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## APPROPRIATION AS A CREATIVE METHOD IN VISUAL FEMINIST ART

*The article provides the research of the method of appropriation as a powerful tool of transmitting own messages against certain patterns and common-known ideas in frames of the art-feminism movement. The work is carried out using the general scientific methods of analysis and synthesis, as well as historical and cultural, art history and comparative analysis. The study found that by using ready-made materials – images, photographs and pictures that were taken in the media and fine arts, artists create a provocative works on issues of femininity against the objectification of women, in order to criticize her social role as a hostess, mother, and other social clichés established in society.*

*From the art analysis of the works of contemporary representatives of art feminism, who had established themselves and gained some fame in the art environment (Wangechi Mutu, Akaterina Gegisian, Lalla Essayd), and the founders of the genre (Martha Rosler, Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, Hannah Hoch) certain regularities in the technological and structural principles in the creation of artworks were revealed. A research showed that appropriation as a main artistic tool has received particular popularity. Based on the data obtained, it was found that different forms of this method such as collage and photomontage, as well as the direct and indirect form of the quoting, reinterpretation or borrowing images from different types of media, continue to be used by various artists exposing disagreement with traditional views on women and raising the questions specific to the feminist movement as a whole, incorporating issues about race, class, forms of privilege, and gender identity. Currently, the Feminist Art are opening the doors for these very important dialogues, through the reinterpretation, citation and transposition of ready-made photos and images into a new context.*

**Key words:** *appropriation, collage, photomontage, zines, art feminism, punk zines, ready-made photos and images, art books, mass media.*

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## АПРОПІАЦІЯ ЯК ТВОРЧИЙ МЕТОД У ВІЗУАЛЬНОМУ ФЕМІНІСТИЧНОМУ МИСТЕЦТВІ

*У статті досліджено особливості методу апропріації як потужного інструменту мистця для передачі меседжів направлених проти певних шаблонів і загальноприйнятих ідей у рамках арт-феміністичного руху. В роботі використано загальнонаукові методи аналізу і синтезу, а також історико-культурологічний, мистецтвознавчий*

*і порівняльний методи. Дослідження показало, що, використовуючи готові матеріали – зображення, фотографії та малюнки, запозичені з сучасних медіа засобів та образотворчого мистецтва, митці створюють провокаційні художні роботи, направлені проти об'єктивізації жінки, соціальних кліше, усталених у суспільстві щодо її соціальної ролі як господині, матері тощо.*

*Проведений мистецтвознавчий аналіз творчості сучасних представниць арт-фемінізму, які утвердилися та здобули певну популярність у мистецькому середовищі (Вангечі Муту, Акатерина Гегісіан, Лалла Ессайд та інших), та засновниць жанру (Марта Рослер, Сінді Шерман, Шері Левін, Ханна Хох) дозволив виявити певні закономірності технологічних і структурних принципів створення художніх творів. Дослідження показали, що метод апропріації як художній засіб акцентуації феміністичних проблем не втрачає своєї актуальності. На основі проведеного аналізу було виявлено, що різні модифікації цього методу, такі як колаж і фотомонтаж, а також прямі та непрямі форми цитування та переосмислення або запозичення образів з різних типів носіїв, продовжують використовуватися у феміністичному мистецтві з метою порушення широкого кола проблем, характерних для феміністичного руху в цілому, включаючи питання про расу, клас, форми привілеїв і гендерну ідентичність. Наразі феміністичне мистецтво відкриває двері для цих дуже важливих діалогів через переосмислення, цитування та переміщення готових образів та фотографій у новий контекст.*

**Ключові слова:** апропріація, колаж, фотомонтаж, зніи, арт-фемінізм, панк-зніи, готові фотографії та зображення, арт-буки, засоби масової інформації.

**Introduction.** Feminist art became popular worldwide and is still relevant and topical form of artist's expression. The method of using borrowed images and direct citation in art projects in this context, or in other words, an appropriation, is of particular interest.

Woman Artists received a direct opportunity to create an independent and controversial works, that are rooted in combination of the existing patterns and images with rethinking and transformation them in their own way. In their search, they established certain traditions and strategies that have found their place in contemporary conceptual art, including various non-commercial types of feminist art publications and art galleries around the world.

**Analysis of previous research.** Although the first appropriation art works appeared at the beginning of the 20th century (for example, Cubist collages made from newspaper and magazine clippings or the first ready-mades –such as wheel of Duchamp, etc.), the practice of artists using pre-existing objects or images became most active during the 1960s, which is obviously related to the spread of popular culture. From 1990s, this area has received a new round of development due to the introduction of digital technologies and digitized information processing, increasing media and internet access. The concept of «cultural appropriation» appeared in the 1980s and 1990s in the works of postcolonial critics of Western Expansionism American linguist John McWhorter.

