

**Are We There Yet? Equality of Representation of Female
Artists in Art Museums in the United States**

by

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis samples ways in which art museums, through their position of power address inclusion through acquisition and exhibition. Despite recent advancements in public awareness around women's rights, museums continue to lack equality in representation of female artists, and equality in the museum workplace. Finally, this thesis looks at how artists respond to these inequalities in the museum. Art museums are trusted, authoritative, and influential places that show us what is important to be known and shown in the arts and art history. Museums set a standard for what is accepted, so if women are excluded on the walls and in offices, people will continue to see no problem in that.

Historically and contemporaneously, women have been underrepresented in museums in the United States due to gender bias in a male-driven society. In the art world dominated by men, women have been extensively excluded as a consequence. For many female artists, their success came from the men around them because of the different societal constructs throughout history. Most female artists are limited with being represented in temporary exhibitions (Sandell, 2012). This short commitment to display these works of art is unfair while male artists get collected, are put on the permanent collections, and are displayed all year around. Melissa Forstrom, Assistant Professor at SUNY Purchase College, explains that,

Temporary exhibitions may be of loaned objects as well as material from the museum's permanent collection and are often designed around a strong thematic concept or singular argument. This is unlike permanent exhibitions, which mostly favor chronological, dynastic and/or teleological displays. Temporary exhibitions may also be designed as touring exhibitions and therefore, may reflect multiple institutional agendas (Forstrom, 2017, p.1).

With the struggle of being temporarily placed in museums, some female artists have chosen the route to become a political artist. Many of the female artists of the 20th century

addressed personal and transnational issues of identity, politics, societal constructs, and feminism. This reasoning is because political art can often have a bigger impact on the viewers, especially those who can personally relate, but many female artists want to be just artists and just create what they want. Many of the female artists haven't received the recognition as artists and therefore, go unnoticed. How can we go about telling these stories of these forgotten artists that continue to make an impact and continue to be spoken about? It is important to tell these stories because we need to have a better understanding of the way history has affected these female artists in order to make a change in the museum collections strategies. Two approaches to change this is to make it possible for contemporary female artists and future to be recognized as great artists, but also recognizing the women of the past for their efforts to try and counteract the stigma.

Art history courses provided by higher education created and perpetuated a bigger gap between men and women in the arts and in general. Female artists are spoken on a different topic and have to be separated from the art history discussion. Creating this addition of female artists classes can be seen as an inclusion, but this also shows that female artists are different and should be seen as separate. Female artists only tend to belong when they are made to feel welcomed or made space for, while male artists have a constant space anywhere and anytime. Indeed Yale University has changed their entire art history curriculum because of responses of students uneasiness over an idealized Western "canon" which included mostly just white, straight, European, and male artists. (Hedeman, 2020). Higher Education plays a big role in the education of the history of art. This is where students are guided on what is important in the field, which typically are men, so by creating this inclusivity, students will learn that this history

does not belong to only men, but there are also women worth mentioning and given the credit of their artistic advancements. Higher education is a link to how museums look at these artists.

THE HISTORY OF MUSEUMS

In order to understand the way museums function, we must first understand how museums came to be and why museums are still lacking in the representation of women. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) defined the museum as “a nonprofit institution that acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study, and enjoyment”, but they added a new addition to the definition in 2019 including, “human dignity and social justice” (Hawley, 2019). Recently as of April 2020, ICOM sent out a survey to their members to propose a new museum definition (ICOFOM, 2020). The definition of museums is constantly changing because their roles and influence keeps changing. Tiffany Jenkins, a socialist and author writes “artefacts go on to hold a meaning and influence beyond which they had at the moment of creation”, meaning a lot of what are in museums now, especially the artifacts have more meaning than they originally did, making a museums the home of knowledge and growth of objects (Jenkins, 2018, p. 214). The origin of the word museum came from the Latin word "mouseion", the Greek term for “a shrine to the Muses”. In Greek mythology, the nine Muses are the goddesses of the arts and sciences. This place dedicated to these goddesses housed important artifacts (Jenkins, 2018, p.37).

