

LOUISE LAWLER

American, born Bronxville, NY, 1947

Who Says, Who Shows, Who Counts, 1990

Three printed wine glasses, glass shelf, and two brackets, 8 1/4 x 3 1/4 inches

Gift of Peter Norton, 2016.4.23

Since the late 1970s, Louise Lawler has questioned the professional practices of the contemporary art world in her exhibitions, photographs, books, posters, announcements, and drawings. Whether by displaying the work of her peers alongside her own in her first “solo” gallery exhibition in New York or by submitting a photograph of the actress Meryl Streep when asked for a headshot to be used as a magazine cover, Lawler has consistently undermined the norms of professional conduct for working artists and provided feminist critiques of those standards.

For *Who Says, Who Shows, Who Counts*, Lawler uses wine glasses—a ubiquitous presence at exhibition openings—to emphasize the role of galleries and museums in constructing the history of art. In doing so, Lawler underscores the social rituals that support the celebration, sale, and canonization of particular artists. These ceremonies—which include the distribution of announcements, the opening party, and the notification of journalists and critics—are essential for making the art hanging on the walls legible as professional contemporary art, establishing cultural and economic values that collectors and museums appraise as higher than amateur or craft forms. In this work, Lawler makes the transparency of the wine glass into a potent metaphor: Were the glass to be filled with wine, its ghostly questions would come into clear relief, underscoring the absence of these critical interrogations during the majority of art world rites. Who has the power to speak about art and to determine its critical frameworks? Which artists get to exhibit their work in prestigious institutions and have the chance to make a living from their art? And how do the answers to these questions affect which communities and perspectives are counted by art historians? It is precisely at the moment of celebration, Lawler seems to say, that we must directly query the normative processes by which artists and artworks are celebrated and canonized or left by the wayside of historical accounting. Here it is wine—a beverage with significant class associations in the United States—that reveals the stakes of allowing the economic and social gears of the art world to turn unquestioned.

—Brian T. Leahy, PhD candidate, Art History