

## Research Article

### A Study of Floral Images in Chinese-Western Feminist Art Creation

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#### Abstract

Both in the West and the East, for a long time, the plant “flower” has always been favored by various artists and poets as a metaphor for women, but mostly in a male-dominated society, the relationship between women and flowers was interpreted with a male vision, until the late 1960s, when the rise of feminist art and the awakening of feminist artists brought more attention to the fact that women's perceptions, emotions, and representations of the world were vastly different from those of men. Feminist artists have a strong sense of self, and their individuality often leaves a deep mark on their works. This mark is given a special conceptual language through the imitation of nature and is projected in the formal expression of their works, which becomes the unique style of each artist. Through these floral images, we can discover the artist's style and thus the personality, as well as certain social phenomena, psychological perceptions, and value orientations that characterize the times under the personality level. This article will compare and analyze the different artistic expressions of flowers by feminist artists in the two places, as well as the artworks of the author's perception of flowers.

**Keywords:** China, West, Artistic Expression, Feminist Art, Comparative Study

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## Introduction

In the 1960s, feminist art in the West began to appear, and feminist artists brought their works to show the world women's desire for "equality." Feminism only began to develop in China in the 1980s, and many feminist artists' works were influenced by the West. Western feminist art is the result of the feminist movement and women's demands for political rights, so the content and form of artworks are more resistant. Despite the fact that Western culture and social background have influenced Chinese feminist art, the works' content and form focus more on women's life perceptions and seek to express women's consciousness in a distinctive way, making them unique. (Perez, 2019)

In early Western feminist art, it can be seen that flowers are no longer a style in the conventional sense, and flowers are endowed with unique characteristics of women, which are divorced from traditional male-dominated aesthetics. Many female artists use flowers to simulate female organs and physical features. Flowers are no longer plants, but symbolic symbols. In contrast to Western feminism, the content and mode of expression in China are more ambiguous and focus more on one's own life experience, which lessens the intensity that directness brings. This article will introduce and compare four representative feminist artists in China and the West, namely Georgia O'Keeffe, Judy Chicago, Cai Jin, and Chen Lingyang. (Rothschild, 1999)

## Objective

1. To compare the differences in the creative background, creative content, expression techniques, and connotation of flower images in Chinese and Western feminist art.
2. The obtained conclusions can be used to enrich the creative methods and inspirations of later feminist artists, as well as to dig deeper and reflect on social phenomena to awaken women's awakening.
3. By analyzing and comparing different art forms under different cultures, the development of art will be more diversified, and the fusion of cultures will produce more innovative art forms.

## Method

### 1. Data collection

Collect interview records of representative feminist artists in the West and China, as well as the representative works of these artists, and experience the connotation of the works.

### 2. Literature research

Collect the analysis of the development background and artistic characteristics of feminist art by Chinese and foreign scholars, as well as the analysis and research of representative feminist artists and their works.

### 3. Comparative study

Analyze and compare the collected data and the differences in the creative backgrounds of Chinese and foreign feminist artists, as well as in the expressive connotation and presentation techniques of the works.

### 4. Work Creation

To create works with contemporary visual language through the collection and understanding of the characteristics of the works of Chinese and foreign feminist artists obtained from the above research and combined with their own experience and characteristics.

## Results/Findings

### 1. Feminist art in the West

Western feminist art came with the second women's movement, so many artists' works are full of resistance, and they use flowers as a medium for the female body to create or express their explicit social and political intentions. Different from the female body under male vision, female artists try to use flowers to abstract the female experience represented by sex and fertility. The artistic language projected in the works comes not only from the natural attributes but also from the cultural composition, paying more attention to women's social identities to shake the male-dominated art field. (Art and Design, 2019)

### *Georgia O'Keeffe's Floral Works (Creators of Art, 2022)*

O'Keeffe is known as "the Picasso of America" and "the greatest female artist in America," and her floral works are her most representative works of art. Her paintings are usually based on flowers that are

enlarged to partial close-ups (Chen, 2005). She uses simple colors and delicate lines into outline abstract flower cores (Zhao, 2018). The reproductive organs of flowers are used to insinuate female sexual organs. The figure not only challenges the audience's visual experience but also symbolizes and exposes the mysteries of women's lives and liberates the long-held bondage of women. (Creators of Art, 2022)



