

# ***Pretty Ladylike:***

***The Exploitation & Censorship of Female Sexuality***

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*Pretty Ladylike: The Exploitation & Censorship of Female Sexuality* is an exhibition hosted inside a city art gallery. Each piece was carefully selected to tell a tale of the various narratives that society weaves and projects onto women: what we are capable of; what we are worthy of; what is expected from us, often with much disregard for what we actually want. The way women are presented, represented, examined and ridiculed in various art and advertising can be seen as demeaning and pedantic in some eyes while conjuring provocative beauty in others. Where do these definitions lie and who is in charge of saying so? The eight pieces in this exhibit are housed between the inside of two free standing walls in the central area of the gallery. The walls are a creamy eggshell color on the inside, while the exterior of the walls is a deep teal. The front teal wall will include the wall inscription below, and the back teal wall will display collaborative exhibition pieces from the Guerilla Girls leading into their installation piece.

**Entry Wall Inscription:** *Pretty Ladylike: The Exploitation & Censorship of Female Sexuality*

Where is our morality and tradition? Politicians, fueled with a rampant fear, worry that our culture is becoming morally corrupt, an invasive thick fog. They reassure us that there are folks prepared to bring down the swift first of justice to bring us back to wholesome tradition. Tradition from whom and for what? This tradition embraces realms of rigid dualism and opposing values; something is either right or wrong but there is never any gray area. We create these boundaries that are tangible and symbolic, intended to exclude and include people in our specific communities based on game of dominance and submission between man and woman. Women are sexualized and yet cannot own their sexuality. They cannot show confidence, pleasure, or assert agency over their own bodies without ridicule and disdain. Why does a woman's overt expression of her own sexuality, pleasure, and desire offend people when women have been sexually exploited in socially acceptable ways for decades? If women wear their sexual prowess like a badge of honor, they are deemed sluts, whores, and tramps. You know the type...the "easy" women...the kind you shag but never marry. Why do we accept thin, white women wearing sheer clothing but racially fat shame Lizzo for doing the same? Why are the choices women make with their

bodies policed in ways that are different than men? Could it be because we prioritize the privilege of the male gaze instead of focusing on female empowerment? The line of morality is thickly etched between the sacred and profane, the pure and the polluted, as it assists to organize each of us within society's cultural walls. We need to come together as women to break free from these boundaries and limitations. Even if our specific struggles do not look exactly alike, we are all fighting to overturn the white hegemonic heteropatriarchy that keeps us from happy lives. As Audre Lorde wrote, "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own."

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### **EXHIBITION ORDER OF DISPLAY:**

1. *Black Shawl* – Henri Matisse (French, 1869-1954)
2. *Our Lady* – Alma Lopez (Mexico, 1966-present)
3. *Reisman's Ruckus* – Matthew Reisman (American 1990-present) New Moon Crystal Sheer Purple Dress from The Reisman's Collection
4. *The Ultimate Choice* – (Tatsuya Ishida 2012)
5. *Control Who?* – (Anonymous 2022)
6. *Pretty* – Katie Makkai (2002)
7. *Ladylike* – (2022)
8. *Roe vs. Wade* – NYT (2022)



***Black Shawl*** (Henri Matisse 1869-1954)

Date: 1917

Medium: Oil on Canvas

Dimensions: 26-1/2 x 50-3/4 in.

Henri Matisse was a French artist, known primarily for his painting, though he did engage in other forms of visual art. Matisse's Odalisque Collection includes this piece. It has been interpreted as a nuanced objectification of woman, captured and contained, bound in lacy bondage, her arms above her head. While this muse is not nude, her expression suggests that she is not the one in control, but rather the one being controlled. This piece reminds us that her needs and desires are not represented here, but instead the desires and needs of the one who views this piece. What do you want with her? She is bound and helpless, and waiting for instruction, a very nuanced exploitation.



