



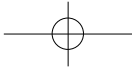
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(on the cover):
Mariko Mori, *Play with Me* (1994), Fuji super gloss print, wood, pewter frame, 120" x 144" x 3".
Courtesy of the artist and Deitch Projects.

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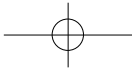
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WOMAN'S ART JOURNAL

SPRING / SUMMER 2008 VOLUME 29, NUMBER 1

- 2
PARALLEL PERSPECTIVES
By Joan Marter and Margaret Barlow
- 3
PORTRAITS, ISSUES AND INSIGHTS
THE PARADOX OF MARIKO MORI'S WOMEN IN POST-BUBBLE JAPAN: OFFICE LADIES, SCHOOLGIRLS, AND VIDEO-VIXENS
By Jonathan Wallis
- 13
LATINA IDENTITY: RECONCILING RITUAL, CULTURE, AND BELONGING
By Stacy E. Schultz
- 21
TO PAINT THE UNSPEAKABLE: MEXICAN FEMALE ARTISTS' ICONOGRAPHY OF THE 1930s AND EARLY 1940s
By Dina Comisarenco Mirkin
- 33
REDISCOVERING HELENE FUNKE: THE INVISIBLE FOREMOTHER
By Julie M. Johnson
- 41
REVIEWS
Italian Women Artists from Renaissance to Baroque
BY CLAUDIO STRINATI, JORDANA POMEROY, ET AL
Reviewed by Katherine M. Poole
- 43
Shifting Priorities: Gender and Genre in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting
BY NANETTE SALOMON
Reviewed by Martha Moffitt Peacock
- 45
Miss Angel: The Art and World of Angelica Kauffman
BY ANGELICA GOODDEN
Angelica Kauffman: Art and Sensibility
BY ANGELA ROSENTHAL
Reviewed by Heidi Strobel
- 49
Tempo, Tempo! The Bauhaus Photomontages of Marianne Brandt
BY ELIZABETH OTTO
Reviewed by Melissa A. Johnson
- 52
Paths to the Press, Printmaking and American Women Artists, 1910-1960
EDITED BY ELIZABETH G. SEATON
Reviewed by Marilyn Symmes
- 56
June Wayne, The Art of Everything: A Catalogue Raisonné 1936-2006
BY ROBERT P. CONWAY
Reviewed by Donna Stein
- 57
The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson: Constructing a Legend
EDITED BY BROOKE KAMIN RAPAPORT, WITH ESSAYS BY ARTHUR C. DANTO ET AL
Reviewed by Mona Hadler
- 60
The Sculpture of Ruth Asawa: Contours in the Air
EDITED BY DANIELL CORNELL
By Midori Yoshimoto
- 62
Betye Saar: Extending the Frozen Moment
ESSAYS BY JAMES CRISTEN STEWARD, DEBORAH WILLIS, ET AL
Reviewed by Robin Rice
- 64
WARM: A Feminist Art Collective in Minnesota
BY JOANNA INGLOT
Reviewed by Joanna Gardner-Huggett
- 66
Pat Steir: Installations
BY DORIS VON DRATHEN
Reviewed by Robin Rice





PARALLEL PERSPECTIVES

This issue of *WAJ* has a decidedly international focus. We are reminded that geographical and cultural differences do matter. While women often share distinctive emotional and psychological experiences, there are differences as well. More important, women artists bring their experiences to bear through original subject matter as well as contributing to the innovative art practices of their time and place.

On our cover is a work by Mariko Mori, a Japanese-born performance artist who engages the cultural, social, and sexual mores of “post-bubble” Japan. In his article, subtitled “Office Ladies, Schoolgirls, and Vixens,” Jonathan Wallis writes that “Mori’s work...exposes layers of meaning embedded in the discourses of late twentieth-century Japanese culture: the paradoxical liberation and oppression of Japanese women.” Wallis explains how the “cyborg” characters this former fashion model creates represent a fascinating and complex portrait of young women in contemporary Japan.

