

## A CLOSER LOOK

# Andrea Bowers



**Andrea Bowers (American, b. 1965)**

*Fight for \$15 March (December 4, 2014), 2015*

Graphite on paper

SBMA, Museum purchase with funds provided by the General Art Acquisition Fund, 2018.17

## About the Artist

Andrea Bowers grew up in a small town in Ohio and later moved to Los Angeles, California. As an artist, she believes that political commitment cannot be separated from her artwork and approaches art through a feminist lens. In regards to feminism, she has said:

*I think that feminism leads to pushing for gender equality, it leads to all sorts of diversity; that's what's so beautiful about feminism. It's all-encompassing.*

Bowers continues to live and work in Los Angeles and has been a professor of Art at Otis College of Art and Design since 2007.

## Themes

- Activism
- Protest
- Labor + Wage Rights
- Feminism

## Overview

Andrea Bowers' artwork centers on the convergence of art and activism, addressing such topics as workers' rights, gender discrimination, and the history of labor movements and protest in the United States. Working in a range of media including video, drawing, installation, and sculpture, she uses her artwork to amplify the work of activists both past and present.

*Fight for \$15 March* is from a series of photorealistic pencil drawings of activists Bowers photographed at workers' rights marches. After photographing protesters in a crowd, she returned to her studio and chose specific individuals to draw. For each drawing, one protester is drawn against a blank white background to emphasize the dignity and strength of each individual person. These meticulous, labor-intensive drawings celebrate these individuals, while also critiquing the common ways that protests are depicted in photojournalism.

## Watch:

In this three-minute YouTube video, listen to Andrea Bowers discuss her art and activism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNd5QRaZeDs>



## Read: Artist Interview

Read the following excerpts from a 2014 interview with Andrea Bowers in which she discusses her pencil drawings of activists:

*“When I started off years ago, doing those drawings focused on individuals in the crowd, I was...wanting to believe that no matter what, individuals could have a creative voice and an identity within the spectacle. They’re usually holding a sign, or the text on their shirt expresses their political positions, or there’s something unique about them. The negative space draws attention to the fact that we might otherwise not pay attention to these people because they’re just one of many. It’s about recognizing issues or important voices that are perhaps being disregarded.”*

*“I was trying to, through those drawings, talk about what was left out—issues dealing with immigration, with ethnicity, with gender diversity—that feminism needs to embrace and confront and include today.”*

## Research: Images of Protest

Bowers’ drawing offers a different way to look at depictions of protesters. Pick two political movements from United States history. They could be from the present day or long ago, such as the Women’s Suffrage Movement or the Stonewall Riots. Then, look up photographs from the movements. Who took these images? What commonalities do you see between the way protest is depicted? What differences are there? Write an essay comparing and contrasting the images from these two movements.



## Activity: Making it Personal

Think about issues you care about that are often left out of popular discussion. What cause would you fight for? What protest would you organize or show up for? Write down a few ideas. Then, pick one of those causes and draw a self-portrait of yourself inspired by Bowers’ artwork. Use a pencil on a plain white sheet of paper, leaving the background blank. Are you holding a sign or wearing a shirt with text on it? What outfit are you wearing? Is there anything in your hands? How do you communicate what you believe in with just a few symbols or words?

*Optional:* To complement your drawing, write a poem or short paragraph that expresses how you feel to fight for your cause.



**Andrea Bowers (American, b. 1965)**

*Fight for \$15 March (December 4, 2014), 2015*

Graphite on paper

SBMA, Museum purchase with funds provided  
by the General Art Acquisition Fund, 2018.17

Image © Andrea Bowers