

The 20th Century Heterosexual Male Artist at the Climax of Objectification: Three-dimensional Mannequins, Forming the Ideal Woman, and the Effects of Sexually Explicit Art Work

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Abstract

For centuries, heterosexual male artists have been creating sexually explicit work which exploits and fetishizes the female muse. The art world has seen a steady increase of vulgar art which has worked its way from the classical Renaissance style of reclining nudes to iconic works such as Allen Jones' *Chair*, in which themes of bondage, domination, and female humiliation are present. Investigation into 20th century artists will examine how the 1960's era of rebellion and the surge of online pornography during the 80's and 90's led to the production of crude art through a variety of mediums. With this rise in accessibility of pornography comes the question of how artists and museums make a distinction between art and erotica. This paper will further investigate how this fine line is handled and whether people deem it necessary and acceptable to have art which demonstrates sexually suggestive characteristics. Finally, it explores what drives these men, as well as women, to create this work.

1. Introduction

Art often allows people to work through the unspoken issues of life in an undisclosed manner leaving behind only an ambiguous work for the viewer to analyze. This process extends into work that deals with a taboo nature as a reflection of an artist's own mind and hardships. Among the plethora of art work created, works which contain sexual and graphic images that we as consumers yearn to pick apart are part of this subcategory. Within and outside of the art world, such explicit work has often led to controversy and debate. As viewers, we must ask the question: what purpose do these pieces serve for the artist? And, in turn, what is our reaction to and engagement with such sexually explicit work? Through research into this subject matter, I will examine instances in which 20th century cisgender, heterosexual male artists have created work of a sexual and graphic nature and try to discover why these works have been produced and how they function for the the audience.

While searching for a meaning behind provocative work I will examine the sculptural works of Allen Jones' 1969, *Chair* and Oskar Kokoschka's 1919, *Alma Doll*. These artists seem to bring their sexual desires to life through the formation of physical women. Investigating these works probes questions of how artists should explore sexuality. As well as questions pertaining to how viewers meant to interact with these works. Underground comic illustrator Robert Crumb will also come into view through this research as I work to uncover the intention behind his 1998 drawing, *Big Healthy Girl Enjoys Deep Penetration From the Rear*. These artists' works center around topics of censorship, sexual identity, and outright eroticism.

In contrast to these male artists I will also take a closer look into female artists that create works which cover similar topics of exploring sexuality. Through these works I will be able to examine the differences and similarities between the ways in which male and female artists work with motifs of the body and view sexual interaction. Sarah Lucas's 1994 piece, *Au Naturel*, will act as a reference point to compare the ways in which physicality may vary

from female artist to male artist. I will also expand on the work of painter Jenny Saville, who explores figurative forms and their interactions with one another. Within Saville's work I will be able to dissect the topics of gender expression and non-idealized representation of bodies.

We have seen many works of art which are sexual in nature that are created by queer artists and artists that do not identify as male or female. I would like to address the fact that I will only be looking at artists that identify as male or female. I want to acknowledge that I do not wish to exclude these artists from the topic at hand but that I will only be analyzing artists that identify as male or female due to the topic of this research. The research focuses on uncovering why cisgender, heterosexual male artists create fetishistic work. In response to these artists, I have purposefully selected cisgender female artists to compare to these male artists.

2. What is a Fetish?

The term "fetish" has been passionately used by writers to describe the artists and the work that I am looking at. Through reading I have found that fetishism is the sexual obsession or sexual attachment to an article of clothing, an object, an act, or a body part that is not sex related. An example of this is having fetish for high heels, in which someone may become fixated in viewing their sexual partner in high heels and these shoes become essential in being able to achieve sexual pleasure.¹ These fixations are obsessive which is why many of the artists that I am researching have been described as having a fetish. These symbols become repeated and necessary for the artist, such as the recurring image of women in high heels seen in Allen Jones work.² Further, "...fetishistic practices have come to be seen as primarily visual..." which is why people examining art have become more prominently aware of these fetishistic symbols to see if these artists are replicating their own fetishes.³ Evenmore, could the artists be getting off on recreating and displaying these works to the public?

Fetishistic practices can be mutually gratifying and wanted by both partners. At times though, fetishes can function as a way to be demeaning, controlling, or humiliating towards you or a sexual partner.⁴ There is an aspect in having control or releasing control that aids fetishes. Within the work of Robert Crumb you will see how the women in his illustrations are portrayed as large and overbearing figures which dominate him.⁵ This is often where the artists throughout this paper come under scrutiny. While presenting women, the men of these works may place women in demeaning positions such as Crumb often showing women as headless and only a subservient body or Allen Jones creating sculptures where the women are used as a place to rest your feet. And when it comes to an object which is fetishized, such as a mannequin, there is a personification that takes place.⁶ Artists such as Oskar Kokoschka humanize and animate an object as a way to cope with a loss, which is a frequent consequence of losing or missing another person.⁷ Today "fetishistic obsession reveals the meaning behind popular images of women..." but historically we can see that centuries before these images were even formed, art was the source for fetishistic imagery.⁸

3. The Female Muse Through History

It is no secret to most people that engage with historical artworks that the sexualization of women and girls is significantly present. The "Great Masters" that we have become so familiar with in our museums and history books such as Picasso, Dali, Courbet, Degas, Manet and many more, all fall in the same category of utilizing a female "muse." The male gaze seems to plague so many of these famous art works aiding in a fetishistic and sexualized finished piece. This practice became popularized during the Renaissance era when there was no way to view sexual imagery via a photo or video, consequently turning drawings and paintings into a digestible material for distinguished men who could afford it.⁹ The use of the female muse became widely popular with the ever so prevalent reclining nude, which is featured in distinct paintings such as Manet's *Olympia* from 1863 and *Velázquez's Venus at her Mirror* from 1648.¹⁰ These nudes showcase the fetishistic trends that took place during these later eras such as displaying young women with no pubic hair, posing the woman so that they were to be touching or covering themselves, and having the women look directly at the viewer.¹¹ Titian's 1534 painting *Venus of Urbino* displays all of these characteristics. Even more disturbing is that this painting was rumored to be commissioned by a Duke for his new young bride to act as instruction for how their intimate life was to take place.¹²