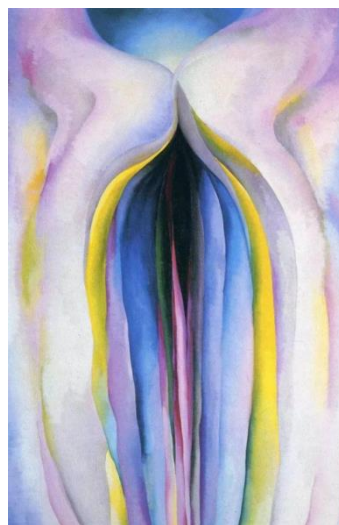
**Figure 1** Georgia O'Keeffe

source: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1733777526164636088&wfr=spider&for=pc>



**Figure 2** Georgia O'Keeffe, Jimson Weed/White Flower No. 1, 1932

source: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1733777526164636088&wfr=spider&for=pc>



**Figure 3** Georgia O'Keeffe, Gray line with black, blue, and yellow

source: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1733777526164636088&wfr=spider&for=pc>

### *Judy Chicago's Floral Works*

Judy Chicago (Baiké, 2021) is an important participant in the American feminist movement and has an important influence on feminist art. Especially “The Dinner Party,” which is one of her flower-themed works, is extremely controversial. In this work, the flowers are also magnified into close-ups, all in full bloom, creating a sense of space with distinct layers inside the flowers. (Zhao, 2018) Walking along “The Dinner Party,” the flowers on the plate are programmed from two-dimensional graphics to three-dimensional sculptures, representing the rise and development of female power, which is seductive and aggressive and, at the same time, the embodiment of female power and sensitivity. Through these flowers, Judy Chicago expresses her feelings as a woman and her struggle against patriarchy. (Yexin, 2016)



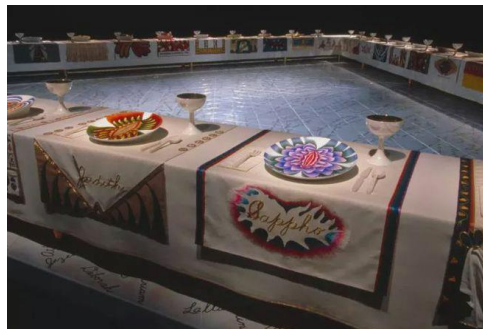
**Figure 4** Judy Chicago

source: [https://baike.baidu.com/item/朱迪·芝加哥/8193710?fr=kg\\_general](https://baike.baidu.com/item/朱迪·芝加哥/8193710?fr=kg_general)



**Figure 5** Judy Chicago “Dinner Party 1”

source: <https://www.163.com/dy/article/ETN0LJ7U05148Q26.html#>



**Figure 6** Judy Chicago “Dinner Party 2”

source: <https://www.163.com/dy/article/ETN0LJ7U05148Q26.html#>

## 2. Feminist Art in China

Chinese feminist art has followed in the footsteps of the West, and in the 1990s, it was already the most active era for feminist artists. Compared with the West, Chinese feminist art had a different cultural background and expression. Chinese feminist artists are inspired not only by their own life experiences but also by the pursuit of 'gender equality'. Chinese feminist art is relatively introverted and repressed, and the connotations of their works are more sorrowful and helpless, accusatory, so many artists use the medium of 'flowers' to subtly transform the meaning of their works, making the culture richer in degree and less fiercely combative. (Yexin, 2016)

### *Cai Jin's floral works(Favorite the World, 2019)*

Cai Jin has been an influential feminist artist since the 1990s. Her “Cannas” series is very distinctive, and she has painted more than 300 paintings so far. Her painting “Canna” is colorful and rich in color. From the early pictures, the red is a sticky and bright infection, and now the red is darkened, with a texture of dried blood, and most of them are gray and black. Look at her. His paintings are like watching a woman's life, from the initial youthful vitality to the decline of vitality. This is also Cai Jin's expression of the gradual changes in her life experience. She uses the plant canna as a medium to express her inner life experience and feelings. (Goya Art, 2022)



**Figure 7** Cai Jin

source: <https://www.163.com/dy/article/HGH6LPOQ055299KW.html>



**Figure 8** Cai Jin's “Beauty Banana 232” series works

source: <https://toutiao.sctx.com/toutiao/details-13292.html>



**Figure 9** Cai Jin's "Beauty Banana 15" series works  
source: <https://toutiao.sctx.com/toutiao/details-13292.html>

*Chen Lingyang's floral works*

Chen Lingyang was a pioneering feminist artist in the late 1990s (Lin, 2013), and her Twelve-Month Flowers unapologetically uses the most secretive parts of the female body in combination with flowers. She combines the monthly physiological periods that women must experience with flowers in different flowering periods of the twelve months, presenting women's physiological experiences in a beautiful and shocking way, exposing the most real but avoided aspects of women's lives, and thus accusing the inequality of gender identity. The visual impact of the images is so extreme that people reject the notion that female genitalia represents sexuality and give women a great deal of respect, both physically and psychologically (Baiké, 2021).



