

For Immediate Release

Rebel Women: Defying Victorianism
On View at the Museum of the City of New York
Beginning July 17



L-R: Hetty Howland Robinson Green, ca. 1897, Courtesy Library of Congress; The Real Ellen Jewett., 1836, MCNY; Portrait of Elizabeth Jennings Graham 1895, Courtesy Kansas State Historical Society; Adah Isaacs Menken in *Mazeppa*, 1863, MCNY

***Exhibition Features Women Who Challenged the
Victorian Ideal in 19th-Century New York City***

(New York, NY, June 28, 2018) [*Rebel Women: Defying Victorianism*](#), on view at the Museum of the City of New York from July 17, 2018, through January 6, 2019, will explore the trailblazing women who challenged Victorian social norms in 19th-century New York City. Featuring photographs, garments, ephemera, and prints primarily drawn from the Museum’s collections, the exhibition will bring to light the compelling and often untold stories of these independent and unconventional women who had an indelible impact on New York’s society, culture, and economy by the turn of the 20th century.

The Victorian era is commonly known as a period of constraints on women’s lives—a time when white, middle-class ideas about femininity defined women by their roles as guardians of virtue and relegated them to the private, domestic sphere. During this era, a woman could be considered a rebel simply by speaking in public, working outside the home, or disregarding middle-class morality or decorum. Yet 19th-century New York City was full of women who defied those expectations in both overt and subtle ways.

“We are thrilled to present ***Rebel Women: Defying Victorianism*** which highlights a group of little-known but courageous women who changed New York City and the country during the 19th century,” said Whitney Donhauser, *Ronay Menschel Director* of the Museum of the City of New York. “At a time when the subject of women’s rights is at the forefront of a national conversation, this exhibition and ***Beyond***

Suffrage: A Century of New York Women in Politics demonstrate the Museum’s commitment to documenting and celebrating the important contributions of women to the City’s history.”

Rebel Women will feature women of different classes, races, and ideologies who challenged these social attitudes including Elizabeth Jennings Graham (1827–1901), an African–American New Yorker who refused to get off a segregated trolley in 1854; Hetty Green (1834–1916), a successful stock broker branded "The Witch of Wall Street," who went on to become one of the richest people in the country; Helen Jewett (1813–1836), New York’s most prominent courtesan who—before her sensationalized murder—turned a shunned profession into a source of power; and Adah Isaacs Menken (1835–1868), a gender-bending actress and poet who was an outspoken advocate for women’s rights and who supported a woman’s right *not* to marry.

"***Rebel Women***, my capstone project, has provided me an excellent opportunity to not only share my academic research on 19th-century women, but also highlight some of the many women that have been relegated to the margins of history," said the exhibition’s curator Marcela Micucci. "I am grateful to the Museum of the City of New York and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for helping me bring these stories to light in both ***Rebel Women*** and ***Beyond Suffrage***."

Also featured in the exhibition will be more well-known figures who entered public life with a political agenda, demanding women’s rights as social activists or as politicians, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902), Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906), and Victoria Woodhull (1838–1927). The exhibition will also highlight pioneers for women in professional careers in medicine and journalism like Dr. Susan Smith McKinney-Steward (1847–1918), the first African–American female doctor licensed in New York, and the groundbreaking investigative reporter Elizabeth Jane Cochrane (1864–1922), a.k.a "Nellie Bly." A section of the exhibition will focus on the women who operated in, and profited from, an underworld of vice, crime, and sex in the city, specifically Sophie Lyons, a talented pickpocket who became an artful "confidence woman," using her intellect and beauty to steal from wealthy men, and Ann Trow Lohman (1812–1878), a.k.a "Madame Restell," the most successful and infamous birth control provider of her era who earned the title "The Wickedest Woman in New York."

These women broke with convention in gender-specific ways and forged a new space for themselves and others in New York society.

Credits

The exhibition is organized by Dr. Marcela Micucci, Andrew W. Mellon Post-Doctoral Curatorial Fellow at the Museum of the City of New York.

The Museum gratefully acknowledges The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s support for exhibition curator Dr. Marcela Micucci’s fellowship. ***Rebel Women*** is her capstone project.

Program

On Wednesday, July 18, the Museum will present [Make Some Noise at MCNY](#), an outdoor concert on the Museum’s Terrace featuring performances by vocalist and composer Imani Uzuri, who will also MC the evening, and sets by Zoe Allyn and Jack Lucy, two rising stars of New York City’s singer-songwriter scene. This musical celebration launches ***Rebel Women: Defying Victorianism*** and marks the grand finale of the exhibition [Beyond Suffrage: A Century of New York Women in Politics](#).

#RebelWomenNY

About the Museum of the City of New York

The Museum of the City of New York fosters understanding of the distinctive nature of urban life in the world's most influential metropolis. It engages visitors by celebrating, documenting, and interpreting the city's past, present, and future. To connect with the Museum on social media, follow us on Instagram and Twitter at @MuseumofCityNY and visit our Facebook page at [Facebook.com/MuseumofCityNY](https://www.facebook.com/MuseumofCityNY). For more information please visit www.mcny.org.

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