

Article

Ecofeminist Art as Pedagogy: Spiritual and Ecological Consciousness in Female Visual Expression

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Abstract: Contemporary environmental crises and revival of spiritual practices have triggered multidisciplinary responses globally. In art education, contemporary female artists increasingly combine ecological consciousness with inner spiritual experiences, using painting as a medium to explore empathetic relationships between self, body, and nature. This study examines how contemporary female artists express ecological and spiritual themes through visual symbolism, analyses the educational potential of ecofeminist art in promoting environmental awareness and explores the social implications of integrating spiritual and ecological consciousness in artistic expression. Through qualitative analysis that combines thematic and visual analysis, this research investigates representative paintings by Gaia Orion and Verena Wild as case studies, examining how their artistic language carries ecological and spiritual meanings. Specifically, this study addresses the gap in understanding how ecofeminist art functions as an alternative pedagogical tool, as this intersection has remained underexplored in art-based pedagogy. The analysis reveals that these works use the female body, natural elements, and cyclical symbols as core visual strategies, responding to ecofeminist critiques of cultural-natural dualism while embodying the integrated "nature-body-sacred" worldview found in feminist theology. The research findings indicate that these artworks serve not only as expressions of personal transformation but also constitute a visual pathway for ecological ethics and feminist subjectivity reconstruction. Through symbolic imagery, sensory composition, and intuitive colour use, they establish an artistic discourse that transcends traditional logic, providing new theoretical reference and aesthetic dimensions for understanding the integration of ecology and consciousness in contemporary female art.

Keywords: Ecofeminism; art education; environmental consciousness; contemporary women's painting; visual analysis.

Introduction

The intersection of environmental education and feminist pedagogy has emerged as a critical area of scholarly inquiry in contemporary educational research. As global ecological crises intensify and traditional educational approaches prove insufficient for addressing complex environmental challenges, alternative pedagogical methods have gained prominence (Gaard, 2011). Among these innovative approaches, the visual arts, particularly works by contemporary female artists, offer unique opportunities for experiential learning that transcends conventional classroom boundaries due to their emotional impact and symbolic power that can communicate complex concepts more effectively than traditional academic discourse.

Contemporary female artists increasingly serve as informal educators, using their artistic practices to communicate complex ecological and spiritual concepts that formal educational systems often struggle to

convey effectively. This phenomenon reflects what Starhawk (2013) describes as the potential for spiritual relationships with Earth to enable unity between individuals and the cosmos. In the current context of ecological crisis and spiritual revival, a growing number of contemporary female artists place nature, body, and spirit at the core of their creative practices, using artistic expression to explore deep connections between humans and nature.

The educational significance of ecofeminist art extends beyond traditional art appreciation to encompass environmental education, gender studies, and spiritual development. Boettger (2016) notes that compared to literary ecocriticism, ecocritical analysis of visual arts, including painting, remains in its nascent stages, with attention primarily focused on broader visual art fields. However, a significant gap exists in understanding how ecofeminist art specifically functions as an educational tool and consciousness-raising medium. While previous studies have examined environmental art and feminist art separately, limited research has explored the educational potential of works that explicitly integrate ecological consciousness, spiritual awareness, and feminist perspectives through visual symbolism.

The purpose of this study is to examine the educational potential of ecofeminist art in promoting ecological consciousness and spiritual awareness among diverse audiences. By analyzing representative works by contemporary female artists Gaia Orion and Verena Wild, this research investigates how visual symbolism in painting can serve as an effective educational tool for environmental and social awareness. The first objective is to examine how contemporary female artists use visual symbolism to express ecological consciousness and spiritual experiences in their paintings, thereby creating alternative educational narratives about human–nature relationships. The second objective is to analyze the educational potential of ecofeminist art in promoting environmental awareness and gender equality among diverse audiences through visual storytelling and symbolic representation. The final objective is to explore the social implications of integrating spiritual and ecological themes in contemporary female artistic expression as a form of informal environmental education and consciousness-raising.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on alternative pedagogical approaches in environmental education while providing insights into the role of visual arts in promoting social and ecological consciousness. The research employs a qualitative methodology combining visual analysis and thematic interpretation, examining how artistic symbolism functions as an educational medium for complex environmental and social concepts.

Literature Review

1. Ecofeminism and Educational Theory

Ecofeminism, a term coined in the 1970s, establishes connections between the historical subordination of women under patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial systems and the domination of nature. Prominent scholars such as Vandana Shiva, Carolyn Merchant, and Susan Griffin have emphasized the symbolic and material intersections between women's oppression and ecological degradation (Merchant, 2014). Ecofeminism challenges dualistic thinking such as mind/body, male/female, culture/nature, and advocates for a holistic worldview based on care, embodiment, and interconnectedness.

