

Mariona Barkus

About the Artwork

For Mariona Barkus, it all started at an early age—reading the newspaper, listening to the news on the radio or TV, and arguing with her conservative Republican father—which fostered her nascent political awareness.

For the last forty years, through the *Illustrated History* collection and installation, Barkus has been a chronicler of these times in our lives, being a witness, offering testimony and documentation, seeking to expose, inform, enlighten, reveal, and inspire. All with a dash of wry humor—if at all possible. The stories are true, compilations of texts from newspapers and other sources, with interpolations by Barkus. Over the years, the images have incorporated collage, photography, and painting. Each of these 138 *Illustrated History* broadsides asks the viewer to linger, read, and contemplate its message. While reading, Barkus wants the viewer to note the different years that each of the *Illustrated History* panels was created, and to perhaps notice that many of the issues important years ago are still quite relevant today.

Additionally, over 90,000 metric tons of nuclear waste are stored above ground at 121 sites in 35 states of the United States. Around 1995, Yucca Mountain, Nevada was chosen as the ideal place to bury this long-lived radioactive waste. Barkus was inspired by the call for a system of surface markers to warn of this planned lethal underground cache. She thought about the ideal surface marker to ward off intruders for future millennia. In communicating so far into the future, most could assume that despite the passage of time, and with evolving cultures and languages over time, future beings will still have the same basic human bodily functions—thus, comes the inception of Barkus's installation titled *Monument For A Nuclear Dump*. The logical next step for her was to provide a roll of "toilet paper" that encapsulates an 'archive' of newspaper clippings referencing nuclear waste over the last four decades, in order to mimic the folly of this entombment, while simultaneously documenting ubiquitous nuclear waste proliferation. This continues to be a work in progress that will continually grow over time, as nuclear waste continues to proliferate over time.

While environmental activists have successfully kept Yucca Mountain from being activated, New Mexico has the only active below-ground nuclear waste dump, which will be full and sealed soon. The illustration in *Our Lethal Legacy* presents some of the texts suggested by the Sandia Report which suggested written warnings as well as physical barriers to keep civilizations, millennia in the future, away from this highly radioactive and lethal repository.

In her newest installation, created for this exhibition, titled *Mad As Hell and Not Taking It Anymore*, these metallic 'critters' marching forth in formation, are out to battle with malevolent misogynist forces. A vengeful army taking back the right to women's physical autonomy and expressing the anger felt by generations of women subjected to sexual harassment and violence.

A clenched fist atop a vaginal speculum becomes the embodiment of women's rage at being devalued, denied education and income equality, considered second-class citizens, and subjected to violence just because they are women. Expose egregious sexual harassers and predators, add in outrage at state legislatures restricting women's equality, health care, and reproductive rights, mix in fury at the day-to-day sexual harassments, assaults, and discrimination seared into many women's memories, and voila, viewers have the sentiments expressed by *Mad As Hell and Not Taking It Anymore*.

About the Artist

Originally from Illinois, Mariona Barkus moved to California in 1970. Her work reflects values and humor honed by her Midwest childhood experiences, which she characterizes as redemption through optimism in the face of adversity.



Photo Courtesy of Artist

Barkus has shown her work in solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States as well as internationally in Ireland, Japan, Korea, Lithuania, and Spain, and is in the collections of the Yale University Art Museum, Getty Research Institute, Art Institute of Chicago, Franklin Furnace Collection at the Museum of Modern Art, Special Collections at the Whitney Museum of Art, Center for the Study of Political Graphics, Long Beach Museum of Art, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Lucy Lippard Collection at the New Mexico Museum of Art, UCLA, Indiana-Purdue University, among many others.

Her work has been reviewed in numerous catalogs and periodicals including: *The Los Angeles Times* and *Artweek*, among others. Some of the books featuring her work are *Crossing Over: Feminism and Art of Social Concern* by Arlene Raven; *Other Visions, Other Voices* by Paul Von Blum with a forward by Lucy Lippard; *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook* by *The Visual Studies Workshop*; *From Site to Vision: The Woman's Building in Contemporary Culture*, edited by Sondra Hale and Terry Wolverton, and most recently, from the University of California Press: *American Artists Against War 1935—2010* by David McCarthy. Barkus has received grants from the City of Los Angeles, Women's Studio Workshop, and New York State Arts Council.

