

GUERILLA WARFARE:
REPRESENTING THE OTHER IN CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUMS

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INTRODUCTION

In 1989, the Guerrilla Girls created their iconic billboard that said, “Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?” With a statistic below that said only 5% of the artists in the Modern art section are women while 85% of the nudes are female (Manchester, 2005). Since that billboard, there has been an increase around awareness for representation issues within museums. For example, the Baltimore Museum of Art plans to only acquire art made by women for the year of 2020 (Schmidt, 2019). Despite this push towards equality, there is still disparity in representation for women identifying and non-male artists.

I use the term ‘women identifying’ to be inclusionary of trans and intersex women. The term makes the distinction that we are talking about gender, not biological sex. Non-male is used as an inclusionary term for those that may not identify as women but also don’t only identify as men, including identities such as non-binary, gender-nonconforming and gender-fluid. These identities are ‘othered’ within contemporary art museums, meaning that work by them is less often presented within the context of galleries and museums. Thereby sending the message that their art and identities are valued less by the system and people that decide what art is selected for contemporary settings. Through a literature review, I investigate the disparity in representation for women identifying and non-male artists, how this is built on institutional bias and how it can be combated with curatorial intervention.

To prove this, I answer three questions: is there a lack of representation for women-identifying and non-male artists? Does this lack of representation come from institutional bias and what are possible solutions to this bias in contemporary art museums? To find the answers, I examine a series of texts including *The Birth of the Museum* by Tony Bennett and varying articles about the lack of representation for women-identifying and non-male artists, statistics for

representation, articles about exhibits with diverse identities and articles that talk about minority women artists' struggles. Also, there are articles about why representation matters in terms of educating youth and curatorial intervention. Before addressing my research questions, it is essential to understand the foundation of this paper. This foundation includes defining contemporary art, the methodology of this project and theoretical frame behind it. Without a foundation in these areas, the following sections hold no weight. Our first stop is defining the contemporary art context.

It is necessary to define contemporary art before continuing with this investigation. Although there is no set start date for contemporary art, it is generally agreed to have started in the 1970s and represents our current movement. 'Movements' is a term used to describe the approximate period art is from and the accompanying style, characteristics, or issues it addresses. Artists react to the world around them, so movements of art are often influenced by what is happening historically. For example, the impressionist movement, which happened in France in the 1860s and 70s is characterized by the style of painting that focused on the impression of an image as opposed to reality. This came as a direct counteract to the prior focus on realism which focused on getting art to match reality's conventions. There was a governmental mandated style that forced artists to adhere to realism. Impressionism was born as a counteract to that mandate (Sheposh, 2017).

Contemporary art is different from previous movements because it isn't defined by a single medium or style. Instead it encompasses multiple trends that come from challenging the style before them. Contemporary artists use a wide variety of mediums including more traditional ones such as painting, sculpture, photography and more recent developments such as computer based art, natural objects, and performance art that uses the human body. Despite the

lack of unifying medium that we see in previous movements, contemporary art is connected by a general focus on concept being the most important part of the work and the physical aspect of the work, becomes a way to get across those ideas (Sheposh, 2017). Now that contemporary art is defined, it is vital to explain *why* contemporary art is the context of this project. Art has existed for as long as humans have and it is impossible to acknowledge women's roles as artists throughout time within one paper. By focusing in on contemporary art we narrow the scope of time, giving a specific context of inequalities contemporary women are facing. Also, in looking at contemporary art, we aim to correct the current path of inequality we are on, not undo the past. Now that the context of contemporary art is understood, the larger picture of how this research is conducted needs to be discussed.

This project is a literature review and uses that methodical frame work to investigate issues of representation for women identifying and non-male artists. This project is best suited to a literature review because it creates a landscape of what literature and examples are out there that illustrate the issue of representation at hand. A literature review collects and presents literature surrounding one topic. It critically assesses the information present, acknowledging the limitations the research may present (Feak & Swales, 2009). The review is organized in a way that shows the landscape surrounding research around inequality of representation and possible solutions.

Literature reviews use inductive as opposed to deductive reasoning to create their argument. Inductive reasoning means using specific evidence together to come to a larger conclusion (Feak & Swales, 2009). In the case of my project, this means using specific texts and evidence from them to create a larger claim about inequality in representation of artists in art museums. When all the specific evidence of lacking representation comes together, it will prove

that there is an issue across the board and create a stronger argument for reform. Inductive reasoning can be used to answer my research questions; is there a lack of representation for women identifying and non-male artists? Does this lack of representation come from institutional bias and what are possible solutions to this bias in contemporary art museums?

These research questions do not require causal claims, thus aligning with the methodology of a literature review. Causal I claims require that one specific variable causes the result of another (Freak & Swales, 2009). In my project this would be saying the institution of art museums causes lack of diversity in artists presented in their exhibits. While that may be true, that is just one factor in a larger pool of variables that all contribute to the lack of representation including, institutional bias, curatorial design, lack of support groups for diverse artists, gender bias in art market, and racial bias. This literature review may show correlation between these factors and representation, not direct causation.

Another essential way to answer my research question is with data. One type of data I am using for my thesis research is articles that show specific exhibitions or curatorial endeavors that combat the lack of representation for women identifying and non-male artists. These examples are qualitative meaning they explain what characteristics representation has and not specific numbers related to it. This kind of data allows me to create a landscape of different identity groups and ways to represent them. I also have quantifiable data that shows numbers behind representation bias within the art world. These statistics can prove that there is a disparity in representation of women and non-male artists. Both quantifiable and qualitative evidence will help me prove my claim about representation.

To find this data, I collected from the database search engine EBSCO Discovery Service, which allows you to search many databases at once and the library catalog. This resulted in

obtaining many online articles and essays directly from the site. Some of the sources I found were books in the library that I checked out and began researching. Other articles needed to be requested through inter-library loan that allowed me to pull from resources we do not have available at this school. I found the articles in the databases by researching key words around my research questions such as representation, art museum as an institution, and gender. Through this, I compiled a large pool of research that supports my thesis surrounding the concept of representation.

To present this information, the essay is broken up into different sections. These sections will include the formation of the museum, women's roles, contemporary bias, reform, and curation as a solution. This essay will include specific examples for each of these sections that address each of the mentioned topics, as well as theories that support the information. By the end, the essay will prove that there is disparity in representation for women and non-male artists, exhibits that do showcase diverse voices, ways curators can fight back and why all this all matters. Understanding what a literature review is allows us to proceed to the theoretical framework that this project is based on. Theoretical framework provides the theories and theorist that this paper is built on, giving context and reason to my thesis.

The theoretical framework of this paper is based in feminist theory, including feminist art history, intersectional identities, and Butler's conception of gender trouble. On a foundational level, feminism advocates for women's equality and fight against oppression. There are different definitions, motivations and methods that feminists use to fight for their goal of equality (Laughey, 2007). This project uses feminism to advocate for the equality of artists regardless of gender while acknowledging how there is institutions bias against women identifying and non-

male artists. A future evaluation of where in the feminist landscape this paper fits will be discussed later.