There are many other repeated images that historians have connected to the male gaze such as "...women undressing for her bath."¹³ It is also not uncommon to see historical paintings where the artists have fetishized women having sex with each other.¹⁴ When the man is present in these images they are often of him resting while the female nude contrasts him with the image of her being "ready and available."¹⁵ Evenmore, artists will insert themselves and their desires into these sexually charged images as a form of autoeroticism, to arouse oneself with

their own mind and body. Salvador Dalí created the work *The Great Masurbator* in 1929 which is a piece charged with sexual imagery such as the face of woman, presumed to be his then wife Gala, with her face pressed against a man's penis.¹⁶ “The need to put one’s own attributes on display can become a perversion...” which became more popularized with artists through the 1900’s.¹⁷

These features of art which act to sexualize women have slowly evolved into modern day media. Characteristics such as minimal public hair, women having sex with other women, costumes, accessories, and intentional posing are all elements that have carried over to modern day pornography. Specifically within the 1990’s onward there seems to be a want for shock and buzz when it came to presenting artwork.¹⁸ But this has caused the lines of pornography and erotica to have blurred with art and leave the viewer in a state of unknowing, discomfort, and possibly arousal.

4. Oskar Kokoschka

Oskar Kokoschka was born in Austria and grew up in a financially unstable household where he was pushed to step up and provide for his three brothers and parents. Little is known about Kokoschka’s early life except for the accidental viewing of his little brother's traumatic death. As he progressed through school he was recognized for his drawing skills and ultimately went on to pursue a higher education within the arts. Kokoschka applied to the Kunstgewerbeschule in Vienna, now known as the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, where he studied painting. Due to his artistic abilities, Kokoschka was introduced into the art scene of Vienna where he gained attention for his expressionist portrait paintings.¹⁹ His paintings feature patches of lively color that are stitched together to create a gestural human figure. These paintings showcase elongated faces and emphasize the movement of Kokoschka’s hand.

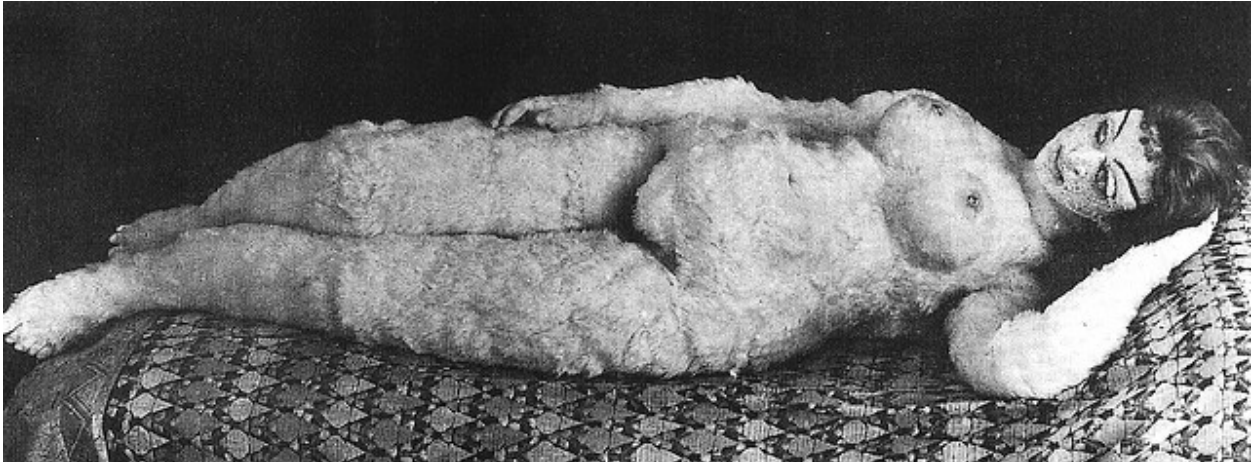
During this same period, Alma Mahler was a high society woman with a passion for writing music. Alma had a taste for artistic and intellectual men and during her lifetime dated the celebrated painter Gustav Klimt and was married to famous composer Gustav Mahler, the poet and writer Franz Werfel, and well known architect Walter Gropius. It was after the death of her first husband, Gustav Mahler, that Alma was attending a party thrown by her stepfather, Carl Moll. It was here that Alma was introduced to the young, aspiring painter Oskar Kokoschka. Kokoschka’s obsession with Alma was immediate as he instantly fell in love with her musical inclination and vivacious personality.²⁰

During this period, Alma was already involved with another man, Walter Gropius, whom she had become romantically invested in while still married to Gustav Mahler. Kokoschka faced extreme jealousy during his two and a half year relationship with Alma.²¹ Alma spoke highly of her late husband, and “while Kokoschka greatly admired Gustav Mahler's musical accomplishment, he was jealous and resentful that he could not compete with Alma’s dead hero.”²² Their relationship was one that highly influenced Kokoschka’s paintings. During the highs of their relationship his paintings were full of bright color and when their relationship faltered they became dark. While together, “...Alma became the overt or covert central subject and object of his art; he devoted twenty paintings, seventy drawings, and seven fans to their relationship.”²³ Kokoschka’s obsessive love for Alma became overpowered with jealousy and restriction even “...[insisting], for example, that she dress very conservatively, always wear long sleeves, never sit with her legs crossed and always keep her gaze fixed on him.”²⁴ Their tumultuous affair eventually ended as Kokoschka went off to war and Alma ultimately married Gropius.

