

# ESTHETICS TOWARDS FEMINISM

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When we talk today about the art of women, we think about three loosely related phenomena. We think about feminist art, how slogans and postulates of the feminist movement were expressed in the art of Judy Chicago and Nancy Spero, Carolee Scheemann and Valie Export, Miriam Schapiro and Mary Kelly, and in Poland in the art of Maria Pinińska-Bereś, Natalia LL or Ewa Partum. We think about female art, about forgotten, omitted, ignored female artists pushed out from the main route of the history of art, and reminded with such exhibitions as 'Women Artists 1550–1950' by Linda Nochlin and Sutherland Harris in Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1976 – an exhibition that was later transferred to the Brooklyn Museum in New York (1977); Munich exhibition 'Kunstlerinnen 1877–1977' (1977); a Vienna exhibition 'Kunst mit Eigen-Sinn. Aktuelle Kunst von Frauen' (1982) or the exhibition curated by Agnieszka Morawińska: 'Polish women artists' in the National Museum in Warsaw (1991), one year later shown in the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington. Since then, there have appeared multiple exhibitions, books, anthologies of texts on the art of women and feminist interpretations of the art of women<sup>1</sup>, and the interest is directed not only at artists of the Western world, but also Arab artists<sup>2</sup>, artists from Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>3</sup> and post-Soviet countries<sup>4</sup>. Male

and female researchers are interested in particular in the moment when female artists are no longer trying to become equal with their fellow male artists, but they try to create *the art of their own*, expressing their femininity in a better or worse way. In Poland such art was created by Alina Szapocznikow, but it may be looked for earlier, for example in the art of Tamara Łempicka. Izabella Gustowska, when preparing the exhibition 'Obecność II' (1992) brought closer the contemporary art of women with works of various artists such as Magdalena Abakanowicz, Wanda Gołkowska, Aleksandra Jachtoma, Janina Kraupe-Świdorska, Alina Szapocznikow, Jadwiga Maziarska, Teresa Pałowska, Barbara Falender, Ewa Kuryluk<sup>5</sup>. Fans of female art (*Frauenkunst*) may easily be accused of reductionism and essentialism; reducing art created by women to femininity and faith that things like femininity (mysticism of femininity) exists and is able to be captured and illustrated.

Finally, we think about art created by women (*women's art*). *What do Magdalena Abakanowicz, Marina Abramović, Jenny Holzer, Rebeka Horn, Barbara Kruger, Yoko Ono, Cindy Sherman, Nan Goldin, Rosemarie Trockel have in common?* – asks Magdalena Ujma<sup>6</sup>. They all had individual exhibitions in Poland in the 1990s. Femininity is here in the background, is an apparent, superficial connector. These are notable artists, recognized, of indisputable achievements and importance for modern art, who create their own artistic worlds, not forgetting that the rights of women are still fought for. When Barbara Kruger had her individual exhibition in the Modern Art Centre in Warsaw in 1992, she asked to put posters around the city with a very unambiguous message, addressed not only to women: *Your body is the battlefield. Vindicate rights of women. Fight for the right for abortion. Demand sexual education* (1989).

### 1. Feminist movement

In the classical work of art of American feminism, *Sexual Politics* (1969), Kate Millett divides the history of female movement into three stages: the first revolution between 1830–1930, the period of contra-revolution between 1930–1960 and the second revolution, namely neo-feminism of the 1960s<sup>7</sup>. The first of the said periods was the time of women's fight for civil and political rights, for equal rights of both sexes, for the change of law discriminating women. American women started to organize themselves to fight political rights only men were eligible for, around 1830. In 1848 there was a meeting of 250 women activists organized in Seneca Falls, that ended with the adoption of the *Declaration of feelings and resolutions*, an act considered to be the beginning of women's organized movement in America. In Europe the demands for equalization of political rights of women and men occurred earlier, as early as at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Mary Wollstonecraft, wife of an English anarchist William Goldwin and mother of an equally famous daughter Mary Wollstonecraft-Shelley, published a brochure *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Since then, the idea of emancipation of women, thus awarding women full civic and political rights became a part of programs of all revolutionary ideologies – from utopian socialism to different variations of anarchist socialism. Socialist movement was not the only ally of women fighting for their rights. In the middle of the century women gained support from the side of the progressive liberal thought. In 1867 John Stuart Mill made a speech in the British parliament defending rights of women, becoming in later years an enthusiastic supporter and advocate of equalizing both sexes in the name of progress and harmonious development of humankind.

Increasing interest in the so-called women case and support given to the female movement by the main forces of the 19<sup>th</sup> century political scene led to the division of the female movement into two

streams: the socialist stream, getting closer and closer to the labour movement – the Second International established in 1889 added the issue of liberation of women to their political program – and the liberal stream. As much as the socialist stream linked liberation of women with the worldwide proletariat revolution, made liberation of women dependent on liberation of the labour class, the liberal stream demanded full rights for women in the current, not future, society, exposing specific demands of women: the right to manage their own property, the right to inherit, to get divorced, to decide about their own bodies. This division disturbed the unity of the women's movement but not enough to make it impossible for women to fight for voting rights. The moment when women gained their voting rights closes the first stage of the feminist revolution. The earliest voting rights were gained in the Nordics – in Finland (1907) and Norway (1908), a bit later in other countries; in Poland – in 1918, in the USA – in 1920, in Britain – in 1928, in France as late as in 1945, and in Switzerland even later, in 1970<sup>8</sup>.