**Figure 10** Chen Linyang  
source: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%99%88%E7%BE%9A%E7%BE%8A/310852?fr=aladdin>



**Figure 11** Chen Linyang “Twelve-month Flowers-July Orchids  
source: [https://www.douban.com/note/304741277/?\\_i=9621452znesaen](https://www.douban.com/note/304741277/?_i=9621452znesaen)



**Figure 12** Chen Linyang “Twelve-month Flowers-March Peach Blossom  
source: [https://www.douban.com/note/304741277/?\\_i=9621452znesaen](https://www.douban.com/note/304741277/?_i=9621452znesaen)

### 3. Comparison of flowers in Chinese and Western feminist art

The photographic material and interviews with the artists in this study were collated and categorized to analyze and compare the representation of flowers in the works of Chinese and Western feminist artists, (Zhang, 2014) including 1) creation background, 2) creation content, 3) expression techniques, and 4) work connotation.



**Table 1** Comparison of Chinese and Western Feminist Art Creation Background

Projects	Georgian O'Keeffe	Judy Chicago	Cai Jin	Chen Lingyang
Creation Period	1920s-1960s	1974-1979	1991-present	1999-2000
Creation Background	1. Discover the unique artistic aesthetic of women 2. Teacher's artistic influence 3. Close-up crop of modernist photography	Challenging male society and the male-dominated art field	1. The love of sketching and the obsession with detailed color depiction when I was young 2. Reflections on women's lives	1. A challenge to traditional Chinese ideas 2. Rebellion against male vision
Creation Inspiration	Let more people notice the huge flowers	A true understanding of women themselves	The canna I saw in my hometown when I was a teenager	Face the natural phenomenon of female physiology and the connection of monthly flowers

**Table 2** Comparison of Chinese and Western Feminist Art Creation Content

Projects	Georgian O'Keeffe	Judy Chicago	Cai Jin	Chen Lingyang
Flower Type	Lily, Datura, Morning Glory, Poppy	Abstract Flowers	Canna	Narcissus, Magnolia, Peach Blossom, Peony, Pomegranate, Lotus, Orchid, Osmanthus, Chrysanthemum, Poinsettia, Camellia, Winter Plum



**Table 3** Comparison of Chinese and Western Feminist Art Expression Techniques

Projects	Georgian O'Keeffe	Judy Chicago	Cai Jin	Chen Lingyang
Type of Work	Oil Painting	Installation Art	Oil Painting, Installation Art	Photography
Color of Work	Simple Color	Colorful and Complex	Mainly Red, Rich and Gorgeous - the Picture is Gray and Dark	Depressed, Dark
Technique of Work	Smooth and Soft Lines	Painting, Weaving, Embroidery, Sculpture	Multi-material Drawing, Color Stacking Effect	Multi-angle Photography

**Table 4** Comparison of Chinese and Western Feminist Art Work Connotation

Projects	Georgian O'Keeffe	Judy Chicago	Cai Jin	Chen Lingyang
Work Connotation	There are things in women that women can only discover	Challenging patriarchal female reproduction to be as powerful and symbolic as male reproduction	Use the canna as a metaphor for your own life perception	Face up to the fact that women are biologically unequal to men

Comparative research shows that the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western (Sun, 2007) feminist art flower themes include:

1. Creation Background - The idea of resistance to the male-dominated society and art field appeared earlier in the West, and women also highlighted the artistic characteristics of female artists earlier, while China was influenced by Western feminist art and began to let women reflect and break free from the shackles of traditional patriarchal society.

2. Content of creation - Chinese and Western feminist artists all choose flowers to create their works. Although they choose different varieties of flowers, they all use flowers as a metaphor for the physiological characteristics of women.