Two articles on Latin American artists uncover issues related to universal themes. One, a survey of contemporary Latina performance artists by Stacy Shultz, presents works by several women engaged in “journals of self-discovery.” Coco Fusco, Marta María Pérez Bravo, Lorena Wolffer, Merián Soto, and Elia Arce—representing various nationalities and backgrounds and inspired by Ana Mendieta’s work in the 1970s and 1980s—define Latina identity through ethnic, racial, emotional, political, and geographic elements. What they share, Shultz observes, is that “[t]he cultural traditions of colonial cross-fertilization and overwhelming machismo profoundly affect how Latina women see themselves.”

Dina Comisarenco Mirkin has identified themes such as “the unhappy bride,” “frustrated motherhood,” “infant deaths,” and “gender violence” in works by Mexican women artists of the 1930s and 1940s. She examines how María Izquierdo, Frida Kahlo, Rosa Rolando, Olga Costa, Aurora Reyes, and Isabel Villaseñor, among others, expressed private, deeply personal, and often painful, life experiences, and compares their works with those by their well-known male contemporaries.

In keeping with *WAJ*’s tradition of recovering all-but-forgotten artists, author Julie Johnson introduces the work of Viennese painter Helene Funke. She exhibited with Matisse and the Fauves in Paris (and even shared an address with Gertrude and Leo Stein at 27 rue des Fleurus). Following her return to Vienna in 1911, Funke continued exploring daring approaches to still life subjects, introducing the color dissonances and harmonies of a true modernist.

WAJ’s indefatigable book editor, Ute Tellini, has the job of selecting—from an impossible number of volumes that arrive—which books to discuss in the review section and matching them with willing reviewers. *WAJ* easily could become a “Women’s Review of Art Books” and still not have space to give attention to all the worthy texts received.

The first three reviews in this issue are on pre-modern subjects. Nanette Salomon’s collection of her essays on gender and genre in seventeenth-century Dutch painting offers “truly feminist encounters with art, rather than merely superficial treatments of women as subject matter,” writes reviewer Martha Moffit Peacock. Reviewer Katherine Poole discusses the

National Museum of Women in the Arts’ catalogue, *Italian Women Artists from Renaissance to Baroque*. Its chapters, by various essayists, cover a range of topics “from the contemporary fascination with the ‘woman artist’ to the unique financial and professional struggles” these women faced. Two books on Angelica Kauffman, reviewed by Heidi Strobel, reveal the similar challenges this eighteenth-century Swiss-born artist faced as she “fashioned a feminine identity in an overwhelming masculine art world.”

Three books on graphic arts and artists bring this often-neglected fine-art area to the fore. Marianne Brandt became well known for her Bauhaus metalwork designs, but her Dadaist photomontages are the subject of Elizabeth Otto’s *Tempo Tempo!*, reviewed by Melissa Johnson. Marilyn Symmes reviews *Paths to the Press, Printmaking and American Women Artists, 1910-1960*, a survey that looks at “women’s creative and technical role in American printmaking.” In 1960, June Wayne, the subject of the third book in this group, helped revive the art of lithography when she founded the Tamarind Lithography Workshop. Reviewer Donna Stein writes that Wayne, who just turned ninety, is one of a few living American women artists to be the subject of a catalogue raisonné, and is well-served by this beautifully produced, 450-page documentation of a life in art.

In many ways sculptors Louise Nevelson and Ruth Asawa epitomize their respective mid-twentieth-century East and West Coast art worlds; both are now being reassessed. Mona Hadler writes in her review of the recent Nevelson catalogue that a “commanding show and its important catalogue go a long way toward recontextualizing Nevelson’s elegant, challenging, and in its own way, problematic production.” Describing the “organic sculptures” pictured in the beautifully produced monograph on Asawa as “ethereal,” reviewer Midori Yoshimoto writes that “they grow like seaweeds in the ocean or orbit like planets in the universe.”

