

Question 4: From the series of FINE ART MAKING research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designers that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500-word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

BA Fine Art: studio site and context

Research in context

Lectures: Alex Duncan and Holly Slingsby

How society standards of beauty have influenced artist to rebel against them through their practice.

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What humans considered to be beautiful has changed over the many years that humans have existed. From kings looking for a suitable partner to posting an image on social media these standards have created insecurities and mental illness as people are not able to obtain these beauty standards as they can be either genetic like eye colour or to being disabled and the standards being able-bodied. Beauty standards have always been a staple in any society, and I wanted to research how artists have seen these standards and showed the wider society how they have affected people and how artists want to show the truth about beauty and the unnecessary need for these standards.

Throughout different cultures, religions and time beauty has changed significantly from ancient Greece, the sculpture of Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty having fat rolls and small breasts. A prominent nose and small lips were preferred. To the 1400 Renaissance period of when big foreheads were favoured to the point that women would pluck their hair line to make it look like they have a bigger forehead. In the 1880s women were expected to have a feminine and sickly look with extra layers of ruffles to make them look like they have an exaggerated butt. All these standards even exist today to some degree such as having a bigger ass or having your hair in a certain way to fit in. In my essay I will discuss how beauty standards are shown through different artworks and how different bodies are represented. I also want to discuss how important it is that we have artwork from a women's perspective so I will be looking at artists like Jenny Saville and Alice Neel and how through their practice they have shown the theme of beauty standards.

The theme of beauty standards can be a tough topic to talk about and to show through artwork but an artist, Jenny Saville, a British artist who focuses on challenging societal standards on human bodies often "displaying a realistic and visceral version of the human figure" Oliveira, R. (2023). She uses a painterly style which adds texture in the piece which shows the flaws and imperfections of the human body and isn't afraid of showing them in her work. As we can see in the painting below, she isn't afraid of adding detail and the texture of the piece mimics the realness of human skin and not smoothed over. Her painting has a lot of texture, is bold and very painterly. The style she used reflects what she wants to show in her themes are realness.



Figure 1 Jenny Saville, *Hyphen*, 1999. Courtesy:

The quirks of the human body are shown in the curves and the realness of the people instead of the most perfect version of themselves. In the modern-day era we have so many different filters, make up and photoshop that is used as we tend to hide what we don't like about ourselves and hide behind these techniques whereas Savills work is focused on this. She wants the grittiness of the human form and the realness of it. She also mainly focusses on female bodies and women, and she was to deconstruct the gender stereotypes of being a woman and the standards there are in being a woman in the modern-day era. In Savills case "her work challenges conventional norms of beauty and offers more authentic and inclusive representations of female bodies" Oliveira, R. (2023). In which is what we need in days world.

We need realistic body standards and more authentic ways the human body can look as a society we criticize anyone who looks different or anyone that doesn't fit our standards and see them as outcast furthering the "Pretty Privilege" that is so often seen in magazines, movies or celebrities especially women celebrity's. Pretty privilege is defined as "that people who are more conventionally attractive based on societal beauty standards have more advantages and opportunities compared to people who are deemed less attractive" O'Brien, K. (2022).

Savills works against the pretty privilege as at the beginning of Savills work, she completed more detailed pieces, however in her practice now her style is considered to be more abstract, and experimental style is shows how she doesn't care about what is considered conventional attracted or the harsh beauty standards she just wants to draw the human figure but also wants to challenge the modern day standards of what is considered beautiful. Alice Neel another female artist also wanted to do this by instead of drawing women through the stereotypic male gaze she wanted to draw women through her own female gaze and against the stereotypical nude depiction of women by men.

Alice Neel is American artist who is self-described as a champion of social justice her work is focused on the those who have been wronged by society and how her works show the realness of those who have been put down by society such as people of colour, gender discrimination including the LGBTQ+ community, Immigrants and women's freedom from stereotype such as beauty standards. Alice Neel has always been very left wing as I believe that if she wants to challenge beauty standards you have to explore everything that people on the other side of the political spectrum don't want you to see and her work embrace this.

Alice Neels work was infused with the interested in humanity. From the times in which abstract was preferred her work did not receive praise for her work until the 1960. Her work challenges the stereotypic work of the female nude body, and she wanted to show how human bodies actual looked like instead and she was hyper vigilant of the way that men dominated the industry and the objectification that men put on to the nude figure. This is like Jenny Saville work as they both want to show the grittiness of the human figure in the realness instead of being edited but I feel like Alice Neels work

is seen as more controversial as it was completed in a time of when the beauty standards were even harsher, so her work was not received as well as Saville's work. From Saville's point of view "I always need women's Lib. I had it inside of me, but outside these people ran over men even though I was a much better painter" Bauer, D. (1994) She was constantly put down for her work and for showing her work.

In her work she did not depict the human body in a realistic manner she wanted to give dignity to the women who sat for her work and not just straight objectification of women and because of her style she is described as having truthful and honest portraits of women instead of an over-refined piece and the standards that women should have at that time. It also challenged women's roles in society as this shows they can be an art piece, something to talk about, for something to see and challenged how beauty was seen back then.

