

The Importance of Women in Art

Jean Cooke

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Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction	4
Literature Review	7
Women in the Art World	7
Shaping the Art World	13
An overshadowed population	21
Cooke's Biography	26
Early Life	26
The Start of her Career and her Marriage	27
Marriage	29
Later Life	33
Cooke's Art Analysis	36
Introduction	36
"Mad Self Portrait"	37
"Up The Road and Pigeon Die"	39
"Blast Boadicea"	41
"Toujours en Fête"	44
"Cliff, Birling Gap"	45
Conclusion	47
Personal Art Analysis	49
Introduction	49
Painting 1: Beyond the Fence	50
Painting 2: Dorm Room	53
Painting 3: Window of Windows 2	55
Painting 4: Window of Window Reflection	58
Painting 5	61
Conclusion	65
References	66

Abstract

In the text, the theme of women in the art world being looked over as professionals is studied through the lens of the artist Jean Cooke. Throughout history, artists having less opportunities than their husbands is a pattern that is seen in many artists' lives including in Cooke's. Through research found in studies and articles spanning many years in the art industry the effects of this pattern were seen. Articles analyzing Cooke and her husband's lives and art were also looked at for this project. Despite the obstacles facing Cooke as a woman, she fostered a career that is being discovered more and more. Using the art and life of Cooke as a reference, I created artworks that utilize the techniques, subject matters, and themes similar to Cooke. By looking at these women that were once ignored, important themes and artworks can be found and learned from to shape the modern art world.

Introduction

Art surrounds each individual, through the music on repeat to the movies in theaters, the clothes lining stores, the fonts used on paper, and posters taped to walls. In everyday life, even though these aspects of life are not always recognized as art, they are created because of art and creative creation. Whether one identifies as an artist or appreciates the arts or not, humans are drawn to create and appreciate these beautiful creations that are all around. Individuals are drawn to them because they see something that resonates with who they are. Having art of all genres, subject matters, and artists behind them is important for all audiences.

Having an art world that reflects the population is vital to the arts impact and inspiration on all. Artworks carry the stories of artists through the subject, medium, and approach to the art. These hidden stories are one reason audiences are drawn to certain pieces of art. Through the artists' experiences and identity shown in the artworks, audiences can better connect to these pieces. Art can be seen from all places, in all times, from all people. These differing aspects of art help share countless ideas and themes within society. People of all different backgrounds are creating art but are not always recognized for it. While all kinds of different perspectives exist in art, they are not always shared and appreciated. A main reason for this is because of these unique perspectives and identities. These identities can be a reason their art

is so inspiring and special, but also why they are excluded from museums and shows. Artists that are white men are the main identity present in museums, history books, and pop culture. They are the artists that are the most seen and accepted due to the fact that this is the main identity that drives society.

Because of clear patriarchal ideals in western society, male artists are the ones with the opportunities to pursue this career. Most famous artists considered to be the greats are mainly male artists. On the other hand, artists are not acknowledged because their identities and stories are not being told and supported.

As a female artist, seeing the same type of paintings created by the same artists over and over can be appreciated and loved, but also limiting. As I have pursued information and classes in art and art history, the majority of art is created by white men from very certain time periods and art movements. This frustration of only seeing certain identities represented has resulted in seeking out artists that have unique experiences that result in special works of art. Artwork created by women of all times and backgrounds resonated with me. Seeing stories and art that is so different from what has been seen before is special and compelling. As I have learned more about different art and artists, I have been pulled to each artist's life story and their inspirations behind their art. Seeking these stories out I saw a clear connection between many women artists married to male artists and their

lack of popularity. When the female artists married other artists, the world looked at the husband artists with favor while ignoring the women as they were written off as just wives and not creatives. This fascination with these forgotten artists led me to be inspired by the artist Jean Cooke who experienced this with her story and art due to society and her husband. Studying her life has been an inspiration to see the impacts of her work and life story in the art world. Her story has inspired me as an artist to create more art surrounding themes explored in her work and life.

Literature Review

Women in the Art World

Throughout history, art materializes in countless different forms through how it is made and expressed because of the differences from person and culture all over the world. From cave paintings to sculptures and architecture to paintings on wood canvas, art has been a part of life.

Throughout this timeline, art has developed and changed over time. However, the artists documented are mainly a reflection of male identities. This is not just an experience in historical art studies, but the male dominated art world is still reflected today. Women artists are typically not represented in history books, museums, and discussions. Instead works created by men dominate art spaces, which does not accurately represent this space as a whole. The art world is made up of viewers, artists, art historians, and other workers and enjoyers who range in identities, including gender. Only showing art by certain identities impedes the participation of others, which discourages people with differing identities from being a part of the representation and conversations in the art world. Representation for the artists and the viewers is important in sharing the full scope of the art and the world it represents.

Part of the lack of female representation is due to the patriarchal ideas that drive society as a whole. This is reflected in how women are treated within society. Women in general have limited opportunities, clear

expectations, and set roles in their communities and households. In society, women are limited by set roles created for them to fit into and fulfill. Because of these societal demands, the path to be an artist has been very restrictive in the past. Mainly only people who were male, had money, or social status could be artists. This idea is explained well in an article exploring past female artists as it states, "All of us have the potential to be creative, but for most of our collective history it is only the privileged few who were given the right to exercise that creativity in any meaningful way" (Montague, 2021). This is true for many people who were not born into a privileged life. In this article, the author uses an artist from Renaissance Italy, by the name of Artemisia Gentileschi as an example of how female artists had to overcome boundaries in order to be creatives. Artemisia was brought up to be a wife and mother in order to create a family. Her father helped her start learning art, which was possible because of her family's social status (Montague, 2021). There were still many boundaries to overcome, but her career was partially helped by her family's status and money. This system affected women in professional and creative areas because their education and upbringing centered around how to fulfill expectations to be a successful wife. Being taught throughout their lives that they have one sole job and purpose, the majority of women had no other options than to follow what they were taught. Female education was geared toward skills that would support them as a stay-at-home mother and

wife. Having no tools or encouragement to pursue a profession like art, most women did not try to break out of the mold laid before them. "Their creativity was either fettered to the point of non-expression, punished so severely it became buried beyond recognition, or lost and wasted with no work to mark the fact that it ever existed. This has been the overwhelming lot of female creatives in every era of human history" (Montague, 2021). The structure of society and female education led them to stay in the mold instead of following other pursuits. Purposeful barriers were put in place to make it difficult for these women to become more than what was laid out for them. Montague (2021) lays out the three barriers of, "the expectation of sacrifice, the burden of forced motherhood, and the unrelenting and often violent oppression of the collective patriarchy." The author continues her point by explaining that these were universal barriers that were typically accompanied by other issues, especially for those who did not have wealth and status (Montague, 2021). These women had many barriers stacked against them that few were able to overcome. Conditioned to be quiet and obedient, women were taught that their purpose was to be married. Serving their husbands as a good wife, young women were governed by their families, society, and their religion (Montague, 2021). These three values impacted their lives and often restrained them to a specific path. This leaves us with a world in which lacks the perspectives and creativity of many women artists. Only the creatives that

endured the oppression of the patriarchal systems they were born into are still present. As Montague (2021) puts it, "One of the greatest tragedies of our time is all of the lost work that could have added to our lives - if only its creators had been given the opportunity to do what they were born to do." Dictating the life of women and limiting their creative voices has left modern societies with a lack of representation in the art world because those voices were ignored or not preserved. The restrictive expectations created for women limited their creativity and their choices. Many of these barriers that impacted women's choices have been lessened by ensuring that women have more rights and autonomy over their lives. However, the aftermath of these strict barriers can still be felt by many today.

