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# Independent Inquiry Proposal: Misogyny, Visual and Installation Art

## Introduction

This proposal document aims to investigate three interconnected keywords **Misogyny, Visual and Installation Art** that will support my third-year practice project. Firstly, the meaning of misogyny will be explored, as it is a term that I have heard frequently but do not fully understand. Secondly, the ways in which men perceive the women around us will be examined, particularly the concept of seeing. Finally, the topic of installation art will be researched, as it has always fascinated me, and I am curious about the creative process and what aspects one should consider when creating an installation piece. Through this research, I hope to develop an in-depth knowledge of these topics and how they might inform and inspire my own artistic practice for my third year.

## Misogyny

Andrea Dworkin states that “Misogyny is the system that maintains the subordination of women” (the Guardian, 2021). The independent inquiry proposal focuses on the theme of misogyny in visual and installation art. Misogyny can be defined as a strong feeling of hate or dislike towards women or the belief that women are inferior to men. This theme has been extensively discussed in various fields, including literature, politics, and sociology. In the context of visual and installation art, it is interesting to explore how artists have addressed misogynistic attitudes and beliefs and challenged them. The inquiry aims to

investigate the ways in which artists have used their works to address misogyny and how their creations have impacted the public's understanding of gender issues. The exploration of this subject will hopefully contribute to the current dialogue about misogyny and how it affects women's lives, both inside and outside the world of the arts.

The famous feminist Chizuko Ueno (2015) states that the misogynistic system underpins the gender binary order is one that neither men nor women can avoid. Furthermore, The gender binary is a patriarchal tool that defends gender norms and maintains the gap in status between men and women. It can be argued that misogyny creates a possible idea that women are inferior to men (Briggs, 2021). Like gravity, misogyny permeates this order and is so commonplace that it can go unseen Ueno (2015).

For a considerable time, the phenomenon of misogyny has been and continues to be problematic in society (GOV.UK, 2022), yet it has gone unnoticed by many people. Historically, men have been seen as above women (Becker, 1999). Furthermore, Aristotle (1981, n.p) states "The male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled," In *The Second Sex* De Beauvoir (2010, p.18) gives reference to past scholars and influential figures from the past. For example, she mentions Saint Thomas referring to women as an "incomplete man," Bossuet interpreted the Genesis story as indicating that women were a secondary creation from a spare rib. Similarly, Michelet viewed women as a "relative being" defined in relation to men. Shahzad, Abdullah and Baig (2021) also mention that Monsieur Benda went as far as to say that a woman's body is devoid of meaning without reference to a man, while a man's body has meaning in itself. The Enlightenment philosopher believed that women's primary role was to satisfy the desires of men, rather than to pursue their own individual goals and aspirations. They

portrayed women as secondary to men, deficient in qualities that defined their femininity, and devoid of meaning without reference to men (De Beauvoir, 2010).

In *The Second Sex* De Beauvoir (2010) emphasises how men establish themselves as the absolute and the subject, while women are devalued to the status of the other. Women have been objectified by men as a result of this constantly and they are constantly seen as unimportant in comparison to men. According to Crenshaw (1991) these perspectives reinforce the idea that women are determined by their relation to men, rather than as unique individuals with their own distinct identities. Gender interactions are still impacted by this perspective today.

As Ueno (2015) claims, men use the exclusive act of gender to maintain their dominant position and realise their subjectification device by excluding "non-men." For example, the fear of being treated as sexual objects and losing subject status results in homophobia and harsh scrutiny of homosexuality within male communities, to ensure homogeneity. Additionally, large percentage of male authors and artists in the late nineteenth century tried to minimise their sexual anxiousness by demeaning women. This behaviour exemplifies how historical perspectives on women have influenced the ways in which men have used gender to maintain their dominance (De Beauvoir, 2010).

In the process of researching, I noticed an installation art (see the Fig.1) from The Institute for Public Art (2018) about misogynies. Elina Chauvet's installation in Juárez, Mexico commemorates the hundreds of young women who were tortured and killed



Fig.1, Pairs of women's red shoes seen in the Zocalo square in Mexico City, Photo by Gustavo Graf, 2020

in the city during the 1990s and 2000s.

Juárez's status as a free trade zone and its vulnerability to drug trafficking and cheap labour have contributed to a culture of abuse, particularly against factory workers' wives, The Institute for Public Art (2018). This has made the city a symbol of gender-based violence and femicide, highlighting the tragic number of women who are victims of misogynistic violence.



