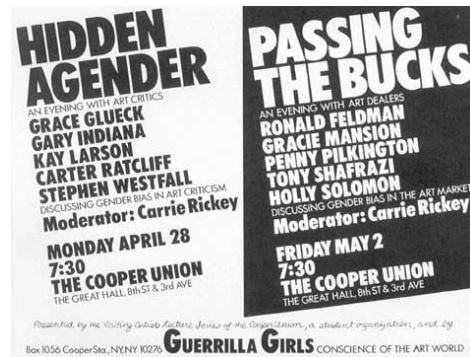


Gender Issues Under the Guerrilla Girls' Lens

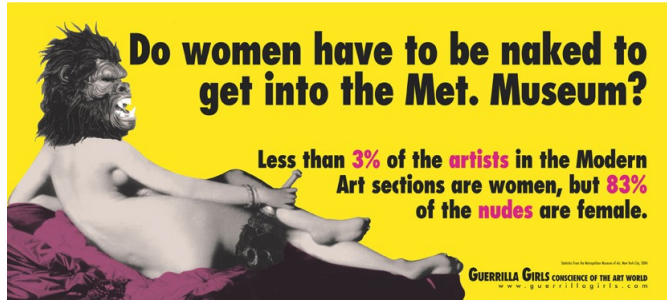
Visual portrayals of gender, specifically the female gender bias, bring ethical issues to attention. As mentioned in class, the Guerrilla Girls are a good example of feminists in action. These women were tired of being oppressed by society and its corresponding negative views of women. Women are underrepresented in TV shows, films, among newscasters and news stories, and among athletes (Rodgers & Zhang, 2006). The Guerrilla Girls wanted to act out in order to, “expose sexism, racism and corruption in politics, art, film and pop culture” (Guerrilla Girls, 2009). In order to protest, they formed a group where every woman wore a gorilla mask to hide their identity, since anonymity is a powerful force. This is a clear instance of visual incongruity in the form of juxtaposition. The female body is portrayed as very elegant, beautiful, and voluptuous, whereas a gorilla is seen as primitive, barbarian-like, and unattractive.

Another interesting unspoken trait about actual gorillas is that they are seen as less intelligent than humans. Once again, this contrasts with the intelligent mentality of these Guerrilla Girls who are trying to make a difference in their society by changing others' methods of viewing women. When one hears the word, “guerrilla,” people may at first think of, “guerrilla warfare,” or “guerrilla tactics.” This pun suggests that this group of women will use any technique, perhaps even unethical ones, in order to succeed in their feminist endeavors. In fact, “Some art dealers and critics complained that the Guerrilla Girls' hit-and-run tactics did not allow them enough time to respond to criticisms” (Sklar & Lustig, 2002). The Guerrilla Girls reacted by arranging two panels at Cooper Union. This showed that they would give the critics a chance to respond, revealing that these women were indeed ethical, and not all of their tactics were contemptible.



This is the most recent of many poster “letters” like this. (Dearest Eli Broad action at LACMA, Los Angeles, 2007). The letter provides a strong argument in a simple way. By “noticing” there weren’t enough female artists and artists of color, the girls simply asked to “rectify” this occurrence. Writing the letter in this manner could make it seem more unethical, since anyone reading it knows the Guerrilla Girls’ intent- to harm the Eli Broad Foundation if they don’t comply. The actual response letter by The Broad Art Foundation defended themselves noting an increase of female artists since 1995. (Dearest Eli Broad action at LACMA, Los Angeles,

2007). The Guerrilla Girls response noted the foundation's faults in argument, including that counting each instance of the same female artist was misleading. To provide incentive, the women also mentioned that they should follow suit with the Tate Modern and the Museum of Modern Art, who had publicly admitted that they hadn't collected enough work by women, and would remedy this.



This poster is one of the most famous, likely since it was a particularly clever consciousness raiser. Nudity is a form of art, portrayed in the poster expertly by using an artistic painting. Nudity is also a taboo, as the poster explains, "83% of the nudes are female." The Girls were

ridiculing the Metropolitan Museum for its exclusion of female artists and exaggeration of female nudity (in comparison to male nudity). The unethical traits of this poster begins by specifically mentioning one specific museum instead of a general statement. In addition, the portrait of the woman is being degraded by the gorilla mask.

This poster was discussed in Anne Demo's, "The Guerrilla Girls' Comic Politics of Subversion." (2000). It was one of the Guerrilla Girls' favorites, and was consequently translated into other languages to be distributed all over the world. It is particularly intriguing since it highlights and jokes with the positives of being a female artist, instead of the negatives which many of their other posters addressed.

