



KMA Roundtable Discussions: Women's Representation in Art



IMAGE:
The Birth of Venus
Sandro Botticelli
1485-1486
Uffizi Gallery

SOURCE: <https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/birth-of-venus>

KMA Selections

1

TEXT:

First set of selections from the Kennedy Museum of Art can be used to discuss The Body or The Female Form

SOURCE: Text from Marissa Stewart, Graduate Assistant at the Kennedy Museum of Art

“Nude”

Clarence White

1912

Platinum Print



3

TEXT:

Clarence White was a pictorialist photographer from Ohio with no formal training. His dedication to the craft made him one of the leaders in the early 20th century Photo-Secession movement, which advocated for photography as a fine art medium. By softening the focus of the image, pictorialists created photos that appeared almost like a painting. In 1914 White opened the Clarence H. White School of Photography in New York City, which was reestablished at Ohio University in 1948. The current OHIO program in Photography + Integrated Media builds on this legacy by focusing on “photographic practice in its most inclusive and experimental manifestations.”

Although White followed socialist ideals, he was not trying to make political art. Instead, his camera was a means for creating ideals of aesthetic beauty and the undressed human form was one of his “muses.” His body of work includes numerous female nudes in both indoor and outdoor settings.

SOURCES:

Kennedy Museum of Art Collections/KMA Picks

<https://artblart.com/2018/01/04/exhibition-clarence-h-white-and-his-world-the-art-and-craft-of-photography-1895-1925-at-the-princeton-university-art-museum/>

<https://www.howardgreenberg.com/artists/clarence-white>

<https://www.ohio.edu/fine-arts/art/undergraduate/bfa-studio-art/photography-integrated-media>

Ideas to think about:

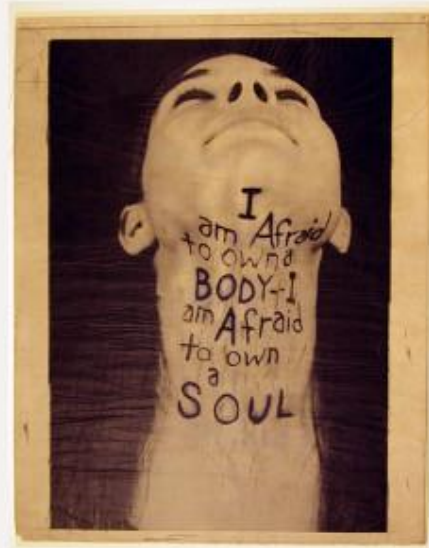
- Nude vs Naked
- The camera as power
- Male gaze
- Female figure in nature
- Composition

"A Word Made Flesh...Throat"

Lesley Dill

1994

Photolithograph and intaglio on hand
sewn, tea-stained Mulberry paper



TEXT:

Lesley Dill is one of the most prominent American artists working at the intersection of language and fine art. Her elegant sculptures, art installations, mixed-media photographs, and evocative performances draw from both her travels abroad and profound interests in spirituality and the world's faith traditions. Exploring the power of words to cloak and reveal the psyche, Dill invests new meaning in the human form. Intellectually and aesthetical engaging, the core of her work emerges from an essential, visionary awareness of the world.

Lesley Dill's art was completely changed when her mother gifted her a book of Emily Dickinson's poetry for her 40th birthday. These pieces from her four-part series *A Word Made Flesh* show Dill's signature affinity for words and the human body. Her early work also focuses on vulnerability and sensuality, which is highlighted in this series. Dill was inspired by trips to India and the art of henna to put Dickinson's poetry on her models' bodies, saying "I thought maybe we do have words on us, invisible text we all wear." Dill's models were all friends, students, or assistants.

SOURCES:

Kennedy Museum of Art Collections/KMA Picks

From <https://www.lesleydill.net/about>

<https://nmwa.org/blog/solo-spotlight-lesley-dill/>

<https://www.artic.edu/artworks/135480/a-word-made-flesh-throat>

Ideas to think about:

- Text and Image
- Writing on the body
- Isolating the form
- Dissecting the body ("chopping" off from the neck down)

"Girl on Blue Coverlet"

Philip Pearlstein

1974

Lithograph



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TEXT:

Philip Pearlstein was born in Pittsburgh, PA, in 1924. In 1941, his junior year in high school, he received his first recognition when awarded first and third prizes in Scholastic Magazine's 14th National High School Art Exhibition. Upon graduation from high school in 1942, he enrolled in the Carnegie Institute of Technology but the draft limited his attendance to one year. After discharge from the army in 1946, he returned to Carnegie Tech where he received his BFA in 1949. Upon graduation, he moved to New York City where he pursued work in graphic design and received a Master's degree in art history from New York University in 1955.