Early museums were started as private collections of wealthy individuals and families. The first museum was the private collection of the Medici family in the 16th century. This family

controlled Florence, Italy for centuries (Jenkins, 2018, p.39). This private collection was often displayed in so-called wonder rooms or cabinets of curiosities. At this point in the museums there was no public access. The first public museums in the world opened in Europe during the eighteenth century's Age of Enlightenment, The Museo Sacro, the first museum in the Vatican Museums complex, was opened in Rome in 1756, The British Museum in London, was founded in 1753 and opened to the public in 1759. Sir Isaac Sloan's collection of curios provided the initial foundation for the British Museum's collection, The Uffizi Gallery in Florence, which had been open to visitors on request since the sixteenth century, was officially opened to the public in 1765, and The Belvedere Palace of the Habsburg monarchs in Vienna opened with an outstanding collection of art in 1781. The first museum that was open to anyone at any time not just upon request was the Louvre in Paris, opened in 1793 during the French Revolution, allowing for the first time in history free access to the former French royal collections for people of all status. This was significant because for centuries “museums” didn’t give access to see these famous works of art to anyone of any social status. This was a period of intellectual, political, and social life (Jenkins, 2018, p.37). Museums are constantly changing and shaped by social context. Jenkins writes that “Many museums were originally built for the public, and collections are still held in their name. As we go forward, perhaps we should think of the interest of the millions of people who visit each day to find out a little bit and who trusts museum curators to show them more” (Jenkins, 2017, p.318). Consequently it can be argued that museums now have an obligation to show the community and visitors the history of female artists too.

NEW ADVANCEMENTS

Directly relating to the history of museums and the place of female artists in art history, many Western societies have become more gender inclusive, but there has been very little change in the representation of women in museums. There have been more exhibitions, more acquisitions, and an emergence of more female artists, but there has been a little upward change. Throughout history, women have been underrepresented in visual arts. This has been a constant struggle for female artists to be recognized in the art world (NMWA). Over the past decade, there has been a slight improvement in the representation of female artists in museums. From 2008 to 2018 there has been an 11 percent increase in works by female artists acquisitions by the top museums. Women's artworks in the global auctions only make up two percent of the total market share (Jacobs, 2019). Working together in the 24 hour global arts market newswire, Artnet News and "In Other Words," a weekly podcast and newsletter produced by Art Agency, Partners, an art advisory firm that was acquired by Sotheby's started an investigation and resulted in a total of 260,470 works of art have that have entered the museums' permanent collections since 2008, only 29,247 were by women, while 89% of the works acquired were male artists (Halperin, 2019). Halperin also explained that some critics argued that this underrepresentation could just be due to women being outnumbered by men in the art world, but the Yale School of Art indicated that this was not the source of the inequalities (Jacobs, 2019). Critics believe that there are just more male artists in the market, which also adds to the inequality of female artists not being recognized. Although curators have created monograph exhibitions of female artists, there still isn't enough representation.

As discussed earlier, Yale University school of arts also has changed their entire art history curriculum because of responses of students uneasiness over an idealized Western “canon” which included mostly just white, straight, European and male artists (Hedeman, 2020). The art history department chair and the introductory art history course instructor, Tim Barringer, said that he plans to show that a class about the history of art is not just about Western art, “there are so many other regions, genres and traditions all equally deserving of study- putting European art on a pedestal is problematic” (Hedeman, 2020). Although there has been a lot of backlash to Yale for allowing this change, there has actually been more enrollment and interest from students (Hedeman, 2020). When there is more student involvement and interest, there is more engagement from students wanting to learn.

It is often difficult to create a change within an institution that prioritizes what needs to be shown and taught or even included, which also becomes an inequality issue. What makes one department worth more to museums on what should have bigger budgets, and/or worth donating more money to? Some of these institutions are not interested in showing work made by female artists. Richard Armstrong, the museum director at the Guggenheim in New York was not in support of displaying works made by women, but when chief curator Nancy Spector finally was able to put up the *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the future* exhibition, it was to his amazement that it was one of the most popular exhibitions at the Guggenheim. Sadly many museums only put up exhibitions of female artists to check it off their “list” of what museums should be displaying (Hermo, 2019). It’s disappointing to know this when you think there is actually a change going on. It is not because the institution wants to, it's because they have to just look like they are being progressive, when in reality that's not their true intention.

In the decade prior in 2002, the Brooklyn Museum in New York started their Elizabeth A. Sackler Centre for Feminist Art, when Elizabeth Sackler, a board member at the time offered to acquire Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party' for the museum to display (Sandell, 2012, p.29). Sadly, many were not interested in this piece, and there were many negative comments about it, but now it is one of the most prominent works in Feminism Art (Reilly, 2018, p.66). Elizabeth Sackler took the initiative to create a department for female artists, while also acquiring art work made by a female artist, Judy Chicago, when not many works by women were being acquired. Not many museums take the initiative of acquiring work made by female artists, just borrowing them for temporary exhibitions.

