

Ways of Perceiving,

Imagined display Space for feminist icons of the art
world

Student Name: Mary Bath

Student Number: 1802660

Program of Study: Illustration

Module: ADAD4019

Contextual Practices Tutor's name: Jonathan Pugh

Word count: 1582

Titled 'Femininity', this is an art exhibition I intend to curate; it features five art pieces by five world renowned feminist icons, creating a space where people can discuss and question feminism and stereotypes in art. It explores gender inequality and misogyny within the art world and society. I have chosen five separate art pieces highlighting different aspects of feminism and women's life within a patriarchal society.

Art is a male dominated profession, '87% of artists in major U.S museums are men' resulting in women artists to be foreshadowed (chad.m.t, et al 2019). This exhibition will showcase female artists who defy and question social norms, stereotypes and beauty standards that one would not normally associate with art museums.

The exhibition would be held in a ten by nine-meter pop up building outside major art museums, more specifically the Met Museum. The purpose of this exhibition is to educate art spectators about inequality in the art world, thus providing new insights before entering these art museums. Where women's rights are under constant threat, and with the recent events and protests, I want to see an exhibition that celebrates women but also highlights some contemporary societal problems.



Fig 1. Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into the Met. Museum?, Guerrilla Girls, 1989

First to be displayed in the exhibition is the piece 'Do women have to be naked to get into the met.museum?' by the Guerrilla Girls (Tate, 2021). This provocative piece will be

displayed through a glass window at the public entrance. This piece is directed at the Metropolitan Museum, addressing the sexism and sexualisation of women in the art world. This is a very powerful statement to have directly outside the museum itself.

Based on the 1984 'International Survey of Painting and Sculpture' conducted by the 'museum of modern art,' in New York, the piece highlights the fact that "less than 5% of the artists in the modern art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female" (Manchester, 2005). Since then, the poster has been recreated twice to keep the information relevant, which shows the percentage on the poster decreases to 3% in 2005 and 4% 2012. The print features a naked woman sporting the gorilla mask, the same one that members of the guerrilla girls use to hide their identity. Based on the painting 'La Grande Odalisque 1814' by artist 'Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' (Tate, 2021). The piece was originally commissioned as a billboard, by the 'Public Art Fund of New York city,' but was then rejected, in retaliation they used the print for New York public busses, since then it has been seen on books, museums, streets and newspapers (National Gallery of Art, 2021). The anonymous group 'Guerrilla girls' have a history of pointing out inequalities of women and people of colour in the art industry and have made many appearances in protests and marches (Leng, 2020). Using a mixture of humour and irony, they have showcased a form of feminist activism that gathered attention and highlighted the absurdity of the inequality and discrimination (Leng, 2020). I would have the exhibit positioned from the floor up, with the dimensions of five by two meters to create a statement, taller than the spectator's, and viewed through the full-length windows.



Fig 2. Untitled film stills 1977-1980, Cindy Sherman



Fig 3. Untitled Film Still #12, Cindy Sherman. 1978



Fig 4. Untitled Film Still #84, Cindy Sherman 1978

The second piece added to the exhibition is 'Cindy Sherman's Untitled Film Stills 1977-1980,' a collection of 69 black and white stills of imaginary B movies, imitating cinematic camera angles (MoMA Learning , 2021). Each still consists of Cindy disguised as a range of characters, often portrayed as patriarchal representations of women. The cliché stereotypes of a damsel in distress, fashion victim, schoolgirl, bombshell, unhappy housewife et cetera (Walle, 2017). Sherman's work encourages the spectator to evaluate their concept of femininity (Kérchy, 2003). Each photo is 8 x 10 inches on a gelatine silver print, I would like to present them using simple black frames similar to fig 2 but including all 69 pieces. Placed at the centre of the left wall, they would form the second piece on display.



