

An Examination of Influential Feminist Artists and Their Impact on the Art Community

To what extent has the work of feminist artists Leonor Fini, Betty Tompkins and Anita Steckel challenged how the idea of femininity has been represented in the past?

Group 6 Visual Arts

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Introduction

Traditionally, many of the world's most well-known artworks come from patriarchal and male dominated cultures. The cultures that artists are born in and create in have a large effect on how they create their works and why. In these cultures, women are usually painted nude and in submissive positions. This is almost purely for male viewers enjoyment and fantasies. Women were also traditionally depicted in the sense of their value to society. Features such as breasts would be emphasized to show fertility which in many cultures was viewed as the only use women help in society¹. This is very evident in *Venus of*



Figure 2 Stead, Fred. *Butterflies* Fred Stead (1863–1940). Cartwright Hall Art Gallery.

Willendorf, c. 24,000-22,000 B.C.E (Fig. 1). This Venus had enlarged breasts and pubic regions in order to highlight fertility². This statue was also portable

showing its potential to be used in rituals to pray for fertility for the tribe³. There was a pattern that emerged in the classical era of depicting women almost always with their children, if not in a sensual sense. Artist Fred Stead used this in many of his works portraying mothers. An example of this is his piece *Butterflies* Fred Stead (1863–1940) (Fig. 2)⁴. This portrayal of mothers once again



Figure 1 *Venus of Willendorf*, c. 24,000-22,000 B.C.E. Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna.

¹ Zygmunt, Bryan. "Venus of Willendorf." *Khan Academy*, Khan Academy. *Khan Academy*, www.khanacademy.org/humanities/prehistoric-art/paleolithic/paleolithic-objects/a/venus-of-willendorf. Accessed 20 Oct. 2020.

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ "Butterflies Fred Stead (1863–1940) Cartwright Hall Art Gallery." *Art UK*, Public Catalogue Foundation. *Google*, artuk.org/discover/artworks/butterflies-22350/search/actor:stead-fred-18631940/page/1/view_as/grid. Accessed 20 Oct. 2020.

places their value in their ability to have and raise children above all else. Women are then shown to only have one use and purpose in society, to fulfill men's wants and reproduce their children. This enables men to place their power in their sexuality with the need to produce children, specifically boys, to carry on the family name and help with the physical and intellectual labor. Their dominant personalities are reassured by these artworks and depicts that the concepts of women and femininity are used to empower men, reassuring their patriarchal cultures. Although, this is not true of all cultures and artworks. Egyptian art often tells the story of equality between men and women. Egyptian Gods were both male and female making them all important status⁵. In artworks, only women were shown holding knives, allowing them to be aggressive and powerful along with motherly⁶. Female pubic areas were painted to show the power of a woman's fertility and sexuality, allowing women to feel empowered⁷. Russian culture had a strong focus on the power of fertility, especially with matryoshka dolls⁸. With these dolls, the largest is always a mother⁹. This highlights the importance of fertility as well as the woman's role in society because without them, there would be no society¹⁰. These artworks aim to highlight and empower women, while the works of Leonor Fini, Betty Tompkins and Anita Steckel also aim to do just that. They were all driven to show femininity for what it should be - strong, powerful and beautiful- as well as forcing the audience to question **why it is important**

⁵ Mark, Joshua J. "Women in Ancient Egypt." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, Ancient History Encyclopedia, 4 Nov. 2016. *Google*, www.ancient.eu/article/623/women-in-ancient-egypt/. Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

⁶ Jeffries, Emma. "Divinity, Fertility, Mourning, Royalty: How were woman portrayed in Ancient Egyptian art of the Eighteenth Dynasty(1550-1292BC)? ." *Academia. Academia*, www.academia.edu/35068969/How_were_women_depicted_in_Ancient_Egyptian_Art_of_the_Eighteenth_Dynasty.docx. Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

⁷ Ibid

⁸"THE MEANING AND SYMBOLISM OF THE MATRYOSHKA NESTING DOLLS." *Nesting Dolls*, Nesting Dolls. *Google*, nestingdolls.co/blogs/posts/meaning-symbolism-nesting-dolls. Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

to note the difference between their works and traditional works and how they differ in depicting women and femininity?

Leonor Fini

Leonor Fini was considered one of the most influential female artists of the twentieth century. Unlike Anita Steckel and Betty Tompkins, Fini was producing controversial feminine artwork at a time where the idea of feminism was even less accepted by the public, especially in artwork making her rebellious in her time. She rejected her status as a famous surrealist artist and tried to disassociate herself with the group of prominent surrealist artists that greatly contributed to her fame and success¹¹. Leonor's main goal with her works was to challenge the societal definition of what it meant to be male and female¹². She believed that not everyone fits into a perfect mold including her herself who identified as androgynous¹³.

