Student Name: Cara Edwards

Student Number: 2004414

Course: Graphic Design

Module: Research In Practise

Word Count:

Lecture: Donna Williams

Dissertation Proposal

In this essay I am going to include a short context to discuss my three key words. I will support this with at least three key images by three visual artists and thinkers. This research will attempt to link the three words of Humour, Feminism, Graphic Design to form a question for my independent research. These will relate to visual artists including Guerrilla Girls (Humour), Judy Chicago (Feminism) and Under the Skin (Graphic Design). It will also be supported by the thinkers/philosophers Simone de Beauvoir (Feminism) and Dieter Ram (Design).

Key Word 1: Humour

In both activism and campaigns, humour can play an essential role. It can be a non-violent method of engaging audiences imagination and emotions. Humour can help people develop their sense of self and their community. It can also be a method of promoting awareness to other issues such as Feminism.

Different types of humour can be used in art, some can be controversial, it is a method that help bring awareness to important issues and help start discussion. (Arts Columbia, 2022) However used impropriety or unsensitively it may offend your audience, or be misinterpreted unfavourably thus risking alienating your audience, or having your campaign banned.

The Guerrilla Girls are committed to highlighting injustices in gender inequality and racism. The group formed in 1984 and were particularly effective in the tactics they employed to draw attention to causes they were committed to. Their causes were similar to those of second wave feminists, but they used alternative protest methods like educational performance art to send out their messages. Through their use of art and activism these

powerful female artists were able to broaden people's understanding of sexism and inequality for women. They were mainly active in New York. The group members' identities were kept secret through the use of gorilla masks when they were out in public and the use of false names e.g. names of dead female figures like artist Frido Kahlo.

The catalyst for forming the group was

> a response to the International Survey of Painting and Sculpture held in 1984 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The exhibition included the work of 169 artists, less than 10% of whom were women. (Tate, 1989)

Although women were involved in the 1970s experimental art scene, when it came to getting gallery exhibition space, females lost out to white male artists. In response, a group of activists known as the Guerrilla Girls creating a poster campaign. They targeted museums, and critics, who in their opinion were to blame for side-lining the work of women and also people of colour. They saw themselves as "the conscience of the art world". (Tate, 1989)

Fig 1: *Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into the Met. Museum?*

This poster is one of 30 in the “Gorilla Girls Talk Back” series. It is based on La Grande Odalisque 1814 by Ingrez. They chose the image because 85% of nudes in paintings are women, but less than 5% of paintings in galleries are by women.

The Guerrilla Girls appropriated the visual language of advertising, specifically fly-posting, to convey their messages in a quick and accessible manner e.g. they rented advertising space on New York City buses. They employed this tactic to make a statement and draw the audiences in and make people discuss their message.

