

The female gaze
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Through my proposal I will discuss the sexist oppression female artists have endured throughout their careers from the art society and their male companions. The areas my observations will draw from are reinforced by feminist theorists, whose philosophies helped illuminate female presence. Also artists and activists whose work not only captured the struggles of female oppression but who exist as case studies in themselves for feminine empowerment. Through the carefully chosen key-words and images I will define my agenda appropriately as I raise case studies exploring female repression through the ages of art.

First keyword- Feminism

Feminism in societies can mean many things to many different cultures, some believe it's an organization to diminish males but others believe it's the empowerment of not only the female voice but the voices of a variety of social groups, on a more academic scale the dictionary defines the word feminism as 'the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes.' Feminism to me is being equals as a human beings and not a gender, I believe we should be judged on our actions and achievements in life rather than diminished or praised because of gender. There are many areas in which the female voice has been outspoken by devaluating means. The mention of woman engaging with the intellectual, cultural or political is a feat which may have caused shock a mere century ago.

"Women's work is inevitably in the sphere of culture as opposed to nature and women often perform tasks similar to those of men, but their work is awarded a secondary status because of the different place the tasks are performed." (Parker,Pollock:2013:70)

Female's are perhaps inherently regarded as a lesser gender when doing the same tasks as a male even in a creative aspect. Activists such as The Guerrilla Girls challenge the museums and galleries officials by provocative text, visuals and humor that express equality and demand social change in human rights but formally address the insufficiency of opportunities and respect woman of art don't receive. This is shown in one of the Guerrilla Girls piece which stated, "Do women have to be naked to get into the met. Museum?". (Guerrilla girls:2013) They proceed to strengthen this statement as between 2011 and 2013 only 4% of artists in the modern art section of the museum are female, however 76% of the naked figures throughout the museum are female. Promoting the prospective that females are still judged as a matter to be objectified rather than intellectually liberated, excluding females from the art community. This is reinforced further in another protest piece of art the organisation created.

The Guerrilla girls weren't the first feminist artists to actively protest against the unfair way women are treated in the art world. In the late 60s and 70s the feminist art movement arose the connection the viewer of the work to artist through highlighting the political and cultural inequalities genders experience. Leading to a positive understanding to change the art society into being equal through all mediums of art such as performance art, conceptual art, body art, craftivism, film, video and textile.

"It is out of these different conditions that the hierarchical division between art and craft has been constructed; it has nothing to do with the inherent qualities of the object nor the gender of the maker." (Parker,Pollock:2013:70)

This encourages that the craft of art should have no business with oppressive gender politics but that crafting is a universal skill within the capabilities of us all. The role women had in art history and culture was changing, one of the most iconic female artist of the feminist movement was Judy Chicago. She created large art installations and paintings examine the role of women and birth, at the same time found the first feminist art program in the united

states. Judy Chicago's art work merges a variety of artistic skills such as needlework, ceramics, welding and explores many more. An example of her extensive skill and research on female heritage is her exhibition called "The Dinner Party". (Chicago,Woodman:2018)

There are many different areas of the exhibition that celebrate feminism however I will be focusing on the ceremonial table shown above. There are 39 table places each representing and important female historical figures giving their achievements and contributions a presence



in modern day society, she and a team of artists created a hand painted china plate and is styled in a yonic (vulva) form. Chicago's work has given feminist art a positive drive force towards broadening the definition of what art represents through the exploration of new media and a fresh perspective on equality.

As shown above feminism in art is distinguished and empowering to all genders of society however females are still cast aside when faced with the power of art dealers, suffer with anonymity and sexism endeavours in museums, galleries and the art community. This will be explored in the following keyword, power.

Second keyword: Power

Power has a many meaning in different aspects of life but the two that i will depicting is the power to have authority over the system of the art world and the power women harness to be influenced by said authority.