Fig 5. Untitled (Your body is a battleground), Barbara Kruger, 1989

The third piece to be added the exhibition is Barbara Kruger's 'untitled (Your body is a battleground)' (Hagen, 2020). This striking piece exhibits a black and white portrait of a Woman from the 1950s overlaid with bold red panels contrasted with the words "Your body is a battleground". A perfectly symmetrical face, society's standard of beauty, sliced in half showing a negative and positive rendition of the image. This photomontage reflects women versus the patriarchal society (Public Delivery, 2021), where feminine stereotypes created by the male gaze, objectifying women, making it difficult for them to be seen as people (Public Delivery, 2021). Originally designed to promote the 'pro-choice' march in 1989, Washington, the image has now become a representation of Kruger's own views on

gender inequality and how today's society view and treat women's bodies (Public Delivery, 2021). By using pronouns like "I", "you", "your", "they" and "we" in her work she forces the spectators to view and reflect on their own opinions on the subject matter (Fullleylove, 2021). This piece tackles personal anatomy and the constant battle for women's rights which remains relevant today and is no less impactful than in the 80's (Hagen, 2020). Standing nine feet high and nine feet wide on photographic silk sheet on vinyl, Kruger's piece would be situated on the wall opposite the entrance.



Fig 6. Some Living American Women Artists, Mary Beth Edelson, 1972.

Directly to the right would be Mary Beth Edelson's piece 'Some Living American Women Artists' (The Museum of Modern Art , 2021). Based on Leonardo da Vinci's 'The Last Super' with over eighty female artists and idols, it includes Agnes Martin, Yoko Ono and Alice Neel collaged over the faces of Jesus and his disciples (The Museum of Modern Art , 2021). Edelson stated she had the "pleasure of presenting the names and faces of many women artists who were seldom seen in 1972...while spoofing the male exclusivity of the patriarchy" (The Museum of Modern Art , 2021). Not only did she tackle a male dominated

religion but also created a room for female artists, she questioned the inequality, recognition and opportunities for women in the art world (The Second Shelf, 2020). The print sized 28 ¼" x 43" would be positioned at eye level, in the centre of the wall without distractions making it the sole attention of the area.



Fig 7, Tree of Hope, Remain Strong, Frida Kahlo, 1946.

The last piece to be added would be Frida Kahlo's 1946 painting 'Tree of hope, Remain strong' (Frida Kahlo, 2021). A self-portrait exhibiting Kahlo's struggle with chronic pain after a serious bus accident which she injured her spine, pelvis and uterus (Woodcock, 2008). Placed in the centre of the painting are two figures, one laying on a gurney covered in a white sheet exposing large surgical cuts, and the other sitting straight dressed in traditional

Tehuana clothing while holding and wearing a back brace (Frida Kahlo, 2021). The second figure seen to be crying holding a flag that translates to “Tree of Hope, Stay firm”. Both representing Frida Kahlo, one portrayed as a victim of a horrific tragedy and the other as a heroic survivor (Frida Kahlo, 2021). Like many of her paintings, Frida deviated from society’s depiction of femininity, showcasing her life struggles including miscarriages, abortion, chronic illness and pain in its rawest form. Frida an icon in the feminist world, known to defy gender stereotypes by posing in men’s clothing in family portraits, exaggerating her more “masculine” features such as her mono-brow and faint moustache in her work, and made no apologies for being openly bisexual (Crehan, 2016). The piece challenges multiple conventions including appearance and society’s beauty standards that differs from the social expected norm in art. With the dimensions of 41 cm x 56 cm the painting will be positioned on the last wall.

The ten by nine-meter building’s exterior will be purple, with green and white abstract lines symbolising the Suffragettes, ‘Women’s Social and Political Union’ who used these colours to represent justice, dignity and hope, and which is now widely used to represent women (International Women's Development Agency, 2021). The interior will consist of white walls, ceiling and floor with a purple line on the floor guiding the spectator through the exhibition. There would also be information posters with the history of each artists and their work.

