


“There are more histories to be written and explored than the official narratives and canons”: interview with Griselda Pollock

*“Há mais histórias a escrever e explorar do que permitem as narrativas oficiais e os cânones”:
entrevista com Griselda Pollock*

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Abstract

The interview, via email between May and October 2023, focuses on the author’s intellectual trajectory, addressing the key concepts of her thinking and the recent developments in her research. The field of art history, contributions of feminist struggles and theories to criticizing canons are also discussed, as well as available methodologies confronting the historical and artistic-cultural field, based on ethnic, religious, gender, race, class, sexuality, etc. Working in the United Kingdom, Pollock is the author of more than 20 books that, linking art history and feminism, is considered to be today’s leading feminist art historian.

Keywords

Women artists. Feminisms.

Feminist interventions. Art histories.

Cláudia de Oliveira / We would like you to introduce yourself, and tell us how and why you embraced and pioneered, with such determination, this new field in the historiography of art, namely, the feminist art history?

Griselda Pollock / My name is Griselda Pollock. I was born in South Africa and then grew up in both French-and English-speaking Canada before arriving in England to complete my education. I studied History at Oxford University and discovered art history during my degree. I decided to do graduate studies in art history at the Courtauld Institute, London. I had to learn the whole history of Western art from scratch by attending their undergraduate lectures, while doing graduate studies in 19th century European Romanticism and Modernism. Meanwhile, in 1970, I who had always been a feminist in spirit with ambition implanted in me by my mother, who had sadly died when I was 14, was thrilled to witness the rise of new women's movements worldwide. I found a women's group and I became more aware. I was being taught art history without any women artists. Yet in the women's movement I was meeting many women artists and began to research women artists. In 1978 I wrote my first book on Mary Cassatt. There were so many exciting political and intellectual things happening in the early 1970s that made me realize how dull, limited and conservative my art history studies had been. By discovering what was happening in literary and film studies, I encountered both Marxism and psychoanalysis as resources to think about art and society, culture and difference. I also had access to other tools, outside the university in collectives and reading groups, to be able to understand the kind of society in which I lived: class, race, gender, sexuality, power, vision, the gaze, difference, subjectivity and so forth. All these concepts gave us a way to penetrate the opaque surface of consumer capitalism. The important point is that this was a worldwide movement of revolt by people of colour, working class men and women, women from all classes, lesbians and gay people and by 'Third World' people who gave their names to the structures of power and oppression: racism, capitalism, homophobia, colonialism.

There is, however, no feminist history of art. There are what I term feminist interventions in art histories. There is no single master narrative for art, but many histories, each centred in its own time and place. Those histories are also sites of difference, according to class, race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality and gender. These terms are themselves entangled and at times agonistic, conflicted and painful.

Feminism is itself not a unified project, but also fractured by these differences. So the work of creating feminist interventions is double-sided. Feminism has to interrogate itself about its own power structures. But we also learned from Michel Foucault that power works through discourse and these discourses become institutionalized. The art gallery, museum, school and university are institutions that shape and endorse certain discourses, ways of knowing, and knowledge to support the dominant social groups and their ideologies.

So I learned that I belonged to a massive political protest moment that was reshaping the field of knowledge and that, for instance, art history and history were instruments of cultural and ideological power and in order to make change we also had to change these discourses and institutions. Not as an individual, but as part of a movement or several movements.

I was not a pioneer, a word heavy with colonial meaning. I was part of a larger movement, so I helped to launch a collective of artists and art historians, and we began to work things out together, doing research, debated, starting teaching and then Rozsika Parker and I decided to write a book based on our explorations and studies.

Fernanda Pequeno / In the book *Old mistresses*¹ that you wrote with Rozsika Parker in 1977-1979 and published in 1981, the term “feminine stereotype” is addressed as “essential qualities for all women”² used as “negative essentialism to disqualify women from being considered artists”³. In your later book of 1988, *Vision and difference*⁴, you would explore “Modernity and the spaces of femininity”. Could you comment a little on the meanings of such “spaces of femininity”?

GP / The feminine stereotype was the name we gave to the way patriarchal art history judged art made by women. The feminine stereotype exhibited all the qualities the art historians considered to be signs of lack. What men did was virile, powerful, rigorous, original. What women artists did was

¹ Parker, Rozsika; Pollock, Griselda. *Old mistresses. Women, art and ideology*. London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013.