Pearlstein worked as a graphic designer for LIFE Magazine before becoming an instructor at the Pratt Institute, and then a professor at Brooklyn College; he has also served as a visiting artist at several prestigious institutions throughout the country. His work has been exhibited in several solo exhibitions throughout the United States with paintings in the collections of over 70 public art museums. Pearlstein served as a President of the American Academy of Arts and Letters from 2003-2006 and currently lives and works in New York.

SOURCES:

Kennedy Museum of Art Collections/KMA Picks

<https://philippearlstein.com/about/bio/>

<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/pearlstein-philip/>

<https://philippearlstein.com/about/videos/>

Ideas to think about:

- Nude vs Naked
- Composition/Form
- Symbolism
- Gaze
- Dissection
- Figure Study



Ideas to think about:

- Common threads between works
- What are the differences in composition? Does that change with the gender of the artists?
- Importance of gaze?
- Female form
- Does the type of medium make you view the work in a particular way?

SOURCE: Text from Marissa Stewart, Graduate Assistant at the Kennedy Museum of Art

KMA Selections

2

TEXT:

Second set of selections from the Kennedy Museum of Art can be used to discuss Work Made By Women Artists

SOURCE: Text from Marissa Stewart, Graduate Assistant at the Kennedy Museum of Art

"Rising from the Ashes"

Kathryn Polk

2013

Lithograph



8

TEXT:

Kathryn Polk was born in 1952 in Memphis, Tennessee where she studied Fine Art at the Memphis Art Academy (now The Memphis College of Art) and Memphis State University (now The University of Memphis). Polk moved to Tucson, Arizona in 1983 with her husband Andrew Polk, a fellow lithographer. In 2017 Polk and her husband relocated to a farm near Bloomington, Indiana where they have set up L VIS Press (because of her Memphis connection).

This print was created at Ohio University and Museum Academic Programs Assistant, Tristen had the opportunity to speak with the artist. According to Polk the title *Rising from the Ashes* directly comments on her decision to leave her business job and become an artist. The subject of the work is meant to be two, represented by the different eye colors and line down the center. She represents Polk and her sister, who were both going through significant life changes. Fire not only connects to her father being a firefighter, but also to the idea that fire can cleanse. The cactus represents one's ability to withstand harsh conditions, while the hands with spikes represent fending off any outside restrictions. The purse is a symbol of fortune and money while the snake can represent two different personalities, one good and one bad.

SOURCES:

Kennedy Museum of Art Collections/KMA Picks

<https://art.utk.edu/visiting-artist-kathryn-polk/>

<https://tribeza.com/kathryn-polk-wally-workman-gallery/>

Personal Interview with Artists with Tristen Luken

Ideas to think about:

- Symbols
- Subject Matter
- Context and Mystery

'What's Your Cut? (from the series Porkopolis)'

