

Independent Inquiry

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**Essay title: Female Representation:
an enquiry into feminist perspectives that challenge the male gaze.**

Female Representation:
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In this essay I will be looking into gender underrepresentation within the art world and how female artists struggle to gain the same level of success and recognition that is equal to their fellow male artists. I will be looking at the male gaze and how female artists have objected to being inferior to their male counterparts.

With information I found on history.com, the earliest eras of human civilization has starting points of feminism and the equality of women. For example, in ancient Rome, there were protests over the Oppian Law. This was a law that restricted women's access to gold and other goods. There is a quote from an article about Feminism on history.com that says "As soon as they begin to be your equals, they will have to become your superiors." This was said by Marcus Porcius Cato who was a male Roman Consul, who was against the idea of women having access to items that were only available to men. This is also an example of history being typically constructed by privileged men, they were able to decide what rights women had and what laws/events were able to take place. Although the Oppian Law was dismissed despite Marcus Porcius Cato's objections.

An important moment in feminist history was the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. This is where Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott exclaimed their, now very famous, Declaration of Sentiments that "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men and women are created equal.



(The Independent, 2019)

The Suffragettes played a large part of the history of feminism and equal rights. The Suffragettes were a group of women, and a movement, that started in Manchester in 1903. They fought for equal rights, most of the time using extreme methods to protest, often using violence and vandalism to display their political voice. An example of their extreme methods was the famous protest in 1913 where Emily Davidson ran into the path of the King's racehorse at the Epsom Derby to revolt against women not being able to vote. In a video by the BBC News, called Suffragettes: 100 Years Since Women Won the Right to Vote, they say how the Suffragettes were militant and unrelenting, their actions shocked the world and radically changed the democracy in Britain. A quote from this video says how "they changed what was being talked about in Parliament at that time." From hearing this, it shows how much their impact had on the country at that time. They became a topic of conversation and even the powers that be began listening to them and changing the ways of how things were usually done in those days. These protests weren't just about getting the vote, although this is what they're most known for, but they were a pathway that has led us on a much bigger journey, and the equal rights that they fought for are still being fought for today and they are still inspiring and empowering the generations that came after them. Their protests began to claim them a lot of successes. Women gained the vote, first in New Zealand in 1893, Australia in 1902, Finland in 1906 and the United Kingdom in 1908, although the United Kingdom only allowed women over 30 to vote at first. The first world war had a lot of female participation, which proved to a lot of people that they deserved equal representation in the United States. With this female involvement in the war, American women finally gained the right to vote in 1920, 27 years after New Zealand. I think that this gap is outrageous because it took women to prove themselves to others before their voice for equal rights were heard.

There was a second wave of feminism that came after the previous rights were secured. Many women actively participated in the second World War, sparking the iconic media figure of Rosie the Riveter. This famous figure, symbolising women in the workplace, has been a symbol since the 1940s after becoming associated with the female defence



(Rositheriveter.org, 2019)

workers during the second World War. The figure has also stood as a symbol for Women's Independence, being an international image that everyone is aware of and recognises as being a powerful image that represents women. Every year there is an International Women's Day where we celebrate female life. This all comes down to the women who have fought, both physically and metaphorically, so that females today can have the freedom and life that we do.

After the second World War, women wished for greater participation in the workplace which led to the equal pay act of 1963. The equal pay act was a labour law that aimed to stop gender based wage discrimination in the United States. The act was signed by President Kennedy in 1963 as an amendment to the Fair Labour Standards Act. The act forbid employers from paying men and women a different wage for doing the same job. It was one of the first laws in American history that started to reduce gender discrimination in the workplace. After the equal pay act, the Equal Rights Amendment was passed by congress in 1972. This amendment sought legal equality for women and banned discrimination on the basis of sex in general.

The Feminine Mystique was also a large part of feminist history. The Feminine Mystique was a 1963 publication by Betty Friedan, who later co-founded the National Organization for women. The publication argues that women were still solely occupied with unfulfilling roles in homemaking and childcare, which led to feminism being referred to as a 'woman's liberation.'