Front of building

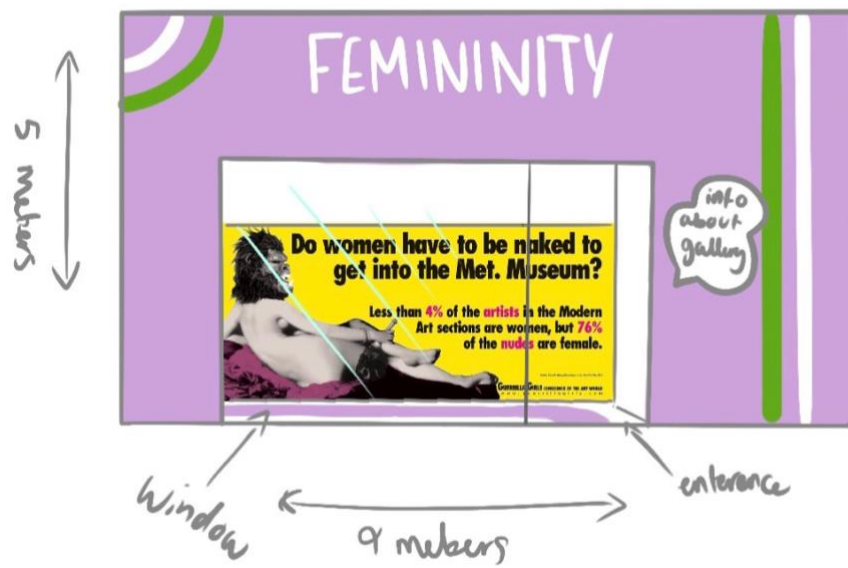


Fig 8

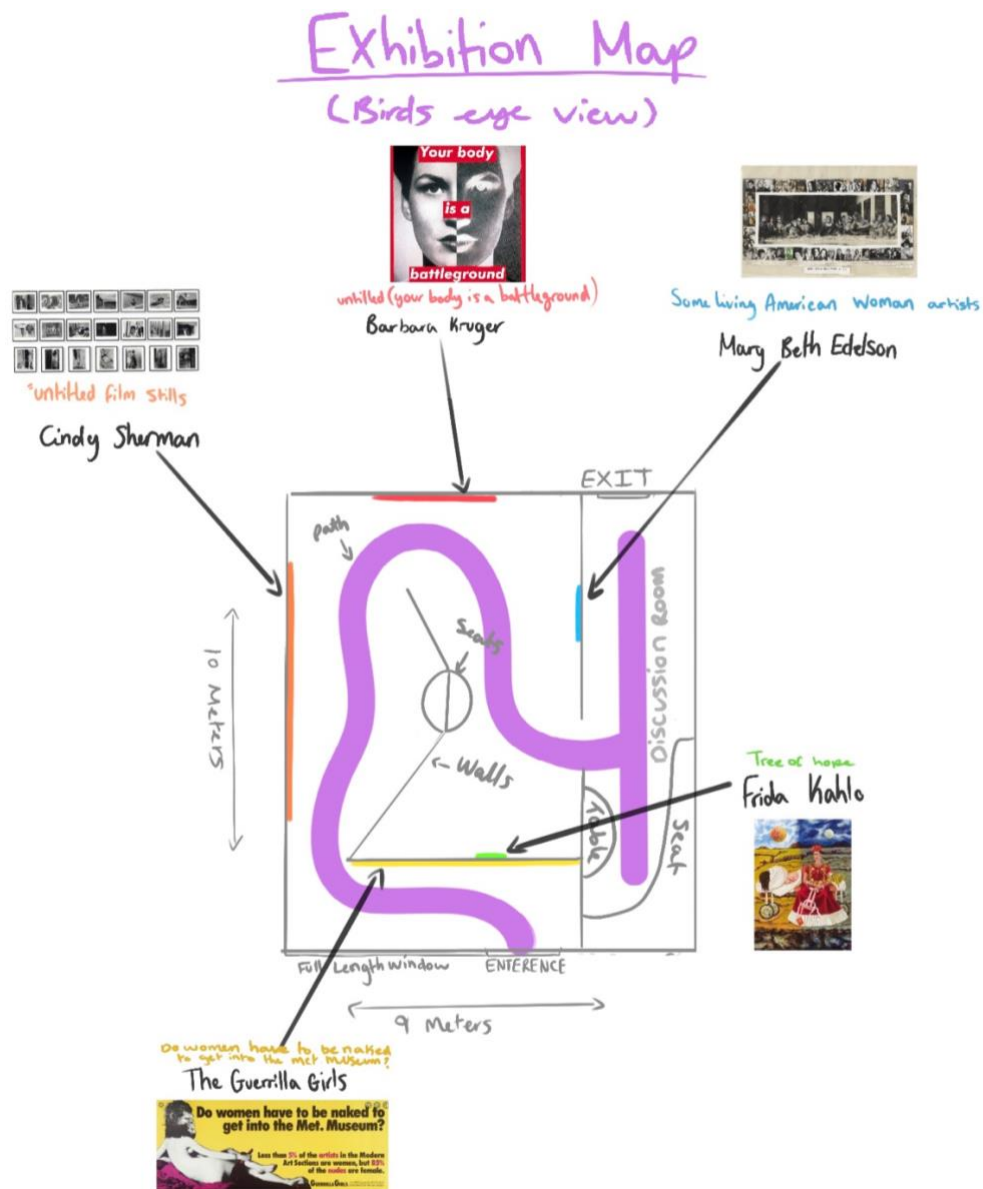


Fig 9

A few diagrams showing each part of the exhibition.



