STRAND

APRIL 2020
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THE FEMALE EMPOWERMENT ISSUE

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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

This year, I'm celebrating two birthdays. One is today, the day I was brought into this world (yes, I'm actually writing this on my birthday—sad, I know). The second is the day I launch this issue, stepping up as your new editor-in-chief!

I never imagined that I would be such an active member of Strand Magazine. Starting university as an eager yet unsure first-year, I was willing to try anything and everything. During freshers fair, though, I knew that Strand was for me. The iconic holographic stickers were what did it, personally! All jokes aside, writing for this magazine has introduced me to so many great people. I have attended press events at galleries, interviewed artists, and frequented London fashion week—things I would never have been able to do if it wasn't for Strand. It has been a pleasure to be a part of a society with over 200 dedicated members, and I can't wait to see the magazine develop further.

This issue embraces female empowerment, celebrating women within creative industries. We have a diverse array of pieces in store for you, from interviews with singer-songwriter Rina Sawayama and artist Ellie Turley, to insightful essays on painful sex and reading like a feminist.

Finally, I'd also like to thank Isabel for all her hard work. You're a great friend and an amazing editor-in-chief—I can't imagine Strand Magazine without your contributions. We'll continue to give our all in creating a magazine that gives a voice to creatives at King's. Have a great spring break everyone, and enjoy this issue!

LOVE, HALIM KIM

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HOW TO READ LIKE A FEMINIST

Many of us are avid readers, but what an English degree teaches you is that there is an incomprehensible difference between reading for mere pleasure and reading to understand the ambitions and motives of an author.

In the past, like many adolescents, I was drawn to stereotypical romances and exhausted sci-fi's, along with the Classics all 'good girls' were expected to read such as 'Pride and Prejudice' and 'Jane Eyre'. At this tender age, we absorb these texts, their morals and their sentiments like a cell in osmosis, as we lack experiences of our own to focus on. Not only can this heavily effect our own style of writing, but it can drastically influence our once malleable teenage mindsets.

The British education system doesn't assist this. It offers a reading list rife with sexism, inhibiting gender norms. 'Romeo and Juliet' presents a woman's life as dictated by men, as a jewel to be collected for mere value in appearance. 'To Kill A Mockingbird' sees a young girl, Scout, struggle with her desire to 'act like a boy' in a society ruled by its established roles for men and women. These are just a few from the typical reading list we are expected to thrive off in our high school years. These limiting depictions, alongside the media's illustration of beauty as defined by the 'male gaze', can drive even the most headstrong woman into insecurity and uncertainty regarding her place in this world.

These texts come from a great record of patriarchal writing within our literary canon, kicking off with Milton's famous representation of Eve. For decades thereafter, male and female authors alike wrote in servitude to Milton and his concept of woman as a 'serviceable second' – good for bearing children or pruning flowers. This continuation of misogyny in published print gave the written woman very little room for expanse. We were at risk of solidifying to a chauvinistic mould, a cast that reduced us to 'Adam's rib' at the most, or an objectifiable piece of flesh at the least.

However, thanks to a century of ball busting ladies, 'the fallen woman' need be no more. The likes of Sylvia Plath and Alice Walker have rewritten a woman's place in literature, destroying Milton's canon and bombing the patriarchy into oblivion. So, in an effort to keep our minds *EMPOWERED, PROUD AND EXPANDING*, I've written a list of 5 texts, fiction and non, guaranteed to dismantle patriarchal mindsets and demolish misogynistic tendencies.

THE COLOR PURPLE - ALICE WALKER

This piece is witty, emotional and thoughtful. It creates a space of solace, support and awareness regarding sexual abuse and assault, whilst also demonstrating the pleasures sex can bring and reminding us that a woman's role isn't merely to please, but to be pleased.

MY THOUGHTS EXACTLY - LILY ALLEN

Candid. Honest. Bloody hilarious. Never have the true joys and absolute agonies of being a woman been written about more truthfully. If you need a laugh, a friend or something to remind you of your worth, this text is IT.

ARIEL - SYLVIA PLATH

Not one for the faint hearted. Plath is mostly known for her novel 'The Bell Jar', however I've found this collection of poems far more telling.

LITTLE WOMEN - LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

Need I explain? This masterful novel will abolish the constraints you've inflicted upon yourself and remind you that, as a woman, you are an exceptional being with evolving skills and talents that you deserve to pursue.

CIRCE - MADELINE MILLER

The daughter of Zeus must summon all her strength to stand alone against the wrath of mortal men and Gods. Inherently feminist, this text writes against renowned Greek Epic to revise a girl's place in history and the present day.

Read actively and intellectually. Don't let a dramatic and thrilling novel blind you with its pace then catch you off guard with its pitiful treatment of women. Instead, select your reading thoughtfully and design yourself a collection of texts that question the Western patriarchy's fondest fancies with uncompromising truths. Draw in candor and sincerity rather than allowing yourself to be distracted by a book's popularity and rating. Read to ask questions, not to merely accept. Probe, interrogate and examine each author's characterization of women. Take a stance, hold an opinion and voice it. This is what literature is meant for. It isn't written to be read and put down. It's created to catalyse conversations, ignite movements and spark debate. Let that feminist fire shine and illuminate a literary future where women are respected for their strength, not valued for their weakness.

BY GRACE VICKERS
EDITED BY HALIM KIM

PAINFUL SEX

THE SECRET KEPT BY 1 IN 7 WOMEN

BY ANNABEL FROST. EDITED: HELEN SOULSBY & HALIM KIM.

Sex is a topic dominating our lives - it seems we can't go a minute without discussing it. Whether it's politics, that new TV drama or simply a catch up with an old friend, sex is on everyone's lips. And what's wrong with that? Sex between consenting adults is a fun and feel-good experience that has been scientifically linked to an improved immune system, lower blood pressure and a healthy lifestyle. Everyone's a winner...right?

The discourse surrounding sex rarely focuses on an alarming fact. Through a survey, the NHS discovered in 2017 that 7.5% of women suffer from pain during sex. After interviewing 7000 women, the results indicated that 1 in 13 suffer from dyspareunia. This pain can take many forms and is clearly not an uncommon occurrence, yet the high number of women who suffer from it does not correspond with our attitudes and dialogues surrounding the subject. For example, the media rarely indicates that women can feel pain during consensual sex, rather, showing it as an easy act that all women are able to accomplish without much thought in films and on TV. Moreover, sex education in schools often glosses over the condition, focusing instead on what sex is rather than how it can feel - both physically and mentally. Not surprisingly, the lack of representation of dyspareunia leaves women who suffer with the condition confused and embarrassed, often resulting in a silent struggle when it comes to the bedroom.

This topic resonates with me deeply as I am one of the 7.5% - sex for me is a painful and awkward encounter. Yet, I kept it a secret for the first three years of my sex life. The absence of information had led me to believe it was normal and that women had to 'power through' the pain.