While Kokoschka recovered from a head wound during battle, he learned of Alma’s marriage and subsequent child with Gropius. After his recovery, Kokoschka still suffered from a broken heart, and the loss of a model for his paintings.²⁵ Thus, in 1918 Kokoschka contacted his seamstress, Hermione Moos, from whom he commissioned a life-size doll replica of Alma. Kokoschka corresponded with Moos for about nine months through letters in order to get the doll exactly to his liking. Within these letters are specific instructions and drawings which detail information such as the proportions of the doll and even the feel of the doll’s skin. Kokoschka instructs Moos to disregard anatomy books but to instead touch her own body to figure out the proportions of the doll.²⁶ Kokoschka oozes with excitement and anticipation within these letters as he tells Moos he hopes the doll “will deceive him into believing it is living.”²⁷ Even further, Kokoschka exclaims within his writing to Moos that he has already bought expensive underwear for the doll and refers to the figurine as his fetish. One detail within his writing that can not be overlooked is when he states, “Although I feel ashamed I must still write this, but it remains our secret (and you are my confidante): the *parties honteuses* must be made perfect and luxuriant and covered with hair, otherwise it is not to be a woman but a monster. And only a woman can inspire me to create works of art, even when she lives in my imagination only.”²⁸ Even further, Kokoschka ensures that the doll is made with a mouth that opens and also has teeth. These letters provide an example that “... mental behavior plays an extraordinarily large part in the total consolation of those kinds of behavior we call sexual.”²⁹ Corresponding about the making of the doll almost acts as

a form of erotica for Kokoschka as he gets to instruct someone else on how to build his fantasy woman.

As the time grew near for the doll to arrive, Kokoschka planned a party for the reveal of his beloved *Alma Doll* (figure 1). When the doll arrived, it was recorded that Kokoschka was displeased with the results.³⁰ Images of the life size figure immediately drew the viewer to the skin of the doll. Per Kokoschka's request for soft skin, the doll maker has covered the entirety of the figure in white feathers. When viewing the doll there appears to be a softness to the feathers, which makes you instantly want to touch the model's fur-skin. The feathers cover almost all areas of the body except for her fingertips and toes, which have been left to reveal hairless, stuffed animal-like phalanges with painted or stitched on nails. Although it is stated that Kokoschka was not satisfied with the doll, many question



his views on Moos' use of feathers. As seen in his letters, Kokoschka was invested in the doll having hair, especially near the doll's genitalia. Moreover, prior letters to Moor expressed an emphasis on the feeling of the figure. Kokoschka even stated his yearning for the model to feel as soft as feathers.³¹

Figure 1: Hermine Moos. 1919. *Alma Doll*. Feathers, sawdust, paint.
<https://www.frieze.com/article/strange-portrait-former-lover>.

The body of the sculpture holds a loose form and seems to appear as though it had no structure underneath the soft linen and silk cushioned body. The doll's figure is shown completely nude which reveals a shapely figure with large hips and full breasts. The anatomy of the soft-sculpture is not consistent with real human figures. This can be seen in areas such as the dolls wrists, which bend awkwardly, or the models breasts, which sit abnormally high on the doll's chest. Kokoschka wrote that he was obsessed with the doll and that it was beautiful "...even though its breasts and hips were made of sawdust."³² Areas of the body that do give way to an uncanny realness are shown in sections such as the doll's stomach, which appears to show Moos attention to physique and how the female body holds weight (figure 1).

The figurine was given a heart shaped face and appears to be painted with dark makeup. The doll was given full lips and a round nose. Her eyes hold pupils which look in multiple directions, outlined with dark marks similar to black eyeliner. Most notable about the doll's facial features are her prominent eyebrows. Thin black lines stretch high across the face of the *Alma Doll* which gives her the facial expression of inquisitiveness and mischief. The doll is adorned with a long brunette wig which showcases short bangs and soft curls. Overall, the general impression of the doll is quite frightening with her drawn on features. And when seen next to photographs of Alma Mahler, it becomes apparent that there are few similarities between the two (figure 1). Possibly, this was why Kokoschka was unhappy with the final results of the doll?

Because of the information provided in Kokoschka's letters with Moos and his investment with the doll's physical functionality, it is assumed that Kokoschka used the doll for his own sexual gratification. It is known, however, that he used this doll as a stand-in for models within his portrait paintings. This can be seen in Kokoschka's 1921 oil painting on canvas titled *Painter with Doll* (figure 2). The painting is dark in color and features deep greens, reds, and black. Examining the image, the viewer sees a woman on the left reclining on a red sofa. Fully nude, she looks to the viewer, her head tilted to one side. The woman cups her breasts with her hands while leaning against a pillow. Although depicted in the same illustrative manner as the man to her right, the female figure looks pale. The man, fully clothed in a dark blue shirt, looks off into the distance. He engages with the woman by placing a hand on her knee, which is propped up. What makes this painting most curious is the gesture of the male subject, who we know

is Kokoschka due to the title of the work. With his other hand he points his finger down towards the female figures pubis region. Due to the positioning of the woman's leg, her knee just barely covers this area of her body (figure 2). The viewer's eye is immediately drawn to this section of the painting, as it takes place directly in the center of the piece. As the viewers, it makes us question, what are his intentions with this gesture? Even further, knowing that this image is meant to depict an effigy of his past lover, how should we dissect this work?



