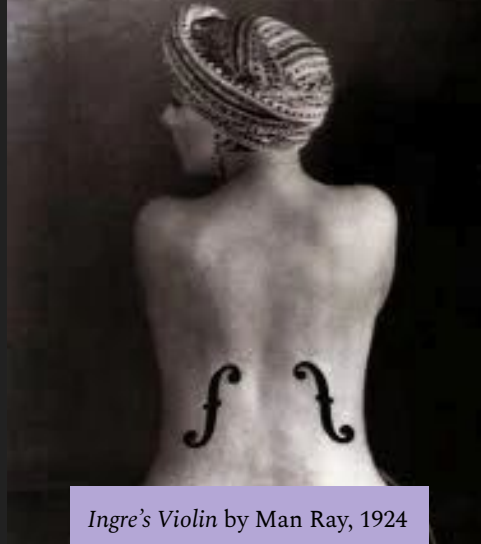


A Comparison between Color Photo of Earth and Tree of Life by Ana Mendieta and Ingre's Violin by Man Ray

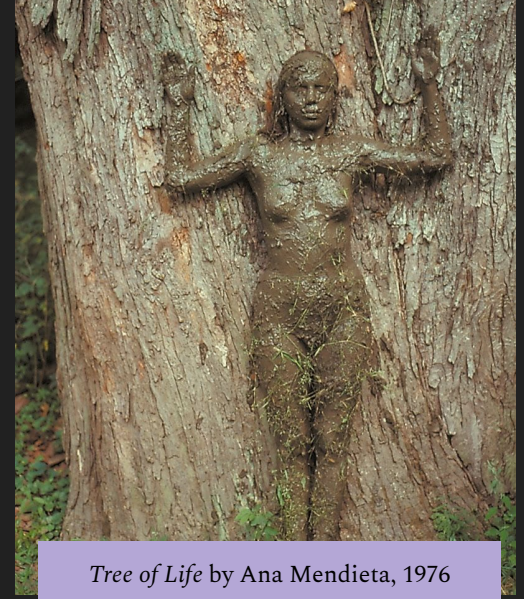
By Teresa Schmidt



Color Photo of Earth by Ana Mendieta, 1973



Ingre's Violin by Man Ray, 1924



Tree of Life by Ana Mendieta, 1976

I will be comparing three artworks that center around the female figure but come from different contexts. My theme is using the female figure to create art. I am analyzing the artworks through a feminist lens, and then using the themes the artists present to create my own work. I will compare and contrast all the works to each other and analyze the function, purpose, formal qualities, and cultural context of each piece.



Cultural Contexts in Man Ray's work

Man Ray is known for his contributions to the Surrealist and Dadaist movement. Dadaism was shaped by the trauma gained from those living during World War One. Dada artists were always looking for ways to make themselves heard through controversial themes and ideas, and brought many new ideas to the art world.

Ray was also immersed in the culture of “modern art” of the time. Like many Dada artists, many of Ray's works were experiments meant to test the boundaries of the art world. In *Ingre's Violin*, he used a female body and transformed it into an instrument. Ray fascinated himself with combining an inanimate object with the living human figure, bringing the idea into the modern art world. Other ideas Ray brought into this art culture include the “rayograph”, which is a photograph taken with photosensitized paper and light rather than a camera.

Ingre's Violin is a photograph taken of the model Kiki de Montparnasse. The marks on her back were painted on for the photograph. Kiki liberated herself through her modeling, but this piece is considered by some to be an objectification of the model. The title in French, *Le Violon d'Ingres*, is an idiom meaning “hobby”, further suggesting that the piece is created to objectify rather than liberate. Man Ray created the piece to poke fun at the model, so it is meant to be somewhat humorous and playful, though it is unknown how Montparnasse felt about it all.



Ingre's Violin, 1924

Ingre's Violin function and purpose

This piece can be looked into through a feminist lens. Given the time period, women were very much looked at as objects. The figure's body is shaped like an instrument, and instruments are meant to be played.

Essentially, this piece objectifies the body of the woman, stripping her down to an object meant to be used. The title supports this view. Instead of focusing on the figure, it focuses on the owner of the figure, and gives "Ingre" possessiveness. It also directly refers to her as an object; specifically, a violin. This could say that Ray is viewing women as an instrument for his own use. It could also say that he is using the piece to prove a point—that women are viewed as objects and that they should not be—and to bring a feminist aspect into his work.

Ray created this piece to be a somewhat seductive and playful image, but it can be analyzed in modern times through a feminist lens to understand how men viewed women in the 1920's. So, along with being something humorous for the time it was created, *Ingre's Violin* also serves as a look into the 20's through the eyes of a man.