Looking at one of the few treatments in the literature of “collaborative practice, particularly the history of women artists’ collectives,” Joanna Gardner-Huggett reviews a catalogue documenting the Women’s Art Registry of Minnesota, a thirty-five-year old feminist art collective. Finally, Robin Rice examines recent publications on two American originals: Pat Steir, who says that her “life is a product of my pictures and not the other way round,” and Betye Saar, whose “iconic” art pictures the realities of the American black experience. “Even though Saar’s work embodies nearly every kind of pain imaginable., it can be so brilliantly conceived and executed that the perception of beauty, as well as occasional laughter, offer a momentary respite,” writes Rice.

As the “new” editorial team of *WAJ* commences its third year, we are pleased to report that Rutgers University will continue its support of the journal’s editorial production, and we will continue to collaborate with Old City Publishing, Inc.

Joan Marter and Margaret Barlow, co-editors



THE PARADOX OF MARIKO MORI'S WOMEN IN POST-BUBBLE JAPAN

Office Ladies, Schoolgirls, and Video-Vixens

By Jonathan Wallis

More than a decade ago, in the mid 1990s, Mariko Mori produced a series of photographic works that catapulted her onto the international art scene. This series, which showed the artist's self-image in a variety of "futuristic" guises, posing in various settings in urban Tokyo, revealed her interest in the critical evaluation of her native country's current cultural, social, and sexual mores. Mori began the series in 1994, having returned home to Japan following five years of study abroad. The experience had enriched her and given her a new perspective, the result of her firsthand experience of Western culture and education in Western critical theory gained during her artistic education in London and her internship at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City.¹ In a 1998 interview, Mori recalled:

Ten years ago I decided to leave my own country to get the freedom to do what I wanted to achieve in my life. The position of women in Japan wasn't accommodating my desire or ambition. When I returned to Tokyo after going to school abroad, these pictures...were my reaction to Japan after having opportunities in the West to pursue my ambitions. I found that I wanted to communicate some things about Japan, and these were my demonstration to that society, it was my personal reaction to Japan.²

Judging from the subjects of Mori's photographs and their artistic presentation, it is evident that certain aspects of woman's status and role in late-twentieth-century Japan was the main focus of this series.³ In every instance, the image Mori presents of herself reveals nothing about her personally.⁴ Instead, each photograph contains a woman protagonist (Mori in costume) engaged in a stereotyped "female" role filtered through recent technological, economic, or cultural change. In *Tea Ceremony III* (1995; Fig. 1), for example, a smiling, well-dressed woman offers tea to passing male businessmen outside a Tokyo office building, and in *Play with Me* (1995; front cover and Fig. 2), a woman waits expectantly outside an electronics store, appearing as if she might be "working the street." These are not ordinary-looking women. With their poses, modes of dress, and anatomically enhancing costumes, they stand out dramatically in their



Fig. 1. Mariko Mori. *Tea Ceremony III* (1995), Cibachrome print, 4' x 5' x 2". Courtesy of the artist and Deitch Projects, New York.

environments. Moreover, they appear as either cyborgs partially made of machine parts or futuristic aliens with pointy ears.

Employing photography and digital manipulation, Mori either performed in costume or inserted transformed self-portraits into photographs of Tokyo street scenes—the electronic market in Akihabara, the city's downtown corporate center, a romantic hotel suite in the affluent Ginza district in *Love Hotel* (1994; Fig. 3), and other public venues. Thus, these women are paradoxically connected to and disconnected from their surroundings at the same time. While they perform familiar, and often dutiful tasks assigned certain women in Japan, they nevertheless appear foreign, or alien, through anachronistic costumes.

What is most striking about these images is their apparent superficiality. Lavish settings boasting economic prosperity, technological advances, and corporate power provide the backdrop for female protagonists who smile vacuously, facing viewers with their feigned, overly cute personalities. Beside the natural movements of the "regular" people in these images, their gestures seem exaggerated, forced, and their bodies stand



Fig. 2. Mariko Mori. *Play with Me* (1995), Fuji Super Gloss print, 10' x 12' x 3". Courtesy of the artist and Deitch Projects, New York.

out from the crowds by their stasis in the face of the photograph's time exposure.