Sue Coe

1989

Etching



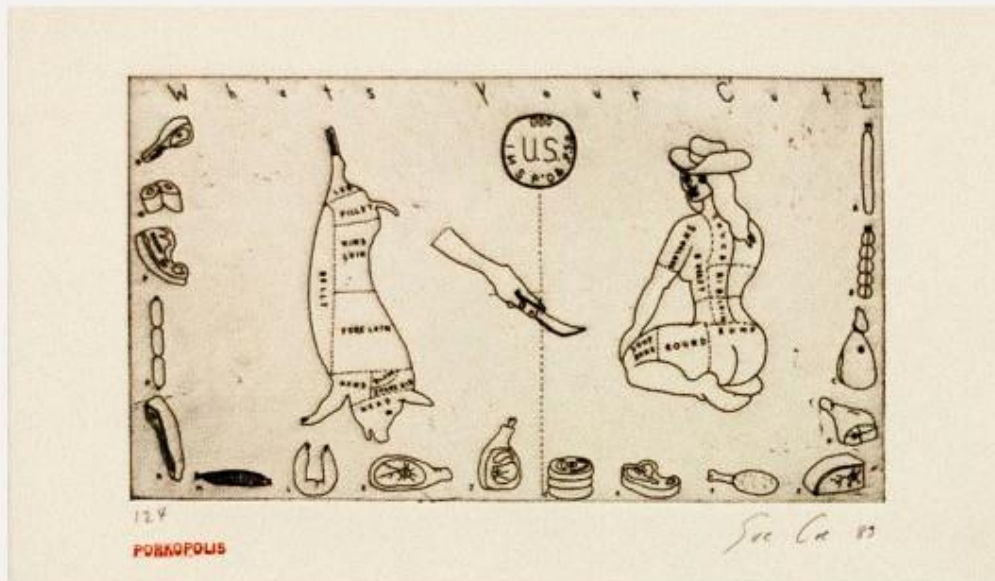
9

TEXT:

Sue Coe is a contemporary English artist, noted for her intensely political graphic illustrations and activism. Born on November 28, 1951 in Staffordshire, England, she grew up near a slaughterhouse, which instilled in the artist a lifelong passion for animal rights activism. This political sensibility characterizes Coe's work, which often explicitly makes animal rights and other social issues its central subject. The artist uses painting, printmaking, and a realistic drawing style to depict scenes of animal suffering, as seen in *BP Burns Turtles* (2010). Her work is notably influenced by [Chaim Soutine](#), [Käthe Kollwitz](#), and [Francisco de Goya](#), among others. Along with her investigation of cruelty against animals, Coe has also explored topics such as sweatshops, prisons, AIDS, war, and anticapitalism throughout her work. Her illustrations have appeared in a wide variety of publications, including *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Nation*. She lives and works in upstate New York.

SOURCES:

Kennedy Museum of Art Collections
<http://www.artnet.com/artists/sue-coe/>



TEXT:

Porkopolis is a graphic illustration of Coe's research into the multibillion-dollar farm food production industry. This is the gross side of a fast-food hamburger and the all- you-can-eat rib dinner, a womb-to-slaughterhouse look at animals (mostly pigs), raised to feed a nation. It's damning. Shivering animals standing in blood watch as those before them are shot and strung up on hooks to bleed and be dismembered. It's all there--the gore, the detail-rich bits of visual information that let you know this is reality, observed on one of Coe's trips to 15 slaughterhouses, not simply events invented to make a non-issue volatile.

SOURCES:

Kennedy Museum of Art Collections

<https://www.suecoe.gseart.com/exhibition-essay>

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-07-23-ca-46-story.html>

Ideas to think about:

- Activism
- Culture
- Farm food production industry and the female body?
- The quote "raised to feed a nation" can that also be used to think about women in society? (feed as in entertainment, desire, status, etc.)

“A Word Made Flesh...Front”

Lesley Dill

1994

Photolithograph and intaglio on hand
sewn, tea-stained Mulberry paper



11

TEXT:

Almost all of Dill's works contain words, and frequently they are those of Emily Dickinson. Dill has said, "I think of words, and especially the poems of Emily Dickinson, for their embodiment of psychological states of despair and euphoria as metaphors for being, as a kind of spiritual armor, an intervening skin between ourselves and the world." *A Word Made Flesh*, a series of four mixed-process prints, literally transcribes the words of Dickinson onto a woman's body. While the text is legible in *Back* and *Throat*, Dill has manipulated the language within the ghostly composition of *Front* to the point where only select phrases are visible: "ghastly" over the woman's chest and "cares" (short for caress) over her stomach for example. In this series, word and image merge with forceful, yet disturbingly vulnerable, effect.

SOURCES:

Kennedy Museum of Art Collections

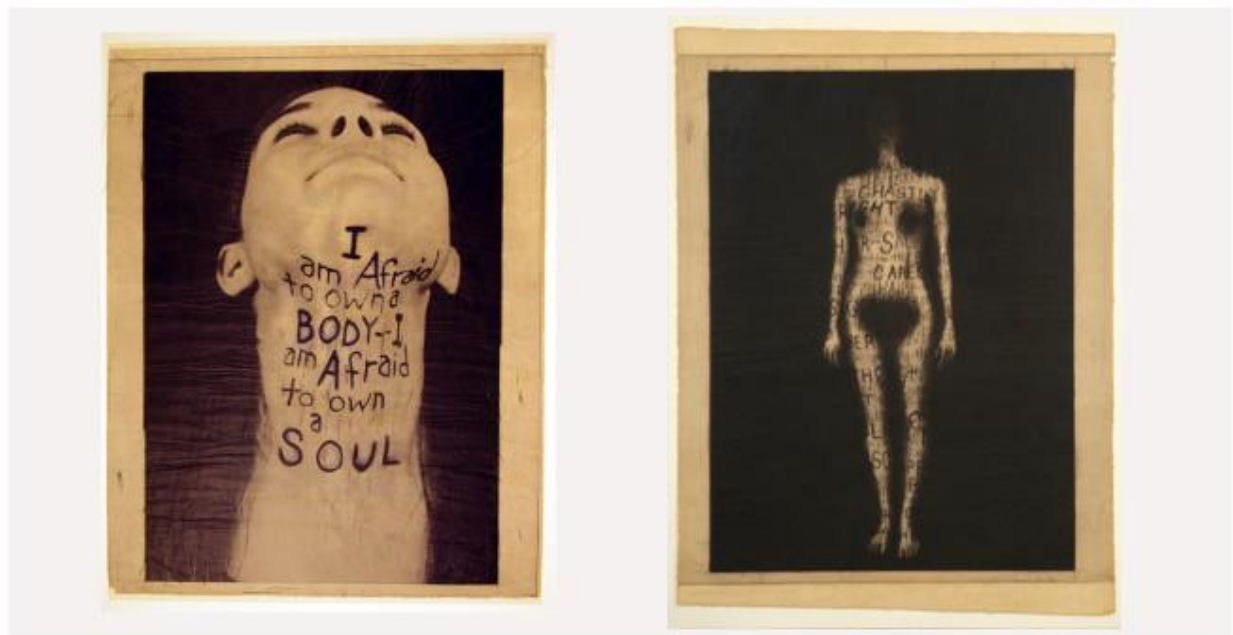
From <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/135480/a-word-made-flesh-throat>



Ideas to think about:

- Figures
- Medium (mostly print, ink and paper)
- Context of work
- Connecting threads, what could link them together?
- All have made individual unique ciphers in the work but leave viewer with clues to decode the meaning

SOURCE: Text from Marissa Stewart, Graduate Assistant at the Kennedy Museum of Art



Two of the four pieces from *A Word Made Flesh* prints (just for visual reference) may show to enhance conversation

SOURCE: Text from Marissa Stewart, Graduate Assistant at the Kennedy Museum of Art



Contemporary Selections

TEXT:

Contemporary Selections of women artists, these selections were created from 2005 to 2015. They can be used to compare and contrast with KMA selections, and to draw out current trends and issues.

SOURCE: Text from Marissa Stewart, Graduate Assistant at the Kennedy Museum of Art

“La leçon d'amour”

Mickalene Thomas

2008

Chromogenic Print



15

TEXT:

Mickalene Thomas (lives and works in Brooklyn, NY) makes paintings, collages, photography, video, and installations that draw on art history and popular culture to create a contemporary vision of female sexuality, beauty, and power. Blurring the distinction between object and subject, concrete and abstract, real and imaginary, Thomas constructs complex portraits, landscapes, and interiors in order to examine how identity, gender, and sense-of-self are informed by the ways women (and “feminine” spaces) are represented in art and popular culture. Thomas received a B.F.A. from the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY in 2000 and an M.F.A. from Yale University School of Art, New Haven, CT in 2002.

La Leçon d'amour, the 2008 painting by Mickalene Thomas recalls two earlier works, the first sacred, the second very much profane. The first is the *pietà*, a common image in Medieval and Renaissance art, perhaps best exemplified by Michelangelo's 1499 sculpture, of the Virgin Mary holding Christ's body after the crucifixion. The second is Balthus's notorious painting *The Guitar Lesson*, “which was considered so sexually explicit when it was first exhibited in Paris in 1934 that it was hidden behind a curtain in a back room.”

The work's name, *La Leçon d'amour*, or *The Love Lesson*, clearly acknowledges Balthus's painting, but it doesn't seem as though Thomas is honoring Balthus but correcting him. No one is unwillingly objectified here, instead both sexual partners are raised to the status of beautiful lovers, and homosexual love is as holy and revered as the bond between Christ and the Virgin Mary.