Figure 2: Oskar Kokoschka. 1921. *Painter with Doll*. Oil Paint on Canvas. https://www.wikiart.org/en/oskar-kokoschka/not_Detected_235836.

In regards to the gesture, psychoanalytic Harold Blum states, “The spectator is left to respond emotionally to the artful contrast of a presumed affective dead sterility and a revival of frustrated lustful longing.”³³ In this, Blum is likely referring to two separate pregnancies between Alma and Kokoschka, which were both terminated without Kokoschka's acceptance.³⁴ The expression on both of their faces read as somber, which only adds to this sadness of his. The gesture also contains a sexual message which juxtaposes the melancholy attitude of the painting. Due to the title, we know that this work was created by utilizing the doll as a model. With this knowledge, we can understand the stark white moments of flesh on the female figure as well as the odd proportions of the women's body, such as her shortened arms and odd foot positioning. But there is a seemingly equal rendering of the female figure and the male figure. Both hold the same amount of realism. Could it be that Kokoschka was truly trying to place Alma within this image? Bring her back into his life? In some sense, maybe this was a therapeutic practice for Kokoschka. We find confirmation for this in Kokoschka's claims that drawing and painting the doll over and over again cured his depression in dealing with the heartache of losing Alma.³⁵

There are very few photographs of the *Alma Doll* as it was destroyed by Kokoschka soon after its creation. The date of the doll's destruction is unclear. While some claim that it was the day of its arrival, others claim it must have been some period after since there are multiple paintings which include the doll.³⁶ What is known is that the destruction of the sculpture was violent. In a drunken rage, Kokoschka beheaded the doll in the front yard and poured red wine on the white doll's figure. The next morning Kokoschka was awoken by the police due to the report of a dead woman in his front yard.³⁷ Due to this destruction, there isn't conclusive information about how the doll was formed and used, but Kokoschka did conclude that the doll “... cured him of his passion” for Alma.³⁸

5. Allen Jones

While Jones presents many female figures that function as different furniture pieces such as a figure on all fours with a table resting on her back or a cabinet built into the chest of a figure, *Chair* seems to be one of the most well known pieces of this collection. The concept was formulated "... on a trip to the gambling resort of Reno, Nevada, [where] he took a picture of a slot machine embedded into a sculpture of a showgirl, complete with real stockings and a wig. "I didn't make the connection with my later sculptures for a few years, but it had a real presence, was sexy and it caught my eye."³⁹ This piqued Jones' interest and he went on to formulate the idea of replicating female figures as functional objects.

Chair (figure 3), originally created in 1969, features a female mannequin-like figure as a place to sit. This work, planned by Jones and fabricated by external help, is formed from acrylic painted fiberglass, resin, and perspex which has been outfitted with leather. Firstly, "the figure itself had been made in clay by Dick Beech at Gems Wax Models, and then the cast was taken from the clay model."⁴⁰ The figure is shown with her back pressed to the floor and her thighs pressed against her bare chest. The mannequin's legs, dressed in calf-length, leather black high heels, stretch upwards. The figure's arms, which are also outfitted in long leather black gloves, lay on the floor next to her body, palms down. Jones strategically planned the outfit for this figure and had a large portion of her black leather garments custom made for the mannequin.⁴¹ The figure appears as though she is attempting to do a sit-up with her legs raised in the air. But the viewer is quickly brought back to the functionality of the piece. A leather strap buckles the models thighs and midsection together, creating a flat surface to lay a thick square sheet of plexiglass. Atop the plexiglass is a large, black leather cushion.



Figure 3: Allen Jones. 1969. *Chair*. Acrylic paint on fiberglass and resin with Perspex and leather.
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/jones-chair-t03244>

Although the figure is exposed such as the sides of her breasts being accentuated, the model is covered substantially in black leather. Her bottom, at the base of the cushion, sports small shorts in the same material. Notions of bondage are shown through the thick leather strap as well as an additional black string which ties the figure's chest to her knees. The figure as a whole is presented more as a contorted woman than a piece of furniture. But this is contrasted as the piece is presented on top of a lush, cream colored rug, just as a chair might be configured in a room. The title *Chair* seems to be an attempt on the behalf of Jones to be witty towards the viewer knowing that what they are viewing is indeed a sexualized and fetishized figure. Naming the work as an appliance which decorates a room rather than titling the work as a nod towards a representation of women makes us wonder about his own relationship to women though. Functionally, if someone were to sit on this piece, their back would rest against the slightly opened legs of the figure. The figure's face peers between the legs showcasing her apricot colored lips and baby blue eyeshadow. The model wears a short, ashy gray wig which differs from older pictures of the *Chair*.

The work that we today know as *Chair* required updating from the original late 60's model. The older version is nearly identical except for its longer, 70's style shag wig. The changes made to the piece were necessary after two women defaced the work. In March of 1986, on National Women's Day, two feminist protestors passed through the security of the Tate Gallery holding clear bottles of paint stripper. As they walked past the work they drenched the mannequin, completely eroding the paint on the body as well as ruining her leather clothes.⁴² The sculpture took years to restore and during this time there was much controversy amongst people whether this work should even be restored and if it should be shown to the public again. Coincidentally, this was not the first time that Jones' furniture series had caused an upheaval amongst viewers. In 1978, protestors attended an exhibition of Jones' at The Institute of Contemporary Art in London where people who objected to his work set off a stink bomb.⁴³