Another theory used for this research is cultural studies. Cultural studies looks at the social, political, and historical factors that create change. Cultural studies also has ties to structuralism and poststructuralism. Poststructuralism is interested in the power of discourse and how it can shape reality. This framework believes that theory and reality are inseparable (Murphy, 1992). These schools of thought will be used when investigating Tony Bennett's work, *The Birth of the Museum* and Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. Both works investigate how structures within institutions such as museums and prisons, create power relationships.

The theoretical framework of the Frankfurt School is also present within this work. This school of thought is based in a combination of subjects including philosophy, psychoanalysis, economics, critical theory and Marxism (McLaughlin, 1999). It seeks to create change through primarily critical theory. Critical theory is described as looking at societal relationships and how the lower class is exploited or disadvantaged (Wellmer, 2014). Three theorist that are in the Frankfurt school and work to support this argument are Adorno, Horkheimer, and Benjamin. Adorno and Horkheimer's theory of high and low culture and Benjamin's theory of mechanical reproduction will be discussed later and how they relate to supporting this argument surrounding representation of women identifying and non-male artists.

In conclusion, theories surrounding culture and feminism can be used to show some of the foundational issues. These issues include sexism that continues into today despite efforts of feminists to stop it and bias in taste as curated by elites. I will use these theories and standpoints to support why it is important to fight for representation of women identifying and non-male

artists in art museums. Understanding the theories behind these issues allows for a better fight against the problems they discuss.

Our first stop on the road to equality is the formation of museums, elitist values and how they shape what we value in art. This is then followed by women's roles in art museums: bodies and minds. The next section covers contemporary bias, intersectional identities and diversity of art. The fourth section goes over why diversity matters for museums as educational tools and curatorial intervention. The final section is my own intervention, creation of a performance exhibition. These sections come together to form an argument for diverse representation of artists regardless of gender and advocates for intervention through curation. With this in mind, it is important to start at the roots of inequality, the birth of the public museum.

SECTION ONE: THE FORMATION OF THE MUSEUM

The contemporary understanding of art museums is built on institutional bias. By understanding what the institutional foundation of museums are, it allows a contextualization of how contemporary art museums perpetuate inequality for artists. The pedagogical system as we know it today is entrenched in elitist values that not only tell the viewers what art they get to see but also how they behave and whose identities are valued. A text that encapsulates those ideas is Tony Bennett's book, *The Birth of the Museum*.

The Birth of the Museum explains changes in the eighteenth to early nineteenth century that formulated the contemporary concept of public museums. During this time, there was a shift from private collections to public museums. This was a governmental push that gave more of the working class an opportunity to see rare artifacts, great works of art and further their education. Despite the exciting prospects of de-privatizing collections, there were more complex motivations at work. This shift hoped to use these institutions of high culture to civilize the

population. These institutions were described as ‘high culture’ because they were cultivated by the taste of the elites, meaning that what the upper class valued was what the working class was told to value. By doing this, the government and the elites in control of governmental positions hoped to change the working classes’ behavior and ‘reform’ them to be more aligned with upper class values (Bennett, 1995).

Within these institutions, it was believed that the working classes’ exposure to the culture and ‘correct’ behaviors of the elites would cause them to lead a life of moral restraint and self-monitoring outside the museum. Bennett explains this by referencing Sir Henry Cole, a British cultural reformer, who says, “the museum would help the working class man choose a life characterized by moral restraint as preferable to the temptations of both bed and the ale house” (Bennett, 1995, pp.20). This quote illustrates how the elites saw activities such as drinking in a bar to be undesirable and they therefore wanted to show the working class a preferable way to life, according to their standards. This was inherently classist, by presuming the elitist way of life is the ideal way and is a goal to strive towards.

The idea of self-regulation and inner change was also reflected in changes to the prison system during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Bennett references Michel Foucault’s work which explains how prisons were reformed in the opposite direction as museums. Punishment of criminals went from public spectacle to privately handled in prisons. The new system saw solitary confinement as the best way for reformation because it would give them time to reflect and make inner changes (Foucault, 1995). This correlates to how the working class was meant to make inner changes by visiting museums. Through structural changes such as public museums and prisons, elites found ways to try and mold the working class as they saw fit. Although important to acknowledge, this focus on institutional bias in places like museums does not

account for other biases that effect opportunities for artists. However, it does lay a foundation of where this bias is built from. It is vital to acknowledge who was making these structural changes and their motivations. In the cases of the museum and prison, it was elites making these reforms to align with their own elitist tastes and values. These tastes and values are constructed and therefore can be deconstructed.

Social Construction of Taste and Values

The elites and classist standards that shape art museums as we know them today are entirely arbitrary. When visiting an art museum there is an assumption that whatever is within the walls of the sacred institution is ‘good’ art. To go even further, by being able to understand and appreciate that art, means the patron has ‘good’ taste. These preconceived notions are meaningless due to the fact that taste is not natural but created. Bourdieu discusses how culture is developed from social class by dividing capital into three distinctions, economic capital, social capital and cultural capital. For economic capital, this is what you have or don’t have. This goes alongside with social capital which is about who you know and is often influence by where you are financially. Social and economic capital come together to form cultural capital and this is how we arrive at the concept of taste (Bourdieu, 2002).

Taste is curated by economic and social class and aids in creating further separation between the upper, middle and lower class. In other words, dependent on what capital the person holds, is how they learn what to value, therefore creating taste. Learned taste means that according to your cultural capital, some artifacts are considered ‘good’ taste vs. ‘poor’ taste (Bourdieu, 2002). This brings us back to the art museum, where it is the elites deciding what art is in good taste and consequently, what art ends up in museums. By understanding that taste is

not natural, but created, it reminds us that behind all art in museums, there are people that put it there. These people can be influenced by biases such as personal taste along with other factors.

Another way to look at the arbitrary nature of value in art is through Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of 'highbrow' vs. 'lowbrow.' In their essay, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," they discuss this theory in terms of popular music. Serious music such as operas are considered 'highbrow' which works within upper class taste. This is compared to 'lowbrow,' which is popular music, and consumed by the masses. This distinction places people that consume 'lowbrow' culture as having less refined taste. 'Lowbrow' cultural products are often referred to as guilty pleasures. This means that consumers enjoy the product but feel like they should because of its low cultural value (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). The distinction of high vs. low culture puts cultural artifacts into a hierarchy of assumed value despite value being an arbitrary assertion. This connects to what we place in museums. Once art has been placed within the pedagogical setting, it automatically has assumed value which aligns with what the elites value.