Fig 10

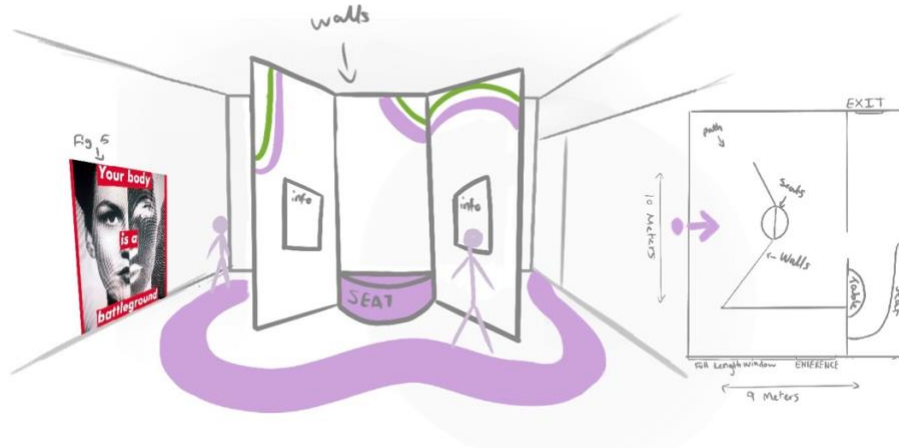


Fig 11

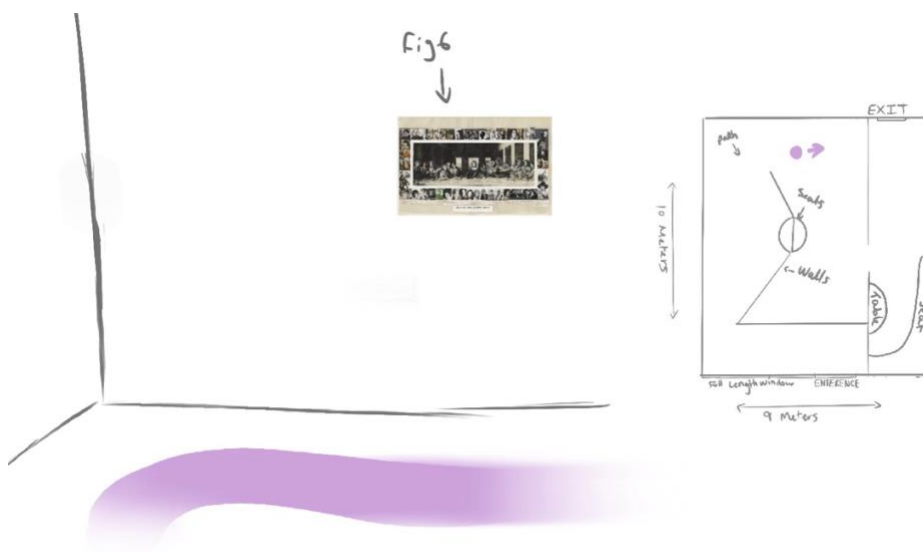


Fig 12

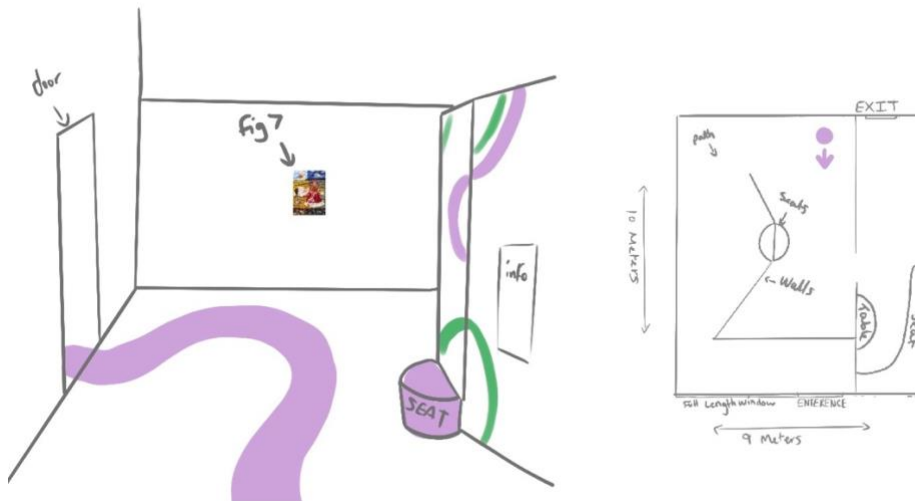


Fig 13

I want the spectators to first experience the guerrilla girl's irony and wittiness right down to Frida Kahlo's pain and resilience. I want the spectator to experience all the emotions and the powerful messages emitting from each piece. Demonstrated in *fig 8*, there will be seats situated in the centre of the room for people to sit, look, speculate and discuss its message. There would also be a discussion room specifically for this, including an area where spectators can find resources for women artists organizations, such as 'National association of women artists' and 'Women made gallery'. In a society where women still are not getting the full recognition and rights they deserve, exhibitions like this could make a small difference in the long road ahead.

Bibliography

National Gallery of Art. (2021). *Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?*, 1989. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.139856.html>

[Accessed 15 May 2021].

