

SURFACE

ART

An Exhibition for the #MeToo Era Opens in D.C.

The National Museum of Women in the Arts organizes an all-female exhibition that proves there's more to women metalsmiths than just jewelry.

BY EMILY CONKLIN

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Clockwise from left: Alice Hope, "Untitled" (2016). © Alice Hope (Photo: Jenny Gorman). Paula Castillo, "Tethered" (2014). © 2017, Paula Castillo. All rights reserved. (Photo: Courtesy the artist). Petronella Eriksson, "Silver Sake jug with cups" (2017). © Petronella Eriksson (Photo: Petronella Eriksson).

This is the year for women in metal—not electric guitars, but the material that fills “Heavy Metal,” an exhibition opening at the National Museum of Women on June 28. It’s the fifth and largest-ever edition of the Women to Watch series, the D.C institution’s triannual show that elevates underrepresented artists to a national stage. (Founded in 1981, it is still the only museum in the world dedicated exclusively to showing work by female practitioners.)

“People are realizing the playing field isn’t even, and never has been,” says associate curator Virginia Treanor, who helped organize the exhibition. Metalwork is often thought of as a masculine endeavor, she continues, even though women have been working in the medium for centuries. It’s a fact that Treanor seeks to expose in the exhibition, which verifies that there’s more to female metalsmiths than just jewelry.

Featuring more than 50 objects, “Heavy Metal” highlights 20 female artists in the boys’ club of metalworking whose creations are marked by striking complexity and variety. Among them are American artist Jenny Hope, who transformed used Budweiser tabs into a ruby rope that spills from a massive wall-mounted mass; Frenchwoman Charlotte Charbonnel, who arranged stainless-steel rods in a pattern that evokes television static; and Swedish artist Petronella Eriksson’s lyrical, vinelike reinterpretation of a sake set.

“The categories we hold in the art world are black and white,” Treanor continues. “We try to break apart these divisions, expose them to be arbitrary, and get people to start asking questions.”