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## Intersectional Feminist and Queer Activists' Agendas in the Contemporary Arts: The use of Socio-Politically Fueled Motifs as Subjects in the Field Today

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INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST AND QUEER ACTIVISTS' AGENDAS IN THE  
CONTEMPORARY ARTS: THE USE OF SOCIO-POLITICALLY FUELED MOTIFS AS  
SUBJECTS IN THE FIELD TODAY

by

Florence Bonner

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts in Art History and Visual Culture

at

Lindenwood University

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Florence Bonner, Florence V. Bonner, July 20, 2024

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Instructor

INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST AND QUEER ACTIVISTS' AGENDAS IN THE  
CONTEMPORARY ARTS: THE USE OF SOCIO-POLITICALLY FUELED MOTIFS AS  
SUBJECTS IN THE FIELD TODAY

A Directed Project Submitted to the Faculty of the Art and Design Department

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in Art History and Visual Culture

at

Lindenwood University

By

Florence Bonner

Saint Charles, Missouri

July 2024

## ABSTRACT

Title of Project: Intersectional Feminist and Queer Activists' Agendas in the Contemporary Arts:

The use of Socio-Politically Fueled Motifs as Subjects in the Field Today

Florence Bonner, Master of Arts in Art History and Visual Culture, 2024

Project Directed by: Dr. Nadia McDonald, PhD.

This paper explores the Intersectional Feminist and Queer activist's work in the Contemporary arts through a reconsideration of the existing scholarly literature and the use of social media platforms from the third wave of Intersection and Transnational Feminist and Queer work. Looking specifically at motifs that connote to the bodies of people assigned female at birth, there are recognizable impacts at both micro and macro community levels. This research is done in an Intersectional Feminist and Queer theoretical methodology to better understand the implications of valuing multifaceted identities in the 21st century. This paper identifies artists and activists who work in the arts and are using their platforms to push boundaries and take their autonomy back. The Intersectional and Transnational waves of Feminist and Queer movements are building safe communities worldwide and are progressing inclusivity in the arts while demanding reparations for injustices in the past against individuals who identify with these multifaceted realities. This is seen in posts and comments on Instagram, Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), and Reedit, while this discourse remains prevalent as more perspectives are brought forward. As future researchers continue to consider the power held in social media for community development, more validity will emerge around diverse experiences as gaps in knowledge are further narrowed.



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## Introduction

The feminist movement gained traction in the United States in the 1960s and 70s with the organization of socio-political platforms calling for equitable change and restorative justice. The first wave of organized feminism stood exclusively for white women and their daily issues but did not include any other women affected by the same or similar circumstances. In the second wave of the feminist movements, emerging during the mid-1970s and 80s, there was better inclusion for women of different races. However, earlier waves of feminist activist demonstrations still excluded anyone who identified any differently from the heteronormative "female," beauty standards and societal roles. This exclusion was based on oppressive stereotypes pertaining to queer identities and what their lifestyles may entail.

In a still largely heteronormative society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Queer and Feminist artists find connections through online platforms despite the obstacles that stand in their way globally. Researchers are still debating if the works emerging from the 2020s are connecting with Third Wave Intersectional Feminism, that appeared in the 1990s, or if what is seen now has become another wave of demonstrations entirely. Curator Reilly Maura calls this development Transnational Feminism in her article "Curating Transnational Feminisms," published in 2010 while considering the global connections developing technology has made possible.<sup>1</sup> Transnational Feminism refers to the Intersection of feminist and queer activists around the world. This generation of activists are uniting through various means both at micro and macro levels and has progressed noticeably since the rise of the internet. Kimberlé Crenshaw uses the term Intersectional Feminism to refer to the inclusive scope the progression of feminist activism

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<sup>1</sup> Maura Reilly, "Curating Transnational Feminisms," *Feminist Studies* 36, no. 1 (2010): 156–73.

has taken on. Currently, the Intersectional Feminist movements are inclusive of Queer and BIPOC identities, different religious and cultural affiliations, and makes space for new expressions as valid upon presentation.<sup>2</sup> In her article, author Katy Deepwell acknowledges the political power of the Transnational Feminist movement, as it has expanded significantly with the development of globally accessible platforms.<sup>3</sup> Transnational and Intersectional Feminism has connected people who identify with or are allies globally by creating networks of activists who use different forms of art in their demonstrations.

Many feminist art critics note the impacts local activists have had in facilitating global movement starting at a micro level. In AmberLynn Zimmerman's article, "The Local Is Global: Third Wave Feminism, Peace, and Social Justice," she argues that when activists work at the local level, the Intersectional Feminist movement builds into a reputable community with traction that will expand to a macro scale and connect communities.<sup>4</sup> With more recognition around the violent actions perpetrated against women and queer individuals historically—and an increased awareness of individual political power—more people are banding together within their communities as women have been doing for centuries.

A globally recognized feminist activist group called the Guerrilla Girls began their work in New York City in 1985. They are expanding their influence in more countries as the

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<sup>2</sup> Julia Schuster, "Why the Personal Remained Political: Comparing Second and Third Wave Perspectives on Everyday Feminism," *Social Movement Studies* 16, no. 6 (2017): 647–59.

<sup>3</sup> Katy Deepwell, "The Politics and Aesthetic Choices of Feminist Art Criticism," *Arts (2076-0752)* 12, no. 2 (2023): 63.

<sup>4</sup> AmberLynn Zimmerman et al, "The Local Is Global: Third Wave Feminism, Peace, and Social Justice," *Contemporary Justice Review* 12, no. 1 (2009): 77–90.

foundation of the Guerrilla Girls Broadband has allowed for better accessibility online.<sup>5</sup> This platform has helped the activist group reach a broader audience in their efforts to bring recognition to the oppression women and queer artists have and still face. The Guerilla Girls Broadband also protects the anonymity of the activists joining the movement demonstrating globally. The group uses satire and humor in their demonstrations and publications to draw a wider audience.

In this thesis, I will examine how Contemporary artists in the third wave of Intersectional Feminist and Queer activism use their platforms for equitable restoration and justice within their communities. Many of these artists have begun taking back and redefining the connotations around the heteronormative female reproductive sex organs like the vulva, breasts, and experiences of motherhood as subject matter in their art. These motifs and themes have societally been censored through various means of oppression to put certain behaviors and experiences on a pedestal. There has been evidence of deeper awareness around the discrimination people assigned as female at birth inherently face in a patriarchal society. The Intersectional Feminist and Queer agendas include bringing value back to their experiences and symbolism. In trends seen beginning in the 2010s and 20s with home décor, fashion, and the fine arts, more individuals are using the motifs in everyday style.

I will examine seven works of art through an Intersectional Feminist and Queer theoretical lens to further the discussion within the current state of the field. These case studies will demonstrate how artists are using their platforms to redefine the aforementioned body parts and experiences in an inclusive way. With more people connecting in the 2020s to socio-political

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<sup>5</sup> Jennifer L Motter, "Feminist Virtual World Activism: 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence Campaign, Guerrilla Girls Broadband, and Subrosa." *Visual Culture & Gender* 6 (2011): 109–19.

movements that impact their own lives or the lives of people they love, there's been recognizable growth around the acceptance of blurring boundaries around multifaceted individuality.

Case Study One: I first plan to evaluate the Guerrilla Girls, *The Male Graze*, demonstration and exhibition created for ARTNIGHT in London and available on the Guerrilla Girls broadband, that calls direct attention to the inequitable nature women's bodies and rights have been violated in the fine arts.<sup>6</sup> This online exhibition features several different subsections to click through including, *Flesh Through the Ages*, *Art School/ World Confidential*, and *Bad Male Behavior*.<sup>7</sup> These subsections identify male artists who have used the female nude in their work and/ or are perpetrating harmful behavior against women and queer artists and models. Figure 1 is a billboard installation of the detailed section, "Are there more naked women than women artists in art museums?" This is a call to action that brings attention to the inequitable treatment of women's bodies as subject matter compared to the limited representation of women artists.<sup>8</sup> This billboard and other posters from this series includes fifteen different works of art that feature female nudes from various movements and geographic regions, all of which are painted or sculpted by male artists.

To further support this case study Figure 2 is a lithograph of the original Guerrilla Girls street posted created in 1989 that this exhibition drew inspiration from.<sup>9</sup> This work is now seen in several museums around the world, ironic to the group's original intentions. Figure 3 is one

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<sup>6</sup> Guerrilla Girls, "The Male Graze," *Guerrilla Girls Broadband*, 2021, <https://www.themalegraze.com>.

<sup>7</sup> Guerrilla Girls, "The Male Graze," 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Figure 1, Guerrilla Girls, "The Male Graze," *Guerrilla Girls*, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Figure 2, Guerrilla Girls, "Do Women Have to be Naked to Get into the Met. Museum?" 1989.

example of this work being translated and hung in a gallery exhibition and used on social media by that gallery to gain attention.<sup>10</sup> The final figure to be discussed in this case study is an example of another visual used on the Guerrilla Girls Broadband with *The Male Graze* exhibition. As seen in Figure 4, *Art School/ World Confidential* is a historical visual manipulated for the impact the Guerrilla Girls were after and used as a heading image on that subpage of information.<sup>11</sup> I will examine this online exhibition further and consider commentary online from an Intersectional Feminist and Queer perspective as I discuss the impacts further.

Case Study Two: Feminist curator, Judith Collard, discusses some of the Intersectional Feminist and Queer activist-based art relevant in New Zealand during the rise of early activist movements across the globe. In her publication, "Spiral Women: Locating Lesbian Activism in New Zealand Feminist Art, 1975-1992," she identifies several artists who use explicit imagery as a form of activism in their portfolios.<sup>12</sup> For this case study, I will discuss a mixed media piece by Allie Eagle titled, *This Woman Died, I Care*, seen in Figure 5 was completed in 1978.<sup>13</sup> This painting uses watercolor, pastel, and graphite to depict a nude woman lying on the ground dead with evidence of an unsafe abortion attempt further defining the scene. At the top of the paper are a few band-aids holding together a cut corner and below the figure are the words, 'This

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<sup>10</sup> Figure 3, Museu de Arte de São Paulo, "The Guerrilla Girls define themselves as..." Instagram, 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Figure 4, Guerrilla Girls. "The Male Graze: Art School/ World Confidential." *Guerrilla Girls*, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Judith Collard, "Spiral Women: Locating Lesbian Activism in New Zealand Feminist Art, 1975-1992," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15, no. 2 (2006): 292–320.

<sup>13</sup> Figure 5, Allie Eagle, "*This Woman Died: I Care (Died Trying to Abort Herself)*," 1978.



woman died, I care.' This piece is a commentary on harmful abortion controls and the devastations such limitations can impose from an AFAB's (assigned female at birth) perspective.

This piece has been discussed through a feminist lens evident through current research; I intend to apply an Intersectional Feminist and Queer lens to highlight this art in a new way. Eagle's work features raw and emotional content with themes of abortion, death, and blood blatantly put in the viewer's path. In support of this case study, I've included a Contemporary demonstration by Deborah de Robertis as seen in Figure 6.<sup>14</sup> This Feminist activist artist has continued to bring attention to the inequities against women in the arts in radical ways, including the recent defamation of a famous piece completed by a male artist. She brought the #metoo movement to the arts that would be reminiscent of the piece completed by Allie Eagle. These works are relevant to my thesis as their core values align the previous generations of feminist activists with the change makers in the Contemporary arts.

Case Study Three: Historically, religious and Feminist agendas have not aligned with founding ideations, though some activists defend these two worlds' coexistence in the Contemporary arts. Feminist art critic Sheila Hughes discusses one demonstration of active resistance from a female art student, Rachel Dennis, on a religiously affiliated campus in the United States who used the vagina's anatomy as subject matter in her portfolio.<sup>15</sup> In the article, "Lippy Women: Feminist Art Activism on a Catholic Campus," Shelia Hughes discusses the work titled, *Penthouses from Irving*, seen in Figure 7 exhibited by Rachel Dennis approached

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<sup>14</sup> Figure 6, Deborah de Robertis, "A look at just how far we haven't come' ... Gustave Coubet's L'Origine du Monde (1866)," demonstration/ photograph, 2024.

<sup>15</sup> Sheila Hassell Hughes, "Lippy Women: Feminist Art Activism on a Catholic Campus," *Visual Culture & Gender* 7 (2012): 26–38.

through a feminist lens.<sup>16</sup> This work details four horizontal sculpted multimedia labia on small canvases with flat black centers, each expressive and a bit different from the next. I will contribute to current discourse by examining *Penthouses from Irving*, through an Intersectional Feminist and Queer theoretical lens while acknowledging the coexistence of religious identities within these communities.

Case Study Four: While Intersectional Feminism has continued to grow into a globally influential movement, pop culture has further embraced the heteronormative female anatomy in the fine arts and everyday design. In Arielle Kaplan's blog, *hey alma*, she brings up a functional art piece by artist Rachel Bloom that had a big response following its initial post on social media in 2018.<sup>17</sup> This work sparked some controversial conversations that remain relevant each year around the holidays and has taken on a life different from what the artist originally intended. Rachel Bloom created a ceramic tabletop piece titled, *Labia Menorah*, as seen in Figure 8, a full Vagina with labia and multiple clitorises down the middle for the traditional candles to be placed in and shared on social media.<sup>18</sup> I will further discuss this functional art and some of the response social media has taken on as it connects the multifaceted perspectives of Intersectional Feminist and Queer activists who also identify with the Jewish community either culturally, religiously, or both.

Case Study Five, Six, and Seven: As the final portion of my discussion, I will examine three self-portrait photographs done by Queer American Photographer, Catherine Opie, in addition to some of the commentary and her relevance on social media today. In Josephine

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<sup>16</sup> Figure 7, Rachel Ann Dennis, "Penthouses from Irving," 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Arielle Kaplan, "All I want for Hanukkah Is Rachel Bloom's Labia Menorah," *hey alma*, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Figure 8, Rachel Bloom, "Labia Menorah," Instagram, 2018.