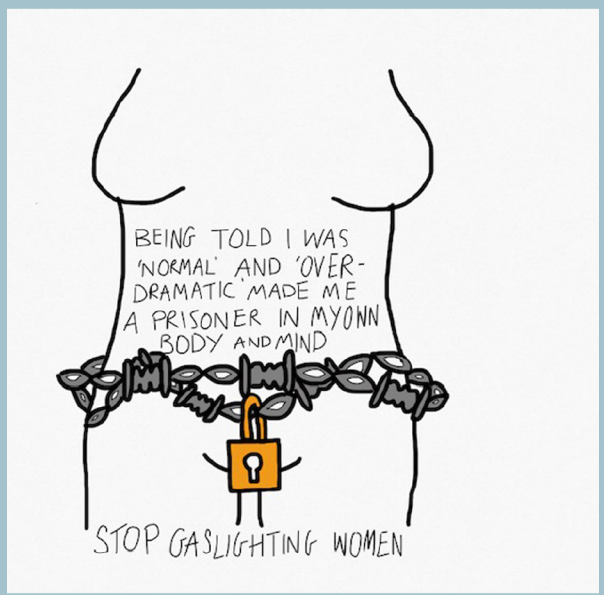
I miserably forced myself to withstand the agony I felt, as I thought one day I would be free of it and simply needed to continue having sexual intercourse in order to eventually feel its pleasures. My mindset was guided by what I saw in the media and the conversations I had with my friends; I was taught that everyone found sex painful at first and that it was to be expected for the first few times or when you changed partners.

ILLUSTRATIONS: ANNABEL FROST

What's more, my lack of understanding around the subject kept me from the doctor as I believed I would be simply wasting their time. So I stayed silent. Three years into my struggle, a friend and I were discussing the men in our lives. She was in her first relationship and was having difficulty when it came to the bedroom. As she slowly shared more with me, I found myself on the verge of tears. She too suffered from painful intercourse, and she too didn't know what to do about it or who to go to. We confided in each other and for the first time, I accepted I wasn't normal and needed to visit the doctor. We deserved to know what was wrong with our bodies and what we could do to help enjoy our sex lives.

Three years into my struggle, a friend and I were discussing the men in our lives. She was in her first relationship and was having difficulty when it came to the bedroom. As she slowly shared more with me, I found myself on the verge of tears. She too suffered from painful intercourse, and she too didn't know what to do about it or who to go to. We confided in each other and for the first time, I accepted I wasn't normal and needed to visit the doctor. We deserved to know what was wrong with our bodies and what we could do to help enjoy our sex lives. However, this is easier said than done. Multiple visits, countless diagnoses and one surgery later, I'm as confused as ever. Both my friend and I are continually told by the majority of GPs we see that what we face is 'normal' and that we'll hopefully 'grow out of it'. The few that do listen and agree something is wrong rarely have answers to accompany their understandings, advising us to seek private care, which is a luxury not many can afford.

"BOTH MY FRIEND AND I ARE CONTINUALLY TOLD BY THE MAJORITY OF GPS WE SEE THAT WHAT WE FACE IS 'NORMAL' AND THAT WE'LL HOPEFULLY 'GROW OUT OF IT'."



The lack of information, education and care available to women is as dangerous as it is frustrating. Painful sex can be a symptom of much more sinister illnesses and life-changing conditions, ones that women often do not know they have until they attempt to start a family, go through a horrific menopause, or are told too late for a cure to be effective. The message that is time and time again sent out to women in regard to their reproductive and sexual health is one of persistence and endurance. Whether they seek advice for dyspareunia or painful periods, women are often ignored and encouraged to 'get on with things' or that 'it's just a phase', leaving them suffering quietly and alone. More needs to be done in order to address this issue shared by 7.5% of adult women in the UK, in hopes that future generations will be treated appropriately and go on to live happy and healthy sex lives, a simple desire that is currently unobtainable for so many, a desire that I myself am desperate to experience.

FEMINISM UNDER NEOLIBERALISM

By: Callista Saputra
Edited: Issabella Orlando & Halim Kim

THE BUYING AND SELLING OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In the wake of the #MeToo and Time's Up movement, it seems as though everyone wants to be in the loop and involved in the conversation about feminism. Nowadays most celebrities seem to be walking the red carpet with a 'Time's Up' logo on their gowns and brands have caught up with the trend. However, this provokes questions of how effective feminism really is in the age of neoliberalism, and if so, whether the market would merely regard feminist ideals as a consumer trend.

This form of the movement can be categorised as 'commodity feminism', in which feminist discourse are appropriated for commercial purposes. An example can be seen by the controversy generated by Gillette's 'toxic masculinity' advertisement. On the one hand, the campaign can be seen as encouraging greater awareness regarding issues of consent for Gillette's largely male audience. However, it also highlights its reductive nature as feminist ideals are simplified into a digestible form in order to sell products. The inherent nature of capitalism is here shown as the market only regards women's rights as a change in consumer demand. It becomes obvious that what's good for women might be good for capitalism; however, what is good for capitalism might not be good for women.

This relationship can be seen as deeply ironic, as capitalism itself has done some damage in conjuring sexist values in society, particularly via the beauty industry and its creation of conventional beauty standards. Moreover, this image often becomes racialized as the beauty industry still regards a slim, usually white woman to be the symbol of attraction, erasing women of other diverse backgrounds and ridding them of any form of representation in popular media. In Gender Trouble, Judith Butler outlines her theory of abjection, in which the creation of a subject is only possible through the exclusion of forms of identity that do not fit the status quo. The endless amount of advertisements and products fit into this model; marketing and the media have influenced how society views the female body and dictate which bodies do matter and which bodies become othered. In response, as the theory of the free hand of the market goes, the industry will only react to what is deemed to be profitable at the time.

It is therefore important is to understand the distinction between systemic change and individual change. Under capitalism, feminism is merely a slogan. It is the simple performative act of wearing a trendy "woke" t-shirt or buying unnecessary 'Goop' products. In other words, neoliberalist feminism charms one into believing that one has enacted change in a still-sexist society through spending money. However, the fact is that issues regarding women's rights cannot be fixed one purchase at a time and that these issues arise due to the inherent misogyny within the political system. It thus becomes clear that in order to dismantle a system built to disempower women is to join a collective action against it. Whether a brand claims to be feminist or not, the true nature of the beauty industry, for instance, is to make money out of women's insecurities. The only way to be free of this as an individual is to realise that there is no such thing as conventional beauty standards and that what exists in real life is merely a projection of the industry's capacity to invoke self-hatred and materialistic consumption. On a societal level, on the other hand, true empowerment of women and the market may simply be incompatible.

Image credit: unsplash

REVOLUTIONARY FASHION TRANSFORMATION:

BY: OLIVIA KIM
EDITED: LIZA MIKHALEVA

FREELANCE PR CONSULTANT CANDICE QUINERLY (INSTAGRAM: @PROZACANDPEARLS) WEARING THE SAVAGE X FENTY BY RIHANNA LINGERIE #SAVAGEXIRL
PHOTO BY ERICA R. ANTHONY (INSTAGRAM: @ERAPHOTO_ , ERICARANTONY.COM)

FEMALE EMPOWERMENT THROUGH NOVEL RUNWAY POLITICS

Throughout history, the aesthetics of female bodies were idealised through the male gaze and the fashion industry has been dominated by men. Consequently, for a long time, women's fashion was produced in conformity to so-called 'conventional beauty standards'. Such societal obsessions created a toxic fallacy of women having to fit in the mould of gender-specific looks to meet expectations. However, recent years have witnessed an optimistic rise in female empowerment through fashion. With more revolutionary and non-conforming fashion pieces produced by designers, the modern world has seen multiple glimpses of hope for a progressive change in the fight for female beauty liberation. The runway — the first link in the chain of a new collection's visual demonstration — is equally keeping up with this forward movement. Everything from their organisation to their execution has been transforming to simultaneously reflect and advocate for female empowerment.