Being a Dada artist, Ray was looking for a way to bring new, unique ideas into his artwork, which is what this piece functioned as. By combining a woman and an instrument, he was creating something aesthetically pleasing at first glance but strange when looked further into, because of how it objectifies the woman.



Ingre's Violin, 1924

Formal Qualities in Ingre's Violin

The grayscale **color scheme** draws attention away from color to focus on other elements of this piece, such as **shape**.

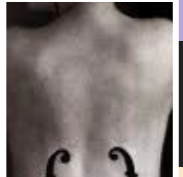
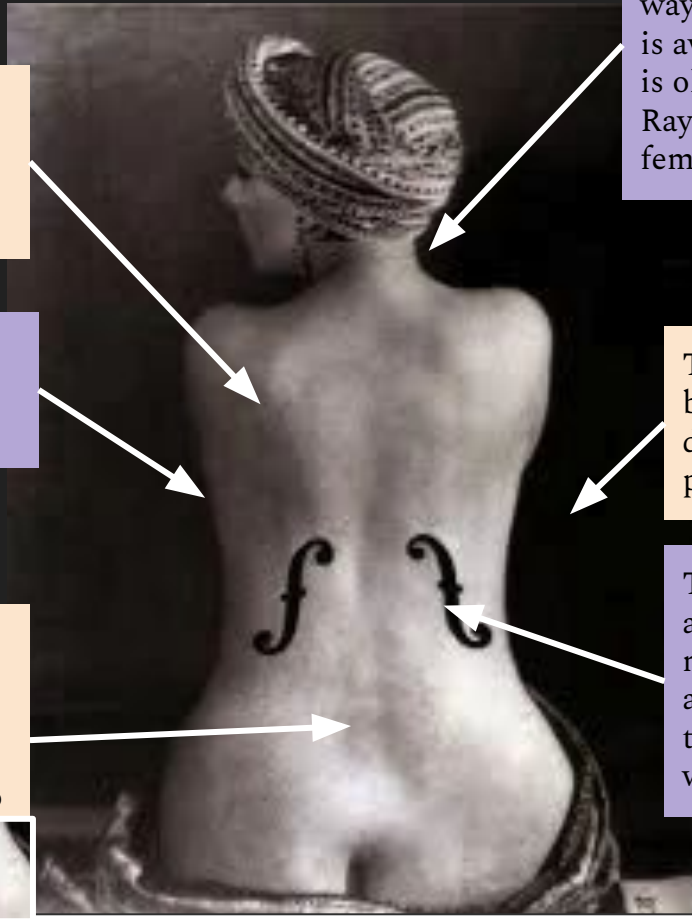
There is a clear **contrast** from where the background meets the figure, further accentuating her **form**.

Surrealist **photography** techniques give the skin **texture** and makes it look as if you could reach out and touch it. The **shape** of the figure is simple, so it is this detail in the photo that gives it life.

The figure is posed in an almost seductive way and appears relaxed. Based on the way her head is turned, it is likely that she is aware that she is being objectified and is okay with it. This rejects the idea that Ray created this piece through a 1920's feminist lens.

The background is simple and plain, bringing all the focus on the figure. Its darkness also **highlights** her prominent features.

The simple **lines** on her back label her as an instrument. These two simple markings completely alter the piece and its meaning. Without these **lines**, the piece would simply be a photo of a woman with a bare back.



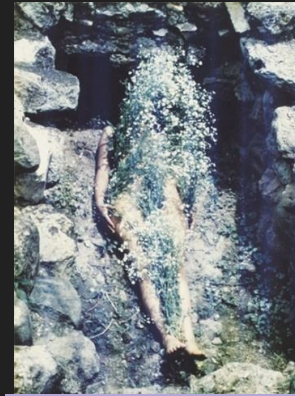
Cultural Contexts in Ana Mendieta's work



Ana Mendieta grew up with many disconnections from her identity which she expressed in her artwork. She was a refugee adopted into an American family, and she struggled with a lack of a sense of belonging, being torn from her family and culture. Her artwork revolves around connection. In *Tree of Life*, her figure is connected to a tree by being covered in mud and blending in with the dull brown color of the tree trunk. Similarly, in *Color Photo of Earth*, Mendieta also connects herself to nature, This time by covering herself with flowers

And laying in a small pond surrounded by rocks. Mendieta's work also connects to feminism and female empowerment, with a theme in her work being her own figure, but also in other works such as *Rape Scene* (1973) which explores violence against women. In this piece a naked figure is bent over a table covered in blood, illustrating the horrifying reality of what women face and fear to this day.

