

Article

Representation and Identity in Contemporary Women Artists' Video

Laura Leuzzi 

Department of History Anthropology Religions Art History Media and Performing Arts, Sapienza University of Rome, 00185 Roma, Italy; laura.leuzzi@uniroma1.it

Abstract: This essay is an initial study that examines selected contemporary video artworks addressing identity and representation by contemporary Italian women artists. The author shows how these women artists seek to avoid the objectification and sanitisation of the traditional iconographies involving women in patriarchal Catholic systems. Selected works by Elisabetta Di Sopra, Francesca Fini, and Mariateresa Sartori are discussed by comparing elements from works by earlier generations of feminist video artists, such as Pipilotti Rist, Elaine Shemilt, and Catherine Elwes. Drawing on theories of both video and feminist art, this article examines how the development of a new aesthetic in early women's video art practice in the 1970s and 1980s is still relevant to the task of critically examining and assessing aesthetics in video today, and how video remains a key tool used to experiment with the remediation of women's representation and identity.

Keywords: feminism; video art; performance; Italian art; European art

In this article, I argue that some feminist aesthetic traits in contemporary video art can be analysed through a comparison with early women artists' video.¹ The development of video art as an art form in the late 1960s and early 1970s coincided with the second wave of feminist movements in many countries. This medium soon became an important tool for investigating and engaging with feminist themes in relation to identity and subjectivity (Leuzzi 2019), even though the artists were often not directly involved in feminist collectives or actively engaged politically in campaigning for legislative changes or reforms.

When examining art by women artists today, especially in the field of video, the focus is still on identity, representation, and the subjectivity of women. Various authors have argued that women artists utilise the body as a vehicle through which to unpack, question, and discuss the role of women in society, shifting from a personal perspective to a public one. In all too many cases today and in the past, the dominant form of representation of women's bodies in culture and the media is sexual objectification. Feminist authors have repeatedly discussed this issue, but when looking at women's self-representation have considered how a single woman artist's approach to sexuality represents a women's point of view (an identity) that is neither sanitised nor demonised by the patriarchal society but departs from it or challenges it.

My article aims to demonstrate the challenge intrinsic to this method by discussing contemporary feminist aesthetics in relation to early women's video artworks through the analysis of some case studies from Italy in the wider European context.

1. Early Video Art: Reclaiming a Feminist Gaze

The portable video recorder was released on the commercial market in the late 1960s and early 1970s, first in the USA and then in Europe. This "new" apparatus had certain advantages which would soon be exploited by artists. It was less expensive and easier to operate than film because it could be easily transported (although it was still relatively heavy) and could be operated and maintained by a very small crew. The videos it produced were immediately available for show as, unlike film, they did not need printing. This



Citation: Leuzzi, Laura. 2023. Representation and Identity in Contemporary Women Artists' Video. *Arts* 12: 42. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts12020042>

Academic Editor: Katy Deepwell

Received: 13 December 2022

Revised: 16 February 2023

Accepted: 20 February 2023

Published: 22 February 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

immediacy facilitated independent and intimate recordings of performances to camera. The instant feedback on the monitor allowed the artist to check and adjust the shot throughout the recording. This empowered artists to retain control over what had been captured by the camera. These material advantages—and video art's lack of an oppressive patriarchal tradition—stimulated women artists to experiment with a wide range of different approaches and perspectives ([San Francisco Museum of Modern Art 2011](#)).

Historically, the emergence of video art coincided with the flowering of second-wave feminism. Many feminist movements, groups, and collectives had sprung up in several different countries, calling for a structural change regarding women's place in culture and society. Women demanded changes on a global scale and battled for recognition and equal rights in and across nation states. This was when several women artists—some of whom were actively involved or organised in feminist groups—began to employ video to explore feminist issues. The women's movement inspired this early work in feminist video. Many women artists addressed through their work the same issues and problems that were being raised and discussed in political forums.

