

*Reflections on Public  
Humanities Civic Humanist  
Field Trip*

High School for Performing and Visual  
Arts (HSPVA)

Talk by Jessica Davenport and Whitney  
Sparks on October 14, 2015



Tuesday Haynes

Art Criticism

AM

### Rice Reflection

Annette Messenger is a French artist who brings attention to stereotyping and the expectations of society for women to be beautiful. She explores these expectations, set by the media and themselves to look attractive. Messenger also comments on the history behind the objectification of women, making people aware that these stereotypes are not a recent development. Many of her works are exaggerated or ironic in her portrayal of the stereotypes that are supposed to define women. Messenger does not consider herself a feminist, and she is not against the stereotyping of women and the expectations of women in society, she just wants to make people aware of it.

In the work *Les Tortures Volontaire* (Voluntary Tortures), Messenger compiled a series of eighty-one images from fashion magazines, which she cropped, photographed again, and arranged. The images depict the "tortures" that women put themselves through to appear beautiful and match the stereotypes set by society and enforced by the media, many of which are painful and bizarre procedures. This work is part of a larger "album-collection," created in the 1970s, which explores the French society, particularly the roles of women in society. Messenger is drawing attention to the process that the women go through to be beautiful in the eyes of society, including makeup and plastic surgery, rather than the appearance of the women after the completion of the process of making themselves beautiful, perhaps commenting on the endlessness of the painful process. By titling the piece *Les Tortures Volontaire*, Messenger is adding to the meaning of the piece, by referring to the process many women go through as "voluntary torture." In 2013, Messenger discovered the original photographs in her studio and, for the first time, the series was published in its entirety and in its original size.

Another work of Annette Messenger, entitled *Ma Collection de Proverbes* is a collection of French proverbs that Messenger has embroidered onto white fabric. All of the proverbs convey a message of female inferiority or male dominance over women. Framed and arranged on the wall in a rectangular shape, the piece has an ironic perspective. The proverbs are a clear demonstration of the stereotypes that have restricted women for hundreds of years. Messenger compiled the proverbs over a long period of time, beginning in 1974 and made many of them; usually only small groups of them are on display. The piece magnifies stereotypes of women, and, translated into English, the proverbs have meanings

such as, "When a girl is born, even the walls cry," and "Beware of a bad woman and distrust one who is good." These exaggerated displays of female stereotypes force the viewer to consider female stereotypes and promote awareness of them, which is Messenger's goal in creating the work.

*Les Tortures Volontaires*, Album-Collection No. 18, 1972



*Ma Collection de Proverbes*, 1974



Monique Coleman  
Criticism PM  
10/27/15



BY Kara Walker

This piece is a stereotype for a relationship between man and a woman. In most cultures men has been noticed as the king of a relationship because in reality the king has more power than the queen. Woman had to stay home watch the kids, look pretty, and clean up while the man was at just to please her man unless the man was mean and highly disrespectful. What I get from this piece is that the woman is week and the man is strong in the relationship and in most cases they are .At the end of the day they both need each other even though one is stronger. The man feeds off the woman breast for that extra support he needs and his everyday life. The woman o she is weak, she's about to be on her knees but the man is gripping her tightly so she want fall completely. Even though a king is more prior he needs that woman in that beautiful dress to take his mind off of work every once in a while. The marks on her dress is swifter than his too separate the gender form of wear. There are more pieces coming off her than him because he is taking control of her which

means the man has power. This piece gives me a sense of love and pain at the same time. This piece is in Kara Walker's book she created by hand from a play called *The Porgy and Bess*. Porgy is the woman in this piece that has been abused by her lover a drug dealer named Bess.



BY Kara Walker

This piece is challenging both the female and male role in society. Who's more prior now ha? It defiantly change your view point of a woman because this should be the other way around. That is black woman because of her poufy hair and white man because the suit, pointed nose and hair on the chin. Once upon a time there was female black slaves couldn't do nothing but pleasure her master because if she didn't lord knows would have happened to her. Basically she was forced against her will all she can do was cry. Eventually once the female gets used to she doesn't cry no more one the outside but the inside there's pain.in this art piece it's the male who knows how it feels to be on the other side to be female to have something taking without giving at your own will. Men having more power over a women is the stereotype that's being challenged in this piece.