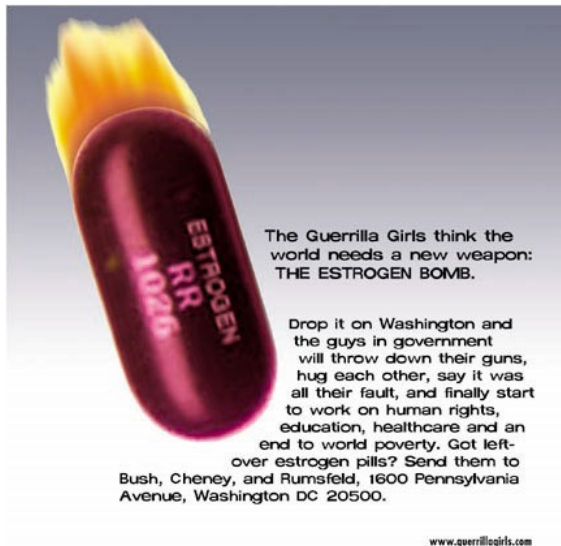
Depending on the viewer, a bias could be accounted for, especially a male versus a female viewer. It could be seen from a one's perspective as being sarcastic towards the actual disadvantages from each statement. On the other hand, another perspective would focus on the actual advantages from each statement. For example, the first line, "Working without the pressure of success," has two meanings. One may interpret that the woman will never have to worry about doing a good job and succeeding because she will never succeed. Conversely, another could interpret it to be that a man is always pressured to succeed and failure is not an

THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING A WOMAN ARTIST:

- Working without the pressure of success.
- Not having to be in shows with men.
- Having an escape from the art world in your 4 free-lance jobs.
- Knowing your career might pick up after you're eighty.
- Being reassured that whatever kind of art you make it will be labeled feminine.
- Not being stuck in a tenured teaching position.
- Seeing your ideas live on in the work of others.
- Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood.
- Not having to choke on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits.
- Having more time to work when your mate dumps you for someone younger.
- Being included in revised versions of art history.
- Not having to undergo the embarrassment of being called a genius.
- Getting your picture in the art magazines wearing a gorilla suit.

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM **GUERRILLA GIRLS** CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD
332 LEXINGTON AVENUE, 4TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10017
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option, whereas women are over-praised when they succeed. It is difficult to analyze the use of irony, yet this poster is one of the more ethical approaches to their cause, seeing that it isn't directed with malice toward one specific entity.



This poster clearly has unethical qualities. There is encouragement for a “bomb,” addressing of the White House and its direct members, and blatantly blaming them for not improving human rights, education, and healthcare, and not finding an end to world poverty. Directly attacking the White House is very controversial, since it is a place of respect and honor, and an important symbol in the American culture. By implementing this bomb, Americans will stop fighting in the war. The shape of the estrogen pill and its downward direction even further suggests a bomb. It is ironic that the bomb, a form of violence, is trying to stop the actual violence

taking place. The hidden message the Girls wanted to express was that there needs to be more females in the realm of politics and government, so that they can advance the aforementioned areas.

In an interview from 1995, the girls used codenames to disguise themselves (Guerrilla Girls, 2009). Essentially, Anne Demo (2000) explains, “by assuming the names of under-acknowledged female artists during interviews and performances, the Guerrilla Girls draw attention to the number of forgotten women artists who have produced art throughout history” (p.141). The Guerrilla Girls were not afraid to address gay and lesbian issues. They admitted that they support lesbian and gay rights, and some of the members are queer. “Gertrude Stein: We’ve covered lesbian and gay issues in a number of posters. For example, we called for the Far Right to undergo psychoanalysis to determine the source of its interest in Robert Mapplethorpe. Violette LeDuc: We proclaimed that Clarence Thomas would extend the same right to privacy he demanded for himself to homosexuals. Alice Neel: We ridiculed homophobic AIDS paranoia in our explanation of Natural Law. Vanessa Bell: The first Hot Flashes poked fun at *The New York Times*’ puritanical language when covering lesbian and gay issues.” A “Georgia O’Keeffe” even admitted that they would like to see art about lesbian sexuality taken as seriously as art about gay male sexuality. And it’s happening” (Guerrilla Girls, 2009).

It is enlightening to learn of the Guerrilla Girls’ struggles and successes. The group’s 80 posters, graphic works, and guerilla actions have targeted sexism and racism. (Demo, 2000). Although their “guerrilla tactics” were controversial and unethical, the Guerrilla Girls achieved

changing the public's opinion. However, their creative way of asserting themselves and poking fun at stereotypes, could help the argument that they were not being unethical. In this manner, they were attacking their enemies in the same, perhaps unethical way, which they were being attacked. Their cause was what was considered ethical, which could be argued to somewhat override their notorious strategies. Female and colored artists were given much more power and freedom. They changed not only the art world, but many other aspects of culture as a whole. Demo (2000) adds, "In addition, an exaggeration and playfulness with norms of femininity, which defines the Guerrilla Girls' rhetoric, connects feminism and femininity in ways that deconstruct dominant understandings of both terms" (p.140).

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