The controversy around Jones' sculptural work led curators, art critics, scholars and the public to the same question. Why? Jones has answered this question multiple times, but there seem to be a variety of differing motives behind these sculptures. Firstly, while growing up in the city and attending school at both Hornsey College of Art in London and the Royal College of Art, Jones was mesmerized by the chasm between Londoners.⁴⁴ He found intrigue in the ways in which people present themselves and was "fascinated by the "amount of fakery and construction that goes into making something that looks normal."⁴⁵ In 1964, Jones decided to move to New York City where "... he discovered that sexually explicit content which was discouraged and looked down upon..." in the art scenes of Europe.⁴⁶ During this period Jones also took an interest in Jung, Freud and Nietzsche, as he was interested in understanding the unconscious.⁴⁷

While his sculptural works look somewhat real and recognizable, Jones' has augmented the physical female attributes to be unrealistic and fetishistic, including a larger breast and butt.⁴⁸ There is a sense of artifice to the female figure. Earlier works of Jones demonstrate this interest in representation of urban life such as his bus pictures, which were inspired by his rides into London via bus.⁴⁹ As time moved away from Pop Art, Jones created paintings and prints which explored the relationship between men and women. Many of the couples he portrays in these work morph together and the movement portrayed in his work often alludes to the act of sexual intercourse.⁵⁰ Jones states that these works are an exploration of his own sexuality in which he often inserts himself into the male character, using motifs such as a striped tie, which he often wore himself.⁵¹ And while having to defend these works as well as the sculptures which he has created, Jones recognizes that his work deals with icons of high heels, leather, and breasts which appear fetishistic but are meant to stand in metaphorically for a "... contemplation of the mystery of sex and creation."⁵² Even further, Jones has stated that he uses eroticism as a way to engage the audience to then further examine the painting for its subject, sex itself.⁵³ The 1980's and 1990's could be deemed "... the pornography decade in art" which could largely be attributed to the surge of video pornography.⁵⁴ As mentioned earlier, art and pornography can be indistinguishable, especially during a period such as the 1990's when consumption of pornography was accessible to all.

I had the pleasure of traveling to London recently where I explored Allen Jones' works in person. In my own opinion, I don't believe that there was much "mystery" left behind when it came to how he was trying to portray sex and creation. At the Tate Britain I was able to spend time viewing Jones' collection of prints created in 1976 to 1977, entitled *Ways of Means*. This booklet held about thirty pages of printed and collaged images, all of which feature women shown in a provocative manner. These images included content such as women in fetishistic masks, old ads for sex toys, as well as original prints of Jones' work. In particular I was drawn to an untitled spread which featured forty varying images of masks, women in masks, bonded faces, and mannequin heads (figure 4). Throughout history, a mask or veil has been used as a titillation tool.⁵⁵ "The mystery of a masked lady, the seductive attraction of eyes hidden behind a fan or parasol, the cunning use of accessories, are often more intensely erotic than total nudity...". Jones implements these accessories through his work by displaying his sculptures and paintings of women in fetishistic garb which barely cover the figure, placing the viewer, and Jones, in a place of suspenseful

arousal.⁵⁶ During my time in England the use of the veil became more and more apparent. Works such as Hendrik Goltzius' *Jupiter and Antiope*, formed in 1612, in which the painting shows a practically transparent cloth which drapes over Antiope, barely covering her vagina shows how far throughout history the veil has been used. Further, what is intriguing about Allen Jones' sculptural work is that "although every single image is a female form, not one shows the actual female genitals. Not one is [fully] naked."⁵⁷



Figure 4: Allen Jones. 1976-1977. [No Title], *Ways of Means*. Screenprint on paper. 502 x 702 mm. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/jones-ways-and-means-67769>

6. Sarah Lucas

In 1994, Sarah Lucas created a sculptural work formed from found materials titled, *Au Naturel* (figure 5). Presented in this piece is a bare yellowing mattress, which appears to be stained with age. The lumpy mattress partially rests against the white wall of a gallery, making the bed appear even more saturated in color. The bed's position against the wall gives it an anthropomorphic feeling as it sags against the wall like a tired person. Even more, embedded into the mattress are a few simple objects that stand in for people. In the top left corner of the bed two horizontal holes cut into the mattress hold large lemons. The lemons are faced outwards so that the tips of the fruit showcase the brown center where they were picked from the tree. Just below the lemons, sitting on the floor of the bed is a large bucket, its empty hole facing the viewer. The outside of the pail is a deep rusted red and indented with age. Inside, a graying steel blue. These three objects together give way to the viewer's imagination and seem to signify the body parts of a woman's breasts and vagina.

The bed acts as the fleshy skin, and between the lemons and the bucket the mattress folds just like a human's midriff would when bent over. On the bottom right of the mattress, next to the bucket, sits two oranges, a bit smaller in size compared to the lemons. The oranges act as a base for the large erect cucumber that sticks straight into the air. The right side of the mattress seems to act as a male companion to the feminized objects on the left. With just these few objects the viewer is able to humanize the forms and even seek out a relationship between them. These characters, not touching, yet linked by the singular bed, provide a point of interest for the viewer. Their bodily

objects give the idea that they are sexually charged, and ready to break this tension. The presence of both the female and male characters feel equally present and dominant next to each other.

There is a grungy quality to this work with its stained fabric and rusted bucket. Many of Lucas's works carry these feelings of grime and crudeness, with repeating motifs of cigarettes, phallic objects, and bodily fluids. Lucas made her break into the art world as a member of the popular group Young British Artists, who took London's art scene by storm in the late 1980's.⁵⁸ The group, which included well known artists such as Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst, was created through their attendance to the Bachelor of Fine Arts program at Goldsmiths, University of London. The artists within this group became popularized for their odd materials, shocking subject matter, and strange processes.⁵⁹ The "shock value" that these artists sought after led Lucas to create art pieces that often dealt with sexual references, particularly of male genitalia.

