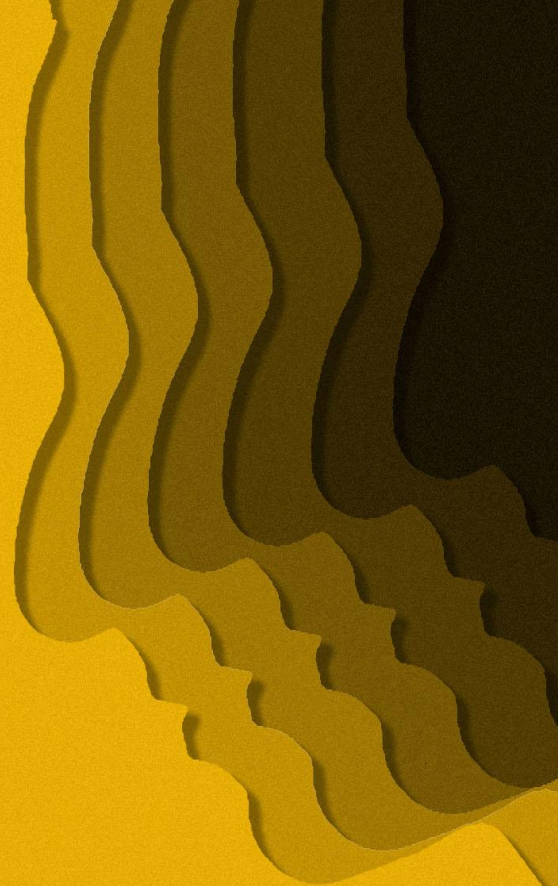


Representation of **Armenian
Female Artists** of the **20th
Century** in Contemporary Armenia

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Outline

- Abstract
- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Research Question
- Methodology
- Artist Statement
- Reflection on Process
- Epilogue
- References

Outline

Abstract

20th century Armenian art history is rich with names, yet the great majority of these names belong to men. The National Gallery of Armenia exhibits Armenian artists with a huge imbalance in the ratio of men to women. This research study aimed to find possible reasons behind this issue. Among my findings was the fact that with the challenges that came with the Soviet revolution and socialist propaganda, many women still had the opportunity to receive education in arts and pursue their careers. Despite this, the presence of gender-based selective representation is present in Armenia today. To share about the issue, I created a digital art installation that stands as a platform for a public discourse on the subject matter.

Abstract

Introduction

I came across the issue by realizing I could barely name any Armenian women artists. I later found out about the existence of these women, who created during the 20th century. It was unclear to me however, why people are not informed about these women.

I applied qualitative methods of research to address my questions and concluded the project with a research creation piece.

I drew approximate information from the official website of the National Gallery of Armenia which showed an evident gender imbalance in the representation of the artists.

I concluded my research with a digital art installation to create a discourse around the issue of gender-based selective representation of 20th century artists in contemporary Armenian society.

Introduction

Literature Review

“Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?”

American art historian Linda Nochlin’s essay “Why have there been no great women artists?” (1971) is known to be one of the fundamental works of feminist art history. According to her, feminists should not try to discover women who haven’t been spoken about. On the contrary, Nochlin pursues the importance of accepting that there have been no equals to Picasso and Rembrandt and proceeds to give reasons to why it is so (Nochlin, 1971). Her exceptional approach in the 20th century, also molded my way of questioning the scarcity of female names in Armenian art history.

Differencing the Canon

Gender-based canonical exclusion was and still is a relevant discourse. I referred to the book *Differencing the Canon* from 1999, to address what the canon is. Art historian and cultural analyst, Griselda Pollock introduces the idea of fluctuation in taste when it comes to art. No less engaging was the writer's perception of 'tradition', its origins and impact on what is viewed to be natural in social settings (Pollock, 1999). The above-mentioned ideas retrieved from the major work of Pollock, greatly contributed to my perception and analyses of the Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian art canon, its canonical exclusions and what is/was established as 'common sense'.