"My art is grounded on the belief in one universal energy which runs through everything; from insect to man, from man to spectre, from spectre to plant, from plant to galaxy." ~ Ana Mendieta



Color Photo of Earth, 1973



Tree of Life, 1976

Mendieta added a feminist theme to her work after a woman at her university was brutally raped and killed. She felt that she needed to bring awareness to violence against women, so she began creating work with more violent themes. She would often cover herself in animal blood and expose her body to create artistic masterpieces. During the 70's, feminist body art was becoming more popular, and Mendieta became a significant artist of her time.

Function and Purpose of Color Photo of Earth

Color Photo of Earth is from Ana Mendieta's *Siluetas* series in Mexico. While working on this series she was interested in Indigenous Central American culture, which led to a fascination with nature. The purpose of this piece was connecting herself to the world around her. As an immigrant forced to leave her home country at a young age, she felt many disconnections between the culture she came from and American culture, which she expressed in her land art. Her land art was done by using her figure, or an outline of her figure, in nature in some way. She would use anything she could find in the natural environment; rocks, sticks, mud, feathers, plants, and even fire. She would then outline or shape her body in some way to create a silhouette. Her *Siluetas* series contains over 200 earth-body works, in which she sought to become one with the earth.



Color Photo of Earth, 1973



Untitled: *Siluetas* Series by Ana Mendieta, 1976



Siluetas Sangrientas by Ana Mendieta, 1975

Color Photo of Earth connects a body to nature and makes a feminist statement due to how it is covered and positioned. The figure is stiff, as if it is uncomfortable with existing, and this is backed up by the fact that it is covered. This piece expresses a feeling of objectification and a want to hide oneself from an unwanted gaze. Being a part of Mendieta's *Siluetas* series, it also serves as a connection between the body and nature.

Formal Qualities in Color Photo of Earth

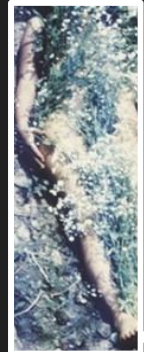
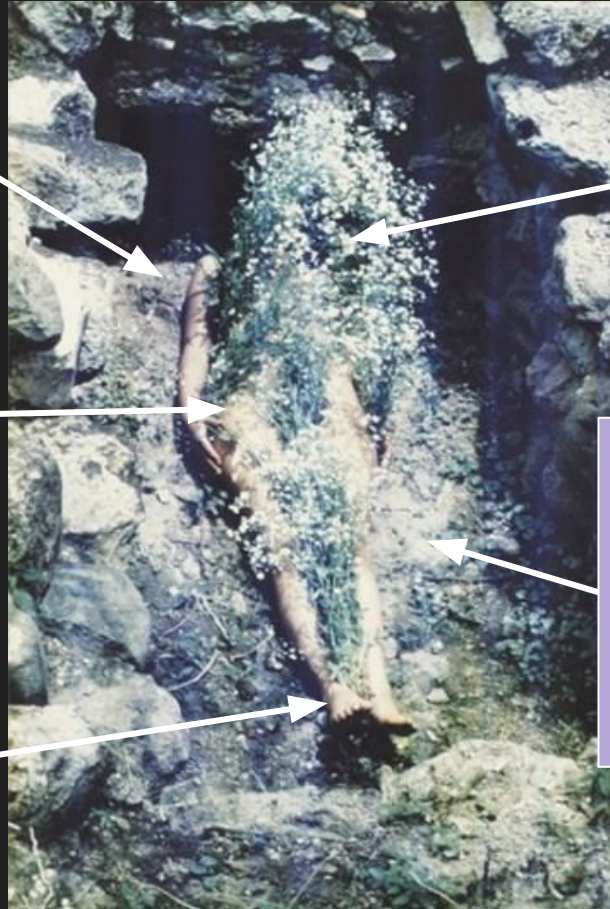
Color Photo of Earth lacks vibrant **color** but has very prominent **contrast**; the shadows start and end in sharp **lines** and the **highlights** brighten the piece as a whole.

There is a gray-blue **hue** that **blends** the figure into the background and effectively displays the connection between woman and nature.

The figure is in a tense position and appears almost awkward or uncomfortable to match the appearance of the jagged rocks surrounding.

The photo is taken from an overhead angle so that the legs and arms of the body are still prominent but the face and torso are completely covered. The fact that the body is covered, combined with the tense position of the figure, suggest discomfort and a need to cover up and shield the body from the world.

The brightness of the photo is almost blinding and blocks out detail in the piece, giving the viewer the ability to interpret it in their own way. For example, it is hard to tell what is covering the figure, one could guess flowers, but overall it is up to the viewer to decide.