Tobias Marlin  
October 29, 2015  
PM

Suzanne Lacy challenges and disrupts stereotypes in her work often. Her pieces *From Reverence to Rape to Respect* and *Three Weeks in May* are great examples of her breaking away at stereotypes about rape.

Her collaborative piece *From Reverence to Rape to Respect* from 1978 with Leslie Labowitz, Kathy Kauffman, and Claudine King challenges the idea that rape is a sexual act that is only a threat to women. This performance piece took place in Las Vegas, Nevada, a city flooded with rape culture. This piece consisted of two billboards that read, "Rape: is everybody's concern", press coverage including a newspaper article, and a PBS documentary. The performance part of this piece included women standing by the billboards carrying signs that challenge the myths of rape and recover the reality of this violent act. Some of their signs read, "Myth: If you resist you will be killed" and, "Reality: major motive for rape is aggression, not sex. Rape is an act of violence". The signs and the billboard break the stereotypes that rape is only a concern for women, that it is only a sexual act, and it disrupts the myths many believe to be true about this horrific act. *From Reverence*

*to Rape to Respect* disrupts rape culture in Las Vegas, and it makes the viewers reflect on how society perceives rape.

Another piece that challenges the stereotypes of rape is Suzanne Lacy's *Three Weeks in May Recreation* from 2014. This piece consists of two maps of Los Angeles with red stamps that read, "rape" placed where each rape was committed in 1977. This was a public performance piece in which viewers could help create the piece by stamping where the rape occurred. This work challenges the stereotype that rape is not a big problem. By showing how many rapes occurred over a year, it is obvious to the viewers that this is a much more extreme problem than society leads people to believe. This visual creates an uneven feeling. The number of red stamps on the maps is unnerving. It entertains the question: How could we have let this happen?

Suzanne Lacy does an outstanding job at breaking down stereotypes to the public and revealing the reality of the world we live in.

Ilona Altman

Research one artist and find two pieces of art that challenge, interrogate, disrupt or magnify stereotypes. What stereotypes do the works address? Do they redefine how we view others? Do they enhance our thoughts?

SHIRIN NESHAT

FILM *TURBULENT* and PHOTOGRAPH *REBELLIOUS SILENCE*

Both pieces challenge the common dramatically simplified Western depiction of Middle Eastern women as submissive and as powerless victims. In both the photograph *Rebellious Silence* and short film *Turbulent*, Neshat reveals the increasingly complex reality of the female identity in the changing Middle East.

It is with some irony and interest that both of these pieces are black and white. In both of these works, juxtaposition and opposites are used to add to their conceptual nature.

In *Rebellious Silence*, even the name highlights emerging opposites and challenges a submissive view of Middle Eastern women. Silence may superficially hold an idea of suppression, but this silence is not weak, it is strong and rebellious. It is a testament against seeing women as strictly victims of their identity. In the silent gaze of the photographed, a strength and power is detected and demands to be acknowledged. The harsh line of the gun divides the woman's face in two, revealing the dualities of a single subject. The clear gaze from both sides of the gun could symbolize the simultaneous existence two realities – one where woman are suppressed and one where women are powerful. Fragmentation in female identity is stemmed from power, which may be symbolized by the dividing gun. Power is used in the mistreatment of women, but also woman hold a silent, rebellious power.

In the short film *Turbulent*, duality also plays a role, adding to the revealed complexities of the true reality. There are physically two juxtaposed screens, one of a male singing to a group of other men, and another of a women singing to an empty room. Her song is one of no language and is loud and guttural. The man on the opposing screen is awestruck as she sings. On the surface, this piece reveals the differences between male and female. The woman, clothed in black, begins singing with her back to the viewer, and an audience is non-existent, while the male, clothed in white, sings to a crowd, who applauds him upon his conclusion. The woman, despite maybe an empty room, sings with a passion and strength. Language may be a symbol of societies constructs, to the social construct aids the male in his expression, and though the female lacks this construct to support her, it makes her no weaker. Revealing the dualities of female, this piece also seems to do the same fore men, as his song is one of love and pain and deep emotion.

