

Feminism Through the Lense of Art

Feminism Through the Lense of Art is an exhibition showing what feminism truly is/means to the art world, it looks directly at how the art movement and the feminist movement go hand in hand. Without the feminist movement we can only imagine how our world would look; we do have some insight while looking at what women go through in Afghanistan while being under the leadership of the Taliban. The feminist movement has had an unbelievable impact on society. To get to the position we are in now, many women lost their lives fighting for equal rights. Some artists I have investigated are Florestine Perrault Collins, Hengameh Golestan, Adriana Lestido, Helen Chadwick. The images I have chosen mainly to portray the fight women had to go through and some images highlight particularly the struggle of black women and their fight. The images chosen for this exhibition also look into the fight behind the images and the stories of the artists themselves. I chose to only have one image in colour.

Throughout history, women have been seen as nothing more than a housewife and a mother, specifically by men. Women have had to fight for basic rights like equal pay; this fight is still happening to this day. The right to access health care when needed - a right that was recently taken from women in America with the overturning of Roe vs Wade “declaring that the constitutional right to abortion, upheld for nearly half a century, no longer exists.” (Totenberg N, McCammon S, 2022) – is also an ongoing fight today. Women all over the world are facing constant challenge and hardship. Even though the fight has gone on for so long, women everywhere are still fighting. With this exhibition the hope is to show what women have had to go through and how the art world has helped the feminist movement. Feminism is universal in the same way as the art industry, and it is an important movement as it’s everyone fighting for equal rights. As stated earlier “three hundred men and women rallied to the cause” (Rampton, 2019). Feminism has always been a fight for nothing more than equal rights and fair opportunities. This has been a universal fight fought by so many different people. Thanks to the feminist movement and protests women have been able to achieve the unthinkable. However, as Chambers observed, “A focus on women’s studies also risks sidelining issues concerning men and masculinity, which feminists need to engage with since it is not only women who are constructed and affected by patriarchy” (Chambers, 2024)

The feminist movement has challenged those views on women and shown the world what women can do and that what they say matters. It also gets rid of stereotypes and shows that women are people not objects that can be obtained or controlled - “It expresses the perspective of women as women.” (Chambers, 2024). The fight women have faced for, at one-point, basic rights has gone on since 1848. “The wave formally began at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 when three hundred men and women

rallied to the cause of equality for women”. (Rampton, 2019). Art and feminism have gone hand in hand throughout history, despite the fact that the art industry used to be an industry that consisted of mainly men. Using “art that seeks to challenge the dominance of men in both art and society” (MoMa, 2022), feminism has pushed and touched many female artists and pushed them to fight for the right to be able to create art and to be seen as an artist.

This alone stands on the idea of feminism because, until recently, women haven't had the opportunity in society to be seen as an artist. This is why the feminist movement has affected the art scene and vice versa - “feminist artists sought to rewrite a falsely male-dominated art history, change the contemporary world around them through their art” (The Art Story, 2017). For this exhibition, most of the artworks chosen are from movements and are in black and white. Only one image is in colour this was done deliberately to highlight the stereotype of women and to highlight the ongoing issue women face today.

I chose the artists because the work really stuck out to me when researching as I wanted to focus specifically on photography. A lot of the images are images from history. I used these images as I felt this connected to using art to document and spread the word around the issue of feminism.



Florestine Perrault Collins was born in 1895. Her family were people of colour that could live freely. Unfortunately, she had to leave school early to help her family. Collins found a job in photography but had to strip her identity as a woman of colour to be taken

seriously and to be able to further her education in photography. Cinelli noted that “In order for her to learn more about photography, she had to lie about her race” (2017). This is an issue many women of colour, especially artists, still fight to this day. However, once she had finished learning everything, she needed from white photographers she got married and opened her own studio. Only after this did she reveal that she was a black woman. This is a stereotype unfortunately many women of colour have to deal with in this day and age. I wanted to add this portrait in the exhibition as I wanted to show her gender and skin colour had nothing to do with the work she created while she was alive. I wanted to add this image to prove women and art go hand in hand and the skill set of women is just as advanced as men’s, even though women’s opportunities are more limited. This image captures that aspect amazingly.



Women protesting against compulsory use of the hijab in Tehran in 1979, by Hengameh Golestan.

Hengameh Golestan is an inspirational woman. Hengameh was one of the small groups of photographers who photographed the storm of the capital in Iran during the revolution. The events that unfolded in Iran since this time have been devastating for all Iranian women. Since these images were taken, Hengameh was denied the right to fight in the Iran- Iraq war so she spent her time in the more rural areas. The image was chosen due to the strength shown in the image. This image shows how you can tear women down from the top and they will still stand strong. In terms of the art scene this was a very important part of history as, if it hadn't been documented, we may not have known about it today. This image also strikes fear into women as it shows how easily your rights can be taken away from you in the same way that is happening in America currently.



