

Joseph Thabang Palframan

S2411709

2411709@vuw.leidenuniv.nl

K. Wild

Leiden University

BA Arts, Media and Society

Academic Year 2020/21

15th June 2021

Words: 5829

Emerging Gender Relations In 'How to Travel Safe' (2016) and 'Myself and I' (2016)

Table of contents

Abstract

Introduction

How do the artworks 'How To Travel Safe' (2016) and 'Myself And I' (2016) represent the influence of institutions on gender relations?

How do the artworks 'How To Travel Safe' (2016) and 'Myself And I' (2016) represent contemporary and emerging gender relations?

Conclusion

Images

Source Image List

Literature List



Barbara. *Myself and I*, 2016, Wood, Cardboard and Duct Tape, 7m x 6m x 3m (Den Haag, Royal Academy of Art Den Haag, Courtyard)

Abstract

Feminisms, Inclusivity, Emerging, Spectrum, Myth

This paper uses two related case studies to critique emerging gender relations with particular reference to the influence of institutional conventions (the art academy). It utilises the theoretical frameworks of Linda Nochlin, Alice Walker, Bell Hooks and Eliza Steinbock in order to interpret the gender relations represented by Narges Mohammadi and Quentley Barbara while still students at The Royal Academy of Art The Hague. Through the objective analysis of 'How to Travel Safe' (2016) and 'Myself and I' (2016) this paper will demonstrate how the artworks are of particular importance as representations of an emerging inclusivity within gender relations. The results and conclusions of these analysis show a movement away from the masculine 'greatness' observed by Nochlin (1971), toward an emerging inclusive 'greatness'.

This thesis will observe and analyse how gender relations are represented within 'How to Travel safe' (2016) by Narges Mohammadi and 'Myself and I' (2016) by Quentley Barbara. Mohammadi and Barbara are both alumni of The Royal Academy of Art The Hague; the works selected for this research were produced and displayed while they were studying there. Mohammadi identifies as a woman so I will use the pronouns she/her; Barbara identifies as male, and so I will be using the pronouns he/him.

In 1971 Linda Nochlin produced her text 'Why have there been no great women artists?' a question forming the basis of contemporary feminist art history.¹ In the 2021 anniversary edition of this essay, featuring her reappraisal 'thirty years on', Nochlin reflects on her original essay remarking upon a developing inclusivity within feminist art history.² Writers such as Bell Hooks have been significant contributors to this development: the texts 'Aint I a Woman' 1981 and 'The Will to Change' 2004 include black women and men within feminist thinking.³ In 2019 Eliza Steinbock re-visited Nochlin's essay questioning, 'Why have there been no great trans artists?' By situating trans cultural production within a feminist frame, Steinbock challenges the traditional,

¹ Nochlin, *Why have there been no great women artists?*, 21.

² Ibid. 100.

³ Hooks, *The will to change*, 107.

binary organisation of people.⁴ By considering the increasing inclusivity within feminisms between 1971 and 2019, we contemporize the representation of gender relations within 'How to Travel Safe' and 'Myself and I'.

In Nochlin's original essay and reappraisal the art academy plays an influential role in understanding how gender relations are mediated and determined.⁵ This thesis however does not aim to contribute research on the influence of art academies upon gender relations, but chooses new artworks, produced and displayed recently within the art academy as reliable sources from which we can determine how emerging gender relations are being represented. In this thesis I will question, *How do the artworks 'How To Travel Safe' (2016) and 'Myself And I' (2016) represent contemporary and emerging gender relations?* When considering my role as researcher, I must acknowledge my status as a graduating student within the Royal Academy of Art The Hague. For this reason the bulk of my research seeks to maintain an objective distance from the artists. My first case study will question how the artworks 'How To Travel Safe' (2016) and 'Myself And I' (2016) represent the influence of institutions on gender relations.

This will provide important insights into the critical roles played by art academies when considering emerging and contemporary gender relations. Representations within 'How to Travel Safe' suggest that institutional influences impose traditional notions of gender, such as 'masculine' greatness. This can be seen in the sled-like shape, and the use of protective materials within the work. 'Myself and I' represents Barbara in a position of social outsider. The main busts monumental size and the smaller sprawling figurations maintain notions of 'masculine greatness', further outlining the influences of institutions on gender relations.

My second case study expands upon my first, asking how the artworks 'How To Travel Safe' (2016) and 'Myself And I' (2016) represent contemporary and emerging gender relations. Here the usages of abstract and opaque imagery

⁴ Steinbock, *Collecting Creative Transcestors: Trans* Portraiture Hirstory*, 225.

⁵ Nochlin, *Why have there been no great women artists?*, 84.

take precedence, opening the works to a spectrum of readings.⁶ We also observe a movement away from westernized notions of gender.

Hook's observations of black masculinity within contemporary pop culture contextualize representations of 'twerking' within 'Myself and I'.⁷ Walker acknowledges those women rendered 'anonymous' within art history drawing direct links with Mohammadi's use of materials.⁸ By framing the works within the concepts of Hooks and Walker, representations enter more inclusive contemplations of gender relations. Overall, I aim to understand how artworks produced by new, young artists, when still in the art academy, represent emerging gender relations.



Mohammadi. *How to Travel Safe*, 2016, Wood, Plastic and Wool, 2m x 1m x 2m (Den Haag, Royal Academy of Art Den Haag).

⁶ Steinbock, *Collecting Creative Transcestors: Trans* Portraiture Hirstory*, 237.

⁷ Hooks, *The will to change*, 127.

⁸ Walker, *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens*, 407.

How do the artworks 'How To Travel Safe' (2016) and 'Myself And I' (2016) represent the influence of institutions on gender relations?

