

Ffion Harding-Thomas

Student number; 2304428

Research and context (ADAD5003/C)

(BA) Fine art

Tutor (s) Holly Slingsby & Alexander Duncan

Question 4: From a series of FINE ART MAKING research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designers that relate to your practice or interests.

Word count: 2531

Table of contents

Lift of illustrations.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Louise bourgeois' <i>maman</i>	5
Berthe Morisot <i>cottage interior</i>	7
Judy Chicago <i>womanhouse</i>	9
Conclusion.....	13
Reference list.....	14
Bibliography.....	15

List of illustrations

Figure 1: Louise Bourgeois, Maman, 1999, Available at: [Appréciation d'une œuvre : Louise Bourgeois, Maman, 1999](#)

Figure 2: Louise Bourgeois, red room (child), 1994, available at: [Louise Bourgeois and the art of anger](#)

Figure 3: Berthe Morisot, Cottage Interior, 1886, Museum of Ixelles, Brussels, Belgium. Available at: The Art of Domesticity: Art Inspired by the Home (dailyartmagazine.com)

Figure 4: Berthe Morisot, the cradle, 1872, available at: [Berthe Morisot's The Cradle: The overlooked painting that unlocks Impressionism - BBC Culture](#)

Figure 5: Judy Chicago, womanhouse, 1972, available at: [Womanhouse: An Iconic Feminist Installation by Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago](#)

Figure 6: Judy Chicago, Eggs to breasts, 1972, available at: [Womanhouse: An Iconic Feminist Installation by Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago](#)

Figure 7: Sandra Orlan, Ironing, 1972, available at: [Womanhouse: An Iconic Feminist Installation by Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago](#)

Figure 8: Kathy Huderland, Bridal staircase, 1972, available at: [Womanhouse: An Iconic Feminist Installation by Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago](#)

Explore how feminist artists use the motif of home in contemporary art.

Anger is used often to create artwork, it's powerful impact often feminist or political in nature. Defined by the Cambridge dictionary:

“feminism: the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state”.

Occasionally that anger stems from the home, from the trauma that those closest to them have inflicted upon the artist. Looking at Louise bourgeois, and her impressive works focusing on the home, anger and her childhood, as well as Berthe Morisot, a “radical” feminist of her time, that painted domestic scenes in her work. Continued by Judy Chicago’s revolutionary feminist works during the second wave feminist movement, we will explore how anger, feminism and the home are represented in contemporary art, as well as how the public, critics and the artists themselves react to their art.

Artists as thinkers and creatives are meant to challenge boundaries, push limits and debate difficult topics, such as politics, discrimination, and human rights. As such artists are often political in nature. Feminist artists have a distinct way of challenging ideals, and world issues, particularly surrounding women and the fight for equal rights. Often artists will take inspiration from the home, domestic life and experiences in the patriarchy and trauma. Bourgeois is known for her feminist views and large scale sculptures and installations, that create conversations around gender issues and the patriarchy, using the home and her own experiences as inspiration. Her sculptural series (fig. 1) “Maman” meaning mother in French, was dedicated to her late mother, using the large spider as a symbol of maternal protection and strength. As well as this, she uses the symbol to represent her discontent with the patriarchy and her relationship with her father, and complicated familial relationships. The unusual use of spider imagery in her work shows her understanding on femininity, using the often-feared creature as a symbol of power and strength of the predator, yet the gentle elegance of the mother, with its ability to weave intricate webs, similar to her own mother that would weave tapestries. The imposing sculpture was cast in bronze and then placed in public areas to see how the audience would interact with it. Each part of the spider would have textured areas, with a cold surface to touch. Moreso the sculpture was large enough for those who wanted to walk underneath, looking up at the egg sack and body of “maman” this viewpoint could leave people feeling protected or perhaps uneasy.