² Parker, Pollock, 2013, p. XIX.

³ Parker, Pollock, 2013, p. XIX.

⁴ Pollock, Griselda. *Vision and difference: feminism, femininity and the histories of art*. Abingdon/New York: Routledge Classics, 2008.

weak, derivative, sentimental, and hence feminine. But there was a paradox. Why did critics and art historians mention women-artists at all, if all they said was how useless women were as artists. That is what we meant by negative essentialism. Essentialism means that all women exhibit these fundamental qualities of feminine weakness, lack of originality, etc. Negative means that these negative qualities have to be constantly asserted to ensure that the category ‘women artists’ became the opposite of what is valued in artists (without having to say that the word artist means being a man).

‘Modernity and the spaces of femininity’ is an essay about mid-19th century art produced in Paris by a small group of European and American artists who were inspired by Charles Baudelaire to be “painters of modern life”. Where would they find the signs of modernity to paint – in the city and the new suburbs, in the sites of leisure and entertainment, in the streets, in the brothels, but also in the garden and in the home. My analysis of the subjects and sites of Impressionist painting produced a map that was not the line dividing public from private space. Women and men artists both painted interiors with children and family, painted in private gardens and painted scenes in public such as boulevards and parks. What women did not and could not paint were the spaces where bourgeois men bought and used working-class women for sex. The spaces of femininity are not just the world of women, but those spaces where: a) a concept of bourgeois femininity was being lived and observed (the drawing room, sometimes the bedroom, holiday home, the loge at the theatre, promenade in the Bois de Boulogne) and; b) women artists associated with creating a new kind of modern painting perceived these spaces (that their male colleagues also painted) painting these spaces from a different perspective. Consequently, they articulated their different social-psychological experience of these spaces of modernity. I found it interesting and important to identify how Cassatt and Morisot re-articulated *space* in painting, via the gaze they created in and for their work, and through the perspective and materiality in their works. There is no shared essential quality. Phenomenologically, each artist’s paintings are different, yet they do share differences from the flaneur’s gaze at the city as his playground and the bodies in the city as the object of his sexual gaze. As art historians we have to examine the paintings’ structures to see how this social and psychological difference comes into existence via painting.

The feminine and femininity are not essences, but rather historically changing situations, class specific, time specific, experiential, positional and articulated by means of the radicalization of painting, drawing or print making and later sculpture itself. This is how we discern the spaces of hetero-masculinity, queer masculinities, as well as the diverse spaces of bourgeois femininities, French and American, Black and white, straight and queer and then classed and raced masculinities and femininities. In *Differencing the canon* (1990), now in Spanish, I discuss the Black maid in Manet’s *Olympia*, the Black woman Jeanne Duval and the White model Victorine Meurend on their differences.

CO / The year 2023 marks the 50th anniversary of the death of Pablo Picasso. In April 2023 (the British newspaper *The Guardian*’s art critic) Alex Needham wrote, “When Picasso died at the age of 91, 50 years ago tomorrow, *The Guardian* called him the most influential artist of the 20th century. Today, Picasso is more often talked about as a misogynist and cultural appropriator, the ultimate example of problematic white guys clogging up the artistic canon”.

This summer in the northern hemisphere, the Brooklyn Museum, in the United States of America, will mount an exhibition co-curated by Hannah Gadsby named “It’s Pablo-matic (geddit?)”; at the same time as in Paris, the Picasso Museum has charged fashion designer Paul Smith with making the morally dubious genius more palatable to Gen Z audiences; and Spain gears up for the great ephemeris.

In view of the considerable and relevant work of the artist – 14,000 paintings and drawings; 100,000 prints; 24,000 book illustrations; 300 models and sculptures – we think it to be of extreme relevance to re-phrase Needham’s questions: Does the artist “really have to be cut down to size in this way? Do his offensive views outweigh masterpieces like *Guernica*? Does Picasso’s undeniably terrible treatment of women mean that we can cast aside the quantum leaps that shifted the course of art?”

Finally, do you see this ‘cancellation’ of the artist 50 years after his death as a result of the vast production in the field of feminist art history that not only has brought to light the production of women artists from different continents in different historical eras, but also has shown how women artists have been obliterated by the artistic canon that has always positioned the white man as the great creative genius?