Furthermore, the expectation of women filling the role of a mother is another role that keeps women from pursuing art. In more modern years, having a family is encouraged and expected in some circles, but this social pressure can be ignored or diverted from. Even though this pressure is there, women have the autonomy to choose different paths for having children or a family. However, in the past this was not just an expectation, but a requirement (Montague, 2021). Similar to how females were raised to be wives, they also were expected to be a mother. "It is instead a role that is assigned to them from the moment they emerge from their *own* mother's wombs - it is the assumption that if you are female, you will eventually

become a mother” (Montague, 2021). Part of this expectation is not just giving birth to children but raising them up in certain ways. This requires individuals to give all their time, energy, and devotion to having children and caring for them and their families. When chosen this can be a beautiful aspect of one’s life, but it can also be hard for women to be able to pursue other things because motherhood comes with many sacrifices. These sacrifices of time and dedication are anticipated for the mother to take on for her children (Montague, 2021). Further, the art world does not always understand these needed sacrifices. Instead of honoring the women who take them on, the art world pushes them farther away in order to not be affected by these sacrifices. Painter, Myriam Bat- Yosef, saw this clear bias against female artists. Artists were not taken seriously or given jobs because of their gender. Afraid that they would have a child and walk away from the work, employers would not provide women with the same opportunities at creating art compared to men. Bat-Yosef (1988) experienced this firsthand, “being thus rejected by the galleries I was exiled from the established male hierarchy.” The patriarchal system pushes having children but also alienates those who do. After not being able to work for the type of job she had studied and worked hard for because of her gender, Bat-Yosef decided to have a child and prove the world wrong. She wanted to start a family but was not ready to walk away from her work. Hearing all the harsh biases about mothers in the

art field, she strived for balance between being a mother and an artist. After having her daughter, she decided to examine her artistic energy and the effects on them after childbirth. The expectation was for her to no longer have the time, drive, or creative passions to be the artist she was. However, after having her daughter she concluded that her later work and creative energy thrived. She reported, "What I was feeling at the time paved the way for the creative work that I am able to produce today. My pregnancy influenced the direction that I was to take in life and in my art" (Bat-Yosef, 1988). Through her balance of being a mother and being creative she found new meaning and passion in her life due to chosen motherhood and all the things that came with it (Bat-Yosef, 1988). She did not walk away from art after her daughter but became more inspired by this time in her life. Proving society's biases and stereotypes are unfair, she became an inspiring mother and artist. Being a mother does not have to be a woman's-only role or restrict her from also being an artist.

The systems created and enforced by society has led to a history of women being put into a mold which dictates their life. Limiting their opportunities by their expectations for women to become wives and mothers, the role of females has been limiting for many women. Not being able to choose a life and passion on their own, they were discriminated against based on their gender. When they were able to follow passions and dreams of their

own, there were still biases that enforced gender stereotypes and created barriers in the opportunities they were allowed to be a part of. Worried that women would not have the same drive or passion to pursue a creative career became limiting to those women. These three ideas of opportunities, marriage, and motherhood limited female choice in the past. While these issues have become better for many creatives, these types of stereotypes, biases, and patriarchal values are still negatively impacting women in the creative industries. There are still barriers in becoming a female creative because of expectations to be a wife and mother and the role of women to not be as active in a professional environment.

Shaping the Art World

As time has gone on, women have gradually gained rights and opportunities like pursuing being an artist, art historian, professor, or a career in museums. However, the ability for them to pursue these paths does not guarantee that they are going to be faced with equal treatment within the art world. Even though females in creative paths became more accepted and more common does not mean that they are represented correctly.

Female individuals are important in the impact of the creation and education of art. Striving for more representation of women in art to make the representation of genders more equal is necessary to correctly recognize

work of all individuals. In an article titled, A 1974 Perspective, the author finds that the number of women in the art field do not match the credit they have in their careers. Written by art historian and professor, Barbara White, this article is a glimpse into the female roles in the art world at the time by using specific numbers of women in the art field. At this time, the majority of people with a degree in the arts and art history were female individuals.

These women outnumbered the men who held degrees and were trained to work as artists, art professors, and art historians. Research showed that two thirds of people training in art and art history were women (White, 1974, p. 340). This included individuals who were currently going into programs, college, and other types of training to work in the art field. When looking at the art industry from the perspective of who held degrees in those areas or who were currently in school getting degrees in those areas, women were the main identity. However, when these women started to enter the art careers of their choosing, they were met with an industry driven by men's representation. Even though art degrees were held mostly by women they were not being hired in these areas (White, 1974, p. 340). Men are still favored when it comes to being hired for the roles in museums and other art professions. This disconnect between the trained professionals and the art representation becomes apparent when looking at art education. When this article was written, the author looked at the main leading textbooks that were

used to teach art history. In these textbooks, not one female artist was mentioned, and their work was not shown (White, 1974, p. 341). All curriculums only mentioned artists and artwork that was created by men. Even now when looking at curriculum it still leans to portray the male viewpoint. Out of the 250 art pieces that are required for high schoolers to know for AP art history, only about twenty pieces are contributed to a female artist. The first piece by a woman is not until piece 96 out of 250 and is from 1711. Part of this is because many of the pieces of art are buildings, manuscripts or created without record of who created them, so there is no one to attribute it to. However, the first piece of art on this list attributed to a male artist is piece 63 and from the year 1303 (Smart History). In the current curriculums, the number of pieces created by women are still out of proportion. Even fifty years after the 1970s there is still a lack of gender portrayal in art education. Art education is an important place for artworks of all representations to be shown. The article explains, "For women art students, knowledge that women have created serious art in the past gives a historical perspective for their present endeavors" (White, 1974, p. 341). This idea is also important because it builds confidence in these professionals and shows them stories and identities that are more closely related to their own. Art history textbooks are not the only place where this disconnect in numbers between trained professionals and work by female artists can be seen.

Barbara White (1947, p. 342) cites data from this time concerning museums and art shows. These areas also see this clear disconnect in numbers. There is a very low percentage of women's art being shown in museums, galleries, and shows. In all kinds of art exhibits, show cases, one man shows, group shows, and pieces in a collection, art created by women artists typically accounted for less than 10% of art. Due to these numbers, females working in this field were making changes in their approach to help try to bridge this gap. These individuals were creating curriculum and courses that specifically looked at women in art. They attempted to have resources, classes, and programs geared at women in the art industry to better give them that representation to carry with them when they ventured into the professional world. The importance of this is reflected in the quote, "Women's studies will help assure that in the future women will no longer be invisible in the art world" (White, 1974, p. 343). At this time, this issue of women not being represented in the career they are trained in became a problem to address.

As time has gone on, these issues are still being studied by many art historians through research and polls in order to gain updated statistics and data. Looking at data surrounding the presence of women artists in the leading galleries, museums, art exhibitions, and shows in the United States, the gap between gender in art is becoming more apparent. These data sets look at how many total shows, individual objects, and leadership in museums,

compared to the female population in the United States. These statistics are important in understanding the issue of this underrepresented group in the modern art world.