One way that Leonor Fini challenged the ideas of what should be considered femininity was with her depiction of strong female characters. One of the most common ways she achieved this was with her representation of women as sphinx' or having other creature-like

¹¹ Luke, Ben. "Surreal ideas about sex: how Dorothea Tanning and Leonor Fini resisted being pigeonholed by their gender." *The Art Newspaper*, The Art Newspaper, 7 Nov. 2018. *Google*, www.theartnewspaper.com/news/surreal-ideas-about-sex-how-dorothea-tanning-and-leonor-fini-resisted-being-pigeonholed-by-their-gender . Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

¹² Mahon, Alyce. "LEONOR FINI: THEATRE OF DESIRE, 1930-1990." *Museum of Sex*, Museum of Sex, 2018. *Google*, www.museumofsex.com/portfolio_page/leonor-fini/ . Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

¹³ Luke, Ben. "Surreal ideas about sex: how Dorothea Tanning and Leonor Fini resisted being pigeonholed by their gender." *The Art Newspaper*, The Art Newspaper, 7 Nov. 2018. *Google*, www.theartnewspaper.com/news/surreal-ideas-about-sex-how-dorothea-tanning-and-leonor-fini-resisted-being-pigeonholed-by-their-gender . Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

characteristics¹⁴. The sphinx has long been a symbol of power, especially in Egyptian culture. However, the Sphinx has typically not been depicted with such human-like qualities, and when this was done, they usually depicted men. The sphinx is seen as a mystical, virago creature of



Figure 1 Fini, Leonor. *Sphinx for David Barrett* (1954). The Gallery N. Zuckerman CFM, Paris (France).

knowledge¹⁵. By depicting women as such strong, powerful, even majestic creature, Fini is giving them the ability to be on par with men in society. Men are usually seen as powerful and dominant just as they are, so women needed to be depicted as greater than themselves and less woman-like in order to be viewed as less inferior. One work that demonstrates this is *Sphinx for David Barrett* (1954) (Fig.

3). This piece shows a half sphinx half woman creature. She is propped up on a ball with a regal-like posture. Although her top half is not clothed, unlike many pieces showing nude females, she is not seen as innocent or delicate. Her

stern facial expression and confident posture gives the viewer a sense of her dominance and power. The use of sharp, intense line creating her hair and fur give her a sense wildness and intensity. The darker, more muted tones used contrast the typical bright and pinker tones usually used in depicting women. Again, the form of her body creates an intense sense of power,

¹⁴ Mahon, Alyce. "LEONOR FINI: THEATRE OF DESIRE, 1930-1990." *Museum of Sex*, Museum of Sex, 2018. *Google*, www.museumofsex.com/portfolio_page/leonor-fini/ . Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

¹⁵ Luke, Ben. "Surreal ideas about sex: how Dorothea Tanning and Leonor Fini resisted being pigeonholed by their gender." *The Art Newspaper*, The Art Newspaper, 7 Nov. 2018. *Google*, www.theartnewspaper.com/news/surreal-ideas-about-sex-how-dorothea-tanning-and-leonor-fini-resisted-being-pigeonholed-by-their-gender . Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

making the viewer feel inferior in the presence of this painting. All these techniques combined help to go against the societal expectations of women in art. There is no sense of delicacy or softness found in this painting. Every aspect of this half woman half sphinx is strong and confidence, showing no care for the opinion of the viewer, or anyone else.

Another strong woman appears in Fini's piece, *They Like to Dress* (1948) (Fig.4). Seen in



Figure 2 Fini, Leonor. *They Like to Dress* (1948). Museum of Sex, New York.

this piece is what appears to be two women, one standing and one sitting. The standing woman has her hand placed on her hip in a confident manner. Fini has painted her in pants, contrary to the style of the time usually consisting of skirts for women and pants for men. Her top contains a scale-like texture, giving the woman a creature-like quality. The sitting woman has a collar of fur around her neck, resembling a lion main. Atop her head sits the skull of some type of ferocious

animal. The presence of animal characteristics on both women gives them a sense of power and dominance. Not only do they represent animals, but seemingly strong predatorial ones. This allows them to be on par with the men in society because they now possess the strength and confidence of predators. Fini's pieces comment on how the only way women can be equal to men is to possess less feminine qualities and more animal-like qualities.



Figure 5 Fini, Leonor. *Woman Seated on a Naked Man* (1942). Private collection.