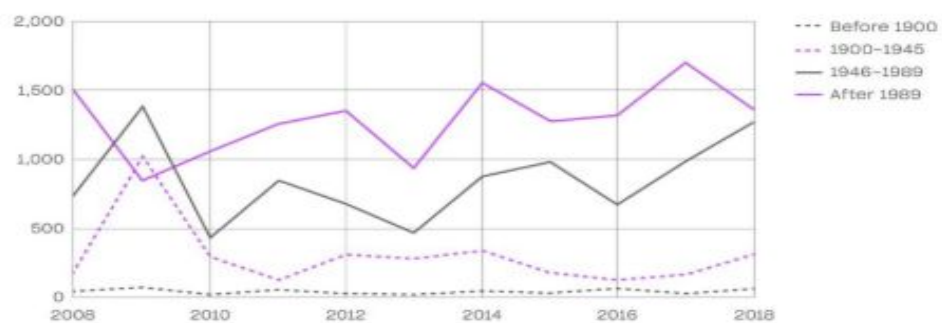
THERE NEEDS TO BE MORE ACQUISITIONS THAN EXHIBITIONS

Having the opportunity to exhibit art in a museum is a big achievement for any artist. Not only does the artist receive recognition, it often impacts the market value positively, making the need of an acquisition more desired. When work is just in a temporary exhibition, it goes away. There is no longevity of the work and then it is likely to be forgotten. Many museums say they care about their commitment to gender inequality but they only do temporary exhibitions and they aren't acquiring works or putting works made by women on the walls of museums permanently. They must make big investments, risks, and be willing to question their own practices. But many are more willing to take those steps of acquiring it if it is easily put out to the press, they only want the good publicity. Maxwell Anderson, president of Souls Grown Deep, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting art made by African Americans said, "The art world runs on hype", meaning that museums center themselves around pieces that are

popularized to gain attraction and visitors (Voon, 2020). Christopher Bedford, the director of the Baltimore Museum of Art says “The great testament to the commitment an institution makes to an artist is through acquisitions, not exhibitions, which are sweeping and frankly cheaper” (Halperin, 2019). Similarly, Connie Butler, the Hammer Museum’s chief curator, discusses the representation of female artists in acquisitions, “There is this weird disconnect that even while people are happy to support a show, the lack of auction records for female artists is a problem when you’re trying to support acquisitions" (Halperin, 2019). The availability of artworks at galleries and auctions has a big impact on the amount of recognition and interest from collectors and museums (Reilly, 2018, p.221). The price of art equates to how famous it is or how it should be recognized. Sadly, many of the prices of female artists aren’t as high as male artists so the amount of work being acquisitioned by museums continues to be low but have improved a bit. From 2008 to 2018, the number is less in 2018 than 2008 (Figure 1). The acquisitions of female artists have decreased since 2017. Through the years of 2008-2018 the acquisitions of museums have not been constant, and that is a huge problem for female artists (Figure 1). These staggering waves could be because museums do not have big budgets for acquisitions of works made by women.

Figure 1. (Halperin, 2019)

**Museum Acquisitions of Work by Women Artists by Date of Work
2008-2018**



In an interview with Carmen Hermo, Associate Curator for the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art department in the Brooklyn Museum. She mentioned that she had a previous career at the Guggenheim in New York City. The museum has a big collection of artwork made by women but they never want to display these works. She had mentioned that the Chief Curator Nancy Spector was very invested in displaying works made by female artists but constantly received setbacks from the male head director. Apparently, he would laugh at Nancy's requests because he did not believe in the exploration of female artists and was not interested in doing women artist shows (Herma, 2019). Who is in charge in these institutions affect what a museum can do and what they can display. If those in charge continue to not diversify museum collection, it will be impossible to have any kind of significant inclusive change. Museums must integrate equality and diversity into their policies and practices as it relates to acquisitions strategies and exhibitions best practices and policies. Lonnie Bunch, Founding Director of the National Museum of African and American History and Culture and now the head of the entire Smithsonian explains that the reason that there is a lack of these policies because the funding for most museums other than the Smithsonian, are all funded by private donors rather than public sources (Sandell, 2012, p.13 & 15). Private donors may also donate money to a museum to only certain programs or departments, which is what leads to most departments being underfunded and not being able to afford many works of art to display. With museums' high increase of reliance on corporate, foundation, and private funding, many of these business people are members of these boards. Through donations may come rules that need to be followed in order to continue to receive funding.