Function and purpose of *Tree of Life*

Tree of Life serves as an “earth body” sculpture, connecting to life, death, and rebirth in a spiritual sense, shown through the title of the work. This piece is spiritually expressive, and it functions as a way for Mendieta to connect herself with nature and the circle of life. Mendieta felt a connection with nature and the earth around her and was very spiritual and at peace with natural life. Much of her work was done in a nature setting because it’s where she felt most free to express herself. Mendieta stands with her body exposed to represent strength. By making herself vulnerable to criticism, she is challenging the artistic norms of the 70’s. Nude art in the past has often been used to show beauty, but this isn’t a main theme in Mendieta’s work. Rather, she is using her body as a canvas and a tool to create her art.

This piece appears to be a person trying to be a tree. This connects to Mendieta’s culture because of how she feels disconnected from American culture due to being an immigrant. The tree is representative of the mold that she is trying to fit into, and she is covered in mud to match the color of the tree bark, standing stiffly, like how a tree stands. You can still clearly tell that she is a person, and this is intentional; representing how despite how hard she tries, she will never quite fit the mold of an “ideal” American. The strong outline also connects it to her *Siluetas* series, because the shadow makes a silhouette of her body.

Tree of Life by Ana Mendieta, 1976 (right)
Tree of Life (zoomed out) by Ana Mendieta,
1976 (below)

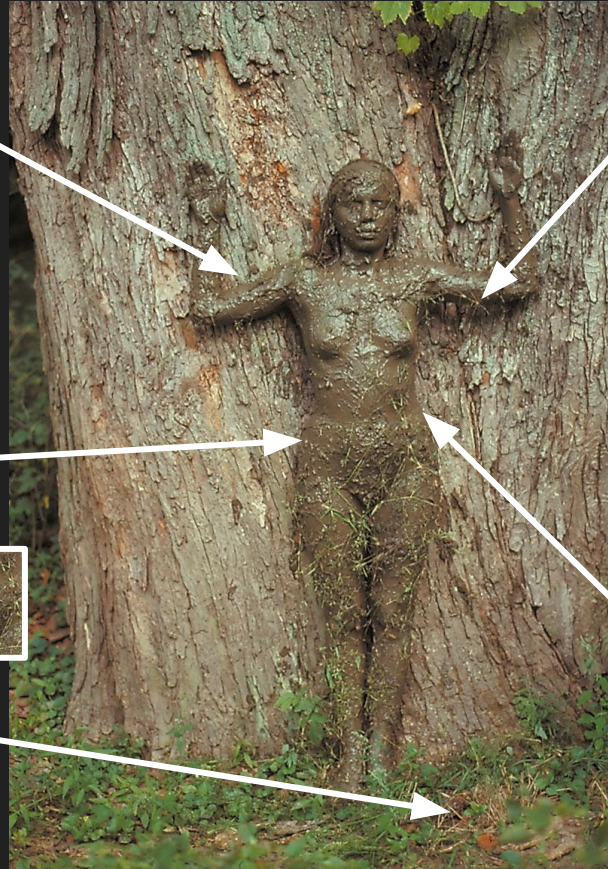


Formal Qualities in Tree of Life

Similar to *Color Photo of Earth*, the figure in *Tree of Life* is stiff and awkward, although in this piece it is to represent the stiffness and sturdiness of trees rather than to show discomfort. It also represents strength due to how she is exposing her body so openly and confidently.

The figure is intended to blend in with the background, so the **colors** of the tree bark and the mud are the same. This connects the figure to the tree from a color perspective.

The **tones** in this piece are very warm, bringing out the natural aspect of it and giving it a calming and gentle **background**.



Shape of the figure is very defined with **shadows**, there are clear facial features and every finger is easy to see, this keeps the identity of the figure in place so that the tree is not completely concealing her. This could relate to Mendieta's identity and how, as an immigrant, she was not entirely connected to American culture, and didn't quite fit into the mold she needed to fit.



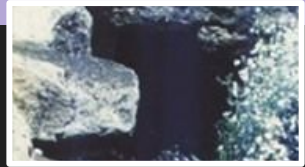
The **focus** is on the figure and the image centers around her.

The eye is drawn to her first, then the background. This makes it clear that she is intended to be seen and is not hiding. Her strong, sturdy stance suggests anything but fear, this piece is meant to show strength. The tree is a symbol of this strength, because of its rigid stance.

Comparison: Ingre's Violin and Color Photo of Earth

Formal Qualities

Both pieces have prominent **contrast** in **shadows** and **highlights** to emphasize where the figure is and to make it a focus point of the piece.