Crehan, M. (2016). *6 reasons why Frida Kahlo is a feminist icon*. [Online]

Available at: <https://rosie.org.au/blog/6-reasons-frida-kahlo-feminist-icon/>

[Accessed 21 May 2021].

Frida Kahlo. (2021). *Tree of Hope, Remain Strong, 1946 by Frida Kahlo*. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.fridakahlo.org/tree-of-hope.jsp#prettyPhoto>

[Accessed 21 May 2021].

Fullleylove, R. (2021). *The feminist artists who's work you need to know*. [Online]

Available at: <https://artsandculture.google.com/theme/the-feminist-artists-whose-work-you-need-to-know/IQISUC6SwwhEKw?hl=en>

[Accessed 20 May 2021].

Hagen, I. V. (2020). *This Artwork Changed My Life: Barbra Kruger's "Untitled (Your body is a battleground)"*. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-artwork-changed-life-barbara-krugers-untitled-body-battleground>

[Accessed 20 May 2021].

International Women's Development Agency, (2021). *International womans day*. [Online]

Available at: <https://iwda.org.au/take-action/international-womens-day/>

Kérchy, A. (2003). THE WOMAN 69 TIMES: CINDY SHERMAN'S UNTITLED FILM STILL.

Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS), 9(1), pp. 181-189.