With the viral rise of the #MeToo movement, various fashion brands have shown efforts in becoming an integral part of it by embedding elements of women's freedom into their clothes. Consistent with the feminist messages in its previous collections, Dior's recent AW20 show made an explicit reference to the #MeToo campaign through the installation of vivid lights highlighting 'CONSENT'. Other empowering slogans like 'WE ARE ALL CLITORIDIAN WOMEN' and 'WOMEN ARE THE MOON THAT MOVES THE TIDES' were hung up in the air as well. The house's first female designer Maria Grazia Chiuri made a series of applaudable attempts to establish a platform of women's activism through Dior's recent show in Paris. One model wore a shirt that read 'I say I' — a phrase invented by Italian feminist and art critic Carla Lonzi. This emphasised the show's focus on giving women their individuality and autonomy over themselves. Dior's newest runway collection notably presented a wide range of aesthetics that went beyond the traditionally feminine and graceful looks of female attire. From the more tailored look of a strong and masculine suit to the softened looks of skirts and dresses...

"...THE AW20 UNVEILED AN OUTSTANDING COMPILATION OF ARTISTIC MULTIPLICITY CHALLENGING THE GENDER ROLES IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY."

Another designer that chooses alternative scenarios to runways is Annaïss Yucra Mancilla from Peru. Her SS19 collection 'Resistencia' focused on the issue of femicides. To raise awareness on the problem, she created an interactive performance where the audience could walk around and get close to the models – all to the sounds of testimonials of people who lost women in their lives and femicide facts. The designer also deconstructed some gender-associated tasks like washing-up through staging this action in oversized gloves. Transparent dresses symbolised Latin American women's choice to protest naked, and flower prints on them alluded to bruises.

ANNAÏSS YUCRA MANCILLA SS19 SHOW - PHOTOS BY LIZA MIKHALEVA

DIOR AW20 SHOW - PHOTOS BY LISA BATTILOMO

Furthermore, women's liberation has been increasingly endorsed in the diversity of the cast on catwalks. Rihanna's Savage x Fenty lingerie brand is amongst the pioneers with her brand's DNA synthesised through embracing the diverse nature of female beauty. The 2019 show demonstrated an excellent inclusion of women of all races, genders, sizes and shapes. One thing was clear: her show strived to celebrate the attractiveness and glamour of every woman. More notably, with the diva leading the creative direction of the brand, the Savage x Fenty show was exhibited through the female-gaze, rather than the common male-gaze of fashion events. The show demonstrated a form of rebellion against the repression of femininity, and it very much aimed to assert the individual freedom and independence of women through what they wear. Moreover, it openly welcomed the distinctive traits of women's bodies that are often not called attention to in the media. The sheer confidence that the models of various shapes and sizes demonstrated on stage became a source of liberation for women (many of whom are sharing photos of them enjoying the inclusive lingerie on Instagram under the hashtag #savagexirl).

The French brand L'Oreal established another way of showing their support for female empowerment through the choice of the cast. They selected models, singers and movie stars – some who are older than the others, and some who are parents– for their 2019 catwalk. There is a common stereotype of female runway models being youthful and thin – an expectation that has been gradually implemented on ordinary girls in the contemporary world. By incorporating celebrities of different age groups and professions, L'Oreal encouraged a social recognition of women's beauty in every life period. Helen Mirren's joyful, barefooted run across the runway with her child-like smile and carefreeness illuminated the ever-lasting youthful energy and allure that women can radiate through their appearances and mannerisms, regardless of their age. Santiago Enrique Bastón's presence on stage with her young son created an undeniably heart-warming scene, as models are hardly ever present in runways with their children. L'Oreal successfully tackled the limited presence of women and feminine grace in the fashion industry, by expanding the types of women selected to participate in their catwalk.

In recent years, the fashion industry has also seen more females involved in the creation of runways beyond the demonstration of clothes. For instance, Mugler used the song 'Supersoaker' by Eartheater – a Queen's based musician – for their AW20 show, where she participated as a model as well. This wasn't the first time Mugler decided to incorporate music by emerging female artists in their show. Lyzza's 'Talk Ur Talk' was played during their SS20 showcase at Paris Fashion Week. Such inclusion of female artists in the runway routine is a noteworthy occasion since the creative industries (including fashion) are still heavily run by male artists. Collaborations of fashion giants with talented women of all backgrounds and fame
allow the general public to better acknowledge women's capabilities to have just as much input into the fashion industry as their male colleagues. Thereby they call for equal opportunities of people behind fashion runways and shows, regardless of their gender.

Ultimately, numerous brands and creators in the fashion industry have progressively paved the way for developing female empowerment in the world through their refreshing runway politics. In retaliation against the past constraints and restrictions against women, various members of the fashion industry have strived to demolish the previously romanticised and limited depictions of feminine gender expressions. Instead, various designers have been gradually constructing a podium where women could be valued in their uniquely organic form. The field of fashion has come a long way to confront the pervasive issue of women's rights. One can only hope that they will extend their current efforts to ensure that female empowerment is further available to all the women in the future.

SAVAGE X FENTY BRAND AMBASSADOR – PLUS SIZE MODEL AND BODY POSITIVE ACTIVIST- VICTORIA BARRA (INSTAGRAM: @VICTORIAXBARRA) WEARING THE SAVAGE X FENTY BY RIHANNA - LINGERIE #SAVAGEXIRL - PHOTO BY VICTORIA BARRA

IN CONVERSATION WITH CHRISTINA NEWLAND, AUTHOR OF "SHE FOUND IT AT THE MOVIES: WOMEN WRITERS ON SEX, DESIRE, AND CINEMA"

By: Eloise Wright
Edited: Andriani Scordellis and Ketki Mahabaleshwarkar

Watching films and reading about them is thrilling. Whether it be light criticism, personal entries, or academic scholarship, one strives to discover and learn more about the creative development behind it. But like with most things that become monetised, this field of work has been overcharged with male energy and perspective, not bad, but often the only perspective taken seriously. Cultural journalist Christina Newland is charging to bridge that gap by joining the voices of a strong network of female writers. Alongside her own dynamic words and mind, she delivers a much needed, fresh dose of contemporary criticism into journalism and film discussion today. Here, Christina takes the time to indulge my questions about the book and its topic, one that I myself have only recently started to truly delve into wholeheartedly. Reading about sex, desire and cinema has never been more exciting.

When did you start writing? And what have you learnt about your career path so far?

I mean, I started writing stories when I was a little kid! When I was about eight years old I used to get my grandfather to tell me stories about his life and try to write them down. So I always wanted to write, though I didn't always know about what. I started a blog after university, mostly for my own edification. I studied English and Film and I actually had loved writing and researching my dissertation so much that I wanted to continue writing about cinema, so I did. Some small, now defunct film publications offered to commission me, not for a ton of money, but for small fees. And it sort of went from there.

It hasn't always been easy and it's certainly not the most financially reliable job in the world, but it never fails to amaze me that I can get paid to write about movies for a living. It's an enormous privilege, in spite of the difficulties at times.

Your upcoming book "She Found It at The Movies" talks about the female gaze in cinema, desire, and sex. What made you want to dive into this topic?

