

FEMINIST:STORIES from WOMEN'S LIBERATION

A documentary film about the 20th century feminist revolution 1963-1970. By Jennifer Lee

Feminist:Stories

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There is a Girl Museum in the World

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December 11, 2012

There is a new museum in the world and it is called the Girl Museum. I spoke with the Head Girl, Ashley E. Remer.



Ashley E. Remer
Head Girl



Ashley R. Remer, Head Girl at the [Girl Museum](#)

JL: What is the Girl Museum?

AR: "Girl Museum is a virtual space for research, exhibitions, collaboration, and education about being a girl. We explore and document the unique experience of growing up female through historic and contemporary images, stories and material culture."

JL: How can I visit the Girl Museum?

AR: "If you have Internet access you can visit anytime."

JL: Why did you start the Girl Museum?

AR: "I have always worked in the arts and in museums and I have always noticed that girls, specifically, are missing from the big picture in art history. If they are discussed

its basically in regards to their sex. I wanted to broaden the dialogue and the Internet was the perfect platform to engage in a relatively inexpensive way."

JL: Who are some of the people involved?

AR: "I have a board of two other women that I've known since being an undergrad and they help keep my feet on the ground. We have an advisory board of scholars from all over the world from various disciplines, but their focus is girls or girlhood in some way. There are a few museum Gurus, too. But the biggest human resource I have are my interns, my Junior Girls. At the moment I have 14. The girls are spread all over the world, mostly in UK and US. We have had Junior Girls from India, Greece and New Zealand."

JL: Give us an example of some of your exhibits.



[Home and Away: Girls of the British Empire](#)

AR: "We have four exhibition series: Girlhoods in Art, Art of Girlhood, Girls in the World, and Girl -Speak. Our most recent example, which has been really successful, has been '[Home and Away : Girls of the British Empire](#).' We looked at girls both in the UK and all over the world during that time of mass imperialism and colonialization and it was launched in June 2012 at a conference at the University of Melbourne to a huge group of women who focus on Colonial girl studies. So it was really brilliant to have that support and it has really helped us in connecting those dots and trying to understand the colonial state."

"[Girl for Sale](#)" has been another really big success. It's a co-production with the American Poetry Museum. They have a similar model to us of being primarily out reach rather than a physical space. That exhibition focused on art and poetry to both examine human trafficking/girl trafficking as well as poetry used as part of girls' recovery process. We had an event in Washington, DC in 2011 where we talked the audience through the exhibition. That's how we combined the online experience with physical events and we are hoping to do more."

JL: There is an exhibit at the museum called "Defining Terms." Can you explain this?

AR: "I find that most of our misunderstandings in the world come from ignorance and not getting the basics. So its super important to say 'look here is how we are defining museum.' Most people have a hard time wrapping their head around 'virtual museum.' And, also defining "girl." That's been a huge challenge. 'Girl,' the word is seen by so many as inherently pejorative and we want to take that back and say it's not negative. Women are girls forever just like men are boys forever, which is, sort of more accepted. I thinks its also important that we start on the same page and that exhibition sort of defines our terms is to say 'This is who we are, this is what we're doing and this is what you might think you already know' and trying to turn it sideways and look at it from a girls eye view."

JL: Can you elaborate on this particular quote on your site?

"This absence of representation makes understanding what girl's lives were like

even more difficult. From the marginalized place of the girl, our exhibitions are sites to examine the images that do exist and how these representations coalesce on the body and mind of the girl, young and old."

AR: "I worked at the Metropolitan Museum for almost two years. And I can't tell you how many men I saw lift the skirt of Degas' *The Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer*, the little bronze statue with a cloth skirt. And I always thought, "What are you looking for? Do you think it's like a Barbie doll under there? It disturbed me on so many levels. I thought, "This is fundamental, right here." Dealing with art, people in public spaces, but also the girl's body. Girls have been around forever, in every culture, pre-historic, pre-literate, even nonrepresentational."



[The Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer, Edgar Degas, French, Paris, 1834-1917](#)

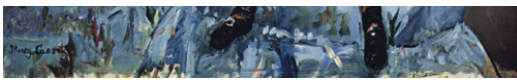
"I think we need to bring in this perspective of what the girl's lives were like beyond their economic value, which is the only thing that typically gets recorded. Girl's perspectives are pretty much denied in academia, in museums alike. And museums are places we go to find ourselves and look at ourselves in the past. And if the only images of girls are the pretty Impressionist girls and we look at what the wall text says and it talks about brush strokes and the play of light, but doesn't speak of the person that we are looking at, what we are looking at it is a disconnect."

"Today's onslaught of exploitative images is new in terms of volume, but we've been creating these images forever. If we don't engage in a way that help girls understand what these images mean to them and for them going into adulthood then we are going to continue making the same mistakes and have them misunderstand their own selves."

JL: How does it help a girl by visiting the Girl Museum?

AR: "We are a safe place for girls to land when they are visiting the Internet. We hope girls learn a little something when they come visit us, either about other girls who are living now in other countries that they can relate to or learn about their customs. Hopefully, see something of themselves. And to understand that if there's an artwork that you are looking at it was made by someone and of someone like us. We haven't changed. History is so relative. That's what I'm trying to do - raising awareness and relationship building and to inspire confidence. To showcase good things that girls have done in the past. And also to inspire creativity as well so they can create their own self-image and not wait for someone else to do it."





Mary Cassatt, *Young Girl in Blue Armchair*, 1889.
National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.
WikiCommons.

JL: Can you tell us some examples of a painting or artwork you'd like to talk about?

AR: "I think it is important to look at the late 19c work of Degas and those guys from the girl's perspective. They are just never discussed that way. There are quite a few images that look incredibly questionable like "Girl bathing. " There is a Degas called "Intérieur", but it is also known as "The Rape." You don't actually see something happening but it's evident in the mood and tone of the painting.

There is a Chinese pillow that's made in the shape of a little girl. You look and say 'oh it's a cute little ceramic' and then you realize it's for someone to literally rest their head on. Something that's also important are the contemporary photographs we have of girls, especially girls in developing countries, that are happy. "



Unknown, *Ceramic Pillow* c. 1175, Jin Dynasty , British Museum, London



[Two girls, near Ibadan in Nigeria](#),
February 2007. Photo: Amy Lee

JL: We now have an International Day of the Girl. How do you see the Girl Museum in this context?

AR: "To recognize the first International Day of the Girl, we showcased the UN Foundation program, "Girl Up." They focus on girls in America raising money and awareness for girls in several countries in Africa and Guatemala. Its really about getting girls engaged in leadership roles.

And that's the start of a series that we hope to continue each year for October 11. We are in a unique position as a museum- to reflect on the past, comment on the present and lead into the future. And that's where I see us sitting terms of the day of the girl and making every day the Day of the Girl."

JL: How do we become involved?

AR: "There are many ways to get involved with Girl Museum, involving varying degrees of commitment- the easiest is to become a patron and make a donation or

become a member, like us on [Facebook](#), follow us on [Twitter](#), [Pinterest](#) and [Tumblr](#). We have volunteers and internships for those with time to give and a keen interest in what we are doing. We also invite ideas for community exhibitions and collaborations. There is also a Junior Curatorial program for girls who want to learn how to be a curator and put their own exhibition together. And if they want to put it online, we will host it."



John West-Bey, Director of American Poetry Museum, & Ashley E. Remer, Head Girl of [Girl Museum](#), & at opening of Girl for Sale exhibition.



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Cynthia Ruccia about a day ago

What a GREAT idea!!!! Bravo Ashley Remer!!!
