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Task: Curatorial Project

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Introduction:

Gender inequality has existed in our society for centuries and it is now an inevitable issue to every individual who shares the public sphere. As the object of discrimination in gender inequality, women need to explore their roles other than reproducers, to obtain equal rights and even break the rule of patriarchy. Therefore, the thinking and emotional processes during the investigation need to be exhibited in public spaces such as a gallery or museum to provoke the audience to ponder and discuss.

The theory of how misogyny objectifies women as the core of the gender binary system, and the approach in which the patriarchy exploits women will be touched upon in this essay. The position of Foucault on truth and power will be mentioned since feminism itself is a subcategory of power. Additionally, Merleau-Ponty's theory of "body perception" has been applied.

Context:

Women are an oppressed and discriminated class in the world, dubbed "the second sex" by Simone de Beauvoir. Under the rule of the patriarchy, which is a ubiquitous social structure that crosses history and cultures, women are in an unequal position with men in many aspects, even in the private realm of the family (Li, 2018).

Women are exploited not only because they take the role of the reproducer, but also because they are deprived of their products that come out of the reproduction labour by the patriarchy. Patriarchal attempts have always sought to dominate and control the womb as a means of reproduction (Ueno, 2020). Specific actions such as contriving to take the right to decide on contraception and conception away from women underpin this viewpoint.

Hence, the female body, as the carrier for the reproductive organ, has been inevitably

dominated by the male gaze throughout its long history. This is also reflected in the history of art in the form of misogyny. In the past, when the art world was completely male-dominated and female artists had no recognition and no space to speak, male artists used their works of submissive female figures to reinforce the men's definition of women, so as to consolidate the position of men as sexual subjects. Male artists regarded female nudity as one of their main themes, while at the same time they disparaged women (Ueno, 2015).

At the moment when female consciousness is gradually awakening and the need for equal treatment is no longer completely suppressed, it is crucial for women to explore their self-identity, which is also the case in the field of art. Thus, the artworks and artists selected are responses to this theme.

The artists introduced in this imagined show are Artemisia Gentileschi, Gwen John, Yuliang Pan, Carol Rama, Carolee Schneemann, and Joan Semmel. They are all emblematic female figures who broke free from the limitations of time and society, ventured to challenge the male gaze, turned women's passive roles into active ones.

The abolition of patriarchy will not be achieved by changing men's attitudes and consciousness. It can only be achieved by changing the actual institutions and power structures (Ueno, 2020) because the voices of the subdued are rarely heard and the discourse belongs to the powerful (Foucault, 2020 ed.). The qualities that the aforementioned artists embody can help implement such a proposal.

Artists and Artworks:

For the purpose of showing the process of women's self-identity exploration better, the artworks are not placed in the time sequence of the creation year. They will be analysed in the order they are seen by the audience in the exhibition.

The layout and the design of the exhibition space will be briefly introduced before analysing the artworks and the artists. The layout attempts to simulate the process of birth from the

womb through the birth canal into the world, and the colours of the walls are to serve this purpose as well. This imitation is intended to imply that the approach by which women discover their identity is like the process of reproduction. Merleau-Ponty believes that the body is the subject of perception, and the body provides the method, process, and content of perception. The attempt of simulation is based on this theory, in order to arouse the spectators to exert a holistic way of perceiving in which the body as the subject (Li, 2020).



Fig 1. Map of the Exhibition Space

The first artwork the viewers see after passing the entrance is the renowned *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, made by Artemisia Gentileschi in 1620. It is an oil on canvas measuring 162.5 x 199 cm. It was created after a trial that was held to convict her sexual assailant but ended with her being publicly humiliated and deported from Rome (Frigeri, 2019). The work exceeded Caravaggio's version for its intense gore and vividness in the scene (Camara, 2015), and it gives a woman a central role (Frigeri, 2019). Moreover, the body language and the expression in the eyes of Judith and



Fig 2. *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, Artemisia Gentileschi, 1620.

her maidservant reveal the assertiveness and strength of women as a group with subjective initiative.