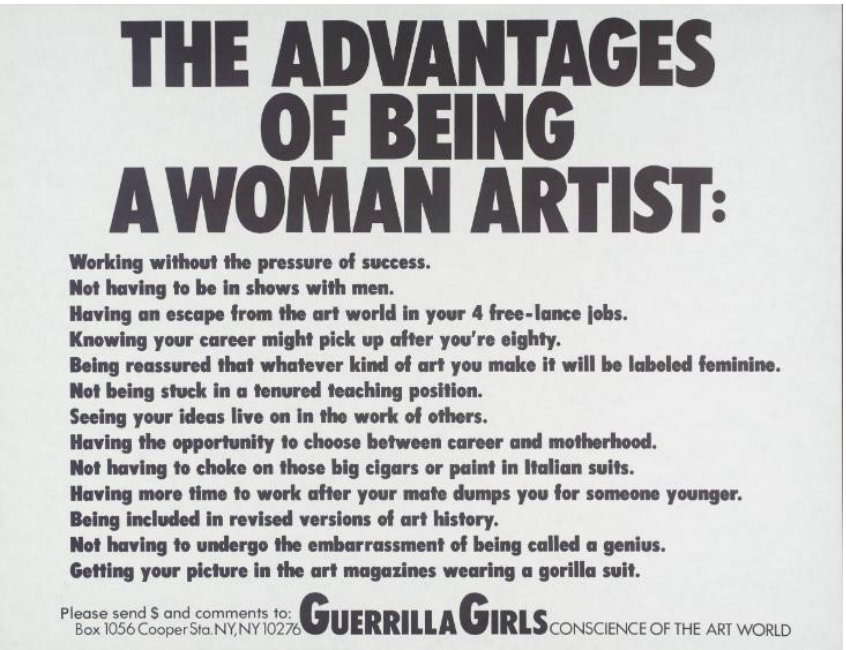

Fig. 2: *The Advantages Of Being A Woman Artist*

“The advantages of being a woman artist” is another one of the Guerrilla Girls' poster portfolio “Gorilla Girls Talk Back” and demonstrates their strategy of using humour to defuse and break down discrimination and prejudice within the art world. The tone used is ‘tongue-in-cheek” as they list the "advantages" that still faced women artists in the late 1980s.

Thirteen is considered an unlucky number, so choosing to list thirteen problems facing women is symbolic. They have used satire to highlight the fact that the contribution of women has not been acknowledged in history and they have had less opportunity. The title is large, bold and sarcastic to draw attention in an otherwise simply designed poster. The sarcastic approach is continued in the list of so called “advantages”. For example, the second statement “not having to be in shows with men” is a dig about women not being invited to exhibit their work. The fourth statement “knowing your career might pick up after you’re eighty” refers to women finding it hard to succeed as artists, or if they are successful its usually towards the end of their careers. The last advantage of being a woman “getting your picture in the art magazines wearing a gorilla suit” is a direct reference to the Guerrilla Girls and the fact that they had to dress up as gorillas to draw attention to the unfairness that women artists face. This is particularly ironic because in the art world, they got more recognition as ‘gorillas’ than as women. (Tate, 1989)

Guerrilla Girl, (pseudonym) Lee Krasner stated,

> The world of High Art, the kind that gets into museums and history books, is run by a very small group of people. Our posters have proved over and over again that these people, no matter how smart or good-intentioned, have been biased against women and artists of colour. (The Art Story, 2022)

This poster reflects on the bias, which was prevalent in 1989, even though feminists had been active for almost two decades. The Guerrilla Girls are still making posters which appear

globally. The fact that they need to continue this work shows that the world has not yet become fair and equal.

Contemporary Art allowed women to have the space and opportunity to try and put a spotlight on the feminist issues which were not spoken about or that were important to them for the first time. Artists wanted to create a dialogue between the artwork and its viewer which included a female perspective. They tried to show that Art was not just something pretty to look at but should be something which provoked thought and invited questions about such issues as politics and social justice. By giving the viewer something to think about, they hoped to help change opinion and help bring about the changes that were important to female artists. Referencing feminism in work has undoubtedly challenged viewers and highlighted inequality in different ways in the period from the 1960s. Yet work remains to be done.

Key Word 2: Feminism

"Feminism is a quest for the liberation of women from patriarchy: it comes from a history of collective activism". (Bindel, 2021) Feminism can be also be used alongside activism. It is seen as a movement to end oppression and ensure equality of opportunity for all genders in all aspects of life.

Historically women artists has been overlooked and underrepresented in many areas of art and design. Feminism has ability to inspire new and exciting artists and then in turn they can inspire others to consider feminist ideals.

Whilst researching the subject of feminism, including the philosopher/activist Simone de Beauvoir ‘s work and founder Mary Wollstonecraft’s book, I found out that they have both contributed a lot on awareness of women’s rights across world, using feminist principles to educate and strive for social equality. They may have inspired other artists such as Judy Chicago.

Judy Chicago wanted to consider whether the works of female artists contained an innate femininity which bonded them as artists and was uniquely different from male artists i.e. had an essentialist nature.