At present, many works are devoted to the growing interest in the art strategies, where the boundaries and perception of reproduction, interpretation, citation and the phenomenon of borrowed photos, are shifting on a global scale. The focus of the article includes the contextualization of works of contemporary artists who use the appropriation as a tool, that highlights the problem of femininity and women's rights. An example of recent works devoted to this

method is the work of Dai Xiaoling and Kan Qing, who analyzes the aesthetic transformation of appropriation, which encompasses ready-mades, signs and phenomenon (Xiaoling and Qing, 2020).

It also should be mentioned Liz Linden (2016), who considers the use of the found objects and images as a form of artistic strategy analyzing the exhibition titled «Pictures» of 5 renowned artists pioneered a method, curated by Douglas Crimp (Linden, 2016).

A number of studies and articles analyzes the phenomenon of collage thinking, as well as the use of the images of media culture in various manifestations of feminist art. The most significant work that explores the phenomenon of collage in all areas of feminist art: video art, painting, sculpture and ready-made and shows the variety of perspectives that are shaping the panorama of collage are the book «Collage by Women: 50 Essential Contemporary Artists» by Rebeka Elizegi (2019), an article «Fragmentation: Collage as Feminist Strategy in the Arts» by Gwen Raaberg (Raaberg, 1998), as well as the voluminous study of James M. Harding «Cutting Performances: Collage Events, Feminist Artists, and the American Avant-Garde» (2010), where the collage technique is considered in the artist's performance aesthetic. Some attention is paid to the practice of appropriation and collage as a powerful tool of transmitting messages can be found in the works by Helena Reckitt (Reckitt, 2018) and by Nicole Smith (Smith, 2009), of which the last one is dedicated to a specific feminist artist her creative heritage.

A fairly large number of popular science articles are presented on Internet resources and in Internet magazines, including narrowly focused, devoted to feminist collage artists, photographers, painters, and to the a certain well-known artist, who deals with the Women's issues. The magazines «Aperture», «Times», «Artland», «Huck» are one of the most famed from them.

The main task of feminist art is to reveal an idea that has social value about the representation of woman and her role, challenging the mass media stamps and clichés. Studying the scientific literature concerning this topic makes it possible to state quite a high degree of knowledge of the problem, however, the use of appropriation as the method in feminist visual artworks and the features of this approach is currently being insufficiently covered and requires a more thorough art historical study.

**Statement of the problem.** The purpose of our research is therefore to analyze and clarify the methods of appropriation and its peculiarities, as a means of conveying feminist ideas. The analysis is based on the key visual works of the most prominent pioneers of the genre (Martha Rosler, Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, Hannah Hoch), and the emerging contemporary artists, who work in this area and have already received a world recognition and fame in the frames of art space (Wangechi Mutu, Anna Masal, Akaterina Gegisian, Lalla Essaydi). It should be also admitted, that because of the fact that the direction was newly formed, mostly all representatives are working and creating new projects currently, including the first founders of art-feminism.

**Results of the research.** Art feminism acquired a mass character from the 1960s, which is primarily attributed to the spread of the second wave of the feminist movement, directed against systemic sexism, the restriction of social rights, the stereotyped traditional role of a woman as a homemaker and mother, as well as social stamps that supported this idea. The artists worked in this medium criticized an idea, that art was separate from society and beyond the politics and social problems, communicating with a broader audience to convey their ideas (Millner et al., 2015: 143). Within the framework of the movement, a method that involves borrowing ready-made materials and images from various media spheres (magazines, cinema, visual art) and moving them in a new context, has developed.

A comparative analysis of feminist works made at the peak of the development of art feminism, which have become classics within the genre, as well as contemporary works of art that inherit the same principles, made it possible to identify the following methods of appropriation in various types of feminist art publications:

- *A complex combination of borrowed images in the form of a collage or photomontage;*
- *The usage of an existing images for the purpose of rethinking or interpreting it through the artist's vision, experience and perception;*
- *Direct use of borrowed images to attract attention and create a provocative conflict over the copyright.*

Let's take a closer look at the characteristics of different types. The first involves conveying the author's idea through the use of various methods of collage and photomontage. The collages are basically made from images that are directly related to social clichés or patterns that have developed in modern culture. However, their placement in a new context leads to a new interpretation, and rethinking of its original meaning.

The experience of transforming and combining appropriated pictures or everyday objects and moving it in an unusual context in order to display a certain social and political position of the artist is associated with the Dada movements, whose collages had clearly anti-war character. Among the participants of the movement, it is worth highlighting the works of the artist Hana Hoch, whose heritage subsequently inspired both artists of the 70s and representatives of contemporary art. Her work reads with strong feminist themes, but also reflects the surrounding art movement with references to modernity and machinery. Hoch decontextualizes the images she appropriates by manipulating with a scale of human figures and their ambiguous combination (fig. 1).