Within educational contexts, ecofeminist theory offers significant contributions to environmental pedagogy. Kiel (2016) demonstrates that ecofeminist researchers emphasize connections with nature, goddess worship, and spirituality, believing that this holistic integration of body, mind, and spirit constitutes the unique appeal of ecofeminism and provides a spiritual foundation for art and activism. This theoretical framework provides a critical lens for understanding how contemporary female artists contribute to environmental education through their artistic practice.

In this framework, feminized embodiment and Earth are viewed not only as victims of exploitation but also as sources of healing, renewal, and resistance. Ecofeminist theory offers a critical perspective for understanding how contemporary female artists reclaim these symbolic connections through visual language,

creating educational opportunities that challenge traditional pedagogical approaches. This perspective highlights how art can function as both a medium of resistance and a tool for reimagining more equitable relationships between humans and the natural world, thereby reinforcing its pedagogical value in environmental and feminist education.

2. Eco-Spirituality and Holistic Education

Eco-spirituality, building upon ecological theory, expands understanding of nature beyond viewing it merely as an ecosystem member coexisting with humans, attributing inherent sacredness to nature (Starhawk, 2013). This spiritual perspective emphasizes that all natural entities possess inherent spiritual value, making the human-nature relationship not merely an ethical balancing issue but a profound existential perception and cosmic connection. Within this framework, spirituality encompasses not only belief systems but also the capacity to establish empathetic relationships with land, flora, fauna, weather, and seasons—representing sensory wisdom about "how to live together." For ecofeminist art education, eco-spiritual perspectives provide a non-linear, non-dominating worldview that inspires artists to reconceptualize relationships between nature and self during creative processes.

Many female artists view creative practice as a form of dialogue with nature, expressing through painting the spiritual touch, empathetic experiences, and inner contemplation they experience when encountering nature through colour flow, form transformation, and symbolic imagery. These visual languages serve not only as nature depictions but also as responses to and participation in nature as a spiritual entity, representing the artist's embodied process of "internalizing natural experience as sacred" through physical perception. Therefore, eco-spirituality functions not as a religious worship system but as a profound artistic consciousness pathway for interconnection. Within ecofeminist contexts, it becomes an important intellectual resource for understanding how contemporary female artists express life reverence, perceptual extension, and ecological belonging through their works, making spirituality a tangible, visible, and empathetic visual practice.

2. Feminist Pedagogy and Visual Arts Education

Feminist pedagogy, emerging from educational theory's engagement with feminist scholarship, emphasizes experiential learning, collaborative knowledge construction, and the validation of diverse ways of knowing (hooks, 2000). This pedagogical approach recognizes the educational value of emotional, intuitive, and embodied knowledge alongside traditional academic discourse. Within visual arts education, feminist pedagogy challenges traditional hierarchies between teacher and student, expert and novice, encouraging learners to draw upon their lived experiences as sources of knowledge. Shaw (2001) argues for attention to non-dogmatic, non-authoritative religious experiences, emphasizing metaphor and symbolism as mediators of individual experience.

Contemporary ecofeminist artists' creative processes often embody spiritual activities, with artworks serving as symbolic containers carrying inner experiences, bodily perceptions, and natural empathy. Through visual metaphors such as Earth Mother, water, moon, trees, and cyclical imagery, female artists not only convey emotional connections to nature but also construct embodied spiritual expression forms that transcend religious institutional constraints. This artistic language precisely responds to feminist pragmatism's emphasis on individual spiritual autonomy and the mediating role of symbolic experience, making art a crucial field connecting ecological consciousness with spiritual practice.

3. Contemporary Women's Art and Environmental Education

Recent scholarship has increasingly recognized the potential of visual arts, particularly works by women artists, to serve educational functions in environmental and social consciousness-raising (Weintraub, 2007). Research in environmental visual communication has demonstrated that image narrative significantly influences environmental awareness, with visual storytelling proving more effective than technical aspects in shaping consciousness about ecological issues (Mat Husain et al., 2024). This finding aligns with the

educational potential of ecofeminist art, which employs powerful visual narratives to communicate complex environmental and spiritual concepts.

The effectiveness of art-based interventions in promoting psychological well-being and social change has been well-documented, particularly in therapeutic and educational contexts (Liu & Sabran, 2024). These empirical studies demonstrate how artistic expression can serve as a medium for processing complex emotions, building resilience, and fostering new perspectives on challenging issues, supporting the potential of ecofeminist art as an educational tool. Female artists like Ana Mendieta, whose "Silueta Series" merged her body's silhouette with earth, sand, and grassland, emphasizing feminine body integration and symbiosis with nature, represent pioneering examples of ecofeminist art education.

