

Womanhood, Metamodernism and Consumerism.

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Fig 2. Broom, C. (1908) Suffragettes in Hyde Park on Women's Sunday [image] Available at: <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/march-women-photographing-suffragettes-broom>

Fig 3. Guerrilla girls. (1989) when racism and sexism are no longer fashionable, what will your art collection be worth? [image] available at: <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/work>

Fig 4. Wade, F. (2022). Mother with Child on her Arm, Nude II, 1906. Meet the artist: Paula Modersohn-Becker | Blog | Royal Academy of Arts. [online] www.royalacademy.org.uk. Available at: <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/ra-magazine-francesca-wade-paula-modherson-becker-artist>.

Fig 5. Artlead. (n.d.). Untitled Film Stills #10, 1978. Modern Classics: Cindy Sherman – Untitled Film Stills, 1977-1980 | Art for Sale | Artlead. [online] Available at: <https://artlead.net/journal/modern-classics-cindy-sherman-untitled-film-stills/>.

Fig 6. Hauser & Wirth. (n.d.). Untitled #652, 2023. Cindy Sherman. [online] Available at: <https://www.hauserwirth.com/hauser-wirth-exhibitions/cindy-sherman/#>.

Fig 7. Wade, Lisa (2009) Details magazine, Girl Not Included. Women as Items for Conspicuous Consumption. Available at: <https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2009/04/06/women-as-items-for-conspicuous-consumption/>

Throughout this proposal I aim to critically analyse and relate three key words that are the foundations within my own practice and reflect on contemporary society. Here the words *Womanhood*, *Metamodernism* and *Consumerism* will be explored. Inspired by the history of misogyny that women face, as a female photographer my practice aims to challenge the narrative and ideologies that restrict women in our society. Visual artists including Christina Broom, Guerilla Girls, Paula Modersohn-Becker, Cindy Sherman will present this through their practice. Theorists including John Tagg, Susan Sontag, John Berger, Bell Hooks, Betty Fridan, Florence Given and Katy Deepwell will be discussed. Following this the collation of research will lead me to formulate a question to begin my independent inquiry.

Womanhood

‘Womanhood’ meaning “the state of being a woman; womanly character or qualities” and “women collectively” (www.dictionary.com, n.d.) signifies community and empowerment which the feminist movement continue to fight for. Where “womanhood bound women together even as it bound them down” (Cott, 1986, pg.149) evidence of this is clear through the visual representation of woman and female artists and photographers such as Christina Broom. First wave feminism saw the fight for the right to vote and equality for female agency through the Suffragettes, Broom being the UK’s first female press photographer documented these protests, meetings, arrestings’s, and fundraisers. Her images composition shows the unity, courage, and ambition in the height of the movement from 1908- 1913, which influenced the winning of the votes for the first time in 1918 before full equality in 1928 through the equal franchise act. Moreover, with men opposing the reform and social change such as James Grant MP

who at the time said, "Men have the vote and the power at the present moment; I say for Heaven's sake let us keep it." (Gillett, 2018) suggests the patriarchal political ideologies embedded in the male dominant society. It is unknown whether Broom supported the Suffragettes due to the conservative nature of her other work and the commercial potential, it is clear through the selling of her work to magazines and newspapers it became a form of advertisement and propaganda for the Suffragettes. Theorist John Tagg expands of this through the importance of representation in photography, where "the portrait is therefore a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of social identity" (Tagg, 1988, pg. 37) suggesting that Broom's imagery reflects on Womanhood historically and its social oppression through the iconography of the Suffragettes. Furthermore, Broom does this successfully, as a woman herself she is the subject of the same subordination, so when representing both the 'individual' and the 'social identity' she uses large groups of women to create a community and idea of power and activism, in contrast to how institutionally women were made to feel indifferent and alone.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Liberal feminist and pioneer of the second wave of feminism Betty Friedan expands on Womanhood through her book 'The Feminine Mystique' (2010) which says, "The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own." (Freidan,2010, pg,378). Suggesting encouragement for women to retract from their traditional roles and develop a life out of their domesticity, also the word 'creative' implies visual arts which can be seen through the movement W.A.R (Women's Art Revolution) and the Guerilla Girls. Womanhood within art is the embodiment of the W.A.R where a female community and movement was formed in 1969 to fight the gender discrimination and exclusion from New Yorks art industry, including galleries and museums who saw women's work as illegitimate and not considered. Furthermore, this suggests masculine hegemony was institutionalised through the ideological state apparatus to deconstruct womanhood's empowerment by excluding women from the visual art world. Fierstein explains that "Art has the power to transform, to illuminate, to educate, inspire and motivate." (Fierstein, 2012) suggesting that giving this power to women threatened their traditional male ideologies within the history of art. Functionalist beliefs ensured women couldn't produce art due to their subjection to the domestic sphere.