This section of the thesis observes how the art academy functions as an institution within which gender relations are shaped. Feminisms have brought the critique and deconstruction of 'institutions and ideologies' to the forefront of art-historical practices.⁹ In her 1971 essay 'Why are there no great women artists' Nochlin observes and questions how the art academy 'mediates and determines' un-equal gender relations.¹⁰ She points out the relationship between, education, masculinity and 'greatness' describing it as "the myth of the great artist (...) unique, godlike- bearing with his person since birth a mysterious essence".¹¹ I will first explore how the art academy is represented as a restraining construction within 'How to Travel Safe', and then observe how representations within 'Myself and I' position Barbara as a social outsider. Further observations will question whether representations of traditional gender roles, particularly masculine 'greatness', are maintained within both of the works. By observing how institutional influence effects representation within the artworks 'How to Travel Safe' and 'Myself and I', we can later outline the ways in which emerging gender relations are represented by Mohammadi and Barbara.

'How to Travel Safe' is a sculpture/installation made out of wood, plastic and wool. Mohammadi has taken the classical notions of the sculpture and plinth display and used them as a point of departure within this work. The plinth appears to be gold; in it we see decorative engravings. Placed on top is a sculpture - blue due to the colour of the tarpaulin - bound to its shape by a rope. The artwork was presented in 2016 in one of the gallery halls of the Royal Academy of Art The Hague. The plinth sits diagonally within the room where it clashes with the direction of the gallery floor's construction. The work, upon first take, resembles a packed object which, due to the abstract shape in which it is bound, remains unspecific. This ambiguous sculpture captures the intrigue of its audience. This is amplified by the artwork's title; 'How to Travel Safe', which seems to offer up the artwork as an imperative without satisfying the

⁹ D'Alleva, 'How to write art history', 63.

¹⁰ Nochlin, 'Why have there been no great women artists?', 41.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 34.

corresponding anticipations for clarity. Its abstract form thus engages with a plethora of readings. It is at this point that we can consider how gender relations are represented within the work. The engravings on the wooden plinth contain floral motifs, alongside a rendition of what looks like Greek meander. The plinth is also hollow, and therefore reads like a sled, or two-tracked vehicles/tool, imbuing the artwork with the sense of movement as suggested within its title.¹²

'How to Travel Safe' is placed at an angle, intersecting the direction of the wooden planks lining the floor of the art academy. This shows how institutional influences function as restraining constructions against which representations of gender relations are determined. By doing this, Mohammadi's work is positioned as a mismatch within the construction of the art academy. Nochlin states that institutions, such as academies, have particular 'myth-making' capabilities responsible for the "myth of the great artist"- a practice that ultimately favours the masculine artist over the feminine artist.¹³ Nochlin recounts how "Picasso passed all the examinations for entrance to the Barcelona, and later to the Madrid, Academy of Art at the age of fifteen in but a single day, a feat of such difficulty that most candidates required a month of preparation". This suggests that it was Pablo Picasso's (1881-1973) proficiency in fitting into the art academy that framed his 'greatness'.¹⁴ The intersecting positioning of 'How to Travel Safe' disturbs how it is framed by the art academies construction.

'How to Travel Safe' can also be considered as a critique on the harsh conditions the academy constructs for 'women artists'.¹⁵ Objective analyses of the plinth show a sled-like form when considering the hollow anti-space created by its upturned 'U' shape. On a sled, surface area contact is reduced as a means of reducing friction and easing physical movement. This contrasts with how Nochlin presents Picasso's speed- 'but a single day' in comparison to other candidates who 'required a month of preparation'- as what leads to assumptions of 'natural' preparedness or 'greatness'.¹⁶ Nochlin maintains that "We tend to accept what's natural" and that "'natural' assumptions must be questioned".¹⁷

¹² Fig. 1.

¹³ Nochlin, 'Why have there been no great women artists?', 34.

¹⁴ Ibid. 36.

¹⁵ Fig. 1.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 34.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 21.

Through this objective analysis, the sled-like form of the plinth reminds us of harsh natural terrains. Reflections of 'naturally' presumed gender relations within the art academy represent the conditions of Mohammadi's movement through the academy. 'How to Travel Safe' then, can be observed as a representation of a social vehicle designed to navigate unequal gender relations as influenced by the art academy.

Mohammadi's title 'How to Travel Safe' also suggests the awareness of potential damage. This threat to safety is formally addressed within the work - tarpaulin is a plastic protective material often used to shield against nature; it is tightly and repetitively bound by rope forming the skin of the sculpture. Nochlin exposes the potential damage caused when lacking Picassos 'natural' masculine advantage within the art academy.¹⁸ Nochlin critiques assumptions of 'natural' preparedness. She does this by stating that "one would like to find out more about similar precocious qualifiers for art academies who then went on to achieve nothing but mediocrity or failure--- in whom, of course, art historians are uninterested".¹⁹ Here she hints at a relationship between 'uninterested' art historians and 'mediocrity or failure'. References to safety in the title of Mohammadi's work represent how institutional influences create potentially damaging conditions for those who aren't male.

Unlike 'How to Travel Safe', Barbara's title 'Myself and I' is consciously self-referential. It is an installation made up of several pre-existing figurative sculptures and a larger central bust. It was presented in the courtyard of the Royal Academy of Art The Hague near the base of a large tree. The smaller figurative sculptures are positioned around the presentation space, standing, crawling and sitting. The figures interact with one another, paralleling the population of the academy, illustrating and reflecting social dynamics. When presented separately from 'Myself and I' these works are titled 'Twerk 1', 'Twerk 2', 'Friends 1', 'Friends 2' and 'Friends 3'. The central bust is seven meters high, six meters across and four meters in depth. It looks out over the rest of the figurative sculptures, away from the academy, and over the courtyard. It depicts a man whose long dreadlocks flow over his shoulders. There is a large hammer

¹⁸ Nochlin, 'Why have there been no great women artists?', 34.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 36.

that protrudes from the back of the head. While the overall sculpture is formed using duct tape, we see a large build-up of the material where Barbara forms the features of the face, suggesting particular efforts in self-representation.²⁰

The collective of the works are made primarily out of wood, cardboard and, in the case of the central bust, duct tape too. The smaller sizes of the figurative surrounding sculptures show how the cardboard has been turned into a paste-like substance, easily manipulated by Barbara to create the bulk of the figurations.²¹ The cardboard used on the bust is manipulated less by Barbara. Rather, he uses the duct tape to bind the cardboard boxes together - a familiar material combination.²²



Barbara. *'Myself and I'*, 2016, Wood, Cardboard and Duct Tape, 7m x 6m x 3m (Den Haag, Royal Academy of Art Den Haag, Courtyard)

Representations within 'Myself and I' position Barbara as social outsider within the art academy. 'Myself and I' is placed in the courtyard of The Royal Academy of Art The Hague: its large size is immediately impressive and presents

²⁰ Fig. 2.