Figure 1

Bourgeois' anger towards her family, specifically her father continued throughout her work as an artist. Her 'red rooms' series (fig.2) "red room (child)" caused an uproar among the male dominated art world. Her wooden cell like structure, with bobbins, spiral glass tubes and intertwined hands that lay throughout the space bathed in red, with only a small window to look through adding to the voyeuristic feeling of the space. This installation was created as a reflection on bourgeois' own fathers' infidelity as well as her reflections of childhood, with the bobbins used as a nod to her mother who taught bourgeois to sew and created tapestries in bourgeois memory of her childhood. Both rooms, "red room (parents)" and "red room (child)" are a juxtaposition of violence and intimacy, showing the relationship between parents and their daughter. The use of red has been a reoccurring theme amongst Bourgeoise works, from red ink when writing to red thread and now the red rooms, bathed in red lights as a display of raw anger., and pain that bourgeois was still holding onto. However, others did not take to this series of work so well. "The Telegraph published the piece in 1998 with the headline, "Daddy's Angry Little Girl Gets Even". Bourgeois was 87... as if an angry woman were an exotic animal; a repulsive spectacle." (law, maura. 2020) Bourgeois' anger was seen as another act of women being too sensitive, as though a woman's anger does not stem from patriarchal actions. As though the rage that created the piece of work takes away from the quality of the piece. The negative remarks made towards Bourgeois' work confirms that the anger directed at a woman's own rage stems from a place of fear of a woman's power, how it can be used and those it may affect. "It was that anger at injustice that was the impetus for creating a womans liberation movement" (Hooks, Bell; Feminism is

for everyone, Pluto press, 2000.) The doors that create walls for this installation were repurposed and weathered to create the anguished outcome bourgeois wanted. Using only one door with a small window for the audience to interact with could suggest that bourgeois wanted to control the narrative at which point the audience look onto, using one central door could change the impression of the space compared to having windows in all the doors.



Figure 2

Berthe Morisot, an impressionist painter, created many paintings detailing the domestic scenes within the household, especially of her own daughter. Using quick brushstrokes and an appreciation of light to create works devoted to her daughter. Morisot's painting "cottage interior" (fig 3) is one such example. The painting displays Morisot's daughter in the conservatory of the cottage, considering her doll, during a family holiday to the Channel Islands. The light shimmery lavenders, blues and greens were inspired by her teacher, and well known artist Jean Baptiste Camille Carot. She often left canvases unfinished. Perhaps pointing towards her as spontaneous.



Figure 3: *cottage interior* (Morisot, 1886)

Morisot's husband, Eugene manet, had left his work to care for their daughter and aid Morisot in her exhibitions. The quote by Mierle Alderman Ukeles in her manifesto of maintenance art, 1969. "I am an artist. I am a woman. I am a wife. I am a mother." (Gosling, Tobin, Robinson. 2019, London Tate.) shows how in modern society women are proving themselves to be wonderful multitaskers as mothers and working women without compromising one for the other. Morisot was often weighed down by the weight of the male dominating art world, she often depicted women and children in her work, regardless of status and wealth. Her male peers had the ability to paint the French scenery, of which Morisot couldn't without an escort.

Furthermore, Morisot was often considered a feminist, perhaps even radical at times in her views, often her works were described as delicate, charming and feminine. This insinuates that her work was taken as seriously as her male peers in the impressionist era.

Despite this Morisot continued to work tirelessly as both an artist and a mother, using her home, and her family as inspiration. Though she also used the park as a background and scenery for her paintings she truly adored using domestic scenes such as "the cradle" (fig. 4), a painting of her sister Edma and her newborn baby. "of course, thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed." (Stilgoes, 1994) the house must have shown true intimacy, as the reader would know far more about a person in such an intimate setting as their home, than they would outside of it.



