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COVER ILLUSTRATION: Painter William Conger created 'Crossfire Cow' for the summer 1999 Chicago public art display CowParade. This exhibition, a successor of CULTURE IN ACTION in 1993 (discussed in Chapter 4 of this book) was the most successful public art program in the city's history. More than 300 life-sized fiberglass cows were individually decorated by recognized and outsider artists, then displayed around the city. Many were later sold in a 'cattle auction' with proceeds going to charity (to the tune of \$3.4 million). Artist Conger, a Chicago-area painter and art professor, has explained that he made his cow both in fun and as a serious work with art historical references. His title alludes to the 'crossfire' in modernist and post-modernist art criticism and theory. Originating in Zurich and then moving to America with the successful Chicago installation, CowParade has gone on to become a franchise, with parades in New York, Houston, and other cities; CowParade London was postponed in summer 2001 due to sensitivities concerning the Foot and Mouth epidemic.

# But is it art?

AN INTRODUCTION TO ART THEORY

Cynthia Freeland

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*To Herbert Garelick*

## Gender, genius, and Guerrilla Girls

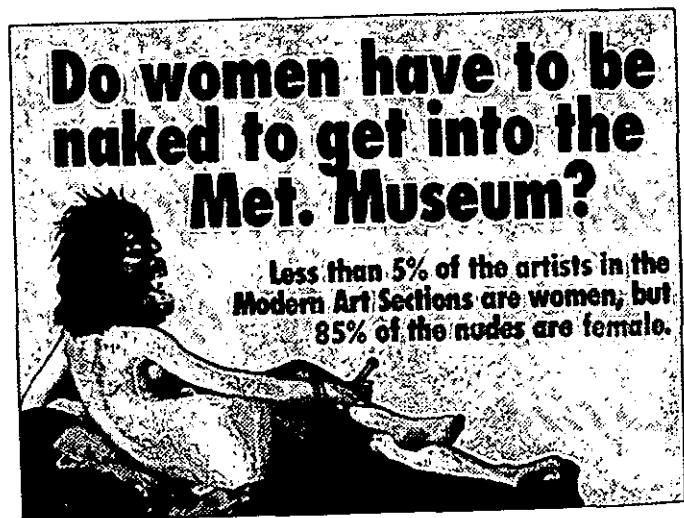
Minority groups have begun to create art institutions of their own, and among these groups are women—not a minority in the population, but a definite minority in standard histories of art. Feminism has had a major impact in other spheres, so it is not surprising to find it in art theory too. One of the best-known women painters, Georgia O’Keeffe, always resisted the label ‘woman artist’. By contrast, Judy Chicago was aggressively female in *The Dinner Party*, the 1979 work which helped launch the feminist art movement. Her triangular dinner table installation celebrated prominent women at place settings done in traditionally ‘female’ mediums of embroidery and china painting, each plate adorned with vaginal imagery of fruits and flowers. The controversial *Dinner Party* is now homeless, dismantled, and in storage. It is even scorned by many feminists as ‘essentialist’—too closely

ted to conceptions of an allegedly universal female biology.

Is gender relevant to art—to work an artist makes, or to meaning? What about sexual orientation? Robert Mapplethorpe flaunted his sexual preferences in his art. But what about artists from the past, like Leonardo? Recent scholarship suggests that composer Franz Schubert was gay; but, as one news story covering a 1992 musicology conference asked, ‘If he was, so what?’ It seems that some people think it matters—though why, and whether for good reasons, remains to be seen. This chapter addresses the relevance of gender and sexuality to art.

### *Gorilla tactics*

In 1985 a group of women artists in New York organized to protest against sexism in the art world. The ‘Guerrilla Girls’ hid their identity under furry gorilla masks. Apart from their unique headgear, they dressed conventionally in black attire, even in short skirts with high heels. To complement their saucy use of the label ‘girls’, the ‘G-Girls’ created billboard-style posters using bold black text and graphics that grab the viewer’s attention. Plus, they used humour—to show that feminists do have some!



18 This Guerrilla Girls ad explains where to find women in a museum: *How Women Get Maximum Exposure*, 1989.

One Guerrilla Girls' ad, 'How women get maximum exposure' (1989), done in vivid (banana) yellow, depicted an Ingres reclining nude topped by a big gorilla head. Underneath, the text asked, 'Do women have to be naked to get in the Met?' The poster said that only 5 per cent of the artists in the modern section of the Metropolitan Museum are female, compared to 85 per cent of the nudes. Another poster listed 'Advantages of being a woman artist', such as 'not having to deal with the pressure of success'. Yet another poster listed more than 60 female and minority artists and told the art buyer that he could have acquired one from each for the \$17.7 million spent on a Jasper Johns painting.