"Power is associated firmly with the male and masculinity." (Hartsock in Nicholson:1990:157)

Women have always been associated with being submissive and bending to the will of the males dominance, it's the same in the art society. Powerful and wealthy art dealers having dominance over content of art museums, galleries, art collages and artists deciding what the public are exposed to and manipulating art history to their consumerism benefit. I again refer

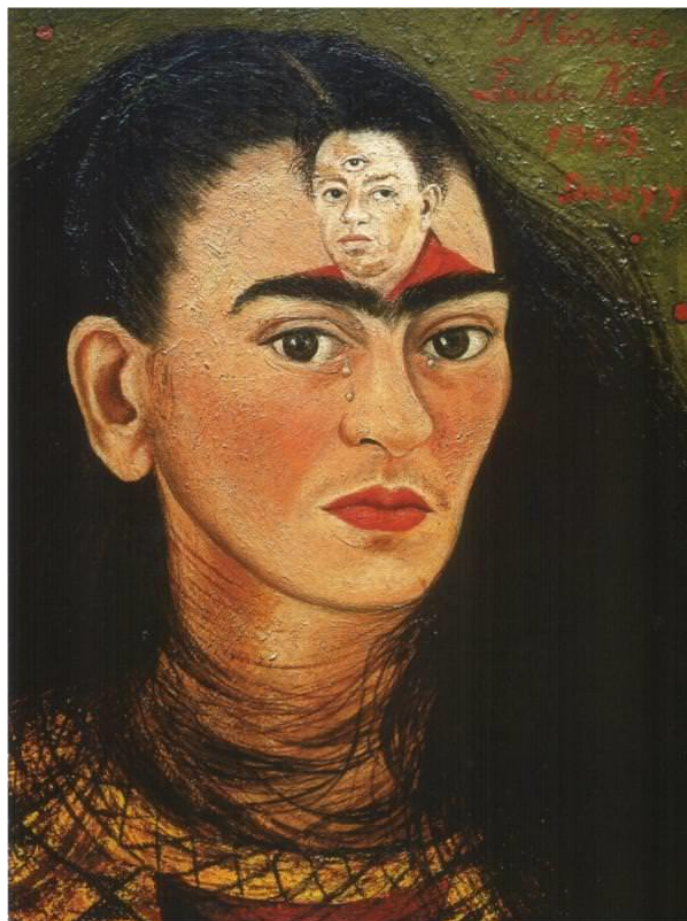
to The Guerilla Girls they have addressed these issues in the art world through many posters and videos stating the facts of how the art community is operated by money and power.

“The art world is kind of run by billionaire art collectors who buy art that appeal to their values”(Guerilla Girls:2016)

This was extracted from a tv interview, they were discussing the battle between the history of art and the history of power. Exclaiming how art has turned into power and is no longer the expression of the soul but a money making scheme. Considering that all the decisions that have aesthetic values are being made by the same organisation then the art displayed to the public will never be authentic representation of cultures.

“It’s not the history of art. It’s the history of power.” (Guerilla Girls:2016)

Female artists not only struggle with the crushing power of art dealers but additionally the power from the relationships they have with other artists. One well known art controversy was between Frida Kahlo and her husband Diego Rivera. Rivera reincarnated the mayan mural tradition of frescoes by visualising the centuries of equality oppression mexican labourers experience, Whilst Frida mixed realism with fantasy alongside autobiographical structures. Enchanted with mexican nature and artifacts, Frida used her paintings to explore the uncertainty of identity, postcolonialism, gender, class and race in herself and the society surrounding her. This lead to Frida's paintings of portraits and many self-portraits empowering herself and modern day society.



(FridaKahlo:2011)

In this painting, Diego and I, Frida expressed her heartache over another affair Diego had with her american friend Maria Felix. As you can see, she paints Diego as her third eye presenting he opened her mind to art and allowed diego to have power over there life together. Fridas whole life revolved around diego after her marriage to him in 1929. Frida followed him around the united states stopping her from painting, focusing all her energy on their marriage and his art. "Her palette and canvas went untouched. Instead she accompanied her husband wherever he went, and became his most important critic." (Bauer:2007:20) This demonstrates a level of succumbing that Frida submitted herself to as she idolised her husband, even went to the extremes of musing her every action to his liking; which of course affected her work. To a degree it seems power struggle is ignited by the failure of humanities relationships. The decline of which is the focus of my third and final analysis: relationships.

