



Fans & the Female Gaze Lecture Notes  
Jessica Bay  
2019

Readings:

- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."
- Coppa, Francesca. 2008. Women, Star Trek, and the early development of fannish vidding. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 1.  
<https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2008.044>.
- Scott, Suzanne. "The Hawkeye Initiative: Pinning Down Transformative Feminisms in Comic-Book Culture Through Superhero Crossplay Fanart." *Cinema Journal*, Volume 55, Number 1, Fall 2015, pp. 150-160

1. History of film/film studies
  - a. Pre-film as new technological toys and marvels: zoetropes, kinetoscope parlours, then nickelodeons in the early years of film – film projections as well as some songs and vaudeville acts mixed in. Moved to Movie Palaces in the 1920s for extravagant filmgoing – the experience was at least/more important than the films.
  - b. SLIDES: kinetoscope parlour and then nickelodeon and zoetrope
  - c. A spectacle/technological marvel
2. Mid-1950s the French critics at the journal *Cahiers du Cinema* started discussing film as art, rather than just as a business. Looking at the films of the 20s-40s
  - a. Film business was a studio system, like a factory; everyone had one job, churning out films (ended in 1948 basically with the Paramount Decision. Big 5: Paramount, MGM, Fox, Warner Bros., RKO; Little 3: Universal, United Artists, Columbia)
  - b. French critics finding style and form through semiotic analysis in certain films of the studio system – particularly directors like Hitchcock.
  - c. SLIDE: Hitchcock images
  - d. The auteur theory: the director is the artist – pulling from literature, visual art, music, etc. to inform the theory. If this is art – even within a factory – then some ONE must be the artist
3. By 1975 Mulvey working under assumption that film can be art and so asking for more of that art form. Asking indie & alternate film to put pressure on mainstream filmmaking for change.
  - a. A bit unfair – asking those with the least power and money to educate and change those in charge at great risk to themselves
4. So, what does Mulvey see happening in the films she's talking about
  - a. CLIPS: classic film 1:16-1:49 Psycho, given permission to look. Rear Window trailer (see the actual cameras, direct address by the protagonist. Specifically told to look and gaze on the characters)
  - b. What do you see?

5. What Mulvey sees here is the “image of woman as (passive) for the (active) gaze of man” (67) – both the men onscreen and the men in the audience
6. She uses psychoanalysis against its supporters to suggest that the male protagonist is a standin for the audience allowing the (male) audience member to live the life of the good-looking hero who interacts with the girl, for a couple of hours at least.
7. At the same time, the actual audience member has the pleasure of looking without consequence. We are invited to stare at the woman on screen through both the eyes of the protagonist and the lens of the camera. A camera that pretends to be invisible, unbiased, neutral, but provides us with a very particular perspective on the action and the characters.
  - a. Has filmmaking changed since 1975? Does the male gaze still exist?
  - b. CLIP: Black Widow’s intro in Iron Man 2 on YouTube – camera follows her, “I want one” [note: does she turn the gaze back on us?]
  - c. What other examples can you think of that support or run counter to the male gaze? (groups?)
8. Mulvey is ultimately pointing to both the visual representation of woman and the lack of diverse roles for women onscreen – an argument that has since been made about people of colour, disabled folx, lgbtq+ people, elders, etc. Essentially, the complaint is that these characters exist onscreen, individually to further the story of the (usually) cis, white man protagonist. Since Mulvey made this argument, many others – academic and not – have made their own complaints. You may have heard of some of the more popular culture ones.
9. SLIDE: Bechdel Test. In 1985 Alison Bechdel produced the Bechdel Test in her comic strip Dykes to Watch Out For. It has since become iconic and a bit of a judge for how the film industry is doing in terms of the representation of women. The comic asks us to think about the women we see on screen, how many there are, and who and what they are discussing. It’s important to remember that, first, this is a comic that is criticizing the industry NOT some directive from any organized body as it is sometimes spoken of these days. Also, this is the absolute bare minimum we could ask of women characters in film. And they consistently fail.
  - a. SLIDE: Bechdel Test results
  - b. Results are showing, however, that the films that pass the Bechdel Test tend to have more speaking parts and time for women. These films also tend to have more women working behind the scenes on the production: writing, producing, directing. The way to get more women onscreen is to hire more women to develop film projects.
  - c. CLIPS: City of Bones YouTube clip to 1:06 (fails), Vampire Academy trailer on YouTube (passes)
  - d. What films can you think of that pass the test? What films pass the test with women of colour?
10. Other recent and popular criticisms that have come from fans and the industry itself are ideas like fridging and the Bury Your Gays trope.
  - a. SLIDE: fridging, Green Lantern comic.