SOURCES:

<https://whitney.org/collection/works/35442>

<https://icpbardmfa.wordpress.com/2009/11/29/race-sex-identity/001-thomas-la-lecondamour-2008/>

<https://www.mickalenthomas.com/about>

<https://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2017/december/21/who-knew-mickalene-thomas-did-erotica/>

Ideas to think about

- Appropriation
- Recontextualization
- Sexuality
- Race
- Constructed Narrative/Constructed Scene (Authenticity)
- Gaze (subject to viewer vs viewer to subject)

“Massage Mask”

Juno Calypso

2015

Archival Pigment Print



16

TEXT:

Juno Calypso is a London based artist working with photography, film and installation. While studying photography at the London College of Communication, Juno began taking pictures of herself disguised as a character named Joyce. In 2015 Juno took Joyce to a romantic themed hotel in America. Posing as a travel writer, Juno gained access to multiple rooms which she used to stage her series of solitary self-portraits. Studying solitude, desire and femininity through a dark comedy lens. *The Honeymoon* was awarded an international prize by The British Journal of Photography. For her latest project, *What to do With A Million Years*, Juno staged photographs in a mansion built underneath Las Vegas in the 1970s as a shelter from nuclear terror, and currently owned by a mystery group attempting to achieve immortality.

“Juno Calypso travelled all the way from her hometown of London to visit a Pennsylvanian love hotel. But the artist wasn't making this trek to celebrate recent nuptials, as is the case with most guests staying at the honeymoon lodge. Rather, she was prepared to embark on a new photo project all alone, save for her accidentally created alter ego Joyce. Entitled *The Honeymoon*, Calypso's series of self-portraits shot inside the retro resort are a bubblegum-tinged ode to womanhood and finding comfort in solitude. Though at first glance her images appear to center on the sweet, a closer inspection reveals the sense of eeriness that lies underneath. I began to think about intimacy, solitude, companionship, marriage and monogamy. It made me think about the woman who married herself, I love that woman.”

-Sleek Magazine interview by Gloria Cardona

SOURCES:

<https://www.sleek-mag.com/article/juno-calypso-art/>

<https://www.jasminelubybarrow.com/post/juno-calypso-a-classical-and-commercial-enigma>

<https://photomonitor.co.uk/interview/the-honeymoon/>

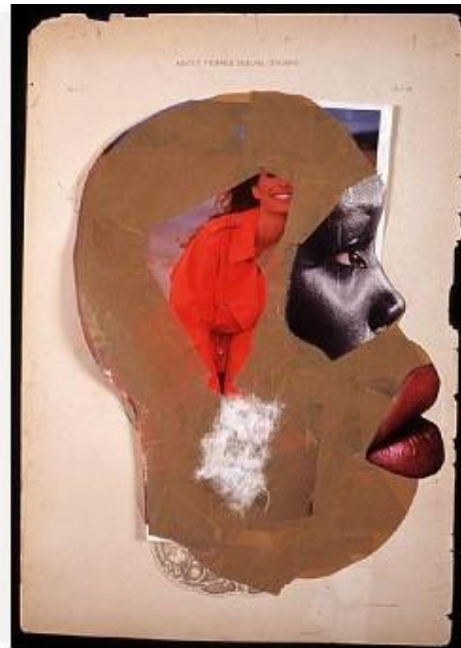
<https://www.junocalypso.com/produce/d1n1zjqpg1rzo62wedxhozonj5h1u> <https://www.junocalypso.com/about>

“Adult Female Sexual Organs”

Wangechi Mutu

2005

Packing tape, fur, collage on found
medical illustration paper



17

TEXT:

Born in Nairobi, artist Wangechi Mutu (Kenyan, b.1972) was educated in Great Britain and the United States. Having received a BFA from Cooper Union College in New York in 1996 and an MFA from Yale University in 2000, Mutu creates paintings and collages that incorporate a variety of themes and materials. Her pastiche-like works on paper are made from Mylar polyester film, acrylic paint, packing tape, glitter, and imagery from magazines.