Mendieta's work combined Latin American indigenous religion, land rituals, and feminine bodily experience, demonstrating artistic practice that "returns the body to Earth." Her commitment to believing in nature's fundamental elements—water, air, and land—viewed them as spirits (Cabañas, 1999). Her Silueta series, through combining body and natural environment, embodied tight connections between culture and individuals. These works reflect not only reverence for Earth but also desires to reconnect with Earth through visual forms expressing care, fluidity, and renewal cycles. In this sense, art serves both as self-healing methodology and as a channel for expressing ecological belonging to life. This research builds upon these perspectives to explore how selected female artists transform their inner spiritual and emotional landscapes into visual languages that resonate with ecological sensitivity and feminine insight.

Current research gaps exist in understanding how individual female artists use visual strategies to simultaneously engage spiritual themes, ecological themes, and feminine identity. Additionally, there is limited empirical research on the effectiveness of ecofeminist art as pedagogy across diverse cultural and educational contexts. This study addresses these gaps by examining specific artistic works and their potential contributions to environmental education and consciousness-raising.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative methodology based on interpretive analysis, drawing from visual culture studies, feminist pragmatism, ecofeminism, eco-spirituality, and feminist theology theories. The study focuses on in-depth visual and thematic analysis of paintings by two contemporary female artists whose works address spiritual, ecological, and feminine symbolic elements. By combining these theoretical foundations with systematic interpretive methods, the research aims to capture both the symbolic richness of the artworks and their potential pedagogical functions, ensuring that the findings remain academically rigorous and contextually meaningful.

1. Research Design and Data Collection

The research design follows a case study approach, examining representative artworks that demonstrate the integration of ecological consciousness and spiritual themes in contemporary female painting. Data sources include publicly available creative texts and visual works, comprising high-resolution artwork images from artists' official websites or art platforms, creative statements and interview excerpts, and related exhibition catalogs and interpretive texts.

Sample selection criteria required works to simultaneously demonstrate "ecological," "spiritual," and "feminine imagery" integration dimensions. The selection of two Western artists (Gaia Orion and Verena Wild) represents a purposive sampling approach focused on artists whose work explicitly addresses ecofeminist themes and has received formal recognition in exhibitions and publications. While this limits cross-cultural representation, it allows for in-depth analysis suitable for establishing foundational understanding of ecofeminist art's educational potential within the scope of this article.

Specific selection standards included: works must receive formal explanation in public exhibitions or official artist publications; visual elements must prominently feature natural elements (trees, water, moon) and feminine symbols (goddess postures, body gestures); textual descriptions must explicitly mention artists' reflections on themes such as "body and nature," "emotional healing," and "sacred feminine." These standards

ensured that the selected artworks clearly embodied the intersection of ecological and spiritual dimensions while also offering sufficient contextual material for systematic visual and thematic analysis.

2. Visual Analysis Framework

The analytical framework combines formalist analysis and semiotic analysis to examine how artistic symbolism functions as educational medium. To ensure trustworthiness in interpreting artworks, this study employed triangulation through artist statements, exhibition texts, and critical reviews, along with peer discussion among researchers and reflexive journaling to acknowledge researcher positionality and potential interpretive bias.

Table 1. Analysis process phases

Phase	Activity	Educational Focus
Phase 1	Image collection and documentation	Identifying pedagogical symbols
Phase 2	Symbolic reading and coding	Mapping educational metaphors
Phase 3	Thematic synthesis	Connecting to learning theories
Phase 4	Educational interpretation	Assessing pedagogical potential