²¹ Fig. 8.

²² Fig. 3.

the work as a competing or alternative construction to that of the academy building. Within this space we see a large bust that functions as a self-portrait. Busts are commonly used to skilfully represent important people. In this case we can consider the form of a bust as a means by which Barbara re-exerts his presence within the art academy.

Barbara places figurative sculptures that parallel and puppeteer social interactions within the art academy- we can see 'Friend 3' placed at the top of some stairs, reaching down toward the crawling 'Twerk 1'.²³ The title of the work 'friends' further extenuates Barbara's role as a social out-cast. When originally displayed, 'Friends 3' was taken outside of the art academy and placed within a food shop. The figure was positioned as a customer at the point of choosing their purchase.²⁴ 'Friends 3', as represented within 'Myself and I', can therefore be seen as at the point of 'choosing' 'Twerk 1'.²⁵ 'Twerk 1' was originally shown crawling over the same wooden gallery floor referenced when discussing Mohammadi's 'How to Travel Safe'.²⁶ The relationship between 'Friends 3' and 'Twerk 1' suggests an objectification of the feminine body. Barbara's reconstructions of social interactions within 'Myself and I' parallel social interactions within the art academy, both reiterating his position as social outsider, as well as representing the unequal gender relations as mediated and determined by the institution.

By observing artists in the margins of the academy we can conduct a thorough analysis of how gender relations are influenced throughout the art academy. Within her text Nochlin also points out that "Filippo Lippi and Poussin, Courbet and Monet are all reported to have drawn caricatures in the margins of their school-books" here, once again, Nochlin references reports of a 'natural' preparedness. Nochlin shows how the art academy, or 'school', functions as a site for myth creation, framing the overflowing creativity of said 'great' masters. Barbara's peripheral placement of the smaller figures surrounding the bust parallel the 'caricatures in the margins of their school-books'.²⁷ The positioning

²³ Fig. 5.

²⁴ Fig. 11.

²⁵ Fig. 5.

²⁶ Fig. 7.

²⁷ Nochlin, *Why have there been no great women artists?*, 45.

of these figures highlight his role as marginalized 'outsider', who still is capable of competing with/ mimicking the academic construction- a condition that if anything 'greatens' the grandeur of his artwork. This creates a correspondence between Barbara and masculine 'greatness'.

Barbara is positioned as a marginalised outsider within the work 'Myself and I'. Where this could represent a distancing from institutional influences on gender relations; we still see continuations of masculine 'greatness' represented within the work. Barbara, being male, benefits from institutionally shaped gender relations; his positioning of outsider show persistent institutional influences within marginal spaces of art academy.

Representations within both works engage with the institutional influence of art academies on gender relations. Through Mohammadi's representations of a protectively bound, sled-like sculpture within 'How to Travel Safe' we can consider the art academy as being socially harsh or even dangerous for 'women artists'. Within 'Myself and I' the large bust and surrounding figurations placed in the courtyard of the art academy present Barbara as social outsider. Within this marginalised position however, 'Myself and I' still features representations of masculine 'greatness' reflecting the reach of the intuitions influence within the art academy. By maintaining representations of un-equal gender relations within 'Myself and I' Barbara aligns with the intuitional influences described by Nochlin, suggesting that Barbara's position of social outsider is not related to traditionally unequal gender relations, but of other causation.

How do the artworks 'How To Travel Safe' (2016) and 'Myself And I' (2016) represent emerging gender relations?

Within the last case study we observed how traditional gender roles are determined by the art academy, questioning how this influence impacts representations within the artworks. Within this case study we will observe how Mohammadi and Barbara's movement away from traditional gender roles toward contemporary feminist theory represents emerging gender relations. In the appraisal featured in the fiftieth anniversary edition of 'Why have there been no great women artists' Nochlin points out that "Women artists, of all kinds,

are talked about, looked at, have made their mark—and this includes women artists of colour”.²⁸ The increasing inclusivity being described here has been led by feminist thinkers such as Alice Walker, Bell Hooks and Eliza Steinbock who discuss the experiences of the previously marginalised within their texts ‘In Search of Our Mothers Gardens’ (1983), ‘The Will to Change’ (2005) and ‘A Companion to Feminist Art: Collecting Creative Transcestors: Trans* Portraiture Hirstory’ (2019). The traditional gender roles discussed by Nochlin observe how masculine ‘greatness’ relates to western femininity. Contemporary gender relations include how western orientated masculinity determines gender roles for black and trans bodies.

First I will analyse how Mohammadi and Barbara subvert traditionally western gender relations through their use of materials and the representation of non-western experiences within their works and wider practices. I will then consider how the uses of incomplete, abstract and opaque representations open their works up to a spectrum of readings. This movement away from traditional gender relations toward more inclusive feminist frameworks would suggest the emergence of an inclusive ‘greatness’.