Figure 6 Fini, Leonor. *Alcove/Self-Portrait With Nico Papatakis* (1941). Weinstein Gallery, San Francisco.

of his hand gives him a soft, feminine appearance. In direct contrast to many traditional paintings, the woman is fully clothed in bold, loud colors. Her dress drapes over the naked man who would otherwise be left exposed. She serves as his only protection, looking over him while he sleeps. In *The Alcove/Self-Portrait With Nico Papatakis* (1941), the figure is

In many works, Fini directly challenges femininity and masculinity by showing men in the submissive roles and women in dominant ones¹⁶. One way she did this was by depicting men sleeping in a delicate fashion with a woman watching over him. This is seen in both her piece *Woman Seated on a Naked Man* (1942) (Fig. 5) and *The Alcove/Self-Portrait With Nico Papatakis* (1941) (Fig. 6). In her piece *Woman Seated on a Naked Man* (1942) Fini depicts an elegantly dressed woman who sits atop a slender and delicate looking man. The woman appears to be strong and possess a confident posture and expression. Contrary to this, the man lies sleeping with a peaceful and content facial expression. His body language and the placement



Figure 7 Manet, Edouard. *Olympia* (1863). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

¹⁶ "Leonor Fini Biography." *Artnet*, Artnet Worldwide Corporation. Google, www.artnet.com/artists/leonor-fini/biography. Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

laying similar to Manet's *Olympia* (1863) (Fig. 7). Manet's version of this piece was a direct commentary on Titan's *Venus of Urbino* (1538) (Fig. 8). Manet wanted to paint a real woman, not a Venus. In classical art, a Venus was a curvy woman in the nude, painted in a flirtatious manner to appeal to men. Her distinct characteristics such as her curves, especially larger chest,



Figure 8 Titan. *Venus of Urbino* (1538). Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

symbolized her fertility making her even more appealing to men. Manet stripped the piece of its academic style and technique to go against societies ideals of what a woman should be¹⁷. He wanted to paint what a real woman looked like, not what the ideal woman was seen from a man's perspective. The woman's posture in Manet's piece is stronger and

confident. The lines used to create her figure are sharper in contrast to the softer lines of Titan's piece. This is used in order to place the woman in a more powerful and dominate position. Fini creates a vastly different feel with her work although with a very similar comment. Fini places her own twist on both Titan's and Manet's piece with her *The Alcove/Self-Portrait With Nico Papatakis* (1941). The piece contains two naked men, strategically covering themselves. The lines and form in their body language express a soft and submissive stance. Like Titan's variation these figures are meant to be seen in a flirtatious manner. The men lay delicate and soft. This submissive portrayal comments on the tradition of displaying women in this manner and men in the opposite, once again allowing the viewers to question what it means to look feminine. Fini comments "The man in my painting sleeps because he refuses the animus role of the social

¹⁷ Gersh-Nesic, Dr. Beth. "Manet, Olympia." Khan Academy, Khan Academy. Google, www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/late-europe-and-americas/modernity-ap/v/manet-olympia-1863-exhibited-1865. Accessed 31 Aug. 2020.

and constructed and has rejected the responsibility of working in society toward those ends”¹⁸. Fini has directly flipped the roles of masculinity and femininity, challenging their meaning all together.

One painting that strongly represents female dominance is, *The Tower* (1952) (Fig. 9). By



Figure 9 Fini, Leonor. *The Tower* (1952). Weinstein Gallery San Francisco.

painting the man nude, Fini has placed him in the vulnerable state, leaving the woman to dominate over him. The man is also depicted as petit in stature, leading the viewer to believe the woman is stronger than the man. The woman is shown guiding the man through the tower, showing she has control over the situation, and the man. The woman appears in a black dress, contrasting the red robe the man wears. This is unusual because women are often shown in the lighter, delicate, and more revealing clothing. Men are typically depicted in the strong, dark colored clothing. By reversing the clothing and stature of the two figures, Fini has placed the woman in the powerful position. This trend of showing “passive, beautiful, handsome males”¹⁹ continues throughout much of Fini’s work. She continues to reverse the roles of what is considered masculine and feminine to challenge societies ideas of these concepts.

¹⁸ Frank, Priscilla. "How To Be A Surrealist Queen, According To Artist Leonor Fini." *Huffpost*, Huffington Post Verizon Media, 13 Nov. 2015. *Google*, www.huffpost.com/entry/leonor-fini-surrealism_n_5645158ce4b08cda34882e57 . Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

¹⁹ Luke, Ben. "Surreal ideas about sex: how Dorothea Tanning and Leonor Fini resisted being pigeonholed by their gender." *The Art Newspaper*, The Art Newspaper, 7 Nov. 2018. *Google*, www.theartnewspaper.com/news/surreal-ideas-about-sex-how-dorothea-tanning-and-leonor-fini-resisted-being-pigeonholed-by-their-gender . Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

Betty Tompkins

Betty Tompkins is an influential feminist artist whose work is modern and rooted in current feminist issues, such as the #metoo movement. Tompkins was ignored by many associated with the early feminist movement²⁰. These people were disapproving of where she got inspiration for many of her pieces, this being her husband's porn magazines²¹. Her pieces incorporate text as well as her unique approach of painting over copies of famous artworks. Betty was once asked in an interview why she did this. She responded “they would always talk about being able to 'read' the work. So, I thought, let's give them something to read”²². Each of her collection aims to communicate a powerful message to the audience about how women and femininity is viewed in society.

