

Cover page

Question 5: Choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designers that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500-word essay. Critically assess consider primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioner

Student number: 1907206

Course title: BA Fine Art Site And Context

Word count 2550

Lecture name: Alex Duncan

The Beauty Standard

What is classed as beautiful? Who says who is beautiful and who's not? Society pushes its idea of "beauty" everyday in many different forms, but who has the final say. One of the most debated and controversial themes in philosophy is the idea and definition of beauty. For centuries it has ejected many different theories and personal views since the beginning of history. David Hume Scottish philosopher states

"Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty..."(Hume 1757)

However Greek philosopher Plato believed there was a universal truth. He claimed that there was a perfect form of beauty which was "imperfectly manifested in what we call beautiful". Main controversial issue that surrounds beauty is that some believe that true beauty is defined by someone's outer appearance, their physical self, while others believe it is something that is experienced through a person's character, their inner self and soul.

Over the Years the ideas of standards of social beauty have evolved as well as differ from culture to culture. Today it is commonly known in western culture to thrive to look like the women who is "thin" "large breasted" "tanned" "plump lips" and "smooth skin." All are apart of a socially constructed idea of "beautiful." Features that are so natural to the human body such as "cellulite" "stretch marks" "scars" features that hold a story to each individual are simply airbrushed today and society pushes the idea that these things are "disgusting" or "unpleasant to look at."



(Image of kylie Jenner one of the most influential people today. Showing the change of her facial features that are commonly seen as the ideal beauty today. Big lips, soft skin etc)

Media today pushes the influence of standards of beauty heavily, from billboards with models on to Instagram and adverts. It has shown to have devastating effects for the majority of women, mentally and physically. According to a recent survey of 3,300 girls and women across 10 countries, 90 per cent of all women aged 15 to 64 worldwide want to change at least one aspect of their physical appearance, with body weight ranking the highest (Etcoff, Orbach, Scott, & D'Agostino, 2004). There is a danger of living up to the new image of beautiful, such as physical, economics and psychological costs. Physical costs such as tattoos, piercings and even some as common such a fashion and wearing heels. This conformity to one idea of beautiful is leading to unhappiness and dissatisfaction of many women in themselves, which leads to more drastic alterations like plastic surgery and anorexia to fit in. A strong theme and movement I wish to indulge on with my work and push those boundaries of beauty for a better acceptance of our true forms.

"Beauty shouldn't be about changing yourself to achieve an ideal or be more socially acceptable. Real beauty, the interesting, truly pleasing kind, is about honouring the beauty within you and without you. It's about knowing that someone else's definition of pretty has no hold over you." Golda Poretsky (2010).

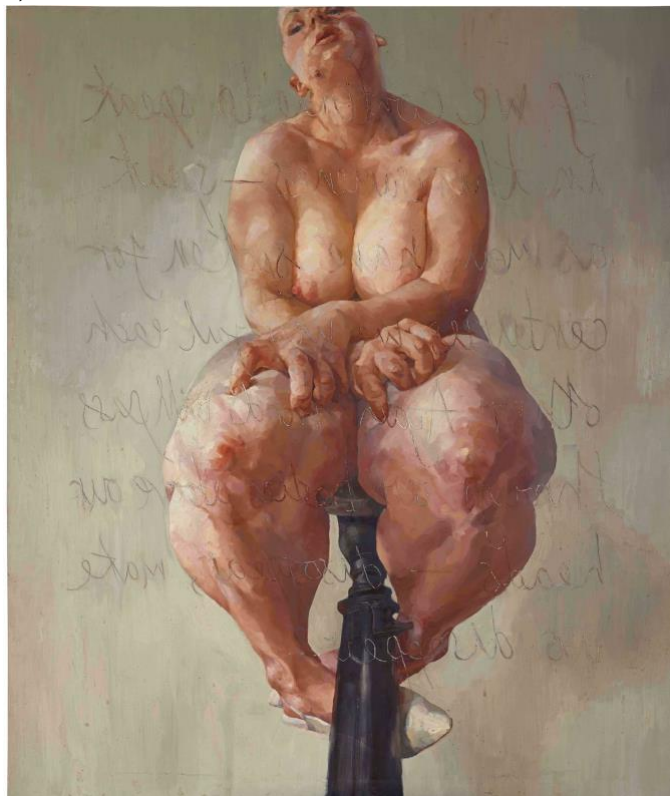
Throughout history the idea of what is beautiful has altered and is forever changing. The standards seem to be getting much more intense and unrealistic. When it comes to body shape however Women's bodies is not what changed, it is the ideals" (Kilbourne, 1995). We have become numb to what advertising, retailing and entertainment push onto us and these notions of a beauty standard. There have been changes over time, From the 1400s to the 1700s, the fat body shape was considered sexual and trend. But the fat shape was replaced by curvaceous figure, large breasts and hips with a narrow waist by the 19th century. Through the beginning part of the twentieth century this shape persisted, but was eventually replaced by a slender shape of the 1920s. This continued through to the 1950s. However by 1960 the standards shifted again. And in came the idealisation of wonder body shapes over curvy ones. This then spreads into the standard of beauty we have today with only a slight shift to the shapes by adding a more muscle of the still very thin body. The female ideal is extreme thinness.