It was something I was always trying to sort of bury or hide. Ever since being a teenager and getting into films with James Dean and Marlon Brando in them, I knew that screen crushes and beautiful male stars were a huge part of my being drawn into being a cinephile. But I put that away because it didn't gel with being a professional, serious film critic in such a male industry. And over time, that didn't sit right with me, because I knew that there was more to say on the subject and that actually it was quite a deep-rooted thing. So in September 2017, I was commissioned by Sight & Sound to write a sort of manifesto for putting female desire back into writing about movies, and the idea for the book came from that. I wrote about 2000 words and felt like I'd only just skimmed the surface. There was so much more to say.

As an experienced columnist and culture journalist, how did the idea and process of compiling a collection of essays on this topic come about?

I knew I wanted to put together a collection of essays because female desire and our relationship with movies was just too complex and individual. It had to be from a variety of different perspectives, not just from my POV as a white, straight cis woman. I already know a selection of truly talented women and non-binary culture writers, so I opened up submissions not just to them but publicly, so it was a democratic process.

Do you think this has started to normalize itself in film and everyday conversations?

I think it has to some extent, and I'm so into it. Don't get me wrong: I don't think it's feminist every time a woman expresses her lust for someone in a film, but I think the conversations happening around this stuff are useful and interesting. They're also fun, and I think that has a lot more mileage than people give it credit for. It seems like as soon as we speak about women and sex in film, we're talking about #MeToo. That is a vitally important, crucial conversation, but I just wanted women to feel they could also be sex-positive and have some fun with those conversations, too. We spend so much time dodging male lust, we hardly have any time or room to look at our own.

I just wanted women to feel they could also be sex-positive

What is your relationship to film, past and present?

I guess it's hard to actually separate myself from films in some way, they're such a big part of my life. If I'm not watching them, I'm writing or talking or reading about them!

What are your favourite films about desire, and why?

Ones that had a big formative impression for me as a teenager, that were explicitly featuring sex that was *actually* sexy: "Y Tu Mama Tambien", "The Dreamers". I also think that often, the sexiest films are often more about implication than sex specifically. A film I come back to a lot, which I screened for the BFI season, is "The Way We Were". That seems like an odd one, but to me I love the desirous, openly yearning female character and the ultimate love object in the form of Robert Redford. Women have always had people like Redford - movie stars, musicians - who they could lust over in large numbers and make it safer that way, somehow. You can't be singled out as a slut if there's a huge group of you all desiring the same idol. Movie stars are ideal for this. So sometimes films that aren't even necessarily *about* desire per se can be revealing in terms of female audiences and their desires.

The erotic thriller had a moment of intense success during the nineties. To you, what about the genre makes it so revolutionary and compelling?

I mean, some of them aren't revolutionary at all, but reactionary when it comes to women's roles - especially stuff like "Fatal Attraction", which goes above and beyond to vilify and punish the sexually active, independent career woman who exists outside the traditional family.

Having said that, the best of them - like "The Last Seduction" or "Bound", for example - caricature men as these easily-fooled and simplistic sex-starved beings who smart women can use to their own ends. But erotic thrillers are often so schematic and so dominated by male filmmakers that it can be difficult to see real eroticism in them.

Where do you think the female gaze differs from the male gaze? And vice versa, where do they coalesce?

It's a complicated question. 'The male gaze' was a term coined by the incredible scholar Laura Mulvey, and her piece on it has defined so much of the cultural conversation about where the camera focuses its erotic energy and why. The female gaze is murkier in origin & meaning. Some use it just to mean a woman's directorial vision. Others to specify how a woman director may have a different way of seeing things, outside the traditional masculine way. Others think of it as a reversal of the male gaze, so – ogling men. I think the jury is still out on there being one unified definition. I'd always encourage any writer or curator using it to be specific in terms of what they mean for that reason!

And finally, how would you describe the topic of sex and desire through the female gaze on film to someone who has no interest in it? Or, why is it important and interesting? What is changing and morphing and what are we learning from the films themselves and the study of them?

Film is such a deeply affecting medium and it usually gets to us at a very tender age, so naturally I think it has an influence on the way we think about sex and sexuality. You don't have to be an expert on movies or particularly interested in female sexuality to see that; we all have our own stories or little moments onscreen that sparked something in us. I wanted to put that relationship under the lens, especially at a time when female pleasure and sex positivity feels important to focus on. The world and definitely the film industry are still profoundly unequal in terms of gender and sexuality, and so much of that is bleak, so why shouldn't we be able to make space for these conversations? With "She Found it at the Movies", I tried to get all the writers to hit the right balance between personal essay and larger cultural analysis. It's a really engaging way to read about our relationship to films and how they influence us.

"She Found it at the Movies", published by Red Press 31/01/2020 - available to order

Follow Christina on Twitter: @christinalefou

All images in this article are courtesy of Christina Newland and/or her book's publishing company, Red Press.

You can't be singled out as a slut if there's a huge group of you all desiring the same idol. Movie stars are ideal for this.

And I would love to hear about your experience compiling and creating your upcoming film season at the BFI, "Thirst: Female Desire on Screen" – what was involved, what did you want to generate (conversations, commentary, aesthetics)?

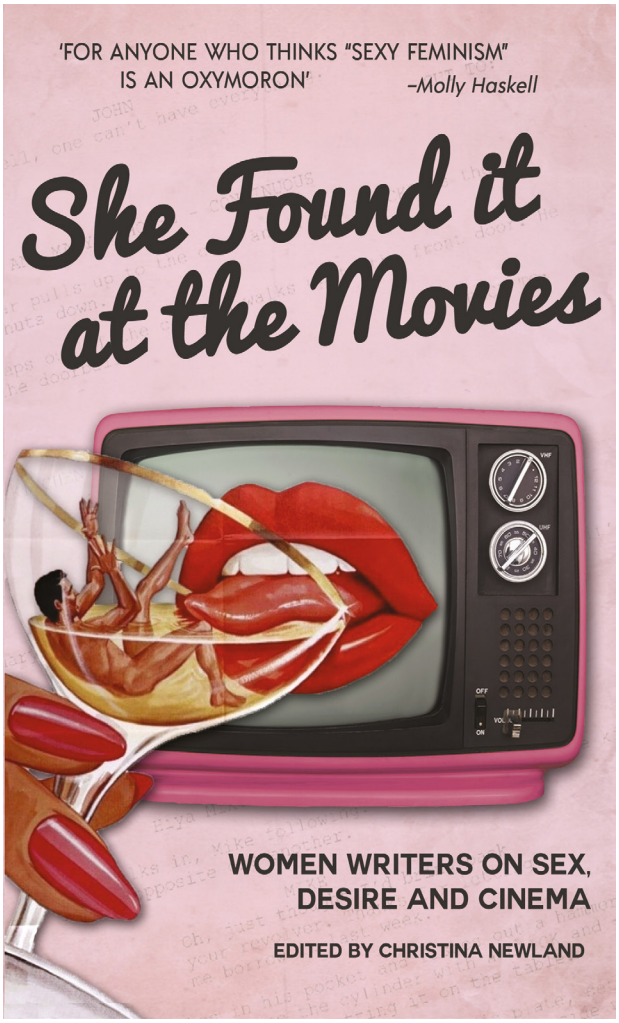
The idea of choosing a dozen movies to represent the subjects in the book and across the topic of female desire was daunting. It's basically impossible to do. But I tried to pick a mixture of populist Hollywood choices that speak to female audience members' experiences - "The Way We Were", "Magic Mike XXL" - with stories about sexual awakening from female directors - "Pariah", "Diary of a Teenage Girl" - and rarer gems, like the first film to feature a lesbian kiss, "Madchen in Uniform" (1931), or "Instinct", a Dutch film from 2019 about falling in lust with a convicted sex offender. That last one is pretty shocking and transgressive. Not everyone will agree with or like all my choices, particularly because desire is so incredibly complex and subjective, but that's why I always wanted it to be a season with lively conversation built into it. That's why there are so many discussion events with audiences in the season. There's no one answer. It was never about me curating a definitive season and telling people what was what. It's about asking questions, and a multiplicity of voices.