Function and Purpose

Color Photo of Earth and *Ingre's Violin* both have a theme of manipulating the female body to give meaning to the piece. This is done by adding on to figure. In *Color Photo of Earth*, flowers have been placed on top of the body, and in *Ingre's Violin*, markings have been painted on the back of the figure. They both focus on the beauty of a bare figure by using the body as a canvas.

Both pieces contain a female human figure who has been altered in some way to give meaning to the piece. In Ray's piece, this figure is meant to appear seductive. In Mendieta's piece, this figure is meant to look uncomfortable.

Both pieces have muted **colors** as a way to avoid distracting the viewer from the figure. **Color** would not serve a purpose in either piece, so it is not a point of focus.

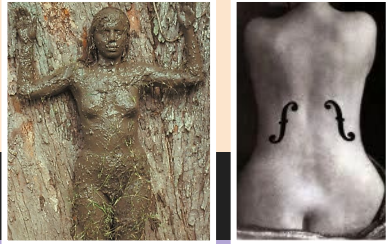
Cultural Context

The culture behind both pieces relates to creating controversial and new work. Man Ray was a Dada artist, and Dadaism was a movement meant to cross art boundaries to create new and never before seen work. Ana Mendieta was also crossing boundaries because feminist body art was rather new and not widely accepted.

Comparison: Ingre's Violin and Tree of Life

Formal Qualities

Both pieces use a female as a subject, and focus on her body rather than her face to depict the transformation from woman to instrument and woman to tree.



Cultural Context

By using her own body in this artwork, Mendieta is challenging art boundaries at the time, as body art was still gradually becoming accepted in art. Being a Dada artist, Ray is also testing art boundaries of his time, not only by using a nude figure, but also by transforming it.

Function and Purpose

Both pieces depict a female figure being used as a canvas to bring meaning to the piece. In *Ingre's Violin*, the figure is being transformed into an instrument. In *Tree of Life*, the figure is being transformed into a part of the tree trunk.

The **pose** of the figures is very significant to the finished product. In *Ingre's Violin*, the subject's back is posed in such a way that she can have a somewhat violin like **shape**. In *Tree of Life*, the subject's arms are held out to make her **shape** more like a tree's.

Both pieces have a similar **composition**, with a focus on the mostly centered figures, a **background**, and a **foreground**. They also both have a connection to the **background** and a reason why it is there.

Comparison: Color Photo of Earth and Tree of Life

Formal Qualities

The **shadows** are very important to both pieces. The **color** of the figures nearly matches the color of the **background**, the **shadows** help outline the figure and differentiate the **background** from the figure.

Both pieces contain a figure connecting herself to nature, representing a spiritual connection between person and nature. It also labels the female body as “natural”.

The **color schemes** match the background of the pieces well. In *Color Photo of Earth*, the figure is surrounded by rocks and lays in a small puddle. The **color scheme** is cool colors. In *Tree of Life*, the figure is surrounded by trees and fresh grass, so the **color scheme** is warm.



Function and Purpose

Both pieces are ritualistic, showing the connection between person and earth. The artist, Ana Mendieta, felt strongly connected spiritually to nature, and these pieces show the peace and comfort she felt when among it. It shows her longing to be a part of this peace and comfort she has found.

Cultural Context

These pieces relate to feminism and body art. They were created by a female artist who used herself as the subject of the works, which was still a newer idea in the 70's. They also both show the Indigenous culture Mendieta was infatuated with, it was her research on this culture that brought about her connection to nature.

Contrasting: Ingre's Violin and Color Photo of Earth

Formal Qualities

Ingre's Violin is completely **grayscale** to bring out other qualities of the piece. *Color Photo of Earth* has some **color** to maintain the lush aspect of nature.



Cultural Context

Ana Mendieta's piece speaks more to women's rights and empowerment based on how she is concealing her body. Man Ray objectifies the figure in his piece and dehumanizes her to an instrument, something meant to be used by someone else. Man Ray's piece is controversial because of how it sends a dehumanizing message to women. *Color Photo of Earth* suggests insecurity and discomfort sparked by the objectification that *Ingre's Violin* implies.

Ingre's Violin has a very blank, dark **background**; kept simple to bring out the **shape** of the figure more clearly. The **background** of *Color Photo of Earth* helps the figure blend in as a way to conceal her body. The purpose of the figure in *Ingre's Violin* is to stand out, and the purpose of the figure in *Color Photo of Earth* is to hide in the background.

The **composition** of both pieces is somewhat different. In *Ingre's Violin*, there is a clear **foreground** and **background**. In *Color Photo of Earth*, all we see is the ground the subject is laying on.