Marilyn Monroe was the idolised figure and woman during the 1940s. She emphasised and celebrated a look that was embracing the curves that you're born with. In this photograph, she is seen smiling and looks to be happy and confident in the way she shows off her stomach, arms and chest with all its natural beauty- portraying what the trend was during this time. What is so remarkable is Marilyn Monroe was a larger size, today a larger size is heavily looked at negatively and a immense amount of pressure is put on girls to loose weight and be thin. Curves are no longer celebrated.

Today the natural form of the female body and curvaceous ness is no longer seen as often and is sometimes seen as “disgusting” to look at. Everyday we are bombarded with the extreme thin physique and natural curves and folds are not as appreciated. However one artist who majorly celebrates this natural figure is Jenny Saville. “British artist Jenny Saville became famous for paintings that render female flesh on a monumental scale.” Her canvases, often larger than 6 by 6 feet, magnify the raw details of embodied experience: large, drooping breasts; pregnant bellies and flab; faces smashed against plexiglass, a figure sitting on the toilet. (The guardian). Painters throughout history that have objectified the body are Peter Paul Rubens, Titian,Pablo Picasso ; the subject that Saville has shown is newly surprising.She was anointed the “most expensive living female artist” after her 1992 painting Propped sold at auction for \$12.4 million (New York times 2016).

Saville states it was “obese women in shopping malls” that influenced her work. She once told The Guardian that even as a child, a piano teacher’s body had entranced her: “I was fascinated by the way her two breasts would become one, the way her fat moved, the way it hung on the back of her arms.” (Jenny Saville 1998)



Jenny Saville, Propped, 1992.

An empowering piece of work that pushes against the idea of cultural beauty standards. Saville's figure digs at her curvy flesh, She struggles to live and keep up with the roles given to her in a patriarchal society. As Saville stated, she “grew up as a teenager in the 80s, when body regulation became huge... we had a cultural obsession with the body”. This work “questions all conventional and historical notions of the female standard of beauty.” (New York times)

Young girls are constantly overwhelmed and enclosed with unrealistic images of today's beauty standard and what is the beautiful female. A false reality played out massively by media. Young growing girls feel they must look like the women they see in films, ads, and billboards and all over social media by "influencers". Their idea of what their bodies should look like and what is normal becomes heavily distorted. This can have devastating effects on how they see their body and can significantly effect their self esteem as well as have a heavy influence on mental health issues.

"The modern Western cultural environment often cultivates and reinforces a desire for thinness. Success and worth are often equated with being thin in popular culture. Peer pressure and what people see in the media may fuel this desire to be thin, particularly among young girls." (Mayo Clinic, 2010).