Sometimes museums are restricted in what they can and can not acquire for example: The Frick Collection in New York, holds all of Henry Frick's art that he collected during his lifetime. He wanted his collection to be his memorial in a mansion that he built. When he passed, he left his home and art to be shown to the public (Duncan, 2008, p.75). This museum is stuck to keep the artwork in the ways that Frick had intended, needing to follow his rules, although he is dead. These are some of the things that museums have to deal with donors. Most times museums have to follow the requests of the donors in order to receive more money and gifts, because if they do not respect these rules they can lose more than just what was donated.

Carmen Hermo mentioned that the Brooklyn Museum Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, is very underfunded and this is what makes it difficult to acquire works of art, or to even put on exhibitions (Herma, 2019). Not being able to afford, acquire, or borrow works to display becomes a major setback for the institution and department to create this inclusivity. Some staff members who work in specific departments operate on different levels within the hierarchy of museums. This affects what and when they can make change within the institution they are in (Sandell, 2012, p.20). Diversifying boards and demanding more representation for exhibitions is what these institutions need. Sadly, many institutions want to preserve their white, male, upper class patrons and donors (Reilly, 2018, p. 222). The underrepresentation of female artists does not completely fall on employees such as the director of the museum or curators, the blame can fall on board members and donors. The board members and donors have an influence on what goes on in museums too.

Robert Janes, Museum Management and Curatorship Adjunct Professor discusses remedies on how to solve these problems. He states that museums should have these three

research and development possibilities to help encourage innovation; An Annual Think Leak, Creativity Forums, and Local and Regional Heritage Federations (Janes, 2012, p.69). Museums have to do a better job on diversifying board members, diversifying their programs in order to demand broader representations for exhibitions by hiring more non-white, and female staff (Reilly, 2018, p.222). Many of these museums are afraid to do anything different because of the risk of losing any type of funding (Janes, 2012, p.58-59). They have to rethink their roles and responsibilities as museums, they constantly forget their purpose under the need of making money.

An “Annual Think Leak” is a forum where the museum would discuss their success and failures of the museum as a whole. The emphasis of this forum would be to “evaluate” and “disseminate” new ideas, approaches, and improvements to their current practices (Janes, 2012, p.69). By doing this, the museums can work on vocalizing and recognizing what is going wrong and how it can be fixed. Having the recognition is a big step, and discussing what can be done to change is the next step as a museum to take into account in becoming a museum of the community, not just of their donors.

“Creativity Forums” involve not just museum staff and experts but also non-museum innovators. This will result in many creative ideas to engage more minds in order to benefit the museum. This would be a great way to get ideas on how to better help and serve the community (Janes, 2019, p.69). When there is a wider discussion outside of museum staff, there is a variety of ideas. When museum staff can express more that they would like to see more female artists and have other outside staff people also agree to this, this would show more of a need for this representation. When staff are not able to comfortably express their ideas or feel that the

hierarchy would not allow this idea, having a forum to discuss what most want to see, this can help push for equality.

“Local and Regional Heritage Federations” Janes explains that it could be pilot projects to explore the value of creating federations of museums with similar ideas. Through this collaboration, these museums can develop research, development funds, and opportunities to explore (Janes, 2019, p.69). Although many museums lack the representation, if there is a group of museum staff members that collectively have the same ideas, this is something that can be expressed and be seen throughout all the museums that is important to be showing and recognized is a problem and problem solve on how to get proper funding allocated for different projects.

Again, without having a diversified staff and board members, all of Janes’ possibilities of research and development will have little to no effect if there are no members who understand the need of change or want this change. There could also be a forum of collaboration within museums with outside organizations to create a more powerful impact. Janes asks “ Where are the collaborations and partnerships with environmental organizations, health care providers, community development agencies, and humanitarian organizations?” These collaborations would help bring museums much more recognition and a round of applause for being innovative in making change. Instead of having only these business people on the board, they could diversify their table with more people who are a part of their communities, including different cultural groups, community organizations, and youth. In New York City, Mayor Bill de Blasio introduced a cultural plan linking future fundings for museums to diversify their employees and board members (Pogrebin, 2017). Art museums should want to be valued by their community

and the people who come to the institutions and give their time, it's not all about money (Janes, 2012, p.70-71). It is not just about getting more women up on museum walls, it's also about changing those in charge of museums who are willing to put up more women. There are museums who are invested in making a change in the underrepresentation of female artists.

WHAT ARE MUSEUMS DOING?