Changes have occurred that have positively impacted females being able to work as artists, art historians, and in museums compared to past generations. Their opportunities have increased and are much more attainable for females to pursue this career than it has been. These opportunities have been created through women fighting for their voices to be heard in art and social circles. Not only are people from wealthy or privileged backgrounds able to make art, but people of all walks of life have opportunities to create. Also, artist spaces over time have become more inclusive as different people and genres are able to show up in galleries and museums. Artists are also able to make their work known on their own like creating a social media presence through different kinds of content like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. All of these various changes in society and technology have made it easier for a person to become an artist no matter their social standing, family, or gender. However, the problem of a gender gap is far from solved despite these changes. Women are still not as supported or valued in this industry as evident in the data collected by the Burns Halperin Report. This project, published in 2022, was created in order to understand and visualize the gender gap in the world of professional art. The detailed

report was researched and written by art editor for The Art Net, Julia Halperin and journalist Charlotte Burns. Changes in the art world were being seen and praises of inclusive museums and projects were being sung. However, when the Burn's Halperin report collected accurate data from museums and galleries in the United States, they analyzed the changes were not as equal as once expected. All of their findings are updated with data from 2008-2020. The data available at their website, shows that the art created by women makes up about 11% of all the art showcased across the major 31 art acquisitions in the United States from 2008-2020. The 11 percent of female art does not compare to the population of the United States because women make up more than half of the population. In the United States, more 50.5% of the total population is female (Burns Halperin Report). The art being upheld as special in these museums is dominated by male artists. Art museums can be further analyzed by what has been gifted versus what has been bought. This data can add more layers of what is being sought out versus what the museum is just acquiring through gifts. For art created by female artists only, about 8,000 of the more than 28,000 art pieces have been bought (The Burns Halperin Report). The majority of pieces these museums did not seek out but were gifted through various sources. This does seem to be changing because 2019 was the greatest year for museums buying art created by women artists, showing potential change in this area. Museums are not the only place in

which the male artist population dominates the industry. The Burns Halperin Report gathered data on exhibitions as well. While museums are places in which art is displayed, exhibitions are temporary or permanent showcases of different kinds of art following a specific idea or theme. The number of exhibitions driven by art by female artists is 14.9% of all exhibitions (Burns Halperin Report). Compared to the art housed only in museums there is an increase between museum art and overall exhibitions, creating slightly more opportunities for different artists. The last main piece of data in this report is the amount of money that female artists are able to make for their art compared to men on a global scale. When looking at art created by male artists they are able to sell more art for a much higher price that creates a profit of 176.9 billion dollars at auctions. Contrastly, female artists make about 6.2 billion dollars at auctions (Burns Halperin Report). When looking at both of these numbers, male artists are able to make more than 28 times the amount as women. Taking a closer look at this statistic these numbers amount to about 2.2% of the auction numbers being women sales. Further broken down, the money made at auction is dominated by a couple artists selling the majority of their art. This is true for male and female artists. For example, artist Pablo Picasso's art can make 6.2 billion on his own, matching the entire amount of profits for female artists at auctions. The leading money maker for female artists is modern artist Yayoi Kusama. Other artists

following Kusama consist of Joan Michelle, Louise Bourgeois, Georgia O'Keefe, and Agnes Martin. These five artists make up almost half of the 6.2 billion dollars. All remaining 3.8 billion is spread out in the market among other individuals (Burns Halperin Report). While some artists or genders making more than others at auctions may not seem significant, it can be when understanding what these numbers can mean. Auction money could be going to the artists and their families which means the artist pay gap is significant at auctions. If private owners are selling it means that they are going to prefer selling, buying, or reselling pieces created by males over women because of the higher price. The artists represented in museums and the amount of art being sold changes with time. These changes in the art industry are also very clear in this data with social movements and efforts. For example, peaks in the art of women artists being shared was high in 2018 and 2019 which could be due to the #MeToo movement (Halperin & Burns, 2022). Other highs and lows can also be explained through different social and art movements. All the data collected and presented helps create a better understanding of the art industry. Mainly recognizing one identity in the art industry, because that is the art being sought after and celebrated is going to continue if more changes are not made and pushed. These changes can help all people be equal parts of creating the art around us.

An overshadowed population

Other factors in an artist's life can make creating and being celebrated for their art more difficult. One obstacle in art history for female artists is being married to an artist. From working together, to meeting in university, or being in the social circle, many artists working around the same time periods knew each other. Through work and social circles various kinds of relationships were forged, including romantic relationships. So many household artists were married to other artists that were not as well known. The lack of support in this industry, especially for women, made it hard for these couples to both pursue their careers.

Various factors impacted their careers and home life. This often made it difficult for both of the artists to pursue their careers to their greatest potential. While both parties were artists, the husband of the couple typically became popular while the wives became supporters of their husband's career. Because of competition in the industry, the grueling workload, and a lack of work life balance, many female artists were impacted. These factors are just a handful of things that pushed the artist wives out of the spotlight of the art world and into a position of supporting their husbands. Creating a cycle of artist to wife of an artist, these women were not recognized for their craft. These cycles started to be pointed out through articles analyzing the various women who were impacted by being overlooked as an artist because

of who they were married to. One article discussing this looked at ten women and their stories of being overlooked in favor of their husbands' careers.

Another article has discussed this as a part of looking at three notable artists who have become more popular after their time. Both of these articles show the treatment of artists who were married and the unfair treatment and pressure put on them. Artists like Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Edward Hopper were notable artists of their time that were known for their modern styles and for pushing the art movements (Millington, 2020). These artists are still known and praised for their work today. Pollock is renowned for his abstract drip paintings that set him aside from others. Kooning was also an abstract artist that pushed the movement of abstract expressionism with his well-known loose and bold brush strokes. Another artist mentioned is Edward Hopper who had a more realistic approach to painting. His most famous work is *Nighthawks* which depicts a night scene of a bar. All of these men were not just known in their time and art circles, but also now for their accomplishments. Alongside them the unspoken truth is that their wives were creating change in the same art periods, movements, or mediums. The artists Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning, and Jo Hopper are lesser known, but were important because of how they pushed many art movements forward. These artists pushed the boundaries on similar art movements as their husbands, but became secondary to their husband's art (Tresadern, 2017). Krasner was

an Abstract Expressionist with a unique style of big, bright, and bold colors and shapes. Kooning was an abstract artist, figure painter, and worked as a writer who created with lots of layers of colors and texture. Lastly, Jo Hopper had a wide variety of skills as she worked as a sketcher for a newspaper, painter, a teacher, and an actor (Millington, 2020). These artists had their own art careers that fell prey to the cycle of artist to wife of an artist. The article written by Millington about the women and their careers analyzed the role that these women had by stating, "Women whose partners were artists have frequently found themselves in a supporting role, keeping books, contacting dealers, managing studio spaces and more" (2020). Because of the competitive nature of the industry women found themselves not welcomed in certain circles and treated harshly. Elaine de Kooning's art was unique as her goal in her figure paintings was to capture the essence of people. Her art was not appreciated, and she was not given proper credit for her art. In more modern times her art is often given a little more credit and praise (Millington, 2020). Another example is Lee Krasner who worked as an abstract expressionist alongside her husband Jackson Pollock. She was referred to as his wife and called a dame instead of an artist in her own right. She was not seen as an equal even though she was a working artist in the same medium and movement (Tresadern, 2017). Krasner ended up making less art and supporting her husband's career instead. Just like Krasner many women

artists took a step back from the world because of the pressure the art world created for them. Instead, they watched and supported their husbands as they became the star artists (Tresadern, 2017). Krasner not just supported her husband but helped him create work, keep up in the industry, and aided in the intellectual talks required. Krasner was a vital piece to Pollock's successful career. After Jackson's death, Krasner started creating art on her own again and flourished. (Millington, 2020). Lastly, many artists are forced to take a step back due to their personal lives. Having both individuals in a couple pursue careers as artists can be difficult. The Hopper's relationship suffered because of this, alongside other factors in their lives. This resulted in a divorce right before Jo Hopper's death. In a constant cycle, these artists created less of their own art as they helped their husband's career, became a muse, were excluded from the artist environment, or asked to stay home. A quote encapsulating this experience from the article states, "Art history is full of women whose work has been obscured or belittled in the context of their male partners" (Tresadern, 201). Excluded from their own career because of the harmful misogynistic foundation of society these women could not be seen as the artist they worked hard to be but had to see their husbands become that figure instead.