Both of these highlight contradictions as opposite as the black and white coloring of the works are shown in. This is ironic, as by offering the duality of femininity in the Middle Eastern context, Neshat is adding to the complexity of the identity, and in doing this offers a reality that is anything but black and white.

These pieces both redefine our viewing of Islamic Middle Eastern women. In our present culture, we have a generally negative view of Islam, and see the males as highly radical and



violent and the females as victims to an unkind faith. These pieces tell stories of the highly complex and dynamic reality and invite the viewer to analyze the internal contradictions – of powerful and powerless, of faith, beauty and violence - alongside their own preconceptions. The viewer is invited to question and analyze the limits of a simple identity connotation.

These works enhance our thoughts and allow us to see the humanity of all in a less limited manner than before viewing these pieces.

*REBELLIOUS SILENCE*, WOMEN OF ALLAH SERIES, 1994





*TURBULANT*, SHORT FILM, 1998

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2DNMG2s\\_O0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2DNMG2s_O0)

(Translated lyrics to the male's song)

How long can I lament with this depressed heart and soul?

How long can I remain a sad autumn ever since my grief has shed my leaves?

My entire heart and soul is burning in agony.

How long can I hide the flames wanting to rise out of this fire?

How long can one suffer the pain of hatred of another human?

A friend behaving like an enemy with a broken heart.

How much more can I take the message from body to soul?

I believe in love.

I swear by love.

Believe me my love.

How long like a prisoner of grief can I beg for mercy?

You know I'm not a piece of rock or steel,

But hearing my story even water will become as tense as a stone.

If I can only recount the story of my life,

Right out of my body flames will grow.

Jade Tran

Reflection on Stereotypes/Correlation to Artists

Suzanne Lacy's art helps people understand the truth behind violence in the home. Lacy's work magnifies domestic violence and gender-based violence. The stereotype that women are weaker and more vulnerable is broken in her art. Lacy demonstrates that no matter what kind of events women may go through, they are still strong enough to fight back. She presents women as prominent, courageous, fearless figures, people who are capable of breaking the stereotypes and creating new futures for themselves.

In one of Lacy's works from 1993, "Underground" is used as an interactive art installation. Lacy and sculptor Carol Kumata create and tell a story about domestic violence. Cars are used to display escape plans, monologues, and plaques in memory of those who suffered from injustice. A railroad with lines from a poem about escaping the violence is written on each track. Then leading to a telephone booth where you are given the option of

leaving your own story, hearing someone else's story, or talking to a live person. All three components to this insulation cause people to think, to process, and to analyze the work in different ways. Either by discovering the subject for the first time, or by coming to the realization that you may have been in the same situation or are currently in the same situation. This insulation revealed the subject of women and children being affected by domestic violence. It uncovered this common issue within many homes, and let people create a better understanding of the subject. People were able to connect with the art and connect with the issue.

In 2010, Lacy worked with film director Cecilia Barriga to create a film. "Tattooed Skeleton" was made up of many performances and interviews from victims of domestic violence as well as the use of these victims as actors for the film. Lacy had women hand write each of their individual stories on a white mask. This represented women who are afraid and in hiding. All the women who have been victims were able to free themselves. They were able to overcome this fear of telling society what they have gone through or are going through. This piece goes into depth of the subject of gender-based violence. This bringing up the stereotype of women not being able to control their relationship, being that the man is the one in the relationship who has all control and say of how things will work. Women are the victims and men are the offenders. By using these women to reveal personal stories about their past allows them to create a new person of themselves. It makes them stronger and develops them into women who are capable of directing their own future.

