

# Representation Of Women In Art Museums: How Can We Improve Gender Balance In Exhibition Practice?

Astrid Aspegren  
Master of Arts in Visual Culture from the University of  
Copenhagen, Denmark  
[aa@cki.dk](mailto:aa@cki.dk)

## ABSTRACT

This paper is a summary of my master thesis from 2019. The paper examines the obstacles that artists, who are women, face in their artistic practice and opportunity to have their works exhibited in a Danish context. The paper is the result of a study into the representation of women artists in Danish state art museums; a study stemming from the observation that the prestigious Charlottenborg Spring Exhibition in Copenhagen always exhibits as many (if not more) women than men. Given the well documented imbalance of men and women artists in museum exhibitions around the world, the paper offers some inspiration for curators and museums to look at their own exhibition practice in order to foster gender equity and engage in active history-making.

"We will need all our wit and courage to make sure women's voices are heard, their work seen and written about. That is our task for the future" - Linda Nochlin 1972

## Keywords:

Gender

representation, art  
museums

Cultural policy  
exhibition practice

feminism

## Introduction

The balance between the representation of men and women artists has always been heavily skewed in men's favor ever since the establishment of the first art museum. This makes sense considering the fact that women were not allowed to study at the Danish Royal Academy of Art alongside men until 1908, and for a very long time, women were not allowed to be artists. The Danish architect Vilhelm Klein is cited to have said "The fact that women have the same abilities as men is no one likely to claim" in 1876 (cf. The Royal Danish Academy of Art, website). Today the Danish Royal Academy of Art (hereafter 'The Academy') enrolls an equal amount of men and women every year (cf. The Academy's website and 2019 Global Art Market Report) but the representation of men and women artists in Danish state art museums still exhibit far more artworks by men than by women.

Over the years, the lack of exhibition and acquisition of art made by women has been criticized and questioned, but one counter argument has often been, that we can not base our exhibition practice on gender; it should be based on quality (Hans Bonde, 2015, Poul Erik Tøjner, 2005). The research of my master thesis is based on an observation made in 2016, that out of 129 artists, the annual Charlottenborg Spring Exhibition in Copenhagen exhibited 59 men and 70 women. This was compelling considering the debate on gender inequality in art museums at the time. At the Charlottenborg Spring Exhibition, an independent jury is selected every year to represent different genres, and they are not aware of the artists genders or identities, before they have chosen which pieces to exhibit. During this research, data was collected on previous and following years showing the same result; that women and men artists were represented equally.

The question of the research then became "What stands in the way for representation of women artists in the state art museums, and what can be done to change the imbalance? To this end, I will begin by explaining my methodology used during this research, then I will provide a brief overview of the feminist and constructivist theory underlining my thesis, and finally I will sum up the result of the research and the suggestions for action that these findings uncovered.

## Method and Analysis

From a methodological standpoint, this article

aligns itself with feminist critical voices, which have been analyzing the position of women within the world of art for the last 50 years. The research is carried out following grounded theory and situated analysis (Adele E Clarke, 2013) in which empirical or theoretical data is gathered and organised into situational maps, that were categorized in order to identify categories and make connections between the data. In grounded theory, data can consist of human elements, non-human elements, invisible elements (such as social, political, historical or relational factors), discursive elements, unspoken elements (such as concepts or cultural factors), or positionalities (ie. how are people positioned regarding power, authority, opposition etc.) (Clarke 2013). For this research, data includes the statistics of men and women artists exhibited at the four museums, interviews based on these statistics, concepts and arguments in literature and debate articles, the museum law and literature on cultural politics.

The scope of the research is narrowed down to the four biggest art museums in Denmark: The National Gallery, Arken Museum of Modern Art, ARoS Aarhus Art Museum and Louisiana Museum of Modern Art. The museums keep a record of previous exhibitions, so from here all men and women artists were counted, as well as the artists from the Spring Exhibition in Charlottenborg in order to compare the differences in gender representation. This became the starting point of the interviews. Erlend Høyersten, director of ARoS Aarhus Art Museum, Camilla Jalving, Deputy Director of The National Gallery, and Anna Krogh, former member of the jury of the Spring Exhibition 2019 have all three been interviewed.