Through the observation of Mohammadi and Barbara’s wider practices we can observe a re-orientation away from traditional western gender relations. Both Mohammadi and Barbara are ‘non-white’ artists, although based in Den Haag, Netherlands both artists represent a larger cultural plane within their wider practices. Barbara references experiences of cultural difference throughout his practice, stating “What I consider bizarre in Holland is the community attitude towards useful stuff - people buy utilitarian objects and later dispose of them just because they can be replaced with new ones” suggesting a provenance for his choice of reusable, accessible materials.²⁹ In 2020 Mohammadi won the Ron Mandos Young Blood Award for the artwork she presented when graduating from the Royal Academy of Art The Hague. The artwork called ‘Passing Traces’ was made out of seven-hundred kilograms of Persian Halva- she describes her work as a “play with fragrances, colours,

²⁸ Nochlin, ‘Why have there been no great women artists?’, 100.

²⁹ Barbara, Quentley. Accessed 10 May 2021. <https://quentleybarbara.hotglue.me/?Sculptures>

symbols and habits of different cultural heritages”.³⁰ Where Nochlin critiqued the role played by the academy in mediating and determining unequal gender relations through western orientated ‘myths’- Mohammadi’s graduating success tells of a change in this dynamic. Nochlin states, “There has been a change in what counts - from phallic ‘greatness’ to being innovative, making interesting, provocative work, making an impact, and making one’s voice heard”.³¹ When observing the wider practices of Mohammadi and Barbara we begin to see representations of increasing inclusivity within gender relations.

In ‘How to Travel Safe’, Mohammadi’s turns her back on ‘traditional’ notions of ‘femininity’ simply by working in sculpture. Where Nochlin suggests, “daintiness, delicacy and precariousness are to be counted earmarks of a feminine style.” ‘How to Travel Safe’ is authoritative and dominating.³² The title of the work positions Mohammadi’s sculpture as an answer to danger; as a representation of safety, ‘How to Travel Safe’ becomes informative and instructional. The imperative nature of the work places Mohammadi in a position of knowledgeable dominance; she knows how to travel safe, because she has had too. The domination over the audience is further pronounced, as the abstracted form of the sculpture offers nothing but ambiguity, hinting that hidden beneath the protective tarpaulin is the spectators desired clarity. Nochlin also states that traditionally “women artists are more inward looking, more delicate and nuanced in their treatment of their medium”.³³ When observing Mohammadi’s use of medium, we must first observe her choice of materials. The use of plastic tarpaulin, regular rope - and further the hastily and tightly wrapped nature in which Mohammadi bounds the sculpture - better correspond with Walker’s consideration of marginalised artistic practices. Mohammadi’s use of cheap, accessible materials references those women artists ‘anonymous’ within art history books; those who used the ‘materials she could afford’.³⁴ When considering that, according to Walker, marginalised women artists used “the only medium her position in society allowed her to use” Mohammadi’s choices of

³⁰ Mohammadi, Narges. Accessed 12 May 2021.
<https://www.nargesmohammadi.com/About.html>

³¹ Nochlin, *Why have there been no great women artists?*, 84.

³² *Ibid.* p. 27.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 27.

³⁴ Walker, *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens*, 407

material become outward rather than 'inward'- reflecting her own position within society.³⁵ Imbued with the 'instructional' aura of its title, 'How to Travel Safe' stipulates that, rather than embodying 'masculine' traits, as suggested by Nochlin, Mohammadi must embody 'anonymity' as explored by Walker in order to subvert the 'traditional' notions of western femininity.

Barbra uses femininity to subvert representations of masculine 'greatness' within his work. 'Myself and I's' momentous size functions as an immediate indicator of 'masculine' 'greatness'. Upon more nuanced inspections of the work however, 'traditional' notions of femininity can also be recognised. According to Nochlin's traditionalized "Two valued scale of 'Masculinity vs Femininity'", the representation of 'femininity' by a male artist would subvert notions of masculinity.³⁶ Barbara's work 'Myself and I' could either benefit 'masculine' 'greatness' or transversely, subvert 'masculine' 'greatness' by embodying traditionally 'feminine traits'. Nochlin states that there is "nothing fragile about Rosa Bonheur's Horse Fair" when referencing how women artists subvert 'masculine' 'greatness'.³⁷ This idea of a complete lack of fragility in 'masculine' work is turned on its head in Barbara's 'Myself and I'. Barbara's use of cardboard and tape, reference parcel packaging- a practice within which this familiar material combination is usually used to protect 'fragile' objects- in this case the fragile package is titled 'Myself and I'. The accommodation of 'fragility' within Barbara's work moves away from traditional gender relations toward more inclusive representations.

Moving away from traditional gender relations, representations of masculinity within 'Myself and I' reference those within contemporary pop culture. Barbara's work is made up of a collection of sculptures, two of which are called 'Twerk 1' and 'Twerk 2'.³⁸ 'Twerk 1' is a life-sized sculpture of a female figure crawling across the floor; the sculpture is depicted wearing a bright pink under garment; this is the sculpture's main recognisable detail.³⁹ 'Twerk 2' is standing; the arms of the figure extend out behind the body framing the buttocks,

³⁵ Nochlin, *Why have there been no great women artists?*, 407.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 27.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 27.

³⁸ Fig. 2.

³⁹ Fig. 7.

and its head is turned, looking back over its shoulder.⁴⁰ In both sculptures Barbara presents a representation of gender relations centred on the sexualisation of the feminine body. In 'The Will to Change', Hooks points out that in contemporary popular culture "Male domination of women simply became a new form of mass entertainment" which relates to a relationship between 'twerking' and mass entertainment music videos.⁴¹ 'Twerk 2' is placed in a central position - just beyond the large bust. Considering 'Myself and I' as having a biographical nature, it can be argued that Barbara is self-aware concerning the role male domination plays in the treatment of women when concerning contemporary gender relations.⁴² Rather than framed by incompetence, contemporary culture's treatment of women seems to become part of Barbara's self described damnation - "I can't physically be that way I've depicted myself figuratively" positioning the objectification of the feminine body as attempts at self reflection.⁴³ Hooks also states that, particularly amongst black communities, "Men were more compelled than ever to enact rituals of domination" - "black on back homicide" is used as an example.⁴⁴ When looking at Barbara's wider practice, Hooks' observations take more precedence.⁴⁵ Referring back to the first case study, Barbara's position of social outsider may not be a consequence of an inability to perform masculine 'greatness' but rather of being a black man. Representations of gender relations in 'Myself and I' include references of black masculinity and femininity within contemporary pop culture.

