How have representations of the female form and notions of femininity within art and visual culture changed in line with the experience of female artists?

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Introduction

The notion of femininity and the depiction of the female form in art is an ever-evolving construct that continues to expand as concepts of gender morph into totally personal and subjective ideologies that are dependent on a person's own gender beliefs.

There is an outdated perception that gender is conducive of sex, therefore, the dictionary definition of femininity is as follows "the quality or nature of the female sex" (www.merriam-webster.com, n.d.) This definition is an untruth. It is the product of a male dictated ideology that has long placed restraint on all genders and appoints masculinity as the most powerful gender construct. "To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men. The social presence of women has developed as a result of their ingenuity in living under such tutelage within such a limited space." (Berger, 2008)

Throughout this essay I will explore the ways in which female artists have challenged this and how they redefined notions of femininity as well as images of the female form in art. I will showcase the work of both female and male artists and curators through case studies of relevant exhibitions that have been shaping modern feminism in art.

I also plan to explore the female experience within the art world through these case studies and exhibitions and will explore and expose the inequalities between genders that is evident in the art world with supporting evidence and statistics. I will also draw attention to artists interpretations of the female form throughout the course of art history with comparisons and contrasts where relevant.

Throughout most well renowned Western art galleries and schools of art, the white male has long been the most dominant figure within art and classical art history. Artists such as Claude Monet, Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol are instantly recognisable as key figures in the linier teaching of art history due to male curated art galleries providing them with iconic status, however, this displays a clear inequality between genders as there is a lack of female representation on this illustrious scale. This, however, "has become so deeply entrenched and naturalised that it exists, largely unquestioned, as *the* history of modern art" (Reilly, 2018)

"In the West, greatness has been defined since antiquity as white, Western, privileged, and, above all, male." (Nochlin, 2015) However, through art activism, feminist artists have exposed this inequality between genders within the art community and society as a whole and this has challenged the male dictated beliefs of what femininity is. This has resulted in profound change within the art community as women begin to be at the forefront of the conversation about their own representation and experience after years of suppression from male colleagues and curators.

Chapter One – The Female Experience in a Male dominated art world

When talking about the female experience within the art world and the female experience in general, it is firstly crucial to take into consideration the shared female experience of sexual harassment and abuse. A survey undertaken in January 2021 by UN women UK found that "Over 70% of women in the UK say they have experienced sexual harassment in public" (UN Women, 2021) This statistic is unacceptably high with the UK government and justice systems doing little to help those affected as according to the same UN women UK survey "Only 4% of women told us they reported the incidents of harassment to an official organisation – with 45% of women saying they didn't believe reporting would help change anything" (UN Women, 2021)

Women artists play a key role in not only drawing attention to this issue but also in empowering change. The UN women UK are a charity with female artists at the forefront of their campaigning and in 2018 the organisation set up a campaign titled "The Art of Empowerment" that encourages female artists to create one-of-a-kind, limited-edition pieces of art that are sold to provide funding for women's educational and career skills programmes not just in the United Kingdom but throughout the world. In their own words "These beautiful editions are created in textile and stitched fabric, to honour the timeless craft of women across cultures, and as a symbol and celebration of the work of women through the ages." (UN Women, 2021)

In 2019 the limited-edition piece was created by Jadé Fadojutimi and titled "Clustering Thoughts." It was inspired by identity constructs and limitations placed on women by society with the layers of fabric protruding out of the piece symbolising the multiple elements that make women who they are. It is an emotive piece that contrasts the outdated societal belief that women are only objects for the use of men.

Clustering Thoughts by Jadé Fadojutimi, 2019

Another key aspect of the female experience, more specifically within the art world, is that despite many steps in the right direction and years of feminist theory and activism, the struggle for female representation and equality between genders is still an ongoing issue. This deeply affects the art community on a plethora of levels as "statistics demonstrate that the fight for gender and race equality in the art world is far from over." (Reilly, 2018)

There is an overwhelming lack of female presence within the art world, and this is reflected in galleries and exhibitions throughout the western world. For example, the Tate Modern, London, opened the doors to its newest £260 million extension in the June of 2016. The event was highly anticipated and publicised as "the most important new cultural building to open in the UK for almost twenty years." (Tate, 2015.) This gallery opening proved tremendously disappointing as far as female representation goes as "of the three hundred artists represented in the re-hang of the permanent collection, less than a third were women." (Reilly 2018) This is true for many modern art institutions.

