

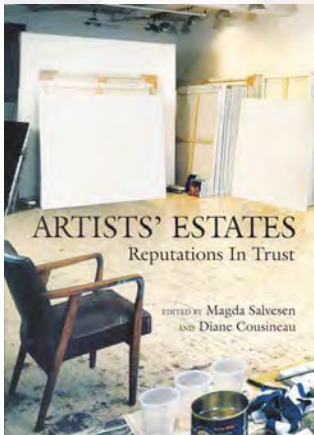
WOMAN'S ART JOURNAL

SPRING/SUMMER 2006 VOLUME 27, NUMBER 1 \$12.00



Saving minds from boring reading since 1936

ARTISTS' ESTATES



Reputations in Trust

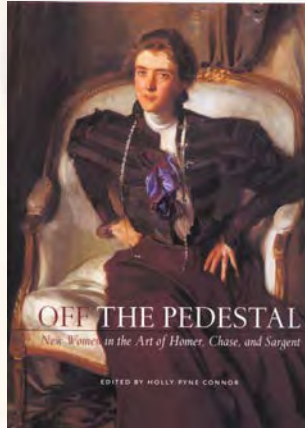
*Edited by Magda Salvesen
and Diane Cousineau*

"A revealing and touching book . . . filled with many success stories as well as many cautionary tales. It is a guide to those thinking about what will happen to their work when they are gone."

—Robert Sievert, *Artezone*

384 pages, 88 b&w illustrations
Cloth, \$34.95, 0-8135-3604-9

OFF THE PEDESTAL



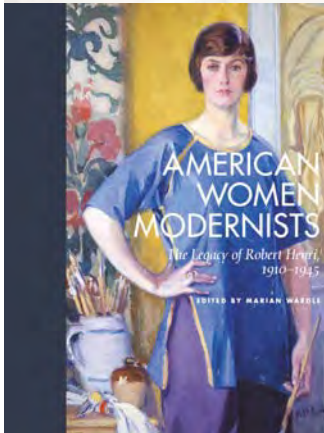
**New Women in the Art of
Homer, Chase, and Sargent**
Edited Holly Pyne Connor

"*Off the Pedestal* is a lively and meticulously researched introduction to the imagery of the New Woman that will appeal to a full range of readers interested in the visual culture of the United States in the nineteenth century."

—Barbara Gallati, Curator Emerita of American Art at the Brooklyn Museum, and author of *Great Expectations: John Singer Sargent Painting Children*

208 pages, 32 color and 46 b&w illustrations, Paper, \$29.95,
0-8135-3697-2

AMERICAN WOMEN MODERNISTS



**The Legacy of Robert Henri,
1910-1945**

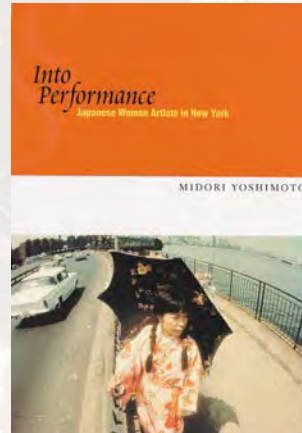
Edited by Marian Wardle

"Long overdue, this richly documented book restores the female presence in early twentieth-century American art, design, and craft. Brava to all the contributors for their mighty labors in the archives and museum collections."

—Wanda M. Corn, Robert and Ruth Halperin professor in art history, Stanford University

288 pages, 93 color and 74 b&w illustrations, Paper, \$34.95,
0-8135-3684-2
Copublished with the Brigham Young University Museum of Art

INTO PERFORMANCE



**Japanese Women Artists in
New York**
Midori Yoshimoto

"Yoshimoto produced a penetrating study of five Japanese artists who were very active at the time [1960s] and continue so today. This book convincingly shows that each contributed to and derived from the artistic environment of the time." —*Choice*

288 pages, 76 b&w illustrations
Paper, \$29.95, 0-8135-3521-2



RUTGERS UNIVERSITY PRESS

To order, call 800-446-9323
or visit rutgerspress.rutgers.edu



(on the cover):
Elizabeth Murray, *Painter's Progress*
(1981), oil on canvas, 19 panels,
9'8" x 7'9". Museum of Modern Art,
New York. *Acquired through the
Bernhill Fund and gift of Agnes
Gund, 1983.*

EDITORS

JOAN MARTER AND MARGARET BARLOW

BOOK EDITOR: UTE TELLINI

FOUNDING EDITOR: ELSA HONIG FINE

EDITORIAL BOARD

NORMA BROUDE	NANCY MOWLL MATHEWS
THERESE DOLAN	MARTIN ROSENBERG
MARY GARRARD	PAMELA H. SIMPSON
SALOMON GRIMBERG	ROBERTA TARBELL
ANN SUTHERLAND HARRIS	JUDITH ZILCZER
ELLEN G. LANDAU	

PRODUCTION, AND DESIGN SERVICES

OLD CITY PUBLISHING, INC.

Editorial Offices:

Woman's Art Journal
Rutgers University
Dept. of Art History, Voorhees Hall
71 Hamilton Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08901, USA
Phone (732) 932-7041 ext.20
Fax (732) 932-1261
waj@womansartjournal.org

Advertising and Subscriptions:

Ian Mellanby
Old City Publishing, Inc.
628 North Second St.
Philadelphia, PA 19123, USA
Phone: +1.215.925.4390
Fax: +1.215.925.4371
info@oldcitypublishing.com
www.oldcitypublishing.com

© 2006 Rutgers University, Department of Art History and
Old City Publishing, Inc.,

Woman's Art Journal (ISSN 0270-7993.) is published semiannually,
Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter by Old City Publishing, Inc., a
member of the Old City Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

Subscription rates \$24.00 per year for individuals and \$52.00 per year
for institutions. Issues are shipped in May and November. Missed
issues must be reported no later than three months after shipping date
or we cannot be responsible for replacements. All rights reserved.

Indexed in Bibliography of the History of Art (BHA), Art Bibliogra-
phies Modern, Arts and Humanities Citation Index (ISI) and Wilson
Full Text. The full text is also available through JSTOR's Arts &
Sciences III Collection, www.jstor.org.

Except as permitted under national laws or under the photocopy license
described below, no part of this publication may be reproduced or
transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, pho-
tocopying or otherwise, or stored in a retrieval system of any nature,
without the advance written permission of the publisher.

Rights and Permissions/Reprints of Individual Articles

This publication and each of the articles contained herein are protected
by copyright. Permission to reproduce and /or translate material con-
tained in this journal must be obtained in writing from the publisher.

For permission to photocopy for internal use within your organization,
or to make copies for external or academic use please contact the
Copyright Clearance Center at 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA
01923, USA; telephone: +1 978-750-8400 or online at <http://www.copyright.com/>.

Any unauthorized reproduction, transmission, or storage may result
in civil or criminal liability.

SPRING/SUMMER 2006 VOLUME 27, NUMBER 1

2 PARALLEL PERSPECTIVES

By Joan Marter and Margaret Barlow

PORTRAITS, ISSUES AND INSIGHTS

3 LEE MILLER'S REVENGE ON CULTURE: PHOTOJOURNALISM, SURREALISM,
AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By Caitlin S. Davis

10 THE ART OF HELEN LUNDEBERG: ILLUMINATING PORTRAITS

By Donna Stein

17 GEORGIA O'KEEFE AND EMILY CARR: HEALTH, NATURE AND THE
CREATIVE PROCESS

By Sharyn R. Udall

26 WOMEN ARTISTS IN THE JAPANESE POSTWAR AVANT-GARDE:
CELEBRATING A MULTIPLICITY

By Midori Yoshimoto

REVIEWS

33 Elizabeth Murray BY ROBERT STORR

Reviewed by Corinne Robins

36 Joan Snyder

BY HAYDEN HERRERA, WITH JENNI SORKIN AND NORMAN L. KLEEBLATT

Reviewed by Cassandra Langer

39 Gender, Politics, and Allegory in the Art of Rubens

BY LISA ROSENTHAL

Reviewed by Lilian H. Zirpolo

42 American Women Modernists: The Legacy of Robert Henri, 1910-45

EDITED BY MARIAN E. WARDLE

Reviewed by Roberta K. Tarbell

45 Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York

BY MIDORI YOSHIMOTO

Reviewed by Karen Kurczynski

50 Louise Bourgeois

BY ROBERT STORR, PAULO HERKENHOFF, AND ALLAN SCHWARTZMAN

Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art

BY MIGNON NIXON

Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art-Writing

BY MIEKE BAL

Reviewed by Robert J. Belton

54 Lee Miller: A Life BY CAROLYN BURKE

Reviewed by Lynda Hoffman-Jeep

57 Alice Aycock: Sculpture and Projects BY ROBERT HOBBS

Reviewed by Christine Filippone

61 Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker

BY GWENDOLYN DuBOIS SHAW

Reviewed by Jennifer Heusel

65 The Art of Rachel Whiteread

EDITED BY CHRIS TOWNSEND

Reviewed by Robin Rice

The past year has been filled with uncertainty, excitement, and exhaustion, as Margaret Barlow and I took over the reins of *Woman's Art Journal*. In the Spring/Summer 2005 issue, Elsa Honig Fine announced her intentions to cease publication of *WAJ* with the next issue. As Elsa and I walked around the Dorothy Dehner exhibition at New York's Kraushaar Galleries last May, she explained that after publishing the journal for 26 years, she had decided to move on to other projects.

My attempt to assure the journal's survival under the auspices of Rutgers University was somewhat impeded by the summer doldrums of academe. My art history faculty colleagues were scattered to various research sites, but the administrators were mostly available. Thanks to the efforts of Philip Furmanski, Executive Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Isabel Nazario, Associate Vice President, and Barry Qualls, Dean of Humanities, the Rutgers administration eventually offered a stipend to continue publication of the journal.

As co-sponsors and business partners, we were fortunate to meet Ian Mellanby and Guy Griffiths at Old City Publishing in Philadelphia. Mellanby and Griffiths were interested in adding *WAJ* to their list as a complement to the *Women's Review of Books*, which they had just signed on to co-sponsor with Wellesley College.

The process was completed in October, and we got to work.

Joan Marter

For *WAJ*, this is the 53rd issue, but for us, it is the first. With very different sets of skills and experiences, and with only a nodding acquaintance, we assumed the task of keeping *WAJ* afloat and on course. Although presented with more hurdles than expected, we have worked well together and believe this issue continues the journal's high standards.

Publication was slated to end last November, and all new submissions had been turned away for more than a year. We instantly began networking to attract authors and reviewers for our first issue and oversaw the naming of the new editorial board. The distinguished scholars who graciously agreed to serve are taking an active role in the jurying and selection of articles.

Inviting Ute Tellini to be our book review editor—to coordinate the complex task of selecting books and finding reviewers—was an inspired move. An art historian with a doctorate from Rutgers and a longtime contributor to *WAJ*, she quickly engaged authors for the dozen reviews of recent books included here.

By happenstance, the subjects in this first issue are mostly of the 20th century. In keeping with the journal's history, our interests encompass women artists and images of women from all ages, and we expect future issues to be more indicative of the breadth of women's participation in the history of art. However, even given their contemporaneity, the articles in this issue display geographical and topical variety.

Authors Sharyn Udall and Caitlin Davis write on familiar artists, but take a novel approach by exploring connections between their mental and physical states and the creative process. Udall writes on similarities in the way that the North American

icons Georgia O'Keeffe and Emily Carr experienced bouts of depression. "In their work and in their words," she writes, "lies evidence that both painters incorporated...imaginative body images, deeply entwined with illness, into the ongoing processes of identity formation and creativity."

The model and photographer Lee Miller, best known for her collaborations with the Surrealist artist Man Ray in Paris, later took on the demanding role of war photojournalist. In examining Miller's photograph *Revenge on Culture* (1940), taken during the London Blitz, Caitlin Davis found some striking personal connections. According to Davis, "Miller's image of a ruined statue not only refers to the annihilation of a city and the attempted destruction of a civilization by the horrors of modern warfare, but also contains more than one veiled reference to Miller herself."

The aftermath and destruction of World War II brought about some positive changes for women in Japan, including their admission to the major art schools. Midori Yoshimoto describes a subsequent blossoming of avant-garde art that included dozens of women, whose work was gathered recently for a major exhibition in Japan. Here she highlights "just four of these extraordinary women—Saori Akutagawa, Mitsuko Tabe, Sayako Kishimoto, and Miyori Hayashi...to illuminate [their] striking multiplicity of content and styles."

California modernist painter Helen Lundeberg traveled little and experienced the world of art through books, writes Donna Stein. Her intellectual approach to painting drew from across the art spectrum, from the Renaissance to Surrealism, and her "illuminating portraits," including her well-known *Double Portrait in Time* (1935), capture not so much a particular life but "the stages and transitory nature of life," writes Stein.

Most of the reviews are of monographs, some of them monumental, such as Robert Hobbs's *Alice Aycock: Sculpture and Projects* (reviewed by Christine Filippone). In two instances, the reviewers of major exhibition catalogues, Corinne Robins of *Elizabeth Murray* (by Robert Storr) and Cassandra Langer of *Joan Snyder* (by Hayden Herrera et al), also discuss related exhibitions, at the Museum of Modern Art and the Jewish Museum, respectively. Robert Belton reviews "three reappraisals of [Louise] Bourgeois's life and work written from entirely different perspectives." The books are *Louise Bourgeois* by Robert Storr, Paulo Herkenhoff, and Allan Schwartzman; *Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art* by Mignon Nixon; and *Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art Writing* by Mieke Bal.

The subjects of monographs reviewed by Robin Rice and Jennifer Heusel also are well known, though their stories are far from complete. The books are, respectively, Chris Townsend's *The Art of Rachel Whiteread* and Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw's *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker*.

Two of the reviews in this issue turned out to complement two of the articles: Karen Kurczynski's review of Midori Yoshimoto's *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* adds insights on several of the artists Yoshimoto discusses in her article, and Lynda Hoffman-Jeep's review of Carolyn Burke's *Lee Miller: A Life* fills in some details of Miller's life story.

continued on page 9

LEE MILLER'S *REVENGE ON CULTURE*

Photojournalism, Surrealism, and Autobiography

By Caitlin S. Davis

Lee Miller (1907-77) is probably best known to art historians as the model for Man Ray's Surrealist-inspired photographic images of truncated torsos and nudes and as a Surrealist photographer herself. However, this former *Vogue* cover model, Surrealist artist, and professional fashion photographer became a serious photojournalist during World War II. As she witnessed the bombing of London, she created images such as *Revenge on Culture* (1940; Fig. 1). Later she received accreditation as a photojournalist with the United States Army and followed the Allied advance across Europe, starting in the fields of Normandy and culminating in the death camps in Germany.

Lee Miller was born in 1907 in Poughkeepsie, New York, to a comfortable middle-class family. Her father, Theodore Miller, who introduced her to the mechanics of photography, was an upper-level manager at the DeLaval Separator Company, while her mother, Florence, kept house and watched over her daughter and two sons. Miller was rebellious in her youth, and was consequently expelled from a number of public and private schools. Enthralled by visits to the theater in New York City, after high school, Miller traveled to France to attend L'Ecole Medgyès pour la Technique du Théâtre, then returned to America and enrolled in Dramatic Production at Vassar College, and soon thereafter at the Art Students League in New York.

A collision with the fashion world sparked Miller's career in photography. At the age of 19, while in New York City, she was rescued from being struck by an oncoming car by none other than the magazine publisher Condé Nast, and it was not long after that Miller's face graced the cover of *Vogue*.¹ Her image was recorded by the great photographers of the time, including Edward Steichen, Arnold Genthe, George Hoyningen-Huene, and Horst P. Horst. She formed enduring friendships with these men and learned from all of them about the art of photography. However, it was not until she spent several years in Paris (1929-32) under the tutelage of Man Ray that Miller acquired the tools necessary to become an innovative photographer in her own right.

Miller introduced herself to Man Ray during the summer of 1929 and soon became his student, assistant, and lover. These artistically fertile years, spent among the

Parisian avant-garde, proved invaluable to Miller in terms of photographic training and the development of a distinctly Surrealist style. In her own words: "[Man Ray] had taught me to do fashion pictures, he'd taught me to do portraits, he taught me the whole technique of what he did."² The Paris years were filled with activity. Miller collaborated with Man Ray on a number of photographic projects, both commercial and artistic, including the discovery of the solarization technique; worked as both a fashion model and photographer for French *Vogue*; and enjoyed the stimulating atmosphere created by the constant companionship of the Surrealists, including Paul Eluard, Max Ernst, André Breton, and Jean Cocteau. The formative impact of these years revealed itself a decade later in Miller's photo-documentation of World War II, examples of which provide clues to her self-image and personal biography.



Fig. 1. Lee Miller, *Revenge on Culture* (1940), gelatin silver print, © Lee Miller Archives, England 2006. All rights reserved. www.leemiller.co.uk.



Fig. 2. Lee Miller, *Fire Masks* (1941), gelatin silver print, © Lee Miller Archives, England 2006. All rights reserved. www.leemiller.co.uk.

After her split with Man Ray, Miller returned to New York, where she ran her own photography studio for two years before marrying a wealthy Egyptian industrialist and moving with him to Cairo. The marriage eventually broke up after she met the British Surrealist Roland Penrose in Paris in 1937. She spent the summer of that year as well as the following one in Europe with Penrose and their circle of friends, which included Man Ray, Paul and Nusch Éluard, and Pablo Picasso and Dora Maar. During the summer of 1939, just before the outbreak of German hostilities, Miller finally left her first husband and took up residence in Europe. When war was officially declared in September, Miller opted not to return to the United States. She decided to experience the war up close and moved into Roland Penrose's Downshire Hill home in London.

Miller supported herself as a fashion photographer for *Vogue*, working out of the publication's London office. In her glossy images of glamorous women modeling chic clothing, Miller revealed her Surrealist background and refused to ignore the unattractive reality of modern warfare. *Fire Masks* (1941; Fig. 2) was posed at the entrance of an air-raid shelter and shows two women modeling masks designed to protect the wearer from the deleterious effects of incendiary bombs. Miller's composition, prominently featuring these arresting masks, bears witness to the fact that her Surrealist tendencies, honed under the tutelage of Man Ray and the extended Surrealist circle in Paris more than a decade earlier, were still flourishing in London during the early years of World War II. The insouciant pose of one model and the blithe, calm expression on the visible portion of the other model's face contrast with the bizarre masks. Like futuristic appendages, the ungainly metallic pieces incongruously rest upon their softly feminine wearers. Richard Calvocoressi, author of a recent study of Miller's portraits, believes this composition was influenced by the artists

inhabiting Miller's social circle. "The masks...here...have a surrealist quality, recalling Magritte's paintings of figures with concealed faces or Henry Moore's lead *Helmet* which Penrose had acquired in 1940."³ The photograph is also an expression of Miller's and her fellow Londoners' existence and attitudes during the Blitz, the devastating aerial bombardment of their city by the German air force. The masks are a tangible representation of the ugliness of modern warfare. As the models accept the heavy burden of these uncomely, thoroughly modern appendages, the arms akimbo and the upturned visage can also be interpreted as defiance, just as Londoners found the ability to survive the attack upon themselves and their city with aplomb.

Miller witnessed the Blitz firsthand. During her free time she documented the physical state of the city in the aftermath of the punishing air raids. With her wry sense of humor and ironic eye, Miller regarded wartime London as a canvas with limitless opportunities for Surrealist-inspired compositions. Her resulting images were so powerful that a friend arranged to have the photographs published. The critical success of the book, entitled *Grim Glory: Photographs of Britain Under Fire*⁴ served to enhance Miller's reputation as a serious photographer.

Two other Americans also living in London were Miller's collaborators on the project. Ernestine Carter, the wife of the London director of the American publisher Scribners, served as the book's editor, and the broadcaster Edward R. Murrow wrote the preface. Although only 22 of the 100 or so photographs reproduced in this short book were actually Miller's—the remaining images were culled from news agencies such as the Associated Press—Miller is the sole credited photographer.

For the purposes of the book, Miller had constraints placed on her subject matter. She was required to use objects that would communicate both the devastating damage sustained in London as well as the unquenchable spirit of the British people. For this, Miller relied upon her background in Surrealist art, where the object was systematically isolated and analyzed under a new framework.⁵ Miller's biographer, Carolyn Burke, states that "typically Miller saw silent witnesses in ruined artifacts and used her favorite camera, a Rolleiflex, as the framing device that let them speak."⁶ More specifically, she was not permitted to photograph the dead.⁷

It was under the tutelage of Man Ray that Miller first learned about the evocative, expressive potential of everyday objects. Ten years later, Man Ray's influence on Miller can be seen in her photograph *Remington Silent* (1940; Fig. 3), a close-up image of a shattered, eviscerated typewriter. The art critic Francine Prose states: "The smashed, melted typewriter...evokes those sculptures (Man Ray's flat iron studded with nails, Meret Oppenheim's fur tea cup) that transform a practical household object into something fantastically useless..."⁸ *Remington Silent*, a photograph that gives evidence to Miller's personal interpretation of the war, thus exists in direct relation to its Surrealist predecessors. However, here, the transformation of the item from useful to ineffective is achieved not by the hand of the artist, as before, but by the anonymous bombs of the enemy. Although Miller did not physically transform the typewriter herself, she was drawn to this relatively small object located within a wide field of rubble, and elevated it to the status of art

by the act of framing it within the lens of her camera. Her son Antony Penrose observed that although “[s]uperficially the picture...may be of a bashed-up typewriter; subliminally the shattered machine taps out an eloquent essay on the war’s assault on culture.”⁹

Miller’s imagination and creativity enabled her to look upon the ruins that transformed the cityscape of London with a fresh eye and an original perspective to generate works that contained ironic juxtapositions and give evidence to her dark humor. Her documentation of the effects of the aerial attacks on London represents the beginning of her break from her commercial fashion work. While creating unique images dealing with the effects of modern warfare, Miller chafed against the restraints placed upon her in her job as fashion photographer for *Vogue* and rejected her life-long self-identification as a glamorous model. Lee Miller’s war photography demonstrated that an artist could take the genre of photojournalism and manipulate it into a personal and evocative statement.

One of Miller’s most famous images from *Grim Glory is Revenge on Culture*, which was widely reproduced.¹⁰ This photograph deftly summarized the physical destruction wrought by war. Casting her adroit eye over a wide field of rubble, Miller framed a specific portion of the detritus, focusing on the upper part of a classical nude female statue, to form a poignant and eloquent composition. As the photographic scholar Jane Livingston attests: “Lee Miller’s natural way with the camera was to use its *framing capacity* itself as a powerful tool for isolating and re-presenting reality.”¹¹

Miller’s skill in the darkroom adds to the aesthetic impact of this image. Her manipulation during the development of the gelatin silver print creates a forcible contrast between the delicate creamy gray shades of the statue itself with the thick, unmodulated black of an iron bar that cuts directly across the statue’s graceful throat. One bare breast and nipple are visible, the other breast is partially covered, “bruised by a brick” that apparently had fallen upon the sculpture.¹² A smudge of dirt at the corner of the statue’s eye introduces a hint of pathos, and *Revenge on Culture* communicates to the viewer that an unblemished statue has been cast from its pedestal to lie amid wreckage. Burke notes that the perspective used by Miller in the photograph—standing directly above the ruined piece looking down—“heightens the immediacy of a classical statue’s downfall. With this icon, a civilization has been brought low....”¹³

Beyond Burke’s identification of the symbolism of *Revenge on Culture*, this photograph is multi-layered in theme and content. Miller’s image of a ruined statue not only refers to the annihilation of a city and the attempted destruction of a civilization by the horrors of modern warfare, but also contains more than one veiled reference to Miller herself. The elements of the exposed neck, turned head, bared torso, as well as the very subject of this photograph itself—a statue of a woman—refer to Miller’s past and provide important clues to her self-identification.

The distorted metal bar slicing the fragile neck of the statue would have resonated with Miller. During her period of working with Man Ray in Paris, she posed for a photograph (c.



Fig. 3. Lee Miller, *Remington Silent* (1940), gelatin silver print, © Lee Miller Archives, England 2006. All rights reserved. www.leemiller.co.uk.



Fig. 4. Man Ray and Lee Miller, *Neck* (c. 1930), gelatin silver print. (c) 2006 Man Ray Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris. Courtesy of the Lee Miller Archives, England, 2006. All rights reserved. www.leemiller.co.uk.

1930: Fig. 4) by exposing, elongating, and twisting her neck. Initially, Man Ray discarded the image, believing it to be inferior, but Miller retrieved the negative, toiled in the darkroom, and produced the now well-known print. An argument ensued between the two, with each claiming authorship of the photograph, and Man Ray forced Miller out of the studio. When Miller returned, she found the image tacked to



Fig. 5. David Scherman. *Lee Miller in Hitler's Bath* (1945), gelatin silver print, © Lee Miller Archives, England 2006. All rights reserved. www.leemiller.co.uk.

the wall, with a razor slash across the throat and red ink (symbolizing blood) dripping from the wound. Later, when Miller left him, and Paris, for good, Man Ray incorporated the image of Miller's long neck (once again, slashed through) into a painting entitled *Le Logis de l'artiste* (c. 1931). The emotional turmoil associated with these two works of art would probably have caused Miller to react at the sight of a woman's vulnerable throat violently slashed. However, by the time of the Blitz, she was also reminded daily of the emotional episode: *Le Logis de l'artiste* had made its way to London and hung in Roland Penrose's Hampstead home.¹⁴

Burke, indeed, points out that the profile of the statue resembles that of Miller herself.¹⁵ Famous for her classical profile, Miller often posed with her head turned to the side, allowing a side or three-quarter view. Her son Antony Penrose attested, "whenever anybody produced a camera, she would always turn into profile...and continue the conversation because she felt quite sure that she looked better in profile...[it was a] professional reflex."¹⁶ The resemblance between Miller and the statue goes beyond their shared classical profile, however. When Miller modeled for Man Ray in Paris, she was at least as famous for her beautiful nude torso as for her well-proportioned facial features. Many works of art were based on, or inspired by, Miller's nude torso. This attractive part of her body was shaped in classical proportions, and therefore took on the appearance of a classical statue when reproduced in almost any medium, whether photography, painting, or sculpture.

Whitney Chadwick writes: "During the late 1920s and early 1930s, images of Lee Miller's body circulated widely...in surrealist photographs by Man Ray that fragmented and deformed the body and often focused obsessively on its parts: [specifically] breasts...[and] torso."¹⁷ Rosalind Krauss has highlighted Man Ray's triptych of a bared-to-the-waist Miller,

"the nude torso...shown as if submitting to possession by space," as one of his photographic masterpieces.¹⁸ What Francine Prose described as Man Ray's "unquenchable aesthetic interest in his lover's body, the sheer number...of his photos of Lee [with bared torso], and the renown they rapidly achieved"¹⁹ led *Time* magazine, in a 1932 article on Man Ray, to pronounce that Lee Miller "known as 'Lee-Girl' to her intimates, [is] widely celebrated as the possessor of the most beautiful navel in Paris."²⁰ During the same period a glass manufacturer designed a champagne glass inspired by the shape of her breasts.²¹

Roland Penrose, too, was enamored of Miller's beauty, and at the outset of their affair recreated her torso in his artwork. In his painting *Bien Visé* (*Good Shooting*) (1939), a portrait of Miller, the only way that the sitter can be identified is through the depiction of her nude torso; in place of her head is a vision of a sparsely vegetated shoreline with a lone sailboat in the distance, while the area below the abdomen appears to be encased in iron. This was a premeditated choice: in the graphite study for the work, Penrose concentrated solely on Miller's torso. His obsession with this portion of Miller's body persisted at least into the war years, when he made a life-cast of her breasts and stomach, circa 1943.²² At the same time that this work of art was being created—literally, converting Miller's living flesh into sculpture, a process with which, by its very nature, Miller the subject would have had to be intimately involved—Miller the photographer was documenting the devastation of London, including the image *Revenge on Culture*.

Although Antony Penrose stated, in a conversation with this author, that he did not know of Miller's making the comparison herself,²³ there were obvious similarities between Miller and a statue, both their profiles and bared torsos, and a sufficient number of references suggest such correlations. One historical association of Miller with a classical female nude sculpture is quite well known. In interwar Paris Miller rose to fame because of her role as the animated statue in Jean Cocteau's celebrated Surrealist film of 1930, *Le Sang d'un Poète* (*Blood of a Poet*).²⁴ In an interview conducted late in her life, Miller explained why she had taken the role of the statue: "I looked the part, I was the part, it was me."²⁵ Whether because of this critically acclaimed film role or her arresting classical appearance, which played a part in her successful modeling career, more than one photographer made the visual comparison between Miller and a statue.

George Hoyningen-Huene, who often photographed Miller, both professionally and informally, and who became a friend,²⁶ photographed Miller and her brother Erik in Paris in 1930. In one portrait, Miller is seated upon a chair, face typically turned to the side, while her brother is perched on the chair's back. Directly above Lee Miller is the head of a classical sculpture mounted on the wall. In the sparsely furnished, otherwise bare room, the fragment seems all the more prominent.²⁷ A decade later, Roland Penrose conflated the identification of Miller as statue and as synecdochical torso in a series of photographs that posed her as the mirror-image of a sculpture of her own torso. In all of the images, Miller poses in a bed with the sculpture. In one photograph, she covers her head so that only her torso is visible, thus creating the appearance of twin torsos lying side-by-side partially covered by blankets. In another image, Miller positions

the sculpture upside-down and in front of her own head, evoking a double-torsoed Hans Bellmer-like doll.

At least one additional example of Miller linked with a statue may be the most well-known photograph taken of her during World War II: *Lee Miller in Hitler's Bath* (1945; Fig. 5), by David Scherman. The photograph, which depicts Miller sitting in the bathtub in the Munich apartment of the German leader, also has received much critical attention.²⁸ In it Miller is desecrating the purity of an immaculate, hygienic space by bringing her filthy combat boots up to the edge of the tub, grinding mud onto the pristine white throw rug. This is not ordinary dirt from the Front. She has tracked the earth and ashes of Dachau into Hitler's own *sanctum sanctorum*, soiling his shrine to cleanliness with the ashes of the victims whom he deemed to be utterly impure. Miller and Scherman inserted props, the most prominent being Miller's combat boots; however, one cannot overlook the official military photo of Hitler leaning precariously alongside the edge of the tub, nor the piece of Nazi kitsch, a nude statue of what appears to be Venus, perched at the edge of a table flanking the tub. Hitler's image and the nude statue face each other on a diagonal from opposite sides and depths of the frame, with Miller's nude body in the exact center. This statue possibly represents Miller herself, according to Burke:

...[T]he Venus de Milo became [Miller's] emblem, albeit not one of her own choosing. The female form evokes both her modeling career in New York and her iconic role in avant-garde Paris—as Man Ray's subject and companion, and as Cocteau's armless muse in *Blood of a Poet*. Here the statuette, re-armed but cut off at the knees, is placed opposite Hitler in a deliberate face-off.²⁹

Perhaps Miller herself wryly placed the sculpture within the picture frame. Of course, this placement could have been more a comment on Nazi-sanctioned art. Antony Penrose stated that Miller was "profoundly aware" of what the Nazis referred to as "degenerate" art. It was the art of her friends, acquaintances and colleagues that had been banned from Germany before the war by the leaders of the Third Reich. Miller reviled the art sanctioned by the Nazis in place of the banished art of the avant-garde, which art historians today agree is little more than kitsch. Penrose suggests that the inclusion of the Neoclassical statue may have been Miller's own "sophisticated joke," one understood by her and the high-class readership of *Vogue* magazine.³⁰ Whether or not the meanings layered within this image are intentional on the part of the model and the photographer, nonetheless, it is worth noting that one of the prominent features in this psychically resonant photograph is the placement of the statue in direct connection to Miller herself.

Likewise, whether Miller consciously empathized with the sculpture of the broken woman when she composed *Revenge on Culture*, the subject attracted her interest. Finding this statue situated among rubble, she was propelled to frame the tumbled sculpture so that the emphasis was on the head turned in profile, the twisted throat cruelly cut with an iron bar, and the bared torso injured by a heavy brick. Interestingly, Burke describes this "emblem of femininity" as being concurrently



Fig. 6. Lee Miller, *Behind the Sight* (1944), gelatin silver print, © Lee Miller Archives, England 2006. All rights reserved. www.leemiller.co.uk.

"overthrown and *liberated* [italics mine] by destructive forces within the very culture that placed her on a pedestal."³¹

Miller's photographic activities during the war liberated her from her previous role of beautiful muse and model. Likewise, women all over Great Britain broke free from the constrictive mold of traditional female roles in order to adopt jobs traditionally held by men. The success of *Grim Glory* led to additional assignments for Miller, including a project to record the activities of women serving in Britain's Royal Navy. Known as Wrens, these servicewomen were featured in Miller's other wartime publication, *Wrens in Camera* (1945).³² Although upon first glance Miller's pictures appear to exist as a straight documentation of the subject matter, a closer examination reveals that many of the "straight" photographs from this group give evidence to influences from Miller's life experiences. Out of necessity, Miller adapted her style in order to incorporate elements of photojournalism, the category of photography traditionally developed to transmit news stories, with Surrealist photography, the genre in which she had been trained and which most accurately expressed her aesthetic sensibility. The result was a Surrealist-inflected photojournalism unique to Miller.

In *Behind the Sight* (1944; Fig. 6), an image from *Wrens in Camera*, the cheerful face of a Wren posing at the controls of a deck-mounted gun is practically obscured by the mesh of the gun sight. This image recalls Man Ray's photograph *Lee Miller Wearing Sabre Guard* (1930), a bust-length image of Miller in which the conical mesh guard has been fitted over her head. The mesh piece contains inherent Surrealist elements, as elaborated by Whitney Chadwick:

There is a visual play with surrealist notions of juxtaposition (the living flesh and the metal guard)...and the fetish

(the stiff wire form focuses attention on the part rather than the whole), but in the end the odd device serves mainly to call attention to a performance before the camera...³³

Richard Calvocoressi states that this metal element “adds an erotic frisson” to an image of a nude woman.³⁴ There exists another, full-length image by Man Ray of a nude Miller seated in profile, with her arm, covered with the mesh guard, clasped behind her back.³⁵ Miller herself used the guard in a similar manner in her own photograph of a nude woman, where she draped the object over her model’s shoulders.

In *Behind the Sight*, Miller introduced a touch of whimsy by framing the photograph in such a way that the two cylindrical pieces at the front of the gun evoke a woman’s breasts; perhaps recalling the very breasts that are beautifully on display in both Man Ray’s image of Miller and her own image of a nude woman. Here, Miller took the new palette of war imagery and interpreted it using her life experiences, manipulating it to fit within her Surrealist aesthetic. The resulting, rather playful, photograph suggests perhaps that this Wren is at a Surrealist carnival and is posing for an amusing picture by placing her head at the top of a pre-fabricated cut-out figure.

Surrealist scholar Amy Lyford noted the combative qualities of the original Man Ray photograph of Miller that may have partially inspired *Behind the Sight*. “Miller’s head reads as that of a woman who is both the artist’s material and the captive of a fantastic Surrealist prison. Yet if she is a captive, she appears armed for battle with her wire mesh mask.”³⁶ In Miller’s photograph of 1943, this figurative interpretation has become a reality, as the photographer presents a slightly humorous image of a woman who is literally prepared to engage in armed conflict.

During these first years of World War II, Miller was on the threshold of one of the most prolific and expressive phases of her photographic career, namely, the rich output stemming from her photo-documentation of the war in Europe. Attempting to follow a daily schedule with a degree of normalcy in London during the terror and hardship of the Blitz made playing the role of a glamorous model an impossibility. When she began traveling with the army in Europe after D-Day, she cast aside all preoccupations with her physical appearance and, in the words of Scherman, who became her professional and personal companion for the duration of the war, “always looked like a filthy G.I.”³⁷ The war itself liberated Miller from her previously prescribed role of “beautiful woman—it toppled her from her pedestal where she existed as an object of beauty, and gave her a sense of mission and purpose to produce some of the best photographs of her entire career. Miller relied upon the richness of her artistic training in order to create a revolutionary style of photojournalism that fused both Surrealist and autobiographic influences. Lee Miller as model, as statue, the woman possessing the impeccable profile and desirable torso, was left behind, putting forward in her place a professional photographer who would no longer model for images but rather would create them. •

Caitlin S. Davis wrote her doctoral dissertation on the war photography of Lee Miller. She has most recently worked as a Research Associate in the American Art Department at The Newark Museum.

NOTES

1. Cover illustration by Georges Lepape, *Vogue*, March 15, 1927.
2. Mario Amaya, “My Man Ray: An Interview with Lee Miller Penrose,” *Art in America* 63 (May/June 1975): 55.
3. Richard Calvocoressi, *Portraits from a Life: Lee Miller* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 52. In his comprehensive biography of Moore, Roger Berthoud describes *Helmet*. “It was the first of Moore’s works in which an outer figure contained an inner one. The helmet itself is womblike and slightly sinister, and it is hard to say whether the nervous, spaghetti-like creature within is being protected or imprisoned. With overtones both of war and of the mother and child theme, it is very Moore-ish in its rich and many-layered suggestiveness.” See Roger Berthoud, *The Life of Henry Moore* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1987), 161.
4. This was the title under which the book was published in Britain in 1941. The book was initially intended for an American audience; see Ernestine Carter, ed., *Bloody but Unbowed: Pictures of Britain Under Fire*, with a preface by Edward R. Murrow and photographs by Lee Miller and others (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941). *Grim Glory* is the title most consistently used by art historians. The author refers to a copy of the American text; however, in keeping with scholarly tradition, will refer to the book here as *Grim Glory*.
5. Examples of such Surrealist objects include Man Ray’s *Cadeau* of 1921 and Meret Oppenheim’s *Le Déjeuner en Fourrure* of 1936.
6. Carolyn Burke, “Framing a Life: Lee Miller,” in *Roland Penrose Lee Miller: The Surrealist and the Photographer* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2001), 131.
7. It would not be until after D-Day, when Miller began to cover the war in Europe, that she would begin to photograph corpses. These images would almost exclusively concentrate upon enemy dead.
8. Francine Prose, “Lee Miller,” in *The Lives of the Muses* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 249.
9. Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 103.
10. Penrose reports that this photograph “caught the attention of the press throughout the world. It was reproduced countless times, even on the front page of an Arabic newspaper.” Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 104.
11. Jane Livingston, *Lee Miller: Photographer* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 35.
12. Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 104.
13. Burke, “Framing a Life,” 131.
14. The quarrel between Man Ray and Miller is related in Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 30-32, as well as in the documentary film of the same name. Antony Penrose and Jonathan Mantle, *The Lives of Lee Miller*, VHS, directed by Robin Lough (Chiddingfold, East Sussex, UK: Penrose Film Productions, Ltd., 1985). The incident is also mentioned in Herbert R. Lottman, *Man Ray’s Montparnasse* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 188-89. In June of 1938, the Surrealist poet Paul Éluard urged Penrose to buy his art collection, which included “forty Ernsts, six de Chiricos, Picasso’s portrait of Nusch, and work by Klee, Arp, Chagall, Dalí, and Man Ray,” including *Le Logis de l’Artiste*. See Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller: A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 187-88.
15. Burke, “Framing a Life,” 131.

16. Antony Penrose in Camille Guichard, *Lee Miller: Through the Mirror*, VHS, directed by Sylvain Roumette (Terra Luna Films, 1995).
17. Whitney Chadwick, "Lee Miller's Two Bodies," in *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars*, eds. Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer (New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press, 2003), 199.
18. Rosalind Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," in *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism*, eds. Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 74. Antony Penrose owns the original photographs from this series, and acknowledges that "The interesting thing about this picture is that we normally see it cropped [to show only the torso]." See Guichard, *Lee Miller: Through the Mirror*, VHS.
19. Prose, 238.
20. "Rayograms," *Time*, April 18, 1932, 35. This reference to his daughter displeased Lee Miller's father, Theodore Miller, who wrote a letter to the editors of *Time*. The editors printed this letter along with a retraction and an apology. See Letters, *Time*, August 1, 1932, 4.
21. Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 32.
22. See Antony Penrose, *The Home of the Surrealists: Lee Miller, Roland Penrose, and their circle at Farley Farm* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2001), 105, 107. Pablo Picasso also had used Miller's torso in his *Portrait of Lee Miller à l'Arlésienne* (1937), and the two may have been lovers during that summer of 1937. See Antony Penrose, *Roland Penrose: The Friendly Surrealist* (New York: Prestel, 2001), 79; and Burke, *Lee Miller: A Life*, 167-73.
23. In a conversation with the author on October 22, 2003, Antony Penrose stated that his mother had neither talked about herself being compared to a statue, nor thought of a statue as a symbol for her.
24. Miller's decision to play this part caused a scandal, because the Surrealists in her circle were at odds with Cocteau. See Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 42.
25. Amaya, 59.
26. See Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 29. The friendship between the two photographers endured through her break with Man Ray and subsequent marriage and move to Egypt; Hoyningen-Huene accompanied Miller and Roland Penrose on a trip through the Egyptian desert in 1939. See William A. Ewing, *The Photographic Art of Hoyningen-Huene* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 137. For an additional account of this vacation, see also Penrose, *Roland Penrose*, 93 and Burke, *Lee Miller: A Life*, 192.
27. See Ewing, *The Photographic Art of Hoyningen-Huene*, 39. Hoyningen-Huene often inserted classical or neoclassical references into his pictures. Ewing points out the popularity of Neoclassical references for Hoyningen-Huene and other photographers at the time. See also Chadwick, "Lee Miller's Two Bodies," 206.
28. See Amy J. Lyford, "Lee Miller's Photographic Impersonations 1930-1945: Conversing with Surrealism," *History of Photography* 18 (Autumn 1994): 230-41; Melody Davis, in "Lee Miller: Bathing with the Enemy," *History of Photography* 21 (Winter 1997): 314-18; Jean Gallagher, in "Vision, Violence and Vogue," in her *The World Wars Through the Female Gaze* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998); Carolyn Burke, "Lee Miller in Hitler's Bathtub," *Heat* 12 (1999): 148-57; and Annalisa Zox-Weaver, "When the War Was in Vogue: Lee Miller's War Reports," *Women's Studies* 32 (March 2003): 131-63.
29. Burke, "Lee Miller in Hitler's Bathtub," 150.
30. Antony Penrose, conversation with the author, October 22, 2003. Miller herself discussed "degenerate" art in an earlier article published in *Vogue*. Lee Miller, "Brussels," *Vogue*, March 1, 1945, 134.
31. Burke, "Framing a Life," 131.
32. Lee Miller, *Wrens in Camera* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1945).
33. Chadwick, "Lee Miller's Two Bodies," 212-213.
34. Calvocoressi, *Portraits from a Life*, 23.
35. See Chadwick, "Lee Miller's Two Bodies," 212-13.
36. Amy J. Lyford, "Body Parts: Surrealism and the Reconstruction of Masculinity" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1997), 173.
37. David E. Scherman in Guichard, *Lee Miller: Through the Mirror*, VHS.

PARALLEL PERSPECTIVES

continued from page 2

The sole entry on an earlier century is Lilian Zirpolo's review of *Gender, Politics, and Allegory in the Art of Rubens* by Lisa Rosenthal. Here Zirpolo disputes the author's success in demonstrating that her new method of analysis can explain "the polyvalent meanings" regarding notions of gender and politics in Rubens's art.

Rescuing women artists from obscurity was a job undertaken by Marian Wardle in *American Women Modernists: The Legacy of Robert Henri*. The book's "brilliantly colored images of mostly unknown works by little known artists," says reviewer Roberta Tarbell, will be "the most spectacular presentation ever of their work." This rescue mission has been one focus of *WAJ* and will continue. In the future we will be

publishing articles on women artists of all periods of art history, and giving attention to feminist interpretations of images of women.

We thank Founding Editor and Publisher Elsa Honig Fine for her excellent stewardship of *WAJ*, and her willingness to have the journal continued by new editors, a new publisher, and a new editorial board.

