feminism.

The month of March is Women's awareness month and I wanted to pick these fine ladies as a testimony to what being a real woman is! These women are survivors of breast cancer, fashion designers, performers, noise makers, path creators, medicine women who want to change the landscape of what femininity is, and what it needs to be.

I chose these women for their originality and their passion for the arts, not only are they artists but they all suffer from over achievement. Their interdisciplinary uses from Fay Chiang, coordinator of Project Reach of Canal street Manhattan, a painter, a mother, a sister, and painter, she is a 4 time breast cancer survivor who graduated from Columbia University with a Master's degree in Painting. Fay, a product of the Communist Chinese government overthrow. Overcoming all and every obstacle may seem superhuman to many but not to Fay, if asked of her experiences, she says, "My strength is that I am very strong-willed. I will accomplish things when I decide it is the right thing to do, and especially when people say it's impossible." Fay is an example of phenomenal women. How about Christian Walthall a Queens resident and up & coming fashion designer from FIT, a female who is young but passionate about fashion, music, and art. Christina says it beautifully when she says, "I design for people that want to be seen and make a scene" -C. Walthall.

Why are You phenomenal and what is your drive?



Fay Chiang.
Writer. Painter. CEO @ Project Reach.

I don't compare my life's journey or work to other women or people. It's been my own quest. I'm trying to figure out things that have affected my life; racism, sexism, hetero-sexism, classism, patriarchy, poverty, etc.

The work that I create when wrestling and trying to understand these issues comes from a deep place and if it resonates for others.... and their work resonates for me.....a commonality of experiences and work is created, which becomes grounds for a sharing and supportive community from which we can all move in and into the world.

I don't really think I'd do too much differently from what has become my life's journey. Along the way I've learned a lot through experiences, from what I've learned or learned from others. We can't change the past, but we can move forward from the present to the future in a different way. I feel my success has been to survive this breast cancer that I've had for 20 years (from the time my daughter was 4 years old) and to raise a wonderful daughter, watch her grow up, graduate from high school and college, meet a wonderful partner and become independent w/her own dreams of writing and traveling.

I don't see myself as having failures, but life experiences (some very difficult ones) that I've learned from. My strength is that I keep going

despite life's difficulties and from this I've gained a circle of friends who love me dearly and support me w/their love in the most harshest of times. When one comes from a traditional family, one has to pick and choose and decide what parts of that tradition you continue in your own life. I chose to support the members of my growing up family: my father when he came down from colon cancer; my brother when he came down with Hodgkin's disease; my mother when she had an aneurism and two years ago, my sister had a heart attack.

I wanted to go to art school and applied in my senior year in high school to Fashion Institute of Technology, School of Visual Arts, and Pratt Institute and got into all of them w/a partial scholarship. But my parents did not give me their income tax return in order to qualify for the scholarship, so I was not able to attend the art schools and was very disappointed. Instead I went to Hunter College and attended art classes there.

Has failure made you phenomenal ?



Ayana Evans.
Handbag Designer, Performance Artist, Teacher, native Chicagoan.

Failures that I'm willing to admit to are: my business failed twice before getting to where it is now. It's still small but steadily moving in the right direction twice. I completely failed to get an art

show or residency in NYC for the first two years that I was here, so I gave up and focused on fashion. My lovelife is an epic failure. I learned a lot about how to run a business. I learned it the hard way but I learned a lot. I learned to never be too shy to network and ask for what you want. I also finally got some solid press for my designs (Lucky magazine, Essence, LA Times, etc) and over the past two years I have been in art shows again. I have a BA in Visual Arts from Brown University, MFA in painting from Temple University and an AS in Accessory Design from the Fashion Institute of Technology---In that order because I had to go back to school for design to better run my business. I'm funny, smart and easy going. People tend to like me. Sometimes my looks work in my favor. (Only sometimes though) Don't give up on your dreams, do what you love, ignore negative thoughts, don't over think life, date people of quality and spend money wisely. I have dreams. But I do feel success is relative. It means different things to different people, which is a good thing. It would suck if we were all chasing the exact same dreams. Somehow I think that would create a lack of abundance do performance work that deals with vulnerability, public objectification, and the female body. I suppose my project #operationcatsuit is ground breaking.



ESTHER NEFF
PANOPOLY LAB
PERFORMANCE

Ms. Neff, does your upbringing make you phenomenal? My parents divorced when I was 12. I had very nurturing parenting as a small kid, I'm the oldest so I was least affected by a lot of subsequent goings-on, but despite everything, my mother remained extremely supportive and strict at the same time, I think the discipline and intense values and rules that she had for us have made me the insane person I am today. . Both of my parents are workaholics for ideals and for very little money, my dad works for environmental ideals, my mother writes and does sustainable urban planning, started a farmer's market and a food co-op, la leche league and women's rights, lots of work all the time on a grassroots organizing scale and gradually larger. They enforced a lifestyle which prioritizes martyrdom to causes.

I was "unschooled" as a kid because my parents don't believe in institutionalized education, they let me and my siblings run wild on the farm and through the woods behind it. They did enforce autodidactism and taught me a lot about farming, plants, really useless stuff now. I ended up being "self taught" with assistance from my parents and a lot of other people. I in philosophy, so I went there for 4 years. I lived during college at "Eugene V. Debs Socialist Co-Operative" and eventually was the president for the last two years, participated in a lot of labor organizing and activism and theater. I also met my first husband at that co-op house.

But I think most of my actual education came after college when I moved to NYC.

