

(Un)Fallen Woman

“Fallen Woman” is an archaic term which was used to describe a woman who has “lost her innocence”, and has fallen from the grace of God. It is used as an expression by which they believe that to be socially and morally acceptable, a woman’s sexuality and experience should be entirely restricted to marriage, and that she should also be under the supervision and care of an authoritative man.

“Fallen Woman” was an umbrella term that was applied to a variety of woman in a variety of settings for instance: she may have been a woman who had sex once or habitually outside the confines of marriage; a woman of a lower socioeconomic class; a woman who had been raped or sexually coerced by a male aggressor; a woman with a tarnished reputation; or a prostitute.

The term, Fallen Woman, has long been recognized as a popular theme for artists and writers during the nineteenth century including paintings by well-known Victorian artists such as D. G. Rossetti.

This work will not be confined to Pre-Raphaelite paintings but will examine a range of images produced during the twentieth century. The purpose is to relocate images of women in high art with a specific history, that is, the history of the sexuality.

Additionally, I want to demonstrate that the imagery are passively constructing meanings, values and morals which in Victorian times were demonstrated actively. The imagery are determined by their social context as much as personal motivation, adding a feminist lens has the potential to aggrandise the representation of women and visualized allegories of them.

This visual presentation shows the Fallen Women in standing form where we as the viewer look down upon them. Robustly laid out with a focus on putting down the sexual gaze—that subverts the woman as a binary, sexual human being.