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Module Title and Code: ADAD5003

Course: BA Fine Art: Studio, Site and Context.

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Word count: 2,751 (excluding title page, table of contents, figure list and reference page)

Question 1: Explore how artists have approached the concepts around 'gender' in art practice; providing evidence from at least 2 artists and thinkers.

'Tremate,tremate, le streghe son tornate!'

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Introduction

Throughout history, societies have sought to define and control the boundaries of belief, behaviour and the unknown. Among the harrowing manifestations of this impulse was the persecution of individuals accused of witchcraft. The witch trials, which swept across Europe and America between the 15th and 18th century, were not just mere episodes of religious trepidation; they were complex socio-political events that sought out to control gender, power and the meager line between orthodoxy and heresy. This questions George Santayana's quote 'A woman, if she laughs at nothing, is a fool; 'if she finds nothing to laugh at, is a bigot' (Santayana, 1905-1906), which proposes that whatever a woman does, she is always the one to blame for. This essay will explore and investigate how two separate artists portray Witches and Witchcraft within their work from a male perspective, while discussing the sexism and power males had over women during the trials.

The first being Francisco De Goya and his somber *Black Paintings* of old hags and goats, first depicted within his own home, cast directly on his walls out of the public eye. Now collectively known as the *Black Paintings*, grouped together and displayed in the Prado, Madrid. Painted in dark murky colours, distorted figures and disturbing subject matter. Depicting violence, madness and despair. Reflecting a bleak and pessimistic view of humanity after witnessing harrowing acts of deprivation of his countrymen from the Civil War; which can be seen in his *Disasters of War* etchings. The famous *Witches' Sabbath* (1798) showcases a goat portraying the devil,

surrounded by old, disfigured hags praying for him to either save their sick or dying children or to offer their sacrifices to him. This makes sense, as superstition at the time believed that the devil fed on children, and witches were his slaves. 'Witches are women who have turned against God' (king James I, 1597). Interestingly, Goya protests against the Spanish Inquisition, which has been held during the Basque Witch trials. Many of Goya's paintings are an attack on superstitious beliefs, especially in Spain. Humoring on the rumours of midnight gatherings and deals with the Devil himself.



Figure one *Witches' Sabbath* by Francisco De Goya 1597

Other more notable works done by Goya include, *Witches' Flight* (1797), 'Aquelarre' (1820), and *The Spell* (1797-1798). All having the same disturbing imagery, grotesque women and a goat. By focusing on the content itself, Goya utilises omens, animals or items in a way to tell a story. *The Spell* (1797-1798) depicts 5 old terrifying women, whose faces are haggard and skull-like, irregular shaped heads

and sharp teeth. With imagery surrounding them which convey their intentions. More importantly, the depictions of 'superstition' of the devil, which in hindsight was actually syphilis due to prostitution. This can be seen in multiple of Goya's artworks, in this case, the owl revealing the witches baldness in *The Spell* is the start. The use of symbolism to depict sensitive subjects like prostitution, especially during the Witch Trials, was a way to navigate social and religious constraints. Ultimately critiquing societal issues without directly challenging the norms. 'These women were believed to be subject to stronger sexual urges than in their youth...driven to seek copulation with the Devil' Chollet (2022, p. 32). Also, suggestives of whether Goya's paintings were merely fact or fiction. In many of previous paintings like *The Sleep Of Reason*, it's very obvious that Goya is aware of what's real or reality. However, within Goya's *Black Paintings* this is hard to tell, suggesting that the witches were a sheer sign of disillusionment, melancholy and delusion by Goya.



Figure two, *The Spell* by Francisco Goya, 1797-1798

During the witch trials, any deviation from religious or social expectations could be seen as evidence of witchcraft, therefore artists had to be cautious. Many of the women in Goya's work only depict old women, hardly ever younger women.

Compared to the counterparts of young male victims, who are more often shown in white clothing representing innocence or purity. In relation to the trials, men were often seen as the superior, even if they were committing the same atrocities as the women they were putting to death.