Withers's article, "All Representation Is Political: Feminist Art Past and Present," she engages in the critical discussion around exhibitions that feature feminist artists from the United States and considers where the movements could progress.<sup>19</sup> That said, she does not specifically examine Catherine Opie's work through a lens that acknowledges the intersectional realities of people's lives today. The three self-portraits are photographs where Catherine Opie puts herself in the likeness of her usual subjects and encompasses the intersecting themes of femininity, queer lifestyles, kink, motherhood and community. Most of these are relatively universal experiences of womanhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century yet not openly discussed in the same contexts.

Catherine Opie's work is mentioned during an interview with Christina Schlesinger where she discusses the influences of lesbian artists in the Contemporary field.<sup>20</sup> One of the ways women and queer Contemporary artists use their platforms within their communities to embrace activist agendas is with the use of specific motifs that have been visually linked to the female sexual anatomy. Another means of activist demonstration is to spotlight subcultures and taboo subjects as Catherine Opie does in her career. Her photographs celebrate the union of multifaceted perspectives, and she made it a point as the photographer to include herself as the subject as well to not set herself apart from the communities she worked with.

The First portrait I will discuss in an Intersectional Feminist and Queer theoretical lens should be prefaced with a content warning as it features freshly cut skin surfaces and blood. The *Self-portrait/ Cutting*, seen in Figure 9, was the first of a series of three Catherine Opie would

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<sup>19</sup> Josephine Withers, "All Representation Is Political: Feminist Art Past and Present," *Feminist Studies* 34, no. 3 (2008): 456–75.

<sup>20</sup> Christina Schlesinger, "Filling the Void in Lesbian Art," *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* 22, no. 2 (2015): 20–23.

come to publish over her career.<sup>21</sup> The photograph depicts her seated facing away from the camera with a bare upper body and the scene of a lesbian couple in front of a home with cloudy skies crudely cut into her back. This portrait was quite radical in expressing her wants for the future and she proceeded to exhibit it regardless of the impact that could come in her career. At this time, Catherine Opie was only showing her work in alternative spaces that already embraced Queer individuals. Her work is now a part of the Guggenheim Museum's private collection in New York City.

The second portrait I will examine in an Intersectional Feminist and Queer theoretical lens should also be prefaced with a content warning as it includes the use of needles, blood, and cut skin surfaces. This photograph as seen in Figure 10, is titled *Self Portrait/ Pervert*, was done early in her career and published in 1994.<sup>22</sup> This photograph is also a part of the Guggenheim Museum's private collection in New York City. This portrait shows Catherine Opie seated for a consensual BDSM session wearing a black leather mask with two small holes for breathing that connect to a neck collar with a submissive O ring, her upper body completely bare, 'Pervert,' intricately carved into her chest, and rows of play needles placed inserted along the entirety of her arms. Pervert and decorative features are freshly cut with the appearance of bright red blood that will eventually scar the skin. This self-portrait is a great example of Contemporary photography that breaks barriers in the fine arts world and allows for an intersectional analysis

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<sup>21</sup> Figure 9, Catherine Opie, "Self Portrait/ Cutting," *The Guggenheim Museums and Foundations*, 1993.

<sup>22</sup> Figure 11, Catherine Opie, "Self Portrait/ Pervert," *The Guggenheim Museums and Foundations*, 1994.

including feminist and queer perspectives to be presented in a means that has not been explored previously.

In addition to the portrait, I have included Figure 11, which shows a screenshot from Instagram where Panmela Castro posted in 2024 with fellow feminist artist Catherine Opie showing the scars from their work at a current exhibition.<sup>23</sup> To further the discussion around the impacts Catherine Opie has made in her career and on social media at a larger scale is Panmela Castro's *Consagrada*, seen in Figure 12, completed through performance and photographed in 2021.<sup>24</sup> Catherine Opie's work has remained relevant on a vast scale and is used at the micro level in smaller communities by artists who use their platforms in similar ways. Many artists learn from each other and pull inspirations not limited by field or artistic medium. An example from Instagram, posted by Limpwrist.tattoo in 2021 seen in Figure 13 gives the artist credit with his title and caption, "Catherine Opie- Self Portrait/ Pervert," while recreating it in their style to promote business.<sup>25</sup>

The third self-portrait I will discuss was published later in Catherine Opie's career titled, *Self Portrait/ Nursing*, seen in Figure 14, that brings insight into her life developments.<sup>26</sup> This photograph depicts Opie seated while breastfeeding (also referred to as chestfeeding for inclusivity) her young child skin to skin in a pose that references famous art historical contexts. The scars from her previous work visible across her chest brings her full portfolio back into

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<sup>23</sup> Figure 11, Panmela Castro, "Conhecendo minhas artistas de referenência." Instagram, 2024.

<sup>24</sup> Figure 12, Panmela Castro, "*Consagrada*," Performance/ Photography, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Figure 13, Limpwrist.tattoo, "Catherine Opie- Self Portrait/ Pervert," Digital line art, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Figure 14, Catherine Opie, "Self Portrait/ Nursing," The Guggenheim Museums and Foundations, 2004.

current relevance for further discussion. In my discussion of this portrait, I will consider the intersectional perspectives she explores including motherhood, queer identity, kink, and community through an Intersectional Feminist and Queer theoretical approach.

In connection with this portrait, I will discuss how social media has been used to spread this work and some of the responses coming from different communities. Catherine Opie posted this portrait to her Instagram account on Mother's Day 2024 seen in a screenshot from Instagram in Figure 15 and has since found it reposted and referenced many times over.<sup>27</sup> I will include specific comments from active social media accounts that consider the impact the work continues to make in an Intersectional approach. To further the discussion, I have included a work from Katejustknits on Instagram titled, “Feminist Fan Series: Catherine Opie, Self Portrait/ Nursing, 2004,” seen in Figure 16.<sup>28</sup> This knit portrait inspired by Catherine Opie’s portrait was posted to social media in 2016. This work continues to be well received by the activists using online platforms.

### **Literature Review**

As more Intersectional Feminist and Queer activists use art within their platforms to demonstrate in their communities, the language barriers people have faced globally have become less of an obstacle in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Visual motifs have long-standing associated connotations that vary by community, many now centering around feminist and/ or queer agendas. As a global society continues to progress, platforms that project calls for action have more progressive objectives and are better organized. The article written by Julia Schuster titled, “Why the

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<sup>27</sup> Figure 15, csopie, “Happy Mother’s Day,” Instagram, 2024.

<sup>28</sup> Figure 16, Katejustknits, “Feminist Fan Series: Catherine Opie, Self Portrait/ Nursing, 2004,” Instagram, 2016.

Personal Remained Political: Comparing Second and Third Wave Perspectives on Everyday Feminism,” compares the intentions of the Second and Third Wave Feminist movements and the perspectives of those who identify with their agendas.<sup>29</sup> One of the author's main discussion points considered the differences in everyday experiences for people generationally as the socio-political movements evolved. In the political landscapes of the 2020s, there are significantly more individual rights and empowerments globally that wouldn't be possible without the combined work of generational activism.

Researcher and qualitative data analyst, Kera Lovell, identified many progressive thought patterns that have emerged through the evolution of generations by evaluating letters from teen girls' perspectives as they developed their understandings of their surrounding communities.<sup>30</sup> This data is a valuable record in tracking the shifts in reality for these adolescent girls and young women. She noticed in these letters the writers were expressing the wants for a much different reality compared to prior generations and this thought process revealed itself to be a cyclical pattern as progressive action reflected the current realities girls and women expressed. As this dialog turned outward and began connecting women at a local level, awareness was raised to match their generation's expectations; this has continued to progress into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Intersectional Feminist and Queer activists in the 2020s aim to further build inclusive spaces, spotlight multifaceted perspectives, and call for freedom around their own lifestyle decisions without compromising their political voices in exchange.

Soon to move beyond the boundaries of the United States through shared experiences and

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<sup>29</sup> Schuster, “Why the Personal Remained Political,” 647–59.

<sup>30</sup> Lovell, Kera. “Girls Are Equal Too: Education, Body Politics, and the Making of Teenage Feminism.” *Gender Issues* 33, no. 2 (2016): 71–95.

open-minded perspectives, communities were unifying to support their members. Intersectional Feminist and Queer activists progress their agendas by establishing inclusive environments for people to have the ability to explore themselves without judgment. Safe spaces like this grant marginalized people freedom from oppressive standards all over the world. Researcher Fiona Anderson and her team published an article in 2021 titled, “Desire Revolution: Imagining Queer Europe,” that considers the early developments of Feminist and Queer communities across Europe from the 1960s and 70s as the socio-political movements began to expand to present-day standards.<sup>31</sup> This research contributes to a developing timeline that recognizes and understands the progressive global development reflected in local communities building to macro-scale change. This is made clear through restoration efforts that further historical documentation of such change. With this information better deciphered and relayed, restorative political action for equitable experiences in Europe can be better supported through links created by change-makers in local communities.

Contemporary Feminist Art critic Heather McLean from Toronto, Canada calls attention to some of the changes implemented in her local community with the arts.<sup>32</sup> It’s evident through these implementations that generations of thought and opinion went into creating a space for betterment within their community. In her discussion, she demonstrates how policies implemented in the city created an arts-based space that fosters progressive change and equitable restoration at a micro level making big strides in the surrounding community. There are many implementations discussed that are inclusive to Queer, feminist, and BIPOC individuals within

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<sup>31</sup> Fiona Anderson, Glyn Davis, and Nat Raha, “Desire Revolution: Imagining Queer Europe,” *Third Text* 35, no. 1 (2021): 1–9.

<sup>32</sup> Heather McLean, “Digging into the Creative City: A Feminist Critique,” *Antipode* 46, no. 3 (2014): 669–90.



the creative hub. This space was established to combat growing gentrification and forced assimilation into a whitewashed and heteronormative narrative that's been further reinforced through colonization over centuries.

Cultures vary drastically around the world, yet people find connection through shared experiences seen with the advances in technology and the impacts of a global society developing. In V Jourdain's article, "Memory Gaps and Hollow Bodies. LGBTQI+ Inclusivity in the Visual Arts: Experiences in France and Quebec," published in 2020 they discuss two separate cities as they each reflect activist work in Queer communities in the arts. They also discuss the approaches each city has implemented to further inclusivity in educational and museum-based arts spaces.<sup>33</sup> V Jourdain considers some experiences shared by artists who identify as Queer and proposes some ways the current community could better support them while still considering the different political states of each of the cities at large. This is important to weigh within the current state of the field to direct future researchers in drawing connections between artists and their platforms, both in person and virtually.

Foundationally, New Zealand was the first self-governing country in the world that granted all women the right to vote in 1893.<sup>34</sup> This country is certainly progressive and influenced by many generations of social change-makers. The Women's liberation movement that rose in New Zealand in the 1970s was heavily influenced by the American feminist and civil rights movements. During this first wave of contemporary feminist activism priorities were

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<sup>33</sup> V Jourdain, "Memory Gaps and Hollow Bodies. LGBTQI+ Inclusivity in the Visual Arts: Experiences in France and Quebec," *Museum International* 72, no. 3/4 (2020): 54–65.

<sup>34</sup> Sharon McAuley, and Anonymous, "Suffrage 125; Stories of women's activism," *New Zealand History*, Manatu Tonga- Ministry for culture and Heritage, 2022, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/suffrage125/three-waves-of-womens-activism>.

placed on fair division of labor, loosening of gendered social norms, reproductive rights, and protections against violence. As the demonstrations for change progressed the country saw the emergence of women's conventions and the founding of gender studies in the academic realm with feminist theory.<sup>35</sup> In the Intersectional feminist activism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, further emphasis is placed on supporting individuality and celebrating the diversity of their culture in an inclusive equitable means.

The New Zealand government provides this history and recognition to their Suffrages for the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the implementation of voting rights in a published statement that acknowledges the impacts of generations of great leaders. In this reflection, they state, "A hallmark of the contemporary women's movement is its multifaceted nature and the interconnected diversity of the issues being fought for."<sup>36</sup> This country has made recognizable steps in the direction of equitable treatment and restorative justice for its population not seen in the United States. This affirmative action has been further spread with the use of social media as a means for people to connect with others and to motivate influential change.

As a result of the socio-politically influenced organizations, researcher Marina Vishmidt identifies points of progress that have been made in the first two waves of feminist activism, the opportunity then arises for critics and researchers to consider other ways Intersectional Feminist and Queer activists may use their art as calls for recognition and actionable change.<sup>37</sup> Vishmidt identifies reproductive rights as one of the many common fronts from the waves of generational

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<sup>35</sup> Sharon McAuley, "Suffrage 125," 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Sharon McAuley, "Suffrage 125," 2022.

<sup>37</sup> Marina Vishmidt, "The Two Reproductions in (Feminist) Art and Theory since the 1970s," *Third Text* 31, no. 1 (2017): 49–66.

influences that remain on treacherous grounds in the 2020s political landscape. As contemporary activists continue to spread their agendas, the use of motifs like the breasts, vulva, and uterus are used in art. This has been recognized for at least a decade as the emergence of these motifs has historically been met with backlash as explicit connotations are still actively being reclaimed on a global scale.

Consequently, the United States' present political landscape concerning abortion rights is as prevalent as ever as discussions for control disconnect from individual realities. This painting remains a highly relevant work to discuss in 2024 as reproductive rights remain a forefront issue that affects anyone, not just the people who can physically carry out pregnancies. Intersectional feminist and queer activists still currently fight for access to safe procedures regardless of the cause. Access to safe abortions is a politically tied right that remains in discourse within the United States where this artist was exhibiting her work. Universal health care is denied with classist, sexist, racist, and homophobic exclusions that are reinforced at various governmental and societal levels, despite the applicability of bettering communities that could gain access. Liza Fuentes at the Guttmacher Institute at the Boston Medical Center published a statement in 2023 that states,

“Profound inequities in abortion access that have long marked the reproductive health and well-being of pregnant people and their families. Not only Black, Latino and Indigenous people and people living with low incomes, but transmen and nonbinary people, immigrants, adolescents and people living with disabilities are all particularly likely to encounter compounding obstacles to abortion care and be harmed as a result.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Liza Fuentes, “Inequity in US Abortion Rights and Access: The End of Roe Is Deepening Existing Divides,” *Guttmacher Institute, Boston Medical Center*, 2023, <https://www.guttmacher.org/2023/01/inequity-us-abortion-rights-and-access-end-roe-deepening-existing-divides#:~:text=Another%20consequence%20of%20eliminating%20the,travel%20for%20clinic%2Dbased%20care.>

That benefit would however take power away from the defining upper class that has continued to dominate a globally influenced commerce.