Between 1930–1960 the offensive of the female movement a bit stopped. Millett calls this period contra-revolution, inspired on the one hand by psychoanalysis in its orthodox Freud version and on the other hand – seeking permanent, unchangeable, mythical sources of culture. Both psychoanalysis and majority of myths occurring in various cultures show a woman as a subordinate creature, unformed, subject to the power of men, and at the same time dangerous because equipped in powers threatening human order. In the two main sources of European symbolism and imagination, in the Greek and Judaeo-Christian tradition, a woman, and in fact femininity in a form of Pandora and Eve, brings bad luck to humankind. Thus, a postulate occurs to tame anarchistic life of femininity and subject it to male supervision. Under the influence of the feminist contra-revolution of the years 1930–1960 feminists realized that radical change of the

fate of women is not possible without changing the world of imagination. It is not only necessary to reform the society, change laws and social institutions, but also the language and culturally rooted images of women, including jokes and gags. No wonder then, that the American neo-feminism of the 1960s was initiated with a book by Betty Friedan *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which fought a certain image of femininity deeply enrooted in the society's awareness.

An invaluable role in making the female movement aware of a double task – social and awareness (cultural) emancipation, change of the institution and revolution of the minds – was played by the book of Simone de Beauvoir *Le deuxième sexe* (*The second sex*, 1949), analysing both the actual and mythical position of a woman in Western culture. The book of de Beauvoir was familiarized by American feminists only in the 1960s and was immediately considered amazingly pertinent, although terrifying in its pessimism, recognition of the situation of women in the world created by men. Neo-feminists of the 1960s did not argue with the description presented by the French writer, but, agreeing with the diagnosis, wanted to undertake the fight against patriarchal society. Simone de Beauvoir did not take such possibility into account at all, she wanted to remain an unbiased researcher, whereas American feminists immediately took the role of ideologists soliciting for a fight with the patriarchal model of culture. Such was the basic difference between Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett.

The relation with the mass social-political movement originally worked for the benefit of feminist art, but later, when post-modernism propagated suspicion and distrust towards big stories, people started to talk more often about post-feminism<sup>9</sup>, and put the heyday of the feminist art in the past, mainly in the 1970s<sup>10</sup>.

Feminism of the first wave is often called 'feminism of equality' as it aimed at equality, equal legal status of women and men. Feminism of the second wave is called 'feminism of difference' as

it emphasized differences – women are different from men, but that does not mean they should be discriminated. No one should be discriminated because of their being different<sup>11</sup>.

## **2. Criticism of the patriarchal world of art**

Feminists wanted to revise the existing history of art, to discover the recognized women artists and find the artistic expression specific for women. However, in the very beginning, namely at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, the aim of the feminist campaigns was to reveal the patriarchal nature of the Western world of art<sup>12</sup>. Women felt discriminated in the male world of art, and all observations proved that discrimination. In 1969 on the annual exhibition of American art in the Whitney Museum of American Art there were presented works of 143 male artists and only 8 female artists, which was only 5.5% of exhibitors. The following year the percentage share of female participants went up to 22% – among 103 exhibitors there were 22 women, but the average share of women on exhibitions in the Whitney Museum of American Art oscillated between 5 to 10%<sup>13</sup>. In 1970 the top ten New York galleries showed 190 male artists and only 18 female artists (9.5%). In the two most prestigious American museums, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Los Angeles County Museum, in the 1960s there was no individual exhibition organized for any female artist. The history of art institutions in the United States employed 88% of men and only 12% of women (FTEs, and among part-time employees this ratio was 76% to 24%<sup>14</sup>). More of such data could be mentioned, not only regarding the United States. For the exhibition '35 years of painting in the People's Republic of Poland' in the National Museum in Poznan (1979), Maria Berdyszak invited 102 male painters and only 9 female painters (?), which accounted for 9%. Alicja Kępińska in her book *Nowa sztuka. Sztuka polska w latach 1945-1979* (1982) lists 232 artists, including

37 female artists, which accounts for 16%, but among the top twenty most referred to artists there are only two women, and additionally on remote positions – Wanda Gołkowska as number 17 and Alina Szapocznikow as number 20.

If we look at the world of art as a pyramid, it turns out that women never or very rarely reached the very top, namely individual museum exhibition. And women, as calculated by feminists, account for more than 60% of students of schools of art and almost 50% of practicing artists<sup>15</sup>. Why then do not women achieve such artistic successes as men? Are those critics right who – as Otto Weininger (*Geschlecht und Charakter*, 1903) or Hans Hildebrandt (*Die Frau als Künstler*, 1928) – claimed that women have less talent? Such answer was as a rule rejected by feminists. They did not acknowledge it. Linda Nochlin in her famous article, already a classic of modern history of art, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* ('Art News', 1971, Nov.) looked for the answer to the title question and suggested it – the fault was on the side of the androcentric world of art, which in many ways discriminated women, made it difficult for them to access artistic education, did not allow them to study in the best academies or draw naked male models (in the London Royal Academy women could draw from a naked model only from 1893) and created a false image of art perceived as female – only the big and lofty is male, the small and delicate is female<sup>16</sup>. Women who wanted to realize their artistic ambitions were pushed by the men's world of art into areas of lower art, decorative, useful, ornate or to lower painting genres, such as still life, flowers, portraits (mainly child portraits).