Fig.2, Wearing a luchador mask, artist Elina Chauvet (L). The photo on the right shows installation that was displayed on Grand Valley State University's Pew Campus in 2017. Photos courtesy of Elina Chauvet

The use of the colour red according to artists (PBS News Hour, 2020) is for bloodshed, as well as for change, hope, and love. This artwork highlights the urgency for addressing gender-based abuse across various settings such as domestic and workplace environments. What is more, in 2012, Mexico formally separated homicides from “femicides,” the killing of women for reasons related to their gender (The Institute for Public Art, 2018). This modification in the law was intended to result in harsher punishments and a stronger victim support structure. The installation's unique ability to unite individuals from diverse backgrounds and convey a powerful message about the state of our world is a testament to the power of visual art, as a medium for social change (The Institute for Public Art, 2018).

## Visual

**“We never look just at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves” (Berger, 1972, p.9).**

Due to the primary key word, I explore the relationship between men and women. Also, I would like to observe their relationship within the visual context.

To understand about the ways how men see the women will be focused on Berger’s *ways of seeing*, which analyses how the male gaze has historically dominated the representation of women in art. It has a chapter on how naked women are portrayed in European oil paintings. During that era, male painters and spectator-owners were the dominant producers and consumers of art. As a result, women were objectified and treated as sexual objects in media representations.

The portrayal of women in visual media reflects and reinforces gendered power dynamics in society. Women are often positioned as objects of male

desire, while men are positioned as active subjects (Gavey, 1992). As Berger mentioned a story of Paris and the Judgement of Paris, illustrates the problematic nature of beauty contests, and the objectification of women. By making beauty a competition, “Paris awards the apple to the woman he finds most beautiful”, (Berger, 1972, p.50) (See the fig. 3).



Fig.3, Rubens, (1577-1640) Paris and the Judgement of Paris

Those who are not deemed beautiful are viewed as unworthy, reinforcing harmful beauty standards and perpetuating the objectification of women as objects of male pleasure (Haskell, 1994).

Gradually, women became desensitised to men judging them, whilst trying their best to achieve “perfect” behaviour suitable for the men. Women are often viewed as objects of visual pleasure by men, while women internalise this perspective (Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr, 2011).

Additionally, Berger (1972) argues that the visual representation of women is not just about their physical appearance, but also about the way in which they are seen and judged by society. The way a woman presents herself to men can often be seen as a significant factor in determining the success of her life. A woman’s perception of her identity is overshadowed by the desire to be valued and accepted for who she is by someone else. That is why De Beauvoir (2010, p. 194) claims “woman is to become woman.” Societal expectations and gender roles are imposed upon women, limiting their ability to fully express their individuality and autonomy (Becker, 1999). Women are socialised to conform to traditional gender norms and behaviours, resulting in the objectification and subjugation of women by men. Women are passive in the presence of the subject and active at the same time. “Women often see themselves through the lens of the male gaze, leading to their objectification” (Berger, 1972, p. 47).

Laura Mulvey's work (1999) on the “male gaze” supports Berger's argument that women are often portrayed as passive objects of male desire in film and other visual media.

Through a heterosexual perspective, men often gaze upon women, leading to the objectification of women in society. This viewpoint is forced upon all audiences, prolonging the objectification of women. Additionally, women often internalise this perspective, leading to their own objectification and an altered perception of themselves. Overall, Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze" further reinforces Berger's argument that women are frequently objectified in visual media and society.

### **Installation Art**

**“Art historian Julie Reiss describes how, in the 1970s, the verb ‘to install’ was used to describe a working process that freed itself from the artist’s studio and aimed for direct contact with the audience” (Saaze, 2013, cited in Reiss, 1999, p.48).**

Installation art has emerged as a popular mode of producing and displaying art that involves the arrangement of objects within a space to create an artwork, using various media (Suderburg, 2000). In this paragraph, I will discuss the key elements of installation art and the challenges that artists face when creating and preserving these works. The focus of this paragraph is to explore installation art as a possible method for presenting my practice project in the third year.

Firstly, installation art is not a specific movement or style, but a way of producing and displaying art. Objects are rearranged, aggregated, synthesised, expanded and dematerialised to create an artwork that is unique to its space and environment (Suderburg, 2000). In this definition, I realised two key elements of installation art that artists should consider when creating their works: “objects” and “site”.