Joan Marter and Margaret Barlow

THE ART OF HELEN LUNDEBERG

Illuminating Portraits

By Donna Stein

Helen Lundeborg's (1908-99) art evolved from narrative symbolism based on a classicist's concern for structure into a uniquely subjective style of hard-edged abstraction, in which referential images are refined to their most minimal impression of volume and space. Lundeborg, a master colorist and illusionist, often reexamined old ideas in provocative new ways. Her themes and variations, crossing media and time, offer a unique perspective of her sources and aesthetic strategies.

From the beginning, Lundeborg painted portraits of her sister, her mother, and herself. She continually investigated family and self as a means of understanding her history and used these images as players in a larger narrative. Like the women of the Surrealist movement, she dared to renounce the conventions of her upbringing and embarked on the difficult path to artistic maturity at a time when few role models existed for women in the visual arts. She was one of the few women of her generation in Los Angeles who exhibited widely and regularly since 1931, particularly throughout California. Lundeborg offered an alternative vision of the female who actively searches for meaning and considers philosophical questions of reality and existence.

Lundeborg's unforgettable masterpiece, *Double Portrait of the Artist in Time* (1935; Fig. 1), in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, skillfully weaves autobiographical, feminist, social, and metaphysical themes into a stunning depiction of selfhood. She considered this meditation on portraiture, time, and memory her "Mona Lisa,"¹ because it was reproduced so often that people who knew nothing else she had done knew this painting.

A tall, gentle woman, Lundeborg was courteous and reserved. Her parents, Selma Edmonds and Frederick Lundeborg, were born in Galesburg, Illinois, a Swedish enclave and railroad hub northwest of Peoria, famous as the birthplace of Carl Sandburg and the surrealist painter Dorothea Tanning. Her four grandparents emigrated from Sweden about 1870.² The overzealousness of her paternal grandfather, a deacon in the Swedish Lutheran Church who observed the religion's most puritanical rules, cured her father of religion.

After her parents married they moved to Chicago, where Helen was born on June 24, 1908, and her sister Inez (known as Kitty) three years later. When she was four years old, her



Fig. 1. Helen Lundeborg, *Double Portrait of the Artist in Time* (1935), oil on masonite, 48" x 40". Smithsonian American Art Museum.

mother's fragile health prompted the family to relocate to sunny Pasadena, where her father's cousin lived. Lundeborg was raised in a comfortable, middle-class suburban home in the northeast section of the city. The family's typical California bungalow had a lovely garden and spectacular views of the San Gabriel Mountains. Across the street was an enormous

meadow that filled in springtime with poppies and a kind of iris called “baby blue-eyes.”

Although Lundeberg’s father was an accountant and worked for a real estate and stock brokerage company, as a young man he had studied painting, and a respectable copy of a melancholic Victorian scene always hung over the piano in their living room. He made sure his daughters had plenty of paper and colored pencils and taught them they could do anything boys could do. They weren’t religious, and Lundeberg said, “On Sunday afternoons the whole family read. You could hear a pin drop. Reading became a lifelong habit.”³ Her mother sewed like a professional and made all of her daughters’ clothes—dresses, coats, even hats. Because of her refined color sense and choice of fabrics, Lundeberg thought she might have become an artist under different circumstances.

During her first year at Pasadena High School, Lundeberg was chosen to participate in a research study led by Dr. Lewis Terman from Stanford University in which the top 1 percent of gifted children in California schools were reported on every five years until 1945. At Pasadena City College she was an English major and belonged to a creative writing group. She planned to be a librarian, but by the time she was ready to apply to U.C.L.A., the Depression had worsened and her family could no longer afford to send her to college.

Aware of Lundeberg’s childhood interest in drawing, Helen Letty, a family friend and bookkeeper in her father’s office,⁴ offered to pay the tuition for a three-month course at the local Stickney Memorial School of Art, established in 1912. At first she studied life drawing with Lawrence Murphy, who taught the Bridgman method using a series of boxes to construct the figure and geared to illustration. She found his instruction frustrating, but when he left on vacation, and Lorser Feitelson took over his classes, things changed for the better. She later recalled their first meeting:

I was alone in the studio working on a drawing for my composition class, not knowing very much about what I was doing. The school caretaker brought this handsome young man in and said, ‘Mr. Feitelson is going to be your new teacher.’ He sat down behind me and without my knowing it, looked at what I was doing. I had drawn a sort of semi-circular composition of figures on a beach. One figure was standing in the center. He couldn’t resist telling me where I was going wrong. ‘No. You’ve got to lead up to the vertical,’ he said. So I got my first composition lesson...He was a great teacher. He loved to talk about art. He loved to read about art. It was his whole life really. I didn’t realize at first how lucky I was.⁵

The meeting would change Lundeberg’s life.

At the end of her first year of study, Feitelson encouraged her to enter *Apple Harvest* (1930), her first complete painting, in the Sixth Annual Exhibition of Southern California Art, a juried exhibition at the Fine Arts Gallery in San Diego. She was thrilled to be accepted and subsequently submitted work to numerous exhibitions.

Lundeberg painted herself at every stage of her life, and her

self-portraits are an essential part of her oeuvre. Acts of self-exploration and self-interpretation, a kind of visual diary, they document the passage of time. They rely on reflection, though not necessarily from a mirror, although as Leonardo da Vinci once said, “The mirror, above all, the mirror is our teacher.”⁶

Lundeberg’s first *Self Portrait*, done in 1933 (Fig. 2), was painted at her parent’s Pasadena home,⁷ with the imposing San Gabriel Mountains in the background. It was shown that year at her first one-person exhibition, arranged by Feitelson for the Stanley Rose Bookshop and Gallery on Vine Street. The artist later wrote,

I now recognize in this painting two chief influences: my great admiration for the serene monumentality of the early Renaissance painters—Piero della Francesca, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Fra Angelico, and others—and my personal interpretation of the principles of Cézanne’s organization—every element of the painting was considered structurally...It is linear in conception, rather than painterly, and it is concerned with the inextricable welding of formalism and lyricism.⁸

Always working from memory, her imagery resonates with her love of Renaissance art, which often provided visual solutions for her ideas. A small pencil study after Fra Angelico from 1930 corroborates her interest. The atypical representation of her classic profile in *Self-Portrait* may have been easier to paint and suggests a voluntary withdrawal from interaction with her viewers. One of the few examples in the history of art showing a similar orientation is a youthful self-portrait (1911-12) by Giorgio de Chirico. Richard Cándida Smith has suggested that “[i]solation for Lundeberg, symbolized by the protective wall of mountains, was a strategic choice.”⁹

Lundeberg’s knowledge of the painterly tradition came almost entirely from books and discussions with teachers and other artists.¹⁰ Her repertory of props and visual and literary references reveals a rich dream world mostly gleaned through reading. Although Lundeberg never traveled outside the United States, she was extremely well read in the history of art, and she and Feitelson avidly collected old master drawings. For someone who had been painting for only three years, *Self Portrait* shows a remarkable degree of technical skill and stylistic maturity. This is the hallmark of her work from the beginning. As Diane Moran pointed out, “There seem to have been no false starts.”¹¹

In a companion piece, *Portrait of Inez* (1933), Lundeberg



Fig. 2. Helen Lundeberg, *Self Portrait* (1933), oil on celotex, 28" x 20". The Buck Collection, Laguna Beach, California.

portrayed her sister, carefully rendering her stern facial features. Slightly larger in scale, the view is also a profile facing left, though the artist reveals more of the figure and tackles the problem of representing her hands. The solidity of the figure and stylized background also hark back to the early Renaissance masters the artist admired.

By 1933 Lundeberg and Feitelson were a couple, although they did not marry until the late 1940s. They were always noncompetitive yet totally supportive of each other. They shared a studio; Lundeberg painted during the day while Feitelson taught, and he used the studio at night. Throughout her life she intentionally kept herself in Feitelson's shadow, although they both gained national attention at the same time. Recognized as a major force in the development of Modernism in Los Angeles, Lorser Feitelson was an extrovert, a commanding personality compared to Lundeberg's shy and romantic demeanor. Artist, critic, and curator Frederick Wight once aptly described them as "like moonlight and sunlight."¹² Like other women artists such as Sonia Delaunay and Lee Krasner, her art and ideas need to be re-evaluated independently from those of her charismatic artist husband.¹³

From late 1933 through the middle of 1934, Lundeberg participated in the Southern California Division of the Federal Public Works Art Project. Besides giving her money to live on, it allowed her to move into a small studio in Los Angeles to be near her work, and of greatest significance, her family accepted that she was an artist. At the same time, Feitelson was clarifying the first American response to the European-based Surrealist movement; he called it New Classicism, Subjective Classicism, or by its modifying subtitle, Post Surrealism, the name that stuck. Lundeberg was involved with his brainchild from the beginning. Although she wrote the manifesto¹⁴ for the group's first exhibition in November 1934 at the Centaur Bookshop and Gallery in Hollywood, she always maintained that the aesthetic theories of Post Surrealism were the result of his ideas, their discussions, and her literary interests combined with his concern for the visual construction of meaning.

The movement attracted a small group of West Coast artists, including San Francisco painter Lucien Labaudt, and Los Angeles painters Knud Merrild, Grace Clements,¹⁵ Harold Lehman, Reuben Kadish, Philip Goldstein (later Guston), Ben Berlin, Elizabeth Ann Mills, Ethel Evans, and Helen Klokke. They produced symbolic tableaux, based not on irrational



Fig. 3. Helen Lundeberg, *Persephone* (1933), oil on celotex, 25 1/8" x 17 1/4". Orange County Museum of Art, Museum Purchase with funds provided through prior gift of Lois Outerbridge.

dream imagery and automatism like the European Surrealists but on logical associations and juxtapositions of subjective material and the ability of those objects to signify. The relationship and sequencing of forms created the rhythms of a picture and its aesthetic order. The Post Surrealist artists showed together for about six years before individual artists' participation in the Federal Art Project and the onset of World War II cut the group's activities short.

Lundeberg's earliest effort in the Post Surrealist style—and the first Post Surrealist painting to be exhibited, at the Eighth Annual Exhibition of Southern California Art in 1934—was *Persephone* (1933; Fig. 3). The Greek goddess of fertility was the subject of several paintings by Lundeberg.¹⁶ The idea for this painting evolved from a reproduction of a terra cotta head of Persephone such as the one depicted.¹⁷ On a white cloth draped over a table visible in the bottom right foreground, an idealized Greek head personifies the goddess. A chin-shaped pear lies between the terra cotta head and a pomegranate, whose sprinkled seeds move the eye upward toward the space between the top of the pomegranate and the

cigarette, which suggested to the artist a loosely tied tobacco pouch. Forms metamorphose as they come in contact with other objects. A cigarette rests on a horizontal, sea-green volume inscribed *Ulysses* on the spine (it is unclear whether this alludes to the Homeric tradition or to the still-banned but soon-to-be published novel by James Joyce). The edge of the book becomes the horizon and the ocean. The drapery takes on the angularity of marble steps to support the Corinthian columns. Smoke floats behind the columns and an oversized volume of classical mythology by the Roman author Ovidius Naso, to become a cloud in the sky. Lundeberg eliminated standard conventions such as the nude representation of the goddess and the image of Hades. The artist carefully analyzed the allegorical meaning of each real and imagined form in this still life, whose circular rhythms invoke the eternal cycle of life and death. Instead of the traditional reduction of the story to the act of rape, she presented the allegory as transformation—the change from nature to culture.

Clearly, Lundeberg had studied the metaphysical paintings of Giorgio deChirico, whose work was exhibited as early as 1930 at the Stendahl Gallery in Los Angeles. His substitutions of classical heads and sculpture fragments for the figure, perspective tipped

vertically, vegetable and fruit props, and architectural details framing the far horizon provided her with essential elements in developing her own Post Surrealist language. Lundeberg also adapted motifs first used by René Magritte, such as the doubling of a painted and real landscape and the view through a window, which reappear throughout her oeuvre.

Before putting anything down on canvas, Lundeberg wrote down ideas and made sketches or full-size drawings. Drawings were her way of thinking out complex works such as *Plant and Animal Analogies* (Pl. 1), which she started in late 1933 and reproduced the following year on the New Classicism manifesto. In this model of Post Surrealist theory, Lundeberg relates meticulously rendered fruits and vegetables to parts of the human body through analogies of form and function. The artist incorporates the organizing principles of montage by juxtaposing an interior still life on a table with an outdoor view separated by a window-like threshold. The cross section of the bell pepper appears similar to that of an embryonic brain. Lundeberg depicts realistic cherries next to a knife that cuts one in two. There is a functional analogy at play in comparing the cross section of a cherry and an anatomical drawing of a womb showing a fetus; its strategic placement in front of a sculpture of a female torso reinforces the implied meaning. A magnified network of placental blood vessels echoes the form and function of a branching tree. The diagrams are purposely painted in shades of black and white as if they were plates in a book.

In this exploration of the nature of being female, objects with implicit gender references are placed around the periphery of the painting and depend on a sequential circular movement reinforced by dotted lines and arrows to reveal the formal, rhetorical structure. Lundeberg referred to this painting in her manifesto as an "idea entity," because of its cerebral nature.

After the painting had been reproduced and exhibited, Lundeberg reworked it in 1935, repainting the broken top of the sculptured torso, showing the cherry cut to make the thematic relationship to the diagrammed fruit more obvious, and adding the small figures of a woman and child in the background to reinforce the central subject of fertility.¹⁸ In the statement about her work shown in "Americans 1942: 18 Artists from 9 States," an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, Lundeberg explained her position regarding Post Surrealism:

The pictorial elements are deliberately arranged to stimulate in the mind of the spectator, an ordered, pleasurable, introspective activity, resulting in a configuration, or subjective unity, which is the esthetic order of the painting and which makes possible the long-discussed ideal integrity of subject matter and form.¹⁹

Lundeberg's *Double Portrait of the Artist in Time* successfully encompasses both aspects of Post Surrealist theory: ideational and emotional. It was meant to suggest her thoughts and feelings about age and time.²⁰ In 1971, Lundeberg discussed her conceptual synthesis with Joseph Young: "For the portrait of myself as a child I used a photograph I had just found, and though the props are a little different in the painting, the pose is pretty much exact. I also used the clock set at a quarter past two,

which corresponds to the child's age. And instead of presenting myself as an adult before a painting of myself as a child, in *Double Portrait in Time* I reversed this possibility where the child casts a shadow, which is that of an adult who appears in the portrait on the wall."²¹ This portrait of her adult self, a mysterious symphony in browns, is actually a painting she completed the previous year, *Artist, Flowers and Hemispheres* (1934, now in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art).

Although the title of *Double Portrait of the Artist in Time* calls attention to two images of the artist, the enigmatic purple shadow rising like a wraith across the wall creates a third, uniting the child and adult, linking past and present. As Susan Ehrlich noted, the painting gives a feminist reading to the maxim, "The child is the father of the man."²² The original photograph taken in Chicago shows a young Helen seated next to a ladder-back chair with papers on the seat, while her painted child-self is seated next to a small table covered with paper. While the adult self above holds a flower in bloom, the child self holds a stem with three rosebuds, symbolizing youth. The stem leads the eye to the legend, "Ages of Man," which is faintly written in black. Thus, while the painting is of a specific individual, the artist, it alludes to the classical allegory about the stages of life.

Lundeberg's masterwork was included in the first large Post Surrealist museum exhibition held in December 1935 at the newly opened San Francisco Museum of Art under the direction of Grace Morley. An expanded version of the exhibition traveled to the Brooklyn Museum in 1936, where it remained for five months, much to the surprise of the participants. Their work received favorable attention, and Alfred Barr asked Lundeberg, Feitelson and Knud Merrild to participate in the seminal "Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism" exhibition he was organizing for the Museum of Modern Art that year.

Lundeberg never hesitated to include herself or other women as models of the universal correspondent, but almost always on the margins, an idea she took from Cézanne. In *Microcosm and Macrocosm* (1937; Fig. 4), the artist, cropped by the left framing edge, observes how microorganisms evolve, from seabed to galaxy, from microcosm to macrocosm. Her downcast eyes observe the lower half of the canvas. Fish on the lower right locate the scene while cloudy spots in the seawater indicate some kind of life. In three red-rimmed circles, each progressively magnified and more specific, Lundeberg graphically enlarges miniscule plankton until the largest details one creature. In the sky the smaller circle shows nebulous matter and some sparks of stars or planet-like forms. The larger circle shows a blowup of Saturn. She holds a magnifying glass, a symbolic reference to a microscope and telescope. Two pencil studies of the same size, also from 1937, show variations of the self-portrait, and in *Three Generations* (collection of The Huntington Museum and Gardens, Pasadena), the figure is reversed.

Eyes (1938-39), now lost, which was exhibited in the "Americans 1942" exhibit and reproduced in the catalogue, contains another double self-portrait, with the artist's cropped head and left hand constituting one image and her shadow cast on the sheet of paper she holds the second. She stands next to a window, and the vertical edge of the sill allows the artist to



Fig. 4. Helen Lundeborg, *Microcosm and Macrocosm* (1937), oil on masonite, 28" x 14". Museum Associates/LACMA, Purchased with funds provided by Mrs. and Mr. Robert B. Honeyman, Jr.

juxtapose interior and exterior. On the paper, the word "eyes" and drawings of an eye and eye-like nuclei highlight the role of intellect in imposing pattern upon vision. Strange knot-like eyes in the tree outside the window, two lonely clouds floating above distant mountains, and a tiny bent figure with a cane seem derivative of the European Surrealists, particularly Magritte. As Cándida Smith wrote, Lundeborg believed that painting could achieve poetic form as artists mastered scientific understanding

of the structure of perception and attribution, using this knowledge to reveal internal connections between experience, ideas, and moods.²³ The artist continued to use the silhouette of the artist's shadow profile, in *Self Portrait in a Tree* from 1950 and again in 1967 for *Night Interior*.

Lundeborg considered *The Evanescent* (1941-44), an investigation of the stages and transitory nature of life, as her last truly Post Surreal painting.²⁴ She probably started this painting shortly after her mother's death in October 1941. On the left a statuesque woman in a diaphanous dress and shawl, perhaps an idealized self-portrait, is leaning on a mountain outcropping, contemplating a flower. Two sheets of paper are draped over the massive headstone, with a spider web and dying plants in the foreground. The top sheet depicts two irises, one in full bloom and the other with two dead buds. The iris, a symbol of warmth, affection, courage, and faith, appears repeatedly in Lundeborg's paintings from the mid 1930s onward. The bottom drawing shows the world with notations of the sun in June and December, a reference to the time of her mother's passing. To the left of the headstone, a bent old woman follows her long shadow toward an open grave. A younger woman with long blond hair, not unlike her own at that time, holds a bouquet of flowers as she gazes into the abyss. In the distance are several more headstones. On the far right a hand holds a lit match, which barely illuminates a woman walking in a barren landscape under an ominous sky. The foreboding mood, enhanced by the change from light to dark as the narrative moves from left to right, communicates the artist's deep sense of loss. Years later she stated, "I never entirely got away from Post Surrealism. The opportunity to paint various kinds of realities, all in the same painting, appealed to me. A little feeling for the strange always persisted in my work, sometimes more abstracted than not."²⁵

Self Portrait with Green Ball (1944; Pl. 2) shows a more traditional depiction of the artist at work in her studio. Here Lundeborg presents herself in dialogue with the viewer: seated before an easel placed in front of an open window, she looks out directly at the viewer. A paintbrush in her left hand is poised in front of the moon she has just painted, while her right hand holds a green ball that is serving as her model. Two simple line drawings from 1942 are studies for her hands and their props. Lundeborg was fascinated by the cosmos and repeatedly depicted its mysteries and astronomical signs throughout her career. The doubling of the painted and actual landscape in this self-portrait suggests that art is a fulcrum, the balancing point for the real and the metaphysical.

The Print and Mural Division of the Federal Art Projects employed Lundeborg in 1936 until they closed down in 1942. After having worked for most of a decade designing murals, some more than 200 feet long, and supervising a crew of artists, she was happy to go back to the easel. By 1942, she was already making small, colorful, personal paintings, although she worked slowly, usually one painting at a time, and was not terribly prolific.

Lundeborg always showed a predilection for definite outlines, cool precision, and microscopic detail. She painted two versions of *Poetic Justice*, another summation of the life cycle with its references to birth and death. In the horizontal version (1945; Fig. 5), painted three years after a vertical representation,

Lundeberg displays her gentle wit and a magical sense of fantasy by switching the life cycles of the snail and the iris. The artist's well-manicured hand clasps an empty snail shell out of which a small iris is growing. A roadway cuts through the center of the composition toward the distant mountains, which function as a backdrop for the foreground drama. Like the snail eating the leaves of the iris plant on the right, mankind has tunneled away portions of the mountain.

"The hand is a useful introduction of something human," Lundeberg told one interviewer. "It can hold a flower, stone, a shell, what have you. It can point at something. I used my own hands because I was the most convenient model."²⁶ Although she liked her hands, she said that she tried not to do self-portraits, as she was not fond of her own figure and face and preferred more generic types.²⁷ *Painting the Mountain* (1945) shows the artist's right hand holding a paintbrush, suggesting the hand may represent the artist's creativity, while in *The Veil* (1946), the artist's hand is shown drawing back a curtain on which is painted a sun-filled landscape only to reveal the nocturnal magic of the identical scene. The idea of daytime as a veil that hides another world was the starting point for several paintings.

Lundeberg seldom traveled outside of California—she crossed the border once into Mexico and made occasional trips to New York, Chicago, and San Antonio. She was 38 when she made her first trip to New York after World War II. (It was the first time Feitelson had been back since he moved to Los Angeles in 1927.) Nevertheless, she met luminaries like Peggy Guggenheim in New York, and was part of a social scene in Los Angeles that included collectors like the Arensbergs and Galka Scheyer, and celebrities from the entertainment industry.

Rather than painting from nature, Lundeberg summarized and synthesized, describing imaginary vistas. She was inspired by and worked from photographs and reproductions; however, she was never interested in taking photographs. She disliked "monkeying," her word, with cameras, and found them a distraction from really looking at things. She thought of herself as the camera, always looking intently as she went through life.²⁸

An artist's portrait of her mother is an extremely personal statement, which may even rival a self-portrait in emotional significance. *Selma* (1957; Pl. 3) was the latest of several portraits the artist made after early photographs of her mother. Lundeberg transmutes a black and white carte-de-visite photograph from around 1890, when her mother was about 20 years old, taken with two of her friends.²⁹ "I always liked the way my mother looked," Lundeberg said, "so I thought I would do a painting as a tribute."³⁰ She used only the image of her mother, imagining the colors of her dress and hair. A precursor for the hand holding the flowers can be seen in the small painting *The Offering* (1949). Wilting on the windowsill are gaillardia, commonly called blanketflower, a favorite of her mother's that grew in the family's



Fig. 5. Helen Lundeberg, *Poetic Justice* (1945), oil on board, 13" x 17". Oakland Museum of California, Museum Donors Acquisition Fund.

Pasadena garden. Seen together with the dark view into the distance, they strike a sad note, signifying her mother is gone. This memorial tribute shows the artist disengaging from as well as embracing her mother, and may have been her way of facing mortality. Lundeberg was awarded a \$400 prize for *Selma* in 1957 at the Los Angeles County Museum's Annual Exhibition/ Artists of Los Angeles and Vicinity.

After working in oil since the 1930s, in 1965, through her friend June Harwood, Lundeberg discovered the virtues of acrylics. She liked their drying quality, and that they mixed with water, were tough and washable when there were sufficient coats on the canvas, and could be layered and did not crackle. Lundeberg rarely used a pure color. She mixed colors in glass bowls in a process that reminded her of "stirring up a thick batter of frosting."³¹ She then added water to the mixture, because thin coats made it easier to achieve the smooth surface she preferred.

Unmodulated flat areas of color and angular and curved geometric shapes formed the basis of her compositions from 1950 onwards, becoming increasingly more abstract after she started working in acrylics. About 1968, a landscape Lundeberg had been working on went through so many changes the forms eventually suggested a torso. *Reclining Landscape*, simultaneously a vista of gently rolling mountains and a reclining nude of consummate grace, prompted a return to the figure using the torso to suggest the repose, permanence, and security of Earth or the buoyant form of a water nymph in motion. Although no corporeal beings populate *Still Life with Shadow* (1974), the artist's shadow falls across the canvas to take shape on the back wall, placing the pure still life in relief. Lundeberg said she always liked the idea of evidence of something outside a painting throwing its reflection or shadow.³² Symbolically, the shadow could be a graphic portrayal of the soul of the artist.

The human presence so prominent in Lundeberg's early work is unusual in her late paintings. "The trouble was I didn't know what I wanted to do with the human figure," she said, "except for a few portraits of the family—myself, my sister, my mother. Nymphs dancing in a field have become passé and an unrewarding subject. So I just let the figure go. Why that little cropped figure crept into the mirror in *Reflections* (1982; Pl. 4) I couldn't tell you. It wasn't anybody in particular."³³ Lundeberg told Jan Butterfield she was thinking of the attitude of some of the figures of Piero della Francesca, whose work she loved. In addition, said Lundeberg, she always worked an exit into her compositions,³⁴ and the way out of this painting is reflected in the mirror. Behind the ghostly figure peering intensely like an apparition in the mirror is an archway through which a mountain and the night sky can be seen.

Helen Lundeberg continued painting until 1990 and passed away on April 19, 1999. Hailed as a poet among painters, she spent a lifetime examining philosophical questions about life and the nature of reality. In painting her primary concerns were structure and color, and her portraits of herself and others carry meaning beyond their visual resemblance to the subject. In spite of distancing herself from feminist issues, a study of Lundeberg's art shows that she continually explored the nature of being a woman and a woman painter. She depicted the symbiotic relationships of interior/exterior, day/night, tangible/intangible, illusion/reality in her bisected formats, and played with the processes of perception. These qualities have made Lundeberg's work eternally fascinating and rewarding to see. •

Donna Stein is an independent art historian, curator and essayist. She is currently Senior Development Associate at California Institute of the Arts.

NOTES

All of the images are reproduced by permission of the Lorser Feitelson and Helen Lundeberg Feitelson Arts Foundation.

1. Videotaped interview with Helen Lundeberg, c. 1988, Tom Boles, director; Tobey C. Moss, producer; Reels 22, 23, 3 (hereafter, Videotaped interview).
2. Interview with Helen Lundeberg, 1986, Audiotape I, Side A, page 3.
3. Videotaped interview, Reels 11, 12, 21.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Quoted in Ludwig Goldscheider, *Five Hundred Self Portraits From Antique Times to the Present Day in Sculpture, Painting, Drawing and Engraving*. (Vienna, Austria: Phaidon Press, 1937), 7.
7. Feitelson and Lundeberg Papers, Archives of American Art; Lundeberg responses to questions from *San Francisco Chronicle* art and music critic Alfred Frankenstein, October 1976.
8. Ibid.
9. Richard Cándida Smith, *Utopia and Dissent, Art, Poetry and the Politics in California*. (Berkeley: University of California, 1995), 17.
10. Ibid., 8.
11. Diane Moran, "Helen Lundeberg," *Lorser Feitelson and Helen Lundeberg: A Retrospective Exhibition*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: Museum of Modern Art, 1980), 24.
12. Recorded interview by Betty Lochrie Hoag, March 17, 1965, Part I, p. 7.
13. I have chosen not to discuss Feitelson's work so that Lundeberg's work can be understood and assessed based on its own merits.
14. Helen Lundeberg, "New Classicism," (Los Angeles: printed statement, 1934), n.p. Later manifestos were issued by Grace Clements ("New Content – New Form," *Art Front* 11, March 1936, 8-9) and Lorser Feitelson ("What is Postsurrealism?" *Spanish Village Art Quarterly*, San Diego, Spring 1941, 6).
15. See Michael Duncan, "Post Surrealism: Genesis and Equilibrium," *Post Surrealism*, Pasadena Museum of California Art, 2002. Grace Clements' work differs from Lundeberg because she addressed socially conscious and anti-war themes, however, only one Post Surrealist painting is currently known, "Reconsideration of Time and Space," (1935) in the collection of the Oakland Museum of Art. Clements used the concept of filmic montage, where "two conflicting factors unlike in kind but united in idea create a climax" as a way of conveying ideas that can be understood optically.
16. Persephone was the daughter of Demeter and Zeus. When Demeter learned that Hades had abducted her daughter, she refused to allow anything to grow on earth. Because Persephone had already eaten sacred pomegranate seeds binding her to the marriage, a compromise was reached in which Persephone spent part of each year in the underworld as Hades's wife, and in spring returned to earth so crops would blossom once more. Another painting on the subject, *Persephone's Return* (1944) was recently rediscovered. As queen of the underworld Persephone was a stern woman, but here, as the daughter of Demeter, she appears as a lovely young maiden with a garland of roses in her hand instead of the more familiar symbol of the horn of plenty. Surrounded by a desolate landscape of skeletal trees and ruined buildings, she surveys the work ahead of her, having just emerged from the chasm of the underworld.
17. Marianne Kinkel, *Visual Poetics: the Post Surrealist Paintings by Helen Lundeberg*. (M.A. thesis; Chico, CA: California State University, 1991), 112.
18. Videotaped interview, Reels 22, 23, 3.
19. Dorothy C. Miller, ed. *Americans 1942: 18 Artists from 9 States*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1942), 93.
20. Feitelson and Lundeberg Papers, Archives of American Art; responses to questions from A. Frankenstein.
21. Joseph Young, "Helen Lundeberg: an American Independent," *Art International* 15, no. 6 (September 1971): 46.
22. Paul J. Karlstrom and Susan Ehrlich, *Turning the Tide: Early Los Angeles Modernists 1920-1956*. (Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1990), 84.
23. Cándida-Smith, *Utopia and Dissent*, 13.
24. Videotaped interview, Reels 61-63.
25. Videotaped interview, Reels 22, 23, 3.
26. Videotaped interview, Reels 71-73.
27. Interview with the author, October 5, 1993.
28. Interview conducted by Jan Butterfield for the Archives of American Art, July 19 and August 29, 1980, 33.
29. Feitelson and Lundeberg papers, Archives of American Art.
30. Videotaped interview, Reels 61-63.
31. Videotaped interview, Reel 81.
32. Videotaped interview, Reels 71-73.
33. Ibid.
34. Jan Butterfield, "Helen Lundeberg: A Poet Among Painters," *Helen Lundeberg Since 1970* (Palm Springs Desert Museum, March 25-June 5, 1983), 27.

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE AND EMILY CARR

Health, Nature and the Creative Process

By Sharyn R. Udall

Widely regarded as their nation's preeminent women painters of the 20th century are the American Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986) and Canadian Emily Carr (1871-1945). Their public identities are as well known as the iconic images they made, and their biographers have tracked the lifelong efforts of each to define an artistic style while living out her own invented, unique, and sometimes conflicted personal mythology. What they also shared, and what is worth closer scrutiny within their careers, is periodic depressive illness.

Today depression is understood by most experts as a debilitating disorder that afflicts, in the estimation of the World Health Organization, as many as 25 percent of persons worldwide. But that modern view of the illness has evolved from multiple, evolving views. Before its redefinition as a disease, depression—especially among creative individuals—was long romanticized and even totemized: a persistent myth credited “heroic melancholy” as a source of artistry, soulfulness, and rebellion. Chalked up to depression were the kind of enhanced emotional or cognitive powers believed to fire any number of major artistic expressions: Vincent Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* spring readily to mind.

Challenging that popular myth of depression-fueled creativity are modern scientific studies that debunk such romantic notions, insisting instead that depression's gifts are far more malevolent: sadness, chronic exhaustion, and corrosive anxiety. In his recent book *Against Depression*, the eminent clinical psychiatrist Peter D. Kramer characterizes the disorder as “fragility, brittleness, lack of resilience, a failure to heal.”¹ In this view, depression—far from augmenting creativity—can damage the brain's structure and function, resulting in lost productivity, accidents, physical illness, even suicide.

At the outset of the 20th century, when Carr and O'Keeffe were beginning their careers, older notions about the relationship between mind and body still held sway. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic colleague Sándor Ferenczi, for example, regarded each organ as having a private life, a sort of personality or body-based awareness of its own role in the larger organism.² Emily Carr often imagined her physical self in a similar fashion, envisioning a kind of “cognitive map” of her

body, upon which she could pinpoint its function or dysfunction. She frequently remarked in her journal of her mind's image of bodily ills: “My spirit is still black and smarting.... it wanted to hide away from the fuss and weariness. Liver, I suspect.”³ Such views have been rendered quaint by modern science's mighty struggle to dispel mystery from the body. No longer is the liver regarded as the seat of black moods or the spleen the site of anger. Organs have lost their old metaphorical or symbolic “personalities.” Instead, they have been given new, largely mechanical roles: the heart has become a muscular pump, the brain is likened to a living computer.

But a century ago many people, including creative individuals such as Carr and O'Keeffe, listened to their bodies in ways we mostly disparage these days. While neither allowed a metaphorical or metaphysical view of disease to replace the medical one (they both relied on medical treatment for their physical ills), they also gave a measure of credence to the body's poetic truth as an important component of their physical and artistic identities. O'Keeffe and Carr (like many other visual artists) brought imagination to the human body and have related it to the forms and processes of nature. They intuited that the self is articulated in countless expressive forms: physiognomy, movement, gesture, dress and—not least—in illness. And they refused to banish from their own work the expressive possibilities of disease. In their work and in their words lies evidence that both painters incorporated such imaginative body images, deeply entwined with illness, into the ongoing processes of identity formation and creativity. Such evidence forms a small but significant part of the larger argument that paintings are often “about” the artist's life. By following the lead of these two artists, returning some measure of imagination to things they refused to relegate to the merely physical realm, it is possible to glimpse their own poetic or artistic reading of the body as expressed in illness.

To begin in a fundamental, demonstrable way, O'Keeffe's (Fig. 1) and Carr's (Fig. 2) health and body images directly affected their artistic production. O'Keeffe's energies and emotions were intimately intertwined. Patterns of depression accompanied by physical illness in her life developed early and dogged her periodically through many decades. She grew aware of the linkage and eventually came to understand its power and its

place in her life. In the beginning, though, illness was a terrifying foe. When she contracted typhoid, for example, at the age of 18, the disease left her physically depleted, without hair and in low spirits. She missed a year of art school, and only gradually recovered her emotional equilibrium.

O'Keeffe's was a family beset with many illness and losses, which they often strove to defeat by sheer force of will. From childhood she had shared her family's reluctance to give in to despair; she learned early to steel herself against pain. When sorrow threatened to overwhelm her during her mother's last illness in 1916, O'Keeffe summoned her inner resolve. In February 1916 she wrote to her friend Anita Pollitzer, "Self-control is a wonderful thing—I think we must even keep ourselves from feeling too much—often—if we are going to keep sane..."⁴ But three months later, when her mother finally lost a long battle with tuberculosis, Georgia had temporarily exhausted her supply of self-control, giving in to grief. For six weeks she languished in depression, exhausted and unable to work. She roused herself in time to teach summer school at the University of Virginia, and the experience of work began to redirect O'Keeffe's energies in positive channels. While grieving at the death of one's mother is an understandable, even necessary emotional nadir, O'Keeffe's later bouts of depression were often linked to intense work, followed by predictable exhaustion and illness.

As a young woman O'Keeffe first learned something about personal freedom and solitude, lessons she would later occasionally forget at her peril. Taking teaching jobs in Texas and South Carolina between 1912 and 1918, she found places remote from stress and the complexities of city life: "I was alone and singularly free," she recalled, "working into my own, unknown—no one to satisfy but myself."⁵ O'Keeffe especially loved the plains of West Texas during her two periods of residence there, although she sometimes felt herself a misfit in the conservative Panhandle towns. Periodically at odds with school administrators over curriculum and teacher decorum (O'Keeffe's refusal to attend church and her free associations with men were thought to be somewhat unconventional behavior), tensions increased after the United States entered World War I in 1917. She was supportive of the American position, but grew increasingly isolated from the college community at Canyon by her opposition to excessive militarism. Depressed and disillusioned, she stopped painting that fall. Worst of all, she seemed not to care. To the photographer Paul Strand she wrote,

I guess can't work because everything seems so mixed up—so inconsistent—I cannot really be any one thing enough to want to say anything about it—Everything



Fig. 1 Georgia O'Keeffe with hood and bird's wing, 1953, New Mexico. Photo courtesy of George Daniell.

seems to be whirling or unbalanced—I'm suspended in the air—can't get my feet on the ground—I hate all the folks I see every day—hate the things I see them doing—the things I see them thinking.⁶

That she could not "really be any one thing enough to want to say anything about it" points to a crisis within her deepest artistic identity. O'Keeffe always needed a clear vision of herself to paint at her best; now she seemed blind to that image and mute in her expressive voice. She went on to tell Strand, "It's all like a bad dream."

Enervated and depressed, O'Keeffe fell victim to the dangerous influenza epidemic sweeping the country early in 1918. She received a medical leave from the college and retreated to Waring, near San Antonio, to convalesce with her friend Leah Harris, herself recovering from tuberculosis.

It took a change of both scene and companions for O'Keeffe to recover herself in 1918. In future years, it would sometimes take more. In the 1920s, when her exhibitions began to attract critical notice, the anticipation of them often plunged her into depression accompanied by significant physical symptoms. That she became physically ill at the approach of her exhibitions has been well documented. It began early, when critics trumpeted sexuality in the photographic portraits Alfred Stieglitz made of her as well as in her flower paintings. Scholar Barbara Lynes has seen a distinct pattern: "[O'Keeffe] hated exhibiting her work, the publicity exhibitions generated, and in general, being in the public eye."⁷

O'Keeffe's cognitive map of her body was sometimes vague. Her work-related symptoms took many forms: a week into her 1923 show she took to her bed "with the grippe." A year later, still reeling from the critical reaction to the 1923 show, she sequestered herself in anticipation of the next one: "I have had a cold" she wrote to her friend Sherwood Anderson, "and have been shut up in my room since I knew the event was to take place—and nothing goes on in my head...."⁸

It is in O'Keeffe's letters, and in some of her husband Alfred Stieglitz's, that one glimpses most clearly the ways the painter's emotional state affected her physical well-being and creativity. Summers at Lake George, ostensibly spent in quiet retreat from the city, sometimes made things worse for O'Keeffe. At the lake, where streams of visitors and lack of privacy oppressed her, the tension at times grew unbearable. During the summer of 1924 she suffered a prolonged malaise, and in 1925 a severe allergic reaction from which it took her nine weeks to recover amid the turmoil of the Stieglitz clan. The summer of 1926 found her anxiety-ridden; from Lake George that year her husband confided to a friend "Georgia worries me much. . . psychic conditions."⁹ A few days later he added, "She has lost 15 pounds and was terribly nervous."¹⁰ In a desperate flight from the lake, O'Keeffe headed for York Beach, Maine,

where she remained for a month, despite Stieglitz's visit and letters pleading for her return to Lake George.

At times O'Keeffe seemed to understand the way life's tensions undermined her art. To a sick friend, she disclosed her growing realization that mind and body functioned together in health and in disease. And she seemed to advocate something of a therapeutic role for art itself. "I hope you are caring for yourself—giving yourself a chance," she wrote to her friend Blanche Matthias, then

Something in you must quiet down so that you can get well—I wish I could help you I am learning something myself—I don't know exactly what it is—but if I did—if I could put it clearly into form it would cure you. That is worthy of a laugh—but I am sure it is true.¹¹

O'Keeffe was not a follower of fashionable therapies, but she was certainly aware, living in New York, of the widespread preoccupation with mind-cure in modernist circles from the 1910s onward. Seen in activities ranging from Christian Science to Native American peyote rites to Theosophy and psychoanalysis, the notion of art as therapeutic was linked on the one hand to modernist openness to the new, on the other to modernist absorption with oneself, one's moods, perceptions and intuitions.

Following the same yearly routine—winters in New York City, summers at Lake George—proved anything but curative for O'Keeffe's tensions. As the twenties advanced, she suffered an attack of painful rheumatism in 1927, followed by the discovery of a breast lump that sabotaged her summer's work. A second surgery a few months later debilitated her even further. By the spring of 1928 O'Keeffe was overtired and on edge. She escaped to Maine for two weeks during April, then went with Stieglitz to Lake George in May. But after only two weeks there she grew increasingly depressed and fled again to Maine. She couldn't stay on in Maine indefinitely, but she balked at the prospect of the long summer stretching out before her at Lake George. Instead, she made plans for a trip to visit her family back in Wisconsin. Stieglitz, whose tendencies towards hypochondria were complicated by real ailments, invoked ill health to keep from going along. At once self-absorbed and sensitive to her emotional strain, he wrote "I sometimes wish I had a few ailments instead of the many so that I might be able to take a few months off and accompany O'Keeffe to 'her' America. I know that is what she craves for."¹²

O'Keeffe's America, as was becoming all too clear, was emerging as much a state of mind as a physical place. It was definitely not to be found at Lake George. Neither was it present in the city. After a long, difficult winter, she wrote to Sherwood Anderson from Lake George, "Living is so difficult—almost too difficult." She added, by way of explanation, "Do not think from what I write that I am blue—I am having my few great days of the year when there is no one around and I can really breathe—I don't know why people disturb me so much—" And, confessing in the same letter to the power her environment exerted, "I wanted to write you in the city often but couldn't—It wasn't nice—it was cracked and



Fig. 2. Emily Carr, 1942. Photo courtesy of Provincial Archives of British Columbia.

torn and bent and a little moldy."¹³

As the artist of her own life, O'Keeffe cloaked her city-linked depression in the metaphor of a painting, a canvas badly in need of refurbishing. Many of her canvases that year were dark in tonality: corn plants, abstractions, a series of three dull-toned works she called *Portrait of a Day*.

