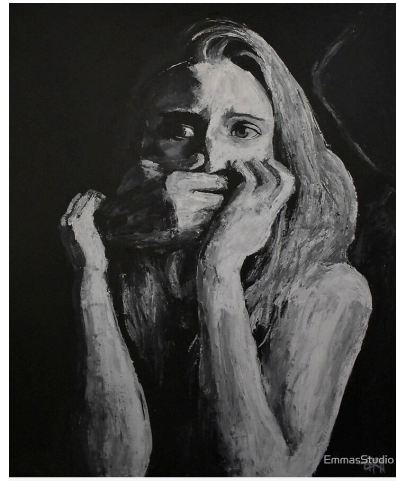


Has History Forgotten Female Artists? Sexism through the ages.

By Chloe Hunt



In this essay I want to explore the question – “*has history forgotten female artists?*” I had never even thought about this until it was recently brought to my attention, why hadn't I realised beforehand that there aren't many well known female artists?. In this essay I want to explore female artists throughout history in a variety of genres and eras and answer this question. At the same time, I hope to discover new female artists and be inspired. I will be researching my question through art historians, authors and philosophers such as Linda Nochlin and artists such as Frida Kahlo.

Has history forgotten women and is it up to us to bring light to them in the twentieth century? I am excited to learn how female artists impacted the future of art and if they were celebrated or hidden in the shadows of their male counterparts.

I want start my research with an overview of the art world and find some statistics, facts and history about women and equality within the art world. According to the website “National Museum Of Women In The Arts” a data analysis of U.S museums, “87% of art was created by men”. This is a really shocking statistic that means most of the art people in the US consume is made by men only. Also, Women's art sells for a “discount” price compared to men's at auction. And, “Only two works by women have ever been in the top 100 auction sales for paintings”. This is a devastating discovery - it is so saddening to see that womens' work is not only in fewer galleries but is sold for less value than work produced by men.

Moreover, I have read the article “10 Female Artists Forgotten By Art History” written by Zuzanna Stanska in 2023, in which she says “Many great female artists tend to be forgotten in art history. Those who have been neglected and marginalized for years or even centuries, lately are regaining their place on museum walls.” This article shows work by female artists who never got public recognition. A female artist who caught my attention was an Italian Renaissance painter called Fede Galizia. “Fede Galizia was an Italian early modern painter of still lifes, portraits, and religious pictures. Although she has remained in the shadows for most of history, her painterly style is now associated with the great masters of her time. Since 20th-century scholars discovered her work, she has been credited with helping define the early 17th-century still life genre.”

Her style is beautiful and she is credited as one of the great masters of all time - but her name remains unknown. Here are some pieces by Fede Galizia.



Additionally, to learn more about this topic, I have read the book "Why have there been no great women artists?" by Linda Nochlin who is a professor at the university of Fine Arts in New York, "In the field of art history, the white Western male viewpoint is unconsciously accepted as the viewpoint of the art historian." This is an intriguing point and the root of the issue, in a history dominated by the male point of view it is inevitable that those considered "great" are viewed through the lens of those making the opinions of the time - i.e Men. Next, Linda Nochlin discusses the equality of men and women in the book - "if men and women are equal then why have there been no great women composers, philosophers or musicians?". Personally, after discovering the works of Fede Galizia and the other female artists in the previous article, I know there have been great female artists and musicians etc but I think women throughout time were disregarded and women weren't allowed or given the opportunities as men.

Moreover, Nochlin writes "There have been no great women artists because women are incapable of greatness." This is a powerful statement which makes me feel disappointed by how the world throughout history has viewed and undervalued women and not been given the opportunity to achieve greatness because for so many years, women weren't allowed to achieve greatness - for example the first female students of the Royal Academy of Arts was 1860.

"There were many women artists who were much more prominent in their own time, but after they were gone art history came and shovelled dirt over their graves." This is a quote from art critic Julia Voss, in the article "The HIStory Of Forgetting" This is a very interesting article discussing how women were celebrated in their time but history has forgotten them. The article also states "Art history reads like a litany of the same male names, over and over again, while women artists are sidelined as either "exceptional talents" or "token females." This is hard to read because it reinforces the feeling of women's unimportance in a world that is male dominated. Womens' art was celebrated but swept under the carpet after they died and ultimately forgotten and abandoned. Moreover, "while they did not deny the existence of women artists, they did for a long time use art produced by women to "prove" the superiority of male artists and consolidate that idea in the public psyche." Personally, I think men had more respect for men at this time and would rather remember men as the great artists of all time instead of women. This also, most likely impacted how people view women in the art world because there weren't celebrated or well known female artists.

Furthermore, I'll be researching Frida Kahlo who hasn't been forgotten by history unlike many other women who also possessed a talent for art. Using the article "Frida, Me And Femininity" by The Whorticulturist, i'll be researching Kahlo's success and how she stood out in a male dominated field.

Firstly, Frida Kahlo struggled with miscarriages and depression - this fueled her art and she poured her heart and soul unapologetically into her work. " I believe it must have taken tremendous courage on her part to bare her inner self for the world to see, even though she had no guarantee of the reaction, especially when she dared to do it for the first time. Women in every part of the world at the time were still fighting for their rightful space in public lives. They were considered inferior to men in every respect." Says the article, this is very inspiring and shows Frida Kahlo like so many women who had a talent and a dream for art still dared to paint and draw and sketch regardless of the odds were stacked against them.

It makes me proud to be a woman and an artist.

It also shows that despite her hardships in life, she found peace in her art and used her pain as inspiration and expression. Frida Kahlo also used semiotics in her work that symbolised her mental health and painted symbolically. An example of semiotics in her work would be how boldly she portrays her facial hair, which is stereotypically a symbol of masculinity. Perhaps, this is why Kahlo's work has stood the test of time and is so memorable as the use of semiotics combined with masculinity as well as femininity, such as using butterflies to represent her struggles and hardships, infusing depth and feeling into her work and making her stand out. As you can see in this piece below, a black cat is usually known as a symbol of bad luck, Frida Kahlo experienced bad luck in her life when a bus accident left her with life-altering injuries. The necklace she is wearing in this piece below is a semiotic of the crown worn by Jesus in the Bible which represents the struggle, self sacrifice and devotion which Frida Kahlo experienced in her life and it is also a masculine symbol.



In conclusion, the world hasn't been kind to female artists. The talented women in the arts have not been celebrated in museums or sold for millions in galleries and "Art history came and shovelled dirt over their graves" and their names were forgotten to history. Moreover, my research has taught me that there have been inspiring and strong female artists in the world who have paved the way for not only women but also men in the world of art such as Frida Kahlo and `Fede Galizia. The world hasn't celebrated women in the arts.

Lastly, my research has taught me, like the women before me, to pursue my love for art regardless if my work may not end up in as many galleries or my name not remembered after I'm gone but it is done for love of the art and in the hope it may inspire future generations of women like the women before me have.

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