The Guerrilla Girls' ads are published in magazines, pasted up as street signage or slapped onto bathroom walls in museums and theatres. Some ads lampoon prestigious galleries and curators. They satirized a 1997 still-life exhibit at MoMA which featured only four women among 71 artists. The Girls believe their posters have had an impact: '[Gallery owner] Mary Boone is too macho to admit we influenced her in any way, but she never represented any women until we targeted her'. To point out sexism in other fields, they have protested the absence of women in theatre's Tony awards: only 8 per cent of the plays produced on Broadway were written by women. Several of their ads underscore the absence of

women as film directors. One poster reshaped the Oscar award statuette to look more like the men who actually receive him, showing the once-sleek golden man as portly, slump-shouldered, and pale.

The 'Girls' recently published their own art history, *The Guerrilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art* (1998). It argues, with humour and satire, that more women should be included in standard art histories and in museums. The ex-slave Harriet Powers was using African symbolism in quilts based on Biblical themes in the early part of this century, before Picasso and Matisse, so the 'Girls' demand that all modern art curators now take crash courses in the history of quilting. The G-Girls also decry the fact that Georgia O'Keeffe's sexual flower imagery gets described by male critics in terms that make her sound like a 'sex-obsessed nymphomaniac', whereas, 'When a guy shows his libido in his art, it's usually thought of as a noble gift to the world that is really about larger philosophic and aesthetic ideas'.

### *No great women artists?*

Some of the problems the Guerrilla Girls identify have been addressed by more conventional art theorists.

Linda Nochlin wrote an influential essay in 1971 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', where she noted:

There *are* no women equivalents for Michelangelo or Rembrandt, Delacroix or Cézanne, Picasso or Matisse, or even, in very recent times, for de Kooning or Warhol, any more than there are black American equivalents for the same.

Nochlin knew of women artists in the past, like Rosa Bonheur and Suzanne Valadon—even of famous ones like Helen Frankenthaler. We might defend their greatness or 'equivalence' to male artists. But Nochlin thought it would be hard to find female parallels to the greatest male artists, and this inspired her essay. She also pointed out that good women artists had nothing special in common as women—no 'essence' of femininity linked their styles.

To explain female absences from art, remember the social and economic facts of women's lives in the past. It is what Nochlin calls a 'myth of the Great Artist' to imagine that greatness will be manifested no matter what the surrounding circumstances. Artists need training and materials. Famous painters often came from specific social groups, and many had artist fathers who supported and encouraged their sons' interest in art.

And far fewer fathers did this with daughters (but in fact, most of the women who did become painters had artist fathers). Art required both patronage (which women artists were unlikely to win) and academic training (from which women were barred). Through much of the past, strict social expectations about women's roles in family life discouraged them from seeing art as more than a hobby. Nochlin concluded that women must 'face up to the reality of their history and of their present situation, without making excuses or puffing mediocrity'.

Even where women's contributions have been recognized—for example, in various kinds of American art pottery—the artists still experienced restrictions and discrimination. Both the great San Ildefonso potter Maria Martinez and the Hopi potter Nampeyo made pottery while attending to household chores, child-care, and the significant ritual responsibilities of Pueblo ceremonial society. Sometimes women's ambition in their art was restricted by their own sense of what is appropriate to their gender, or by internalized sexism. For example, Adelaide Alsop Robineau, who carried the torch of the Arts and Crafts Movement into the United States, wrote words in her magazine *Keramic Studio* in 1913 that make us cringe today:

[A]s in the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love, so in this new spring time of ceramic opportunity, the young woman's fancy will turn . . . to thoughts of the beautiful things she can now make to keep the young man's fancy fixed, if not on thoughts of love, at least on thoughts of the attractiveness of food served up in dishes decorated with these new and lovely designs and colors. . . . For after all eating is the chief end of man, and man is the chief interest of woman, in spite of these days of suffragettes and politics.

### *Gender and genius*

Since 1971, when Nochlin wrote her essay, many more women artists have been recognized as important. In fact, the MacArthur Foundation, which annually funds 'genius awards', has given out quite a few to women artists. Georgia O'Keeffe now has her own museum (in Santa Fe), and since 1990 there has been a National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, DC. Women photographers and artists such as Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, and Jenny Holzer, working in new media like photography, neon signs, and LED panels, have achieved fame and international recognition. We could say that the social conditions have changed enormously to facilitate more female participation in

the arts and greater recognition of women artists' merits. But some people might suspect instead we have watered down or altered old notions of greatness and genius.