***Our Lady*** (Alma Lopez 1966 - )

Date: 1999

Medium: Digital Print on Canvas

Dimensions: 24 x 36 in.

Alma Lopez identifies as a Queer Chicana artist from Mexico. Her pieces represent cultural and historical Mexican figures that are pivotal to her heritage, but many deem her lens as immoral. This supposed immoral lens is reflective of her very intersectional Chicana feminist and lesbian identity, and this makes her art profane. It is a stark contrast to Our Lady of Guadalupe, whose head is bowed in prayer, a symbol of virtue. Lopez embraces the confident Latina goddess, hands on hips, with a direct stare into the viewer's eyes. Here there is a beautiful, young Latina staring directly at you.



***Reisman's Ruckus*** (Matthew Reisman 1990 -)

Date: 2021

Medium: Designer Gown

Display: Hanging from a seemingly invisible wire in the ceiling, this dress is suspended 6 feet from the ground, encased in an air-bubble style vitrine.

Adorned with pasties and a thong, Lizzo wore NY Designer Reisman's New Moon Crystal Sheer Purple Dress to attend a party hosted by Cardi B and received serious public backlash. Reactions based on "inappropriate" attire to avoid talk of her weight, when in reality haters took to social media outlets to express their disgust and criticism by fat-shaming her and referring to her as a "fat mammy". When many of the rich and famous wear not much more on the red carpet of any awards show or gallery opening are met with much less criticism, if Lizzo was skinny and white, would this be an issue?



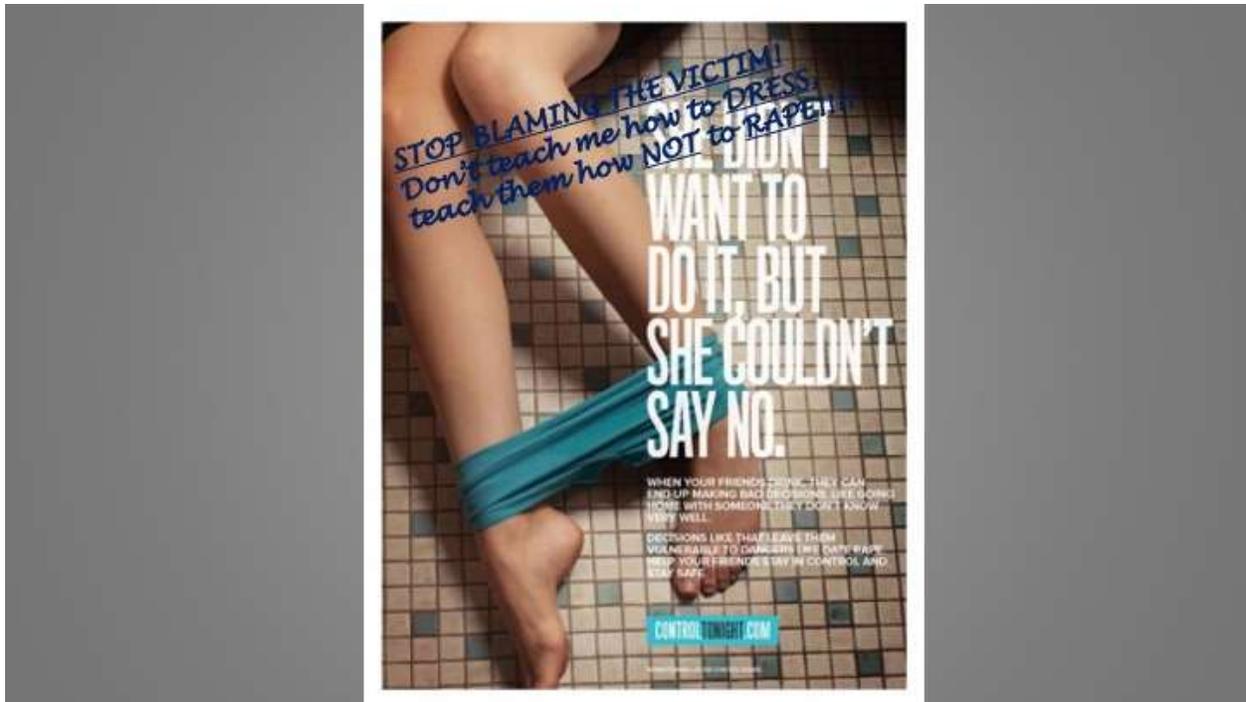
***The Ultimate Choice*** (Tatsuya Ishida)