To expose these inequalities (and iniquities) and reflect upon issues of identity and representation, many were utilising their own body in front of the camera. From interviews and conversations, it emerges that, even in this practice, they were left vulnerable to the very same mechanisms of the objectification of women's bodies that they were trying to combat.² The essay 'The Aesthetics of Narcissism' (1976), by American art historian Rosalind Krauss, became a key theoretical piece associated with video performance, and many women artists stressed that they were aware of the critical debate initiated by this essay.³

Krauss associated video with a mirror on the grounds that a direct feedback loop was created between the camera and the video's instant playback. Her argument drew upon the traditional meaning of the mirror as a symbolic object for self-reflection. This theme had developed in terms of visual representation over the centuries in the Western context. Deploying this powerful metaphor, Krauss related video to narcissism and argued that this trope was intrinsic to the medium. Central to her analysis was the example of *Centers* (1971) by Vito Acconci (1940–2017), in which the artist performs in front of the camera, with his arm and hand raised, pointing to the centre of the monitor. Krauss explained that Acconci "uses the video monitor as a mirror" and that we should imagine a line that runs from the artist's eye, ending in the eyes of "his projected double" ([Krauss 1976](#), p. 50). For her, "video's real medium is a psychological situation", the very same situation that Freud had outlined when defining narcissism as a transformation of "object libido into ego libido".⁴ Therefore, Krauss advanced a psychological interpretation of video, focusing on its instant quality as well as on the preponderance of performance to camera in pioneering video production. To support her argument, she discussed examples of work by both men and women artists. She stressed the peculiarly profound connection between the self and reflected self that video entails, where the body is "centered between the parenthesis of camera and monitor".⁵

Krauss' essay had a profound impact upon the general perception and reception of early video art, and upon our understanding of how video performances work. Her essay since became a key text through which early video works have been interpreted, and in particular, works made by women in which the artist has used her own body.

Michael Rush offered a diametrically opposed interpretation of Acconci's gesture: the artist, in his opinion, and notwithstanding Krauss's claim, is not reflecting himself in the camera/mirror, but addressing us, an invisible audience beyond the camera, and trying to draw us, the audience, into the work.⁶ We might say he is talking to us, initiating a form of communication with an audience, instead of talking to himself. In her book on Bruce Nauman, Vito Acconci, and Joan Jonas, *Sexy Lies in Videotapes* (2003), Anja Osswald likewise argues that the metaphor of video-as-mirror does not work because, differently from a mirror, video does not produce a reversed image, but creates a doppelgänger.⁷ Helen Westgeest has further suggested that the 'other', the double, breaks the narcissistic loop.⁸

The use of a double or a doppelgänger was a very important trope in many early video artworks, and as such offers an alternative means to engage with feminist issues. We can plausibly argue that it sheds far more light on these video works than does the concept of narcissism. An example of an artist's practice which demonstrates this shift in thinking about video art is *Doppelgänger* (1979/81), by British video artist Elaine Shemilt, which challenges a narcissistic reading of the camera as mirror. In this video, sitting in front of a mirror and with her back to the camera, Shemilt first applies make up on her face. Then, she uses it to draw her portrait, a double, on the surface of the mirror itself. This sequence is interrupted by a slide show featuring photographic slides and prints portraying her body art performances to camera. At the end of the video, the doppelgänger on the mirror is left alone, replacing the artist. The soundtrack includes some psychological commentary on cases of schizophrenia. In line with many works of the time, the video literally utilised the metaphor of the mirror–video. Shemilt explored video as a tool for exploring and showing the inner self and identity from a psychological point of view. However, Shemilt's *Doppelgänger* embodies superlatively well how, in Osswald's words, video creates a double. Shemilt's mirror does not simply reflect the image of the artist but also hosts its doppelgänger. The double is a figure that, at the end of the video, stands alone, supplanting the artist. The representation of the artist is thus mediated and filtered by that double, thereby avoiding any objectification of her body and image. This preoccupation—as we shall consider below—is at the very heart of how the practice of many women video artists needs to be discussed.