As a result of the constraints impacting such large percentages of the population in the United States the Human Rights Campaign has remained a largely influential force. Their demonstrations and calls for action protect independent civil rights and fight for access to safe and inclusive health care. This group of campaigners has partnered with local-level activists to connect communities as well as large institutions like Planned Parenthood and NARAL to bring attention to the threats certain legislations can impose. One of the campaign activists, Sarah Warbelow, published, “Reproductive Rights are Queer Rights,” in response to the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* in the supreme court.<sup>39</sup> She makes a point to identify the ways this action causes harm to everyone’s rights and not just people who identify as female or were assigned female at birth. This impacts the Queer community significantly as it also impedes gender-affirming care and treatments like transitionary surgeries, hormones, and access to safe medical environments.

Liza Fuentes at the Guttmacher Institute continues:

"Failures of the health care and economic systems to provide Black, Indigenous, and Latino communities and communities living with low incomes access to high-quality, affordable health care, and safe and sustainable communities. Thus, while abortion bans and other legal restrictions harm all people who are or may become pregnant, they cause even greater harm to those already subject to systemic racism and economic injustice."<sup>40</sup>

These points are further supported by significant statistical evidence that identifies inequities experienced by BIPOC and Queer communities that are indisputable. This solidifies the

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<sup>39</sup> Sarah Warbelow, “Reproductive Rights Are LGBTQ+ Rights,” *Human Rights Campaign*, 2022, <https://www.hrc.org/magazine/2022-spring/reproductive-rights-are-lgbtq-rights>.

<sup>40</sup> Liza Fuentes, “Inequity in US Abortion Rights and Access,” 2023.

intersectional realities that are impacted by restrictive legislature and access to safe medical practices.

Religious groups have established various ideologies around the world, critically applying guilt and ostracization within their communities, inevitably placing restrictions upon anyone who does not want to carry out a pregnancy. This is a clear cause of discreet and dangerous approaches being used often despite the known repercussions that frequently lead to death. As more artists like Allie Eagle have emerged over generations of activist demonstrations, intersectional mindsets will continue to bring communities together with problem-solving skills. This could then lead to inclusive equitable justice spanning across communities without the conditions of support that are still currently present.

Warbelow goes on to make their intentions clear within their statement by directly calling out the oppressive behaviors this legislation enforces stating, "Discrimination and denial of resources, rights, and information on the basis of sexuality, race/ethnicity, gender, age, citizenship status and disability uniquely shape abortion access for people subject to intersecting forms of discrimination."<sup>41</sup> The HRC continues to support its argument with statistics that reflect the current state of these access rights, identifying that only 29% of people who can carry pregnancies can also access a safe abortion.<sup>42</sup> This is due to discriminatory restrictions that stem from religious foundations and racial biases already existing in communities.

There is a recognizable co-existence between established supportive communities and an active fight against such progress as oppressive standards are still largely upheld worldwide. As

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<sup>41</sup> Warbelow, "Reproductive Rights Are LGBTQ+ Rights," 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Warbelow, "Reproductive Rights Are LGBTQ+ Rights," 2022.

Feminist critic Sheila Lintott further points out in her response to the article written by Andrea Liss titled, “Feminist Art and the Maternal,” there is an unavoidable connection between these two dynamics that come with a lot of debate.<sup>43</sup> The Intersectional Feminist and Queer activists in the most current wave of organized demonstrations fight for the opportunity of choice around different lifestyles without judgment and reproductive rights are a large aspect of these freedoms that affects everyone. Many activist artists bring awareness and attention to the issues surrounding reproductive freedoms with their platforms both in person and through social media.

Women and Queer individuals have continued to make progress for equitable treatment throughout the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginnings of the 21<sup>st</sup> century following the rise of organized socio-political movements. One part of these efforts is the restoration of the Intersectional Feminist and Queer art history canon and the recognition of artist’s reputations. Researcher and author Giovanna Zapperi points out some examples of these efforts in her 2013 article, “Woman’s Reappearance: Rethinking the Archive in Contemporary Art-Feminist Perspectives.”<sup>44</sup> Zapperi considers the portfolios of a few Contemporary Feminist artists from the 1990s and 2000s to shed light on their perspectives that have historically been left out of important spaces and discussions. With this information being restored to the state of the field, researchers will be able to identify gaps in knowledge and further historical contributions. Artists have begun to reclaim imagery through their platforms that have previously been associated with negative connotations and narratives established by people who benefit from oppressive standards.

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<sup>43</sup> Sheila Lintott, “Feminist Art and the Maternal by Liss, Andrea,” *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism* 68, no. 1 (2010): 74–76.

<sup>44</sup> Giovanna Zapperi, “Woman’s Reappearance: Rethinking the Archive in Contemporary Art-Feminist Perspectives,” *Feminist Review*, no. 105 (2013): 21–47.

One of the most reputable Feminist activist groups in the Contemporary art world emerged in 1985 from New York City and called themselves the Guerrilla Girls. This group of activists have made significant strides for equitable treatment and justice in the arts through an Intersectional Feminist and Queer theoretical approach. Author Katarzyne Maniak identifies several ways the anonymous group has made impacts from their founding into present-day narratives.<sup>45</sup> This group not only aims to dismantle sexist and homophobic barriers in the art world in their contemporary work but also uses the aforementioned motifs to drive their intentions around the messages in humorous ways. This group uses their anonymous voices to create large-scale demonstrations and exhibitions as calls to action globally addressing higher institutions directly to rectify their wrongdoings. By investigating some examples of their demonstrations, this thesis seeks to address gaps in Intersectional Feminist and Queer theory in the fine arts world.

The Met now includes the lithograph seen in Figure 2 in their collection and has hosted a discussion between feminist art historians and curators, Katy Hessel and Allison Rudnick titled, "Museums without Men: Guerrilla Girls," published in 2023.<sup>46</sup> This discussion is highly relevant in the climate of the art field today as it connects the same fought-for issues from the first and second waves of feminist activism to the most contemporary influences of third-wave or Intersection and Transnational Feminism. These women discuss the importance of gender

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<sup>45</sup> Katarzyne Maniak, "Guerrilla Girls: Invisible Sex in the Field of Art," *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis: Studia de Arte et Educatione* 13, no. 264 (2018): 87-95.

<sup>46</sup> Kate Hessel and Allison Rudnick, "Museums without Men: Guerrilla Girls," Interview, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 2023.  
<https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/articles/2024/03/katy-hessel-audio-tour-guerrilla-girls-transcript>.

representation in the museums, though they do not get into an intersectional interpretation of this matter to consider the impacts around queer identities. They further consider how statistical numbers can't be argued as evidence and the implications of such a radical statement having been made against the fine arts institution in the 1980s. Katy and Allison point out the guerrilla mask worn by demonstrators and consider this an intervention to the arts from the Guerrilla Girls' point of view, which brings the artwork back to the reality of that being a person's nude body.<sup>47</sup> This argument is a timeless issue when women's rights and autonomy are made political debates and now includes the representation of queer and non-conforming bodies.

A smaller Feminist artist club established itself in New York City as well as the city is a hub in the Contemporary Fine Arts with many large institutions establishing posts there. In an article written by Maria Basczek "Ladies Auxiliary of the Lower East Side: Post-punk feminist art and New York's Club 57," she identifies some of the mediums frequently used on Feminist artists' platforms and how those were received by the community they were initially shared in.<sup>48</sup> With New York City being a significantly more progressive space compared to many small rural towns, the works presented gained attention from the downtown scene quickly and gave this generation of Feminist artists their first platforms. Much of the work produced by Club 57 has only been evaluated from a traditional feminist perspective and would be richened with Intersectional Feminist and Queer perspectives applied through further evaluation.

A great demonstration that has brought attention to the ways women and queer people have been politically policed historically was evaluated by researcher and author Jennie Klein,

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<sup>47</sup> Hessel and Rudnick, "Museums without Men," 2023.

<sup>48</sup> Maria Elena Buszek, "Ladies' Auxiliary of the Lower East Side: Post-Punk Feminist Art and New York's Club 57," *Punk & Post Punk* 9, no. 3 (2020): 425–42.



where she discusses the Lesbian Art Project as a source of safe and supportive exhibition space.<sup>49</sup> The Lesbian Art Project was founded by Terry Wolverton and Arlene Raven, two Feminist curators, who highlighted the impacts of the First and Second waves of feminist activists through art exhibitions. These curators hosted shows in both New York and Los Angeles featuring artists who used motifs of this nature to draw attention to their missions. These exhibitions featured work from diverse perspectives that included women and Queer identifying people of different races, cultures, religions, and shared personal experiences of motherhood.

Another exhibition organized by Christina Schlesinger titled, "Filling the Void in Lesbian Art," is a great example of Intersectional Feminist and Queer agendas in the art world that embraces the use of heteronormative female bodies and experiences as representations of different perspectives.<sup>50</sup> Exhibited in Soho, New York City, this curator was able to gain a lot of attention through pop-ups that generated buzz around the subject matter. This is a strong demonstration in the Contemporary arts field that acknowledges Intersectional Feminist and Queer activist's work from the third wave of organized changemakers. Without the progress made through prior generations, artists who use their platforms, both online and in person, for activism wouldn't be able to push the limits to such extents and further the fight for equitable justice. In order to understand the complexities around Intersectional Feminist and Queer activist agendas, many perspectives globally should be considered to validate differing experiences.

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<sup>49</sup> Jennie Klein, "The Lesbian Art Project," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 14, no. 2/3 (2010): 238–59.

<sup>50</sup> Christina Schlesinger, "Filling the Void in Lesbian Art," *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 22, no. 2 (2015): 20-23.

## **Methodology**

In this thesis research I will be using a qualitative methodology to examine the impacts Intersectional Feminist and Queer activists have had in the Contemporary arts field through the use of motifs related to the female sex organs, the vulva, uterus, and breasts and with evidence from social media. I will look specifically at the early organizations of socio-political activist groups and their demonstrations, Contemporary artists who use these motifs as subjects in their work, as well as reviewing scholarly literature and social media that discusses the impacts of Intersectional Feminist and Queer activism in the arts through an intersectional lens.

This investigation is innovative in the art history field as it tracks the impressions of such work through social media that connects people to global communities. This allows for open dialog comparing and validating individual experiences as multifaceted members of society.

This methodological approach illustrates the ways the Intersectional and Transnational Feminist Movement has fostered space for more progressive imagery to be used in the artistic process. This is made evident by giving diverse voices a spotlight and organizing exhibitions that make significant differences within their communities. Highlighting different experiences and celebrating individual perspectives at the local level can lead to change at a macro scale as the global culture of the 2020s establishes itself. This will be supported by evidence from several countries including the United States, Canada, European countries, and New Zealand as well as through social media platforms made accessible to individuals. The Intersectional Feminist and Queer theoretical lens approaches the current research in a holistic means to interpret the all-around identities in the Contemporary arts relevant today.

## Discussion

Case Study One: The Guerrilla Girls feminist art activist group has spread globally in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and is accessible on the internet through The Guerrilla Girls Broadband as well as on social media platforms. The Guerrilla Girls Broadband acts as a virtual gallery space and has further connected activists across the world, bringing attention to the inequities women and queer individuals face in the fine arts. The Guerrilla Girls also include content warnings on the Broadband stating, “Please note, this website contains images and text that could be upsetting to viewers including depictions of rape, abuse and violence, descriptions of assault, violence against women and abuse of power.”<sup>51</sup> The exhibition titled, “The Male Graze,” organized and published for the project ARTNIGHT in London was brought to the Broadband and had been seen at street level through the group's favored approach by installing street posters and billboards around 11 cities in 2021.<sup>52</sup> The Guerrilla Girls titled this exhibition as a call to action acknowledging and challenging what has become known as ‘the male gaze’ in a way that calls out the predatory nature of the patriarchal dynamics.

The Guerrilla Girls verified Instagram account has a following of 146 thousand people as of July 2024.<sup>53</sup> This is a widely established following for a fairly niche activist group to have grown into with thousands of affiliated posts that tag their influences at local levels. At the top of their page are several highlight reels that include their most recent exhibitions and press mentions that bring their work and influences to the forefront as viewers access their page. The

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<sup>51</sup> Guerrilla Girls, “The Male Graze,” 2021.

<sup>52</sup> Guerrilla Girls, “The Male Graze,” 2021.

<sup>53</sup> Guerrilla Girls, “Verified Profile,” Instagram, 2024.  
<https://www.instagram.com/guerrillagirls/>.

group has a similar audience on Facebook with a following of 129 thousand and features posts of their current work, press, and promotion around their new book.<sup>54</sup> These posts bring their now large-scale works done in partnership with the museums they are directly addressing to people worldwide more accessibly.

The billboard print, seen in Figure 1, is a call to action the group is directing at larger fine arts institutions and everyday viewers, that is one part of the online exhibition that has more features to consider.<sup>55</sup> It poses the question, “Are there more naked women than women artists in UK museums?” Below this furthers, “Visit your favorite museum, count ‘em up & let the guerrilla girls know!” asking for the responses to gather a realistic answer and bring recognition to the issues for furthered discourse. When an activist group presents a call for response more people engage in the ideas presented than would happen without the attention brought to the issue.

This call to action is not an original concept seen coming from this group as they have been bringing these questions to the street level for many decades by the time this project was produced. As demonstrated in Figure 2, the Guerrilla Girls have created lithographs to use as images in street posters calling out the inequities against women in the arts since their foundation in the 1980s.<sup>56</sup> The lithograph from 1989 asks, “Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?” and includes a statistic, “Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art Sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female.” Beside the text is a classic female nude pulled from

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<sup>54</sup> Guerrilla Girls, “Verified Profile,” Facebook, 2024. <https://www.facebook.com/guerrillagirls>.