All around the world people are paying thousands of pounds to have plastic surgery done to enhance and achievement this unreal idea of beauty, Images of this idea of beauty will make people do almost anything to fit in and have the "perfect" body or face. Simply a plastic society that all look the same. Sadly, reality of today is that beauty is now the idea of having the biggest breasts size, no body fat, and the most delicate chiseled nose with plump lips. Cosmetic surgeons are making a lot of money with women doing cosmetic surgeries for every imperfection that we can imagine (Naomi wolf, 1990)

Women learn to reconstruct themselves. It is second nature to disguise them, dress them and decorate themselves with a huge range of materials. Over the past 30 years they have gone further than ever before in this process. They can re-arrange some of the organic material that is their body-sometimes without any harm, sometimes with devastating consequences."(Wykes and Gunter, 2005)

Photographer Paola Kudacki is celebrated for her unusual projects that are often deemed as normal. “Plasticity” Kudacki considers how shallow and damaging beauty standards can be, as the title suggests, the idea that a person to be completely perfect is not realistic or maintainable. To display this many of her models pose in uncomfortable ways and have props to enhance this. Showing a selection of image Kudacki has her models face and bodies bound by tape and plastic. Representing the idea to adhere to the unnatural.





(Plasticity series 2016)

The series suggest how tight beauty standards are today in modern media. The model is trying to escape the tight plastic that is bound to her. Her skin bulging out trying to fight against the material. The model is also suffocating in the plastic, gasping for air. This is representing today's struggle of finding one's identity and the definition of beauty. The fight against plastic surgery and the need to all look like Barbie dolls, so perfect and neat. Women are struggling to keep up with the pressure and drowning in this constant idea of beautiful.

An estimated 80% of people have stretch marks. Stretch marks are long, narrow streaks, stripes, or lines that develop on the skin, they occur when the skin is suddenly stretched and are extremely common. They can be caused by a sudden weight gain or factors such as pregnancy, puberty, loss of weight suddenly, or even just being female. However, it is commonly known for women to only have these, which is not the case. Anyone can develop stretch marks. In today's society, everything is air brushed, smoothed and blurred out that are deemed "imperfect" or "unsightly." Men and women are often encouraged to feel bad or have negative view on the most natural of things to our body, from ageing to transforming (weight). But this shouldn't be the case. Stretch marks are a sign of you living your life, experiencing things and developing. Whether that be from pregnancy or eating. They tell a story, and make you a individual, different from everyone else.

"Don't hide your scars, your stretch marks, your laugh lines, your calloused hands. They are your life story, telling of struggles won and lost, challenges faced, losses overcome, life grown and birthed and nurtured, hard work accomplished, stars reached for, hopes dashed, dreams realised, rock bottoms and mountain tops. They tell the story of your one amazing, awful, beautiful life written in the curves and lines of extraordinary, miraculous, beautiful you."

— L.R. Knost

Spanish artist Cinta Tort Cartró, whose name is Zinteta on social media, fights against this stigma of stretch marks. Her colourful style of stretch marks involves glitter, and rainbow paint. She aims to express the notion of self love to our bodies.

"Stretch marks are part of our essence, our moments, our lives, our stories and us," Cartró writes, "To accept all this is to accept your roots, your history, everything in it and, after all, accept yourself." It gives a sense of power to the individual with these scars, and helps them embrace all natural formations of our bodies in a oppressed system.



