

# The Role of Women in the Art World Throughout History

## Tarih Boyunca Sanat Dünyasında Kadınların Rolü

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### ABSTRACT

Despite being largely excluded from the mainstream narrative, women have played a vital role in the art world, the contributions of female artists, collectors, and patrons have been frequently overlooked or diminished, and the art world has been dominated by male artists and collectors. In ancient times, women were involved in creating art in many cultures. However, their works were often unattributed or forgotten. In the Renaissance, women were allowed to participate in the arts but were often relegated to less prestigious mediums such as embroidery or miniature painting. It was not until the 19th century that women began to gain more recognition for their artistic achievements. Despite these achievements, today, women are still underrepresented in many areas of the art world. Women artists are still paid less than their male counterparts and less likely to be represented in major museums and galleries. The study adopted a qualitative research method using literature review as the major source of data collection. Data were sourced from books, journal articles, as well as online sources. Data were qualitatively analyzed using the art historian method to present the data descriptively. The study revealed that there has been a growing awareness of the need for gender equality in the art world, and many organizations are working to promote the work of female artists and to provide opportunities for women to succeed in the field. This is important to create a more equitable and just art world for all.

**Keywords:** Art, history, role, women

### Öz

Ana akım anlatıdan büyük ölçüde dışlanmış olmalarına rağmen kadınlar sanat dünyasında hayati bir rol oynamış; kadın sanatçıların, koleksiyoncuların ve patronların katkıları sıklıkla göz ardı edilmiş veya azaltılmış ve sanat dünyası erkek sanatçıların ve koleksiyonerlerin hakimiyetinde kalmıştır. Antik çağda kadınlar birçok kültürde sanatın yaratılmasında yer almışlardır. Ancak eserleri çoğu zaman atfedilmedi veya unutuldu. Rönesans'ta kadınların sanata katılmasına izin veriliyordu; ancak genellikle nakış veya minyatür resim gibi daha az prestijli ortamlara yönlendirildiler. Kadınların sanatsal başarıları 19. yüzyıla kadar daha fazla tanınmaya başlandı. Bu başarılarla rağmen günümüzde kadınlar sanat dünyasının birçok alanında hâlâ yeterince temsil edilmiyor. Kadın sanatçıların hâlâ erkek meslektaşlarından daha az maaş alıyor ve büyük müze ve galerilerde temsil edilme olasılıkları da daha düşük. Araştırma, temel veri toplama kaynağı olarak literatür taramasını kullanan nitel bir araştırma yöntemini benimsemiştir. Veriler kitaplardan, dergi makalelerinden ve çevrimiçi kaynaklardan elde edildi. Verilerin tanımlayıcı bir şekilde sunulması için veriler sanat tarihçisi yöntemi kullanılarak niteliksel olarak analiz edildi. Araştırma, sanat dünyasında toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği ihtiyacı konusunda artan bir farkındalığın olduğunu ve birçok kuruluşun kadın sanatçıların çalışmalarını teşvik etmek ve kadınlara bu alanda başarılı olmaları için fırsatlar sağlamak için çalıştığını ortaya çıkardı. Herkes için daha eşitlikçi ve adil bir sanat dünyası yaratmak adına bu önemli.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Rol, kadın, sanat, tarih

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### Introduction

The role of women in the art world throughout history has been a topic of growing interest and debate in recent years. Despite facing significant obstacles, women have made significant contributions to arts, and their achievements have had a lasting impact on the field. In ancient times, women were involved in creating art in many cultures, including Egypt, Greece, and Rome. However, their works were often unattributed or forgotten, and they were rarely credited for their contributions (Chadwick, 2012).

According to Broude and Garrard (1982), during the Renaissance period, women were allowed to participate in the arts. However, they were often relegated to less prestigious mediums such as embroidery or miniature painting. Yet, some women artists, such as Sofonisba Anguissola and Artemisia Gentileschi, were able to achieve success during this period and challenge the gender norms of their society. Women during this period were still not allowed to study the nude model, making it difficult for them to master anatomy.