The history of the goat as a symbol used for the devil originates in a mixture of ancient Pagan beliefs and early Christian interpretations. Oftentimes, goats were symbolised as fertility or virility in Paganism. According to Hooker (2025) 'a goat became a new identity in the 6th century; a mosaic was discovered in Italy that depicted Satan as a goat'. Or the more popular use of the goat, being Mathew 25:31-46 parable of The Sheep and Goats. The use of the goat escalated gradually from overtime venturing up during the Middle Ages, particularly during the witchcraft allegations. This then led to the goat being used as representation for a demonic figure that is often seen being worshipped in the witches' sabbaths. Thus, then leading to the goat being a recognised symbol for the devil. 'In virtue of his horns and the he-goat that stood by his side, he might have passed for Bacchus' (Michelet, 2019, p. 63)

Again, the figure of the devil can be seen here, in Goya's *Aquelarre* (1820) illustrating a group of witches during a sabbath, the recurring faces of unattractive women to represent superstition, the unsettling atmosphere and seemingly a mass of debate amongst the witches. The painting also shows Goya's own disillusionment,

his intentions to mock the Christian belief, the Church and his own negative relationship with humanity. The gloomy, perplexing scene taking place symbolises the pessimism that Goya withheld, which fitted the reason why Goya didn't make them public in the first place.



Figure three Aquelarre By Francisco De Goya 1820

The witch trials killed around 60,000 women in Europe alone. Torture, drownings, burnings, hangings all succumbed to the women's demises. In an interview with The Guardian, (Worsely, 2022)

'The prejudices that led to witch-hunts haven't completely disappeared. It's still the case that women – especially odd-seeming, mouthy ones – often feel the anger of the men whose hackles they raise'.

Historian Lucy Worsley discusses the fate of witches, arguing how unjust and dehumanized women were treated. Mentioning 'kinship' some women have with these previous women, especially those who advocate. Helen Duncan, also known as the last witch of Scotland. Duncan was brought to trial at the Old Bailey in London and became the last person to be prosecuted under the Witchcraft Act of 1735, which had not been used for more than a century. Due to the nature of her 'crime' she was upfront denied the right to appeal to the House of Lords. The case of Duncan finally led to the abolishment of the Witchcraft Acts which were finally repealed in 1951. As a formal Act of Parliament three years later officially recognised spiritualism as a religion.

Due to the publication in the 15th century of *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer Of Witches), a guide on how to hunt witches by Heinrich Kramer. This book influenced the political roles and the judiciary system for the next 200 years. The Malleus is an extremely sexist book, smothered in misogynistic text. Even so, philosophers blame The Malleus and Christian demonology when it comes to blaming women for witchcraft, hence showing the power Malleus had on this view of witches naturally being female. In addition, another notorious case of a witch trial taking place within the UK, being The Pendle Witches. However, in this trial the apparent Christian paranoia was more evident, especially in the reign of King James. 'Because of fearful bounding at this time in this country of these detestable slaves of the devil, the witches or enchanterers' (James I, 1597, p. 1). King James I of Lancashire, survivor of the Gunpowder plot of 1605, feared rebellion. His fear and anger brought grim punishments to those within the favour of the Catholic faith. Thus, leading to an inevitable spiral of paranoia and obsessions with witchcraft. In result, leading to the

creation of his book *Daemonologie* 1597. 'In my opinion, barns or wives are never so defamed persons...may of our laws serve for sufficient witnesses and proofs in matters of high treasons against God' (King James I, 1597, p. 45)

Interestingly enough, the act of printing upheaved the hysteria and 'mob' mentality during the witch trials. Pamphlets were created which advertised trials, confessions and executions; fueling the sensationalisation of witchcraft and normalising violence as punishment.

Luis Ricardo Falero is known for his decorative, lustful paintings. Exhibiting nude, hairless, mythical women, alongside witches. His astronomy paintings depict celestial settings, the recurring black fabric and stellar themes for the women. However, included within the witches paintings, the element featured is chaos. In *Vision Of Faust* the anarchic scene of witches attending their sabbath, showing witches who display beauty but accompany evil as they take their supposed sacrifice pictured at the front. This painting portrays a much darker take on witches as opposed to Falero's other witch paintings. Symbols of demons pushing the witches, the whirling of witches suggesting a sexual tension, goat riding and bats as a symbol of bad omens and intuition.

fascinated in astronomy and mythology, especially since the occult being popular during the 19th century. His paintings suggest a blend of scientific curiosity and mystical wonder. The esoteric surrounding of celestial symbols emphasise their power, hinting that they are connected with unseen forces.