I've also struggled with psychic abilities and spirituality, etc. Advice I guess would be to learn as much as possible, read as much as possible, don't just hang out with your 3-4 close friends and do the same thing everyday, keep yourself socially, politically disoriented so you don't obsess about things. I think romantic relationships are a distraction for women, we are so much more intelligent and capable of conceptual thinking than we are taught by mainstream media. Making art has been my life, without it I would be dead. It's possible to get through many days of working and not sleeping or eating much if you truly believe in what you're doing. It's all about "purpose" in life (see below).

I feel very much a part of "womanhood," whatever that means. I am probably more arrogant than "most women," or at least people sometimes accuse me of being a "know-it-all" and talking too much, basically taking up too much space, being too much. I do not shrink from life. In terms of "ground breaking" it seems like the ground is pretty broken up, but it takes a lot of energy to synthesize the clods and mud into something like bricks or something with which to build. I am a builder of objects, relationships, situations, communities, emotions, If you have no dreams and feel that success is relative, please indicate this, if you find that everything is hopeless and in despair please feel free to convey this! I myself feel that dreams and goals are useless and find that un-creating is a powerful tool to recognize who you are and what you are not! Destruction is always an option and how do you find that this benefits your art, day to day life?

Having any philosophy of life is necessary. It doesn't even matter what it is, and it should change all the time. But as long as I feel like I know what I'm doing, I can do something, which is better

than nothing. I don't believe in "success" of any kind, and I have no dreams for the future, but I have methodologies (both for art and for life) that help me deal with the seconds and minutes and hours.



Amelia Marzec. Artist, Teacher, Engineer, Performer.

How has your health, interdisciplinary usage of art and technology make you phenomenal?

I'm pretty sensitive, and I try to accommodate that rather than fight it, because it's so central to how I synthesize information and so tied to creativity. Living in New York is very stimulating, and also exhausting. I tend to plan my week around how much energy I think I'll have. A few years ago I had head surgery for a tumor that caused me to lose all the hearing in one ear. I was terrified and didn't know what my life would look like in six months. I was lucky that things worked out. Now I have a million dreams for the future which I never take for granted. Perhaps because of my body adjusting to one ear, I began feeling a lot more sensitive to my environment; perhaps by coincidence, it was around that time that I started doing a lot more of my own creative work.

I myself feel that dreams and goals are useless and find that un-creating is a powerful tool to recognize who you are and what you are not! Destruction is always an option and how do you find that this benefits your art, day to day life? Destruction and failure can leave you in a moment of total freedom. Your previous ideas about yourself, your situation, or your projects is gone. Taking a risk feels amazing because you develop skills and come up with ideas you never knew you were capable of. Learning in that way is very satisfying, so start a crazy project, switch careers, give up everything and start over. You can always

return to your previous plans, but you might end up having too much fun off the beaten track.

I'm interested in our relationship to technology. Even a simple cell phone is an extension of the body, and it intervenes in our relationships. Sometimes it can be pretty obnoxious, hanging up on people for no reason! We're also in a struggle between our need for privacy, and our need for connection. I'm interested in creating new communication devices for a future where it's in our own hands- not in the hands of Verizon or the government- to maintain our relationships. I've made prototypes for emergency phones, a privacy booth, a factory to build them in, and even a hearing aid for myself. I often show these projects in public, demonstrating how they work. They combine fine art, design, engineering, and performance.



Christina Walthall Fashion Designer.

Dear Christina, You are so young and powerful. How are you phenomenal?

I was born and raised in Brooklyn, East New York to be exact. It's actually quiet demeaning because many people imply that my style and aura is not "hood" or "ghetto fabulous" based off of where I come from. It's sad that stereotypes remain in full effect, but on a lighter note, I have never allowed my surroundings to disable my creativity. Even when I am facing a financial hardship, I can find and create beauty in recycled fibers and take something old and make it new again by adding left over fabrics and trims to a garment. I can't say that I have had any real past failures. I believe everything happens for a reason and so-called "mistakes" or "failures" can easily transform into a beneficial trait for better decision making for the future.

Maya Angelou,
Phenomenal Women
(1978)



(full poem)

*"Now you understand
just why my head's not
bowed.*

*I don't shout or jump about
Or have to talk real loud.*

When you see me passing,

*It ought to make you
proud.*

I say,

It's in the click of my heels,

The bend of my hair,

the palm of my hand,

the need for my care.

'Cause I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me."

One of my personal successes was quitting my retail job in December 2013. Without preparation to stay financially afloat, I threw myself into make a living from my designs. The pressure of not having an hourly based job encouraged me that much more to hustle and grind for what I am passionate about. Thankfully, the experience did not blow up in my face, but taught me that having faith and taking risks are vital to becoming a small busi-

ness owner. My clients were my bodies I feel that a goal or dream is useless without plan and action. It is not enough to dream big, you must put yourself in a position to do big. Often times, people are intimidated by other people's successes or the boldness of their dreams. If everyone had average, realistic dreams, everyone would be conquering them. What makes you stand out is your willingness to take action and not have anyone sway your faith and possibilities. No matter how big or small your goals are, no one will believe in you if you don't show confidence and belief in yourself. What sets me apart from other women is the way I display my sexuality through clothing and the fact that I think beyond my years. I enjoy wearing masculine type clothing such as blazers. I am not gay or butch, but I love to leave a lot of what is underneath my clothing to the imagination. I am 21 years old and am not interested in clubbing, but I am interested in taking actions necessary to become an entrepreneur. I feel as though I should already be a household name, and I am in the mindset of becoming just that for the future. Show love, faith, and inspiration in yourself and the world will soon follow.



curtesy: christinawalthall.com

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