O'Keeffe's artistic production during the late 1920s was meager and, in her mind, less than successful. In 1927 she wrote to Waldo Frank, "I do not seem to be crystallizing anything this winter—much is happening—but it doesn't take shape.... I have come to the end of something."¹⁴ By 1929 her state of mind grew grimmer, and, looking back at her last show she was unhappy about it: "When I saw my exhibition . . . I knew I must get back to some of my own ways or quit—it was mostly all dead for me."¹⁵ The paintings in her February–March 1929 show were not all new. Mostly small, they included some flowers, images of the New York skyline, and a number of leaf studies, many of the latter with torn, broken, or jagged edges. The enterprise of relating paintings to emotional states is imprecise at best, but it is certainly true that O'Keeffe's feelings that year were battered and bruised as well. She was all too aware of Stieglitz's infatuation with the younger, adoring Dorothy Norman. To stay another summer with Stieglitz was a sentence to further tension and depression. O'Keeffe struggled with competing loyalties—to Stieglitz and to her own emotional survival. It took all her resolve to break away. "If I can keep my courage and leave Stieglitz I plan to go West," she wrote a friend in 1929.¹⁶

When O'Keeffe departed for New Mexico in 1929, her traveling companion Rebecca Strand promised to report to Stieglitz on his wife's health. Soon she could assure him of the Southwest's salubrious effect on O'Keeffe:

Red cheeks, round face and ready for anything—with no

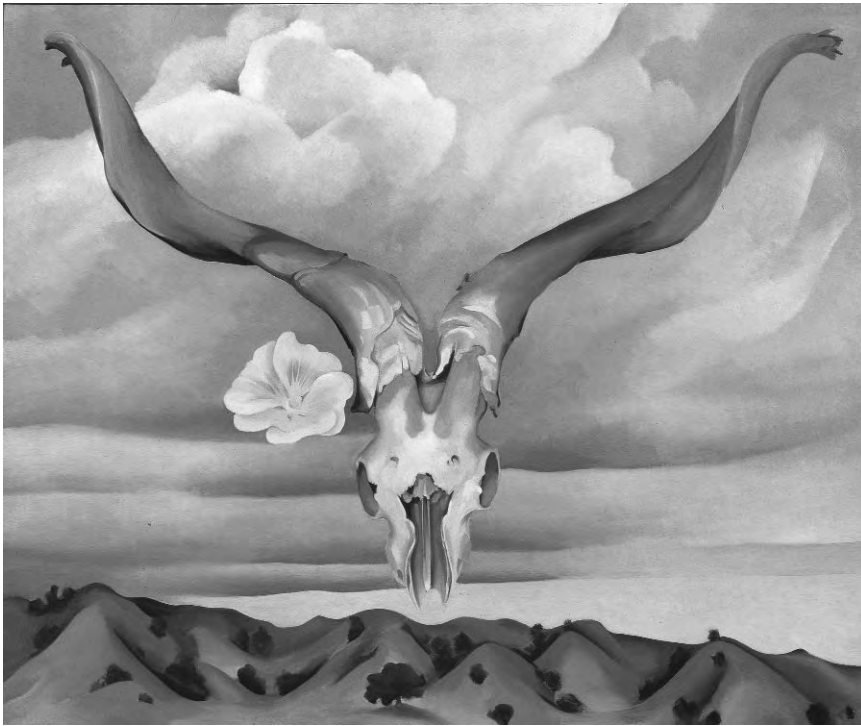


Fig. 3. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Ram's Head, White Hollyhock— Little Hills. New Mexico* (1935), oil on canvas, 30" x 36". Brooklyn Museum of Art, Bequest of Edith and Milton Lowenthal.

bad after effects—eats everything—sleeps long and laughs a lot. I wish you could be here to see the visible proof—I am afraid I am going to be a terrible disbeliever, when, in the future, I hear you say she is frail—here she seems as tough as a hickory root, and it's not the false toughness of excitement and newness, but a strength that has come from finding what she knew she needed.¹⁷

In fact, O'Keeffe felt altogether invigorated by her summers in New Mexico. Following that first four-month stay in 1929, she was healthier—physically and emotionally—than she had been in years, newly rich in the experience of herself. She had found some new subjects in the distinctive architecture and landscape around Taos. En route back East she wrote to her friend Ettie Stettheimer of the exhilaration she felt: "I have had four months west and it seems to be all that I needed... I haven't gained an ounce in weight but I feel so alive that I am apt to crack at any moment.... I laughed a great deal—I went every place that I had time to go—and Im ready to go back East as long as I have to go sometime—If it were not for the Stieglitz call I would probably never go."¹⁸ To Mabel Dodge Luhan, her Taos hostess, she said simply, "it seems the most perfect thing that has ever happened to me."¹⁹

During the following two summers in New Mexico, O'Keeffe thrived in the freedom it offered her, but the next year, 1932, she decided abruptly against going. Perhaps because of Stieglitz's growing involvement with Dorothy Norman, O'Keeffe chose to stay in the East. Another frenetic summer at the lake, overrun

with houseguests, drove O'Keeffe to seek some quiet on an August painting trip with Stieglitz's niece to the Gaspé Peninsula in Canada. She returned twice more to Canada that year. Out of those ventures came landscapes of somber greens, some leavened with the whiteness of old Canadian barns, solid shapes she painted in a manner both specific and abstract.

In the fall of 1932 O'Keeffe worked hard on designs for a mural commission she had accepted at the new Radio City Music Hall in New York. It was a project Stieglitz opposed vigorously, calling it a crassly commercial undertaking. O'Keeffe persisted, worrying over the contract for months. When it came time to inspect the intended wall space—canvas laid over plaster—she saw that the surface had been improperly prepared, was still wet, and the canvas was peeling off. With only six weeks until the scheduled completion date, O'Keeffe's determination wavered; she abruptly backed out of her contract, aided by Stieglitz, who phoned the project agent to say that O'Keeffe was having a nervous breakdown.

It was an excuse that would prove prophetic. O'Keeffe retreated to Lake George, but returned to the city in December in a state of severe anxiety. Debilitating physical

symptoms accompanied the mental collapse: shortness of breath, chest pains, and difficulty in speaking. Stieglitz's physician-brother diagnosed it as shock, while other specialists mentioned heart or kidneys. With bed rest O'Keeffe improved temporarily, and plunged into preparing for her January show at Stieglitz's gallery, *An American Place*. But now the expected pre-exhibition anxieties were layered over a lingering disappointment in the failed mural project. Soon O'Keeffe showed more physical symptoms: fatigue, severe headaches, and crying spells. Then she grew unable to eat or sleep. The array of symptoms O'Keeffe displayed first suggested physical disorder, but instead proved to be classic features of disorders growing out of extreme psychological stress—conditions variously described as conversion disorder or hysterical neurosis. In that debilitated state, O'Keeffe was forced to avoid all immanent stress—in this case, preparing for her upcoming show—and Stieglitz was obliged to do it alone. O'Keeffe moved into her sister Anita's Park Avenue apartment. In mid-January Stieglitz wrote to Arthur Dove, "Georgia is very very sick & I am really worried more than I dare admit. . . . [she] is in very bad shape. It is ghastly.—She may see no one. I may not see her for a week & then only for 10 minutes.—Talk about a living death."²⁰

Was he speaking of O'Keeffe's living death, or his own? It pained him to have his wife away, and his discomfort certainly stemmed from genuine concern for her well-being. But he also disliked her removal from his direct oversight; he wanted to be in control of her professional life, as he had shown in his objections to the mural commission. O'Keeffe knew this and

grew accustomed to his hovering nature: “Alfred once admitted,” she recalled, “that he was happiest when I was ill in bed because then he knew where I was and what I was doing.”²¹ For the time being, in 1933, he was forced to relinquish control as O’Keeffe’s emotional health worsened. On February 1 she was hospitalized in New York, diagnosed with psychoneurosis. Released in March, she recuperated in Bermuda until May, then spent most of the year’s remainder resting at Lake George. From there she wrote her friend Rebecca Salsbury Strand of her continuing lassitude: “I just sit in my effortless soup and wait for myself And the worst of my fatigue is a suffering in my nerves that is much worse than physical pain—I don’t really get tired physically.”²²

That state of enervation sapped all her strength for painting. As she approached the end of a full year of artistic inactivity, she wrote to a friend in New Mexico that “I have not worked at all... Nothing seems worth being put down—I seem to have nothing to say.”²³ She spoke of feeling like a dead weight, and it was clear that despair had displaced any creative will. It was not until early 1934 that she resumed painting. As she felt her energies and equilibrium returning, O’Keeffe looked back with wonder at the experience she’d been through. In a letter to the writer Jean Toomer, who had spent time with her at Lake George, she wrote, “I seem to have come to life in such a quiet surprising fashion—as tho I am not sick any more—Everything in me begins to move and I feel like a really positive thing again.”²⁴

After her long hiatus, reconnecting with the city and the art world proved difficult. O’Keeffe struggled to redefine her space and to attend to what she needed for her work and well-being. “If the past year or two or three has taught me anything,” she wrote Toomer, “it is that my plot of earth must be tended with absurd care—By myself first—and if second by someone else it must be with absolute trust—their thinking carefully and knowing what they do—It seems it would be very difficult for me to live if it were wrecked again just now—”²⁵ O’Keeffe had moved through a period of darkness and silence, in which she had learned how to listen closely to self, merely to *be* instead of to *do*. She had initiated an honest examination of her life, listening to the messages of her body, and allowing her imagination (the metaphorical tending of her “plot of earth”) to move into deeper insights.

The comment about caring for herself reveals O’Keeffe’s new resolve not to give over her health and stability to anyone’s keeping—implicitly, not even to Stieglitz. On some level, she realized that he had exercised too much control over her private and artistic life, to a point of undermining her own confidence and ability to make decisions. For the relationship to survive in any form, and for O’Keeffe to maintain her emotional health, she had to separate herself from him, from a relationship that had become too tightly packed. She left him again in March 1934, for another respite in Bermuda, testing her strength: “It was very difficult to leave him but I knew I could not stay—” she confided to Toomer. As her ship steamed into the Atlantic, she was still adrift emotionally: “My old sense of reality seems displaced and I cannot quite anchor a new one.”²⁶

Displaced and drifting, O’Keeffe had nonetheless learned

something else important from her illness. What was emerging with growing clarity was her need to offset the demands of society with large doses of solitude. To withstand the pressures people placed on her, she seemed to need to separate herself into two parts—a city self, interacting with people, and a country or private self. Returning to peaceful wintertime Lake George after twelve days in the city, she wrote of the severing of her twin selves:

I feel like someone else here—just in the two or three hours I am here—It seems that I can barely remember the day I went—as tho I was smashed to bits so many times in the 12 days that I don’t remember by whom or what or when or where—only what sits here and writes does not seem to have much connection with that terrible time I had in town—Already I feel very quiet and pleasant—²⁷

By the early 1930s illness had become, one concludes, almost a part of O’Keeffe’s mystique, perhaps internalized by the artist herself. It had started as early as 1922, when her health difficulties were publicly discussed. That year a journalist wrote on O’Keeffe’s art as it stemmed from the complexities of her personality, citing “genuineness and simplicity,” while noting that she was “sensitive,” “intellectual and introspective,” displaying an “aloofness from life.” The writer wondered whether illness might be a factor in the “secret of that personality,” speculating, “Is there after all, a connection between genius and ill health? Miss O’Keeffe has known a great deal of illness in her life: she has, we imagine, been thrown back upon her own resources to a large extent.”²⁸ The journalist’s suggestion that illness deepens experience and textures life is a clear example of the romanticizing of depression, the old myth that the affliction was somehow generative of creativity.

Although O’Keeffe would never again experience a breakdown of similar magnitude, there would be other bouts of illness to endure. In February 1935 Stieglitz reported to Dove that O’Keeffe would go to Washington for a respite: “New York is too much for her.”²⁹ Two months later she underwent surgery to remove her appendix and an ovarian cyst, procedures requiring a two-month recuperation period. When well enough, she escaped to New Mexico, where her painting took on new strength and direction. Leaving behind the difficult months of fragmentation and disintegration, O’Keeffe moved visibly to recovery.

The seventeen new paintings from that New Mexico period, evoked knowing comments from critics when they were shown in New York in 1936. Lewis Mumford, who had followed her work through its dark passage, wrote of its re-emergence:

Certain elements in O’Keeffe’s biography were plainly visible in the paintings of the previous few years; physical illness cannot be concealed. There was more than conventional symbolism in the dark crosses that stood out against the clear desert sky, and there was a bitter note in the pink rose stuck in the horse’s skull. The painting in these pictures was still fine, and there was

even technical progress in her modelling of the landscape, but the work lacked the sense of sharp discovery that the earlier paintings had. One felt that the next word might diminish into that silence which is the artist's death.³⁰

Mumford singled out O'Keeffe's *Ram's Head—White Hollyhock—Little Hills, New Mexico* (1935; Fig. 3) for special praise. This work he placed, along with other landscapes from that recovery year, within the ranks of O'Keeffe's finest landscape efforts, all demonstrating "health and mastery." "This new work," he declared, "glows with poetry and truth; and neither strain or weariness nor despair is visible."³¹

But the old demons were not completely vanquished in 1935; O'Keeffe would be dogged periodically by emotional illnesses arising from predictable situations, usually conflict and loss of personal control over her art. In 1939 she took a three-month trip to Hawaii at the invitation of the Dole Pineapple Company. Though entranced by the beauty of the islands, the strain of working to a company's specifications—they wanted her to paint pineapples—created tensions and discord. O'Keeffe returned exhausted, experiencing headaches, stomach problems and weight loss, some of the same symptoms that had accompanied her 1932 illness. In June Stieglitz wrote to Dove that "Georgia has had a nervous breakdown.—Has been laid up for 4 weeks.—Came back [from Hawaii] in bad condition.—For the present there is no thought of Lake George or anywhere else for either of us.... I do hope that Georgia will get on her feet again somehow. There seems no end."³² Again, there were months of recovery and no painting until October. For O'Keeffe's part, she told her friend Henry McBride that she was following her doctor's recovery regimen assiduously, but "As far as I can make out there isn't much the matter with me except that I was tired, and had been too tired too long."³³

She was right, to the extent that chronic exhaustion was a long-term nemesis for her. Although not diagnosed as such, it was clearly a component of recurring depression. When O'Keeffe grew overtired, compounded by the stresses of her professional or personal life, it was likely to overtake her. What O'Keeffe had neglected to do in 1939 was to tend her "plot" with the kind of "absurd care" she had promised herself seven years earlier. She would rededicate herself to it as the years passed, and the task became easier as she lived increasingly on her own in the West. Her growing financial independence in the 1930s afforded O'Keeffe the opportunity to take back her reputation from Stieglitz and to start to live out her own myth.

Emily Carr provides another model for the ways the creative Epath offers a means of transforming or healing the self. The Canadian painter's health affected her creativity periodically, and in ways curiously similar to the experiences of Georgia O'Keeffe. Perhaps the most striking parallel lies in the major breakdown Carr experienced in 1902—an illness arising out of emotional stress manifested in physical symptoms. It appears very similar to the one O'Keeffe would suffer 30 years later. Both artists were diagnosed with forms of hysteria, that vaguely defined malady often seen among women decades ago.

Carr had been studying art in England for several years, including two years at London's Westminster School of Art and eight months in the Cornish fishing village of St. Ives. Despite artistic growth, her experience in Britain had been of mixed success. At times she was intensely homesick for British Columbia, where she had been born and grew up. That emotion was compounded by her feeling (often mentioned in her writings) that fellow students dismissed her as a "colonial." London itself disagreed with her, she decided, blaming her frequent attacks of nausea and migraine headaches on the urban environment. Carr's own accounts of this period, written later and with free embellishment, are both contradictory and vague. She caught the flu; then, over a period of months she developed an array of symptoms: numbness in her right arm and leg, vomiting, difficulty with vision and speech. Carr's sister Lizzie came from Victoria to care for her, and the two moved from one rural boarding house to another in search of rest and recovery for Emily.

Temporary improvement gave way to a sharp decline late in 1902, when a London doctor diagnosed "nervous breakdown" and ordered several months of rest. The following January Emily entered the East Anglia Sanatorium, where she spent 15 months. Primarily a tuberculosis hospital, it also treated patients with some other ailments, including hysteria, the diagnosis entered for Carr in the institution's records. Her treatment regimen was unlikely to please anyone, least of all the intractable, angry Carr: hot and cold baths, alternate overfeeding and fasting, and electroshock therapy.

Carr later gave confusing explanations for this hospital stay, ranging from anemia to exhaustion, though she also referred on occasion to her "crack-up." Most consistent was her attribution of illness to a combination of the flu, overwork, and the confinements of city life. Her biographers have speculated on the causes in a wildly inclusive lexicon: insecurity, irritability, and sexual conflicts, combined with the pressure on her to succeed as an artist, are the most frequently mentioned. All contain a grain of truth, but none encompasses the larger affliction Carr suffered: depression.

To set forth her own version of events, Carr wrote *Pause*, a book about her experience in the "San." It is an account written late in her life and published posthumously, eight years after her death. She subtitled it "A Sketch Book," and illustrated it with drawings of the hospital's patients and the animals that provided Carr with solace there. In *Pause* Carr downplayed the possibility of emotional issues and played up (as O'Keeffe would later do) the exhaustion angle. In an "author's note" at the beginning of the text Carr introduced herself in a brisk, third-person fashion:

The Fat Girl and Her Failure

The fat girl came from the far west where the forests are magnificent and solemn but no singing birds are there. The fat girl found birds in the early days of her sojourn in England. She heard a thrush sing. It was a poor prisoner in London, broken tailed and bedabbled, in such a dirty cage, but the pure song coming from its dreary prison touched the fat girl. By and by illness came and the fat

girl subsided into a San with a limp and a stutter. Then it was that the plan came to her to rear some thrushes and take home to her glorious silent woods. The fat girl bucked up. Spring came, birds built. The fat girl waddled forth with her stick and watched for many weeks the pretty mothers build and sit and hatch their clean and ugly babes.³⁴

What an introduction! Carr's title, including the negative self-appellations of "fat" and "failure" is a revealing one, denigrating a self she finds deficient in both body and character. The "San" clearly represented a nadir in Carr's life, a time when she despised herself while at the same time pitying her lot. She identified, it seems, with the thrush: a "poor prisoner in London" but capable of producing a "pure song." What exactly was Carr's perceived failure, anyway? Being fat, getting sick, sublimating her despair through nature?

At Sunhill Sanatorium there was no opportunity for serious artistic effort. Excitement was forbidden; rest, fresh air, and healthful food formed each day's regimen. But that did not stop Carr from memorizing her surroundings; immediately after she left Sunhill she recorded her impressions in a little sketchbook, filling it with doggerel verse and caricatures of her animal and human companions there. By 1938, when Carr added a written text to the notebook for publication, she was an experienced writer and recounted her tales in vivid, embellished prose. About herself as a patient, she admitted in *Pause* to impatience and intolerance; never in her life could Carr suffer fools or sycophants. Of the hospital's chief physician, she wrote, "Doctor Sally Bottle, I frankly despised for a toady. She licked the boots of the wealthy and fairly ate the feet off a title." It was an attitude that would resurface frequently in Carr's life. Yet she understood her own recalcitrance as a patient too: "I was not always polite, not always biddable. The monotony bored me. I despised the everlasting red tape, the sheep-like stupidity."³⁵

In later years Carr experienced many personal frustrations that undercut her creativity. Chief among them was her sour travail as a landlady, a long attempt to earn her own living in economic hard times. The everlasting chores associated with running a boarding house—cooking, cleaning, gardening, but most especially dealing with difficult tenants—often brought her low. And yet, out of that negative experience came another book, *The House of All Sorts*, in which Carr vented her considerable spleen against those tenants. Unable to paint with any regularity during her landlady years, she nonetheless relieved her depression by allowing it to speak, putting all her travails down on paper.

Besides in her books, Carr regularly confessed her changing moods to her journal. When she grew saturnine, it was often recorded (similarly to O'Keeffe's descriptions) as darkness or a weight upon her: "A heaviness descended upon me this afternoon, a great, black foreboding cloud. Why? I cannot shake it." Or, "Heavy today. Such a weight upon me....Weariness and rheumatic joints try to down me and I have to flog my spirit to rise and fly over them." Sometimes the weight became so heavy it seemed to press her down to the floor: "I have been real 'rag rug' level this week no inspiration."³⁶



Fig. 4. Emily Carr, *Scorned as Timber, Beloved of the Sky* (1935), oil on canvas, 43 3/4" x 26 7/8", Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Emily Carr Trust. Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery.

Occasionally, when overcast or dripping skies forced her to stay in, Carr succumbed to the dark moods of winter. On a February day when she was smarting under recent criticism of both her writing and her painting, she vented her frustration to her journal:

Well, today has been like a day of lead. Why are there days when yeast, gunpowder and champagne are lifeless and you are brown and sagging as a rotten apple ...Life's hideous just now, everyone anxious and pinched and unnatural and sore about something. Some wicked fairy has turned all the blood and flesh hearts into affairs of fire and lead and stone, with all the warm soft gone out, just a hard, dry ache and a hungry want. Where have you gone to, Joy? You are ached out of existence.³⁷

Carr's spirits often lifted when she could escape to the outdoors, and her most ebullient self emerges in contact with the grandness of the British Columbia rain forest. But even there depression could descend. While camping and painting among her beloved trees in midsummer 1935, another black mood descended suddenly: "Something's happened, I don't know what. A cloud and a heaviness is on this place. It doesn't speak anymore. The wind is rude and rough, the skies have lost their lofty blue graciousness. I don't want to work. My heart is like a weight inside me."³⁸ Yet she emerged once again, restored by immersion in the natural world. Her canvas *Scorned as Timber, Beloved of the Sky* (1935; Fig. 4) is a testament to that restoration. It was painted, coincidentally, the same year as O'Keeffe's redemptive *Ram's Head-White Hollyhock-Little Hills, New Mexico*, and in these clearly autobiographical paintings, each artist has created a symbolic self-portrait in natural forms. With their great sweeps of bones or trees flung across the sky, they are paintings about reconnections and reintegrations within nature and within the artists themselves. Both are metaphors of creative regeneration after bouts with depression.

Over time, Carr learned to combat depression in a variety of ways: by slogging away at drawings and paintings until the dark lifted; by reading, especially the poetry of Walt Whitman; and by writing, whether stories or journaling in her own inventive, idiosyncratic prose. Sometimes she simply allowed herself to submit to the weight of sadness. To a friend, Nan Cheney, she offered counsel (as O'Keeffe had to Blanche Matthias) by revealing something of her own cathartic efforts to fight depression:

I am so sorry [sic] your miseries are so prolongeder it is so disheartening when one can't hurry despite the best intentions of oneself & the most violent efforts. I know all about it & can truly sympathize but can now see that forcing is no good keeping as happy as one can, & occupying your thoughts with other things helps. In demonstration of this, I had a bout of crying lasting 12 hours & let myself enjoy it to the full & have been better ever since. Washed away lots of sediment We Britishers have forced for so long ourselves to be strong and put on a surface of heroics & smash under all feeling, that we've over-bottled ourselves, & it's hard to let go.³⁹ (Carr's emphasis)

Carr's self-administered treatment for emotional and physical ills also included fasting, which seemed to lighten both mind and body: "I have just come off a three days' starve and feel fine. We eat too much. It is my cure for neuralgia and such-like pains. Orange and grapefruit juice only for three days. How clean and easy one feels after, gay as pyjamas on the line on windy wash days."⁴⁰

Toward the end of their artistic lives, Carr and O'Keeffe faced inevitable physical decline in various ways. The last eight years of Carr's life were slowed by heart problems, but she kept remarkably active. At the outset of that period she asked herself, "What has 1937 contributed to life? Invalidism. Teaching me what? Alice [her sister] says I've been sweet-

tempered over it. Perhaps I've been too busy to cuss for I've written a lot, painted a lot, and have had lots of visitors. Illness has not meant idleness."⁴¹

Carr made friends promise to tell her if and when her painting deteriorated in quality. As the last years unfolded, more of her time and energies went into writing, work she often accomplished in bed. Carr thus accommodated the last stage of her life with characteristic pragmatism, and often with more sanguine temper, even humor, than she had shown in previous periods. Working abed she could tolerate; what she minded was the decrepit physical self she saw: "It is the ugliness of old age I hate. Being old is not bad if you keep away from mirrors, but broken-down feet, bent knees, peering eyes, rheumatic knuckles, withered skin, these are ugly, hard to tolerate with patience."⁴²

The will to keep working was strong in Georgia O'Keeffe's long life as well. When her eyesight failed in the early 1970s, she tried working in clay, then asked those around her for assistance in painting. Several young helpers enabled her to fix on canvas the shapes and colors she still wanted to summon from the remembered store in her mind.

How can we finally assess these two artists' health in relation to their creativity? Although each artist reacted differently to the mutability of her body and mind, we see clearly in those histories the profound impact of will, or perhaps resilience, on artistic production. Despite periods of illness, depression, and inactivity, Carr and O'Keeffe possessed a will or stubbornness that fired the creative process; this can be seen as an organizing feature of their personalities. Both were interested in the primary processes of life and death; they yearned for intense experience, for change, and for the exercise of their deepest energies. Neither would have chosen depression or physical illness as a means to experience life's processes; still, in spite of its toll in sadness, exhaustion, and anxiety, depression—or at least the long process of recovery from its episodes—also birthed artistic breakthroughs, especially for O'Keeffe.

Journeying alone through the fragmentation illness created in their lives, Carr and O'Keeffe gained new appreciation for health and wholeness. Perhaps not surprisingly, in each life wholeness and autonomy were linked in observable ways. By achieving some measure of autonomy and by exercising their own wills, these women discovered ways to put their creativity back on track. In Carr's life two distinct passages reveal the process: first, she learned from her sojourns and illness in Europe how important her attachment to home, nation, and nature were for her well-being. Later, after years spent struggling to find an artist-identity, Carr's autonomy was restored when she finally retrieved her energies from the apartment house that had sapped her for so long. Without those nagging demands she moved into a more calmly productive period of her life.

For O'Keeffe, recovering wholeness in her life meant confronting her fundamental vision of achievement. When her health broke following the failed Radio City mural in 1932, she was forced to recognize that her vision of success had demanded too high a price from her. In the course of recovery

she had to learn to say no—or at least “not now”—to the heroics of the ego. Letting go of that bondage eventually gave her a sense of her own autonomy and restored a measure of wholeness to a shattered ego. Broadly speaking, sickness led Carr and O’Keeffe into confrontation with the deepest ranges of the self, where creativity and despair mingle. There they discovered new reservoirs of strength for living out their own particular realities, and there too, they ultimately acquired a larger understanding of what it means to be whole and human. To many of their admirers their creative paths have provided useful and inspiring models for living. •

Sharyn Udall is an art historian whose most recent book was *Carr, O’Keeffe, Kahlo: Places of their Own* (2000). She is currently at work on a book and exhibition about subjects of the dance in American art.

NOTES

1. Peter D. Kramer, *Against Depression* (New York: Viking, 2005), xiii, 189.
2. Ferenczi wrote, “Man is an organism with specific organs for the performance of essential psychic functions (nervous, intellectual activities). Sándor Ferenczi, “Thinking with the Body equals Hysteria,” in *The Clinical Diary of Sándor Ferenczi*, J. Dupont, ed., M. Balint and N.Z. Jackson, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1988), 5-6.
3. Emily Carr, journal entry for December 25, 1935, *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of an Artist* (Toronto: Irwin, 1966), 212-13 (hereafter *Hundreds and Thousands*).
4. O’Keeffe to Anita Pollitzer, February 9, 1916, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Library (hereafter YCAL).
5. O’Keeffe, quoted in Laurie Lisle, *Portrait of an Artist: A Biography of Georgia O’Keeffe* (New York: Seaview, 1980), 67.
6. O’Keeffe to Paul Strand, October 30, 1917, quoted in Roxana Robinson, *Georgia O’Keeffe: A Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 192.
7. Barbara Buhler Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics 1916-1929* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), 70.
8. O’Keeffe to Sherwood Anderson, February 22, 1924, in Jack Cowart et al., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Art and Letters* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1987), no. 30, p. 176 (hereafter *Art and Letters*).
9. Stieglitz to Herbert J. Seligmann, August 20, 1926, YCAL.
10. Stieglitz to Herbert J. Seligmann, August 22, 1926, YCAL.
11. O’Keeffe to Blanche Matthias, March 1926, in *Art and Letters* no. 36, p. 183.
12. Stieglitz to Herbert J. Seligmann, June 28, 1928, YCAL.
13. O’Keeffe to Sherwood Anderson, June 11, 1924, in *Art and Letters*, no. 31, p. 178.
14. O’Keeffe to Waldo Frank, January 10, 1927, in *Art and Letters*, no. 38, pp. 184-85.
15. O’Keeffe to Ettie Stettheimer, August 24, 1929, in *Art and Letters*, no. 49, p. 195.
16. O’Keeffe to Blanche Matthias, April 1929 in *Art and Letters*, no. 43, p. 188.
17. Rebecca S. Strand to Stieglitz from Taos, May 14, 1929, YCAL.
18. O’Keeffe to Ettie Stettheimer, August 24, 1929, in *Art and Letters*, no. 49, p. 195.
19. O’Keeffe to Mabel Dodge Luhan, September 1929, in *Art and Letters*, no. 50, p. 196.
20. Stieglitz to Arthur Dove, January 19, 1933, in Ann Lee Morgan, ed. *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware, 1988), 263.
21. Leo Janis, “Georgia O’Keeffe at Eighty-four,” *Atlantic Monthly* (December 1971), quoted in Lisle, 198.
22. O’Keeffe to Rebecca Salsbury Strand, August 1933, YCAL.
23. O’Keeffe to Russell Vernon Hunter, October 21, 1933, in *Art and Letters*, 213.
24. O’Keeffe to Jean Toomer, January 3, 1934, in *Art and Letters*, no. 67, p. 216.
25. O’Keeffe to Jean Toomer, January 10, 1934 in *Art and Letters*, no. 68, p. 217.
26. O’Keeffe to Toomer, March 5, 1934, in *Art and Letters*, no. 70, p. 219.
27. O’Keeffe to Toomer, February 8, 1934, in *Art and Letters*, no. 69, p. 218. The sense of physical oppression by others, expressed here by O’Keeffe, is curiously similar to remarks made by Emily Carr, who sometimes felt attacked by people. Wrote Carr, “It is funny. . . how I sought my companionship out in woods and trees rather than persons. It was as if they had hit and hurt me and made me mad, and cut me off, so that I went howling back like a smacked child to Mother Nature.” See Carr, journal entry for January 28, 1936, *Hundreds and Thousands*, 219.
28. “I can’t Sing, So I Paint! Says Ultra Realistic Artist; Art Is Not Photography—It is Expression of Inner Life! Miss Georgia O’Keeffe Explains Subjective Aspect of her Work,” *New York Sun* (December 5, 1922), 22, quoted in Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, 180-82.
29. Stieglitz to Dove, February 1935, in Morgan, ed. *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, 304.
30. Lewis Mumford, “The Art Galleries: Autobiographies in Paint,” *The New Yorker* 11, no. 4 (January 18, 1936): 48.
31. Mumford, “Autobiographies in Paint,” 48.
32. Stieglitz to Dove, June 16, 1939 in Morgan, ed. *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, 420.
33. O’Keeffe, letter to Henry McBride, July 22, 1939, YCAL.
34. Emily Carr, “Author’s Note,” *Pause* ([1953]; Toronto: Stoddart, 1995), 3.
35. Carr, “Me,” in *Pause*, 57.
36. Carr, journal entries for December 1, 1933 and March 26, 1934, *Hundreds and Thousands*, 85, 104. The last sentence is from Carr to Cheney, May 1938, in *Dear Nan: Letters of Emily Carr, Nan Cheney and Humphrey Toms*, ed. Doreen Walker (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia, 1990), no. 42, 83-85.
37. Carr, journal entry for February 8, 1935, *Hundreds and Thousands*, 169-74.
38. Carr, journal entry for July 2, 1935, *Hundreds and Thousands*, 188.
39. Carr, letter to Nan Cheney, postmarked August 12, 1940, reprinted in *Dear Nan*, 242.
40. Carr, journal entry for December 8, 1933, *Hundreds and Thousands*, 86.
41. Carr, journal entry for December 31, 1937, *Hundreds and Thousands*, 297-98.
42. Carr, journal entry for February 21, 1941, *Hundreds and Thousands*, 331.

WOMEN ARTISTS IN THE JAPANESE POSTWAR AVANT-GARDE

Celebrating a Multiplicity

By Midori Yoshimoto

A work of art that is newly created must express a beauty that is new and distinct from that of other existing works. To duplicate pre-existing beauty is artisan's work, it is a work of handicraft. An artist's responsibility is to discover an unknown beauty and realize it as her work.

—Atsuko Tanaka¹

A dress made of nearly 200 light bulbs incessantly changed colors, as if pulsing in correspondence to the indecipherable rhythm of the universe. This awe-inspiring artwork by Atsuko Tanaka (1932–2005) was recently featured in a retrospective exhibition at the Grey Art Gallery in New York that introduced Western audiences to a majority of the artist's works. When a young Tanaka risked electrocution to wear this *Electric Dress* (1956) during an exhibition, she sought to realize the “extraordinary beauty that cannot be created by human hands.”² At that time she declared that the artist's role was the discovery and realization of an “unknown beauty”; Tanaka persistently pursued this concept throughout her career until her recent death.

Along with Yayoi Kusama and Yoko Ono, Tanaka is one of the few Japanese women artists to have received recognition in the West, though many others just as deserving still await their introduction or reevaluation in the global context. Such lack of recognition is largely due to the historical relegation to oblivion of women artists by the mainstream Japanese art world, which remains resistant to political approaches to art history, including those inspired by feminism and gender studies. During the last decade, however, curators and art historians—primarily female—have made efforts to rediscover these artists buried in history. A substantial recent effort to bring recognition to a new group of women artists was the 2005 exhibit “*Zen'ei no Josei, 1950–1975/Japanese Women Artists in Avant-Garde Movements, 1950–1975*,” organized by Reiko Kokatsu at the Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Art.³ She spent years preparing for this monumental exhibition, locating the art and documenting the careers and contributions of the Japanese women artists whose works were represented.⁴

Conceived as the sequel to Kokatsu's 2001 exhibition “*Hashiru Onnatachi/Japanese Women Artists before and after*

World War II, 1930s–1950s,” “*Zen'ei no Josei*” presented 220 objects by 46 artists engaged with the historical context of postwar Japanese avant-garde movements.⁵ The term *zen'ei*, the literal translation of the French term *avant-garde*, was at first received with much reservation by Japanese artists and critics because of its close association with the Communist political left. Yet the term eventually became accepted in the Japanese art world to refer inclusively to those artists not belonging to the existing art organizations, or to artworks that challenged established notions of beauty by utilizing unconventional styles and media. Tanaka's statement attests to the fact that she took the *zen'ei* connotation to heart.

Though most of the 46 women artists in the exhibition have pursued an artist's career throughout their lives, only a dozen or so—including Yuki(ko) Katsura (1913–1991), Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929), Yoko Ono (b. 1933), and Shigeko Kubota (b. 1937)—have earned museum-scale retrospective exhibitions.⁶ The rest, many of them now deceased, still await reevaluation by museum curators and art historians. Shattering the historical oblivion, “*Zen'ei no Josei*” provided the first opportunity to view together the achievements of 46 remarkable artists. Despite its considerable distance from Tokyo, the exhibition at Utsunomiya attracted thousands of viewers and was widely (and positively) reviewed in major newspapers and journals.⁷ Partly due to the resistance towards feminism among the majority of Japanese institutions, the exhibition did not travel elsewhere. In the hope that some of these works will be seen outside Japan in the near future, it is important to introduce the artists to a wider audience. By highlighting here just four of these extraordinary women—Saori Akutagawa, Mitsuko Tabe, Sayako Kishimoto, and Miyori Hayashi—I hope to illuminate the striking multiplicity of content and styles that enlivened this groundbreaking exhibition.

The admission of female students to the nation's major art schools after World War II led to a dramatic increase in the number of women artists in Japan. Before the war almost no school except Joshi Bijutsu Gakkō (now Joshi Bijutsu Daigaku, or Women's Art University) accepted female students. In 1946, after the Japanese government issued guidelines for revamping women's education, art institutions, including the elite Tokyo Bijutsu Gakkō (now Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music), switched to a co-ed system. Likewise, the established *Bijutsu*

dantais (art organizations) began granting memberships to women artists. In the prewar system, even though their art works were accepted to the annual exhibitions organized by those organizations, women rarely were invited to become members.

By the early 1950s, the names of women artists started appearing in exhibitions and reviews. As Reiko Kokatsu pointed out, however, their success did not necessarily lead to a fundamental transformation of women's position in the Japanese art world. Even though some women became prominent in the established art organizations, they were still in the minority and unable to overturn the social preconception of women as unsuited to be professional artists. Frustrated by the slowness of change in the art world, progressive women artists sought alternative ways to exhibit their art works, and an increase in public juried and independent exhibitions created new opportunities for them. As a result, women did not have to belong to the established art organizations, and many opted to remain independent or exhibit in circles of newly formed—and more democratically run—artists' collectives.⁸

One of the few renowned women artists from the prewar period was Yuki(ko) Katsura. While she chose to keep her prewar affiliations with several traditional artist organizations, she also helped found Jyoryū Gaka Kyōkai (Association of Women Painters) and Nihon Avant-Garde Artists Club in 1947. The latter move indicated that Katsura was not fully satisfied with her relationships to the traditional organizations. Jyoryū Gaka Kyōkai increased exhibition opportunities for women artists across various artistic styles, but it was never unified aesthetically. For her Surrealist and abstract orientation, she found more kindred spirits in Nihon Avant-Garde Artists Club, whose principal members included male vanguard luminaries of the period—artists Tarō Okamoto, Saburō Hasegawa, Nobuya Abe, and art critic Shūzō Takiguchi.⁹ On the contrary, Yayoi Kusama, who emerged as a media star in the mid-1950s with the critical support of Abe and Takiguchi, remained skeptical of any art organizations and remained independent.

Although Saori Akutagawa (1924–1966) is not well known today, she received frequent media attention during the mid-1950s. After the war, Akutagawa graduated from what is presently Tokyo National University of Arts and Music with a degree in vocal music. She turned to painting after marrying her classmate and later composer, Yasushi Akutagawa. Because of her husband's fame, she was at first referred to as Mrs. Akutagawa and as a “housewife painter.” One article explained that she became a painter because she feared her voice lessons at home would interfere with her husband's composing.¹⁰ However, her dynamic, semi-abstract dye paintings soon began to win her critical recognition, which may have encouraged her to make the larger works for which she became known.

Dyeing techniques allowed her to cover large areas with saturated colors. For example, Akutagawa's masterpiece, *Kojiki yori* (from the *Ancient Chronicle*) (1957; Pl. 5) is approximately 6 feet high and 44 feet wide. Like a traditional scroll painting, the narrative moves from right to left. The tale derives from the eighth-century *Kojiki*, the earliest known chronicle about the making of Japan by deities including the god Izanagi and



Fig. 1. Mitsuko Tabe, *Placard*, (1961), resin, collage on paper, 34" x 37". Artist's Collection. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

goddess Izanami. At the far right, a monstrous, lion-like figure representing Izanagi thrusts a sword toward the central figure with an octopus-like head and attenuated body. This figure perhaps stands for the couple's first son, who was born with a deformity. Izanagi appears to be full of anger about this misfortune, while a reclining figure, representing Izanami, seems more at ease, watching another figure eating grapes from a tree at far left. In her review of the *Zen'ei no Josei* exhibition, art historian Megumi Kitahara relates this painting to Japan's prosperity in the late 1950s after World War II and the Korean War.¹¹ Indeed, Akutagawa's interest in Japanese ancient myths during this period may have reflected the country's efforts to assert independence from the United States, which continued to dominate Japanese politics with its military presence on the archipelago. Like the Mexican muralists whom she admired, Akutagawa may have been interested in depicting concurrent social themes as monumental allegories,¹² themes she made all more interesting through her use of indigenous dyes.

As Akutagawa's dye painting even today seems innovative, the work met with some prejudice when first shown in the 1950s. As Kokatsu rightly points out, Akutagawa may have turned to oil painting in the 1960s partly because of a comment by the prominent art critic Yoshiaki Tōno, who had stated: “She rapidly painted with dye powder on a thin sheet of cloth, so I heard. Yet, I hope the time will come when her work is fixed in an unyielding resistance of oil painting.”¹³ Having absorbed Western art history, Tōno clearly considered dye painting as craft rather than fine art. In the meantime, Akutagawa's painting activities strained her marriage, and she divorced her husband and left her two daughters to come to the United States. When she exhibited her painting along with Yuki(ko)

Katsura and Yayoi Kusama in the “Japan-U.S. Women Artists Exhibition” held at the Riverside Museum in New York City in 1960, she used her maiden name, Saori Yamada. In 1961, she turned to oil painting under the guidance of Will Barnet at the Art Students League. Also that year she married the architect Yukio Madokoro, and again changed her name to her new husband’s. After returning to Japan in 1962, she pursued modernist style paintings. Regrettably, she died at age 42 due to complications from pregnancy.¹⁴

It is worth noting that as many as 20 artists included in the *Zen’ei no Josei* exhibition left Japan, either temporarily or permanently, to explore new artistic or career possibilities in the West.¹⁵ By the mid-1960s, many avant-garde artists were convinced that the Japanese art world was too conservative to appreciate their work. Even so, many of those who remained in Japan were able to succeed in the global arena because of the rapid internationalization after World War II. Japanese artists, including many women, took advantage of numerous opportunities offered them to exhibit their works outside Japan and in the West.

Several artist groups that formed in postwar Japan attracted attention for their experimental work. After Hideko Fukushima, a member of Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop), one of the earliest vanguard collectives, was quickly recognized by the leading critic Shūzō Takiguchi and invited to show her paintings in many of the domestic and international exhibitions he curated, many women became involved in these avant-garde groups. Perhaps the most active and long-lived artist collective based in the Kansai region around Osaka was Gutai (1954-1972), to which Atsuko Tanaka belonged.¹⁶ Compared to conventional art organizations with their hierarchical (and patriarchal) systems, these collectives were relatively democratic, allowing more involvement of female artists.

Shortly after the formation of Gutai, in 1957, nearly 20 artists formed the Kyūshū-ha (Kyūshū School) in Fukuoka in the southern island of Kyūshū. Mitsuko Tabe (b. 1933) was one of a few women artists involved in the group from its formation.¹⁷ Tabe remained a central figure in the Kyūshū-ha, serving as its accountant until the group dissolved in 1968. Basically a self-taught artist, Tabe’s early work showed few preconceptions about art. Thick textures and the use of asphalt were common features of Kyūshū-ha members’ work and became the group’s signature style. Her paintings such as *Gyozoku no Ikari* (Anger of Fishes, c. 1957), in which she used melted asphalt, oil paint, and cut bamboo rings, reflect Tabe’s concern about industrial pollution. It was this social consciousness that often distinguished her work from that of her peers. For example, three of the five *Placards* created in 1961 (Fig. 1) feature a collage representation of the African continent made from magazine cutouts and kiss-shaped stamps. The cutouts contain photo reproductions of African American jazz musicians and American popular culture, loosely referring to the civil rights movement in the United States and the newly won independences of African nations. Because Tabe thought the usual placards used in political demonstrations were too old fashioned to be effective, she sought to convey the visual

messages culled from the current news and popular culture. The resin used to attach the cutouts appears as diluted paint, leaving long streaks and drips. Along with ominous strands of reddish hemp palm fiber pasted to two of the *Placards*, resin drips imply blood shed in acquiring freedom. Not surprisingly, the types of subject matter and materials expanded along with the presence of women in this and other collectives.

Tabé’s social consciousness developed through her various experiences as a woman in a male-centered society. While she was pregnant with her first son, she conceived and realized a mixed-media installation entitled *Jinkō Taiban* (Artificial Placenta) (1961; Pl. 6). Exhibited with *Placards* at the Kyūshū-ha’s 1961 group exhibition at Ginza Gallery in Tokyo, *Jinkō Taiban* consists of the hip portions of three mannequins propped upside down on pedestals in front of a wall, with the torso portions of two child mannequins hung horizontally on the upper right side of the same wall. Each hip section has an opening in the center with a radio vacuum tube inserted into a “uterus.” Cotton and cloth surrounded the tube, with ping-pong balls outlining the open area. Although the original work is no longer extant, Tabé recreated it in 2004 for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Kumamoto, and this new version (without the child mannequins) was shown at the *Zen’ei no Josei* exhibition. The strong impact made by these recreated objects at the recent exhibition caused many reviewers to recognize Tabé’s early feminist awareness. In 1961 Tabé claimed that the artificial placenta would free women from the burden of childbearing in the near future. Moreover, the artificial materials used in the sculpture seem to satirize the fact that women are often considered childbearing machines. This work stands out in postwar Japanese art as an early personal and political commentary on the accepted norms of gender.

Unlike other postwar avant-garde collectives, Kyūshū-ha seems to have treated its male and female members as equals. While the comment of Tabé and another female Kyūshū-ha artist that males in the group did not see them as women may seem liberating,¹⁸ it may actually suggest a situation in which the women needed to behave like men in order to be accepted. Considering Kyūshū-ha merely as the starting point in her career, Tabé went on to organize the annual Kyūshū Women Artists Exhibition from 1974 to 1984 and dedicated herself to increasing the visibility of women artists in her region. Throughout the 1980s, she headed The Earth Art Post Office, where she promoted a postal exchange of art worldwide. At age 55, she declared of herself “retired from housewife-hood” and concentrated on painting and collage. She has held a solo exhibition in New York and Washington D.C. every year since 1994, and is still working to expand her exhibition opportunities outside Japan.¹⁹

Sayako Kishimoto (1939–88) was often the only female in the extremely short-lived Neo Dadaism Organizers (later Neo Dada), based in Tokyo. She appears in the group photograph used in the invitation to Neo Dada’s second exhibition in 1960.²⁰ Named after American Neo-Dada as represented by Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, Japanese Neo Dada sought to purge conventionalism from art by introducing destructive

actions and ephemeral junk art. The group lasted only six months but attracted media attention with shocking performances, such as Masunobu Yoshimura wrapping his naked body with Neo Dada exhibition announcements and walking down the streets of the Ginza, and Ushio Shinohara's boxing painting demonstrations. Kishimoto's presence in the group allowed for experimentation with the female form as well, and she was unwittingly turned into the group's mascot girl or a target of male aggression.