Let us go back into the origins of the use of this term ('genius') to apply to art. Genius, you may recall, was something that Kant invoked in his *Critique of Judgment* to label the mysterious quality in an artist that enabled him (*sic*) to create work with beauty. 'Genius' is what 'gives the rule to art', meaning that an artist somehow can make materials come together into a form that is recognizably beautiful to viewers, setting the example for later artists to follow. But there is no rule to predict or explain how people can do this—it's just their genius. The sculptor who made the famous Laocöon grouping showing a scene from Greek mythology, where a man and his two young sons struggle, about to be devoured by snakes, showed genius in capturing emotion in formed stone.

Kant did not know about Cubism or Abstract Expressionism, of course, but he might make similar points about why a particular Picasso or Pollock painting is beautiful or shows genius. Such paintings are path-breaking in the way they reshape our perceptions. Genius belongs to creators who employ their medium so that all viewers can respond with awe and admiration.

Genius is often cited to excuse or justify an artist's strange behaviour (Van Gogh's cutting off his ear), abandonment of ordinary obligations (Gauguin's running off to Tahiti), or alcoholism, womanizing, and mood swings (Pollock). It is difficult to imagine a woman in the 1950s getting away with Pollock's bad boy antics, like urinating into Peggy Guggenheim's fireplace when a crowd was gathered to see one of his paintings.

In a study of how the notion of genius evolved, *Gender and Genius*, Christine Battersby argues that 'genius' came into its modern use only towards the end of the eighteenth century. In this time period people revised both Renaissance and ancient views of men's and women's natures. The late medieval picture of lustful woman' (think of the Wife of Bath in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*) was replaced by a view of woman as pure and gentle. Perhaps strangely, the male became more associated with a set of qualities including not just reason but also imagination and passion. Genius was now seen as something 'primitive', 'natural', and unexplained by reason. It was almost like a creative fit to which the artist (whether Shakespeare, Mozart, or Van Gogh) was subject as art flooded from his very pores. As the notion of genius got tied to *men*, there were peculiar shifts and diagnoses: Rousseau denied that women could be geniuses because they lack the requisite

passion, but Kant reversed things by insisting that genius obeys a sort of law or inner duty, and claiming that women lacked such discipline on their emotions—they must derive it from their husbands or fathers!

### *Canons away*

By challenging the exclusion of women from lists of great artists or musicians, feminists are questioning the *canon* in these fields. The canon in art or music is the list of 'great' people or 'geniuses' that made their mark in that field. In art it would include Michelangelo, David, and Picasso; in music Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. The term derives from the ancient Greek word *kanon*, which designated a straight rod, ruler, or exemplary model. Canons in a field get entrenched: they appear everywhere, in courses, textbooks, bibliographies, institutions. They reinforce the public's view about what counts as 'quality' in a field. Feminists criticize canons because they enshrine traditional ideas about what makes for 'greatness' in art, literature, music, etc; and this 'greatness' always seems to exclude women.

There are two main types of feminist critique of canons. The option chosen by the Guerrilla Girls in their revisionist history can be called the 'Add Women

and Stir' approach. These feminists' goal is to include more women in the canon of great and important art. This involves research to uncover lost or forgotten great women in a field, or to seek 'Foremothers'—as the Guerrilla Girls look to find lesbian or minority artists whose work deserves more study and recognition. The second option is to do a more radical re-examination of the whole idea of a canon (or, 'Down with Hierarchy!'). The feminist asks how canons have become constructed, when, and for what purposes. Canons are described as 'ideologies' or belief systems that falsely pretend to objectivity when they actually reflect power and dominance relations (in this case, the power relations of patriarchy). This second approach advocates a careful re-examination of the standards and values that contributed to formulation of the canon. What does the omission (or the exceptional inclusion) of women tell us about problems with the values in a field? Perhaps instead of creating a new and separate female canon, we need to explore what existing canons reveal.