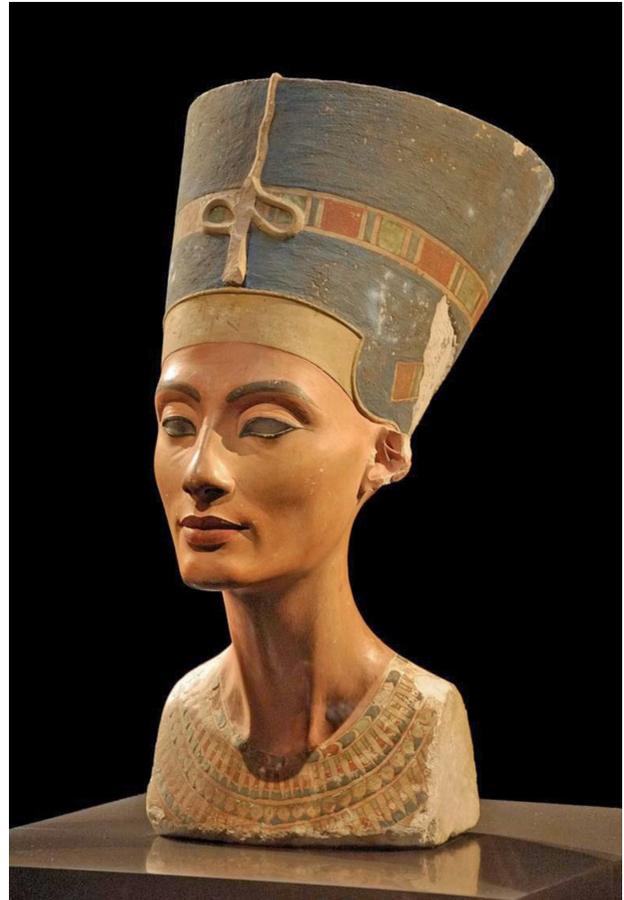
In the 19th century, women faced limited opportunities for training and exhibition but still managed to create significant works of art. Women were not allowed to attend the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, the most prestigious art school of the time, until the end of the century. Women were also not allowed to attend life drawing classes, making it difficult for them to gain the skills necessary to become successful artists. Women artists like Mary Cassatt, Rosa Bonheur, and Berthe Morisot succeeded during this time but still faced significant obstacles (Broude & Garrard, 1982). Women continued to make strides in the art world in the 20th century, with artists like Frida Kahlo, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Louise Bourgeois becoming well-known and celebrated. Women also began to play a more prominent role as curators, critics, and art historians. Women in the 20th century challenged traditional art forms and created new ones, such as performance and installation art (Chadwick, 2012). Despite these achievements, women are still underrepresented in many areas of the art world. Women artists are still paid less than their male counterparts and are less likely to be represented in major museums and galleries. However, there has been a growing awareness of the need for gender equality in the art world, and many organizations are working to promote the work of female artists and to provide opportunities for women to succeed in the field (National Museum of Women in the Arts, 2021).

## Method

This research was carried out qualitatively. The review method was used for this research, using a secondary data collection approach. The existing literature relevant to the topic was carefully reviewed and discussed. The pieces of literature reviewed were carefully selected based on the originality of their contents and relevance to the study. The data collected were analyzed using a descriptive method of analysis. The research focused on the role of women in art from ancient times. The study explored different roles women played in art and also some notable female artists in history.

### Women's Involvement in Ancient Egyptian Art

Women in ancient Egypt played a significant role in the creation of art and crafts, despite the patriarchal nature of Egyptian society. Women were involved in various aspects of art production, including painting, sculpture, pottery, and weaving. They also served as patrons of the arts and commissioned artworks for religious and domestic purposes (Dodson & Ikram, 2008). Women played a significant role in ancient Egyptian art, as creators and subjects. Ancient Egyptian art was created for both religious and secular purposes, and women were often depicted in various roles in both types of art (Robins, 1993). The bust of Queen Nefertiti is one of the most well-known works of woman-related ancient Egyptian art (Image 1). This bust, now housed in the Neues Museum in Berlin, Germany, is considered one of the greatest works of art from ancient Egypt. It is believed to have been created during the reign of Akhenaten, Nefertiti's husband,