What inspires you and what stimulates you creatively and intellectually?

Just depends on the day, but: lively debates with cinephile friends, travelling, watching old films, reading as many different types of writing as I can.

Who are your favourite cinematic and literary voices about desire?

In literature, definitely Anais Nin. Her erotica is great, but so is her writing about the act of looking and just enjoying that. Cinematically, Catherine Breillat and Claire Denis are remarkable.



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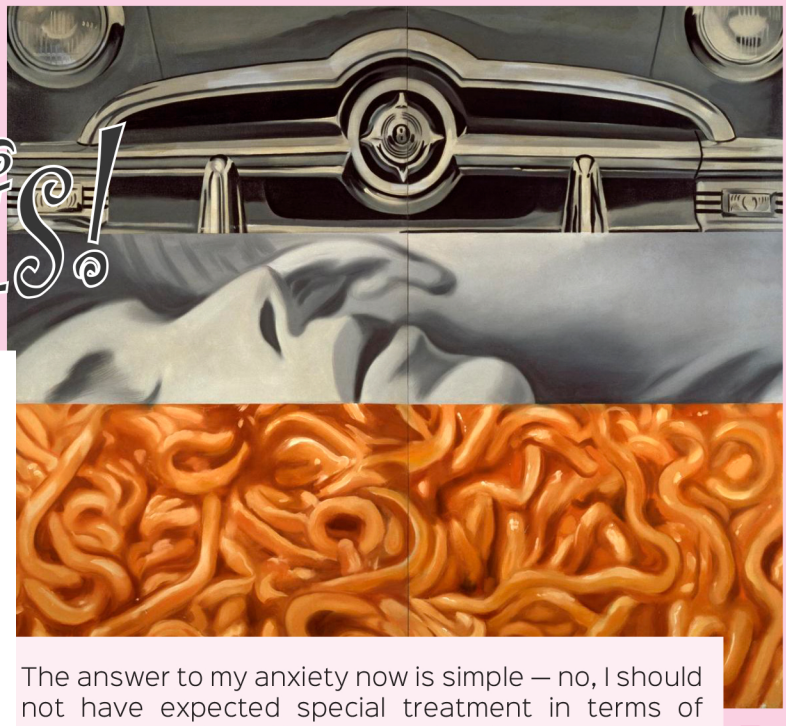

I Love You with My Ford, 1961. Oil on canvas. 82 3/4" x 93 1/2" (210.2 x 237.5 cm). Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

It is embarrassing to admit, but I always have expectations for Valentines. No, no please. Don't tell me that it is just a made up capitalist holiday — I KNOW THAT. My friends, readers and parents know that. The latter company knew that so well, they would always try to protect my sisters and I by treating us the 14th as all-you-can-eat holiday. We would pick an institution, usually a pizza place or a sushi restaurant, and feast. Now, that we all have moved out and are in romantic relationships ourselves, through my 22-year-old eyes I realise how much I miss eating great food with no fear of being broke for the rest of the month.

During my time in London, I have crafted a list of hypothetical future dinner locations. I fetishise about those dream locations quite often. I imagine myself in my forties, working as a marketing consultant, or a publishing executive, or occupying some other classic well-payed position in London, having Saturday lunch at Salon and casual dinners at Quo Vadis. In those dreams, I am usually drenched in Neroli, wrapped in black cashmere and accompanied by a good looking persona, but that is the material for another article. My point is, that great London restaurants like Leroy, Westerns Laundry, Lyle's, etc. are a distant cry for my purse. Sometimes I feel like meal-deals and Krishna's lunch will never end, and my restaurant list will die with me. Eating interesting good quality food outside the comfort of one's dining room or library desk, is a dream for so many young people, and I struggle to normalise that in my brain.

The struggle of craving pleasant eating experiences but rarely being able to afford them started bothering me a week before the V day. Did I want to have some light nigiri that tastes like the ocean and a little bit of airy, delicious sake? Oh, yes. Could I actually afford it? Did I have to save up for the meal and carefully manage my budged after a dinner date? I could not afford it, but I thought that if so many of international students from my feed seem to dine out weekly, maybe I could take the risk. When my boyfriend sent me the menu of Asakusa, it looked a bit too pricy for a ££ ranked restaurant, but I swallowed my concerns. Instead, I caught a horrifying thought crossing my mind — 'maybe he will pay tonight?'

I felt embarrassed by the thought, but it would be lying to say I wasn't hoping. It was Valentines, the most stupid day of the entire year that can make everyone disappointed in different ways, and I thought skipping bill-splitting was on the table that night. After all, I did grow up in Lithuania, where staggering gender inequality is very much alive, after 16 years in the EU.

By: Aistė Bakutytė

Edited: Halim Kim

The answer to my anxiety now is simple — no, I should not have expected special treatment in terms of economics, I should have voiced my financial worries and picked a different place. But at the moment, when my evening companion was ordering quite a lot of starters and asking if I'd like more sake, I thought the night will take a different turn.

As the days passed and discounted heart-shaped chocolate boxes filled my cupboard, I inquired my friends in relationships what their thoughts were at the Valentines table. As expected, there were several teams: the ones who were ready to pay for themselves, but knew that their bills will be covered anyways; the ones who always choose to pay for themselves, no matter the circumstances, and the anxious crowd — people, who would pay, but on some level expect to be paid for, if they are taken to an expensive restaurant by a more affluent partner. The interviewees fell into further categories — the ones who eat out often and earn the same amount as their partners tend to have no expectation for the bill, and couples from different economic backgrounds felt like they often can't keep up with their loved one's dining preferences.

More than half of my female friends, even the ones who earn more than a living wage, stated that deep down they like when their bill is covered. When I asked why, some of them stated that they felt that their partners were earning more and could cover more, they felt like they were influenced by social norms and definition of masculinity, and have such expectations almost unconsciously. My sister even stated that for some of her boyfriends, who struggled to express their feelings verbally, covering the bill was a way to communicate love and admiration.

The 'bill' issue concerns predominately women, which leads to the wider horizons of income inequality. Income inequality, whether you are single or in a relationship, is an underexposed component of the Valentines Anxiety™. In 2020, when a living wage barely covers rent and every human being in Britain is rated, like a restaurant, by the perverse points-based system, thousands of lovers reaching for a bill are dreaming to hear — 'No worries, I got this!'

INTERVIEW AND WORDS: HALIM KIM
EDITED: AMIKA MOSER

ALL PHOTOS (INCLUDING COVER):
HENDRIK SCHNEIDER

BE MORE LIKE RINA SAWAYAMA

I came across Rina in the most gen z way possible – scrolling through Instagram. Her single "STFU!" had just come out and was widely praised across social media. The enthusiasm I felt seeing a face that resembled mine turned into a full-fledged fan girl obsession as I indulged myself with everything from her earlier works to her Youtube series RINA TV.