If there is a critical method at work in these photographs, it functions differently from the more typical postmodern strategies of critique employed by artists such as Cindy Sherman and Yasumasa Morimura. Instead of turning the language of mass culture back onto itself through parody, Mori adds an element of disjunction through both the various identities that are mismatched with their contexts and the figures' positions outside the flow of time. As viewers, we are left with several questions: Should we take these works seriously in spite of their seemingly shallow, playful surface? If so, then what is Mori critiquing exactly? And what do these images reveal about the artist's attitudes toward gender in an evolving Japanese culture? It is these questions that I address here, taking each in turn and building a general context for this photographic series.

To understand the economic, social, and sexual implications of these works, it is helpful to have a brief overview of the cultural climate of Japan in the mid-1990s, at the time of the production of this series. Within this discussion, it is important also to address the issue of feminism as it relates to late-twentieth-century Japanese society, since the artist herself is a complicated hybrid of native and foreign influences: born in Japan yet educated largely in London and New York. What emerges out of this discussion is a reading of Mori's work that exposes layers of meanings embedded in the discourses of late-twentieth-century Japanese culture: the paradoxical liberation and oppression of Japanese women in the corporate workplace, the infantilization of Japanese women in both the real and virtual worlds, and the exploitation of the entertainment industry in sexualizing and complicating the relationship of woman as image in mass culture within urban Japan. Playing with the boundaries of fantasy and reality formally through the sartorial and the digital, and subjectively through references to popular culture, Mori creates characters whose actions and appearances

expose specific issues confronting women in post-bubble Japan.

Japan's cultural climate during the 1990s is both fascinating and complex. Yet, it is possible to isolate a number of significant events and developments that provide the foundation for the country's recent (and arguably current) cultural profile. Among these, a reliance on American support coupled with forced isolationism during the Occupation in the early years following World War II resulted in a shift in cultural values in Japan. What began as reluctant acceptance of an American way of life transformed, over the following decades leading up to the 1980s and 1990s, into a worship and imitation of American culture. As Yasue Kuwahara states in an essay on Japanese popular culture, "[T]he postwar Japanese society has attached a high value to everything associated with the United States which symbolizes a better life, freedom, and a higher standard of everything."⁵ This interest in American products and values instigated the formulation of a new hybrid popular and corporate culture in urban Japan in the mid-1990s that combined indigenous and Western (mainly American) commodities and values and that affected (and questioned) traditional gender roles.

The implementation of economic reforms in the mid-1980s led to an expansion of this fascination with the American way of life through a surge in mass consumerism under a newly established form of hypercapitalism. This economic growth was the direct result of the 1985 Plaza Accord, in which the major world economies provided permission and opportunity to strengthen the Japanese yen.⁶ This agreement, meant to create a comfortable balance in trade between industrialized countries and Japan, resulted in one of the fastest economic booms in recent history. Suddenly, Japanese companies excelled in the production and export of goods, especially electronics, and Japanese monetary institutions usurped several of the world's largest banks. This financial success story, often dubbed the "bubble economy," brought an unprecedented level of positivism to a culture still psychologically recovering from the humiliation and loss of World War II, including the devastating tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

As early as 1990 however, the "bubble" was already showing signs of deflating,⁷ the start of a slow economic downturn that continued for the next several years, eventually affecting a wide range of cultural life in Japan. By the time of Mori's photographs, of which two of the series were made toward the end of 1994 and the rest during 1995, Japan was experiencing a sequence of terrible events that could never have been predicted ten years earlier. In his book *The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence*, Gavan McCormack called 1995 "the worst [year] in memory" for Japan, citing among the numerous contributing factors "recession, political instability, corruption, unseasonable weather and emergency rice imports," along with a general anxiety about the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war.⁸ If it seemed that matters could not get worse, they did: that same year the city of Kobe experienced one of the worst earthquakes in recent history, and "urban terrorism" was introduced to Japan when the Aum Supreme Truth, an esoteric religious cult, released chemical agents in the Tokyo subway system.⁹ Feelings of optimism and security quickly turned into an "overwhelming mood of pessimism in Japan."¹⁰