What was supposed to result from such a total criticism of the world of art? Making us aware that in the European artistic tradition women were rather the topic of art than the artists (?). They were present more with their bodies than spirits. They appeared in the form of the biblical Foremother Eve and Virgin Mary, Maria Magdalena and

Aphrodite, the reclining Venus and Susanne watched by old men. They were a symbol of beauty, charm, grace, as well as Nature, Justice, Freedom, Reason, Nation – *almost all allegories, both words and graphic, are women*, notices, with a slight astonishment, Simone de Beauvoir<sup>7</sup>. Activists of Guerrilla Girls were mostly right claiming that important museum collections will rather have a naked woman than a female artist. In one of the posters they wrote that in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the department of modern art there are only 5% of female artists, and 85% of nude acts there are nude acts of women.

Should women after such inspection leave the existing world of art and build their own, alternative world of art? But how? From scratch? Away from the institutions of the existing world of art or in the outskirts, so somehow already dependent on it, as it was done by Judy Chicago, opening in 1970 in the California Institute of Art (CalArts) in Valencia the first feminist artistic program of educating women by women for women? Or maybe not to reject the world of art totally, but to change its functioning, make it less patriarchal? Remove or weaken the mechanisms functioning in it, as well as the strategies detrimental to women. For example, a strategy of omitting, ignoring or diminishing artistic achievements of women, not including them in the artistic canon, instead reaching out to their private lives and emphasizing who they are related with, whose wives or lovers they are, to underestimate their independence and suggest that their creative life was more or less impacted by their life partners. The most known examples of this strategy in use are Camille Claudel, Lee Krasner, Frida Kahlo. This strategy refers to quite a popular saying that a man graduating from art studies becomes an artist, and a woman basically remains a woman, and if she is an artist, usually 'seasonal', until she has the first baby.

Would that feminist movement be successful in art? Promoted in the second half of the 1980s the term 'post-feminism' seemed to suggest that it would. Young female artists debuting in the 1980s did not

have to so aggressively react to various forms of discriminations, like their older sisters. Women were not forced, therefore, to subordinate their art to any ideologies, even feminist. But did feminism win? Jolanta Ciesielska estimates that the share of female artists included in important exhibitions of the Polish art of 1990s was between 10 and 20%<sup>18</sup>, and the number of women increased as the age of exhibitor went down. Women still were underrepresented at the top of the world of art. The Guerrilla Girls activists showed that female artists are underestimated also in the art market; for one painting by Jasper Johns sold in 1988 for 17.7 billion dollars one could have bought, as precisely counted by the Guerrilla Girls, more than sixty works of art by female artists. 'How much would your collection of art be worth, if racism and sexism were not fashionable anymore?' – they asked.

The Guerrilla Girls are the authoresses of a sarcastic text titled *Benefits from being a female artist* (1988), where we read: *You do not work under the pressure of success. You do not have to exhibit together with men. You can have hope that you will be discovered after turning 80. You can be more than sure that whatever you do, it will always be called feminist art. You will find your ideas in works of other artists. You will have a chance to choose: career or maternity? You will not have to smoke those dreadful cigars and wear Italian suits. You will have more time to work, when your partner leaves you for a younger woman. You can find yourself in a corrected history of art. You will not feel embarrassed, as no one will call you a genius or a master*<sup>19</sup>.

### **3. Feminist deconstruction of esthetics**

The art of women is as good as the art created by men, said feminists, however, to see and appreciate this art, one has to adopt other criteria of assessing art. Let us make this paradoxical, as it may sound, thesis a starting point for considerations regarding the impact of feminism on modern esthetics<sup>20</sup>.





Brooklyn Museum, *Women Artists: 1550–1950* exhibition, 1977

Feminists accurately recognized the sources of the lower position of the art of women. They were totally right claiming that the reason for this lies in the currently adopted assessment criteria for the assessment of artistic productions. As there is no doubt that the criteria for assessing works of art developed and practised in our culture expressly promoted male productions, since they were developed on the basis of observation and analysis of male artworks. No wonder then that they accepted and imposed on the world the male point of view, the male way of perceiving and valuating art. This point of view was accepted by modern esthetics, enhancing it with all its philosophical-scientific authority. In this way female artists were faced with quite a diabolic alternative: adjust your art to male standards in the name of one, universal, sexless art, in which both men and women may express themselves and find self-satisfaction, or keep the female features of their art for the price of withdrawing to those areas of art and genres that are considered lower, pragmatic, decorative, beautifying, that were said by Hegel to *give a pleasant and sexy form to the outside of our lives, but do not have a lot to do with the truth brought by free art*<sup>21</sup>.

Both solutions confirmed a lower status of art created by women. The first showed that high art is not a men's invention and domain, that women are also talented in this regard, if only they get rid of sexual prejudices and inhibitions. The second provided numerous proofs that women feel the best and realize themselves artistically in lower, decorative, beautifying arts. Therefore, whatever women-artists would do, whatever strategy they would choose, they would always lose, confirming the image of art created by modern esthetics, in which productions of women always played a secondary role. No wonder then that criticism of feminists was directed in the first place to the criteria of art assessment developed by modern esthetics.