Neither Christian Gether, director of Arken Museum of Modern Art nor Poul Erik Tøjner, director of Louisiana Museum of Modern Art didn't agree to an interview.

While it is important to overcome the gender imbalance, not everyone identifies with either of these genders, so to a certain extent a research like this is flawed and unnuanced. This paper uses a definition of gender coined by Barbara Risman (2004), who sees gender as a social structure in the same analytical plane as politics and economics, so it can be analyzed and discussed in the same manner. Women and men are two different structural categories, and women and men often choose their gendered path. Actors within a structure often compare themselves to similarly situated individuals when making choices, meaning that women don't normally consider men's options open for themselves. Actions are chosen out of

interest, but the structure often constrains the choices made available (Risman 2004). I use the term 'woman artist' well aware that artists who are women have complained for the last hundred years about this term, because it puts them in opposition to the man as the 'natural' artist. I don't believe in the inherent nature of the woman artist as a particular thing, but I use the term for political reasons, to showcase the fact that artists, who are women, face certain systemic inequalities and continually face biases in their work.

Charlottenborg Spring Exhibition 2011-2019	No. Of artists	No. Of male artists	No. Of women artists	Ratio of women
2019	49	25	24	48,9%
2018	40	17	23	57,5%
2017	70	27	43	61,4%
2016	129	59	70	54,2%
2015	81	31	50	61,7%
2014	51	17	34	66,66%
2013	76	36	40	52,6%
2012	69	29	49	57,9%
2011	49	25	24	48,9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>614</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>56,66%</b>
<b>Average/year</b>	<b>68,22</b>	<b>19,55</b>	<b>39,66</b>	<b>58,13%</b>

**TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF MEN AND WOMEN ARTISTS EXHIBITED AT THE CHARLOTTENBORG SPRING EXHIBITION (2011-2019)**

Source: Aspegren (2019).

National Gallery (SMK) Exhibitions 1999-2018	No. of Exhibitions	No. of artists	No. of male artists	No. of women artists	Ratio of women
2018	6	15	12	3	20%
2017	9	35	30	5	14,28%
2016	8	37	33	4	10,8%
2015	5	31	18	13	41,9%
2014	6	6	6	0	0%
2013	3	9	8	1	11,11%
2012	-	-	-	-	-
2011	7	21	19	2	9,5%
2010	7	15	12	3	20%
2009	7	17	9	8	47%
2008	11	25	20	5	20%
2007	4	4	3	1	25%
2006	7	24	23	1	4,16%
2005	3	3	3	0	0%
2004	8	8	5	3	37,5%
2003	5	9	6	3	33,33%
2002	8	17	14	3	17,64%
2001	4	21	21	0	0%
2000	6	10	10	0	0%
1999	7	22	22	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>16,7%</b>
<b>Average/year</b>	<b>6,36</b>	<b>19,55</b>	<b>14,42</b>	<b>2,89</b>	<b>16,69%</b>

**TABLE 2. DISTRIBUTION OF MEN AND WOMEN ARTISTS EXHIBITED AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY (SMK) (1999-2018)**

Source: Aspegren (2019).

Arken Exhibitions 1996-2018	No. of Exhibitions	No. of artists	No. of male artists	No. of women artists	Ratio of women
2018	6	32	19	13	40,62%
2017	5	42	36	6	14,28%
2016	5	27	21	6	22,22%
2015	5	14	7	7	50%
2014	5	9	9	0	0%
2013	6	24	21	3	12,5%
2012	5	42	28	14	33,33%
2011	4	4	3	1	25%
2010	7	27	21	6	22,22%
2009	3	19	19	0	0%
2008	5	43	31	12	27,9%
2007	3	25	19	6	24%
2006	4	20	16	4	20%
2005	4	4	4	0	0%
2004	5	28	21	7	25%
2003	5	12	10	2	16,66%
2002	6	18	8	10	55,55%
2001	6	43	38	5	11,62%
2000	5	22	13	9	40,9%
1999	7	27	15	2	7,4%
1998	6	13	13	0	0%
1997	8	23	22	1	2,34%
1996	9	27	22	5	18,5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>476</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>21,8%</b>
<b>Average/year</b>	<b>5,39</b>	<b>23,69</b>	<b>18,52</b>	<b>5,17</b>	<b>21,8%</b>

**TABLE 3. DISTRIBUTION OF MEN AND WOMEN ARTISTS EXHIBITED AT ARKEN EXHIBITIONS (1996-2018)**

Source: Aspegren (2019).