Fig. 3: *The Dinner Party*

Helena Reckitt suggests that for Judy Chicago “the notion of a central connection between women was the motivation for feminist art.” (Reckit, H. and Phelan. P, 2001, p. 37*).* Women collaborating was seen as a powerful force at the core of the feminist art movement.

In Chicago’s collaborative work ‘The Dinner Party’ (1979) that was created over 4 years she pays homage to women in history in an attempt to celebrate the contribution they made to

Western culture and what they achieved. A plate which has symbols representing individual lives and eras commemorates each woman. Every place also makes reference to the female body and symbolises women's sexuality, growth and freedom.

In Chicago's own words she says

> the point of the vaginal reference in The Dinner Party was to say that these women are not known because they have vaginas; that is all they had in common actually. They were from different periods, classes, ethnicities, geographies, experiences, but what kept them within the same confined historical space was the fact they had vaginas (Broude, Garrard, and Brodsky, 1994, p.71)

Some see her work as the reclamation of the female anatomy and as a marked contrast to the phallus in visual culture. Chicago sought to re-write the history books. She designed a triangular table for the thirty-nine place settings, complete with an individually designed place mat and plate. Inside the table, was a the Heritage Floor, where
nine hundred and nicety-nine names are inscribed in gold on porcelain tiles in her attempt to acknowledge the achievements of history's forgotten women.

Chicago's piece was one of the most popular feminist installations of all time but was not universally accepted. Some saw it as "Chicago reinforcing a heterosexist and racist view of history (out of 39 women depicted in The Dinner Party, all but one was white)" (Stange, Oyster and Sloan, 2011, p. 399) and according to Helena Reckitt "... set off a backlash against 'essentialist' art" (Reckit and Phelan, 2001, p. 37) within feminist art theory. This

controversial and unique piece of work was considered shocking at this time within the art world.

Key Word 3: Design

According to Diter Ramm's the principles of what is good design must include are: aesthetic, honest, innovative, unobtrusive, involves little design as possible, makes a product useful/understandable, through down to last detail long lasting and environmentally friendly (Rams, 2002).

Under skin are great example of engaging many of these aspects of design. They have used their design skills and come up with creative idea of prints to tackle the problem of animal extinction.

