Welcome to our first annual Curators List! The curator plays an imperative role in the art world. Curators, who are the conceptual conduits of the art world, see to it that art is granted justice in a world where it is easily disregarded and misunderstood. But in a male-dominated field like art, how can one be sure that the curating community does not have its own members who at times feel disregarded and misunderstood? In that vein, we have focused on the role of the female curator, not only in the context of the art community, but as a role model to women and aspiring female artists everywhere.

A bustling metropolis like New York is home to hundreds of curators. While there was a large pool of talented women to choose from, we managed to track down five of our favorite female curators who live and work right here in the City. These women, both on and off the map, have shown extraordinary curatorial prowess and a distinctive vision, which makes them worth watching in the year 2014.
Leanne Stella is on a mission to promote the creative hotbed that is Harlem. As the head of Art in FLUX Harlem, Stella is intently focused on casting an artistic light on a historic neighborhood that is currently more known for its gentrification and Renaissance heyday.

Why did you become a curator?

I don’t call myself a curator, other people do... so I am finally succumbing to the pressure and accepting the title. But why do I do what I do? Because I love to be around art and artists. I don’t think the same way artists do and I enjoy hearing their thought process and what makes them create. Sometimes they just have a concept that seems so out there. I might have no idea where they are going at first, then after listening to them for a bit, it makes perfect sense and it makes me glad I took the time to listen because often they remind you to stop and think about life for a moment. But I also do what I do—produce pop-up art galleries in Harlem—because I love this community. Artists are a big part of what makes this such a vibrant and beautiful community. It’s important to me to bring a lot of eyes to see what Harlem artists are doing, to see the talent and diversity of artists that live and work here. And contribute to making this a sustainable place for artists to continue to live and work, because living in a community without artists would not be an enjoyable place to live.

What is the key to curating?

One of the most important elements of the curating role that I am in, is to present the Harlem artists in a way that puts them in the context of the larger art community. To help tell their story and help them select work that will intrigue people to want to know more about them and to see more.

What special trait do you look for when curating a show?

I think any curator is looking for that work that speaks to you, those pieces that stop you in your tracks and hold you. This is what you want the work to do for your audience. There is not always an explanation for why certain work does this, but you should be able to help your artists identify which of their pieces can have this effect.

And then sometimes I also have another perspective to consider with the pop-up gallery.

When you are curating for four white walls you can tell almost any story within a white box. With the pop-up gallery it’s often necessary to tell a story that also connects with the space. It adds another dimension of how you’re looking at pieces and building a show.

Out of all the shows that you have curated so far, do you have a favorite?

My favorite show is definitely the one I’m working on right now. I think it’s because when you’re working on a show you put your whole self into it. Just like an artist puts their whole heart and soul into every piece of artwork they do? When you’re creating a show you’re kind of all in it, so it’s always my favorite right when I do it, and then they’re not my favorite after that. But I’d have to say some of my favorites have been when I’ve collaborated with other people, filmmakers, writers, musicians, or playwrights. I love bringing an independent filmmaker in the room and having them talk about what story they want to share through their film and then seeing how the visual artist comments on that with their artwork... And the dialogue between them can be captivating. You don’t often find them in the same room, so I’ve loved working on projects where we did that.

What is the significance of the role of the curator in the art world?

The significance of the role of the curator is to create a dialogue between the artist, the audience, and the space. By telling a story and creating a platform for dialogue you’re acknowledging the importance of the artist in a global arena, not just in the art world but in the WORLD. The curator has an opportunity to show an aesthetic, but he or she can also present the artist as social commentator, instigator, peacemaker. It’s these social and political discussions where the curator can affect change with the artists. Curators can create the space for these discussions to happen around art and because of art.