“Gender and the Artist Archetype: Understanding Gender Inequality in Artistic Careers”

In her article “Gender and the Artist Archetype: Understanding Gender Inequality in Artistic Careers”, Diana L. Miller (2016) studies the image of an ‘ideal-typical’ artist, also known as the creative genius. Miller identifies three ways in which the image of a successful artist is built on a masculine model. First, the abstract worker is argued to be a man, as jobs, organizations and hierarchies require workers with gendered practices and characteristics. Secondly, entrepreneurial practices needed for an artist privilege men since they are more socially acceptable in men than women. Lastly, the collective evaluation and qualification of the artwork itself is gender biased as it favors men over women (Miller, 2016).

Soviet Female Artists and Soviet Armenian Female Artists

Narrowing down to female artists of the Soviet era and later focusing on only Armenian women, possible sources for research became extremely scarce. I then referred to online articles to study how the revolution affected female artists of the Soviet era.

Literature

Review

Research Question

20th century Armenian art history is rich with names, yet the great majority of these names belong to men. The National Gallery of Armenia exhibits Armenian artists with a huge imbalance in the ratio of men to women. This research study aimed to find possible reasons behind this issue. Among my findings was the fact that with the challenges that came with the Soviet revolution and socialist propaganda, many women still had the opportunity to receive education in arts and pursue their careers. Despite this, the presence of gender-based selective representation is present in Armenia today. To share about the issue, I created a digital art installation that stands as a platform for a public discourse on the subject matter.

Methodology

I first examined the possible origin of general gender discrimination in arts and then progressed to the 20th century and narrowed it down to Armenia with an emphasis on Soviet-Armenia.

The only reason I wanted to retrieve numerical data was with the intention to ascertain the presence of gender imbalance in one of the biggest narrators of the country's art history. I decided to study the name list of the permanently exhibited Armenian artists in the National Gallery of Armenia.

With this research, I aimed to determine and identify possible reasons of the evidently existing discrimination in the way Armenian art history is displayed, through the prism of existing literature on the global issue of the lack of "great" women in arts.

Methodology

Artist Statement

Are there many Armenian women artists? If not, then why? If yes, then where? I wanted to ignite this discourse within every viewer. To achieve this, I created a character that directly addresses these questions to the audience. The character herself is a collective image of an Armenian female artist and is created right in front of the viewers' eyes. As twenty five individual fragments of actual paintings of Armenian female artists gradually appear on the screen alongside with the artists' names, a silhouette of a female profile is composed. The silhouette is a literal unification of their works, coming together to be seen and later heard.

Artist Statement

The Exhibition of The Art Installation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8de2wALN00>

Installation

Reflections on Process

With the outcome of my research in hand, I had an urge to try and shed light on as many names as possible. Seeing the unjust gender-based selective representation, I wanted to have my tiny contribution towards balancing it. My initial idea was to have people randomly pick names of artists and stick them on a blank canvas with a frame. With this idea of interactive installation, I hoped to make people familiar with these women and their works. After a few sessions of brainstorming, I realized how much bigger my imprint can be if I inform people on the issue, instead of sharing a limited number of names that would most likely be forgotten afterwards. Accordingly, my objective shifted from uncovering the names to initiating a discourse on the relevant issue of underrepresentation in contemporary society of Armenia.

Epilogue

A few days before the launch of my installation, as I was finalizing the project I had a memorable conversation with my little sister. Seeing me work on the project, my eleven-year-old sister approached to fulfill her curiosity. "Are you sure mom's voice fits well to this face?". She was not only critical of my creative choices, but also wanted to learn more about the meaning, to my surprise. At that very moment I realized how I have neglected to initiate the conversation myself. I began telling her about my experience from choosing the topic to doing the research. I made sure to mention all the intricacies I had discovered. After giving her the background, I played the video and she asked, "why is she saying those words?". Her face reflected deliberate effort to understand my words. Showing my little sister the effort I put into voicing about discrimination against women made me realize the importance of the work I was doing.

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