Lucas has accumulated a lot of criticism surrounding these works, as they are deemed by art critic Michael Kimmelman as repetitive, "juvenile", and that her "brand of work doesn't have enough impact."⁶⁰ This seems to be the repeated response to her work as critics attempt to dissect why a female artist is creating such "blokey" work. Another art critic, Philip Kennicott, states that "there is, apparently, a feminist component to this, as though the artist might remedy centuries of artistic exploitation of women by substituting a manic reiteration of the penis as subject matter."⁶¹ The theme of redemption seems to surface within these critiques as the critics argue for how Lucas should be pushing for the elimination of exploitation, not simply reversing the gender roles.⁶² They ask the question, Is this how sexuality should be dealt with? Fighting fire with fire? But "... there is a political point in questioning what it means for a woman to be rude"⁶³ and in this case the viewer should evaluate why women, in particular, women artists, are expected to take the higher road and turn the other cheek.



Figure 5: Sarah Lucas. 1994. *Au Naturel*. Mattress, melons, oranges, cucumber, and water bucket, 84 x 168.8 x 144.8 cm. <https://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/2019/sarah-lucas-au-naturel>

7. Robert Crumb

Robert Crumb, one of the leading illustrators within the Underground Comix community, was not one to shy away from images of sex and violence. Crumb grew up in a poor neighborhood of Philadelphia where he was squeezed into a small house with a self-described dysfunctional family. In this classically Catholic household, Crumb was surrounded by four siblings, an overbearing and abusive father, Charles Crumb, and a mother, Beatrice Crumb who was absent and addicted to amphetamine.⁶⁴ It was in this setting with his two brothers, Charles Jr. and Maxon, that he became interested in illustration. Charles Jr. in particular was passionate about comic books which led to the formulation of the brothers comic book club which they called “Animal Town.”⁶⁵ When he first started his career in visual arts Crumb “...began his professional life as an illustrator for American Greetings at twenty.”⁶⁶ As Robert Crumb grew up he utilized his odd upbringing to relay stories from childhood memories. Within the documentary *Crumb*, Robert shows the filmmakers a comic strip which details a memory from when he was about four years old. Through his drawings he recounts having an obsession with his aunt from a young age and details a memory of getting an erection from humping his aunt’s boot.⁶⁷ While some of these storylines relay truth and the life of the artist, he also confesses to creating comics which act as self-indulgent fantasies. During this same scene Crumb also remembers as a child being sexually attracted to cartoon character, specifically Bugs Bunny, which could have acted as a gateway in to the formulation of sexually driven cartoon images that he produced.⁶⁸

Images, such as his 1998 illustration *Big Healthy Girl Enjoys Deep Penetration From the Rear* (figure 6), exemplify the content that often appears within his work. Depicted within this piece is a man crouched, sitting on top of a woman, riding her through the air. It can be assumed that the man is Robert Crumb, as he depicts himself often as the subject of his own work. His fading hairline, round glasses, large nose, and mustache often act as markers for himself. In this illustration he shows himself grasping on to the female figure almost as a jockey riding a racing horse would. Leaned forward, the man’s face is shown mouth agape and strained, beads of sweat run down his face and frame his head. His hands grasp on to the woman’s hair as if they are the reins to his horse. The man is wearing a shirt and socks but not pants, and although it is not shown directly, it can be visually inferred that Crumb is engaging in sexual intercourse with the woman. If not visually confirmed, the comics title states for the viewer what exactly is happening.



Figure 6: Robert Crumb. 1998. *Big Healthy Girl Enjoys Deep Penetration from the Rear*. Pen on paper.
<https://www.facebook.com/CrumbComix/photos/have-a-good-day-/10156111823788466/>

The woman that Crumb has depicted is substantially larger next to the caricature of himself. Her head is jerked back in reaction to the man's grasp of her hair. Next to her head in dark squiggly letters she's seen saying "AWRNH!!", a reaction to her companions actions. Her facial expression is not exactly readable as her eyebrows are furrowed, eyes rolled upward, and mouth wide open, drooling. Once again, the title aids the viewer in understanding that the woman is enjoying this experience. The woman wears a black top or bra which highlights her large breasts and protruding nipples. She wears no pants, similar to the male figure but is presented in thigh high tights, socks, and heeled black combat boots. She sports a small black watch which seems to act as a stirrup for the male figures foot to latch on to. Her body is muscular which is accentuated in her large arms, thighs and butt. She lays flat in the sky with her arms to her side, similar to how Superman may be depicted when he flies through the air. The viewer can infer that they are moving quickly through the sky as horizontal lines stream off their bodies and illustrations of clouds line the bottom of the drawing (figure 6).

Defenders of Crumb's have chalked up the suggestive and provocative nature of his work to the time period. Starting in the 1950's, adults were appalled with the level of violence and sex which was being sold to young children through comic books. "From the late 1950s through the '60s, '70s, and '80s, mainstream comic book publishers closely controlled the imagery, subject matter, and language in their books."⁶⁹ The process of running these works through the Comics Code Authority almost ran the industry of comic book illustration and publishing into the ground. This led to the creation of the underground comix community, which are a group of comic book publishers who chose to bypass the Comics Code Authority in order to distribute works with more mature content.⁷⁰ During the 70's, the underground comic scene "... abounded in a free fervor of sexual freedom, psychedelic visions fostered by LSD, jazz music, and an ideological sympathy for the New Left ideals."⁷¹

