

Art and Feminism

Where are the women in art history? Under what circumstances did women make art? What did they make? How was it received? How do we study art in a discipline that has largely dismissed women?

This course will attempt to answer these questions as we consider the work of female artists from the Renaissance to artists practising today. Participants will gain a deeper understanding of how art has been created, interpreted and re-interpreted through the shifting sands of gender identity, gender roles, restrictions and expectations.

Integral to our discussions will be the development and application of critical visual analysis skills. Students will be empowered to build confidence in observing, describing and interpreting a wide range of artworks. These skills will support individual reflection of your own personal practices and philosophies.

Outcomes

At the completion of the course it is expected that students will be able to:

- Observe and describe the formal elements of any given artwork.
- Articulate their personal interpretation of any given artwork with justification.
- Understand key concepts in feminist art and art history, citing specific examples.

Course Outline

Week 1: Introduction and case study of Artemisia Gentileschi

This class will explore some overarching questions that will frame our discussions for the course. What are/were the circumstances in which women could or could not produce art in Western European art history? In what ways is gender a social construct, and what implications does this have on making art and looking at art? We will examine the work of Artemisia Gentileschi in the context of her 17th century professional and social environment as a case study.

Week 2: The Dutch Golden Age: a woman's world

This class will explore how the economic and social circumstances of the Dutch Republic created greater opportunities for women as artists. We will examine work by flower painter Rachel Ruysch, genre painter and portraitist Judith Leyster, and printmaker Geertruid Roghman. We will also look at how women were portrayed in genre paintings and portraits, to gain a broader understanding of these artists' professional and social contexts.

Week 3: Mary Cassatt: looking at women, looking as women

This class will investigate the work of Mary Cassatt, an Impressionist artist. Over the course of a long and illustrious career, she experimented with avant-garde painting techniques, domestic subject matter and Japanese printmaking. Work by Degas and Renoir will also be considered as comparative examples.

Week 4: Modern women: Sonia Delaunay and Hilma af Klint

Art was being pushed towards complete abstraction in the early 20th century, as artists explored ways of representing the invisible: Hilma af Klint's spiritualism and Sonia Delaunay's prismatic patterns inspired by electricity. We will also consider Delaunay's textile designs and collaborations with Dadaist and Surrealist artists.

Week 5: The female body

The female body has a long tradition of being objectified in Western European art. This class will consider the complexities of Yves Klein's Anthropometry series where nude women covered in paint were his 'living brushes', Niki de Saint Phalle's tongue-in-cheek Hon, and Carolee Schneeman's iconic feminist performance Interior Scroll.

Week 6: The 1960's to contemporary

This class will sample a few key works from this period, to explore the diverse ways that feminism can be used as a lens through which to interrogate art, and a framework for making art. Our discussions will include Yoko Ono's performance Cut Piece, Cindy Sherman's Untitled film still series and Mickalene Thomas' appropriation of canonic female nude paintings.