

# Femininity in the age of now? would plato and aristotle approve?

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Art is something that has been known to evoke different emotions from each and every person, how one deals with these emotions though, is up to them. The way we should deal with these emotions evoked, and how we should treat artists who devote their time, energy, lives to their work is to respect them. What that respect means, varies in today's world of art, some believing that artists need to be paid thousands for the amount of effort they put into their esteemed craft, others feeling that artists should simply create for the passion. These two worldviews mimic an older extreme philosophical viewpoints of aesthetics and the artists themselves. Plato and Aristotle had drastically differing views on the arts and how they should be regulated and artists should be treated.

Plato's view point on the arts was extreme to say the least. Plato believed that art was simply an escape from reality. When he looked at the Athenians around him, and their love for the arts, he saw the way that it transported them to a fictional universe, and allowed them to forget reality and invoked strong emotions from them. Plato felt that art was dangerous as he agreed with his teacher Socrates, that people couldn't differentiate reality from fantasy. Plato saw art as a hindrance on people's ability to understand reality and the truth. Plato felt that art was 3 removals from nature, farthest from reality. He felt that art in itself was a delusion that the Athenian people became enraptured in and couldn't distinguish from reality. Plato felt that artists themselves needed to be held accountable for their art and the emotions they invoked. He felt that the government should step in and censor artists, effectively controlling the levels of emotions they evoke within people.

Aristotle had a different view on the arts and artists than Plato. Aristotle agreed with Plato that artists evoke emotion, but rather than trying to criticize them, and censor them he felt that we should admire and encourage this talent. Aristotle felt that having feelings triggered by artistic performances allowed us to release these powerful emotions. He did believe that this release should be done in moderation, and controlled circumstances, and he felt that art was a worthy outlet for the release. Aristotle believed that art was imitation, but did not put a negative light onto it. Rather, he felt that it allowed us to focus on unfamiliar things, and encouraged us to focus on the world around us. He felt that art forms such as plays, allowed us an opportunity to experience emotions indirectly. For example, in a tragedy we see characters we respect go through hardships and emotions of pity and fear are aroused within us. Aristotle felt that these emotions built up until we reach a state that Aristotle coins 'catharsis', or the moment when pent up feelings generated from an art form, in this case a play are able to break free. To Aristotle, art was a way to allow emotions to spill free in a controlled way.

Art today is something that has evolved into so many different forms beyond what Aristotle and Plato could have ever imagined. Art has expanded so much, with subgenres forming within music, acting, painting, sculpting and more. In this current age, we celebrate artists on various levels, some artists are able to make it, with their works being celebrated in museums and galleries, however there are an excess of artists struggling to make it within that. Social media is a concept that has taken over the world in recent years,

with various platforms connecting millions around the world. Platforms such as Instagram have grown immensely in popularity, and effectively with their growth, have allowed artists a platform to share their art. One of the artists that has effectively been able to grow and share her art on this platform, is London based artist Polly Nor, who has collected 1 million followers of her art on the platform.

Polly is an artist who according to her website “ best known for her dark and satirical drawings of women and their demons”, her art consists of “ and drawn, digital illustrations and sculpture work. Interweaving themes of identity, female sexuality and emotional turmoil throughout her work” Through her Instagram, (@pollynor) her works often feature women, naked, with fat deposits in their hips and stomachs, their breasts bare and sagging, and their bodies covered in hair. Her most recent series depicts a woman being awoken on her period only to find a snake eating her vagina, causing blood to come out in excess.

