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Annotated Bibliography

Hults, L. C. (2005) *The witch as muse: art, gender, and power in early modern Europe*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press

The book impressed me with the immense scope of historical resources involved in the author's research. Hults discusses the emergence and evolution of the concept of the witch in Western visual arts, spanning from the 15th century to the end of the 19th century. Hults persuasively demonstrates how male artists, influenced by historical, cultural, and political contexts, contributed to creating distorted, sinister, and ambivalent depictions of witches. This new visual iconography of witches then shaped societal perceptions of the supposed existence of witches and the expectations for appropriate behaviour for women.

The work is invaluable in understanding the interplay between artistic concepts and socio-political beliefs. To support the author's argument, the book highlights direct connections between the economic and political situations in European countries and the rise of witch-hunting tendencies.

Personally, it was both significant and painful to realize how deeply rooted the biased perception of women is in art history. Hults demonstrates that even the most sophisticated, educated, and creative male artists of the past used the concept of the wicked witch to secure their societal positions, often at the expense of misrepresented women who lacked the opportunity to self-represent or challenge these portrayals. The book strengthened my intention to explore how women can be represented in art in all the complexity of human existence but without prejudice.

Betterton, R. (1996) *An intimate distance: women, artists and the body*. New York: Routledge

In her book, Rosemary Betterton, a feminist art historian and influential art critic, explores the representation of the female body in the works of women artists and how this representation has been shaped by feminist discourse throughout the 20th century. Through a series of highly engaging critical essays, Betterton analyses different approaches to portraying the female body and depicting women's life experiences that transcend the dominant perception of women as mere objects of the male gaze.

By providing a detailed analysis of European and American women artists' works, she illustrates the methods these artists use to achieve this, such as employing the nude maternal body as a form of self-representation, incorporating the aesthetics of horror films into self-portraits, or creating abstract art forms that reflect bodily experiences to dissociate the body from being an object of desire.

The author presents a wide range of documented personal accounts from the lives of the artists and demonstrates a thorough understanding of the perspectives of other contemporary art critics on the subject, such as Linda Nochlin and Julia Kristeva. This book was particularly important to me, as it helped place feminist ideas within a broader historical and political context, while also offering a deep understanding of seminal works by female artists.

Gorrill H. (2020) *Women Can't Paint: Gender, the Glass Ceiling and Values in Contemporary Art*. London: Bloomsbury

Helen Gorrill's significant work offers a comprehensive analysis of the position of female artists in the contemporary art market, highlighting the obstacles they continue to face in their artistic careers in the Western world throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Gorrill engages with the perspectives of key feminist thinkers and philosophers on gender and gender discrimination, including Griselda Pollock, Judith Butler, and Linda Nochlin. Her arguments are supported by extensive statistical data from both Western and Middle Eastern regions. She challenges the concept of gender fluidity as well as the idea of distinct feminine and masculine styles in art, arguing that neither approach effectively addresses gender-based discrimination.

Gorrill effectively demonstrates that in anonymous art sales, people are unable to distinguish the gender of the artist, and that such "blind" auditions for musicians and anonymous sales can benefit women creators by removing the historical bias that favours men. Her research indicates that the disparity in the art market gradually lessens with the progress of feminism in Western societies, though it still persists. Surprisingly, the difference in the market value of art based on gender is much smaller in the Middle East, while the largest gaps are found in America and Europe. Gorrill's work also addresses other challenges commonly faced by professional women, such as ageism, sexism, and biased attitudes within art institutions.

The book was an eye-opener for me. While I had experienced many of these issues as a female artist, I had not fully grasped the extent of the discrimination or how deeply it is embedded in the established art structures. Gorrill raises crucial questions about the

impact of Western liberal principles on improving the position of women in society, as well as exploring potential ways to overcome this discrimination.

Modleski, T. (1990) *Loving with a vengeance mass-produced fantasies for women.*

New York: Routledge

In this relatively small but nonetheless noteworthy academic work, American feminist scholar and cultural critic Modleski analyses mass-produced fiction books and TV productions aimed at women. She examines three genres: romance novels from the Harlequin publishing company, Gothic novels, and soap operas.

Modleski argues that the enduring popularity of these genres lies in their ability to express the common experiences of many women while simultaneously offering a subtle resistance to traditional notions of female subservience. However, this resistance is often neutralized within the narratives through strategies such as differences between the reader's perception and the heroine's perspective, or other techniques that keep the story grounded in reality. Modleski employs a psychoanalytic approach in her work and effectively challenges position of the Frankfurt School of thought.

I found the book highly engaging and informative about the portrayal of female characters and narratives in non-visual arts. It provided me with a more comprehensive understanding of gender-based stereotypes in modern Western popular culture.

Sontag, S. (2003) *Regarding the pain of others*

In her groundbreaking essay, Sontag discusses the contexts and meanings of pain as a subject in visual imagery, including photography, fine art, and video. Her work effectively challenges the concept of the "society of the spectacle" by Guy Debord, demonstrating that portraying such a complex and difficult subject can contribute to the humanistic nature of our society, even if such portrayals are often misused.

The book is one of the best written on the subject, offering a compelling combination of highly persuasive reasoning and an extensive analysis of visual evidence that supports Sontag's findings. It effectively addresses every aspect of the representation and use of visual depictions of pain in culture and politics, including ethical concerns, paving the way for further discussion and exploration of the topic.

The subject of pain interested me as a potential means to enhance the immediate response to a visual image. Reading such a strong, exquisitely written analytical text by a woman philosopher was both formative and inspiring for me. Sontag brilliantly articulated and introduced into contemporary intellectual discourse many ideas that I had felt intuitively but had not been able to organise into such a clear and concise system of thought.