Function and Purpose

These pieces have opposing meanings. *Color Photo of Earth* has a spiritual connection and portrays a figure in discomfort attempting to hide herself. *Ingre's Violin* portrays a figure exposing her back in a seductive manner. Her strong posture suggests confidence, while Mendieta's pose suggests fear. *Ingre's Violin* is seen through the eyes of a man viewing a woman as an object. *Color Photo of Earth* is seen through the eyes of a woman tired of being objectified.

Contrasting: Ingre's Violin and Tree of Life

Formal Qualities

Ingre's Violin is **colorless** to amplify the features of the figure. *Tree of Life* is **colorful** to better camouflage these features. There is stronger focus on the body in *Ingre's Violin*, and the face is mostly hidden to objectify and dehumanize the figure.



Cultural Context

Man Ray's work is influenced by Dadaism. Dada artists intentionally create art that stands out controversially, rebels, and catches one's eye. Ana Mendieta wanted to take people aback with her unique work, but it was less about making her out stand out and more about conveying her message and expressing herself. Art was the way she let herself be free. In *Tree of Life* specifically, there is a physical attempt to hide the figure, yet in *Ingre's Violin* the figure is shown off.

The figure in *Ingre's Violin* looks comfortable and relaxed to mimic the relaxing sound of music, while the pose of the figure in *Tree of Life* is tense and rigid to symbolize how a tree stands.

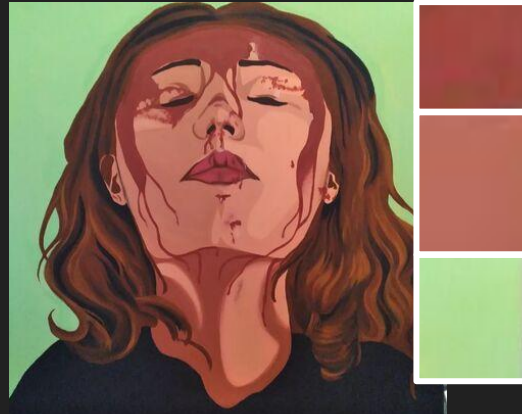
Ingre's Violin has a simple dark **background** so that all of the focus is on the subject and incorporates soft **shadows** and **lines**. *Tree of Life* has a background filled with **color**, **light**, and **texture** to distract the viewer from the figure.

Function and Purpose

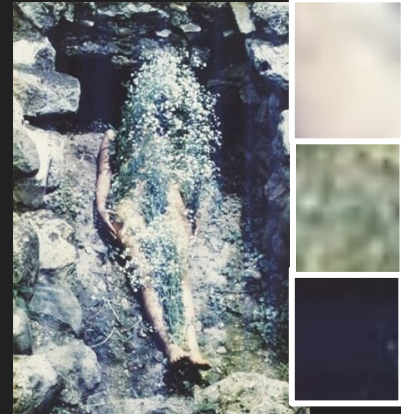
The purpose of *Tree of Life* was to physically connect person to nature. This contrasts with *Ingre's Violin*, whose purpose is to transform a body into an instrument. There is also the concept of shape that is more prominent in *Ingre's Violin* to show how the woman's back is shaped like a violin. In *Tree of Life*, the figure is meant to be becoming one with the tree.

Color Photo of Earth's Influence on My Work: Function/Purpose and Formal Qualities

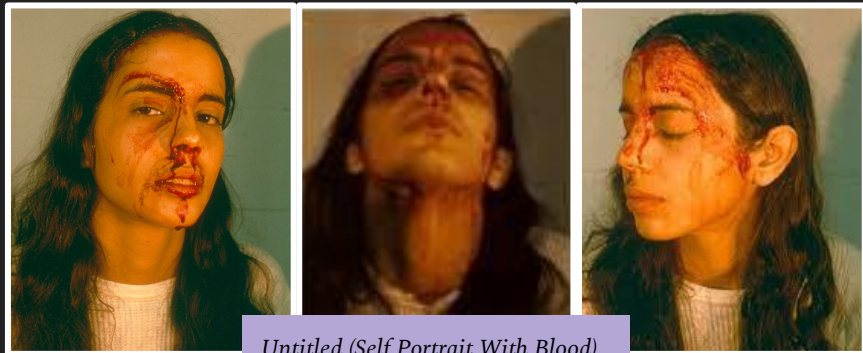
There is a major **contrast** in **hues** between both pieces. *Self Portrait Covered in Blood* has more **vibrant hues**, while *Color Photo of Earth* has muted colors and an amplified **brightness**. Despite this difference, the connection to feminism remains. In both pieces, the figure/face is covered in something to enhance the meaning of the piece. In *Color Photo of Earth*, this covering reveals a want to hide oneself as a response to objectification. In *Self Portrait Covered in Blood*, the face being covered in blood to represent violence against women.