The second work displayed is *Interior Scroll*, a print documenting a performance made by Carolee Schneemann in 1975 when it was the time of second-wave feminism. Her work was centred on feminist concerns and gender consciousness from the outset. This specific piece was an attempt to overturn the conventions with her act of reading from a scroll that she pulled out from her vagina. She denounced the distressing male bias, which female artists experienced, by the means of treating her reproductive organ as a source of knowledge (Frigeri, 2019). It is hung on the wall of a narrow aisle, allowing visitors to pass through the aisle, which is the "birth canal", to resonate with the artist's action.

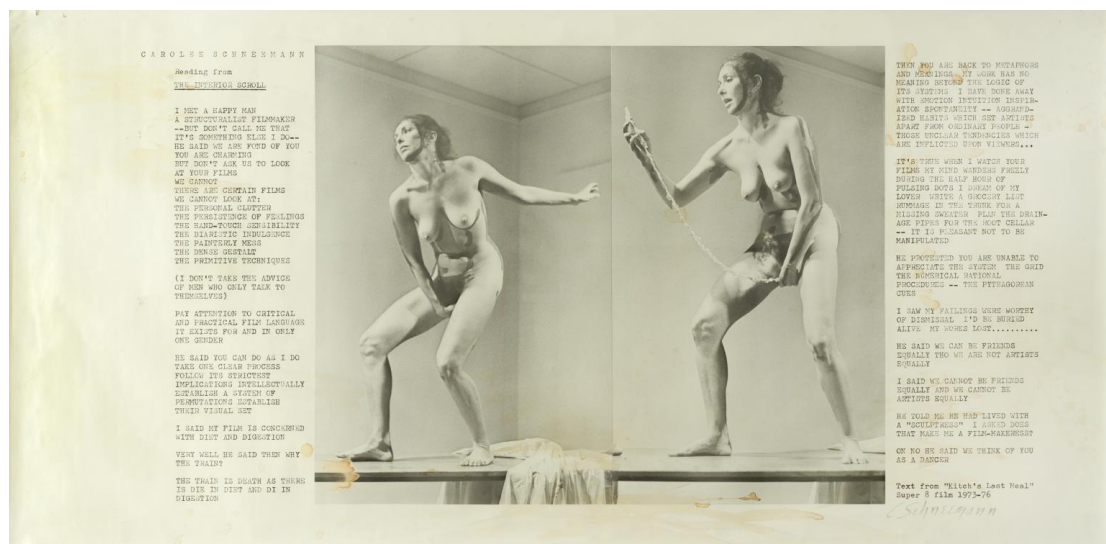


Fig 3. *Interior Scroll*, Carolee Schneemann, 1975.



Fig 4. *Maternità*, Carol Rama, 1966.

The third exhibit presented to the visitors is *Maternità (Maternity)*, created by Carol Rama in 1966. It is a work of mixed mediums on canvas, 90 × 70 cm. The work is full of the use of red and black is also rendered to form the maternity itself and the colour of blood, and to give the sense of suffering and the fury that comes out of it. Carol Rama was ushered into the canon under the direction of a curator who paid her a lot of attention, relegated to a definite identity based on her gender, an insane female outsider (Cruz, 2017). Although she cannot be simply categorised as a feminist artist, her work has

always challenged the patriarchal definition of women. In particular, the work has inspired people to think about maternity, not only the organ but also the trait that is traditionally regarded as innate. This idea was fundamentally rejected by feminists during second-wave feminism because it comes with the “dual burden” of women in their “dual role” as both wage and domestic workers (Ueno, 2020).

The fourth piece is *Secret Spaces* by Joan Semmel. It is an oil on canvas measuring 177.2 × 173.8 cm, produced based on a photograph that she took of her own body (Johnston, 2016) in 1976, which was also during the second-wave feminism. It depicts what a woman sees when looking at her body from a first-person perspective, without the male gaze objectifying or sexualising the body. Along with artists such as Carolee Schneemann, who has likewise considered subjecting their nakedness as a way in which to subvert the male gaze (Johnston, 2016).