- b. Comes from a few places, but is tied for many to comics writer Gail Simone. The idea, also briefly mentioned in Mulvey's essay, that women are used in plots to further the male protagonist's story – often through emotional turmoil which means they have to be killed or raped or beaten severely. Think of the Martha moment in *Batman v. Superman*.
  - c. SLIDE: gif
  - d. SLIDE: Simone called this fridging before she was a professional comics writer in 1999 when she named her blog *Women in Refrigerators* after *Green Lantern* #54 1994 – girlfriend killed and stuffed in fridge. So, Simone & friends listed all women killed, maimed, or depowered to further a man's story arc.
  - e. SLIDE: Likewise, the Bury Your Gays trope is a trope seen and criticized most recently on long-running television series, but has been seen in other media. The issue here involves killing off LGBTQ+ characters, sometimes to further the main character's plot, but often just to create tension through the death of a main/popular character.
  - f. SLIDE: *The 100*, etc. "In the past 30 days, four lesbian or bisexual female characters have been killed off on their respective TV shows. It began Feb. 22 on The CW's *Jane the Virgin* with the murder of Rose (Bridget Regan). Then it continued with the high-profile killing of Lexa (Alycia Debnam-Carey) on The CW's *The 100*. Next came Kira on Syfy's *The Magicians*, and Sunday night witnessed the pointed demise of Denise (Merritt Wever) on AMC's *The Walking Dead*." March 2016
  - g. Similar to the Bechdel Test, these are alternative criticisms of the industry, but not coming from within the industry at all – not that some might not feel that way.
11. We actually find that fans/engaged audiences are the most critical. And they/we CAN make some change. Fans have had shows renewed, and I'm sure the initial public outcry had something to do with Don Cherry's firing and it certainly had something to do with Ron McLean's quick apology.
- a. Fan scholar Paul Booth suggests that fans are media critics in their own right – just as media studies scholars in universities, for example. He says we are often all doing the same kind of work and the level of intimate knowledge fans have of the content they are studying is often even more involved than the formal academic's. Francesca Coppa alludes to this in her history of fan vidding article as well.
12. Brief breakdown of fans vs. audience: fans generally engage with the content they love. They may create content related to it, they seek out information related to their content. The audience is generally everyone who consumes the content, though they may not engage beyond that consumption.
- a. Engagement can be: watching trailers, sharing set photos, watching/sharing bts videos, press interviews, following on social media OR going to the film's homepage, seeking out other fans, news stories, etc. OR making and/or sharing your own content related to it like stories, videos, art, cosplay, music, memes, gifs, spoofs, etc.

- b. SLIDE: Larsen & Zubernis, 3 types of fan
  - c. What do you know about fan engagement? What have you seen?
  - d. CLIP: Infinity War: Whatever it Takes, Hillywood Show, maybe a crackvid, fanart, AO3, tumblr
- 13. The creation part of fandom is transformative and subversive as scholars like Henry Jenkins, Matt Hills, Francesca Coppa and others have said because it is often speaking back to the original content. Fans are finding ways to continue to live within the world they love by extending the story – absolutely – but they are also often critiquing that story as well. Either literally fixing things they think the writers got wrong, adding relationships they see happening in the subtext, or adding characters that aren't represented.
- 14. Brief moment of terminology: slash or yaoi/yuri (anime). Transformative because taking two or more characters who present in the original content as heteronormative and putting them in a loving/sexual relationship because of subtext. Happens mostly with men – WHY?
  - a. SLIDE: teen's choice award ships 2015 Destiel won, CLIP: teen wolf "on a ship"
  - b. CLIP: Stony fanvid (A Thousand Years) and show the Stucky book around
- 15. Back to Coppa's article and history: media fandom proper as we know it began with Star Trek, but there was also a very strong fandom surrounding The Man from UNCLE at the same time. (ST long-running franchise, but fans existed before. Writing Sherlock fic and even Slash while Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was alive)
  - a. Show Verba's book
  - b. Coppa does a great job of tracing some of this history in terms of vidding in particular – which was very closely tied to the technology available. The need to be in the same physical space to share technology helped define the fandom early on. VCRs expensive – only certain people could afford, had to work in groups = a community, but privilege.
  - c. What has changed from the days of expensive VCRs? [fewer barriers]
- 16. So, if the male gaze places women as passive objects for the active male viewer/subject, what could the female gaze be?
- 17. Coppa here suggests that "many vids reverse, or at least complicate, traditional scopophilia of the kind Mulvey describes, casting men as objects of visual desire and addressing sexist problems in visual texts" (2). Basically, the female fans made a point of highlighting a way that, perhaps, wasn't intended by the original filmmaker.
  - a. CLIP: Avengers Hit Me Baby
  - b. What is happening in the video? What do you think the author of the video is trying to say? Does this speak back to the original content? Is this showing men as objects of desire?
  - c. Is this the female gaze? Flip the switch, put men in the place of women and vice versa?
  - d. SLIDE: ghostbusters 2016.
  - e. Is it enough to have women replace the original Ghostbusters and sexy Hemsworth replace Janine (who was not played as sexy in the original)? Is it the