The three artists mentioned above are only a small number of artists that experienced the cycle of having to be considered an artist's wife. Too

many artists suffered this fate. More recently these artists that were excluded before are being rediscovered and given more of the attention that their stories and art deserve. Stepping outside of the box and being trailblazers for so many art movements, women artists have made great progress so that the art studied involves the art and movements it does.

Another artist that created art that was ignored in her time was Jean Cooke. Jean Cooke's life follows a similar story, as her husband and his career impacted her own career and life. Due to her husband, another artist, her art and story were somewhat lost. Artists that were once ignored and cast aside have a chance to be recognized without the art of their husbands following their individual legacies. One person's legacy that is able to change and be remembered is Jean Cooke's.

Cooke's Biography

Early Life

In order to have a complete understanding of the art and character of Jean Cooke, knowing her life story is imperative. In many of Cook's artworks, themes that are seen throughout her work and life materialize. These can be better understood with a background in her experiences. Further, telling her story and remembering her becomes part of her legacy. Her bold use of colors, playfulness in her paintings, and varying subjects reflect the life she experienced.

Cooke was born after the First World War in 1927 in London, England. She grew up surrounded by the bustling world of her family's grocery and hardware store ("Jean Cooke" 2008, p. 34). Most of her time was spent in her father's store when she was young. Her formal schooling was not very consistent until later on in her life, which meant her understanding of the world was informed through the daily life of her father running his store and her mother completing various projects around the store and house.

Growing up Jean Cooke did not have a lengthy academic history and had limited education. This is thought to be due to her mother's preferences about education ("Jean Cooke" 2008, p. 34). As Cooke grew older, she started attending different schools in order to get an education centered in the arts. At age sixteen, Cooke started her journey of formal art education. The first art

academy attended by Cooke was Central School Arts and Crafts. Cooke attended this academy from 1943-1945. Here she learned different skills from a wide range of art mediums and styles. Among these styles, Cooke practiced illustrating, life drawing, and textiles ("Jean Cooke" 2008, p. 34). With a range of art mediums and styles she moved onto Camberwell School. At this time, Cooke started to focus on clay and pottery as her main medium. This decision was mostly informed by the cost of supplies. The cost of paints like oils were very expensive while clay was free through her school ("Jean Cooke" 2008, p. 34). This led Cooke to exploring and sticking with pottery for some time. After pottery, Cooke studied sculpture at Goldsmith College. This school was attended by Cooke from 1945-1950. Studying sculpture at this school, Cooke used the free college clay to create sculptures that went on to win prizes. Here she not only studied art but also decided to become a teacher by completing their teacher prep program ("Jean Cooke" 2008, p. 34). This skill was utilized later on in her life, though her main career was in the arts. The variety of art schools became a foundation in Cooke's art seen in her work and life decisions.

The Start of her Career and her Marriage

Coming away from these schools Cooke had a solid background in the arts, knew her preferred mediums, and had started to develop an art style.

Around this time Cooke's intentions seemed to be creating sculptures like she had been doing in school. However, an accident led her to dislocating her thumb. This injury ended up changing the course of her art career. Pivoting with her career, Cooke decided to step back from sculpting and instead she opened a pottery studio in Sussex where she continued to work with clay ("Jean Cooke" 2008, p. 34). Cooke created art in her studio from 1950-1953 and became surrounded with more artists as she built up her career. One artist that she met was John Bratby. He was an up-and-coming artist who was studying at the Royal College of the Arts at this time (Salter, 2013, p. 36). The pair became quickly enamored with the other and within weeks of knowing each other the two were married (Salter, 2013, p. 36). After the wedding, the clay studio was let go of and an acceptance letter to the Royal College of Art was acquired for Jean. Continuing on in her art education, she attended the Royal College as a part of her post grad education. At this college, she switched art focuses once again in order to create oil paintings. This decision could have been made on account of her surroundings at the Royal College, but speculation is that John pressured her to study painting as it was his preferred medium. Adopting oils quickly and passionately, her art started to become her own style. At this time her art became more circulated as she started to create a following for herself. She had a couple of people that started to follow and purchase her artwork. Around this time, she also started

showcasing her art in shows. Cooke showcased her artwork in her first solo show in 1963 ("Jean Cooke" 2008, p. 34). This exhibition was held at the Establishment Club and was followed by other solo shows sprinkled throughout her career.

Marriage

The importance of looking at the life and work of an artist is true for Jean Cooke as well as her husband John Bratby. Understanding an artist helps to understand their work and understanding the work can help make sense of who they were as a person. One's work says a lot about the person. The subjects painted and how the artist approaches their work can say a lot about themselves and their reasons for painting. John Bratby is no exception.

At the time that John and Jean met, John was starting to paint for the art movement that he would later be known for. This art movement was later deemed the Kitchen Sink Movement. Being created in the wake of the Second World War, this style was developed by John Bratby and a couple of other artists of the time (Salter, 2013, p. 36). Instead of altering large moments of life and death, the subjects of this movement were small everyday objects and moments. Instead of painting subjects that were deemed grand and important like the recent war, Bratby focused on everyday people living their ordinary lives. Bratby and three other artists of this time, Jack Smith, Edward

Middleditch, and Derrick Greave, started to capture these smaller moments and they were grouped together and named by critics the Kitchen Sink painters (Shapiro, 2019). Even though his work has been grouped alongside these other painters, he had a personal style and approach to painting. The perspective of his work is typically painted from above. This bird's eye view further pushes the idea of small and simple (Salter, 2013, p. 44). Bratby also painted using large, sweeping strokes across the canvas leading the subject away from realism and much more into the realm of abstract expressionism.

Bratby's approach to painting mirrors his own life and self in many ways. Bratby was reported to be a controlling person who looked for power over things and people. His unique use of perspectives from painting above is one way he exercised his control over the aspects of his life (Salter, 2013, p. 44). Painting from above and making the subject look small, weak, powerless, or unimportant next to other things is a way that the artist can be in control of the subject. This perspective is highlighted in the paintings he executed of Cooke. Bratby would use Cooke as a model for many of his pieces, since she was a part of his everyday life. When asked about painting his wife Bratby explained that "I sometimes painted my wife Jean Cooke as a particular person, not with affection. She was someone to paint" (Salter, 2013, p. 79). This quote reveals the complicated and rocky relationship between these two artists. Bratby's uninterested attitude in painting her is seen in his harsh

perspectives and strokes of paint. She is painted as diminished and sickly in many of his paintings, once again showing his need for control about how she was painted.

Bratby's disrespect for Jean is seen further through their rushed marriage. Cooke explains getting to know her future husband with the comment, "We decided to get married the day we met and did so as soon as the banns were called: then we moved into my father's house and John went straight upstairs to paint - and didn't come down for three weeks, not even to meet my father" (Salter, 2013, p. 36). This start to their relationship paved the way for the next years of their lives together.