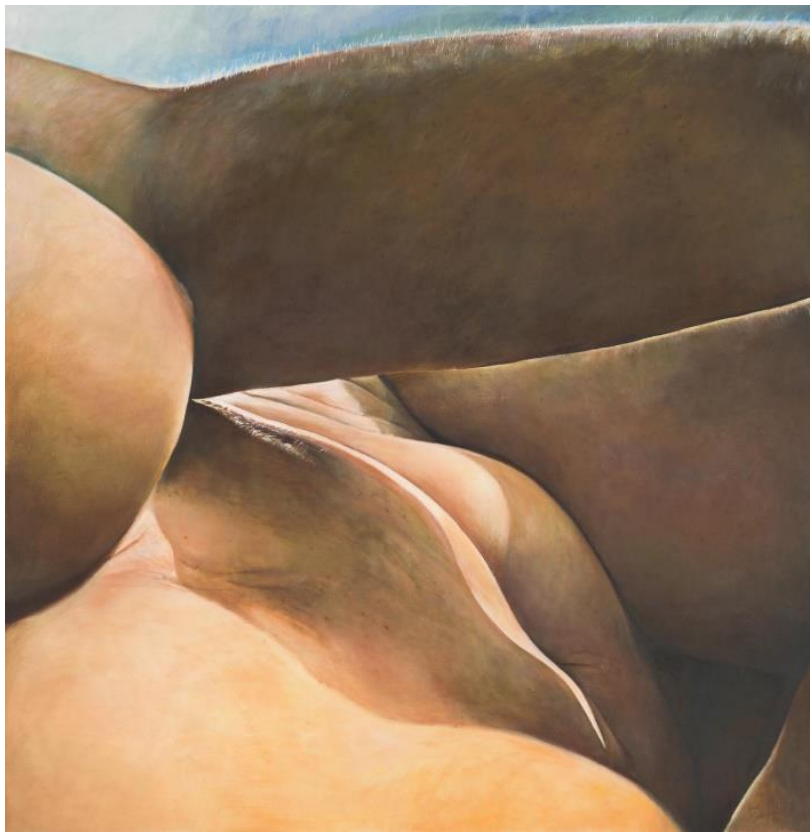


Fig 5. *Secret Spaces*, Joan Semmel, 1976.

The fifth piece showed to the viewers is *Nude Girl*, a work of Gwen John. In a profession under male dominance, the artist had to endeavour for recognition which was barely validated while she was alive. However, today she is widely esteemed for her powerful and intimist portraits (Tate, 2020). She kept faith in her own talents and carried on pursuing art even without being recognised. Such self-belief should be obtained by women in order to resist the oppression of patriarchy, and further to break the rule of patriarchy.

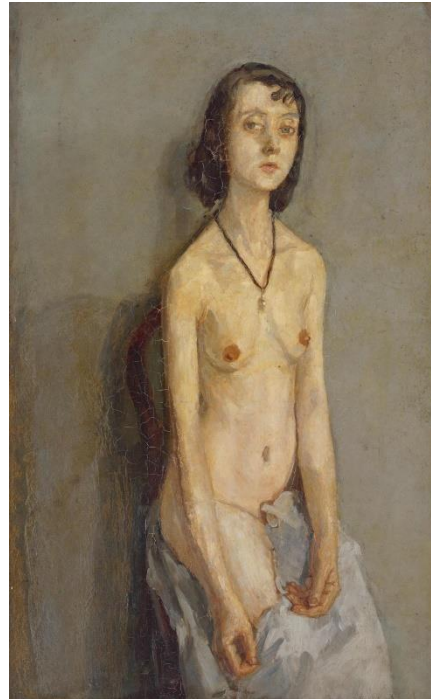


Fig 6. *Nude Girl*, Gwen John, 1909-1910

Self-Portrait created by Yuliang Pan in 1945 is the last for the spectators to view. In this painting, she looks confident, calm, and firm – qualities that are not only her self-image, but also the characteristics shared by the female figures in her works; and it is her justification for women being stigmatized by labels such as weakness and emotion.



