

April 2021

Sexual Assault Awareness Month

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Though the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 70s began the change of Western societal views and traditional beliefs towards sexual behavior and liberty, many components of sex were still considered taboo: sexual assault and violence. Victims' voices continued to be hushed after history's long-existing standard of protecting abusers over survivors. As early as the Renaissance, there has existed art depicting rape, founded on Greek mythology, as "heroic" with the male victor conquering the property of his opposer--the wife. Exemplified in the 1618 painting, "The Rape of Daughters of Leucippus," displays Phoebe and Hilaeira, the two daughters of Leucippus, being raped by Greek myths Castor and Pollux.

The idolization and reinforcement of sexual violence since then has proven to be a barrier for survivors and their healing but feminist artists in recent decades have tried to change the narrative. Instead of using paint and canvas to publicize the issue, artists Yoko Ono and Suzanne Lacy used the less known medium of performance art to provide new perspectives on sexual assault. In one of Ono's most famous pieces, the 1964 *Cut Piece*, she performs by silently sitting on stage and allowing the audience to cut away pieces of her clothing, symbolizing the trauma and loss of identity faced after sexual assault, a simple yet aggressive idea for female empowerment. Less than a decade later, artist Suzanne Lacy, alongside Judy Chicago and Sandra Orge, addressed sexual assault similarly with the performance art approach when creating a piece named, "Ablutions," in 1972. With ablution meaning, "the washing of one's body or part of it (as in a religious rite)" the art consisted of two women bathing in bathtubs with a variety of clay, eggs, and blood within the tub, a seated woman wrapped in a bandage, and 50 beef kidneys stapled to the wall, all accompanied the recordings of seven womens' rape stories. The union of the graphic elements belonging to the piece reveals the underlying pain and destruction of mind and body when entered without consent.

By redirecting the historical positive connotation of sexual assault in art to a negative one, Ono, Lacy, and others have spotlighted the raw atrocity of such acts, as well as having set the path for future feminist artists.

You can find more information about these artists more at:

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-body-issues-feminist-artists-1970s-art-condemn-sexual-violence>

<https://www.suzannelacy.com/performance-installation#/ablutions/>

<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/suzanne-lacy-social-practice-nancy-princenthal-13412/>

Cohen, Alina. "How Feminist Artists of the 1970s Used Art to Condemn Sexual Violence." *Artsy*, 14 Jan. 2020,

www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-body-issues-feminist-artists-1970s-art-condemn-sexual-violence



"The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 4 Feb. 2021, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rape_of_the_Daughters_of_Leucippus.



Gotthardt, Alexxa. "Yoko Ono's 5 Most Iconic Works." *Artsy*, 26 Oct. 2019, www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-yoko-onos-5-iconic-works



<https://www.suzannelacy.com/performance-installation#/ablutions/>