Rina Sawayama has worked from the bottom up starting her journey into music with her hip hop group Lazy Lion back when she studied at Cambridge University. She officially debuted as a musician in 2013 with her single "Sleeping in Walking". Rina has since then released multiple singles and an EP titled "RINA" in 2017 that includes iconic bops such as "Cyber Stockholm Syndrome" and "Alterlife".

However, 2019 was definitely the artist's best year yet. Not only did she release the hit single "STFU!", but she signed to Dirty Hit Records, joining the likes of The 1975 and The Japanese House. Rina was also named one of Japan's Vogue Women of the Year alongside influential Japanese women like actress, Hana Sugisaki, and the infamous organizing consultant, Marie Kondo. When asked about the occasion, Rina felt honoured and thankful for Japanese encouragement. "I did this documentary in Japan that was aired six months ago," Rina tells Strand. "That was the first time I've ever done proper Japanese press and it was really cool. I was really scared that people would hate me from that documentary because I was quite outspoken, but the response was incredible – Japan gave me huge support."

What gravitated me towards her initially was how relatable her music was. "I want to develop my songwriting in a way that still talks about wider issues while still trying to keep it quite personal," she says. Her single "STFU!" does exactly this. Through her powerful, metal-inspired number, Rina tackles microaggression towards east-Asian people in the most realistic way possible. The "STFU!" music video adds to this kicking off with a hilarious yet hauntingly familiar first date between Rina and a white man at a Japanese restaurant. The man continuously blasts ignorant remarks asking Rina if she has been to the Wagamama's in Heathrow and how he's writing a "fan-fiction piece but from the perspective of like, a little Japanese woman." Rina explains: "the whole dialogue was kind of born from conversations that I've had, and other friends have experienced," She raises the point that racism takes all forms and that just because an offence disguises itself "casual racism" doesn't mean it should be excused. Through "STFU!", Rina creates a safe space for the East-Asian community to deal with the aggression through humour.

"I FELT I WAS VERY TORN BETWEEN TWO WORLDS, BUT I THINK THE ACT OF SONGWRITING HAS BROUGHT IT TOGETHER."

Her first single of 2020 "Comme des Garçons" touches on the topic of gendered confidence. The song stemmed from a discussion with producer and song-writer Nicole Morier on a male politician's loss during the US primaries, "she was talking about how interesting it was that this guy lost but he had this attitude that he was born to win it." This idea of male confidence is what Rina taps into.

Her debut album SAWAYAMA scheduled for release on 17 April examines another theme that hits closer to home. “I think the overall theme is family and identity, but I want to discuss that topic in a way that hasn’t been discussed before,” Rina claims. “I come from a single-parent family and I never understood the other side, so it was interesting to put that into song.” She uses this album as an opportunity to explore where she sits between the black and white in the world and her family.

The singer-songwriter adds that her childhood and teenage years greatly shaped who she is today. Rina was exposed to both Japanese and British culture moving to the UK when she was young due to her father’s work. Attending an UK-based Japanese school then transferring to an English one gave Rina access to the best of both worlds. She was influenced by Japanese television and music but was also familiar with pop musicians like Britney Spears, “I guess all of it kind of formed into my songwriting now”. However, Rina admits that being a part of two cultures was never easy, “I felt I was very torn between two worlds, but I think the act of songwriting has brought it together.”

When asked about her favourite track on the new album, Rina struggled finally stating that although she’s proud of the full album, track 8 is one of her biggest “songwriting feats”. The song in question “is about being a bad friend,” she says.

Rina is one of many East-Asian artists that has risen to the spotlight in recent years. “A couple of years ago I felt that we’re not represented at all and that’s already changed,” she states. “I’m really happy to see more faces that look like me,” she says naming the media collective 88rising and indie-pop musicians such as Mitski and Japanese Breakfast. And it’s clear that artists like Rina are extremely influential. “It’s already spawning a whole generation of young people who are Asian and who are inspired for music as a career.”

Although the music industry is making significant advances in inclusivity, there are still areas that could be worked on such as sexism. Discussing her personal experiences, she states that she was lucky to have a team around her who are politically aligned with her and “all about inclusivity and diversity”. However, Rina brings up instances where she has seen it around her and how institutionalized sexism is engrained in the industry from banter to actual maltreatment of women. The example she gave of her tour manager shows this clearly, “She’s the point of contact for like months and the venue will be like ‘who’s this? Is it your friend?’ or just won’t talk to her with any respect.” Rina also addresses how female musicians are often undermined for their work, despite being business leaders. “Every single pop artist is like a CEO and they employ people so don’t think they’re stupid.”

This idea of how artists treat music as a business is what Rina wishes she knew when she was starting out as an up and coming musician. When listing tips and tricks for aspiring artists she provides great advice “if you want to make a job out of your music then treat it like a job – treat yourself like a business rather than an artist.” Rina also highlights the importance of networking and collaborating with as many people as possible to achieve your goals.

A strong businesswoman and an amazing artist, Rina has certainly used this advice to make her dream a reality.

ESSAY

IN BLOOM: YOUNG WOMEN IN THE AGE OF UNCERTAINTY

To have been born in the late 1990s or early 2000s carries with it implications of countless advantages, but as with every other generation, the weight of significant concerns as well. The foundations of our generation's experience have largely been framed by globalisation reaching new heights and a consequential instability and uncertainty in the face of change. This has tinted our outlook and experience of life, namely with a sense of unease and restlessness with regards to the future.

BY: EGLANTINE CHAHMERIAN

EDITED: ISSABELLA ORLANDO & HALIM KIM

Some of the challenges we have faced as a generation have come to seem symptomatic of the inconsistency of our times. To have grown up during such a period in history, namely with women attaining recognition and agency to a greater extent than ever before, has brought about its own particularities. We've garnered the reputation of being self-expressive, open-minded digital natives, though also self-centred and entitled. Yet, these idiosyncrasies also come in the form of difficulties we face in constructing and imagining our futures on seemingly precarious grounds. The world in flux and the industries within it set a tumultuous terrain as the foundations on which we are to build ourselves and our careers. In turn, making it all the more challenging to nurture a sense of personal identity, when everything around us is subject to change. The limitations or absence of external security makes for somewhat unfavourable conditions for our development as young adults, and especially for women, who stand in the centre of push-pull motions determining our rights and role in society, thus bearing much of the weight of change. Cultivating a sense of self seems essential to withstanding the pressure imposed by these circumstances.

Part of the problem might be that being hopeful and ambitious does not guarantee a result that might be deemed worthwhile, nor assures us that we will reap what we have sown to begin with. This is especially the case for women trying to establish a career as ambition is often reduced to fantasy and hopefulness to a lack of rational thinking. These issues may find their origin partly in the constant presence of global concerns, such as the planet 'dying'. In fact, the possibility that within our lifetimes we may see environmental collapse brings about a sense of catastrophe to the present, and to the decisions we make regarding our futures. In this way, these shifts in the collective consciousness and the functioning of society has proved itself greatly influential in the rise of climate anxiety within our generation. This term underlines the notion of fighting for a future when there may not be a future, which can, in turn, instigate existential anxiety – if there is nothing to live for, we begin to question our purpose and search for meaning. Although such questions burden our young minds, this form of anxious concern holds value. Considering the nature of existence, and anxiousness more specifically, can function as a tool for self-awareness and understanding. In this way, the anxious mind can alter one's perception of reality, which can be an opportunity for growth, though not one without growing pains.