The beauty standards in the 1940s were to have a slim waist, muscle tone and up-done curly hair was the standard that women aspired to have. The fact that the women that she painted didn't fit that standard created a statement in how the beauty standard didn't fit everyone and they didn't need to, as bodies are unique and everyone's body can't be the stereotypical beauty standards of the time due to either genetics, lifestyle or just genuine not caring about it as in the bigger picture of it, beauty standards change with each decade and are incredibly difficult to keep up with in one lifetime. Even women who give birth to children or who are parents don't even get a break from the standards.



Figure 2 Winifred Mesmer, 1940

Alice Neel's work also includes a series of pregnant women being painted, and she wanted to do this as she wanted to show the physical changes that pregnant people go through, and she also wanted to show that how these women are still desirable even though they are pregnant. Stereotypical pregnant women don't fit the stereotypical beauty standards even though they are the backbone of life. Without them all of us would not exist. Society wants women to be pregnant so that the capitalism society can be carried on through generations, yet society damns any women that change because of pregnancy and is perpetuated by the fact they are not seen as the beauty standards. Neel wanted to paint pregnant women as she wanted to paint "basic facts of life" Allara, P. (1994) and believed that they were truly worth painting.



Figure 3 Pregnant Woman,

In a contemporary art world, the art an artist called Amilia Ullman completed a performance piece on the social media platform of Instagram called Excellence and perfection. Over the course of five months from, April 19, 2014, she posted several pictures of a scripted character that she made up and over these months she posted several pictures from showing her shopping hauls to posting about the fact she got a breast augmentation. She wated to show you how the beauty standards even extended to your lifestyle and how liked it is by other people. She was mainly inspired by the 2014 by the extreme makeover culture which was heavily inspired by the beauty standards in the 2010's.

I want to explore this artist and her work as I wanted to see the consequences of what it is like to fit into the beauty standards that are set of that time. She is a conventional attractive person, and she fits into the stereotypical beauty standards and because off all her post she was putting up she was re-caving direct messages on her account was a “swamp of sex and desperation” Duguid, R. (2018). She was the main target for all these messages as she was seen as attractive and fit the beauty standards but what is also shows how bad that the beauty standards are that for this performance piece, she went on the Zao Dha Diet to get skinner. This even shows that behind her piece that even though she in conventional attractive person she still had to make herself fit int to the standards of the stereotypical skinner small girl.as she continued this posting as well she “conversely spirals into a performance of the feminine as it historically has often been portrayed: hysterical, crazy, vain, infantilized, suffering”(Ulman et al., 2019, p.72)



Even though she only wanted to show her post thought the stereotypical beauty standards and what she had done to achieve that it still showed how unobtainable they are for some people as she pretend to get surgery and used things like photo shop. She rebelled again the stereotypical beauty standards as she is showing that most of them are just a massive façade and just for a way that cosmetic companies exploit women in to making more money with this procedure or that procedure just to make a profit Edwin Schur a sociologist” estimates 1979 expenditures on cosmetics and personal hygiene products as follows: cosmetics, nearly \$3 billion; women's hair products, nearly \$2 billion; women's fragrances, close to \$2 billion; skin preparations’ this was in 1979. I wanted to find figures from a long time ago to show how prevalent the beauty industry, even before social media, how much it would exploit women into fitting in the beauty standards.



In conclusion to my work Jenny Saville's work shows the realness and grittiness on the human body and that she should not be afraid to draw people in their true state instead of hiding it behind filters and perfect brush strokes as in real life nobody is perfect or has the best eyes or hair. We are all human. As a society we have become so blind to the fact that we are heading in the wrong direction of what beauty standard should be. Beauty standards should be someone just existing and not having to have a procedure or photoshop done to them to feel a semblance of beauty and the fact that pretty privilege exists in which we give people positive attributes to those who look conventionally attractive. Such as with Alice Neel's work. Even though pregnant women are not seen as the stereotypical beauty standards they are still deserved to be painted and that is a rebellion to paint them and to show them off to a wider audience even in the 1930's.

To Amelia Ullman's work in which to fit into the stereotypical beauty standards she has to create an entire persona and interior persona to fit in with the standard and not already being the standards is a rebellion itself. To rebel against anything, you must go against it and today's beauty standards so many people don't fit in to it so many people are rebelling against it even if they may not know. The only way to get rid of beauty standards is to normalise things against the beauty standards and for people to not be concerned with how they look to other people as long as you are healthy. Why does it matter what you look like? What does it matter if we have a bigger body or back folds or wrinkles. It's all natural for us to have. On the opposite side of this though we should penalise people who do get cosmetic surgery to fit in to the modern day beauty standards as they either do just genuinely want to look conventionally attractive or they think they need to fit like Amelia Ullman creating a whole another person just to show the beauty standards.

To conclude this essay I believe that many people have fallen down the rabbit hole of what they think "looks pretty" and tries to fit in with society and that we need to demolish all beauty standards, rebel against them and accept what every we think is beautiful.

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