Figure 4: *the cradle* (Morisot, 1872)

Women have always been considered and criticized inside the home. From more domestic scenes to small pieces found around the house, fresh flowers, pads and tampons in bathrooms, sewing kits in old sweet tins. Judy Chicago's installation "woman house" (fig 5) was created as a collaboration between herself and her students. Judy Chicago founded the first feminist art program in America in the 1970's while working as a professor in the California institute of the arts. While working there she and Miriam Schapiro continued the feminist program and created a community for the students, bringing them together to work on a collaborative piece. The instillation discussed, studies and dissected several topics, from issues of domesticity, power dynamics, daily routines and rituals, abuse, gender roles and private space. Each room of the exhibition became a separate instillation, meanwhile the living room acted as a stage for the performances. The press did not take to this project well, most reports were condescending. The LA times stating "cheerful and disarming as a pack of schoolgirls under a porcelain sky" although that couldn't have been further from the truth, the documentary images of the exhibition showed in Judy Chicago's 'menstruation room' a bin, overflowing with used tampons. The messy feminine symbol could suggest an overflowing rage, with the blood-soaked tampons as a symbol of irritation over the negative connotations with natural bodily functions and needs. In this series there were three bathrooms created, the other two being the "lipstick bathroom" and the "fright bathroom". Inside the "lipstick bathroom" everything had been painted red, from the bathtub to the toilet and walls, with fluffy pink toilet covers and hair rollers, brushes, combs and hundreds of lipsticks around the room. The room was created to highlight societies obsessive encouragement of beauty standards and the over analysis of women's appearances. The red in the room as well as the fur lined toilet hinting towards societies views as women as seductive and shallow, using their beauty to entice men but unable to concern themselves with much else of importance.



Figure 5: *Womanhouse* (Chicago, 1972)

In another section of the renovated mansion, one room was called “the womb room” with spun wool and rope, spread and intricately woven around the room as one massive web, the rope and string suggesting towards symbolism of the umbilical cord in the wombs as well as the artful skill of intricate weaving methods mothers and woman once learnt, as well as the threads of life symbolised by wool. The use of exhibitions spaces and performances created a female lead narrative of feminist art. Meanwhile Sandra Orgel created a closet with a female mannequin interrupted abruptly by shelves at the chest, shoulder, and head. Suggesting to the viewer how women are often interrupted by men and patriarchal society, often being told to shelve dreams and focus on the importance of beginning a family, raising children and caring for the home, it also shows the viewer how Orgel and Chicago are disregarding the opinions of others by creating a statement that women all over the world would understand, empathise and stand with. This work was a massive attribute to the second wave feminist movement. Of which women’s liberation both domestically and sexually was actively being fought for, while news channels and media still influenced magazines such as *playboy*. “The highly irrational, emotional, kookie trend that feminism has taken in the last couple of years (quoted in Pitzulo, 2011, p. 142).” (Dow, B.J, 2014, pg. 120). This showed that despite the fight for equal rights, women were still being taken lightly as well as the movement being seen as a mockery. However, this did not defer artists such as Chicago. “Woman house” would eventually be demolished, however while it stood the house created a space for artists of all races, gender and ethnicities to talk about gender equality, patriarchy, feminist movements and figure, as well as domesticity and oppression.

Every surface in the kitchen inside “woman house” named “eggs to breasts” (fig. 6) was covered in eggs which later transitioned into breasts, from the oven to the walls, to the floor and ceiling not a single area was empty. The eggs symbolise the time spent in the kitchen with their mothers, as well as seen where women fight for the love of their mothers, as well as their mother’s bitterness and resentment at the feeling of imprisonment they felt withing the space, confined to remain a live-in cook, nanny, and maid while also maintaining adoration towards their husbands. The last of the three bathrooms “fright bathroom” shared a similar motif to the kitchen, inside lay a woman made from sand, in a bathtub, with a blackbird hovering above her hung from the ceiling. The bathroom was filled with cosmetic and perfume bottles filled with sand as well, alluding to the woman’s feeling of imprisonment. The sand acts as a symbol of passing time as the woman lay there.



