

We are not “The Stepford Wives”

I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

I wanted to show the common prejudices and role models that are assigned to women in society and with which I was always confronted and to portray the misunderstandings of everyday life. (Jurgenssen, 2010, pp 196-213)

Birgit Jurgenssen's quote has been source of inspiration to curate an exhibition based on "Feminism is the belief that everyone, regardless of gender, should have equal rights and opportunities" (UNWOMEN, 2026). Whereas, domesticity is defined as "life at home taking care of your house and family" (Cambridge dictionary, N.D).

The title of this exhibition is in reference to Ira Levin's book *the Stepford Wives*(1972). This book explores the themes of gendered roles and conformity that fits with the theme of this exhibition. The use of the words 'we are not' battles the satirical roles that the book suggests.

This exhibition based on the theme of feminism and domesticity will be housed at the Glynn Vivian art Gallery, Swansea. The works of the artists that will be featured have similarities in their practice. It will showcase the artworks of Carrie Mae Weems; Mona Hatoum; Martha Rosler; Laurie Simmons; Judy Chicago and Birgit Jürgenssen. The artists to be featured, challenge the original idea of the 'typical' housewife within the domestic setting. Within this exhibition, artists like Weems and Rosler are known for their well known works that present women in the kitchen setting, as well as artists like Hatoum, Simmons, Chicago and Jürgenssen. These artists express the themes of domesticity in different ways and mediums. The curation of the works will present the way the theme comes together. These artists have common threads of the house, the home and feminism running through their work. Their work will showcase the different ways that women are portrayed in the home setting, and the way they are portrayed in doing tasks that challenge the female role in the domestic space.



Fig 1.



Fig 2.

The work *The Kitchen Table Series* (1989-1990) by Weems, seen in figures 1&2 portrays the domestic setting that showcases the kitchen table in a domestic space and often considered as a female space. In figure 1 it depicts Weems putting on make-up with a little girl next to her imitating her actions, this produces a playful scene between mother and daughter. While in figure 2 she is standing behind a man almost waiting to serve him while he reads a newspaper, there are 2 cups on the table but one person sat at the table. (Aslan. 2020) (Weems. n.d)



Fig 3.

The works of Hatoum is the second artist to be featured. She mainly creates sculptural/installation pieces. The *Grater Divide* (2002), seen in figure 3, is a room screen in the form of a cheese grater. Even though it is relatively harmless, it looks threatening. This work fits the theme of the exhibition as it is in the form of a kitchen utensil, synonymous with the domestic space. (Tate, n.d)



Fig 4

Rosler's *semiotics of the kitchen* (1975) see figure 4 , will also be featured. This performative piece is a video where she recites letters of the alphabet and picks up a kitchen utensil that starts with the letter. As the video continues, her voice becomes louder and her actions become more aggressive. This piece fits the theme of this exhibition as a woman in the kitchen setting is seen, however, it challenges the stereotype that women belonged in the kitchen at the time that this was produced, as it was typical of women to be at home doing the house work. (Everything has its first time, 2017)



Fig 5

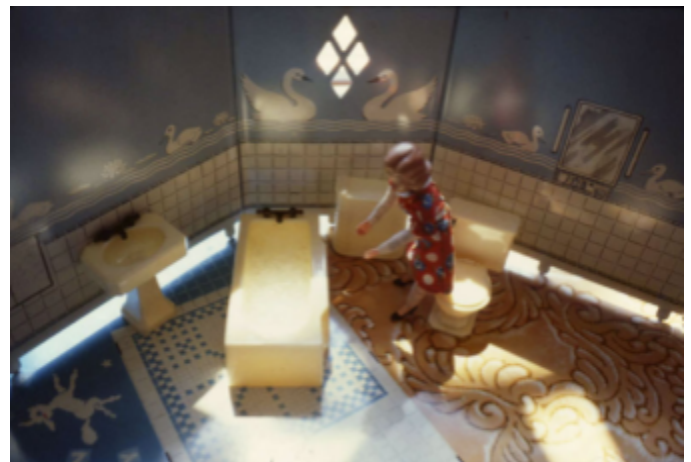


Fig 6



Fig 7.