<sup>55</sup> Figure 1, Guerrilla Girls, “The Male Graze,” *Guerrilla Girls Broadband*, 2021. <https://www.themalegraze.com>.

<sup>56</sup> Figure 2, Guerrilla Girls. “Do Women Have to be Naked to Get into the Met. Museum?” 1989.

the galleries at the Met but her face has been concealed with a guerrilla mask in the same manner the Guerrilla Girls use when demonstrating. This lithograph has continued to be used in gallery spaces to drum up humor, with a touch of irony. Museu de Arte de São Paulo uses their social media platforms to bring attention to their exhibitions as seen in Figure 3, where this lithograph has been included in a translated version.<sup>57</sup> The gallery opened with Catherine Opie and Pamela Castro's work included in 2024.

Graphically the billboards for "The Male Graze," include fifteen fine art pieces from fine arts institutions, mostly 2D paintings with some frames included, all depicting the female nude. These nude portraits are all done from the male artist's perspective and have various styles, indicating the global normalization around the use of a woman's body as the subject in art. The paintings span several centuries and geographic origins, that portray ideal beauty standards from each culture. This billboard includes the motifs associated with a woman's nude body like breasts and vulvas that have been distorted from the male artist's perspective for centuries. The statue of a nude woman at the top left is crouched concealing her body and is wearing a gorilla mask as protection from the repercussions of demonstrations, keeping her identity anonymous as she poses the question and call to action. The Guerrilla Girls reflect their work metaphorically by taking a woman "created" from the male's perspective and intervening, giving her independent thought and creating a sense of relatability for the contemporary viewers who will come to interact with this display.

In the online exhibition, the group produced a video that defined their intentions and has six pages of interactive material to go through. In the subsection, "Art School/ Art World

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<sup>57</sup> Figure 3, Museu de Arte de São Paulo, "The Guerrilla Girls define themselves as..." Instagram, 2024.

Confidential," the Guerrilla Girls cite many examples of males abusing their power in their positions over female students or models without fear of naming the institutions affiliated.<sup>58</sup> They gave big and small examples of the gross behaviors men have exhibited towards young women and girls, including a comment from a male professor, Walter Gaudnek with the University of Central Florida, who said to a young female artist, "You should just put a vagina on it, it would be much better," in 2017.<sup>59</sup> The group continues to acknowledge the ties large museums have with harmful funders who abuse their wealth to gain inappropriate access to studios and exhibitions.

At the top of this subsection of the exhibition is a photograph titled, *Life Drawing Class, Royal Academy of Art 1953-2021 (with Guerrilla Girls)*, that can be seen in Figure 4.<sup>60</sup> In this photograph, a nude female figure model stands on a platform with a class of mostly male artists working around her. Dappled among the male students are a few women and two have photoshopped Guerrilla masks covering their faces. This brings the demonstrators into the photograph to be humorous before the hard facts the remainder of the subsection presents. The Guerrilla Girls include a declarative statement, "Many suffer lifelong trauma as a result of this abuse of power and their careers are upended as a result. And it doesn't stop after art school. The art world is a hierarchy with mostly white men at the top who continue this bad behavior or look

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<sup>58</sup> Guerrilla Girls, "Art School/ World Confidential," *Guerrilla Girls Broadband*, 2021, <https://www.themalegraze.com/gg/art-school-world>.

<sup>59</sup> Guerrilla Girls, "Art School/ World Confidential," 2021.

<sup>60</sup> Figure 4, Guerrilla Girls, "Life Drawing Class, Royal Academy of Art 1953-2021 (with Guerrilla Girls)," *Guerrilla Girls Broadband*, 2021, <https://www.themalegraze.com/gg/art-school-world>.

the other way when their colleagues engage in it.”<sup>61</sup> This activist group is not afraid to use their voices in direct ways to bring attention to the harsh reality of what has been occurring in the art field both academically and professionally. This is pivotal in their shift between waves of feminist activism to become more inclusive and representative of any person being oppressed by those who hold power.

Through an intersectional perspective, this group aligns with queer and feminist activist agendas as evident by their work demonstrated in the 2020s. Many contemporary artists are a part of the queer community and identify with many other important aspects of self that lend to their experiences. Art has been used as a platform for seeking and establishing connections to safe spaces in many cultures. This is part of why these demonstrations draw so many perspectives together and is an identifiable factor in how they have grown to global recognition. The Guerrilla Girls recently published a book of their work titled, “Guerrilla Girls: The Art of Behaving Badly,” that has caught some attention from big media with reviews from critics like Christopher Knights from the LA Times who stated,

“The masked and anonymous Guerrilla Girls, behaving so badly they’re good, have been agitating for gender equity in the institutional art world for 35 years. Progress has been made — though not enough — but graphic punch and irrepressible wit skewer powerful patriarchy at every turn in the pages of “Guerrilla Girls: The Art of Behaving Badly,” which chronicles the history of their exploits.”<sup>62</sup>

This largely recognized review was a great source of representation for the group that brings significantly broader exposure to another audience.

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<sup>61</sup> Guerrilla Girls, “Art School/ World Confidential,” *Guerrilla Girls Broadband*, 2021, <https://www.themalegraze.com>.

<sup>62</sup> Christopher Knight, “The 10 Best Coffee Table Books for the Art Museum Obsessed,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/lifestyle/story/2020-10-30/unique-art-books-spark-creativity-2020-holidays>.

The Guerrilla Girls save a space on their exhibition to reference the press and reviews received over their work to acknowledge both critique and praise of their demonstration. The comment section on the Male Graze site is currently disabled but the discourse remains ever-present on other social media platforms. On Instagram, under one of the many relevant posts of *The Male Graze*, users discuss the Intersectional needs of the group. In 2021 user nathaliavega commented, "Yes, just like Latin America's indigenous art is called 'folk art,'..." pointing out another injustice in the current art field that affects people from that community.<sup>63</sup> While many of the comments are praising the work the group is doing, a few comments are calling for further action for Intersectional perspectives.

In response to a post showing the instillation of one of the billboards on Instagram jilleshelman states, "This is the greatest picture I have ever seen... calling out the patriarchy via art = everything I am about."<sup>64</sup> Others respond to the posts calling out their concerns of such activism growing to this large of a scale as brandi\_maria66 comments, "Commercialisation of rebellion! Just like punk rock!"<sup>65</sup> This sparked a response from \_Lab0b0 saying, "If you can commercialize any act of protest or rebellion you remove its power. Capitalism is very clever that way."<sup>66</sup> While these are strong points to consider there is much nuance between the polarity

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<sup>63</sup> Guerrilla Girls, "In 2020 our work was shown..." Instagram, 2021.  
[https://www.instagram.com/p/CNIs92hF1Pn/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/CNIs92hF1Pn/?img_index=1)

<sup>64</sup> Guerrilla Girls, "More Guerrilla Girls billboards are up!" Instagram, 2021.  
[https://www.instagram.com/p/CRAAjE6LC0f/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/CRAAjE6LC0f/?img_index=1)

<sup>65</sup> Guerrilla Girls, "The Guerrilla Girls have taken over..." Instagram, 2024.  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/C2Mq5J-Cg9z/>

<sup>66</sup> Guerrilla Girls, "The Guerrilla Girls have taken over..." Instagram, 2024.  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/C2Mq5J-Cg9z/>



of impacts. It wouldn't be possible for this activist group to work at such a large level without the impacts of their smaller scale work and while it is valid to point out the consumerist part of this reality, there are more people reached with the same and progressing missions for Intersectional Feminist and Queer activism in the arts.

Author and Painter Nell Irwin's quote about their book is included in their feed to recognize some of their intentions in the field. Irwin states, "You can't understand art history without the Guerrilla Girls, and you can't grasp the Guerrilla Girls' depth and humor without this book. It's an essential resource for thinking and making art."<sup>67</sup> Queer and feminist activists are not calling for the exclusion of male artists from large fine arts institutions or history in the ways women have, but rather to be held accountable for the misdeeds against women and queer people in art history. With equitable representation in the art field, there would be better diversity in perspectives bringing art using these motifs to the forefront. The beauty standards formed within the global society in present cultures could be altered with progress from the intersectional queer and feminist wave of the 2020s as activists continue pushing the hard questions.

Case Study Two: In the latter half of the 1970s, attention demanded by multiple social justice movements began expanding with the inclusion of more radical thoughts reflected in the Contemporary arts. Mixed media artist Allie Eagle used her platform in the 1970s and 1980s to bring attention to women's reproductive rights and the horrific impacts a lack of access to reproductive healthcare can cause. In the mixed media piece completed in 1978 titled, *This Woman Died: I Care*, seen in Figure 5, she uses watercolor, pastel, and graphite to make a very direct comment around the lack of access to safe abortions as she highlights the fact that death is

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<sup>67</sup> Guerrilla Girls, "What They're Saying About our Newest Book," *Guerrilla Girls*, 2024, <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/press>.

a frequent outcome of such desperation.<sup>68</sup> This painting was purchased by the Auckland Art Gallery TOI O TAMAKI in the 1990s and remains in the New Zealand Art Museum's collection today.<sup>69</sup>

The painting depicts a woman lying face down, her body positioned away from the viewer, in the center of the canvas. Her body itself is not painted in but left empty as an outline with red paint near her vagina and on her leg spilling onto the floor representing lost blood from an unsafe abortion attempt. Across her left leg and below her body on the floor is a motif representative of the tactic she'd used, that cost her life. This item is not identifiable as a known object but is long and flexible as it lies piled up and has sharply pointed ends. A deep black wash of paint rims her vagina and seemingly spreads below her body. The wash connects from her feet to her crown, blending into her hair. The paper is cleanly cut along the top right corner with a slight wave, not torn, and "repaired" with two band-aids to hold the pieces back together, seemingly like stitches would bond cut skin. The bright red paint runs down the bottom half of the paper through the words Allie Eagle included in the painting. "THIS WOMAN DIED I CARE," is fully capitalized in black ink below the figure and motif.

The composition and body's perspective pull the viewer's eyes down the page to the text, that stands out in the painting as she makes her intentions clear with the work. The background is a few light layers of washed blue and green watercolors, making the figure seem as if she is floating, upside down, in water. This could be another impactful comment the artist is making with the work around the societal pressures people born with uteruses are put under to hide their

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<sup>68</sup> Figure 5, Allie Eagle, "This Woman Died: I care (Died Trying to Abort Herself)," 1978, <https://www.aucklandartgallery.com/explore-art-and-ideas/artwork/7698/this-woman-died-i-care>.

<sup>69</sup> Figure 5, Allie Eagle, "This Woman Died," 1978.

circumstances, regardless of the reasons behind it. Seeking an abortion largely remains seen as a shameful predicament in many cultures, even as global society has developed over decades. A hidden home abortion is often attempted to resolve these matters privately, often in a bathtub to contain and clean up any evidence more easily.

Allie Eagle passed away in 2022 and a public obituary identified her radical feminist work and how her views shifted some at the end of her life. Her obituary was shared across social media platforms and brought a resurgence of discussion around her work in New Zealand from the second and third waves of Feminist activism. From the Facebook page Celebrity and Notable Deaths, posted July 2022, is her detailed obituary that cited many of her influences as, “feminist art historians, artists and writers such as Judy Chicago and Linda Nochlin, arguing that women have been prevented from being seen as serious artists because of social misconceptions about their abilities and role in society.”<sup>70</sup> Allie Eagle created a documentary in 2004 where she identified herself as a lesbian and discussed her relationship with religion changing as she got older.<sup>71</sup> Eagle’s perspective around abortion shifted following her involvement in the church but that didn’t necessarily change the impact the art from her early career was still making.

Allie Eagle's work became relevant on social media following her death primarily on X, previously known as Twitter, as reproductive rights are still being fought for and movements branch from the third wave of Feminism to being intersectional and inclusive. X user @zarahnSouthon shared Allie Eagles' work with the caption, “Despite Allie later having

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<sup>70</sup> Celebrity and Notable Deaths, “Allie Eagle January 9, 1949 to May 25, 2022 Age 73,” Facebook, July 2022.

[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid031otkPRuTVHhKxw7TcLt8edYFa4HayedJRxvLvwctJy2n4jaY3WbBtBojBMLfL471&id=584099078325206](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid031otkPRuTVHhKxw7TcLt8edYFa4HayedJRxvLvwctJy2n4jaY3WbBtBojBMLfL471&id=584099078325206).

<sup>71</sup> Celebrity and Notable Deaths, “Allie Eagle,” Facebook, July 2022.

reservations about her artwork & radical performance pieces of the 60's & 70's the radicalism paved the way for future activists. This Woman Died I Care, was inspired by a photograph of a woman who died from an illegal abortion.”<sup>72</sup> Some of the posts are reshared with hashtags to trend in the algorithms like from Marian Evans, @7R4SM, who posted the image and shared, “Allie Eagle (1949-2022) “This woman died: I care (died trying to abort herself)” 1978 watercolour & pastel 72x54cm. #womensart.”<sup>73</sup> As rape culture has continued to perpetrate society and cause harmful regulations around reproductive rights, the “Metoo,” movement has gained traction globally with Intersection Feminist and Queer activists.

More Activists are demonstrating through very direct approaches that border legal consequences to get their points across. Influenced by larger activist group demonstrations calling out art institutions, many artists use their platforms to further their access to a specific space. The #MeToo movement is fueled by victims of rape and sexual assault who are bringing awareness to the culture that allows these things to happen without dire consequences. In May 2024 a feminist artist from Luxemburg exhibiting their work in a show that also featured a painting by Gustave Courbet, used this opportunity to demonstrate a clear message by defacing the Courbet. In an article from The Guardian published quickly after, the author details how Deborah de Robertis has made a public demonstration against the painting *L'Origine du Monde*

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<sup>72</sup> Zarah Southon, “Despite Allie later having reservations about her artwork & radical performance pieces of the 60's & 70's...” X, May 2022.  
<https://x.com/zarahnsouthon/status/1529645114359853056>.