Leng, K. (2020). Art, Humour and Acrivism: The sardonic, Sustraining Feminism of Guerrilla Girls, 1985-200. *Journal of Women's History*, winter, 32(4), pp. 110-134.

Manchester, E. (2005). *Guerrilla Girls, Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into the Met. Museum? 1989*. [Online]

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 15 may 2021].

MoMA Learning , 2021. *Untitled film still #21*. [Online]

Available at: https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/cindy-sherman-untitled-film-stills-1977-80/ [Accessed 16 may 2021]

Public Delivery, (2021). *Barbara Kruger - Your body is a battleground*. [Online]
Available at: <https://publicdelivery.org/barbara-kruger-battleground/>
[Accessed 19 May 2021].

Tate, (2021). The Museum of Modern Art , 2021. *Mary Beth Edelson Some Living Women Artists 1972*. [Online]
Available at:
https://www.moma.org/collection/works/117141?sov_referrer=art_term&art_term_slug=feminist-art
[Accessed 20 May 2021].

Tate, (2021). *Guerilla Girls Do Women Have To Get Naked Into The Met. Museum?*. [Online]
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 15 May 2021].

The Second Shelf. (2020). *Some Living American Women Artists? Last Supper by Mary Beth Edelson*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.thesecondshelf.com/art-ephemera/some-living-american-women-artistslast-supper-by-mary-beth-edelson>
[Accessed 21 May 2021].

Topaz, C, M. Klingenberg, B. Turek, D. Heggeseth, B. Harris, P, E. Julie, C. Blackwood, C. Chavoya, O. Nelson, S. Murphy, K. (2019). *Diversity of artists in major U.S. museums*. DOI: doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0212852 Available at:
<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/10.1371/journal.pone.0212852> [Accessed on 8 of May 2021].

Walle, j. V. d. (2017). *Modern classics: Cindy Sherman - Untitles Film Stills, 1977 - 1980*. [Online]
Available at: <https://artlead.net/content/journal/modern-classics-cindy-sherman-untitled-film-stills/>
[Accessed 16 May 2021].

Woodcock, J. (2008). *NYU Langone Health*. [Online]
Available at: <https://medhum.med.nyu.edu/view/10370>
[Accessed 21 May 2021].

List of figures

Figure 1. Guerrilla Girls, (1989) *Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into The Met. Museum?*. Accessed from: <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/naked-through-the-ages> (Accessed: 15th of May 2021)

Figure 2. Sherman, c. (1977-1980) *Untitled film stills*. Accessed from: <https://www.christiesrealestate.com/blog/untitled-cindy-shermans-record-breaking-film-stills/> (Accessed: 16th of May 2021)

Figure 3. Sherman, C. (1978) *Untitled film still #12*. Accessed from: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/56571?artist_id=5392&page=1&sov_referrer=artist (Accessed: 16th of May 2021)

Figure 4. Sherman, C. (1978) *Untitled film still #84*. Accessed from <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/57236> (Accessed: 16th of May 2021)

Figure 5. Kruger, B. (1989) *Untitled (Your body is a battleground)*. Accessed from <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-artwork-changed-life-barbara-krugers-untitled-body-battleground> (Accessed: 17th of May 2021)

Figure 6. Edelson, M, B. (1972) *Some living American women artists*. Accessed from: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/117141> (Accessed: 19th of May 2021)

Figure 8. Kahlo, F. (1946) *Tree of Hope, Remain Strong*. Accessed from: <https://www.fridakahlo.org/tree-of-hope.jsp> (Accessed: 20th of May 2021)

Figure 8. Bath, M. (2021) *Exhibition diagram* [Digital generated image]

Figure 9. Bath, M. (2021) *Exhibition map* [Digital Generated image]

Figure 10. Bath, M. (2021) *Exhibition diagram 2* [Digital generated image]

Figure 11. Bath, M. (2021) *Exhibition diagram 3* [Digital generated image]

Figure 12. Bath, M. (2021) *Exhibition diagram 4* [Digital generated image]

Figure 13. Bath, M. (2021) *Exhibition diagram 5* [Digital generated image]