Although Mori studied art in London and New York City during the apex of the prosperous Japanese bubble economy, her early years as a student in Tokyo at the Bunka Fashion Institute, 1986 to 1988, certainly provided her with ample experience of this exciting cultural climate while it was on the rise. Interestingly, the artist's return to Japan in 1994 came after the "burst of the bubble," during a moment when it was almost entirely deflated. There is an irony about both Japan during this time and Mori's images of its megacity, an irony that remains today in the early years of the twenty-first century: that the outward signs of these crucial changes and events are not easily seen. The Japanese continue to exist within an "endless cycle of desire, consumption, and waste" as if it were still 1987 or 1988.¹¹ Shopping malls, electronic markets, and other buying venues are still generally crammed with shoppers who demand the most up-to-date goods and services and consume with an unbridled economic fury. On the surface, it was (and still is today) hard to see signs of what was supposed to be a Japanese sense of anxiousness and malaise about their fin de siècle culture during these immediate post-bubble years. Indeed, this is something that the visitor to Japan today can still witness.

At first glance, Mori's photographs appear to portray Japanese culture as thriving. The subjects, settings, and general atmosphere of her images reveal little, if anything, about the harsher realities of post-bubble Japan. Instead, they teem with consumerism, and portray superficial characters constantly involved in activities that relate to new pleasures and ease of living brought on by the cultural ramifications of the bubble economy and Western influence. Yet under closer scrutiny this surface is exposed as a thin subjective veneer that veils a forceful critical commentary. Through various formal and subjective means, Mori's photographs whisper the resultant effects of a society obsessed with demand, consumption, and waste while still holding strong ties to social and cultural traditions.

The relationship between feminism and the visual arts has changed considerably since its inception in the late 1960s and early 1970s. To describe a young artist who presents the female body as subject in visual art today as a "feminist" can be dangerously misrepresentative and potentially offensive. The revered qualities of feminist art of the 1970s and early 1980s—deconstructing patriarchal control and influence in art and society, celebration of the natural female body and its functions, sexual liberation—are no longer the focus of a growing number of women artists. Rather, many of these young female artists embrace and celebrate attire, attitudes, and roles condemned by their foremothers. As the curators of "Gloria," a recent retrospective of feminist art of the 1970s, explain in their introduction to the exhibition catalogue,

To young practitioners, looking back thirty years, ostensibly at one's parents, the issues and icons of feminist art may seem remote—or worse, ridiculous. An ironic state of affairs given the currency of art constructed around images of female identity, female sexuality, femininity, and traditional female pursuits, such as fashion and the decorative arts.¹²

This new wave of art by female artists is often labeled "second-generation feminism." However, at a 1998 panel discussion at the New Museum for Contemporary Art subtitled "Whatever Happened to the Women Artist's Movement?" this artistic phenomenon was described as the "Madonna School of Feminism," a trend in which popular culture and its various manifestations are embraced, rather than denied, for female empowerment and celebration in art.¹³ Like Madonna, and her protégé Britney Spears, who push the boundaries of female sexuality, fashion, and behavior in music and choreographed videos that play with marketing trends and popular culture, many young artists jump headfirst into a cultural system their previous generation fought to deconstruct and destroy. Restating the message of Elizabeth Hayt's 1999 article "The Artist is a Glamour Puss," the "Gloria" curators equate the "success enjoyed by a bevy of hot young women artists with their stylish beauty and ability to exploit their own sexuality."¹⁴