<sup>73</sup> Marian Evans, ““Allie Eagle (1949-2022) “This woman died: I care (died trying to abort herself)” 1978 watercolour & pastel 72x54cm. #womensart,” X, June 2022.  
<https://x.com/7R4SM/status/1540900385724198912>.

(1866) twice.<sup>74</sup> The title of this painting translates to The Origin of Life and was created through the male gaze of what a woman's purpose should be. This reduces the model down to her ability to have children as the painting only features a close-up of the vagina and no face.

The first demonstration by Deborah de Robertis was intervened with police action as she sat in front of the painting displaying her vagina. In the second demonstration, she wrote "METOO" across the entire painting, seen in Figure 6, getting the paint on the frame as well.<sup>75</sup> In this exhibition, Robertis was showing a piece titled, *On Ne Sépare Pas La Femme de l'Artiste*, which translates to "You do not Separate the woman from the artist."<sup>76</sup> She was calling out the damage the male artists are impacting on their models and the inequities this has further perpetrated against women artists. This demonstration was quickly shared across social media platforms warranting responses from many perspectives bringing forth polarizing discourse. In this context, the vagina becomes a weapon against oppression instead of a symbol of submission.

Intersectional Feminist and Queer activists fight for reproductive rights as these freedoms affect everyone, not just people assigned female at birth. This brings people of different backgrounds together to recognize the importance of their freedoms and use their voices together to bring real acknowledgment to the issues at hand. Having individual bodily autonomy is often neglected in patriarchal societies and religious communities. A frequent and dire consequence of rape is an unwanted pregnancy, that is often forced in communities that don't have protected

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<sup>74</sup> Dale B. Sawa, "Hurrah for the Courbet vandals: Defacing the vulva painting is basic feminism," The Guardian, 2024.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/article/2024/may/08/painting-metoo-gustave-courbet-origin-of-the-world>.

<sup>75</sup> Figure 6, Deborah de Robertis, "A look at just how far we haven't come'... Gustave Coubet's L'Origine du Monde (1866)," demonstration/ photograph, 2024.

<sup>76</sup> Sawa, "Hurrah for the Courbet vandals: The Guardian, 2024.

abortion access for those individuals. By connecting the early work of Allie Eagle to the Intersectional Feminist and Queer movements in the 2020s, it brings generations of influence together to create sustainable change in communities.

Case Study Three: Higher education institutions with religious affiliations have struggled to embrace full creative freedoms within their gallery spaces as activists have progressed the normalization and acceptance of certain motifs and themes. Gender and Women's studies have had academic protections for a few decades but higher education institutions that have religiously affiliated missions struggle to accept this without attempted limitations. Both spoken and unspoken boundaries and social norms exist in the religious communities which affects the student population regardless of the individual student's affiliation. This influences the way progressive activism is received both by students and faculty. Rachell Ann Dennis' portfolio features artwork reflective of the Intersectional Feminist and Queer activist agendas that were exhibited at the University of Dayton, a Catholic institution with ties to the Society of Mary.<sup>77</sup>

Feminist art historian Sheila Hughes reflects on this exhibition in her article, "Lippy Women: Feminist Art Activism on a Catholic Campus," published in 2012, she states, "...even at most colleges and universities with active church-related missions, academic freedom is protected in the classroom following the second wave of feminist activism. So far as feminist issues and activism are the content of women's studies courses, they are thus protected 'in the classroom.'"<sup>78</sup> She continues to describe more around the school informing the reader of the

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<sup>77</sup> Sheila Hassell Hughes, "Lippy Women: Feminist Art Activism on a Catholic Campus," *Visual Culture & Gender* 7 (2012): 26–38.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=89471863&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>78</sup> Hughes, "Lippy Women," 2012.

established women's and gender studies programs and an on-campus Women's Center that had been fought for with representation from prior waves of activist demonstrations.

The exhibition of Rachel Dennis's work was organized by the Women's Center Director Lisa Rismiller and titled, "Claiming the Labia," that featured paintings of vaginas made in 3D on the canvas to emphasize the labia in the spring of 2006.<sup>79</sup> Rachel Dennis was a photography and women's study double major who overheard a man criticizing a woman's body and choose to create this work from a woman's point of view to be shown in conjunction with *The Vagina Monologues* now hosted off campus. Sheila Hughes states, "The accumulated weight of alumnae/i backlash seemed to take its toll, when the administration blocked student plans for their annual campus production of *The Vagina Monologues*. Students have since launched the play at alternative venues, but it has not been performed on campus since 2005."<sup>80</sup> Rachel Dennis spoke on the works in her exhibition sharing that these experiences were personal and her intentions with the art were politically framed. With this exhibition, they pushed the borders around degrees of autonomy and put the rationale of the university's mission on trial. With such a challenge from part of their current community, many of the nuances between activist intentions and the negotiations with an institution found a fair amount of backlash from other people associated with the school.

Going public with a set of work such as the "Claiming the Labia," exhibition was bound to bring a varied set of responses. Though the reception was small, 25 people in total, the backlash from other students, admin, and alumni was ample enough to spark concerns about

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<sup>79</sup> Hughes, "Lippy Women," 2012.

<sup>80</sup> Hughes, "Lippy Women," 2012.

continuing the show without censorship.<sup>81</sup> Rachel Dennis defended her work as representative of many people's experiences presenting the female body as unique, diverse, and fully independent. Students who did not identify as straight or white noticed and reported inequitable treatment on campus and shared their own experiences to raise awareness. It is further reported that, "...our predominantly White, middle- and upper-class students have problematically christened it, that gang-style sexual harassment is common, pornography use is rampant, and sexual assault is a regular and normalized occurrence."<sup>82</sup> She continues to say, "While sexual violence is common at college campuses across the country, UD's cam-

pus culture promotes silence and denial in particularly troubling ways."<sup>83</sup> Following these remarks the author supports her argument by citing previous generations of feminist activists who've taken to critiquing the definition of community and identifying the harm that comes from the inevitable exclusions out of assumed protection.

Rachel Dennis shared her own experiences around putting together this show stating, "It may be the broader culture or climate on such a campus, rather than any specific legislative structure, that proves most challenging to feminist action," calling out a sort of fear and aversion the response reflected.<sup>84</sup> Such a response from the community speaks volumes about the work to still be done for progressive equity in the academic realm of the fine arts. Hughes furthers this point by stating, "Those few victims who report sexual assault may be accused by their peers of unfairly ruining the assailant's life simply over *regrettable sex*—and this backlash is often

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<sup>81</sup> Hughes, "Lippy Women," 2012.

<sup>82</sup> Hughes, "Lippy Women," 2012.

<sup>83</sup> Hughes, "Lippy Women," 2012.

<sup>84</sup> Hughes, "Lippy Women," 2012.



aligned with a misguided invocation of the Marianist commitment to community.”<sup>85</sup> The cliques that form in these communities then separate victims or anyone who identifies differently from their norm who in turn seek a safe space of their own to connect within. Divided communities that don't validate the individual identities that make them multifaceted see more challenges than communities that accept people with an intersectional mindset.

Rachel Dennis’ series of small paintings titled, *Penthouses from Irving*, as seen in Figure 7, is a set of four canvases each featuring slightly different vulvas with dark center spaces, the void disturbingly staring back at the viewer.<sup>86</sup> Shelia Hughes describes these paintings in her discussion as if the lips are speaking to the viewers, "questioning, critical, and comforting."<sup>87</sup> The four vaginas all depict light pink skin tones, and none feature pubic hair insinuating youth and pornographic details. As this artist focuses on the Labia Majora, the external lips of the vulva in her work, she intentionally excludes further defining details of the Labia Minora, Clitoris, and vagina in these paintings leaving a void-like unblinking eyes staring back at the viewer. The specific details in this series are important to note for a viewer to gather clues around the statement Rachel Ann Dennis is making with these features. Each of the lips are sort of expressive with emotions of anger, sadness, and pleasure being readable through the cued details.

No two vaginas are the same, each built naturally distinct but from the male gaze harmful preferences have evoked a consciousness around the rise of labiaplasty and conversations about the porn industry. Intersectional feminists support sex work as valid work and still discuss the inequities and violence against women in the industry to fight for progressive change.

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<sup>85</sup> Hughes, “Lippy Women,” 2012.

<sup>86</sup> Figure 7, Rachel Ann Dennis, “Penthouses from Irving,” 2006.

<sup>87</sup> Hughes, “Lippy Women,” 2012.

Labiaplasty is a cosmetic surgery that alters the vagina and can influence the appearance of labia and the clitoris. The influence of the porn industry on young people is seen in many ways and affects self-esteem and confidence in ways that cause undue harm perpetrated against underage kids. The lack of maturity visible in the vaginas created by this artist are a commentary against pedophilia in the industry as well that is further perpetrated by whitewashed colonized social norms.

Viewing this work through an intersectional feminist and queer perspective, Rachel Ann Dennis connects to the queer communities' activist agendas in direct opposition to the religious rhetoric that has lived cohesively with colonization for centuries. Viewers could identify the sexist, agist, and racist discriminations all within the context of the paintings. While this work is not found on social media, *The Vagina Monologues* continue to grow in relevance on campuses across the United States. First written by Feminist playwright, V, in 1994, was based on interviews that addressed women's sexuality, social stigmas, and violence to create new conversations with individuals.<sup>88</sup> With these impacts, more higher education institutions have had to conform their stances to support the student bodies. Many young individuals share their experiences from performing in the Vagina Monologues on social media platforms and connect their institutions to their posts.

There are a lot of artists who use their social media platforms to reflect the work they are doing for Intersectional Feminist and Queer activist agenda points which gain a similar, if not wider audience, through curated algorithms. The work of Intersectional Feminist and Queer artists shared through these platforms creates a lot of discourse to acknowledge the violence

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<sup>88</sup> V, "The Vagina Monologues," V Day Until the Violence Stops, 2024.  
<https://www.vday.org/art-activism/the-vagina-monologues/>.

people assigned female at birth experience and take back their autonomy. An Instagram user from India, doodleodrama, shared a set of their digital work relating to vaginas and the slurs various cultures have given them to address some of the inequities.<sup>89</sup> In their post from 2019, they captioned the work first met with a trigger warning and then with a strong declarative statement to society.

“Dear society, I’d like to take back the rights on my body and my vagina. I’d like to scrub it clean of the shame, honour, pride, oppression, and objectification. Our sexuality is violated in the name of war, religion, revenge, oppression, honour, and for others pleasure. It’s been a tool of oppression, a war weapon, and an object/tool that defines us for centuries now. Carrying the family’s and community’s honour in it. We didn’t place it there. We surely didn’t ask for it. It’s easier to sometimes believe that things are changing but the morning news tell me a different story. I don’t wish to serve the male gaze and the male impulses. My vagina is not meant to please the men, to produce men, and to be abused by men. I’d like to understand what female sexual freedom feels like. Someday.”<sup>90</sup>

This user also included several hashtags relevant to the work like #malegaze, #rapeculture #rapeandreligion, and #vaginamonologues that bring more people to the work.

This post has been viewed 134,073 times and has 205 comments either praising the work or creating discussion around the impacts of it on a global scale. One user, moonstruck89, responds to this stating,

“When you wrote property of partner: my first thought was: umm no. That doesn’t apply if my partner is a woman. Then I was like but what if that partner grew up believing in patriarchy? Sometimes I feel that sex is biological. And the biggest issue of our society is to try and put this biological trait into something deeply personal. Does gender really exist? Or is it just sex? Rest is just the beautiful individual: beyond any labels whatsoever.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Doodleodrama, “TW- rape, sexual violence. Dear Society,” Instagram, 2019. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BykvP3kAKUQ/>.

<sup>90</sup> Doodleodrama, “TW- rape, sexual violence. Dear Society,” Instagram, 2019. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BykvP3kAKUQ/>.

<sup>91</sup> Moonstruck89, “when you wrote property of partner,” Instagram, 2019. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BykvP3kAKUQ/>.

Within the conversation, there are realities acknowledged that may not have been realized previously that expand people's understanding of the deeper-rooted implications of such injustices. This challenges people in their everyday patterns to acknowledge the ways they may be perpetrating Intersectional Feminist and Queer activist points to impact change starting in small ways. The influences will build among communities to correct bad behaviors, hold people accountable for their actions, and learn lessons that will trickle into many factors of life at the individual level.

Case Study Four: The functional ceramic sculpture created by Rachel Bloom titled, “Labia Menorah,” seen in Figure 8, is multifaceted with the complex statements the piece relays within the Contemporary arts.<sup>92</sup> Initially presented on Instagram from Rachel Bloom's verified account, racheldoesstuff, the piece immediately caught attention and gained more than 26,000 likes and nearly a thousand comments.<sup>93</sup> This brightly pigmented ceramic vagina is flat on the bottom to sit on a tabletop, inside the sculpted labia are nine candle base holders that connect to the anatomical clitoris. This work of art is religiously affiliated and brings a lot of cultural perspectives to the conversation to broaden the intersectional scope of discussion. In a study completed in 2018 by Michelle Shain, the impacts of the feminist movement and Intersectional identities in Jewish communities were considered in relation to the expression of faith.<sup>94</sup>

Historically queer identities have been prosecuted in religiously affiliated groups, though the

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<sup>92</sup> Figure 8, Rachel Bloom, “Labia Menorah,” Instagram, 2018.

<sup>93</sup> Rachel Bloom, “Happy Chanukah. This is our custom-made labia menorah,” Instagram, 2018. [https://www.instagram.com/racheldoesstuff/?utm\\_source=ig\\_embed&ig\\_rid=cfd13fb5-be69-476e-9c02-9ec25e722c8e](https://www.instagram.com/racheldoesstuff/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_rid=cfd13fb5-be69-476e-9c02-9ec25e722c8e).

<sup>94</sup> Michelle Shain, “Whence Orthodox Jewish Feminism? Cognitive Dissonance and Religious Change in the United States,” *Religions* 9, no. 11 (November 2018): 332. doi:10.3390/rel9110332.