This argument does not acknowledge the free will of art museum visitors. As a visitor, audiences of art museums have the choice of accepting the art presented to them as having inherent value or they can reject this. One might think of the popular phrase when walking through a contemporary art museums, "my toddler could do that." This rejects the art that seems too simple to be presented within the context of the museum. Even though patrons do have free will to make their own evaluation of art, they are still impacted by elites' systems of values. These systems are what decides what people see, so even if they are rejecting its value, they are still seeing it within the context of the institution. With this information, we can acknowledge that public art museums are built on institutional bias and elitists values. This system of bias and

elitism may have started in the eighteenth century but it continues until today. This next example places elitism into the contemporary context.

Contemporary Elitism

To put this concept of elitism in museums into contemporary context, Yuha Jung discusses the influence of class within art museums. In the chapter, “Class Exclusion,” they discuss their research done on the Avery Art Museum and the surrounding Midwestern community. In this study, they found three interrelated reasons as to why the Avery was viewed as an elitist institution by community members. These reasons included an elitist perception around the name of the museum, the type of exhibitions and programs offered and a rejection of visual arts in the community (Jung, 2014).

Art museums have a history of being perceived as elitist and tend to cater to society’s elite as we discussed with Bourdieu. The Avery came off as elitist to community members from its name and the architecture. The name “Avery” is connected to a private banking business owned by the Avery Family. This name connects to upper class individuals and therefore their values, setting the tone that if artists and community members are not a part of that group, it is off limits for them too (Jung, 2014).

The chapter also considers how exhibitions are presented and how presentations are never truly neutral. How curators and organizers decide to display art sends the message viewers should take from art and can aid in alienation for some viewers. For example, one label read: “Neoclassicists rejected the precious feminine, decadent Rococo style in favor to ancient Greco-Roman ideas...” (Jung, 2014, pp.135). Jung explains that this label includes word choices that are outside the comfortable vocabulary of the average visitors, alienating them from understanding the art in the ‘correct’ way, and making them feel like their own interpretations

are not valued there (2014). This supports the classist notions of what background patrons need to have to interact with art in the desired way by the elites that create exhibitions.

This relates to the ‘fear of art’ that was the last reason why the Avery was viewed as an elitist institution. As Bourdieu explained, the cultural capital of an individual affects what types of cultural knowledge they hold. Lower socioeconomic status means that some community members may not have the knowledge to access art in the same way as the upper and upper-middle class, which is who the museum is catered to. Jung concludes the chapter by explaining that museums like the Avery have the obligation to provide opportunities for all community members to engage with the art they present, not just the more affluent ones (Jung, 2014). Despite the Avery being only one contemporary example of elitism in art museums, it illustrates how the elitism present in the formation of the public museum is still prevalent.

As seen through the Avery, public art museums as we know them today are still built on institutional bias and elitist values. The foundation of where these biases come from is key to understanding not only how museums were shaped but by what biases lie at their core. While this acknowledges who is setting taste and values for institutions, it does not show what identities are ignored for the sake of elite values. For a better understanding of this, we will examine the role of women in art institutions.

SECTION TWO: WOMEN’S ROLES

Women in art institutions have not been seen as equal participants since the formation of the public art museum. This institutional foundation perpetuates inequality for women identifying as non-male artists through today. This foundation of inequality for women is discussed by Bennett in *The Birth of the Museum*. He notes that at the time of the shift to the public, women had been pushed out of the public sphere and into the private. The public sphere is where policy

making, politics and professionalism happens. Whereas, the private sphere has strong associations with the domestic. Women's association with the private sphere and domestic living meant that women's voices were heard less in public settings (Bennett, 1995). This is important to consider when thinking about women's presence in public art museums.

Women were encouraged to be visitors in museums but there were conditions placed around this. During the formation of the public museum, women were only encouraged to visit museums to make the space more reputable for men. Women's association with the home meant that when they are in the museum with their husbands, it aligned with home life values, preventing the space from becoming one of ill-repute. Bennett explains this by saying, women were allowed in as "culture's instruments rather than its targets" (Bennett, 1995, pp.33). This further reinforces that women were allowed into museums not as equals but as objects.

Although, the role of women at the formation of the museum is important to acknowledge, it needs to be understood within its own context of time. At the formation of the public museums in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth, women had not yet gained the right to vote. There was a precedent that women did not have the same legal rights or social standing compared to men. This prevalence of inequality for women and the fight against it, falls under the name feminism. The term feminism is an umbrella term that covers many issues within gender construction and the fight against inequality based on gender. In the "Feminisms and Gender" chapter in the *Key Themes in Media Theory* book, feminist media theory is introduced as analyzing gender and how media constructs gender. The chapter also makes the distinction that 'feminisms' is a preferred term over the singular feminism because of how far reaching the term is (Laughey, 2007). Feminism has always existed in some capacity or another but the most

familiar narrative categorizes waves of feminism in history that focuses on the last one hundred years.

The first-wave feminism fought for women's right to vote and the Suffragette movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They were successful in gaining the right to vote but inequality prevailed. In the 1960's came second wave feminism. This included the Women's Liberation Movement and advocated for employment rights and representation outside of the housewife role. Again, there were improvements for women's rights but not true equality. The next wave came in the 1990's with the third wave. This wave built on the past by focused on empowerment and expression of gender identity (Laughey, 2007).

It is unclear if we are in are still in third wave feminism or have moved on to the fourth wave but it is important to have a baseline of some of the major motivations and efforts of the past one hundred years. This narrative however does not always acknowledge identities that mainstream feminism left out. Despite women's roles at the formation of the public museum being outside of the traditional scope of feminism, it is still necessary to acknowledge where these inequalities are built from. The next context of inequality for women in museums to be discussed is the role of women's bodies within the institution.

The Role of Women's Bodies

Women's image and body has been historically more valuable to art intuitions than their minds. Contemporary art can be used to reclaim this body. Bennett discusses how the female body was seen as a weaker version of man's in an anthropological sense. This knowledge was the narrative that was presented in private collections before the transition to public museums (Bennett, 1995). The physical assumption of the female body has a lasting effect on society and

women's role in the museums where they are not only seen as physically weaker but also not an equal mind and not worth including in the conversation surrounding cultural products.

Within museums women were far more often the subjects of art, rather than the artists. The female nude is a popular motif within art history. Before the nineteenth century, the female body was conceived as an object, subject to the male gaze. The male gaze is a concept that notes how presentations of women's bodies in cultural products such as movies, television and art, are made to appeal to men as viewers. Products made for the male gaze often oversexualize and objectify women's bodies. 'Pro'Sobopha discusses how in the 19th century some female nudes such as Manet's Olympia, began to return the gaze. This return gave back some agency of the female body in art ('Pro'Sobopha, 2005). Art is often a portal into what issues society is facing at any point in history, seeing the female nude begin to return the male gaze suggests that artists were grappling at questions surrounding agency of women within their cultural and historical context. This trend of using art as a way to explore issues continues until today.