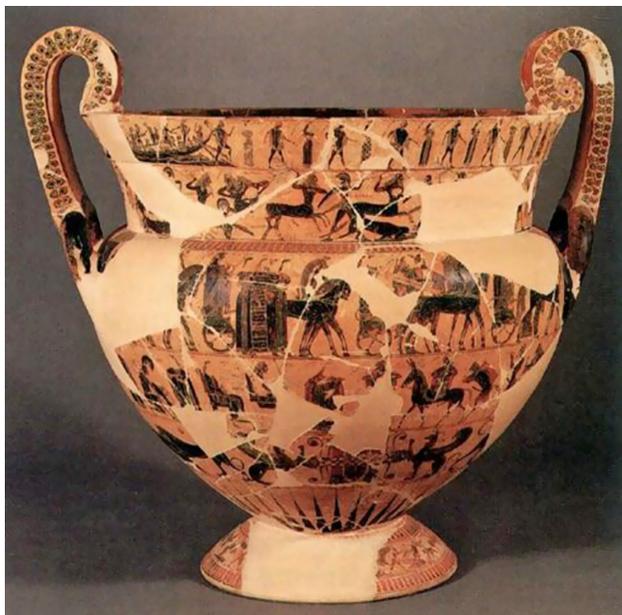
**Image 1.**  
*Bust of Queen Nefertiti, c.a. 1345 BCE (Yaw, 2020)*

who is known for his religious reforms that centered on the worship of the sun god Aten.

Women were also depicted in other forms of ancient Egyptian art, such as tomb paintings and reliefs. These works often depicted women in various roles, such as musicians, dancers, or even mourners at funerals (Robins, 1993). Women were also depicted in scenes of daily life, such as working in fields or preparing food. Women in ancient Egypt were also involved in the creation of art. Women worked as painters, scribes, and weavers, creating highly valued textiles for their intricate designs and vibrant colors (Dodson & Ikram, 2008). Women in ancient Egypt played a significant role in the creation and depiction of art, but their contributions were often overshadowed by the works of their male counterparts. Despite the patriarchal nature of Egyptian society, women could make significant contributions to the art world and were valued for their artistic skills. Nevertheless, a closer examination of ancient Egyptian art reveals women's significant role in shaping this civilization's art (Dodson & Ikram, 2008).

### Women's Involvement in Ancient Greek Art

Women's involvement in art in ancient Greece was limited due to the patriarchal nature of Greek society. However, women played a role in certain aspects of Greek art, particularly weaving and pottery. Women also served as patrons of the arts, commissioning works of art and sponsoring artistic competitions. In ancient Greece, weaving was considered one of the most important skills for women, and women were responsible for creating textiles for clothing and household use. Many Greek women also created



**Image 2.**  
*François Vase, c.a. 570/560 BCE (Basar, 2019)*

pottery, particularly in the cities of Corinth and Athens. Some women even owned their own pottery workshops and became successful potters, such as the famous Greek potter Aspasia of Athens (Heller, 2000).

In ancient Greece, pottery was an essential aspect of everyday life, and women were the primary producers of pottery. Women also created other art forms, such as textiles, embroidery, and tapestries (Stewart, 1990). One of the most notable examples of women in ancient Greek art is the pottery created by the Corinthian and Attic workshops. Women produced these works, which were highly valued for their intricate designs and vibrant colors. The pottery was decorated with various motifs, including animals, mythological creatures, and scenes of daily life. Some of the most well-known pieces of ancient Greek pottery were created by women, such as the François Vase, which was created by a woman named Ergotimos and her son Kleitias (Heller, 2000) (Image 2).

According to Heller (2000), women in ancient Greece also played a role in religious art. They created small figurines of gods and goddesses, used in religious ceremonies and as offerings to the gods. These figurines were often made of terracotta or bronze and were highly prized for their beauty and craftsmanship. Stewart (1990) noted that women also played a role in the patronage of the arts in ancient Greece. Women, particularly wealthy women, commissioned works of art and sponsored artistic competitions, such as musical contests and dramatic performances. One of the most famous examples of female patronage in ancient Greece is the Parthenon, a temple in Athens dedicated to the goddess Athena, which was built with funds from the Athenian treasury, which was largely supplied by wealthy Athenian women. Although women in ancient Greece played a significant role in the creation of art, their contributions were often overshadowed by the works of male artists.