The most notable art showcase that has, on more than one occasion, been called out for its blatant lack of female representation is the Venice Biennale. The Venice Biennale is arguably one of the most esteemed and respected cultural institutions in the world. "Established in 1895, the Biennale has an attendance today of over 500,000 visitors at the Art Exhibition." (La Biennale di Venezia, 2017) This elevated level of public notability should provide a benchmark for other smaller galleries and exhibitions of inclusivity, however, the number of female artists whose work has been displayed at the Biennale has fluctuated massively over the course of the 21st century.

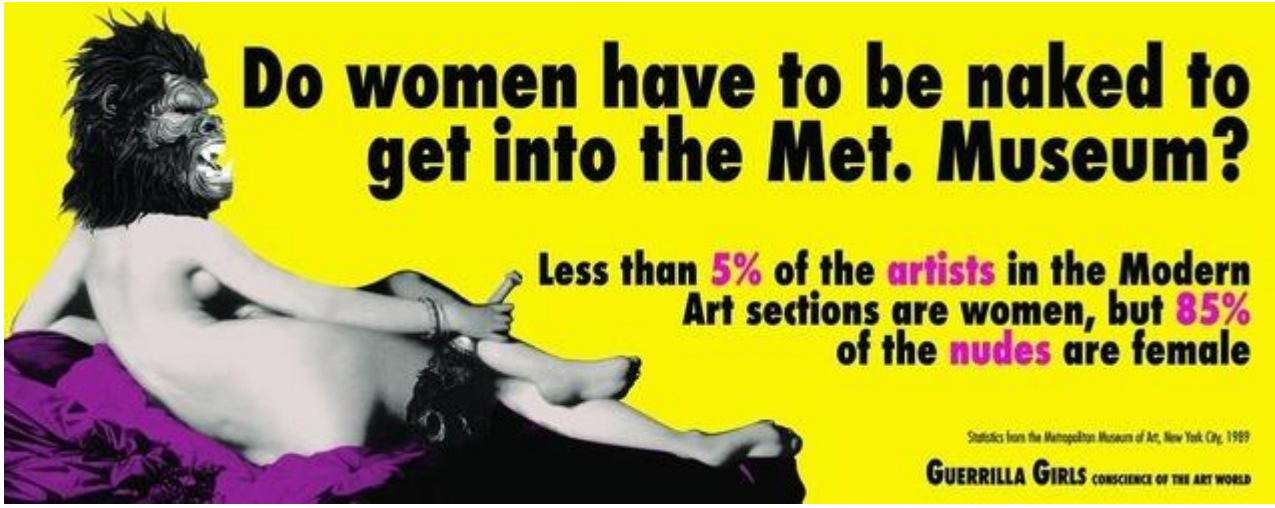
Within the first 10 years of the 2000's it is clear that throughout the western world feminist art had continued its thrust into the public eye. The 2005 Venice Biennale was particularly notable as it was the first in the Biennale's history to be curated by women. Rosa Martinez and Maria de Corral clearly were striving to create an exhibition that showcased female artists and created a conversation about the role of women in art. "It was clear from both their exhibitions that Martinez and de Corral wanted to identify their curatorial practices as feminist." (Reilly, 2018)

This intention was made evident from the offset as the iconic white exterior of the Italian pavilion displayed a huge mural by artist Barbra Kruger. Kruger has always resisted labelling herself as an artist as she tries to avoid being boxed in or categorised, although, in an interview with Dazed magazine Kruger said, "Women's art, political art - those categorisations perpetuate a certain kind of marginality which I'm resistant to." "But I absolutely define myself as a feminist." (Dazed, 2020)

Kruger's mural in the 2005 Biennale read a number of politically charged phrases like "Admit nothing. Blame everyone" and "God is on our side." As well as words evocative of patriarchal ideologies such as "money" and "power." The choice to place this artwork on the exterior of the building meant that visitors would immediately be met with a feminist tone and viewpoint which set the mood for the rest of the exhibition. Kruger's work has always been political, but the pieces shown at the Biennale seemed to have a definite feminist tone.