Figure 6: *eggs to breasts* (Chicago & Schapiro, 1972)

Within the seventeen rooms inside the house, two “maintenance” pieces were performed. One named “ironing” (fig. 7) performed by Sandra orlen, and the other named “scrubbing” performed by Chris Rush. This pair of performance pieces showed the continuous movements within ‘women’s work’ where the artists repeated the motions of ironing and scrubbing repeatedly. This was to highlight how the tasks conveyed the notion that women were supposed to find the tasks fulfilling and meaningful, however showing how monotonous the acts were, emphasising the banality of the tasks.

When this installation was opened, over the entire duration 10,000 people visited the space. According to some records many visitors wept due to the emotional nature of the rooms, and the moving messages and motifs.



Figure 7: *ironing* (Sandra Orlen, 1972)

The “bridal staircase” (fig. 8) by Kathy Huberland, was a performance piece within the “woman house” where a mannequin was dressed as a bride on top of the staircase decorated in flowers, lace and surrounded by a blue sky. As the bride descends the sky begins to turn darker grey. The flowers and lace could symbolise the bride as an offering, as she continues into the kitchen to face the counter with party plates sat on the surface, this could signify how society believes that women are considered offerings or gifts to help the man, and to cook and do the housework. The mannequin adds to the statement, objectifying and infantilising the women for the man. The focus on the woman’s housewife role is a stark feminist critique of how women are objectified as servants instead of romantic partners.



Figure 8: *Bridal Staircase* (Kathy Huderland, 1972)

“Woman house” as it’s known was recently re created to include black, trans and artists from different ethnicities and experiences. This was a revolutionary moment for those in the feminist art world and contemporary society that wouldn’t have had a voice to add to this project fifty years prior. It shows us how contemporary society is achieving equality for everyone just as the artists mentioned would have wanted.

This wave of feminist artists, pushed boundaries in their use of materials and subsequent encounter with the audience, touch, voyeurism, and interaction are key parts to these works’ success. Influenced by Morisot and Bourgeois leading the way for contemporary artists such as anna Mendieta and Mona Hatome exploring domesticity, the female experience in contemporary society and controversial female discussions, there is now an incredible range of female artists to study, understand and emphasise with. The stories of female experiences in contemporary society through art are now being told with more urgency than ever before.

Reference list:

Gosling, L., Tobin, A. and Robinson, H. (2019) *The art of feminism : images that shaped the fight for equality*. Edited by H. Reckitt. London: Tate. Pg. 110

Hooks, Bell. (2000) *Feminism is for everybody*, Pluto press, pg. 2

[FEMINISM | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary](#)

Stilgoe, John R (1994) *the poetics of space*, 2nd edn. Grossman publishers, inc. pg. 8

Maw, L (2020) *louise bourgeois and the art of anger*. Available at: [Louise Bourgeois and the art of anger](#)

bibliography:

Dow, B.J. (2014) *Watching women's liberation, 1970 : feminism's pivotal year on the network news*. Urbana, Illinois ; University of Illinois Press.

Gosling, L., Tobin, A. and Robinson, H. (2019) *The art of feminism : images that shaped the fight for equality*. Edited by H. Reckitt. London: Tate.

MOSES, C.G., 2012. "what's in a name?" on writing the history of feminism. *Feminist studies*, 38(3), pp. 757-779-784-785. ["What's in a Name?" On Writing the History of Feminism - ProQuest](#)

Ozcan, Y. (2024) *the art of domesticity: art inspired by the home*. Available at:
<https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/the-art-of-domesticity-art-inspired-by-home/>
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/louise-bourgeois-2351/art-louise-bourgeois>

Everisto. B. (2021) *look again: Feminism*, London: Tate.

Bourgeois. L. (2015) *The spider and the Tapestries*, Hatje Cantz, Hauser & Wirth.

Binde. J. (2019) *Berthe Morisot – Artist monographs*, Koenemann.com GmbH

Rey, Jean-Dominique. (2023) *Berthe Morisot*, Flammarion.

Lucie-smith. E & Chicago. J (1999) *Women and art: contested territory*, Watson-Guptill