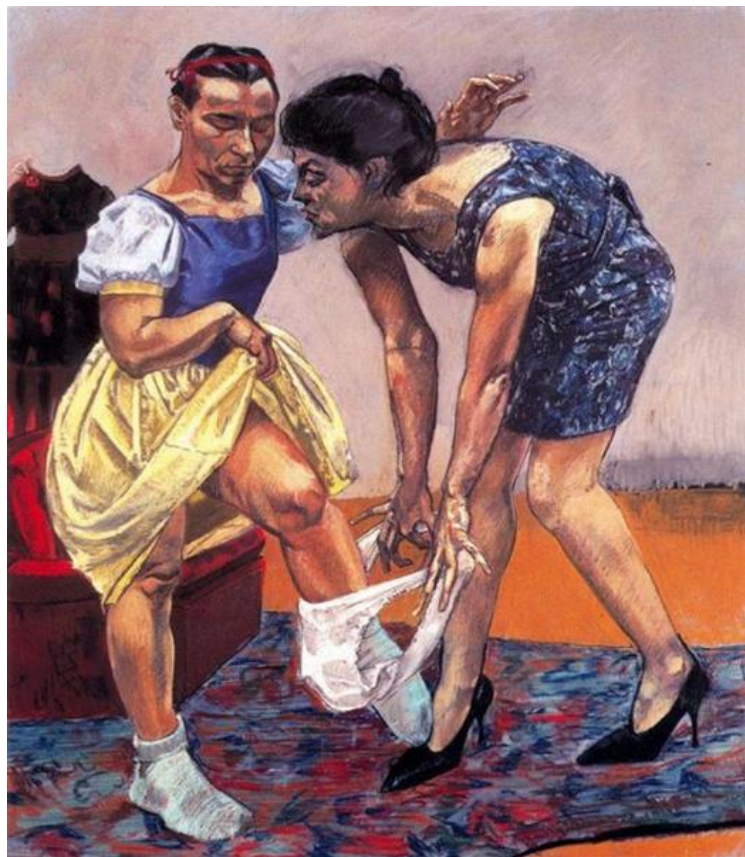


(Zineta's work, sourced from Instagram 2017)

In today's society acceptance of any form always shows to be somewhat of a struggle. Whether it be the acceptance of beauty and scars or natural formation of body, or even the acceptance of gender. Society always seems to have an oppression to most things and an idea of the "perfect women". But what if a woman wasn't born a female?

When a child is born the first thing said usually is "is it a boy or a girl." Whatever they have been born with usually sets them up for a certain life path. Boys are made to be seen as masculine and females very sweet and pleasant. However, if this child begins acting opposite to their gender biologically, e.g. a boy playing with female toys, or wearing female clothes, the society will not approve. The first thing the parents may usually do is try to 'correct' this child, or seek help. Causing the child numerous struggles of Identity crisis and confusion. This is the reality of transgender, the feeling of being born into the wrong body. A major issue today with Transgenders is acceptance in society. But what makes a woman a woman?

*"One is not born, but rather becomes, woman." One of the most quoted lines from Simone de Beauvoir's groundbreaking work *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir distinguishes sex from gender and suggests that gender is an aspect of identity that is gradually acquired. Beauvoir has the idea that "gender is one that is constructed by society and rides completely on the existence of women being different and lesser than men." Beauvoir argues ferociously against attempts to lay down pressures for how women have to behave.*



Paula Rego, 'Snow White and her Stepmother', 1995

Paula Rego's practice projects themes of gender and femininity. Throughout her work she has approached taboo topics such as rape and abortion rights. She is focused on women's experiences and constructed ideas of what it means to be a woman. Above is her "Snow White" series, in which she tells the well-known Disney story in a much different light. The Snow White we know is not the

innocent pretty princess. Paula address the idea that “women must be simplified wicked older witch or pretty young princess. Hers are a grown-up sort of darker fairy tale, in which identities are far more complex” (Paula Rego 1995)

In conclusion, for centuries beauty standards have been around, from oppressing women for their looks to even their gender and how they must act. It is something that has affected everyone at least to some degree. However due to the unique technological advances in today's 21st century there has never been such a intense exposure to these things in society like today. The Self Love movement and acceptance of society is evolving. Artists and creatives are exposing the media and everyday pressure we encounter, slightly more varied body types have been slowly involved into the mainstream media and plus size models and darker skin tones are beginning to be seen. If the media and minds of masses where to change and social media allow more of a realistic idea of beauty, social pressures would lower, self-esteem would rise and confidence in the younger generation would be restored. Mental illnesses would also decrease such as eating disorders. All this creating a healthy, and happier more content society. More people should come forward and push against the beauty standards, and create a better society for the future.

“She wins who calls herself beautiful and challenges the world to change to truly see her.”
— Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*

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