For example, the male gaze is put into the contemporary context of art when discussing South African women artists and how they are using their own bodies in their art to reclaim their bodies from the male gaze. These artists also address issues of identity surrounding being women of color in South Africa during apartheid. With this context, these artists are not only addressing interruption of the male gaze but also the white gaze acknowledging both gender and racial bias ('Pro'Sobopha, 2005). This example shows how contemporary artists are able to shift a narrative of inequality. Even though women artists are still not equals in comparison to their male counterparts, art can be used as a way to bring these issues to light and advocate for better treatment of women artists. This goes against the history that regarded them as objects to be places within art, not the art makers.

This example shows that Bennett and 'Pro'Sobopha's discussion of women's role in the history of art is still applicable to today, as shown through the contemporary example of the South African women artists. It may seem limiting to only discuss South African women artists as a contemporary example of reclamation of women's bodies in art, however, use of art to navigate issues people face is a cross cultural occurrence as we will continue to explore throughout this essay. When thinking about contemporary women artists, it is necessary to acknowledge the historical landscape they come from.

The Historical Role of Women Artists

Just as women's bodies in relation to art has not been as valuable to institutions throughout history, their identities as artists have also been undervalued. To understand this, we can look through a feminist art history lens and consider the impact of women artists through the general understanding of Western art history. Linda Nochlin's essay "Why have there Been No Great Women Artists?" discusses the lack of recognition for women artists and how it is not based on lack of talent but instead an institutionalized system that puts men's art at a greater value and therefore gives them more opportunities to become great artists. Nochlin further explains her argument by saying that some feminist theorists argue that women artists should be acknowledged for their distinct feminine style and should not be compared to their male counterparts. This school of thought argues that women live different lives compared to men and therefore create art from a different perspective. She negates these arguments by saying there is no female equivalent to Michelangelo or Picasso and therefore, even if men and women artists are separate, they are not on the same playing field (Hess & Baker, 1971).

Nochlin also notes that even though women as a whole were disadvantaged compared to men, minority women had more barriers that prevented them from succeeding. To explain this

she says, “The arts...remain stultifying, oppressive, and discouraging to all those – women included – who did not have to good fortune to be born white, preferably middle class and, above all, male” (Hess & Baker, 1971, pp.5). This statement highlights that not all women face the same amount of discrimination when it comes to art.

However, not all feminists agree with Nolchin’s thoughts on the fact that there have been no great women artists. The Guerilla Girls, who are an artist collective that make art (often publically) that addresses issues surrounding the gap in representation and pay for women identifying and non-male artists, created a book that rewrites the narrative surrounding historical women artists. They go through notable women artist from the middle ages to the 20th century. Some of the artists include, Artemisia Gentileschi, Claude Cahun and Frida Kahlo. The Guerrilla Girls take on two different voices throughout the book, either commenting on the artist and issues in equality at the time or taking on the voice of the artist. They explain not only who the artist is but what issues they may have had to overcome and what privileges they may have had. The Guerrilla Girls also make note that art history is often organized with one notable male artist influencing the next and creating different ‘movements’ of art. This is overly linear and often ignores women and minority artists. The Guerilla Girls are able to create a new narrative, highlighting artists’ voices who were overlooked (possibly due to their gender) (1998). This approach to feminism in art history acknowledges women artists for their accomplishment and suggests an alternative narrative the Western art history without the inequality on the bases of gender.

Nolchin and the Guerilla Girls have different stances on how we should acknowledge women artist but both have aspects that help fight for equality. Nolchin’s disregard for women artists helps push her point that the inequality of women artists can make the same success given

to men impossible (Hess & Baker, 1971). The Guerilla Girls give voice to those that this inequality has impacted (1998). However, both focus on Western art history which ignores the value and experiences of art makers outside of western culture. Therefore, we do not have the whole picture of the value of women artists in history. Despite this, it is important to understand that there has been a historical and continued bias against women as viewers of art, subjects of art and creators of art. Even though, there are women identifying and non-male artists that are reclaiming this narrative in a contemporary context, othered artists still face discrimination within the art field resulting in less representation and success.

SECTION THREE: CONTEMPORARY BIAS

The same patterns of bias against women identifying artists and non-male artists are still being played out within the art world. This contemporary bias correlates to gender and representation for artist within galleries and museums. One study that illustrates this issue reports on the effect of gender on marketing art and the prices. The study looked at artists that graduated from the Yale School of Art and found that female graduates had fewer auction sales than their male counter parts. However, once they achieved a sale, their works on average went for more money. The conclusion was that, while art intuitions may be influenced by gender (resulting in less representation for women identifying and non-male artists), the market (what art work is bought and how much it goes for) may have different motivations (Cameron et al., 2019). This supports that gender does not grant inherent values or skills but is perceived through social constructed lenses. Not only that but gender is a socially constructed concept and therefore has no merit in devaluing art.

Construction of Gender

When thinking about the impact of constructed gender roles it is important to bring in a third wave feminism theory called gender trouble. The term gender trouble is coined by Judith Butler in the 1990s. Butler's theory has two aspects. One being that gender is not natural but rather constructed and the second, that gender is performative. Where the 'trouble' comes in is when gender is not being performed in a way that coincides with the binary system and what you were assigned at birth (Butler, 1990). With gender assignment comes associations of how you are supposed to 'perform' that gender and what expectations you are meant to meet or fail. For example, being assigned male at a birth but choosing to wear a dress, which is a clothing option associated with femininity, could be an example of gender trouble. By denaturalizing binary differences of gender expectations, it helps establish that the quality of artists' works is not affected by being male or female but instead understood based on societal expectations of said gender.

If we accept gender as a binary system that assigns male or female to people at birth and along with that social expectations, we ignore those that do not fit within those limitations. In global feminism, one artist featured, Tejal Shah poses that a possible solution to societal gender pressures is to de-gender and declassify which is a concept she embraces in her work (Reilly & Nochlin, 2007). Even if we accept that gender is socially constructed, that social construction still exist and people will still make judgements based off that. With more understanding that gender is constructed, we can deconstruct expectations and promote equality. Despite this goal, equality is a more difficult achievement for some women when compared to others. The multiple factors of women's identities need to be acknowledged in order to reach this equality.

Minority Women

Women artist are represented less frequently in galleries and even less if they are a minority. One source shows a study done in the 1980's on how diverse the artists of major United States art museums were in terms of ethnicity. The majority of galleries represented between 94% and 69% white artists. Pindell's book also addresses museums in New York and the ethnicity of artists who have exhibits. The average minority artist has zero to two exhibits per each museum. For the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), 97.11% of the exhibitions were from Europe or of European decent during the time of this study. This trend of disproportion was seen throughout all the museums this study considered. For the Whitney Biennial from 1973-1987, there was only 0.30% representation for women of color (Pindell, 1987). This study shows the uneven representation in comparing artists of European descent versus minority artists and women artists. Despite the fact these examples are from the 80's, statistics for women artists have not improved greatly.