While second wave feminism focused on the fight for social change womanhood has become more culturally diverse through postmodernism with the emphasis of individuality. W.A.R is highly criticised for this as its constricted representation of identity and gender is seen through no non-binary or trans artists and a key criticism being lack of acknowledgement of women of colour. Bell Hooks explores this through her activist tone arguing women's solidarity was radical, "As long as women are using class or race power to dominate other women, feminist sisterhood cannot be fully

realized.” (Hooks, 2014. Pg,16) showing how womanhood cannot be complete without the representation of all women. An example of this can be seen as “roughly 5,800 female artists whose works were acquired, 190 women or just 3 percent were African American” (Jacobs, 2019). Subsequently, further feminist movements have expanded on the foundations of W.A.R such as the ‘Guerilla Girls’ in 1985 including racial inequality into the fight for gender equality in the arts. As seen in figure three their materiality lies in the form of posters, billboards, books and occasionally they make public appearances to expose discrimination. They use statistics and data as Fierstein previously said to ‘educate’ society on systemic sexism and racism in the art world. By having an anonymous identity themselves they show that womanhood does not hold a specific appearance, compared to the Suffragettes for example, who fed into Hooks belief that feminism was constructed by white middle-class women to support their beliefs and not that of all women in society. As well as this it allows the audience to focus on the activism and politics rather than their individual identities.

WHEN RACISM & SEXISM ARE NO LONGER FASHIONABLE, WHAT WILL YOUR ART COLLECTION BE WORTH?

The art market won't bestow mega-buck prices on the work of a few white males forever. For the 17.7 million you just spent on a single Jasper Johns painting, you could have bought at least one work by all of these women and artists of color:

Bernice Abbott	Elaine de Kooning	Dorothea Lange	Sarah Peale
Anni Albers	Lavinia Fontana	Marie Laurencin	Ljubova Popova
Sofonisba Anguissola	Meta Warwick Fuller	Edmonia Lewis	Olga Rosanova
Diane Arbus	Artemisia Gentileschi	Judith Leyster	Nellie Mae Rowe
Vanessa Bell	Marguerite Gérard	Barbara Longhi	Rachel Ruysch
Isabel Bishop	Natalia Goncharova	Dora Maar	Kay Sage
Rosa Bonheur	Kate Greenaway	Lee Miller	Augusta Savage
Elizabeth Bougureau	Barbara Hepworth	Lisette Model	Vavara Stepanova
Margaret Bourke-White	Eva Hesse	Paula Modersohn-Becker	Florine Stettheimer
Romaine Brooks	Hannah Hoch	Tina Modotti	Sophie Taeuber-Arp
Julia Margaret Cameron	Anna Huntington	Berthe Morisot	Alma Thomas
Emily Carr	May Howard Jackson	Grandma Moses	Marietta Robusti Tintoretto
Rosalba Carriera	Frida Kahlo	Gabriele Münter	Suzanne Valadon
Mary Cassatt	Angelica Kauffmann	Alice Neel	Remedios Varo
Constance Marie Charpentier	Hilma af Klimt	Louise Nevelson	Elizabeth Vigée Le Brun
Imogen Cunningham	Kathe Kollwitz	Georgia O'Keeffe	Laura Wheeling Waring
Sonia Delaunay	Lee Krasner	Meret Oppenheim	

Information courtesy of Christie's, Sotheby's, Meyer's International Auction Records and Leonard's Annual Price Index of Auctions.