GP / Cancellation culture in any form is mindless and a thoughtless expression of prejudice rather than reasoned argument. I do not believe that the issues are reducible to negating this artist or this writer.

That Picasso was prolific as an artist (who carried on too long and became tedious in the end) is a question for art historians of many different perspectives. I personally taught Picasso's *Demaiselles d'Avignon* via both the formalist reading and Leo Steinberg's sexual reading. I explained to my students that some men are driven by their sexuality and in an era before penicillin, unprotected sex and syphilis and a horrible death went together. What if Picasso was a man overwhelmed with sexual desire and yet terrified of dying... you might produce just such a painting... This is not excusing him for maltreatment of several of his partners, but allowing issues of sexuality and their real conditions to be acknowledged in a non-heroic way. Eroticism, and sexuality as psychoanalysis reveals, is deep, and dark and complicated and entwined with violence as well as pathos.

I never felt safe with Picasso's work. It is violent and I do not think people under 18 should be exposed to his imagination, even though now children access violent pornography via the internet from very early ages and have their concepts of sex and women especially disfigured by images way more extreme, but still psychologically related to Picasso's exploration of his own passions, desire and violence.

Guernica remains one of the major works of 20th century responses to fascism.

Cubism Picasso-style and Cubism Braque-style register Spanish and French cultural tendencies, both symptomatic of the legacies of capitalist-colonial violence and violation in different ways.

My ways of thinking about art history are not individualistic and artist-focussed. I am not a Vasarian but rather a social historian of art practices and their historical conditions shaped by the violence of class, race, gender and sexuality, geopolitical location, or neurosensory diversity. These work negatively and sometime generatively to expand our understanding of lived experience

I do not think feminist art histories have been about indicting artists. We might indict certain men for real crimes committed. But feminism offers us tools for both analysing patriarchal masculinities (not unified) and phallogocentric

cultures. I have chosen to write about artist-women because I am more interested in learning about the world through their work. Women need us to be excellent art historians writing about their work with knowledge and insight.

Picasso was serially monogamous while also being self-centred and exploitative of the men who worked for him. His case is symptomatic. I find the cancellation culture is in Hannah Arendt’s terms, thoughtless and not fuelled by the feminism as I understand it.

FP / The formulation of “Feminist interventions in the histories of art” is a key concept in your intellectual trajectory. What has changed in art historiography and in the possibilities for intervention in the academic discipline Art History since the publication of your book *Vision and difference* in 1988? How do you critically intervene today, from a feminist perspective of art history?

GP / I must make a statement here. I know that few books of mine have been translated into Spanish or Portuguese. People apparently only know *Old mistresses* (1980) and *Vision and difference* (1988). Since then I have published and edited about 20 books, each one taking the feminist interventions project further, with new concepts: *Generations and geographies* (1995), to address the postcolonial question; *Differencing the canon: feminist desire and the writing of art’s histories* (1999), to address the question: why does the canon persist even when we exposed its falsehood; *Encounters in The Virtual Feminist Museum* (2007) to think about time, space and the archive in 20th century artistic practice; and then *After-affects/after-images: trauma and aesthetic transformation in The Virtual Feminist Museum* and there are many collections such as *Looking back to the future* (2001) and published collections. I have been developing feminist interventions by creating concepts for thinking through the challenges of writing about art, and doing so historically and also in the present in ways not confined to conventions of art history (monographs, style, period, oeuvre, medium, nation, iconography).

There are clearly many changes in the discipline. But what I protest most at the moment is that the mainstream of art history has not really engaged theoretically with the feminist challenge. There is a lot now about decentering and decolonizing which, of course, Latin American and African art historians have been doing for half a century or more. But feminist art history as a theoretically rich and methodologically innovative field has had no impact because it is radical, theoretical and about women.

FP / Is psychoanalysis still an important instrument for the feminist art history? How can we use psychoanalysis as a methodological tool?