Wangechi Mutu observes: “Females carry the marks, language and nuances of their culture more than the male. Anything that is desired or despised is always placed on the female body.” Piecing together magazine imagery with painted surfaces and found materials, Mutu’s collages explore the split nature of cultural identity, referencing colonial history, fashion and contemporary African politics. In *Adult Female Sexual Organs*, Mutu uses a Victorian medical diagram as a base: an archetype of biased anthropology and sexual repression. The head is a caricatured mask – made of packing tape, its material makes reference to bandages, migration, and cheap ‘quick-fix’ solutions. Mutu portrays the inner and outer ideals of self with physical attributes clipped from lifestyle magazines: the woman’s face being a racial distortion, her mind occupied by a prototypical white model. Drawing from the aesthetics of traditional African crafts, Mutu engages in her own form of storytelling; her works document the contemporary myth-making of endangered cultural heritage.

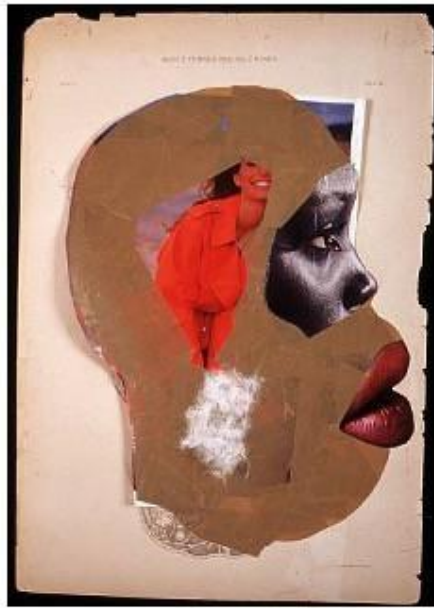
SOURCES:

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/wangechi-mutu/biography>

https://saatchigallery.com/artist/wangechi_mutu#:~:text=In%20Adult%20Female%20Sexual%20Organs,'quick%20Dfix'%20solutions.

<https://sites.google.com/site/gallagheronart/empowering-women-stephany-jean-on-wangechi-mutu>

<https://bombmagazine.org/articles/wangechi-mutu/>



Ideas to think about:

- Sexuality
- Ownership of Image
- Constructed Image
- Power
- The photographic medium
- Color

SOURCE: Text from Marissa Stewart, Graduate Assistant at the Kennedy Museum of Art

Representation in the Art World



Museum Acquisitions of Work by Women vs. Total Acquisitions 2008-2018



TEXT:

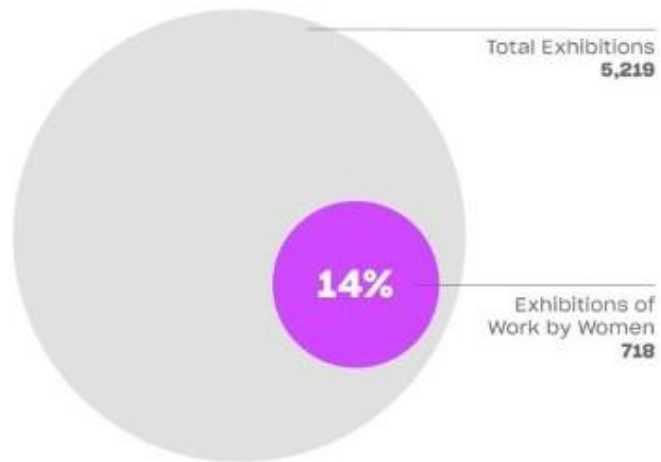
Infographic: 11% of all acquisitions at 26 prominent U.S. museums over the past decade were of work by women artists.

SOURCES:

Julia Halperin and Charlotte Burns, "[Museums Claim They're Paying More Attention to Female Artists. That's an Illusion](https://news.artnet.com/womens-place-in-the-art-world/visualizing-the-numbers-see-infographics-1654084)," Artnet, from the series "Women's Place in the Art World." September 19, 2019.