female gaze if Wonderwoman's boyfriend Steve is fridged to give her the emotional push needed to discover her full powers?

18. That's kind of the idea behind The Hawkeye Initiative. This is, as Suzanne Scott mentions, a tumblr site where people contribute examples of, usually comics covers, showing women in highly suggestive poses and/or outfits along with either a drawing or, increasingly, cosplay versions of Hawkeye from the Avengers in the same pose.
  - a. SLIDES: examples from The Hawkeye Initiative (x4)
  - b. Again, this is fans using the technology at their disposal to criticize popular culture with the hope of making it better.
19. Is this the female gaze? Seeing Hawkeye with his butt facing the camera instead of Black Widow? It doesn't feel like it to me
20. A little literary theory here: Helene Cixous in "The Laugh of the Medusa" is calling for *L'écriture féminine* and I think this is getting closer to what Mulvey was asking for – whether she knew it or not.
  - a. Cixous talks about how a lot of writing about women, whether by men or women, "obscures or reproduces the classic representations of women" (245) – I think we can take this to mean all content about women and extend it to suggest that roles for women are also often male roles rewritten for women, without changing the characterization.
  - b. So a strong woman is also emotionally unavailable, unbreakable, and a fighter. If she does show some weakness or female friendships, or general emotion, she's no longer as strong.
    - i. SLIDE: Hunger Games vs Divergent; Captain Marvel vs Wonderwoman
    - ii. Why do we find Katniss a stronger protagonist than Tris, for example? Or Wonderwoman vs Captain Marvel?
  - c. Cixous says that "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing" (242). She is actually quite militant throughout the piece, but I think the base argument stands here: women have been excluded from the industry and it shows in the stories we have received, it's time for women to write their own stories.
  - d. She wrote this in 1975. It's still time.
21. So, women telling their own stories gets us closer, but what about visually? Do we gaze at men as they have gazed at us? What if we're lesbians? Or asexual? Or not white? Does that change our gaze?
22. bell hooks says that many black women have always felt the disconnect from Hollywood that Mulvey discovered as the industry has always othered them. hooks calls this an oppositional gaze that denies identification with both the white women "victims" of the "phallographic gaze" or the "perpetrator[s]" (275). This positionality allowed them to, like the media criticism of fans, be critical even as they were engaging with the content.
  - a. She also points out that the experience for black men and black women was very different. Danger of looking publicly at white womanhood vs. the directed gaze at white womanhood in dark theatre and black women being completely disconnected from that view --- never going to be the white womanhood they saw onscreen.

23. Has filmmaking changed? We saw the clip of Black Widow and a couple of other recent clips, but has the camera changed its gaze? Does it look at women differently now than it did in the past? Can you think of examples?

a. CLIPS: The 2 Carrie films – opening sequences. Explain what the films are about, where they come from.

i. Warning: full-frontal female nudity & menstrual blood: Brian DePalma 1:09-5:24 [romantic music, flows when she's touching herself, phallic-looking nozzles, full nudity, extreme close-ups of the girls' faces, camera isolates parts of Carrie's body, follows the girls]

ii. Warning: menstrual blood: 6:40-9:14 [music: more suspenseful, less phallic looking nozzles, still touching herself, but less time and only belly before blood starts, medium close-up to extreme close-up of girls, doesn't last as long, suspenseful music is back, focus on Sue realizing it was wrong in the moment]

b. What is different? Discuss plots, characters too.