Jewish community has been more progressive than Christian faiths. It was reflected statistically that women's rights and freedoms around expression were a driving factor in the evolution of the community to be more inclusive.

Rachel has since discussed this work in some interviews and acknowledges that her intentions were not centering around a feminist statement. In the article from Tablet Magazine discussing the interview between Rachel Bloom and Amir Bogen, "The Very Jewish Humor of Rachel Bloom," there are a few perspectives shared that don't necessarily match the conversations reflected on social media in 2024.<sup>95</sup> Rachel states "...all kosher comedians who channel their existential Jewish dread through humor. "That's the root of Yiddish culture and Yiddish humor."<sup>96</sup> This is a good example to demonstrate art having its own narrative once it has been produced and this work does now take on the Feminist and Queer context as well as its religious and cultural affiliations in contemporary discourse.

People of the Jewish faith celebrate the holiday of Hanukkah each year and the celebration spans eight nights. The menorah is a candle base that holds nine candles, four candles on each side of one center-raised candle that are lit each night throughout the holiday. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the menorah has taken on new looks as Jewish people celebrate culturally and don't necessarily practice the religious components associated. The sculpture is functional and used with a group of lesbian women and queer-identifying people who shared the work on social media. This gained widespread attention in different ways, embraced, and loved by one community's perspectives and pushed against with distaste from another despite the common

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<sup>95</sup> Amir Bogen, "The Very Jewish Humor of Rachel Bloom," Tablet Magazine, October 10, 2018. <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/the-very-jewish-humor-of-rachel-bloom>.

<sup>96</sup> Bogen, "The Very Jewish Humor of Rachel Bloom," 2018.

experiences shared around the holiday's affiliations. The "Labia Menorah," is a single-color clay, bright pink, and at the top has carved pubic hair around the labia. The candle holes could depict the clitoris and other genital features of this anatomy but limit further details to prevent taking away from the point of the work. This functional sculpture was created from the female gaze of a female's body and demonstrates so by featuring signs of maturity and the realistic differences between vaginas.

MFA student Jenny Singer published an opinion piece written for the Forward, a Jewish nonprofit in 2018 soon after the initial post to Instagram. Jenny Singer makes several noteworthy points in this piece as she critiques the responses from a negative point of view. She states, "Rachel Bloom is not the first Jewish artist to create work that shocks and provokes powerful men, and she will not be the last! Her art, perhaps, surpasses all the others in terms of pun-usage."<sup>97</sup> Singer continues to recognize where this could be a line drawn for people as the historic intentions are still highly valued in communities that don't identify with intersectionality. "...you don't have to like this. You don't have to think it's respectful or appropriate. The menorah is a holy ritual object that dates to ancient Temple times. It's a major symbol of the state of Israel, and a worldwide symbol of Jewish pride. To form one into the shape of genitalia is subversive, to say the least."<sup>98</sup> This creates a space for respectful discourse between identities and can influence individual understandings. The intentions of a piece can still be understood and respected even if not fully agreed with, which is a leading factor around activist work.

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<sup>97</sup> Jenny Singer, "Rachel Bloom Unveils Vagina Menorah- Just in Time for Hanukkah," The Jewish Daily Forward, December 5, 2018. <https://forward.com/schmooze/415396/rachel-bloom-unveils-vagina-menorah-just-in-time-for-hanukkah/>

<sup>98</sup> Singer, "Rachel Bloom Unveils Vagina Menorah," 2018.

Intersectional feminist theory would consider the religious, cultural, sexual, and racial connections around the piece fitting into all of these perspectives interchangeably with various narratives to come from it. That is one of the strengths of the work being shared on Instagram and reaching a global platform. With so many diverse experiences relating to this work in positive and negative ways, the artist hit the head on the intentions for activism in the arts. When conversations are continuing there are more opportunities to shift understandings of perspective and creates open-minded environments for growth. This work was initially shared on X, formerly Twitter, as evident from the affiliated links in Jenny Singer's comment piece but is no longer available for review.<sup>99</sup> Instagram user, Midwifical, responded to this piece soon after its initial post in 2018 describing Rachel and her work as, "A woman after my own heart!"<sup>100</sup> The work has continued to be shared over the years as more people have identified with it creating further discourse on its impact on Feminist and Queer activists.

Another user, Drlauriemintz, reposted the work acknowledging Rachel Blook through the caption and making a small joke, "repost from @racheldoesstuff of a Labia Menorah (not to be confused with the Labia Majora, or outer lips) if more people knew about the Labia Minora (inner lips) and the clitoris (both chock full of touch sensitive nerves and erectile tissues) female orgasm wouldn't be such a miracle but instead would be commonplace! Let's celebrate both the traditional Hanukkah miracle (if you are so inclined) and female orgasm." relevant to her career and personal identity.<sup>101</sup> There were many threads established on Reddit, a discussion forum in

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<sup>99</sup> Singer, "Rachel Bloom Unveils Vagina Menorah," 2018.

<sup>100</sup> Midwifical, "A woman after my own heart!" Instagram, December, 2018.

<sup>101</sup> Drlauriemintz. "repost from @racheldoesstuff of a Labia Menorah (not to be confused with the Labia Majora, or outer lips)." Instagram, December, 2013. <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bq70xqpH5xj/>.

relation to social media use. This is a great platform for discourse as users remain anonymous and a vast array of subject matter comes up on this site. The anonymity aids in open communication that spreads agendas, both with positive and negative responses.

Intersectional Feminist and Queer activists seek space for conversation and social media allows for those interactions at a larger level. With more people relating to each other through various platforms, discourse can occur with reasonable levels of pushback to learn from one another and better demonstrate perspectives. With more perspectives highlighted, there's the fostering of growth mindsets creating a safe space. For people who have historically been intentionally excluded, having a safe space is sacred to finding the ability to voice concerns and needs. As activists continue to shift perspectives through online platforms, more safe spaces connect globally and impact communities.

Case Study Five: Catherine Opie is a lesbian Contemporary photographer whose career took off in the United States and has now spanned several decades gaining a global reputation. Her portfolio is influential in the fine arts today as she combines many parts of her identity and highlights subcultures relevant to Queer and Feminist lifestyles without the constraints of fitting into a box. Catherine Opie's early self-portrait, *Cutting*, seen in Figure 9, was taken in 1993 and is an excellent example of the Intersectional Feminist and Queer agendas that emerged with the third wave of activism globally.<sup>102</sup> This portrait belongs to the Guggenheim Museum's collection and has been featured on the museum's social media accounts, that has a following of 2.8 million.<sup>103</sup> This self-portrait was the first of three Catherine Opie would come to publish in her

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<sup>102</sup> Figure 9, Opie, Catherine. "Self Portrait/ Cutting" *The Guggenheim Museums and Foundations*, 1993.

<sup>103</sup> Guggenheim Museum, "Verified Account," Instagram, 2024. <https://www.instagram.com/guggenheim/>



career thus far, completed at the age of 32; all of which connect through personal identity and dreams. Catherine Opie challenges the definitions of and conditions for a supportive community through her work and has continued to participate in exhibitions in the 2020s.

In this portrait, Opie is seated facing away from the camera without a shirt or bra on. Her hair is short and highlighted, and her earrings are visible reflecting personal care for herself. On her bare back is a crudely cut picture that freshly bleeds bright red, dripping in some areas across her skin. This drawing depicts two stick-figure women, made evident by the skirts they wear, holding hands in the foreground, and in the background sits a house with smoke coming from its chimney and a cloud in the sky. This image reflects one of Catherine Opie's desires for her future as she considers her identities in connection with society's expectations of women. She explores her own sexuality and cultural identities while redefining terms of acceptance in her perspective. This drawing looks childish and could be representative of how Opie has felt since she was young with the hopes of having a nuclear family that also reflects her realities.

The approach she has taken to document this future dream is not widely accepted by the general population, instead seen as aggressive and perverse. This speaks to the importance of the artist's perspective in demonstrations from Intersectional Feminist and Queer activists. Each time the Guggenheim Museums' Instagram account posts Catherine Opie's photography, there are negative comments that call her work perverse, and disgusting or criticize the encouragement of self-harm without understanding the points the artist was making. In the most recent posts comment thread, user ekheko states, "I think this is a serious museum statement about their definition of art. Art is any kind of human manifestation including those which are evidence of

psychopathology...”<sup>104</sup> This comment continues into a negative reflection of the work itself but made a strong point around the interpretations of art and the acceptance of various mediums in the Contemporary arts field of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Within these comments were also people who whole heartily understood the artistic intentions and praised Catherine Opie as a changemaker for Intersectionality in a heteronormative society. Guggenheim exhibition Curator Nat Trotman stated on Instagram in 2015, "In #CatherineOpie's self-portraits, the artist offers something deeply personal, even confessional," in response to the storytelling aspect of Catherine Opie's work that has been included in several exhibitions.<sup>105</sup> The curator was wise to include this work in the exhibition and on social media pages for the museum as it sparks controversy and creates space for conversation. One commenter, ravenlu\_zy, simply states, "This is a really powerful piece of work," and doesn't further evaluate how it holds power while others engage in well-thought-out reflections.<sup>106</sup> Projectwyrd followed this comment with a personal reflection, “I think the adverse reaction I had to this was the reason I liked it, whether you like the context or not, art evokes emotion and if it’s strong enough evokes change.”<sup>107</sup> This is a great example of the ways activist agendas continue to spread through social media platforms. As this portrait is nearing 35 years in the public's critical eye, these conversations remain relevant and engaging.

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<sup>104</sup> Guggenheim, “Catherine Opie draws inspiration...” Instagram, 2024.  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/C8C5nPEvprV/>

<sup>105</sup> Nat Troptman, “Verified Account,” Instagram, 2024.  
[https://www.instagram.com/smoke\\_and\\_mirrors/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/smoke_and_mirrors/?hl=en)

<sup>106</sup> Guggenheim, “Catherine Opie draws inspiration...” Instagram, 2024.

<sup>107</sup> Guggenheim, “Catherine Opie draws inspiration...” Instagram, 2024.

This piece of art is not exclusive in its style and includes examples of BDSM and Kink. It is not just hanging on the walls of a tattoo shop like many similar artists' work, though Opie began showing her work in alternative spaces before breaking into the fine arts. This work is now included in a largely reputable collection and is representative of a much broader population that seeks acceptance for their lifestyles. Catherine Opie reflects on this portrait in a 2023 interview with the Guardian Magazine:

“I’ve made a lot of work in my life and a lot of times it just always circles back to this self-portrait. People also presume so much about me because I made this. My son, who is an art history major, said to me the other day: ‘I spent this semester studying you in school and if you weren’t my mom, I think I’d be scared of you.’ So much has been written about this photo. There have been dissertations around it. It is a really important work. I’m so glad that I made it. But it also overshadows 30 years of work. People go right for it because it is challenging.”<sup>108</sup>

This work has inspired many exhibitions including group shows like *Dreaming of Home* put on at the Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art that is further discussed in her interview.<sup>109</sup> Catherine Opie continues to engage with the Contemporary arts at a global scale as she has begun to acknowledge the impacts and representation, she has brought into the art history canon for women and queer-identifying people.

Not only has Catherine Opie opened many doors for these communities to come together, but she has also created the opportunity for further discourse around what Intersectionality looks like. This challenges the communities she's working in to expand their understanding and embrace the multifaceted realities people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are living in. Having online

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<sup>108</sup> Lehmann Maupin, Regen Projects, and Catherine Opie, “Drag, Gridiron and Kids in Tutus: America through the Lens of Catherine Opie,” *The Guardian*, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2023/apr/17/drag-gridiron-and-kids-in-tutus-america-through-the-lens-of-catherine-opie-in-pictures>.

<sup>109</sup> Maupin, Regen Projects, and Opie, “Drag, Gridiron and Kids in Tutus,” *The Guardian*, 2023.

communities is equally as important as having in-person connections for creating a safe space to better understand each other. When there is more open-mindedness fostered, diverse perspectives and experiences are given the recognition they deserve in spaces that have historically excluded anyone whose been othered by the heteronormative narrative.

Case Study Six: As Catherine Opie presents her queerness and personal interests within the kink community in a public display through her photography, she demonstrates a great tolerance for pain and endurance in her self-portraits. Catherine Opie sought to normalize her life experiences through various kinks reflected in her second self-portrait, *Pervert*, which she published the following year in 1994. As seen in Figure 10, she includes the use of leather accessories, cutting, and play piercing all in the same Kink session.<sup>110</sup> This can be seen as a more extreme level of participation in BDSM kink and other sadomasochistic fetishes that are not usually publicly displayed out of the participant's physical vulnerability.

Leather play is one of the kinks Catherine Opie openly brings into her work as she has connected with the queer leather community many times throughout her career. In this photograph she is seated wearing a black leather mask that features two small holes to breathe through around the nose, straps crossing the upper portion of the face, and connects down the neck with a submissive O ring at her throat. The essential need for air is controlled as other factors further contribute to her pain levels, demonstrating extended tolerance as she sits for the session and photo at its conclusion. Play needles along her arm are inserted just below skin level and span from her top shoulder to her wrists. Needle play is not intended to be permanently installed but will be removed at the end of a session, healing with little evidence aside from small punctures.

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<sup>110</sup> Figure 10, Catherine Opie, "Self Portrait/ Pervert," 1994.

Furthering this BDSM session is a freshly carved tattoo on her bare chest that says, “Pervert,” with decorative greenery around the base of it that will in time heal like a brand. The carved tattoo will remain a permanent and public announcement as a scar for anyone she interacts with to see in the future. As seen in Figure 11, Catherine Opie and Brazilian artist, Panmela Castro, pose at a recent exhibition opening and show their scars proudly, for Opie more than 30 years later.<sup>111</sup> Posted to Instagram by both Catherine Opie and Panmela Castro, Castro states, “To love art is to love the work of other artists and to respect what your elders have done for you to exist today. Catherine Opie as an artist has done a lot for me to exist as an artist today, and being with her, showing our scars from work was one of those unique joys of life.”<sup>112</sup> It is important to note Catherine Opie is in her thirties in this self-portrait and published it without any shame or concerns of backlash in her career. Though Catherine Opie’s face is covered in this self-portrait she does not hide herself from the viewer, it’s quite the opposite. In all future self-portraits, there will remain a reference to this part of her identity, thus always reminding her of her multifaceted interests regardless of age or other achievements.