At the end of 1960s, when feminist art started to be born, these criteria were so unstable and so effectively undermined by previous

vanguard movements, that feminists did not come across larger resistance at their revolutionizing and destroying. The most engaged feminists did not care for those criteria anyway: first of all, they wanted to talk about the oppression that women are subject to in their daily life<sup>22</sup>. It appeared to be much more difficult to remove misogyny antifemale practices and discourses from the institution of art. It was a difficult task also because the alternatives proposed by feminists raised various, to a large extent justified, doubts. As feminists raised, against the existing esthetics – hiding phallogentric ambitions under universal declarations, a proposal of their own esthetics, ostentatiously referring to the feeling of female superiority.

Otherness, deciding on dissimilarity of female emotions and experience of the world, was looked for at first in biology. However, very quickly feminists realized that referring to biological determiners, even though useful in disputes with radical left-wing, even due to the fact that it allows to consider the conflict of sexes more as a basic conflict than a class conflict, leads to a kind of fatalism that has a limited critical power. Besides, it may be easily used by conservative ideologists to justify the historically created *status quo*. Therefore, not resigning from the search for dissimilarity of female emotions and experience of the world, sources of that otherness were started to be looked for in social-cultural factors, not biological, in similar mechanisms of limitation and enslavement of female activity through the eras, practically in all known cultures. Such a constant element was co-existence of two clearly separated areas: private and public. Women were expected to be realized at home, whereas boys were from their early age prepared to be present in the public area. The division into domestic (private) and public areas was supposed to be the source of all significant differences between women and men. Their sources were, therefore, not in biology, but in social mechanisms of socialisation, in assigned social roles. The

socio-anthropological perspective created much more possibilities to criticise social institutions, norms, rules and discourses than the bio-sexual, and feminist movement has always been very sensitive to that critical aspect.

Stefan Morawski wrote that the two said approaches – bio-sexual and socio-anthropological – *determine two main manners of cultivating feminist thinking, both as regards art and esthetics, as these two overlap*<sup>23</sup>. These are competitive approaches, in many points contradictory, but also having some common features, including essentialism, expressed in seeking the essence of female experience, which is located in the biological, cultural area, or – like maternity – at the intersection of these two. Moreover – peculiar fundamentalism, which is trying to root the idea of femininity in some kind of undeniable foundation – defined biologically or culturally. And, finally, universalism, dragging various female experiences under one, universal scheme of femininity.

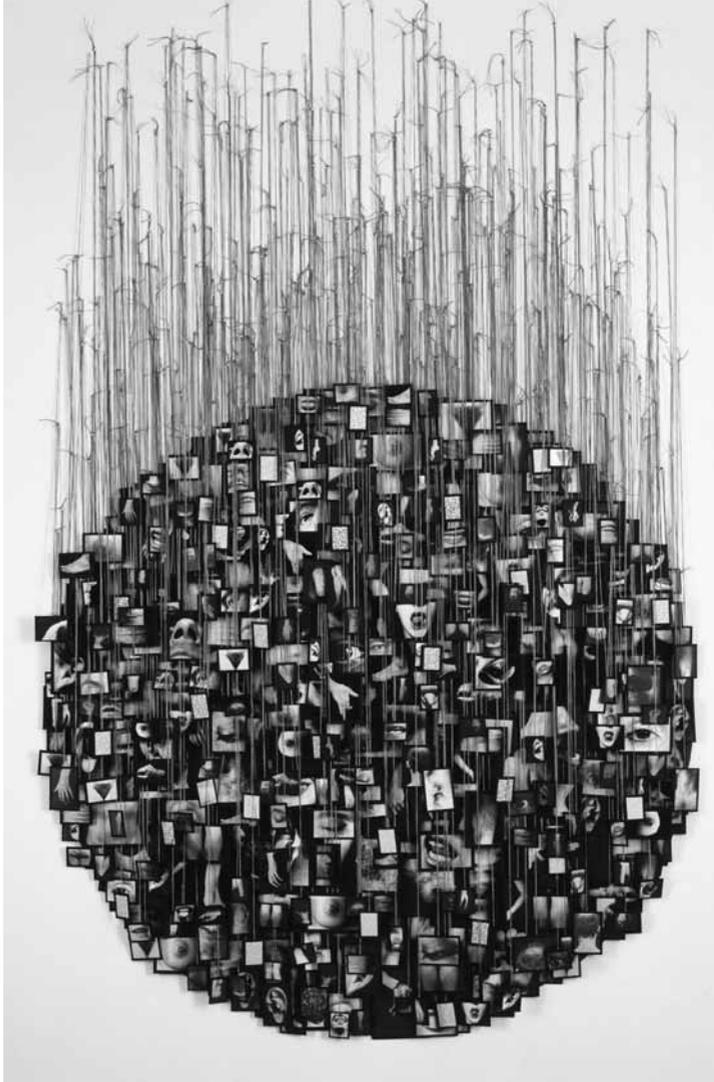
Therefore, one may say that the said approaches, with all their differences, proposed new versions of big stories. Big stories of the modern era were contrasted by feminists with their own, similarly structured meta-narrations, written not from the male anymore, but the female perspective. Of course, these stories carried a dose of criticism – disturbed the monopoly of existing meta-narrations, even though they kept all binary oppositions of modern thinking. In feminist meta-narrations old oppositions were replayed with changed characters; things that used to be lower, as feminine, now became higher; and things that were higher, as masculine, changed to the lower. Man/Woman, Active/Passive, Culture/Science, Day/Night, Sun/Moon, Father/Mother, Brain/Heart, Structure/Pulp, Logos/Emotions, High/Low. Always the same metaphors, the same oppositions not allowing to go beyond a patriarchal way of thinking, complained Helene Cixous<sup>24</sup>. No wonder then, that activities of feminists gained

