“Art and Feminism: New Perspectives on This World”

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Abstract

Many women do not perceive themselves as feminists since the meaning of this term in society is sometimes perceived only as hatred of men. However, this is a big misconception. Feminism combines many concepts that support the equality of all sexes. Feminism raises ideas such as social equality, reproductive rights, issues of heteronormativity, sexuality, ending sexual abuse, and many others.

As an artist, it is easier for me to convey many of my ideas through creativity. However, despite my idea in the works, each of the viewers will respond with their idea since everyone has a different life experience. Thus, in my essay, I will combine various aspects of feminism with the versatility of art. I will try to compare the experience of artists, critics, psychologists, and many other specialists of the past time with more modern views of people and with my own experience.

Essay

Feminism is a social, cultural, and political movement that promotes equality and protects women's rights. Feminists manifested themselves using different methods to be heard. As an artist, I firmly believe in the power of art to inspire people to act and advance social change. In this essay, I will discuss how feminism affected my art project and how it will support the ongoing feminist movement.

First, I will tell a little bit history of feminism to give some clearance about what happened and when. The early twentieth century saw the emergence of the first wave of feminism, which was influenced by liberal, socialist politics and urban industrialism. With a focus on voting, this wave sought to increase possibilities for women. The 1960s began the second wave, which lasted into the 1990s. In this stage, sexuality and reproductive rights were the most important topics, and the movement emphasized getting the Equal Rights Amendment, which guarantees social equality regardless of sex, passed into the Constitution (Rampton, 2015).

In the middle of the 1990s, the third wave of feminism was influenced by postcolonial and postmodern thought. Many constructions, such as "universal femininity," body, gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity, were destabilized during this time. The emphasis on women's empowerment, online resources, and intersectionality defines the fourth wave of feminism, which emerged around 2012. Feminists concerned their primary attention to issues crucial to the early stages of the women's movement, including sexual abuse, rape, violence against women, unequal pay, and the pressure on women to fit into a single, unrealistic body type (Rampton, 2015).

Our generation continued to bring more ideas about feminism and say them out loud. However, many women still do not like to consider themselves a feminist because of the negative association with the "she hates men" stereotype. In my project, I want to show another side of feminism, where women try to make equality for all genders in the workplace, at home, etc. In this way, there is no negativity or belittling of any sexes, but there is a clear idea that women need the same rights as everyone else.

Most of the works in this series are connected to some stories and myths that inspired me in the past. I will show some examples from books, artists, and the experience of people from other domains. One of the good examples of life from a woman's point of view is presented in one of my favourite books, *Little Women*.

Louisa May Alcott's most well-known novel, *Little Women* (1868), combines wholesome life lessons with more radical viewpoints on women's roles in 19th-century America. The author was able to convey truthful scenes from the domestic life of families of that time and showed realistic images of women that are not usually found in modern fiction. She used her memories and stories from her mother's childhood. I also did that in my paintings, using my memories and my own stories.

Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy grew up with their mother because their father left to fight in the Civil War. The author talks about a friendly family that handles all the difficulties together and how these little women grow up and find love and their place in this world. The author tells the story through all these sisters. This audience can see people's behaviour, especially men, regarding women. In the book, Jo said: "Women—they have minds, and they have souls, as well as just hearts. And they've got ambition, and they've got talent, as well as just beauty. I'm so sick of people saying that love is all a woman is fit for" (Alcott, 1868).

Jo is one of the most inspiring characters for me in this novel. She is intelligent, powerful, and beautiful at the same time. She became a reference for my first work *Jo* in the feminism series. This painting contains symbols like a book, a dress and nature. The book symbolizes education available to women in the 19th century (at different times, this opportunity appeared in different countries). The dress in this painting is very delicate and depicts a feminine nature. Nature (trees, water) it's all that fills us with energy, that inspires and makes a person feel part of something bigger. However, nature is changeable, like women. You can notice how fast the water moves, demolishing everything in its path, even men cannot resist this force.

A modern reference for me was Jenny Saville, she shows a realistic portrayal of the feminine form. Her works oppose the male gaze and the "ideal body" concept. In her newer works, Jenny Saville began to refer to essential facts about motherhood and began to study ancient myths and art history.

The author of *Exploring Jenny Saville's Paintings and Contribution to Art* discussed the significance and relevance of Jenny Saville's works. For example, in the painting *Plan*, the artist depicted a naked woman. A woman has lines drawn all over her body that indicate areas for liposuction. Saville comments that "the contours in the body were not down onto the painting, but rather cut into the thick layers of paint, as a surgeon would cut into a body" (Art in Context, 2022).

I use the works of this artist as references for some of my works (*Aphrodite* and *Eve*) because I admire how Jenny Saville plausibly paints women's bodies and, at the same time, retain impressionism in brushstrokes. In *Eve*, I show how women are subjected to constant attention. Someone is constantly "watching." Unfortunately, this is not the attention that is attracted by the mind. It most often concerns appearance. Many girls are bullied since childhood because of their small or considerable weight, behaviour in the community like "a girl shouldn't do that," or other external signs.

While in *Aphrodite*, the viewer initially focuses on the girl's beauty and the bright and delicious donuts. However, if you look closely, you can notice Aphrodite's saddened face and the fact that she has no hands. There is a metaphor familiar to everyone, as in *Eve*- The forbidden fruit is the sweetest. Donuts, as a symbol of something very desirable, but there is nothing to take it with. So, people, trying to achieve the ideal, sacrifice what they love and are used to please everyone and fit society's standards.

In my other works, *Place Where Everything Happened*, *Girls Night* and *Come Back*, I convey more everyday scenes and connections with places. The stylistic and ideological reference for them was Mary Cassatt. The assumption that Mary Cassatt's primary subject—the lives of women—is not inherently political hews to retrograde ideas about gender, domesticity, and their interpretative limitations. However, by looking more closely, the viewer can consider these topics (Georgopulos, 2022.).

Looking closely at the details in my paintings, you can also find references to these topics. For example, *Girls' Night* is the most obvious example of the attitude towards the female sex as a housekeeper. However, remembering the history of the Middle Ages and seeing this broom in the closet, the image of a woman changes from a weak housekeeper to a powerful witch. Or another example, *Come Back*, shows that no one can imprison girls in eternal expectation. Mona Lisa (Da Vinci, 1506) also has the right to leave if she wants to.

Thus, I am considering new ideas of feminism about female inner strength and freedom. To accurately convey these thoughts in my works, I have concluded hints that will help viewers decipher new ideas they might not have thought of before.

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