24. Back to the question of what could we call the female gaze. Jill Soloway, author, comedian, director, showrunner of the show Transparent, and many other things, offers an interesting suggestion for the female gaze:

a. It involves affect – a feeling camera

b. Awareness of the gaze and turning it back around on the viewer

c. "stories are empathy machines ... [and] ... a privilege generator ... to get you on someone's side ... a wresting away"

d. "The female gaze is a cultural critic"

e. They also call for women to speak for themselves: "Could we change laws with our gaze?"

f. CLIP: Soloway at TIFF: 41:40-42:33

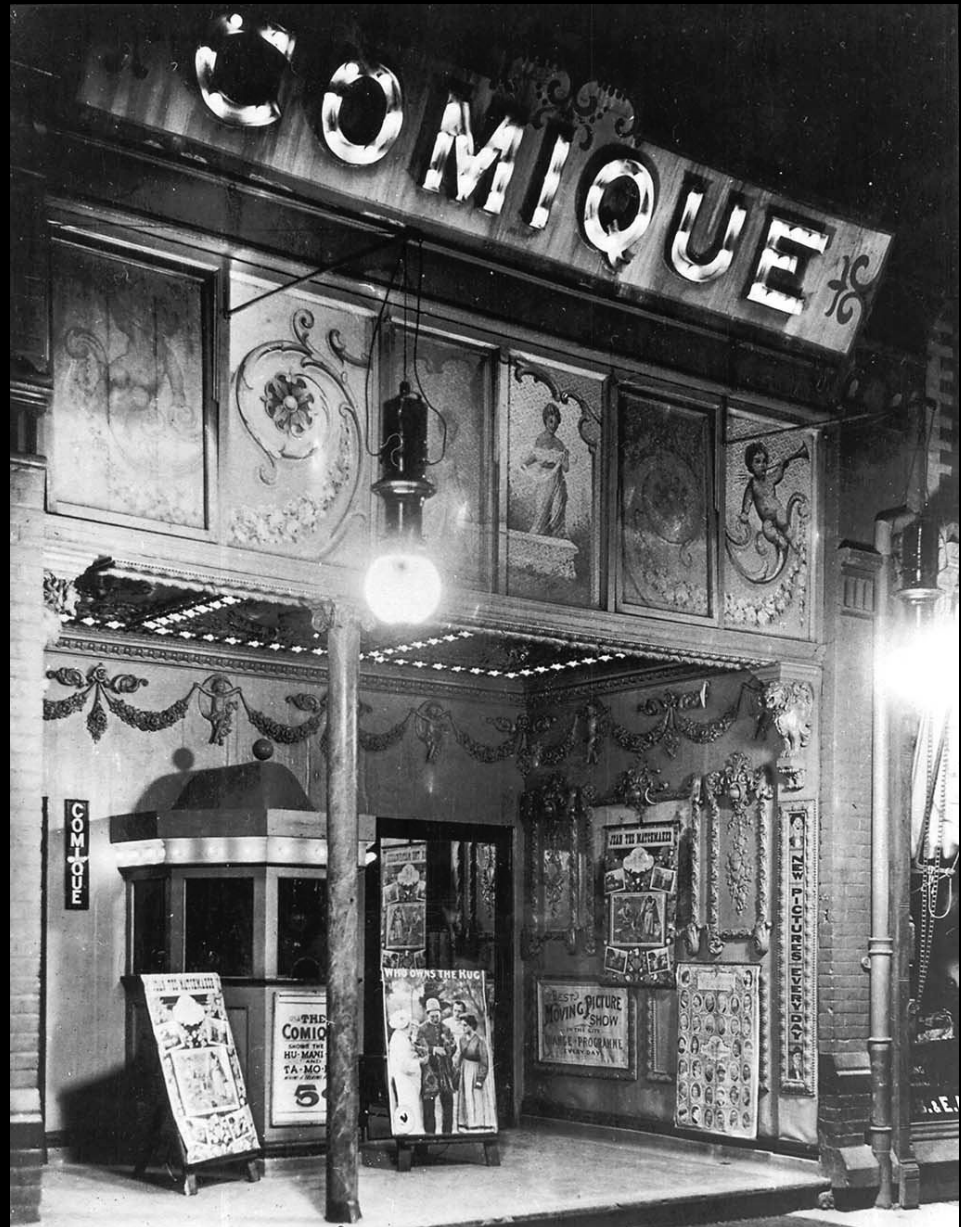


**Kinetoscope Parlour**





**Zoetrope**



**Nickelodeon**



***Rear Window***



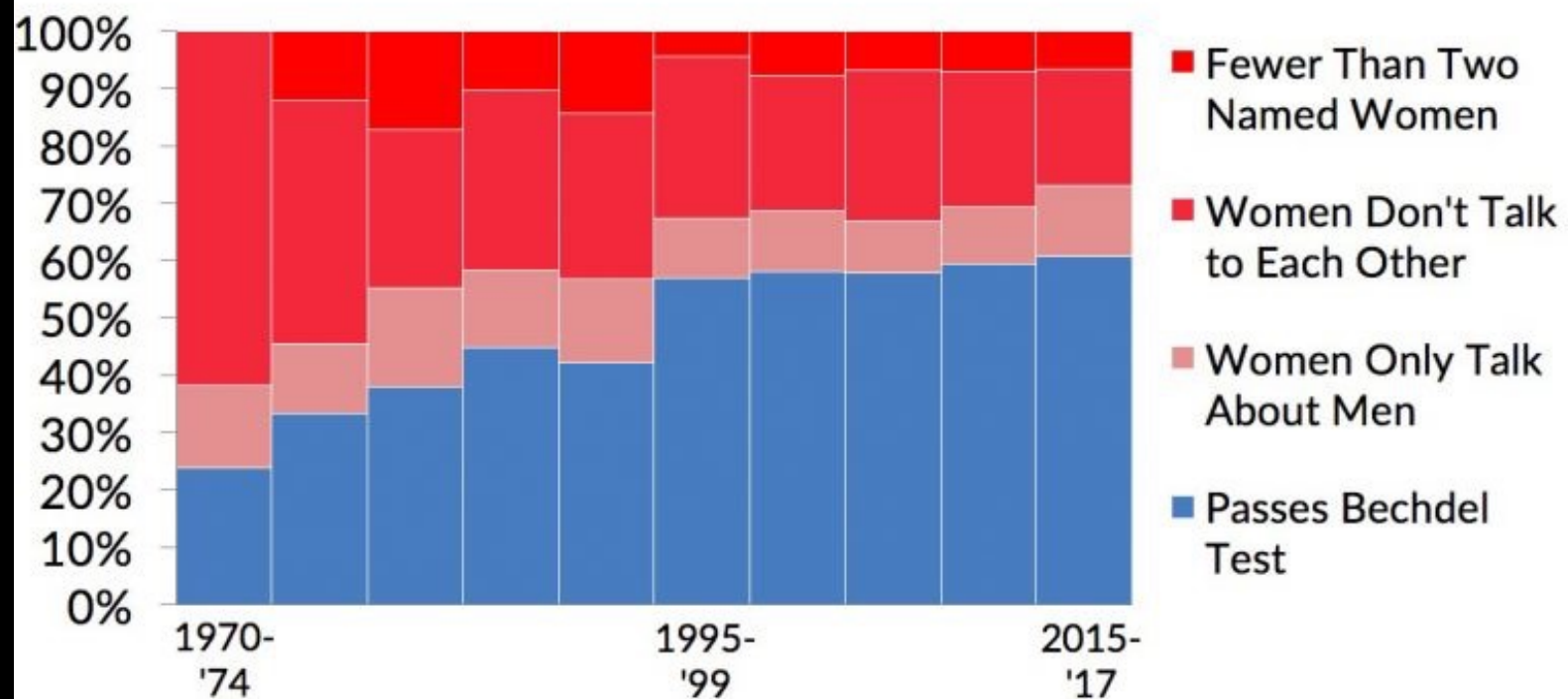
***Psycho***





Alison Bechdel, *Dykes to Watch Out For*, 1985

## The Bechdel Test Over Time

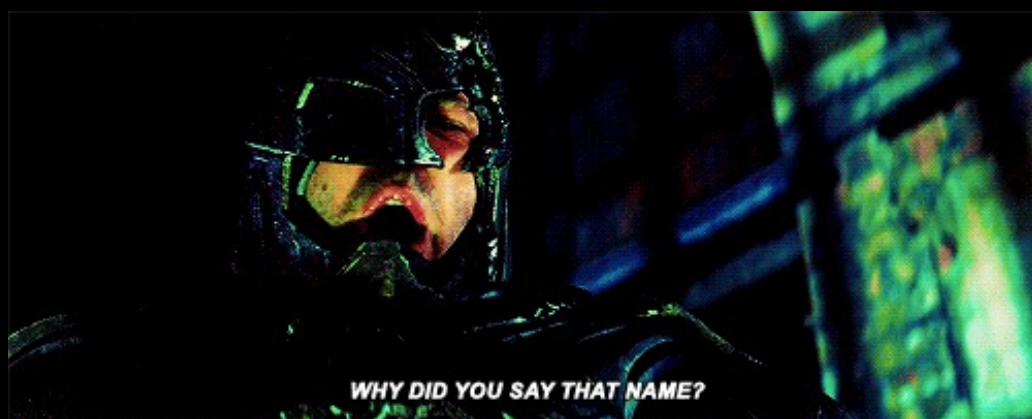


Robin Smith, "Sizing Up Hollywood's Gender Gap," *Duke Research Blog*, 2017





*Green Lantern #54 1994*





# WOMEN IN REFRIGERATORS

[Front Page](#) | [Character List](#) | [Respondent List](#) | [Reactions](#)

---

Hi.

*This is a [list](#) I made when it occurred to me that it's not that healthy to be a female character in comics. I'm curious to find out if this list seems somewhat disproportionate, and if so, what it means, really.*