GP / Around 1905 there were several revolutions in thought, or rather in our understanding of a range of structures and processes, such as Einstein on relativity, Husserl on phenomenology in philosophy, de Saussure on semiotics in linguistics, Bergson on materialism in philosophy, and Freud and psychoanalysis in psychology, and we might say Picasso and Braque and Cubism in art, while anthropology and sociology were also major developments with the spread of major thinking systems. By the 1950s, the shock, if not the trauma, of those revolutionary developments, ‘came home to roost’ as we say in English. That is to say that their impact begins to be registered, especially in the arts and humanities with the development of structuralism and soon post-structuralism. The 1905 revolutions touch on what the mind is, what is language, what is the nature of the physical universe. There is no going back to pre-1905 psychological understanding since Freud and to a lesser extent Jung had formally theorized the idea of the unconsciousness (*Unbewusstsein*), which had been around since the late 18th century. Freud’s other radical revolution lay in deconstructing any residual naturalism about sexuality and, indeed, sexual difference. We can no more dispense with psychoanalysis, than with evolution or, on my part, historical materialism, semiotics and structuralist theories of language.

Around 1968, a historical intersection occurs between certain trends in feminism and a critical but not dismissive involvement with the potential of psychoanalytic theory.

CO / For art historians researching women artists made invisible by the art history canon, how do we deal with the lack of sources (documents) and of canvases (disappeared)?

Why were women artists made invisible by the modernist canon?

Our undergraduate, master’s and doctoral students raise a methodological question: with women artists as objects of research almost entirely obliterated from the historiography of Brazilian art – few traces of their life trajectories exist, and their artistic production is reduced to just a few extant works – what paths should a feminist art historian follow to divulge such obliterated lives and their artistic production?

GP / I think it is important not to use the word *obliterated*. Women artists have always created and still create; they made their work and are still making

work, and they continue. When we talk about canon or the modernist canon, we have to identify more precisely who actively refused to see, to look at or look for, who chose not to collect, not to exhibit, not to write about artists because they were women and when this occurred. The canon was constantly being constructed as the discipline of art history was itself evolving. It was not just ‘men’ but also women curators, women museum directors, women art historians who created and sustained the selectivity on grounds of race and gender. There is a history of women dealers, art historians and curators who challenged the increasing exclusiveness.

My work has addressed the kinds of ideological and psychological investments in creating an identification between masculinity and creativity and then institutionalizing it and producing a language for art history that normalized this exclusiveness. Both men and women were thus trained and schooled in a mind-set of a completely sexist model that only became a norm in the 20th century. The history of Western art history and art writing since the 16th century has left records of only a minority of women artists, often seen as miracles or exceptions but never completely excluded! This acknowledgement of women as artists culminated in the 19th century in many books of European art history devoted to women artists, and documented in major dictionaries of artists, namely Benezit and Thieme-Becker, compiled around 1900. Across many countries and regions, women campaigned for entry to all professions and many were admitted to art schools, and finally all disciplines of the curriculum, including the life room, by the early 20th century. So, the deep contradiction is that the discipline of art history and the museum world responded to modernization in all these areas by systematically refusing to incorporate women as artists despite the evidence of their increasing presence!

If, as a result, the education and training of art historians and curators and museum directors tell a story of art without women, placing women as minor artists and followers, the profession has not only lied but also fabricated a historically inaccurate mythology. My contention is that we can correlate the creation of a discriminatory terminology for women as artists or work by women artists in the 20th century in direct proportion to the creation of a particularly phallogocentric but increasingly sexualized mythology of the male artist that became institutionalized only in the 20th century; and the concurrent stereotypical degradation of anything done by any woman.

Both are symptomatic not of an eternal patriarchal system, but of specifically modern and precise responses to those challenges to the theological structure that women were sociologically and politically building within the range of modernity and its capitalist base.

It is important to recognize and deconstruct this correlation because the systematic suppression of acknowledgement of women's creative activity across art and literature in the modern period was symptomatic of a challenge to patriarchy and then it became institutionalized so that we, feminists are now put in the position to rescue 'forgotten' artists, rather than indicting our discipline of falsifying the actual history of art. We need to stress that there were limitations placed on women in western models of creativity because of the non-universal church-state-family alliance. Learning from many ancient and non-western cultures specifically first nations' cultures, offers us what Gerardo Mosquera terms as multiple aesthetic-symbolic systems that are not based on the western models of professionalization and, therefore, competition.