There are some individuals in museums that are taking part in the initiative to make a change as it relates to female artists in the United States. These museums have focused on becoming innovative through ways that most museums and other people may find controversial. In 2013, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA) announced that they were going to sell an Edward Hopper painting worth 36 Million dollars to start a fund focused on buying contemporary art by female artists and artists of colors (Voon, 2020). This process of selling something that was in a museum's collection is called deaccession. The PAFA's director Brooke Davis, said that deaccessioning can be controversial, but the museum continues to acquire more works of art especially by women. This also shows the community that they are committed to working artists today, not just displaying works in their collection that no longer showed their community who they really are (Jacobs, 2019). Robert Janes explains that it is important for museums to be public with their deaccessions even though it is something questionable and controversial. Deaccession shows that museums are willing to grow and have a "sound collection management and a professional necessity" (Janes, 2012, p.91). Many museums, if not all, have a vast collection, with many works of art getting lost in the basement. Museums should be going through their collections to make room and generate an income to be able to acquire more works

to continue to show a positive growth within the museum. Many museums have works made by women hidden in their storage without any thought that it is there. Brooke Davis says she was and will continue to collect work from artists who have been historically marginalized, “We are trying to build a collection that tells a truthful history of American art... that cannot be told without the work of women and artists of color and yet, those are the very individuals who museums have excluded for decades, if not for over a century” (Voon, 2020).

Another museum working towards a positive change is the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (MFA). Despite recent diversity issues, MFA Boston continues to be progressive, creating a 500,000 diversity fund to ensure that there continues to be positive change (Gross, 2020). Although between 2008-2018, they only acquired four percent of works made by women, that was only 3,788 out of the 90,215 that the museum acquired, Nonie Gadsden, senior curator at the museum said that she was so shocked even though she's been working in the field for 20 years (Jacobs, 2019). She said that the museum is now making a conscious effort to display more works made by women. In September of 2019, MFA Boston cleared out the entire third floor of a wing in the museum and filled it with works made by female artists from the years 1920-2020, naming the exhibition *Women Take the Floor*. By putting these women in their own space not surrounded by big famous male artists, helped these women continue to not be overlooked. Gadsden says if these artists were put into a room with Jackson Pollock, everyone would just go into the room for Jackson Pollock and ignore the female artists (Jacobs, 2019).

Like PAFA, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) sold seven works by men in 2018 as part of an acquisition plan for its 2020 Vision initiative, being able to set aside \$2.5 Million dollars. Over the past two year, BMA has been collecting art made by only women and put up

exhibitions and programs that recognized female artists and was made to correspond with the centenary of the 19th amendment; which gave women the right to vote. BMA's chief curator Asma Naeem said "Although that amount won't help it reach gender parity in its collection, four percent of which is works by women artists, the plan is intended as a bold way to make a statement about the underrepresentation of female-identifying artists in museums overall" (Voon, 2020).

As discussed earlier, the Guggenheim in New York curated a show for a female artist named Hilma af Klint. *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future* was exhibited from October 12, 2018- April 23, 2019. This survey of Hilma af Klint was the first monograph or solo show of her work in the United States. The exhibition focused on Klint's most active years, 1906–20. She began creating these radical abstract paintings before all these other male artists that take the stand as the creators of modern art such as Vasily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, and Piet Mondrian. af Klint kept her paintings private. She rarely exhibited them and thought that people were not yet ready to understand her work. She stored away more than 1200 paintings. Her work wasn't seen until 1986, and only fairly recently has her work began to receive significant attention (Guggenheim). *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future*, was overall a very well received exhibition, having many articles stating the excellence of the exhibition. The curators curated a show that showed people that the history of art is wrong and there needs to be a change in the way we view history. The curators brought more recognition to female artists by themselves without having to connect them and pair their work with other works by men. af Klint was ahead of her time, but sadly was forgotten. The Guggenheim brought her back to life and showed the world a different side of history that is constantly overlooked.

It is also important to note that the curator for this show was a woman, Tracey Bashkoff, Director of Collections and Senior Curator. As I have mentioned before, museum staff in positions of power are usually male, there aren't many women in the museum workplace with these positions of power. They typically hold curatorship positions which still have a big impact for inclusivity. Now, there are a lot more women, such as the senior curator for the MFA in Boston, and PAFA's Director Brooke Davis as mentioned in previous paragraphs, but there is still a lack of museum staff who are women. These women made the initiative to create a more inclusive space to female artists, which otherwise would have been overlooked by the male museum staff. Like I have stated previously, the head curators for the *Hilma af Klint* exhibition, is a woman. It is important to see that a woman is curating a woman artist solo show. It is important to see that now there are many more women holding positions of power in museums. This will bring diversity into museums internally through their employees as well, it's not just the artwork that speaks on an issue, it's the ones running the show that also comment on all the social issues.

