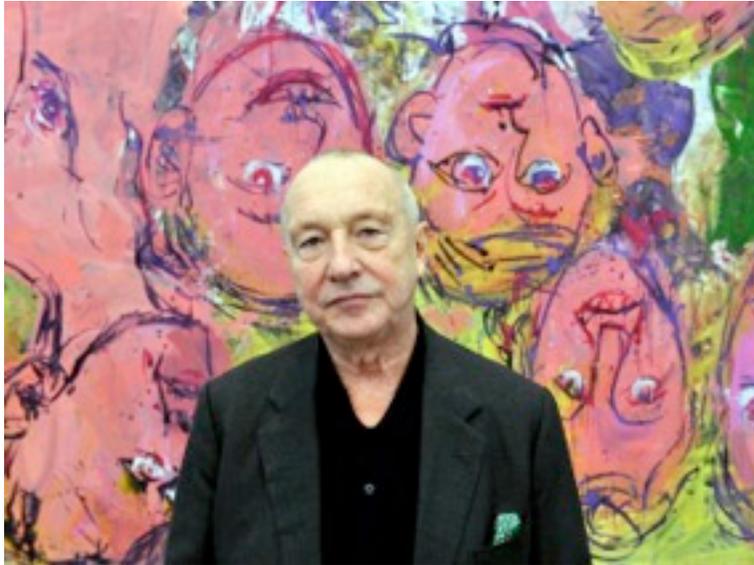


## What's the biggest problem with women artists? None of them can actually paint, says Georg Baselitz



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Women cannot paint well, despite making up the majority of art students, according to one of Europe's pre-eminent post-war artists.

Germany's Georg Baselitz has dismissed centuries of female artists at a stroke – from Artemisia Gentileschi and Frida Kahlo to Bridget Riley and Paula Rego – in his claim that women lack the basic character to become great painters.

Baselitz, who was lauded by the Royal Academy five years ago as one of the greatest living artists, dismissed women painters, saying that they “simply don't pass the market test, the value test”, adding: “As always, the market is right.”

His comments sparked a backlash, with one art historian calling them “nonsense”.

“Women don't paint very well. It's a fact,” the 75-year-old German artist told the German newspaper Der Spiegel. “And that despite the fact that they still constitute the majority of students in the art academies.”

Baselitz conceded there were exceptions, pointing to Agnes Martin, Cecily Brown and Rosemarie Trockel. After praising Paula Modersohn-Becker, however, he added that “she is no Picasso, no Modigliani and no Gauguin”.

Griselda Pollock, professor of the social and critical history of art at the University of Leeds, hit back: “The most boring of all arguments is that men are better than women. It's self-evidently nonsense.”

Pollock, co-author of *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, said: “Only few men paint brilliantly and it's not their masculinity that makes them brilliant. It's their individuality.”

She continued: “You have to change people’s perceptions. Baselitz says women don’t paint very well, with a few exceptions. Men don’t paint very well either, with a few exceptions.”

Baselitz is a divisive figure in the art world. Art critic Martin Gayford has called him a “walking monument of art history, one of the major figures of post-war art, and a point of reference for younger artists”. The Independent’s Michael Glover, meanwhile, has described him as “self-aggrandising and publicity-seeking”.

Sarah Thornton, who wrote *Seven Days in the Art World*, said: “I disagree with him; the market gets it wrong all the time. To see the market as a mark of quality is going down a delusional path. I’m shocked Baselitz does. His work doesn’t go for so much.”

The record for a work by Baselitz was £3.2m in 2011 for his work *Spekulatius*. The record for a painting by Yayoi Kusama, a female artist, is £3.8m. In the UK, Bridget Riley has sold for as much as £2.5m.

Pollock said women were held back by several factors but principally the “myth of the painter. The image in the West of a lonely, tortured white man. I could run rings around you with great women artists but there isn’t space in the cultural imagination.”

She added that 20th century art historians had edited out much of the contribution of women painters. “Women have also been put down, when they are good, as having talent and taste, but being too nice and not taking enough risks. It’s a sexist hierarchy.”

Baselitz is not alone in expressing such views about female artists. In 2008, Brian Sewell went further saying there has “never been a first-rank woman artist”. He referred to Bridget Riley and Louise Bourgeois as of the “second and third rank”.

Before the opening of Jenny Saville’s breakout show at the Saatchi Gallery, critic David Sylvester said he “always thought women couldn’t be painters” because “that’s just the way it’s always been”. In 1937, artist Hans Hofmann said Lee Krasner’s work was “so good, you would not know it was painted by a woman”.

Ivan Lindsay, an art dealer and writer, said: “This is a hugely contentious issue. Some people think women just generally aren’t as good, others believe they have been held back throughout history.”

He continued: “It is a fairly outrageous and provocative thing for Baselitz to say and we inevitably react against a comment like that. But he has got to an age where he doesn’t care. Others would probably agree but wouldn’t like to stick their head above the parapet.”