#### **Women's Involvement in Ancient Chinese Art**

Women's involvement in art in ancient China was also limited due to the patriarchal nature of Chinese society. However, women did play a role in certain aspects of Chinese art, particularly in textile



**Image 3.**  
*Neolithic Pottery of the Yangshao and Longshan Cultures Depicting Female Figure, c.a. 5000–3000 BCE (Krahl, 2006)*

production, embroidery, and painting (Clunas, 2009). Clunas (2009) noted that in ancient China, women were responsible for creating textiles for clothing and household use, and embroidery, which was considered a highly valued skill. Women's embroidery was used to decorate clothing, as well as other textiles such as bedspreads, wall hangings, and screens. Their contributions to Chinese art have been largely overlooked in traditional Chinese history, but recent research has highlighted their significant role (Clunas, 2009). According to Clunas (2009), one of the earliest examples of women in Chinese art is the female figures depicted in the Neolithic pottery of the Yangshao and Longshan cultures (Image 3). These cultures flourished in the Yellow River Valley during the Neolithic period, between 5000 and 2000 BCE. Women were often depicted in these works as dancers, musicians, and farmers.

Clunas (2009) recorded that during the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), women were active in the creation of poetry, painting, and calligraphy. Wu Daozi, a famous Tang dynasty artist, received instruction from his mother and aunt, both of whom were accomplished painters. The Tang dynasty also saw the creation of the famous Women's Script, a writing system developed by women for their exclusive use. In the Ming dynasty (1368–1644 CE), women significantly contributed to the development of ceramics, particularly blue and white porcelain. The Empress Dowager Cixi, who ruled China from 1861 to 1908, was also a significant patron of the arts, commissioning many works of art and sponsoring the creation of new art schools (Clunas, 2009). Clunas (2009) noted that the earliest known female painter in China is Gu Kaizhi, who

lived during the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420 CE). However, most female artists in ancient China were either members of the imperial family or the wives and daughters of scholars and officials. Women's involvement in art in ancient China was also limited due to social and cultural barriers, but they did play a significant role in certain aspects of art, particularly in textile production, embroidery, and painting.

### Challenges Faced by Women Artists in Ancient Times

Women artists in ancient times faced numerous challenges that prevented them from achieving recognition and success in their artistic pursuits. These challenges were often rooted in the patriarchal societies of the time, which limited women's access to education, training, and professional opportunities (Perry, 1996). According to Kleiner (2004), women artists in ancient times lacked access to education and training. In many societies, women were not allowed to attend school or receive formal training in the arts. As a result, they were often self-taught or learned from family members and other informal sources. Women artists also lacked opportunities for professional advancement. In many cases, women were not allowed to join artist guilds or professional organizations, which limited their ability to network, collaborate, and showcase their work. Women artists in ancient times also faced significant societal and cultural barriers.

In many societies, women were expected to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers over their artistic pursuits. Many societies held negative attitudes toward women who pursued careers in the arts, viewing them as immoral or unfeminine (Chadwick, 2012). However, despite these challenges, some women artists in ancient times were able to achieve recognition and success in their artistic pursuits. For example, the Greek artist Timarete was known for her skill in painting, while the Egyptian artist Nebetah achieved renown for her work in sculpture.

### Women's Involvement in Art in the Middle Ages

The period between ancient civilizations and Renaissance spans a vast stretch of time, encompassing several historical eras and cultures. This period is known as the Medieval period or Middle Ages, which lasted from around the 5th century AD to the 15th century AD. Yawn (1991) stated that women's involvement in art during the Middle Ages varied significantly depending on their social status, geographical location, and prevailing cultural norms. While the opportunities for women were limited compared to men, they did play crucial roles in the creation and promotion of art during this period. The Middle Ages saw a significant amount of religious art being produced, such as illuminated manuscripts, frescoes, and sculptures for churches and monasteries. Women often participated in the creation of religious art as patrons, scribes, illuminators, and even as models for religious figures in paintings and sculptures (Chadwick, 2012). According to Chadwick (2012), noble and royal women were influential patrons of the arts during the Middle Ages. They commissioned artworks, including manuscripts and tapestries, which became important cultural symbols of their power and prestige.