The Brooklyn Museum in New York put on a solo show on Frida Kahlo. *Frida Kahlo: Appearances Can Be Deceiving*, was exhibited from February 8- May 12, 2019. Frida Kahlo is one of the most recognized female artists. If you ask someone to name 5 female artists, it is likely that Frida will be the first name. *Frida Kahlo: Appearances Can Be Deceiving* was the largest exhibition in the United States in ten years devoted to Kahlo and the first in the U.S to display a collection of her clothing and other possessions, which were locked away since Kahlo's death and then was rediscovered and inventoried in 2004. The team that curated this solo exhibition was also all women (Brooklyn). Again, it is important that not only is the museum

including female artists, but having female employees in higher positions of power being able to put on these shows, shows that the Brooklyn museum is invested in representing female artists and women workers in their environment. The representation of female artists and those in the workplace as well have constantly been underrepresented, but the Brooklyn Museum is making the effort to change that. With these museums creating a space for women, it is important to understand that these female artists are just artists. Many museums will use this as a tactic to bring attention and visitors, but when they put on temporary exhibitions about male artists, they will never say “Male Artists”.

FEMALE ARTISTS ARE JUST ARTISTS

There can be tension with focusing attention to different groups such as sectioning female artists in a different section of museums and not including them in the general section of the museums. This separation tells us there needs to be a distinction between them, but when focusing separate attention to specific groups there are concerns to who belongs where. For example, all female artists do not fall into the Feminist Artist category (Sandell, 2012, p.28-29). This is why having this gender in front of the word artists, excludes women. Why can't they be just artists, not female artists? Why are women so different? They don't paint any differently, they use the same materials, visually can look no different, and there is no difference side by side with a male artist.

Separating artists by gender in a history in which the word “artist” has been defined as male unless the word “female” is written before it. Why do we automatically assume that an artist is male unless the woman is added before the word? This distinction has created the notion

that female artists are in a secondary status in art history. This creates a narrative in which art was only produced by men. The term “female artist” makes the term artist a highly masculine one.

Museums constantly refer to male artists as geniuses and pioneers of the visual arts, but when referring to female artists, they just talk about how these women were so “great” but do not acknowledge them as highly as they do to men. British Philosopher and author, Christine Battersby, argues that the romantic conception of genius is particularly harmful to women. We still associate the visual arts with male dominance. Christine Battersby supports her argument with evidence from the many meanings of “genius” and how it was always associated with males or something amazing created by men when women did the same they did not receive the same title. Women were constantly looked down upon and looked as inferior to men. Women continued to be represented inferiorly compared to men. Hostility towards women increased when art became a craft for men. Women were seen as a muse but never as artists themselves (Battersby, 1994, p.559-561).

We can see that not only in art but in other forms of media we see that men take over the way women are seen and presented. The “male gaze” is the manner of treating women's bodies as objects to be surveyed, which is associated by feminists with hegemonic masculinity, both in everyday social interaction and in relation to their representation in visual arts (Oxford Reference, 2019). Throughout the centuries, women have just been allowed to be models and the ones painted on the walls, but were not able to put up their own works of art on museum walls. There are some artists who bring the attention of the underrepresentation to the eyes of the views in creative ways.

Museum interventionists, the Guerilla Girls, a group of anonymous women who address the underrepresentation of female artists in museums. It all began in 1984 when the Museum of Modern Art in New York opened an exhibition, *An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture*. It was “an up-to-the minute summary of the most significant contemporary art in the world” (Guerilla Girls, www.guerrillagirls.com). There were only 13 female artists out of 169 artists. The curator at the time, Kynaston McShine, said any artist who wasn't in the show should rethink “his” career, showing that the curator probably only believed in artists being male. The Guerrilla Girls are trying to make a change to this by explicitly calling out a specific museum, and giving exact facts, such as percentages to back up their claims. Members of the Guerrilla Girls go to museums and calculate the statistics themselves (Ryzik, 2015).