Simmons will also be featured with her works as seen in figures 5,6,7 titled *Woman Opening Refrigerator/ Milk to the Right, New Bathroom/ Aerial View/ Sunlight* and *Pushing Lipstick (Red Lipstick Vertical)* (1978-1979). These are only a few of the images in this series. The full series will be used. This series of work is meant to portray the classic housewife. According to the Women's Collective Gallery (2010), the pieces "not only illustrate the expected duties of a housewife, but also the sense of loneliness and isolation felt by many women in that situation." Simmons further states that "The doll serves to bridge the gap of childhood toy to adult role model, as many of the girls who play with that doll will grow up to be that doll." (The Women's Collective Gallery, 2010)



Fig 8

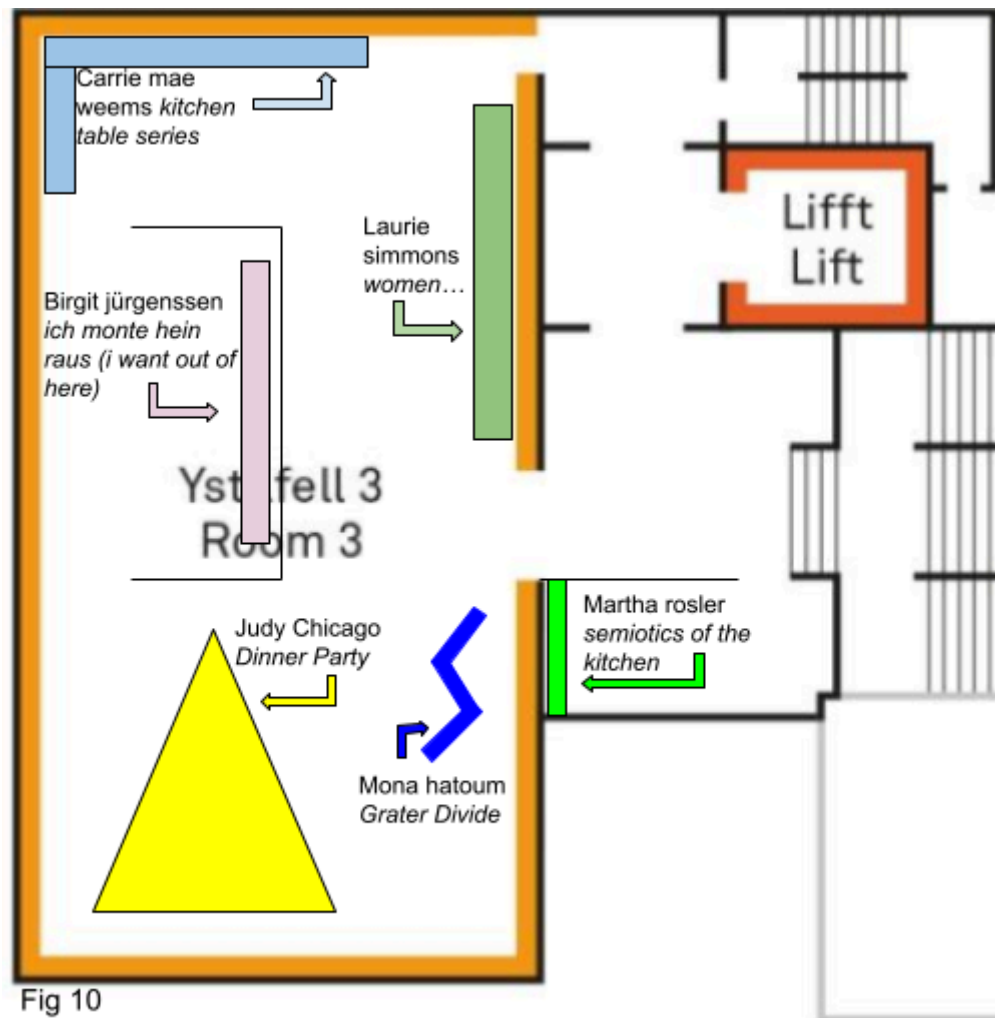
Figure 8 depicts Judy Chicago's installation of *the dinner party* (1974-1979). This table setting is for 39 people with names of 999 more women sprawled out on the heritage floor around it. A U.S. congressman at the Brooklyn Museum (n.d) stated "Once derided as "3-D ceramic pornography" by " *The Dinner Party's* symbolic layers reward close looking." *The dinner party* is arranged in the shape of an open triangle, which is a symbol of equality. The first wing of the table begins in prehistory with the Primordial Goddess and ends with the Roman Empire, which marks the decline in women's power. The 2nd wing represents early Christianity through the Reformation, depicting women who signify early expressions of the fight for equal rights, from Marcella to Anna Van Schurman. The final wing begins with Anne Hutchinson and addresses the movements of the American revolution, the Suffragettes, and women's increased individual creative expression symbolised at the end by Georgia O'Keeffe. (Brooklyn Museum, n.d)