Women in religious orders, particularly nuns in convents, had some of the best opportunities to engage in artistic activities. Many convents had scriptoria where nuns copied and illuminated religious texts, demonstrating exceptional skill and creativity (Yawn, 1991). In some regions, women were allowed to join artistic guilds, although their participation was often restricted. As members of guilds, they could engage in activities such as embroidery, weaving, and bookbinding. Women were frequently

depicted in medieval art, often as religious figures, saints, or allegorical representations. These representations served to reinforce societal norms and values concerning women's roles in the religious and social spheres. While the number of known female artists from the Middle Ages is relatively small compared to men, some women such as Hildegard of Bingen, a polymath who created illuminations and wrote treatises on various subjects, and Caterina de Vigri, an Italian nun and painter, managed to establish themselves as artists (Clunas, 2009). Yawn (1991) also noted that women faced significant challenges in the medieval art world. Society often relegated them to supporting roles and limited their opportunities to gain recognition and fame as artists. Religious restrictions on women's participation in certain religious practices and roles also limited their artistic endeavors.

### Renaissance Art and Women

According to Broude and Garrard (1982), the Renaissance period marked a significant shift in the role of women in the art world. During this time, women began to gain greater recognition for their artistic abilities and achieved success as artists in their own right. However, women artists still faced significant barriers and challenges in the male-dominated art world. The emergence of female portrait painters was a major development during the Renaissance period. Women such as Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana gained recognition for their portraits, which were praised for their sensitivity and emotional depth. These women were able to achieve a degree of professional success and financial independence through their work as portrait painters (Schneider, 2010). During the Renaissance period, women also began to make significant contributions to other areas of the arts. Women such as Artemisia Gentileschi and Plautilla Nelli achieved acclaim for their paintings, while Caterina van Hemessen was recognized for her skill as a miniaturist. Women artists during the Renaissance period, despite their success, were often subject to negative attitudes and stereotypes, which limited their ability to achieve recognition and success in the art world (Garrard, 1989).

According to Broude and Garrard (1982), Artemisia Gentileschi was one of the most famous female artists of the Renaissance. Gentileschi lived in Rome during the 17th century; she was known for her powerful depictions of female heroines and her innovative use of light and shadow. Her paintings are characterized by their dramatic intensity and emotional expressiveness, which was rare for a female artist then. Gentileschi's works challenged the gender norms of the period and continue to inspire and captivate audiences today. Lavinia Fontana was another Renaissance female artist who lived in Bologna during the late 16th century; she was one of the first women to establish herself as a professional artist. Wealthy patrons all over Italy highly sought after her works, which featured portraits, religious scenes, and mythological subjects, were by throughout. Fontana's success paved the way for other women to pursue careers as professional artists, and her legacy continues to inspire generations of female artists (Garrard, 1989).

During the Renaissance period, women made significant contributions to the arts despite the social and cultural constraints placed upon them. Women were often excluded from formal art schools and apprenticeships, and their work was frequently dismissed as being inferior to that of male artists. However, many women persisted in pursuing their artistic passions, producing works of remarkable skill and beauty that continue to be celebrated and studied today (Schneider, 2010).

### Women in the 19th-Century Art World

The 19th century saw significant changes in the art world, including the emergence of new artistic movements and a growing recognition of the value of women's contributions to the field (Chadwick, 2012). Women artists in the 19th century also faced significant challenges, such as limited access to education and professional opportunities. Professional opportunities for women artists were also limited. Many art galleries and institutions were reluctant to show or collect the work of women artists, and women were often excluded from prestigious exhibitions and competitions. Women were also excluded from certain professional organizations, such as the Royal Academy in London, which only admitted women as associate members until the 20th century (Waller, 1991).