Helen Chadwick *In the Kitchen (Stove)* 1977 (detail) One of a set of 12 archival pigment prints - framed Courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome © Estate of Helen Chadwick

The next image I chose is from the artist Helen Chadwick; I chose this image as it captures the power of feminist art. In the image you can see Chadwick become part of the display itself. She almost embodies the oven as if it's part of her identity, as if this is all she could achieve "Dressed in costumes that represented 'gendered' kitchen appliances" (Richard Saltoun, 2020) This is a perfect example of the movement art and feminism can create when they are together. The art world is an incredible resource when trying to portray a message. Chadwick used this to her advantage with this piece which is why I wanted to show it as the only artwork in colour to highlight her through this element.



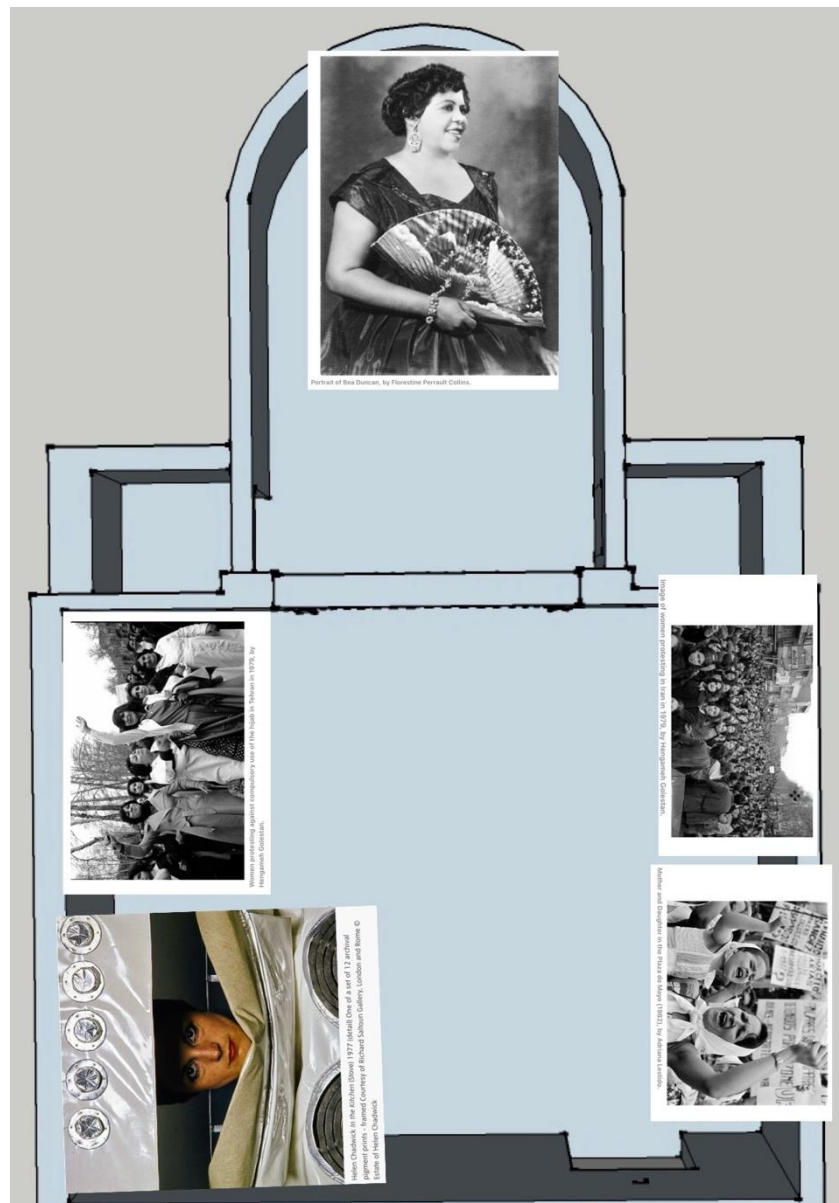
Mother and Daughter in the Plaza de Mayo (1982), by Adriana Lestido.

Adriana Lestidos' work is incredible. The composition of her images are really what give them the element of feeling and make the viewer sympathise with the two women in the image. This image was chosen as it highlights the incredible fight of women around the world. Lestidos showing two generations of women fighting for the same cause really shows once again the way the art world and feminism go hand in hand. The visual representation shows that feminism is not just for those who are seen as strong and powerful; it empowers other people to stand up for what they believe. This is what Adriana's work captured, whereas if there was no document of these issues people would never feel the fight or want to join it.



Image of women protesting in Iran in 1979, by Hengameh Golestan.

For the final image I wanted to revisit Golestan's images of the women in Iran. Due to the events that have gone on in Iran, it is a place the world should learn from. Their women are suppressed every day. Due to their government, places like America and the UK are now following the same path by banning access to abortion or making it harder to access. In the image you can see the despair on the women's faces. This artwork shows how many people are against what's going on in their country but the laws they disagree with still came through. This is why it's important to have art alongside movements like feminism because you can capture the raw emotion and feeling during these shoots that can move someone to create a difference.



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