Work of Barbara Kruger at Venice Biennale 2005.

The 2005 Venice Biennale also displayed work from the feminist art collective the Guerrilla Girls. Known for their hard-hitting factual art, the anonymous female art collective the Guerrilla Girls are hugely influential figures in the feminist art movement. Their work is some of the most widely recognised feminist art of the 20th and 21st century and in the 2005 Venice Biennale, the Guerrilla girls exhibited their 1989 work *Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get into The Met. Museum?* This work highlights the clear inequalities between male and female artists as the work was created after the Guerrilla Girls found that within New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art 'less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art Sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female'. This reflected just one of the many prestigious art galleries that lack female representation.



Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into the Met. Museum? (1989) by Guerrilla Girls

Another famed work by The Guerrilla Girls that clearly highlights the lack of diversity and inclusivity within landmark art galleries is their 1986 Report Card. This work highlighted the number of female artists who had work on display in galleries within New York and offered commentary on the obvious lack of female representation. This comedic, sarcastic way of highlighting pressing issues is classic of the new wave feminist art movement as Marcia Tanner, curator of the 1994 *Bad Girls* exhibition explains, "what distinguished this new wave from earlier feminist work was its use of humour as a subversive strategy operating outside the bounds of feminine propriety." (Reilly, 2018) Meaning that new wave feminists were using sarcastic and satirical humour to highlight their struggles, a tactic once out of bounds for female artists.

What is particularly interesting about The Guerrilla Girls Report Card is its usefulness when comparing how far galleries have come in terms of inclusivity and equal representation. Another anonymous feminist Art activism collective, Pussy Galore, created their own report card in 2015 and the results were mixed but largely disappointing. Within the 2015 report card the three lowest scores are that of the "Tony Shafrazi Gallery, whose roster contains only 5% women, followed closely by Marlborough Gallery (7%) and Sperone Westwater (9%)." (Steinhauer, 2015) All three of these galleries are also featured in The Guerrilla girls 1986 report card with similarly abysmal results indicating that many galleries have yet to improve their figures for inclusivity and therefore proving that this is still an ongoing issue.

GUERRILLA GIRLS' 1986 REPORT CARD

GALLERY	NO. OF WOMEN 1985-6	NO. OF WOMEN 1986-7	REMARKS
Blum Helman	1	1	No improvement
Mary Boone	0	0	Boy crazy
Grace Borgenicht	0	0	Lacks initiative
Diane Brown	0	2	Could do even better
Leo Castelli	4	3	Not paying attention
Charles Cowles	2	2	Needs work
Marisa del Rey	0	0	No progress
Allan Frumkin	1	1	Doesn't follow directions
Marian Goodman	0	1	Keep trying
Pat Hearn	0	0	Delinquent
Marlborough	2	1	Failing
Oil & Steel	0	1	Underachiever
Pace	2	2	Working below capacity
Tony Shafrazi	0	1	Still unsatisfactory
Sperone Westwater	0	0	Unforgivable
Edward Thorp	1	4	Making excellent progress
Washburn	1	1	Unacceptable

Source: Art In America Annual 1985-6 and 1986-7

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM GUERRILLA GIRLS CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

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Email: guerrillagirls@voyager.com