In more recent history, the MeToo movement was founded in 2006. This movement, that due to the digital age went viral over social media, helps to find pathways to healing for survivors of sexual violence. The movement that became a hashtag over the media, became the topic of conversation about sexual violence has been thrown into the national dialogue. Their goal is to expand the



(Spiked-online.com, 2019)

conversation about sexual violence around the world, reaching a global community of sexual abuse survivors from all different backgrounds. These people included all women and girls from all communities, with queer, trans and disabled people being included. From this movement is the rising concern of rape culture with sexual violence against women being normalised and excused in the media and pop culture.

Women's marches are a very popular act that are still very common and happen all the time. A very known march was the women's march on January 21st 2017. This march was to support gender equality, civil rights and many other issues that became a very large event. It was originally only to be held in Washington D.C but it became a worldwide event. This shows that these issues are a worldwide issue and women all around the world are still fighting for equal rights which, to me, shouldn't be happening. Females and males should just be equal from the get go.

In 1975, Laura Mulvey used the term 'The Male Gaze' for the first time in an essay she wrote called Visual Pleasure. This term is widely used in more present times but is described as the act of depicting women. In her essay she inspects the male gaze and tells how this male gaze is a perspective that turns the female body into parts which damages the view of the woman and makes the viewpoint seem presumably heterosexual male. This is due to how sexualised females appear within media. For example, advertisements. Women in advertisements usually appear semi clothed or posed in some sort of sexual way that would attract a predominantly male audience. Although, sometimes this posing is not obvious and presented in more of a discrete way.

This theoretical concept of the male gaze shows to us how culture influences media. For example, according to the website projectcensored.org, it is believed that men control the media and the creation of media. The messages from media are dominated by a male point of view which the male gaze theory argues that because of the fact that men control the media, women are often the object and not the possessor of the male gaze. The subject of men controlling the media isn't just about the content but also the object of media itself. 90% of the CEO's of the six companies that own the media are all white males. Although

when these men decide to allow women have power within the media, they are met with barriers that do not allow them to have the same level of power. For example, NBC news hired Deborah Turness to become their news president, yet she held less power in her position than the presidents before her. She also had struggles with male anchors who dictated network decisions to her when she had the power over them, not the other way around. To me this shows that even when women have some sort of high ranking position that they're still not taken seriously and male workers in a lower position than them do not see them as superiors and see them as lesser whereas if it was a male superior they would have immediate respect for them and not diminish their power in any way.

This male gaze also has a large impact on the art world and the female artists who try to gain recognition, or the same level of recognition as their fellow male artists, but have struggles with this purely because of their gender. I am going to look at this and look at the differences between men and women in the art world and what exactly is being done about it. Theguardian.com talks about this male gaze and states a fact that in art history, artists were men and professional female artists were deemed as freaks. Brian Sewell argued that women could not be great artists which, to me, is another male artist still trying to find reasons that female artists cannot receive good praise and an entry into the higher rankings of the art field, even in this day and age when we believe that everyone is equal.

John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* was a source I had to look into for this subject, an article called 'Why We Still Need John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*' from www.dazeddigital.com says a lot about the concept of the male gaze before it was labelled as that. The article says how in 1972, John opened our eyes with his critic of the female figure in art and advertising and although this was in 1972, and the sex discrimination act still being three years away, his lessons about this topic are still relevant and vital today. Berger and his all-male team discussed issues such as agency, empowerment and their relationship to their own bodies and to men.

A quote I have pulled from this article says "A woman is always accompanied, except when quite alone, and perhaps even then, by her own image of herself. While she is walking across a room or weeping at the death of her father, she cannot avoid envisioning herself

walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she is taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. She has to survey everything she is and everything she does, because how she appears to others – and particularly how she appears to men – is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life.” I think that this is quite a powerful quote because it says how women do not tend to do anything without wondering how what they’re doing is being seen as and how it looks. Women are taught to act and be a certain way and as you go through life you tend to stick by this and often continue to act like this even during times it’s not expected, for example as it says in the quote, weeping. It also comes across as if everything a woman does is to please a man with how she acts, which can often be the case. Females watch every little thing they do. This feeling may not be a universal one, but is familiar to a vast majority of women. Our ‘gazes,’ or the male gaze in this case, depicts women and possessions. This was even the case in Western paintings where females appeared nude. Through John’s conclusions of these images showed that they were presented this way to feed an appetite of male sexual desire where she existed to be looked and only to be consumed, which to me seems awfully inhuman and as if she’s some sort of product and not an actual human being.