In 2017, Elaine Shemilt performed a live re-enactment of *Doppelgänger* in front of an audience at the Nunnery Gallery, Bow Arts in London.⁹ The work was thus entitled *Doppelgänger Redux*. A close-up of the artist reproducing the framing of the original video, was shown throughout on a large projection screen during the performance. *Doppelgänger's* final sequence—featuring her prints and 35 mm slides—was simply projected from the original video, thus creating a new filter of time, space, and distance, which once again succeeded in avoiding the objectification of a woman's body. Both the original work and its 2017 re-enactment engage with issues and strategies that resonate with many other women's video artworks of the time, including Di Sopra's *Il Limite*, which I will discuss later. Other examples from the 1970s where this doubling effect operates include *A Phrenological Self-portrait* (1976), by Norwegian artist Marianne Heske (b. 1946), in which the artist draws a phrenological map on her double, presented on a video monitor, or the famous *Make up Make down* (1976) and *Instructions # 1* (1976), by Croatian artist Sanja Iveković (b. 1949), in which the artist uses the make up or drawing on her face to challenge and defy notions of traditional Western beauty and the unattainable standard of perfection promoted by media and culture.

Westgeest argues that the term 'self-portrait' appears in very few titles of these early videos, an absence explicable in terms of the artist's depersonalised role as 'an empty container', exposing the 'rhetorical artificiality of self-images' (including the doubling and splitting that are an integral part of our analysis) and what she defines as the 'paradox of "self-less self-images"' (Westgeest 2015).

We can therefore question whether early video artworks, especially those by feminist artists, engage with notions of representation of the self and self-identity as personal and narcissistic, or whether, conversely, they address these themes in more general ways as a representative of women's perspectives, from what we could call a public and universal point of view. The examination of how the personal is political was central to second-wave feminist artists' practice. This is the link that supports how artists can be seen in relation to other claims to change what were considered as political issues that feminists were battling for and why so many women from different backgrounds and geographical areas were feminist; this was encapsulated in the famous phrase 'the personal is political'.

Regarding Krauss, Jayne Wark commented that she "remained oblivious to how [women video artists] were positioned differently, as women, in relation to subjectivity, and she certainly did not acknowledge the possibility that they might be using narcissistic

self-reflection as a specifically feminist kind of critical strategy” (Wark 2006, pp. 187–89; quoted in Williams 2010).

If Krauss’s paper cast a negative shadow upon the use of a reflective image in video, seeming almost to intimate that women were narcissistic, highly personal, or self-obsessed, there was another critical piece that engaged with representation and the moving image, which was also highly influential at the time for feminist artists and exposed another possible pitfall in the utilising of bodies and women’s image in film and video. In 1975, Laura Mulvey published ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, in which she popularised the very famous expression “the male gaze”, which had been coined by Berger (1972), and explored tropes from mainstream Hollywood cinema of the 1950s (Mulvey 1975; Berger 1972). Adopting an emerging medium that had been rapidly employed by broadcast TV for news and shows, as already mentioned, women video pioneers were conscious of the risk of perpetuating the male gaze through the use of stereotypical images of nudity, not nakedness. Mulvey’s identification of the male gaze in cinema prompted many women to start investigating strategies through which to cultivate a different (female) gaze for the re-appropriation of women’s own naked image as an approach to self-representation. Mulvey herself started to make films at this time. As British artist and theorist Catherine Elwes argued, many women artists aimed to explore ‘new forms of visibility’, in order to resist and combat ‘sexual representation’ (Elwes 2005, pp. 48–49). This feminist approach to the moving image stimulated profound innovations, understood in the broadest possible terms, engaging with many different themes including identity, eroticism, motherhood, and the professional status of women artists.