Fig 7. *Self-Portrait*, Yuliang Pan, 1945

Before leaving the space, the audience will be seeing a quotation of Beauvoir on the wall: "One is not born a woman but becomes one". In this exhibition, it tends to be interpreted in a different sense than the original: the definition of women is replaced by the new one by investigation, to keep creating the new definitions, we must not stop exploring. How women are defined depends on how women act.

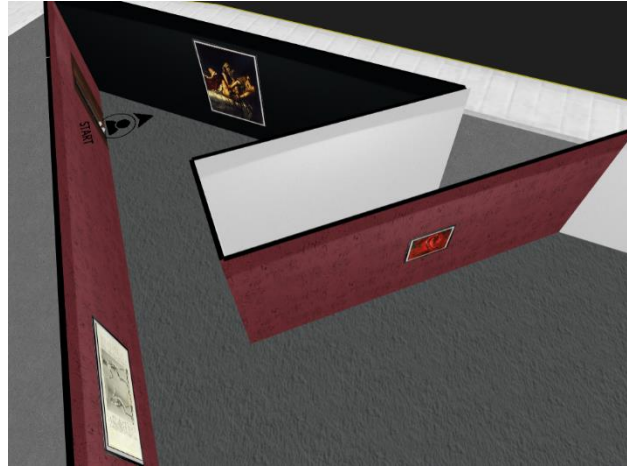


Fig 8. Map, Pt. 1

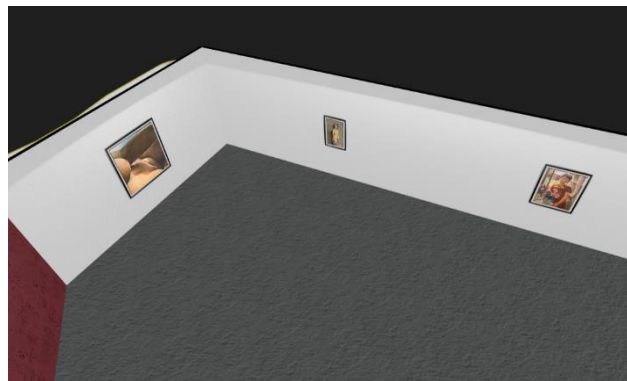


Fig 8. Map, Pt. 2



Fig 10. Map, Pt. 3

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List of Figures

- Figure 1.* Map of the Exhibition Space, Yilan Men, (2021). [Accessed on 30th April 2021]
- Figure 2.* *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, Artemisia Gentileschi, 1620. Accessed from: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/renaissance-reformation/baroque-art1/baroque-italy/a/gentileschi-judith-slaying-holofernes> [Accessed on 9th March 2021]
- Figure 3.* *Interior Scroll*, Carolee Schneemann, 1975. Accessed from:

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/schneemann-interior-scroll-p13282> [Accessed on 9th March 2021]

Figure 4. Maternità, Carol Rama, 1966. Accessed from: <https://hyperallergic.com/381487/carol-ramas-resistant-desire/> [Accessed on 9th March 2021]

Figure 5. Secret Spaces, Joan Semmel, 1976. Accessed from: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/semmel-secret-spaces-t15716> [Accessed on 9th March 2021]

Figure 6. Nude Girl, Gwen John, 1909-1910. Accessed from: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/john-nude-girl-n03173> [Accessed on 9th March 2021]

Figure 7. Self-Portrait, Yuliang Pan, 1945. [photograph] [Accessed on 29th December 2020]

Figure 8. Map, Pt. 1, Yilan Men, (2021). [Accessed on 30th April 2021]

Figure 9. Map, Pt. 2, Yilan Men, (2021). [Accessed on 30th April 2021]

Figure 10. Map, Pt. 3, Yilan Men, (2021). [Accessed on 30th April 2021]