Self Portrait Covered in Blood, 2020



Color Photo of Earth, 1973

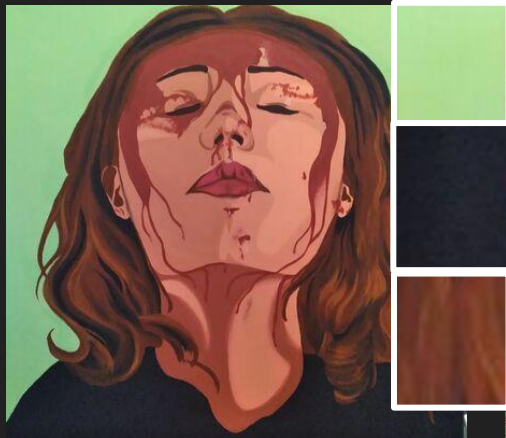


Untitled (Self Portrait With Blood), 1973

My piece, *Self Portrait Covered In Blood*, is inspired by Ana Mendieta's series of self portraits, which feature her face lathered in blood. Both pieces use the artist as the reference. This is significant because it brings a personal aspect into the work. It directly connects the artist to the work and suggests that the meaning applies to and personally affects the artists. Both of these pieces relate to feminist art. *Color Photo of Earth* relates to the objectification of the female body. *Self Portrait Covered in Blood* relates to violence against women.

Tree of Life's Influence on My Work: Function/Purpose and Formal Qualities

The meanings in the pieces are very different. *Tree of Life* represents a disconnection in one's culture and is more calming and warm. *Self Portrait Covered in Blood* is more bold and gruesome and relates to feminist art. They are similar in the way that they use a female figure as the subject for the art, and also in how the figure used is the artist of the work; directly connecting the artist to the artwork.



Self Portrait Covered in Blood, 2020



Tree of Life, 1976

Mendieta covered her face in animal blood in a series of photographs to bring awareness to violence against women. She would often use blood in her photography, because it was shocking and bold and made her work stand out. In *Untitled (Self Portrait With Blood)*, she used the blood to make herself look like a sacrificial victim. In this particular photograph, her head is tilted back and she appears tired and drained.



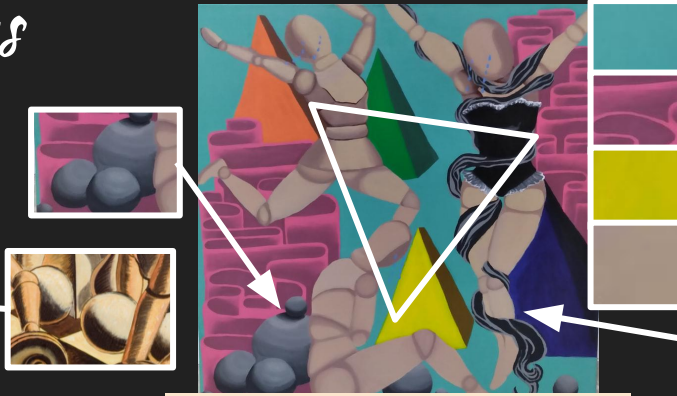
Untitled (Self Portrait With Blood), 1973

There is a **contrast** of **hues** between both pieces; *Tree of Life* has neutral earth tones, and *Self Portrait Covered in Blood* has very vibrant tones. There is also a **contrast** of mediums. *Tree of Life* is a photograph to capture realness, and *Self Portrait Covered in Blood* is a painting so that the aspect of realness has to be achieved by skill if it is desired. Ana Mendieta used photography because she wanted to capture realness, and other mediums were not enough to do this. I used paint to study how acrylic paint **blends** skin tones and to extend my painting skills.

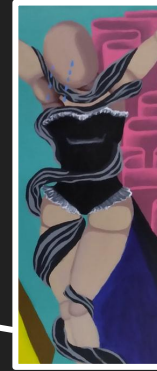
Man Ray's Influence on My Work: Function/Purpose and Formal Qualities