### *Canon revision in art and music*

The 'Add women and stir' approach shows up in some major textbooks in art and music history. Feminism has



led to increased awareness of certain painters of the past, such as Artemisia Gentileschi and Rosa Bonheur. Gentileschi survived rape and vilification in a trial where her rapist, and former teacher, was found not guilty after her own character was sullied. Some critics suggest that Artemisia 'got even' with men with her depictions of very powerful female figures such as Judith from the Bible, beheading the foul man Holofernes. Artemisia's Judith is not a delicate flower who recoils from her task, but a muscular woman who boldly does the deed amid spurting blood. Similarly, Rosa Bonheur actually had to get legal permission to wear trousers while trudging through muddy streets of Paris to visit slaughterhouses and horse stables for her animal studies. She flourished as an artist and was successfully unconventional, never marrying but sharing her life with a female companion.

When Nochlin wrote her article back in 1971, standard histories of art, like E. H. Gombrich's *The Story of Art* and H. W. Janson's *History of Art*, mentioned no women artists by name. (Janson even had an Introduction called 'The Artist and His Public'.) Janson's book continues to be prominent; *History of Art* is used in college classrooms across the United States. In its present fifth and revised edition (1995), the text mentions and reproduces works by many contemporary women

painters, such as Lee Krasner (Jackson Pollock's wife), Audrey Flack, Elizabeth Murray, and others. Even its historical chapters include works by women, such as the Dutch flower painter Rachel Ruysch and the English portraitist Angelica Kauffmann, along with one of Rosa Bonheur's majestic horse paintings. There is even a letter by Artemisia Gentileschi in the 'Primary Sources' section. The inclusion of all these women in Janson's and other modern art history textbooks shows the impact feminism has had on the field. (Janson's Introduction is now headed, 'Art and the Artist'.) But the Guerrilla Girls still lampoon Janson's book in their own version of art history, by recreating its cover in one of their poster-style artworks, defaced by a bit of graffiti so that it reads, 'History of *Mostly Male Art*'.

Let's switch to music history. In *Gender and the Musical Canon*, Marcia J. Citron studied relatively new textbooks of music history to see how they adopted different models from standard texts of musicology. Some women composers, like Clara Schumann and Fanny Hensel, are now recognized in major texts—but not many. There are consequences of canonicity in music: just as people in the history of art books are also the ones whose works we see in museums, so also do we hear more musical performances of people in the

history of music books. Citron describes how music history is being revised, not as a history of 'great men' and 'periods', but with more attempts to focus on music's evolving social function and role.

How were women composers affected by their gender? Often they stopped writing or changed what they did when they married and began having families. To conform to rigid social expectations (or if forbidden by husbands), some gave up their work. Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, the sister of Felix Mendelssohn, was raised in a supportive context where her mother in particular ensured that she received musical training equal to her brother's. Fanny's talent seemed great, but she was unable to publish her work—in part because her famous brother insisted it was not appropriate for a woman in her social circles to do so. Felix wrote to their mother:

Fanny, as I know her, possesses neither the inclination nor calling for authorship. She is too much a woman for that, as is proper, and looks after her house and thinks neither about the public nor the musical world, unless that primary occupation is accomplished. Publishing would only disrupt her in these duties. . . .

Fanny Hensel's musical ability was confined to work that could be performed in salons and homes rather

than in concert halls. Similar obstacles limited the types of output of other female composers.

Citron advocates a *social* history approach that would challenge the canon in music by focusing more on how high art and popular music were differentiated, on women's roles as singers and teachers, on how audiences were constructed and expected to behave, and so on. Musicology needs to be broadened to help us understand more facets of music. We could study how women participated in it in ways that have not been seen as significant by considering 'women in the salons, women in the Church, women in the courts, women as patrons, women and the voice, women and the theater, women as music teachers, women and folk traditions, women and jazz, women and reception, etc.'

### *More canon blasts*

It is too simple in re-examining canons of either art or music history just to find and celebrate famous foremothers, whether the painters Bonheur and Gentileschi, or musicians like Hildegard of Bingen and Fanny Hensel. Critics of the 'Add women and stir' approach suggest that we start over again, and look more closely at the very idea of hierarchy created by canons in art and

music. A similar approach to Citron's revisionist musicology is the book *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology*, by Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock. Before the rise of modern art history, earlier histories routinely *did* recognize women artists' contributions. Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, from the Renaissance period, shows women artists were recognized for their ability and success in his time. As we just saw, our idea of 'genius' is relatively modern; in much of the past, artists were not seen as expressing deep spiritual needs or letting genius 'flow out' in their art. They were simply skilled craftspeople hired for jobs and trained through a system of apprenticeship. Art was often a family business, and some artistic families included sisters and daughters. Tintoretto's daughter Maria Robusti (1560–1590) worked as part of his studio system alongside others. She may have done many portions of his works or even entire paintings, up to the time of her early death in childbirth—always a risk for women in the past. Medieval art was also done by both men and women in varied settings. Both monks and nuns alike made tapestries and illuminated manuscripts. Queens and ladies of their courts did elaborate needlework as proof not only of ability but also of lofty social status in Renaissance England.