The risk run by women artists when using their own naked bodies in performance art which was also documented on video was discussed in art more generally by Lucy Lippard, in relation to narcissism (Lippard 1976). Lippard asked: “Why will so few women admit to using their own bodies or biological experience even as unconscious subject matter?”. Lippard nevertheless identified sexuality as an important element in how women’s bodies are portrayed in artworks and its role as an important area for feminists to redefine, because women had been objectified for centuries.

An example of how women artists utilised video to avoid objectification is provided by Pipilotti Rist, a pioneer of video art who, over several decades, explored new forms of representation of identity and the body in her productions. In the 1980s and the 1990s, she explicitly engaged with how the female body and women specifically could be empowered in contrast to their negative or stereotypical representations in society, the media and popular culture. The title of Rist’s *I’m Not the Girl Who Misses Much* (1986), for example, is inspired by a line, ‘she’s not the girl who misses much’, from the Beatles’ song *Happiness Is a Warm Gun* (1968), which John Lennon dedicated to his partner, the conceptual artist Yoko Ono.¹⁰ Rist claims this line as her own, switching the objective “she” to “I am”. Analysing the title, the modification of the original lyrics from the ‘she’ into ‘I’ shifts the story away from being told by someone else about a girl, to that of the woman artist who is the protagonist and author reclaiming her agency and power over the way she is represented and framed.

In the video, Pipilotti repeats this refrain, dancing wildly in front of the camera, with her breasts exposed. In post-production, the image and sound are distorted to avoid the objectification of the body; by altering the colour balance and the speed to a crescendo, the lyrics and the image of the performer become unrecognisable, and the fetishization of the body is avoided by this use of video techniques. Rist’s approach follows that of several other women pioneers in video art, including for example, Nan Hoover, who in works such as *Landscape* (1983) used close-ups of body parts to produce a de-objectification/de-sexualisation effect. Rist developed this strategy in later works such as *Pickelporno* (‘Pimple Porno’) (1992).

A question often asked about Pipilotti Rist is whether, as the subject of her work, she is investigating and representing just her own identity (a personal story), or if she is, in a way, commenting on young women of her generation (a political one)¹¹ I believe the key

point which distinguishes her videos as political is how she manipulates image and sound in the medium of video to render the artist almost unrecognisable, an anonymous female figure, that could as well embody and symbolise more generally women and a sentiment of the rejection of stereotypes (that of being referred to as a “girl”). This manipulation of the visual image challenges dominant aesthetic standards regarding beauty in Western societies, as well as codified and sanitised behaviours.

2. Of Another Gaze: Renegotiating Visibility through a Feminist Perspective

The investigation of a different gaze, as either a female or more specifically a feminist gaze, is, I believe, still relevant to the interpretation of contemporary artworks, and, in particular, video and film artworks, by women artists who are investigating identity and representation.

For example, *Dust Grains* (2014), by the Italian artist Elisabetta Di Sopra (b. 1969), directly engages the gaze through the use of a close-up of the artist’s eye, focusing only on the pupil, where, in this dark space, the artist superimposed a sequence from old family film footage, shot in Super 8, of her childhood with her family in the countryside. In this way, Di Sopra shifts the paradigm of looking from that of a woman being seen to her as the person seeing. We could say that she aims to redirect our gaze, so that instead of perusing her body or her face, the artist has redirected the viewer’s eye onto what she herself saw. If the eye is the mirror of the soul, once again, the video becomes that of a reflective mirror, both as a gateway to the inner self and a gateway to a memory of the past. Utilising her own face, the wrinkles around her eyes bear witness to the passage of time, but the artist is not shying away from representing ageing bodies, which are usually marginalised in popular culture as well as art.