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GUERRILLA GIRLS CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

Figure 3

Metamodernism

Cultural theorist Timotheus Vermeulen & Robin van den Akker define metamodernism through "Greek English Lexicon the prefix "meta" refers to such notions as "with", "between", and "beyond" allowing them to "contend that metamodernism should be situated epistemologically *with* (post) modernism, ontologically *between* (post) modernism, and historically *beyond* (post) modernism." (Timotheus and Akker, 2010, pg56). Suggesting that metamodernism as an idiom and philosophy is a new conceptualised understanding of today's contemporary culture and aesthetics that has moved on from the postmodern mode of the late 20th century. Countless social and environmental challenges such as climate change, financial meltdown and global conflicts have created a desire for change, where our generation no longer fits the Modernism and Postmodernism beliefs of "anti-foundationalist" and "no absolute truths" (Osborne, 2010, pg. 159) instead our culture yearn for expression and constructive progression. Metamodernism is "oscillating between modern enthusiasm and postmodern irony" (Timotheus and Akker, 2010, pg56) this is to say that postmodernist relativism, irony and rejection of grand narratives is not to be diminished in metamodernisms romanticism, hope and universal truth. For example, the digital age shaped these ideologies from modernism such as the age of radio which encouraged creation, to then after World War II postmodernisms age of the television which enabled scepticism and rejection of reliable knowledge, to the 2000s metamodern age of the internet which opened the polarising nature of humans such as hope cannot be possible without doubt. Furthermore, metamodernism is about

creating something new with what was created before, for example a 'Meme' is the best example of this in contemporary society, by taking a snapshot of a film and placing your own text over it, it creates a whole new meaning. Through understanding the fundamental points of metamodernism it shows an understanding into the evolution of feminism and representation of women through different ideologies of the time. Metamodernism here sees femininity in a diverse range of forms that have been constructed by modernism and postmodernism.



Figure 4 herself nude she challenged traditional representations of the female post-partum body. Metamodernism considers this in its philosophy as the contemporary culture thrives off diversity in which movements strive for inclusion in body positivity. Although arguably the digital era has brought negative stereotypes and labels to this as contemporary culture often advertises idealistic body types, making metamodernism a continuous evolving ideology. Furthermore, modernism in art being a break from the

Due to advances in gendered politics female artists were able to “develop representations of their diverse experiences of modernity that took different forms to those which characterised contemporary avant-garde art practice.” (Deepwell, 1998, pg18). Paula Modersohn-Becker does this in figure 4 in *Mother with Child on her Arm, Nude II, 1906* through abstract depictions of the nude female body no longer for the male gaze, but is expressive of maternalism and female subjectivity. As the first artist to paint

past and a search for new forms of expression transcends into this adaptation from the biblical renaissance 'Madonna and child' where resemblances are seen through the fruit's symbolism of fertility and the composition. However, "Modernists hold that reality is limited to the physical world, eliminating all possibility of God intervening in history" (Mitchell, 2022) suggesting that this depiction of womanhood and motherhood is represented authentically by Becker to refrain from the institutionalised Christian portrayal of the Virgin Mary as a symbolism for women in art.



Figure 5



Figure 6

Postmodernism focusses on individualism, where identity and what resides with the individual is more favoured than structural conformity. Cindy Sherman uses mass media codes and representation techniques to comment on contemporary society, she then uses photography as a medium to analyse stereotypes by photographing herself in various female archetypes. Her collective works have "influenced the way generations of artists think about photography, portraiture, narrative and identity"

(Hoban, 2012). By creating her own style of work she has embodied the spirit of contemporary art in a postmodern fashion in using tools of the past to do so. Through the aim of post-modernist artists to examine cultural codes, politics and social ideologies within their own practice and context, it represents a step forward from modernism. Sherman's work consists of portraits which depict herself in many ways showing how women do not conform to a singular ideology but are diverse within their own identities, she does this through performative practice of dressing herself up and inhabiting new personalities for the characters. Furthermore, figure five 'Untitled Film Stills #10' in 1978 is inspired through cinematography at the time, similar to this metamodernism also is highly constructed through television portrayals and its effect on shaping a generation. This image represents a youthful woman with what seems to be a bag of shopping, although her outfit suggests a perspective of feminism's advancement on identity. The environment she is set in being a kitchen and her low position depicts an image of a woman still fulfilling her traditional roles during this era. Alternatively, through her contemporary work there is a clear distinguishable development in her practice through metamodernism as she begins to use AI to create collages of women's portraits as seen in figure six. Here her representation of women has become even more diverse such as showing ageing and more mature women, who often are seen as less desirable by society in terms of looks and aesthetics. Susan Sontag comments on this saying "Women should allow their faces to show the lives they have lived. Women should tell the truth." (Sontag, 2023 pg. 39). Here you can see this in figure six through the texture of the skin and grey hair. Furthermore, it is clear that Sherman through her practice and own identity shows how feminism takes many forms and through contemporary development more diverse forms of representation of women are being presented, this transcends into metamodernism.