It seems fundamental to consider what we fear, and to see that these concerns are rooted in a fear of loss, and that what we apprehend tends to be what we desire. To be afraid to lose what we want most in life can rob us of ambition, and perhaps most fundamentally, of hope. This is reflective of recent political and judicial events, particularly in the United States, in which politicians are questioning and reversing certain laws pertaining to women's health and access to appropriate, specialised healthcare, in addition to expressing resistance towards recognising women's rights as equal to that of men within the U.S. constitution. This speaks volumes about the lack of politico-judicial safety and security affecting women in particular, and the reverberations of such conditions.

Anxious feelings crop up at the glimpse of hope, especially that for a fairer world, and grows as we believe it to slip through one's fingers at the sleight of a hand, leaving any attempts at grasping the ideal, or the desirable, to dissipate. But the anxieties we face and the sheer potentiality they reflect can make us better informed as we attempt to understand how they arise. Furthermore, although it is much easier to stay within the comfort of the conventional, it is crisis which often pushes us to change. We wish so strongly to be a part of something beyond ourselves that we often prefer to stick to the status quo than tap into our power to challenge the standards. As with women from generations before us, the only way to keep the movement alive is to stay in motion ourselves.

So perhaps we must rephrase this uncertainty and see it rather as mystery – perceiving it as something that has yet to unfold or something we are yet to understand or experience. The idea of mystery frames these concerns in a way that uncertainty, with its accompanying notions of boundlessness and inertia, does not. This can help us to channel our fear and to come to appreciate the absence of guarantees and see this as an opportunity to take risks and free ourselves from the illusion of security and confines of outdated ways of being. Fears can fuel change and initiative, through understanding and patience. In a world that is constantly shifting, opportunities arise continuously, we can choose to tap into this, rather than to sit back in fear. As young women in 2020, it is imperative for us to continue to encourage each other, enable ourselves to feel empowered by the endless possibilities and for our success to be seen.

PHOTOS: EGLANTINE CHAHMERIAN

IN CONVERSATION WITH DIRECTOR AND WRITER OF V&V, MISHA PINNINGTON

In a rehearsal studio near Regents Park, the director and writer of V&V, Misha Pinnington, is doing a line run-through with her cast. The walls are covered in doodle-esque painting and some kind of art project made with old keys. String is strung up on one side of the room. Misha cuts a modest, self assured figure in a sports bomber with messily dyed grey-blonde hair. She sits me on a red mattress in the corner of the studio with a cup of tea. Sunlight, city trees and bare brick walls slate through the old-fashioned windows.

Misha tells me how V&V was originally inspired by reading Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf's love letters during her English undergraduate degree - "I remember studying it at uni and thinking I really want to see this on its feet, I want to see this on stage." Her enthusiasm for the letters is clear as she quotes the perhaps most well known fragment of Woolf's correspondence "I like your energy. I love your legs. I long to see you." She grins telling me the letters are

"...really saucy, really sexy, really put our sexting to shame these days."

Vita and Virginia's letters have become iconic in recent years with everything from a 2018 film based on them to Twitter bots spewing out fragments. "Woolf is hot right now" Misha says. "I don't know what it is. I think with the whole MeToo movement happening, people are relating more to her writing." I ask what drew her to the larger than life historic figures. "The whole point of the play is you have both your real self and your curated self. I'm fascinated with public personas and private ones. We know a lot about public Virginia and public Vita. We don't know about their private sides. We don't know about their insecurities. We see them as ideas and icons as opposed to actual human beings."

V&V parallels a dramatic enactment of Vita and Virginia's letters, insights into their private lives, with the hurdles of a modern day online relationship. "What I'm exploring is letter writing a hundred years ago and messaging now and whether we can really communicate or not" Misha says of her choice to weave together the two narratives. "Whilst I like the interplay between the past and the present, I don't want direct parallels. I think that would be unrealistic." Misha describes how she wanted Mia and Lottie's modern day story of long distance love, all interfaced through technology, to be more relatable to the audience. "You send a message to someone you really fancy but it's heavily curated. Like you put a 'c' next to your 'x"s to make it look a bit more casual."

Misha has worked on short films before but this is her first theatrical piece. "For this story, it works as theatre because of that space. I want the audience to really be there in the middle. Because even when they were writing the letters there was a public face to it, they're competing for audience, for attention." The letters add another element of tension to the play, bridging the distance between the actors not physically, but verbally. "I wanted to see spatially how it turned out. I love the idea of two people almost touching but not."

BY: OLIVE FRANKLIN EDITED: KETKI MAHABALESHWARKAR

LOGO DESIGN: KATIE ALLEN - PHOTOS: JESSICA VOICU

I ask Misha if she thinks our communication has really broken down compared to 19th century letter writing. “Every word that Vita and Virginia are writing is so meaningful and so calculated. In the present day narrative of the play, there’s a lot of throwaway comments, lol, yeah, cool. I mean, think of housemate drama— whenever it gets onto WhatsApp it becomes so passive aggressive. Things go much better when people meet in person.”

Despite claiming to love letter-writing, Misha talks about how letters can obscure us from each other as much as technology. “Having read all of the letters you can’t tell Virginia’s having a really bad time, it would be hard for Vita to know.” She says referencing Woolf’s suicide. “We’re having a conversation here and we’re both in the same moment.” She gestures to the rehearsal room, the mattress, the cups of tea. “Whereas if I’m messaging you, you could be in a completely different world to me. You can’t really tell unless you’re there. That’s what I think I wanted to say in the end: look, this is our culture now, our digital culture, but our human side can still win through, despite all that distance.”

ART, ACTIVISM, AND THE AGE OF INCLUSIVITY

INTERVIEW WITH ELLIE TURLEY

Through a contemporary lens, female representation in the art world is diverse and progressive. There are more artists than ever before working across all platforms, one being social media. Art has become a medium of acceptance, rather than limits, where socio-political issues can be presented in an accessible form. However, considering the power of protest in the progression of female influence in art is essential. Without the voices (or in this case, animalistic noises) of rebellion, would the world of art see institutional change?

A recent exhibit at the Tate Modern highlights the work of the anonymous group 'Guerrilla Girls'. Through donning gorilla masks, this group of artists post blazing feminist slogans in the form of billboards, posters, and public appearances. The group was formed in 1975 in New York City dubbed the cultural centre of the western world – one only has to walk the streets of 53rd to find The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Met, and many others. These museums are the setting to the Guerrilla Girls' mission of 'culture-jamming'. Culture-jamming is a form of subvertising, a practise of criticising often corporate advertising in the mass media. It in itself is a form of artwork through parody encouraging self-reflection. This jamming is how the Guerrilla Girls have been criticising the flaws in representation, where 'billionaires defined what our visual culture is'.

In the Tate's video interview, Guerrilla Girls: You have to Question what you See, the mask-donned members explained that art was a white masculine sphere of influence with no one was asking why. The significant lack of female artists and artists of colour was continuously excused, despite the existence of talented female and minority creatives. The group published lists of names, galleries, and statistics that highlighted the underrepresentation occurring in almost every gallery in New York City. Combining comedy, satire, and provocative slogans, the Guerrilla Girls aimed to produce digestible material that would pressure those in all tiers of the art world: the buyer, seller, collector, and gallery owner. At its core, the group wants to provoke, not pressure, people to question what is not there, what they are not seeing, when it should be there.

"ART CAN BE REVOLUTIONARY, AND IT IS IN AN ERA OF INCLUSION, COLLABORATION, AND DIVERSITY. IT TRULY SEEMS THAT THE BRUSH IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD IN THE VEHICLE OF PROTEST."