Women ageing is also at the centre of *Il Limite* (The Limit, 2019), one of Di Sopra’s most recent video installations, presented at the Venice National Archaeological Museum on San Marco Square in 2021. In this piece, Di Sopra investigates, in video, the traditional (male) artist’s practice of figure drawing from a live and naked model—usually a woman. The gendered and hierarchical power relations of the male artist (maker) and female model (object/muse) has been the subject of extensive feminist critiques in art history and art practice. In Di Sopra’s three-channel installation, the figure of an elderly naked woman is captured on video in broken close-ups and long, slow camera shots. In the video in the central monitor, the model is captured in full figure, seen from the back. The woman is a (now) retired professional model and she is posing in front of an invisible audience of students at the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice. Di Sopra’s focus on the model intercepts the silent interaction with the students for the purpose of drawing. This audience is situated beyond the camera, breaking the supposed narcissistic loop that, in Krauss’s judgement, was inherent in video and recalling what Michael Rush outlined as a strategy to break that loop.

On either side, on two separate monitors, there are close-ups with details of the model’s body: on one screen, we can see her legs held quite still as she enacts a typical flexed and bent pose in modelling, and on the other, the inscrutable expression of her face, which is only very partially visible, while she extends her arms in particular poses and gestures. These details testify how the model’s body is tested to its limits, maintaining poses that are entrenched in tradition and require endurance (hence the title). Di Sopra cleverly adopts similar devices to renegotiate the representation of women’s naked bodies, redeploying a number of strategies that have featured strongly in early video art. The model’s body is given over to the scrutiny of the camera gaze in an explicit and revealing way. The model’s naked skin does not hide the passage of time: it is there to peruse, and yet, by virtue of her avowedly sculptural pose, any objectification is denied. Glimpses of plaster casts of ancient Greek male sculptures—unattainable models of beauty and perfection—can be seen in the background of this life room, presented as the ideal form of life model, but representing in themselves a clash with the norms of today’s objectified and highly standardised images of mainstream Western culture, which are not visible in the frame. This effect was enhanced

by its installation in the rooms of the Archaeological National Museum in Venice, where this artwork was displayed surrounded by casts of Greek male sculptures, in which this older woman's body could reclaim her space and equal dignity.

In her work, *The Drawers* (2013), another Venetian artist, Mariateresa Sartori, flips the perspective of the seeing/being seen paradigm, deriving inspiration again from the traditional artist/model relationship. The video shows a group of students looking to the camera, where—we imagine—the artist is placed with her camera modelling for her students who draw on their sketchpads. Their gaze is directed towards an invisible object of investigation which eludes our gaze and, therefore, the objectification of the body. Instead, we face the students' gaze, their eyes looking at the camera and, therefore, at us. Our position becomes, at the same time, that of the viewer and the object of the gaze: an intrusive gaze that is laid upon us. Once again, Michael Rush's remark would seem to be relevant: the dialogue instigated with the audience is the key and disrupts whatever narcissistic system might materialise or be suggested.

Sartori writes about the student's gaze in this work that "I was very impressed by the particular way they looked at me: suddenly I stopped being perceived as a person with her own character, her psychology, etc. I became just a physical space in the space, just a physical phenomenon."¹² With these words, she describes the process of objectification to which female bodies are commonly subjected. A process of being-looked-at that, recalling Lippard's words (Lippard 1976), is the plight of women, and yet one that women artists, through their work and the use of their own bodies, are now resisting. These artists thus prompt audiences to reconsider how the viewer might become aware of the ways in which women's bodies become objects, feelings, and sensations to others.

In her diptych, *The Care* (2018), Di Sopra explores two key Christian iconographies from the Renaissance and the Baroque period: the Pietà, with a young woman bathing an elderly lady, and the Madonna and Child, with a mother bathing her child. In both cases, the traditional stereotypical iconographies of the perfect, caring female figure are disrupted by the way the bodies are depicted—the expressions and relaxed "natural" behaviours—and by how the camera close-up focuses on the action/labour. The subversion of traditional iconographies and tropes from earlier centuries of art is another element that was already evident within early video art in the 1970s and 1980s. The identification of the woman with the Madonna had been a target of many women artists, for example, in *Don't Believe I'm an Amazon* (1975), Ulrike Rosenbach (b. 1943), who used the layering of the video to juxtapose the face of the artist as just a woman to that of the Virgin Mary, idealised and transfigured through the divine.