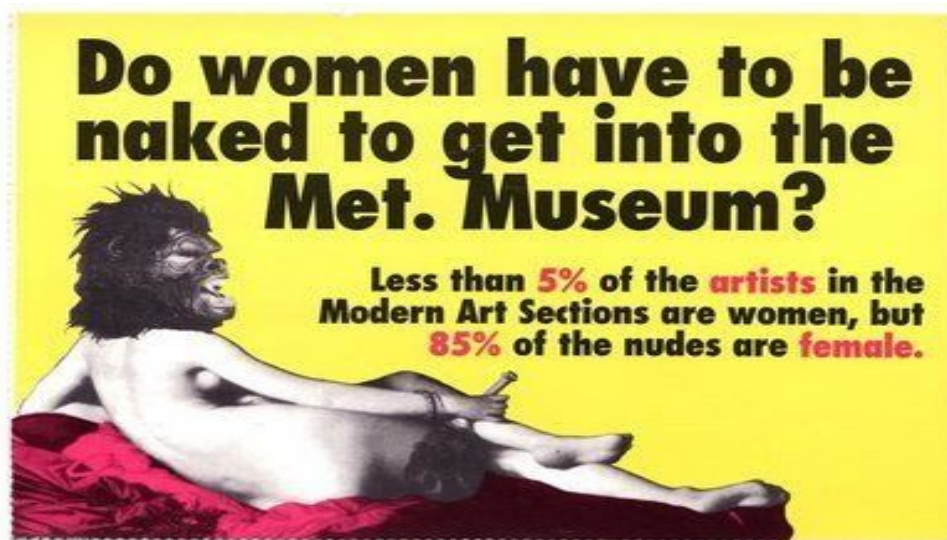


Figure 2: (Guerrilla Girls, www.guerrillagirls.com)

One Poster they created, saying “Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? Less than 5% of the artists in the modern arts section are women but 85% of the nudes are women”. They are showing their viewers that women are constantly the nude subjects of the artworks in museums but are a lot less likely to be on the walls as the artist themselves. This

strategy shows how women are being exploited in museums, making you notice more of these problems when you go visit these museums. Most of their pieces are based on the underappreciated and wrongfulness of the art museums not including art created by women. The Guerrilla Girls focus on the discrimination and sexism against women in the art field. Most images created by the Guerrilla Girls deal with female artists not being put up in museums or how women aren't being given the credit they deserve for their creative work like men are. In today's society, it's all about men and the Guerilla Girls want to change that and show the world the injustices going on to make people more aware. These women are giving voices to issues most aren't aware of. Little by little they are making that change, just by displaying their artworks. It is amazing that they are doing this and also having their works displayed in Whitechapel Gallery, Tate Modern, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Whitney, and many other arts institutions (Guerilla Girls, www.guerrillagirls.com).

While many museums continue to exclude female artists out of their lists of works to display, the Guerrilla Girls continue to use art to voice their message to help people understand the underrepresentation that female artists experience. They enforce feminism and the inequality that has been happening between women and men in the arts throughout the centuries. Art created by women is not being displayed in museums like the male artists are. Women are being used and put down for just being women, yet men can be anything they want. Us women have to work harder. The Bureau of Labor Statistics recorded that women only now earned 82 percent of men's earnings: men's median weekly salaries were \$915 to women's \$749 in 2016, for men and women aged 16 and up and employed full-time, but this was not the case in earlier years (BLS). In a broader view, this inequality is present throughout the professional world.

Feminism has become more recognized and accepted today by more women, and men. Men are now becoming more aware of injustice and inequality. Societal standards in a male-driven society have pushed women to rise and speak up. The Guerrilla Girls are making people more aware of what is going on in the arts and making people think about what they have been ignoring, and why. Some people don't seem to see it as a problem. In an interview with Gloria Vasquez, who studied visual arts in the Dominican Republic, she says she doesn't think that the lack of representation of female artists is an issue. She believes that art is art, and she just enjoys going to museums to look at art, not to search for female artists (Vasquez 2018). Gloria says she goes to galleries and/or museums at least once a month and enjoys looking at art in her free time.

The Guerilla Girls reframe the question: "Why haven't there been more great women artists throughout Western history?" Instead, they asked: "Why haven't more women been *considered* great artists throughout Western history?" (NMWA). Male artists were the only artists to create art and invent new styles and movements, but we know this not to be true. Earlier in this thesis it is mentioned that Hilma af Klint was the pioneer of the modern abstract movement, but she was quickly overseen. This happened and continues to happen to many other female artists. For centuries women have constantly been overlooked, schools often forget to mention these female artists too, unless you take a specific class on female artists. It is unfair that women have to be constantly overlooked and have no place to be seen.

The Guerilla Girls created a poster saying "How many women had one-person exhibitions at NYC museums last year?" with the Guggenheim, the Metropolitan Museums of Art (MET), the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the Whitney. The Museum of Modern art

was the only Museum that had one single show of a woman artist in 1985, but the Guerilla Girls recounted again 30 years later in 2015 and the number only went up by one. This is to show that many of the Museums, especially in NYC, do not cater to female artists and are not interested in showing female artists and giving them a spotlight to be known and acknowledged (Figure 3). Although the last recount was that of 2015, it is important to see that even in this century, museums have lacked change with the representation of female artists.