BY: KETKI MAHABALESHWARKAR
EDITED: GODELIEVE DE BREE AND HALIM KIM

To continue this exploration of activism in art, I spoke to artist Ellie Turley, who is based in South London. We spoke extensively about her projects' focus on female portrayal in mass media and the importance of protest.

Q: Firstly, what would you say your work is focused on?
E: I tend to explore women's place in society, body-image, lesbianism and how that's all portrayed in the media. I use childhood brands and motifs to make it more relatable.

Q: In your opinion, why is art such a powerful medium for modern society? How do you use it to convey your desired message?

E: It's nice that art is a medium for people can look at. I think a visual presentation is so powerful in conveying important messages of feminism and politics. At first sight, it's a standard piece of art, yet it's charged with a specific message or intent, created by the artist. Art is effective because one can choose to look at it. It's both in your face and not, do you know what I mean? It's more sublime than yelling your opinion yet it can still be explicit. Someone has to step back and look at it. Despite its creation being subjective, it's accessible to all in its form.

Q: Why do you choose to focus on women's portrayal in media in particular?

E: I'd say that through experiences in own life, I've realised that there's one 'idealistic' way of portraying women: as sex sirens or inherently feminine characters. There is definitely an idea of a prescribed womanhood. I drew literary influence from Frankenstein, where the media is Victor Frankenstein who chooses specific parts of women to build an ideal image. It's a metaphor for how society sees appearance as somehow fulfilling a checklist.

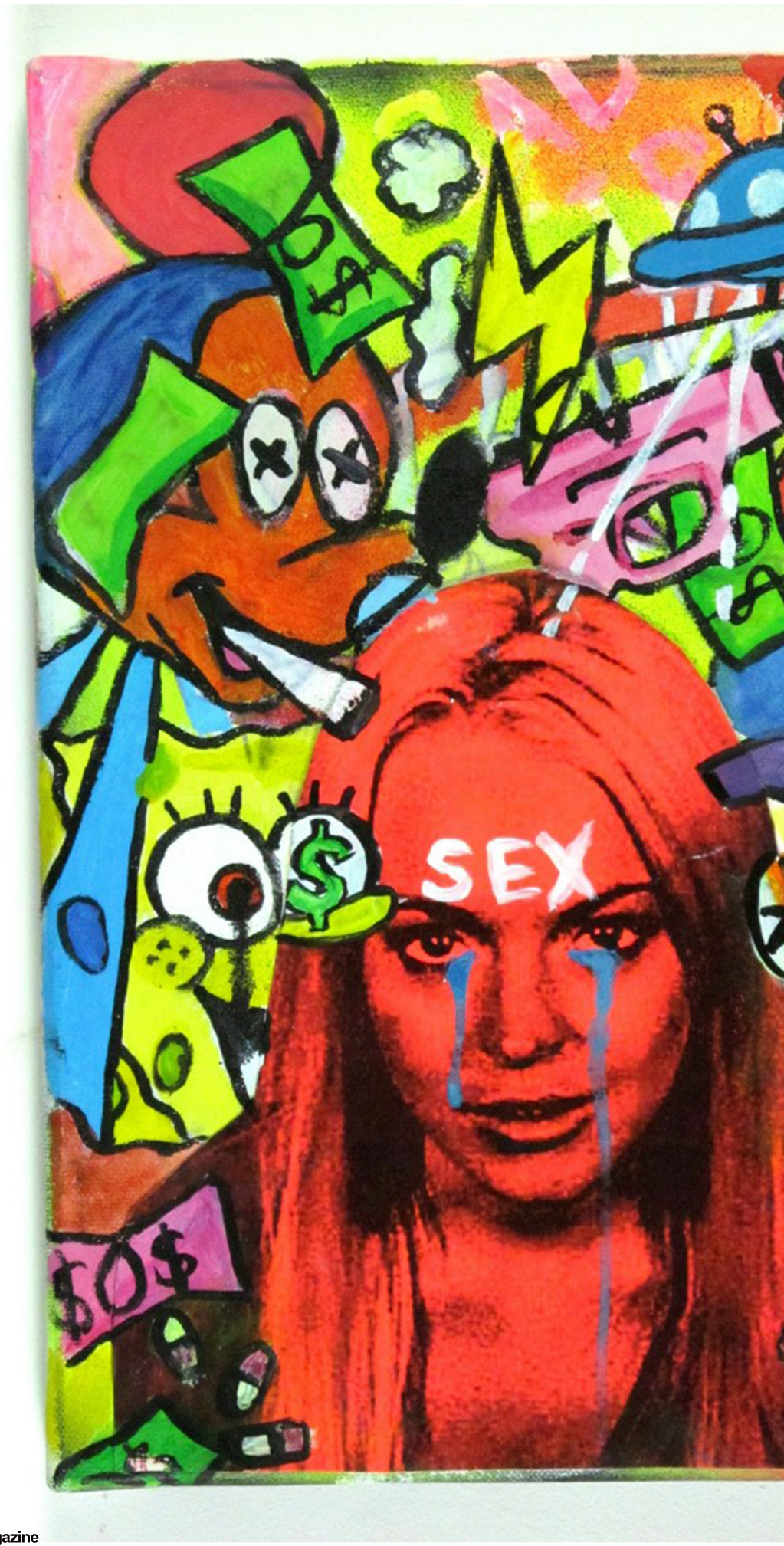

IMAGE CREDIT:
Ellie Turley (2018)
"shut up mum im 13 now" - Beauty Quest series.
Showcased at the 'Her Truth' exhibition, Hackney
Medium: Spray paint and Acrylic
Ellie Turley
'Only thing that's changed is the date' - (2018)
Acrylic on Canvas
ADAPTED IMAGE: Robbie Fimmano via Interview Magazine

Q: In your recent 'IKEA build-a-bitch' project, how do you explore this further?

E: The whole project is about the idea that modern society can building a woman, who is accessible and easily marketable, much like IKEA products. We truly live in a 'flatpack society' – everything is easily consumable, including products to improve self-image. This irony is portrayed in my project. These 'doll' women don't speak back, they're ready to buy, and are identical; exactly what the media seems to want.

Q: There has certainly been progress in the art community with representation and diversity. Have you seen this change? And how can one contribute to it?

E: Like the Guerrilla Girls emphasised, art can be a medium of activism. I aspire to reflect my desire for change in my artwork. I have definitely seen change in the industry where there has been an increase in collaborations with female and LGBTQ+ artists. I think collaboration is so powerful because it shows the existence of a shared goal. I think a lot about where I show my art, like at other feminist organisations. Spaces that invite and attract a diverse crowd is what my art is about: diversity and inclusion. Saying that, it's also great to show my art to those who may disagree because it's still making a statement, through their shock or discomfort. I'm fascinated about how paint on a piece of canvas can make people so uncomfortable.

The Guerrilla Girls exist as the 'conscious of the art world': a force to remind us of the underrepresentation of women and minorities in art. Their work has inspired artists like Turley to use art as a force for activism. Art has a distinct ability to invoke reactions, which only emphasises the power of the medium. Art can be revolutionary, and it is in an era of inclusion, collaboration, and diversity. It truly seems that the brush is mightier than the sword in the vehicle of protest.

Tate exhibition link:
https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/guerrilla-girls-6858/guerrilla-girls-interview-tateshots
Ellie's Instagram: @ellie.turley

https://www.thestrandmagazine.com