CO / In 2020 you won the Holberg Prize, an award established by the Norwegian government and considered one of the world's top awards for contributions to the humanities, social sciences, law, theology, and the arts. Since its creation in 2004, this was the first time an art historian has been awarded, thus joining the coterie of celebrated intellectuals who have won the awards since its founding, including Fredric Jameson, Jürgen Habermas and Bruno Latour. On our side, we would like to congratulate you for the important award, as well as for your brilliant research that, published in countless books over more than five decades, has not only opened up a new field, but centralized a debate that for many centuries was entirely disregarded in the humanities, social sciences and arts, as the place of the Other in official history, namely, the Other-Woman-Artist in the history of art. How do you, as a feminist art historian, see this award, given that the field of art history is still elitist, marked by knowledge and attached to canonical and universal values, especially when addressing male artists, still regarded as Great Geniuses or Artist-Heroes, as you so clearly analysed in your book *Differencing the canon?* Can we understand this award as an important turning point in understanding the role and place of the Other-Woman-Artist in the canon? How did the epistemologies inaugurated by you and other feminist art historians contribute to a new historiography of art that now contemplates the Other of history, the Other-Woman-Artist?

GP / Thank you for your warm congratulations on the prize and for the question as well. I also want to thank the women, unknown to me, who nominated me for the prize and also understood the nature of my work, in order to be able to make the case for why it was significant enough for me to be considered for the prize: namely the feminist thought. I am very proud to be the first art historian to win this prize, and to win it for contributions specifically to feminist studies in art and art history and a wider concept of cultural analysis. Yet, of course, I have been both a passionate art historian and a scholar critical of the discourses of art history. I would love to believe that this prize being awarded to a visibly and ‘loud’ feminist critic of her discipline and capitalist, racist patriarchy in general marks a turning point in our struggle. The Holberg Prize has been regularly awarded to powerfully critical thinkers changing the basis of our thought at deep theoretical levels. I am so honoured and indeed unworthy to be in the company of those who have taught and inspired me. We all belong to a historic moment in western thought that embraced the very complex challenges of understanding humans as symbolic, thinking, speaking but also psychologically opaque creatures. By that I mean, we are overdetermined both by the symbolic system of language – we speak but we are spoken – and by the unconscious. We all recognize the work with the impact of the theoretical revolutions in science, psychology, linguistics and anthropology developing over the 20th century and we also understand that they showed us that we have to analyse what structures us: hence our thought. We also share an understanding that aesthetic practices, art, literary, and mythology are equally ‘forms of thought’ that are also significant because they also deal with affect: passion, intensity, darkness, violence.

My work is not ‘my’ individual contribution. I have brought to the study of art, literature and film, several different ways of thinking in order to address a deep question of the formation, character, violence and persistence of both patriarchal cultural forms and phallogocentric psycho-linguistic orders (varying across cultures in their forms but not in their effects of dehumanizing half of humanity, other life-forms and the planet itself). I think the key to my work is ‘reading’, studying, and then using the great theoretical revolutions in 20th century thought in conjunction with deep political rage at the violence and injustice and indeed danger of the alliance of patriarchy and unbridled

rapacious capitalism. Bluntly the degradation of women almost universally and the dehumanization that occurred in the wake of first colonial mercantile capitalism and now flourishes internationally in its corporate neoliberal terrorization of the entire planet are closely connected. Recently I belatedly discovered the work of a French materialist-feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne, who wrote a book in 1974 *Le féminisme ou la mort* and is the foundation for what is now called eco-feminism. She also wrote a book titled *L'histoire de l'art et la lutte des sexes* in 1978, challenging the Marxist focus only on class relations. She argues that the foundations of both women's and the earth's endangered condition lie in patriarchal systems that originated the expropriation and exploitation of nature and of women. She was way ahead of us all.

Finally, I really welcome your question about epistemologies. I sometimes feel misunderstood because much Anglophone feminist writing remains within the norms of western art history. For instance, so many books are studies of women artists, repeating the biographical and individualist model created in early modern times by Vasari, who was repeating a classical model of the great man, the exceptional individual. So feminist art history also often follows periodization or nationalism. I understand my work, when I look back, as creating concepts for re-thinking our models and methods. Immersed in semiotics, structuralism, new Marxist theory and then psychoanalysis (all coming to me via feminism, cultural studies, and film studies), I also learnt from Mieke Bal that theories are developed within each field, but the concepts they formulate can cross many fields. So the idea of the Other travels from anthropology and from a different formulation of L'Autre in Lacanian psychoanalysis and becomes a tool for post-colonial analysis. Feminist thought becomes radically transdisciplinary requiring concepts from many sources to pierce the complexity in which sexual difference (a psychoanalytical concept) and difference itself are entangled. Derrida gave me the idea of making the noun difference into a gerundive, differencing, a constant process. Thus differencing the canon is a continuous work of creative deconstruction: as we see the market is creating for us a canon of famous women artists, selected from the many possible candidates by deeper forces that allow us some women artists on condition they are wounded, abused, disabled, and often prematurely dead. Few of these are lesbian artists or artists of colour, although some are tokenised. I am not interested in artists in this way, but