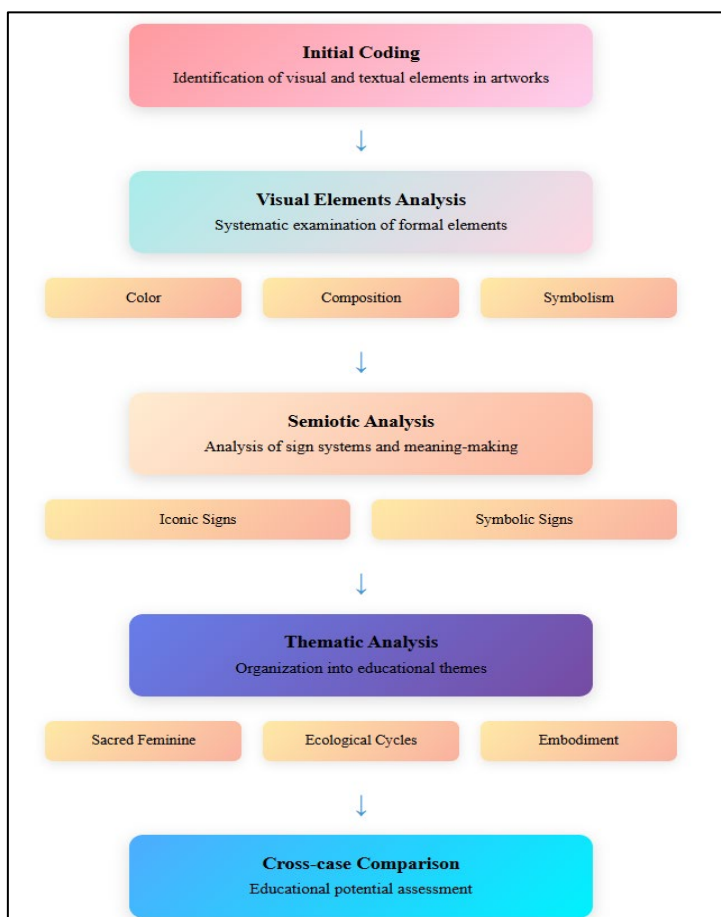


Figure 1. Visual analysis process for ecofeminist art education research

Visual content analysis has proven effective in revealing communicative essence embedded in artistic works, particularly when integrated with semiotics, cultural symbolism, and visual rhetoric (Wei et al., 2024). Formalist analysis focuses on composition, colour, line, spatial structure, rhythm, and image arrangement, evaluating how these visual languages embody inner spiritual states and natural beauty. When combined with cultural and symbolic interpretation, this approach provides a holistic framework that moves beyond surface-level description to reveal deeper pedagogical meanings.

Semiotic analysis employs frameworks for analysing symbolic systems in images, examining how meaning transforms through context and interpretation. Recent research in performance semiotics demonstrates that symbolic objects and visual elements can transcend their original utilitarian purposes to become dynamic narrative tools, acquiring new meanings through manipulation, context, and interaction (Amirrul & Paharul Rozi, 2025). This approach is particularly relevant for understanding how ecofeminist artworks function as educational media. These analytical results provide important foundations for thematic analysis, with research first identifying and coding visually meaningful symbols, then incorporating these symbols into corresponding core themes (such as "sacred feminine" or "ecological healing") during thematic analysis.

3. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis combines extraction from semiotic analysis and application of ecofeminist and feminist theology theories. The research identifies key themes appearing in selected paintings, including Earth's sacredness, feminine energy embodiment, life and death cycles, and interconnections between body and environment. Through considering artists' cultural backgrounds, published artist statements, exhibition texts, and reviews, this interpretation becomes further contextualized.

This methodological framework aligns with ecofeminist scholarship's emphasis on subjective experience, intuition, and related knowledge. The two selected artists were chosen through purposive sampling based on their visual language's apparent ecological and spiritual content. This small sample allows for deep, focused analysis suitable for article length and scope.

Table 2. Research Framework for Ecofeminist Art as Educational Tool

Component	Description	Educational Function
Theoretical Foundation	Ecofeminism, Eco-spirituality, Feminist Pedagogy	Provides critical lens for analysing nature-culture relationships
Visual Elements	Colour, composition, symbolism, form	Creates accessible metaphors for complex concepts
Thematic Content	Sacred feminine, ecological cycles, embodiment	Challenges dominant narratives, promotes alternative worldviews
Educational Outcomes	Environmental awareness, spiritual consciousness, gender equality	Facilitates transformative learning through aesthetic engagement
Methodology	Visual analysis, thematic interpretation	Enables systematic examination of artistic educational potential

4. Case Study Selection

Research subjects include two contemporary female artists: Gaia Orion and Verena Wild. Gaia Orion (born 1973) is a French-born, Canada-based interdisciplinary visual artist specializing in spiritual art, symbolism, and ecological consciousness integration. Her works encompass painting, illustration, and mandala creation. Orion's artistic practice draws inspiration from ecological philosophy, feminine spiritual traditions, sacred geometry, and psychology.

Verena Wild is a German artist, writer, and illustrator whose works draw inspiration from nature, spirituality, and multicultural traditions. Her artistic practice combines detailed patterns and rich colours, aiming to awaken connections between people and nature and inner worlds through visual language. She studied Chinese Studies and Social Anthropology at university and travelled extensively across Asian countries, gaining deep understanding of different cultural art forms.

Both artists explicitly integrate ecological consciousness with spiritual themes in their work, making them ideal subjects for examining the educational potential of ecofeminist art. Their works demonstrate how visual symbolism can serve as an effective medium for communicating complex environmental and spiritual concepts to diverse audiences. In doing so, they provide accessible entry points into ecological discourse, allowing viewers to engage with sustainability and gender equality through aesthetic and emotional channels rather than purely academic or scientific frameworks.