Despite her popularity, Pollynor work is nothing if not controversial. Her work definitely evokes emotions from those who consume her art. Polly’s art tackles viewpoints of women that society rejects. In her work, the woman is depicted as having beady eyes, heavy wrinkles, bags under her eyes, fat around her stomach, tiny breasts that sag and messy hair. This contradicts what society deems ‘ beautiful’, completely, there is no supermodel, or woman of goddess like beauty, but rather just a normal girl. Her work depicts a snake crawling up and feasting upon this woman’s vagina, and her bleeding symbolism of her period. Up until now, and too an extent today,

women's menstrual cycles are often deemed as disgusting, and glossed over. However, in her work Polly faces the issue head on, forcing her audience to give attention to, and face not only the fact of menstruation, but also how it feels to be a woman in this situation. Polly's art is graphic to say the least, her art's depiction of women in the nude, and their relationship with themselves and their bodies in non-conventional. Her work is controversial in its focus on the woman's body and parts of it that society shapes and censors itself from. She does not simply draw women, she draws their experiences in their femininity – the parts that we usually say 'ew' or 'gross' at, and brings them to life beautifully. On her postings of her art on Instagram, she is given support, through her comments, however there are so many more that wonder where this story she tells is going, what is happening and more. Her art forces people to question what they know, and what they have been shielded from. Her art itself tests Instagram's policy agreement, while in their policy they state that " Nudity in photos of paintings and sculptures is OK" they also state that " We know that there are times when people might want to share nude images that are artistic or creative in nature, but for a variety of reasons, we don't allow nudity on Instagram. This includes photos, videos, and some digitally-created content that show sexual intercourse, genitals, and close-ups of fully-nude buttocks." (Instagram Community Guidelines) Her work directly challenges this guidelines, and pushes the boundaries of what is acceptable.

Aristotle's viewpoint of Poly's work would welcome it, and celebrate it. Her work is a way for people to indirectly understand the emotions that women

go through, in their struggles. Women are able to relate with her work, whereas men are able to understand the feelings and pain that go along with being a woman, in this case on her menstrual cycle and the pain one feels while on it. This would be a way to understand emotions that we would not normally experience, and effectively rid ourselves of them temporarily. Polly's work would most likely be considered similar to a tragedy in that it effectively stimulates feelings of pity and outrage. The perception she gives through her art of women's struggles allows others to relate and vent out their emotions, that they would not be able to otherwise feel. He would see her work as a way for people to achieve catharsis as they are able to have feelings of anger, sadness, and empowerment from her artwork, and are able to release it as she effectively tells a story through each piece of artwork. In the case of the piece with the snake and the period, we are able to understand the feelings of one's period, and how it is discovered and felt through the woman's discovery and the snake's presence. Aristotle would most likely approve of the platform that Poly chooses to share her artwork on as he felt that art needed to be shared in an environment where it could be consumed in moderation. Instagram provides this platform and is able to moderate artwork in its community.

Plato would most likely want to censor Poly's work and hold heavy criticism for Instagram as a platform in itself. Given his viewpoint on art, Plato would see it as a way of separating what a woman's bodily functions and natural form is from what a woman should be like. He would want Instagram as a mass media to censor itself as he himself saw the dangers of mass media's

influence. He would see Poly's work as a distraction from the reality of the world, that her work was not realistic in its depiction, as it is unrealistic for a woman to feel blood from her vagina only to then see a snake eating her. This graphic display would invoke emotions that he deemed unnecessary in the pursuit of the truth. He would see the beautiful art displayed in this woman's suffering and struggle with her menstrual cycle as something that would just bring up unnecessary emotions that are not relevant to us. His viewpoint that people are too ignorant to differentiate art from reality, would lead him to call for its censorship. This view would lead him to call for more censorship beyond the level of censorship that Instagram already has within its community. He would probably feel that people can't handle the vulgarity and extremities presented in Poly's works. And if he even agreed with the concept of social media sites such as Instagram, they would be heavily regulated, instead of being a place where people can share content, content would be reviewed and most likely simply push for an education where people can achieve the truth.

In today's age, art and media have evolved far beyond what Aristotle and Plato could have ever imagined it to be, yet their philosophies on the arts still apply. There is a divide of where we should recognize art, and where we should censor it, how far we should allow this invoking of emotions before it goes a step too far. Artists like Polly Nor effectively play with that line of controversy, and are currently using mass media in order to share their works, and are able to invoke emotion from a larger group of people than they ever could. While Plato would most likely disapprove, and Aristotle

celebrate it, I believe that it is a beautiful thing to witness, as we are able to see different perspectives from all around the world through art and mass media.