ARoS Exhibitions 2005 -2018	No. of Exhibitions	No. of artists	No. of male artists	No. of women artists	Ratio of women	
2018	6	28	21	7	25%	
Triennalen	3	87	73	14	16%	
2017	5	59	33	26	44%	
2016	9	18	9	9	50%	
2015	7	32	27	5	15,62%	
2014	6	8	5	3	37,5%	
2013	6	9	7	2	22,22%	
2012	6	12	12	0	0%	
2011	5	7	6	1	14,28%	
2010	8	25	17	8	32%	
2009	6	44	31	13	29,54%	
2008	6	18	16	2	11,11%	
2007	5	3	3	0	0%	Uncertain data
2006	3	5	5	0	0%	
2005	3	14	13	1	7,1%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>24,66%</b>	
<b>Average/year</b>	<b>5,78</b>	<b>26,35</b>	<b>19,85</b>	<b>6,5</b>	<b>24,66%</b>	

**TABLE 4. DISTRIBUTION OF MEN AND WOMEN ARTISTS EXHIBITED AT ARoS EXHIBITIONS (2005-2018).**

Source: Aspegren (2019).

Louisiana Exhibitions 2009-2018	No. of Exhibitions	No. of artists	No. of male artists	No. of women artists	Ratio of women
2018	7	72	50	22	30,55%
2017	10	35	24	11	31,42%
2016	8	26	18	8	30,76%
2015	13	53	48	5	9,43%
2014	11	53	40	13	24,5%
2013	6	20	16	4	20%
2012	7	45	31	14	31,11%
2011	7	7	6	1	14,28%
2010	6	20	17	3	15%
2009	4	50	39	11	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>Average/year</b>	<b>7,9</b>	<b>38,1</b>	<b>28,9</b>	<b>9,2</b>	<b>24,14%</b>

**TABLE 5. DISTRIBUTION OF MEN AND WOMEN ARTISTS EXHIBITED AT LOUISIANA EXHIBITIONS (2009-2018).**

Source: Aspegren (2019).

## A Feminist Genealogy

This section is a brief summary of the theoretical background of the thesis, this paper is based on. It covers some feminist art- and culture historic voices from 1972 to the present.

Linda Nochlin wrote a famous essay in 1972 in which she questioned why there had been no great women artists. (Nochlin, Linda: "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?", 1972) This question needs clarification. The concept of greatness in art history is tied with the myth of the Artist with a capital A, as someone who has an inherent genius which makes him able to create masterpieces, and that this is always a man, never a woman (Nochlin 1972). Nochlin disregards the idea that there is something inherent in the masculine body that makes the man by definition a better artist.

She presents a threefold argument to this case: First, even after women were admitted to the Academy of Art<sup>1</sup>, they were not permitted to study the nude body, as it was found inappropriate. This put women at a disadvantage, because the nude was considered one of the highest forms of art, and women were prevented from learning this technique. The second part of Nochlin's argument she calls 'The Lady's Accomplishment' referring to the sociocultural idea that existed at the time, that the woman should not excel at anything but rather tend to art as a hobby. A woman should spend more time being generally attractive and useful, which would not be possible if she were to spend too much time learning only one skill. The third part of the argument is called 'Success', and here Nochlin argues that the only women artists who have truly gained success have done so by being closely related to male artists, such as their fathers or husbands. (Nochlin 1972)

Laura Mulvey is, on the other hand, a feminist film theorist, and one of the main points of her 1975 essay (Mulvey, Laura: "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Screen vol. 16, issue 3, 1975) is the representation of sexual difference in cinematic films: "*In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is stylized accordingly.*" (Laura

Mulvey, 1975, p. 808) The differentiating of the active/male and the passive/female can be translated into the myth of the artist-as-man. The man is the subject artist, whereas the woman is oftentimes depicted as the object of male desire – we see the man as artist and the woman as muse. This is exemplified in numerous categories such as the nude painting, pin-ups, strip-tease, in which the woman is sexualized (Mulvey, 1975).