⁴⁰ Fig. 8.

⁴¹ Hooks, *The will to change*, 127.

⁴² Fig. 2.

⁴³ Barbara, Quentley. Accessed 10 May 2021. <https://quentleybarbara.hotglue.me/?Sculptures>

⁴⁴ Hooks, *The will to change*, 127.

⁴⁵ Fig. 13.



Barbara. *'Tearful Hato'*, NA, Oil on Canvas, 15cm x15cm

The artwork 'How to Travel Safe' represents the practice of a more fundamental subversion of 'traditional femininity'. Mohammadi's work bypasses referencing the 'great women artists' as recognised by Nochlin throughout her text. Rather, it corresponds with women artists, as discussed by Walker who existed 'anonymously' within the confines of restrictive traditional gender relations. Barbara's work, on the other hand, subverts notions of 'masculine greatness' through the centralization of 'fragility'. By representing femininity within pop culture, Barbara contemporizes gender relations within his work.

By opening the artworks to a spectrum of readings, representations of inclusive gender relations emerge. In the text 'Collecting Creative Transcestors: Trans* Portraiture Hirstory, from Snapshots to Sculpture' Steinbock describes the exploration of gender 'non-representationally' as being a 'current trend'.⁴⁶ While analysing the work 'The Presence of Certain Invisibilities: Some known, Some Unknown' by Jonah Groeneboer, Steinbock observes how the display of a spectrum within the work "reminds the viewer of all the ways perception can be expanded to see more, to see successive states of being". The 'spectrum', in

⁴⁶ Steinbock, *Collecting Creative Transcestors: Trans* Portraiture Hirstory*, 238.

comparison to singular block colour, merges colours together; there is no point of distinguishing one colour from the next. Steinbock expands the duality implied by Nochlin in her title 'no great women artists' by asking 'why have there been no great trans artists' in the opening lines of her text.⁴⁷ It must be acknowledged that Trans experiences within feminist art historical practices do not only add complexity to 'masculinity' and 'femininity', but also represent fundamentally ever-changing and constantly shifting dynamics within gender relations; affordances of an inclusive 'greatness'.

By observing how artists from the past occupied the spaces between genders, we can draw comparisons with how this is currently being represented by Mohammadi and Barbara. These shifting dynamics are explored in the work 'The Mythic Being' (1973-75) where Adrian Piper uses the medium of performance art to explore how social dynamics change in relation to gender representation. Piper is a mixed 'Caucasian and African American' artist, who would dress up as a 'black male', adopting masculine roles in order to experience and document what she describes as 'the mythic being'.⁴⁸ Her large afro-wig, fake moustache and sunglasses mirror that of a disguise.⁴⁹ Piper's movement between masculinity and femininity within this work is relevant when considering how 'spectrums' of gender influence representations within the artworks 'How to Travel Safe' and 'Myself and I'.

⁴⁷ Steinbock, *Collecting Creative Transcestors: Trans* Portraiture Hirstory*, 237.

⁴⁸ Piper, *The Mythic Being, 1973-75*

⁴⁹ Fig. 14.



Piper. *'The Mythic Being'*, United States, Photographs, drawings and performances, 1973-75

'How to Travel Safe', has a similarly mysterious aura. The work is specifically unspecific. Engraved onto the plinth we see floral and Greek motifs, a collection of which have no direct cultural provenance but are painted in gold, highlighting this mysterious aura in the work with a transverse sense of prestige and importance.⁵⁰ The sculpture itself is an abstract form; an opaque objective representation which opens the artwork up to a 'spectrum' of different readings. In 'Ten Queer Theses on Abstraction', Getsy describes a 'Queer Abstraction', similar to the abstract form in Mohammadi's work by stating; "anything claimed as queer defiantly stands to the side of the normal and demands witnessing of its exclusions and partiality".⁵¹ By once again acknowledging the imperative function of the work's title; 'How to Travel Safe', Mohammadi's work similarly to Piper's, allows the audience to relate beyond the disguised and socially misread. As put by Mimi Marinucci in 'Feminism is Queer', "in a world without gender, or at least without gender socialization, would people be more like the androgynous characters that inhabit the fictional future?"⁵² The image of a 'myth', as demonstrated by artists such as Piper and Mohammadi, moves beyond

⁵⁰ Fig. 1.

⁵¹ Getsy, *Ten queer theses on abstraction*, 65

⁵² Marinucci, *Feminism is Queer*, 112

the dualities of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ traits, exploring the androgynous traits of the described ‘Mythic being’.⁵³



Barbara, Q. *'Myself and I'*, 2016, Wood, Cardboard and Duct Tape, 7m x 6m x 3m (Den Haag, Royal Academy of Art Den Haag, Courtyard)

Unfinished or intangible representations within ‘Myself and I’ similarly open the work up to a spectrum of readings. Barbara describes his work as “unfinished, missing parts, not manifesting their full potential, they are always under construction”.⁵⁴ This can be seen reflected in the skeletal forms of the surrounding figures, as well as the large gaping hole seen in the front of the bust.⁵⁵ Analysis of gender relations within the mixes of readings created by Barbara’s use of ‘unfinished’ representations aligns with the notion of exploring gender non-representationally.

Within the spectrum of readings afforded within Barbara’s ‘Myself and I’ the extent to which contemporary gender relations have become inclusive are questioned. Barbara mentions that his overarching practice is about

⁵³ Fig. 14.

⁵⁴ Barbara, Quentley. Accessed 10 May 2021. <https://quentleybarbara.hotglue.me/?Sculptures>

⁵⁵ Fig. 2. <https://quentleybarbara.hotglue.me/?Sculptures>

representing 'broken dreams'.⁵⁶ Through the missing or incomplete representations within his work Barbara acknowledges this 'break'.