One of Betty Tompkins most controversial collections is her *Apologia* collection. This collection consists of pages she ripped out of art history textbooks and then painted text over²³.

²⁰ JANSEN, CHARLOTTE. "Betty Tompkins Is The Feminist Artist You Need To Know." *Elle*, Hearst, 20 Nov. 2017. *Google*, www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/culture/longform/a40061/betty-tompkins-feminist-art/ . Accessed 30 Mar. 2020

²¹ JANSEN, CHARLOTTE. "Betty Tompkins Is The Feminist Artist You Need To Know." *Elle*, Hearst, 20 Nov. 2017. *Google*, www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/culture/longform/a40061/betty-tompkins-feminist-art/ . Accessed 30 Mar. 2020

²² Ibid

²³ Cascone, Sarah. "Artist Betty Tompkins Explains Why the Vile Words Used to Describe Women are Worth Painting." *artnetnews*, artnet, 14 Dec. 2018. *Google*, news.artnet.com/exhibitions/betty-tompkins-metoo-1406275 . Accessed 29 Mar. 2020.

Other background pictures used were sources of details from the #metoo movement. The text she used was the formal confessions made by public figures who were accused of rape and sexual harassment during the #metoo movement²⁴. Tompkins entitled the series *Apologia* – Greek for defenses. She felt that the people that were making these apologies were not authentic, simply defending their reputation²⁵. One piece in this series is *Apologia (Mary Shepard Greene Blumenstein)* (2018) (Fig. 10). This painting depicts a



Figure 10 Tompkins, Betty. *Apologia (Mary Shepard Greene Blumenstein)* (2018). P·P·O·W Gallery, New York.

woman staring at herself in the mirror with word covering her body. The words are written in pink “because pink is for girls—...., right?” (Betty Tompkins)²⁶. The words covering her body represent how the apologies and excuses made by these people cover up how tragic the events are. As the girl looks into the mirror, she views herself originally in a positive light enhancing her beauty. However, in Fini’s version this girl is forced to confront what society thinks of her,

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Cohen, Alina. "Betty Tompkins Gives Art History a #MeToo Overhaul." *Artsy*, Artsy, 23 Nov. 2018. *Google*, www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-betty-tompkins-art-history-metoo-overhaul . Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

²⁶ Cascone, Sarah. "Artist Betty Tompkins Explains Why the Vile Words Used to Describe Women are Worth Painting." *artnetnews*, artnet, 14 Dec. 2018. *Google*, news.artnet.com/exhibitions/betty-tompkins-metoo-1406275 . Accessed 29 Mar. 2020.



Figure 11 Tompkins, Betty. *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #3)*, (2018). P-P-O-W Gallery, New York.

someone of youth and beauty that is seen as an object for men. The words completely cover her to symbolize her as victim not being seen, only overlooked by the fake apology given by her abuser. This draws the focus away from her and places it on the man causing empathy for him. This is done in a satirical manner to critique how society

and old artworks place an emphasis on women only in the sense of how they relate to men in society. Another piece of great significance is Betty Tompkin's *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #3)*, (2018) (Fig. 11). The original piece that Tompkins painted over was *Jael and Sisera* (c. 1620) Artemisia Gentileschi (Fig. 12). This piece depicts the Bible story where God told his people a woman would be the one to eventually defeat Sisera. Jael killed him in his sleep when he thought he was safe. This story was used to show the power women held during this time because most people did not believe that women were of great importance aside from wife and motherly duties. Most of the men did not even believe God when they



Figure 12 Gentileschi, Artemisia. *Jael and Sisera* (c. 1620). Museum of Fine Arts (Budapest).

were told a woman would do what men had been trying to do for decades and would receive none of the glory. Gentileschi original painted this piece because she had been raped by someone who worked in her fathers' shop²⁷. She wanted to depict violence against women, but more so

²⁷ "ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI – Jael and Sisera (C. 1620)." *ARTSCHAFT Art gems and explorations*, Wordpress, 9 May 2018. Google, artschaft.com/2018/05/09/artemisia-gentileschi-jael-and-sisera-c-1620/. Accessed 27 May 2020.

representing women taking power into their own hands. Being that Gentileschi is now known as a feminist in her time, it seems fitting that Tompkins chose this piece to add to her *Apologia* collection²⁸. Tompkins designed this collection as a way to draw awareness to the issues surrounding rape culture. This time, the words are used to cover the man's figure, giving him ownership of the false apologies. Tompkins did this to place the blame back on the men responsible for these acts of abuse and mistreatment, using Sisera as a synecdoche for all men. She continues with the original meaning of Jael, focusing on women taking back their power that society used to dismiss and take away. Tompkins stated, "There's no end to the idiot guys who have gotten away with things for years and years and now have to apologize—sort of,"²⁹.