Griselda Pollock asked the question, if "adding women to art history the same as producing feminist art history" in her essay collection "Vision and Difference" from 1988. She discusses how, or if, we can write a satisfactory art history that places women just the same as men. This, she argues, is not done by merely discovering the female geniuses of art history, because we would still only add feminist interventions into the existing male dominated social order and thus accepting the status quo (Pollock, 1988). She makes the case for a paradigm shift in which we would look at art not as objects to be received or consumed, but as practice. She then diverts the question of why there are no great women artists to "what is problematic for feminist artist practice" (1988). In Pollock's argument, a woman's gender has always been used against her to justify her societal role as the wife and mother as the natural feminine. The man is neutral and the woman is in opposition. What is problematic for feminist artist practice is part of a broader problem for women in general: "*Feminist interventions demand recognition of gender power relations, making visible the mechanisms of male power, the social construction of sexual difference and the role of cultural representations in that construction*" (Pollock, 1988, p. 9)

Kvinder på værtshus (Women Down the Pub) is group of feminist visual artists who work with representation and gender in art. In a 2004 publishing, they present essays and examples of feminist strategies in artist practice that they have experienced since the 1970s. In it, art historian Sanne Kofod Olsen (who would go on to be appointed Rector for the Royal Academy of Visual Arts in 2014) makes the case for a new art history. In her essay (Olsen, Sanne Kofod: "En ny kunsthistorie" (English: "A New Art History") 2004), she reflects on the prior years of feminism in art history, which she sees divided into two categories: a linguistic, constructivist category and an essentialist category. Griselda Pollock

<sup>1</sup> In Denmark, the Royal Academy of Art was established in 1754, but at the time only men were allowed. In 1976, architect Vilhelm Klein (who didn't believe women could have artistic talent) established a private drawing- and craft school for women. This private school was supported by the women's movement, but it was eventually used as an excuse not to establish an actual art school for women. In 1888, after some debate, an Art school for women was established by painter Johanne Krebs. In 1908 the art school for women was merged with the Academy, but women were not allowed to study the nude before 1924: <https://kunstakademiet.dk/da/billedkunstskolerne/billedkunstskolernes-historie/undervisning-kvinder-1870erne-1920erne>



is an example of an art historian that dismissed the essentialism of gender and saw all history as a social construction. Others believed in a separate woman art history, because they argued that a woman is essentially different from a man, and her space of experience differs from that of the man's (Kofod Olsen 2004).

Kofod offers four strategies of feminist artist practice: language, narrative, space and action. Feminist artist practice includes media such as film, happening, performance, and the body. The use of the body is particularly feminist, because it brings attention to the female body, which is often a site of political or social conflict (Kofod Olsen 2004). She offers an explanation of why women at this point still are under-represented in art exhibitions, and points to the ecosystem of art which include private galleries, cataloguing, museum acquisitions, scholarships, funding etc. Art is still in large part bound to the artist, which is traditionally a man (2004). Kofod Olsen emphasizes the importance of action in contemporary art, because the exhibition practice of today shape the art history of tomorrow: "It is not the art that has to change, it is the representation of it" (Sanne Kofod Olsen, 2004, p. 12)

According to art historian, Ellen Yoshi Tani, there is a distinction in feminist art practice from the 1960s and 1970s, and 21st century feminist artist practice in the role of 'beauty'. Feminist arts practice now and then champion themes such as social, political, and economic equality and women's control of their own bodies, but where the 1970s feminist artists rejected the objectifying beauty norms, feminist artists of today embrace beauty and brains as a combined power agency. (Tani, Ellen Yoshi: "What Makes Contemporary Art Feminist? An Art Genome Project Case Study" Artsy for Education, Jan 16th, 2015).