Oscillating between both modernism and postmodernisms representation of women it has accumulated a metamodern understanding that feminism has multiple forms but is structurally influenced by secularisation and identity, where the decline and change in beliefs around religion has affected traditional gender roles and freedom of voice and choice for women. Furthermore, this has left metamodernism to turn more so towards spirituality, while postmodernists do not believe in truth, they say there is no objective reality. However, influenced by modernism there is still religious connections within the symbolism and contextualisation of metamoderist art, where there is a demand for individuals seeking their own identity rather than a systemic one, with “fewer than half of people in England and Wales describe themselves as Christian” (Russell. and Farley, 2022).

Consumerism

“Consumerism refers to the tendency of people living in a capitalist economy to engage in a lifestyle of excessive materialism that revolves around reflexive, wasteful, or conspicuous overconsumption.” (Hayes, 2022). Western societies post industrialisation have created materialistic ideologies, through metamodernism as it has extended further with the age of the internet encouraging the gratification of instant desires and purchases. Advertising creates these desires, systemic social pressure and manipulation create an economic system based on material obsession. Digital technology has allowed consumerism to flourish through advertisement, a key example of this is the term ‘sex sells’ where women have been objectified for the presumed heterosexual male point of view, also known as the “male gaze”. Here across “58 magazines, 51.8 percent of advertisements that featured women portrayed

them as sex objects. However, when women appeared in advertisements in men's magazines, they were objectified 76 percent of the time" (Swift and Gould, 2021). Suggesting that the sexualisation of women is a marketing strategy for consumerism, it also reflects on society as a whole and undermines the progression of the feminist movement.



Figure 6

"You painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, put a mirror in her hand, and you called the painting Vanity, thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure." (Berger, 2008, pg. 51)

This suggests how the male gaze has subjected women to objects used for male pleasure, this can be seen in how the women's body is being used as an item of furniture for the products to be laid upon. Additionally, she has been situated in a sexual vulnerable position, creating the idea that she is up for sale along with the male items themselves. However, contemporary society has addressed this and created the

female gaze. The female gaze is defined as, “The ways in which women and girls look at other females, at males, and at things in the world. This concerns the kinds of looking involved, and how these may be related to identification, objectification, subjectivity.” (Oxford reference, 2019). This suggests that through the feminist movement there is a large cultural change around rejecting the male gaze and empowering women. Florence Given, a female social activist was inspired by the statement “prettiness is not a rent you pay for occupying a space marked ‘female’” (Erin McKean in Given, 2020, pg 9). This suggests women are creating new ideologies to be defined by in a once male dominated belief society, this can also be seen in the ‘Me-Too’ movement, where women are taking a stand against the male gaze and objectification. Consumerism has shown that the power of the gaze is now in female hands and that societies institutionalised misogyny is being re written.

Through the analysis of the three key words ‘Womanhood, Metamodernism, Consumerism’, I allowed my passions and interests guide me in the essay to write on topics that truly interest me as an insight for next year. Although the essay follows a feminist structure throughout, I found this was the best way to narrow down the subject matter and link them together. In doing this I discovered how interrelated these subjects are, and I am keen to expand on this, looking into further movements. Womanhood has been shaped by philosophies in the representation of art which has altered its meaning over time, such as metamodernism where womanhood is seen through different portrayals of femininity, and consumerism through the rejection of the male gaze. There is the potential for many research questions to derive from my findings, such as how metamodernism’s continuous evolution will impact feminism? Or how consumerism using nudity and sexualisation has impacted women and female

artists? However, I have come to the conclusion that the themes within the essay are being focused on how feminism is being conceived over time. The title for my independent research project is as follows:

How will the analysis of Womanhood, Metamodernism and Consumerism be explored through the objectification of women through time?

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