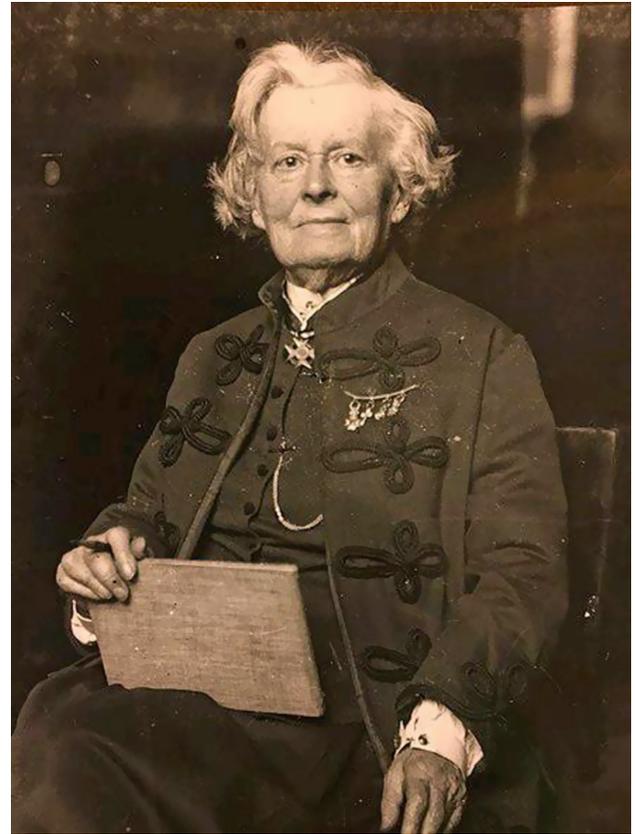
However, many women successfully pursued their artistic passions, creating skillful and beautiful works that are celebrated till date (Chadwick, 2012). The rise of the Romantic movement, which emphasized emotion, imagination, and individualism, was a significant development in the art world during the 19th century. Women artists were particularly drawn to the Romantic aesthetic, allowing them to express their feelings and experiences in their work. Women also played a key role in the Pre-Raphaelite movement, which rejected the conventions of academic art and drew inspiration from medieval and early Renaissance art (Waller, 1991).

According to Chadwick (2012), Mary Cassatt, who lived in Paris during the late 1800s, was the most famous female artist of the 19th century. She was known for her sensitive depictions of women and children, which were influenced by her experiences as a woman and a mother. Her paintings were highly acclaimed and helped to establish her as one of the most important artists of the Impressionist movement (Image 4).

Rosa Bonheur was also a notable female artist from the 19th century. Bonheur was a French artist who specialized in animal paintings and became one of the most famous artists of her time. Despite facing numerous obstacles, including being barred from



**Image 4.**  
Mary Cassatt, 1844–1926 (Luther, 2019)



**Image 5.**  
Rosa Bonheur, 1822–1899 (Wikimedia, 2022)

attending the École des Beaux-Arts due to her gender, Bonheur persevered and gained recognition for her work. She became the first woman to receive the French Legion of Honour for her contributions to the arts and was celebrated for her unique style and depictions of animals (Waller, 1991) (Image 5).

Berthe Morisot was another influential female artist of the 19th century. She was a French Impressionist painter who is known for her portraits and scenes of domestic life. Morisot was a founding member of the Impressionist movement and was one of the few female artists to exhibit in the group's exhibitions. She gained recognition for her unique style and use of color, and her work continues to be celebrated for its sensitivity and emotional depth (Chadwick, 2012) (Image 6).



**Image 6.**  
Berthe Morisot, 1841–1895 (Dolan, 1995)

Rosa Bonheur, Berthe Morisot, and other female artists of the 19th century contributed to the changing attitudes toward women in the arts, and their work continues to inspire and influence artists today. While women in the 19th century faced significant obstacles during their lifetimes, their achievements demonstrate the power of persistence and determination in the face of adversity.