© Guerrilla Girls 1986

PUSSY GALORE'S 2015 REPORT CARD

GALLERY	% OF WOMEN	GALLERY	% OF WOMEN
303 Gallery	33%	Luhring Augustine	22%
Alexander & Bonin	27%	Matthew Marks	16%
Mary Boone	17%	Marlborough	7%
Leo Castelli	14%	Metro Pictures	25%
Cheim & Read	37%	Pace	16%
Paula Cooper	32%	Postmasters	30%
Derek Eller	18%	PPOW	53%
Ronald Feldman	29%	Andrea Rosen	27%
Zach Feuer	59%	Salon 94	48%
Gagosian	21%	Tony Shafrazi	5%
Marian Goodman	23%	Jack Shainman	47%
Casey Kaplan	14%	Sikkema Jenkins	52%
Paul Kasmin	13%	Sonnabend	28%
Yvon Lambert	21%	Sperone Westwater	9%
Lehmann Maupin	45%	Edward Thorp	38%
Galerie Lelong	64%	Tracey Williams	59%
Lombard Fried	20%	David Zwirner	24%

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM PUSSY GALORE KICKING IDIOCY IN THE ARSE

© Pussy Galore 2015

The Guerrilla Girls 1986 Report Card alongside Pussy Galore's 2015 Report Card

The Guerrilla Girls website now has a database in which you can upload data from your local art galleries and museums regarding the number of female artists and the number of female nudes in order to compile a graph.

With this in mind I have attended exhibitions within art Galleries locally, in particular The Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, in order to discover what inclusivity is like within the art community in Swansea and therefore compare this to the galleries in larger, more culturally diverse cities such as London and New York.

The overriding theme of The Glynn Vivian art gallery's current exhibitions is female, with a large number of both curators and artists who are exhibiting work here being female or using she/her pronouns. I found it particularly interesting that one of the main historical works currently on display here within the permanent collection is a portrait of a female subject. The exhibition is entitled 'Indigo: Collections, Conservation, and Chemistry' and has "a portrait painting of a young woman from the court of Queen Anne, from the Richard Glynn Vivian Bequest of 1911" (www.glynnvivian.co.uk, 2021a) as its focal point.

Portrait of a young lady from the court of Queen Anne approx. 1911

The restoration of this artwork has been led by an all-female team and I believe that the subject within the painting has been presented in a way that seems quietly powerful and poised. The image does not depict a fragile and submissive nude female form which we are so used to seeing within renaissance oil paintings and paintings of this period which I will discuss further within chapter two. Therefore, we can conduce that this exhibition is supportive of female artists and makers.

Another current exhibition at the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery which is almost totally female lead is Cardiff based artist Zoe Preece's 'In Reverse'. This exhibition is a showcase of domestic objects such as pots and pans that have been totally hand crafted by the artists using time consuming and classical production methods and materials such as porcelain and wood. The aim of this exhibition is to draw attention to the mundane objects that are used primarily by women in everyday domestic life and highlight the beauty in the repetitive nature of crafting these objects and using them.

"For the artist, the repetitive and unseen activity of her craft resonates with the ceaseless, invisible domestic labour undertaken usually by women, within the home, such as cleaning, care work and bringing up children. It is this often unnoticed and undervalued home work that Preece tries to capture in this installation." (www.glynnvivian.co.uk, 2021b) Subsequently this installation has an eery quality as it highlights the gender stereotypes that have long been placed on women but arguably this also displays the strength of females as is showcases the responsibility held within these domestic tasks.

An artist whose work has recently been displayed at The Glynn Vivian is the work of Welsh and Ghanaian artist Anya Paintsil. Working predominantly with textiles Paintsil's process of making include techniques such as weaving and embroidery that have been passed down to her by her grandmother. This in itself is indicative of female experience as classically textile making is a female led practice which has been a process of making for women to bond over. Paintsil's work also provokes conversations about class and race as she often uses hair pieces and her own hair within her weaving, therefore, quite literally embedding the debate around race and gender into the fibres of her work.