In *Untitled* (2007), Di Sopra had already engaged with traditional ways of representing the body of a mother with her child such as the Madonna lactans, or 'Nursing Madonna', where the mechanics and emotional relationship of the act do not relate to women's actual experience of breast-feeding but to how they are observed by others. Di Sopra explores with the camera the breast that starts expressing milk, responding automatically to the cry of the baby, representing a bond that is at once physical and emotional. Once again, the unsanitised way in which the breast is represented with the dark nipples and the milk flowing aims to challenge the dominant sexualised representation of women's breasts in art history, the media, and pornography.

The close-up and a similarly unsanitised approach were also utilised by British feminist artist and author Catherine Elwes (b. 1952) in her *There is a Myth* (1984), that likewise shows a breast expressing when stimulated to lactation by the tiny hand of a baby. This shows once again how early feminist video art laid down some elements that are still influential today, although there remain major differences between these works due to the shifting conventions in how the medium itself is used in art practice today.

Another Italian video and media artist who significantly engaged with issues of representation and the body from a feminist perspective is Francesca Fini (b. 1970). Looking at her productions over the past ten years, a work that particularly engaged with the notions of gaze and visibility in video is the live media performance *Cry me* (2009), in which the

artist stated that “as a woman, I reveal myself through video art, playing with a tv display that is like a uterus where my secret avatar lives and sings”¹³.

In the performance, the artist holds in her hands a monitor that displays an animation made from a video performance. She moves the monitor from her head, descending down her breast and chest, unveiling both parts of her body as well as even the interior of it. In the first part, we see the monitor with the head of the artist reworked in animation while she lip-syncs to the song *Cry Me a River*, performed by Julie London. The song is about the end of a relationship in which the female protagonist reclaims her power when she tells her lover it is his turn to cry over her.

In her video, as Fini moves the monitor down her body and reaches her chest, the animation shows her breast undressed and squeezed by the hand of the artist, and the nipple dripping a coloured liquid, that seems to match the song’s “crying”, but also refers to the bodily function of breastfeeding. The video animation then reveals her heart beating within her chest that is shown through a hole ringed by teeth. The song continues and the voice of Julie London laments what is clearly her wounded heart. Fini then moves the monitor to her belly, which is opened up by her own hands, and uncovers her uterus with a foetus inside. The image shows the glowing being not moving, but simply nested in the cavity of the body. Then, the monitor is left still, with this image of the inside of her belly on the floor, and Fini leaves the stage. The representation of Fini’s body is filtered by the animation which uncovers what is underneath, while the materiality of the monitor, at the same time, covers the real body of the artist. Through these two tools, Fini guides the gaze of the viewer and manipulates her own body to convey what she feels is an empowered and therefore feminist representation of it. In both these videos, Fini utilises the medium as a tool for introspection to reveal an emotional and psychological trait that is underneath or beyond visual appearance.

This approach of manipulating the body can also be found in several other contemporary women artists, including, for example, Scottish multimedia artist Rachel Maclean (b. 1987), who in works such as *Feed Me* (2015) pursues an “ugliness” in her characters that disrupts the standard canon of beauty through the alteration of her image and body.¹⁴

Another artwork by Fini that raises similar issues and engages specifically with a number of elements that were outlined in early video art is *Wombs* (2012).¹⁵