Starting out in their relationship they stayed at Jean's father's house as newlyweds. They were both focusing on school and building up their artists' opportunities. John's disrespect and need to control Jean became worse with marriage. Rules and restrictions were inflicted upon Cooke's time and freedom throughout their relationship. He painted his subjects and built up his style of the Kitchen Sink movement freely. In their house, he made sure he had places to paint and time to create. When it came to his wife, he did not give her the space, resources, and time to paint and create. Clinging on to the idea of a domestic household governed by a strong-willed man, Bratby made stipulations stopping Cooke from being her own person with a successful career. The main way he controlled Cooke was through rules given that

impacted her career. Around this time, Jean was starting her career and catching the attention of people in the art world. This was impacted as she handled all the household tasks, fetched things for Bratby, and was the person who took care of the home (Hallett, 2019). This left her little time to pursue her career. Furthermore, she was only allowed to work on art for a certain amount of time in a day, while he worked as much as he needed to finish his pieces of art (McNay, 2023). Jean's safety was also impacted in this relationship as she was locked up and restricted from leaving the house unless it was on his terms (Hallett, 2019). Later on in interviews it was reported by Cooke that, "I used to tell lies so I didn't get beaten up" (Hallett, 2019). When Cooke was allowed to paint it was further restricted by Bratby's rules. These rules touched on things like she had to create in the studio he provided, which was falling apart and unsafe to work in. This room was located in their home and instead of being fixed up was given to Cooke ("Jean Cooke" 2008, p. 34). Instead of this restricting Cooke, she continued to create despite her paintings being destroyed or painted over to provide more canvases for Bratby (McNay, 2023). The actions he took were in order to boost his own ego and career. He saw her talent and hard work and sabotaged that in any way he could. Bratby made a difficult industry harder. Already the art industry valued male artists over females, but she was further

restricted by Bratby's actions. Through this blatant abuse, Cooke still created and tried to pursue the career and life she wanted.

As time went on, the pair moved in 1955 away from her father's house in Greenwich to Carlisle where he started teaching art. The same year Jean and Bratby were expecting their first child, a son they named David (Salter 43). As summer approached the couple decided not to stay at the school Bratby was working at and moved back to London. Cooke spent the summer taking care of her newborn child as Bratby spent the summer with Angela Heskett, a former student of his. This affair lasted the summer and was one of many that he had while married to Cooke. A handful of paintings capture his affairs as they posed to be his muses (Salter, 2013, p. 44). Despite these affairs, the Bratby family continued to grow. Cooke ended up having three more children after David. Cooke's family grew as she welcomed her children Dayan, Jason, and Wendy into the world (Salter, 2013, p.43).

Later Life

After years of an uneasy marriage the couple split in 1977. The two parted ways after more than 20 years of their complicated marriage. Even though this was the end of their relationship this is not the end of Cooke's story either personally or artistically. In fact, with this newfound freedom she was able to build a life she got to choose for herself. Reflecting back on her

relationship she commented saying that Bratby's attitude towards Cooke helped her motivation in creating. His disdain for her making art made her want to pursue that even more. After their divorce she even gave credit to him for her artworks because him trying to control her made her passion to create stronger (McNay, 2023). Moving forward Cooke still created many art pieces inspired by her new surroundings. Moving to the coast, Cooke lived many years in a cottage by the sea in Birling Gap (Vann, 2008). Many of Cooke's later paintings reflect living here as she painted the coast, the sea, and the outside world from here. In 1995, the cottage that she was living at experienced coastal erosion. This made it impossible for her to keep living in it or to save her beloved cottage. Sadly, the home she had found endless inspiration in was forced to be demolished (Vann, 2008). In the following years, she moved down the coast into another cottage, not wanting to move away from her beautiful coast. After a few years she made another move into a house in Blackheath. This home was greeted by a fire in 2003. Many pieces of her life and art were saved and those involved were safe. However, the house was burned to the point that Cooke made the decision to move back into the city. Moving back into London, the last recorded place she lived was in southeast London in a flat (Vann, 2008).

Cooke lived a long and beautiful life of creating and not letting the world she lived in or the people around her stop her from her passions and

wants. The inspirational painter died on August 6 in 2007 at age 81 due to pneumonia. In her passing, she left behind paintings and her four children who share the story, art, and life of Jean (Vann, 2008). Acting as part of her legacy, more knowledge of her comes to the surface as audiences start to recognize her name and art. In 2023, her work was displayed in a project called "Ungardening (McNay, 2023)." Even thirteen years after her death more of her work is being celebrated for the talented and unwavering person she was. Bratby's effects of controlling Cooke and covering up her art did not prevail as the legacy of her beautiful pieces and the story of a persevering artist are known.

Cooke's Art Analysis

Introduction

Knowledge on Cooke's life helps deepen the understanding of her art. A deeper understanding of the artist and the obstacles they have faced helps the viewer make sense of the choice the artist makes in their pieces. For Cooke, her artworks span decades where her style, focus, and subject develop. These changes can be attributed to many things including her art developing as she learns more as an artist over time. Especially for Cooke who often painted personal subjects like herself, her family, or her surroundings, her perspective changed how she viewed and painted these things. Looking at Cooke's life helps audiences make sense of changes in her work. With an understanding of Cooke and her life, her artwork will be able to be viewed with a deeper understanding.

In order to start to understand Cooke's various oil painting artworks, paintings spanning different themes and years will be looked at. In each painting the subject, colors, perspective, and use of strokes are important aspects of the work. Many of her paintings reflect the life she was leading at the time. Through her art, a better understanding of her as an artist and person can be found.

“Mad Self Portrait”

Portraits of herself and her family populate Cooke’s work. One of Cooke’s common subjects was people in portraits. Many of these portraits depicted Cooke herself. The self-portraits were painted from all angles, lighting, compositions, and depict her many moods and ages. This painting is an early self-portrait named “Mad Self Portrait” painted in 1954, which was the year before Cooke was married. At this point in time, Cooke was finding her style in school and experimenting with oils more and more (“Jean Cooke” 2008, p. 34). In the painting, Cooke is captured from the waist area up. She is close to the viewer but not centered in the painting. The major focus in the painting is her face. In the painting, the viewer’s gaze goes directly to the eyes of Cooke. The eyes are painted large and wide with slightly raised eyebrows and lines under her eyes. Her mouth is set in a line with her hair down and a plain white dress. The wide expression in the eyes mixed with the stern set of the mouth creates an unruly look in Cooke, capturing the viewer’s curiosity.

Throughout Cooke’s portfolio of artwork, she uses clear lines and thick strokes in order to create her recognizable style of art. Her lines are large and uncontrolled. This makes her pieces look more abstract, which earns her place in the genre of abstract expressionism. This gesturing type of style is seen in her work especially in the background of “Mad Self Portrait.” In this artwork, it is hard to distinguish what items are depicted in the background

strokes. The large strokes make the painting feel like this space is filled without filling in the specific details. This makes the figure pop so the viewer's focus is pulled into the main figure, not the background. On the figure, the strokes are still more gestural but are slightly smaller and focused than the strokes everywhere else. The details on the face are essential to the painting. Creating details in the face helps depict the expression on Cooke's face being clear and precise. These more precise details and gestural background also become a point of contrast in the painting. Cooke's use of line and strokes are very important to how her piece looks and the feeling it gives off.

