

Thinking about Feminism, Art, and Social Change

Because the mission of the Kentucky Foundation for Women is to promote *positive social change* through varied *feminist expression in the arts*, both grant programs focus on the connections between **feminism, art and social change**.

Thinking About Feminism

KFW staff and reviewers recognize feminism as a dynamic force for social change that varies across age, ethnicity, economic class, geography, sexuality, and other differences. For this reason, KFW does not promote a single definition of feminism. Instead, the staff encourages grant applicants to describe their own understanding and practice of feminism, based on their own unique histories, communities, and experiences.

Questions to ask yourself:

What does feminism mean to me?

What is my understanding and practice of feminism?

How does my art reflect feminism?

What is the feminist nature of my art?

In 2006, the KFW Board of Directors adopted the following statement on feminism: *Feminism is a conceptual framework based on a radical transformation of society and self. Feminism challenges socially and politically defined gender roles and fosters greater opportunity, choice, and independence. Feminism creates economic equality, a violence-free society, and racial and ethnic justice. Feminism is an evolving process, which requires courage and advocacy.*

This statement may serve as a useful starting point for thinking about feminism. However, it should not be taken as an official organizational definition. Again, KFW's staff encourages you to develop your own vision of feminism as it relates to your work as a social change artist, in your own context.

Thinking About Art

KFW staff and Board recognize the value and importance of a wide variety of art forms. If you apply for a grant, you will be asked to indicate the primary art form you will be using in one of the four following categories: Performing, Media, Visual, or Literary. Although you may be working in more than one of these forms, you will need to identify one art form as the most important for this application.

Questions to ask yourself:

Am I prepared to demonstrate that my artwork that relates to the proposed activities is strong and highly original (a criteria for both grant programs)?

How does my art express feminism?

How does my art inspire social change?

Do I have (or can I create) a work sample that will demonstrate the strength of the work I want to pursue if I receive a grant?

Which of the four categories of art forms (Performing, Media, Visual, Literary) best describes my strength as an artist or the strength of the lead artist with regard to the proposed activities?

Thinking About Social Change

In thinking about social change, you may want to consider how feminist art can increase awareness about women's issues, alter perceptions, stimulate dialogue, open new spaces for civic participation, and/ or imagine new ways to create a more just and equitable Kentucky.

The global Women's Funding Network points to the importance of community-based "women-led solutions" as a key component of positive social change:

"Women-led solutions" are ideas and programs developed by women who are closest to their communities' needs. We believe women offer a critical perspective on the world's greatest social and economic challenges, and that their voices and solutions must be brought to the forefront for those issues to be tackled in any lasting way. Their vital perspective is informed by their life experiences as daughters, mothers, workers, community leaders and entrepreneurs. <http://womensfundingnetwork.org/impact>

KFW staff have seen that feminist social change artists throughout the state are using their artistic voices to offer "critical perspectives" on many issues that affect women and girls in Kentucky. Some issues that impact women and girls that KFW community members have addressed include:

- Gender roles
- Portrayal of women in the Media
- Gender and body image
- Women's history
- Leadership/ women's & youth empowerment
- Birth and motherhood
- Social inequality
- Reproductive justice

Feminist artists in Kentucky and across the world are also leading solutions to systemic inequities affecting all people from the local to the international levels, which disproportionately affect women and girls, such as:

- Addressing health disparities
- Increasing equal access to education
- Protecting human rights
- Advancing economic justice
- Stopping violence
- Protecting the environment
- Challenging discriminatory policies and practices
- Expanding acceptance of all forms of spirituality and faith

The Leeway Foundation, KFW's sister organization that funds feminist social change artists in the Philadelphia area, has identified "social impact" as one of its core values. The Leeway staff and board state:

We are committed to supporting work that intends a social impact. Work that:

- can alter how we think about ourselves, our society, or our culture by challenging or questioning societal norms including prevailing attitudes about race, class, gender, sexuality, identity, age, and ability;
- inspires action when used as a tool or strategy for organizing and movement building;
- helps to preserve or reclaim traditional cultural practices or is using an artistic practice as a form of resistance or empowerment;
- creates space for expression and building a sense of community; or
- can shift or transform perceptions of power, privilege and the dynamics associated with justice, equality, and/or accountability.

<http://www.leeway.org/about-us/mission-values-vision/values.html>

Questions to ask yourself:

What is my understanding of the relationship between feminist art and social change?

What kind of social change do I want to see in my life, town, area, state, nation, or world?

Does my artwork address, evoke or inspire social change and women-led solutions on topics of concern in my neighborhood, town, region or the state?

What kind of creative work am I doing now or would I like to do that may inspire social change?

What kinds of activities will help my art or artmaking inspire and affect the kind of change I want to see?

How will I know what kind of social change impact my art will have?