In the most notorious event, a swimsuit-clad Kishimoto was bandaged and hung from a tree while her male peers lit fireworks beneath her and threw dirt mixed with the spent ashes at her.²¹ Held on a beach in Kamakura, this was done as part of the group's advertising event for TBS television. Art historian Mayumi Kagawa has noted that Kishimoto's position in the group was tenuous, and in this instance she was relegated from the subject of action to the object of male sadism. While male members saw her as an extraordinary woman who expressed herself through bold actions, they never considered her their equal, and took advantage of her to attract media attention.²² Not surprisingly, none of Kishimoto's work from the Neo Dada period remains, and no one on record recalls what it was like.

After the dissolution of Neo Dada, Kishimoto remained within a circle of the former members and their associates, often exhibiting with them until the late 1960s. For a 1966 solo exhibition, she created *Gravestone of Narcissus*, a gallery-filling, mixed-media installation that used an abundance of plaster, which was very expensive compared to the found objects her male colleagues used.²³ The installation included walls painted in yellow with plaster female nudes, a plaster male figure seated on a box, a gigantic plaster skull, and a plywood gravestone painted yellow and white with a silhouette of a baby falling into a grave.²⁴ This morbid subject shows Kishimoto's determination to live as an artist who denies the feminine, motherly impulses within her. Recollecting her youth in the late 1970s, Kishimoto stated, "I believed that ART could not serve its original role and function as the releasing machine to uplift the mind of the viewer unless I completely broke with my narcissism as a woman and human being. Those works were the very result of my desperate act of self-annihilation at age twenty six."²⁵ Neo Dada's male-centered logic as well as the chauvinist attitude prevalent in Japanese society at large did not allow Kishimoto to accept her feminine side and negotiate it with her career. She was made to behave as a man in order to become a professional artist. Kishimoto's self-destructive acts continued in 1967, as demonstrated by her action painting performance during the opening reception of her solo exhibition in Nagoya, her hometown. In the presence of many friends and former Neo Dada colleagues, Kishimoto sprayed white house paint over the works to destroy them, then covered herself with paint and cut her hair.

In the early 1970s, Kishimoto adapted a Pop art style, often juxtaposing Japanese traditional motifs such as cherry blossoms and Mt. Fuji with images from contemporary popular culture. In one recently discovered painting,²⁶ she depicts two male figures who appear to be Japanese heroes of the past and



Fig. 2. Miyori Hayashi, (Box) Title unknown (1964), paint on wood, variable sizes, from 6" x 6" x 6" to 14" x 14" x 14".

White Noise Miyori Hayashi Museum. Photo: Norihiro Ueno.

present (early 1970s; Pl. 7). The phrase in the lower left, "Oppekepenope," suggests that the left-hand figure may be Otojirō Kawakami, a performance artist who popularized his Oppekepe song satirizing the gap between the poor and rich after the Meiji revolution. (He toured Europe and the United States with his troupe in the early-20th century.) The figure on the right is Yukio Mishima, a right-wing novelist who committed a shocking hara-kiri suicide in 1970 to protest the Japanese government. Yellow lettering appearing near Kawakami says, "I don't care, I am going to sleep," a phrase indicating a resigned attitude, and a speech balloon for Mishima reads, "I am very disappointed!!" and "Shit," three phrases that were popularized by a contemporary manga by Fujio Akatsuka.²⁷ Between the two men is an enigmatic phrase in red: "Spitting out blood in tears," suggesting that both heroes are sadly giving up on Japan. At the bottom, in front of Mt. Fuji, a cheetah has a seal (or sea lion) in its mouth, while the Japanese Diet is depicted in the upper right. Collaged at the far right is a photograph of Yoko Ono and John Lennon from their 1969 *Bed In*. The amalgam of seemingly unrelated figures may point loosely to the rapidly changing relationship between Japan and the United States (or the West in general) since the 1850s, as indicated by a large bow made from the two countries' flags and the symbolic union of East and West in the Ono-Lennon marriage. Cynicism resonates more strongly than celebration, however, as the tied flags also refer to the renewal of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty against which many young students had demonstrated (unsuccessfully). While further research is necessary to contextualize this painting within Kishimoto's

existing oeuvre, it attests to a breadth of styles that she explored during her short career. The last phase of her life, before her death in 1988 from breast cancer, was devoted to various political activities, including protesting the construction of the Nagoya City Art Museum, which was being built specifically to house paintings by an older impressionist painter from Nagoya rather than works by contemporary artists.

Avant-garde artist collectives became points of departure for many Japanese women artists in the late 1950s and early 1960s, despite some traumatic experiences, such as those Kishimoto suffered. Other women belonged to more loosely formed artists associations, if for no other reason than to gain exhibition opportunities. Miyori Hayashi (1933-2000), based in the Bizen city of Okayama prefecture, began her career in 1958 exhibiting with two of these organizations, the Salon de Moi and the Okayama Seinen Bijutsuka Shūdan (Okayama Young Artists Group). Both lacked any credo and allowed individuals to pursue their own directions. Like Tabe, Hayashi was self-taught, having taken up painting after quitting her English literature major. Because she lacked connections to the art community, belonging to these associations gave her access to some of the limited number of venues in Okayama. Her work attracted notice at the third exhibition of the Okayama Seinen Bijutsuka Shūdan at Shinjuku Gallery in Tokyo in May 1964, gaining her access to the Tokyo art world; three months later, she held her first solo exhibition at Surugadai Gallery in Tokyo.

The exhibition, entitled "Box," comprised black and white wooden cubical boxes of varying sizes, some nested in larger ones and displayed on the floor, others hung on walls at different heights (1964; Fig. 2). While most were painted either all black or white, some had both colors—one on the interior and the opposite on the exterior. Hayashi's interest in boxes may have started in 1963: at the second Okayama Seinen Bijutsuka Shūdan exhibition that year, she dressed in a black top and pants and lay horizontally inside a raised rectangular glass case with a sign reading: "Look at this person!!" According to the text contained in a 1964 collage, Hayashi saw in a box "another universe" with "completeness and stability" and considered her concept of a box a "reverse of the Pythagorean theorem."²⁸ The box may have symbolized to Hayashi an opening to a new dimension. Many contained a bull's eye target, suggesting expanses of unknown spaces beyond what the eye can see. That December, Hayashi furthered the idea of this installation at her "Box-Maker" exhibition at Naiqua Gallery in Tokyo. Here the ordinary became extraordinary by attaching many black-painted cardboard boxes to the walls and ceiling in an irregular order.

Around the summer of 1964, Hayashi met Yoko Ono, who was temporarily staying in Japan between 1962 and 1964. Intrigued by Ono's instruction pieces, which ask the viewer to enact them, Hayashi attended most of her events held that summer at various venues, including the rooftop of her apartment. Hayashi treasured the invitations or instruction cards from these events as well as Ono's self-published first edition of *Grapefruit* (1964). She even kept a piece of the dress Ono cut during her second performance of *Cut Piece* at the

Sōgetsu Art Center. Hayashi also knew Mieko Shiomi (also from Okayama), one of the Fluxus artists who had gone to New York, and Hayashi participated with her in "Flux Week," a series of events at Crystal Gallery in Tokyo during September of 1965.²⁹ The Fluxus influence, through Ono and Shiomi, can be observed in two of Hayashi's 1971 works, *Event We're going into...*, where she used a crane to raise and then drop a used car, and *Green Revolution*, consisting of a series of mailed instructions and the spraying of seeds onto a large area in Okayama city from an airplane.³⁰ Soon after and through the 1970s, Hayashi shifted to administering the Okayama branch of the Artist Union, and from 1987 to 1997 she organized the annual "Bizen Art Event," attracting international musicians and artists. As a devoted organizer, Hayashi may be compared to Charlotte Moorman, who organized the annual New York Avant-Garde Festival (1963 to 1980); Hayashi's many contributions to promoting and enriching Japanese art deserve reconsideration.

Although the four artists discussed here—Akutagawa, Tabe, Kishimoto, and Hayashi—represent only a small fraction of the artists in *Zen'ei no Josei*, they amply demonstrate the multiplicity of subjects and styles that reverberated throughout this exhibition. Critics and viewers may attempt to discover certain threads within this complex web of diverse artists and their expressions, but perhaps in vain. Most of these women artists were unafraid of being unique. They were eager to experiment with new media and styles, and their works display neither prominent iconographic or stylistic affinities to one another nor clearly identifiable characteristics of particular movements. For these unique works to be properly evaluated, we need to view them with fresh eyes, to go beyond the existing artistic categories set forth by male-dominated avant-garde movements. As suggested by curator Mitsuda Yuri, we need to free these women artists from the avant-garde groups and movements to which they belonged and reevaluate them in their own contexts.³¹ The fact that 19 of the 46 artists included in *Zen'ei no Josei, 1950-1975* are already deceased raises a sense of urgency in studying and documenting the achievements of these underrepresented women artists. We must keep moving forward. ●

Midori Yoshimoto is an Assistant Professor of Art History and gallery director at New Jersey City University. She is the author of *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (2005).

NOTES

This essay is written in memory of all those women artists in the exhibition *Zen'ei no Josei, 1950-1975/Japanese Women Artists in Avant-garde Movements, 1950-1975* who are no longer with us.

1. Atsuko Tanaka, "Search for an Unknown Aesthetic" (1960), translated and reprinted in Mizuko Katō and Ming Tiampo, *Electrifying Art: Atsuko Tanaka 1954-1968* (New York: Grey Art Gallery, 2004), 102.
2. Atsuko Tanaka, "Butaifuku" (Stage Costume), *Gutai 7* (1956); reprinted in *Gutai Shiryōshū/Document Gutai 1954-1972* (Ashiya: Ashiya City Museum of Art and History, 1993), 299. Atsuko Tanaka passed away in December 2005. I vividly remember her recent visit to New York and my visit to her studio the previous summer.

3. I had the honor of participating in the research and preparation for this historic exhibition, including curating a section on four women artists who were involved in Fluxus and contributing an essay on this topic to the exhibition catalog. Reiko Kokatsu and Midori Yoshimoto, eds. *Zen'ei no Josei, 1950-1975/Japanese Women Artists in Avant-garde Movements, 1950-1975* (Utsunomiya: Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Art, 2005) (hereafter *Zen'ei no Josei*). A short description of the exhibition, list of artists, and selected images of the works can be found at <http://www.art.pref.tochigi.jp/en/exhibition/t050724/index.html>
4. Five of the artists shown in the exhibition—Yayoi Kusama, Yoko Ono, Takako Saito, Mieko Shiomi, and Shigeko Kubota—are discussed extensively in my essay in *Zen'ei no Josei*, and in my *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2005) (see page 45 in this issue for a review).
5. *Hashiru Onnatachi* highlighted 48 Japanese women artists in the early-20th century, featuring as many as 137 works in various media, including *Nihonga* or Japanese-style painting and photography. Six women artists who were active in the 1950s appeared in both exhibits. These are Keiko Akana, Saori Akutagawa, Kinuko Emi, Yuki(ko) Katsura, Tazuko Tanaka, and Hideko Fukushima.
6. This information was gathered from short biographies included in the *Zen'ei no Josei* catalogue, 140-165. According to this resource, others who received museum-scale retrospectives include Yuki(ko) Katsura (1913-1991), Takako Araki (1921-2004), Kinuko Emi (b. 1923), Miwa Tada (b.1924), Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929), Aiko Miyawaki (b. 1929), Tsuruko Yamasaki (b. 1925), Atsuko Tanaka, Seiko Kanno (1933-1988), Yoko Ono (b. 1933), Shigeko Kubota (b. 1937), Yuri Nonaka (b. 1938), and Sawako Goda (b. 1940).
7. Reviews included (here I only list my translation of Japanese titles): Sanzō Tanaka, "Zen'ei no Josei exhibition: The Postwar Art History Seen from a Different Perspective," *Asahi Shimbun* (August 4, 2005); Kyōji Maeda, "Zen'ei no Josei exhibition: Depth Not Limited to Ono and Kusama," *Yomiuri Shimbun* (August 11, 2005); Haruo Sanda, "Zen'ei no Josei exhibition: Clear Assertion and Rich Content," *Mainichi Shimbun* (August 15, 2005). Additional scholarly reviews included Megumi Kitahara, "Precedence in Feminist Expression and Reconsideration of the 'Avant-garde'"; Junko Fukazawa "Meeting the Mountain of Treasures"; Taiji Yamaguchi, "Considering the Avant-garde Quality of the Artists"; and Junko Kitamura, "Responsibility of 'Super-Girl'" all published in *Aida* no. 118 (October 2005).
8. For more background, see Reiko Kokatsu, "Avant-garde Movements after World War II and Japanese Women Artists, 1950-1960s" (English summary) in *Zen'ei no Josei*, 188-90, and Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 10-16.
9. See Kokatsu, "Avant-garde Movements," 10.
10. *Ibid.*, 190-91.
11. Kitahara, "Precedence in Feminist Expression," 3-4.
12. A Mexican art exhibition was held at the Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art in 1955.
13. Kokatsu, "Avant-garde Movements," 191.
14. Biographical information for Akutagawa is from Kokatsu, "Artist's Biographies" in *Zen'ei no Josei*, 141.
15. Hideko Urushibara lived in London until age twelve, and Yoko Ono moved between Japan and the U.S. because of her father's business; however, many other Japanese women artists traveled to the West for artistic exposure during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Kinuko Emi held her solo exhibition in Paris and San Francisco in 1954. Yuki(ko) Katrura traveled to and exhibited in Europe, Africa, and the U.S. from 1956. Yayoi Kusama stayed in the United States from 1958 to 1972. Toshiko Uchima moved to New York City in 1960. Yasu Mori showed her woodcuts and held woodcut workshops throughout the U.S. between 1960 and 1962. Takako Araki studied sculpture in New York in 1961 and held a solo exhibition at Japan Society Gallery the following year. After her sojourn in Milan, Italy, from 1959 to 1961, Aiko Miyawaki stayed in New York from 1963 to 1966. In addition to traveling South America and Cuba from 1961 to 1962, Taeko Tomiyama traveled alone from Eastern Europe to India in 1967. Hiroko Hiraoka has lived in New York since 1962. Takako Idemitsu lived in Paris for ten years after 1963, exhibiting there and in Milan. Mako Idemitsu lived in San Francisco from 1965 to 1973, following two years in New York. For more, see Kokatsu, "Artists' Biographies" (in Japanese), 140-65. For more on the history of Japanese artists leaving for the West, see my *Into Performance*, 33-37.
16. Atsuko Tanaka, Tsuruko Yamasaki, and Fujiko Shiraga were early members of Gutai. The third generation of Gutai artists included four women artists: Kumiko Imanaka, Seiko Kanno, Akiko Horio, and Keiko Moriuchi.
17. There were three other female members: Aiko Ooguro, Kazuko Nakanishi, and another artist who later "excommunicated" herself from the group. Since only a few of their works have been located, further research is needed. For more on Kyūshū-ha, see Raiji Kuroda, et al., *Kyūshū-ha*, exhibition catalogue (Fukuoka: Fukuoka City Art Museum, 1988).
18. Shun'ichiro Tashiro, *Kakenuketa zen'ei—Kyūshūha to sono jidai* (The Avant-Garde That Run Through: Kyushu-ha and Its Era) (Fukuoka: Kashoin, 1996), 95.
19. For a chronology and other works, see Mitsuko Tabe, *Mitsuko Tabe, Recent Works* (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Cultural Foundation and Gallery Toile, 2002). Also a writer, two of Tabe's recent publications are *Jyutai Geijutsu/Conception Art* (Fukuoka: Kashoin, 1997), which includes her opinions on Yayoi Kusama, Frida Kahlo, Tamara de Lempicka, and other women artists; and *Nisennen no Ringo: Watashi no Datsu-geijutsu-ron* (Apple of Two Millennia: My Theory of Deconstructing Art) (Fukuoka: Nishinohon Shimbun-sha, 2001).
20. For this photograph and more about Neo Dada, see my *Into Performance*, 26-29. The Japanese Neo Dada is written without a hyphen to differentiate it from its American counterpart, Neo-Dada. I thank Dr. Reiko Tomii for pointing this out and providing comments on my draft of this essay.
21. Ushio Shinohara, "S-ko to Neo Dada" [The girl S and Neo Dada] in Sayako Kishimoto Retrospective Exhibition Preparation Committee, *Sayako Kishimoto, 1939-1988* (Kanazawa: Wakakusa Shobō, 1990), 6.
22. Mayumi Kagawa, "Neo dada, aruiwa houkai no tameno projekuto" (Neo Dada, or A Project for Destruction), in Josei to Āto projekuto (Women and Art Project), ed., *Neodada kara 21seikigata majo e—Kishimoto Sayoko no hito to sakuhiin* (The Life and Art of Kishimoto Sayoko) (Yokohama: Josei to Āto projekuto, 1997), 49-50. I would like to acknowledge Mayumi Kagawa, Junko Fukazawa, and Chieko Nishiyama of Josei to Āto projekuto for their devoted research on Japanese women artists. Without their cooperation, I could not have written in depth on Kishimoto in my *Into Performance*.
23. Reiko Kokatsu, "Bijutsu no Konseki?—Josei no Kōi/ Sakuhiin no juyō megutte" [Traces of Art?—On Receptions of Actions and Works by Women], the series 'Āto to jenda o meguru oufuku shokan' [Correspondences on Art and Gender] #7, *diatxt* no. 15 (June 2005): 132.
24. For a photograph, see my *Into Performance*, 28. For additional documentary photographs of Kishimoto's works and performances, see *Zen'ei no Josei*, 79-83.
25. Sayako Kishimoto, "Jitsuwabab Seishun Zankoku Monogatari" (A True Cruel Story of Youth), in *Sayako Kishimoto, 1939-1988*, 52.
26. This painting was found during my research visit with Ms. Kokatsu to the family house of Sayako Kishimoto in Nagoya in the summer of

2004. It had a large round cut in the middle and was rolled up, but the Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Art repaired it for the exhibition. I thank Mrs. Yoshiko Iida and her daughter for opening their home to us and assisting our research. Ms. Kokatsu and I agreed upon the approximate date of the early 1970s, judging from the inclusion of Mishima and stylistic affinities with other paintings of Kishimoto during the same period. The painting is now in the collection of the Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Art.

27. This connection was suggested by Reiko Kokatsu in her email to the author on January 31, 2006.

28. For the photograph of this performance and collage, see *Zen'ei no Josei*, 84, fig. M.15, and 85, cat. 113.

29. For the photograph of Hayashi's performance at Gallery Crystal, see *Zen'ei no Josei*, 136.

30. Both events are described in *Sengo Okayama no Bijutsu –Zen'ei tachi no Sugata* (Art in Postwar Okayama—Portraits of the Avant-garde), exhibition catalogue (Okayama: Okayama Prefectural Museum of Art, 2002), 114-15. Hayashi's works and documents may be viewed at the White Noise/Miyori Hayashi Museum in Bizen, Okayama.

31. Yuri Mitsuda, comment in her presentation on "The Reception of Women Artists in the 1950s" at the symposium held in conjunction with *Zen'ei no Josei* exhibition at the Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Art, on August 6, 2005. The author was among the invited speakers.

WOMEN ARTISTS IN THE JAPANESE POSTWAR AVANT-GARDE

Celebrating a Multiplicity

By Midori Yoshimoto

A work of art that is newly created must express a beauty that is new and distinct from that of other existing works. To duplicate pre-existing beauty is artisan's work, it is a work of handicraft. An artist's responsibility is to discover an unknown beauty and realize it as her work.

—Atsuko Tanaka¹

A dress made of nearly 200 light bulbs incessantly changed colors, as if pulsing in correspondence to the indecipherable rhythm of the universe. This awe-inspiring artwork by Atsuko Tanaka (1932-2005) was recently featured in a retrospective exhibition at the Grey Art Gallery in New York that introduced Western audiences to a majority of the artist's works. When a young Tanaka risked electrocution to wear this *Electric Dress* (1956) during an exhibition, she sought to realize the "extraordinary beauty that cannot be created by human hands."² At that time she declared that the artist's role was the discovery and realization of an "unknown beauty"; Tanaka persistently pursued this concept throughout her career until her recent death.

Along with Yayoi Kusama and Yoko Ono, Tanaka is one of the few Japanese women artists to have received recognition in the West, though many others just as deserving still await their introduction or reevaluation in the global context. Such lack of recognition is largely due to the historical relegation to oblivion of women artists by the mainstream Japanese art world, which remains resistant to political approaches to art history, including those inspired by feminism and gender studies. During the last decade, however, curators and art historians—primarily female—have made efforts to rediscover these artists buried in history. A substantial recent effort to bring recognition to a new group of women artists was the 2005 exhibit "*Zen'ei no Josei, 1950-1975/Japanese Women Artists in Avant-Garde Movements, 1950-1975*," organized by Reiko Kokatsu at the Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Art.³ She spent years preparing for this monumental exhibition, locating the art and documenting the careers and contributions of the Japanese women artists whose works were represented.⁴

Conceived as the sequel to Kokatsu's 2001 exhibition "*Hashiru Onnatachi/Japanese Women Artists before and after*

World War II, 1930s-1950s," "*Zen'ei no Josei*" presented 220 objects by 46 artists engaged with the historical context of postwar Japanese avant-garde movements.⁵ The term *zen'ei*, the literal translation of the French term *avant-garde*, was at first received with much reservation by Japanese artists and critics because of its close association with the Communist political left. Yet the term eventually became accepted in the Japanese art world to refer inclusively to those artists not belonging to the existing art organizations, or to artworks that challenged established notions of beauty by utilizing unconventional styles and media. Tanaka's statement attests to the fact that she took the *zen'ei* connotation to heart.

Though most of the 46 women artists in the exhibition have pursued an artist's career throughout their lives, only a dozen or so—including Yuki(ko) Katsura (1913-1991), Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929), Yoko Ono (b. 1933), and Shigeko Kubota (b. 1937)—have earned museum-scale retrospective exhibitions.⁶ The rest, many of them now deceased, still await reevaluation by museum curators and art historians. Shattering the historical oblivion, "*Zen'ei no Josei*" provided the first opportunity to view together the achievements of 46 remarkable artists. Despite its considerable distance from Tokyo, the exhibition at Utsunomiya attracted thousands of viewers and was widely (and positively) reviewed in major newspapers and journals.⁷ Partly due to the resistance towards feminism among the majority of Japanese institutions, the exhibition did not travel elsewhere. In the hope that some of these works will be seen outside Japan in the near future, it is important to introduce the artists to a wider audience. By highlighting here just four of these extraordinary women—Saori Akutagawa, Mitsuko Tabe, Sayako Kishimoto, and Miyori Hayashi—I hope to illuminate the striking multiplicity of content and styles that enlivened this groundbreaking exhibition.

The admission of female students to the nation's major art schools after World War II led to a dramatic increase in the number of women artists in Japan. Before the war almost no school except Joshi Bijutsu Gakkō (now Joshi Bijutsu Daigaku, or Women's Art University) accepted female students. In 1946, after the Japanese government issued guidelines for revamping women's education, art institutions, including the elite Tokyo Bijutsu Gakkō (now Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music), switched to a co-ed system. Likewise, the established *Bijutsu*

dantais (art organizations) began granting memberships to women artists. In the prewar system, even though their art works were accepted to the annual exhibitions organized by those organizations, women rarely were invited to become members.

By the early 1950s, the names of women artists started appearing in exhibitions and reviews. As Reiko Kokatsu pointed out, however, their success did not necessarily lead to a fundamental transformation of women's position in the Japanese art world. Even though some women became prominent in the established art organizations, they were still in the minority and unable to overturn the social preconception of women as unsuited to be professional artists. Frustrated by the slowness of change in the art world, progressive women artists sought alternative ways to exhibit their art works, and an increase in public juried and independent exhibitions created new opportunities for them. As a result, women did not have to belong to the established art organizations, and many opted to remain independent or exhibit in circles of newly formed—and more democratically run—artists' collectives.⁸

One of the few renowned women artists from the prewar period was Yuki(ko) Katsura. While she chose to keep her prewar affiliations with several traditional artist organizations, she also helped found Jyoryū Gaka Kyōkai (Association of Women Painters) and Nihon Avant-Garde Artists Club in 1947. The latter move indicated that Katsura was not fully satisfied with her relationships to the traditional organizations. Jyoryū Gaka Kyōkai increased exhibition opportunities for women artists across various artistic styles, but it was never unified aesthetically. For her Surrealist and abstract orientation, she found more kindred spirits in Nihon Avant-Garde Artists Club, whose principal members included male vanguard luminaries of the period—artists Tarō Okamoto, Saburō Hasegawa, Nobuya Abe, and art critic Shūzō Takiguchi.⁹ On the contrary, Yayoi Kusama, who emerged as a media star in the mid-1950s with the critical support of Abe and Takiguchi, remained skeptical of any art organizations and remained independent.

Although Saori Akutagawa (1924–1966) is not well known today, she received frequent media attention during the mid-1950s. After the war, Akutagawa graduated from what is presently Tokyo National University of Arts and Music with a degree in vocal music. She turned to painting after marrying her classmate and later composer, Yasushi Akutagawa. Because of her husband's fame, she was at first referred to as Mrs. Akutagawa and as a “housewife painter.” One article explained that she became a painter because she feared her voice lessons at home would interfere with her husband's composing.¹⁰ However, her dynamic, semi-abstract dye paintings soon began to win her critical recognition, which may have encouraged her to make the larger works for which she became known.

Dyeing techniques allowed her to cover large areas with saturated colors. For example, Akutagawa's masterpiece, *Kojiki yori* (from the *Ancient Chronicle*) (1957; Pl. 5) is approximately 6 feet high and 44 feet wide. Like a traditional scroll painting, the narrative moves from right to left. The tale derives from the eighth-century *Kojiki*, the earliest known chronicle about the making of Japan by deities including the god Izanagi and



Fig. 1. Mitsuko Tabe, *Placard*, (1961), resin, collage on paper, 34" x 37". Artist's Collection. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

goddess Izanami. At the far right, a monstrous, lion-like figure representing Izanagi thrusts a sword toward the central figure with an octopus-like head and attenuated body. This figure perhaps stands for the couple's first son, who was born with a deformity. Izanagi appears to be full of anger about this misfortune, while a reclining figure, representing Izanami, seems more at ease, watching another figure eating grapes from a tree at far left. In her review of the *Zen'ei no Josei* exhibition, art historian Megumi Kitahara relates this painting to Japan's prosperity in the late 1950s after World War II and the Korean War.¹¹ Indeed, Akutagawa's interest in Japanese ancient myths during this period may have reflected the country's efforts to assert independence from the United States, which continued to dominate Japanese politics with its military presence on the archipelago. Like the Mexican muralists whom she admired, Akutagawa may have been interested in depicting concurrent social themes as monumental allegories,¹² themes she made all more interesting through her use of indigenous dyes.

As Akutagawa's dye painting even today seems innovative, the work met with some prejudice when first shown in the 1950s. As Kokatsu rightly points out, Akutagawa may have turned to oil painting in the 1960s partly because of a comment by the prominent art critic Yoshiaki Tōno, who had stated: “She rapidly painted with dye powder on a thin sheet of cloth, so I heard. Yet, I hope the time will come when her work is fixed in an unyielding resistance of oil painting.”¹³ Having absorbed Western art history, Tōno clearly considered dye painting as craft rather than fine art. In the meantime, Akutagawa's painting activities strained her marriage, and she divorced her husband and left her two daughters to come to the United States. When she exhibited her painting along with Yuki(ko)

Katsura and Yayoi Kusama in the “Japan-U.S. Women Artists Exhibition” held at the Riverside Museum in New York City in 1960, she used her maiden name, Saori Yamada. In 1961, she turned to oil painting under the guidance of Will Barnet at the Art Students League. Also that year she married the architect Yukio Madokoro, and again changed her name to her new husband’s. After returning to Japan in 1962, she pursued modernist style paintings. Regrettably, she died at age 42 due to complications from pregnancy.¹⁴

It is worth noting that as many as 20 artists included in the *Zen’ei no Josei* exhibition left Japan, either temporarily or permanently, to explore new artistic or career possibilities in the West.¹⁵ By the mid-1960s, many avant-garde artists were convinced that the Japanese art world was too conservative to appreciate their work. Even so, many of those who remained in Japan were able to succeed in the global arena because of the rapid internationalization after World War II. Japanese artists, including many women, took advantage of numerous opportunities offered them to exhibit their works outside Japan and in the West.

Several artist groups that formed in postwar Japan attracted attention for their experimental work. After Hideko Fukushima, a member of Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop), one of the earliest vanguard collectives, was quickly recognized by the leading critic Shūzō Takiguchi and invited to show her paintings in many of the domestic and international exhibitions he curated, many women became involved in these avant-garde groups. Perhaps the most active and long-lived artist collective based in the Kansai region around Osaka was Gutai (1954-1972), to which Atsuko Tanaka belonged.¹⁶ Compared to conventional art organizations with their hierarchical (and patriarchal) systems, these collectives were relatively democratic, allowing more involvement of female artists.

Shortly after the formation of Gutai, in 1957, nearly 20 artists formed the Kyūshū-ha (Kyūshū School) in Fukuoka in the southern island of Kyūshū. Mitsuko Tabe (b. 1933) was one of a few women artists involved in the group from its formation.¹⁷ Tabe remained a central figure in the Kyūshū-ha, serving as its accountant until the group dissolved in 1968. Basically a self-taught artist, Tabe’s early work showed few preconceptions about art. Thick textures and the use of asphalt were common features of Kyūshū-ha members’ work and became the group’s signature style. Her paintings such as *Gyozoku no Ikari* (Anger of Fishes, c. 1957), in which she used melted asphalt, oil paint, and cut bamboo rings, reflect Tabe’s concern about industrial pollution. It was this social consciousness that often distinguished her work from that of her peers. For example, three of the five *Placards* created in 1961 (Fig. 1) feature a collage representation of the African continent made from magazine cutouts and kiss-shaped stamps. The cutouts contain photo reproductions of African American jazz musicians and American popular culture, loosely referring to the civil rights movement in the United States and the newly won independences of African nations. Because Tabe thought the usual placards used in political demonstrations were too old fashioned to be effective, she sought to convey the visual

messages culled from the current news and popular culture. The resin used to attach the cutouts appears as diluted paint, leaving long streaks and drips. Along with ominous strands of reddish hemp palm fiber pasted to two of the *Placards*, resin drips imply blood shed in acquiring freedom. Not surprisingly, the types of subject matter and materials expanded along with the presence of women in this and other collectives.

Tabé’s social consciousness developed through her various experiences as a woman in a male-centered society. While she was pregnant with her first son, she conceived and realized a mixed-media installation entitled *Jinkō Taiban* (Artificial Placenta) (1961; Pl. 6). Exhibited with *Placards* at the Kyūshū-ha’s 1961 group exhibition at Ginza Gallery in Tokyo, *Jinkō Taiban* consists of the hip portions of three mannequins propped upside down on pedestals in front of a wall, with the torso portions of two child mannequins hung horizontally on the upper right side of the same wall. Each hip section has an opening in the center with a radio vacuum tube inserted into a “uterus.” Cotton and cloth surrounded the tube, with ping-pong balls outlining the open area. Although the original work is no longer extant, Tabé recreated it in 2004 for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Kumamoto, and this new version (without the child mannequins) was shown at the *Zen’ei no Josei* exhibition. The strong impact made by these recreated objects at the recent exhibition caused many reviewers to recognize Tabé’s early feminist awareness. In 1961 Tabé claimed that the artificial placenta would free women from the burden of childbearing in the near future. Moreover, the artificial materials used in the sculpture seem to satirize the fact that women are often considered childbearing machines. This work stands out in postwar Japanese art as an early personal and political commentary on the accepted norms of gender.

Unlike other postwar avant-garde collectives, Kyūshū-ha seems to have treated its male and female members as equals. While the comment of Tabé and another female Kyūshū-ha artist that males in the group did not see them as women may seem liberating,¹⁸ it may actually suggest a situation in which the women needed to behave like men in order to be accepted. Considering Kyūshū-ha merely as the starting point in her career, Tabé went on to organize the annual Kyūshū Women Artists Exhibition from 1974 to 1984 and dedicated herself to increasing the visibility of women artists in her region. Throughout the 1980s, she headed The Earth Art Post Office, where she promoted a postal exchange of art worldwide. At age 55, she declared of herself “retired from housewife-hood” and concentrated on painting and collage. She has held a solo exhibition in New York and Washington D.C. every year since 1994, and is still working to expand her exhibition opportunities outside Japan.¹⁹

Sayako Kishimoto (1939–88) was often the only female in the extremely short-lived Neo Dadaism Organizers (later Neo Dada), based in Tokyo. She appears in the group photograph used in the invitation to Neo Dada’s second exhibition in 1960.²⁰ Named after American Neo-Dada as represented by Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, Japanese Neo Dada sought to purge conventionalism from art by introducing destructive

actions and ephemeral junk art. The group lasted only six months but attracted media attention with shocking performances, such as Masunobu Yoshimura wrapping his naked body with Neo Dada exhibition announcements and walking down the streets of the Ginza, and Ushio Shinohara's boxing painting demonstrations. Kishimoto's presence in the group allowed for experimentation with the female form as well, and she was unwittingly turned into the group's mascot girl or a target of male aggression.

In the most notorious event, a swimsuit-clad Kishimoto was bandaged and hung from a tree while her male peers lit fireworks beneath her and threw dirt mixed with the spent ashes at her.²¹ Held on a beach in Kamakura, this was done as part of the group's advertising event for TBS television. Art historian Mayumi Kagawa has noted that Kishimoto's position in the group was tenuous, and in this instance she was relegated from the subject of action to the object of male sadism. While male members saw her as an extraordinary woman who expressed herself through bold actions, they never considered her their equal, and took advantage of her to attract media attention.²² Not surprisingly, none of Kishimoto's work from the Neo Dada period remains, and no one on record recalls what it was like.

After the dissolution of Neo Dada, Kishimoto remained within a circle of the former members and their associates, often exhibiting with them until the late 1960s. For a 1966 solo exhibition, she created *Gravestone of Narcissus*, a gallery-filling, mixed-media installation that used an abundance of plaster, which was very expensive compared to the found objects her male colleagues used.²³ The installation included walls painted in yellow with plaster female nudes, a plaster male figure seated on a box, a gigantic plaster skull, and a plywood gravestone painted yellow and white with a silhouette of a baby falling into a grave.²⁴ This morbid subject shows Kishimoto's determination to live as an artist who denies the feminine, motherly impulses within her. Recollecting her youth in the late 1970s, Kishimoto stated, "I believed that ART could not serve its original role and function as the releasing machine to uplift the mind of the viewer unless I completely broke with my narcissism as a woman and human being. Those works were the very result of my desperate act of self-annihilation at age twenty six."²⁵ Neo Dada's male-centered logic as well as the chauvinist attitude prevalent in Japanese society at large did not allow Kishimoto to accept her feminine side and negotiate it with her career. She was made to behave as a man in order to become a professional artist. Kishimoto's self-destructive acts continued in 1967, as demonstrated by her action painting performance during the opening reception of her solo exhibition in Nagoya, her hometown. In the presence of many friends and former Neo Dada colleagues, Kishimoto sprayed white house paint over the works to destroy them, then covered herself with paint and cut her hair.

In the early 1970s, Kishimoto adapted a Pop art style, often juxtaposing Japanese traditional motifs such as cherry blossoms and Mt. Fuji with images from contemporary popular culture. In one recently discovered painting,²⁶ she depicts two male figures who appear to be Japanese heroes of the past and



Fig. 2. Miyori Hayashi, (Box) Title unknown (1964), paint on wood, variable sizes, from 6" x 6" x 6" to 14" x 14" x 14".

White Noise Miyori Hayashi Museum. Photo: Norihiro Ueno.

present (early 1970s; Pl. 7). The phrase in the lower left, "Oppekepenope," suggests that the left-hand figure may be Otojirō Kawakami, a performance artist who popularized his Oppekepe song satirizing the gap between the poor and rich after the Meiji revolution. (He toured Europe and the United States with his troupe in the early-20th century.) The figure on the right is Yukio Mishima, a right-wing novelist who committed a shocking hara-kiri suicide in 1970 to protest the Japanese government. Yellow lettering appearing near Kawakami says, "I don't care, I am going to sleep," a phrase indicating a resigned attitude, and a speech balloon for Mishima reads, "I am very disappointed!!" and "Shit," three phrases that were popularized by a contemporary manga by Fujio Akatsuka.²⁷ Between the two men is an enigmatic phrase in red: "Spitting out blood in tears," suggesting that both heroes are sadly giving up on Japan. At the bottom, in front of Mt. Fuji, a cheetah has a seal (or sea lion) in its mouth, while the Japanese Diet is depicted in the upper right. Collaged at the far right is a photograph of Yoko Ono and John Lennon from their 1969 *Bed In*. The amalgam of seemingly unrelated figures may point loosely to the rapidly changing relationship between Japan and the United States (or the West in general) since the 1850s, as indicated by a large bow made from the two countries' flags and the symbolic union of East and West in the Ono-Lennon marriage. Cynicism resonates more strongly than celebration, however, as the tied flags also refer to the renewal of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty against which many young students had demonstrated (unsuccessfully). While further research is necessary to contextualize this painting within Kishimoto's

existing oeuvre, it attests to a breadth of styles that she explored during her short career. The last phase of her life, before her death in 1988 from breast cancer, was devoted to various political activities, including protesting the construction of the Nagoya City Art Museum, which was being built specifically to house paintings by an older impressionist painter from Nagoya rather than works by contemporary artists.

Avant-garde artist collectives became points of departure for many Japanese women artists in the late 1950s and early 1960s, despite some traumatic experiences, such as those Kishimoto suffered. Other women belonged to more loosely formed artists associations, if for no other reason than to gain exhibition opportunities. Miyori Hayashi (1933-2000), based in the Bizen city of Okayama prefecture, began her career in 1958 exhibiting with two of these organizations, the Salon de Moi and the Okayama Seinen Bijutsuka Shūdan (Okayama Young Artists Group). Both lacked any credo and allowed individuals to pursue their own directions. Like Tabe, Hayashi was self-taught, having taken up painting after quitting her English literature major. Because she lacked connections to the art community, belonging to these associations gave her access to some of the limited number of venues in Okayama. Her work attracted notice at the third exhibition of the Okayama Seinen Bijutsuka Shūdan at Shinjuku Gallery in Tokyo in May 1964, gaining her access to the Tokyo art world; three months later, she held her first solo exhibition at Surugadai Gallery in Tokyo.

The exhibition, entitled "Box," comprised black and white wooden cubical boxes of varying sizes, some nested in larger ones and displayed on the floor, others hung on walls at different heights (1964; Fig. 2). While most were painted either all black or white, some had both colors—one on the interior and the opposite on the exterior. Hayashi's interest in boxes may have started in 1963: at the second Okayama Seinen Bijutsuka Shūdan exhibition that year, she dressed in a black top and pants and lay horizontally inside a raised rectangular glass case with a sign reading: "Look at this person!!" According to the text contained in a 1964 collage, Hayashi saw in a box "another universe" with "completeness and stability" and considered her concept of a box a "reverse of the Pythagorean theorem."²⁸ The box may have symbolized to Hayashi an opening to a new dimension. Many contained a bull's eye target, suggesting expanses of unknown spaces beyond what the eye can see. That December, Hayashi furthered the idea of this installation at her "Box-Maker" exhibition at Naiqua Gallery in Tokyo. Here the ordinary became extraordinary by attaching many black-painted cardboard boxes to the walls and ceiling in an irregular order.

Around the summer of 1964, Hayashi met Yoko Ono, who was temporarily staying in Japan between 1962 and 1964. Intrigued by Ono's instruction pieces, which ask the viewer to enact them, Hayashi attended most of her events held that summer at various venues, including the rooftop of her apartment. Hayashi treasured the invitations or instruction cards from these events as well as Ono's self-published first edition of *Grapefruit* (1964). She even kept a piece of the dress Ono cut during her second performance of *Cut Piece* at the

Sōgetsu Art Center. Hayashi also knew Mieko Shiomi (also from Okayama), one of the Fluxus artists who had gone to New York, and Hayashi participated with her in "Flux Week," a series of events at Crystal Gallery in Tokyo during September of 1965.²⁹ The Fluxus influence, through Ono and Shiomi, can be observed in two of Hayashi's 1971 works, *Event We're going into...*, where she used a crane to raise and then drop a used car, and *Green Revolution*, consisting of a series of mailed instructions and the spraying of seeds onto a large area in Okayama city from an airplane.³⁰ Soon after and through the 1970s, Hayashi shifted to administering the Okayama branch of the Artist Union, and from 1987 to 1997 she organized the annual "Bizen Art Event," attracting international musicians and artists. As a devoted organizer, Hayashi may be compared to Charlotte Moorman, who organized the annual New York Avant-Garde Festival (1963 to 1980); Hayashi's many contributions to promoting and enriching Japanese art deserve reconsideration.

Although the four artists discussed here—Akutagawa, Tabe, Kishimoto, and Hayashi—represent only a small fraction of the artists in *Zen'ei no Josei*, they amply demonstrate the multiplicity of subjects and styles that reverberated throughout this exhibition. Critics and viewers may attempt to discover certain threads within this complex web of diverse artists and their expressions, but perhaps in vain. Most of these women artists were unafraid of being unique. They were eager to experiment with new media and styles, and their works display neither prominent iconographic or stylistic affinities to one another nor clearly identifiable characteristics of particular movements. For these unique works to be properly evaluated, we need to view them with fresh eyes, to go beyond the existing artistic categories set forth by male-dominated avant-garde movements. As suggested by curator Mitsuda Yuri, we need to free these women artists from the avant-garde groups and movements to which they belonged and reevaluate them in their own contexts.³¹ The fact that 19 of the 46 artists included in *Zen'ei no Josei, 1950-1975* are already deceased raises a sense of urgency in studying and documenting the achievements of these underrepresented women artists. We must keep moving forward. ●

Midori Yoshimoto is an Assistant Professor of Art History and gallery director at New Jersey City University. She is the author of *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (2005).

NOTES

This essay is written in memory of all those women artists in the exhibition *Zen'ei no Josei, 1950-1975/Japanese Women Artists in Avant-garde Movements, 1950-1975* who are no longer with us.

1. Atsuko Tanaka, "Search for an Unknown Aesthetic" (1960), translated and reprinted in Mizuho Katō and Ming Tiampo, *Electrifying Art: Atsuko Tanaka 1954-1968* (New York: Grey Art Gallery, 2004), 102.
2. Atsuko Tanaka, "Butaifuku" (Stage Costume), *Gutai 7* (1956); reprinted in *Gutai Shiryōshū/Document Gutai 1954-1972* (Ashiya: Ashiya City Museum of Art and History, 1993), 299. Atsuko Tanaka passed away in December 2005. I vividly remember her recent visit to New York and my visit to her studio the previous summer.

