

THE POLITICS OF PINK



Dearest Art Collector,
It has come to our attention that your collection, like most, does not contain enough art by women.

We know that you feel terrible about this and will rectify the situation immediately.

All our love,
Guerrilla Girls

BOX 1056 COOPER STA., NY NY 10276

A **SPACE** for **DIALOGUE** 96

HOOD MUSEUM OF ART, DARTMOUTH

The Question of Human Pink

Color

I don't know much about color really
I use it intuitively.

I don't know much about racism really
my knowledge is skindeep.

What do you mean, he said.

Oh, she said, didn't you know

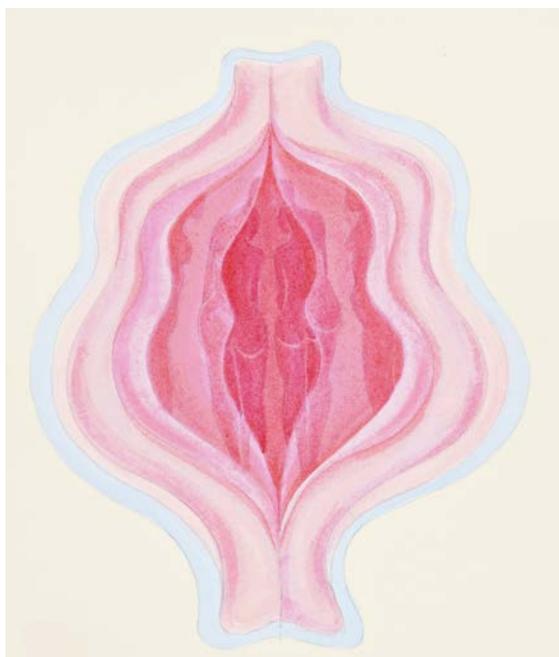
all scars have a pink that shows?

—Marlene Dumas

THE POLITICS OF PINK

Rose, salmon, peach, coral,
bubblegum, flamingo,
magenta, taffy?

Pink is problematic. The color's longstanding stereotypical associations mean that it is evocative of so much more than little girls or the trending hue of "millennial pink." Pink is a symbol of womanhood, gender norms, and femininity. Through these associations, pink



bears the negative connotations of the perceived weakness of women, oppressive gender rules, and exclusively white femininity. Global societies and gender roles are constantly evolving, yet pink provides a perfect indicator that gender roles are, in fact, not evolving as quickly as society is. Women no longer predominantly stay home to be mothers, the workforce is no longer dominated by men, and there are more women in universities than men, yet men still earn more than women, and pink remains as gendered as ever. Why does a color still have a gender?

Light pink tones are related to the body, the nude, and "flesh"—yet what does this mean for the bodies that are not pink? The problem is not pink, but how it has been used to represent all skin and flesh within the Western art-historical canon. The seemingly universal flesh color in classical paintings of nudes and blushing women is racially discriminatory as it portrays only one shade of human. Artist Anton Kannemeyer broaches this subject in his work, creating graphic satirical pieces that foster dialogue about race and its depiction in art. Significantly, despite the variation in external skin tone, everyone's insides are pink—our mucus membranes, lips, genitals—making us see the color as both soft and sexual. The term "pink parts," which makes the genitalia simultaneously seem more innocent and more mysterious, highlights the color's complexity. Artist Sonia Landy Sheridan subtly highlights the sexuality of pink within a single artwork. Her drawing *Growing*, showing a simplified yonic shape, gracefully nods at a body part traditionally avoided or obscured in visual depictions.

The color is also used to group together people with shared experiences, in both positive and negative ways. The looped pink ribbon is now synonymous with breast cancer, instantly recognizable regardless of context. The emblematic logo represents charitable efforts to fund research and campaigns to raise awareness for the one in eight women who are diagnosed with breast cancer—although it has simultaneously been criticized for being overly commercial, with too much of an emphasis on branding and promoting products instead of the cause itself. The color has a history of being used to ostracize and shame other groups. As a symbol of femininity, pink has morphed to become a color representing homosexuality.

In Nazi concentration camps an upside-down pink triangle badge was used to identify and shame homosexual men. Adding to its derogatory implications, the pink triangle was also used to identify rapists, conflating gay identity with criminality. In this context, pink functioned as a counterpoint to hetero-masculinity, a colored artifact of the gender binary. More recently the pink triangle has been reclaimed as an icon for gay rights. In 1987 the pink triangle was used as a symbol for the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, responding to the AIDS epidemic. Today, the term “pinkwashing” is used to critique both companies that promote queer-friendly initiatives to mask problematic business practices or hostile work environments, and the cynical branding of goods in the color of breast cancer awareness to create goodwill with the consumer.