Keyword: Relationship

To fully comprehend the repression females endure in art I explored the professional as well as romantic relationship between female and male artists.

According to Di Stepheno, "Western feminism was finally able to deconstruct the presumably fixed universal association between femininity and the biology of reproduction." (Stefano in Nicholson:1990:64) this statement agrees that there is a crippling assumption that in a relationship the female gender is a universal symbol for maternity, a vessel for reproduction. Society are able to look beyond these repressed roles of the female and notice the capability as fairly as the male gender. As Di Stepheno continues on to say, "At the same time, however, gender (rather than sex) differences have emerged as highly significant, salient features which do more to divide and distinguish men and women from each other than to make them parts of some larger, complementary, humanistic whole." (Stefano in Nicholson:1990:64)

Even though this assumption of femininity is becoming less of a norm in modern times back in the early 1900s when Frida was coming of age being a wife and mother came before career. As we explored in point two, Frida sacrificed her own artists development to become a maternal wife, provide help for Diego to rise in the art community in Mexico and the United States.

"The male desire to rule is the primary, if not the only, stumbling block to womens enlightenment." (Roy in Appignanesi,Holmes,Orbach:2013:127)

Despite Diego admiring Frida's paintings and artistic mind he suppressed her artistic outlet however Frida used the power of pain and despair life threw at her to create the most emotionally engaging paintings in art history.

In contrast to how the power struggle within a relationship may have affected the work of a female artist and with the most unhealthy means, influence it; I can compare a slightly more modern relationship with evidence of how the female voice may have taken the back seat. Lee Krasner and her husband Jackson Pollock had a romantic relationship with each other Krasner was a highly independent artist, even playing a vital role in the fluctuation of New York art school in the 40s and 50s taking the attention away from paris and more onto the United States. The artists married in October 1945, shortly after in 1949 Pollock was named the greatest living painter in the United States whilst Krasner was forced into the role of Pollock's career, promoter and artistic companion because of his raging alcoholism and destructive behaviour.

"It's too bad that women's liberation didn't occur 30 years earlier in my life," the Abstract Expressionist painter Lee Krasner told *Artforum* in 1973. "I couldn't run out and do a one-woman job on the sexist aspects of the art world, continue my painting, and stay in the role I was in as Mrs. Pollock." (Mendelsohn:2017)

Having to take care of Pollock's artistic life and their personal life left Krasner with very little consistency in her own artwork, she metamorphosed her artistic style constantly making her work hard to identify as hers. It was only after Pollock death in 1956 Krasner was emancipation in her art.



(Paul Kasmin Gallery:2017)

This is a picture taken in Paul Kasmin Gallery of Lee Krasner's painting *Uncaged*. Krasner painted a series of paintings after Pollock's death in his studio space, normally she'd paint in colour but because she suffered from insomnia given the circumstances she painted in middle of the night, in the dark and could only use earthly browns.

The canvas in this vivid work provides a mouthpiece for her suppressed inner scream, an expression of violent freedom mixed with grief seems to burst around the gallery disclosing Kasmin and Pollock's relationship. What I can summarize from my discussion of artistic Relationships is that even though the male presents restricted the development of the females art, they channeled the pain and mental suffering they experienced from the relationship into their artwork, creating the nationally idolised and empowering art pieces of the modern day.

CONCLUSION

If I could draw a resolution from my proposed voyage into the representation of the female gaze in art; I would conclude that art isn't about gender, it's about the human condition and by repressing the female gender to its activity, you are restricting arts truth to 50% of the human state and therefore misrepresenting it.

"The most notable fact out culture imprints on women is the sense of out limits. The most important thing one woman can do for another is to illuminate and expand her sense of actual possibilities" (Rich in Appignanesi,Holmes,Orbach:2013:217)

Society has forgotten arts reach, potential and what it represents organically: to the way you tie your shoe to the technique of swirling spaghetti on a spoon everyone does it differently in a unique way. Everyone and anyone of any gender or species can do it there's no good art or bad art it's an expression of oneself, of a soul.

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