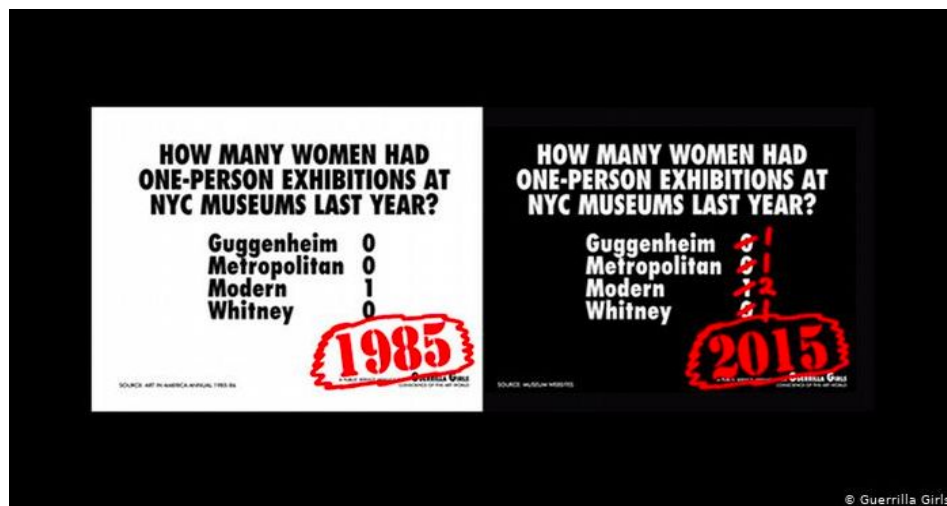


Figure 3: (Guerrilla Girls, www.guerrillagirls.com)

Most recently, over the past few years in the United Kingdom, there has been an emergence of a barbie doll named “ArtActivistBarbie” appearing in museums. Art Activist Barbie, similar to the Guerrilla Girls, attack museums on their lack of inclusivity. Sarah Williamson, a senior lecturer in education and professional development at the University of Huddersfield, is the woman behind the project. This all began when she was trying to find ways to engage her students on social justice issues, feminist ideas, and the problematic ways women are portrayed in art in museums. She decided to use a Barbie, “that plastic idealised women

could become a vehicle for playful commentary on the patriarchal palaces of painting” (Langham-Hooper, 2020).

The barbie holds an index card glued to a popsicle stick and is placed in front of an art piece. ArtActivistBarbie’s index cards will have a sentence describing what is problematic about it. One image taken in a museum in the UK, Barbie holds up a protest sign saying “Where are all the female artists? No problem being represented if you’re nude of course!” (Figure 4). Sarah Williamson says “It can take courage and nerve on my part when she holds a mirror up to cultural institutions, making comments and questioning them about visibly obvious and not-so-visibly-obvious patriarchal history, visuals and narratives” (Williamson).



Figure 4: (ArtActivistBarbie, 2020)

This is a really creative way to create attention to the activism of fighting for inclusivity in museums. Although these forms of activism are based in the UK, it also brings recognition that these inequalities do not just happen in the United States, they also continue to happen all around the world. Williamson is just one out of many other women who are fighting for change

in museums to include female artists on the walls and permanent collections, they want to educate visitors and viewers on social justice and promote change.

CONCLUSION

Today museums continue to lack inclusion of female artists through acquisitions, exhibitions, and positions of power in museums while also lacking representation of female artists, higher education's lack of art history resources. On a positive note women are starting to take over positions of power in museums, which is helping with the disparity of change. Women have been underrepresented in museums in the United States due to gender bias in a male-driven society.

For centuries, even up until now, women have faced major inequalities in museums in the United States. Although there has been some change and progress through some museums, there is still a disparity in progress. Some museums genuinely want to create a change in the museum collections, while some museums want the good publicity for it. Oftentimes, museums create exhibitions of women artists to just be able to check off their lists of being inclusive, but are not making the actual effort of making a constant effort to want this change.

We have a long way to go before we can make change but it all starts with the museums allowing this effort to be done. Once museums change internally, there will be more innovation for the future and generations to come. Female artists continue to be marginalized in museums, and many are advocating for them, for a constant space to be seen and recognized on the same platform as these male artists. Male artists continue to dominate the space while having to fight to be in the space until they pass away or are found about later after they died. Women deserve

this space before they are dead, women deserve to be acquisitioned and to have a spot on museum walls permanently, not just for temporary exhibitions where they will continue to be forgotten like history has. It is my hope that through the different factors mentioned in this thesis, there will be a better understanding of how the underrepresentation of female artists continues in art museums in the United States.

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