Art 325 Women Art and Society

First Response Paper (5%) Two pages Due January 29

Do we need a Museum for women? What are the pros and cons of this issue? Are things the same today as when Day's article was published twenty years ago? Does such a museum serve a function today?

Guidelines for writing a response paper:

1) The point of this exercise is for you to take a stand; decide what you think about the issue.
2) Think about WHY you have come to that conclusion.
3) Find evidence that supports your position. Opinion is not evidence. Nor is it enough. You need facts. You could use the texts provided as material for your argument.
4) Construct an argument with the thesis at or near the beginning of the essay. The thesis should convey the essence of your response.
5) Make sure you have a conclusion, hopefully one that enlarges on or intensifies your thesis/response. What is the significance of your thesis?
6) Edit the essay and proofread it.
Is it a good idea to establish a private museum dedicated only to the women in the arts? In my opinion, this is not a good idea. The disadvantages, such as separation and mediocrity, far outweigh the benefits in this enterprise, specifically in the methods the National Museum of Women in the Arts has used. In place of an isolated museum, all efforts should be focused on a rapid integration of women’s art into the already established art world. This process would celebrate women’s rise to equality rather than deflate it.

In theory, the idea of the museum has value. The National Museum of Women in the Arts’ mission states the museum’s desires to “bring recognition to the achievements of women artists...and nationalities...and by teaching the public about their accomplishments (National Museum of Women in the Arts, January 27, 2007).” In many ways the museum does accomplish these goals. The museum boasts a strong research library with more than two thousand volumes and an extensive archive of American women artists that achieve the museum’s goal of teaching the public about women and their place in art history, per Day’s article. Furthermore, the various exhibitions the museum has hosted in its twenty years encompass all nationalities, local artists from many of the states around the country, and four centuries worth of work by women artists (NMWA, January 27, 2007). The museum acts as a platform for contemporary women artists to
achieve renown in the art world by allowing them more extensive opportunities for solo exhibitions then the art world had offered before the museum’s existence.

Counterbalancing these benefits, numerous disadvantages plague the museum’s mere existence. The problems do not necessarily lie in the museum itself, though some do. Largely criticisms fall upon the symbolic separation of women artists that the museum represents. As a lone figure, the museum “trivializes the position of women as artists, reinforcing their artificial separateness”, as commented by Norma Broude, by simply not giving them the chance to be part of the art world instead of a miniscule barnacle attached to its underbelly. The museum simply cannot singularly account for all of the achievements of women artists, especially in comparison to the ubiquitous museums exhibiting primarily the work of men. Furthermore, the museum increases this separation by refusing to incorporate the social history of women into its exhibitions (Day, 116). By omitting this important information, the audience then has no foundation for understanding why the museum is separated because without this history it is unclear why women have been so neglected in the art field. This lack of knowledge could lead to further assumptions of the natural inferiority of women because the audience has no other reason before them to think otherwise. Lastly, the National Museum of Women in the Arts provides lax standards in their new purchases because they are so enmeshed in getting a wide variety of works instead of quality pieces (Day, 115).

The incorporation of women’s art into preexisting structures, such as the famous museums that surround the National Museum of Women in the Arts, would enhance the role of women in the art world by placing them on equal footing with men rather than highlighting their exclusion. In this way, the art of women would be looked at as art qua art versus art that was done under a certain social context and must have specifically feminine meanings and therefore
must be segregated from the greater world of art and potentially viewed as lesser art because of these differences. The art historians do not claim that a Picasso painting is necessarily better than a work of Caravaggio just because of their vast differences. In fact, works by these two painters can both be found in the permanent collections of the Chicago Art Institute. Therefore, why must the differences (if there are any) between the art of men and the art of women constitute complete segregation when masters of contrasting styles coexist?