Fig 9

The final artist that will be included in the exhibition is Jürgenssen. The piece *ich mochte hien raus (I want out of here)* (1976), as seen in figure 9 will be featured. In this piece she is seen pushing against a glass panel and just under her head is the title of the artwork written on the glass. This is interesting, as the writing is the right way around, which creates the illusion that she is sending an urgent message to the viewer. This piece in its all is conveying the message of entrapment (Schor, 2010).

This exhibition will take place in the Glynn Vivian Gallery, Swansea, as it was originally founded by a male donor and was a male lead gallery. However, as time progresses, the relationship and roles that the glynn Vivian have built with women can be seen.



As seen in figure 10, see the curation of the works for the forthcoming exhibition. Following O'Docherty's (1999) principles within his book *inside the white cube: the ideology of the gallery space*, he states that over the course of art history with it developing into modern art the viewers see the space before they see the art. He also suggests that the "space was clarified not only in the picture, but in the place where it hangs" (O'Docherty, 1999 p39), the final thing that he says is "the eye is the only inhabitant of the sanitised installation shot. The spectator is not present" (O'Docherty, 1999 p42).

Following these statements, the exhibition begins with Rosler's work of *semiotics of the kitchen* (1975) in the video area of the gallery, upstairs on level 1, before entering room 3. This will be shown in this room which will be painted black to accentuate the video playing on the opposite wall from where the viewer is. On entering room 3, and turning to the right, Simmons' works will be curated (figure 5,6,7) on a soft blue wall. On the adjoining wall, Weems' *kitchen table series* (1989-1990) will be displayed, which consist of 20 evenly spaced photographs. From this series these images will be displayed at eye level to create a level of intimacy with the viewer.

To follow, Jurgenssens *ich mochte hien raus (I want out of here)* (1976) will be a stand alone piece with a soft grey backdrop. The next piece to be viewed is Chicago's *dinner party* (1974-1979) the great triangle table is almost the centre piece of the exhibition with the wall painted in a dark grey that spans over Hatoum's *greater divide* (2002). This is the final piece of the exhibition that brings the theme together.

In conclusion, this exhibition demonstrates the frustration of women in being seen as domestic 'objects' and the way that they should behave in a domestic setting. Chicago's *Dinner Party* (1978-79) piece, women's names are stitched into the fabric of the table cloth to celebrate women's achievements. The title given is appropriate to the theme because the book, *The Stepford Wives* (1972) which is originally satirical, goes with what all of these artists are trying to communicate about roles of women and how they are portrayed in society, and in reality are equally important to the workings of the world. With some artworks exhibited not deliberately fighting back at the stereotype, though others show exactly that, like the way that Weems' series quietly challenges the perfect house, with her subtle, yet nonconfrontational images in contrast to Jurgenssens works where she is pushing against the glass, as if to escape, while dressed like a classic housewife.

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