While many works of Crumb's have stirred up negative emotions surrounding female objectification, race, and fetishization there are also critics who react positively to his work. While some see these monstrous depictions of women as off putting, some see the images as a promotion of body positivity and sex positivity. These images of women act as a resource to showcase untraditional body types as well as show some of the women in powerful positions over men.⁷² But, challenging traditional beauty standards seems to be regarded as a way to work around creating misogynistic work.⁷³ When asked about Crumb's own intentions behind his work his response is often that they were meant to be satirical commentary on American culture but were misinterpreted as literal ideologies that Crumb supported. For example, Crumb created a satirical comic strip about race relations which was later appropriated and "... subsequently reprinted (without Crumb's knowledge or permission) in a neo-Nazi newspaper called *Race and Reality*, the satire failed. Although Crumb saw the stories as satire, the hatred he expressed seemed genuine enough, and the stereotypes he drew on found a resonance among rabid bigots."⁷⁴ Moreover, when confronted with his more sexual works Crumb confessed to creating comics that indulged in his own fantasies which he subsequently used to pleasure himself with.⁷⁵

Crumb seems to be aware of the images that he is putting forth into the world and when asked "in a 1995 interview, he admits (if somewhat ironically) that he is a misogynist. He confesses to harboring "bitterness toward women," weakly justifying his feelings as part and parcel of his "disgust for all humanity."⁷⁶ He also notes that he hates America's version of masculinity and often depicts himself in a submissive or less powerful role than the women in his illustrations. These counter points still don't stop us from asking why he keeps putting these images out into the public to be consumed if they could be used in a harmful way? We have witnessed these illustrations be weaponized in a non-satirical way, further embracing the negative parts of American culture that Crumb attempts to mock. These comics perpetuate ideas due to the fine line which is drawn between sarcasm intertwined with stereotypes.⁷⁷ It appears that as we move into the future, Crumb has become more aware of this and in recent interviews the artist states that he doesn't often create work anymore because someone always ends up being hurt.⁷⁸ But this sense of diminished expression leaves us with the dilemma of just what exactly should be shown and viewed, particularly in a museum and gallery setting. For centuries artists have used their medium as a mode of expression, often in conjunction with exploring their own sexuality. But currently, in a time with so much uproar about sexual exploitation, especially when dealing with feminism, we must ask ourselves "do works having to deal with expressing sexuality still deserve a place in museums?"⁷⁹

8. Jenny Saville

Another member of the Young British Artists, Jenny Saville, seems to answer this question clearly. Artworks

dealing with topics of gender and sexuality absolutely deserve a place where they can be shown to the public, mulled over by art critics, and examined for their meaning. Saville's fascination with flesh and the body started at a young age as she recalled being captivated by her piano teacher's breasts and how they pulled together under her shirt creating "one large mass."⁸⁰ At 22, Saville graduated from Glasgow School of art in 1992 and was immediately offered an exhibition of her own in London by collector Charles Saatchi.⁸¹ During her time in school she spent a semester abroad in Cincinnati where she was granted the opportunity to observe a New York plastic surgeon perform his work.⁸² This fascination with flesh and the ways in which it can be manipulated still follows her today as she often uses images from medical books as inspiration for her paintings.⁸³ Paintings such as Saville's 2002-2003 piece *Reflective Flesh* (figure 7) serve as the perfect example for the type of provocative and intriguing figurative work that Saville has been creating for the last thirty years.



Figure 7: Jenny Saville. 2002-2003. *Reflective Flesh*. Oil on canvas. 305.2 x 244.2 cm. <https://arthur.io/art/jenny-saville/reflective-flesh>.

Reflective Flesh is one of many of Saville's paintings in which she selectively uses color to make important areas of the piece pop out to the viewer. Within this painting, Saville has created the image of a nude woman squatting down, her legs open to the viewer. In this squatting position the woman leans backwards, almost in a table top position, her arms supporting herself from behind. Immediately the audience is met face to face with a vulva, which is saturated with deep red and purple paint. These rich colors are starkly contrasted by the ghostly white flesh of the woman. Patches of muted pinks, oranges, and greens give volume to the porcelain figure. Below the woman is a mirror which reflects and extends the woman's genitalia, exaggerating its length. Saville has also exaggerated the perspective of the figure, a technique she does often throughout her work, forcing the viewer to confront the woman's genitalia.

This overstated perspective almost makes the viewer glaze over the face, which rests at the top right corner of the painting. With these emphasized elements, the viewer may even miss the fact that the figure is indeed, Jenny Saville.

The figure's face, similar to the body, is also reflected, giving the viewer four separate perspectives of the figure's head. The incorporation of multiple areas of reflection and repetition "... both add to the sexual impact, yet at the same time, fracture it, spread it out, splinter the initial sensual shock into multiple shards of visual experience."⁸⁴ Sections of pale blue paint divide the mirrors of reflected flesh from the background. But interestingly, the large spaces of white seen on the body is what draws a lot of attention down to the exposed genitalia.

The level of confrontation that is seen with *Reflective Flesh* can be viewed within many other pieces of Saville's, giving the artist a sense of control within her work. By using herself as a model, Saville adds another dimension of authority. Saville prefers working from photographs rather than the live model, making it easier to splice together varying images. These images allow for more flexibility when painting the figure, which provides unique elements such as strange perspectives or morphing bodies.⁸⁵ By utilizing herself she aims to include herself and women into the conversation of painting. When speaking about her series *Prop*, a body of work which showcased nude women and herself in varying poses on a stool, Saville stated that she had "the realization of my relationship to the history of art as a woman, as a vision in art, and not really the producer of culture."⁸⁶ Saville goes on to relay her strained relationship as the observer of the object, which is so often women within art. To combat this, she employed her own body as the object.⁸⁷ But, what does it mean if these works are still coming across as sensual? Is the viewer or the artist giving a sexual significance to the work?