To help understand “site”, one of the important elements of installation art, I noticed another keyword, site art. Site refers to an artwork that is created to exist in a specific location, taking into account the unique physical elements and characteristics of that location. The scale, size, and location of site-specific works are determined by the topography of the site, whether it be urban or landscape or architectural enclosure. The works become part of the site and restructure both conceptually and perceptually, which in turn organises the site (Kwon, 1997).

When thinking about how to choose my installation location, I need to consider the second element of installation art - objects. Depending on the number of objects and the nature of the display, installation spaces can range from cluttered to minimal (Cole and McIntyre, 2008). At the same time, artwork should also respond to its site and be influenced by its unique features, including the materials and concepts produced within that location (Suderburg, 2000).

Furthermore, installation art involves incorporating the site or display area into the artwork, making the site an integral part of the piece that cannot be altered (Hofman and Frock, 2015). Even a small change in a component can make a big difference, and some elements are essential to the work, and without them, the entire piece loses its meaning (Suderburg, 2000). Thus, a change in location alters the relationship between the object, context, and viewer (Hofman and Frock, 2015).

To create an engaging installation artwork, it is important to consider the audience and how the work will interact with them. Unlike traditional works of art that are often viewed

passively, installation art requires active engagement from the audience and aims to make research more accessible to diverse audiences beyond academia (Cole and McIntyre, 2008). This can be achieved by engaging multiple senses, going beyond the visual to include touch, sound, and scent, whilst encouraging the audience to view the artwork from different angles. This can usefully be linked to the Visual elements.

Furthermore, contrasting demographics of people may perceive the same artwork differently, depending on their backgrounds and experiences. When thinking about my design my practice project, at this stage I am carefully considering making the project be more accessible to wider audiences. According to Currie (1991), our ability to perceive spatial and temporal relationships between ourselves and the objects we observe, is based on our body or eye position, which allows us to understand the present moment. In other words, our perspective of information is usually informed by our physical position in space and time.

While installation art offers many benefits, it also presents unique challenges related to conservation, preservation, and longevity. Installations could experience wear and tear from active use, which could give conservation challenges. Some installations have moving parts or involve interaction with visitors, which can shorten their physical lifespan. To ensure their longevity and preservation, it might be important to consider the impact of storage on the artwork's impact over time (Wharton and Molotch, 2010). Reflecting on this, I will need to pay attention when designing a practice specifically in this genre.

## Conclusion

In my proposal I have discussed misogyny, which refers to the hatred, dislike, or prejudice against women. I examined the definition of misogyny and explored how it is ingrained in society and perpetuated through various means, as well as the historical and contemporary societal constructs that contribute to it. Additionally, I highlighted the negative impact misogyny has on women. To illustrate this, I used Chauvet's installation in, Mexico, which depicts the cultural and societal context of gender-based violence. Juárez used red colour and visual representation in feminist art, and the impact of the installation on raising awareness of gender-based violence.

Furthermore, I have examined the relationship between men and women within the visual context, particularly focusing on the objectification of women in art and media. I focused on Berger's *Ways of Seeing* highlights how women are often portrayed as objects of visual pleasure by men, perpetuating harmful beauty standards and the objectification of women. Mulvey's "male gaze" describes how women are portrayed as passive objects of male desire in visual media, leading to a skewed perception of themselves. I have also explored installation art as a possible way to present my practice in the next year, which involves arranging objects within a space to create an artwork that responds to the unique features of a specific location.

Based on a synthesis of research areas around the key words: **misogyny, visual, and installation art**, it is evident that Installation art can produce immersive experiences, that inspire thought and conversation by incorporating site-specific elements, and involving the audience's senses on a variety of levels. This process has generated some questions. For instance, how can installation art be used to create awareness about misogyny, and what

visual and conceptual elements can be used to convey this message effectively? It also leads to my final proposal question: **How can misogyny be represented visually by installation art?**

Therefore, for a possible practice, it can be an installation artwork to confront misogyny using various materials and interactive elements. Create an immersive experience using sound and lighting to convey the emotional impact of misogyny. Use the site-specific nature of installation art to represent how misogyny operates in society.

This research brings up a potential area of study for the following year, which might be an investigation into how installation art might be used to raise awareness of misogyny. This could entail researching the historical and modern context of misogyny to inform the conceptual aspects of the installation, looking at how visual elements are used to convey messages related to misogyny, and studying various installation art forms.

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