In 'Racism is the issue' Lorraine O'Grady explores the meaning behind 'black dreams'- and what they can tell us about society. In 'The futurist dream' O'Grady reports being 'amazed' by an intercultural reality; 'the future has good taste'.⁵⁷ However this reality is soon 'broken' when she experiences an interaction with 'middle-American types' who steal the cab she pulls over and hands her a doughnut in return.⁵⁸ The dream's closing words are; 'I looked down at the doughnut in disgust' here the doughnut is a by-product of inclusive cultural activity.⁵⁹ Within this dream, the future can be considered as inclusive. It is envisioned as being 'great' at first, but soon becomes 'broken' due to the interactions facilitated by this inclusivity. When considering what the 'broken dream' suggests about gender relations within Barbara's work 'Greatness' (whether inclusive or masculine) becomes sobering, rather than intoxicating; it breaks O'Grady out of her alternate reality.

Barbara's work is part of a spectrum of realities; incomplete representations expand upon traditional notions of gender relations - opening its representations to transverse influences; what is 'femininity' beyond western 'masculinity'? What is gender beyond culture? Who are 'Myself and I' within these spectrums of reality?

When considering how 'How to Travel Safe' and 'Myself and I' move away from traditional notions of gender, we see contemporary representations of gender relations come to the forefront. Mohammadi subverts the notions of traditional femininity as described by Nochlin in her 1971 text; 'Why have there been no great women artists?' In doing so, 'How to Travel Safe' becomes an exploration of gender non-representation, offering a spectrum of readings to its audience through abstract and mysterious representations of gender relations. 'Myself and I' does feature 'masculine greatness' but also features 'fragility' aligned with femininity as described by Nochlin. Barbara is a black man and for this reason his representation of gender relations is framed by contemporary

⁵⁶ Barbara, Quentley. Accessed 10 May 2021. <https://quentleybarbara.hotglue.me/?Sculptures>

⁵⁷ O'grady, *Black dreams*, Dream 3,

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

pop culture as expanded upon by Bell Hooks, in her text 'The Will To Change'. Barbara's practice uses incomplete representations to bring spectrums of meaning into the work 'Myself and I'. When discussing his work, Barbara references the 'broken dream', which leads to a questioning of how inclusivity might emerge in the future. By outlining the nature of this movement from traditional to contemporary, we observe the representations of a typically 'masculine' 'greatness' being replaced by representations of feminine, black and trans 'greatness'.

To conclude, this text was aimed at understanding how contemporary and emerging gender relations are represented by Narges Mohammadi and Quentley Barbara. This exploration was split into two case studies, which relied on mainly objective analyses of the artworks uncovering possible readings of gender representation. Both of the artworks were presented within the Royal Academy of Art The Hague in 2016. For this reason the first case study is focused on how institutional influences of the art academy are represented within the artworks. 'How to Travel Safe' featured a sculpturally sled-like form that led to a reading of a socially harsh terrain institutionally influenced within the art academy. This reading is further supported by the use of protective materials within the work. 'Myself and I' is primarily made out of cardboard and tape, which also signify protection from harm. This can be viewed with the lens of Nochlin's critique on the art academy which states that as an institution it maintains traditionally unequal gender relations.⁶⁰ While Mohammadi seems to connote to this influence as being harmful (hence the reference to 'safety'), within Barbara's work, the monumental size maintains a representation of 'masculine greatness'. His work, presented in the courtyard positions him as a social outsider. Further considerations of inclusive representations of gender relations suggested that this position of social outsider might also be a reflection of the artist's social position as black male.

After determining that the influence of the art academy maintains traditional gender roles, a questioning of how the artworks move away from this traditionalism helps begin the second case study.

⁶⁰ Nochlin, 'Why have there been no great women artists?', 41

'How to Travel Safe' subverted the traditional notions of femininity as defined by Nochlin. This meant that representations of gender within the work became less concerned with western notions of gender, and more accurately representational of the increasing inclusivity remarked upon in Nochlin's reprisal '30 years later'.⁶¹ Choices of material used by Mohammadi related more to the 'anonymous' women within art historical practices as discussed by Alice Walker, rather than the European examples of female 'greatness' central to Nochlin's original essay.

Representations of gender relations in both 'How to Travel Safe' and 'Myself and I', after recognising this 'movement away', can be considered as exploring gender non-representationally. Within 'How to Travel Safe', this is referenced through the uses of abstract and opaque imagery. Within 'Myself and I' this is recognised through Barbara's usage of incomplete and broken biographical representations. Both works appear to exemplify the writing of Eliza Steinbock, whose research observes trans cultural production. Rather than either representing 'femininity' or 'masculinity' the works were now open to a spectrum of readings.

The gender relations within 'How to Travel Safe' and 'Myself and I' are subjected to the maintenance or movement away from traditional 'masculine' greatness. Contemporary representations of gender relations consider previously marginalised bodies, such as female, black and trans artists. When observing how emerging gender relations are represented by Mohammadi and Barbara within 'How to Travel Safe' and 'Myself and I', we see a movement away from traditionally 'masculine' greatness toward a contemporary, inclusive 'greatness'.

⁶¹ Nochlin, *Why have there been no great women artists?* 100.

Images



Fig. 1. Mohammadi. *How to Travel Safe*, 2016, Wood, Plastic and Wool, 2m x 1m x 2m (Den Haag, Royal Academy of Art Den Haag).