Date: 2012

Medium: Digital Print on Canvas

Dimensions: 36 x 48 in.

Tatsuya Ishida is a visual artist and graphic designer of webcomics who tackles American politics, organized religion and feminism. This print brings us to the fork in the road of the Madonna-Whore complex of purity and pollution. The Madonna symbolizes sacred sexuality and love, while the whore represents profane perversion and sex, as a reminder to women that you are either marriage material or “fuckable” used goods.



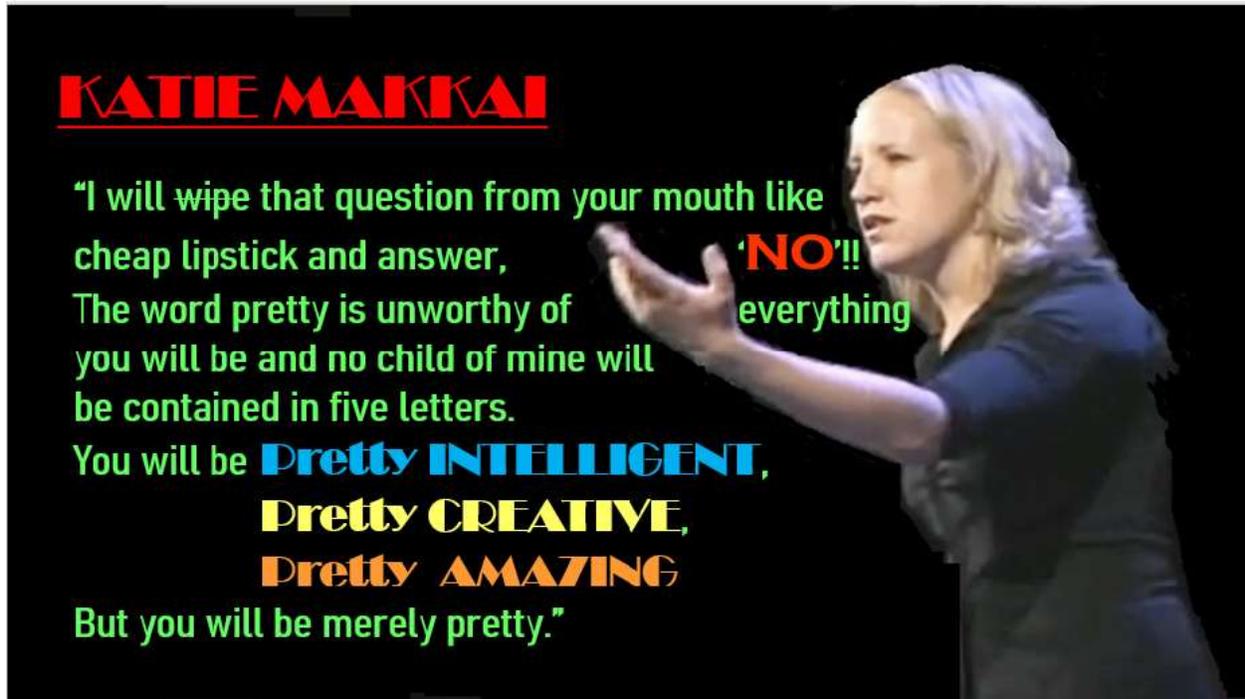
***Control Who?*** (Anonymous)

Date: 2022

Medium: Digital Print on Canvas

Dimensions: 24 x 36 in.