3. I had the honor of participating in the research and preparation for this historic exhibition, including curating a section on four women artists who were involved in Fluxus and contributing an essay on this topic to the exhibition catalog. Reiko Kokatsu and Midori Yoshimoto, eds. *Zen'ei no Josei, 1950-1975/Japanese Women Artists in Avant-garde Movements, 1950-1975* (Utsunomiya: Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Art, 2005) (hereafter *Zen'ei no Josei*). A short description of the exhibition, list of artists, and selected images of the works can be found at <http://www.art.pref.tochigi.jp/en/exhibition/t050724/index.html>
4. Five of the artists shown in the exhibition—Yayoi Kusama, Yoko Ono, Takako Saito, Mieko Shiomi, and Shigeko Kubota—are discussed extensively in my essay in *Zen'ei no Josei*, and in my *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2005) (see page 45 in this issue for a review).
5. *Hashiru Onnatachi* highlighted 48 Japanese women artists in the early-20th century, featuring as many as 137 works in various media, including *Nihonga* or Japanese-style painting and photography. Six women artists who were active in the 1950s appeared in both exhibits. These are Keiko Akana, Saori Akutagawa, Kinuko Emi, Yuki(ko) Katsura, Tazuko Tanaka, and Hideko Fukushima.
6. This information was gathered from short biographies included in the *Zen'ei no Josei* catalogue, 140-165. According to this resource, others who received museum-scale retrospectives include Yuki(ko) Katsura (1913-1991), Takako Araki (1921-2004), Kinuko Emi (b. 1923), Miwa Tada (b.1924), Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929), Aiko Miyawaki (b. 1929), Tsuruko Yamasaki (b. 1925), Atsuko Tanaka, Seiko Kanno (1933-1988), Yoko Ono (b. 1933), Shigeko Kubota (b. 1937), Yuri Nonaka (b. 1938), and Sawako Goda (b. 1940).
7. Reviews included (here I only list my translation of Japanese titles): Sanzō Tanaka, "Zen'ei no Josei exhibition: The Postwar Art History Seen from a Different Perspective," *Asahi Shimbun* (August 4, 2005); Kyōji Maeda, "Zen'ei no Josei exhibition: Depth Not Limited to Ono and Kusama," *Yomiuri Shimbun* (August 11, 2005); Haruo Sanda, "Zen'ei no Josei exhibition: Clear Assertion and Rich Content," *Mainichi Shimbun* (August 15, 2005). Additional scholarly reviews included Megumi Kitahara, "Precedence in Feminist Expression and Reconsideration of the 'Avant-garde'"; Junko Fukazawa "Meeting the Mountain of Treasures"; Taiji Yamaguchi, "Considering the Avant-garde Quality of the Artists"; and Junko Kitamura, "Responsibility of 'Super-Girl'" all published in *Aida* no. 118 (October 2005).
8. For more background, see Reiko Kokatsu, "Avant-garde Movements after World War II and Japanese Women Artists, 1950-1960s" (English summary) in *Zen'ei no Josei*, 188-90, and Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 10-16.
9. See Kokatsu, "Avant-garde Movements," 10.
10. *Ibid.*, 190-91.
11. Kitahara, "Precedence in Feminist Expression," 3-4.
12. A Mexican art exhibition was held at the Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art in 1955.
13. Kokatsu, "Avant-garde Movements," 191.
14. Biographical information for Akutagawa is from Kokatsu, "Artist's Biographies" in *Zen'ei no Josei*, 141.
15. Hideko Urushibara lived in London until age twelve, and Yoko Ono moved between Japan and the U.S. because of her father's business; however, many other Japanese women artists traveled to the West for artistic exposure during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Kinuko Emi held her solo exhibition in Paris and San Francisco in 1954. Yuki(ko) Katrura traveled to and exhibited in Europe, Africa, and the U.S. from 1956. Yayoi Kusama stayed in the United States from 1958 to 1972. Toshiko Uchima moved to New York City in 1960. Yasu Mori showed her woodcuts and held woodcut workshops throughout the U.S. between 1960 and 1962. Takako Araki studied sculpture in New York in 1961 and held a solo exhibition at Japan Society Gallery the following year. After her sojourn in Milan, Italy, from 1959 to 1961, Aiko Miyawaki stayed in New York from 1963 to 1966. In addition to traveling South America and Cuba from 1961 to 1962, Taeko Tomiyama traveled alone from Eastern Europe to India in 1967. Hiroko Hiraoka has lived in New York since 1962. Takako Idemitsu lived in Paris for ten years after 1963, exhibiting there and in Milan. Mako Idemitsu lived in San Francisco from 1965 to 1973, following two years in New York. For more, see Kokatsu, "Artists' Biographies" (in Japanese), 140-65. For more on the history of Japanese artists leaving for the West, see my *Into Performance*, 33-37.
16. Atsuko Tanaka, Tsuruko Yamasaki, and Fujiko Shiraga were early members of Gutai. The third generation of Gutai artists included four women artists: Kumiko Imanaka, Seiko Kanno, Akiko Horio, and Keiko Moriuchi.
17. There were three other female members: Aiko Ooguro, Kazuko Nakanishi, and another artist who later "excommunicated" herself from the group. Since only a few of their works have been located, further research is needed. For more on Kyūshū-ha, see Raiji Kuroda, et al., *Kyūshū-ha*, exhibition catalogue (Fukuoka: Fukuoka City Art Museum, 1988).
18. Shun'ichiro Tashiro, *Kakenuketa zen'ei—Kyūshūha to sono jidai* (The Avant-Garde That Run Through: Kyushu-ha and Its Era) (Fukuoka: Kashoin, 1996), 95.
19. For a chronology and other works, see Mitsuko Tabe, *Mitsuko Tabe, Recent Works* (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Cultural Foundation and Gallery Toile, 2002). Also a writer, two of Tabe's recent publications are *Jyutai Geijutsu/Conception Art* (Fukuoka: Kashoin, 1997), which includes her opinions on Yayoi Kusama, Frida Kahlo, Tamara de Lempicka, and other women artists; and *Nisennen no Ringo: Watashi no Datsu-geijutsu-ron* (Apple of Two Millennia: My Theory of Deconstructing Art) (Fukuoka: Nishinihon Shimbun-sha, 2001).
20. For this photograph and more about Neo Dada, see my *Into Performance*, 26-29. The Japanese Neo Dada is written without a hyphen to differentiate it from its American counterpart, Neo-Dada. I thank Dr. Reiko Tomii for pointing this out and providing comments on my draft of this essay.
21. Ushio Shinohara, "S-ko to Neo Dada" [The girl S and Neo Dada] in Sayako Kishimoto Retrospective Exhibition Preparation Committee, *Sayako Kishimoto, 1939-1988* (Kanazawa: Wakakusa Shobō, 1990), 6.
22. Mayumi Kagawa, "Neo dada, aruiwa houkai no tameno projekuto" (Neo Dada, or A Project for Destruction), in Josei to Āto projekuto (Women and Art Project), ed., *Neodada kara 21seikigata majo e—Kishimoto Sayoko no hito to sakuin* (The Life and Art of Kishimoto Sayoko) (Yokohama: Josei to Āto projekuto, 1997), 49-50. I would like to acknowledge Mayumi Kagawa, Junko Fukazawa, and Chieko Nishiyama of Josei to Āto projekuto for their devoted research on Japanese women artists. Without their cooperation, I could not have written in depth on Kishimoto in my *Into Performance*.
23. Reiko Kokatsu, "Bijutsu no Konseki?—Josei no Kōi/ Sakuin no juyō megutte" [*Traces of Art? – On Receptions of Actions and Works by Women*], the series 'Āto to jenda o meguru oufuku shokan' [Correspondences on Art and Gender] #7, *diatxt* no. 15 (June 2005): 132.
24. For a photograph, see my *Into Performance*, 28. For additional documentary photographs of Kishimoto's works and performances, see *Zen'ei no Josei*, 79-83.
25. Sayako Kishimoto, "Jitsuwabab Seishun Zankoku Monogatari" (A True Cruel Story of Youth), in *Sayako Kishimoto, 1939-1988*, 52.
26. This painting was found during my research visit with Ms. Kokatsu to the family house of Sayako Kishimoto in Nagoya in the summer of

2004. It had a large round cut in the middle and was rolled up, but the Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Art repaired it for the exhibition. I thank Mrs. Yoshiko Iida and her daughter for opening their home to us and assisting our research. Ms. Kokatsu and I agreed upon the approximate date of the early 1970s, judging from the inclusion of Mishima and stylistic affinities with other paintings of Kishimoto during the same period. The painting is now in the collection of the Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Art.

27. This connection was suggested by Reiko Kokatsu in her email to the author on January 31, 2006.

28. For the photograph of this performance and collage, see *Zen'ei no Josei*, 84, fig. M.15, and 85, cat. 113.

29. For the photograph of Hayashi's performance at Gallery Crystal, see *Zen'ei no Josei*, 136.

30. Both events are described in *Sengo Okayama no Bijutsu –Zen'ei tachi no Sugata* (Art in Postwar Okayama—Portraits of the Avant-garde), exhibition catalogue (Okayama: Okayama Prefectural Museum of Art, 2002), 114-15. Hayashi's works and documents may be viewed at the White Noise/Miyori Hayashi Museum in Bizen, Okayama.

31. Yuri Mitsuda, comment in her presentation on "The Reception of Women Artists in the 1950s" at the symposium held in conjunction with *Zen'ei no Josei* exhibition at the Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Art, on August 6, 2005. The author was among the invited speakers.

Elizabeth Murray

by Robert Storr

Museum of Modern Art, 2005

Reviewed by Corinne Robins

"Dreams are like paintings. They are completely unpredictable" (195), Elizabeth Murray told curator Robert Storr in the intense interview which rounds out her giant exhibition catalog for The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. The interview explains how her work evolved from rectangular to idiosyncratically shaped canvases to her current jigsaw puzzles. One can measure the reach of Murray's ambition when the artist notes that she needed to make paintings "that would blow up into space" (185). Which is exactly what happened last October, when *Dis Pair* (1989-90; Fig.1), two giant forms closing the gap between painting and sculpture, walked the walls of the sixth floor of MoMA. *Dis Pair*, two giant soles made of canvas and wood, painted in dark blues and green with orange laces, led the way into Murray's 40-year retrospective. The elegant and luxurious catalog—despite its excellent reproductions—can only suggest the force, vigor, and scale of the artist's wall-size works in the exhibition, which was on view from October 23, 2005, through January 9, 2006.

In the lead article of the January 2006 issue of *Art in America*, critic Stephen Westfall writes that the artist's MoMA retrospective "makes a strong case for Murray as one of the great painters of our time, an artist who is a synthesizer and innovator of the many forms of modernist painting."¹ Westfall compares Murray with Philip Guston and Frank Stella, and agrees with Storr's assertion in the catalog that "Murray has proven herself to be an undeterrable force in the rejuvenation of painting in New York in the last quarter of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first" (78).

Storr begins his essay, entitled "Elizabeth Murray: Shape Shifter," with a discussion of the emergence of women artists at mid-century, and briefly reviews the position of women artists in the permanent collection of MoMA through the 1960s, the decades before Murray

herself set out to walk in their shoes. Curator and artist both make the point that Murray's aesthetic influences were all male, and the idea of women artists as role models was unheard of when she was an art student. At the time, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the likes of Walt Disney, Claes Oldenburg, and the Abstract Expressionists loomed large in her thinking. That was before she joined the Women's Action Coalition. Subsequently, when Murray was invited to curate an exhibition drawn from MoMA's permanent collection in 1996, the artist told Storr, "the only idea I had was 'women's work at the Modern.' I was going to call it Mamas at MoMA."² She did, in fact, organize an exhibition made up of works by women artists who had exhibited there and then been largely forgotten. Elizabeth Murray's own MoMA retrospective was the first full-scale exhibition devoted to a female artist at the museum since 1989. "I see my own work as androgynous. Art is about the male and female components in all of us,"

Murray remarked in an earlier interview. "Art is sexy but it doesn't have sex."³

Born in Chicago in 1940, Murray grew up in Bloomington, Indiana, in the 1950s. As a child, she created her own comic books and at one point wrote a fan letter to Walt Disney offering to be his secretary and enclosing a sketchbook as proof of her ability. The Murrrays had no money for their daughter's college, and it was through the intervention of her high school teacher that Murray won a scholarship to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She enrolled in 1958, determined to become a commercial artist. The school was then an adjunct of the Art Institute, and walking through the museum galleries to get to class, she was daily confronted with the great modernists. She was struck particularly by the work of Paul Cézanne, and at age 20, through this French master's work, she made the decision to become a painter. Murray's other strong affinity was with Willem de Kooning, whose painting *Excavation* (1950) hung in the



Fig. 1. Elizabeth Murray, *Dis Pair* (1989-90), oil and synthetic polymer on canvas and wood, two panels 10'2" x 10' 9 1/4" x 13". Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Gift of Marcia Riklis, Arthur Fleischer, and Anna Marie and Robert F. Shapiro; Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Fund; and purchase.

permanent collection at the Art Institute. After receiving her BFA in 1962, she went on to Mills College in Oakland, California, and completed her MFA in 1964. One of her classmates at Mills was Jennifer Bartlett, and when Murray—married and with a son—later moved to New York City, the two painters renewed their friendship. On the West Coast Murray had encountered Pop Art in various exhibitions, and it was seeing works by Jasper Johns that inspired her to come East: “Johns packs emotional and intellectual excitement into a painting and then forces you to see the physicality of that work.”⁴

When Murray arrived in Manhattan in 1967, she began to connect with a small group of young artists in the city who were reacting to the prevailing currents of Minimalism. She made paintings with simple, repetitious lines. Storr conscientiously describes the art world Murray became a part of in these years, and how her work developed. Rejecting the “less is more” spirit that surrounded her, Murray began by making small-sized paintings of simple, repetitious, diagonal lines that evolved into the 1973 *Wave Painting*, which represented Murray commencing a dialogue with Frank Stella’s early Minimal work. By 1974, she began her transition to larger, shaped canvases on which she replaced the grid with a curved line. Storr outlines the roots of her 1980s shaped canvases in works of the late sixties and early seventies made by Stella and Charles Hinman. As Murray went on to bend, twist, and all but eliminate the conventional rectangular canvas, she discovered a new source of expressive possibility, and her paintings took on even more radical shapes.

Beginner (1976) represents Murray’s own beginning of the wall-size works, and marks her transition from the traditional rectangular canvas to overlapping structures of individual forms that would proliferate in the early eighties. Murray’s work from that decade, when she married for a second time, includes giant shoes, and broken cups.

Murray’s work stood out from many of her peers’ not only because her paintings had everyday-life subjects, but for their sense of humor. She took a movie

cartoon approach to her subject matter even as she offered a disconcerting mix of daily-ness, of life lived, which Oldenburg had introduced into the art world back in the fifties with Pop Art. But even as Murray took on the domestic as a subject for both personal feeling and humor, the objects she deconstructed were simultaneously skewed, and her rooms, cups, saucers, broken hearts became subversively feminist.

A dozen years ago, Elizabeth Murray explained her paintings in this way: “My paintings are often strange, and sometimes show me a side of myself—a violence and physicality that scares me. It’s not always pleasant or easy. I don’t always like it, and really when I do them it’s a journey.”⁵ Her ‘journey’ over the years offers insights sparked by a flux of comic nursery images emerging in dark, dreamlike forms, which have disturbed and reshaped our contemporary sensibilities.

The Dallas Museum of Art organized Murray’s first retrospective in 1987. The exhibition traveled to museums in Boston, Los Angeles, Des Moines, and Minneapolis before ending its tour in New York City the following year at the Whitney Museum of American Art. After this nationwide exposure, MoMA included Murray’s giant 1988 shoe painting, *Tomorrow*, in its 1990 “High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture” exhibition, gaining greater recognition for the artist. The art world had become accustomed to Murray’s twirling of forms in space, and her deconstruction of objects which reverberate with illusionary shapes. Real objects transformed, reshaped, and spread out in a series of fragments across a wall and painted in combinations of bleak, unexpected colors became the artist’s trademark. Meanwhile, the paintings themselves continued to evolve.

Although Murray established a print studio at Bard College in 1974, she avoided printmaking at first for her own work, feeling the intricacy of the technical process might get in the way of her creativity. At the request of her various dealers, in the early eighties she started making prints, bringing new energy and even a new dimension to her graphic work. In her various paintings of cups, she had used multiple shaped

canvases. To achieve a similar effect for the shape of a cup in her prints, she gave the work added dimension by including cut and raised paper elements. For *Body and Soul* (2002) she made a lithograph and screen print on cut and raised paper. And in her Metropolitan Series (2004), Murray created each composition individually by pasting on elements and adding hand coloring. The artist has always insisted on the individuality of her works, and in her prints as well as her paintings has superseded the conventional rectangle, requiring that each print have dimension and an individual shape.

The museum catalog includes a 34-page interview with Murray centering around the painting *Do the Dance* (Pl. 8), created in 2005 and the most recent work in the exhibition. In the bright, jazzy series of cutout figures in *Do the Dance*, her painting seems to have come full circle; its figurative imagery harks back to Murray’s early interest in cartoons and comic books.

As does the catalog, the exhibition traced the artist’s development through a succession of art movements from Cézanne through Minimalism, Cubism, Pop, to her emerging new quasi-cartoon imagery. In the opening rooms of the exhibition could be found the paintings of the early 1970s, when her imagery was stripped down to grids and loops. The show began with the artist’s *Night Empire* (1967-68), which seems to hearken back to the urban paintings of Joseph Stella in the 1930s, although her Empire State Building’s urban imagery is, in turn, undercut by a sky full of synthetic stars resting on a pink patterned bedspread. Murray limits herself to simple bars, square studs, and open curves. *Pink Spiral Leap* (1975) and *Beginner* (1976) mark the transition at the end of her brief Minimal period. She continues using the rectangular canvas, but in these works moves from color and abstract shapes to organic shapes that can be read in different ways. Dark blues, greens, and browns characterized her expressionist palette, which kept pace with the neo-expressionist mood of young male artists such as Julian Schnabel and Jean-Michel Basquiat. After the feminist decade of the 1970s, women artists were sidelined in

the 1980s. Meanwhile, the narrative and symbolic import of Murray's shapes became more difficult to decipher. In the catalog to her 1987 retrospective, she explains, "the 'Tweety Bird' shape in *Beginner*, evolved from combining two commas but soon they twisted out to that little pointy place, which is like a parenthesis."⁶ Four years after *Beginner*, she created the two-panel, brilliantly colored painting (purple, red, pink, green and blue) *Join* (1980; Pl. 9), which the artist says is about polar opposites. In *Join*, two profiles are touching, and a green form is growing into an orange heart shape that corresponds to an opposing orange profile fronting a green heart. The two profiles become four moving forms, with two black and white lines as centering space markers intersecting the large profile shapes. The elements suggest that in Murray's world, two, philosophically at least, are always better than one. Images of hearts, of children's heads, of mundane biography, of the reduction of formalist art to the personal, pervade Murray's paintings, to the chagrin of critics. In the painting *Deeper than D* (1983; Pl. 10), Murray explains she was dealing with the death of her mother "whose name was Dorothy," and who "really was much deeper than I could comprehend."⁷ Her paintings of the 1980s were part of an era of inward searching, an intertwining of the formal and the personal. The twin, brightly colored, crossed palette shapes of *Deeper than D* testify to the artist's ambition, even as its window and beam of light add a mystical quality. Murray matches the sense of her mother's commitment to life as she was in the process of losing it.

In the modernist canon, Cézanne's still-life paintings are considered masterpieces because they are more than apples and vases. According to Meyer Schapiro, they are surrogates for primordial drives. The use of outward objects, investigations of a skirt or a table as shapes to turn into something else, characterize Murray's paintings of the eighties and nineties. *Deeper than D* follows two years after *Painter's Progress* (1981; front cover), the artist's commentary on the tools of her trade, reduced to fragments and forming a

puzzle that becomes a palette/vase/head and brush holder. The physical overlapping of parts becomes Murray's introductory theme, part of her thought process that starts physically but ends intellectually. In the eighties, for example, the work started with images of a skirt or a table, which, in turn, became the subject of the artist's skewed humor. To delve into a shape for Murray means to enter in, turn it around, perhaps see it from the inside. What is behind these wall pieces—the bulbous, bouncing cartoon shapes and titles—sums up her approach to life.

Murray's paintings begin as drawings and sketches. Then, with the help of assistants, her drawings of shapes are built out of wood and sanded and glued, and the canvas is stretched over the wood. Murray needs to push as far as possible, which means also pushing inward, turning around her own life experiences.

As Storr notes in the catalog, *Can You Hear Me* (1984), *Euclid* (1989), and other paintings of the 1980s are expressionistic. The eighties registered a new worldwide interest in expressionist painting, and Elizabeth Murray in her own personal manner reflected the prevailing influence under the label of Neo-expressionism, which dominated American and European art.

Over the years, the domestic has been a subject for humor. Moreover, Murray has asserted that these objects she deconstructs—the rooms, cups, saucers, and broken hearts—are the stuff of her own life. Her subject matter, thus, is subversively female—and, at times, unashamedly full of personal and art historical references.

In fact, Elizabeth Murray's paintings from the 1980s have received considerable critical attention. However, Storr's catalog essay is doubly valuable in that it takes on the challenge of the artist's development and changes in the nineties. *Euclid* (1989), a work that displays the feet of the table and *trompe l'oeil* openings suggestive of brass pipes, was completed the same year as *Dis Pair*, and signals a new beginning. By 1993, in *Bounding Dog*, Murray revives her old love of cartoon shapes briefly on a conventional rectangular canvas. Then for the rest of the decade she continues making multi-

part, shaped paintings that repeat and in subtle ways continue the green, yellow, and gray expressionist narratives of *Euclid* and *Kitchen Painting* (1983).

The final rooms, and the last pages of the catalog, reveal a dramatic reversal. Suddenly, Murray radically alters her shapes, colors, and rhythms. In more recent works like *Bare* (1999), *Bowtie* (2000) and *Do the Dance* we are confronted with candy-colored, kindergarten cartoon shapes in bright primary colors. Storr believes that Murray has moved from picture making to making pictographs whose shapes seem to swell out against the white wall. With puzzle pieces that lean against each other, she has turned a new corner, leaving us breathless to catch up. Storr congratulates the artist on "breaking the decorum of mainstream modernism with her own distinctive brand of grab-you-by-the-collar urgency and improvisatory, implicitly anarchistic joie de vivre."⁸

Stephen Westfall ends his 2006 review of the MoMA show by eloquently comparing Murray to Philip Guston. "Murray is more formally driven, but both artists," he writes, "demonstrate the continuing possibility that a painter in the studio will concoct something that will shock, amuse and seduce us through an uncomfortable beauty into desiring to speak their material language—to pick up a brush."⁹ For my part, I find very little resemblance—apart from similarities of subject matter—between these two. Late rose-colored Guston paintings explore the tragedy of alcoholism, and the power of night and his surroundings on the artist. The sense of the tragic in early Guston paintings reappears, certainly deepened at the end of his life by illness. Murray in her current work has greeted a new century with rejoicing, has discovered in herself a new energy, a rebirth of youth which is a quality harking back to an earlier time. Her paintings share an élan vital with younger artists such as Keith Haring and Carroll Dunham, and with the triumphant youthful sparkle of modern master Joan Miró. After 40 years, Murray remains an artist both difficult and exciting to encounter. Differing voices remain about her artistic achievement, but following this, her

second major retrospective, the stature of Elizabeth Murray in the art world today seems beyond question. ●

Corinne Robins, a poet and art critic, teaches art criticism at Pratt Institute in New York. She is the author of *The Pluralist Era: American Art 1968-81* (1984), and four books of poetry.

NOTES

1. Stephen Westfall, "Elizabeth Murray: Scary Funny," *Art in America* (January 2006): 76.
2. Elizabeth Murray, quoted in Joan Simon, "An Interview with Elizabeth Murray," in *Elizabeth Murray: Recent Paintings*, exh. cat. (New York: Pace Wildenstein, 1997), 19.
3. Elizabeth Murray, quoted in Paul Gardner, "Elizabeth Murray Shapes Up," *Artnews*, 83 (September 1984): 55.
4. Claude Marks, ed., "World Artists 1980-1990," in *Biographical Dictionary* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1991), 275.
5. Elizabeth Murray, from an interview with Corinne Robins in the artist's studio, September 17, 1990.
6. Edith M. Pavese, *Elizabeth Murray: Paintings and Drawings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams 1987). 40.
7. Pavese, *Murray*, 76.
8. Robert Storr, Elizabeth Murray exhibition brochure at the The Museum of Modern Art, 2005, n.p.
9. Westfall, "Elizabeth Murray: Scary Funny," 84.

Joan Snyder

by Hayden Herrera, with Jenni Sorkin and Norman L. Kleeblatt
Abrams, 2005

Reviewed by **Cassandra Langer**

"Joan Snyder: A Painting Survey, 1969-2005," the exhibition presented in the fall of 2005 at the Jewish Museum in New York City, gave fresh insights into the world of this artist at mid-career. This summing-up included more than 30 of Snyder's major works, the most comprehensive showing of her paintings to date. Concurrent with the show was the publication of *Joan Snyder*, a lavishly illustrated book by the art historian Hayden Herrera, with an essay by Jenni Sorkin and an introduction by Norman L. Kleeblatt. Herrera's lengthy essay, titled "Joan Snyder: Speaking with Paint," provides a comprehensive view of the artist's life and career.

Joan Snyder (b. 1940) defines art through a woman's experience as dictated by her inner necessity. For her, the contemplation of art and the body through their formal relationships to gender reveals the hidden psychic structures that dominate life and art. Her artistic lineage is easy to situate in the history of American art of the past four decades. Although not strictly a pioneer in any of the forms she began to synthesize during the late 1960s, Snyder was able to reinvent herself as a feminist artist in the politically charged 1970s when the emerging

feminist movement in art reshaped the face of art making in America. Snyder, along with other feminist artists including Judy Chicago, Harmony Hammond, Joyce Kozloff, Ana Mendieta, Adrian Piper, Faith Ringgold, Betye Saar, Miriam Schapiro, Nancy Spero, and Hannah Wilke helped spread the ideas of American feminism. These women felt disrespected by the patriarchal art establishment. They revolted against the prevailing masculinist value judgments of the contemporary art scene. Snyder's pioneering work reflected many of the concerns of the early feminist art movement. Her development as an artist is the focus of this long overdue retrospective.

Snyder's work resists easy categorization. Since the 1960s, however, her art is distinguished by her dedication to carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body while creating her own distinctive style. As a graduate student at Rutgers in the 1960s, Snyder was exposed to works by such artists as Vlaminck, Jawlensky, Nolde, Kandinsky, and Klee. Later she admired the works of Hans Hofmann and Modigliani, whose styles she emulated. But no woman of the period could fail to notice the absence of female art teachers or of female artists in art history texts and in museum exhibitions. As a consequence of these observations, Snyder became an early, active feminist.

Her large-format paintings of the late 1960s and early 1970s seen in the exhibition display expressive qualities

reminiscent of Abstract Expressionism, both gestural and lyric. *Lines and Strokes* (1969; Pl. 11), "her first good painting" (28), is distinguished by its high key colors and use of brush, knife, and fingers; *Little Yellow* (1971) has heavily impastoed surfaces of violets, greens, and textured buttery horizontal bars; and in *Hard Sweetness* (1971) lyric raspberry, lush pinks, and sunny cantaloupes float amid washes of blue and green. The paint application in these works ranges from ponderously thick to excruciatingly thin; the grid "became an essential framework for spontaneous gesture" (28). The jewel-like *Squares* (1972), with its focus on the immediacy of the experience of colors and forms, reminds me a little of the Zen Buddhist-influenced paintings of Bradley Walker Tomlin. Here the artist forges beauty out of conflict by not denying conflict.¹ In *Flesh Art* (1973) she cuts into the canvas and creates soft pockets with colored edges that seem to bleed.

For Snyder painting is "like speaking for the first time" (18). In fact, the expressive qualities in her work—grids, ribbon-like patterns, lushly mixed colors, and a repository of rounded, sagging, flaccid, and creased forms—are strongly influenced by Carl Gustav Jung's notion of the "collective unconscious" and the "universality of archetypes."² Her new imagery was partially aimed at making these visible in her own terms. In this aspect her work follows in the footsteps of such predecessors as Grace Hartigan,

Lee Krasner, and Joan Mitchell. *Love Your Bones* (1971-72) exemplifies Snyder's all-over painting, with a composition that displays great spatial sensitivity coupled with the forceful brushwork that characterized her canvases during this period. *Love Your Bones* is a synthesis of these tendencies in Abstract Expressionism. Simultaneously, it evokes the image of a Japanese screen, with long stretches of emptiness folding in and out upon itself while a penciled grid shows the hand of the artist everywhere.

Many of Snyder's canvases have a musical quality reflective of her lifelong love of music (75). When she moved to Eastport, Long Island, in 1984, the landscape enchanted and inspired her, and in *Beanfield with Music* (1984), she brings together these interests for the first time. With its soft and hard passages of the brush and high and low intensities of color, she brings forth a clarity of mind and spirit that expresses the inexpressible through strokes of green, gold, and raw earth tones. The painting, which signaled a turn to landscape that has continued, has a radiance and inner strength that reflects the pathos and sincerity of both great music and lyric expressionist painting.

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, Snyder continued refining her painting vocabulary, adding glitter, paper, seeds, flocking, and linen to her canvases as well as found objects, challenging the definitions of "high art" championed by Clement Greenberg with their flat surfaces and "less is more" philosophy. Snyder theorized that "Female sensibility is layers, words, membranes, cotton, cloth, rope, repetition of bodies, wet, opening, closing, repetition, lists, life stories..." (25). The artist's smashing of masculinities was based on her own idea of healing the world through female energies. These were disruptive acts that mirrored her own questioning of the two truths of patriarchal society: order, discipline, and family on the one hand, and freedom, cultivation of self, and the flowering of the individual on the other.³

In 1971 Snyder married the photographer Larry Fink, and in 1979 (following a miscarriage the preceding year), she gave birth to her daughter,



Fig. 1. Joan Snyder, *Oratorio* (1997), 72" x 114", oil, acrylic, plastic grapes, feathers, fabric, nails, herbs, mud, papier-mâché, graphite, paper on canvas. Private collection. Photo: Zindman/Fremont.

Molly. After her marriage collapsed, Snyder began to identify herself as a lesbian. Perhaps reflective of the artist's struggles in her personal life, *Sweet Cathy's Song (for Cathy Elzea)* (1978) proceeds from the formal treatment of images to an amalgam of experiences that represent a leap forward for her. Resembling Gottlieb's iconic style, this canvas incorporates children's drawings and symbolically evokes times and places both remote from the present yet paradoxically of it. In it, she seems to be fulfilling an ardent need to include female symbols in her work in order to collapse the artificial separation between the formal and the organic in painting. Wild unbalanced strokes of warm saffron cross and merge, simultaneously dissolving into diaphanous washes of honey and milk. At the top of the canvas, tree forms cramped in rectangular boxes create a Klee-like landscape filled with actual children's drawings of people, houses, flowers, and animals. Mixing forms, formats, genres, materials, and emotions in this way, Snyder gives deep personal meanings to her painterly narratives, integrating the lives of others with her own.

Painful imagery dominated her art for the next decade—a time of both trauma and great creativity. Her

paintings from this period range from the violent and brutal to the poetic and transcendent. She often turned to nature, especially to trees and landscape, to symbolize her feelings.

The New York venue included several of Snyder's meditations on Jewish themes such as the catastrophic horrors of the Holocaust. A growing impatience with the limited expression of traditional painting led Snyder to integrate photographs into the blackened, sooty surfaces of *Women in Camps* (1988), spattering them with silver ashes. Evocative phrases scratched into the fractured planes refer to "women with babies," "grandmas wearing babushkas... and yellow stars," and "men... still seeking final solutions." The fading images of women and children haunt these pictures like ghosts reminding the world of its bankruptcy in resolving this crisis of humanity.

Narrative works, such as *Journey of the Souls* (1993), deal with the AIDS epidemic, with its victims inhabiting the barren landscape of death. Their faces, carved into woodblocks and printed on silk and rice paper, are collaged onto the painting's surface. In the lower right a great velvety black hole gapes, surrounded by brittle twig-like strokes of pigment forming a barbed wire nest. In *Faces* (1993), also about AIDS, Snyder inscribes a

quote from Edna St. Vincent Millay's poem "Dirge without Music": "I am resigned to the shutting away of loving hearts in the hard ground." These paintings, so charged with emotion, are painful to look at despite their superb colors and luminosity.

Others like *Oratorio* (1997: Fig. 1) and *And Always Searching for Beauty* (2001; Pl. 12) seem to me to draw heavily upon her Jewish heritage, reminding the artist of feelings of grief stemming from the deaths of her maternal grandmother, to whom she felt very close, and her parents, whom she lost in the early 1990s. These are visual Kaddish prayers. The Kaddish is written in Aramaic and has not one reference to death; rather it is an affirmation of life. When reciting the Kaddish the mourner goes on a journey through loss to grief, acceptance, and a recommitment to living.

By 1989, Snyder and her partner Maggie Cammer were splitting their time between the city and Woodstock, New York, where Snyder kept a summer studio. Inspired by the bucolic splendor of the mountain landscape with its lush and variegated colors, her paintings displayed a new intimacy, sensuousness, and translucency. Like the smells Proust describes in *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Remembrance of Things Past), Snyder's delicately colored fragments seem to float through an organic stream of memories.⁴ The importance of remembering is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, and Snyder's awareness of the world and her idea of spiritual strength seems to be shaped by this age-old wisdom. Nowhere is this more clearly expressed than in her most recent paintings. *Perpetuo* (2004; Pl.13), for instance, incorporates buds and seeds into the paint itself. The canvas becomes a field of disembodied breasts—the truth of generations built on a foundation of living hope. It is a virtual synthesis of collective human memories.

The experience of moving through this show at the Jewish Museum, which was beautifully and intelligently installed, clarified to me that Snyder consciously chose to resist competing on male terms. The exhibition attested to Snyder's achievements as an artist. As Rabbi Nathan has observed "One who possesses both learning and character is

like an artist with all tools in hand."⁵ Joan Snyder is just such an artist.

Published concurrently with the exhibition is *Joan Snyder*, with a lead essay by Hayden Herrera that documents many of the 140 illustrations, most in full color, in this beautifully produced publication. The color plates are divided into three sections by subject: "Strokes," "Fields," and "Narrative." Norman Kleeblatt's introduction positions Snyder's art squarely in the implausible space of "Catholic transubstantiation and Jewish mysticism" (13). To this mix he adds the art of homosexual artists Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, pointing out the hidden codes and "cloistered meanings" (14) that link these artists across gender and time.

Herrera begins with the early years and continues throughout Snyder's turbulent life to the present. Her essay is one of the first systematic art historical overviews that highlights the artist's Jewish background and its impact on her artistic vision. Most of the 31 works exhibited in the show at the Jewish Museum are illustrated, and these are enlarged by Jenni Sorkin's essay, which includes sketches, drawings, and additional paintings.

Herrera's informative essay includes quotes as well as illustrations that help to support her insights into Snyder's art. Herrera had access to Snyder's personal notebooks and diaries and includes a spread of documentary photographs of Snyder in her studios and with her daughter. She relied heavily on interviews she has conducted with the artist over a number of years and on critical reviews of the work.

In her text she smartly combines biographical details dealing with Snyder's difficult childhood with insightful descriptions of the artist's working methods and artistic vision. Take for example, *The Cherry Tree* (1993) that "was inspired by a cherry-laden tree that she (Snyder) saw in a Brooklyn yard as she was driving to visit her dying father in a nursing home. There was fruit on the tree and fruit on the ground. To Snyder it was 'a metaphor of life and death'" (56). Over the years the cherry tree has come to be a major theme in Snyder's oeuvre.

Herrera's mixture of biographical

connections and psychological insights enlivens her systematic art historical analysis and makes readers acutely aware of Snyder's feminism and the high cost of speaking out against gender discrimination. Snyder has said, "Painting certainly keeps my life in equilibrium. I do it because it is one of the things that I do really well. I'm proud of myself when I'm doing it. When I'm painting I'm the healthiest person" (61). What we come away with is a sense of the power of Snyder's painting and how hard she has had to struggle to find her own voice.

In an attempt to balance Herrera's generally biographical essay, Jenni Sorkin, in "Joan Snyder: The geography of the surface," focuses on the more formal elements of Snyder's art; she links brush stroke, spatial continuity, texture, and gesture to the body and the sensory qualities of paint as a language of expression. Quoting from Snyder's diaries, she supports her arguments with penetrating analysis and astute insights into how Snyder's art moves seamlessly between feminist issues and sensations of color (69). Citing works like *Omphalos* (2002), Sorkin points out its process-oriented fluidity, citing "the continuous return across bodies of work" (74). Snyder's self-referential language reveals that the text serves as a bridge to the multiple meanings. The omphalos was a stone the ancient Greeks regarded as the center of the world, and in Snyder's work the center is a compass, the navel, the center of her belly, which functions as the gut—the heart of the city. Moreover, it is the core and the heart of her creative imagination.

In *And Always Searching for Beauty* Snyder evokes past and present, digesting Monet and Redon (75) as well as Hofmann, Kline, de Kooning, Pollock, and Guston. This triptych also seems to combine the forms she used in the mid-nineties after the deaths of her own and her partner's parents with the brighter palette that has energized her later work. Out of this fusion of gestures, intervals, silences, pauses, and musical metaphors, she engages with her particular history and her artistic predecessors, and ultimately creates something fresh and profoundly her own.

Assuredly, the decade from 1965 to 1975 was a time when many intellectually ambitious artists, men and women, lost faith in making traditional objects and began to explore the outer limits of formal possibility, from the most abstruse types of conceptualism to the most abject modes of performance. But feminists, including Snyder, were the cutting edge of this movement away from masculinized values regarding art making, redefining the territory for all artists well into the 1980s, though rarely getting the credit they deserved.

Looking back, we see how her art opened up new terrain for women, how as an outsider she was able to create discourses on inequality through a set of symbolic structures and sometimes

theatrical metaphors that created a language to embody her experiences as a woman. It is a superlative performance. What both this retrospective exhibition and the new book reveal is that Joan Snyder's achievement has left an indelible mark on American painting. We comprehend that like Atticus Finch in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Snyder has remained true and lighted a candle of understanding in people's hearts that cannot be extinguished. •

Cassandra Langer is a New York-based art historian, critic, and art appraiser. She is currently working on a critical study of Romaine Brooks.

NOTES

1. Some would point to the similarities to Hans Hofmann's "push-pull" surfaces, but I believe Snyder goes beyond just spatial issues to emotional ones.
2. The term "collective unconscious" was coined by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, to describe that part of the unconscious which is common to all human beings, containing symbols or archetypes that are recognized by people in all cultures.
3. Mary Louise Robert, "The Fantastic Sarah Bernhardt," in *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 165-219.
4. Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-27), known in the English translation as *Remembrance of Things Past*.
5. Rabbi Bernard S. Raskas, *Jewish Spirituality*, (Jersey City: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 2004), 55.

Gender, Politics, and Allegory in the Art of Rubens

by Lisa Rosenthal
Cambridge University Press, 2005

Reviewed by Lilian H. Zirpolo

In the final pages of *Gender, Politics, and Allegory*, Lisa Rosenthal states that her purpose has been to argue for the polysemic richness of Rubens's allegorical paintings and to demonstrate a new method for analyzing "the deep imbrication of notions of gender and politics" in the master's art (236). In her view, traditional iconographic modes of analysis do not adequately explain the polyvalent meanings of the images. She claims to have recognized in Rubens's art dissonant themes of male valor/virtue and male disempowerment/infantilization/feminization—tensions recognizable only through this new method she offers. Only through the melding of gender studies, semiotics, and psychoanalysis can the "dissonance and displeasure into the mechanisms by which cultural artifacts produce meaning" be identified (237). In the first chapter, titled "Rubens, Allegory, and Art-Historical Method," Rosenthal, who is assistant professor of



Fig. 1. Peter Paul Rubens and Workshop, *The Victorious Hero Seizes Opportunity to Conclude Peace* (c. 1636), oil on canvas, 89 3/4" x 106 1/2". Siegerlandmuseum, Siegen.

art history at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, maintains that her book is "a kind of twenty-first-century version of Panofsky's iconology, one that

has dramatically broadened the network of cultural contexts in which images speak" (12).

Unfortunate statements such as these

would not be so off-putting if the book in fact fulfilled its promises. Though there is merit to Rosenthal's text, regrettably it also leaves much to be desired. Rosenthal's need to justify her methodology in a large portion of her first chapter denotes lack of confidence in her own thesis. And while she insists that psychoanalysis is a main part of her argument, a true psychoanalytical reading of Rubens's art does not materialize until the middle of the fourth chapter. The earlier chapters offer only sporadic mention of castrating and phallic symbols, but nothing that could be defined as a true psychoanalytical approach. Gender issues, and in particular masculinities, are the more prevalent themes. Also, the author's claims of innovative readings do not always hold up, as much of the interpretative material has long been part of the canon in Rubens scholarship. Moreover, there is a persistent need to explicate the obvious, a major intrusion in a text meant for a highly specialized audience.

Rosenthal builds her discussion around several paintings by Rubens to which she applies her analysis. These are *Minerva Protects Pax from Mars* (c. 1629-30; London National Gallery), *The Hero Crowned by Victory* (c. 1612; Bayerische Alte Pinakothek), *Drunken Hercules* (c. 1612; Staatliche Kunstsammlungen), *Hercules Mocked by Omphale* (c. 1606; Louvre), *Venus Lamenting Adonis* (c. 1602; private collection), *The Victorious Hero Seizes Opportunity to Conclude Peace* (c. 1636; Fig 1.), and *Self-Portrait with his Wife, Hélène Fourment and Their Son, Peter Paul* (c. 1639; Metropolitan Museum of Art).

In Chapter II, "The Parens Patriae: Kingship and Fatherhood," Rosenthal looks at *Minerva Protects Pax from Mars*, which Rubens painted for Charles I of England. The chapter's title is borrowed from a speech James I (1566-1625) made at Parliament where he called himself the "Parens Patriae, the politique father of his people."¹ Rosenthal recognizes visual correlations between the *Minerva* painting and Rubens's portrait *Deborah Kip and her Children* (c. 1629-30; National Gallery, Washington, D.C.). Kip was the wife of Balthasar Gerbier, with whom Rubens lived while in England in 1629-30. Rubens was there to negotiate peace between England and Spain, and he gave

the *Minerva* painting to Charles I to commemorate the success of the negotiations. Unwilling to recognize that Gerbier's children figure in the painting simply because Rubens needed child models and conveniently found them in the family portrait, Rosenthal contends that they are there to proclaim the relationship between paternity and power that James I expressed so succinctly at Parliament.

For Rosenthal, the Kip-Gerbier portrait presents the notion of family as belonging to a distinctly feminine sphere. Fatherly affection and intimacy with his children do not figure in the painting. The father's presence is in fact only implied, as the children seem to respond to his gaze as he stands outside the picture. In the same manner, the implied viewer of *Minerva Protects Pax from Mars*, is Charles I, the "Parens Patriae," and the family, formed by Pax and the children around her, stands for the state. Charles's legitimacy as Parens Patriae relies on the rejection of the loving/aggressive father, denoted by Mars whom Minerva pushes away from the central figures, and its replacement with a more distanced authority. The child who looks out at the viewer (imploringly, in Rosenthal's perception, though in my view the expression is one of timidity) seems to be appealing to the fatherly king for his protection.

To justify the prominent presence of the satyr that holds the horn of plenty at Pax's feet, Rosenthal invokes two depictions by Rubens where these mythical figures are placed within the context of the family, with satyrs observing passively as their female counterparts suckle their young (as in the Pushkin Museum *Bacchanal*). These creatures, Rosenthal contends, represent for Rubens domesticated symbols of sexuality. In the *Minerva* painting, Rosenthal believes, the satyr is "the embodiment of an ideal male principle rather than a fully actualized figure who would complete the family group," and the family is "a maternally defined unit, distinct from the world of male activity and strife" (36). A reading of the satyr as symbol of domesticated sexuality based on the assumption that Rubens's intentions here were the same as in the

two other satyr works is questionable, especially since more often than not Rubens placed satyrs in a bacchic, not familial context. In fact, in *Drunken Hercules*, which Rosenthal discusses in the next chapter and which has nothing to do with the concept of family, a satyr in the central grouping seems as inebriated as the mythical hero.