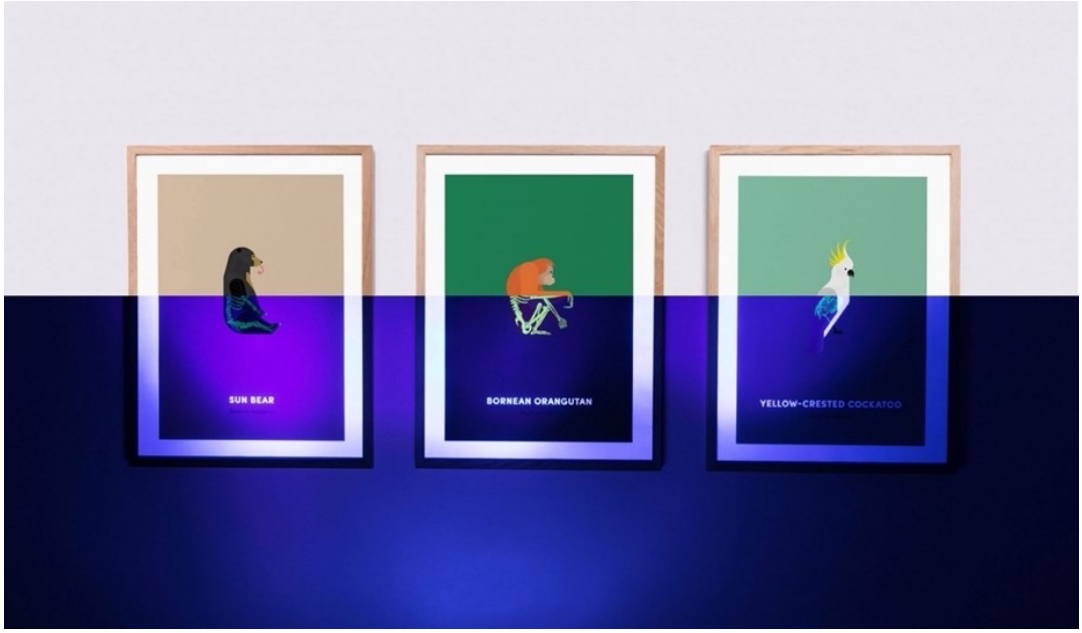

Fig 4: *Under the Skin of Endangered Animals*

The prints are from series of Under the Skin of Endangered Animals that was created by a design company called Under The Skin which was founded by two brothers called Ed and James Harrison in 2015. (Under the Skin, 2022) They wanted to find a contemporary way to bring attention to the threat of extinction. They also wanted to highlight the amazing biodiversity of the animal world.

The brothers use creative interactive screen prints to achieve their aims and to support the animal conservation work in partnership with charities. The use of phosphorescent ink in their visual communication is a powerful way to emphasize the animal's plight.

Protecting the endangered species featured in their work and decreasing loss of habitat is important to them. Their mission therefore is to raise both awareness and funds to help in this field. They themselves donate twenty percent of their print sales to their chosen animal conservation charities. They also like to be clear with their customers what on they are contributing towards. James Harrison explains: "We're giving the customer as much information as possible on the species they are protecting and where that money is going because we feel transparency is really important," (Risher, 2020).

The brothers are very environmentally aware. They produce their bold limited edition prints on a carbon neutral paper called Fedrigioni. Each print purchased also comes with information for the customer telling them how the work was produced, which charity is being supported and facts about the species featured as well as a UV torch to allow them to see the X Ray like effect of the phosphorescent ink used. Perhaps they have used this to show corelation between viewer process and that of the animal involved.

Under the Skin’s illustrations try to capture the spirit of the animal in a simple minimalistic style. They aim to draw in the viewer with seemingly playful images whilst still showing the dark underlining message (Funded by Fun, 2020). This reminds the viewer that if we do not address the issues of these endangered animals soon, the only way we will see them is as skeletons in a museum, like dinosaurs.

The company has exhibited its work worldwide in all kinds of venues ranging from small community spaces to renowned capital museums such as the Natural History Museum. Laura Ashby, Events Manger from Natural History Museum says, "The impact of their striking interactive artwork, along with Ed and James’ enthusiasm, helped museum visitors of all ages to engage with the threat of extinction to species across the planet." (Harrison, 2022)

The uncertain future of animal species globally is a continually growing threat. More than 50% of the earth’s land animal species have disappeared in just 40 years. (The Guardian, 2014). The loss of species and habitats has a knock-on effect on insects, birds, animals and plants. The loss of forest habitats for example affects not only the animals but the planet too, as carbon is not absorbed and is released into the atmosphere.

They employed clever design to make an interactive and engaging artwork for the audience. The design may encourage people to learn more about their environment and the consequences of not acting.

Conclusion

Upon researching and deconstructing the three key words in this dissertation proposal, this has opened many questions and sub-genre words in connection to the proposed question. It questions about how today's society is currently receiving information and the sheer quantity we are exposed to on a daily basis. This raises further questions regarding how design can impact positively and lead people to embrace new ideas and campaigns. Is humour an effective tool in design, or do we need more interactive and immersive design such as guerrilla marketing advertisements or installations art like Olafur Eliasson's Ice watch (2018)? Analysing past and current campaigns to see how different components and techniques can be used to achieve a successful outcome. Looking at specifics, such as: size, colour, shape, space, typography, visual media and language. Each have strengths and weakness that can be used effectively when applying them to a visual design.