only partial support. Outside the feminist group was supported as much as it strengthened distrust and suspicion towards big stories and raised resistance and objection when it attempted to put their own narrations in place of modernist narrations.

In that situation a part of feminists resigned from building a separate feminist esthetics, following a conviction that each of such attempts is doomed to failure, each, sooner or later, will become a meta-narration and will fall into the trap of essentialism, fundamentalism and universalism. Thus – the proposal to forsake dreams of feminist esthetics. Instead of contrasting the patriarchal esthetics with own contra-esthetics, it should rather be criticism of the very idea of esthetic assessment of art, raise importance of non-esthetic values in assessment of art, take clearly the side of assessing art in moral or political categories. Feminist reflection on art was to become an example of a radically anti-esthetic approach to art. In this way feminists avoided the accusation of restoring modernist meta-narrations and assign to feminist art a status of perpetual dissident escaping universal esthetic categories<sup>25</sup>.

#### **4. Feminist esthetics or gender esthetics?**

Authors writing on feminist esthetics exceptionally agree on the subject of its beginnings. Feminist esthetics was born in the first half of the 1990s with two anthologies: *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective* (1993) Hilde Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer and *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics* (1995) Peggy Zeglin Brand and Carolyn Korsmeyer<sup>26</sup>. Two books are the starting point for feminist esthetics: *Room of One's Own* (1929) by Virginia Woolf and already referred to *Second sex* (1949) by Simone de Beauvoir. Later, authors interested in feminist art separate their ways: some go after the Anglo-Saxon feminists (Kate Millett, Elain Showalter), others feel closer to the French tradition (Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray)<sup>27</sup>. Some dealt with



Annette Messenger, *Mes Voeux*, 1988

Valie Export, Peter Weiber, performance of *Aus der Mappe der Hundigkeit*, Vienna 1968



descriptions of women's daily lives, organizing quasi-reportage exhibitions, such as *Portrait of the Artist as Housewife* (London 1977) or *Post-Partum Document* (1973–1978) by Mary Kelly; others had a philosophical reflection on the idea of femininity. As long as authors writing on feminist esthetics agree about its beginnings, they do not agree about its name. Titles of the above said anthologies say, 'feminist perspective', 'attitude of feminism to esthetics'. Is it, therefore, justified, to talk about feminist esthetics or esthetics of sex, gender esthetics? Feminist esthetics is supposed to be a criticism of the existing esthetics and seeking alternative esthetics, and gender esthetics introduces a sex (gender) point of view to esthetics. The latter approach is more interesting and seems to promise more – does not create a partial esthetics but leads to rework of the whole esthetics.

The most important problem that feminist esthetics pointed to and which it had to face, was the problem of male gaze. This phenomenon was described by Laura Mulvey in the now classic essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* of 1975<sup>28</sup>. Feminists posed a question key for modern art: is seeing a cultural construct?<sup>29</sup> Let us take one of canonical works of art of the European painting, a painting by Łukasz Cranach *Adam i Ewa* (1525). Adam and Eve are standing naked under the tree of good and evil with a snake around its trunk. Eve has already picked an apple from the tree and gives it to Adam. She is tempting Adam who is hesitating, wondering. How do we know that? From the painting by Cranach or the Book of Genesis illustrated by the painting? We see that Eve is seducing Adam, do we know that Eve is tempting Adam? We associate feminine features with Eve, such as tempting, weakness, evil. And with Adam we associate masculine features like innocence, good, morality. Eve becomes the opposite of Maria, mother of Jesus, who is innocent, gentle, fragile with motherly love<sup>30</sup>.

Let us take another painting, portrait of Mrs. Fiske Warren with her daughter, by John Singer Sargent from 1903. The painting presents two

women in ball dresses, painted in a post-impressionist manner. The theme of the painting, as the title suggests, is the wife and daughter of Mr. Warren. He is not present in the painting but is the perpetrator of what we see. He ordered the painting and put his wife and daughter like trophies. The wife was even deprived of the name and maiden name – Gretchen Osgood. If we asked who sees and who is seen, who possesses and who is possessed, who is free and who is limited and, at last, who is the subject and who is the object, then we would find the patriarchal social structure embedded in that apparently innocent image<sup>31</sup>.

The concept of a look of a man suggested that in the whole to-date history of art was not only created by men, but also for men. Carolyn Korsmeyer brings us closer to this issue on the example of painting by Jean-Leon Gerome *A Roman Slave Market* (1886)<sup>32</sup>. This academic painting presents a young female slave standing naked in front of a group of aroused men – potential buyers. The spectators of the slave for sale may be *disgusted, embarrassed, outraged or aroused* with the theme of the painting, writes Korsmeyer, *and at the same time he is forced to contemplate the composition and technique*<sup>33</sup>. Esthetic assessment, which we have known at least since Kant, is to excess sensual pleasure, is to be not as much happiness, but a promise of happiness and to focus on esthetic qualities – in a nude female act we are not to see a naked woman, but a female nude, namely a woman ‘wearing’ art<sup>34</sup>.

