

WAYS OF PERCIEVIING (ADDA4023/C)

OBJECTS

Introduction

Objects an Exhibition that explores the hyper-sexualisation of women and how women are regularly being reduced down to a bodily appearance through social, cultural, economic systems and norms throughout history. Although many people will argue that contemporary culture has moved past this issue, it has simply taken more subtle and complex forms.

Feminist theorists and philosophers have studied long into the idea as to why women are objectified and how it is deeply imbedded into our society, often showing through artworks. I intend to create a provoking and immersive experience into the topic by exploring these artists *Betty Tompkins, Francesca Woodman, Paul Gauguin, Linder sterling* and their work.

Context

The hyper-sexualization of women has been and continues to be a major issue in societal norms. The central concern in feminist theory and philosophy refers to the ongoing issue of women's identities being reduced to sexualised bodies. The exploration of women existing purely for consumption, enjoyment and control rather than the portrayal of women as sexual beings. The hyper-sexualization of the female body is referring to the cultural process in which women are assessed, comprehended and often portrayed in terms of their sexual appeal. Although sexuality in itself is not inherently problematic, feminist theorists argue that over sexualising women becomes problematic when it begins to diminish a woman's identity, purely to their physical form causing uneven power dynamics. At a philosophical level the concept of women being reduced down from a recognised member of society down to just their body and physical appearance can be traced back to the foundation of the 'western thought'. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir argues that a woman is defined down to "Other" meaning she is in relation to a man rather than a person capable of acting independently without said man. "No group ever defines itself as One without immediately setting up the Other opposite itself" (de Beauvoir, 1949, p.26) This idea situates women in a state of "immanence" as de Beauvoir calls it. "Immanence" being a state associated with the body, nature and reproduction this contrasts the male association with intellect and power. The implications of "immanence" is that women as seen as these 'bodily' beings in which their value is heavily tied with and almost limited to their physical form. Hyper-sexualisation intensifies this concept by narrowing down the meaning of the female body to its sexual desirability. This objectification reinforces the notion that there is a limited understanding of womanhood. This philosophical foundation is built upon by Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), In this essay Mulvey explains that through camera angles, aesthetic framing and narrative roles visual media portrays women in a desirable way for heterosexual men. The visual media presenting women and objects, passive spectacles. Women are broken down into sexualised body parts detaching the person from the body. "Woman displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle" (Mulvey, 1975, p.12) here Mulvey is arguing the sexualised display of women in visual media is not incidental but rather a central factor to it. Constantly framed as sexual spectacles women's bodies are portrayed to provide visual pleasure, supporting the idea of sexualization through exaggerated

depictions of the female form styled and prioritised for maximum erotic value. These factors not only objectify women but reducing them down to visual components within media texts and limits their representation as complex characters. Bell Hooks essay *Eating the Other* highlights how in the sexualisation of women racial differences are selectively appropriated to suit the cultural norms which are heavily dominated. “Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.” (Hooks, 1992, p.21) Hooks’ essay and critique reveals how the sexualisation of women cannot be separated from race, capitalism and power. Women are a product racialised and positioned within systems that benefit from them being reduced down to just a body. Hooks discusses the idea that women of colour are hyper-sexualised in a different way that of a caucasian women and that sexualisation is not neutral. Exploring how Black or Latina women are often seen as more “exciting” and “exotic” than Caucasian individuals. The way women of colour are represented reinforce harmful stereotypes contributing to the female hierarchy in which fetishisation and disrespect is often accepted towards racialised bodies. This fetishisation reduces women of colour down to stereotyped body traits purely to serve the desires of men.

Artists and artworks



Just a Pretty Face (Figure 1)

Betty Tompkins

Dimension 61cm x 61cm

Just a pretty face by Betty Tompkins is an Acrylic on canvas on piece with vinyl lettering central to the canvas saying ‘Just a Pretty face’. This piece uses familiar, condescending phrases to critique the concept of women being reduced down to just their physical appearances. Questioning how ‘pretty’ is often treated as a female trait. The blurred background depicting the

female genitalia in a vague way subtly draws your attention to the physicality of women rather than personality. The lack of a face in this piece further reinforces the idea that women are objects, interchangeable rather than individuals. The phrase “Just a Pretty Face” is an immediately recognisable phrase stereotyping women to nothing more than their beauty. At a first look this work can be aesthetically pleasing but looking beyond that the critical tone of the lettering is supposed to make users feel uneasy and question their own perceptions. The subtle imagery of the female genitalia along with the phrase used directly implicates the sexualisation of women and how they are reduced to their bodies.