(Titian, Venus of Urbino, 1532 or 1534.

(Everiss, 2019)

Another quote from this article that I want to add is “It comes with adolescence – maybe the first time a man yells at you from a moving car – and is the sense of living life one step removed, living as your own spectator. You are never yourself, you are yourself as you appear to others. To men, yes, and to the women with whom you are supposed to compete for their attention.” This is a very strong concept to me because, not only can I relate to it, but females especially seem to think more of what others think of them rather than thinking of themselves first. What males think of them especially when in an uncomfortable situation, such as cat calling, is a reoccurring subject. In *Ways of seeing*, Berger talks about how the goddesses of art became the models of contemporary advertising. To me, this seems as although it’s a different era, it’s the same concept. Women are used for marketing purposes and throughout the years that hasn’t changed. They were used in art as a way to

attract male viewers and that logic is still being used in the present day in advertising. Although, today's marketing isn't aimed directly at men, women themselves look at these images and sometimes it's lustfully, often it's because they want to look like or envy the model in the advert which can be toxic as most of the time it's an unrealistic body image or heavily manipulated so that it's not the actual body or look of a woman.

The Victoria's Secret Angels are a prime example of the term 'sex sells'. These women produce the ultimate female fantasy, which attracts both male and female viewers. These women seem like they are the perfect females, but they're more of an unrealistic representation on what women should look and act like. John Berger describes these women as "living, breathing advertisements, existing for mass consumption" which is very true but also, as I have said already, presents them as a product rather than just a female. Their job is to sell items with the use of their body and it works because it's attracting all the right people it intends to. Our society is currently image obsessed and I think that this is largely down to social media, portraying more of these unrealistic female features and the celebrities that go alongside it.

From looking at John Berger's Ways of seeing, it shows how even men themselves realised that something wasn't right with women being used as a pawn to market items and, without realising it at the time, became a starting point for a topic that people didn't seem ready to talk about; men seeing women as objects and possessions.

A video I watched called "What does it mean to be a woman in art?" from the [tate.org.uk/](https://www.tate.org.uk/) shows different women talking about what it is like to be a female artist. These women, Kelly Green, Frances Morris, Dana Olarescu, Cairo Clarke, Alketa Xhafa Mripa and Bojana Jankovic are a mix of artists in different fields and positions who feature in this video.

Frances Morris, the director of Tate Modern, talks about how women in history of the modern world have been discriminated against for centuries. She says how there are very few female voices and as the voices double as time goes on, big institutions have failed to recognize the voices of those female artists and their work.

Bojana Jankovic says how there is a disproportional representation in every single big institution there is. She explains how there is always more white men than anyone else. She says how although the thought process is usually "oh well, I suppose it's been going on for a while and we're making progress and so on, but really actually as an artist, you find the doors ever so subtly being just quietly shut down, because you make work that is of a certain kind, because you're a woman or whatever and the person in charge of deciding on what happens with that work has a completely different experience to you because that person is white and male." This quote, directly from Bojana, comes across as female artists already knowing the outcome on trying to make it in the art world and knowing they will not succeed down to the decision of a white male. This is quite saddening because they should be optimistic instead of thinking they already know the fate of their work. Throughout the video there is a lot more said about females in the art world but I think that this point from Bojana is the strongest point of them all and really shows how even though things seem as though it's changing and female artists are gaining recognition, in most cases this is not the point and it is totally down to white male artists being in charge of these huge institutions and choosing other white men instead of going down another path. I think they do this because they think it's safer to choose male artists as they think it will make them more money as that is the way it's been for centuries but this is not the case.