Feminist esthetics rejected the conviction being the base for modern esthetics that art should be a subject of selfless contemplation. Gerome’s painting shows the effect of a man’s look described by Laura Mulvey. A girl exposed to the view of a horde of men becomes objectivized, becomes an object to watch, which arouses erotic fantasies of the viewers, who associate themselves with buyers, as they seem to see their mirror reflections in them, namely ‘imagined me’

with whom watching the painting allows to identify. The male look by Laura Mulvey was built on the Lacan's psychoanalysis<sup>35</sup>. The substantial problem of feminist esthetics became demasking the male and seeking the female look. The issue is important as for centuries we have been taught that the male look is the only one, the right one, the one look at the art, the look of all the people. The art of women undermined that indisputable, as it may seem, dogma, and made it by referring to the 'double subject' by Luce Irigaray<sup>36</sup>. Art created by women who are not trying to match art created by men. This is the art that French female philosophers demanded when they talked about *écriture féminine*, about female writing or female letter, which was to differentiate art created by women. The term was introduced by Irigaray, brought to discussion by Cixous, and universalized by Kristeva.

All three French authors represent feminism inspired by psychoanalysis. There is a certain paradox in this, as Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalysis were considered for a long time to be the main enemies of feminism. It changed as late as in the 1970s when feminists started to reach for Jacques Lacan, and through him to psychoanalysis. The breakthrough came with an essay by Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974). Feminists realized that psychoanalysis is one of few, or even the only philosophical direction which assumes two kinds of subjects, i.e. it assumes at the starting point that there are two subjects – a woman and a man – even is a woman is defined purely negatively, by lack, as a non-man. It is also the only orientation which replaces the Descartes' thinking subject (consciousness) with corporal and gender substance<sup>37</sup>, and the stable ego with dynamic, changing personality, exposed to constant fight of the conscious with forces of the subconscious and superconscious (superego). It was now enough to make the next step: accept that things that Freud and his supporters thought to be a discovery of objective scientific truth, is in fact a product of patriarchal culture or – as some started to say now – logocentric or

phallogocentric, and psychoanalysis, from the enemy of feminism, changed into its supporter.

The second wing of feminist esthetics, started by Virginia Woolf, was inspired by the myth of Androgyne<sup>38</sup>. Creative individuals develop both aspects of their personality – masculine and feminine – thus strengthening their double genderness. Therefore, one should focus on writing (*écriture*) which will express this doubled personality in the best way, namely new ways of seeing and feeling the world. Women should liberate themselves from the differentiation between the masculine and the feminine as metaphysical opposition, and, to the extent allowed by the handicapped patriarchal society, shape their lives themselves, wrote Julia Kristeva. It was a call for creativity which does not reinforce, does not strengthen the existing divisions, but allows their exceeding<sup>39</sup>.

The proposal of the French authors was not so new as it might have seemed. Many years before, *anima*, *animus* and human androgyny were described by Jung; *anima* is a feminine element in a man, *animus* is a masculine element in a woman. Female unawareness has a male nature, stores the blurred image of a father; unawareness of a man has a female nature, stores the image of a mother<sup>40</sup>. Jung was referred to by a Czech theoretician Jindrich Chalupecky in *Souls of androgyne* (1976): *Art of women is different than art of men, just like women are different from men. Poetry by Dickinson, Achmatowa or Plath would not be written by any man and that is why it is great. But we are all androgynes. Male and female are not opposites, they are two sides of the same being, two halves of the universe. Jung finds a female soul in every man, and a male soul in every woman: anima and animus is a spirit of order and organization*<sup>41</sup>. In the last sentence Chalupecky almost quotes Kristeva. Paradoxically, proponents of androgyny, as shown by Chalupecky, maintain the faith in significance of the difference between male and female, and at the same time, remove

that difference, as in each of us there are masculine and feminine elements, we are all, to a larger or smaller extent, women and men: we are strong and weak, reasonable and emotional, active and passive, intellectual and sensual, logical and pompous. If it was not for that duality, not for the immanent androgenicity, we would not understand the other gender.