### **Quality Is Not Objective Fact**

*"The world as-it-is is more than objective fact, it includes consciousness. When an image is presented as a work of art, the way people look at it is affected by a whole series of learnt assumptions about art. Assumptions concerning: Beauty, truth, genius, civilization, form, status, taste, etc." (Berger, 1972 p 11)*

Berger speaks to the idea of situatedness – the way one person perceives an image may not correspond to the way another person perceives that same image. More than that, situatedness is affected by the current strata of our social and historic time. The 'etc.' in the quote makes room for other types of learned assumptions, and I find it appropriate in this case to add

'quality'. We make assumptions on quality based on the current standards of our time. The criticism of 'new ways' is triggered because the art goes against established assumptions about these concerns (listed by Berger with my addition of 'quality'), and these assumptions are established through the social negotiating processes, which are always won by the ruling classes. Historically, the consumption of art has been available for a privileged minority, always belonging to the ruling classes, and in this social mechanism a hierarchy and a narrative of reality is constructed. Who benefits from this narrative? The ruling class, the privileged few. Vision is never neutral, and assumptions of beauty, truth, genius, civilization, form, status, taste and quality are ever changing through historic periods, and it is problematic for these assumptions to be established by a privileged few. Combining voices of differently situated people gives us a better understanding of global experiences. The acquisition and exhibition of art in our museums should be based on quality, yes, but it is unsatisfactory to let this judgement be up to the few. The ecosystem of art consists of many factors, such as private galleries, critics, publications, exhibitions and now also social media, and it is within this ecosystem, that 'quality' is defined. This is why the ecosystem has to be inclusive so as to not reproduce itself and exclude people from situating themselves in their own past, present and future.

### **What Stands in the Way for Women Artists' Practice?**

The following is a summary of the results based on the grounded theory research. After having worked with the data, categorizing it into situational maps, seven connections were drawn. The following seven headlines are all examples of different obstacles that stand in the way of women artists' ability to practice their work and become exhibited and acknowledged.

#### **Quality, Availability And Relevance**

Access to The Academy is not the only condition to become an artist. Former headmaster of the Royal Academy of Art, Sanne Kofod criticized the unequal representation of men and women and referenced the entrenched inequality in traditional arts practice (Kofod 2014). She called for a yearly report detailing the museums' inclusion and exclusion politics. This idea was challenged by the argument that the museums should only exhibit and acquire art based on quality,

not gender. Historian Hans Bonde argues that "Instead of actively fighting a potential discrimination of women, we presently implement favoritism systems based on a mistrust to the social systems' ability to secure a fair case management." (Hans Bonde 2015) Christian Gether, Director of Arken was asked about this approach in an article in Information in September 2014, and he replied the following:

*"We exhibit and acquire the art which we find best in line with the direction we have laid out in Arken"*

- *"Is male art just better?"*

*"I don't know if it is better. We don't acquire based on statistics. It is the artistic quality, that decides it."*

An example of how quality can't be determined by gender is the censored exhibition of the Artists' Fall Exhibition at the Art Gallery Den Frie in Copenhagen. Artist Trine Rytter Andersen has examined the exhibition practice over the years, and she recalls an episode in the late 1980s where she describes the tone among the male jury members:

*"That year they made a separation of the exhibited objects into a women- and men division, because the jury members believed that by merely looking at the art they could determine the artists' gender. Afterwards, when they were allowed to see who had made what, they learned that the 'most horrible and women-like' artworks were in fact made by men."*

(Trine Rytter Andersen, interviewed by journalist Torben Sangild, 2015)

Andersen argues that anonymity has helped professionalize these exhibitions that openly favored men and called women artists ridiculous. But quality has nothing to do with gender, and gender cannot determine what kind of art a person makes. Gender is socially constructed (Risman 2004), and it is an unfortunate way to look at an artist.

The concepts of availability and relevance are also relevant in exhibition practice. Erlend Høyesteren, Director of AROs argues that they have to look at 'what art is out there'. In exhibitions about historical art, it makes sense to say that the field is narrower, but in contemporary art, it is clear that women are 'out there'. But of course, being 'out there' is not enough, you also have to say something relevant:

*"We also discuss attention. Statistics is one thing, but we also look at whether it is a man or a woman who says something particular about a current theme that the exhibition is about. Then it becomes a different parameter, we are choosing from."* (Erlend Høyesteren,

2019, interviewed by Astrid Aspegren)

This becomes more interesting if we look at a statement by Anna Krogh, former jury member of the Charlottenborg Spring Exhibition:

*"I have often been in a context where I could ascertain that when something is actually really interesting and groundbreaking and something that wasn't just a repetition of all the things we have seen before in contemporary art, it was made by a woman. Look at Jeanette Ehlers – she has this agenda about decolonization. And if you asked me now to mention 4 or 5 relevant artists who actually do something and make us think differently, it would be women."* (Anna Krogh, 2019, interviewed by Astrid Aspegren)

### **Force of Habit**

Linda Nochlin takes this up in her essay 'Why have there been no great women artists?' from 1972, and to the force of habit 'The question of the nude' is especially interesting. The question of the nude is a reference to the institutional exclusion of women in classes studying nude models. It took a long time for women to fully be accepted as artists and not just an 'other', so the habit and tradition of promoting men over women is not a simple random habit, it is deliberate and institutional.

Socializing is the process of internalizing and externalizing the current values of society, and if these are not actively challenged by law and activism, we will perpetuate the belief that men are worth more than women. The power of habit comes from the socialized power mechanism, that men are true artists, and women artists represent the 'other' (Nochlin 1972). When galleries and museums continue to represent men, art made by men will continue to be considered more qualified and relevant than art made by women.

The inequality in representation happens in spite of museum staff being made up of primarily women. Høyesteren (Interview by Aspegren, 2019) acknowledges the visual rhetoric that convinces you of a certain aesthetic which becomes the norm, and this rhetoric is enforced by the power of habit, when galleries etc. reproduce the narrative of the male artist.

*"You don't necessarily think about how important balance is, because you are concerned with the artists coming through the art galleries. At a certain point, you are convinced of the visual rhetoric."*

This observation is one of the key points in this issue. The habit of choosing men goes back all the way to antiquity. Anna Krogh (Interview by Aspegren, 2019)

has made that same observation:

"When we enter the aesthetic world, it is as if there is an entrenched and written-in-stone tradition that goes all the way back to the ancient Greeks, and that is not something you just throw away. It is a long and tough tradition."

### ***The Modern & The Contemporary***

During the interview, Camilla Jalving, deputy director of the National Gallery, points to their collection of 700 years of art, when asked why women are less exhibited than men. And it is definitely a valid point, that women artists from before the modern period didn't exist. But that is not the whole story. While it is fair to expect a skewed representation in modern art, it is also fair to expect active work done to highlight women artists from the modern era. Camilla Jalving agrees:

*"When we have to do with older materials - which to a long extent is the case for (The National Gallery's) collection and exhibitions the challenge is that historically there have been less women artists and among them, fewer women artists have been described and preserved. This is of course something that we regularly try to correct through research (we have, among other things, research in women artists from the 1800s), through acquisitions (we have for instance a neat collection of Elizabeth Jerichau Bauman, of which the latest 'An Egyptian clay salesperson in Gizeh' has been purchased in 2016), and through exhibitions (in the spring of 2020 we open a large exhibition of Anna Ancher)." (Camilla Jalving, 2019, interviewed by Astrid Aspegren)*

Camilla Jalving provides a strategy in three steps: research, acquisition and exhibition. This is a practice that doesn't just exhibit contemporary artists and lets the past be, it

uses research to disseminate different aspects of art history than the existing canon.

### ***The Monographic Exhibition***

According to Camilla Jalving, "The best we as a museum can do is to place artists, who are women, in the monographic format, which is typically reserved for the man, who is an artist. (...) Is it a group exhibition/themed exhibition or the monographic? That also matters to representation." (2019, interviewed by Aspegren)

Høyersten argues, that it is one thing to count the number of women, and another thing to account for how many mono exhibitions a museum makes with women artists compared to men artists. A mono exhibition is a

format in which one single artist's oeuvre is exhibited, as opposed to a group exhibition that often has a more thematic approach. This has significance, because it speaks to the tradition and the so-called force of habit in art history, because the monographic exhibition in a way is an homage to the great artist (always a man), and it is an exhibition format that highlights the work of the artist and focuses the audience's attention. In the same period, The National Gallery exhibited 66 male artists in a monographic format vs 15 women; Arken exhibited 60 men and 10 women in a monographic format; ARoS 47 men and 11 women; Louisiana 38 men and 12 women.