Fig. 2. Barbara. *'Myself and I'*, 2016, Wood, Cardboard and Duct Tape, 7m x 6m x 3m (Den Haag, Royal Academy of Art Den Haag, Courtyard)



Fig. 3. Barbara. *'Myself and I'*, 2016, Wood, Cardboard and Duct Tape, 7m x 6m x 3m (Den Haag, Royal Academy of Art Den Haag, Courtyard)



Fig. 4. Barbara. *'Myself and I'*, 2016, Wood, Cardboard and Duct Tape, 7m x 6m x 3m (Den Haag, Royal Academy of Art Den Haag, Courtyard)



Fig. 5. Barbara. *'Myself and I'*, 2016, Wood, Cardboard and Duct Tape, 7m x 6m x 3m (Den Haag, Royal Academy of Art Den Haag, Courtyard)



Fig. 6. Barbara. *'Myself and I'*, 2016, Wood, Cardboard and Duct Tape, 7m x 6m x 3m (Den Haag, Royal Academy of Art Den Haag, Courtyard)

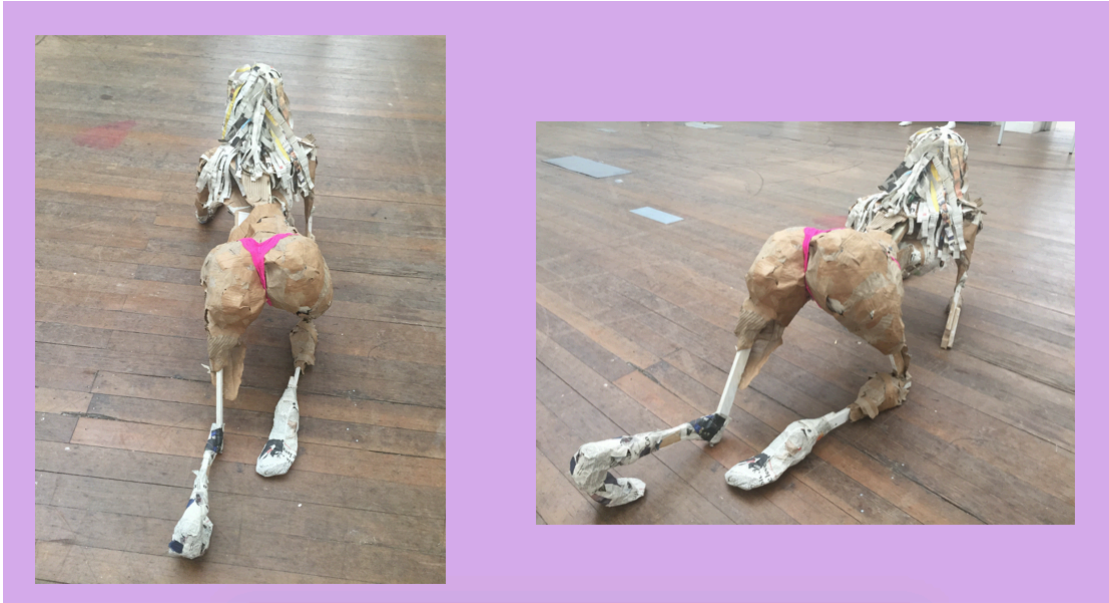


Fig. 7. Barbara. *'Twerk 1'*, 2016, Wood and Cardboard, 58 cm x 164 x 81 cm (Den Haag, Royal Academy of Art Den Haag, Gallery room 1)

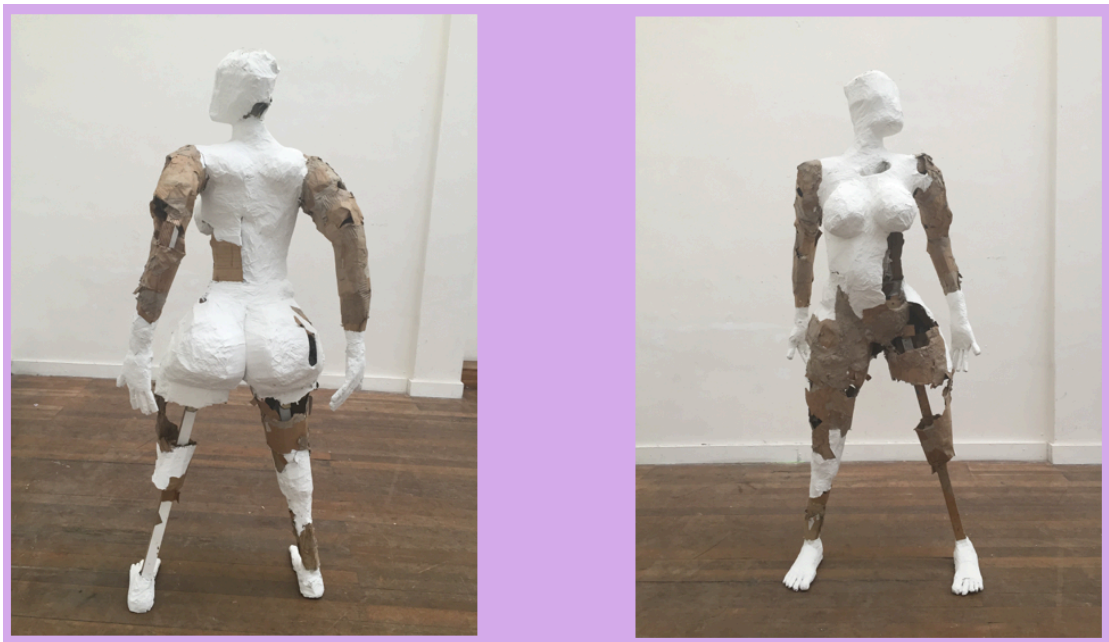


Fig. 8. Barbara. *'Twerk 2'*, 2016, Wood and Cardboard, 89 cm x 172 cm (Den Haag, Royal Academy of Art Den Haag, Gallery room 1)



Fig. 9. Barbara. *'Friends 1'*, 2016, Wood and Cardboard, 67cm x135cm x42cm
(Den Haag scene 1)



Fig. 10. Barbara. *'Friends 2'*, 2016, Wood and Cardboard, 67cm x110cm x49cm
(Den Haag scene 2)



Fig. 11. Barbara. *'Friends 3'*, 2016, Wood and Cardboard, 102cm x119cm x56cm (Den Haag scene 3)