- 1 See G. Borkowska, M. Czermińska, U. Phillips, *Pisarki polskie. Od średniowiecza do współczesności*. Przewodnik, Gdańsk 2000.
- 2 F. Lloyd, *Contemporary Arab Women's Art. Dialogues of the Present*, London 1999.
- 3 E. Bartra, *Crafting Gender. Women and Folk Art in Latin America and the Caribbean*, London 2003.
- 4 R. Baigell, M. Baigell, *Peeling Potatoes, Painting Pictures. Women Artists in Post-Soviet Russia, Estonia and Latvia. The First Decade*, London 2001.
- 5 The exhibition had three parts: the main exhibition with seven artists (Izabella Gustowska, Zofia Kulik, Anna Kutera, Natalia LL, Małgorzata Niedzielko, Krystyna Piotrowska, Anna Płotnicka; the exhibitions of four young artists (Zuzanna Baranowska, Agata Michowska, Anna Tyczyńska, Małgorzata Sufleta) and the presentation of 19 artists creating the tradition of female art in Poland. *Obecność III* [catalogue], Poznań 1992.
- 6 M. Ujma, *Strach przed śmiesznością*, [in:] *Sztuka kobiet*, red. J. Ciesielska, A. Smalcerz, Bielsko-Biała 2000, p. 70.
- 7 K. Millet, *Sexual Politics*, New York 1969. A similar categorization is proposed by a Polish researcher of feminism, Kazimierz Ślęczka, who defines the first wave of feminism (1791–1920), interlude (1920–1963), second wave (1964–1982) and post-feminism of the 1980s. K. Ślęczka, *Feminizm*, Katowice 1999. I proposed a division into the first feminist revolution that can be called, after Juliet Mitchell, 'the longest revolution', from the publishing of the brochure by Mary Wollstonecraft *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to women's gaining their voting rights (1792–1930), contra-revolution (1930–1960) and the second revolution, called also neo-feminism, from the beginning of the 1960s until post-feminism of the 1980s, so feminism liberated from the ideologist corset. G. Dziamski, *Sztuka feministyczna: od outsidera do innego*, [in:] *ibid*, *Sztuka u progu XXI wieku*, Poznań 2002, p. 73–77; and: G. Dziamski, *Płeć kulturowa, czyli problem tożsamości*, [in:] *Kulturoznawstwo, czyli wprowadzenie do kultury ponowoczesnej*, Gdańsk 2016.
- 8 K. Millet, *Sexual Politics*, London 1977.
- 9 Post-feminism was represented by Ally McBeal in the TV series *Ally McBeal* (1997–2002) and Bridget Jones of the bestselling *Bridget Jones' Diary* (1997) by Helen Fielding. In 2001 the story by Fielding was filmed and in 2004 – its sequel.
- 10 See G. Dziamski, *Sztuka feministyczna*, op. cit. and P. Krakowski, *Sztuka feministyczna*, [in:] *Sztuka kobiet*, op. cit., p. 28–30.
- 11 See J. Bator, *Feminizm, postmodernizm, psychoanaliza. Filozoficzne dylematy feministek 'drugiej fali'*, Gdańsk 2002.
- 12 See G. Dziamski, *Sztuka feministyczna*, op. cit.
- 13 C. Robins, *The Pluralist Era. American Art 1968–1984*, New York 1984, p. 58.
- 14 G. Glueck, *A Matter of Redefining the Whole Relationship between Art and Society*, 'Art News', 1980, Oct., p. 63.
- 15 Research conducted in Poland at the end of 2015 shows that women are 77% of students of art schools, 35% of scholars in art schools and only 17% of full professors.
- 16 P. Krakowski, *Sztuka feministyczna*, op. cit., p. 23.
- 17 S. de Beauvoir, *Druga płeć*, Cracow 1972.
- 18 J. Ciesielska, *Orły, sokoły, bażanty...*, [in:] *Kobieta o kobiecie*, ed. A. Smalcerz, Bielska Galeria Sztuki, Bielsko-Biała 1996, p. 7.
- 19 Guerilla Girls, *The Advantages of Being a Woman Artists* (1988), [in:] *The Artist's Joke*, ed. J. Higgie, Cambridge Mass., 2007, p. 100.
- 20 G. Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminist and Histories of Art*, London 1988.
- 21 G. W. F. Hegel, *Wykłady o estetyce*, translated by J. Grabowski, A. Landman, Warsaw 1964, t. I, p. 13.
- 22 See G. Dziamski, *Sztuka feministyczna*, op. cit.
- 23 S. Morawski, *O tak zwanej estetyce*

- feministycznej, [in:] *Czy jeszcze estetyka?*, ed. M. Ostrowicki, Cracow 1994.
- 24** H. Cixous, C. Clement, *The Newly Born Woman*. Op.cit.: J. Bator, *Feminizm, postmodernizm, psychoanaliza*, op. cit., p. 224.
- 25** The figure of dissident was used by Julia Kristeva in the articles *Un nouveau type d'intellectuel; le dissident*, 'Tel Quel', 1977, No. 74.
- 26** S. Worth, *Feminist Aesthetics*, [in:] *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, eds B. Gaut, D. McIver Lopes, London–New York 2001, s. 437. K. Wilkoszewska, *Nowe inspiracje w estetyce drugiej połowy XX wieku*, [in:] *Estetyki filozoficzne XX wieku*, ed. K. Wilkoszewska, Kraków 2000, p. 298. S. Morawski, *O tak zwanej estetyce feministycznej*, [in:] *Czy jeszcze estetyka?*, ed. M. Ostrowicki, Cracow 1994, p. 72.
- 27** T. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics. Feminist Literary Theory*, London–New York 1985.
- 28** This essay was further elaborated by Laura Mulvey's book *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Bloomington 1989.
- 29** W. T. J. Mitchell, *Pokazać widzenie. Krytyka kultury wizualnej*, [in:] *Czego chcą obrazy?*, translated by Ł. Zaremba, Warsaw 2015, p. 371.
- 30** G. Pooke, D. Newall, *Art History. The Basics*, London–New York 2008, p. 141–143.
- 31** Ibid, p. 144–146.
- 32** Previously this painting was analysed by Linda Nochlin: *Women, Art and Power, and Other Essays*, New York 1988.
- 33** C. Korsmeyer, *Gender w estetyce*, translated by A. Nacher, Kraków 2008, p. 64.
- 34** See L. Nead, *Akt kobiecy*, translated by E. Franus, Poznań 1998.
- 35** C. Korsmeyer, *Gender w estetyce*, op. cit., p. 65.
- 36** J. Bator, *Feminizm, postmodernizm, psychoanaliza*, op. cit., p. 38.
- 37** L. Irigaray, *The Question of the Other*, [in:] *French Women Philosophers. A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Ch. Howells, New York–London 2004. Irigaray was accused of abandoning the philosophy of the masters: Platon, Kant, Freud, Derrida.
- 38** T. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, op. cit. p. 2.
- 39** Ibid, p. 13.
- 40** C. G. Jung, *Syzygia: anima i animus*, [in:] ibid: *Archetypy i symbole*, op. cit.
- 41** J. Chaluppecki, *Duse androgynowa*, [in:] *Situace 1970/1980. Ceske a slovenske vytvarne umeni v 70. a 80 letech na Ostravsku*, Frydek-Mistek 1991.
- Chalupecky refers directly to Jung and indirectly to Kristeva with *La revolution du language poetique*, Paris 1974.

