

# In to discuss if the rise in

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In this essay, I aim to discuss Barbara Kruger and how Postmodernist ideas have affected the way she creates her powerful work. I also wish to discuss if the rise in politically expressive female artists from the 1970's onwards is a direct response to postmodernist philosophers or a response to loss of modernist structured ideologies creating a change in western culture. Confronting political topics and focusing on highly debated issues surrounding feminism and gender equality. I aim to explore the origins of postmodernism with its philosophical and political roots and see if the theories that arise about late 20's century western culture and its rejection of the structuralism are what made the postmodern movement such key point in time for female artist making a stand and creating politically driven artworks. I felt Barbara Kruger was a perfect example of this idea and by exploring the roots of this highly complex and interesting movement I will discover its effects on female artists of the time and ultimately the female artist thereafter. I will discuss in depth the history and postmodernist nature of Kruger's well-known work Untitled (Your body is battleground) and I will draw comparisons of the meaning and execution of it to postmodernist philosophers such as Foucault and Barthes.

Looking at the nature of political protest art and the use postmodernist techniques of appropriated photos and use confrontational language to question power and women's politics. Postmodernism is a movement widely recognised due to its dispersal into many parts of western society. It saw a change in politics, music, literature, art and philosophy.

It opposed most of 19/20th century culture and went against modernism, rejecting this very structured and refined society and opening it up to a far

more subjective idea of ideologies once believed by all. It is undecided as to when postmodernism became what we know it to be today however mid to late 20th century is when it started to thrive. Postmodernist literature and philosophy founded the basis of which artists and all other areas of society would follow. Michel Foucault, a leading French philosopher, known for his controversial thoughts on sexuality and ideas of power, caused and continues to cause debates in many areas of society and wanted to break down ideas powers, he broke down power into 'repressive power' and 'normalising power'. Repressive power being what controls most of our society and the threat of this power, normalizing power makes us do what society wants us to do, power that constructs our view of the world and ourselves. 1. A revolutionary figure, he tried to analyse power and the French government of the time, in an attempt to break it down. Though his work would appear to have no bearing on the artist work, the ripples he made in political and philosophical fields left him being a direct influence on many postmodern artistic figures, his concepts of power would have even inspired the likes of Kruger as she created work in response to both consumerism and the defects of political power at that time.

Much of this work has provoked a critical debate among critical theorists and political theorists, as the exact mechanics of resistance to power relations is not necessarily clearly mapped out in Foucault's accounts, but his work has, nevertheless, occasioned a very favourable response from a number of feminists and other critical theorists who have found in his work a way of thinking about the forms of power relations between men and women which do not fit neatly into the types of relations conventionally described within

theorisations of power which tend to focus on the role of the State, ideology or patriarchy (Thornborrow 2002). 2 Kruger's works follow many of the theories comprised by Foucault and only reiterates the ideas he made in artistic form. Another successful postmodernism theorist and philosopher is Roland Barthes, the notion and idea of appropriation is very much one that this movement rely upon. A discussion of originality of ideas is one Barthes takes part in, he often discusses appropriation and its place in our society as well as the critiques of originality and if it even exists in our society anymore.

As Postmodernism continued to develop, many artists not only acknowledged Barthes's denouncement of originality but also embraced it as a means through which to further critique the works and tenets of Modernism. These artists favored the readymade object as more powerful than the supposedly new crafted objects shaped by Modernist artists. By openly acknowledging the process of appropriation that occurs within the manufacture of all art, these artists leveraged the power of pre-existing imagery and signs to produce "new" works with multiple layers and multiple meanings. 3 Barthes was a leading postmodernist philosopher and writer, his literature led the way for many and death of a writer was vital in the changes that occurred during the 1970's, ousting notions of modernism and narrative ideas of realism. Appropriation is a common theme in contemporary art and the use of older works or other people's works has a highly respected place in politically driven artwork. The line to which artist may appropriate is often blurred but artists such as Barbara Kruger use appropriated work to add to the context of their own. Kruger uses the idea of appropriation and the originality of ideas is a highly debated one.