In an interview Betty Tompkins questioned about her intentions with her work states "I do/did these pieces to see what they would look like"³⁰. The pieces are not meant to target an audience, more so to see what reaction comes out of it. When asked about how she views femininity she declined to answer saying "this question would prevent you and other viewers from having an honest personal reaction to my work"³¹. The work effects each viewer differently, causing each person to have a usually intense reaction to it. Tompkins ends commenting on her audience saying "They either love it or they hate it"³².

²⁸Ibid

²⁹ Cascone, Sarah. "Artist Betty Tompkins Explains Why the Vile Words Used to Describe Women are Worth Painting." *artnetnews*, artnet, 14 Dec. 2018. *Google*, news.artnet.com/exhibitions/betty-tompkins-metoo-1406275 . Accessed 29 Mar. 2020.

³⁰ Tompkins, Betty. Personal interview. 29 Mar. 2020 and 01 June 2020.

³¹ Tompkins, Betty. Personal interview. 29 Mar. 2020 and 01 June 2020.

³² Ibid

Anita Steckel

Anita Steckel was well-known for forming the Fight Censorship Group (FCG)³³. The purpose for this group was to fight other organizations and groups who tried to limit what type of artwork was allowed in certain museums and art shows. She decided to form the FCG shortly after an incident that occurred when she was asked to show at Rockland Community College, with the hopes of being offered a job as a professor³⁴. Steckel was warned beforehand that she should not bring any “erotic” pieces³⁵. Believing that most of her work fell under this category, Steckel saw this as an unfair censorship of her work and decided to bring only her most erotic and socially unacceptable pieces³⁶. This greatly angered the staff at Rockland Community College to the point that one member had the district attorney open an investigation on Steckel, attempting to arrest her under New York State obscenity laws³⁷. Anita Steckel continued in her career pushing past what people viewed as appropriate, challenging the way that people think of art, nudity, and sexuality.

³³ Meyer, Richard. "Hard Targets: Male bodies, Feminist Art, and the Force of Censorship in the 1970's." . Google, www.amherst.edu/system/files/media/1098/Butler_Hard_Targets_Male_Bodies.PDF . Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

One of the most notable elements of Anita Steckel's artwork is the use of collage as a medium. Steckel produced many pieces with the background consisting of the New York landscape. By using photography as the background Steckel is presenting an atmosphere that the viewer is familiar with and then corrupting it with erotic images, causing discomfort and "raising doubts about society as a rational endeavor"³⁸. Along with utilizing these realist backgrounds, she also includes pictures of women, most often herself, as the faces of the women in her pictures. She does this instead of trying to paint random women to give her viewers a more intense connection to the pieces and the women in them. The viewer can see a real woman rather than an unrealistic ideal that they would not relate to. These collage techniques were used in Anita Steckel's series entitled "Giant Women". The title was chosen in opposition to the

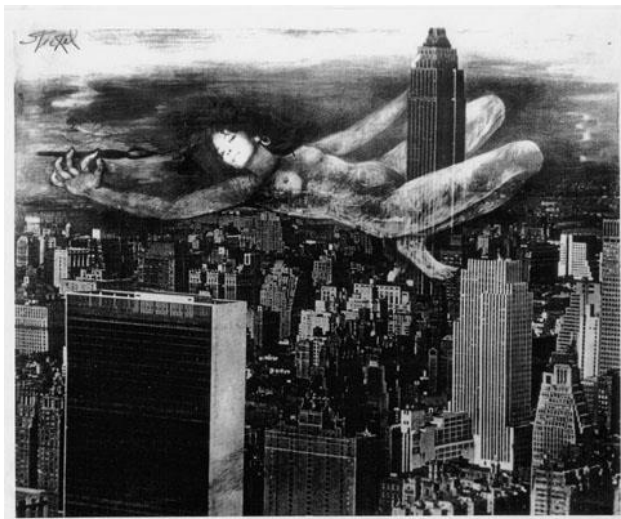


Figure 13 Steckel, Anita. *Giant Woman on Empire State* (1969-70). The Estate of Anita Steckel.

common phrase "little women" used to demean femininity³⁹. This idea of making women seem smaller has been around for centuries. In art, and in society, women are shown as smaller and quieter compared to their male counterparts. "Giant Women" opposes this by making women the focus instead of the quiet noise in the background. These women are shown bigger than men and even society itself. This

collection included some of Steckel's more famous pieces including *Giant Woman on Empire*

³⁸ Middleman, Rachel. "Anita Steckel's Feminist Montage: Merging Politics, Art, and Life." *Woman's Art Journal*, Woman's Art Journal, 2013. Questia School, www.questiaschool.com/read/1G1-337719737/anita-steckel-s-feminist-montage-merging-politics . Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