### Twentieth-Century Art and Women

The 20th century saw increased participation of women in the arts and the emergence of feminist art movements. Heller (2003) noted that many female artists rose to prominence during the 20th century. Lee Krasner was an American abstract expressionist painter who gained recognition in the 1950s and 1960s. Despite facing discrimination and having her husband Jackson Pollock overshadow her, Krasner's work later gained recognition for its originality and impact on the abstract expressionist movement. Louise Bourgeois was a French-American artist who gained recognition for her sculptures, installations, and drawings. Her work explored themes of femininity, sexuality, and the human body, and she became known for her innovative use of materials and techniques. Yayoi Kusama, a Japanese female artist, also gained recognition for her avant-garde sculptures, installations, and paintings during the 20th century. Her works often explore themes of repetition, pattern, and infinity, and she became known for her bold use of color and unique artistic vision (Chadwick, 2012). Mary Cassatt was an American Impressionist painter who gained recognition in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Her work often focused on women and children; she became known for her innovative use of color and composition. Frida Kahlo was a Mexican artist who gained recognition in the mid-20th century for her powerful self-portraits and depictions of Mexican culture. Despite facing discrimination and health issues, Kahlo's work gained recognition and acclaim, and she became an important figure in the Mexican art world and a symbol of female empowerment. These artists, among many others, challenged traditional gender roles and paved the way for future generations of women artists. Despite facing significant barriers and discrimination, their contributions to the art world continue to be celebrated and recognized today (Waller, 1991).

The emergence of feminist art movements during the 20th century aimed to challenge patriarchal norms and promote the work of female artists. One of the most notable feminist art movements was the Women's Art Movement, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. The movement aimed to challenge the male-dominated art world and promote the work of female artists (Waller, 1991). The 20th century also saw significant changes in the art world, including increased recognition and opportunities for women artists. Women artists gained greater access to education, exhibitions, and other opportunities, and their work was increasingly recognized and celebrated. Heller (2003) noted that, despite these changes, women artists continued to face challenges and discrimination in the art world. Issues such as unequal pay, limited representation in galleries and museums, and a lack of critical attention persisted throughout the century.

### Women's Role as Curators, Critics, and Art Historians from Ancient Periods Till Date

Heller (2003) noted that women had played essential roles in the art world beyond creating artworks such as painting, sculpture, and pottery, among others. Women have also made significant contributions to the art world as curators, critics, and art historians, shaping how we view and understand art today. Women

curators have been instrumental in shaping museum collections and exhibitions. In the 1940s, Dorothy Miller was one of the first curators at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, and she helped introduce the public to the work of many contemporary artists, including Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko (Heller, 2003). In the 1960s and 70s, Lucy Lippard was a prominent curator and writer who helped to promote the work of feminist artists and artists from marginalized communities. Today, women curators continue to make important contributions to the art world, such as Thelma Golden, the director and chief curator of the Studio Museum in Harlem (Moyer, 2017).

Moyer (2017) stated that women critics have played a significant role in shaping our understanding of art movements and individual artists. In the 1960s and 1970s, Rosalind Krauss was an influential art critic who helped to define the postmodern art theory field. Linda Nochlin was another influential critic who wrote extensively about the role of women in the art world, challenging the idea that women were incapable of creating great art. More recently, women critics such as Holland Cotter and Jerry Saltz have helped to shape our understanding of contemporary art (Moyer, 2017). Women art historians have also made significant contributions to the study of art history, often focusing on overlooked artists and art movements. Linda Nochlin was also a prominent art historian who wrote about the representation of women in art. Griselda Pollock is another important feminist art historian who has written extensively about the work of women artists. Other notable women art historians include Mary Garrard, who wrote about the work of Baroque artist Artemisia Gentileschi, and Linda Nochlin's daughter, Maura Reilly, who curated the groundbreaking exhibition "Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader." Heller (2003) opined that women's contributions to the art world as curators, critics, and art historians have been essential in shaping our understanding and appreciation of art. Without their important work, many artists and movements may have gone unrecognized or underappreciated.