### ***The Myth of The Artist***

The Myth of the Artist is an element that frequently reoccurred in the data. It was first presented by Linda Nochlin, when she challenged the idea, that the male body should somehow inherently be better equipped for making quality art:

*"Underlying the question about woman as artist, then, we find the myth of the Great Artist—subject of a hundred monographs, unique, godlike—bearing within his person since birth a mysterious essence, rather like the golden nugget in Mrs. Grass's chicken soup, called Genius or Talent, which, like murder, must always out, no matter how unlikely or unpromising the circumstances." (Nochlin, 1971)*

John Berger, whose book was written around the same time as Nochlin's essay, defines the great the artist as such:

*"The great artist is a man whose lifetime is consumed by struggle: partly against material circumstances, partly against incomprehension, partly against himself. He is imagined as a kind of Jacob wrestling with an Angel." (Berger, 1972, p. 110)*

In Berger's definition we see the biblical parallel being drawn, associating the great artist with something God-like, something mythical, which ever since the antique, as Anna Krogh observes, has been reserved to the male body (interview by Aspegren 2019). The myth of the artist is so closely tied to the masculine, the 'natural', and the woman is seen as the 'other' – a role women so often confirm by externalizing a behavior learned through socialization. Høyersten (interview 2019) highlights the responsibility of the private galleries in the perpetuation of this habit, because they continue to choose men. And as he says, whereas museums exhibit established artists, galleries can be more experimental, and they create the conditions that make it possible for artists to live off their own work and become established.

### ***Prestige of Established Artists***

When the myth of the artist is so defining for the great artist, it is not very odd to suggest that there is more prestige in exhibiting male artists, especially from historic periods of particularly great artists. But Anna Krogh suggests that it is not just prestigious to exhibit icons of art history, but male artists in general, and that there is something unserious about choosing a woman artist over a male artist. (2019, Interview by Aspegren)

How can prestige be determined? One way is to look at a museum's blockbuster exhibitions – defined by revenue and visitors (John Andreasen and Ane Hejlskov Larsen, 2005). This type of valorization is significant of the newer, market-oriented museology in which the audiences' experience is the focal point. Oftentimes, a blockbuster exhibition is a monographic one. Why are these exhibitions of a single artist's oeuvre so popular? An answer to this lies in the prestige and 'fame' certain artists have obtained, which is tied to the artist persona and the myth of the artist. The bigger the persona, the more prestige and chances of blockbuster exhibitions. This adds monetary as well as ideological value to a museum (John Andreasen and Ane Hejlskov Larsen, 2005).

### ***Systemic Inequality Within an Ecosystem***

Museums exhibit the artists that are established, and they become established by gaining success in private galleries or exhibitions like the Charlottenborg Spring Exhibition. They are, in other words, part of an ecosystem of artistic practice and exhibition practice. Add to this the foundation of the art museum in an elitist, white, male art view, that has always valued men over women. The ecosystem goes well beyond museums and galleries; research and education are part of the system as well.

The things-as-is has been observed as something natural, and through repetition of patterns, and institutional and political resistance, the privileged minority have been able to keep the habit going (Berger 1972). The private galleries' exhibition practice is market oriented, because their existence rationales are primarily monetary, so they exhibit what is established in our culture as qualified and popular. This in turn affects the museums, who exhibit artists who have gotten the seal of approval from the private galleries.

## **What are the Means of Change?**

Following this research, there are four options for immediate steps toward balance and diversity. Concrete steps towards gender mainstreaming and diversity are suggested by Camilla Jalving, deputy director at the National Gallery. During the interview, she laid out three tools for including more women artists. A fourth tool is added here, based on an argument by Griselda Pollock (1988).

### ***Research***

Discovering and disseminating overlooked women artists of the past can influence our perception of art history. Looking back, it is helpful to learn that women have in fact always been artists, but have for various reasons been neglected. Placing women artists in art history is somewhat criticized, because it doesn't do enough to change the institution, but lifting women artists out of oblivion nuances the image of the past. It seems a better alternative to research and disseminate historic women artists rather than repeatedly exhibiting the same artists over and over. For a museum to exhibit modernist women painters, or women painters from even earlier periods, would be a way to challenge the audience by not just exhibiting the things they expect.