Mariko Mori, who was a fashion model before becoming an artist, certainly exploits both her beauty and her sexuality in these photographs. Short skirts and skimpy tops dominate her wardrobe, and she always appears perfectly groomed and styled. Nowhere in this series is there an emphasis on the "natural" female body. Not only do these representations promote surface, they also embrace and celebrate the latest cultural definition of feminine beauty without any obvious presence of oppressive conformity. In these photographs, the synthetic, rather than the natural, becomes a welcome addition to the potential tools of female empowerment. As Mori states, "I think my work is misread sometimes. People think I'm creating a fantasy world to escape from reality. But I believe that a synthetic world has its own reality and consciousness—it's what you experience, what you feel, what you dream."¹⁵

Asked for her definition of 'feminism' in a 2000 interview with Eleanor Heartney, Mori expressed her uncertainty about the term as well as her thoughts on women and their place in society:

I don't quite know what feminism means today. The definition was clearer in the 60's and 70's, and I respect what was done at that time. Feminists of that time opened the door for my generation. But I don't believe that women have to stand against men, or prove that they are stronger or more powerful. I believe they are different, that they do different things. When I see native people, or study ancient cultures, I can see that there are roles for women and roles for men. They collaborate for survival. In modern societies, there is competition between men and women. I certainly disagree with systems in Japan that restrict opportunities for women, but I don't want to repeat what was done in the 60's and 70's.¹⁶

Mori's comments not only reflect an increasingly ambiguous relationship between feminism and art but also a Japanese perspective toward gender at odds with conventional understandings of feminism in the West. It is difficult to imagine an artist from Europe or America interested in feminism accepting socially assigned roles for women and men, or more poignantly, approaching empowerment in art through acceptance and passivity rather than revolt and

aggression (outside, perhaps, a satiric strategy). But in Mori's case, it is an indication of cultural difference that must be considered within a discussion of gender issues in these photographs. Mori explains:

I am interested in femininity that's soft and accepting but strong at the same time. Sometimes it's stronger to be passive. When you are aggressive, you don't receive anything; you can only receive by being soft, by listening. I know that people in the West think Eastern women are submissive, but I don't see it that way. I see it as a great feminine aspect. I'd like to achieve that myself.¹⁷

Far from the rhetoric of radical feminists in the West in previous decades, Mori's statement reveals the artist's oblique approach to a celebration of femininity. As Robert Raczka wrote:

Mostly the roles enacted and condensed into the photographic tableaux are modified versions of conventional femininity—server, model, or teenybopper—and while Mori's representations don't exactly amount to a critique, neither do they promote submissiveness. This is postfeminism in which once abhorred roles are tweaked to create opportunities for female empowerment within the existing social order, or at least to expand the menu of choices about which one needn't feel *guilty*.¹⁸

At the very least, Mori's attitude confuses and complicates interpretation. Are we to assume that these women are empowered even though they appear subservient? Are they rebellious although they appear to conform? Since these photographs deal specifically with Japan, they must be considered within the context of societal roles, representations, and perspectives of young Japanese women during post-bubble Japan. Only then do they reveal critique as well as celebration, because of the unique social structure of contemporary Japanese culture in which women function and live.

In an essay titled "Vampires, Psychic Girls, Flying Women and Sailor Scouts: Four Faces of the young female in Japanese popular culture," Susan Napier asserts that "[n]owhere is the dizzying rate of change in post-war Japan more apparent than in the shifting and varied identities of the modern Japanese woman."¹⁹ But this change is by no means universal. In fact, while signs of postwar influence on women are readily visible in urban Japan, the overall female population remains divided on the issue of familial responsibility and the conflict between tradition and social change. Feminism's application to Japanese culture is largely responsible for the emergence of two new social groups of women over the last three decades, both of which are at odds with the more conservative, traditional view of women as subservient, dutiful, and passive. In a 1996 essay on Japanese feminism, Kanai Yoshiko divides women in post-bubble Japan into three categories: "Those who live under a 'predetermined women's fate'"; the daughters of this generation (Yoshiko includes herself in this group), who make up "the so-called 'feminist generation'...baptized by postwar democracy and by feminism," who "struggled for sexual equality and women's self-reliance...forced to choose between work, on the one hand, and marriage and childbirth on the other"; and lastly

what she terms the "post-feminist generation."²⁰ This last group, according to Yoshiko, does "not hesitate to express antifeminist beliefs, saying 'we are far from feminism.'"²¹ These women "dress themselves up to be pretty and cute and fear the smelly and the dirty; it is difficult therefore for them to share concerns based on the experience of the oppression of women, regarding the reality of an ageing society, childbirth and childbearing, or the environmental crisis."²²