Following on from this video, there was an article called 'Are Women Represented Fairly in the Arts?' which talks about the current situation that female artists are in. According to the National Museum of Women in the Arts, 51% of visual artists today are women. Although this is the case, when it comes to gallery representation, the numbers tell a very different story. 78% of the galleries represent more men than women in London and only 5% represent an equal number of male to female artists. I think that this is mainly down to men being in charge of these galleries and being the ones to set up the exhibitions. My opinion is that the artists being invited to show at these galleries are friends of the directors, meaning white men have more of a chance to show work than females would. This article also says how female artists face unique challenges such as major institutions having failed to support the careers of female artists. I think that this is because of habit, they did not support them before and they're not doing it now. The Modern Tate's collection of female artists is growing and I presume this is down to their new director being female herself, although

work still needs to be done to fairly represent female artists. At February 2017, 27% of living artists in the Tate collection were women. A quote from this article I want to mention is by artist and professor Joan Semmel, she says "If there are no great celebrated women artists, that's because the powers that be have not been celebrating them, but not that they're not there." I think that this is a strong point, we tend to think that because we don't know of something that it doesn't exist until we are told it does, but there are plenty of great female artists all over the world but the people who should be celebrating them and making them popular just aren't, and this is largely down to the reason that the 'powers that be' are usually men.

One thing that shocked me about this whole subject were the statistics I found around female artists and their places in the collections and representation. The amount of females within National Gallery of Scotland's collection was only 4%, a shockingly low percentage of women included. This means that 96% of the collection is male and that's a staggering amount of men and it not even close to even being an equal amount of each gender. This is the type of variance that needs to change within artists work as it shows clear diversity from the get go. The Whitworth Manchester's collection is at 20% for female artwork and Tate Modern's collection of female art is at 35%. These statistics are rising with some institutions but not fast enough and they're still not high enough figures to be calling it equal in any way. The last statistic that I have is for the amount of females that have represented Britain at the Venice Biennale over the past decade. This figure is at 33%. For this being over the past decade it means that men have usually had the spot over women and female artists have had a slim chance of showing there. This does not surprise me after looking into female representation because the percentages for females at exhibitions always seem to be low. This shows the enormous gap in male to female representation and also shows that things do not seem to be changing fast enough. Males still seem to be getting a helping hand with becoming popular due to the fact females aren't looked at as being important or taken serious enough to compete with them.

When talking about female artists not being taken as serious as male artists, I found a good example on theguardian.com within an article called 'How the art world airbrushed female artists from history' where they talked about Plautilla Nelli. Plautilla Nelli was a Renaissance

convent painter who worked in Florence in the 1500s. She was the first female artist of Florence, not forgetting the only known female artist of the Renaissance, while also being a nun at the age of 14. While doing more research beyond this article, I found out that her most famous artwork



‘Last Supper’ was only unveiled in Uffizi in Florence having spent 450 years in storage. (Detail of Plautilla Nelli's *The Last Supper*. Photo: of Rabatti & Domingie. (artnet News, 2019)

For me, this shows that it took 450 years for this piece of work to be appreciated as it had been devalued from the start purely because of the fact Nelli was female. During her time as a practicing artist, females weren't allowed to work in the art field, so, Nelli established an all-woman painting workshop in her convent. Even when females were barred from art, these women still found a way to do what they loved and to fight against the norm at the time to prove themselves as serious artists. The release of the painting, though 450 years too late, was the first ever exhibition of her work and was described as a poetic justice for female artists all around the world. Nelli was described as just another nun with a paintbrush, not taken seriously at all because of her gender. This was a movement by the Uffizi to change the gender imbalance within their gallery. The discharge of her painting from storage was well overdue. Her work wasn't shown when she was alive and she didn't get to see the large impact her painting had on the world. Nelli was written out of every Renaissance book while a large amount of male painters stayed firmly in the spotlight.

I think that this is a prime example of gender representation. I feel that although things may be slowly changing, we do need to look back at the past and see just how unfairly and poorly female artists were treated. They were always producing great work it was just down to the matter of male artists pushing them to the side.

The article carries on to talk about how the art that we deem to be the most valuable, is by men. This comes from the work that is usually pushed in big name galleries and institutions, which show the work from men a far lot more than women. The biggest collections in the world are ones mostly holding work produced by male artists, for example Van Gogh, Picasso and Hockney, to name a few. How many female artists could you easily name that have large collections within the world? The female equivalent just isn't the same.

The price paid for female artist's work is also a big red flag as the auction record for work by a deceased female is \$44.4million for the work called Jimson Weed/White Flower No1 by Georgia O'Keefe. This seems like a lot of money but is nothing compared to the \$179million paid for work by Picasso. Georgia's work sold for a mere 25% than what Picasso's did. It's a staggering difference. This says a lot to me about how they value females and their work they produce. Many art collectors or even male artists in general don't seem to see females being on the same level as them when it comes to art. Again, their work isn't taken seriously enough and although it is improving ever so slowly, the work made should be equal and not discredited.