The artist describes the work as follows: “How do you see yourself in the mirror? We do not ever see how others see us; we do not see how we really are. This video is a dream about femininity. A woman meets her Golem, a piece of clay without features, to be fashioned at will.” The video begins with the bust of a female dummy, on which thick coloured paint is dripped, until the face is completely covered, and then, the video is rewound and played back to be made clean again as the action is reversed. The figure of a human Golem is introduced, but unlike the female dummy, which clearly connotes femininity in her make-up and female facial features, the Golem is completely white, has no face or sexual organs, and only its breasts characterise it as a female. The dummy is then joined by a female performer dressed in a nightgown who tells her “I am everything”, to which the Golem replies “I am nothing”. Additionally, then the performer takes one of her eyes from her face and puts it on the Golem’s face, and afterwards, the lips and other parts, so as to complete the face. Then, the Golem says, “I’m everything”, with the face of the performer now being an empty hole. The initial dummy bust is set on fire and left burning, and this fire renders the dummy as a double. The video continues with a sort of silent performance, in which the woman is now whole again, and she and the Golem seem to reach out their hands to one another. Then, the internal organs of the Golem are shown, and the performer takes a piece of her and rubs her face with it. The Golem’s body is now empty except for a flying element that the performer grabs and ingests and says again “I’m everything”. Then, the performer’s hand rubs the paint on the dummy bust that, earlier, we saw in flames. The Golem repeats “I am nothing”, as a miniaturised version of the performer crawls into her chest cavity and rests there. The video ends with alternating images of the dummy bust burning and the woman sleeping.

Once again, this piece evokes several elements that emerged in early feminist video art, including the doppelgänger and the manipulation of the body; in this case, the artist sees the double as a new and innocent being that can be changed or manipulated. Through digital manipulation, the artist achieves effects of the uncanny in the viewer. The sensuality of the woman performer contrasts deeply with the tabula rasa that is the Golem, and this emphasises the dynamic of power between them: and in that gesture of manipulation, the artist as woman reclaims her own empowerment.

In conclusion, from this brief examination of some Italian contemporary case studies, feminist issues that prominently emerged in second-wave feminism about the personal as political and were in parallel explored in early woman's video art can be identified. These elements in contemporary feminist video artworks capitalise on the practical specificities of the medium and challenge the theoretical implications of women's objectification, as well as myths about women. Even though it could be argued that the circulation of early video artists was quite limited and that their work has had highly specialised audiences, nevertheless, whether or not later artists were aware of individual works, some of the elements might have been prompted or influenced by the nature of the medium itself. The impetus for many women artists in Italy to engage with and challenge stereotypical representation in media and culture might be due to the particularly sexualised image that women are relegated to by Italian media; nonetheless, this is a problem that is still very relevant worldwide.

Video remains a medium that—in its technical capacity to produce changing displays, feedback loops, and immediacy—is particularly well-suited to fighting against the dominance of the male gaze still evident in the representation of women in mainstream moving images, photography, and broadcast TV, allowing a wide degree of experimentation and freedom for feminist artists to use when seeking alternative forms of representation.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: Data is available at <http://www.ewva.ac.uk/artists.html> (accessed on 19 February 2023).

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ This research develops from previous research into portraiture and expands from reflections developed there Leuzzi (2019). I would like to thank all the artists and authors who have supported me and helped me in this research including Katy Deepwell, Cinzia Cremona, Elisabetta Di Sopra, Giulia Casalini, Francesca Fini, Mariateresa Sartori, and Diana Georgiou.

² The author of this essay has conducted several interviews and conversations with women video pioneers, including for example Elaine Shemilt and Catherine Elwes for the AHRC funded project EWVA (DJCAD, University of Dundee, 2015–2018) which are available online at <http://www.ewva.ac.uk/artists.html> (accessed on 19 February 2023).

³ (Krauss 1976, pp. 50–64). On Krauss's theory see also Cremona (2014, p. 48). Regarding the familiarity of Krauss's theories see note 3. For early feminist responses to Krauss's essay see: (Collopy 2022, pp. 113–14).