Parker and Pollock explain that some kinds of art, for

example flower painting, were dubbed 'feminine' for complex reasons. Women could not study nudes in the academies from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century to learn life drawing, and this blocked their participation in the all-important genre of history painting. Northern European flower paintings that were previously admired began to seem 'delicate', 'feminine', and 'weak' by contrast to large bold canvases on classical themes. Yet many male artists also have painted flowers: think of Monet's water lilies and Van Gogh's *Iris*es and *Sunflowers*. So what makes a flower painting 'feminine'? Parker and Pollock trace the origins of prejudice to art historians who see both flowers and females as natural, delicate, and beautiful. Their attitude ignores the content and skill of flower painters. In some periods or regions, flower paintings epitomized high art, and their artists were honoured—viewers knew that bouquets in Dutch still-lives by Maria Oosterwijk and Rachel Ruysch had symbolic meaning as part of *vanitas* images. Many artists and scientists alike treasured the seventeenth-century flower paintings of Maria Sibylla Merian, who made important contributions to botanical and zoological taxonomy with her detailed, careful studies.

A second example concerns twentieth-century textiles and fabric art. Certain textile arts like Navajo rugs

were often hailed as exquisite crafts but not recognized as art. When rugs or American women's quilts began to be exhibited in art museums, they were often detached from their cultural background, with no mention of their functions and origins. Quilts were treated as merely abstract shapes and patterns, linked up to the then-current trend in 'high art' in galleries and museums (this is much like the elevation of Australian Aborigine dot paintings or African sculpture to abstract art, which I discussed in Chapter 4). And when quilts, pots, blankets, and rugs got into art museums, they often were described as being made by 'anonymous' or 'nameless masters'—even when it was known (or could have been discovered) who produced the work! This suggests that women's art flows naturally, without struggle or training, and is too naïve to exemplify an artistic tradition or style. But tradition plays a significant role in these 'feminine' arts, and various types of quilts had specific meanings and roles in women's lives. Women quilt-makers often signed and dated their quilts. The Guerrilla Girls make this clear by discussing the African-American quilt-maker Harriet Powers, whose works now hang in the Smithsonian and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

### *A feminine essence?*

Some women artists have been recognized, like Georgia O'Keeffe. But the Guerrilla Girls complain that this work is not treated on a par with men's: it is always downplayed by being labelled 'female.' In fact, Alfred Stieglitz, the gallery owner who later became O'Keeffe's husband, exclaimed when he first saw her paintings, 'At last! Finally a woman on canvas!' O'Keeffe always pooh-poohed the idea that her works were somehow 'feminine', but many viewers share Stieglitz's gut reaction that they express qualities of female experience. Flowers are sexual organs, and O'Keeffe's large flower paintings often depict immense and engorged stamens and pistils, delighting in the petals' deep folds and plush textures. They do evoke (female) human genitalia in erotic ways (see Plate V).

Judy Chicago, on the other hand, deliberately gave a sexual connotation to flower imagery on plates of *The Dinner Party*. She did not just hint at but really depicted female genitalia. Chicago sought a female representation of intimacies of the female body to counteract the mostly male depictions of women in pornography and high art. *The Dinner Party* celebrated female bodily experiences by linking visual representations to texts

that conveyed women's power and achievement rather than passivity and availability.

But since 1979 when *The Dinner Party* was first exhibited, many writers, including feminists, have criticized it as either vulgar or too political, or else as too 'essentialist'. Some critics argue that art that focuses so much on anatomy and sexual embodiment ignores differences due to women's social class, race, and sexual orientation. *The Dinner Party* has been called simplistic and reductive—as if the achievements of women it is meant to celebrate are cancelled out by the omnipresent and repeated vaginal imagery of each place setting.

A more recent strategy that some feminist artists employ, in contrast to Chicago's reductive and biological approach, is deconstruction. They 'deconstruct' the cultural constructs of femininity by proposing that femininity is not real, but is the artificial product of images, cultural expectations, and ingrained behaviours, such as ways of dressing, walking, or using makeup.