One aspect of painting utilized very purposely to bring her vision to life is her use of colors. Cooke uses very specific color palettes in her painting. In this painting, the limited palette is important due to the intense lights and shadows. The painting overall utilizes darker colors and lots of shadows. The lighter colors are more sporadic in this piece. In many artworks, the source of light is directional. In this piece it seems as though the light is coming from in front of Cooke, which lights the figure up. However, the lights and darks still vary in this area. It does not shine in specific places or from a specific spot. It seems like it just appears in spots on and behind her. The light itself is not very bright. This is created by using an overall darker color palette. The colors used consist of blacks, browns, muddy yellows and beiges. The white

dress she wears is painted using mostly greys and yellows. The intense color palette helps the viewer see the dress as white while painting it in darker colors. The use of colors helps further the mood created by the use of lines and the expression in her face.

This sense of madness is a powerful choice for Cooke to choose to depict herself this way. So often in paintings there is a trend of creating smiling, vibrant depictions of life. Instead, she chose to depict herself differently. She has the power to impact how her audience views her. Later in life, she continues to paint herself and does so how she wants to be depicted instead of creating a “pretty” portrait. All the aspects of line and colors all work together to create the way she wants to be viewed in this painting.

“Up The Road and Pigeon Die”

Another common subject that comes up in Cooke’s work is depictions of landscapes. The landscape captured in “Up the Road and Pigeon Die” was painted in 1964. The painting showcases a street scene from inside a house. The neighborhood street is lined with houses opposite the window. The window frame creates a border that divides the scene. On the window frame, are two pigeons laying down. One is curled in on itself, while the other has its wings spread slightly outward. From the title of the painting, the audience can

assume that the pigeons are painted to be dead. Alongside these pigeons is a vase of flowers partially wrapped.

The most striking aspect of this painting is the way that Cooke composed it. Instead of having the viewer look straight on, the scene captured the windows from an angle. This makes it so that both the right and left side of the painting are encompassed with the windows and walls. In between this framing is where the flowers and pigeons sit on the sill. Behind the flowers and pigeons is where the outside world can be seen.

In many of Cooke's paintings, she distinguishes the background from the foreground by using large and quick strokes for far away and smaller strokes toward the front. This is not the case for this artwork. Instead of stroke, Cooke uses size to show distance. In the background, objects are painted smaller, while in the front things are painted a lot larger. This is a common way to create space and distance in a painting. This variation helps Cooke put detail into all parts of the painting with stroke while still showing what is close and far. The large size of the items closest to the viewer makes the flowers and pigeons very striking. Using size focuses the audience's eye to the items on the windowsill.

At this time in Cooke's life, she was married to Bratby which impacted her painting in so many ways. As mentioned in sections above, she followed very controlled rules that dictated when, where, and how she was allowed to

paint. One analysis of her art states that, “these conditions significantly affected Cooke’s art, making her style urgent and quick, focused and raw.” (McNay, 2023). Throughout her life she refused outward forces from inhibiting her from painting and being creative. Instead, she used these obstacles to her advantage in any way she could, and enduring these difficulties showed through her work. In “Up the Road and Pigeon Die,” the control and rules she faced were shown. One way this is shown in her approach to painting: “these conditions significantly affected Cooke’s art, making her style urgent and quick, focused and raw” (McNay, 2023). Many of Cooke’s paintings during her marriage showcase a scene looking out from the interior out into the world outside. Based on the composition of the piece, the faraway feeling of houses, and the bleaker colors the viewer feels detached from the outside world. This is similar to the reality of Cooke as Bratby tried to control the time she spent out of the house (Hallett, 2019). The painting’s composition reflects Cooke’s life at the time. One of the only landscapes she had the ability to paint was through a window.

“Blast Boadicea”

Cooke’s self-portraits incorporate pieces of her life and identity into them. One such self-portrait was painted in 1966 and is titled “Blast Boadicea”. Painted in her late 30’s this painting depicts herself in her painting

studio. The composition of the painting revolves around Cooke as she paints. Parts of the canvas can be seen as well. Painted from a little bit of a distance, her figure is in the center of the canvas sitting on a stool. Cooke is gazing at the viewer, which is likely the mirror used to paint herself from. Her gaze is steady and concentrated with a serious unwavering expression. In front of her is the painting she is working on, a chest of drawers, and what seems to be a painting or window behind Cooke. Opposite the painting Cooke is working on is a wall of windows with a peek of the outside street.

When looking at the actual techniques used for these paintings, the strokes used by Cooke are very striking. Seen in other works by Cooke, the strokes used are quick and loose. This creates a slightly unfocused blurry like background where there are less details. Contrasting the approach to the background, the foreground has more detailed, tight, and organized strokes. Using this helps create a sense of depth and distance. Using larger and less focused strokes helps the background be more blurry, which creates a sense of distance between that and what is in focus. This helps bring the viewer's eye to the subject of Cooke, not the windows or the cabinet in the background. The main place this can be seen is in the clear and painstaking detail of the subject's face. Because the background has larger less detailed strokes the viewer's eye is immediately drawn to the more detailed face.

Cooke also establishes strong lights and darks. The lights in the painting come from the source of the windows which spill soft light into the studio. The light creates a glow from the windows that spills onto the painting, Cooke's face, and her figure facing the windows. This extreme bright and nearly glowing effect is completed through the juxtaposition of the intense dark shadows found on Cooke's clothing and the flooring. These contrasting lights and darks create a mix of a soft but serious atmosphere. It feels pleasant, but the viewer can notice the importance of painting to Cooke.

This use of the color in the painting reflects Cooke's life at this time. At the time it was painted, she was still married to John Bratby. She was painting from the studio in her home. The colors used to depict the figure and the background of the home studio are dark colors like browns, greys, and blacks. Paired with Cooke's serious expression could show her home life at the time. However, the light front of the outside world shines brightest on her painting which could show her hope and the fulfillment and joy of her art at the time. The blurriness in the background created with large strokes by Cooke also showcases this idea. The light parts of the paintings coincide with the blurry large strokes in the painting, which could be interpreted as the hope being further away and the joy of her art not being as much of a focus in her life. These deeper looks into her art can be seen using her art style and knowledge of her life.

“Toujours en Fête”

In 1969, Cooke painted “Toujours en Fête”. This painting showcases how Cooke would use perspective in unique ways to create her pieces. The painting is an outside scene in her garden with wild grasses, flowers, and trees around Cooke and her children. In the piece, her sons are sitting in the grass: one is reading a book, another sitting and looking at the viewer, and the baby is looking at the world around him in his basket. Cooke is also seen behind the boys posed ready to paint and looking at the viewer.

This painting of Cooke’s is a great example of how she would bend perspective to capture a unique image. Cooke would often piece together different figures or moments into one big piece (McNay, 2023). This is the case for “Toujours en Fête,” each figure looks as if they were transported into the garden from their own worlds. “Her paintings are snapshots of moments – sometimes timelapse snapshots superimposed or jigsawed together to produce a single image” (McNay, 2023). This use of perspective to capture more in a single painting is common for Cooke, especially around the time of her children growing up. Some paintings clearly show one son multiple times in different moments like in her piece “Sofa’s Galore.” In “Toujours en Fête,” many people have spotted a double of the son reading as he walks down a path far in the distance. The use of perspectives let Cooke expand the scene, bringing different people, places, and things together into one painting.

At this time, Cooke was raising her children and painting. One place she paints more and more at this time was her gardens in the places she lived at the time. She would let her garden grow big and wild and paint from similar angles in it (McNay, 20223). In one article it explains that “If it is in an artist’s nature to look at things differently, one feels in Cooke’s case that she looks intently, at angles, and under and around things, in order to find a pocket of freedom for herself,” (Hallett, 2019). Cooke certainly does this as she stitches together the things she loves from around herself to add to her paintings and paints similar things over and over giving the viewer an increasing view of her life at the time.

