

## Guide for SMART Museum -- Gender Civ, Section 4, Ford

Today, we will practice *slow looking*, which I expect will be challenging but rewarding in counterpoint to our digital-media habits of breezing through images.

While visually absorbing the piece is the goal, you are welcome to use your phones/laptops to research some background on the artist and the piece's context. Look at the printed guide for information about the piece.

In pairs, I would like you to examine two works for 20 minutes each. Then, you will have 5 minutes to look briefly at the collection of works as a whole and get a sense for the other pieces. Finally, we will take 20 minutes for you to share your insights and discuss as a group.

- 9:30-9:45 intro
- 9:45-10:05 round 1
- 10:05-10:25 round 2
- 10:25-10:30 look at all
- 10:30-10:50 group discussion

Please keep in mind these **framing questions** as you analyze your two works. These are designed to help us connect this session to the readings for today and to broader class discussions.

- All these artworks are made by women.
  - Does that matter? Why/how? Does it affect how you receive a particular piece?
- Consider your piece in relation to the time period in which it was made.
  - What were the broader social and historical issues taking place?
  - What was going on in the history of art production at the time? Nochlin and the Guerilla Girls give a bit of context specific to this.
- What emotions or sensations arise for you as you look at the piece? What kind of experience does it evoke for you?
  - How would you describe the use of form, texture, color? Are these things put in jarring or harmonious relation?
- **Is it pleasurable to look at this?**
  - Mulvey writes that the pleasure in viewing most cinema participates in the "patriarchal unconscious." If you find pleasure in it, is it the pleasure of conforming with received narratives and desires, or a pleasure of breaking with them? Think carefully about what received narratives and desires might be -- they have changed since the 70s when Mulvey wrote.

- Who is the viewer supposed to be?
  - Mulvey also writes that cinema relies on viewers' identification with the protagonist and the world the art creates. Does this work disrupt the viewer's gaze in some way? Does it invite or disrupt identification?
  
- In class, we discussed art and science as different pursuits of truth, and different paths for cultivating "raw" energy (creativity or curiosity) into disciplined, useful, ingenious contributions to broader social projects of expression and knowledge.
  - What marks of raw energy do you see here, what marks of disciplined participation in a broader conversation?
  - Keeping Woolf and Walker in mind, what barriers might the artist have encountered in developing her creativity/curiosity along socially instituted channels? Does this matter, and how?
  
- Is this "great" art or a "great" artist?
  - Nochlin writes, "The problem lies not so much with the feminists' concept of what femininity is, but rather with their misconception-shared with the public at large of what art is: with **the naive idea that art is the direct, personal expression of individual emotional experience**, a translation of personal life into visual terms. **Art is almost never that, great art never is.** The making of art involves a self-consistent language of form, more or less dependent upon, or free from, given temporally defined conventions, schemata or systems of notation, which have to be learned or worked out, either through teaching, apprenticeship or a long period of individual experimentation." (24)
  
- What might be the relation of "genius" to this piece?
  - Nochlin writes that dispassionate questioning of the material/structural conditions in which art is produced undermines the mythos of "individual genius."
  
- In class, we discussed how art (and science) is *always* political, even when it is not explicitly so. **How is this work political?**
  - Consider the above questions about historical context and the fact that these were made by women.
  - What kinds of bodies are shown, and how? What might that mean?
  - Do you think it is making an explicit political statement?
  - Consider Mulvey's insistence that "apolitical" work for "the masses" channels the political unconscious of the "unmarked category" (white, male, middle-class, etc).