Panmela Castro shares a lot about Catherine Opie on her social media accounts as she found Opie to be a big inspiration for her art and activism work throughout her career. Castro states,

“In my own art story, Catherine Opie is one of the most influential artists. Numerous works that enshrined my journey, were directly influenced by some of Catherine's works that I met at Guggenheim in New York a few years ago. Quoting a few, a most obvious reference is the performance/photography "Consagrada" inspired by Catherine's famous "Pervert" photography. .... Well to say all my production of work related to burden and scarifications comes from Catherine. Even paintings have a certain Catherine influence

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<sup>111</sup> Figure 11, panmelacastro, “Conhecendo minhas artistas de referência,” Instagram, 2024. [https://www.instagram.com/p/C8\\_\\_DH8uQ7r/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/C8__DH8uQ7r/?img_index=1)

<sup>112</sup> panmelacastro, “Conhecendo minhas artistas de referência,” Instagram, 2024.

because I learned to paint my friends seeing Catherine's love photographing her friends and her community.”<sup>113</sup>

*Consagrada* done by Panmela Castro in 2021, seen in Figure 12, is a photograph of Castro's upper body, with her breasts covered by a bra, and at the top of her chest is both a carved word.<sup>114</sup> “Consagrada,” in fine cursive catches attention with bright red fresh blood and eight fresh dermal piercings surrounding the script. This photograph was captured following the performance that installed these body modifications and was shared on social media gaining 1,525 likes.<sup>115</sup>

Consagrada is Portuguese for the word consecrated in English and in religious ideology means to have been declared sacred. This is a strong statement for supporting Intersectional Feminist and Queer activist agendas as the artist brings her body to a level of praise typically reserved for higher figures. In Panmela Castros Instagram post from 2022, as a year reflection on the work she states, “I influenced a whole generation of women and men in Brazil and around the world with my ideas of emancipation, and yet, I needed to be legitimized by powerful institutions in order to exist,” and continued to recognize this work as, “a critique of our world’s criteria for choosing what’s important and worthy of attention.”<sup>116</sup> With this, she identifies her own experiences and perspectives as valid and worthy of such documentation and critique.

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<sup>113</sup> panmelacastro, “Conhecendo minhas artistas de referenência,” Instagram, 2024.

<sup>114</sup> Figure 12, Panmela Castro, *Consagrada*, Performance/ Photography, 2021.  
[https://www.instagram.com/p/CkNsIbwuKbJ/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/CkNsIbwuKbJ/?img_index=1).

<sup>115</sup> panmelacastro, “Consagrada,” Instagram, 2021.

<sup>116</sup> panmelacastro, “Consagrada,” Instagram, 2021.

Catherine Opie is an activist artist whose work stood out as an intersectional example before the term was coined, she paved a path that has allowed continued relations to grow in relevance and acknowledged how identities play large roles in individuals' lives. She presents this work from the female gaze, remaining in power of her autonomy and consenting to the work's public response, both positive and negative. Catherine Opie is clear about her artistic intentions around queer and feminist activism in her works and doesn't place limits on what she wants to reflect within her work as her career progresses. Catherine Opie states in an interview with *Port Magazine*, "I've talked about *Pervert* being harder for me than *Self-Portrait/Cutting on my back*. That portrait is really incredible how it was received and that it was received in a way that's now part of the canon of art history."<sup>117</sup> She recognizes how this work has taken on a new definition in the art activist world and how it continues to inspire further work.

The Museu de Arte de São Paulo in Portugal, abbreviated as MASP, has an active social media presence with a following of 837 thousand followers on Instagram.<sup>118</sup> The museum uses its social media accounts to highlight new exhibitions and openings they have had as well as sharing other exciting aspects of their community. Their Artistic Director and Curator Adriano Pedrosa and Assistant Curator Guilherme Giufrida organized a group of exhibitions that brought generations of activists together for a progressive look at the global changes through decades of demonstrations. They included work from the Guerrilla Girls art activist group, Catherine Opie, Panmela Castro, and many others in "The Gender of Portrait," which opened in June 2024. This

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<sup>117</sup> Williams, Conor and Catherine Opie. "It All Reads in the Body." *Port Magazine*, 2023. <https://www.port-magazine.com/art-photography/it-all-reads-in-the-body/>.

<sup>118</sup> Museu de Arte de São Paulo, "Verified account," Instagram, 2024. <https://www.instagram.com/masp/>.

opening provided the space for Catherine Opie and Pamela Castro to show their scars and is a current exhibition to consider in the current state of the field. Researchers are looking at examples of rectifiable justice being made in the Contemporary arts for women and queer individuals.

This type of art is still largely considered radical as activists in the 2020s seek to normalize diverse perspectives within a global society that also still broadly holds fascist homophobia as its standard. Artists and activists use hashtags to expand their work to broader audiences and gain relevance in trends. Some of the hashtags more frequently used under Catherine Opie's posts and with similar Intersectional Feminist and Queer activists' posts are #sexpositivity, #identity, #lgbtqcommunity, #queer, #activism.<sup>119</sup> This helps galleries gain traction for their exhibitions and activist groups bring further engagement to their demonstrations.

Artists who use social media for their professional growth and support in normalizing what their lives reflect often use other artists' work as inspiration. Instagram user Limpwrist.tattoo posted a digital art piece created in 2021 to his account that re-imagines Catherine Opie's *Self-portrait/Pervert*. As seen in Figure 13, the artist simplifies the photograph into line work that captures a tattoo-like quality and gained 287 likes on his platform.<sup>120</sup> This is just one example of some of the work used at a local that has been inspired by Catherine Opie's portfolio and used in the social media space to draw attention at both the micro and macro levels. This brought the artist's skills and interests to his community and reflects a much broader

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<sup>119</sup> Csopie, "Verified account," Instagram, 2024. <https://www.instagram.com/csopie/>.

<sup>120</sup> Figure 13, Limpwrist.tattoo, "Catherine Opie- Self Portrait/ Pervert," Digital line art, 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CVN6QtyFXOO/>.



conversation still being had amongst activists globally, even decades after Catherine Opie's initial publication.

Art will continue to take on a life of its own through social media and discourse. This is out of an artist's control though it does create space for more identities to relate to the work itself. Giving art to the world and freeing the intentions of the piece can create community impacts unforeseen without such opportunity. As Intersectional Feminist and Queer artists continue to use their platforms for agenda items, they feel are important enough to spotlight without also imposing limitations on their applicability, there is an opportunity to create systemic change beginning at the macro level. For more diverse perspectives to be embraced in the arts field in the future, activists must connect through their relevant communities to reach broader audiences.

Case Study Seven: Catherine Opie's photography career has evolved to reflect the many developments throughout her life. She used this to influence her following to embrace new aspects of her Intersectional Feminist and Queer journey as she grew. In her third self-portrait seen in figure 14, published in 2004, *Nursing*, Catherine holds her young child breastfeeding as they are skin to skin and maintain eye contact.<sup>121</sup> Upon her chest is the healed reminder of the carved "tattoo" completed in the second portrait; though it is quite light, its presence is hard to miss. In this portrait her face and hair are visible, and she presents herself in a natural more holistic state. Her skin is tanned by time outside and more tattoos are present, reflecting her growth through adulthood and her experiences of motherhood. She is seated in a traditional motherly pose, seen in many historical art pieces, as she evokes the important factors of her lifestyle in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Catherine does not wear any makeup in this photograph and remains

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<sup>121</sup> Figure 14, Catherine Opie, "*Self Portrait/ Nursing*," Chromogenic print, 40 x 31 inches, 2004.

skin-to-skin with her child which is an important bonding experience for many mothers. This is relational and intersectional because she is connecting her proud presence in the Queer kink communities as an intersectional feminist, she has chosen motherhood and embraced that in her own way.

This draws in the coexistence of her multifaceted identities while she presents this self-portrait in the Contemporary arts and through social media. Catherine has posted this portrait to her Instagram account gaining 5,422 likes and 103 comments and has been republished by various accounts since.<sup>122</sup> Self-portraits are a vulnerable art to produce and remain subject to the same public critique as any other portrait. In the comments, there were both positive and negative interpretations of this work, though focusing on the positive many users described the work as powerful, inspirational, and important for this generation. Rosie\_anne\_jackson responded saying, “I cried when I first saw this picture. Seeing the scar from when she etched ‘pervert’ into her chest coupled with this absolute tenderness left me in a complete mess. One of the most powerful images for me.”<sup>123</sup> Catherine Opie’s work stands out in the field still today since she has used portraits throughout her career as a relational tool within the various spaces and cultures that she's been a part of; including herself as the subject on camera to not differ herself as the artist from the community. This portrait is significantly tamer to approach in the Contemporary arts. The shadowed evidence from her scar connects her portraits, evoking deeper conversation about what an intersectional lifestyle can look like.

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<sup>122</sup> Csopie, “Verified account,” Instagram, 2024. <https://www.instagram.com/csopie/>.

<sup>123</sup> Rosie\_anne\_jackson, “Csopie: Happy Mother’s Day,” Instagram, 2024. <https://www.instagram.com/csopie/>.

Catherine Opie's work has recently been back in the spotlight in the Contemporary arts, and she has been interviewed recently due to opening exhibitions. In an interview with *Port Magazine*, Catherine Opie reflects on the self-portrait series through a series of questions, where she states:

“Self-Portrait/Nursing is not as challenging as Self-Portrait/Cutting. But they are so linked together because they are about my longing for domesticity. I wanted home, family, a wife, a child – I wanted all of that so badly. So I cut that on my back in 1993. And then a decade later, I have my baby and I'm nursing him. For the world, they say something about queer representation. But for me, they're all about my desire and my longing to have a child.”<sup>124</sup>

In this interview, Opie opens little doors into her life to evaluate both her self-portraits and portraits of others. This allows researchers to better consider her perspective for activist demonstrations. She recognizes the way her art has taken on a reputation and value of its own, independent of her as others interpret and relate to it.

Once a piece has been shared on social media, the artist makes room for individual interpretations to come as a response. As local artists use their platforms to raise awareness for the activist agendas they support, they use influential artists to draw attention down to their scale. As seen in Figure 16, Kateknites, used the portrait Nursing from Catherine Opie to replicate in knit art as she shared the inspirations of Opie's portfolio.<sup>125</sup> Kate goes on to caption the piece stating,

“Opie pictures herself chestfeeding her child in a classical mother and child pose reminiscent of other art historical works. This image is so much about the skin and the way it acts as a texture of our experience. Opie's ruddy face, tan forearms, and tattoos all relay a body that has interfaced with the world and all its elements. In contrast to her own marked and subtly weathered skin, her young child's body is smooth and new. Opie's long history of documenting her own and others' queer experience also pervades this

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<sup>124</sup> Williams and Opie, “It All Reads in the Body,” *Port Magazine*, 2023.

<sup>125</sup> Figure 16, Katejustknits, “Feminist Fan Series: Catherine Opie, Self Portrait/ Nursing, 2004,” Instagram, 2016.

image. Her residual chest scar / cutting that spells 'Pervert' refers to a previous work by Opie in a leather bondage mask entitled *Self Portrait / Pervert* (1994) in which the artist openly documented her embrace of S&M culture. Thus the collision of her sexual identification and maternal role in this image is charged. Opie is so at home in her body and invites us to contemplate the rich, varied, painful and pleasurable experiences a body can have.”<sup>126</sup>

Kate continues to use her platforms on social media to share works that make bold activist statements from an Intersectional Feminist and Queer agenda. Her account has now gained a following of 11.9 thousand people and recently announced she is a finalist in a prestigious art prize. Kate's art is also put into the world, including self-portraits for critique and awareness. This also means her work is open for interpretation and receives negative feedback as well, though that doesn't interrupt the intentions of her platform.

Artists around the world are inspired by the work that is produced by others. Historically artists have learned from each other and copied master's to learn the trades. With this changing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as artists are self-taught and the definitions of art shifting, there are more perspectives embraced in the art community and through social media. People's individuality is an important part of their happiness in their day-to-day lives and finding the freedom to exist freely and authentically is being fought for globally by Intersectional Feminist and Queer activists.

## **Results**

This examination illustrates a small portion of the impacts of the Intersectional and Transnational Feminist and Queer activists using their platforms and social media to progress the use of heteronormative female bodies and experiences in the arts. This was made evident through

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<sup>126</sup> Katejustknits, “Feminist Fan Series: Catherine Opie, *Self Portrait/ Nursing*, 2004,” Instagram, 2016. [https://www.instagram.com/p/Cr7ZOsBLRfk/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/Cr7ZOsBLRfk/?img_index=1).

an Intersectional Feminist and Queer theoretical lens when evaluating social media posts and Contemporary responses to artists' works. The discourse occurring at the academic level is important and combining this with the conversations amongst people on social media illustrates how impactful community building is. When people feel supported in their expressions more individuals will connect to different parts of their identities. This is reflected in the arts and how the arts are used for Intersectional activist movements.

The Intersectional and Transnational Feminist and Queer movements are rooted in community which creates a safe space for expression and exploration. With this more perspectives are seen with validity and their life experiences are honored for what they should be, regardless of other life factors. This allows people who identify with marginalized groups and have had oppressed voices to be celebrated and justice sought in historic spaces. As more people use their platforms at a micro level, change is seen expanding globally through individual embrace. The First and Second waves of Feminist activism allowed for better inclusivity in the world, activists working in the Third wave of Intersectional Feminist and Queer agendas are seeing change made in specific environments that have been unsafe to enter until now.