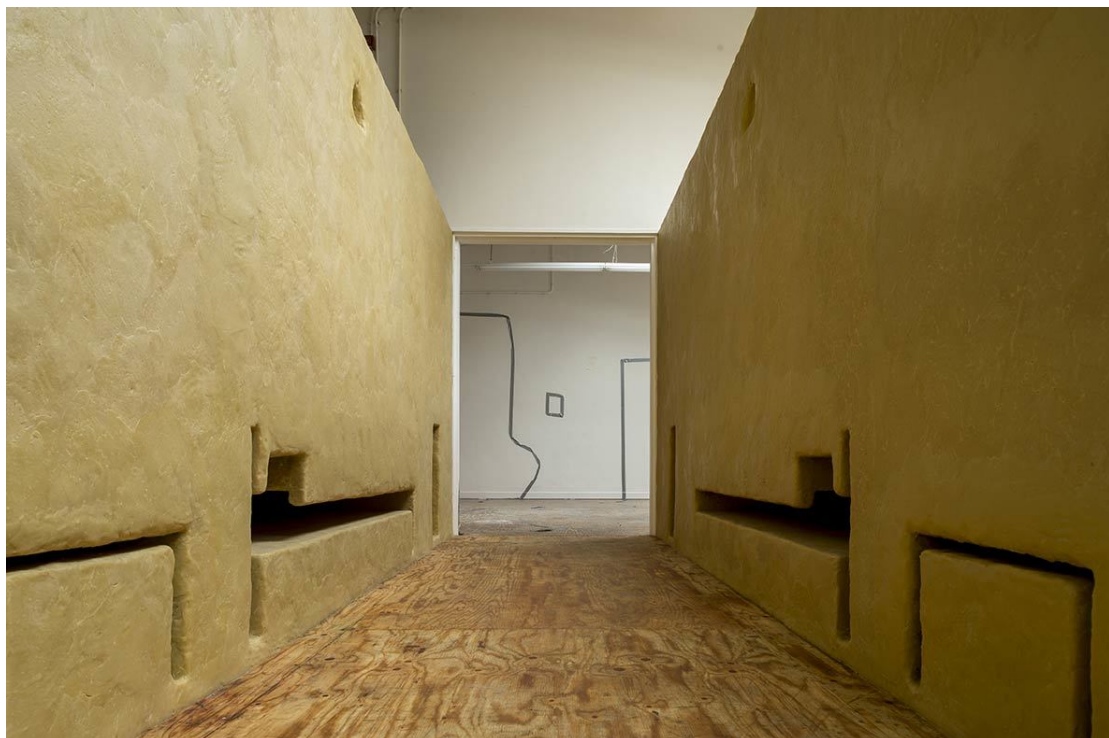


Fig. 12. Mohammadi. *'Passing Traces'*, 2020, Persian Halva, 2,15 m x 4,78 m x 0,80 m (Royal Academy of Art Den Haag)



Fig. 13. Barbara. *'Tearful Hato'*, NA, Oil on Canvas, 15cm x15cm



Fig. 14. Piper. *The Mythic Being*, United States, Photographs, drawings and performances, 1973-75

Image Source list

Fig. 1. Downloaded 1st April 2021

<https://www.nargesmohammadi.com/Artworks.html>

Fig. 2. Downloaded 1st April 2021

<https://quentleybarbara.hotglue.me/?Sculptures>

Fig. 3. Downloaded 1st April 2021

<https://quentleybarbara.hotglue.me/?Sculptures>

Fig. 4. Downloaded 1st April 2021

<https://quentleybarbara.hotglue.me/?Sculptures>

Fig. 5. Downloaded 1st April 2021

<https://quentleybarbara.hotglue.me/?Sculptures>

Fig. 6. Downloaded 1st April 2021

<https://quentleybarbara.hotglue.me/?Sculptures>

Fig. 7. Downloaded 1st April 2021

<https://quentleybarbara.hotglue.me/?Sculptures>

Fig. 8. Downloaded 1st April 2021

<https://quentleybarbara.hotglue.me/?Sculptures>

Fig. 9. Downloaded 1st April 2021

<https://quentleybarbara.hotglue.me/?Sculptures>

Fig. 10. Downloaded 1st April 2021

<https://quentleybarbara.hotglue.me/?Sculptures>

Fig. 11. Downloaded 1st April 2021

<https://quentleybarbara.hotglue.me/?Sculptures>

Fig. 12. Downloaded 1st April 2021

<https://www.nargesmohammadi.com/Artworks.html>

Fig. 13. Downloaded 1st April 2021

<https://quentleybarbara.hotglue.me/?Sculptures>

Fig. 14. Downloaded 12th April 2021

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bly5tUZ11I>

Literature List

D'Alleva, A. *How to write art history: Feminisms*. London: Laurence King Publishing, 2006

Getsy, J. *Queer Abstraction: Ten Queer Theses on Abstraction*. Des Moines: Des Moines Art Center, 2019

Hockly, R. Morris, C. *We wanted a revolution: Black radical women 1965-85: A sourcebook*. United States: Brooklyn Museum, 2017.

Hooks, B. 'The will to change. Men, masculinity, and love'. New York: Washington Square Press, 2005.

Kanter, R. 'Men and women of the corporation'. United States: Basic Books, Inc, Publishers, 1977.

Nochlin, L. *Why have there been no great women artists? 50th Anniversary edition*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2021

Nyong'o, T. *Afro-Fabulations: The queer drama of black life*. United States: New York University Press, 2019

Marinucci, M. *Feminism is Queer: The intimate connection between queer and feminist theory*. London: Zed Books. 2016

O'Grady, L. *Black Dreams, in racism is the issue*. United States: Heresies. 1965-85

Robinson, H. Buszek, M. Steinbock, E. *A Companion to Feminist Art: Collecting Creative Transcestors: Trans* Portraiture Hirstory, From Snapshots to Sculpture*. United States: WILEY Blackwell, 2019
Walker, A. *In search of our mothers gardens*. United States: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983