The Findings

1. Case Study 1: Gaia Orion - "Her Journey"

As seen in Figure 2, Gaia Orion's "Her Journey" presents a large spiral structure displaying multiple stages of feminine life journey while resonating with natural seasonal changes and day-night cycles. The spiral itself symbolizes growth, introspection, consciousness expansion, and return to nature, representing common spiritual themes in ecofeminist contexts.

The painting depicts feminine images from childhood, maidenhood, motherhood to elderhood in sequence, corresponding with seasonal changes of spring, summer, autumn, winter and alternations between sun and moon, presenting profound structural relationships between feminine bodily experience and natural cycles. This "cyclical rather than linear" temporal perspective precisely embodies ecofeminist opposition to linear, instrumental modern temporal logic.



Figure 2. Gaia Orion's "Her Journey"

Visual Analysis

The spiral composition creates inward and outward visual guidance paths, leading viewers along the painted feminine journey while symbolizing self-consciousness expansion. Bright blue, green, yellow contrast with deep brown and black, evoking natural four-season rhythms. Colours transition from cool to warm within the spiral, constructing dynamic flows of time and emotion.

Character postures, branch curves, water flow lines all present organic fluidity with gentle, rhythmic visual tempo, strengthening symbolic meaning of "life flow." The body postures within the spiral present dance-like repetition and variation, symbolizing harmony and unity between body, rhythm, and cosmic order.

Symbolic Interpretation

The spiral represents one of ecofeminism's most important symbols, representing life, growth, womb, cycles, and transformation, embodying non-linear, inclusive temporal perspectives. The feminine figures display varied postures expressing strength, softness, pregnancy, meditation, death, and rebirth bodily experiences, metaphorically representing divine femininity and Earth resonance.

Natural symbols include trees with roots and branches that connect heaven and earth, symbolizing unity between heaven and humanity; moon and sun representing day-night alternation, metaphorically representing yin-yang unity and bodily rhythms; water flow symbolizing emotion, subconsciousness, and

spiritual transformation; rainbow and oval light circles symbolizing hope, renewal, and creativity; deer and flying birds pointing toward freedom and spiritual guidance; central womb-like core suggesting cosmic origins, nurturing, and rebirth as symbolic focal points of feminine creativity. These symbols jointly construct a cosmic map where feminine and natural participation occurs together, serving as both visual journey and eco-spiritual navigation.

Educational Applications

From an educational perspective, this artwork could be used by students to interpret cyclical thinking versus linear progress narratives, making it valuable for sustainability education that emphasizes renewal, interdependence, and long-term thinking rather than short-term exploitation. Students could engage with discussions about life stages, seasonal awareness, and the relationship between personal growth and environmental consciousness.

2. Case Study 2: Verena Wild - "Divine Sanctuary"

As seen in Figure 3, Verena Wild's "Divine Sanctuary" depicts a protected sacred space where Earth and spirit harmoniously merge. The painting centers around a light-surrounded bird's nest containing life-symbolizing eggs, surrounded by various birds, waterfalls, plants, flowers, and supporting human hands.

The painting presents an ecology-embraced, feminine-care-maintained spiritual ecological space, representing a symbolically meaningful "sanctuary" image. Within ecofeminist contexts, this painting embodies feminine body and nature's empathetic and co-creative relationships.



Figure 3. Verena Wild's "Divine Sanctuary"

Educational Implications

From an ecofeminist perspective, this painting reconstructs nature and feminine shared participation in life nurturing imagery systems. The nest symbolizes the womb and ecological home; eggs symbolize new life and potential; flowers, birds, and water constitute emotionally warm ecological wholeness, emphasizing nature's vitality and intimacy.

From eco-spiritual perspectives, Starhawk (2013) advocates that human-nature connections serve as starting points for spiritual awakening. This painting embodies nature's inherent spiritual qualities through gentle, surrounding structures: water flow symbolizes emotional and energy cycles, feathers and light

demonstrate invisible force flows, lotus flowers bloom atop nests, conveying spiritual ascension and inner enlightenment intentions.

Symbolic Analysis

The nest and eggs represent life potential symbols, serving as "womb-Earth" dual imagery convergence in ecofeminism, symbolizing regeneration and care ethics. Lotus flowers positioned above painting centers symbolize spiritual awakening, transcendence, and sacred feminine representation, serving as common imagery for "spiritual ascension" visual themes.