⁴ Ibid p. 57.

⁵ Ibid p. 61.

⁶ "Acconci, in fact, was expressly interested in drawing the viewer into the art process (bringing art out of the narcissistic, hermetic studio)." See Rush ([2003] 2007, p. 11).

⁷ Osswald (2003), referenced in Westgeest (2015, p. 55).

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ The re-enactment was curated by me with Adam Lockhart and was part of the *Visions in the Nunnery* festival, Bow Arts, London.

¹⁰ Cremona (2019, pp. 41–54). See also: Pipilotti Rist, *EyeBall Massage*, Hayward Gallery. [online] Youtube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmJBdLUN2eQ> [accessed on 26 August 2021]; Pipilotti Rist: *Open My Glade*. Louisiana Museum of Modern Art.

¹¹ Amelia Jones' essay on Rist in Munder (2008); Ross (2001).

¹² <https://www.mariateresasartori.it/en/i-disegnatori/> (accessed on 28 November 2022).

¹³ <https://www.francescafini.com/cryme> (accessed on 28 November 2022).

- ¹⁴ The artist herself used the term “ugliness” in a talk entitled *The Queen, the Lion and the Unicorn* at The Hunterian, Glasgow, in conversation with Dr Dominic Paterson on 12 November 2022.
- ¹⁵ <https://www.francescafini.com/wombs> (accessed on 28 November 2022).

References

- Berger, John. 1972. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books.
- Collopy, Peter Sachs. 2022. Video and the Self: Closed Circuit | Feedback | Narcissism. In *Video Theories. A Transdisciplinary Reader*. Edited by Dieter Daniels and Jan Thoben. London: Bloomsbury.
- Cremona, Cinzia. 2014. *Intimations: Videoperformance and Relationality*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Westminster, London, UK.
- Cremona, Cinzia. 2019. *Desire for More*. In *EWVA European Women's Video Art*. Edited by Laura Leuzzi, Elaine Shemilt and Stephen Partridge. New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing.
- Elwes, Catherine. 2005. *Video Art: A Guided Tour*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Krauss, Rosalind. 1976. Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism. *October* 1: 50–64. [CrossRef]
- Leuzzi, Laura. 2019. Self/portraits: The Mirror, the Self and the Other. Identity and Representation in Early Women's Video Art in Europe. In *EWVA European Women's Video Art in the 70s and 80s*. Edited by Laura Leuzzi, Elaine Shemilt and Stephen Partridge. New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing.
- Lippard, Lucy. 1976. Six. In *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art*. New York: Dutton.
- Mulvey, Laura. 1975. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen* 16: 6–18. [CrossRef]
- Munder, Heike. 2008. *It's Time for Action (There's No Option)—About Feminism*. Dijon: Les Presse du reel.
- Osswald, Anja. 2003. *Sexy Lies in Videotapes: Künstlerische Selbstinszenierung im Video um 1970 bei Bruce Nauman, Vito Acconci, Joan Jonas*. In *Berliner Schriften zur Kunst*. Berlin: Mann.
- Ross, Christine. 2001. Pipilotti Rist: Images as quasi-Objects. *n.paradoxa: International Feminist Art Journal* 7: 18–25.
- Rush, Michael. 2007. *Video Art*, revised ed. London: Thames and Hudson. First published 2003.
- San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. 2011. Why Pipilotti Rist Works with Video. YouTube. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=br1C5ONet_c (accessed on 26 August 2021).
- Wark, Jayne. 2006. *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP.
- Westgeest, Helen. 2015. *Video Art Theory: A Comparative Approach*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.
- Williams, Robin Kathleen. 2010. Against the “Subject” of Video, Circa 1976: Joan Jonas's Good Night Good Morning and an Archive of “Narcissism”. Master's thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin. Available online: <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/ETD-UT-2010-08-1810/WILLIAMS-THESIS.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (accessed on 19 February 2023).

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.