in *practices* that perform aesthetic transformation which require us to hone our skills in ‘reading’ the specific ways in which aesthetic formulations work, do their work, and the term in English that I am using relates back to Freud’s theory of the *Arbeit*, the work of the psyche, and work on our own psyche: The *Trauerarbeit*. work of mourning, being an example as is *Durcharbeit*, working through. These terms represent Freud’s realization of the psyche as an economic not static. So instead of the myth of the sublime creative individual, we treat artworks as formulations of affect and productions of meaning, situated, located, historical, and potentially transformative as we learn to read them rather than iconise the artist or fetishise them as objects. I worry that my work is seen as an individual’s ideas rather than as a process of learning, reading and putting to work concepts that have been formulated in many disciplines and by many thinkers.

How can we help our students in art history to understand they need to belong to this wider project of cultural analysis while also learning skills specific to the study of the visual arts. My own graduate programme involved three elements: an in-depth study of feminist and related cultural theories; a radical rethink of historical studies of the art practices, and an involvement with contemporary practices: bearing women and their multiple differences in our minds. Feminism, like *women*, is not a unified field. Both are fissured by the simultaneous axes of class, race, sexuality, geopolitical location and histories, but both address a condition and history affecting over half of humanity and extends to our conditions of planetary existence.

FP / Thinking on how important history of exhibitions (Exhibitions History) is for Art History, we would like to ask you a question on this topic. On recent years, there are many new exhibitions of single artists and collections of women artists happening in museums worldwide. What do they mean for you? Could you please mention briefly about the methods included and what issues are silenced and ignored?

GP / I’m so glad you raised this question. It has two parts. The first is methodological. Particularly for the study of modern and contemporary art, the analysis of the history of exhibitions becomes critical because the exhibition is both a “discursive event” in the selection, installation, catalogue essay and reviews and an “aesthetic-pedagogical” event, in terms of what we can prove was “seen” by the artists, and what became “known” in terms of the public’s

learning about art as presented in a specific exhibition. We can use our own experience and memory for this. For instance, in 1972 I began a PhD on Van Gogh. I was questioned at the time if there was anything new to be discovered or more to be said about this artist! He was considered a boring topic. I had visited an exhibition of his work in London in 1969, the first after a post-war show in 1947. Much later in 1992, I was researching the exhibition history of Van Gogh and came across two important facts. After Second World War Van Gogh's works were exhibited worldwide, in gratitude to the Allies particularly for helping liberate the Netherlands. I then researched the first major Van Gogh show in MoMA New York in 1936, where the Board of the Museum almost rejected the idea because the artist was insignificant and over-exhibited by then. But the show was a huge public success – not for artistic reasons but more through the narrative of the solitary suffering artist which resonated with many during the Depression. When the post-war series of Van Gogh exhibitions travelled the world it also resonated with the public who walked through dark rooms of hungry peasants to be liberated into the sunlight of his paintings of an idyllic world in Provence. The reviews and letters confirmed this social-psychological response to his paintings. The last venue of the post-war tour was Toronto, where I lived. I realized that I saw the exhibition, my first ever. I recall my horror at *The potato eaters* and my liberation once he got to the South. I also realized why I had hated the exhibition in 1969 because the story it told once again led me through darkness to light only to end in death! What do exhibitions do as narratives, choreography? I realized I was part of this story and my choice to do an PhD on this artist was a decision to produce a different narrative, less mythic, less sacrificial, more critically art historical. I curated an exhibition at the Van Gogh Museum in 1980 framing Van Gogh in relation to his Dutch contemporaries, and their negotiation of past and present, of modernization in the city and the country. No one reviewed it. No one mentions it. It did not confirm the established trope and his myth. It made his work historical, derivative and yet also rooted in the crisis of modernity and the new challenges of urban and indeed rural capitalism. I also taught courses on New York painting and the exhibitions in the 1950s become a crucial means of tracking the difficulty curators and critics had in winning public acceptance for abstract expressionist painting. It also reveals exactly the paradox of gender. Women were visible, being exhibited widely... even bought for the museums...