<https://news.artnet.com/womens-place-in-the-art-world/visualizing-the-numbers-see-infographics-1654084>

Museum Exhibitions of Work by Women vs. Total Exhibitions 2008-2018



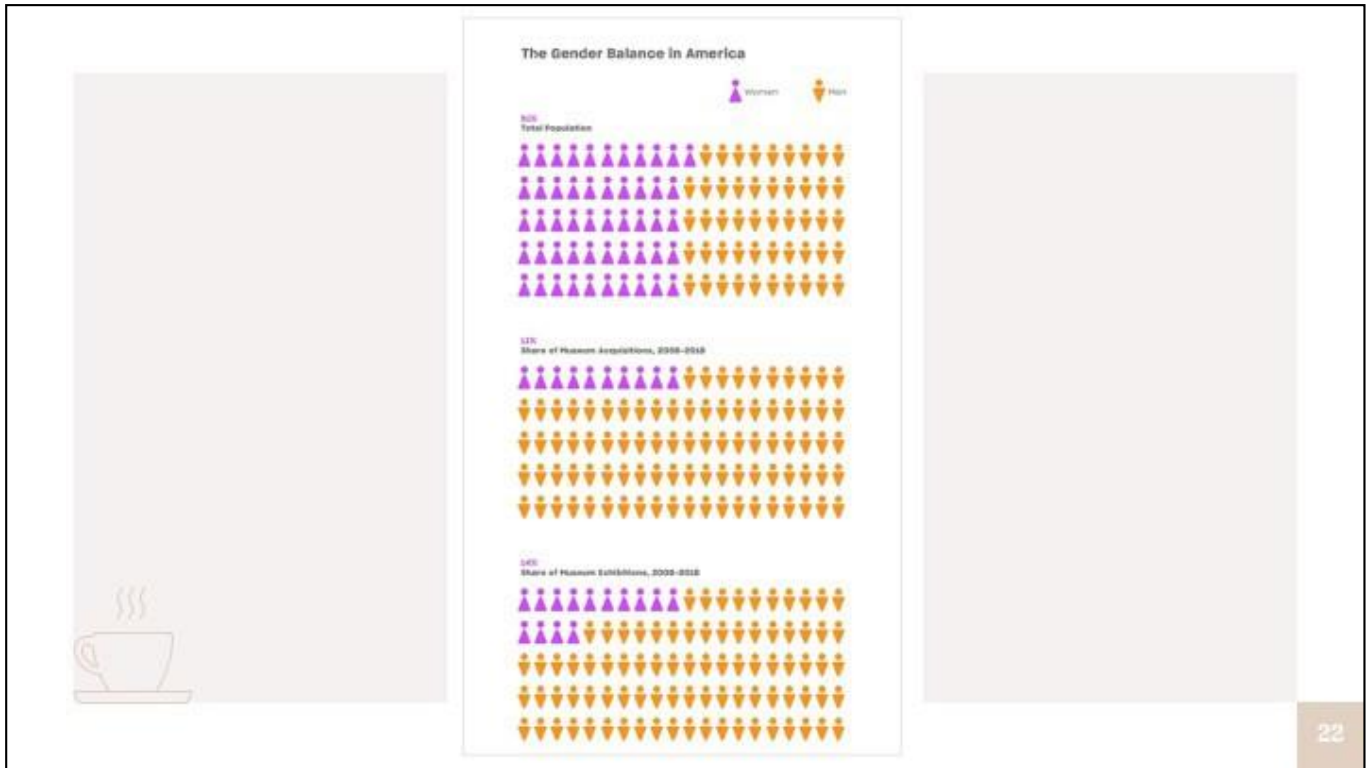
TEXT:

Infographic: 14% of all exhibitions at 26 prominent U.S. museums over the past decade were of work by women artists.

SOURCES:

Julia Halperin and Charlotte Burns, "[Museums Claim They're Paying More Attention to Female Artists. That's an Illusion](https://news.artnet.com/womens-place-in-the-art-world/visualizing-the-numbers-see-infographics-1654084)," Artnet, from the series "Women's Place in the Art World." September 19, 2019.

<https://news.artnet.com/womens-place-in-the-art-world/visualizing-the-numbers-see-infographics-1654084>