The most commonly used methods of direct use of the borrowed images in the work of photo artists are the following:

**a) Sloppy combination of dissimilar elements together with a purpose to create a specific form of collage.** This direction expanded and raised among the young people during the formation of feminist punk «zines» – handicraft magazines, appeared in the 1970s – 80s and is also often associated with the self-publishing boom of the 1980s. A large number of collages, formed under the influence of the aesthetics of punk culture were often used in its design (fig. 2). Among the feminist punk zines of this time are *Bendita* (Brazil), *Bitch* (USA), *Clit Rocket* (Italy), *Good girl* (Canada), *Grrrl:Rebel* (Malaysia), *Pink Punkies* (Argentina), and *Pretty Ugly* (Australia). Their works demonstrated how such resistance was defined by the graphic language, which had emerged not only from a punk 'do-it-yourself' ethos but also from the use of symbols, photographic images, typefaces and the way in which they were laid (Triggs, 2006: 81).

To date, this type of appropriation is developing both in an independent form – in the form of a digital or hand-made image in the space of the gallery or museum, or as a component of artists' books (fig. 3) or zines (limited edition magazines) – self-published magazines of an artist or a group of people («Eye of the Cyclops» by Anna Masal (2016) or «True about the insecurity of others» by Akaterina Gegisian (2020)).

As an example, one of a symbolic and fairly common technique in the frames of feminist collage



Fig. 1. Hannah Hoch. Collages from 1920–1950. <https://www.moma.org/artists/2675>



Fig. 2. Feminist zines, 1970–1980. Collection of LCC Zine. <https://lcczinecollection.myblog.arts.ac.uk/feminist-zines/>

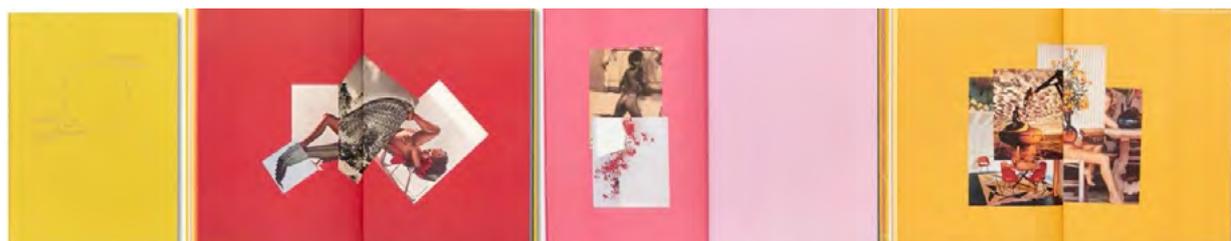


Fig. 3. Aikaterini Gegisian. «Handbook of the Spontaneous Other», 2020. <https://www.printedmatter.org/catalog/56084/>



Fig. 4. Anagret Saltau. «Generative» series (1994–2005). <https://hundredheroines.org/heroine/annegret-soltau/>



Fig. 5. Wangechi Mutu. Works from 2000–2004. [https://www.saatchigallery.com/artist/wangechi\\_mutu](https://www.saatchigallery.com/artist/wangechi_mutu)



Fig. 6. Martha Rosler. «Bringing the War Home (House Beautiful)», 1967–1972.  
<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-martha-roslers-powerful-collages-wake-up-call-america>



Fig. 7. Cindy Sherman. Collection of self-portraits from different series 1975–2020 in frames of the «A Retrospective of Cindy Sherman», Foundation Louis Vuitton. Paris  
<https://www.fondationlouisvuitton.fr/en/events/cindy-sherman-at-the-fondation-louis-vuitton>



Fig. 8. Cindy Sherman. «Untitled Film Still», 1977. <https://kulturologia.ru/blogs/290821/50760/>



Fig. 9. Lalla Essaydi. Series displaying Moroccan woman 2000–2019. <https://globalvoices.org/2020/07/11/through-the-orientalist-looking-glass-an-interview-with-moroccan-artist-lalla-essaydi/>



Fig. 10. Sherrie Levine. A) «After Walker Evans», 1981. B) «Fountain» (After Marcel Duchamp), 1991.  
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/267214>

are works in which a compound image of a woman made from the fragments of various types of mass media materials that contain certain stamp or stereotyped images are shown. This type is widely used by Anagret Saltau (fig. 4), a German visual artist, «examines physical interventions into the female body, anxieties arising from loss of identity post partum and metamorphosis through time» (Heather, 2012: 1)

Another representative of such method is Wanggechi Mutu, challenges the representation of the body and woman. Mutu's collages provides a critique on the image of female in Western culture (fig. 5).