Waterfalls and water flows represent inner emotional flows, natural vitality, and energy release, constituting "flowing divinity." Feathers and net-like light circles embody non-human wisdom's protective forces, with feathers serving as "soul" and "spiritual communication" symbols in many cultures. The dual-hand support represents the most human-characteristic symbolic parts in paintings, embodying "body-spirit-nature" trinity feminine divine perspectives, serving as visual expressions of feminist theology's "sacred as internalized" concepts.

Pedagogical Applications

In educational contexts, students could analyze this artwork to explore themes of environmental stewardship, nurturing relationships with nature, and the concept of sanctuary spaces. This makes it particularly valuable for workshops on ecological ethics, community-based environmental learning, and discussions about protection versus exploitation of natural resources.

3. Case Study 3: Gaia Orion - "Mother Nature"

As seen in Figure 4, "Mother Nature" presents a naked feminine figure merged with Earth, her body emerging from the ground, arms outstretched like trees, roots deep in earth, head aligned with world center. The entire painting symbolizes Earth Mother as a unified embodiment of nature and feminine sacredness.

From ecofeminist perspectives, this work responds to critiques of nature and feminine shared domination, reconstructing empowered visual structures where femininity no longer serves as symbolic "other" of nature but becomes nature's embodiment and protector.



Figure 4. "Mother Nature"

Visual Structure

The entire painting uses circular central symmetrical composition, emphasizing unity, completeness, and cyclical nature. Feminine bodies merge with Earth, strengthening visual logic of "body as nature." Warm tones (yellow, orange, brown) concentrate in feminine body sections, symbolizing vitality and positive energy; cool tones (blue, green) constitute oceans and atmosphere, forming dynamic contrasts.

Visual focus concentrates on feminine chest and heart chakra positions, constituting inner "spiritual energy core" as life flow starting points, with visual structure and spiritual logic maintaining consistency.

Educational Applications

This artwork demonstrates how visual symbolism can effectively communicate complex ecological and spiritual concepts for educational purposes. The integration of feminine imagery with Earth representation challenges traditional nature-culture dualisms while providing accessible entry points for discussions about environmental stewardship and gender equality.

The circular composition and flowing natural elements create visual narratives that transcend linguistic barriers, making the artwork particularly valuable for diverse educational contexts. Students can engage with themes of interconnectedness, environmental responsibility, and feminine empowerment through visual analysis, creative response activities, and embodied learning experiences inspired by the artwork.

Cross-Case Analysis

Analysis of both artists' works reveals consistent themes and visual strategies that demonstrate the educational potential of ecofeminist art. Both Gaia Orion and Verena Wild employ circular, spiral, and flowing compositions that embody non-linear temporal concepts central to ecological thinking. Their use of natural symbols—water, trees, celestial bodies—creates accessible metaphors for complex environmental relationships.

Table 3. Comparative Visual Analysis of Selected Artworks

Visual Element	Gaia Orion Works	Verena Wild Works	Educational Function
Composition	Spiral, circular mandala structures	Central focal points with radiating elements	Represents cyclical time, interconnectedness
Colour Palette	Warm earth tones, rainbow spectrums	Blue-green naturalistic, warm accents	Evokes natural cycles, emotional resonance
Natural Symbols	Trees, water, celestial bodies, seasons	Birds, flowers, water, nests, lotus	Accessible nature metaphors
Feminine Imagery	Goddess figures, life stages, body-nature fusion	Nurturing hands, protective gestures	Challenges gender stereotypes
Spiritual Elements	Mandalas, light rays, sacred geometry	Light emanations, ascending energy	Addresses meaning and purpose
Educational Theme	Life journey, seasonal wisdom	Sanctuary, protection, nurturing	Alternative ways of knowing

The integration of feminine figures with natural elements serves multiple educational functions: challenging gender stereotypes, promoting environmental consciousness, and demonstrating alternative ways of knowing that value intuition and embodied experience alongside rational analysis. These artworks provide concrete examples of how visual culture can serve informal educational functions, reaching audiences beyond traditional classroom settings.

The spiritual dimensions present in both artists' works offer additional educational value by addressing questions of meaning, purpose, and connection that formal environmental education often overlooks. By presenting ecology as sacred rather than merely scientific, these artworks invite deeper engagement with environmental issues and promote more holistic understanding of human-nature relationships.

Discussion

1. Ecofeminist Art as Alternative Pedagogy

The analysis of works by Gaia Orion and Verena Wild demonstrates how ecofeminist art functions as an alternative pedagogy that challenges traditional educational approaches to environmental and social issues. Unlike conventional environmental education that often relies on scientific data and rational argumentation, these artworks engage viewers through emotional, intuitive, and spiritual pathways that complement and enhance cognitive learning.

