Audrey Flack’s Hyperreal Paintings: A Juxtaposing Simulation of Feminism and Femininity in the 1970s

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The 1970s was a prominent decade for feminism. The second-wave feminist activism had seeped into everyday life, making Americans re-evaluate their definition of femininity, what it meant to be a woman, and the rights women deserved. During this period, Jean Baudrillard also published his essay “The Hyper-Realism of Simulation”, which asserted that the post-modern world had become inseparable from the media and its signs and symbols, therefore simulating a hyperreality. Photorealism also emerged as an art movement. Audrey Flack was a pioneer photorealist artist known for her vanitas paintings of cosmetics, jewelry and personal objects. Through Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreal simulacra and simulation, Flack’s paintings are analyzed as rhetorical artifacts that simulate a juxtaposing reality of femininity and the feminism of the time: on one hand, the objects symbolize Flack’s gender identity, while on the other, they signify the intense era of feminism in which the paintings were created.