Another source looked at a more recent canvas of diversity of artists and leadership. This study conducted a large-scale research project by looking at 18 major U.S. museums and over 10,000 individual artists. They wanted to establish how diverse the pool of artist represented in major U.S. museums is in terms of gender and ethnicity. For ethnicity, they found that 85% of artists are white within these 18 museums. Also, that 87% of the artists were men. In the introduction, it states that previous studies have found disparity in diversity of employment in art institutions with it being largely white and white men holding the top leadership positions. The study found that the highest percentage for women artists was white women, at 10.8% of the artists. Any minority women artists were represented at less than 1% (Topaz et al., 2019). This study proves that representation for women identifying and non-male artists in major U.S. art museums is still an issue and that minority women are disproportionately affected.

These are only two studies and cannot give the full array of evidence to support that minority women artists are statistically represented less in museums and galleries. However, in conversation with each other, the two studies support that minority women representation for artists has not really improved from the 1980's until now which is significant to note. To understand why minority women artists face greater challenges, it is essential to understand intersectionality.

Intersectional Identities

When understanding what obstacles are in place for some artists when compared to others, it is useful to know the term intersectionalism. The term intersectionalism was created by Kimberlé Crenshaw to frame race and gender's interaction within the context of violence against women. She notes that identity politics, which embraces issues surrounding specific identities, fails to acknowledge differences within a group. For example, identity politics includes feminism, which focuses on women's issues but doesn't acknowledge other identity factors such as race, sexuality and class. Crenshaw brings the intersection of racism and the patriarchy together for a better understanding of obstacles women of color face (1991).

She breaks down intersectionality into two parts, structural and political. Structural intersectionality acknowledges the economic factors such as access to employment and housing. These structures need to be considered when understanding the difficulties some women face over others. The other part, political intersectionality, notes that there may be conflicting political agendas at play. For example, feminists and antiracists agendas may sometimes be at odds with each other or not align with the experiences of women of color. For feminists, this may mean focusing strategies based off white women's experiences. For antiracist agendas, this could be creating strategies based on men's experiences of racism which will be different from women's.

As Crenshaw breaks it down, it is necessary to consider the intersection of identities to better understand what inequalities effect different women (1991). This concept is necessary when discussing disparity for representation of women artists because minority women are disproportionally affected when compared to white women.

Intersectional identities for women identifying and non-male artists create more obstacles for acceptance and representation. In the 1970's Feminist Art Movement there was a push for equality for women artists. This movement was not supportive of all women artists and was exclusionary to black women by only promoting white women's art. Black women artists were also excluded from the Black Arts Movement because of their focus on black male artists. The invisibility of black women artists within institutions was supported by a belief that black women were not legitimate artists resulting in their exclusion. Black women artists of the 1970's had to become their own advocates so they created their own movement and support system called Black Feminist Art Movement (BFAM). This group worked to have representation for black women artists in museums and galleries (Bailey, 2017). This example only acknowledges black women artists and not the full array of intersectional identities that can make succeeding more difficult. Nevertheless, it does give a clear example of some obstacles minority women can face and what they can do to overcome it. It also acknowledges how women can use their art and identities for activism which we will discuss further in the following section.

Identities and Activism

Women identifying and non-male artists can use their intersectional identities to create diverse art and act as activists. One article about two Korean artists focuses on how art can be used as a political expression in relation to identity. The two artists are Suk Nam Yun (who practices in South Korea) and Yong Soon Min (who practices in America). Both identify as

feminists and political activists while also fulfilling traditional Korean family and domestic roles. The foundation of Korean culture is rooted in Confucianism. This means there is an emphasis on women supporting their family and putting the family's needs before their own. The two artists challenge this notion by not only having their own families but also practicing art professionally. Their work tackles concepts such as their Korean culture. For Suk Nam Yun that means being in the majority in Korea but for Yong Soon Min, she has an added layer of being a minority in America (Caruso, 2005). By showing this example, it demonstrates how different cultures may have different expectations for women and therefore place different barriers for women artists.

Another approach to multicultural awareness and activism can be seen through the artist collective called Moti Roti who aims to create cultural critiques of identity through their art. The group is made up of the cultures from three countries, Trinidad, Pakistan and India. They believe in embracing multicultural and multimedia work to help create a conversation around identity. Moti Roti uses participatory art work to advocate for cultural awareness. For example, they talk about one piece specifically called *Wigs of Wonderment*. In this piece, the audience is offered a 'cultural makeover' to draw parallels to appropriation of black culture in the West (Rowe, 2004). This group uses the crossroad of identity and art to advocate for awareness around social issues.

Not all artists want to make their identity the focus of their art or act as activists. However, it is impossible to separate identity from the artists so it is important to acknowledge when artists use it to further messages of equality. Inequality is still a major issue for women identifying and non-male artists as they have been shown to be statistically represented less often in galleries and museums. Minority artists face even more challenges within these institutions. Artists can use their identities to create work that represents them and act as activism. These intersectional identities can be used to represent diverse experiences within institutions and can

be highlighted through curation. Art and its institutions are a powerful force and need to be reformed to create better experiences for its participants.

SECTION FOUR: THE REFORM OF THE MUSEUM

Art museums play a role in society and can be reformed. By acknowledging museums as a place for education and using curation as a form of intervention, positive change for increase in diverse representation can be made. Museums can serve as educational tools but also can reinforce messages of inequality for students. Alice Wexler addresses issues surrounding representation in museums for minorities and how that affects students in upper level learning in her work about museum culture. Museum leaders often choose to present art based off Western aesthetics and therefore set the tone for what identities are valued. This presentation can play a role in forming young identities that are visiting museums. If students are unable to locate themselves within the work presented, this can impact their perception around their own identity. Students need to have the support that allows them to come in, critically assess the history of art and locate themselves within it (Wexler, 2007). This example shows one aspect of why intervention is so important. Museums are often used as an added layer to education. Students deserve to see their identities reflected within their own education.

One intervention for students comes from a program that talks about the visual representation surrounding cultural identity, pedagogy, hegemony, and racism in museums. The program is interested in how the issues previously stated effect children coming to visit art museums and how teachers should adapt to lessen any negative impacts. It focuses on an educational game called Colorquest which allows students to investigate museum practices and how people of color are represented. The location for this game is the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The example given asks students to name a specific piece of art and then write a clue for

another cultural artifact to compare it to. By doing this, it causes the students to think about the larger cultural and racial context that art exists in within the institution of the art museum. A multicultural approach to education is one that encourages representation and changes the white hegemonic structure that dominates the art world (Chandler, 2007). Colorquest is a great approach to dealing with the already existing inequities within exhibitions. Along with this, it is necessary to acknowledge the people designing exhibitions that foster inequality in the first place.

