

# WOMEN IN THE ARTS



Cindy Sherman

## FIGHTING FOR HER PLACE

THE ARTISTS AND WRITERS THIS WEEK are all women who focus on one particular subject: womanhood itself. Most came to prominence with the first wave of Feminism around 1970; others continued the struggle later, but there were also some notable forerunners. In the first hour of the class, we consider mainly artists who address the condition of women in general: “us” or perhaps “them.” The second hour, though, features artists for whom the subject is personal and individual: “I” and “me.”

### A. WOMEN ON WOMEN

Remarks on women’s education and self-realization by **Christine de Pizan**, **Mary Wollstonecraft**, **Virginia Woolf**, **Simone de Beauvoir**, and **Germaine Greer**.

♪ **Joan Tower**: *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman #1* (1986)  
Marin Alsop, Sao Paulo Brass

### B. PAUSE FOR A PUZZLE

A modern video with a surprising text, shown to provoke discussion.

### C. GLANCING BLOWS

Three artists who have handled the subject of womanhood more or less obliquely, although in very different styles.

**O’Keeffe**: *Black Iris* (1926, NY Met)

**Tanning**: *Birthday; Self-Portrait at 30* (1942, Philadelphia)

**Tanning**: *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (1943, London Tate)

**Bourgeois**: *Destruction of the Father* (1974)

**Bourgeois**: *Nature Study* (1984)

**Bourgeois**: *Maman* (Bilbao)

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## D. HITTING THE TARGET

Three more recent artists who have been absolutely specific in their feminist goals.

♪ **Kruger:** *Your Body is a Battleground* (1989)

♪ **Edelson:** *Some Living American Women Artists* (1972, NY MoMA)

♪ **Chicago:** *The Dinner Party* (1974–79, Brooklyn)

♪ **Video:** Judy Chicago on *The Dinner Party*

## E. ATTWOOD'S DYSTOPIA

In *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), **Margaret Atwood** makes the case for liberty by imagining a future society where women are deprived of it.

♪ **Film:** *The Handmaid's Tale* (1990), excerpts  
directed by Volker Schlöndorff, script by Harold Pinter

## F. I AM WOMAN

**Helen Reddy's** 1971 song (with music by Ray Burton) became the anthem of militant Feminism, but she herself wrote and performed it with a lighter touch.

♪ **Reddy:** *I am Woman, hear me roar* (1971)

♪ **Reddy:** *I am Woman, hear me roar* (2003)

## G. ME, IN MY DAMAGED BODY

The Mexican artist **Frida Kahlo** suffered physical pain all her life, plus the passions of her marriage to Diego Rivera. All of this shows in the self-portraits that are the backbone of her work.

♪ **Kahlo:** *Roots*

♪ **Kahlo:** Two Self Portraits

♪ **Video:** Kahlo's *The Two Fridas* (1939), James Payne

## H. ME, AND OTHER INDIVIDUALS

A poem by Baltimore-born **Adrienne Rich**, a lifelong activist for feminist and lesbian causes.

♪ **Rich:** Dedication from *An Atlas of the Difficult World* (1991)

## I. ME, IN BORROWED BODIES

Two of the series of self-portraits by **Cindy Sherman**, that explore womanhood through their appropriation of costume and setting.

♪ **Sherman:** *History Portraits* (1990–92), selection

♪ **Sherman:** *Untitled Film Stills* (1977–80), montage,  
with Patti Smith: *Because the Night*

## J. THIS IS MY HAND

A recent video by **Shara Nova** that questions the themes of the class.

♪ **Nova:** *This is My Hand* (My Brightest Diamond, 2015)

Margaret **Atwood** (1930– , *Canadian novelist*), Louise **Bourgeois** (1911–2010, *French American sculptor*), Judy **Chicago** (1939– , *American artist*), Simone **de Beauvoir** (1908–46, *French philosopher*), Mary Beth **Edelson** (1933–2021, *American artist*), Germaine **Greer** (1939– , *Australian writer*), Frida **Kahlo** (1907–54, *Mexican painter*), Barbara **Kruger** (1945– , *American artist*), Shara **Nova** (1974– , *American singer/composer*), Georgia **O'Keeffe** (1887–1986, *American painter*), Christine de **Pizan** (1364–1430, *Burgundian writer*), Helen **Reddy** (1941–2020, *Australian singer/writer*), Adrienne **Rich** (1929–2012, *American poet*), Cindy **Sherman** (1964– , *American photographer*), Patti **Smith** (1946– , *American singer/composer*), Dorothea **Tanning** (1910–2012, *American painter*), Joan **Tower** (1938– , *American composer*), Mary **Wollstonecraft** (1759–97, *English writer*), Virginia **Woolf** (1882–1941, *English novelist*)