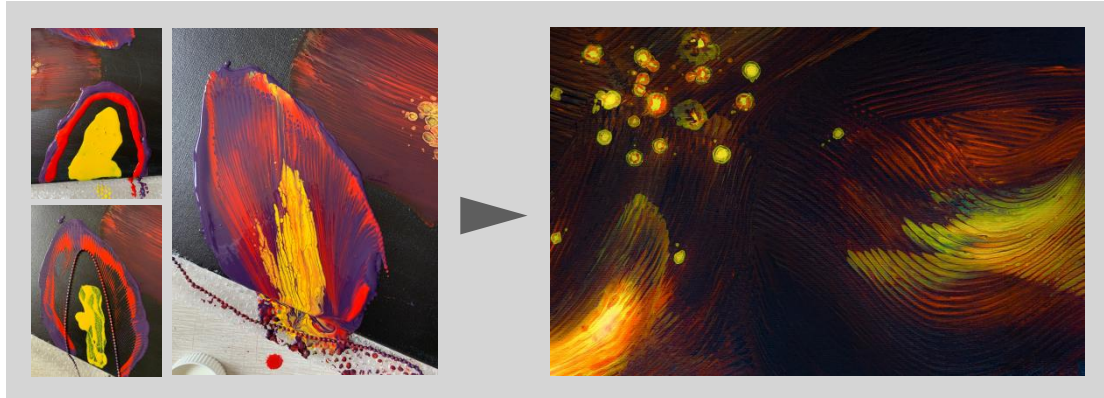
3. Creation techniques - It can be seen that the creative techniques of Chinese and Western feminist artists are not limited to flat painting but are involved in various fields of art techniques.

4. Creative Connotation - The creative connotation of Chinese and Western feminist artists is basically resistance to the male-dominated society and art field, but the Western expression is more resistant, and the Chinese artist's expression is more obscure and oppressive.

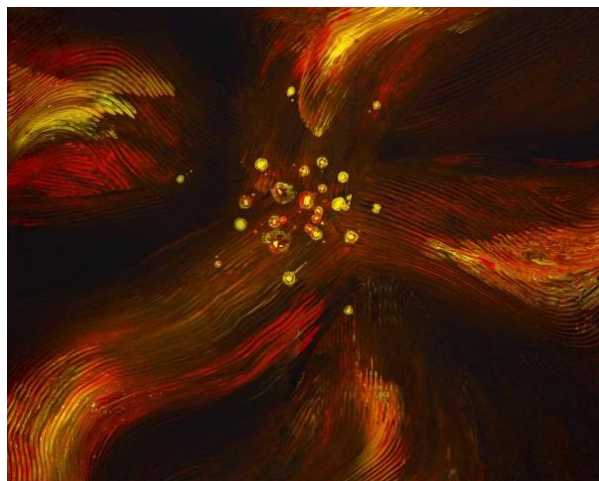
#### *Creative Process*

The creation that integrates and innovates the features and connotations of the works of Chinese and Western representative feminist artists is not only a microcosm of the fusion of Chinese and Western female

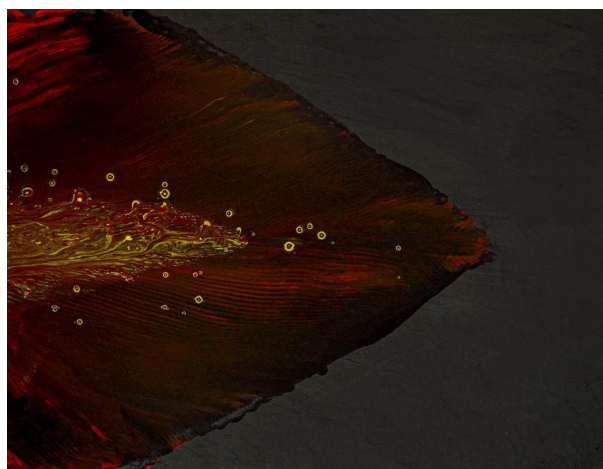
cultures but also a new expression of flowers in feminist art. This fusion of innovation is produced by the influence of Chinese and Western feminist art. The final artwork is also a painting with the theme of flowers, plus modern painting techniques and tools and the author's own understanding and perception of feminism.