*These are superheroines who have been either depowered, raped, or cut up and stuck in the refrigerator. I know I missed a bunch. Some have been revived, even improved -- although the question remains as to why they were thrown in the wood chipper in the first place.*

*I know I missed a bunch -- I just don't know my comics deaths the way I should. I'm not editorializing -- I'm just curious to find out what you guys think it means, if anything.*

The preceding letter was written and sent by me when I realized one day that most of my favorite female comics characters had met untimely and often icky ends. The history of the idea and this site are listed [here](#), and the responses from various comics professionals are listed [here](#).

An important point: This isn't about assessing blame about an individual story or the treatment of an individual character and it's certainly not about personal attacks on the creators who kindly shared their thoughts on this phenomenon. It's about the trend, its meaning and relevance, if any. Plus, it's just fun to talk about refrigerators with dead people in them. I don't know why.

We'd love to [hear what you think](#) on this subject, or women in comics in general.

Thanks for visiting!

-- [Gail Simone](#), March 1999

LONG-AWAITED UPDATE!





[tvtropes.org](http://tvtropes.org)



Skill	Fan Space	Fan Practices	Participation
Technical  (embody an appreciation of how the textual effect is created. For television this includes evaluation of acting, conveyance of feeling, production values, script, camera work)	public spaces, may have ties to corporate entities (production companies, advertisers, special interest groups, academics)	Gathering of information through reading magazines, websites,	Consumptive
Analytic  (analysis of the text from within the parameters of the text itself.)	Semi-public spaces, but with the expectation that they are fans-only spaces	Fan forum discussions, blogging.	Productive (often predicated on technical)
Interpretive  (Interpretation of texts from without the text by comparing them to something else.)	Private, fans only spaces	Creation of fan works (fan fiction, videos, art, music), participation in RPG's.	Productive (often predicated on either technical or analytical skills, or a combination of both)

**Zubernis & Larsen. *Fandom at the Crossroads: Celebration, Shame and Fan/Producer Relationships*. Cambridge Scholars, 2012, pp. 18.**





## <-Fanart created by fans for other fans

## Fanart created by fans for non-fans

**Cobaltmoonysart**  
**.tumblr.com**

# Celeste Madrigal - IMAX Fanart Competition 2016



## Fandoms

### Anime & Manga

僕のヒーローアカデミア | Boku no Hero Academia | My Hero Academia (75356)

Haikyuu!! (54179)

Naruto (47077)

Shingeki no Kyojin | Attack on Titan (41518)

Yuri!!! on Ice (Anime) (34620)

All Anime & Manga...