9. Censorship in Art

Throughout this research the question of censoring sexually explicit artwork has been brought up time and time again. Addressing the issues that can be presently observed within sexually explicit artwork will aid in this debate. When speaking about sexual behavior we must consider how we are talking about it and if we are ascribing meaning, good or bad, to the activity. Essentially, "Is it possible to talk about sexual behavior and its representations neutrally...?"⁸⁸ The topic of sex so often is overshadowed by concepts of the forbidden, the dirty, and sinning, making it difficult to objectively approach themes of sex.⁸⁹ I would like to clarify this in order to assert that this writing is not meant to showcase sex in a negative way but to express how elements of sex and ideas surrounding sexual culture could be damaging towards certain parties involved.

Firstly, a large portion of debate around sexually explicit artwork comes forth when it is compared to pornography. One of the biggest differences seen between pornography and sexual artwork is merely the way in which it is presented. When defining what exactly pornography is, the notion is put forth that it is intended for external stimulation. This stirs up concepts that "... pornographic material *must* arouse disturbing emotions, art that has a pornographic element cannot, therefore, be art."⁹⁰ Which leads us to the question, wouldn't it mean that pornographic art is not pornographic simply because the viewer *cannot* physically react in the way they might if in their own personal space? An acceptable space?⁹¹ The space in which this material is consumed also lends a hand in our interpretation of whether a piece is "high brow" or "low brow". Moreover, the functionality of pornography versus sexually charged artwork must be examined. If we view pornography as a commodity we can further see the implicit issues with charging to view sexually explicit artwork. The works that these artists are creating are also a commodity which gives them attention and money. Consequently, these artists are using these works, which too often exploit women, for their personal gain.⁹² In return, not charging viewers to see these works allows for over accessibility, potentially leading to larger exposure of these works.

The exposure of sexual material is not something that we should completely squander. The creation of the internet made it easier for people to seek out this type of content and therefore more sex-positive ideas have formulated over the last couple of decades.⁹³ Though it should be asked, why are we so attracted to seeking out sexually explicit content? According to Morse Peckham, the act of sex itself is somewhat preformative, confusing, and "improvizational". So when we are able to see sexual artwork, or porn, there is a widespread appeal to see how others feel about it or even to give us a clue into how it should be done or felt.⁹⁴ But the widespread constructs which have been produced by pornography and artwork can become destructive.

The person behind this product can also be the reason for debate, especially in the case that a man is detailing how a woman should sexually interact with a man. As stated by Morse, one of the notions that has been put forth is that men have an uncontainable sexual desire. "True men" are those who are able to harness this sexual power and keep it in check. A man's "sexual potentiality" is often boasted about, but when honestly and unabashedly released he can be seen as strange, meek, and "unusually honest".⁹⁵ Is this why male artists such as Robert Crumb gain attention when creating sexual work? For their honesty? And what does this mean for women artists? Do they have any "sexual potential" to release? And again, should this even be released? There isn't any definitive answer to this question since it depends on the viewer and their relationship to the work. Social and personal context is necessary for answering this question because while some people may view Allen Jones' *Chair* and emphatically declare that

it is dehumanizing towards women and should be taken down, others will find it necessary for addressing attitudes towards BDSM culture or a nod towards how society objectifies and commodifies women. Lastly, throughout this research I have found that there is always a divide between the viewers when unpacking the intention of the artist.

10. Conclusion

The male artists throughout this paper tend to have similar qualities within their process and final product. Firstly, it seems that the women they are forming tend to be standins for either someone they know or someone they want to know. These art pieces are filling in and playing a role for the artists creating them. Whether they are place holders for someone, such as the *Alma Doll* for Kokoschka, or a fantasized version of a partner, such as Allen Jones' *Chair*, they become personified while simultaneously distanced from real life. Secondly, the role that these female artworks play for the artist is submission. This can be seen in all of the artists' shared theme of reducing the woman's figure to just a body, omitting the head of the woman and in return, silencing her. Thirdly, the artists are taking pleasure in constructing, or instructing, these artworks. For example, Kokoschka takes pleasure in writing the instructions to his seamstress and fantasizing about the final product. Almost like foreplay, the suspense and imagination being put forth to form this woman is almost better than the actual product made in the end. It seems that there is something cathartic or liberating about conceptualizing and producing the women in these works. Moreover, the fetishized aspects of the work are placed in the forefront of the piece for the viewer to see.

The fetishization taking place is where issues of who is behind the work come into play. For centuries, women's role within art has been being the muse, the object, and consequently, branded through the male gaze. Not only is this damaging for how society interacts with women within an art setting, but it also highlights the power that the creators of this work yields.⁹⁶ Meaning, to some degree, it does matter who the creator of sexual work is because, "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female."⁹⁷ To be clear, this does not mean that women don't create sexual art work, have sexual desires, or even sexualize others. The women artists through this paper have exemplified that women do indeed make work about sex. In my opinion, it means that there should be some caution when approaching the subject of sex within art work so that we do not publicly harm others by way of stigmatizing, demeaning, or unconsensual fetishizing.

As a viewer, we should also evaluate our relationship and role when it comes to interacting with works that deal with topics of sex. As much as these works may be about the artist's own feelings about sex, we should question how we feel towards the art. Maybe the intention behind the work is truly to have the viewer recognize their relationship to sexually charged visuals. A lot of the works mentioned through this paper could have put "... us in the awkward position of enjoying images that are politically problematic."⁹⁸ And sometimes, we as viewers rush through an art exhibit and it can be unpleasant or boring until we find a piece that makes us stop, maybe read the description, and take a photo so that we can look at it again later. Potentially the artists are offering a viewpoint where we engage with images similar to pornography, which are stimulating, exciting, and that we as humans actively seek out and have been seeking out for centuries.

11. Endnote

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