The informal question I have come up with for my dissertation is: - 'How can components of graphic design impact and educate society?' It may act as a starting point for my independent research and the history of graphic design movements. There are numerous sub-questions generated from this proposal that can be explored more in depth such as 'What is the power of graphic design?', 'What are the most effective graphic design components?', 'Can graphic design have a positive effect on society?'

Bibliography

Books

Beauvoir, S. de, (1949) The second sex. London: Vintage Classic.

Bindel, J. (2021) Feminism for women: The real route to liberation. Great Britain: Constable.

Broude, N., Garrard, M. D. and Brodsky, J. K. (1994) The power of feminist art: the American movement of the 1970s, history and impact. New York: Harry N. Abrams.

Chadwick, W. (1995) Confessions of the Guerrilla Girls. London: Pandora.

Chadwick, W. (1990) Women, art and society. London: Thames and Hudson.

Jones, A. (2010) The feminism and visual culture reader. London: Routledge.

Reckit, H. and Phelan, P. (2001) Art and feminism. London; New York, NY: Phaidon.

Stange, M. Z., Oyster, C.K. and Sloan, J.E. (2011) Encyclopedia of Women in Today's World, Volume 1. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Wollstonecraft, M. (2015) Vindications of the rights of women. London: Vintage

Sim.

<u>Websites</u>

Arts Columbia. (2022) *Humour in activism*. Available at: https://artscolumbia.org/humor-in-activism-172504/ (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

Funded by Fun (2020) *Creativity with a cause.* [Podcast] *Available at:* https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/006-creativity-with-a-cause-ed-harrison-under-the-skin/id1506416929?i=1000492493830 (Accessed: 5 April 2022).

Harrison, E. (2022) *Under the skin.* Available at: https://edharrison.co.uk/work/under-the-skin (Accessed: 4 April 2022).

Rams, D. (2002) Ten Principles of good design. Available at: https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/gooddesign#:~:text=Good%20design%20is%20a%20concept,as%20little%20desi (Accessed: 3 April 2022).

Risher, S. (2020) *These Screen Prints Beautifully Embody the Plight of Endangered Animals.* Available at: https://musebycl.io/environment/these-screen-prints-beautifully-embody-plight-endangered-animals (Accessed: 4 April 2022).

Tate (1989) *Do women have to be naked to get into the met. Museum?* Available at: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/guerrilla-girls-do-women-have-to-be-naked-to-get-into-the-met-museum-p78793 (Accessed: 29 March 2022).

The Art Story. (2022) *Artworks and Artists of Feminist Art.* Available at: https://www.theartstory.org/movement/feminist-art/artworks/ (Accessed: 28 March 2022).

The Guardian. (2014) *Earth has lost half of its wildlife in the past 40 years, says WWF.* Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/sep/29/earth-lost-50-wildlife-in-40-years-wwf (Accessed: 5 April 2022).

Wollstonecraft, M.(2015) *Vindications of the rights of women.* London: Vintage

Under Skin. (2022) *Our Story.* Available at: https://undertheskin.co.uk/about/process/ (Accessed: 28 March 2022).

List of illustrations

Figure 1: Guerrilla Girls. (1989) *Do women have to be naked to get into the met. Museum?* [Poster campaign] Available at :https:/www. Guerrillagirls.com/work/ (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

Figure 2: Guerrilla Girls. (1988) *The Advantages Of Being A Woman Artist*.[Screen printed poster] Available at : https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/guerrilla-girls-the-advantages-of-being-a-woman-artist-p78796 (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

Figure 3: Judy Chicago. (1979) The Dinner Party. Available at: https://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/37787/1/that-time-artist-judy-chicago-served-vulvas-for-dinner-the-dinner-party (Accessed: 4 April 2022).

Figure 4: Under the skin. (2019) Under the Skin of Endangered Animals.
Available at https://edharrison.co.uk/work/under-the-skin (Accessed: 5 April 2022).