³⁹ Ibid

State (1969-70) (Fig. 13). For this piece, and the others in this series, Steckel used photo montage and drawing as mediums for her works. These pieces included a giant, naked woman in New York. In *Giant Woman on Empire State* (1969-70) the woman is drawn straddling the Empire State building. This is significant in the fact that this building has been used as symbol for male power and dominance in her other works. With that in mind, the woman in this piece is representing taking back the power that men have taken away. She straddles it in order to show control over the building that she previously did not have. She has climbed on top of the tower making her visually and metaphorically higher up than the men who own the building. The lack of color in this series aides in making the piece feel more realistic to the viewer. It gives the pieces a journalistic feel, taking away any sense of humor or cosmetics that could be interpreted otherwise if the pieces were in color⁴⁰. The viewer sees this piece as something that could have come straight out of a journal or newspaper showing not only its realistic characteristics, but also emphasizing that there is a message the artist wants to share with the world. Like Fini, Steckel depicts this woman with a powerful, confident and controlling posture. This portrayal of form again makes her seem larger than everything around, contradicting how society views women. By drawing the woman nude, Steckel is aggressively forcing modern feminist ideals into the cityscape, representing America and its patriarchy⁴¹.

One noteworthy piece, although not a part of the Giant Woman Series, that has a very similar purpose and presentation is *The Subway* (1973) (Fig. 14). This piece mimics the style of the Giant Woman series, involving photo montage and drawing a nude woman with the whole

⁴⁰ Middleman, Rachel. "Anita Steckel's Feminist Montage: Merging Politics, Art, and Life." *Woman's Art Journal*, 2013. Questia School, www.questiaschool.com/read/1G1-337719737/anita-steckel-s-feminist-montage-merging-politics . Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

⁴¹ Ibid

piece being drawn in black and white. Explaining her use of collage Anita Steckel states, “paint



Figure 14 Steckel, Anita. *The Subway* (1973). The Estate of Anita Steckel.

an image into a photograph, which we are conditioned to believe is an unquestioned reality--then there sets up an uneasiness of another sort...The whole question becomes the uneasiness of what is real and what is not”⁴². In the context of this piece, the scene depicted is realistic in look, but not in terms of its likeliness

to occur. In this piece the woman sits between two men on the subway. With one hand, she is

touching herself and with the other she puts her hand down the pants the man on the left. The collage format gives a sense of reality, making the viewer uncomfortable. This piece takes a powerful stance against the taboo concept of female masturbation and enjoyment of pornography⁴³. In America, there is a well-known and shared opinion that masturbation and pornography is expected from men. However, masturbation and pornography for women is seen as wrong and a social taboo. This art piece takes these socially unacceptable concepts and places them in a public space directly in front of the viewer, making them impossible to ignore. There is a lack of subtlety making the artists point even more impactful. The expressions on the men’s faces makes them appear confused and judgmental. The emotion on the woman’s face is careless in nature, depicting a sense of freedom and empowerment. This piece, and many other pieces, gives women a sense of power and shows them equal to men in a way that makes the viewer

⁴² Meyer, Richard. "Hard Targets: Male bodies, Feminist Art, and the Force of Censorship in the 1970's." . Google, www.amherst.edu/system/files/media/1098/Butler_Hard_Targets_Male_Bodies.PDF . Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

⁴³ Ibid

uncomfortable, causing them to truly think about the works and what is right and wrong. The viewer is left questioning what emotions would be evoked if the rolls were reversed. Steckel successfully challenges the traditional ideas of femininity and its role it plays in sexuality.

Anita Steckel specialized in taking what was socially unacceptable and using it, intentionally making her viewers uncomfortable. She drew naked women to given them back their own power, instead of drawing them for male pleasure. Steckel painted realistic women, not ones that were too good to be true. This allowed her to depict women that could be found in society, not fantasy. She had a habit of painting the opposite of what was expected and acceptable. She forces her viewers to question their own views on women, femininity and how these roles are interpreted in society. Viewers were made uncomfortable and forced to question why these seemingly powerful women caused them a sense of discomfort. Anita Steckel's pieces challenge society and its patriarchal views by showing women as powerful, sexual beings.

Conclusion

Leonor Fini, Betty Tompkins and Anita Steckel are viewed as some of the most influential feminist artists in history. All these artists were seen as producing radical artworks that went against societal views of women and femininity in their times. Society has since progressed in our ideas of women and what it means to be feminine. As a female athlete, I still view myself as feminine even though I have some traditionally masculine traits such as my competitive nature and muscular build from exercising. However, we still have a long way to go. The #metoo movement is still very prevalent in the US along with many other issues starting to come to light revolving around the treatment of women in society. As women we still face many daily challenges such as not being able to go on a run alone at night or even being able to walk in public without fear of being sexually harassed. Despite this, culture and ideas surrounding

women and femininity will continue to progress positively as society itself progresses. These artists all strived to make their viewers uncomfortable by showing the opposite of what artwork has shown in the past, leading them to question the reality of what it means to be a woman and feminine as well as challenging their own views on the matter.

