

Is Art still just a Man's World?

Lara Alicia Hanford

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An in depth analysis of the life and career of Pauline Boty, the forgotten Pop Artist.

By Lara Alicia Hanford

Introduction

Though she was only on this Earth for a second, Pauline Boty's prolific impact on pop art and feminism blazed a trail in the 50's and 60's remains to this day. She was not only a founder and pioneer of the British pop art movement, she was the only female in the british wing of the movement. Boty's rebellious art was ahead of its time and criticized the male dominated world in which she lived. Boty embodied female confidence whether she was doing the twist in a fur boa with derek boshier, dancing on Ready Steady Go or painting bums.

Chapter 1 :History

Early on she suffered setbacks at the hands of the RCA's institutionalised sexism against female artists when she was told The Royal College of Painting was dominated by men and could not be penetrated by a mere girl.

"Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, feminist artists used a variety of mediums—including painting, performance art, and crafts historically considered "women's work"—to make work aimed at ending sexism and oppression and exposing femininity to be a masquerade or set of poses adopted by women to conform to societal expectations."

When she applied in 1958 female painters were judged harshly against male competitors and restricted from deciding their own major, in a class of 32 students only 8 were women. Female artists were deprived of female mentors and role models at the institute, of the 63 members of staff at the college, only six were female. Boty was deprived of the support and encouragement she deserved in her time at the RCA, the experience left her confidence shattered and stalled her career.

It was only once Boty had left university that she had complete creative freedom and was able to develop her own style of photo realism collage fan art. She formed alliances with other creatives like Peter Blake, Peter Phillips and Derek Boshier, they grew together and established a name for themselves within the young british contemporaries at the time.

Boty's career was often overshadowed by her looks, private life and venture into acting. Architect Edward Jones described Boty as a "goddess", "charming, direct and flirtatious" he went on to say "she looked just like Bardot with a few extra pounds. There were other beautiful women who painted at the time but none who were quite as wonderful as her" His description of her is all about her looks and sexual allure, he fails to mention her talent once. Her work was often overshadowed by her looks, due to society's acceptance of men based on

talent alone whereas women need talent and a plus one, they must also hold other attributes, looks, charisma.

Tragically Pauline lost her life in 1966 aged 26 shortly after the birth of her daughter, during a prenatal scan she was diagnosed with cancer and refused treatment as to not damage her unborn child. Without her charismatic presence her paintings fell into an invisibility that persisted nearly three decades. Blake, Phillips and Hockney Art historian David Mellor tracked down her paintings which were gathering dust in a barn after watching her in *Pop Goes the Easel* when he was just a teenage boy.

Chapter 2 - Her Works

"I've always had very vivid dreams and I can remember them very very easily, and I've used that kind of atmosphere of the dreams in my collages. I think there are two things about this and one is that I often take the moment before something has actually happened and you don't know if it's going to be terrible or it might be very funny. The other thing is that if something very extraordinary is actually happening and yet everyone around is taking no notice of it at all." Many male pop artists at the time such as Peter Blake and Peter Phillips sexually objectified women in their work, using female iconography like pin-ups to make money and gain attention. Juxtapose Boty's work represented women's inner beauty and sexuality. Boty's work celebrated women, she was able to convey in an image how sexy feels, not how sexy looks. Co-curator of Art and the 60's Chris Stephens stated "The fact that Boty was a woman dealing with representations of female sexuality at that time makes her interesting. Many male artists of the period explored popular images of female glamour, like the pin-up, but it was a boy's game. As a woman, she looked at representations of sex and sexuality in a very different way."

Only Blonde in the World (1963)

Composed of 4 bold panels, we see Marilyn Peeking out of the abstract, restricted by her borders. The use of red implies passion and anger and the fact 3 of the 4 pannels are red suggests the lack of freedom Monroe had in her life. Monroes suicide 62 heavily affected Boty as she identified and empathised with her and often featured her in her work.

"The star cult of the era was also a sign of it's sufferings; made-up faces, adapted to their functions as the icons of the sixties, were a source of compensation for the feelings of frustration and the impotence of consumers suffocating in their anonymity."

There are similarities in the lives Pauline and Marilyn, both sadly passing at very young ages. Boty often identified with "tragic" and "missjudged" female celebrities, their issues made her feel less alone.

"If we attach our hopes and fears to the stars we are no longer alone."

Scandal (1963)

Boty's most famous (and missing) picture is *Scandal '63*, an image of Christine Keeler astride a chair with all the male protagonists in the Profumo affair shown at the top. Last seen in the year it was painted, it has presumably remained with the person who commissioned it.

Bum

In November 2017, the painting sold for £632,750

Chapter 3 - Present Day

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