Artist such as Kruger are known for the use of re-photographed imagery. Barbara Kruger is a graphic designer is known for her political charged graphic prints, she uses her platform to display ideas of consumerism, political injustice and conveys strong themes of feminism. She is a well-known postmodern artist and the undertones of her work follow that of many postmodern philosophers such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. Known for her striking work this artist has a history in graphic design which has helped to enable her career. Her use of text in a widely acknowledge graphic design font Futura, often in a bright red colour, is placed against striking black and white appropriated imagery. Her work appears in the format of a posters and that of propaganda techniques. This is a clear line of inspiration especially as her work has a political drive behind it.

Her background in graphic design is often helpful when she makes such bold statements. When discussing Untitled (your body is a battleground), one of her most successful works, I think it is important to note the origin. This work, like many of her others, started on the streets, where it was plastered across many walls. This phrase is most well-known placed across this divided image of a traditionally beautiful women; however, it has been placed across many other images as it featured in female rights campaign all across America. ' for march on Washington in support of legal abortion, birth control, and women's rights, New York, 1989' 4. The roots of her work are really shown when you see the imagery of these protest posers.

Her work discusses' a variety of things but seeing the versatility of her work and how the placement can change so much. Now a well-known artist, in

1989 her work was used at protests for women's reproductive rights, it has just as much of a valued placed in the streets as it does in galleries. Here work was often put on the streets despite her huge success at the time. Meaning her work carried great meaning and felt far more authentic to both the politics she was preaching but the movement of postmodernism. There is still validity in her work but I think she challenged power and politics directly when using these standard propaganda techniques and targeting the issues where they needed it most, with the people it effected and confronting society directly. While discussing Kruger's compliance to the movement it is clear to see that she follows the beliefs and theories of the historians and philosophers of the time. Her work can reiterate philosophical ideas brought up by both Barthes and Foucault. In Kruger's work, you can see that she uses appropriated/ modified appropriated imagery to demonstrate further ideas and make her point even more evident, for example Untitled (Your body is a battleground) includes an image from an unknown source.

This image is specifically powerful up-against the text displayed because it shows the split to the argument of pro-choice and pro-life (positive and negative image). It also displays a woman of traditional beauty and a message of untraditional values. I think females drive to create more politically charged work in this era comes from artwork needing to be made for such protests and it is a prime example of how to re-photographed imagery can be used to aid a narrative such as this and help to denounce the notions of originality in the way Barthes did.

I think there is a clear response to Foucault writings in Untitled (Your body is a battleground) as mentioned earlier but her works, much like Foucault, break down regressive power and the laws of women's reproductive rights that would seem to be controlled by a very sexist power. This fear of threat of power mentioned is exactly what she is opposing in this piece of protest art and the work complements all of Foucault's view on power between women and men and sexuality. She reveals the presence of power in apparently neutral spaces, ostensibly beautiful spaces, and spaces that seem harmonious and insinuates tensions and differences into spaces that repress them beneath the appearance of homogeneity- whether the space in question is an art institution, work of art, self, category, discipline, social group, nation, or any other would-be unity. 5 I think the effect on Kruger work that Foucault made is evident throughout all of her works and her ideas of power could stem directly from his theories. In conclusion discussing how the theories comprised by Foucault and Barthes have effected Kruger's work Untitled (Your body is a battleground) has lead me to believe that her work was highly influenced by the notions made by not only these philosophers but also the generalised ideas of the time.

I also think that the loss of structure and modernist beliefs played a huge part in her work, allowing her to created work that utilised appropriation and politically provocative statements that advocated women's rights, in this case; women's reproductive rights. I also believe the politics of the time are a huge factor that I could develop and research further in the future. Times were changing in most of western culture and this could be due to the change in ideologies and the notions brought to light by such philosophers

but I think I am wrong to assume the rise in politically expressive artists is solely down to the beliefs stated by these scholars. I have shown that Kruger's work takes inspiration from various sources but there is a definite influence from some of these theories.

By drawing conclusions and discussing postmodernist beliefs I can see the great effect it continues to have on female artists. 1 Chapter 2. 5: Michel Foucault, Power. Dir. Leidenhum. YouTube.

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