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Gentileschi, Artemisia. *Jael and Sisera* (c. 1620). Museum of Fine Arts (Budapest).

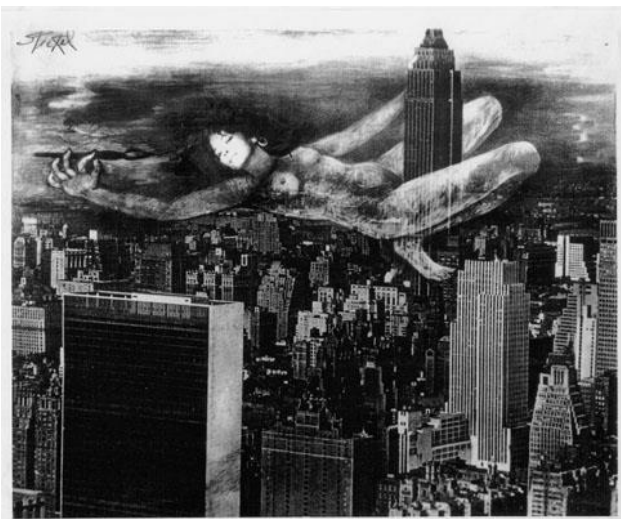
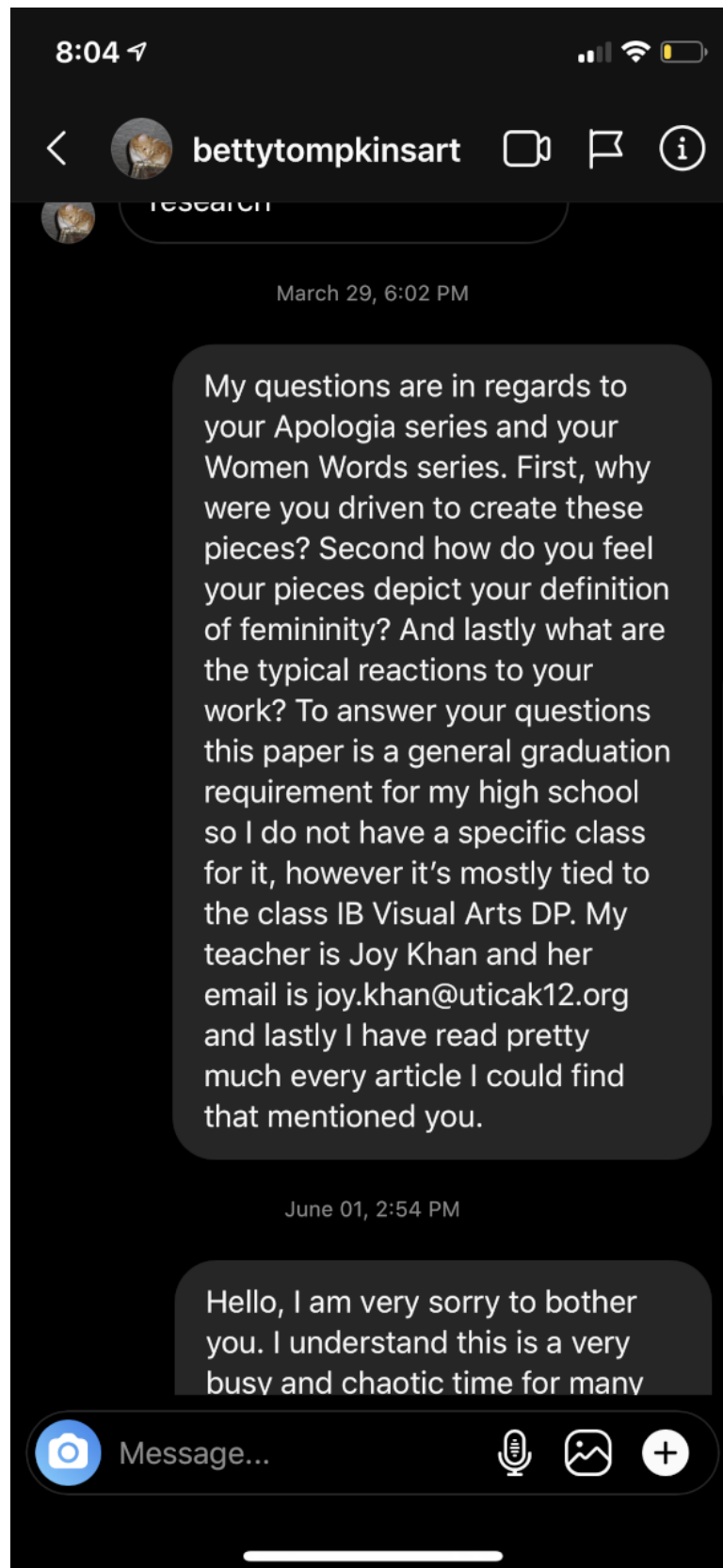


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Steckel, Anita. *Giant Woman on Empire State* (1969-70). The Estate of Anita Steckel.

