



Women's Perils:

"FIXED IT" by HOT 4 THE MOMENT and "NOT A GIRL, NOT YET A WOMAN" by Molly JF Caldwell

By Sophie Daschuk

Despite the great feats women have made over the past few years, the patriarchal system of oppression continues to dominate the professional and personal spheres of Western society. Before we can even imagine a world without misogyny, we must recognize how deeply the system is embedded into our everyday lives. Currently on display at the Neutral Ground Artist Run Centre for Women's History Month, the exhibitions FIXED IT by HOT 4 THE MOMENT and NOT A GIRL, NOT YET A WOMAN by Molly JF Caldwell shed light on the normalized gender biases that exist in our society in a colourful, humorous and impactful way. HOT 4 THE MOMENT's window gallery display highlights the unequal and unfair gender divide in professional spaces.

Molly JF Caldwell's main gallery show takes us back in time to 2004, the prime of Y2K, into the bedroom of a young person being influenced by countless misogynistic ads and standards. Both FIXED IT and NOT A GIRL, NOT YET A WOMAN use textiles—a traditionally feminine craft—to create a safe space where we can examine our own double standards and patriarchal beliefs.

Drew Pardy and Georgia Dawkin, the two members of HOT 4 THE MOMENT, use bright colours, noticeable font and 'silly' phrases to engage viewers with their installation. It is a collection of screen-printed signs and soft sculptures that mimic the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) signage that Canadian employers are required to have when placing workers in dangerous environments. Rather than informing us of physical dangers, the FIXED IT signage warns, in a humorous way, that if you are a woman, your work will most likely go unnoticed. For example, one sign states "Nobody wants to werk anymore" – this references Kim Kardashian's perceived disconnect with the work, responsibilities and tasks that ordinary women do daily.

In the main Gallery of Neutral Ground, Molly JF Caldwell invites the audience to view the past from a nostalgic millennial standpoint. Due to the amount of technological and societal advancements that have occurred since 2003, the Y2K past seems further away than it really is.

In addition to this, the millennial girlhood experience seems to be fondly remembered by those who lived it—as kids, they did not have to think about the perils of adulthood or womanhood. This leads to a strong sense of nostalgia that is undoubtedly present throughout the entire exhibition. The space is reminiscent of a young girl's bedroom from 2004: a blow-up bean bag, lime green and purple plinths, and countless other artistic references to Y2K. For instance, an impressive textile piece consisting of hand-dyed wool and silk blend woven on a Toika compu-dobby loom depicts Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie on their TV show *The Simple Life* (2003).

Another textile created similarly shows Brittany Spears and Madonna kissing on stage at the VMAs in 2003. You are even welcome to indulge in the Y2K fantasy, as Molly offers you take-home butterfly clips, cheap rings, stickers and candy. Two walls in Molly's exhibition were covered, top to bottom, in teen magazine pages and covers with titles such as "Is your period normal?", "Being a party girl" and "Upgrade your pet, get a boyfriend". Molly notes that these articles acted as a road map for how to grow up. Observing them displayed prominently on the walls serves as a reminder of the influential role they played in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of young girls in the Y2K era, especially in regard to their self image and their relationships. The sense of nostalgia and innocence surrounding the exhibition acted as a sugar-coating for the harsh reality of womanhood.

Textiles is the primary art form used by both HOT 4 THE MOMENT and Molly JF Caldwell. While humans have been creating textiles for thousands of years, it has only been in recent times that they have been recognized as a legitimate art form. This is because textiles, such as weaving, embroidery, knitting and sewing, are often considered women's work—it was a duty associated with domestic labour.

It is fitting that the artists featured this Women's History Month are using textiles to express their sentiments towards today's society. Textiles represent the often unnoticed artistic prowess of countless women who have historically been confined to gender-specific labour roles. One of the mock OHS signage quilts by HOT 4 THE MOMENT states "NOTICE ME", forcing us to look at and acknowledge, the work of female textile artists.



The installation FIXED IT and the exhibition NOT A GIRL, NOT YET A WOMAN prompts us to reflect on our internalized gender biases, in a safe and non-judgmental space, created through the artists' use of humour and un-seriousness, or within the safety of a nostalgic past. The mock OHS signage made me wonder: what type of work do I see as valuable? Do I view traditional women's work as less than men's traditional work?

While the Y2K-inspired art made me critically look at my own childhood, and how I have been influenced by various sources telling me to be slimmer, blonder, and more attractive. It also made me realize how naive we were: Many of the female celebrities featured in the exhibit have been abused, whether sexually—such as Paris Hilton at the age of 15—or mentally—such as Brittany Spears since the age of 13. As Molly constructs the nostalgic cultural landscape of 2004, it is the audience who is tasked with making these connections.

The exhibitions FIXED IT by HOT 4 THE MOMENT and NOT A GIRL, NOT YET A WOMAN by Molly JF Caldwell shed light onto our professional assumptions and shared girlhood experiences, showing us just how much work is needed to be done in our society to achieve full gender equality.

Molly JF Caldwell is a yonsei visual artist and cultural worker based in Mohkinstis ("Calgary, AB") She graduated from the local art school in 2017 with a bachelor of fine arts. Some of her interests include Marxist Feminism, Mariah Carey, and textiles.

Image: *FREE WINONA*, (Credit: Molly JF Caldwell)

Drew Parady and Georgia Dawkin are the two halves of the friendship heart necklace that is **HOT 4 THE MOMENT**. HOT 4 THE MOMENT is a creative collective that uses love, silliness, play, and humour to explore themes of feminism, care and play, to "women's work" under the patriarchy. Artist duo Drew Parady and Georgia Dawkin both use play within their art practices as a means to explore difficult topics and humor as a vessel for change. Both Georgia and Drew are currently based in St. John's, NL and have received their BFA from Grenfell Campus, Memorial University.

Image: *NOTICE: ME*, 35" x 35", quilted sign with black backing (Credit: HOT 4 THE MOMENT)