Endgame by Man Ray, 1946



A Chaotic Mind by Teresa Schmidt, 2021



Ingre's Violin by Man Ray, 1924



The figure to the far right in *A Chaotic Mind* is a representation of a woman being forced to fit into a mold she doesn't want to fit in. This opposes the meaning of *Ingre's Violin*, which objectifies the figure of a confident woman who wants to be on display. In both pieces, there is a major **contrast** in **hues**. *Ingre's Violin* is grayscale, and *A Chaotic Mind* is bright and **colorful**, relating to the title and bringing a sense of chaos into the piece. There is also a difference in **movement**. *A Chaotic Mind* has a lot of **movement**, shown most significantly by the figure running across the canvas. *Ingre's Violin* is completely still with no **movement**. The eye is drawn up and down the piece, while it is drawn left to right in *A Chaotic Mind*. This is because of the triangle that the three figures make. The eye goes first to the running figure, then to the one in the corset, and then to the seated one. Like the piece it takes inspiration from, *Endgame*, this piece uses geometrical **shapes** which relate to the figures, who are also made up of **shapes**. The pose of the figures in *A Chaotic Mind* and in *Ingre's Violin* are crucial to the overall piece. In *Ingre's Violin*, the exposed back and the straight posture are what creates the violin **shape**. In *A Chaotic Mind*, each figure is posed differently to express an individual emotion. Since they are faceless, the pose is the only way to tell what this emotion is.

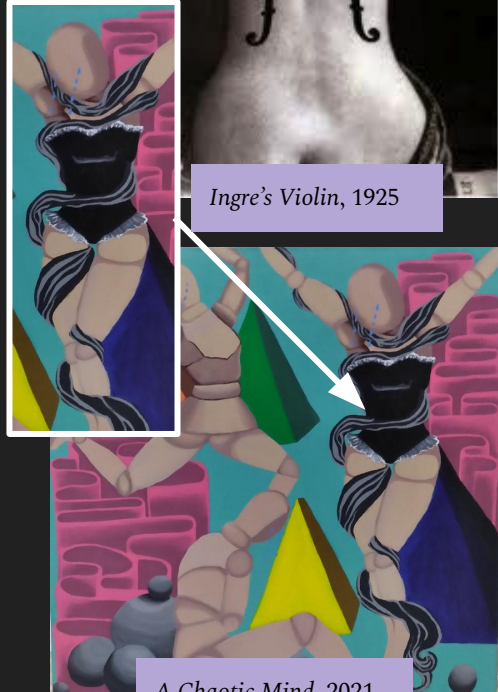
Man Ray's Influence on My Work: Culture

Man Ray lived during a time where women were treated as objects even more so than they are today. His perspective on women was likely formed by this time period, which is why objectifying a woman in his art seemed like a humorous and innocent thing to do. I live during a time period where I can advocate for myself better than the women of the 1920's could. I can use my art to portray a struggle in a more personal way.

The figure to the far right in *A Chaotic Mind* opposes the meaning of *Ingre's Violin*, because it features the figure being uncomfortable with being on display, while in *Ingre's Violin*, the model appears very comfortable. In my piece, this figure is what brings a feminist aspect into the overall work. The figure is in a fancy corset with a long piece of fabric wrapping around its figure and drawing the eye up and down. The figure's head is lolling and it looks defeated and exposed. This figure relates to beauty standards and being forced to fit a mold you don't fit into. This can be analyzed and compared to the figure in *Ingre's Violin*, who is presented during a time where women had limited rights and were viewed as objects. *Ingre's Violin* is a piece created through the eyes of a man with the privileges of a man. He hasn't directly experienced female oppression because he isn't female. *A Chaotic Mind* is created through the eyes of a woman who has felt how the figures are feeling. If the model in *Ingre's Violin* had been the artist of the piece, she may have created it differently, and it might have been more relatable to the figures in *A Chaotic Mind*.



Ingre's Violin, 1925



A Chaotic Mind, 2021

Ana Mendieta's Influence on My Work: Culture

Ana Mendieta focuses her work on body art and feminism. She uses herself as a subject in many of her works to empower herself and to directly connect her to her art. I took inspiration from this in my work, and especially in *Self Portrait Covered in Blood*. This meaning behind this piece comes from violence against women and building oneself back up after experiencing this violence. The blood represents a violent event, and it is worn on the face as a symbol of opening up about experiences women often face, like sexual abuse and violence.

Color Photo of Earth relates to the objectification of the female body and feeling exposed and uncomfortable. *Tree of Life* is more empowering and controversial, because it features a nude figure covered in mud. Nude art has always been common, but what made Mendieta's work controversial is how she used her art. Her art wasn't meant to look pretty or aesthetically pleasing, it was meant to shine light on uglier parts, like the discrimination women face.



Self Portrait Covered in Blood,
2020

Color Photo of Earth, 1973
(leftmost corner)

Tree of Life, 1976 (bottom left)

Mendieta and I are both living in a time where violence against women is prevalent and all too common. Mendieta's passion for making art related to women's issues sparked after a girl at her university was brutally raped. My passion for creating *Self Portrait Covered in Blood* came from somewhere similar, because I have experienced and know many people who have experienced sexual harassment and abuse. *Self Portrait Covered in Blood* and Mendieta's artworks relate to human rights due to their ties to feminism and how they speak to women affected by violence.