Not all students have access to museums and therefore are not exposed to those specific messages of inequality. With the question of access in mind, it is interesting to put this in the context of Walter Benjamin, :The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” In this, he discusses the power that art can have when mass produced. Mechanical Reproduction, meaning the tools used to recreate art at a mass scale, allows for more access to cultural objects for the people who can’t go visit or experience art in person. This lessens the class divides of who gets to access art. However, reproductions of work cannot capture the ‘aura’ of the original work so it is still a privileged experience to see art in person because it is not the same as seeing a recreation (Benjamin, 1968). Despite the fact that not all students have access to museums or may be viewing art objects through mechanical reproduction. It is still important to push for equality in representation in art museums because of those that consume the artifacts presented to them. Also, because of mechanical reproduction, students and others can access collections digitally through museums’ websites. This means that students would still be impacted by museum bias. This bias is curated and can be combated through curation of diverse exhibitions.

Curation as Representation

Curation plays a key role in whose identities are represented within museums. We should be aware that work we see in museums is never chosen at random, there are always humans behind it meaning personal bias is always present. For example, Bennett discusses the visible (the physical display) and invisible (meaning behind display within historical and curatorial context) aspects of art. When art and cultural products are placed within the context of art institutions it gives them inherent value because they have been deemed valuable by the elites. Who gets chosen to be represented in art museum shows what identities are valued over others. Bennett says, “women must be radically other to history and to men” (Bennett, 1995, pp. 46). This quote goes to show that by not representing women and non-male identities within museums as institutions, it places those identities as ‘other.’ Therefore, ‘other’ identities are deemed not valuable without representation.

Curation is a way to give representation to diverse identities. One exhibit that shows diverse identities and why they are crucial to represent is *Crippling the Museum*. This text explores an exhibit called *Scrapes* that features video works by artists that tackle issues such as HIV/AIDS, being transgender, Indigenous people and intellectual and sight disabilities. They use the term ‘cripping’ the museum as a way to unsettle ablest, heteronormative and neocolonial social relations. The article explains that by having these artists and issues they face represented it brings in more diverse voices into the institution of the museum and puts it into scholarly discourse. This throws off familiar ways of thought which the institution is more comfortable with. *Scrapes* creates an intersection between disability, sexuality and race and shows that there is not one unified experience of artist or humanity (Brophy & Hladki, 2014). It validates the importance of ‘othered’ voices by placing them in the context of the university art museum. More diverse voices mean more diverse representation throwing off familiar ways of thought.

Museums are a public commodity and should represent the diverse breadth of human experiences.

When places don't have representation for othered artists, there needs to be advocates that push for equality in representation. For example, one article discusses the need for a women artists' museum in Bandung. The author explains this is necessary because the unique cultural and intellectual contributions of women were not being documented well within the institution of the public museum. She suggests that one of the reasons is that throughout history women are seen more as an object rather as a subject. There has been effort for increasing representation of women artist in Indonesia, with a growing number of art institutions for women to be a part of. However, that number was still much lower than men. The author notes that currently there is only one museum for women in Bandung which prevents more representation for women (Adriati, 2015). This example shows how lack of representation can act as a removal from history and why we need advocates to fight against this.

Curation can be used as not only a way to represent people but as a way to bring different cultures and experiences to the forefront. For example, the University of Leeds partnered with the International Agency for Contemporary South Asian Crafts. Together they created a program called, *Between Kismet and Karma: South Asian Women Artists Respond to Conflict* (BKK). The program curated a show focusing of South Asian female artists' perspective. The article talked about the importance of presenting these female artists in a contemporary sense instead of the historical artifacts of other cultures visitors are more accustomed to seeing. The work of the artists also directly expressed issues of sexism for Pakistani women. The article notes that South Asia's public art infrastructure is largely underfunded and privatized. By partnering with the University of Leeds, it created opportunity for the South Asian women artists to get more

exposure and for the public to diversify their understanding of art (Khan, 2011). *Between Kismet and Karma* is an example to giving voice to perspectives outside of the usual narrative in museums. This can aid in diversifying visitors' cultural awareness and give validation to visitors that identify with the cultures represented.

Another show that focuses on the importance of other voices is *Museums and Sexuality* by Stewart Frost. Frost starts by putting the role of queer history within the context of British history museums. In the beginning of this article he focused on queer historical artifacts such as a silver cup that feature two gay lovers. He poses that by having these objects it creates better representation of queer history. He then shifts to talking about the importance of representation because it allows for discussion and debate. By having queer history in museums, it creates conversations around topics that some people might not have sought out before. One example he gives is an exhibit that chose to have contemporary queer art though out the museum's permanent collection. This forced people to look at it in a larger historical context instead of ignoring a specific room or section of the museum (Frost, 2013). This source shows one perspective that giving othered identities a special room, separate from the larger context of an institution further otherizes them. This suggests that diverse identities should not be an 'other' but a part of the bigger narrative.

Whether representation takes place in the form of a special exhibition or integration in the larger museums, it is important to advocate for. Art museums are meant to be representative of society and they are unable to succeed in that if they do not represent the diverse identities that make up the community around us. Without representation, some visitors of museums, such as children that go there to be educated, will not have their identities validated. This is why it is important to push initiatives such as education and curatorial interventions.

SECTION FIVE: CURATION AS INTERVENTION

With the understanding that curation is a viable solution for inequality in representation. I created a goal of curating my own exhibit that would feature women identifying and non-male artists within Washington College's gallery, Kohl Gallery. To do this, I researched women identifying and non-male artists and invited four artists to participate in a performance focused exhibition. Performance as a medium parallels the marginalization that these artists face. It is often an additive to more traditional museum and gallery programs, as a way to draw in audiences and to be forgotten during the remainder of exhibitions. Performance also has a history that is deeply intertwined with feminism and lends itself well to the goal of equality.

Performance Art and Feminism

In the early 1970's Judy Chicago, a professor at Fresno State University and began the Feminist Art Program which was the first program dedicated to feminist art. Chicago had faced discrimination from educators and others in the art world that set lower expectations for female students. This motivated her to create a program that would empower her female students. At the beginning of the program the students and Chicago moved in an independent space that served as the center for their exploration of art. There was a focus on a collective process that allowed for students to help navigate and design new courses (Lampert, 2013).

One of the most notable project for Chicago and her group was *Womanhouse*. Chicago and nine of her students fixed up a seventeen-room house and created an installation and performance space for their art. Their work commented on the role of women in society. One work feature a segmented female mannequin that fit into the linen shelves commenting on the role of housewife that women were meant to fulfill. They also used performance art. Chris Rush performed her work, *Scrubbing*, where she endlessly scrubbed the house's floor. The first

performances were only open to women audiences but they opened to a mix-gendered audience for the following weekend (Lampert, 2013). This project was able to turn a private space into a public conversation surrounding feminist issues and the role of women in society.