Figure four Visions Of Faust by Luis Ricardo Falero 1878

Falero's work against Goya is provocative, even though Falero's work was made after Goya passed away, they both have similar variations of their works. However, the more obvious difference is the intentions. Whilst Goya's was a motif for a distaste for society during this time, often provoking the turmoil of the Church and humanity. Falero's gave a more conclusive approach to the occult. This is because of the specific symbols used within his works in contrast to Goya's. Witches, being a symbol of power, freedom and knowledge; their cauldrons being the reflection of power and manifestation. The surrounding of oneself by demons invites chaos into the scene and proposes a warning, especially in relation to using too much power without caution. Which can be seen in today's society when referring to politics. The more pronounced contrast between Goya's work and Falero's being the difference of the betrayal of women. While Goya's being intentional, It's definitely important when comparing the two as women during the trials were not seen as attractive, or even if

they were, they too were judged, 'a woman is beautiful to look at, but bad to deal with' (Kramer and Sprenger, 1486). It could be widely discussed that Falero's



Figure five, *The Witches Sabbath* by Luis Ricardo Falero 1880

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'by turning her into a virginal, seductive but distancing bodily "landscape," the model became an erotic illusion, one without will or personality, void of true emotion. Her passive state approximated that of a marble Greek statue'.

Over the years, witches were depicted as old, ugly hags engaging in malevolent acts. Later, witches were depicted more seductive, or mysterious, even sometimes heroic. In feminism, witches often specialise in female empowerment, resistance against patriarchal structures and the reclamation of female knowledge that has been demonised or suppressed.

'The figure of every female healer, every sorceress, every woman who was slightly too forward or too much of a stirrer, to the point that they became a mortal threat to society? What if this Devil were in fact independence?' (Chollet, 2022, p. 64)

A perfect example for female comprise, is artist Leonora Carrington. Who for years worked with spiritual iconography and witches for dismantling power and chauvinism. Renowned for her contribution to the surrealism movement, advocating in female sexuality to be illustrated by women who experienced it, not through male fantasies or the male gaze. Her pieces capture otherworldly women, hybrids and occultish paraphernalia, encompassing the true nature of female power. The contrast between Goya's and Falero's witches against Carrington's, isn't surprising. Goya's witches are dark and critical, Falero's are decorative, whilst Carrington's are rebellious figures. Challenging social norms, her witches are complex, embodying both wisdom and rejection of traditional roles. Which is the symbolism the witch carries in modern day feminism. Moreno (2021) discusses Carrington's British childhood that was filled with Celtic folklore, stemming her relation to alchemy, tarot, Kabbalah and Mexican indigenous cosmologies, feeding her depictions of witches as beings who understand hidden layers of reality.



Figure six, Le Repas de Lord Candlestick by Leonora Carrington, 1938

Falero, most known for focusing on highly detailed and lifelike depictions, encompassing people with almost photographic level of precision, linking to the broader movement called photorealism. Due to the overlapping art movements during the late 19th century, his work does not fit cleanly; however his work showcases various styles of movements making him a unique painter during this time. Most notable, in relation to Falero's would be Late Academic Art (1870 to 1900) featuring the traditional polished techniques, idealised figures, mythical troupes and classic anatomical study. Also, Falero could be linked to Orientalism, featuring exoticised themes, which was favoured during European art at the time. In contrast to Goya is interesting, whilst Falero's is primarily hyperrealist, Goya's was mainly evolved from the Rococo style, featuring stylish and decorative ideas especially his earlier works which depended on an expressive form of realism. Then, ending his painting career by moving into Proto-Modernism, showcasing his raw, dark and emotionally charged works. Rejecting beauty and idealisation. Neoclassicism and Romanticism was most prominent during Goya's era (1800-1850). Goya's work as previously mentioned was inspired by the political upheaval; Napoleonic invasion, Spanish inquisition etc whilst Faleros was just a case of inspiration from scientific fascination and occultism which was popular during the Victorian era. Which could suggest why Falero wasn't as historically influential as Goya. Simply, Goya fundamentally shaped the direction of western art. Bringing awareness to psychological subjectivity, political critique and raw expressions. Whilst Falero in contrast, did not pioneer a major movement, only followed established Academic techniques and remained decorative. Carrington follows both. She's decorative, following the surrealist movement, however her works include the same

psychological subjectivity and political critique. In turn, prompting her to be notable within the female art field.

In conclusion, the exploration of witches throughout historical and modern art highlights the apprehension and humiliation of women throughout history. Through the works of Goya, Falero and Carrington, we are able to see how certain elements of society were viewed during their time, the artists' own expressions and the influence on the public. Goya's allegory paintings to describe his melancholic demeanor towards society, while Carrington explored the feminisation of rebellion, reclaiming the need to take leadership for women's experiences. All while Faleros was a mere act of ornamental establishment, expressing his perversion for women through creating work. Although these artists are contrasting in nature, they give valuable insight into the various ways self expression can be conceived. Through innovative techniques, unique perspectives and powerful storytelling, captures the essence of the subject; influencing cultural understanding. Their work gives a more logical, deeper understanding on how women were treated, the power men withheld, and identity, contributing to an inclusive view of society, whilst being notable within art history.

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