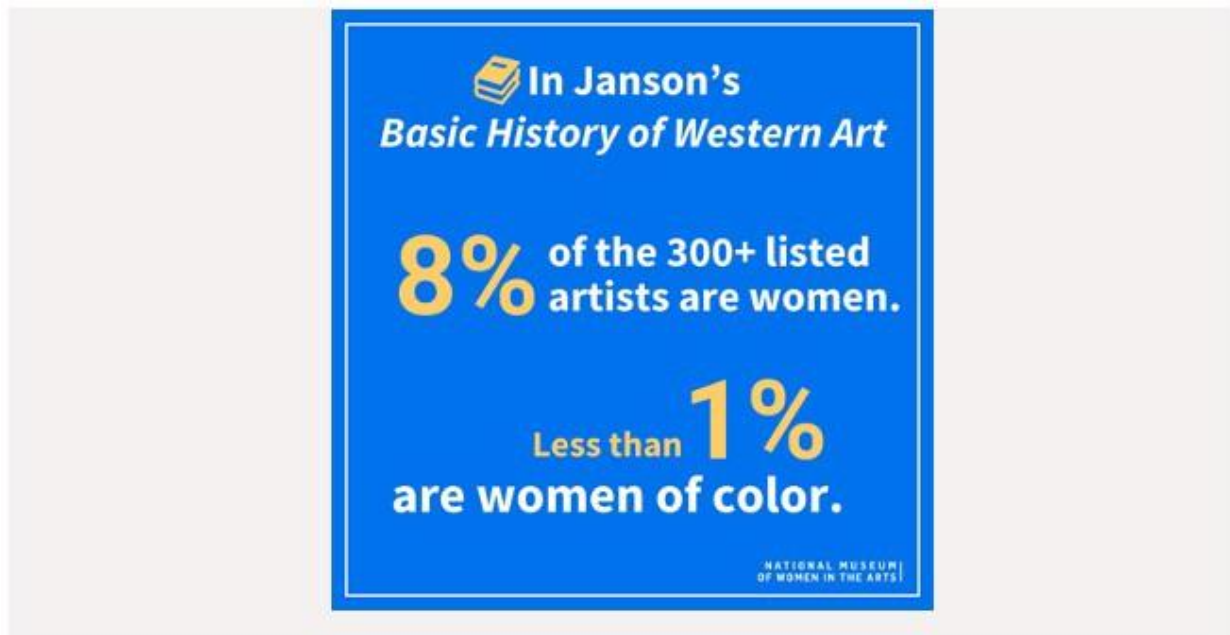
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<https://news.artnet.com/womens-place-in-the-art-world/visualizing-the-numbers-see-infographics-1654084>



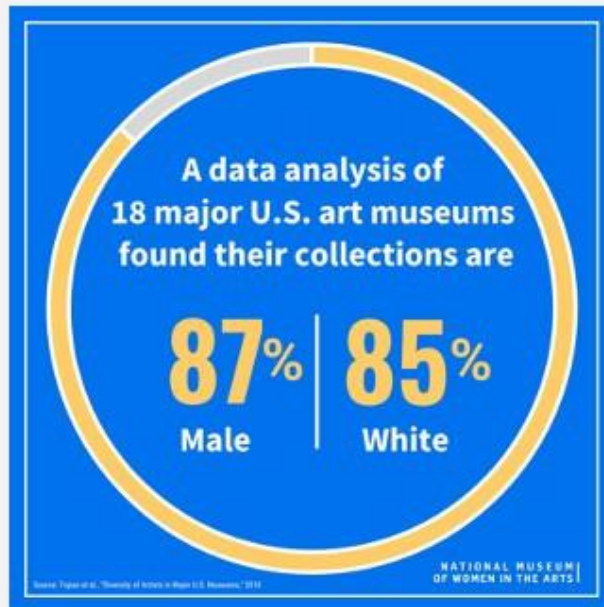
TEXT:

Infographic: In *Janson's Basic History of Western Art*, 8% of the 300+ artists in the index are women. Less than 1% are women of color.

SOURCES:

Penelope J. E. Davies, Frima Fox Hofrichter, Joseph Jacobs, Ann M. Roberts, and David L. Simon (2014) *Janson's Basic History of Western Art* (9th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gV0Ja7SPcDiI2WYBW-BFeFvnKfSnT58rS1MMFDaqDZ8/edit>



SOURCES:

Chad Topaz, Bernhard Klingenberg, Daniel Turek, Brianna Heggeseth, Pamela Harris, Julie C. Blackwood, C. Ondine Chavoya, Steven Nelson, Kevin M. Murphy. "[Diversity of Artists in Major U.S. Museums](#)," Public Library of Science (PLOS). Published March 20, 2019.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gV0Ja7SPcDiI2WYBW-BFeFvnKfSnT58rS1MMFDAQDZ8/edit>

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- *Check out more Kennedy Museum of Art programs at
<https://www.ohio.edu/museum>*