but the official art history wrote them out in their presence. Greenberg simply did not ever write about Frankenthaler with whom he lived for many years, or Krasner whom he knew and even wanted to exhibit... We can see there the moment of disconnect when they are exhibited but not inscribed into the history.

You are quite right that we are witnessing a moment of ‘recovery’ of women artists. These group and monographic shows are proliferating. This is the effect of feminist art history, but weakly. Two issues concern me. They are being presented as discoveries, labelled as forgotten and then framed as exceptions and always as “women artists”. Defining them as women actually disqualifies them as artists, since the noun in the masculine is the norm. To ensure that we know they are women, the artists are feminized in a way that completely erases the issues of feminism: who are these women? What is it to be a woman? What languages do women artists create to explore their experience, their subjectivities, their unconscious, their ideas? How will we learn to read what the men have done without assuming that what they have done is simply great art. We never speak of men’s art. We do examine how they articulate different masculinities, those of class privilege, although we do notice racialized oppression in the masculine but not its specificities in the feminine.

What I notice is this. The price of making women visible through these new monographic or group shows is the exclusion of any feminist theoretical work or analysis. There was a recent Sophonisba Anguissola exhibition in Denmark and the Netherlands using Vasari’s Renaissance term “a miracle” out of the context of Italian rhetoric, and presenting her as an exception, without using feminist studies of both masculinity and femininity in a counter reformation Catholic Europe dominated by Philip II of Spain, and the fact that Anguissola was a court painter in a culture that defined feminine nobility by the acquisition of skills in painting and music... but not literature or philosophy. I am concerned about the price of women entering into public knowledge without the expanded understanding provided by feminist cultural analysis, because this is happening through market forces, by financialising art, by massive investment and speculation in art that has occurred after the 2007 financial crisis in the Northern hemisphere affecting the interconnected economies.

What is silenced and ignored is the critical bias that the theoretically enriched feminist, postcolonial and social historical thinking ever produced. This means the concepts that are the necessary tools for rethinking are never used. A new mythology is being developed alongside forgetting feminism as a critical challenge to patriarchal racist capitalism and capitalist racist patriarchy. Such terms cannot be used. They frighten the potential collectors and sponsors whose money comes precisely from both.

FP / To end this interview, we would like to ask you to comment on your most recent projects and interests. What has changed in your current approaches and focuses, what are the possible paths to feminist art history?

GP / I always speak of feminist interventions in art's histories. My work is not a subsection of art history, a side compartment, a tolerated space for feminists to play in. There are more histories to be written and explored than the official narratives and canons, and even slightly expanded canons, allow. We are permitted to exist but the adjective feminist which I proudly use, actually warns everyone that my work is not to be trusted. It has a *parti-pris*. It is not pure scholarship, but political interest and ideas deforming the purity of art. So, my concept of interventions matters. I intervene from an international women's struggle and its theoretical wing. I intervene in art's histories, seeking more than I know or even yet recognize as I am also challenged by decolonizing, queering, and Marxist questions to be alert to my own position, privilege and blindness or indifference. Feminism has itself to be questioned for its own exclusions and limits in terms of its many forms. Different feminist communities have different priorities because of geo-political and historical situations. I am an art historian struggling within and often against art history as a discipline. I am also a transdisciplinary cultural analyst, seeking to work with a range of methods and theories from within and outside art history in order to understand better the complexity of art practices and the worlds in which they are made and to which they speak.

My most recent project is extremely pertinent to this question. The book to be published this month is *Woman in art: Helen Rosenau's little book of 1944* (Yale University Press, 2023).

