**American Female Artists in the Nineteenth and Twenty-First Centuries**

**Overview**

Leonardo de Vinci, Rembrandt, and Claude Monet are among the first names that come to people’s minds when considering the most prominent artists. These are all men who have become iconic figures in human culture, while female artists’ names appear much less often. It has been acknowledged that the lack of creativity was not the underlying cause of this trend. From the sociological perspective and feminist theory, in particular, social norms have been seen as the primary factors affecting the role women have played in the art for centuries (Ringelberg, 2017). The nineteenth century became the period of major shifts in this field. Female artists entered the pool of professional painters, sculptors, photographers, and so on. The changes that started at that period largely shaped the way female art developed (Borowiecki & Dahl, 2020). It may seem that the twenty-first century with its democratic values and the strive for equality opened up limitless horizons for women. Nevertheless, female artists still face various challenges that can restrict their activity and creativity. This paper compares the peculiarities of female artists’ professional activity in the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries from the feminist perspective.

The nineteenth century was an important milestone in the development of fine arts and the inclusion of females into the cohort of professional artists. It is noteworthy that in the mid-19th century, women still had limited opportunities to explore their creativity, making it their profession. The life and art of Cecilia Beaux can serve as an appropriate illustration of these constraints (McGuirk, 2017). The woman had difficulties with obtaining formal art education as the vast majority of art schools and academies in the USA and Europe tended to enroll men exclusively up to the end of the nineteenth century. Beaux, like many other female artists, had to gain knowledge and skills in private studios (Calo, 2018). She was lucky to attend the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and a private school and later academy of arts in Paris, which became more common at the end of the century and in the twentieth century (Erskine Clement Waters, 2020). Beaux’s creativity and her professionalism made her a successful portrait painter who created portraits of the representatives of the American upper class.

Her bold views on the role of the woman in society contributed to her growth and recognition that enabled Beaux to play an important role in the empowerment of female artists. Beaus provided numerous opportunities for women to start their careers in fine arts through the provision of training, financial support, and exhibition development. In the second part of the nineteenth century, women became aware of their ability to take control of their lives. They wanted to be free to make choices and take up the roles they want instead of submitting to assigned duties (Ringelberg, 2017). Clearly, the feminist movement was not confined to the artistic sphere as females fought for their rights in education, politics, economy, and other spheres. Women artists in the second half of the nineteenth century fought for their right to explore their creativity, sell their works, and display their pieces of art. As far as the topics and themes guiding female artists’ work, these were diverse areas including, but not confined to, such areas as women’s life, inequality, social norms, and so on.

**Current Trends and Research**

These days, the explored topics and areas of concern remain quite similar, as well as the challenges modern women artists face. Although many female artists are able to display their works and be successful in their profession, equality in fine arts is still unattained. Borowiecki and Dahl (2020) analyzed census and statistical data from 1850 to the present day and explored the peculiarities of female artists’ careers. The authors found that time constraints, financial aspects, and racial inequality were some of the most influential factors affecting female artists’ choices. Importantly, these patterns persist throughout decades and remain prevalent in the twenty-first century as well. According to Borowiecki and Dahl (2020), women tend to choose between having a family and exploring their creativity, which explains the young age and smaller families among women involved in the sphere of fine arts.

Females’ access to financial resources remains a critical factor making many creative women choose another sphere or leave the field as artists often have lower salaries compared to other professions. Finally, racial and ethnic inequality also makes it harder for women of color to become successful in creative professions (Borowiecki & Dahl, 2020). It is noteworthy that geographic aspects tend to be influential as well. Women in certain clusters are more committed to the profession and gaining success, which is associated with many successful creative individuals living in those cities or communities. Thus, Borowiecki and Dahl (2020) conclude that social norms and traditions that have existed since 1850 largely shaped female artists’ choices as to their creative profession.

Such conclusions are made by other researchers addressing different aspects of the matter. For instance, Esmaili and Hassanvand (2018) implemented a qualitative study facilitated by library research and noted that female artists are still facing challenges based on social constraints, although the development of technology provides diverse opportunities. It is stated that women artists still have to cope with financial issues making choices based on some biases and prejudice. As far as the topics explored and highlighted in their art, females concentrate on women’s lives and the issues related to inequality in different spheres of life. Clearly, these topics have not changed substantially throughout the decades.

Another study is worth attention in exploring the reasons behind gender inequality in fine arts that still persists. Nie (2017) considered the gender issue among the employees of the museums of arts. Although the research concentrated on curators, managers, and other staff, their experiences shed light on the choices made by female artists as well. Regarding the pay gap that is obvious in the sphere of art museums, Nie (2017) asserted that women were ready to accept lower wages. The author also stressed that the assumption that wages were lower as women worked fewer hours or were not always ready to work extra and move to other places when needed was hardly viable. Nie (2017) concluded that women had lower salaries because they accepted such working conditions. Likewise, the pay gap, as well as the overall achievements of females in fine arts, can be related to their specific priorities and readiness to be less financially successful in their creative professions. These creative women want to realize their potential, so financial factors seem less important for a large part of this cohort.

**Summary, Further Research, and Relevance**

In sum, it is possible to note that the research on the current situation in fine arts and the peculiarities of female artists’ life in the nineteenth century is evidence-based. Quantitative (statistical) and qualitative data have been analyzed to trace the changes in the development of American female artists’ careers since 1850. Notably, the nineteenth century with its Victorian values and prejudice was not a favorable age for women artists. However, the twenty-first century with its democratic principles and morals is still filled with bias and diverse constraints for female artists. The parallels between the two epochs have been drawn with the help of census data analysis, and major trends have been identified. However, further research may bring new valuable insights into the matter.

It is possible to obtain more qualitative data to understand the reasons for the existing inequality in the modern world of fine arts. Female artists should share their perspectives regarding the obstacles they have to address and the choices they have to make. It is also necessary to examine the role education and access to higher education play in female artists’ growth and choices to enter the profession. Finally, researchers should also pay attention to public opinion and the way female artists and their works are accepted by people. The further exploration of various peculiarities of female artists’ development and engagement in creative activity has a high value for the future of fine arts.

Women have created numerous masterpieces that shed light on the aspects of human life that have been ignored or misunderstood by male artists. At the same time, it can be important to identify whether the involvement of more women in the field is necessary. There are still views that the limited engagement of female artists is natural and meets the needs of this population. Hence, the role female artists play and should perform in the development of world fine arts is still open to debate.

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