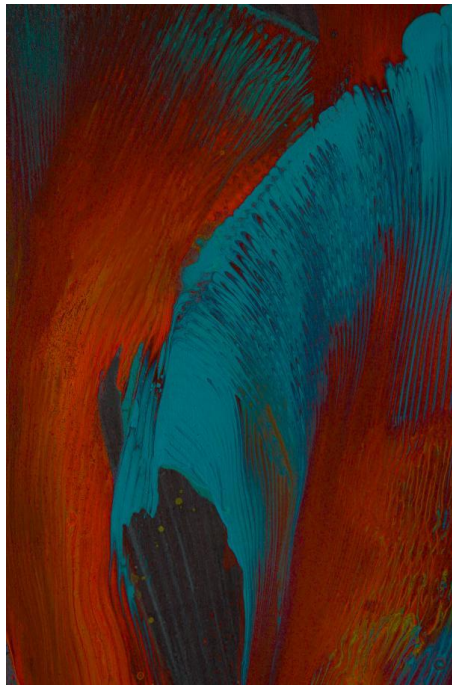
**Figure 13** Chen Linyang “Twelve-month Flowers-July Orchids  
source: [https://www.douban.com/note/304741277/?\\_i=9621452znesaen](https://www.douban.com/note/304741277/?_i=9621452znesaen)



**Figure 14** Chen Linyang “Twelve-month Flowers-July Orchids  
source: [https://www.douban.com/note/304741277/?\\_i=9621452znesaen](https://www.douban.com/note/304741277/?_i=9621452znesaen)



**Figure 15** Iris Tectorum Maxim, Acrylic on canvas  
source: Yexin, 2021



**Figure 16** Lotus, Acrylic on canvas  
source: Yexin, 2021

## Discussion

In the final artwork, firstly, the author was inspired by the painting features of Georgia O'Keeffe's huge flowers and also showed the details of the flowers by partially enlarging the flowers. The author integrated four artists to use an abstract expression method to describe, and the bright and vivid color expression method mainly references the creative characteristics of Judy Chicago and Cai Jin. The connotation expressed in the work is formed by integrating the feminist ideas of the four artists and the author himself. The final artwork expresses freedom and liberation, symbolizing women's desire to break free from traditional shackles, hoping that life can be as splendid as a flower and grow freely. The understanding of flowers in Chinese and Western feminist art is similar, and it is also a manifestation of cultural exchange. They use flowers to rebel against the male-dominated field and, at the same time, use flowers to promote the characteristics of women themselves. Therefore, the painting works are based on the theme of flowers, and the creation is based on the use of modern, more common acrylic paints, with steel ball chains as painting tools, blending the paints by dragging, and creating a unique flower texture effect. The works are open for display, we hope to use them to realize cross-cultural exchanges between China and the West.

## Suggestion

Although there are many differences between China and the West in terms of cultural background, artistic creation, and artistic expression, many feminist artworks have distinct artist characteristics, expressing the artist's own understanding of feminist art and himself with little in-depth understanding. Academic research, which is one of the necessary ways to promote the development of art, and the comparative study of cross-cultural communication can provide more references and possibilities for cultural integration in the art world and can also provide more opportunities for feminist art. research value.

### 1. Value to women

The research on women's self-liberation and the awakening of women's consciousness can become a medium for women's self-thinking to a certain extent, provide richer channels for women's thoughts, strengthen women's self-confidence, promote the display of women's power, and help women get rid of thinking difficulties.

## 2. Value to the art world

The male-dominated art world has always lacked attention and research on female artists and feminist art. This article can enrich the research materials of the art world, enrich the art types and sources of inspiration in the art world, and improve the content of the art research field. It can promote the depth and rigor of academic research.

## 3. Value to scholars

It is helpful to expand research materials, provide scholars with richer research content, and at the same time provide scholars with more references so that subsequent scholars' research has more substantial arguments and, at the same time, can improve some research methods.

## 4. Value to Education

This research can provide education professionals with multi-angle and multi-dimensional content in the teaching process, especially the richness of teaching content, teaching strategy planning, teaching improvement, etc., enrich the educational connotation, and provide a new perspective for art theory education.

## Conclusion

Although there are many differences between the emergence and development of feminist art in China and the West, they all have one thing in common, which is to speak up for women. In the social and artistic fields dominated by men for a long time, coupled with traditional ideas, women's power has been ignored, and there are huge differences between men and women in terms of physiology and psychology, which also determines the independent value of women's art. These feminist artists use their female identities to create works of art from the perspective of women, expressing women's unique visual experiences and life experiences so as to highlight the importance of women. The creation of a fusion of Chinese and Western feminist art is a microcosm of cultural exchange and a result of research. The final artwork, with flowers as its theme, is a work of art that combines modern painting concepts and painting techniques to form a new feminist artwork.

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