### ***Acquisition***

Museums need to acquire more art from women artists. It is unlikely that the National Gallery will achieve a diverse collection anytime soon, but this is not the ultimate goal. The goal is to engage in active history making, so that future generation museum goers will see, that in the 21st century, museums contested previous exhibition practice and became more aware of discriminating mechanisms and worked towards institutional change. Hans Dam Christensen's research shows that museums still favor men in their acquisition policy, which contributes to the structure that men are allowed to live off their art and become well-known, established artists, and women artists' work is presented as interventions into the mainstream narrative.

### ***Exhibition***

It is not enough to just exhibit women artists because the format of the exhibition is important, and a monographic exhibition shows much more prestige than a group, because there are more square meters

to unfold the artist's oeuvre and narrative. One thing is, that men artists are much more represented than women artists, another thing is, that when women artists are exhibited, they are mostly part of larger group exhibitions. Group exhibitions generally operate with a current theme, to which the exhibited artists contribute one or a few works that speaks specifically to the overall theme, and they are not themselves being highlighted. These exhibitions can have great value to the audience, but they do little to present the involved artists.

### **Education**

Griselda Pollock (1988) brings attention to a different crisis in art history as a field taking place at the university. She argues that art history books tend to present a linear narrative of art, without paying much critical attention to connections between artistic movements and societal conditions. This neglect contributes to the perpetuation of the habits and traditions in the ecosystem, and students of art history will become schooled to repeat the same practices. Art history is a field studied by many women, and many women are employed in artistic and cultural institutions, but in all four museums of this study, the directors are men, the exhibited artists are mostly men, and the museums acquire art works by male artists. In the field of education, there is a grand potential for a restructuring of the curriculum and the methods that could challenge the institutions and their exhibition practice.

### **Concluding remarks**

The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression 2005 recognizes the need to take measures to protect the diversity of cultural expression (UNESCO 2005, website), and the Danish Museum Law states that publicly funded art museums must collect and uphold a representative collection (The Danish Museum Law, chapter 3, paragraph 7.2, website).

Here in Denmark, the debate about representation of women in art museums is ongoing, and since this research was conducted in 2019 there have already been a number of interventions in the museums and progression in the public debate. This paper offers a contribution to the debate as well as suggestions for concrete tools for change, however it is not exhaustive. It also only offers the perspective of gender inequality, while social inequality in general is intersectional, and

the debate of gender itself is ongoing.

At this point, feminism is ideologically divided, and some feminists – particularly white, middle-upper class women – consider their objective to transform within the capitalist system (Dimitrakaki, Angela "Gender, Artwork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique" Manchester: University of Manchester Press. 2013) The oppression of women stems from a patriarchal and capitalist system – a system that also oppresses some men and a system in which women are also sometimes the oppressors (Dimitrakaki 2015). For a future feminist artist practice, Dimitrakaki calls for a paradigm shift from the aesthetic to the political; a transformation of the objective of feminist artist practice. Feminist artists should be less concerned with making and disseminating feminist aesthetics and more with bringing about social change. Dimitrakaki brings forth three themes to this point: 1) the need to rethink the priorities of feminist art history; the objective should not be to add women to the long line of men but go about it critically. 2) The need to analyze gendered division of labor in a globalized society & 3) the need to reinvestigate women's and feminist's relationship to the institution of art, power and resistance. Feminist artist practice has always been connected to feminist social issues. (Dimitrakaki 2015).

Dimitrakaki wrote in a position paper in 2015 citing statistics from the World Bank from 2009: "Women perform 66% of the world's work (excluding unpaid domestic labor), produce 50% of the world's food, but earn 10% of the income and own 1% of the property" (Brown, 2012, 2)

*"These statistics (Brown 2012) provide the framework in which feminism has to formulate and actualize its programme of action. Being involved in the art world as a feminist requires an understanding of how feminism and capitalism relate to each other beyond the realm of art. The first thing that needs to be contested is an art-world feminism that takes the art world as its exclusive point of reference. This would not just justify criticisms about art as an ivory tower cut off from popular struggles but would also indicate a profound inability of grasping how art as a terrain of production is connected with the general regime of production that generates such devastating data for women. In 2015, feminism in art cannot be about making more women visible in the art world (as in the 70s) but about understanding the terms of women's participation in the art world and what this illuminate about women and production at large."* (Angela Dimitrakaki 2015, p 25)

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