Both works relate and come to a conclusion that stereotypes can be broken and that they can be proven wrong. Lacy uses real people to tell real stories. She causes people to come up with their own definition and meaning of these important subjects of domestic and gender-based violence. People hidden from fear and judgment come out to tell their story. Women speak freely of their past not only to help them, but open doors to new ideas for society to develop.



Underground (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1993) Suzanne Lacy and Carol Kumata



Tattooed Skeleton (2010) Suzanne Lacy with Cecilia Barriga

## **Beryl Kinsey**

### Going Against Stereotypes Using Art: Ai Weiwei

Ai Weiwei is a Chinese artist who is also an activist. His provocative art and outspoken opinion on the politics in China triggered the attention of the Chinese authorities. Through his art, Ai communicates his strong belief that China should be more liberal. In a Guardian interview in 2010, he said, "I have to speak out for the people who are scared." Ai Weiwei goes against the stereotypes that everyone should follow the government. His works explore and add to the dialogue of culture by adding diverse opinions that many people might not be brave enough to express. Ai's sculptures enhance our thoughts by expanding our ideas.

In November 2010, the Chinese police placed Ai under house arrest and surveilled him at all times. For 81 days, Ai was detained. Ai wanted to show the difference between voluntary surveillance and authoritative surveillance. The sculpture of the security camera mocks state surveillance and protests that China needs to be more liberal. When Ai put up the security cameras, he showed the public that he is a normal human being who does everyday tasks. Ai was planning to keep the cameras rolling for 81 days which was the amount of time he was detained. Less than 48 hours after Ai put the cameras up, the authorities shut them down. The security cameras represent the constant monitoring of the conformity in China and the constant monitoring of the guards during his arrest.

The photograph that is part of a triptych is of Ai dropping a Han Dynasty Urn in protest that China needs to let go of their communist past and allow freedom. By portraying himself as one of the main subjects in the triptych, Ai is identifying himself as a person who goes against the stereotype of following the government. He breaks the stereotype that all Chinese people follow the past ways of China and only fixate their actions according to the government. The triptych also represents time; the past, present, and future. He is all three aspects of time. He is proving that one does not need to necessarily remove all of the past but to separate with parts of it to move forward.

Ai Weiwei goes against the stereotypes of Chinese conformity and through his art, he conveys the message that being Chinese does not mean you have to conform.





*Surveillance Camera, 2010*



*Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn, 1995*



*Shirin Neshat*

As an Iranian artist, Shirin Neshat has found herself fighting a two front war. On one side, she faces the popular western perceptions over the Middle Eastern politics as corrupt, the Islamic religion as a cult of violence and extremism, and the belief of women as submissive, oppressed slaves. On the other side, she faces the Iranian regime which has committed as many crimes as necessary in order to stay in power and has done nothing but validate western perceptions over the Middle East. As an artist, she finds herself constantly basing her art on one particular subject: Iranian women. They are a recurring subject in Neshat's work because of the sharp contrast between what these women are attributed to through western ideals against what these women actually represent in modern-day Iran.

Out of her entire portfolio, an artwork entitled "Rebellious Silence", a black and white photography and ink print from the photographic series "Women of Allah", poses as the most defiant artwork to western perceptions over women in the Middle East. Neshat herself posed as the subject for this photography, in which she wore typical clothing for Islamic women while her face was covered entirely with Farsi poetry by modern female Iranian poets, posing with a gun that divided her face in half. The powerful imagery depicted the woman as an imposing figure, as a person with the power to defend herself and her values alike, a person that took pride in her heritage and constructed her own self out of it. The message was clear: Iranian Women are defiant, powerful, and unrestrained. This piece is a memorial to the women that fought in the Islamic revolution that took place in Iran in 1979. The piece shows admiration for the fervent passion that drove women to participate in a battle against an oppressive regime that violated the cultural identity of Iran even when they found themselves against the wall and had their lives at stake. The desire of these women to reclaim what was theirs and their depiction as imposing and powerful beings is the central theme to this particular piece. This piece obliterates western perception of women in the Middle East by depicting these women as fighters rather than passive beings, as individuals that stand against oppression rather than lesser beings that accept submission without retaliation, and more importantly, as strong, independent human beings capable of self-defense rather than slaves dependent on the will of their masters.