'ni yn unig' by Anya Paintsil 2020

Paintsil's work is largely biographical as she sets out to depict her own personal experience being a person of colour living in a smaller, rural, Welsh community. Her piece intitled "ni yn unig" is a portrait of Paintsil and her sister who, in Paintsil's own words while talking on The Whitworth 'A Walk in the Park' podcast, are "surrounded by whiteness" which reflects Paintsil's experience growing up in Wrexham. On this podcast Paintsil also states that she has definitely endured racism within her rural community while growing up. This is an important aspect of the female experience that differs from women of colour and white women. This is due to another level of struggle for recognition being endured by women of colour as, for example, within the 2017 Venice Biennalle "a mere 5 of the 120 artists were black-just one of whom (Senga Nengudi) was a woman." (Reilly, 2018)

In conclusion to my case study, I have found that despite generalisations that smaller rural communities and working-class cities are less culturally diverse, art galleries in Swansea are doing a great job at showcasing work that is not only diverse in terms of gender representation, but also racially diverse.

Chapter Two - Depictions of The Female Form in Art

Female form in art is something that has lingeringly been depicted as something that is pleasing to the male viewer and this could largely be due to the lack of female voice and representation within the art world, however, nude art is a whole subcategory of art in which women are frequently, if not always, the subject. The female form depicted in these nudes is not always that of truth, but the product of the male gaze. The male gaze is a term used to describe "the presentation of women in visual arts and literature from a male, heterosexual perspective where women are depicted as sexual objects for the pleasure of the male viewer. Men have agency; women are passive and dehumanised." (Macmillan, 2019)

The male gaze has been challenged and is gradually being dismantled by the feminist movement, nevertheless, the ideas of gender that have been indoctrinated into society for millennia which appoint women as objects for the service of men are still prevalent in today's culture as a whole as well as in the art world with the New York Times claiming that "between 2008 and 2018, only 11 percent of art acquired by the country's top museums for their permanent collections was by women." (Jacobs, 2019)

These figures are likely due to the impression that women who present themselves in a way that is not conducive of the male gaze are a threat to masculinity as well as less desirable or palatable to the masses, "the idea of women artists being more of a risk, which seems to speak to a sort of institutional timidity." (Jacobs, 2019) This suggests that male curators and artists are reluctant to highlight and draw upon work that is reflective of the female gaze or the female experience of self.

Most frequently in European oil paintings of the Renaissance period, Male artists interpretations of the female body are seen as soft, curving and have gentile notions that connote maternal feeling. This again is a direct reflection of the male gaze, for example, in the following portrait painted by Peter Lely, the nude subject is seen lounging with body language indicating submissiveness as her opened, relaxed arms and legs suggest a willingness to please the viewer.

Nell Gwynne by Lely 1618 - 1680

"This nakedness is not, however, an expression of her own feelings; it is a sign of her submission to the owner's feelings or demands. (The owner of both woman and painting.)" (Berger, 2008) Meaning that nakedness of the subject may not be a choice of hers as the male viewer does not wish to gaze upon a subject who is aware of her sexuality, instead she is passive and obedient to him.

As well as subservient, women have long been told that to be seen as attractive to men they must present themselves as sexually untouched, yet women are also expected to know how to please men sexually. These juxtapositions are all tools used by men to exert control over women and leave women searching for unattainable male validation. A notable example of this clear juxtaposition within art is Bronzino's 'An Allegory with Venus and Cupid.'

An Allegory with Venus and Cupid by Bronzino about 1545.

Here the female protagonist Venus kisses Cupid, but her positioning is not indicative of her pleasure or engagement in the embrace but instead of the pleasure of the painting's viewer. "This picture was made to appeal to *his* sexuality. It has nothing to do with her sexuality." (Berger, 2008)

The idea of female sexuality and self-exploration of the female form being condemned by men is a theme seen throughout western society even today with women being scrutinized for having the same sexual desires as men. In an interview with The Guardian, feminist author Laura Tanenbaum said that "a 'slut' is a girl or woman who deviates from norms of femininity. The 'slut' is not necessarily sexually active – she just doesn't follow the gender script." (Valenti, 2017) But recently women are taking ownership of their own bodies with influencers and activists coining terms such as 'slut shaming' in order to reclaim the derogatory terms once used to degrade and devalue them and challenge outdated male dictated perceptions.