The one place that women tend to sell their art more is on online marketplaces. This may be down to the case of not being able to tell if it was created by a male or female, or when sold on a website such as etsy.com, it may be seen as more of an arts and crafts rather than artwork which brings me back to the subject of women only being allowed to create work in the past when it was deemed as arts and crafts. This seems like a point of nothing is changing and the matter of the work still not being taken seriously. The art market has been described as a money-driven monster in this article and I completely agree, they're not being given the chance to sell their work for a large amount of money because the collectors only care about the big male names.

The Tate Modern's new female director, who I have mentioned already, says how the collection at the moment holds 335 female artists to a large 959 artists and how it just cannot go on. I feel as though it's taken a female being in charge to change the way the Tate runs when it comes to showing the work of these female artists. Frances Morris, the Tate

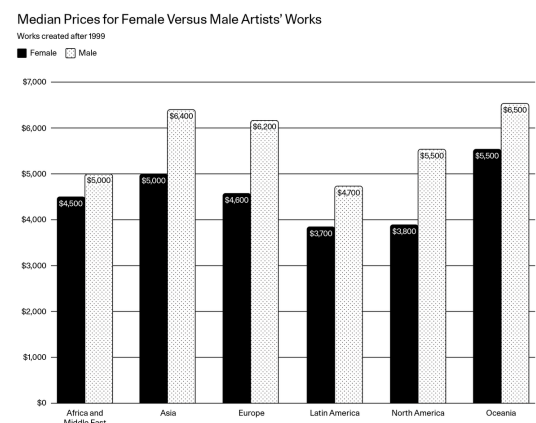
director, is trying. She's on a mission to turn the Tate around and is working hard to ensure that it is equal, if not more devoted to female artists than it previously has been.

In the ending paragraph of the article, it says how there is a new generation of female artists who work online and how they "finally have a platform where they aren't considered a risky investment." Why are women artists deemed as a risky investment? Are male artists also seen as being a risky decision? No. Their work is also seen as being great and professional where as people think they have to choose wisely with the work produced by a female, not choosing wisely for both genders, but just female. Any work from a well-known male artist is snatched up straight away but work from a female has to be assessed and seem as though it's not a risky choice.

Being on the subject of female's work being valued less than males, I found another article dedicated to this exact subject on artsy.net called 'Why is work by female artists still valued less than work by male artists?' This article held a lot of information that I thought was important to my initial question. Just looking at the title of the article, the word 'still' being there shows that this is not a new statement, it's something that has always been there and seems to continue to be an issue in today's society.

The article also shows a graph of median prices for female versus male artists' works from 1999-2019.

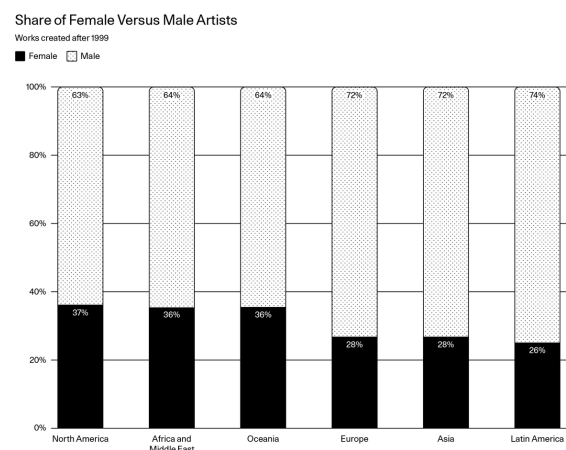
This graph shows that females have always been worth less, both in and out of the art world. As stated already, male artists get higher earnings from their work because of they're seen as being a more important name than females, meaning collectors are more willing to pay more for the work. We often think of a gender pay gap in wages as something that happens in offices or large corporations but it does in fact happen in the art world too. This is more to do with the price of the artwork. We usually wouldn't think about a pay gap in the art work but it is there and it is a massive issue that is present.