In 1944 a German Jewish refugee art historian published a small, modernist-designed book titled *Woman in art: from type to personality*. The book was a reframing of the entire history of art with increasing focus on European

Art from the palaeolithic to modernism that is studied through the theological, symbolic and aesthetic figurations of woman in order to understand the key institutions of society. Adopting examples from Chinese, Indian, Islamic, Jewish and Christian cultures, Helen Rosenau used the social relations of human society that relate to love and life, hierarchy and difference, to reveal how art registers and articulates the deep symbolic systems (anthropology) and the change in social systems (sociology) that today we might term gender or sexual difference.

Rosenau had an amazing art historical education, doing her PhD with a very young Erwin Panofsky in Hamburg but writing this book under the supervision of sociologist Karl Mannheim. Overlooked and ignored in post-1970 feminist art history, I decided to republish the original text by Rosenau inside a larger book flanking her work with an intellectual portrait of Rosenau as a thinker, a feminist, an art historian; and a suite of seven essays analysing her “little book”. Her book is 20,000 words. My analysis runs to 65,000 words and that is a result of my tracking the intellectual foundations of her “intervention in art’s histories” at both the radical moment amongst Hamburg intellectuals such as Aby Warburg, Panofsky (Dora and Erwin) and Ernst Cassirer and so important in the feminist sociological thought of Marianne Weber and Gertrud Simmel, who focussed on the social institutions shaping the divisions between women and men. In addition, Rosenau read widely anthropology and psychoanalysis and drew on this wide range of resources for thinking her way to an analytical model of art’s histories through the prism of Woman as a symbolic form (Cassirer), a *pathosformel* (Warburg) and semiotic signifier and signified.

Researching and writing this book required all my previous work to reach the point where I could appreciate Rosenau’s brilliance and significance. This is my homage to a woman who as a refugee struggled to find an academic place in Britain, and as a woman was sidelined by the men around her, namely in the Warburg circle. It has been such an education to reconnect to a vibrant feminist intellectual culture in Europe in the 19th- to early 20th centuries, to realize that feminist interventions in art histories began long before 1970 and that a woman took the exciting work of Hamburg thinkers into actively feminist, socialist thinking and cultural analysis.

It has been a wonderful journey and a labour of feminist love, respect and re-education.

I'm also working on two other books. One is a feminist art cultural analysis of Marilyn Monroe as a *pathos* of life rather than an icon of sexual objectification. It is a study of seven aspects of Monroe as we encounter her image in film, photography, art and in her own words. It is the complement to the book I published in 2022 *Killing men and dying women: imagining difference in 1950s New York painting*, where the iconic Monroe appears in relation to some works by Lee Krasner and Helen Frankenthaler. The other book is my agony: my PhD thesis, with 200,000 words that was never published because no one wanted to let me destroy or deconstruct the mythology of Van Gogh. No one wants an art history of this amateur Dutchman out of sync with modernity. So I am thinking of calling it *Why are we still loving Vincent?* (remember the title of a recent animated film) a deconstruction of a cultural infatuation... This is the culmination of my conviction that we cannot just write about women artists; we need at the same time to understand how they created the man artist and why the cultural icons of that man artist are injured, damaged, suffering, abject and very often violent men.

Everywhere I turn now, there is another manifestation of the exploitation of Van Gogh... it brings in the public and makes money through endless blockbusters looking at every aspect.

I do not think he was a great painter, nor whether he knew what painting is. He was a draftsman, an illustrator who never grasped modernism but was appalled by modernity.

These twin projects: studying the work of women and deconstructing the myth of the man-artist continue, aided by what I learned from studying what women have done in art across time and what feminists and other thinkers offer to me as methods and tools and, above all, as concepts for rethinking and analysing the world as we learn to see it with art not as its glory but as its library both intellectual – thought – and affective – psycho-symbolically.

I know we shall never understand art if we also fail to learn from all the arts and humanities and, in fact, even more so from the crazy thinking we call science.

Thank you for your questions and indulgence in my answers.

Griselda Pollock (b. 1949) is a South African-British art historian, cultural scientist, and lecturer. She studied Modern History at University of Oxford and Art History at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London. In 1973, she co-founded the Feminist Art History Collective with Rozsika Parker. In 1980, she received her doctorate for her dissertation on the Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh. Pollock has taught at colleges and universities in Manchester, New Delhi, and Leeds. Since 2001, she is Director of Center for Cultural Analysis, Theory and History at the University of Leeds. Pollock’s research revolves around art of the 19th to the 21st century, feminism, queer cinema and culture, trauma and aesthetics.

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