**b) A virtual reality. Photomontage.** Unlike the classical understanding of «virtual reality» and the works that organically combine various images that form new spaces and worlds, feminist photomontage is inherently «disharmonious» and causes visual irritation due to the deliberately careless connection of absolutely different photographs, which are perceived as a complete picture, that is also always have a strong social connotation. For instance, Martha Rostler in her project «Bringing the War Home» combines photos of the home life of girls with images of the war (fig. 6). Such combination is intended to focus the viewer's attention on the current problem (war) and the crackdown on flow of information about this issue in the mass media spaces, that were instead overloaded with advertising and stereotyped pictures of the ordinary life of American women (Moss, 2013).

**Reinterpretation of images through one's experience and perception.** A prime example of indirect borrowed images as a form of appropriation in art feminism can be found in the projects of Cindy Sherman, an influential New York artist who has experimented with costumes, prosthetics, makeup, and digital photography throughout her career, and photographed herself creating highly exaggerated and often grotesque images of characters that became a kind of epoch symbols (fig. 7). Over the course of her career, Cindy Sherman has created a number of such works, using the imagery of classical painting («History portraits / Old masters»), historical and up-to-date images that have developed in modern popular culture (Fairy Tales, Sex Pictures, Masks, Headshots and Clowns and Society Portraits).

The most replicated work of Cindy Sherman in the 80s was the project «Untitled Film Still» (1977), where the photographer captured herself in the roles of famous American film actresses. Sherman skillfully revealed stereotypical female images by showing the characters typical of the American cinema of the 60s – 70s. (fig. 8). Thus, with the help of appropriation, photo artists get the opportunity to focus on the insignificance of modern mass culture, to depreciate

and criticize the attitudes and models of popular culture by using stereotyped images in a peculiar and specific way. This series of photographs has become one of the most prominent landmarks of feminist and postmodern art (Jui-Ch'I, 2010: 79).

In addition to images of mass culture, it becomes equally possible to rethink and criticize images that were previously considered as an invaluable heritage of art.

This projects can be marked by use of recognizable characters from the renowned works of classical art, such as painting. The purpose of such references is protest, deformation of «high art», rethinking and destruction of its perception as a «holy» and «inviolable» object. As a result, it also creates a discourse about the nature of art. Moroccan photographer Lalla Essaydi makes an original series of photographs of Arabic women, by taking 19<sup>th</sup> century French paintings as a basis and adds elements of her own ethnic culture in the form of traditional henna calligraphy (fig. 9). Thus, it combines the idea of the beauty of two polar-different cultures into a single whole, comparing them in one space (Denker, 2004).

**Direct use of borrowed images to attract attention and create a provocative conflict over the copyright.**

The appearance of the approach is primarily connected with opening an art exhibition in 1981 called «Sherry Levine after Walker Evans», which was shown in New York at the Metro Pictures Gallery. It presented a series of photographs made by photographer Walker Evans, which Sherry Levine re-photographed directly from the Walker Evans exhibition catalogue. Levine's gesture could be interpreted in two ways: as a gesture of appropriation and, at the same time, as a negation of any creative act. Through this work, Levine raises questions about the nature of creativity and the context that affects the perception of image. As a feminist artist, Levine says that she remakes the work of male artists, that reinforced the patriarchal dominance in art history.

In addition to the works of Evans, S. Levine recasts the works of Duchamp (fig. 10) In Levine's Fountain (Buddha) 1996, a bronze urinal bears even more provocative character of kitsch, than the original object had (a reference to Marcel Duchamp's urinal).

The photographer herself claims that she perceives her appropriated works «no less a product of popular culture than the images of Elvis or Liz Taylor, appropriated and reproduced by Andy Warhol» (Levine and Halle: 2021).

When appropriating these images, Levine raises questions about class, identity, the political use of images, the nature of creativity, and situations in which context effects on viewing photographs.

Her artistic statement suggests that through retaking the picture, the work can receive some new meanings and sense. It challenges basic notions of originality and censorship ownership, and authenticity and leads to the creation of an alternative postmodern reality (Wolterstorff, 2023).

**Conclusions.** In the art-feminism, the method of appropriation has become one of the way to express protest against objectification of women and her classic roles broadcast by the media. Based on the analysis of the contemporary works and the first feminist works of the 70s, it became possible to classify and identify the ways of creating works based on indirect or direct appropriation. The use of borrowed artistic and photographic materials declared the ideas

of feminism due to its displacement into a new context, that gave new meanings with bright pronounced social connotation to the work.

It is possible to say definitely that the method of appropriation has taken a significant place and is one of the fundamental ways of conveying a certain message in the contemporary art, mass media and graphic design within art feminism. Borrowed images from various sources (magazines, paintings, books, etc.), the use of recognizable «cliché» and «stamp» images in their work, the direct citation of the famous art and mass media objects and transferring it to another context, continue to be used by various photo artists as a protest against sexism and various types of discrimination, as well as other problems arising from them.

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