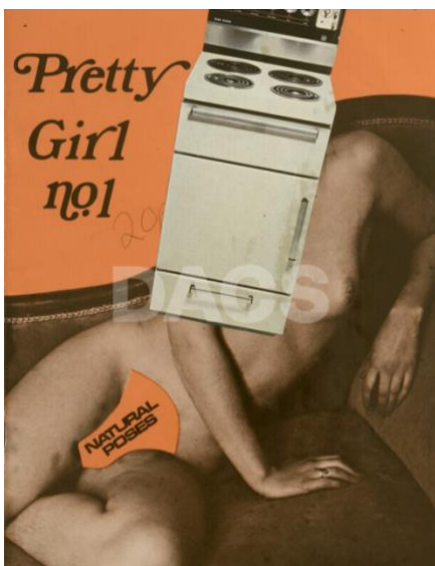


Untitled (figure 2)
Francesca Woodman

14cm x 14 cm

The black and white imagery by Woodman shows a room with damaged walls, ceiling and window giving the impression it is decaying and possibly abandoned. In the centre of the room is a door leaned against the wall diagonally almost as if its floating and underneath it lay a female figure merging into the space. The piece explores the

relationship of the female body and space looking into theme of identity and invisibility. The figure in this image looks fragile and obscured, giving the idea that there is a loss of identity or control. Woodman uses her body to question how women exist in environments that want to confine them. As a whole this image creates feeling that the person shown is not fully present as a person but more an object falling into her surroundings. The old, decaying room is used to reflect the state of the figure further pushing the idea of decay and neglect. The room being empty, deteriorating and an unclear form under the door fills the viewers with a sense of unease and unknowing. Woodmans work links to the hyper-sexualisation of women by challenging it, by making the body unclear it pushes against the idea that women exist just to be viewed.



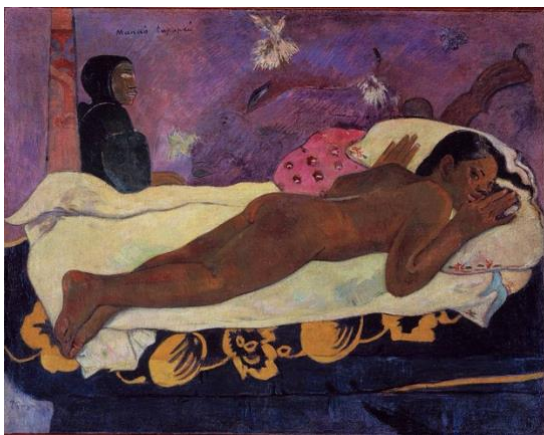
Pretty Girl (figure 3)
Linder Sterling

24cm x 18.5 cm

Linder Sterlings collage style artwork combines a pornographic image cutout from a magazine with a cutout image of an oven covering the woman's head. The background of the image has bold contrasting text reading "Pretty Girls no.1" and "Natural poses". The focus of this piece is to question how women are reduced to sexual objects and domestic roles. Opening up the discussion for why women are expected to stay confined to household duties while being attractive. Both ideas are very unrealistic, purely there for male pleasure and

convenience. The nude body central to the image is from pornographic material posed very intentionally for the best sexual desire, directly representing how women get sexualised and

displayed for viewing. The phrase 'neutral poses' in bold lettering is ironic, implying that heavily posed, staged and sexualised positions are to be expected as normal. The oven covering the woman's head goes back to those expectations in domestic roles, she is seen as the oven and a body with no personality, thoughts, ideas or individuality. The bright background colours feel much like an advertisement you might find in a magazine, linking to the argument that the media spreads these ideologies. The combination of the human body and appliance is there to make the public feel unsettled, creating discomfort for how the woman is clearly being treated as an object. The work forces the viewer to stop and think with its absurdity rather than a passive look.



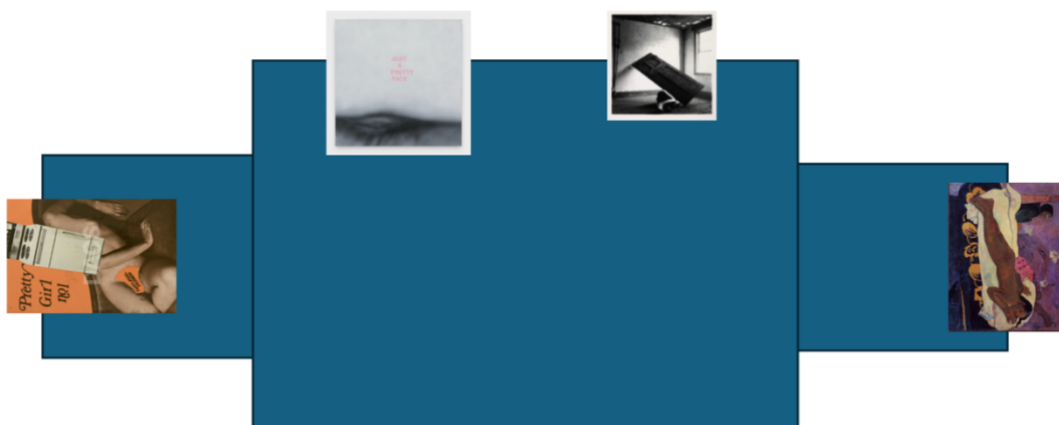
Spirit of the Dead Watching (figure 4)

Paul Gauguin

73cm x 92cm

Spirit of the Dead Watching shows a nude woman laid on a bed facing down, behind her a dark figure with the likeness of a man sat watching her. The main idea of the piece was to explore themes of sexuality, fear and power.

Gauguin was interested in portraying 'exotic' women from Tahiti in his work, but this also reflects a male perspective of the female form. The female body being fully nude and central to the image making it the main focus of the viewer leaning into that idea of women are spectacles to be viewed. With the emphasis on her body laying down, her face turned away from us reduces any personal connection with the viewer. The dark figure slightly off to the side almost creates tension and fear, the idea of someone being watched in such a vulnerable way. At first the piece may seem visually appealing with the bright colours but combined with the uneasiness of the figure may cause conflicting feelings.



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