

Final Report

‘Domestics’

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Executive Summary

Highlights

- ‘Domestics’ exhibition at Unitec’s Snowwhite Gallery.
- Catalogues distributed during the exhibition.
- Discussions related to the exhibition theme were a valuable component throughout the time of the exhibition
- Interest from other tertiary institutions to exhibit the work.

Conclusion

Work exhibited and accompanying written material achieved desired dialogues and further encourages ongoing discussions about the role of ‘gendered’ art in contemporary practice.

Background

The project’s intentions are based on a perceived need to re-invigorate feminist thought around craft, fine art and the everyday.

With the advent of the Women’s Movement in the 1970’s, women started to make conscious use of female concerns: the body (interrogating the male gaze), politicising the private nature of domesticity (the personal is political), women’s sexuality and women’s home-crafts. In New Zealand in the 70’s and 80’s there were politically active and robust women’s groups. The Women’s Gallery in Wellington (1980-1984) was committed to show only women artist’s work. In Auckland Juliet Batten and Carole Shephard were at the forefront of women’s art events. An artistic generation later, there is less awareness of gender as a dominant concern in (women’s) art in New Zealand. Recent major exhibitions and symposiums examining the confluence of feminism and contemporary art such as Text and Subtext 2000-2003, Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution 2007, Global Feminisms 2007, Art and Feminism 1969-2009, elles@centrepompidou 2009-2010, have all taken place overseas. In 2007 an art forum discussion at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne, was titled ‘Feminism never happened’. The curator Alexie Glass commented: *‘Feminism has a troubled and sometimes demonised presence in the contested topography of a ‘we can have it all’ generation of young women. What matters is not how they choose to activate their position in a shamelessly re-masculinized art world but whether they are conversant with, and feel theoretically and visually supported by their feminist legacies’*

In New Zealand, there are few recent discussions on the position of women artists in contemporary art culture. TePapa’s 2009 *‘We are not suitable for Framing’* was a historically informative exhibition of NZ women artists but lacked analysis of the place of gendered art practice today. The ‘domestic’ and it’s accompanying ‘women’s work’ connotations such as cooking, sewing, knitting and cleaning was a major focus in the early woman’s movement.

In America, Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro's 'Womanhouse' (1972) and Chicago's 'Dinner Party' (1974-79) were both contentious and hugely influential. With many young women today revisiting and reviving 'women's work' without gendered analysis, domesticity is repositioned as a contested site.

Aims and Objectives

In this hiatus of a lack of gender consciousness, the project attempts to focus the viewer's attention on the significance of the ways in which gender can be signified. The artworks in our exhibition, gallery talks and the accompanying theoretical essay preserve and re-contextualize women's generational history.

It is hoped that our work will be shown at various galleries within New Zealand and that it will create a renewed awareness and dialogue of the place of gender in relation to art practice.

As this is an ongoing project that is flexible and open to multiple interpretations, it invites further research, more analysis and continuing discussions between artists, critics, historians and a concerned audience.

Methodology

Exploration of the role of contemporary 'gendered' art (the personal is political) through collaboration between a painter, a photographer and an art historian brought together practical, and theoretical considerations and investigations.

The production of exploratory working drawings, video footage, paintings and craft interventions (stitching cutting sewing re-interpreted through the language of photography) was extended by a non-hierarchical practice based dialogue between painting and photography through the exchange and re-working of some of each artist's images.

This practice of 're-making' was followed by reflective and qualitative analysis, subsequent modifications as well as personal responses to 'gendered' looking. Consideration was given to the use of materials. Both artists used *linen* as a substrate for their works and as a metaphoric reference to craft, domesticity, the feminine and finally the *canvas* for 'high art'.

Jotti brings to an archetypal feminist debate about traditional women's craft a visual interrogation of the materiality of sown fabric seen through a modernist lens, then translated by the modern 'crafts' tools of digital photography into images that have a bold presence due to their scale and minimalistic realisation.

Marno's paintings speak of an untold story that is being made and re-made in the fabric of an ordinary domestic life that is lived.

Outcomes/findings

Our research resulted in both written and artistic outcomes. The exhibited artwork, the resulting discussions and catalogue essay all have created a renewed awareness and interest in the place of gender in relation to art practice.

With our work, we have also questioned the cultural capital of 'elitism' and gave dignity to the normally unnoticed, trivial and repetitive actions of the 'domestic' everyday.

Conclusions

A major recent exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris called *elles@centrepompidou* showed 500 'feminine' works by 200 international female artists. This attests to the fact that the conversation about gendered art and gendered looking is still alive.

Our research has shown that the work creates the author, not the reverse, in other words, '..... the sex of the work is inscribed, not only in it's production, but in its reception as well'. (Eric Fassin in '*Gender in Representations*').

It was concluded that despite the use of contemporary technologies fused with modernist techniques and philosophy, the actual subject matter of a domestic nature determined the gendered reading of the works.

The movement between craft (feminine) and fine art (masculine) is still engaging in a complex dialogue related to both low and high art.

Implications

Our work offers a renewed historical understanding and a contemporary perspective which will have valuable ramifications in the art and craft education.

Anyone researching and/or working towards exhibitions that profile feminist concerns will benefit from the various aspects of the work.

We have been invited to exhibit at 'Northart' Gallery in Northcote in November 2011.

This exhibition will build on what we have already achieved and will also include video footage, photographic drawings and additional paintings that will provoke further discussions and dialogues.

Publications and dissemination

Catalogues have been distributed to colleagues in the design and visual arts department at Unitec and other tertiary institutions. Several University libraries in New Zealand have ordered a copy of the catalogue. Copies have also been sent to art venues in Auckland and Wellington. Dates are being finalized for a further exhibition at the 'Thistle Hall Gallery' in Wellington for 2012.