

Shelter

Shake the Pattern

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In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wall Paper," we meet the protagonist as she is sequestered away with a postpartum "nervous affliction" by her physician husband, confined to a room with the titular wall covering as a form of convalescence. As she comes to term with this oppressive situation – both immediate and societal – she begins to see a woman behind the room's yellow wallpaper, shaking the pattern in her efforts to escape.

If only in 2021 one could read this short story as a look at a short-sighted patriarchal perception from the past, a vignette of a time and experience women are no longer forced to endure. But unfortunately, women are told time and time again by tradition, socio-cultural standards, and the medical profession that concerns about their bodies are "in their head;" for women of color this dismissal occurs at an even higher rate. Body ownership has become a constant topic on a political level, and the experience of people with uteruses is still, in 2021, couched in terms of shame and stigma; there are an estimated 5,000 euphemisms for menstruation used around the globe to describe a biological experience that *happens every month*.

The artists in *Shake the Pattern* dare the viewer to question their preconceived assumptions about physical and mental health, community, beauty, and the interior self as they tear apart the patriarchy's wallpaper. Fat is celebrated, isolation and community are juxtaposed, and a celebration of unfettered expression is diametrically opposed to Gilman's protagonist's experience.

Undoubtedly, the artists and artwork in the exhibition show no fear of expression, and indeed, each piece shakes the existing pattern of the patriarchy a little bit more, all the while creating new ones.



Read "The Yellow
Wall Paper"

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