

Feminism *and* Illustration

The role of visual art in shaping social narratives.

The growing visibility of feminist illustration.

What does “female empowerment” mean in the context of illustration?

The use of visual storytelling to challenge gender expectations and empower women through bold imagery, narrative depth, and social commentary.

SUGGESTED READING

Mary Wollstonecraft – *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

Simone de Beauvoir – *The Second Sex*

Betty Friedan – *The Feminine Mystique*

bell hooks – explored intersection of race, class, and gender

Laura Mulvey – The Male Gaze

- Famous for her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975).
- Introduced the idea of the **male gaze**: visual media often depict women as objects for male viewers.

Judith Butler – theory of **gender performativity**

Some interesting illustrators to look at (*but find illustrators that you personally connect with and whose work you admire*):

Florence Given - *Women Don't Owe You Pretty*

Florence Given – *Women Living Deliciously*.

Polly Nor: She intentionally **subverts the gaze** by:

- allowing women to control the frame
- portraying women who look back at the viewer with agency
- presenting bodies without sexual objectification

- depicting the *inner* lives of women (Polly Nor's demon series)

She creates empowering images celebrating self-care, body positivity, emotional honesty, and vulnerability.

This challenges traditional power relations in visual culture.

Laura Callaghan

ALSO look at illustration theory:

Visual Semiotics (see other reading lists)

Images carry meaning through symbols, colour, composition, and stylistic choice.

You can analyse relevant illustrations:

- **Colour** (e.g. bold palettes to signal confidence)
- **Composition** (central positioning of female figures - power)
- **Symbolism** (mirrors, demons, flowers, posture, clothing)
- **Linework and style** (to express empowerment)

Semiotic analysis will strengthen your interpretation of chosen images.

Representation Theory (Stuart Hall)

Representation in media shapes how society understands identities, including womanhood.

When illustrators depict women as leaders, thinkers, autonomous individuals, or complex emotional beings, they shape cultural understandings of femininity.