Another notable performance that Chicago was a part of was *Ablutions*. *Ablutions* was staged by Suzanne Lacy, Judy Chicago, Sandy Orgel, Jan Lester and Aviva Rahmani. The one night performance tackled the subject of sexual assault and the violence surrounding it. The performance featured bathtubs with women in them, filled with things such as eggs, clay and blood. One performer nailed beef kidneys to the wall as a tape recorder played throughout the performance of women talking about their experience of being sexually assaulted. This performance left the audience speechless as they were confronted with this subject matter (Lampert, 2013). Performance as a medium makes audiences think of the artists as people in a more confrontation way compared to more traditional art. It is more difficult to dismiss the person and their message when they are standing right in front of you. Performance can be used as not only an art form but a political intervention.

After Chicago's success with the feminist art program she decided to start the first independent art school for women. She helped create the Woman's Building which housed the women's arts education program. This separatist space did give women more opportunities to explore their voice through the arts. However, most students were white middle-class women (Lampert, 2013). This means that it was still exclusionary to women of color. It is unclear if trans women were welcome in this program but the focus on women only means it was also exclusionary to non-male artists who may identify as gender-nonconforming, gender-fluid or non-binary. Despite that these gender identification terms were less well known during the 70's,

there were people that didn't identify within the gender binary and would have been excluded from Chicago's school.

As seen with Chicago, performance art and feminism are intertwined. Another performer that helped establish this connection is Carolee Schneemann. In 1975, she performed one of her most famous works, *Interior Scroll*. In this piece, she pulled a scroll out from her vagina and read from it. This ground-breaking performance brought up conversations surrounding the female body and what stigmas surround it. Female bodies were meant to be objectified and looked at by men. *Interior Scroll* interrupts this by mimicking pulling out a tampon which is associated with menstruation, a taboo topic that was considered 'unclean' (Moreland, 2015). As we saw in Chicago and Schneemann's work, performance art during this time was often confrontational and shocking to audiences. These performances show how the medium and the message come together to confront inequalities for women.

A Love Letter to Representation

With the understanding of performance art as a tool for feminism, let's revisit the performance exhibition I set out to do. At the core of *Love Letters* lies the desire to promote equality for representation of artists regardless of their gender. *Love Letters* is also based in a belief that curation can be used to combat this inequality and promote diverse voices. I choose performance art as a medium for several reasons. The first reason is its ties to feminism as we just discussed. Feminists like Judy Chicago and Carolee Schneemann had been using performance art since the 1970s to propel women's issues forward. By using this medium, *Love Letters* adds to the historical narrative of feminism and performance.

Another reason why performance art is the perfect medium for this exhibition is the marginalization of performance art as additive programming to galleries and exhibitions.

Performance art frequently exists to pull in audiences to see more traditional forms of art and disappears after the opening night. This runs parallel to the marginalization of diverse women-identifying and non-male artists that we discussed throughout this paper. *Love Letters* rejects this narrative but giving performance art a critical place in the pedagogical institution much like it gives diverse identities a place.

The final reason for performance art is the power of the human body. By having the artists physically present in Kohl Gallery, it is impossible to dismiss their identities. The diverse identities of each artist are present and forces the audience to acknowledge them in an active way. Other art forms like painting can result in passive viewership, allowing audiences to casually pass the art without actively engaging with it. Performance art is confrontational. It is much more difficult to dismiss a human standing in front of you than it is a painting.

Representation of these diverse identities works within the landscape discussed throughout this thesis. As proven, there is a disparity in representation for women-identify and non-male artists within contemporary art museum. Representation is key to validating identities and increasing diversity within the arts. One way diversity of artists can be achieved is through curation. *Love Letters* is built on this philosophy and makes a conscious effort to embrace diverse identities and representation of women artists. With a better understanding of the foundation of this exhibition let's further explore *Love Letters*.

The exhibition *Love Letters* features four women performance artists, Rex Delafkaran, Lynn Hunter, Sara Dittrich and Verónica Peña. The exhibit takes place within the Washington College art gallery, Kohl Gallery. This gallery hosts a variety of exhibitions including solo exhibitions from outside artists, group exhibitions and student shows. I curated *Love Letters* with the help of gallery director Tara Gladden. This exhibition is performance based and shows one

performance from each artist on the opening night. Whatever artifacts remained from the performances became the exhibition for the following week until closing. Unfortunately, this exhibition is delayed due to school closure but is rescheduled for Spring 2021. The goal of this exhibition was to show curation as a viable source of intervention for the inequality for women-identify and non-male artists.

To achieve that goal of intervention by representation, I recruited my artists through invitation as opposed to an open call where anyone could submit work. My initial vision for this exhibition involved more of a student art show. However, this idea had several issues. One being that by having an open call, there is not any control over who submits work. All the submissions could have ended up being white, cis-gendered, heterosexual artists, which feels hypocritical to the thesis I was writing. I could not produce a show with only one identity represented while writing a paper that stressed how minority women face greater challenges and that diversity of artists is a crucial component to better representation. Invitation based recruitment allowed me to have more control over the vision for my exhibition.

Another early on decision that was essential in deciding the route of recruitment was that this exhibition is performance-based. As discussed earlier, performance art has a parallel run to the marginalization of artists. It is a medium near and dear to my heart but meant that specific methods of recruitment were necessary. Since the opening night of this exhibition involved live performances, it had to be feasible for all the artists to come to Chestertown, Maryland, on March 20th, 2020. This geographic limitation meant that I focused my searches on artists within the region. My locations of focus included Washington D.C., Baltimore, and Philadelphia. My search was not limited to just these locations, but they were the most commonly used hot spots.

Now that the location limitations are understood, the next step was researching galleries and artist spaces in those locations to find performance artists. Some of the galleries I looked at were Vox Populi, Grizzly Grizzly, Transformer, and the Hamiltonian. To find artists, I looked at these galleries' (and others') past exhibitions online and their Instagram accounts. I looked for performance artworks through these catalogs and then went on individual artists' websites. The nature of the show meant that I was looking for women-identifying and non-male artists, which excluded male artists. To find if the artists' identity fit within that, I looked at their artist bios and their use of pronouns to determine if they used she/they or he pronouns. I was looking for artists that used "she" and "they" pronouns as their identities often get ignored within the institution of art museums and were the focus of this exhibit.

Beyond the fundamental factor of gender, I looked for performance work that I responded to and could fit within the spatial limitations of Kohl Gallery. I also looked for work that explored concepts of identity or artists that talk about the role of identity in their artist statements. It was not a requirement to speak about identity for these artists, but it was an aspect that I paid attention to and helped narrow down my list. I also had to narrow down my artists based on the style of their work. I ended up focusing on work that involved simple gestures and poetic movements. When I began this process, multiple forms of performance art interested me. I started to narrow down when I chose individual artists and tried to piece their work together like a puzzle. It was important to me that the work presented in *Love Letters* had similar tones. For example, a performance with elegant, dancer-like movements contrasts a DJ performance artist. Both are great, but I decided to go with works that held a more serious tone.