The visual symbolism employed by both artists creates what hooks (2000) describes as "critical consciousness" which refers to awareness of social and environmental injustices combined with commitment to transformative action. Through their integration of feminine imagery with ecological themes, these works challenge the nature-culture dualism that underlies many environmental problems while offering alternative visions of human-Earth relationships.

The spiral structures prominent in Orion's work, for example, provide visual metaphors for cyclical thinking that contrasts sharply with linear progress narratives dominant in Western education. This cyclical perspective, fundamental to many indigenous worldviews, offers important insights for sustainability education by emphasizing renewal, interdependence, and long-term thinking rather than short-term exploitation.

However, critical challenges exist in using art in pedagogical contexts. The interpretive nature of visual symbolism means that messages may not be universally understood, and some concepts may appear too abstract for certain audiences. Additionally, the effectiveness of visual methods can be limited by interpretive subjectivity, requiring careful facilitation to ensure educational objectives are met.

Practical applications could include integration into curriculum through workshops focused on environmental consciousness, development of discussion guides for educators, and creation of community-based learning programs that use ecofeminist art as starting points for environmental action.

2. Spiritual Dimensions of Environmental Education

The integration of spiritual themes in both artists' works addresses a significant gap in contemporary environmental education. While traditional approaches focus primarily on scientific understanding and policy solutions, the spiritual dimensions of environmental consciousness often receive limited attention despite their crucial role in motivating behaviour change and fostering deep ecological awareness. Research has demonstrated that spirituality significantly influences women's coping strategies and resilience, with higher levels of spirituality correlating with more effective problem-focused and emotion-focused engagement approaches (Che Kasim et al., 2017).

The psychological and spiritual effects of visual elements, including light, colour, and spatial composition, have been shown to influence inhabitants' well-being and consciousness (Arjmandi et al., 2011). This research supports the educational potential of ecofeminist artworks, which deliberately employ these visual elements to create transformative experiences for viewers. Starhawk's (2013) concept of "Earth-based spirituality" provides a theoretical framework for understanding how artistic expressions of sacred ecology can contribute to environmental education.

The emphasis on embodied experience in both artists' works reflects feminist pedagogical principles that value diverse ways of knowing. This approach particularly benefits learners who may not respond effectively to traditional academic approaches, offering alternative pathways for developing environmental consciousness through aesthetic and emotional engagement.

3. Social Implications and Consciousness-Raising

The works analysed in this study demonstrate significant potential for social consciousness-raising beyond their immediate artistic contexts. Contemporary research on digital heritage and identity formation reveals how visual media can serve as dynamic cultural archives that facilitate expression, preservation, and transformation of cultural identity (Babalola & Sedisa, 2025). By presenting feminine figures as powerful,

sacred, and intimately connected with nature, these artworks challenge patriarchal narratives that have historically justified both environmental exploitation and gender oppression.

The educational value of this consciousness-raising extends to multiple social justice issues. Environmental degradation disproportionately affects women, particularly in developing countries where women often bear primary responsibility for water collection, food production, and family health (Shiva, 2016). Artworks that connect feminine empowerment with environmental protection thus address intersecting forms of oppression while offering visions of alternative social arrangements.

The spiritual feminist imagery present in both artists' works also contributes to broader cultural conversations about religious and spiritual authority. By reclaiming goddess imagery and feminine sacred symbols, these works participate in what Christ (1997) describes as the "reemergence of the Goddess"—a cultural movement that seeks to restore feminine aspects of divinity that have been suppressed in patriarchal religious traditions.

3. Implications for Formal Education

While the artworks analysed in this study primarily function within informal educational contexts galleries, online platforms, spiritual communities their pedagogical potential extends to formal educational settings. Art educators could incorporate these works through structured visual analysis exercises, environmental studies programs could use them to complement scientific content with emotional and spiritual dimensions, and gender studies courses could examine them as examples of feminist consciousness-raising through visual media.

The visual nature of these educational resources makes them particularly valuable for diverse learning styles and multicultural educational contexts. Students who may struggle with text-heavy academic approaches can engage with complex concepts through visual analysis, creative response activities, and embodied learning experiences inspired by the artworks.

Furthermore, the integration of spiritual themes in these works addresses growing recognition of the need for holistic education that engages students' emotional, spiritual, and social development alongside intellectual growth. This approach aligns with recent trends in educational theory that emphasize mindfulness, contemplative pedagogy, and social-emotional learning.

4. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study's focus on two Western artists significantly limits its cross-cultural applicability, particularly given the global nature of environmental challenges and the diversity of spiritual and feminist traditions worldwide. Additionally, the study's emphasis on visual analysis without direct audience research leaves questions about actual educational impact and effectiveness unanswered. The limitation of interpretive subjectivity in visual methods requires acknowledgment, as different viewers may derive entirely different meanings from the same artwork, potentially limiting their effectiveness as educational tools across diverse cultural contexts.