In Chapter III, "Manhood and Statehood: Rubens's Construction of Heroic Virtue," Rosenthal also considers *The Hero Crowned by Victory*, which she and others assume to be a pendant to *Drunken Hercules*, since they are described as a pair in the artist's death inventory of 1640. Rosenthal rightly relates the paintings to the "Choice of Hercules" theme, where the mythical hero is faced with the choice between virtue and vice. *The Hero Crowned by Victory* also relates to the Christian Knight in St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians (VI: 11-17) who fights spiritual wickedness. From a gendered point of view, Rosenthal contends, the painting, which includes a seated Venus and a standing Victory, is about the choice of either possessing or rejecting the female—of virile possession versus virtuous rejection. Once again, political connotations come into play in her interpretation, now based on Justus Lipsius's expositions about Neostoicism, which exalt the ability to master one's emotions. The virtue of the hero in the painting is a metaphor for the virtue of the state. He exemplifies the state ruler who governs his passions through reason and achieves peace by repressing revolt, symbolized by Intemperance, whom the hero tramples, and Envy, who cowers behind him.

In the *Drunken Hercules*, the theme identified by the author is that of the fragility of heroic masculinity. Hercules has assumed an effeminized state because of his drunkenness, and he has lost his heroic status since his club, symbol of phallic might, has been taken away from him. The Bacchic world, Rosenthal writes, is a castrating place. The thematic relationship of the two paintings discussed in this chapter, then, is the ill-effects of male submission versus the virtues of masculine dominance.

The fourth chapter, "Hercules' Distaff:

Marriage, Masculinity, and the Pleasures of Disempowerment," discusses *Hercules Mocked by Omphale* and *Venus Lamenting Adonis*, both from the collection of Queen Christina of Sweden, who purchased the works from Gian Vincenzo Imperiale of Genoa. These two paintings are also believed by some, including Rosenthal, to have been conceived as pendants, though most scholars of Rubens question the notion. *Hercules Mocked by Omphale* was created for Imperiale in c. 1602, and, when he married in 1606, he supposedly commissioned Rubens to paint *Venus Lamenting Adonis* as its pair.

The element that would tie the earlier painting to marriage is the relief adorning the platform on which Omphale stands. It depicts Plato's Phaethon chariot with an unruly horse—a reference to the human soul caught between sexual urges and transcendence, and to the virtue of reason over sensory gratifications. As such, it cautions women to embrace sexual restraint as a marital virtue. The subjugation of Hercules by Omphale in general warns women against the desire to dominate men. From a Freudian stance, for Rosenthal, Omphale is the phallic woman who evokes fears of castration as she presses down on Hercules' club. Rosenthal reads Hercules' distaff as a phallic symbol as well, and the image as a whole as the loss and recovery of masculinity. Omphale castrates Hercules by taking away his phallic club, but his manhood is restored when he is handed the distaff that becomes his new phallus.

The author sees a number of correlations between *Venus Lamenting Adonis* and the painting of Hercules and Omphale. They both present gender role reversals (Venus becomes the hunter and Adonis the prey) and together they speak of the power of love, sexual restraint, and anxiety over male identity. They also refer to a pulling toward the "infantilizing female realm" which the male both dreads and desires (165). Hercules and Omphale present a comic version of the theme, while Venus and Adonis show its tragic aspect. Rosenthal's discussion here includes a drawn-out analysis (in five pages) of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, which leaves the reader wondering what relevance it has to the subject at hand.

The Victorious Hero Seizes Opportunity

to *Conclude Peace*, a painting most scholars attribute to the artist's workshop, is treated as a signature work in Chapter V, "Making Peace: Concord, Allegory, and Violence." This, in my opinion, is one of the strongest segments of the book, in spite of the attribution problem. Here, finally, we find the method Rosenthal claims to use throughout: the joint use of gender studies, semiotics, and psychoanalysis to decipher the painting's meaning. Rosenthal sees the work as a marriage between the hero and Occasio (Opportunity), who is presented to him by her father, Time, and the maternal figure of Peace. The Medusa shield so prominently displayed to the right in the painting provides a contrast to the young and sensuous Occasio, whose attribute is the long, luxuriant hair the hero fingers. Medusa was also once a beautiful woman with long tresses. But Neptune ravaged her in the Temple of Minerva, and Minerva retaliated by converting her hair into serpents.

Departing from Freud's statement that Medusa's severed head symbolizes castration anxiety, Rosenthal explains that the inclusion of both Occasio and Medusa offers images of both castration and consolation. Occasio's female genitals show the results of castration, while Medusa's snakes are multiple penises that speak of the petrifying effects of erection. By accepting Occasio as his bride, the hero is confronting his castration anxiety. Medusa "serves the male imagination not only through its phallic implications but also by polarizing the representation of femininity into idealized and denigrated forms" (182). Because Medusa generates dangerous vipers from the blood that pours from her severed head, she becomes a symbol of the dangerous power of women. For Rosenthal, this painting is also about seizing allegory, the representation of abstract meaning, to exploit it for political purposes. It represents Rubens's "artistic investment in allegory as a contest between the representable gendered bodies and the abstract socio-political meanings" (194).

The final chapter is on Rubens's self-portrait with his wife and child. In this chapter, titled "Self-Portraiture and the Place of Paternity," Rosenthal awkwardly

ties the painting to the main theme of the book: paternity, masculinity, politics, and authority. The focus in the work is on Hélène Fourment as both Rubens and their child, Peter Paul, direct their gazes at her. Thusly she becomes the center of the family, while Rubens offers his fatherly authority. While Rosenthal's previous analysis of *Minerva Protects Pax from Mars* expounded that Rubens viewed the father as a distant figure who does not partake in the affection between mother and child, in this case she claims that Rubens does in fact show himself as part of the circle of family affection, though he struggled with finding the most effective way of showing this without compromising his male role of authoritarian and protective father. Rosenthal finds evidence of this in the pentimenti revealed by radiography. While working on the self-portrait, Rubens at first depicted himself as a shorter figure who looks out at the viewer. In the final work, however, he elongated his torso so he would appear taller than his wife. He also turned his head and gazes in her direction. Rosenthal sees this as Rubens trying to place himself in a dominion to which he does not securely belong while still establishing his dominance over the group. As evidence, she uses Christoffel Jegher's engraving of the *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* by Rubens (c. 1632-36), where Joseph is shown napping in the distance and completely turned away from the Virgin and Child. There is a long history of images showing Joseph as a distant figure in the story of Christ's Incarnation, since, after all, the Virgin was impregnated by the Holy Ghost and not her husband. Therefore, to use such an example to read into Rubens's intentions of presenting the distancing place of paternity in his self-portrait is, frankly, absurd.

Rosenthal also sees the self-portrait as indication of Rubens's desire to show himself as a courtier and to explicate his artistic views on *imitatio*, elements that have already been recognized by others in Rubens's oeuvre. Also recognized has been the association of the garden in which the family strolls, which recalls the artist's own garden in Antwerp, to the theme of the garden of love and

aristocratic leisure. The fact that his wife is dressed in aristocratic French fashion further suggests claims of high social status. The herm prominently displayed in the background is, for Rosenthal, indication that the work speaks of artistic agency. Sometime in the 1630s, Rubens wrote an essay expounding his theories on the use of sculpture as models for painting. He advocated against rendering the stiffness of sculpture and instead striving for the realistic depiction of the elasticity and translucency of the human flesh. Rosenthal sees the herm's large bosoms and parted lips as Rubens's assertion that painters strive to breathe life into inert matter. She then connects this to the Aristotelian notion that males possess the ability to implant life into the matter supplied by women. Rubens's self-portrait is a metaphor for male

procreative powers. The gloved hand that Rubens holds over the boy's head is not only his proclamation of authority over his son, but also of "the artist's vital creative capacities" (228). The fact that the hand is gloved is, in Lacanian terms, a sign of the mystifying creative powers, since the phallus must be veiled if it is to function properly as a "transcendent signifier" (228). Rosenthal states that female generative powers as metaphors for male creativity were common in the 17th century, yet she does not provide any specific examples.

Rosenthal's book is fraught with contradictions. Signifiers change as convenient, as Rubens's satyrs or the artist partaking in the affections between his wife and child illustrate, resulting in forced interpretations. Also forced is the choice of images interpreted. Some have been attributed to Rubens's workshop,

while others, like the self-portrait, do not relate to the body of works discussed. For such a prolific artist, there are plenty of signature works to choose from that would co-relate more effectively. The intrusive materials, like the prolix (and irrelevant) discussion on Shakespeare's work, are also problematic. *Gender, Politics, and Allegory in the Art of Rubens* leaves much to be desired. ●

Lilian H. Zirpolo is Co-publisher/Co-editor of *Aurora, The Journal of the History of Art*. Her most recent publication is *Ave Papa/Ave Papabile: The Sacchetti Family, Their Art Patronage, and Political Aspirations* (2005).

NOTES

1. James I of England, *The Political Works of James I* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), pp. 272-73, 307.

American Women Modernists: The Legacy of Robert Henri, 1910-45

edited by Marian E. Wardle
Rutgers University Press, 2005

Reviewed by Roberta K. Tarbell

The enduring first impression of *American Women Modernists: The Legacy of Robert Henri, 1910-45* is its brilliantly colored images of mostly unknown works by little known artists. For many of the women modernists included here, this exhibition and catalogue will be the most spectacular presentation ever of their work.

Marian E. Wardle, Curator of American Art at the Brigham Young University (BYU) Museum of Art, headed the multifaceted project at BYU that resulted in both the exhibition and catalogue. The exhibition, "Thoroughly Modern: the New Women Art Students of Robert Henri," was on view at Brigham Young University from February through August 2005.¹ The catalogue, an illuminating anthology,

contains seven essays about American women modernist artists by seven eminent scholars and a substantial reference section with 440 artists' biographies. All of the works in the exhibition are illustrated in the book (along with additional images added by the essayists, including works by male artists and non-Henri students).

In his foreword, Campbell B. Gray, director of the twelve-year-old BYU Museum of Art, explains that the impetus for the project was the catalytic impact Henri had on Minerva Teichert (1888-1976), a muralist whose paintings and archives are at his institution.² Gray perceived three underlying "quests" for the BYU project: to analyze the art and aesthetics of Henri's women students to determine whether Henri gave preferential treatment to his male students (a resounding yes); to study the causal relationship between Henri's gospel of individual freedom and the power and originality of their mature works (patently evident); and to redefine modernism after expanding the roster of artists and the media they favored (vii-viii). For the last quest, I initially was resistant, but

the power of so many new (to me) works and the compelling scholarship of the essays produced my now more nuanced view of American modernism.

Exhibition curator and catalogue editor Wardle's goals for the project, as set out in her preface, were congruent with Gray's and included addressing how these women artists participated in the "modernizing" of women's roles during this era—how gender controlled their art, productivity, sales, and reception; how their work relates to women's involvement in other areas of modern American society and culture; and how their many styles, media, and subjects enrich our understanding of modern American culture (ix). Wardle also acknowledges, among others, the important contributions of Stephanie McNairy, who coordinated the research and writing of the 440 artists' biographies by graduate students enrolled in four different universities.

Wardle's astute selection of contributing scholars, all seasoned and significant in their respective fields of American studies, art history, and/or culture, ensures the excellence of

American Women Modernists. These writers embraced interdisciplinary methodology both in their individual essays and in their ongoing interactions with each other. All utilize what might be described as a Marxist contextualization for issues they are analyzing and amplify breakthroughs in art with ambient cultural history. Far from dogmatic, they concede the various artists' dialectical responses to modern industrialization, urbanization, science, and technology and "the paradoxes that plagued the 'new woman'" (25). They follow the familiar formula of the binary oppositions of the hegemony of male power and female marginalization that continues as a necessary methodology.

Wardle delivers the first essay in Chapter 1, "Thoroughly Modern: the 'New Women' Art Students of Robert Henri," citing the extensive literature dealing with the semantics of modernism and art in America between 1890 and 1940. She argues for the style term 'modernist' to describe the widely various works of the women students of the arch-realist painter Robert Henri. (To support her argument, she quotes 1920s critics who thus described the works of Wanda Gág and Kathleen McEnery Cunningham.) The 31 of Henri's women students whose works are illustrated do display modernist tendencies. This elite group, however, is only 7 percent of the 440 artists whom the research team documented as Henri's roster of women artists, and only 15 percent of those who pursued art as a career. How should we characterize the art of the others?

Henri's students flocked to Philadelphia and New York from all over the United States, and many returned home to assume various leadership positions: they taught art classes, exhibited widely, won major art awards, and belonged to and administered art organizations. "Through their efforts they spread modernism—new subjects, new styles, and democratic ideals promoted by Henri and others—throughout the nation" (4). Although the artists were not racially or ethnically diverse, the subjects of their paintings were. Wardle and most of the other authors in this book identify the most progressive of Henri's women students with the burgeoning freedom of

"the new woman." They contributed to a redefinition of the role of women outside the home and family.

Sarah Burns connects the wide-ranging media of turn-of-the-century Arts and Crafts artists with the textiles and other functional objects that Henri's liberated women chose to design as their primary art objects in Chapter 2, "Fabricating the Modern: Women in Design." Henri, she says, taught all of his students that "beauty was everywhere, there for the seeing, embodied in the stuff of everyday life" and that art-making was not confined to the easel (30). Like their contemporary European counterparts, early-modern American women artists were espousing a type of "feminine, decorative modernism."³ It is generally agreed that in areas of the arts that already were considered marginal, women had a great opportunity for originality, and that women pioneered an especially intellectual approach to modern design. Of the six artists Burns treats, the textile artist Ruth Reeves is the best known because of the prominence of her public commissions, the frequent publication of her works, and her representation in the collections of major museums. The similarities between her *Fabric*, "American Scene" pattern, and *Fabric*, "Manhattan" (both 1930) and fabric designs by her contemporary Marguerite Zorach are striking. Intriguing also is Reeves's residence in the incubator art colony of New City, New York, where sculptors Hugo Robus and John B. Flannagan and many crafts artists lived and the art historian Ananda K. Coomaraswamy visited regularly. One of the greatest values of the volume under review is the provocative possibilities for new connections and syntheses. During the early 1920s, for example, both Robert Laurent and Natalie Van Vleck (another of Burns's featured artists) carved abstract botanical wood reliefs, a rare subject and form for modern sculpture. Did these two artists know each other? Because botanical forms are prominent in one quarter of the works of art illustrated in *American Women Modernists*, future researchers might explore the apparent affinity between women and plants. Henrietta Shore, for example, painted her larger-



Fig. 1. Henrietta Shore, *Cactus* (c.1930), oil on canvas, 38 1/4" x 28". Private collection.

than-life flora in *Cactus* (Fig. 1; 1930), *Cyprus Trees*, *Point Lobos* (1930), and *Artichoke Pickers* (1936) as abstract and wildly expressionist designs. Burns concluded that for the artists she analyzed, "design was so deeply connected with life—with being alive—that there was no separating them. In individual and idiosyncratic ways, women designers formulated vital solutions to the problem of defining the modern and living as modern women in the modern world" (56).

Ironically, many of Henri's women students became printmakers, although Henri neither made prints nor taught printmaking. In Chapter 3, "American Women Printmakers: Adventurous Choices, Modernist Innovations," Helen Langa considers this a more gender-neutral medium for success in art than painting or sculpture. Even so, she concludes, many of the women did not learn the varied techniques of printmaking in art schools (60). Most either were self-taught or sought out experts to help them master particular techniques, which may help explain the independent spirit that informs their modernist prints. Some of the most intensely colored and flattest designs found in *American Women Modernists*

were created by artists who experimented together in 1915 in Provincetown with such vanguard printmakers as B. J. O. Nordfeldt. Among these printmakers Langa features is Ada Gilmore Chaffee, who produced early white line woodcuts with rainbow palettes. Although the chapter is full of interesting insights and serial treatment of some excellent artists, the author does not adequately develop why women fared better with printmaking than with painting.

Betsy Fahlman explains the broad scope and nature of Henri's many teaching venues and places them in the context of pedagogical opportunities for modern artists in Chapter 4, "The Art Spirit in the Classroom: Educating the Modern Woman Artist." In Philadelphia Henri taught at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women and Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and in New York at the Velton School, Henri School of Art, Ferrer Center, New York School of the Arts, and Art Students League. Despite having greater opportunities for art education and advancement than their predecessors, women artists continued to face barriers that restricted their professional development. Women experienced secondary status not only in class with Henri and their other male teachers but in the camaraderie shared by mentor and students out of class.

In Chapter 5, "Complicating Modernism: Issues of Liberation and Constraint among the Women Art Students of Robert Henri," Erika Doss writes a thematic examination of cultural restraints for women who dreamed of careers in art. She discusses specific ways that Henri taught these women to assume multiple roles and to challenge the gendered mind-set. Many adopted his realist subject matter and modern liberal attitudes. Doss explains, "Central to Robert Henri's educational philosophy was an emphasis on the liberatory potential of modern American art. Throughout *The Art Spirit* (1923), the compilation of Henri's essays and letters assembled by his student Margery Ryerson, the Ashcan artist frequently evoked the themes of individuality, rebellion, and freedom" (116). Of all the authors, Doss connects Henri most closely to dozens of his women students. Josephine Nivison

Hopper, Esther Stevens Barney, and Ariel Chaya Kaufman Durant, for example, wrote of their admiration for their teacher, and Henri, in turn, published his praise for student Bessie Marsh Brewer.

Gwendolyn Owens writes in Chapter 6, "Hidden Histories: Robert Henri's Female Students and the Market for American Art," of the many complex societal norms that compromised the women artists' pursuit of financial success. The strongest women, who often violated the boundaries of home and a husband's ego to market their art, found commercial galleries to show their work, and if one venue did not satisfy their needs, they found another. But, those women without the temerity to convince gallery owners that their art was worthy of investment either did not exhibit or placed their works on view in private clubs or homes, with no expectation of sales. "Robert Henri," Owens writes, "was keenly aware of all these complications in the art world and society. His reputation as a teacher came not only from his instruction in technique but also from his dynamic personality and dedication to guide his students about how to live life as an artist" (145). Like most of the essayists in this book, however, Owens only briefly connects Henri directly to the theme of her chapter, and she cites just one letter from Henri to a student. Nevertheless, she amplifies our understanding of the art market, art dealers, art critics, and the difficult choices artists had to make in order to survive.

In the concluding chapter, "Modernizing Women: The New Woman and American Modernism," Lois Palken Rudnick analyzes avant-garde women professionals, intellectuals, patrons, writers, musicians, and dancers as well as pictorial artists. She acknowledges that modernism had multiple interpretations then as now. Believing that modernism cannot be explained outside the context of "the new woman" (29), Rudnick suggests that because "women's access to professional careers and to the public realm had expanded dramatically in the United States," women contributed disproportionately "to the emergence of modern American society and to the cultural formations we call modernism"

(159). As an American Studies specialist, this essayist describes most broadly the historical context for Henri's women, though—not unexpectedly—has little reason even to mention Henri.

Such an ambitious project cannot escape a few inconsistencies and flaws. The essayists relied on the research of Wardle and her team to determine which women to include in the roster of Henri's students. The researchers explored every possible source, including combing the handwritten registration records of the various schools where Henri taught. The 35 boxes of "Robert Henri Papers," deposited in the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, turned out to contain little documentation concerning his female students. Further, a tantalizing twelve file folders of correspondence found between Henri and Helen Niles, written between 1906 and 1927, apparently yielded nothing deserving of more than a mention in the book. Researcher McNairy acknowledged that, since no records exist for his private students or for his classes in Europe or at the New York School, "It will never be possible to identify all the women who studied with Robert Henri" (177). As the book circulates to new audiences, the list of Henri's students and the substantive nature of their interaction with and inspiration from him will become clearer.

More disturbing than the expected errors of omission is the misidentification of at least one major artist, Peggy Bacon, as Henri's student. During extensive interviews with Bacon in 1974 and 1975, she made clear to me that she had not studied with Robert Henri, yet several essayists here feature Bacon as one of his most prominent and successful students, and six of her prints are illustrated. Because Peggy Bacon studied at the Art Students League from 1915 to 1920, when Henri was teaching there, the researchers made the logical (but incorrect) assumption that she took his classes.⁴ (This may be the case for others as well.) In fact, Bacon considered Henri old-fashioned and conservative; he had been a friend of her father, Charles Bacon, a painter who had committed suicide in 1913. Later, during the 1920s, when both Peggy Bacon and

Henri were in Woodstock, New York, they belonged to two separate groups of artists: Henri to a group Bacon dubbed “the Academy” and pronounced “unWoodstockian,”⁵ while Bacon and her modernist companions called themselves “the radicals” or the “Rock City Group.”⁶ Undoubtedly aware of Henri’s aesthetic philosophies, Bacon consciously separated herself from him.

The authors chose not to discuss the work of Henri’s 440 women students as a whole, because works of art by half were unknown and focusing on the best of them produced a better book and exhibition. On the other hand, conflating the work of the chosen few as characteristic of the whole is conjecture and not documented history. I looked in vain for the reasoning behind the dates in the title of the book (1910-45), which preclude Henri’s teaching in Philadelphia. Also, works outside those dates were included in the exhibition and book. The keynote *Self Portrait* reproduced on the cover (n.d.; Pl. 14), by Kathleen McEnery Cunningham, is striking, but its innovative qualities and connection to Henri would be different in 1915 versus 1945.

American Women Modernists’ 167 illustrations (93 in color), informative endnotes, and sizable bibliography and index only increase the book’s significance and usefulness. The emphasis on

documentation (100 of the total 288 pages) reveals the years of intense research behind this fine publication.

Its probative value is enormous as well. Using the proliferating art history and American studies electronic databases and internet search engines, in addition to traditional archival research methods, scholars will find wonderful leads to craft more complete analyses of many of the artists whose work came to life in this exhibition and catalogue. The vast experience and (collectively) hundreds of publications by the essayists inform their excellent interpretations of concepts involving independent-minded American women artists who happened to be students of Robert Henri. •

Roberta K. Tarbell is Associate Professor of Art History and Director of the Museum Studies Program in the Fine Arts Department, Rutgers University, Camden.

NOTES

1. The book and the exhibition were supported by funds from the Alan and Karen Ashton Family Foundation; the Women’s Research Institute, Brigham Young University; and the Judith Rothschild Foundation, which specifically supported research and publication on the following artists: Ruth Armer (1896-1977), Margaret Bruton (1894-1983), Elsie Driggs (1898-1992), Elizabeth Eyre De Lanux (1894-1996),

Sarah McPherson (1894-1978), Elizabeth Olds (1896-1991), Margaret Rocle (1893-1981), and Margery Ryerson (1886-1989).

2. Marian Wardle, “Minerva Teichert’s Murals: The Motivation for Her Large-scale Production,” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1988). Teichert was Wardle’s grandmother.
3. Burns’s convictions echo the theme of Bridget Eliot and Janice Helland, eds., in *Women and the Decorative Arts 1880-1935* (Aldershot, Engl: Ashgate, 2002). In reviewing this book in WAJ (F/W 05-06):64, Dipti Bhagat wrote “European and American women artists of the early-modern period were actively, critically, and reflexively engaged with a rich and meaningful variety of decorative practices, indeed with a feminine, decorative modernism.”
4. Roberta Tarbell, *Peggy Bacon: Personalities and Places* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1975), Checklist of Prints by Janet Flint; Bennard B. Perlman, in *Robert Henri: His Life and Art* (New York: Dover, 1991), also includes Bacon as a student of Henri. Bacon’s registrarial records at the Art Students League list courses she took with George Bellows and John Sloan, plus several for which no instructor was noted. In a telephone conversation with Wardle, Feb. 17, 2006, Wardle told this author that she assumed that Henri probably taught at least one of those unassigned courses.
5. Peggy Bacon to Elizabeth Bacon, Summer 1921, Peggy Bacon Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
6. Ibid., November 1921.

Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York

by Midori Yoshimoto
Rutgers University Press, 2005

Reviewed by Karen Kurczynski

This compelling investigation documents a unique phenomenon in 20th-century art. *Into Performance* describes a generation of Japanese women who, for the first time, left home to seek artistic freedom and fortune elsewhere and established bodies of work that we are now in a position to recognize as equally

significant to those of their male counterparts, both in Japan and in the United States. Author Midori Yoshimoto presents a significant contribution to the small but growing literature in English about the five artists she discusses: Yayoi Kusama, Yoko Ono, Takako Saito, Mieko Shiomi, and Shigeo Kubota. While Kusama and Ono gained early fame, even notoriety, for their work in Europe and New York, Kubota, Saito, and Shiomi are less known as individual artists but generally associated with the Fluxus movement, and in Shiomi’s case with avant-garde musical composition in Japan. Their individual backgrounds varied. Kusama was raised

in an aristocratic household in Matsumoto, which she found stifling and a site of psychological trauma that she would transform into the primary impetus for her work. Ono’s upbringing included elite schooling in Japan and periods in San Francisco and New York. Saito, Shiomi, and Kubota came from similarly upper-class families that emphasized education for women as well as men. Indeed, the fact that all five came from privileged backgrounds implies the necessity of a certain social status for art making to become a viable option at all for women in this period of Japanese history.

Although these five artists rarely collaborated with each other, Yoshimoto, Assistant Professor of Art History and a gallery director at New Jersey City University, calls attention to the significant social background they share and its subsequent effect on their art. She does this in a manner that maintains awareness of her own methodological biases and the risk inherent to social art history of dissolving singular aesthetic innovations into cultural representations—a problem she negotiates skillfully by differentiating among her subjects' divergent aesthetic strategies and unique contributions. The issue of social identity that forms the basis for Yoshimoto's investigations received widespread attention in the art world of the 1990s, where Alexandra Munroe and others directly contributed to the increasing renown in New York of Ono and Kusama in particular.¹ Yoshimoto takes a sophisticated approach to a methodology that has at best been (ironically, insidiously) marginalized, at worst maligned, in American art history since the end of that decade. Yet it is precisely the partially shared gender, class, and national/cultural background that has not been self-consciously investigated among this group of otherwise unrelated artists, although Munroe set a precedent by laying significant weight on cultural and gender themes in Ono's and Kusama's work. Applied to these diverse practitioners, the social identity approach, to shorthand Yoshimoto's complex and layered analysis, opens up new questions about both the individual artists and the limits of the methodology itself.

Performance art, based on the body and developing in time, foregrounded in these artists' work the social construction of identity and the subject's agency to develop it. In some cases it led to early recognition by western feminists for iconic pieces like Yoko Ono's eloquent *Cut Piece* (1964), in which she invited theater audiences to cut off pieces of her clothing until, in at least one performance (at the 1966 Destruction in Art Symposium in London), nothing was left. Equally groundbreaking was Shigeko Kubota's *Vagina Painting*, performed July 4, 1965, exactly a year

after her arrival in the United States. For this work, the artist attached a brush to her underpants—to the audience the brush looked like an actual protrusion—and created bodily gestures in red paint on paper unrolled on the floor. Unsurprisingly, the work was largely dismissed at the time as narcissistic and discomfiting or embarrassing; it has since become an icon of proto-feminist body art precisely for its recognition of the politics of the artist's body, despite the fact that neither Kubota nor the other artists in this study identified themselves as feminists, with the exception of Ono. Yoshimoto's study situates such iconic pieces in an illuminating sociocultural context. In comparison with Kubota's performance, for example, Yoshimoto describes the centuries-old geisha practice of *hanadensha*, or "flower train," which could include drawing calligraphy with a brush held by the vagina (182). Her study demonstrates how the turn to performance for this generation, so groundbreaking for art practices that developed later in both America and Japan, permeated a much wider range of their work than just the one or two pieces that have filtered into our current art historical canon.

Yoshimoto's contribution appears at a time of increasing interest in not only the Japanese postwar avant-garde but also the cross-cultural dimension and transgressive radicality of what could be called the international avant-garde in the 1950s and 1960s.² Gutai, the Osaka-based artists' group, has received the most attention in recent western accounts for its challenges to the dominance of painting—and specifically, American painting—in the mid-1950s.³ As Yoshimoto notes, however, among a range of collectives active around the same time in Japan, including the groups Kyushu-ha, Neo Dadaism Organizers, and Hi Red Center, Gutai has been singled out in western scholarship because of both linguistic accessibility resulting from its greater coverage in the Western press and its tendency to use painting (20).

Into Performance contributes a significant reevaluation of the mid-century art-historical canon. The text is divided into a chapter on the social context of post-

war Japan, five chapters on each of the individual artists, (Two through Six), and a short epilogue which presents significant comments on the artists' diverse approaches to the acts of transgression and the female body. Each section is well illustrated with black and white images, although as is always the case with discussions of performance art—and especially where the less-known performances of Saito and Shiomi are concerned—it remains difficult to envision the more complex events. Yoshimoto develops a new, cross-cultural understanding of the early careers of the five artists she discusses and adds to a feminist canon of Japanese women artists who set the ground for their innovations. In the first chapter, "Historical Background, Common Issues," Yoshimoto presents an important overview of the socioeconomic determinants of the Japanese art world after World War II, including women's increasing involvement in it, and the development of American interest in Japanese culture, broadly speaking, in the 1950s and 1960s. The account of women artists who preceded the 1960s generation and gained some recognition in Japan is particularly useful if only because it acknowledges still relatively little-known women artists like Yuki Ogura,⁴ recognized as a Nihonga master in the 1930s, or Toko Shinoda, the first prominent woman in the field of Japanese calligraphy. According to Yoshimoto, Shinoda "invented her own field and ... surpassed male artists," although she does not explain in this case precisely how (15). She identifies predecessors like Gutai artist Atsuko Tanaka, the recent subject of a retrospective co-organized by the Grey Art Gallery at New York University and The Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.⁵

Tanaka, as described by Yoshimoto, is one of several female artists whose artistic success paved the way for that of her five proper subjects, and her prominence in Gutai was especially significant, given the group's typical patriarchal structure. Gutai's leader Jiro Yoshihara asserted strict control over its public actions, and its symbolic destructions of painting took on a

distinctly virile aspect, as in Kazuo Shiraga's *Challenging Mud* (1955), where the artist wrestled with a ton of clay on the ground. Tanaka explored such performance-based projects as her *Electric Dress*, a collection of over 190 blinking, multicolored light bulbs connected by cords, a work so heavy it had to be suspended from the ceiling in order to be worn at the Second Gutai Art Exhibition in 1956. Apparently due to a certain amount of jealousy and attempted control on the part of Yoshihara over her success (20–22), Tanaka left Gutai on less than desirable terms. Yoshimoto's treatment of these predecessors can be a bit cursory at times, simplifying earlier artists' careers into either "positive" or "negative" precedents for female artistic agency, but given her aims she can only introduce these artists here and inspire further explorations of their legacies.

The rest of the book proceeds with the five artists, one by one, beginning with Yayoi Kusama. Here, Yoshimoto cogently argues that Kusama's self-promotional strategies are equally important artistic contributions as her Infinity Net paintings and soft-sculpture installations of phallic forms. In providing a comprehensive overview of Kusama's history, beginning with her family life in Japan, Yoshimoto explores the relationship of Kusama's self and art (two aspects this artist deliberately makes indistinguishable) to mental illness, and describes her progression from a respected artistic woman "prodigy" in Japanese Nihonga-style painting to a doyenne of Self-Obliteration happenings in New York. Kusama quickly achieved acclaim in the American art world upon her arrival on the East Coast in 1958, impressing the critic Donald Judd, among others, with her large-scale Infinity Net works. Her innovative sculptural environments and photo-collages featured in Allan Kaprow's landmark book *Assemblages, Environments, Happenings* (1966) and inspired Claes Oldenburg's evocative description of her sculpture as "a small thing that covers" (57). Yoshimoto's descriptions of Kusama's late-1960s guerrilla happenings are especially useful, although she does not comment on the significance

Fig. 1. Yayoi Kusama, selling her mirror balls to passersby at the 1966 Venice Biennale. Courtesy Yayoi Kusama Studio.



of a Japanese woman artist taking a position of organizer, Yves Klein-style, of events deliberately related to an American counter-culture movement later chastised by feminists for espousing free love primarily for straight men.

Kusama is a unique and innovative artist and persona whose work has received widespread attention since she started showing in a New York gallery again in the 1980s. Her work also differs radically from the largely conceptual, time-based and Fluxus-oriented works of the other artists discussed in *Into Performance*, and it may not be possible, given Yoshimoto's premise, to introduce a radically new interpretation of her work. Such a comparative operation comes with the serious risk of re-marginalizing Kusama's work as significant merely because it resembles the men's; but the very goal of the comparison is to transform such preexisting assumptions by shifting readers' perceptions of artistic priority, exclusive authorship, and directions of influence. Yoshimoto misses the chance in this section to explore further the relationship of Kusama's work to that of such central figures of the New York avant-garde as Oldenburg or Warhol, who is mentioned only in passing. It seems central to the establishment of Kusama's rightful place in the art-historical canon (itself a necessary gauge of our current perceptions of past precedents) to point out the significance, for example, of Kusama and Oldenburg both creating room-scale soft sculpture in relation to everyday objects at virtually the same time. Who came up with the idea is

irrelevant; the two artists, who were neighbors at the time, likely hit upon it separately from their own trajectories. Oldenburg developed his sculptures with his wife Patti out of the props for his Happenings, while for her sewn phallic pieces, Kusama implemented a kind of women's work (undertaken herself, with neighbor Judd helping stuff the phalluses, as Yoshimoto notes). She was interested as much in the covering of the objects as the objects themselves. Her process developed in part out of her wartime labor in a parachute factory, which she later described as a stifling experience of militarism that "killer [her] mind."⁶ It led to works noticeably different from Oldenburg's in their distinctly feminine subject matter, as Yoshimoto and others have observed (57).⁷ It bears emphasizing in such a significant reevaluation of the artist's trajectory from Japan to New York that her impact in the United States was larger than what we now find presented in major American museums. The text also eschews any investigation of how much Kusama's self-promotional strategies paralleled and differed from Warhol's, precisely in the arenas that made Warhol's art so historically significant in the first place: self-promotion, overt capitalism—her selling at the 1966 Venice Biennale of cheap plastic balls for about \$2 until shut down by the authorities (Fig. 1), repetition of imagery with the greatest speed and ease (she turned to gloves as a labor-saving device upon realizing that they contained five phallic protuberances at once), and use of photomechanical reproduction, as in the "1000 Boats"

show of 1964. For this she made wallpaper out of the 999 images of her sculptural centerpiece, a white phallus-covered rowboat, a couple of years before Warhol's *Cow Wallpaper* (1966), although Kusama subsumed the serial image into her self-avowed compulsion to expand her repetitive visions into the world at large. Kusama's art is unique in that it stays focused on her obsessive forms rather than extending to the absolute anti-humanism of Warhol's blank persona and automatic practice. Her experiments and impact should be acknowledged directly in relation to those still better known male American artists with whom she shared certain strategies. Such a comparison belies Kusama's own repeated attempts to isolate her work as a singular manifestation of madness/genius, and reveals it as a strategic reclaiming of a traditionally male artistic privilege.

While Yoshimoto does successfully emphasize the strategic nature of Kusama's self-presentation in her pin-up photos and collage works, her account loses a bit of context by avoiding discussion of its relationship to artists like Warhol. Yoshimoto applies similar comparisons to productive effect in her discussions of the other artists, for example her account of Mieko Shiomi's "action poem" instructions in relation to those of Ono and George Brecht (146). The discussion of Shiomi's *Spatial Poems* relative to the conceptualist practice of mail art was one of the most interesting revelations of the book. The author details how an artist forced to move home due to visa problems in the United States could continue her artistic practice and maintain key social contacts with the western avant-garde (155). By comparing Shiomi's collaborative practices to the one-way communications typical of mail art projects by Ray Johnson and others, Yoshimoto underscores the singular Fluxus and feminist content of Shiomi's more collective approach.

Yoshimoto has another agenda, which is to draw parallels among the five artists in light of their shared sociocultural backgrounds. For example, her accounts of Ono, Saito, Shiomi, and Kubota emphasize their involvements with Fluxus in New York and their key roles in instigat-

ing a Fluxus presence in Tokyo. This group idealized an anti-individualist approach, despite its organization and marketing by the New York-based, Lithuanian designer George Maciunas. Yoshimoto introduces Maciunas in her second chapter, where she provides a compelling discussion of his fascination with Japanese culture and its effects on his promotion of Ono and other Japanese artists. Yoshimoto's account makes clear the vast distinction between the Japanese women artists' experience of the artists' groups in Japan (the *bijutsu dantai*) as hierarchical and exclusive—obstacles to the development of their artistic expression—and the romanticization of these same groups as collective support structures by western idealists from Van Gogh to Maciunas. At the same time, Yoshimoto describes how artists like Ono and Kusama saw New York as a center of liberatory individualism, whereas Warhol would say the opposite about American culture as a whole.⁸ These shifting points of view about Japanese and American culture develop in an evocative dialogue in Yoshimoto's text, as they did in the lives of the artists themselves.

The discussion of Ono asserts her importance for Japanese art history by describing the impact of her performances in Japan (1962–64), but is equally informed by the American context out of which the artist also developed. Yoshimoto notes, for example, Ono's distinction between "events," which she considered more personal and ritualistic in their communicative function, and "happenings," the term most frequently and somewhat erroneously used by the Japanese press to describe her actions. Yoshimoto's account underscores the important role Ono played in early inter-media and Fluxus activities in New York, beginning with the influential events she organized in her downtown loft in 1960, for which she has not received adequate credit. Yoshimoto also describes key artistic contributions of Ono such as the Instruction Paintings begun in 1958, earlier than more well-known landmarks of conceptual art like Joseph Kosuth's photo-stats begun in 1965, or closer to home, the "event scores" developed independently by George Brecht and La Monte Young around 1960. While Ono's major works

have been described elsewhere, Yoshimoto's account brings a unique perspective to the artist's career with her focus on Ono's complex relationship to Japanese culture as a Japanese woman raised largely in the United States. One of the revelations of this account is Yoshimoto's comparison of *Cut Piece* to the passive protests of Mahatma Gandhi, perhaps the most eloquent embodiment of nonviolent political engagement of the 20th century. The association of *Cut Piece* to Gandhi's acts of protest restores meanings to this work relating to Ono's long-time involvement with peace activism that, as Yoshimoto points out, has been overshadowed by its feminist implications, however significant those also are.

Despite her awareness of issues of cultural difference and alternate perspectives, Yoshimoto's analysis in one or two places falls into exoticist assumptions, for example when she writes of Ono, "Her exploration of extrasensory perceptions that had begun earlier in New York found roots in the Japanese life style, Zen philosophy and aesthetics, and Japanese traditional arts such as *Noh* theater" (101). Here, the equation of extrasensory perception in Ono's work (which has not been explained but stems from Ono's own interpretation) is equated with general tendencies of Japanese culture such as Zen, a discipline which strictly separates itself from all metaphysical speculation. Such passages could have benefited from greater depth of explanation in order to avoid misleading implications. Yet, overall, Yoshimoto's account of Ono underscores the subtly ritualistic aspects of Ono's practice, which contained an undefined spirituality and loosely defined therapeutic qualities from the beginning, qualities that contribute to the subtle poetry and deliberately modest but also mischievous power of her work.

Chapters Four through Six provide the first monographic accounts in English on Takako Saito and Mieko Shiomi, and an essential contribution to the existing English literature on Shigeo Kubota. Yoshimoto recovers the historical role of Saito in New York Fluxus that has been marginalized in part by Maciunas himself, who, despite Saito's intense loyalty to him, took credit for some of her works cre-

ated at a time when neither artist was interested in individual authorship or anything as market-oriented as signing works. Yoshimoto underscores the self-taught skills of Shiomi at paper- and wood-crafting, suggesting their ties to origami and Japanese woodworking. Yoshimoto emphasizes that Shiomi developed these skills out of her own determination, as opposed to Maciunas's somewhat orientalist view that her ethnicity related to her unique skills. With almost comic predictability given the ethnic stereotypes about Japan circulating in New York at the time, he suggested she model her work on that of certain traditional Japanese paulownia boxes he owned (122). Yoshimoto reconstructs Saito's career up to the present. Saito has gained increasing acclaim as a designer, associated especially with the paper-box games that have become a kind of trademark, and a performance artist in Europe, a satisfying end to a rather typical story of feminine marginalization in the 1960s. Saito's *Kicking Box Billiard* performance (Fig. 2), first performed in Exeter, England, in 1971, exemplifies her playful and interactive approach. The game required artists, children, and other viewers to kick one white paper box into another while hopping on one foot and avoiding damage to either the delicate boxes or the flower pots distributed across the playing field, thus mandating not only viewer participation, but a gentle and attentive movement.

Yoshimoto similarly reconstructs Shiomi's career. Shiomi's works relate clearly to the Fluxus emphasis on performance practices derived from music and actions of extreme subtlety, as in her *Disappearing Music for Face* (1964), where performers changed expression from smiling to neutral in gradual unison. While I found her correspondence pieces compelling and highly significant, performances like *Water Music* or *Compound View No. 1* still seem less resolved, and it remains unclear to me whether Yoshimoto considers them as noteworthy as other Fluxus performances such as *Cut Piece*—or whether such a comparison would be fair. Perhaps more investigation into these works will further illuminate their meanings.

One of the most intriguing passages of the book was the section on Shigeo

Fig. 2. Takako Saito, *Kicking Box Billiard* performance at the 1973 Fluxus Game Fest, New York. Photo: Larry Miller.



Kubota. Here Yoshimoto explores the early contacts of Kubota and Shiomi with Ono and the Hi-Red Center group. When Kubota and Shiomi moved to New York in 1964, having already established contact with Ono and Maciunas and exchanged text-based works with both, Maciunas immediately helped them establish themselves there both personally and professionally. Particularly useful in this discussion was the contextualization of Kubota's *Vagina Painting* of 1965 among her other Fluxus activities, such as the Fluxus scores, *Flux Napkins*, and *Flux Medicine* projects. Again, this discussion raised several issues that could have been explored further—and should be by future scholars—such as the feminist dimension of Kubota's Fluxus projects in their deliberate embrace of ephemerality, the domestic sphere, and the artwork as a strengthening of social bonds, even an expression of care. The *Flux Medicine* boxes, for example, appear both revolutionary in their material structure and relationship to the everyday, and morally charged in that, as Yoshimoto observes, they arose out of Kubota's interest in ameliorating Maciunas's suffering from asthma. As with Kusama, I would like to have learned more about Kubota's development of early video in relation to her onetime husband Nam June Paik, whose reputation still precedes hers for his experimentation with video but whose work was indeed, as Yoshimoto points out too briefly (193), directly influenced by Kubota's ideas (in fact, the influence flowed both ways). Video is still a medi-

um whose early history has yet to be satisfactorily investigated. It remains striking that not only Paik but also Kubota experimented with this formerly incredibly arduous medium before the distribution of the Portapak in 1965 that would lead a whole generation of international artists to utilize it.

Yoshimoto's text is a significant contribution to our existing literature in English on these artists, some of whom remain virtually unknown outside the literature on Fluxus and others too often removed from the context of their social backgrounds as Japanese women of a particular generation. The ways in which social identity informs their work have been overlooked, either because of their personal refusal of the social (Kusama), their widespread popular reputations in the west (Ono), or their persistent marginalization in relation to male artists with whom they collaborated and/or exchanged ideas (all five artists). The fact that this study raises so many further questions indicates both what a groundbreaking effort it is and how much remains to be investigated. The exploration of the impact of Japanese women artists in New York in the 1950s and 1960s also raises questions about their presence here and internationally today, and the continuing necessity that Japanese artists in general, and women artists in particular, leave their own country precisely in order to gain recognition there. Traditional gender expectations in Japan as well as Korea, among other places, remain a powerful force

affecting women artists in their decisions to leave their countries, but as in the case of these five artists they can also become a powerful impetus to reject social and artistic convention. *Into Performance* calls for greater historical specificity in interpreting their work, and develops a wealth of new perspectives in the process. ●

Karen Kurczynski received her Ph.D. in postwar European art from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, in 2005. She teaches modern and contemporary art at Pratt Institute and the Museum of Modern Art.