Many deconstructive feminists have worked in film and photography. An example of this approach, which differs radically from Chicago's, is the photography of Cindy Sherman. Sherman became known in the 1980s for the *Untitled Film Stills* series in which she depicted herself in a variety of poses and situations. A



19 Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Still #14*, 1978, multiplies images of the artist as if to convey that her essence can't be pinned down.

chameleon, the young and bland-looking artist was unrecognizable from one scene to the next, as she changed her makeup, hairstyle, pose, and facial expressions. By evoking scenes from old Hollywood melodramas and thrillers, the images conveyed vague feelings of tension and threat. The 'real' woman behind the scenes remained hidden and could not be ferreted out. Sherman had no 'essence' at all—let alone one rooted in biology or genitals. Instead, in this work she is a construct of the camera, elusive, a mystery. But the images do not convey a negative message. Rather, they celebrate the female artist's ability to turn the tables on the men who have typically been empowered to show women and make them behave in socially approved ways.

*Sex and significance*

Let me ask again, in looking at an artwork, is the gender or sexual orientation of the artist important? My inclination is to waffle: at times yes, and at other times no. Let me clarify this ambiguous answer as I sum things up.

First, the fact is that gender *has* mattered in the history of art. Renoir allegedly and notoriously said, 'I paint with my prick'. Museum walls are dominated by

female and not male nudes, done by male and not female painters, just as the Guerrilla Girls have said. Male artists have often seen women as not only sexual objects but simultaneously as their inspirations and muses. (Or, like Leonardo and Michelangelo, they displayed at least some homoerotic interest in idealized male nudes.) And there have been significant restrictions on women's ability to produce art and have their work recognized. These range from the very overt (such as Rosa Bonheur's need to petition to wear trousers to visit the horses she wanted to paint) to the more covert (such as male critics' comments on O'Keeffe's flower paintings). Gender matters if you are looking deeply into questions about who got into the canon of art or music history and why, with what sorts of work. But it does not seem right to say that Bonheur's powerful horses are in any way 'feminine' or that, because Fanny Hensel could not get symphonies produced, her chamber music is somehow 'female' in its very nature.

This leads to my second point, that gender can matter in art history (along with sexual preference) if it reflects a deep personal concern that the artist wants to express in a work. When an artist has *any* thought or feeling that shows up in a work, it is usually important to know about that to understand the work better. The artist might have a political aim (as Goya did in some of

his paintings), or may wish to express a religious concern (like Serrano in *Piss Christ*), or feelings about death and mortality (like Damien Hirst in his shark piece). Religion, sexuality, and politics have affected the output, imagery, and styles of artists over the centuries, from ancient Athens to medieval Chartres, and on up through the Renaissance and beyond. Given that feminism and gay liberation were important political movements, recent art work unsurprisingly made gender and sexual orientation important. Such work continues a long-established tradition. It would be wrong-headed to overlook gender and sexuality in commenting on Mapplethorpe's work or Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*; but good art is not exhausted by one theme. An erotic dimension is consistent with lofty religious or mythological themes (as in Botticelli and Titian); and a political aim can be shown in work that is formally experimental and striking (like Rivera's murals or Picasso's *Guernica*).

The harder cases are about art where the role of gender in relation to meaning and expressive aims is unclear, but some critics claim it is relevant. It seems surprising to think that Schubert's being gay (if he was) affected the meaning of his music. Some people more readily recognize, though, that Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique Symphony* expresses his tortured emotions about being a

closeted gay man. And the new musicologists do believe they can detect stylistic and musical differences between the 'macho' Beethoven and the more 'expressive and lyrical' Schubert.

As I implied above, there are flowers and then there are flowers (or to rephrase Gertrude Stein, sometimes a rose is *not* a rose). In order to interpret artworks, we must look beyond gender and sexual preference to the broader context that gives any art its meaning. For Rachel Ruysch in Holland in the 1740s, flower painting was part of the tradition of the *vanitas* image. For Judy Chicago in San Francisco in the 1970s, flower imagery alluded to free female sexuality and a feminist stance about values and histories. O'Keeffe's flowers seemed to revel in a woman's independent awareness of her physical and spiritual self. But this is not *all* that her work is about; O'Keeffe painted many subjects besides flowers; and even her flower images are also 'about' form, light, composition, and abstraction—just as female nudes by Picasso and De Kooning are 'about' cubism or expressionism, as well as libido. Attention to sexuality may be relevant, but ultimately we need to think more deeply about how to *interpret* art. That will be our topic for Chapter 6.