

Name: Lara Davies

Student Number: 1900468

BA Course: BA Illustration (with Hons)

Word Count: 1648

Tutors Name: Jonathan Pugh

Ways of Perceiving: Curation Essay



The exhibition I intend to curate, entitled “That’s What She Said”, will showcase four subjects for an audience. Ranging from works of art, speeches and music videos they are all linked by their power in promoting equality and creativity. The exhibition will be about celebrating feminism and creativity in the face of adversity and highlight that change is still needed in today’s society. The exhibition will show that feminism is still relevant in today’s society and that inequality of the genders is evident in the creative field as well as the political and social. This exhibition will draw from the theory and ethos of Frances Rifkin’s *The Ethics of Participatory Theatre*, and Brian Lawson’s *The Language of Space*. Supported by feminist artists and writers such as Nina Cosford (illustrator) and Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards the writers of *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism And The Future*.

I intend to hold my exhibition at the Victoria and Albert museum in London. This space would be perfect for the exhibition because not only is there a wide variety of spaces to house the exhibition, it has hosted many feminist artists of the past, such as Frida Kahlo: making herself up, to modern and creative forms of feminism in the media, for example *Call the Midwife* and the *Changing Face of Feminism*. In Bell Hook’s book *Feminism is for Everybody* she highlights that feminism is for “females and males who continue to work for change” (Hooks, 2000) which is often forgotten. “Feminism is not about man hating”, as Emma Watson declares in her *He For She* speech at the United Nations, it is for both genders and Hooks goes on to say “I worked to envision ways of bringing the meaning of feminist thinking and practice to a larger audience, to the masses.” (Hooks, 2000) Research indicated that the V&A has seen an average of 5,000 visitors a day since opening. By having the exhibition at the V&A for even just one week, it could receive an audience of 35,000 people, bringing the celebration of feminism and creativity to the masses. One might argue that people will not visit every corner of the museum, but I intend to spread parts of this exhibition across the museum. If one is walking to the stone courts to observe the cast of Michelangelo’s *David*, they will see projections of the work from the exhibition on the walls and ceilings of the hallways.

While this exhibition celebrates feminism and creativity in the face of adversity, it plays a key role in highlighting that feminism is still important and relevant in today’s society. Cathia Jenainati’s illustrated book *Feminism: A Graphic Guide* asks the same question “Is feminism still relevant?” (Jenainati, 2019, p.10-11) and goes on to refer to the list of objectives that the UK-based Womens Liberation Movement campaigned for from 1970-78. They campaigned for equal pay, equal education and job opportunities, free contraception and abortion on demand, legal and financial independence, the right to self-defined sexuality and an end to discrimination against lesbians, etc. In 2018 BBC News reported that “78% of companies in the UK pay men more than women” but it’s not just the matter of pay that is unequal. Stonewall reported in 2018 “one in five LGBT people have experienced a hate crime or incident because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in the last 12 months.” Talented female celebrities like Taylor Swift, who has won 10 Grammys, has been put under fire in the media for years- many negative articles about her are written in a highly sexist tone- which is why her music will feature in this exhibition. This exhibition will strive to show that feminism is still relevant today.

In *The Poetics of Space* Mark Z. Danielewski observes that “at every turn Bachelard encourages personal engagement” (Danielweski, M. 2014) of a space. My exhibition will require the audience to

engage and contribute to the illustrations that will be exhibited. This was inspired by the ethos of Frances Rifkins participatory theatre in his book *The Ethics of Participatory Theatre in Higher Education* "forms that involve participants – professional and non-professional –in creating, devising and performing in a wide range of modes and relationships." (Rifkin, 2010) The "That's What She Said" competition on Instagram asked the audience to illustrate quotes from inspiring feminists, which will be exhibited in the exhibition, I intend for the audience to participate and illustrate their own quotes which will be added to the exhibit throughout the time that the exhibition is shown.

The main body of work in the exhibition will be the illustrations from the "That's what she said" competition on Instagram, started by the illustrator Nina Cosford. This was what inspired the exhibition. The audience had to pick iconic female figures of the past or present and illustrate a quote from them. In an E-mail interview I had with Nina Cosford she described the positive impact this challenge had "There was a great response from the art community" many people submitted their work because the competition was "focusing on something celebratory and positive." The competition was inspired by a quote from the Eurythmics and Aretha Franklin song "Sister's Are Doin' It For Themselves" that says "Behind every great man, there had to be a great woman", Cosford said the competition was a "good way of looking at the integral and often over-looked role women have always played today and throughout history. Due credit is not often given to women and its high time that their wisdom and inspiration be acknowledged" I will showcase the three winning illustrations in the centre of the room on a large glass screen. I will enlarge them to 48x32 inches and mount them to the screen as prints rather than canvases, they will be seen from both side of the glass. I chose to scale up the illustrations because "by exaggerating it, by personalizing the exaggeration...we may have the good fortune to avoid the habit of reduction." (Lawson, B. 2001) meaning it will be less like that people won't just glance at them for 3 seconds and move on. The competition saw 500+ submissions and I want these to be printed on the walls from floor to ceiling.