This was a protestor's poster at a Ban on Our Bodies March in 2022. The image comes from a controversial Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board poster from 2011 attempting to warn women of the dangers of binge drinking or losing control. It harkens to past societal warnings: to dress appropriately, to not give "mixed signals", or not wear too much makeup. These perpetual suggestions of "safety" don't guarantee we will not get raped, but also remember that we women should not "lose control". We need to be managing the behavior of the oppressor, instead of controlling the behavior of the oppressed.



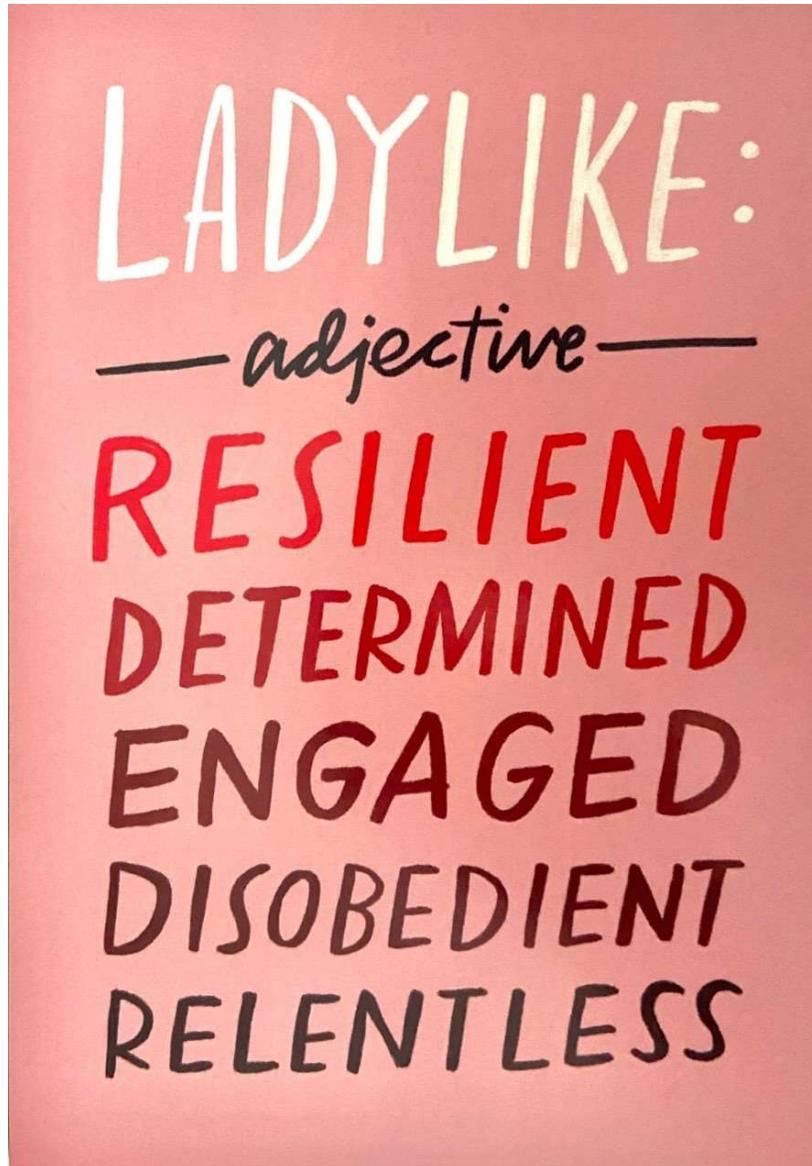
*Pretty* (Katie Makkai)

Date: 2000

Medium: Digital Video

Display: A tattered and cracked IPAD sits on an IPAD cradle encased in a square vitrine. Inside, there is a cord that stretches through a small hole in the glass with a remote permanently attached to the outside of the vitrine. There is a piece of green duct tape over a button marked "PLAY ME".