Besides online research, I used two other methods to finalize my list. These were recommendations and previous connections. I was able to utilize my mentorship with Kohl

Gallery director, Tara Gladden, to get recommendations and advice about the recruitment of artists. I also reached out to Washington College, studio art professor, Julie Wills, for recommendations. Wills is a performance artist herself and familiar with many artists within the region and was able to give suggestions. This method is how I got Sara Dittrich's information.

The other way, previous connections, was crucial in recruiting international artist Verónica Peña. Peña had visited in the fall, and I had the chance to speak with her individually during my senior studio visit. I had researched her work before her visit and fell in love with her body of work. She did not perform any art while she was here in the fall, so I was excited about the prospect of her coming back to be a part of the show. Peña works in New York often and despite being out of the region, I decided to reach out to her. Peña ended up having an overlapping trip to New York during the opening and agreed to be a part of the exhibition.

As I stated earlier, the diversity of artists was an essential part of my communications research and was a theme that I wanted to carry over into my exhibition. My main goal was not to have too much of one particular identity represented. It is impossible to represent every identity within four performers, but I was successful in choosing artists that were diverse from one another. Beyond that, they were also the best artists for *Love Letters* and all produced work that I feel in love with. To better explain why these four artists are perfect for this show, I want to explain my journey for finding and choosing each one.

The first artist I added to *Love Letters* was Rex Delafkaran. I came across her work on Transformer, a gallery in Washington D.C.'s, Instagram page. The post was highlighting an auction event that featured several different performance artists. After investigating all the artists involved, I decided that Delafkaran was perfect for *Love Letters*. Her work used beautiful dance gestures in subtle and interesting ways. The work planned for *Love Letters*, *The way you say*,

How To, displayed those qualities. Beyond my aesthetic interest, her bio discussed how she uses her queer and Iranian identity as inspiration for her work. This kind of investigation in the intersection of identity along with the aesthetic quality of her work was exactly what I was looking for in *Love Letters*.

The next artist I decided on was Lynn Hunter. I had researched Hunter before for Kohl Gallery as a preliminary search for artists for the 2019 schedule. I had connected with the beautiful, poetic and political nature of her work then and was excited for the prospect of finally bringing her to Kohl. In her bio, she discusses her works' focus on black womanhood. Her work *Equinox*, fit within the poetic and nuanced voice of *Love Letters*. The performance involved a simple gesture of pulling cement blocks but had a powerful message of why black women are expected not to cry. Her work is inseparable from who she is and added vulnerability that worked well with the other artists.

As I mentioned earlier, I came across Verónica Peña's work when she visited in the fall for an artist talk and studio visit. Some of the interests she notes in her bio are cross-cultural dialogue and women's empowerment. Peña is from Spain and the prospect of bringing in an international perspective excited me. Her work *Cuerpos Llevados (Carried Bodies)*, fits particularly well within the narrative of *Love Letters*. In this work, she embraces the power of the human body and how it can be manipulated to reveal invisible barriers. In the work, she attempts to overcome these barriers for a powerful message about empowerment. The themes and aesthetic of Peña's work was a perfect addition.

The final artist that is a part of this exhibition is Sara Dittrich. Dittrich was recommend to me by Julie Wills. After investigation of her website, I found that her work fit in perfectly with the other three artists. Her performances have a simple and poetic quality that fits in with the

rest. Another factor that intrigued me about her work was her use of sound and multiple performers. A lot of her work can be categorized by how she uses performers to create rhythmic patterns. Her work for *Love Letters* is called *Cadence* which involved audience participation. Her performance was split up between two ten minute segments, one at the beginning of the evening and one at the end. During this, Dittrich invites two people at a time to be connected to her drum set. The drum set would monitor the participants' pulse and the drum sticks would move to the beat of the pulse. This participation based work means that a multitude of identities can be represented within the show. This work opened potential for any identity to be represented within the exhibition; if they were present, they could be represented.

Beyond the performative nature, aesthetic quality and focus in identity, all four performers had a dedication to the message of *Love Letters*. After reaching out to the artists they all expressed excitement around the opportunity to be a part of a show advocating for diverse representation of women-identifying and non-male artists. I believe that all the performers embody the spirit of *Love Letters* and I am hopeful to bring them to Kohl in the Spring of 2021.

As discussed, this show embraced support of diverse artists by featuring diverse women artists. However, the exhibition did fall short by not including any trans women artists, gender-nonconforming, non-binary or gender-fluid people. Although including more identities is a positive, there were only four artists in the exhibition, making it impossible to represent all identities. There were a few artists that fit into the category of trans women artists, non-binary, gender-nonconforming or gender fluid that were researched during this exhibition but ultimately not chosen. When making the selection of final artists it became about finding a cohesive voice for the exhibition. This eliminated a lot of artists in general. There were statistically fewer trans artists so only a few remained when tone of work was taken into consideration. I reached out to

one artist, Marcelline Mandeng, about participation in the exhibition. They identify as trans and their work fit within the exhibition narrative. However, Mandeng never responded to the invitation so we had to move on. There was one other artist that fit, but their website said they were away for the month of March making them unavailable for *Love Letters*. Although I failed to include the identities of trans women, gender-nonconforming, non-binary and gender-fluid people, their identities are still valid within the context of art institutions. *Love Letters* has been postponed which means that additional artists could be brought in, expanding the identities represented.

Despite this setback, curation of the exhibition gave me the opportunity to bring diverse identities to Washington College and advocate for representation within art institutions such as Kohl Gallery. It also shows an example of how an institution can support diversifying of programs and allow for intervention.

CONCLUSION

There should be equality for artists regardless of gender. However, there is still inequality for women identifying and non-male artists. This can be addressed through education and curatorial intervention. The inequality comes from a foundation in art museums that is rooted in elitist values. Women have a history of not being valued as equals in art museums, as viewers, subjects or artists. Diverse identities of artists can help spread awareness of diversity in lived experiences and voices. Artists can use their voices to create work that acts as activism. Museums can be educational, but we have to be aware of curatorial bias. It is important to curate shows that represent the diverse identities that often get left out of more traditional narratives. There can be reform by increasing awareness of this problem, creating educational solutions for audiences interpreting works at museums and through curation of diverse artists and identities. This was

present in the examples of successful exhibits that did this and the intended exhibit curated for this project, *Love Letters*. Like the Guerilla Girls, don't accept inequality for artists on the bases of gender. Fight back, seek out diverse artists and shows, find new ways to interpret the curatorial narrative, create and curate your own show if your able.

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