“Cliff, Birling Gap”

Later in her life, Cooke painted “Cliff, Birling Gap” in 1994. This painting captures her view when living on the coast in her cottage on the Birling Gap. The painting looks out from one side of the coast to the other. A building on the coast perches in our view with vegetation around it. The sea can be seen to the right side of the cliff and the sky is seen above.

One main tool Cooke uses in her painting is the use of color. The colors seen in this painting are bright and vivid. Cooke uses light greens, blues, browns, and whites to depict the scene. The sun seems to be shining down from a slight angle onto the sea and the cliff. The vivid colors bring the sea

and cliff to life as it seems to glitter in the artwork. Cooke reserves darker colors for the deep shadows in the front of the painting, in the clouds, and a bit in the background vegetation. The rest of the shades used are on the medium to light side with a huge number of highlights. The colors used in "Cliff Birling Gap" is a direct contrast to the somber colors used in her other paintings. Especially in interior settings like "Blast Boadica" and "Mad Self Portrait" the colors are dark with intense shadows and a lack of highlights and bright colors present. Influenced by the outside environment of the painting, Cooke brings in bright and vivid colors from her palette.

Another aspect of this painting that really brings it to life is the texture created by her strokes. Other paintings of Cooke use the strokes to fill space or create a mood. In this painting, the strokes are very directional which create a sense of texture and a flow of movement. The small individual strokes on top of the cliff are painted all in the same direction facing away from the viewer, depicting grass. This is seen again with the creation of the cliff. The cliff is created with small strokes that show texture in the rocks. These strokes are mostly diagonal up and down strokes. The last part of the painting that uses this technique is the water. The waves in the water look like waves rolling toward the shore due to the long, partially rounded strokes in white and blue. This illustrates the movement of the water by using these

types of strokes to give movement and texture. All of these differing strokes create a liveliness to the painting while showing texture and movement.

Cooke created this artwork while living on the coast in her cottages. She was living alone and free to paint what and when she chose. No longer dictated by her ex-husband, she was able to paint outside rather than painting from a window. This painting is a reflection of that through the vivid paints used and the movement created in all parts of the painting. One critique of Cooke's work reads, "Joyous liberation is felt in Cooke's pictures of the outdoors, which have a painterly vigour absent from the domestic scenes." (Hallett, 2019). Cooke's joy about where she was living and painting at the time shine through in this painting.

Conclusion

Cooke's techniques of purposeful color, strokes, composition lead to her unique style of intense lights and shadow, meaningful colors, texture, movement, and perspective to create her artworks. All these techniques are used alongside meaningful subject matters for Cooke. On this subject Cooke comments, "I have a very tactile approach to painting and need the feeling of space. I am very dependent on nature and the things around me." (Jean Cooke, Ungardening). Her approach and subject matter to her paintings also are a reflection of her own experiences as well as her paintings connect to what she

is going through at that time in her life. All of these things are imperative to the engaging and compelling work that she creates.

Personal Art Analysis

Introduction

Looking at Cooke's art, creates an understanding of how her art connects to her life. Her small strokes help her audiences focus on the important things while her colors connect to what she was experiencing at the time. Jean Cooke created work with intentional technique and creative choices in order to showcase her life and identity. Using this understanding of the artist as a guide, I created artwork with the lessons learned and techniques gathered from Cooke's art. The art analysis from above is used to inform the choices in my art, in order to explore similar themes, compositions, subjects, and art techniques. For this series, I created five paintings that reflect Cooke's art and present my identity through my art.

In order to learn from her work, I decided to do three paintings based on her window paintings and her outdoor landscapes. These paintings were painted using gouache paint. This medium was not used by Cooke but is one that I enjoy using. Being a water-based paint that has more pigment and opacity than watercolor paint, gouache layers nicely, and has vibrant colors. These aspects shine through in outdoor paintings. Instead of canvas, I used thick watercolor paper to hold the water-based paint and to be a smooth, solid base for the paints. For the subject of the piece, I selected three different windows that showcase a point in my life and painting journey. Cooke's

painting locations show where she was in her life, and I elected to follow that example.

Painting 1: Beyond the Fence

For the first painting, I selected the window from the room I grew up in during high school. At this time, I had no car and little opportunity for leaving the house for more than a walk, due to the effects of Covid. Being able to be independent was difficult. Lots of free time was spent at home in places that I could have peaceful alone time like in my room. In the left side of the painting, the window scene clocks the outside world. More of the outside world is blocked from the viewer as a fence separating properties is visible. On the left side of the painting above the fence, a neighbor's house with brick and siding is visible. Most of the space in the painting is blocking the nature outside in favor of man-made structures. The last piece of the painting not being blocked by infrastructure is seen in the top right corner. The sky is peaking out in this corner showing a light blue with clouds in the sky. Trees and a telephone pole are also seen in the distance as well.

One important aspect to the painting is composition. In "Up the road and Pigeon Die" composition helps showcase how far Cooke is from the outside world. From the windowsill and the visible glass of the window, the row of houses looks further away from the viewer. This is similar to the

windowsill, fence, and house that blocks the sky in my own painting. These aspects of the composition block the sky, which separates the viewer from the outside world. The separation relates to Cooke's paintings as well as captures a feeling in a time in my life.

As mentioned before, color is an important aspect of Cooke's paintings. She uses color to convey multiple feelings and ideas in her artworks. In "Up the Road and Pigeon Die," she uses mostly neutral colors to create a mood of bleak and trapped surroundings. The colors used in my painting include lots of grays, browns, and white. The exception to this color palette is the bright blue of the sky. The color pops in the sky hinting at a sense of hope, as the brighter color is introduced into the bleak colors of the painting. The pop of color among the bleak colors showcases that something in the future is bright and exciting. Highlighting the feeling of waiting for the next steps of your future and independence, the composition reflects this moment of my life.



"Beyond the Fence" Cybelle MacLean, 2025

Painting 2: Dorm Room

In the second painting in the window series, the artwork showcases the window view of a dorm room I lived in during my second year of university. This painting starts to show the slow gain of independence, confidence, and growing through the picture chosen. The picture showcases the view of a building and courtyard as the sun starts to set. In the distance, the clouds and sun are turning yellow against a blue sky. The buildings are blocking part of the sky. The courtyard between the building and the window is dark with some lights and a tree. The windowsill frames the rest of the composition in shadowy grays. Part of the interior is seen in the bottom right corner in the form of a microwave, plant, mug, and a pitcher of water.

Looking at the composition of this piece and “Up the Road and Pigeon Dies” there are multiple similarities between them. In “Up the Road and Pigeon Dies.” The row of houses seen in that painting relates to the far away dorm building in this painting. The buildings in the distance in both paintings showcase hope, connection, and opportunity that is close, but just out of reach. Furthermore, these compositions relate because of the items in the room. In Cooke’s painting, there are flowers and the pigeons on the windowsill, which gives the viewer a glance into the house in a different way because of these objects. These objects balance life and death with the alive flowers that are fresh, and the dead pigeons laying on the windowsill. In the

dorm room painting, the plant in the jar mimics the flowers that are present in Cooke's painting. Both of these details showcase aliveness in paintings that do not have many signs of life in them. The objects seen in the composition near the windowsill adds to the painting. The composition of the painting mimics Cooke's while having a life of its own.



"The Dorm Room", Cybelle MacLean, 2025

Painting 3: Window of Windows 2

The third painting of the series depicts a zoomed in window with a building outside. This window is located on the third floor of Campbell Hall, the art building at Western Oregon University. This window looks at the neighboring building across the way. Farther out in the painting is a blue grey sky peaking in the top third of the window. A row of winter green and brown trees separates the top of the building from the sky. The unique windowpanes break up the shapes and colors in the painting. The full window and part of the wall are shown with the painting's focus on what can be seen through the window.