Katie Makkai cofounded the Denver poetry slam in 2000, the same year she graduated with her BA from the University of Colorado. She performed this piece at the National Poetry Slam in 2002. It is a powerful spoken word that addresses the suffocating social and cultural norms that demonstrate how a woman's self-worth is wrapped within specific white hegemonic heteropatriarchy and its superficial beauty. With her personal words and her deliberateness, Makkai speaks out against the superficial Aesthetic Beast in hopes that future generations are more preoccupied with true fulfillment, self-worth, and self-love.



*Ladylike* (Anonymous)

Date: 2022

Medium: Postcard

Dimensions: 5 x 7 in.

Display: Sitting in a 4 inch metal gold plated square wire plate stand holder inside a small square vitrine.

This is a postcard that was inside an independent bookstore. It is a rebellion against tradition. It is a reminder to rewrite the history of words to make them relevant to our current cultural climate; to speak against the social norms and expectations. We should do away with the idea of “ladylike” in terms of how to sit; how to talk; how to eat; how to walk; how to dress. Instead, we should embrace ladylike as resilient, determined, engaged, disobedient, and relentless.

# ROE OVERTURNED

## A 6-to-3 Ruling Ends 50 Years of Federal Abortion Rights



Protesters held that the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion. Roe and Casey must be overturned, and the country's abortion rights must be returned to the people and their elected representatives.



By David G. Hayes  
WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Friday overturned the 1973 decision that gave women the constitutional right to abort, a ruling that will have profound effects on the lives of millions of women across the country. The court's decision, which was 6-3, ended 50 years of federal abortion rights. The majority opinion, written by Chief Justice John Roberts, held that the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion. It also overturned the 2017 decision in *Casey*, which had affirmed *Roe*. The court's decision was a landmark moment in American history, one that will have far-reaching consequences for women's lives. The majority opinion, written by Chief Justice John Roberts, held that the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion. It also overturned the 2017 decision in *Casey*, which had affirmed *Roe*. The court's decision was a landmark moment in American history, one that will have far-reaching consequences for women's lives.

### Ending One Fight and Starting Another in a Polarized America

By David G. Hayes  
WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court's decision on Friday to overturn *Roe v. Wade* is a landmark moment in American history, one that will have far-reaching consequences for women's lives. The majority opinion, written by Chief Justice John Roberts, held that the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion. It also overturned the 2017 decision in *Casey*, which had affirmed *Roe*. The court's decision was a landmark moment in American history, one that will have far-reaching consequences for women's lives.

### For Collins, Decision Is a Betrayal by Kavanaugh

By David G. Hayes  
WASHINGTON — Justice Brett Kavanaugh's vote to overturn *Roe v. Wade* is a betrayal, according to Justice Stephen G. Breyer. Justice Breyer, who has been a vocal supporter of *Roe*, said that Justice Kavanaugh's vote was a "betrayal" of the principles that guided the court's previous decisions. Justice Breyer said that Justice Kavanaugh's vote was a "betrayal" of the principles that guided the court's previous decisions.

### A Conservative Supermajority May Be Just Getting Started

By David G. Hayes  
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### In an Instant, Midterm Contests Are Scrambled

By David G. Hayes  
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## Roe Vs. Wade (The New York Times)

Date: 2022

Medium: Newspaper Article

Display: Displayed in a rectangular vitrine on a pedestal. The lighting overhead is dimly lit, but the title of the article seems to pulsate in neon red lighting, the way a vacancy sign would.

This article highlights a tragic day in reproductive rights across America. It is belittling and tragic that in 2022, there is still no respect and no rights for the women that this country continually objectifies and oppresses. There are no words to express the pain and disadvantage that we felt that day, but we must continue to make our voices heard. We must rise up to secure our space in this world.