### Cartoons & Comics & Graphic Novels

Marvel (394751)

The Avengers – Ambiguous Fandom (164061)

The Avengers (Marvel) – All Media Types (160594)

DCU (155842)

Star Wars – All Media Types (94686)

All Cartoons & Comics & Graphic Novels...



Search Tumblr



biashellandflyashell  midrangede... [Follow](#)

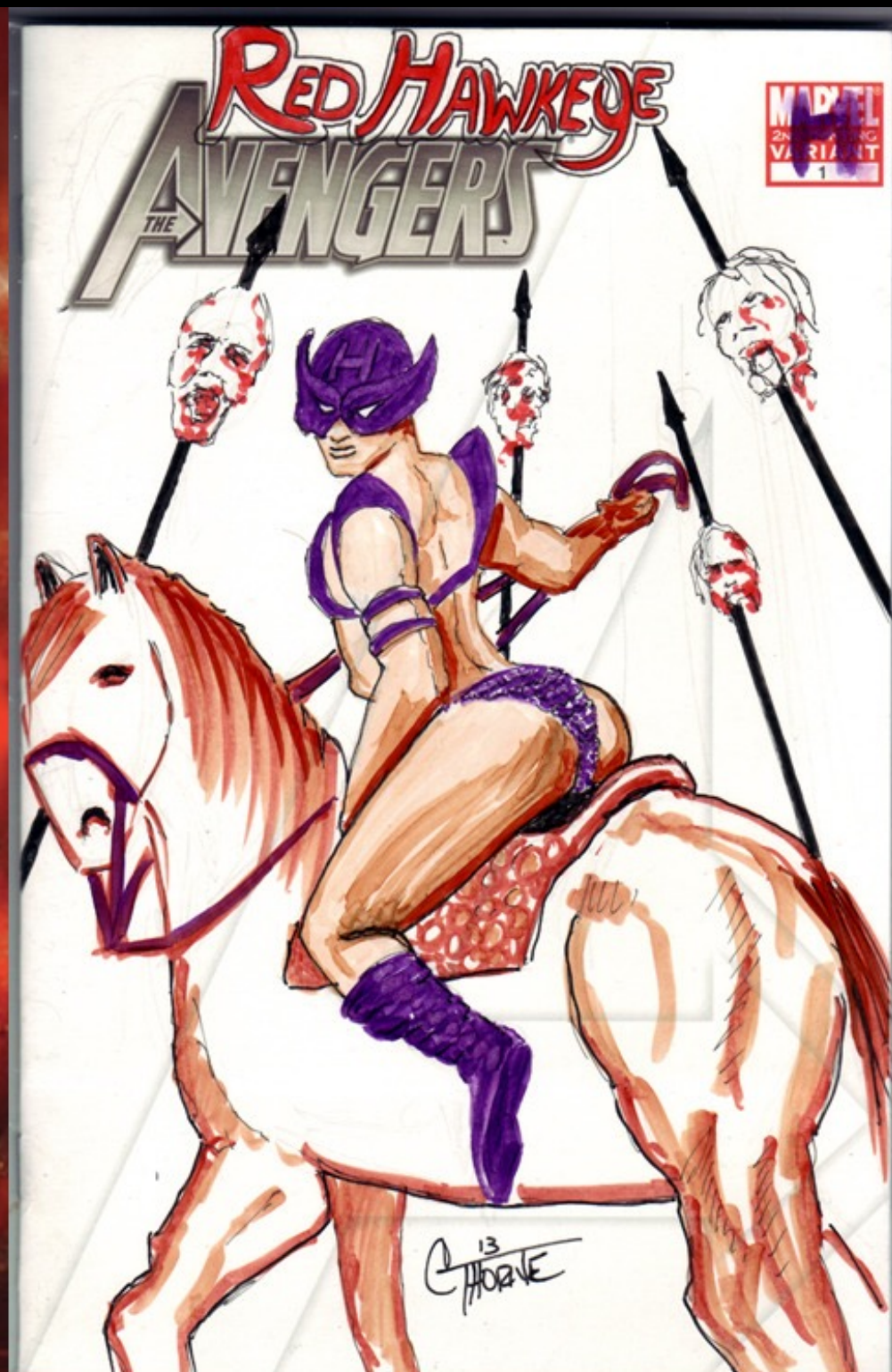






*Ghostbusters (2016)*















"Why does my back always hurt?" :(