The striking thing about many of the female nudes from this time period is the obvious lack of body hair. This again is due to the male need to supress female sexuality so here "not painting the hair on a woman's body helps towards the same end. Hair is associated with sexual power, with passion. The woman's sexual passion needs to be minimized so that the spectator may feel that he has the monopoly of such passion." (Berger, 2008) Due to these depictions of hairless women, real women

began changing themselves to suit this male idealised beauty standard and record of this can be seen as recipes appear in household books. “A recipe that constantly recurs is one based on creating a highly alkaline solution that melts the hair from the surface of the skin (just as hair-removers like Veet do today)” (jillburke, 2012)

It is interesting then to compare the depictions of the female form seen in these Renaissance oil paintings to far more contemporary depictions such as photographs. In a collection of unseen nude photographs taken by American photographer Saul Leiter, Leiter, who was known for photographing for British Vogue, Harper’s Bazaar and Esquire magazines, seemed to take a break from his artificial and glamorous professional work or “maybe they were two sides of the same coin – on one side, the poise, artificiality, and glamour of colour, the sophisticated lighting, accessories, and clothing, the top models for hire; on the other, in black and white, shot in natural light, the candid intimacy of long-time friends and lovers who let Leiter into their own spheres.” (Nagger, 2018)

The obvious difference between Leiter’s nude photographs and the nude forms seen in the Renaissance paintings is the lack of male gaze. The women in these photographs are real, unapologetically themselves and they dictate their own narrative. They have not been depicted as passive sexual objects, instead they are human. “Leiter’s gaze is not that of a typical male: the women can be in turn shy, aggressive, or playful, but they always appear to be partners and full participants…in other words, these are not traditional nudes but rather portraits of women who happen to be in the nude.” (Nagger, 2018)

Untitled Saul Leiter

Often in Leiter’s nude portraits the women’s body hair can clearly been seen, this is in direct contrast to the depictions of female form seen in Renaissance paintings such as Bronzino’s ‘An Allegory with Venus and Cupid.’ This could be due to the rise of the feminist movement that was happening during the 1960’s and 70’s, when these nudes were estimated to be taken, as women were reclaiming their sexualities. Hair removal in the 1960’s became a female preference rather than something deemed a necessity by men, “women gained more liberties and defended their autonomy over their bodies. On one end of the spectrum, many women continued with the clean shaven, body hairless look that had been popularized in the 1940s and '50s, and on the other, feminists turned their back on hair removal and opted to go au naturale.” (Basyah, 2020) Therefore, the fact that some of the women photographed by Leiter have body hair and some do not is a direct reflection of the women’s personal sexuality and not that of the male viewer.

Recently within the 21st century women have used body hair as a way of making a feminist statement that challenges the beauty ideals set by men. For example, actors such as Julia Roberts and Amanda Stenberg have appeared on red carpets with visible under arm hair, subsequently "flaunting one's body hair has become a trend among women who post images of their armpit hair on social media to defy old-fashioned beauty norms." (Basyah, 2020) Artist Anya Paintsil has even included actual body hair within her work by weaving it into her textile portraits. She does this in order to challenge beauty norms and expand ideas of what art is, she has said "The decision to use hair as a material in my work came from a desire to make people reconsider what they think 'art' is, or should be. There is a snobbery when it comes to artistic mediums, and historically craft-based practices have been relegated to the bottom of the hierarchy." (Figes, 2021)

Another interesting feature within Leiter's portraits is the inclusion of everyday activity such as dressing and undressing, reading a newspaper, having a cigarette. This adds a relatable element that cannot be seen within the Renaissance oil paintings, a feeling that the viewer knows this woman or is this woman and therefore a more realistic depiction of the female form. In some of these nude photographs "several women are masturbating, a rare occurrence in classical nude photography" (Nagger, 2018) which again is another obvious reflection of female sexuality.

