

Journal of Femininities, Special Issue: Representing Femininities

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Elisabetta Garletti, University of Cambridge

Representing Femininities: Subversion and Conformity in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture.

Journal of Femininities.

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Historically dismissed as a patriarchal construct, superficial aesthetic, or symbolic marker of women's oppression, femininity has increasingly been rearticulated within queer feminist, trans, and critical femininities scholarship as a performative and political practice rather than a fixed ontological state (Serano, 2007; Dahl, 2012; Hoskin & Hirschfeld, 2018; Raha and van der Drift, 2024). Moving beyond essentialist understandings of femininity or accounts that position it as inherently complicit in patriarchal power, scholars have demonstrated how feminine and femme expressions can function as sites of resistance, coalition, and world-making that unsettle naturalised understandings of gender (Hoskin, 2017; McCann, 2018; Schwartz, 2020). However, while this body of scholarship has significantly expanded understandings of femininity's political possibilities through analyses of performativity, discourse, and embodied practice—primarily within gender studies, critical femininities scholarship, media studies, and sociology—historically, artistic approaches remain underrepresented in these debates, despite their capacity to foreground the role of aesthetic coding and visual mediation in shaping feminine legibility. This special issue therefore aims to examine how aesthetics shape the ways in which femininity is produced, circulated, recognised, and reframed as a site of contestation.

Recent years have witnessed the proliferation and accelerated circulation of feminine aesthetics across digital media and popular culture (Bae, 2011; Dobson, 2015; White, 2015; Evans, 2023; Wiens and McWebb, 2025). Hyperfemininity, soft girl, bimbocore, and coquette aesthetics have become highly visible across social media platforms, while contemporary artists such as Amalia Ulman, Mickalene Thomas, and Juno Calypso have mobilised feminine and femme representational codes as critical visual strategies. At the same time, these developments raise pressing questions regarding the enduring commodification and sexualisation of femininity, the ways racialised, gendered, and ableist norms shape the legibility of feminine expression (Scott, 2015; Lori, 2025), and the entanglement of femininity with neoliberal forms of self-fashioning (Harris, 2002; McRobbie, 2004; Gill, 2007). While feminine and femme aesthetics may hold the potential to unsettle patriarchal visual regimes, they are also susceptible to reabsorption into systems of commodification, gender normativity, and neoliberal governance. This tension invites critical examination of the emancipatory possibilities and the political limitations of feminine and femme aesthetics.

This special issue of the Journal of Femininities invites contributions that examine how femininity

is represented in contemporary art and visual culture and what political work these representations perform. It approaches femininity as an aesthetic practice: a repertoire of formal visual codes, styles, and affects through which gendered meanings are produced, reproduced, negotiated, and contested. We are particularly interested in scholarship that examines how artists and cultural producers mobilise feminine and femme aesthetics to simultaneously 'exist' and 'resist' (Duggan & McHugh, 1996), while remaining attentive to the tensions between aesthetic agency and commodification. We welcome contributions that ask: What forms of resistance, refusal, or visual reimagination do feminine and femme aesthetics make possible? Where do we locate the line between feminine performativity and its commodification? How do race, disability, class, sexuality, and gender shape the legibility and politics of feminine and femme aesthetics? How do contemporary visual cultures negotiate the tensions between pleasure, visibility, agency, and regulation? What role do contemporary artistic and digital practices play in expanding or constraining the possibilities of femininity?

Below is a non-exhaustive list of topics we encourage authors to explore:

- Feminine aesthetics in contemporary art and visual culture
- Femme aesthetics and queer visual politics
- Bimbocore, coquette aesthetics, and digital girlhoods
- Femme drag and the visual subversion of gender norms
- Photography, self-representation, and feminine embodiment
- Social media, influencers, and the online circulation of feminine aesthetics
- Feminine aesthetics and artificial intelligence or digital image production
- Race, whiteness, and the visual politics of femininity
- Disability, crip aesthetics, and femininity
- Colonial and decolonial visualisations of femininity
- Femininity, consumer culture, and neoliberal self-fashioning
- Hyperfemininity, glamour, kitsch, and aesthetic excess

Submission Information

To submit a proposal for consideration, please send a 250-word abstract and a current CV to Elisabetta Garletti at esg36@cam.ac.uk by September 1, 2026.

Authors will be notified of the status of their proposals by September 8, 2026. Full manuscripts will be due January 1, 2027. Please consult the Journal of Femininities website for manuscript preparation guidelines.

Questions regarding this special issue may be directed to the guest Editor at the above address.

Reference:

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