As the Male Gaze has been identified and called out, women and queer individuals are taking the power back around their physical autonomy and speaking out about their own experiences. This brings awareness to the realities people face in the world today and educates others. Activists globally are uniting for change and using social media platforms to approach broader audiences. Humor is one of the many tools used for influence and relatability. Authenticity is another important inspiration among artists who in turn feel empowered to share their experiences. As the Intersectional Feminist and Queer artist Catherine Opie states in her interview with *Port Magazine*, "Just be honest with the work that you want to make and put out,

and don't think about the art world in itself. Know your history, understand the relationship of a history of representation, and what are you going to do to tweak that for yourself? Where is your own language within what you're trying to portray? Because art history is huge, it's *vast...*<sup>127</sup> It's a radical act to show up authentically, even fearfully, to make an impact in local communities.

This research is strengthened through a foundation of peer-reviewed scholarly articles that aim to identify and fill gaps in Feminist and/ or Queer theoretical knowledge by highlighting impacts made through organized activism in the art world. There are many limitations to this research as the field continues to evolve and gaps in our knowledge are better identified. Much of the current research that reflects the state of the field has theoretical limitations and doesn't look at art through an intersectional lens that considers the holistic realities people live in. Historically, the discrimination and exclusion anyone outside of the whitewashed heteronormative standards faced prevented genuine communities from connecting. As dynamics continue to change with the restoration of the art history canon to include women and queer artists, it is the researcher's responsibility to progress in the field. As researchers begin recognizing diverse perspectives with validity around their experiences, the more interconnected communities can become.

### **Conclusions**

This research has investigated the ways Transnational/ Intersectional Feminist and Queer activists are making equitable change and seeking restorative justice for women and queer individuals in the Contemporary art world. Previous generations of activists have used progressively more radical means in their demonstrations which has allowed this generation of

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<sup>127</sup> Williams and Opie, "It All Reads in the Body," *Port Magazine*, 2023.

artists to present their experiences without shame. Having pride in their work and life creates a safe space for others to share in their commonalities while acknowledging the rich life factors that differ them. Intersectional Feminist and Queer activists have been aligning their work over the last couple of decades and will continue to embrace the global developments to come.

As Transnational Feminism continues to stake its presence in the field, more communities are branching together to support individuals holistically. These implications present macro-scale influence in the art field and researchers seek restorative justice in the communities affected. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has presented technological advances for supportive communities to grow by droves and find their voices globally. The dismantling of colonized perspectives from activist work over the last several decades. Intersectional Feminist and Queer artist Catherine Opie states in her Interview with the Port Magazine,

“The Federalist Society and the evangelical communities of America have done an enormous amount of work, very, very hard work in relationship to changing courts and doing everything on this kind of government political level that we see ourselves back here. And it was partly they were doing all that work as we were protesting on the streets in the eighties and so on. This is just continuation of that work, and it’s trickled down now to fuck us all up again.”<sup>128</sup>

Intersectional Feminist and Queer activists are now able to better hold boundaries and address oppressive standards directly with supportive communities backing them. Challenging bad behaviors makes hard topics easier to approach and destigmatizes the lifestyles that are oppressed by such societal standards.

Feminist curators and critics have been hosting these conversations to further relevant discourse in the arts. These perspectives have been reliably building upon each other to embrace congruity globally. Artists generationally have been using motifs to represent their connections

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<sup>128</sup> Williams and Opie, “It All Reads in the Body,” *Port Magazine*, 2023.

underground and establish safe spaces together. This has progressed through the 21<sup>st</sup> century to be more publicly understood and accepted. There are many spaces globally that have not made progressive change and still hold closed mindsets that aren't inclusive of individuals who stray outside of assigned norms and values. This is why the Intersectional Feminist and Queer work of artists through social media platforms is imperative in the current socio-political state that constantly threatens individuals' validity.

To better understand the implications of these results, future studies could expand further into individual identity, subculture communities, and the psychology that is playing into any of the relevant factors. This could reveal clearer causes and effects building upon the presented evidence and discussions. Researchers could explore the psychology around Queer identity and Intersectional Feminist family perspectives as the Contemporary arts continue to evolve and reflect the socio-political agendas of the time and state. Future researchers could also consider more impacts of Transnational Feminism as women's and LGBTQIA+ individual rights are being challenged in some parts of the world.

The United States has faced a significant increase in threats against women and queer communities and rights. The global community supporting activists working through these challenges is as important now as ever. There will be evidence of worldwide community supporting individuals as activists progress their agendas and artists make bolder statements with their platforms yet to be discussed in an Intersectional approach. The art world has acknowledged the impacts of many activist groups and artists and are working to correct the narratives to be inclusive. The experiences of diverse artists globally should aim to support the community's facing oppression who need a platform for their voices to be heard.



## Illustrations



Figure 1, Guerrilla Girls, "The Male Graze," Guerrilla Girls Billboard, 2021.



Figure 2, Guerrilla Girls, "Do Women Have to be Naked to Get into the Met. Museum?"  
Lithograph, 11 x 28 in. (27.9 x 71.1 cm), 1989.

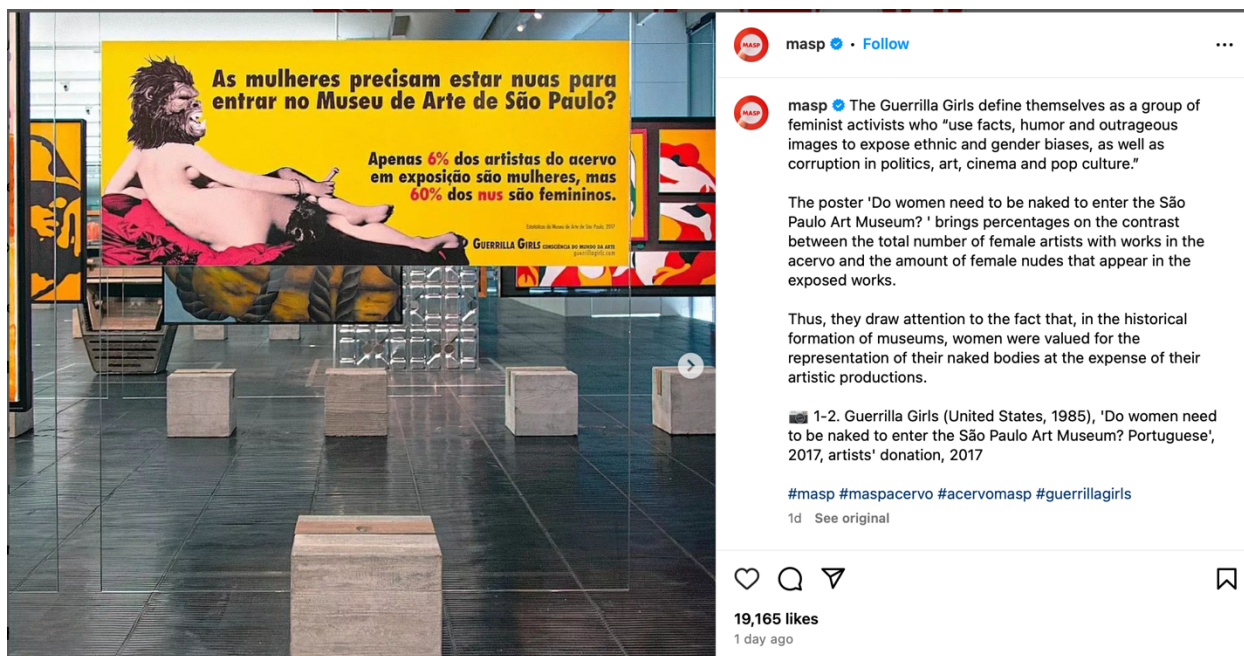


Figure 3, Museu de Arte de São Paulo, “The Guerrilla Girls define themselves as...” Instagram, 2024. [https://www.instagram.com/p/C9FeyJpptZN/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/C9FeyJpptZN/?img_index=1)



Figure 4, Guerrilla Girls, "The Male Graze: Art School/ World Confidential." *Guerrilla Girls Broadband*, 2021.





Figure 5, Allie Eagle, *"This Woman Died: I care (Died Trying to Abort Herself),"* Watercolor, pastel and graphite, 720 x 540 mm, 1978.



Figure 6, Deborah de Robertis, “A look at just how far we haven’t come’... Gustave Courbet’s L’Origine du Monde (1866),” demonstration/ photograph, 2024.



Figure 7, Rachel Ann Dennis, "*Penthouses from Irving,*" mixed media, 4 canvases, 9.5 x 40 inches, 2012.



Figure 8, Rachel Bloom, *Labia Menorah*, ceramic, 2018.





Figure 9, Opie, Catherine. *Self Portrait/ Cutting*. Chromogenic print, 40 x 31 inches, 1993



Figure 10, Catherine Opie, *Self Portrait/ Pervert*, Chromogenic print, 40 x 29 7/8 inches, 1994.





Figure 11, panmelacastro, “Conhecendo minhas artistas de referência.” Instagram, 2024.

[https://www.instagram.com/p/C8\\_DH8uQ7r/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/C8_DH8uQ7r/?img_index=1)



Figure 12, Panmela Castro, *Consagrada*, Performance/ Photography, 2021.  
[https://www.instagram.com/p/CkNsIbwuKbJ/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/CkNsIbwuKbJ/?img_index=1).

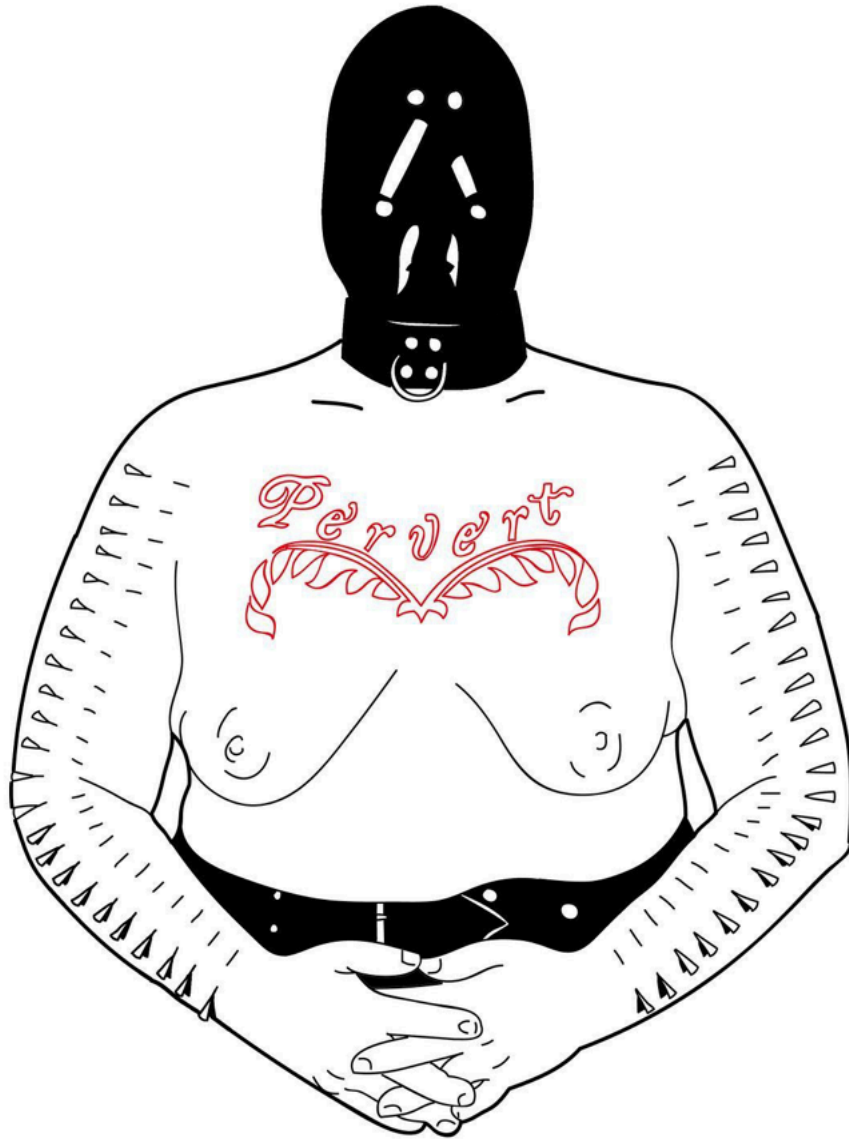


Figure 13, Limpwrist.tattoo, "Catherine Opie- Self Portrait/ Pervert," Digital line art, 2021.  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CVN6QtyFXOO/>.





Figure 14, Catherine Opie, "*Self Portrait/ Nursing*," Chromogenic print, 40 x 31 inches, 2004.



Figure 15, Csopie, “Happy Mother’s Day,” Instagram, 2024.  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/C63zqqRRAiz/>





Figure 16, Katejustknits, "Feminist Fan Series: Catherine Opie, Self Portrait/ Nursing, 2004," knit wrapped canvas, 2016.



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Figure 1. Guerrilla Girls. “The Male Graze.” *Guerrilla Girls Broadband*, 2021.

Figure 2. Guerrilla Girls. “Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into the Met. Museum?” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 1989.

Figure 3. Museu de Arte de São Paulo. “The Guerrilla Girls define themselves as...” Instagram, 2024. [https://www.instagram.com/p/C9FeyJpptZN/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/C9FeyJpptZN/?img_index=1).

Figure 4. Guerrilla Girls. “Life Drawing Class, Royal Academy of Art 1953-2021 (with Guerrilla Girls).” *Guerrilla Girls Broadband*, 2021. <https://www.themalegraze.com/gg/art-school-world>.

Figure 5. Eagle, Allie. “This Woman Died: I care (Died Trying to Abort Herself).” 1978. <https://www.aucklandartgallery.com/explore-art-and-ideas/artwork/7698/this-woman-died-i-care>.

Figure 6. Deborah de Robertis, “A look at just how far we haven’t come’... Gustave Coubet’s L’Origine du Monde (1866).” demonstration/ photograph, 2024.

Figure 7. Dennis, Rachel Ann. “Penthouses from Irving.” 2006.

Figure 8. Bloom, Rachel. “Labia Menorah.” Instagram, 2018.

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