### Challenges Facing Women in the Art World Today

It is a known fact that women artists still face discrimination and bias in the art world. They often struggle for their work to be taken seriously and for their achievements to be recognized. This is particularly true for artists who belong to marginalized groups, such as women of color, LGBTQ+ women, and women with disabilities (Taylor, 2019). There are also challenges facing women in leadership roles in the art world. Women are underrepresented in top leadership positions in museums and galleries, with men holding the majority of CEO and director positions. This lack of representation can lead to a lack of diverse perspectives and decision-making processes (Taylor, 2019). Taylor (2019) also noted that, despite these challenges, there are initiatives in place to address gender inequality in the art world today. For example, the #MeToo movement has led to increased awareness of sexual harassment and assault in the art world, and organizations such as the Association of Art Museum Directors have committed to gender parity in museum leadership positions by 2030.

Taylor (2019) noted that despite the progress made over the years, women in the art world still face challenges. These challenges are often rooted in gender inequality and cultural biases that have persisted for centuries. Women artists still face obstacles such as gender-based stereotypes, sexual harassment, and exclusion from important professional networks. A major challenge facing women in the art world today is the gender pay gap. Male

artists continue to dominate the market, with their works fetching higher prices and being featured more frequently in exhibitions. According to a survey conducted by the National Museum of Women in the Arts, female artists only make 81 cents for every dollar that male artists make. The gender pay gap is also present in the museum and gallery world, where women earn less than men in curatorial and leadership positions (National Museum of Women in the Arts, 2019).

The underrepresentation of women in major museum collections and exhibitions is another major challenge encountered by female artists today. This makes it difficult for women to gain recognition and achieve success in the field. One of the reasons for this underrepresentation is the pervasive sexism and bias that exists in the art world (Taylor, 2019). Many institutions are still run by men, and they often prioritize the work of male artists. This bias can be seen in the lack of female representation in art history textbooks and the canon, which often exclude or marginalize the contributions of women artists. Another factor that contributes to the underrepresentation of women in major museums and galleries is the need for more financial support for female artists. Women artists are less likely to receive grants or funding for their work, which can limit their opportunities for exposure and recognition. Research by the Guerrilla Girls, an anonymous feminist art collective, found that in major New York City museums, less than 5% of the artists in the modern art sections were women, while 85% of the nudes were female. This underrepresentation extends to auction sales, where works by women artists often sell for less than those by male artists (Guerrilla Girls, 2019).

## Conclusion

Throughout history, women have played significant roles in the art world despite facing numerous challenges and obstacles. In ancient times, women artists encountered restrictions and limitations, including a lack of formal training and exclusion from certain artistic mediums; however, they still managed to make important contributions to their respective cultures.

In ancient Egypt, women not only appeared as subjects in artworks but also served as patrons of the arts. Although women artists were rare in ancient Greece, female figures were frequently depicted in art. In China, women played a vital role in the development of ceramics, embroidery, and silk production. Female artists were largely involved in religious arts during the Middle Ages. During the Renaissance, opportunities for women to pursue artistic careers began to increase, leading to notable successes for artists like Sofonisba Anguissola and Artemisia Gentileschi. In the 19th century, despite limited opportunities, artists such as Mary Cassatt achieved recognition. Moving into the 20th century, women continued to face significant obstacles, yet figures like Frida Kahlo and Georgia O'Keeffe gained widespread recognition for their groundbreaking work.

However, in the present day, gender inequality persists in the art world, with women artists still underrepresented in major museums and galleries. To address this issue and achieve gender equality in the arts, a concerted effort is required from individuals, organizations, and institutions at all levels. Promoting greater diversity and inclusivity, supporting female artists, and elevating women into leadership positions are critical steps in creating a more equitable and just art world. Several organizations are already working toward promoting the work of female artists and providing opportunities for women to succeed in the field. These

efforts are essential in fostering a more inclusive and equitable art world.

Despite the progress that has been made, much work remains to be done to ensure that women's contributions to the art world are fully recognized and celebrated. The history of women in the art world serves as evidence of their perseverance, creativity, and commitment. To ensure that women's contributions to the arts are valued and celebrated, it is crucial to continue promoting gender equality in the art world. By doing so, we can foster a vibrant and thriving artistic community that embraces the diverse talents and perspectives of all its members.

**Peer-review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

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