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14 Artworks That Prove Pink Is Tough

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The color that seems softest can often speak most loudly



There's a convention that Pink Is for Girls, but it hasn't always been that way. The color, thought to be named after the frilled edge of a small flower of the Dianthus genus, emerged in the 17th century as a gender-neutral fashion choice for Europe's elite, only becoming associated with femininity when men transitioned into business suits in the 19th century. Deployed in the campaign to lure women into the kitchen after World War II, the color took on a more activist role in the 1990s, when the pink ribbon became a symbol of the campaign against breast cancer.

That's the backdrop for "Think Pink," a show at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts that charts the social meanings of pink using paintings, prints, jewelry, and rose-colored clothing (for both men and women) in the museum's collections, from Kate Greenaway's 1884 volume *Language of Flowers* to Evelyn Lauder's Louboutins.

In visual art the path of pink has been somewhat different, since it's hard to paint sex or violence without it. Meanwhile its traditional associations with femaleness and intimacy continue to provoke and challenge contemporary artists. Pink isn't neutral. Its apparent softness enables it to speak loudly, about gender and race and power and other issues. In a sense, you have to be tough to pull off pink. Here's some tough pink art from around the art scene.

Beverly Semmes

Flirting at the edges of perversion, the pictures in Beverly Semmes's current show at Susan Inglett appear to be erotica, though it isn't entirely clear because the artist has covered the female figures with paint and ink in the spirit of rogue censors who find the whole cover-up a bit of a turn-on. She titled the exhibition "The Feminist Responsibility Project."