Various manifestations of this last group appear to be the focus of Mori's 1994-1995 photographic series, especially since each female identity she portrays is young (sometimes even adolescent), "cute," and fashionable, and appears in a context that suggests nothing of a conflict between domestic responsibility and independence or any struggle attached to Yoshiko's two other categories of women. Interestingly, feminists in Japan perceive domestic responsibility differently than their counterparts in the West, and this contrasting view serves as an example of the need for an understanding of cultural difference hinted at earlier in this essay. Speaking about the distinction between the Japanese domestic housewife, or *okusan*, and her Western counterpart, Ide Sachiko, Professor of Linguistics at the Japan Women's University, states:

Another difference between Western feminism and Japanese feminism is the status afforded the *okusan* role. Domestic labor seems to have been devalued by feminism in North America. A woman who chooses to stay home to raise her children feels almost apologetic. This is sad. There has been no equivalent of this in Japan. The *okusan* role is almost revered in this society. It is the working woman who still has to deal with a social stigma, especially if she has school-aged children.²³

If a feminist commentary exists within Mori's photographs, then perhaps Sachiko's statement explains why the artist chose to portray young women who are independent and free of domestic responsibility in urban settings. As Sachiko describes, workingwomen who function in the new Japan are those confronted with social stigmas. This view is reinforced by scholars who acknowledge a social struggle in Japan for women leaving their traditional realm of the private domain, or *uchi* (inside), for the traditionally male public domain, or *soto* (outside). Halldor Stefansson, for example, claims: "If Japanese urban women are being progressively 'liberated' from their confinement within the household, a tendency to subject them to a new form of marginalization seems to be emerging."²⁴ This seems Mori's targeted issue relating to women in post-bubble Japan. In images such as *Tea Ceremony III*, *Love Hotel*, *Play with Me*, and even *Red Light*, it is suggested that her women are employed, in either a corporate or sexual context. Moreover, their marginalization is subtly observable in many of the actions, or inactions, her characters perform within their respective settings.

Yoshiko views the "common ground of femininity" as collapsing, and she holds the third group of women, the "post-feminists," as partially responsible for a feminist backlash within the youngest generation of Japanese women.²⁵ Through a combination of denial, ignorance, and indifference toward existing feminist issues, in conjunction with the "twisting" of

ideology by journalistic sources, a veil now hides an “invisible and internalized oppression” of women in Japan.²⁶ Mori’s women certainly hide their oppression well. To the uninformed viewer, this would seem to indicate the celebration of feminism’s liberating, positive effect on a new generation of women in Japan, and this is partially the case. But, as previously mentioned, accompanying this celebration in these constructed female identities there also exists the subtle demonstration of what Yoshiko calls the “invisible” and “internalized” oppression of women, here present in a context rather surprising from Western feminist perspectives: seemingly liberated women.²⁷ Mori, in a 1995 interview, confirmed the paradoxical aspect of her characters: “The fashion pieces function as a kind of parody... I’ve always tried to say that things are two-sided. One side of the system is critical the other is, as you say, celebration.”²⁸

In a series of images that portray females serving tea in corporate contexts, of which *Tea Ceremony III* is the most widely published and known, Mori addresses the problems confronting the modern workingwoman in post-bubble Japan. In all of these photographs, a female character is offering tea to male businessmen, either in a conference room, as in *Tea Ceremony II*, or outside a corporate complex, as in *Tea Ceremony III*. Mori is obviously making a statement about the OL (*o-eru*), or “office lady,” who is a common sight in any Japanese business. Performing a variety of secretarial tasks, from paperwork to fielding phone calls, these women have provided cheap labor in the Japanese business sector since the beginning of economic reconstruction after World War II, continuously growing in number until, by the early 1990s, OLs made up one-third of the total female labor force in Japan.²⁹