(Brown, 2019)

It also states in this article how “Walter Gropius claim that women do not think well in three dimensions” which shows how oblivious males are to a woman’s work as they’re exactly the same when it comes to who created them. They can create the same type of work and it not differ because women cannot be on the same level as a man. They have the same talent but this has been the thought process for years, that women have less capability than men. From this thinking, it says how the textile arts were a medium that women were permitted and encouraged to adopt. They were encouraged to do a certain type of art and not to experiment with what they might have actually wanted to do and most women didn’t question it and followed what was expected of them but some did venture out and produced art but it wasn’t seen as being professional or they were shunned for it. Females being barred from the arts and having to delve more into the ‘crafts’ until the 1870s says to me that their work wasn’t important. I think that this is also because female roles were always, and still to this day, seen as being domestic. They were the ones to stay at home and look after the house or children rather than be creative and explore new things.

Another graph I have is of the share of female versus male artists from 1999-2019. In this graph it shows that the highest statistic is 37% which is still nowhere near half or being equal to their fellow male artists. This gender gap shows yet again that they’re not on the same level, or being that they are on the same level but just not seen or appreciated as being on that bar.



(Brown, 2019)

Throughout this piece of writing there are multiple words used that I think show meaning for this subject. The words notoriously difficult gets repeated a lot and it shows that even though it was not easy back then, it still is not easy not now and females still struggle within the art world to be recognised and represented as they should. The word offensive also gets used in this article. It gets used because it is offensive to females that they are inferior to

men and less recognised, less valued even for the exact same work where the same amount of effort gets placed. They also talk about a rapid evolution of contemporary art but I do not think that the evolution is that rapid. The issues female artists face for representation is not changing as fast as it should, although there should not have been anything to change in the first place.

Curatorial Activism is a term from Maura Reilly that she talks about in her book 'Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating.' This is a sort of movement, to me, where she organises exhibitions that include artists who are often excluded or looked over and showcases their work so that they get this representation that I have been talking about. Maura talks about how these artists have been included in injustices within the art world and this is their chance to be a part of something where they can escape these injustices.

I think that is a very strong move and it's something that a lot more people should be doing with not just females, but people from different races, ethnicities, religions and sexuality. She is helping them get their foot in the door to the art world and be themselves, not committing to an art standard where they either have to dismiss the thing that makes them themselves. Maura states in her writing that "We are living and working in an art world that cares little about racism and sexism, a world that appears to pre-date the women's/civil and LGBTQ rights movements." I think that speaks a lot about what it is actually like as a working artist or curator, such as Maura herself, as she has seen it first hand as a female and is pushing forward and helping those who need it the most.

I think that overall the gender under representation within the art world is a very present issue that needs to be faced head on. I think as a starting point the big institutions need to see more of the struggles that female artists have faced and that they cannot be shunned to the side anymore. We're making a start by getting females in higher positions in the art world, such as Frances Morris, who are starting to challenge what these big galleries are doing for female artists and exactly what they can do to help.

The male gaze in the art world all comes down to men thinking they have power over women and restricting them to not letting them achieve what they could if they just let

them be equal to their male counterparts. The men, that are usually always the ones who are in charge, are more concerned of letting their male 'friends' be part of what they have going on rather than venturing out and finding amazing females who could be just as good, if not better. This ends up with the same cycle of these male artists becoming popular and gaining recognition for their artwork. Female artists have to fight, day after day to have their name out there, and usually they hit walls where they are told their work is not worthy enough but in fact their work is more than worthy and often deserves all that much more notice.

This isn't a subject that often slaps you in the face and is that noticeable when you do not look for it. It's something that you might subtly pick up but it is not until you look deep into it that you notice just how messed up female under representation it. It is something that needs drastic change and this change isn't coming soon enough. A large amount of female artists are not getting what they deserve and this all comes down to men having too much power and entitlement. This entitlement does not just appear when they are put in a position of said power, it comes right at the beginning when they are given a helping hand over a female artist. They are put above females without even knowing it on most occasions. They are helped subtly and probably without noticing, are automatically given a helping hand to produce their work at a large scale.

Things need to change and although they already are, it's not moving fast enough. There are enough statistics, as shown within this writing, to show that over the year's things are not increasing to a satisfactory level. As I have said in my research, women have been airbrushed out of history, they need to stop being airbrushed out and start being launched into the limelight and get the honest recognition and representation they deserve. The art world would see a dramatic change if this were an event to happen overnight, although it never will.

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