Another aspect of the exhibition will be enacting Rifkins Participatory theatre so that the audience also become artists having their work exhibited. This pays homage to the competition where people participated, this time the audience will not only have a wealth of iconic female figures to be inspired by to illustrate, they will have the many hundreds of illustrations in the exhibition to be inspired by. When the audience participates they will be responding to the challenge in the way that Nina Cosford intended them to "I wanted people to respond to this theme but in their own, interpreted way which both celebrated the women they're quoting and explored their own creative voice," (Cosford, 2020) Because art is like feminism, it is for everyone and should be explored by everyone. I was inspired by the curator Ellen Lupton and her curation of *Graphic Design – Now in Production* to project the publics illustrations on walls throughout the museum like the Lust, Posterwall for the 21st Century, the audience would have to take a picture of their illustration and hashtag it #thatswhatshesaidEX and through the use of a developed software the illustrations would be projected live onto the walls and would update with each new submission.

The audience will then move through one of the hallways to a dimly lit room. On the centre of the wall Taylor Swifts music video of "The Man" will be playing which has been described as her "gender-bending take down of the patriarchy" (Washington Post, 2020) In Swifts video she wears makeup and prosthetics to transform herself into a man and does all the things that men in the music and film industry do, that wouldn't be tolerable for a woman to do because of sexist double standards. She sings of her struggles as a female artist, despite winning 10 Grammys and writing 7 albums, her work is always questioned and the media tries to invalidate it. She is often mocked for singing about her breakups, Swift herself in an interview has said "Frankly I think that's a very sexist angle to take. No one says that about Ed Sheeran, no one says that about Bruno Mars. They're all singing about their ex's, their current girlfriends, their love life and no one raises a red flag there." They try to invalidate her creative work because she sings about her emotions, in her song "The Man" she sings that if she was a man "They wouldn't question how much of this I deserved," this song is important to the exhibition because it highlights the struggle that female artists are up against in the media and proves that feminism is still necessary. Taylor Swift's song is an example of doing "the big thing feminism invites us to do – to recognise our power to create social justice in our own unique way." (Baumgardner and Richards, 2010)

Finally, I will be playing Emma Watsons campaign speech for the He For She movement at the United Nations as the UN Women's Goodwill Ambassador. This speech importantly emphasises that feminism is for men too "How can we effect change in the world when only half of it is invited or feels welcome to participate in the conversation?" she asks, and states to men "Gender equality is your issue to." Her speech invited men to join the ranks of feminism, on the first day of the campaigns launch 100,000 men pledged themselves to the movement. I feel that people need reminding of this and by adding this to the exhibition men will feel welcomed to be a part of the movement for change "Manifesta's thesis: Social justice increasingly requires individual and personal action." (Baumgardner and Richards, 2010, p. 6).

Bibliography:

Rifkin, F. (2010) The Ethics of Participatory Theatre Available at:

http://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1394/da1ffc7bd2185901d71f9f54c20cc80e58ea.pdf?fbclid=IwAR07j1hAhY6i8INlemXFA_Owb8VCw_JwjrM3q5JT5BQfwKTYBcwiEVc4LmY (accessed on 7 May 2020)

Jenainati, C. (2019) Feminism: A Graphic Guide

https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=0au7QbAJH0gC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=feminism+is+for+everyone&ots=2-0zkjGkix&sig=fp5hXKgg!NuM1RVURwuMgpdFAo&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false (Accessed on 7 May 2020)

Hooks, B. (2000) Feminism is for Everybody Passionate Politics

https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=f4CaDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT7&dq=feminism+is+still+relevant&ots=VhGQ0YkvWS&sig=7esSVDYfGokKJkN2YXZwhpTm2JA&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed on 7 May 2020)

<https://www.artlyst.com/news/va-annual-report-records-4-2m-london-visitors/> (Accessed on 8 May 2020)

https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/the_big_idea/the-other-art-history-the-non-western-women-of-feminist-art-55280?fbclid=IwAR2Rql0mHhvLgixobkhtfYGGVH3_A77zs3jJYvaZAYvT_OVc24t5Y8D7x4A (accessed on May 8 2020)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-43632763> (Accessed on May 8 2020)

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism> (accessed on May 7 2020)

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/9/emma-watson-gender-equality-is-your-issue-too> (accessed on May 11 2020)

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/event/Nm838G5G/call-the-midwife-and-the-changing-face-of-feminism> (accessed on May 8 2020)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/02/28/the-man-taylor-swift/> (accessed on May 10 2020)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4wuHplQO58&fbclid=IwAR1Qbl6CXTQRaJXLkvNUolplh00x7GNbnsDctSFe61Qjqc_xdNdn_9ayPBw (accessed on May 11 2020)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDzhoofkRJI&t=20s> (accessed on May 10 2020) Taylor Swift CBS interview

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqJJzzVkJgk> (accessed on May 10 2020) Taylor Swift 2DayFMSydney

Lawson, B. (2001) The Language of space <https://www-dawsonera-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/readonline/9780080509969> (Accessed on May 7 2020)

Bachelard, G. (1964) The Poetics of Space foreword by Danielweski, M. (2014)