The inclusion of this is imperative in Leiter's goal of creating images that truly reflect the fact that women are sexual beings rather than sexual objects and it could be argued that this depiction of the female form is taboo, even today. Author and activist Florence Given urges "It is imperative that we normalize masturbation for all women. Because if we can normalize masturbation we also normalize female sexuality and with that, be viewed as people who enjoy sex too as opposed to passive objects to have sex with" (Given, 2020)

Florence Given is an award-winning feminist author and definitely a significant figure in the feminist movement currently, her debut book 'Women Don't Owe You Pretty' is a Sunday Times best-seller. "This book is an anti-shame, self-love bible. No, it's not an academic break-down of cutting-edge feminist critical theory" (Rebecca Percival, 2021) but instead this book is a much more accessible introduction to feminism. In her own words Given's work "confronts oppressive attitudes towards women and their bodies and she uses her platform to raise awareness of issues surrounding sexuality, consent, race and gender." (Given, 2020a)

Given also includes a series of illustrations within her book that present us with a more modern comparison of the presentation of the female form in art. For example, within the following image the female form can be seen as powerful and most crucially, presented within the female gaze.

Hairy Bitch – print by Florence Given

Given choses to include body hair in this image and highlights this hair as the subject's personal choice by having visible under arm and arm hair but no visible leg hair. This adds to the overall empowering theme of the image as it is in direct contrast to the images of female form seen within the Renaissance oil paintings as Given's work does not reflect the male gaze.

The print also displays the phrase "If they do not add any value to your life, what the hell are they doing in it?" (Given, 2020) and the catchphrase "dump him," which is often used by Given in her social media posts and within her book, can also been seen within the image. These phrases are indicative of female empowerment as Given champions women being independent and not relying on others (especially men) for validation, she has said "Stop putting up with things you don't have to put up with." (Given, 2020) This narrative of women supporting themselves and being financially independent, opinionated, and powerful is one that can rarely be seen in artistic interpretations of the female form before the feminist art movements of the 1960's, therefore it is a new and empowering viewpoint.

Conclusion

Personally, I have always identified myself as a feminist as the strong female protagonists within my life have always given me great inspiration and my role models, both male and female, have always instilled in me that gender and sex were not a thing of hierarchy and that everyone is equal. That is why I wanted to create this piece of writing and expand my knowledge on the topic of femininity and the female form in art, to better inform myself on the struggles faced by women working within the art and visual culture field.

Within chapter one, my findings conclude that while today's society has supposedly made strides to provide equality between the sexes, we are far from achieving total equality. This is especially true within the art and visual culture world as the statistics for female representation within gallery spaces and museums, though improving gradually, are still alarmingly low. More needs to be done by curatorial teams to create diverse exhibitions that showcase work from all genders, sexes and cultural backgrounds on an equal scale.

As a result of my findings within this chapter, I now have an even greater respect and admiration for female artists and makers. Undertaking this research has personally inspired me to make all efforts possible, within my own practice, to be as activist as possible and to seek out female curated exhibitions and use them as inspiration to drive myself forward as a creator.

Chapter two clearly reveals a more hopeful narrative in terms of equality as women have definitely begun to challenge stereotypes produced by the male gaze. Women now are owning their sexuality and unashamedly flaunting things that were previously deemed taboo such as body hair and masturbation in order to rewrite themselves as sexual beings instead of things for men to have sex with.

As someone who has predominantly lived within a culture where the male gaze had already begun to be challenged and female sexuality was being celebrated, it was particularly interesting to look at examples of depictions of the female form in art that presented a totally different version of the female than I was used to. The renaissance oil paintings I have presented in chapter two, I believe, serve as a reminder of the way that women have been oppressed and therefore reiterate the importance of the feminist movement and the fight for equality.

Finally in answer to my title question, representations of the female form and notions of femininity within art and visual culture have changed in line with the experience of female artists as women have now taken charge of telling their own story. More female representation in art is definitely still needed but great strides have been made by female artists that have made it possible for women within art to be seen and heard. This has ultimately resulted in more accurate depictions of the female form and notions of femininity being portrayed in art that are not conducive of the male gaze, and therefore present a more feminist narrative.

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