NOTES

1. Notable in this regard were several groundbreaking exhibitions. See, for

example, the catalogues: Alexandra Munroe, *Yayoi Kusama: A Retrospective* (New York: Center for International Contemporary Arts, 1989); Lynn Zelevansky, ed., *Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958–1968* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1998), shown at the Museum of Modern Art; Alexandra Munroe et al., *Yes Yoko Ono* (New York: Japan Society, 2000); and Mary Jane Jacob, ed., *Shigeko Kubota: Video Sculpture* (New York: Museum of the Moving Image, 1991).

2. See, for example, Shinichiro Osaki, "Body and Place: Action in Postwar Japan," in *Out of Actions*, ed. Paul Schimmel (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 121–57.
3. For a recent account of Gutai that emphasizes the political problematics of representing the group in western art history, see Joan Kee, "Situating a Singular Kind of 'Action': Early Gutai

Painting, 1954–1957," *Oxford Art Journal* 26, no. 2 (2003): 121–40.

4. See Nanako Yamada, "The Figure Paintings of Ogura Yuki: The Merging of East and West," in *WAJ* (F02/W04), 3–7.
5. Atsuko Tanaka died in Japan at age 73 on Dec. 11, 2005. American audiences are fortunate to have seen an overview of her work at this final stage of her career.
6. Quoted in Alexandra Munroe, "Obsession, Fantasy, and Outrage: The Art of Yayoi Kusama," in *Yayoi Kusama: A Retrospective*, 13.
7. *Ibid.*, 24.
8. In 1963, Warhol observed that, "It doesn't matter what you do. Everyone just goes on thinking the same thing, and every year it gets more and more alike." G. R. Swenson, "What is Pop Art? Part I," in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, ed. Steven Henry Madoff (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 105.

Louise Bourgeois

by Robert Storr, Paulo Herkenhoff, and Allan Schwartzman
Phaidon, 2003

Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art

by Mignon Nixon
MIT Press, 2005

Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art-Writing

by Mieke Bal
University of Chicago Press, 2001

Reviewed by Robert J. Belton

It is difficult to name an artist whose work is more immediately recognizable as "contemporary" and yet less susceptible to easy, contemporary categorization than Louise Bourgeois. Since well before her work was used to illustrate the cover of Lucy Lippard's epochal *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art*,¹ which cemented and widened an already growing reputation, Bourgeois has been

the quintessential free-thinking artist. Her expressive, evocative and personal work has proven nearly impossible to locate in a particular historical or stylistic pigeon-hole. Lippard recognized this complexity just over thirty years ago, writing, "Attempts to bring a coolly evolutionary or art-historical order to her work or to see it in the context of one art group or another have proved more or less irrelevant."² Since then, Bourgeois has been the subject of hundreds of scholarly and popular articles, exhibitions, etc., some of which try to situate her work in one or another artistic movement and some of which undertake to assess her career in a manner as variable and idiosyncratic as the work itself.³ A new critical synthesis approached with a gathering of intense interest in the late 1990s, when highly specialized, theoretically informed articles proliferated on the Internet,⁴ and a special issue on Bourgeois appeared in the *Oxford Art Journal*.⁵ This concentration leads us, just after the turn of the century, to several full critical appraisals of Bourgeois under their own titles. We now have, in the space of half a decade, not one but three reappraisals of Bourgeois's life and work written from entirely different perspectives. So compelling a combination they are that it

makes a good deal of sense to consider them all in the same review.

Although she has worked in most media and with geometrical forms, Bourgeois is most well known now for the biomorphic sculptures that began appearing in the 1960s and the near-theatrical installations of the 1990s and beyond. While the former are immediately, if sometimes misleadingly, accessible as analogues of organic forms, the latter's profusion of rooms, cages, furniture, architectural elements, domestic artifacts, and handcrafted objects can seem uninterpretable to casual viewers. The sculptures bear a superficial resemblance to works by artists like Jean Arp, Max Ernst, and even Hans Bellmer, while the installations recall Duchampian and Neo-Dada environments and postmodern installations. These similarities have tempted many writers, looking for an interpretive leg up, to associate Bourgeois's work with Surrealist aesthetics and theory, while a growing number of writers either deny the association or reinterpret it as a retooling of Surrealism within the context of feminist and other theory.

The most conventional of the three new publications discussed here takes

pains to remove Bourgeois from the Surrealist context even while acknowledging the directness of her contact with it, but it falls short of developing a full feminist context to replace it. A large-scale, lavishly illustrated volume from Phaidon, with contributions from Robert Storr, Paolo Herkenhoff, and Allan Schwartzman, it is filled with 150 photographs, the majority in color and a significant number filling entire pages. As such, it is the most comprehensive, readily available visual survey of the artist's career, and it includes the usual scholarly additions in the form of a fairly detailed chronology, list of exhibitions, selected bibliography, and list of public collections. While it would appear at first glance to be aimed solely at general readers, dismissing it as a coffee-table book would be a mistake. The text includes a biographical sketch, interviews with and several writings by Bourgeois, and a condensed critical survey. While there are no real surprises in this material, it makes an excellent introduction to the artist's thinking and life—an introduction that adds great depth to a viewer's appreciation of Bourgeois's complex and seemingly incomprehensible work.

Like many earlier publications, the Phaidon book gives Bourgeois herself the definitive word on the subject of Surrealism in the course of laying out the details of her life. Although she lived in the building that housed the Surrealists' Galerie Gradyva in the 1930s, she maintains that apart from Joan Miró she despised the Surrealists (41) and prefers to think of herself as an existentialist (14). Despite this, occasional stylistic comparisons are made directly to Surrealist works, but the book provides no clear explanation of the mechanisms that would make these allusions intelligible as commentary on Surrealism, like parody or satire, rather than indulgence in it (54). There is also a vaguely self-contradictory tone. For example, Robert Storr writes that Bourgeois's work is not autobiographical but archetypal (33), but he still tells us the full story of her life. He reports on her troubled childhood, when her father's mistress Sadie lived under the same roof

as Bourgeois and her parents (39–41); her marriage to art historian Robert Goldwater (45); her art training and occasionally troubled relationships with other artists, like Louise Nevelson (58), and so on. But he never explains how the archetypal emerges from this profusion of details. Similarly, Allan Schwartzman alludes to critical detractors who dismiss Bourgeois's work as a confessional kind of autobiography because they overlook the formal aspects of the work, which he feels ties her to “a dialogue about modern art and Bourgeois's place within it or absence from it” (100). Yet this observation is accompanied by Bourgeois herself saying that “There is no feminist aesthetic” and that her work exhibits the character it does not because she is a woman but because of a set of experiences unique to her (142). These remarks are, however, basically quibbles, for the book does us a service by delivering a well-illustrated, readable survey hitting all the key (if uncontroversial) points, among them the feminist revision of modernism and the artistic expression of gender mutability.

Mignon Nixon's *Fantastic Reality* lacks some of the useful and attractive features of the Phaidon book, like a bibliography apart from the notes or color illustrations (although there are plenty of interesting black and white figures, including family photos and rarely reproduced broadsheets). It is, however, a scholarly work of a wholly different order. From the outset, Nixon takes as given that Bourgeois's work was a deliberate rebuttal to Surrealism (1). This means that the traditional art historical analysis of stylistic influences proceeding by “a genetic logic of transmission... to willing recipients” (41) has to be replaced by a reading in the opposite direction, giving the “recipient” the primary role. This post-modern approach has been linked to Harold Bloom's “anxiety of influence” (42), in which the “recipient” is threatened by the source of artistic influence and so reinvents it. In contrast, Nixon leans on Julia Kristeva—temporality is best understood as “the future perfect” (131) understood retroactively—and falls in with the camp of postmodernism in which mimicry and parody “block the

channel of influence” (43). Although she laments that Bourgeois is too often treated with strictly biographical interpretation, that is what Nixon essentially provides, albeit along the “axes of feminism and psychoanalysis” (2).

To underscore the difference between Bourgeois and the historical Surrealists, Nixon points out in her first chapter that Bourgeois was not exhibited as a Surrealist in the New York of the 1940s, when she easily could have been had she wanted to be (16). Instead we are presented with documentary photographs alluding to Bourgeois's parallel curatorial work and to apparently informal photographs of Bourgeois in the ironic guise of a disciple of Miró. Both examples draw attention to Bourgeois's independence from Surrealism, the first directly and the second indirectly, through satire—Miró is draped in the banner of the Paris Surrealist exhibition of 1947 as if to caricature the papal pretensions of the movement. Her “hysterical pose” of discipleship (23–24) is tied anachronistically, but nonetheless convincingly, to the feminist reinterpretation of hysteria that was common three and four decades later (31). The result is humorous and playlike, but it has a cutting edge that opens an avenue of interpretation through the psychoanalytic work of Melanie Klein, whose difference from Freudian orthodoxy turns principally on the analysis of children at play to reveal aggression and negativity (24).

Chapter 3 develops in greater detail how allusions to Klein can answer the question of whether women artists could transform Surrealism rather than merely indulge in it (51). Nixon answers yes—that Bourgeois appropriates and reinvents Surrealism in a decades-long process that began with her resentment of her parents and continues to this day. While it is easy to see that Bourgeois would resent her father for bringing his mistress into the home, Nixon points out that Bourgeois's resentment was also directed at her mother, who allowed it to happen. This is most clearly reflected in a project Bourgeois made for *Artforum* in the 1980s, where she accompanied vintage photos with autobiographical texts, one of which reads, “I am a pawn. Sadie is supposed to be there as my



Fig. 1. Louise Bourgeois, *Untitled* (1950), painted wood, 69" h. Private Collection, St. Louis, Missouri. Photo: Allan Finkelman.

teacher and actually you, mother, are using me to keep track of your husband. This is child abuse" (49). Yet at the same time, however, Bourgeois obviously loved her mother, so there is a combined adoration and aggression that can best be explained with Kleinian object relations theory.

Object relations theory maintains that the self exists only in relation to other "objects," internalized artifacts formed by early relations with parents and characterized by three basic "affects"—attachment, frustration, and rejection. Melanie Klein contributed two fundamental things to this body of thought—first, that psychological drives can be fixed on either "part-objects" or whole objects (for

example, the whole mother or a part thereof, like the maternal breast); and second, that traditional psychoanalysis emphasizes the libido (Eros) at the expense of the death drive (Thanatos). Attempting to restore a balance, Klein proposed that whole and part-objects are signs of both love and hate, of both attachment and aggression. Noting that the psyche seemed to swing between the poles of Eros and Thanatos, Klein called the positive, attached stage "the depressive position" and the aggressive, disintegrating stage "the paranoid-schizoid position." In the depressive position, the subject fuses good and bad objects into a single internal object that resolves aggressive urges, whereas in the paranoid-schizoid position the subject keeps good and bad objects separate. If a child in the depressive position has profoundly mixed feelings about a parent, those feelings will be fused and reconciled, but a child in the paranoid-schizoid position will symbolically split the parent into two objects, often with great retributive violence.⁶

Playing heavily on Bourgeois's desire to get an education in "the psychology of art" or "the remedial care of children" (6-7), although conscious knowl-

edge of Klein is not necessary, Nixon argues that the artist's work can be understood through Kleinian analysis in pretty straightforward ways. For example, the early wooden *Personages* series (1940s), long known to be expressions of a certain homesickness that the artist felt so recently after moving to New York, is seen in the light of the depressive position, so they lack the violence of later series (9). In contrast, some of Bourgeois's forays into more violent territory are linked to the paranoid-schizoid position and sometimes directly to Kleinian case studies. For example, some of the works in the *Soft Landscape* series of the later 1960s are compared directly to a case study (supervised by Klein but conducted by Marion

Milner) about Simon, a boy who set fire to model villages as an affective expression of his aggression (204). In another instance, *Femme couteau* (1969) is described as a fusion of male and female elements to allay mutilation anxiety in a manner linked to the case study of Rita, a 33-month-old girl suffering, ostensibly, from neonatal trauma (235).

Along the way, Nixon provides innumerable insights and critical observations arranged around different bodies of work. For example, the fetish-like objects that Bourgeois nailed repeatedly in the later 1940s are exorcisms of paranoid-schizoid anger, in one case inspired by but redirected away from an unpleasant houseguest (134). Similarly, the untitled stacked figures of the 1950s (Fig. 1) are linked to Bourgeois's separation from her family in France and interpreted in the light of Klein's description of "mourning as a work of reparation" in the form of an obsessive sorting and arranging of objects (147-48). Nixon sees the anti-formalist turn in the *Lairs* series of the later 1960s as a gesture towards the "beginning of subjectivity" in Kleinian terms (179), and so on. One of the more extended discussions concerns the print suite entitled *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* (1940), described here as a rejoinder to Marcel Duchamp's *Large Glass*. In lieu of Duchamp's preoccupation with drives of a sexual nature, Nixon describes Bourgeois as exploring aggression and a prelinguistic death drive (96-103). A similar transformational exercise is offered in a section on the *Femme-maison* series. Nixon maintains that Bourgeois transforms a famous *Mannequin* by André Masson by reimagining its box-like bird cage, worn over the figure's head, as the house forms replacing the heads of female figures in a number of drawings, paintings and sculptures (63). While intensely interesting, this particular passage seems to miss an opportunity, for the Masson work probably alludes to sacred prostitution and the goddess Kali, a fusion of Eros and Thanatos that is more compelling in the Surrealist work than in the work critiquing it.⁷ Instead Nixon presents a Freudian meditation on joke making as the revelation of the obscene.

Nixon's chapter on the 1960s is among

the more interesting because it brings together the Kleinian threads with the historical moment that thrust them into the foreground as feminist mechanisms aimed at revising historical Surrealism. Among Bourgeois's contemporaries were Yayoi Kusama and Eva Hesse, whose works exhibit striking similarities in their phallic anti-formalism; but Nixon takes care to point out that Bourgeois, more than Hesse, produced a repertory of Kleinian part-objects that made her the leader of the recasting of Surrealism in Kleinian terms (225). The act of recasting, by the way, is what Nixon calls "fantastic reality" in the title of the book, though she occasionally changes its spelling to "phantastic" in order to match Klein's self-differentiation from orthodox Freudianism (99).

While Nixon pushes a little into the 1970s and 1980s, she offers only a brief epilogue on the works made after Bourgeois's major MoMA show of 1982. The main example is the large-scale sculptural installation *Spider* (1997; Pl. 15), which Nixon sees as a Kleinian, depressive-mode fusion of the mother as web-maker—she worked in a tapestry shop—and figure of considerable threat (274).

Our third book, Mieke Bal's *Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art-Writing*, begins where Nixon leaves off, but it does so in a manner that is entirely different yet again. Unlike either the relatively traditional Phaidon book or Nixon's edgier Kleinian analysis, Bal's thesis is that art history is plagued and compromised by both biographical and iconographic readings. While such readings serve some purposes, both are flawed by accepting traditional notions of influence and what Bal calls "anteriority," the ostensible impoverishment of artworks by forcing them to be mere illustrations of narratives that precede them (32). Bal offers a close reading of *Spider* as a "theoretical object," which she characterizes as an object that proposes its own, unique theory in the encounter with it, not with an anterior theory to which it is temporally and logically subordinated (xiv). To do this, she has to downplay the evidentiary function of historical context, biographical details, and interpretative frameworks like Kleinian thought.

Instead, she replaces them with an intense focus on virtually every detail of the work—which, because of its sheer size and profusion of elements, provides plenty of opportunities to intervene in the production of an independent narrative in the here-and-now.

Bal begins with about a dozen pages of raw notes—immediate impressions created by the work during two prolonged viewings in different locations (10–25). These exhaustive impressions are supported by the book's welter of color photographs, which, though smallish in scale and limited to the one artwork, are reproduced in many, many details that are not available elsewhere. (The Phaidon book, for instance, includes only one view.) Bal then moves to a sort of cultural processing (27), in which the beginnings of narrative are challenged by memories (which she characterizes as found objects) as well as by the intermittent quality of viewing itself, which threatens to destroy the continuity of narrative (28). Periodically, biography and iconography slip into the text. For example, bits of tapestry pop in as metonyms of Bourgeois's mother (33), and perfume bottles appear as metonyms of a young girl growing up (58). Bal mentions these and others in passing, but her goal is to parry them in an attempt to prove that *any* anteriority destroys the originality of the work (33) and must "go to sleep," as she puts it (37). Equations like "spider = mother" are neither true nor false, Bal writes, "they simply fall short of the work" (72–73).

The consequence of this line of reasoning is that works can generate a first anterior narrative imagined by a critic or a second anterior narrative staged by the artist—I would reverse the order of these—but that makes them "unoriginal." In contrast, an "original" narrative is not anterior, so it must be a performative narrative enacted by the viewer in engagement with the work (49). I would argue that this gives too much priority to viewers in the generation of meaning, making the artwork less of a theoretical object and more of an illustration of the viewer. This, however, is not the current fashion, which prefers to use the present to determine the past, as it were, through

rereading. Thus we also see in Bal the influence of notions like Kristeva's "future perfect." Bal, however, does not use that term. Instead, she refers frequently to *Jetztzeit*, Walter Benjamin's notion of "time filled by the presence of the now."⁸ To do this, Bal (who is not an art historian) has to make art history nothing more than a succession of stylistic boxes, patterns of influence, and mere pigeonholing (45), but that is a straw-figure caricature of what art history can be and has been. This dismissive tendency, by the way, also appears in the work of art historians like Nixon (41).

In many ways the most intriguing part of Bal's very interesting essay is a section in which Bourgeois's *Spider* is freely compared to selected works by Gianlorenzo Bernini. This is done not to uncover specific references or influences but to produce an interpretation of sculpture as architectural narrative, as it were. Some of the points are purely conventional—both Bernini and Bourgeois blur the destinations between sculpture and architecture in theatrical ways—and some seem overstated, if not overdetermined—for example, the drapery folds in Bernini's *Beata Ludovica Albertoni* are "found" in Bourgeois's *Femme maison* of 1983 (102). Worthier of note is the observation that both artists build in limitations that constrain viewers to counter their natural passivity with the active production of narrative (108). Interestingly, Bal links this to the theme of transformation in several Bernini works, including the *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, which is a textbook deployment of an anterior narrative to frame the understanding of the work. All such framing is less a matter of art-historical chestnuts like "schema and correction"⁹ and more a matter of universal psychological phenomena like "semantic [or mnemonic] priming."¹⁰ As such, they are all anterior, in Bal's sense of the word. But that contradiction does not dissuade her from observing that psychological readings suffer from "myopic historicity," so she prefers the "preposterous history" that is as much a result of the writer's own interests as the artist's. In that way, she concludes, "Bourgeois beckons Bernini" (126). I see

instead that “Bal bonded with Bernini” in such a way that “Bal beckons Bernini” as a memory / found-object to deploy in the interpretation of Bourgeois.

For serious scholars interested in modern and contemporary art and/or feminism, the must-read of these three books is, I suggest, Mignon Nixon’s *Fantastic Reality*. For general readers, the must-have is more likely the Phaidon text. I should think, however, that readers would want both, for they complement each other very well in their different emphases on number and nature of illustrations, scholarly apparatus, and depth of critical approach. Bal’s volume might appeal to a more limited audience, for it has a much narrower thesis and is a little difficult, though never turgid. (Nixon’s book, while equally challenging theoretically, is admirably well written and never “difficult.” It was actually a pleasure to read.) On the other hand, Bal’s book does offer an intense and unique engagement with an artwork

that is only summarily represented in the other two books. All three should surely be part of any serious art library. ●

Robert J. Belton, Dean of the Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies at the University of British Columbia Okanagan, is the author of *The Beribboned Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art* (1995) and “Edgar Allan Poe and the Surrealists’ Image of Women,” *WAJ* (Spring/Summer 1987).

NOTES

- 1 Lucy Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women’s Art* (New York: Dutton, 1976).
- 2 Lucy Lippard, “Louise Bourgeois: From the Inside Out,” *Artforum* 13.7 (March 1975): 27.
- 3 A quick search on ARTbibliographies Modern yields 681 publications that include comments on Bourgeois, 359 of which appeared between 1995 and 2000 alone.
- 4 For example, the *n.paradoxa* edition dated May 3, 1997, available both in print and online, included Katy Deepwell’s “Feminist Readings of Louise Bourgeois,

or Why Louise Bourgeois is a Feminist Icon” and Hilary Robinson’s “Louise Bourgeois’s ‘Cells’: Looking at Bourgeois through Irigaray’s Gesturing Towards the Mother.” (See <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/n.paradoxa/index2.htm>.)

- 5 Mignon Nixon, ed., special issue on Louise Bourgeois, *Oxford Art Journal* 22.2 (1999): 3–126.
- 6 C. Fred Alford, Melanie Klein and *Critical Social Theory: An Account of Politics, Art, and Reason Based on Her Psychoanalytic Theory* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989).
- 7 Robert J. Belton, *The Beribboned Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995), 197–98.
- 8 Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 261.
- 9 Paul Richter, “On Professor Gombrich’s Model of Schema and Correction,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 16.4 (1976): 338–46.
- 10 S. Joordens and S. Becker, “The Long and Short of Semantic Priming Effects in Lexical Decision,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, & Cognition* 23.5 (1997): 1083–105.

Lee Miller: A Life

by Carolyn Burke
Alfred A. Knopf, 2005

Reviewed by Lynda Hoffman-Jeep

The two photographs on the dust jacket of Carolyn Burke’s meticulous study of Lee Miller (1907–77) represent crucial milestones in a life voraciously lived. The floating head shot of Miller on the front cover was taken by Man Ray during their years together in Paris (1929–1932), when she apprenticed and lived with Ray. This period marked the beginning of her career as a photographer and as a sought-after fashion model. It was also during this era that she changed her name to Lee Miller, officially launching her career as a professional. The photo on the back cover, taken by Dave Scherman in Hitler’s bathtub (see page 6, Fig. 5), captures Miller at

the height of her power as a photojournalist for *Vogue* in 1945. These bookends document periods of maximum authority in her ability to *see* and *be seen*.

So what’s really in a name? Certainly enough for Burke to use Miller’s various names as chapter linchpins in her biography. Each of the five parts of her exhaustive study carries the name that reflects Miller’s identity during that period of her life. “Part One: Elizabeth” might have been subtitled “Under the Reign of the Father,” because Theodore Miller, a conservative, racist, classist patriarch dominated Miller’s life during her first 22 years. Beginning in his daughter’s infancy, Theodore documented Miller’s development with his own photographs of her and through his diary entries. When Miller was seven she was raped by a family acquaintance and infected with gonorrhea. The damage done to her childhood self remained with her throughout

her life. Despite this violent invasion of her personhood, her father continued to take photographs of Miller in the nude throughout her childhood and well beyond. Burke handles these episodes with excessive care, using language like “we cannot help asking” or “[w]e wonder”(55). In contrast, the conclusion she draws from these experiences is arresting: “it is apparent that Elizabeth coped with the situation by dissociating”(55). Dissociation was a strategy Miller enlisted in a variety of invasive circumstances throughout her life.

Miller’s early years were marked by tomboy play with her brothers, expulsions from almost every school she attended, seven months in Paris studying stage design, and a term spent in New York City at the Art Students League. While in New York in 1926 Miller was accidentally discovered by the publisher Condé Nast, and invited to

work for *Vogue* as a model. She appeared on that magazine's cover for the first time in March 1927. The quintessential flapper, she embodied all that was chic and modern. Through *Vogue* Miller was promptly sitting for the best-known photographers in New York: Nickolas Muray, Arnold Genthe, and Edward Steichen. In fact it was Steichen who suggested she might become a photographer. By embracing a profession and living out her sexual freedom, Miller exemplified the modern woman. Elizabeth Miller took a defining step in her emancipation when "to ensure the continuation of her good luck," she adopted the androgynous "Lee," a version of her childhood nickname "Li Li" (62). Future clients would not know by her name alone if she were male or female, a pivotal move in the early days of commercial photography and women's professional activity.

Somewhat bored with New York, bolstered with endorsements from Condé Nast and Steichen to further her career with Paris *Vogue* and the renowned artist photographer Man Ray respectively, Lee Miller set sail for Europe in May 1929. By June she had attached herself to Man Ray and was becoming his apprentice/lover/muse. By the end of their first year together he had taught her all of the secrets of his photographic genius. The inhabitants of Montparnasse recognized about this odd couple, incongruently matched in stature and age, that "he [was] more attached to her than she to him" (83). To supplement her income Miller began work at Paris *Vogue* both as a model and as an apprentice to its chief photographer George Hoyningen-Huene. By that October she appeared in Paris *Vogue* epitomizing "the aristocracy of elegance" (83), listed in the photo credits like a celebrity as "Miss Lee Miller."

This appellation is the title of Part Two, aptly characterizing her Paris years (1929-1932), which were marked by her symbiotic relationship with Man Ray, who displayed her in hundreds of photographs. Their joint discovery of the "solarization" technique in photo development is another example of their work together. Simultaneously, Miller was becoming a recognized photographer and personality in her own right, and in 1930 she moved into a studio of

her own. Her photos of this era, in Surrealist fashion, frame the strangeness of everyday life. As she became known among various Parisian circles and among influential Americans in Paris, she increasingly became a popular portrait photographer. By 1932 her works were included in exhibits in both Europe and New York.

During this period Miller made her film debut in Jean Cocteau's controversial surrealist film *La Sang d'un Poète* as the embodiment of the artistic muse. In jealous reaction to her collaboration with Cocteau, Man Ray countered with his own cinematic *Self Portrait* in which he visualizes his feelings of despondency in the face of his loss of control over her, both sexually and professionally. Intense affairs with the Egyptian businessman Aziz Eloui Bey and the New York gallerist Julien Levy sealed the end of Miller's relationship to Man Ray and confirmed her resolve to return to New York, alone, to pursue her career as an independent photographer. She returned to New York in October 1932, a celebrity and an icon of elegance.

In November she appeared once again in *Vogue* and opened a studio with her brother Erik as her assistant. She was soon photographing New York's financial and artistic elite. Beginning in December Julien Levy hosted her first one-woman show at his gallery, which opened to rave reviews. The following February *Vanity Fair* named Miller one of the seven most distinguished living photographers, a distinction shared with no less than Huene, Beaton, Muray, and Genthe. Her former lover Aziz Eloui Bey arrived in June, and they were secretly married on July 19th in a civil ceremony. Upon embarking for Egypt and St. Moritz with her new husband, some of her friends remarked upon the age difference of the new couple: Eloui Bey was 43 and Miller 27. Still Aziz was regarded as a kind of mystery figure, like someone out of the Arabian Nights, just the man to sweep Lee Miller up and into a new life.

Burke does a splendid job in the next section, "Part Three: Madame Eloui Bey." Not only does she characterize the relationship unfolding between Miller and her new husband, but she simultaneously contextualizes their marriage in 1930s

Egypt. Using excerpts from Aziz's letters to Lee's parents, rich in insights into their marriage, Burke contrasts the letters with her own descriptions of Miller's photographic forays into this new cultural and historic landscape. Miller enjoyed Egyptian food, began to learn the language, and studied chemistry to better understand the solutions used in photo development. In spite of these distractions, she became bored with life in Egypt. Burke further analyzes her photographs of this period as stages for her feelings of confinement (161).

As an escape from the summer heat of Egypt, in 1937 Aziz agreed to let Miller spend four months in France, accompanied by her maid. On her first evening back in Paris she made the acquaintance of the Englishman Roland Penrose, who fell deeply in love with her. Through Penrose she became immersed in the art and antics of the leading Surrealists (Max Ernst, George Bataille, Paul Eluard) and spent an evening meeting Picasso, with whom she developed a deep and abiding friendship. Miller returned to Cairo in September and was again bored, no matter how much she worked to distract herself with sightseeing, anthropological expeditions, snake charmers, and social gatherings. She ultimately made her way to London in June 1939, joining Penrose, and never to return to Egypt again.

In retrospect one can see that Miller's years as Madame Eloui Bey, with the many indulgences that Aziz afforded her, fortified her against the physical and psychological demands of her deep involvement in World War II. In fact, en route to London Miller was already worried about her finances and contemplated the necessity of employment. In the winter of 1939 she began working for British *Vogue* when several staff photographers left on war work. As the bombing of London intensified throughout the year, Miller began documenting the destruction, which resulted in her first book, *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain Under Fire*, dedicated to Winston Churchill. "Lee's Blitz scenes," writes Burke, "plunge the viewer into a city turned theater of war. They show the new ways of understanding forced on its people" (207). By comparison it became increasingly difficult to find compelling



Fig. 1. Lee Miller,
*Dead SS Prison Guard
Floating in Canal, Dachau*
1945, gelatin silver print,
© Lee Miller Archives,
England 2005. All rights
reserved.
www.leemiller.co.uk.

subject matter for fashion magazines after fabric rationing came into effect in 1941. Miller sought the company of other Americans who had been involved in the war since the beginning and made the acquaintance of the *Life* photographer David Scherman. Soon he was living with Miller and Penrose in a ménage à trois.

After learning about photojournalism from Scherman, by December 1942 Miller was accredited as a correspondent for British *Vogue* and ordered her uniform. In "Part Four: Lee Miller, War Correspondent" Burke thoroughly contextualizes Miller's work within the European theater of war and the emerging contributions of women in the war. Continuing her collaboration with Scherman, and inspired by his work, Miller put together her second book *Wrens in Camera*, which documents British women soldiers in all aspects of their service. She was anxious to report from Europe, so in July 1944 the magazine sent her to Normandy to report on the American nurses' post-invasion duties.

Part Four is further characterized by Burke's meticulous care in capturing the utterly unique eye and voice that Miller brought to photojournalism: "She regularly saw what others missed" (222). From her initial exposure to the war through the field hospitals, Miller "learned that one could photograph horror, but at a cost" (223). Burke chronicles her immersion in

the war beginning with her experiences at Saint-Malo, her limitless hatred of the Germans, the liberation of Paris, her coverage of Luxembourg, the Alsace region, an interview with Colette, and the closing of the Colmar pocket (one of the bloodiest campaigns of the war). These shocking encounters are displayed against the gut-wrenching process that writing was for her. Writing was only possible when accompanied by giant quantities of hard liquor: Miller aptly referred to the writing process as "stone wringing."

Beginning in March 1945, Miller worked her way through Germany interviewing civilians, not one of whom admitted to being a Nazi, much less to having any knowledge of the camps. Her photographs of a family suicide in Leipzig and the camps Ohrdruf and Dachau speak volumes. What distinguishes her photos in these settings is the contrasting emotions she felt that are in evidence: blends of beauty and horror, outrage and empathy. *Dead SS Prison Guard Floating in Canal, Dachau* 1945 (Fig. 1), is an excellent example of this emotional/visual dichotomy. Finally in Munich, she and Scherman staged the now infamous take of Miller in Hitler's bathtub; she even took a nap in Eva Braun's bed. All of these images attest to the banality of evil, as Hannah Arendt so aptly described it in her 1963 study *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*.

After the armistice Miller traveled first through Eastern Europe documenting the war's aftermath but also trying to get a grip on all she had experienced. She tried to wash her depression away with huge doses of alcohol that only left her hung-over and enraged when she awoke the next morning. By the spring of 1946 Miller was again living in London with Penrose. After discovering that she was pregnant, she finally divorced her husband in the spring of 1947 and married Penrose in a civil ceremony.

I think Burke may have entitled Part Five of her study "Lady Penrose," not so much to mark Penrose's knighthood conferred by Queen Elizabeth in 1966, but rather to commemorate the dignity that Miller achieved in the last episodes of her life, in spite of a general public emphasis on her excessive drinking and loss of beauty. The entire era is marked by profound loss: of her profession as photojournalist, dear friends and loved ones (Picasso, Max Ernst, Man Ray, her parents), and difficult relationships with Penrose and their son Antony (Tony). Still she entertained and thus nurtured many, many friends by welcoming them in her home and cooking imaginative meals for them during these years. At a time before post-traumatic stress disorder was recognized, Miller and many others who had participated in the war were left to self-medicate the best way they could find. Cooking became Miller's way of self-medicating: she developed a passion for it and even received a degree of international recognition.

Carolyn Burke has penned a deeply moving biography of a 20th-century icon. Its 373 pages include 24 pages of photographs plus dozens more sprinkled throughout. An Appendix consists of a few of Miller's favorite recipes. Copious notes are located at the end of the book as well as an extensive bibliography. Even Burke's Acknowledgements are illuminating and reflect the scholarly prowess and personal care that one senses on every page. •

Lynda Hoffman-Jeep is an independent scholar, based in Cincinnati, where she teaches German and American Women's History at Ursuline Academy.

Alice Aycock: Sculpture and Projects

by Robert Hobbs
The MIT Press, 2005

Reviewed by Christine Filippone

I recently read an essay by a Nobel prize-winning particle physicist in which he stated that “theories in physics are culture-free and permanent.”¹ I smiled wryly, reflecting upon how often and incisively Alice Aycock had confounded his claim. With mischievous pleasure, I recalled penetrating works that revealed once widely held and now defunct scientific theories, posing searching questions like, Why was this theory upheld as a universal truth in this time and place and not another? In her work, Aycock has consistently sought to expose the fissures in dominant ideologies and in the process, as Robert Hobbs suggests, reveal the possibility of alternatives.

The opportunity to write a monograph on an artist of such complexity and probing intelligence comes rarely. Hobbs, Rhoda Thalheimer Endowed Chair in American Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, has masterfully woven together the many strands of this multifaceted artist’s thoughts and influences under a few overarching themes that encompass the work’s vast scope. From quantum mechanics to systems theory to schizophrenia, he attempts to disentangle the denseness of meaning in her work while maintaining its intended plurality. Throughout this process he consistently returns to what is, perhaps, its true function, an open-ended search for release from embedded cultural assumptions.

Hobbs positions Aycock as a proto-postmodernist whose work may provide clues to understanding the problematic shift in art from the late 1960s to 1970s. He sees her, together with selected other artists, as straddling modernism and postmodernism, presaging a more dynamic and open-ended relationship with viewers.² She accomplishes this by creating work intended to function as a mode of inquiry rather than as a stable, self-contained entity.

In this well-illustrated, 423-page monograph, Hobbs documents Aycock’s

work, beginning with her earthworks created in the late 1960s and early 1970s, followed by the outdoor wood constructions of the mid 1970s, and finally her machine works of the mid 1980s. Unfortunately, he provides only a cursory treatment of her work from the late 1980s to present, briefly mentioning her use of Form-z software beginning in the early 1990s to create virtual models of her developing concepts. He claims that in her more recent work she “create[s] elegiac and retrospective views of her previous works” (4), although he does believe her later public sculptures are deserving of separate study. She has dropped the text in work made over the last two decades, which he rightly says enriched so much of her earlier work, imbuing it with slipping signifiers and added layers of meaning.

Hobbs conducts an in-depth analysis of pivotal works in each phase of the artist’s development, nimbly distilling her dizzying array of sources and influences drawn from the fields of physics, anthropology, literature, psychology, history, art, etc. He admits his method undermines the primary function of her work: to remain as open to interpretation and associative meaning as possible. But he remains true to the artist’s intentions in that his interpretations are duly complex, albeit occasionally esoteric. The monograph presents much of the artist’s writings intended to be concomitant with her works and without which a careful, informed analysis of her work would be impossible. These are sprinkled throughout the text with some gathered in particularly helpful appendices. He also provides a generous array of artist quotes and statements garnered from numerous personal interviews as well as from previously published interviews with other scholars and critics. The manuscript was written over a period of eight years with the artists’ full participation.

Hobbs provides biography in the form of interview excerpts. These offer some insight into the roles played by members of Aycock’s family. Her father was a successful engineer who worked on the Pennsylvania Turnpike and later established his own construction company. Fascinated by her father’s work from childhood, the artist often held and stud-

ied a small model of the family house painstakingly designed by her father and eventually built. Her paternal grandmother also had a significant impact on the artist. A well-read teacher filled with ideas and imagination, she was esteemed by the entire family as the most intelligent among them.

In 1968 Aycock received her B.A. from Douglass College, an all-women’s college that is part of Rutgers University. The environment was conducive to experimentation, as Happenings founder Allan Kaprow participated in art events at Rutgers, and Fluxus adherents Robert Watts and Geoff Hendricks were teaching at Douglass. She received her M.A. in 1971 from Hunter College, where she was exposed to the work of luminaries like Linda Nochlin, Tony Smith, and Robert Morris. She was especially influenced by Morris’s brand of minimalism, which was informed by phenomenology.

Aycock’s earthworks of the early 1970s incorporated the philosophy of phenomenology promoted by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. By emphasizing direct, individual, multisensory experience, phenomenology negated western knowledge based purely on objective observation. Like Happenings and Fluxus events, which privileged the viewer, phenomenological works like Aycock’s required the viewer to complete the work through direct experience. In works such as *Maze*, (destroyed) Gibney Farm, New Kingston, Pennsylvania (1972), a wooden structure approximately 32 feet in diameter, viewers navigated around a complex series of walls about six feet tall. Inspired in part by an Egyptian labyrinth built as a prison, the walls were too high to determine one’s place within the work.³ Lacking a clear sense of position within the piece, viewers were removed from their comfort zone. In this and other early works, Aycock hoped to elicit a sense of fear, surprise or anxiety leading to a heightened level of awareness. The subjective, physiological response she sought countered the traditional rational or logical response that modernist, object-oriented painting and sculpture typically commanded. The ideas inherent in *Maze* were important for the artist and recur throughout her career.

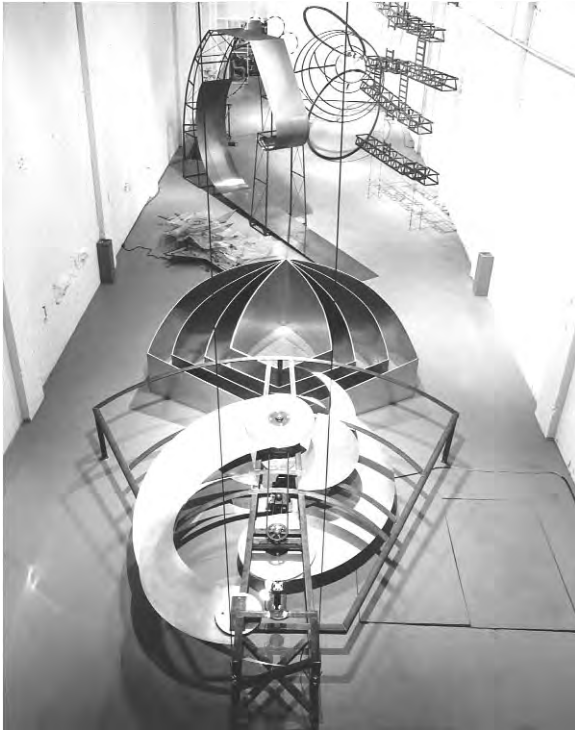


Fig 1. Alice Aycock, *The Thousand and One Nights in the Mansion of Bliss* (1983), steel, aluminum, lights (installation at Protetch-McNeill Gallery), c. 80' l. Collection of the artist. Photo: Wolfgang Staehl.

The roots of the artist's interest in the interaction between viewer and environment may be found in her illustration of systems theory in her master's thesis entitled *An Incomplete Examination of the Highway/ Network/ User/ Perceiver System*, completed in 1971. The interstate was just being finished at the time, and Aycock was intrigued by the way it was designed to conform to the user. Like the labyrinth, the highway can not be comprehended in its entirety at a glance, it must be perceived over time. General systems theory, named in the late 1940s by Austrian-American biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy, studies the dynamic relationships between seemingly independent systems such as driver and highway or highway and environment as interdependent, holistic phenomena. It is important to note that systems theory operates on the premise that real systems, whether physical or biological, are necessarily *open systems* because all interact with their environment.

Aycock's fascination with systems the-

ory stemmed in part from its resistance to simple, linear, cause and effect analysis. Hobbs helpfully reproduces some of the narrative from her thesis, in which Aycock wrote, "Systems theory states that processes can no longer be treated as the result of simple and linear cause and effect or one-to-one relationships. Based on the premise that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, systems theory directs itself to complex wholes" (15). In the midst of the social upheaval of the 1960s many artists rejected closed systems, causality, and absolute truths born of Enlightenment thought. These systems, which had dominated Western society, seemed didactic, oppressive, and exclusive, and had proved inadequate. Instead, artists favored subjective experience, which they believed offered a more plural, more authentic kind of truth. Hobbs's deftly

grounds Aycock's exploration of phenomenology, systems theory, and its close associate, cybernetics, in her interest in the subjective physiological relationship between viewer and environment leading to the creation of open systems that render Descartes's dualism obsolete.

Acknowledging the influence of Robert Smithson on Aycock's development, Hobbs counterposes their approaches in light of her interest in open systems. Smithson was concerned with entropy, the degree of disorder in a given system. Entropy is known to increase in closed or isolated systems as matter and energy seek their simplest form. On the contrary, Hobbs suggests that Aycock's work should be considered in terms of "negentropy," which represents a build-up of information and an increase in complexity and meaning.⁴ Functioning as an open system, Aycock's work admits information from outside sources in the form of viewer interaction and interpretation. Hobbs states, "In Aycock's work, negentropy signals the ability of the work of art to replenish itself from the outside and to

remain open to viewers, who [continually] reframe and reinterpret [the work]" (26). Presented with a profusion of often conflicting meanings in the form of layers of iconographic references and attendant writings, the viewer is forced to form her own meaning drawn from her own experience and her own personal perspective. Each viewer's reading process and resulting interpretation forms a continuum with the work, constantly feeding it with new information and increasing its complexity.

Importantly, Hobbs discusses the relevance of feminism, a term the artist has repeatedly disavowed in relation to her work. Aycock's earthworks were often used to support early feminist notions of essentialism. Built into the ground and covered with tons of earth, works like *Low Building with Dirt Roof (for Mary)*, (1973, Gibney Farm) incorporated restrictive spaces designed to be entered by the viewer. They were thus referred to as feminine archetypal spaces, engulfing the viewer in a womb-like environment.⁵ For an artist intent upon the creation and investigation of plural meanings, essentialism could be construed as extremely limiting. Aycock viewed the label "woman artist" as a fetter to be avoided.⁶ Hobbs, correctly I think, positions Aycock as a liberal feminist, one who sees men and women as equals who should be afforded equal opportunities through legislative reform. He says, "Aycock views gender roles as historically determined and socially constructed narratives that can be manipulated at will" (103). Her work, he claims, is in accord with what critic Jan Avgikos refers to as feminism's contribution to post-modernity, "fragmentation, pluralism, diversity, subjectivity, activism" (96).⁷

To highlight the relevance of feminism to the artist's work, Hobbs discusses the presence of Linda Nochlin at Hunter College, whose classes Aycock audited. At that time, Nochlin was writing her now famous essay, "Why Are There No Great Women Artists?" Nochlin's emphasis on revealing the social and political context of works of art was an important influence that helped the artist think beyond minimalism at that crucial time. Hobbs also discusses Aycock's use of axonometric drawing, typically used in male-dominated professions such as architecture

and engineering, for free-form, associational, or creative purposes. He asserts that her application of this rational drawing method for nonrational purposes may be interpreted as a liberal feminist strategy aimed at upsetting naturalized ideologies.⁸

In the late 1970s, Aycock began to exhibit her works with artist statements intended to extend the meaning of the works and expand the horizon of possible interpretations. In 1977 she created the architectural sculpture *The True and the False Project Entitled "The World is so Full of a Number of Things."* In this work, paradox was implicit in the structure with its inaccessible doorways and ladders leading nowhere. The paradox was multiplied by the accompanying text, which read in part, "The false project after the catacombs of St. Sebastian. The true project after the astronomer Lord Rosse's telescoped construction 'The Leviathan of Parsonstown'" (163). In the text, the artist placed in contradiction monuments for the living found in cities with those for the dead found in necropolises, each of which may or may not function as sources for her work. Thus the viewer oscillates between object and text, and between his direct perceptual experience of the work and his historical knowledge of the monuments and their meaning. Hobbs points out that through this novel approach, in part a response to Roland Barthes's essay *Rhetoric of the Image*, which she had read, Aycock changed the typical relations between text and image by using the text to compound meaning rather than simply to complement the image.