Complementing the artwork "Rebellious Silence" stands one of the most significant photos from the "Fervor series", a black and white photography and gelatin silver print depicting a man addressing a room that has been divided into two parts: one containing only men and the other only women. Both groups are characterized by a distinctive dress code exclusive to one gender only. The women stand on a completely separate area from that of the men and are addressed by the central figure in the same fashion as the men. This piece is significant in the sense that it depicts Iranian women as standing on equal ground as men rather than being slaves in a patriarchal society. They are depicted as abiding to the

same type of rules as their male counterparts and they are acknowledged by the speaker rather than being ignored because of their gender. This imagery is used to bring forward the message that women are equal to men and they should be treated in the same fashion as them, directly attacking the western perception over women being always lesser than men in the Middle East. In this piece, women stand on the same ground as men, and even though they are divided by their gender, united they stand together and form a harmonious Iranian society in which no one should be less than any other based on gender perceptions, opposing the western perception of the middle east as a chaotic society based on gender disparity in the form of female inferiority.

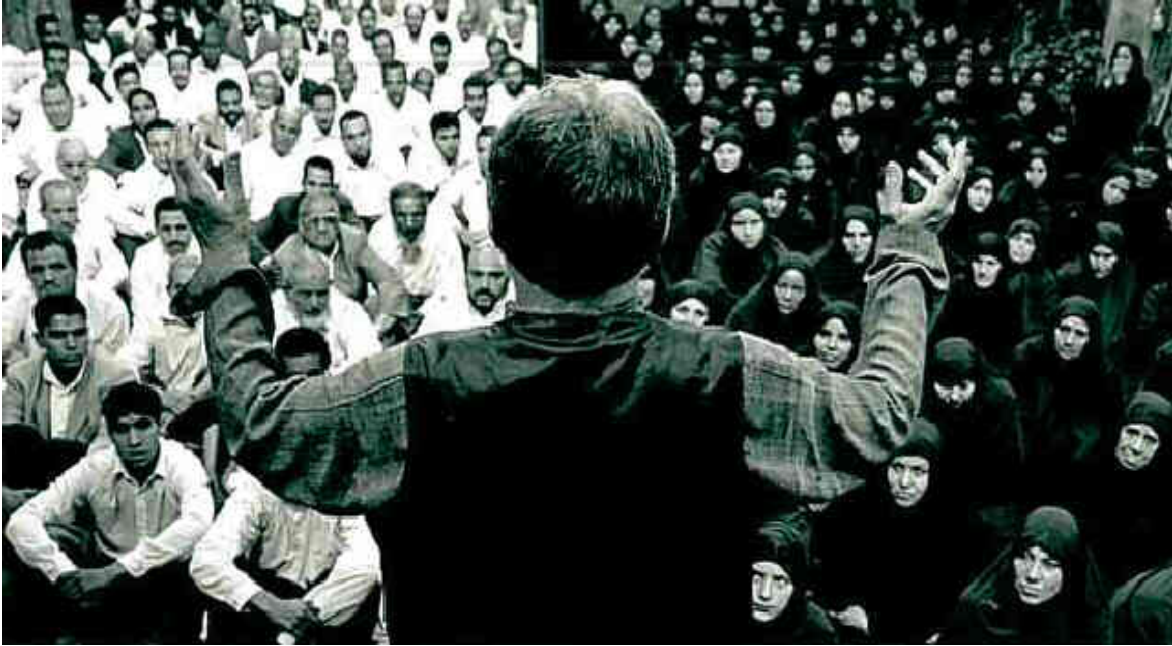
### ARTWORK



*Rebellious Silence (1994)*

Black and white RC print and ink

-No Dimensions Given-



*Fervor Series (2000)*

Black and white Photography, Gelatin silver print

-No Dimensions Given-