Future research could employ ethnographic methods to examine how audiences actually engage with and learn from ecofeminist artworks in various educational contexts. Comparative studies examining ecofeminist art from different cultural backgrounds could provide insights into universal versus culturally specific aspects of visual environmental education.

Longitudinal studies examining the long-term impact of exposure to ecofeminist art on environmental attitudes and behaviours could provide valuable evidence for the educational effectiveness of this alternative pedagogical approach. Such research could inform the development of more intentional educational programs incorporating visual arts as environmental education tools.

Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that contemporary female artists such as Gaia Orion and Verena Wild create powerful educational resources through their integration of ecological consciousness, spiritual awareness, and feminist perspectives in visual art. Their works transcend traditional boundaries between art and education,

offering alternative pedagogical approaches that engage viewers through emotional, intuitive, and spiritual pathways often overlooked in formal educational settings.

The analysis reveals several key contributions of ecofeminist art to environmental and social education. First, these artworks provide accessible visual metaphors for complex ecological concepts, making environmental education more inclusive and engaging for diverse audiences. Research demonstrates that visual metaphors can significantly enhance attention and cognitive engagement compared to standard visual presentations (Ahmad et al., 2024), supporting the educational effectiveness of symbolic imagery in ecofeminist art. Second, they challenge dominant cultural narratives about nature-culture relationships while offering alternative visions of sustainable human-Earth connections. Third, they address spiritual dimensions of environmental consciousness that formal education often neglects despite their crucial role in motivating transformative behaviour change.

The educational potential of ecofeminist art extends beyond immediate aesthetic appreciation to encompass consciousness-raising about intersecting environmental and social justice issues. By presenting feminine figures as powerful, sacred, and intimately connected with nature, these works challenge patriarchal structures that have historically justified both environmental exploitation and gender oppression.

The study's findings suggest significant opportunities for incorporating ecofeminist art into formal educational contexts, particularly in environmental studies, art education, and gender studies programs. The visual nature of these resources makes them particularly valuable for diverse learning styles and multicultural educational settings, while their integration of spiritual themes addresses growing recognition of needs for holistic education approaches.

For educators, curriculum developers, and eco-activists, this research suggests concrete action steps:

- i. Develop educator training programs that incorporate ecofeminist art analysis and interpretation methods
- ii. Create curriculum modules that combine visual arts with environmental education to engage multiple learning styles
- iii. Establish community-based learning initiatives that use art as a starting point for environmental consciousness-raising and policy discussions
- iv. Design assessment tools that evaluate the effectiveness of art-based environmental education interventions

This study contributes to knowledge by establishing a theoretical framework for understanding ecofeminist art as pedagogy, providing empirical evidence of specific visual strategies used by contemporary female artists, and demonstrating practical applications for formal and informal educational contexts. The research fills a significant gap in understanding how visual culture can serve as an alternative pedagogical tool for environmental and social consciousness-raising.

However, the research also reveals limitations requiring future investigation, particularly regarding cross-cultural applicability and actual educational effectiveness. Future studies should include:

- i. Inclusion of non-Western artists from Southeast Asia, Indigenous, African, or other cultural contexts to examine universal versus culturally specific aspects of ecofeminist art as pedagogy
- ii. Comparative studies across different religious and cultural contexts to understand how spiritual themes in art translate across diverse belief systems
- iii. Experimental designs examining student responses to ecofeminist art in controlled educational settings to measure actual learning outcomes, attitude change, and behaviour modification
- iv. Longitudinal studies tracking the long-term impact of exposure to ecofeminist art on environmental attitudes, activism, and sustainable behaviour practices - Ethnographic research examining how different audiences interpret and respond to ecofeminist artworks across various cultural and educational contexts

The integration of ecological consciousness and spiritual awareness in contemporary female art represents a significant development in alternative pedagogy with substantial implications for environmental and social education. As global environmental crises intensify and traditional educational approaches prove

insufficient for motivating necessary social transformations, the educational potential of ecofeminist art offers promising pathways for fostering the deep consciousness changes required for sustainable futures.

The works of artists like Gaia Orion and Verena Wild demonstrate that art can serve not merely as aesthetic object but as powerful educational medium capable of transforming consciousness, challenging dominant narratives, and inspiring alternative visions of human-Earth relationships. Their contribution to environmental and social education extends far beyond traditional artistic contexts, offering insights and inspiration for educators, activists, and all those committed to creating a more just and sustainable world.

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