Grzegorz Dziamski  
*Aesthetics Against Feminism*

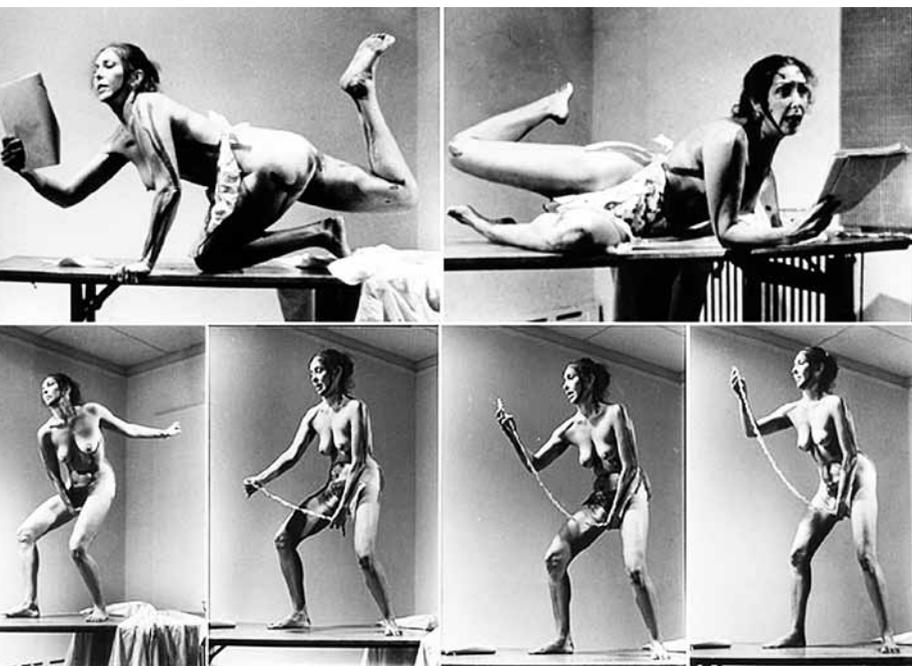
**When we talk today about women's art, we think about three phenomena, quite loosely related. We think about *feminist art*, about the way that the feminist's statements and demands were expressed in the creativity of Judy Chicago and Nancy Spero, Carolee Scheemann and Valie Export, Miriam Schapiro and Mary Kelly, and in Poland in the creativity of Maria Pinińska-Bereś, Natalia LL or Ewa Partum. We think about *female art*, the forgotten, abandoned, neglected artists brought back to memory by the feminists with thousands of exhibitions and reinterpretations. Lastly, we think about the art created by women – *women's art*.**

However, we do not know and will never know, whether the latter two phenomena would develop without the feminist movement. What is more, it is about the first wave of feminism called "the equality feminism", as well as the dominating in the second wave – "the difference feminism". The feminist art was in the beginning a critique of the patriarchal world of art. In a sense it remains as such (see: the Guerilla Girls), yet today we are more interested in the feminist deconstruction of thinking about art, and thus the question arises: should feminism create its own aesthetics – the feminist aesthetics, or should it develop the gender aesthetics, and as a result introduce the gender point of view to thinking about art?

In this moment the androgynous feminism regains its importance, one represented by Virginia Woolf, and referring – in the theoretical layer – to Freud as read by Lucy Irigaray. Freudism, which the feminists became aware of in the 1970s, is the only philosophical movement, which assumes a dual subject, that is, in the starting point assumes the existence of two subjects – man and woman, even if the woman is defined in a purely negative way, by the deficit, as a "not a man". Freudism replaces the Cartesian thinking subject (consciousness) by the corporeal and sexual being, and forces us to re-think the Enlightenment beginnings of the European aesthetics.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

**KEY WORDS: ANDROGYNE, FEMINIST AESTHETICS, GENDER AESTHETICS, FEMINISM, WOMEN'S ART**



Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*, 1975



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