

4. ARTISTIC HERITAGE AT THE COMPLUTENSE UNIVERSITY OF MADRID FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE⁴⁸

ISABEL M. GARCÍA FERNANDEZ

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Abstract

Universities, like other institutions, are obliged to draw up and implement an equality plan, which is a valuable tool for the elimination of gender discrimination. These plans include applicable measures to guarantee equal treatment and equal opportunities.

In our universities, the gender perspective has gradually been mainstreamed in all areas. In the case of historical-artistic heritage, a series of cultural activities has been proposed in an attempt to make women in culture more visible. For this purpose, an accessible itinerary is being designed to highlight the artistic creation by women. After an initial analysis, it has been confirmed that of the 6400 artistic works catalogued at the UCM, 13.2% have been identified as having been created by women compared to 33.7% by men, with 53.1% of unidentified authorship, but we suspect that not many of these may be attributed to women.

In conclusion, this itinerary is a concrete contribution to the interpretation of heritage, an attempt to create a discourse that highlights a past situation and at the

same time tries to contribute to changing an unequal environment and reality into a more gender respectful presentation. We believe that this proposal will help to make visible, encouraging and supporting the presence of new women creators in our collections.

Gender discrimination

Women continue to be the main victims of discrimination in many fields, especially in the context of education and culture, and therefore in the university and its heritage. Gender discrimination is an issue that we have been facing for some time in the world of university museums and collections, but it is necessary to understand it in a broader context. Thus, we highlight the publication by UNESCO of the first issue of the journal *Museum* thirty years ago, entitled *Focus on Women*, and considered "the first-ever broadly international look at a wide spectrum of problems and prospects arising from women's many interactions with museums" (Gillette, 1991, p.123). Most of the articles stressed the poor women's presence in museum collections and displays and the absence of women's history in many museums.

Sixteen years later, in 2007, the issue of *Museum International Gender perspectives on Cultural heritage and Museums* was interpreted as the first attempt to compare two issues that have rarely

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been juxtaposed previously: women and heritage. Its editorial explained that things have changed, but “the relationships between gender equality and heritage still suffer from a lack of visibility and understanding among new heritage policy makers” (Vinson, 2007, p.5). This continued to be the pattern, despite being one of the two global priorities of UNESCO. It is true that there was a noticeable progress; however, it seemed that there was still a long way to go. Following our reference, we need to mention that thirteen years later, a new monographic issue was published in the *Museum International*, *Museums & Gender*. In the articles included, we appreciate an update of the situation in terms of gender representation and inclusion, however, the situation was still not positive, “gender bias in museums requires great effort on the part of the museum sector as a whole” (Remer, 2020, p.7). With this in mind, at the university we inquire how we can work to reverse this situation.

Approaches from the University

The university is a reference model in society; however, it has not been able to address the issue with more vehemence. In Spain, the Organic Law 3/2007, of 22 March, for the effective equality of women and men⁴⁹ refers to the social reality and specifically the cultural and artistic reality where inequality can be generated or perpetuated. Article 26, *equality in the field of artistic and intellectual creation and production* raises the need for measures and initiatives to ensure equal representation in order to redress situations of inequality. How is this managed at the University? As part of the

public administration, the University must adopt initiatives aimed at favouring the specific promotion of women in culture and combatting structural and/or diffusing discrimination, which is the purpose of the existence of Equality Units. It is mandatory for all institutions and the deadline for its implementation expired March 2022. At our university, we recently approved the second equality plan, which will be in force until 2026. This plan aims to promote equality in all areas, emphasizing the transversal dimension.

On a more specific level, we will make a brief overview of the actions being implemented regarding academic heritage intended to give visibility to women who played a key role since the beginning of the existence of the Central University, later and still Complutense University.

Two women, two queens, preside over the most emblematic place of the university, the Paraninfo, where the most important academic events of the University are held. Four hundred years separate them, but their reigns have important similarities, to them we owe important scientific and technical advances that coincide with periods of splendour and progress in Spanish education and culture. Isabel II in 1854 inaugurated the modern university and this fact is recalled at the beginning of each academic year [Fig.14].

Another symbol of the institution is an impressive sculpture made of aluminium located at the centre of the University City. The American artist Anna Hyatt (1876-1976) created the big sculpture of the torchbearers in 1954. She was closely related to the university after her marriage to Archer Milton Huntington (1870-1955), founder of the Hispanic Society of America, who in turn, was closely linked

49 Ley Orgánica 3/2007, de 22 de marzo, para la igualdad efectiva de mujeres y hombres.



to the financing of our campus. [Fig.15]. She also donated the sculpture Diana the Huntress, created in 1922, which is located in the gardens of the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities.

Following the impulse of these women, several initiatives have been launched. In line with the editorial of the above-mentioned issue of *Museum International* we do not seek “a simplistic reification nor oscillate between some studies on women as heritage actors and others on women as heritage contributors” (Vinson, 2007, p.4). We want to go further, trying to understand our history and our present reality through the analysis of the real situation in order to manage our own gendered construction.

After an initial analysis, it has been confirmed that of the 6400 artistic works catalogued at the UCM, 13.2% have been identified as women’s creations compared to 33.7% created by men, and 53.1% of unidentified authorship (pending further investigation).

However, with this data, the Vice-Rectorate for Culture, Sport and University Extension in collaboration with the Equality Unit is working on the creation of an itinerary that highlights the figure and importance of these women and their contribution to art and culture. This itinerary is part of a first initiative that we carried out in 2020 taking advantage of the pandemic and the motto of ICOM, museums for equality, diversity and inclusion. We created an



accessible album with a selection of 40 works of art, 20 of whom were women, either as artists or as portrayed. This project is still available on our website.⁵⁰ The itinerary expands the proposal to include several points of view: representation, represented subject, context, and significance of the work.

These initiatives help us to have a realistic assessment, to value the role that academic heritage plays in understanding gender. Our goal is to achieve gender equality, including tangible and intangible heritage. We understand that hidden heritage must come to life, museums and collections need to continue to be meeting places open to reflection, debate, current interpretations that are fundamental in the university environment and, above all, we must be committed to change.

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Contact information

Isabel M. García Fernandez (PhD)
Vice-rector of Culture, Sport and University
Extension, Complutense University of Madrid

Isabel M. García Fernandez is a Doctor in Geography and History (Archaeology) at the Complutense University of Madrid, M.A. in Museum Studies, San Francisco State University (Fulbright grant). Currently, she is responsible of the museums and collections of the university. Her fields of research include museology and museography, preventive conservation and exhibit design.

Address: Complutense University of Madrid,
Pabellón de Gobierno, 28015 Madrid, Spain
Email: museoig@ucm.es

⁵⁰ See <https://www.ucm.es/cultura/dia-internacional-de-los-museos-2020> (accessed on 29 March 2023).



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