Stroke is an important part of this painting. Especially when compared to Cooke's works. This painting has smaller strokes to show distance out the window. The more the viewer looks in the background the smaller the strokes become and the farther away these objects look. Painting the trees in rows that become smaller and less clear using stroke helps create a sense of distance. Ensuring that objects and strokes get smaller as the painting progresses into the background is vital for this type of perspective and keeping in line with Cooke's style. The stylistic choice of broad strokes of color over small details is best seen in buildings seen out the window. The building is an old brick building with an earthy red toned brick. In the painting, not all the bricks are painted individually, but the likeness to brick is

created by streaks of color, which convey the various tones, shadows, and textures of the brick. These streaks take the place of detailed work. This same technique is used by Cooke to show details, shapes, and textures with whole streaks taking the place of objects. In her paintings she balances out her use of details and larger strokes of color to create her art style.

This last painting was created out of a window in a studio and building that I enjoyed many classes and hours painting. This window has an importance to it that is shown in the bright colors and details that are there. Unlike the other two paintings this one has the full window with nothing obscuring it and no objects obscuring the view of the landscape. Showcasing the peace of mind and the fulfillment that is felt during this time in my life. Like Cooke's work, these artworks showcase different times in my life and the feelings behind these times.



"Window of Window 2", Cybelle MacLean, 2025

Painting 4: Window of Window Reflection

The last two paintings in my series are portraits. I painted two differing self-portraits based on two separate paintings by Jean Cooke. Both of these paintings are oil paint on canvas which is the same medium used by Cooke. As discussed above, Cooke paints herself in a distinct and characterized way, to depict herself in the way she wanted to be seen, giving her back power and autonomy over her own life (Vann, 2008). As someone who has been intimidated by painting portraits and myself, committing to do so claims back my power from my fear. Painting myself based on her styles and paintings let me experiment and play as I understand Cooke better through the process of creating my own self portrait. With her in mind I painted these portraits.

Of these two paintings, the first self-portrait I created was a portrait of myself painting. An old box television takes up the majority of the frame. Around the television is also seen as it sits on an old black cart with cords coming out of it with a beige wall behind it. The television is dusty and black with a turned-off screen with bugs on top of the frame of the television and on the screen. On the screen of the television, it reflects the rest of the room with a figure painting the scene. The rest of the room around the painting figure is a wall, floor, and a wall of windows. The painter is standing at an angle to see the television and the canvas, which is suspended on an easel to the painter's

height. All of these individual aspects come together to create the full composition of the piece.

The composition of the television painting is similarly laid out to Cooke's painting "Blast Boadicea". In the painting described above, it follows a similar flow with Cooke's painting with the canvas on the right of the painter and the window to the left. The wall of windows seen in the television reflection creates a glow of light on parts of the floor, the canvas, and the figure. The basic composition of the painting gives off the same feeling and structure as Jean Cooke's "Blast Boadicea."

With similar structures to the painting there are also similar ideas behind the painting. Cooke's painting creates a sense of peace with a feeling of disconnect from the faraway houses which are dispatched in dull colors with rich details out the window. In the television painting, an almost opposite feeling is created by the window, with a vague outside world in light natural colors. This creates more of a feeling of lightness throughout the painting, not just inside the art studio. All together this piece mirrors Cooke's in what it depicts and the feeling as well.



"Window of Windows Reflection," Cybelle MacLean, 2025

Painting 5

The second portrait painted is a close-up picture of my face and shoulders. Bathed in shadows and harsh lights the focus is on my face with the background of my surroundings peaking through the sides and top of the piece. In the picture, the figure is looking up to the right of the painting. The composition of the painting mimics Cooke's "Mad Self Portrait."

The painting I created pays a nod to Cooke's in more ways than just composition. For example, using a similar color palette with harsh lights and darks also resembles Cooke's. We both utilize a similar color scheme of creams, yellows, and whites that are juxtaposed by harsh shadows of browns and blacks. The dark shadows deepen and create depth and interest in the pieces instead of it looking flat. The light source from both pieces creates a similar effect but come from differing places. In the painting I created, the light is coming from above, which lights up more of the painting.

The last important aspect is the use of stroke. I used large, messy, and loose strokes when painting. Large swabs of color are on the canvas. Especially for the background of the painting, general shapes are shown but small exact details are left out. This can be seen with the large dark rectangle in back of the figure. These blocks of colors depict a door by shape without having exact details in smaller strokes. The figure is painted in a similar way with big, loose strokes. This makes the painting more reliant on color and

shape than small details to define the objects and features. Strokes create movement, dimension, and detail while still being on the looser side like seen in the texture in the sweater and in the hair. The loose and large strokes are utilized in Cooke's painting as well. This is seen in the background and clothing which has messy strokes of color. The way stroke is used in this painting creates interest in the painting and helps it mirror Cooke's art.

All of these parts of the painting come together to deliver the theme of the painting. As hinted at by the title of Cooke's painting the main theme and goal of this painting is to create a feeling of madness. By looking at the shadows, stroke, and limited color this idea is shown to the viewers. The shadows underneath my eyes and the looming shadows in the background create these dark feelings. The large and loose strokes are very striking when used to create a portrait because of the large swabs of color and lack of exactness in the body and face. The color palette lends itself to the dark and mad nature of the piece. Painting a piece that showcases madness and unraveling in a self-portrait was somewhat freeing as an artist. I was able to focus on color and shape instead of detail and exactness. Being free to create something that did not fit into the mold of my other work that typically leans calming and thoughtful, lifted the worry from it. Instead, the focus was on if my shadows were deep enough or if my colors fit into the chosen color

palette. Using Cooke's painting as a blueprint let me experiment with different kinds of portraits and paintings.



"An Ode to Mad Self Portrait," Cybelle MacLean, 2025

By looking at Cooke's paintings as inspiration, I was able to experiment in my approach to painting. I stepped out of my comfort zone in order to loosen up and not keep going back to each painting. I tried to let my brushes be larger and my strokes take up more space. I used her paintings to decide what to paint, which led me to portraits for two of the paintings. As someone with not a lot of portrait experience, it was exciting to challenge myself and to try new things. Like Cooke I used my past and current life to lead my painting. Through this experience I learned to keep expanding my art experiences, face what intimidates me, and to enjoy the painting during the process.

Conclusion

Throughout Jean's Cooke art, the themes in her life show up. The obstacles, joys, and experiences she endured can be found within her work. Despite the hardships within her personal life, she chose to paint in ways that were uncommon at the time. In an era of realism, she played around with the techniques she used to showcase how she felt and saw the world. She used the discouragement she encountered from her husband to make art. In the face of this, "she renders immutable the stark evidence of domestic abuse, inciting people to acknowledge that to which they would sooner turn a blind eye. It is up to us to right these wrongs: to recognize and to remember, to turn our collective neglect – benign and malign – into a thing of the past. Jean Cooke is a name people ought to know" (McNay, 2023). Cooke is one of the many women in art who worked to be heard in a male saturated art scene. Working through the bias in the art industry and the rules created by her husband, Cooke's story is one of perseverance. Through her art, Cooke shows us what it can look like to fight for who you are. After her death, her art continues to spread and pieces of the story are discovered. Silenced but not forgotten, Cooke is one of many artists that have a powerful story to tell about creating art through obstacles.

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