Hobbs also asserts that works like *The True and the False Project Entitled "The World is so Full of a Number of Things"* function as 'schizophrenic' metaphors for the fracture and discontinuity inherent in modern life. Inspired by the stories of the diagnosed schizophrenic N.N. revealed in Geza Roheim's study *Magic and Schizophrenia*, Aycock's allusive texts suggested the concept of a divided and transitory identity. These works negate the concept of a cogent, self-contained meaning and thrust the project of interpretation back upon the viewer. Simultaneously, they assert that meaning is as subjective and plural as the individual viewer.

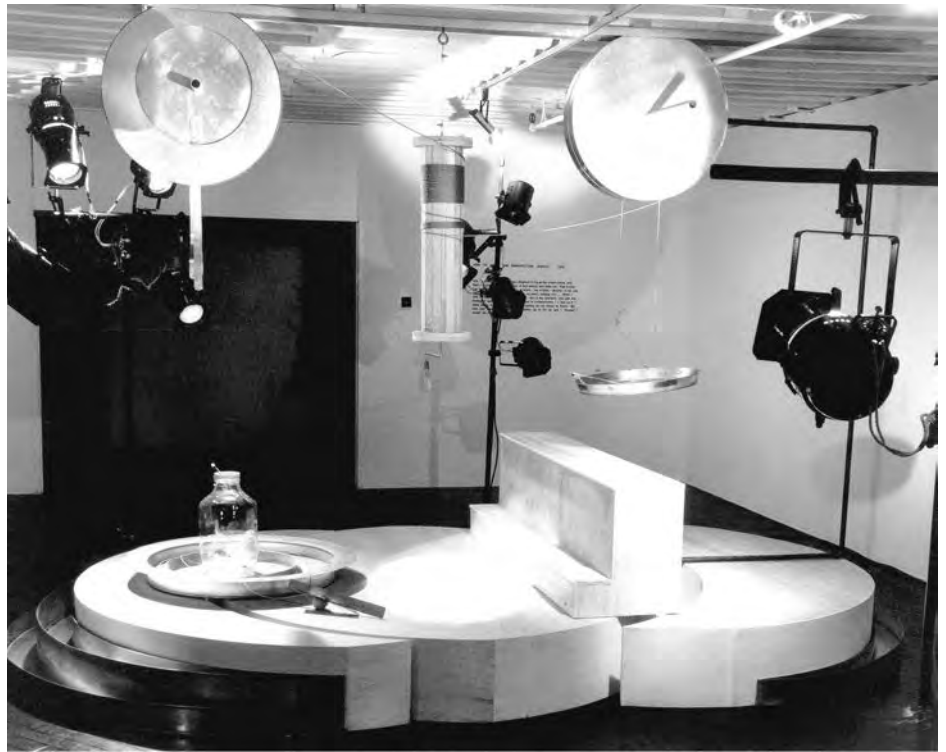


Fig. 2. Alice Aycock, *How to Catch and Manufacture Ghosts* (1979), wood, glass, water, theatrical lights, galvanvanized steel containers, birds, performer with bubbles and pipe, copper, zinc, lemon battery connected to a bird in a glass bottle floating in a pan of water, approx. 10' h x 15' l x 8' w. Installation at John Weber Gallery. Photo: John Ferrari.

In the mid 1960s, the psychiatrist R.D. Laing asserted the logic of madness, particularly schizophrenia and psychoses, in the context of contemporary society. For him, madness was a natural and sometimes necessary response to the restrictive forces of society. Certain forms of madness, he claimed, were the result of an identity crisis caused by social pressure to disassociate from one's inner self. Psychosis and fantasy allowed a place of slippage from social pressures that enabled the retention of the inner self.⁹ Without mentioning Laing, Hobbs credits Aycock as the first to demonstrate this cultural insight. "The schizoid work of art, which is given its first cogent manifestation in Aycock's work, represents a particularly rich development in the realm of postontological art objects, a subcategory of postmodern art. The major characteristic of this schizophrenic condition is an internal division of the work of art into object and text concomitant with a proliferation of possible meanings so that no one particular interpretation can be considered transcendent

and definitive" (168). Akin to many conceptual artists, Aycock forced the viewer to reconsider how the art object functions, and more broadly, how meaning is generated and perpetuated in a given society.

Hobbs also attempts to situate Aycock within the cultural context of the burgeoning information age. With the phrases "global village" and "medium is the message" first coined by Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s, the concept of instant communication and information exchange via electronic media presciently predicted a vast change in the way we live our lives.¹⁰ The information age, formed by the ubiquity of mass media, the creation of personal computers in the 1970s, and the subsequent development of the internet, functions through a complex build-up of ever-increasing layers of information and meaning. By superimposing her own narratives drawn from myriad sources onto her architectural sculptures already rich in iconographic associations, Hobbs contends, Aycock's work functions as a metaphor for the pro-

liferation of information in our society. Hobbs points to the influence of critic, curator, and theorist Jack Burnham's writings on the relevance of cybernetics to art and art production. Burnham's analogy of human bodies with computer hardware and their thoughts with software, and the important interrelationship between them, Hobbs claims, is critical for an understanding of Aycock's work. He is careful to point out, though, that her works "puncture the information age's apparently seamless web, making what she terms 'tears in the universe'" (4).

In the late seventies and early eighties, Aycock's work shifted from primarily outdoor contexts to the gallery and began to incorporate metals, plexiglass, neon, and other industrial materials in addition to wood, as seen in remarkable works like *The Thousand and One Nights in the Mansion of Bliss* (1983; Fig. 1), *How to Catch and Manufacture Ghosts* (Fig. 2) and *The Machine that Makes the World*, both built in 1979 and exhibited at the John Weber Gallery in SoHo, examined the simultaneously creative and destructive powers of machines, the seemingly magical principles upon which they are built, and the sometimes irrational purposes to which they are put. Aycock was inspired to conduct new investigations into the contradictory effects of modern technology and scientific discovery by the partial meltdown at Three Mile Island, the nuclear power plant near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where she grew up. "The potential dangers of Three Mile Island stimulated her to focus in yet a new way on the discredited prehistory of scientific beliefs and to find new means to manifest the mythos of the 'ghost in the machine' to symbolize the mysteries of subatomic particles, quantum mechanics, and electricity" (228). Also influenced by Thomas Kuhn's 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, these works are based on the premise that scientific truths and what is considered science may be subject to change in different contexts.

How to Catch and Manufacture Ghosts functioned in part as a conduit of time travel, revealing mythic truths about the connections between past scientific and pseudo-scientific discoveries, the relationship between cultural understandings of what is rational and irrational, and how

these understandings change over time. For the design of the work's wood and metal base, the artist drew upon Tantric diagrams and medieval cosmological schemes representing alternative world-views. The work was inspired in part by the early-19th-century belief in the concept of electricity as a catalyst for the creation of life, manifested in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, whose monster is brought to life by an electric shock from a bolt of lightning. Aycock also noted the miraculous power of electricity in 18th-century accounts of its use to bring the dead back to life. The installation's various components, steel and glass containers, pipe, and lemon battery referred to a rudimentary 18th-century means of generating electricity described by Franz Anton Mesmer. Mesmer was the founder of the pseudo-science mesmerism, which over several centuries, instigated investigations that influenced the discovery that nuclear reactors could be used to generate electricity. Periodically, a girl would sit in the center of the base of Aycock's sculpture and blow bubbles, indicating the whimsical nature of scientific discovery.

Armed with a discerning knowledge of her sources and a keen understanding of their philosophical underpinnings, Hobbs perceptively identifies a few overarching metaphors that suitably illustrate the complex ways in which Aycock's work functions. Among the most important is the concept of the Aleph taken from the short story by the Argentine poet, essayist, and short-story writer Jorge Luis Borges. Aycock has often referred to Borges in discussing her work, and this story resonates strongly for her. The Aleph is a tiny square inch of space which contains infinity: the entirety of the present, all pasts, and all futures. The protagonist in the story achieves a revelatory moment of enlightenment when given the rare opportunity to observe this veritable interruption in the space-time continuum. In the Aleph, he sees his own past and future along with those of everyone who has ever lived. In this tiny square of space, all spaces and times converge. Aycock's work, Hobbs suggests, functions similarly in that it also represents a nexus where past and future meet and disparate meanings coalesce. He uses the metaphor frequently throughout the book

so that its meaning occasionally becomes diffuse, but it is an immensely insightful means by which to consider how the artist's work functions. Aycock's work moves effortlessly in time, metaphorically surveying the belief systems of other cultures at different points in history. She wonders why these ideologies were appropriate or useful at one time and place and not in another. Her aim is to confront viewers with the transitory nature of our own ideologies that otherwise seem natural and permanent.

Hobbs also draws a parallel between Borges's Aleph and the "rift," or opening, posited by Martin Heidegger in *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1935). Heidegger's rift, Hobbs suggests, represents a hole in dominant ideologies or ways of viewing the world. Through the rift, viewers' minds may be opened to the possibility of alternatives. "Moreover her art undertakes the important task of ideological reformation by puncturing established views—setting up a rift in them—in order to create new spaces where new insights might become possible" (153). The rift may be considered a disjunctive presence in actual physical space, which forces an interruption in the viewer's process of perception. This interruption, may serve as a jolt that triggers a new realization or new way of conceiving the world. Aycock's strategy of layering multiple iconographic and historical references with narrative written neither to illuminate nor obfuscate serves to confound the viewer's ability to instantly interpret her works in terms that conform easily to his expectations.

Hobbs offers a broadly circumscribed, intelligent assessment of Aycock's full range of scientific, mystical, technological, and metaphysical sources and interests. He captures her inquisitive, probing mind and her desire to manifest a rapidly changing culture that remains simultaneously enthralled by and blinded to the effects of science and technology. Examining her work within the cultural context of phenomenology, spectacle, systems theory, postmodern schizophrenia, poststructuralist theory and the information age, he suggests that she was both embedded within her cultural milieu as well as leading interrogations into our cultural blind spots.

Throughout her work, Aycock has searched for a generic image... capable of containing in embryo the basic operation of civilizations past, present, and future, a tear in the universe on the order of Borges's Aleph that provides a view of its essential structure. She believes this to be an impossible goal, yet a venture worth undertaking and continuing (314). ●

Christine Filippone, formerly executive director of The Print Center in Philadelphia, is completing her dissertation on science, technology and utopias in the work of contemporary women artists at Rutgers University.

NOTES

1. Steven Weinberg, "Physics and History" in *Science and Culture*, eds. Peter Galison, Stephen R. Graubard, Everett Mendelsohn. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction

Publishers, 2001), 161-62. Weinberg makes this argument in response to social constructivist claims to the contrary. He says that "even though scientific theory is in a sense a social consensus, it is unlike any other sort of consensus in that it is culture-free and permanent." He is careful to point out that he can not prove that the laws of physics in their mature form are culture-free, but he believes it to be so. He claims (p. 163) that unlike political or artistic history the achievements of science become permanent. The only thing that "changes is our understanding of both why the theories are true and their scope of validity."

2. He also names Vito Acconci, Siah Armajani, Chris Burden, Gordon Matta-Clark, Mary Miss and George Trakas. (6)
3. Alice Aycock, "Work 1972-1974." in Allan Sondheim, ed. *Individuals: Post-Movement Art in America*. (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977), 104-21.
4. Hobbs explores the concept of negentropy as discussed by Jack Burnham in "Real Time Systems" in *Great Western Salt Works: Essays on the Meaning of Post-Formalist Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1974), 30.
5. As late as 1989, her work was discussed in the context of the woman-house metaphor.

Judith E. Stein and Anne-Sargent Wooster, "Making their Mark", in Randy Rosen and Catherine C. Brawer eds., *Making Their Mark: Women Artists Move into the Mainstream, 1970-85* (New York: Abbeville, 1989), 111.

6. Aycock told me in a recent interview, "I just wanted to be, quite frankly, the greatest artist of the latter part of the twentieth century on all levels. I didn't want to be called the greatest woman artist, or the greatest feminist artist or whatever, I just wanted to be hands down really good." Christine Filippone, unpublished interview with the artist on April 5, 2004, in New York.
7. Jan Avgikos, statement in "Feminism & Art [9 Views]," *Artforum* 42.2 (October 2003): 146.
8. The words "may be interpreted" are important here, as I do not believe that this strategy was enacted purposefully by the artist. In this same chapter though, Hobbs rightly discusses the artist's rejection of perspectival drawing as a means of challenging long-held traditions.
9. See R.D. Laing. *The Politics of Experience*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967).
10. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*. (New York: Routledge, 1964).

Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker

by Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw
Duke University Press, 2004

Reviewed by Jennifer Heusel

Biting. Didactic. Haunting. Controversial. Many articles on artist Kara Walker (b. 1969) associate these adjectives with her work. Walker burst onto the contemporary art scene in the mid 1990s with disturbing, life-size silhouettes that explore issues of race and gender in a stark, simplified format. The crisp, cut-paper outlines of her human subjects—familiar forms but in unfamiliar poses—are always shocking. Viewers cannot help but react to the charming figures acting out disturbing content. For example, Walker's silkscreen print *The Emancipation Approximation* (2000) features a southern belle leaning lazily against a tree stump, ignoring the disembodied heads with black features sprawled

around her. She stands opposite an ax, also propped against the stump. Is she the villain of the scene or a mere onlooker? Walker's silhouettes tackle forgotten histories and display them for public consumption. The viewer is always challenged by these disturbing images.

Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, an associate professor of art history at University of Pennsylvania, offers the first book solely dedicated to Walker's career and controversial work outside the context of an exhibit. Succinctly titled *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker*, Shaw's book sets the artist's work against a background of African American history and Western art history. Observed through a racial lens, Shaw argues that Walker's art "reflects and offers up for critique" (6) a collective, often disturbing past, which has yet to be culturally transcended. Shaw centers her discussion in four of the five chapters on specific works. All address sites and themes that are rooted specifically in the antebellum and postbellum South, but generally in "racist, sexist, and

class-based American hegemony" (19). Further, Walker funnels a number of literary and visual icons of American and African American history through a post-modern filter that alters their original meanings and unveils social and individual "unspeakables." For example, Walker portrays the abolitionist John Brown as a restrained, unattractive old man who is painfully nursing a black child.

Shaw sees Walker's silhouetted figures as "black paper doppelgangers created to bring forth the dark side of the viewer's imagination and...responsible for dealing with the guilt that the rest of the psyche must repress" (42). The images are not just a personal cathartic exercise, but also a social criticism of unresolved issues that continue to plague society. Shaw's analysis is a well-executed first installment on the life and work of Kara Walker, who in a career spanning little more than a decade, has accomplished many projects, and generated controversy in the art community. By employing various methods to exam-



Fig. 1. Kara Walker, *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* (1995), wall installation, 13' x 35'. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co.

ine Walker's work, including feminist, Post-Negritude visual practice, and "signifying," Shaw's examination leaves few issues concerning race and gender unconsidered. However, her treatment of the relationship between these issues to class and art as a middle-class economic commodity is limited.

Overall, in *Seeing the Unspeakable*, Shaw demonstrates how Walker's racial and gendered experiences inform her work, and then positions the work within a larger context that critiques race and gender. Another significant component of the book is Shaw's presentation of the controversy surrounding the public display of Walker's disturbing and racially sensitive work. She successfully positions Walker's works as sites for remembering a disturbing and traumatic past, though it is too soon to know if the work can bring about audience reconciliation with those "unspeakable" sites.

When Walker was thirteen, her family moved from Stockton, California, to Stone Mountain, Georgia, where the shock of the Deep South culture made for a difficult transition. After completing her undergraduate degree at Atlanta College of Art, she entered the MFA program at Rhode Island School of Design. Participation in a group show at the Drawing Center after graduation in 1994 introduced her to the New York art scene. The exposure garnered gallery representation and solo shows, both domestic and international. Walker began earning prestigious awards, including a 1997 MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant, and by the end of the 1990s she was receiving large commissions for her wall installations. Most (if not all) of Walker's work is influenced by per-

sonal battles with society's demons including race, class, and gender, and Shaw maximizes Walker's "insider" position as an African American woman when structuring her analysis (19, 133).

The book opens with an investigation of the racial and gendered history of silhouette making. As an artistic medium, silhouettes have the ability to both hide and accentuate appearances or identities. Shaw specifically references the "mixed-raced artist" Moses Williams, who emphasized certain European features in his cut-paper self-portrait (24), and goes on to evaluate the practice of "emphasizing" by other artists, including Walker. Shaw engages this subverted dialogue with art-historical comparative precision, in order to explain Walker's abject imagery. To strengthen the argument that Walker's work is critiquing collective culture, Shaw discusses several well-known products of past-century popular culture, such as Currier and Ives lithographs and the novels *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Gone with the Wind* (38, 90). Shaw proposes a dialogue between Walker's work and these images from history that inform a collective culture—of race, class, gender, and power and privilege—unfolding throughout the book.

In Chapter 1, "Tracing Race and Representation," Shaw positions Walker's career and early success within a racial and gendered framework by focusing on the silhouette as a manipulative medium (18). Walker's work is seen as challenging the historical perception of the "weaker, more feminine" silhouette-medium as one that has communicated and reinforced constructed identities of race and gender (20). Walker's embrace of the silhouette

medium to depict discursive 19th-century racist and sexist literary tropes is a way for audiences to confront these "specters" in our collective memory (36). Shaw highlights these "specters" in Walker's work by way of "signifying," a literary approach developed by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., that identifies creative revisions of societal norms by taking into account alternative experiences, specifically addressing race.

Walker's unearthing of race as a subversive and unreconciled "specter" in American society is explored further in Chapter 2, "The 'Rememory' of Slavery." Considering the artist's large silhouette suite *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* (1995; Fig. 1) through a Freudian lens, Shaw says that Walker "is re-memor[ing] an antinarrative that exists in a place before memory and beyond it, always familiar, yet resoundingly alien" (42). Walker's silhouette thus refamiliarizes her audience to the forgotten and repressed guilt over the trauma of slavery by visually unearthing those traumatic events. The audience then is both attracted to and repulsed by these life-size figures "involved in nightmarish acts" (42), which become the vehicles to rethink the familiar and accepted history that includes the memory of the trauma from both the institution of slavery and the internalization of whiteness.

Building upon this general analysis of "unspeakable" residuals in Walker's work, which Shaw says are lost in contemporary nostalgic memory of 19th-century abolition history, she focuses specifically on the white abolitionist John Brown. In Chapter 3, "The Lactation of John Brown," Shaw discusses Walker's deliberate depiction of Brown as a neglectful martyr figure. Using the poignant drawing entitled *John Brown* (1996), Shaw demonstrates how images that have been positioned as important icons in African American history actually reinforce white patriarchy. "The painfully dry teat" of the white man and by extension white patriarchy does not have the ability to provide "meaningful nourishment for the descendents of the black folks who have kept the memory of his martyrdom alive" (72-73). For Shaw, this depiction is deliberate and meant "to challenge and

resist specific conceptions of what constitutes proper artistic production on the part of a young black woman" (94).

In "Censorship and Reception," the fourth chapter, Shaw documents curatorial situations where museums were coerced into decisions not to show Walker's work, specifically her print *A Means to an End ... A Shadow Drama in Five Acts* (1995), because of the controversial nature of the subject matter. Specifically targeted in this chapter are the negative reactions of African American artists, critics, and institutions to Walker's work and career.

The last chapter, "Final Cut," centers on the self-portrait *Cut* (1998; Fig. 2) and "the self creation of Walker's artistic persona and her attempts to control the discourse around her work" (127). Questioning of identity is a particular interest throughout the book, as Shaw develops the theme of forgotten guilt in the previous chapters, and in this chapter she exposes Walker's self interrogation as a black woman artist.

From challenging critics of Walker's talent by situating her work in an art historical context, to explaining the ideological significance of her postmodern approach, Shaw engages a variety of topics. She identifies in the critiques of Walker's work a desire to devalue the artist on a personal as well as art historical basis, and shows how Walker's use of postmodern theory and subversion give rise to misinterpretation—and viewer discomfort. Postmodernism is disconcerting because it disrupts traditional and accepted societal norms, and the postmodern context of Walker's work is formed visually—through viewer double-take. Images that may appear familiar and safe turn out to be disturbing and discomfiting. *Cut*, for example, at first glance appears to be a figure jumping for joy. But a longer look reveals that the elegant curlicues are streams of blood from the figure's slashed wrists. Further, to explain the difficulty in accepting Walker's work, Shaw reveals that "resolutions" in the work are rarely positive, since Walker, the artist, refuses to pander to black victimhood (118).

Walker is described as an "incommensurable artist," rejecting art world accepted definitions of a black woman

artist (130). This position is embraced by Walker through her silhouette medium and discursive imagery as a way to counteract and "negotiate with the dominant culture" (150), which insists on "the fetishization of the female African American body" (130). Using such analysis, Shaw effectively demonstrates how Walker utilizes the subversive qualities of her silhouettes to reveal the lived and psychological residuals of past oppression and challenge contemporary readers to do the same.

All sides—black and white, conservative and liberal—are fair game for Walker to interrogate in order to "challenge and resist specific conceptions of what constitutes proper artistic production on the part of a young, black woman" (94). Shaw explains some of the ways in which Walker's complicated works destabilize social structures, particularly within the white-dominated art world. For example, Walker has created a persona for artistic consumption that allows her to remain in control of both her art and self-image. Her use of pseudonyms such as "Missus K. E. B. Walker, Colored" and "Negress" challenges the viewer's relationship to the work, the historical consumption of black bodies, and the control of the black artist by the white patron (52, 140, 141). The persona is also documented as Walker's way of reliving "the past in order to confront it in the present" (127) or, stated differently, Walker first positions herself in a dialogue with the "unspeakable" past and then invites her viewers to do the same. Since Walker's persona is also seen as a shield in which she can navigate the oppression of whiteness and dominance of patriarchy (140), only the artist herself can say if this strategy is successful.

Shaw presents the postmodern position of Walker's work as complicating its public reception. Shock can be somewhat of an understatement for uninitiated viewers of Walker's work. Although her images present social criticism, the representations of an old white man sodomizing black children and black women nursing each other while denying a hungry black child, as seen in *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven*, have been viewed as offensive. In fact, controversy



Fig. 2. Kara Walker, *Cut* (1998), cut paper and adhesive on wall, 88" x 54". Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co.

has arisen between offended members of the African American community—mostly middle class and conservative—and some museums hoping to increase African American attendance.

Shaw discusses this controversy in Chapter 4, which begins with the pulling of *A Means to an End* from a 1999 exhibition at the Detroit Institute of Arts. The work consists of five scenes that appear to be: a half dressed woman with a naked child hanging from her breast, a young girl riding backwards on a fox, a woman leaping over stepping stones that are the tops of black heads, a head and hand above water, and a man strangling a child who straddles his leg (103-04). The author then documents several similar curatorial situations where a decision was rendered not to show Walker's work based on its provocative subject matter and the museum's inability to address the contentious situation appropriately. Shaw believes the American art world needs to find the courage to confront such content and images. For example, she writes, "Had there been someone who could authoritatively explain and

defend the work's presence," museum staff and audiences "may have been less threatened by the confrontational nature of the work." Shaw locates this "authoritative" voice as someone who is "comfortable discussing issues of race and representation" (112).

For the better part of this chapter, Shaw arduously defends Walker by demonstrating how some members of the African American artistic community have attacked not her work but lambasted her personally. If Walker's images are meant to critique both white patriarchy and black conservatism, then why are the loudest critics African Americans? Shaw demonstrates that black and white groups respond differently to Walker's work, but she does not interrogate white liberals, who tend to respond to Walker's images through economic means such as purchasing. (I was left wondering whether the messy self-interrogation of white privilege and the guilt that Walker's work is supposed to inflict on those within this privileged position is negated by purchasing the work.) While I agree with Shaw that Walker's images need to enter a public dialogue, Shaw virtually ignores the consumer response of the white art world, possibly because it is precisely this response that validates Walker's work as fine art (15, 19).

The same model of material agency does not correspond similarly for African American patrons and viewers. While Walker's world of violence is more remote to many whites, it is the recent past for many African Americans who have felt the collective pain of dogs tearing at their arms and legs, fires spreading across their city blocks, and floodwaters stranding

them on the rooftops of their homes. This vulnerable, racialized reality is most dangerous and significant to the African American middle class, since they have the most to lose, and skin-color politics still provides the easiest way to lose it. Shaw notes that, "Because black bodies have so often been seen only in the terms of parody, it is difficult for many African Americans to believe that derisive images can be repurposed in a beneficially subversive manner by artists" (118). But who is benefiting from these images, and how? Although they appear disturbing and possibly subversive now, to the next generation of social critics they may seem tame.

While delivering a strong, solid academic critique, Shaw gives priority to race and gender over issues of class. Except to affirm that Walker has "made it to the A-list" in the art world (17), Shaw presents a limited critique on the racial dynamics of the art market. In a footnote she cites that Walker has been criticized for "appeasing" her white patrons (175). I propose we adjust this statement and question the practice of purchasing nonracism by liberal whites, or in Walker's case, alleviating guilt through the economic act of consumption. Many disciplines are struggling with the historical residuals of practiced prejudice in scholarship, and I am not convinced art history (much less society as a whole) has the vocabulary to confront the convergence of race, class, and gender. Variations of white privilege and class distinctions reside at the core of art production, history, and exhibition. Race rarely enters everyday vocabulary unless one lives it. Gender has gained leverage, but not to a position of elimination. Historically in the United States, class

interrogations labeled one as "red" but more recently as anti-democratic and unpatriotic. In a powerful way, Walker's work demonstrates society's and the academy's limited vocabulary on these issues. As Shaw states, "In laying bare the historical myths of American culture, Walker has caught the attention of critics and of the cultural guardians" (122). How best to explore the interrelations of race, class, and gender remains a challenge for us all.

Shaw's book on the early and controversial career of artist Kara Walker is appealing and thought provoking. She provides an introduction into the "unspeakable" realm of Walker's art that will interest scholars across disciplines. Thirty-four black and white images as well as ten color plates enhance Shaw's analysis; however, in a book representing recent theory and scholarship, a bibliography would have strengthened the dialogue between the presented information and the reader.

Shaw provides a comprehensive analysis of Walker's relevance in art history and her place in larger discussions of race and gender in society. This discussion is far from complete, as the author concludes: "The discourse of the unspeakable in Walker's work ... will continue to be a fertile area of research as long as there is so much that remains seen, yet unspoken" (156). The future is expansive and challenged by artists like Kara Walker. ●

Jennifer Heusel is a graduate student in the Departments of African American and African Diaspora Studies and Art History at Indiana University.



Back issues of *Woman's Art Journal* are now available in JSTOR, the not-for-profit online digital archive. Interested users at libraries and institutions that participate in JSTOR's Arts & Sciences III collection will now be able to browse, search, view and download the full-text pdf articles of all journal content from the first issue in 1980 up until and excluding the most recent three years.

Information regarding JSTOR is available at:
<http://www.jstor.org>

The Art of Rachel Whiteread

edited by Chris Townsend
Thames and Hudson, London, 2004

Reviewed by Robin Rice

Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963), one of the best known of the YBA's (Young British Artists) of the late 1980s and 1990s, is internationally recognized for her public works. Whiteread's sculpture concretizing real negative volumes of space engages in a complex dialogue with the modernist tradition, borrowing from and yet almost satirizing Minimalism, Cubism, and Futurism, as well as Surrealism.

In *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*, Chris Townsend, Lecturer in the Department of Media Arts, Royal Holloway, University of London, and editor of several volumes on contemporary artists, brackets chapters composed as independent essays by eight other writers between his own chapters. The book is organized to simultaneously suggest the arc of Whiteread's career so far and to articulate trends in postmodern, post-structuralist critical theory.

Whiteread is known for casting empty spaces using existing furniture and architecture as molds. In his introductory remarks, Townsend describes her work as heterotopian, a contrast to utopian, quoting Michel Foucault, "Heterotopias are disturbing, because they secretly undermine language and because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names..." (29). Foucault, himself, discussed the spaces within houses, rooms, and furniture and spoke of the people who meet through these objects and yet never meet in life, themes frequently mentioned with regard to Whiteread's manifestation of a palpable historical past.

An unscientific impression suggests Foucault, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Derrida, and Rosalind Krauss as the most quoted sources of comments in this book that though not written about Whiteread might have been. Of course, scholars have an eye for apt quotation, but, as Townsend writes,

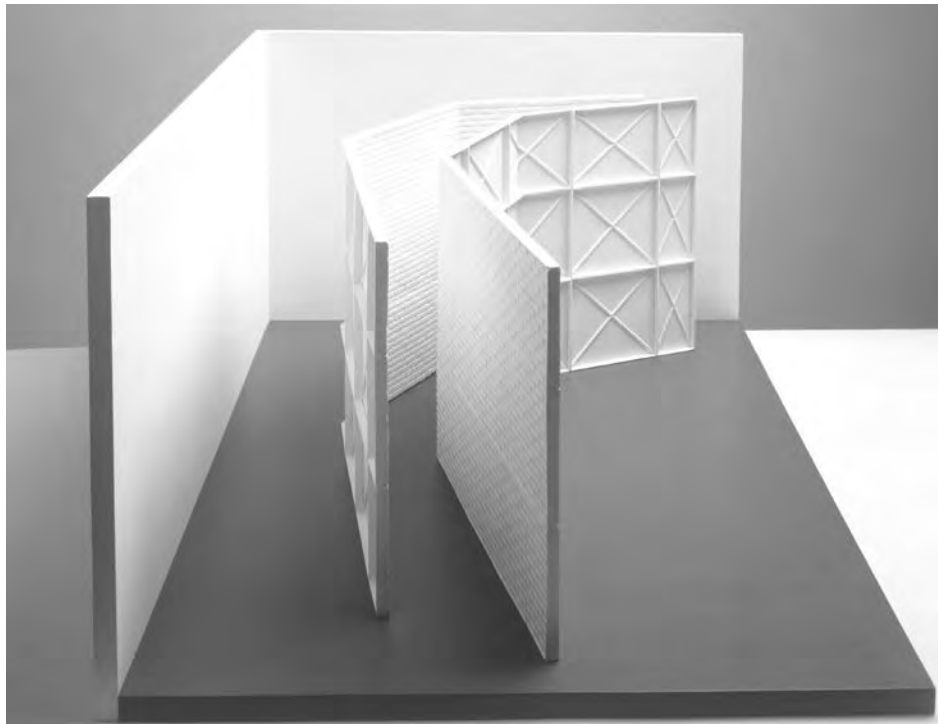


Fig. 1. Rachel Whiteread, *Model for Untitled (Wall)* (1999), dimensions of full size work 123" x 352" x 4". Courtesy of the artist and Luhning Augustine.

It is, perhaps, a mark of the truly significant artist that, however unknowingly, their work anticipates the shifts of the present that come to compose history, as much as it, without flinching, confronts and interprets the past. Whiteread's public art projects...can be seen as fulfilling such an anticipatory function (30).

Whiteread began her studies as a landscape painter. Townsend describes her 1980s castings of mattresses and used furniture as "typically student" in their "not very special" subject matter (7, 10). In "Remembrance of Things Present," essayist Jennifer Gross evokes Proust's fugitive madeleines and the tradition of vanitas painting to address the artist's capacity for "monumental intimacy" and "alienating familiarity" (46). Whiteread's early processes, which "left the sculptures veneered with the impress of soot, staining, and human marking," have greater specificity than her more recent projects (38). Like others in this volume, Gross notes that Whiteread avoids "the peculiarly

English penchant ... to memorialize nostalgia" (41).

Both Shelley Hornstein and Angela Dimitrakaki devote individual essays to *House*, Whiteread's most famous project, which Dimitrakaki calls a "focal point for the rethinking of collective identities" (127). Begun in August of 1993 as a three-month project, monumental *House* recorded the interior spaces of a three-story Victorian terrace slated for destruction. Pleas to preserve the work were overruled by the town council, which voted to destroy it on November 23, 1993, the day Whiteread received the prestigious Turner Prize.

Like James Young, another essayist, Hornstein finds a resonance of Freud's concept of the "uncanny" in Whiteread's elision of an intermediate mold or layer in casting real objects, a "doubling." Her process is central to meaning because the destruction necessary to make a positive becomes a redefinition of the process of casting.

Dimitrakaki contrasts *House* to Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981-89 when it was removed from public view). She is intrigued by the lack of consensus in

the response to the work and the way opinions reflected class and income. The fact that *House* exists today only in memory and documentation makes it, in a sense, a doubly negative work.

In "Sensitive Skin," Susan Lawson relates an atypical work in Whiteread's oeuvre to Derrida's concepts. *Wall* (1999; Fig. 1) was a temporary site-specific gallery installation, "a cast of the wall of the rear gallery set back from the wall by a couple of feet" (71). Here, perhaps uniquely, Whiteread's supporting framework for the cast was exposed to view and the cast negative was placed so that, with the positive, it formed a human-scale corridor through which visitors could walk. This space expanded the territory of *différance* in an unsettling way, which Lawson links to Marce Duchamp's casts of objects and miniature reproductions of his own work (for *Boîte-en-Valise*) and to the indexical function of language. "[I]t seems crucial to me," she says, "that Whiteread places the human body *inside the split*, into the moment of *différance* and so at the heart of language formation" (83).

In "Moving On," Melanie Mariño links Whiteread with Jorge Luis Borges's fictions, which "braid past and future into an infinite and circular labyrinth." She asks, "Might this agile refutation of succession defer the pastness of history, refer to art's end?" (85). The artist's photographs of condemned high-rises imploding and her interest in staircases evoke kinetic experience and "document places of loss, failure, and entropy, those objects and sites on the verge of extinction," writes Mariño (104).

Emphasizing a changing social context, Pamela M. Lee links Whiteread's transparent resin *Water Tower* in SoHo (1998) to the evolution of that neighborhood from a low-rent area appealing to struggling artists into a gallery district and, now, into an increasingly upscale residential and retail community. She discusses the water tower motif as an industrialist, urban emblem. Lee agrees with others who feel that Whiteread's tower unintentionally has become a ghostly monument to the death of SoHo as an art center.

Another transparent cast resin piece, *Trafalgar Square Monument* (2001), is the subject of Blake Stimson's "The Shimmer

of Industrial Form," and Roland Barthes is the theoretical touchstone. *Monument*, yet another temporary site-specific work, was a cast of the plinth on which it rested, inverted. Initially intended for a statue of William IV, the plinth has never been home to a permanent work. Stimson describes the social role of Trafalgar Square, a historic location of demonstrations and celebrations, as well as monuments, and considers "Whiteread's sculptural muteness as a symptom of loss or alienation, on the one hand, and that same muteness as an indication of personal attainment or self-realization or enlightenment on the other—together as if they were one" (150).

Discussing Rachel Whiteread's *Holocaust Memorial* (1995/2005) in Vienna, James E. Young compares Germany's post World War II response to the Holocaust to that of Austria. He feels that Germany is almost guilt-obsessed with its Nazi past while Austria, Hitler's birthplace and the source of around 50 percent of the Nazi SS, has consistently sublimated the memory of its complicity. However, Vienna did give up some parking spaces so Whiteread's *Holocaust Memorial* could be built in its Judenplatz, where a medieval memorial still commemorates a 1421 pogrom against "the terrible crimes of the Hebrew dogs" (169).

The white cube of a monument is composed of casts of the interior of a library. Though the project faced so many obstacles that at one point, "[m]aligned and demoralized, Whiteread resigned herself, she told [Young], to the likelihood that her memorial would never be built" (169), it has been one of her most widely lauded projects. Young quotes Robert Storr's remarks, "Rather than a tomb or cenotaph, Whiteread's work is the solid shape of an intangible absence—of a gap in a nation's identity, and a hollow at a city's heart" (169).

Townsend concludes the volume with a couple of chapters reflecting on two of Whiteread's recent public works. He discusses the Trafalgar Square work as a "monument to monuments" and describes its transparency and "instability," both perceived and historical, as a critique of Boccioni's and Gabo's interest in transparency (188). In the final chapter,

"Live as if Someone Is Always Watching You," Townsend discusses Whiteread's *Room 101* (2003), now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The office used by George Orwell when he worked at the BBC was slated for demolition, so Whiteread was asked to cast the interior.

Townsend is interested in Orwell's 1984, as well as the roles and significance of the BBC, entertainment, media, language, propaganda, and truth. He says, "Whiteread's inversion of surface becomes a metaphor for an inversion of values: a sign that 'doublethink' is now necessary within the BBC" (198). "What we have in Room 101 is the ultimate torture chamber, one that takes place inside the victim's head" (204). This concluding chapter seems a bit off-topic, as Townsend is more engaged with the relevance of Orwell's ideas to the present time than with the artist. Though Whiteread was the perfect choice to commemorate *Room 101*, the work did not reveal a new facet of her genius. It is essentially a commissioned portrait, a good likeness in the expected style.

The Art of Rachel Whiteread is a valuable contribution to discussions of contemporary sculpture and public art and could be an effective teaching tool. It is compact and thoroughly illustrated with 51 photographs, most in color. •

Robin Rice, an artist and critic, teaches at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia and is a frequent contributor to *WAJ*.

**Please send books
for review
and editorial
correspondence to:**

Woman's Art Journal
Rutgers University
Dept. of Art History, Voorhees Hall
71 Hamilton Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08901, USA
Phone (732) 932-7041 ext.20
Fax (732) 932-1261

WOMAN'S ART JOURNAL

Woman's Art Journal • ISSN 0270 7993 (print)
Volume 27, Issues 1-2 (56 pages/issue, 8.5" x 11")

For back issues, e-mail:
info@oldcitypublishing.com

Institutional North America* ☐ US \$52 Institutional Overseas ☐ US\$ 72 ☐ Euro 70 ☐ Yen ¥9,500
Individual North America* ☐ US \$24 Individual* Overseas ☐ US\$32 ☐ Euro 27 ☐ Yen ¥3,700

** Individual rate eligibility: must be for individual use only, sent to a home residential address and paid for by a personal check or credit card of the individual.*

To Subscribe, write or fax: **Old City Publishing**, 628 North 2nd St., Phila., PA 19123 USA

Tel.: +1.215.925.4390 • Fax: +1.215.925.4371 • www.oldcitypublishing.com

Ship to:

Bill to:

Credit Card: ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard No. _____

Exp. date _____ Signature _____

Please make checks payable to:
Old City Publishing, Inc.

WOMAN'S ART JOURNAL

Woman's Art Journal • ISSN 0270 7993 (print)
Volume 27, Issues 1-2 (56 pages/issue, 8.5" x 11")

For back issues, e-mail:
info@oldcitypublishing.com

Institutional North America* ☐ US \$52 Institutional Overseas ☐ US\$ 72 ☐ Euro 70 ☐ Yen ¥9,500
Individual North America* ☐ US \$24 Individual* Overseas ☐ US\$32 ☐ Euro 27 ☐ Yen ¥3,700

** Individual rate eligibility: must be for individual use only, sent to a home residential address and paid for by a personal check or credit card of the individual.*

To Subscribe, write or fax: **Old City Publishing**, 628 North 2nd St., Phila., PA 19123 USA

Tel.: +1.215.925.4390 • Fax: +1.215.925.4371 • www.oldcitypublishing.com

Ship to:

Bill to:

Credit Card: ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard No. _____

Exp. date _____ Signature _____

Please make checks payable to:
Old City Publishing, Inc.

WOMAN'S ART JOURNAL

Postage
Stamp
Here

**Old City Publishing, Inc.
628 North Second Street
Philadelphia, PA 19123
USA**

WOMAN'S ART JOURNAL

Postage
Stamp
Here

**Old City Publishing, Inc.
628 North Second Street
Philadelphia, PA 19123
USA**



Pl. 1. Helen Lundeberg, *Plant and Animal Analogies* (1933-35), oil on celotex, 24" x 30". The Buck Collection, Laguna Beach, California.



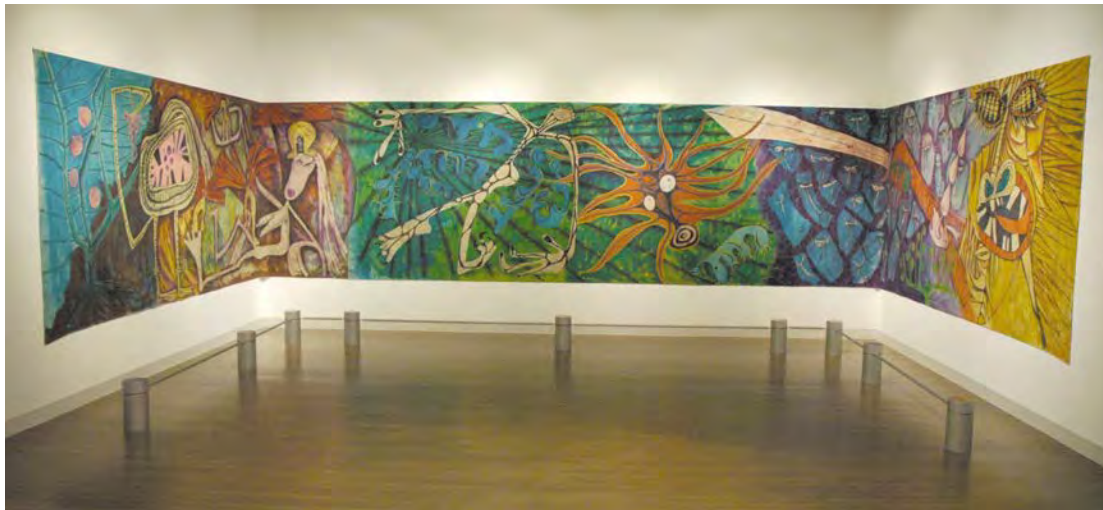
Pl. 2. Helen Lundeberg, *Self Portrait with Green Ball* (1944), oil on masonite, 16" x 27". Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Gift of Lorser Feitelson/Helen Lundeberg Feitelson Foundation.



Pl. 3. Helen Lundeborg, *Selma* (1957), oil on canvas, 30" x 24". Private Collection.



Pl. 4. Helen Lundeborg, *Reflections* (1982), acrylic on canvas, 60" x 40". Palm Springs Desert Museum, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Alan Leslie.



Pl. 5. Saori Akutagawa, *Kojiki yori* (from the *Ancient Chronicle*) (1957), dyes on cloth, c. 6' x 44'. Setagaya Art Museum. Photo: DAGA Graphics.



Pl. 6. Mitsuko Tabe, *Jinko Taiban* (Artificial Placenta) (1961, recreated in 2004), c. 19 1/2" x 19 1/2" x 16 1/2" (each). Museum of Contemporary Art, Kumamoto. Photo: Shin'ichi Yamasaki.



Pl. 7. Sayako Kishimoto, Title unknown (early 1970s), acrylic on cotton, c. 50" x 62".
Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Art. Photo: Norihiro Ueno.



Pl. 8. Elizabeth Murray, *Do the Dance* (2005), oil on canvas, 9'5" x 11' 3" x 1 1/2". Courtesy Pace/Wildenstein. Photo: David Allison.



Pl. 9. Elizabeth Murray, *Join* (1980),
oil on canvas,
11'1" x 10' 11".
Bank of America Collection.



Pl. 10. Elizabeth Murray,
Deeper Than D (1983),
oil on canvas, 8' 10" x 8' 6".
Private collection.
Photo: David Allison.



Pl. 11. Joan Snyder,
Lines and Strokes (1969),
oil, acrylic and spray enamel
on raw canvas, 40" x 52".
Artist's collection.
Photo: Alan Zindman.



Pl. 12. Joan Snyder, *And Always Searching for Beauty* (2001), oil, acrylic, papier-mâché, herbs on linen, 78" x 102".
Collection of the Francis Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, Skidmore College. Photo: Steven Sloman.



Pl. 13. Joan Snyder, *Perpetuo* (2004), acrylic, papier-mâché, buds, seeds, on linen, 42" x 84". Private Collection. Photo: Oren Slor.



Pl. 14. Kathleen McEnery Cunningham, *Self Portrait* (n.d.), oil on canvas, 50 1/8" x 31". Collection of Marian Cunningham.



Pl. 15. Louise Bourgeois, *Spider* (1997), steel, tapestry, wood, glass, fabric, rubber, silver, gold, bone, 175" x 262" x 204".