The symbolic value of pink has been used by activists and artists alike. The Guerrilla Girls lithograph *Dearest Art Collector* critiques the lack of female representation in museums and galleries, with sarcastically sweet text in girlish script printed on pastel pink paper to make a powerful statement. However, the use of pink as a color for feminist activism is still disputed today. The book *Feminists Don't Wear Pink and Other Lies* (2018) by Scarlett Curtis addresses the push to reject traditional symbols of femininity, including the color pink. Curtis was one of the founders of the Pink Protest, a community of British activists who embrace the color as an act of empowerment in support of women. Back across the pond—and around the world—a fuchsia pink hat surprisingly became an icon of the 2017 Women’s March that took place in response to President Donald Trump’s election. The “pussyhat” is a hand-knitted, two-eared pink hat made to show solidarity with women’s rights. Photographs of global marches show seas of vibrant pink hats over the crowds. Yet many questioned what the color of the hat—and its conflation with female anatomy, an allusion to Trump’s predatory remark about “grabbing women by the pussy”—meant for trans women.

When deployed by male artists, pink often results in very different work, as men can coopt the color’s associations, rather than employ it as a reflection of their own gender. In Andy Warhol’s silkscreen *Electric Chair*, the color pink not only



initially makes the electric chair hard to see, but it also affects the viewer’s interpretation of that object. The violent image and controversial topic shock the viewer. Here the color’s youthful connotations and the bright shade of pink come across as mocking. By “feminizing” the electric chair, Warhol undermines the chair as a device of authority and control. Maya Schindler creates a similar juxtaposition with militaristic aggression in her work *Pink Gun*, with the traditionally feminine color and medium (watercolor) literally painting the weapon in an unthreatening light.

Pink is problematic, but it is still a color. It can and should be able to be consumed for pure visual pleasure, yet also remains a hue with powerful symbolic associations, within both art and society. Pink, like all colors, is emotional and evocative and should be celebrated as such.

Charlotte Grussing '19
Conroy Intern

CHECKLIST

Fernando Botero, Colombian, born 1932. *The Butcher's Table (La Mesa del Carnicero): Still Life with Pig's Head*, 1969, oil on canvas. Gift of Joachim Jean Aberbach; P.975.72

Guerrilla Girls, American, founded 1985. *Dearest Art Collector*, from the portfolio *Guerrilla Girls' Most Wanted: 1985–2006*, 1986, offset lithograph on paper. Purchased through the Anonymous Fund #144, 2006.83.3

Martín Gutierrez, American, born 1989. *Real Doll, Raquel 3*, from the *Real Dolls*, 2013, archival inkjet print. Purchased through a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Joseph H. Hazen by exchange; 2014.25.3

Anton Kannemeyer, South African, born 1967. *W is for White*, 2008, hand-printed lithograph on paper. Purchased through the William S. Rubin Fund; 2009.50.3

Jeff Koons, American, born 1955. *Signature Plate*, 1990, porcelain plate with decal image. Gift of Trevor Fairbrother and John T. Kirk; 2012.59.26

Mel Ramos, American, born 1935. *Manet's Olympia*, from an untitled portfolio (*Salute to Art History* series), color colotype on wove paper. Gift of Ernesto Ostheimer; PR.980.286.1

Matthew Ritchie, English, born 1964. *Azazel*, 1996, watercolor and graphite on vellum. Gift of Hugh J. Freund, Class of 1967; 2010.89.2

Favianna Rodriguez, American, born 1978. *Occupy Sisterhood*, from the *Occuprint Sponsor Portfolio*, 2012, screenprint on French paper. Purchased through the Contemporary Art Fund; 2012.38.1

Maya Schindler, Israeli, born 1977. *Pink Gun*, 2004, watercolor on Mylar. Anonymous gift; 2018.37.343

Sonia Landy Sheridan, American, born 1925. *Growing*, 1966, ink and graphite on paper. Gift of the artist; 2004.84.129

Andy Warhol, American, 1928–1987. *Electric Chair*, 1971, silkscreen on paper. Lent by Trevor Fairbrother and John T. Kirk; 2012.60.28

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The exhibition *The Politics of Pink*, part of the museum's student-curated *A Space for Dialogue* series, is on view at the Hood Museum of Art, November 9, 2019, through January 4, 2020.

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Cover: Guerrilla Girls, *Dearest Art Collector*, from the portfolio *Guerrilla Girls' Most Wanted: 1985–2006*, 1986

Inside left: Sonia Landy Sheridan, *Growing*, 1966

Inside right: Anton Kannemeyer, *W Is for White*, 2008

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