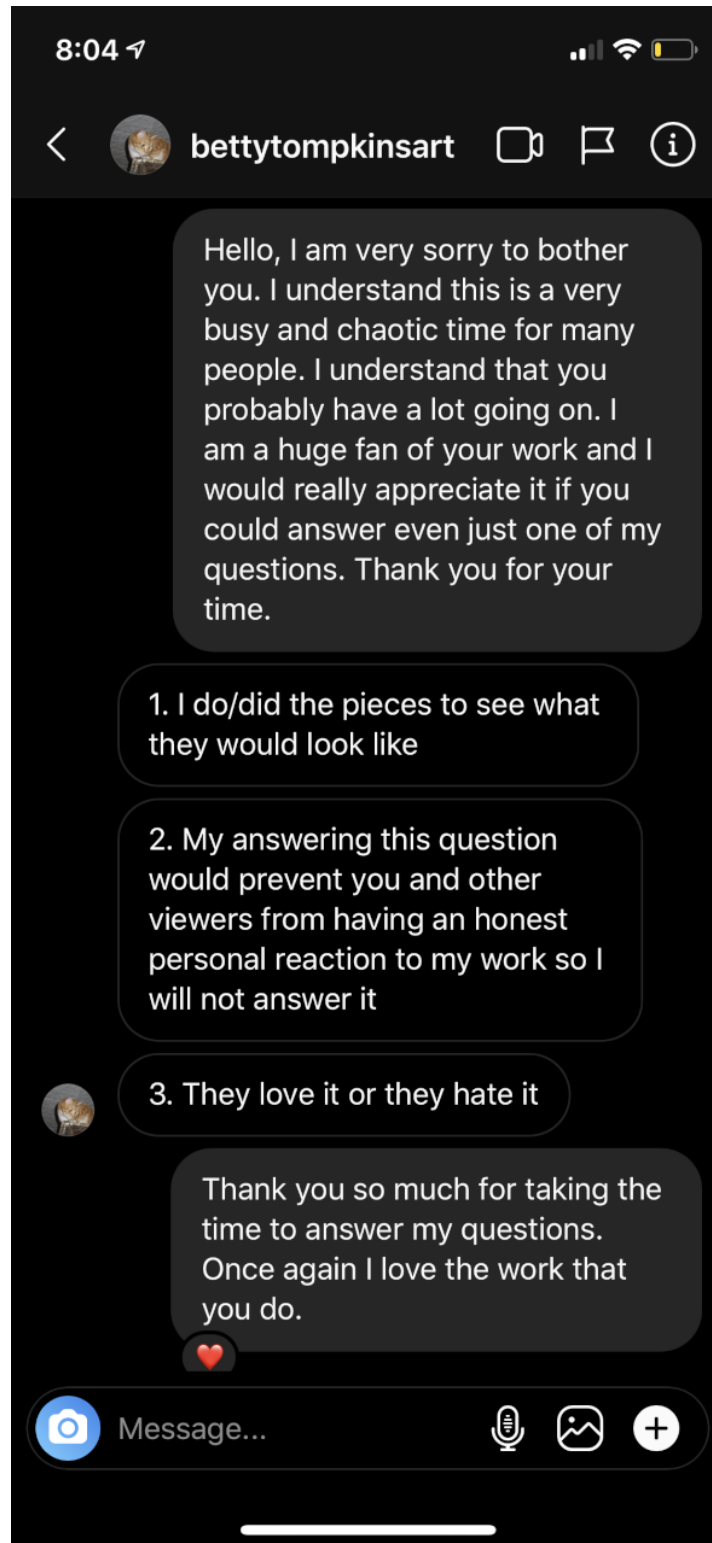


Figure 14 Pg. 16
Steckel, Anita. *The Subway* (1973). The
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Appendix 1: Interview with Betty Tompkins (March 2020)



Appendix 2: Interview with Betty Tompkins (June 2020)



Appendix 3: Transcripts of Betty Tompkins works

Transcript of text in *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #3)*, Betty Tompkins (2018)

“It’s lies. I haven’t slept in weeks. I’ve been such a supporter of women and women artists. I’ve done nothing wrong and I’m being crucified”

Transcript of text in *Apologia (Mary Shepard Greene Blumenstein)*, Betty Tompkins (2018)

“Our communications ... which Reitman now claims constituted sexual harassment ... were between two adults, a gay man and a queer woman, who share ... a penchant for florid and campy communications arising from our common academic backgrounds and sensibilities. These ... were ... invited, responded to and encouraged by him over a period of three years. “There is no more important figure in literary studies at NYU than Avital Ronell...”