The “butt of many jokes,” the OL is a paradox.³⁰ While she is a liberated workingwoman, she still experiences oppression due to the translation of traditional customs from the “old” Japan into a new system that contains its own intrinsic hierarchies and segregation based on gender and rank. For example, in addition to more standard administrative duties, OLs also perform other nonprofessional services for their male superiors in the same manner as wives and female servants did in pre-modern Japan. Moreover, the OL suffers from continued patriarchal control over economic and political decisions within Japanese companies. Rose Carter and Lois Dilatush, in their essay on the subject, describe the common struggles OLs face as “extremely low pay in comparison to male office workers,” lack of access to “higher positions open to men,” and the fact that they are “expected as part of their work to serve tea and perform other ‘womanly’ duties that make working conditions pleasant for their male coworkers.”³¹ Yet, others see the OL as the epitome of “youthful freedom and consumer pleasure”; her position outside the lifetime employment structure as well as her inability to rise within the company offers her fewer restrictions on social behavior, creating an ironic sense of empowerment.³² Yuko Ogasawara argues that, while the OL may in some ways be oppressed in the corporate environment, she nevertheless



Fig. 3. Mariko Mori. *Love Hotel* (1994), Cibachrome print, 4' x 5' x 2". Courtesy of the artist and Deitch Projects, New York.

exploits the strong role of Mother in Japan and also the tendency of Japanese men to avoid offending women (of lower rank) within the corporate system to create a potential reversal of the assumed male/female power relation.³³ Furthermore, the OLs’ manipulative gossip, gift-giving strategies, and work stoppages play into gender dynamics within corporations to an extent that they can greatly alter the course of a man’s corporate career, thus causing businessmen to “curry women’s favor.”³⁴ This situation fuels the paradox of the OL, as Ogasawara explains:

[T]he irony for defiant OLs is that their acts often serve to reinforce traditional gender relations. An OL’s acts of resistance often involve making demands that a man pay attention to her, give her things, and cater to her and her feelings in general. She in turn will demonstrate her admiration and caring for the man, assist him in various ways, and support him. In making claims on men, OLs act out the traditional gender roles.³⁵

Mori seized on a specific duty of the OL, the act of serving tea, as the subjective focus of this series. In *Tea Ceremony III*, for example, Mori stands outside a series of corporate buildings that reference late-twentieth-century Japanese economic might, hand outstretched, offering tea as two businessmen pass obliviously by her position. But while Mori’s uniform and gesture easily identify her character as a typical young OL, she is far from ordinary. Underneath these standard garments she is cloaked from head-to-toe in a silver bodysuit with pointy ears and a hood that transforms her into a quasi-futuristic, robotic-like female figure. Anything but serious, this outfit recalls now laughable projections of Martian-like creatures as they were envisioned in early science fiction films from the 1950s and 1960s by Hollywood directors. By presenting herself in this manner, Mori is able, through satire, to expose the invisible and internalized oppression of women mentioned earlier by Yoshiko through an overexposed, attention-drawing costume. The act of serving tea, one of the tasks of the OL, is “now largely regarded



Fig. 4. Naoko Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon 1* (Schoolgirl Usagi Tsukino with her cat Luna), from the comic series *Sailor Moon* ©1992 Naoko Takeuchi/TOEI Animation.

as a feminine pursuit that stresses constraint, discipline, and tradition,” writes Karin Higa.³⁶ In this instance then, the serving of tea, a ritual emphasizing past Japanese tradition, is juxtaposed with a futuristic-looking being that exaggerates both the visibility of the act and its arguably anachronistic qualities. Moreover, the figure’s smiling face and pleasant demeanor further stresses the dutiful, subservient expectations of this appointed task—in this case given an almost cold, mechanical quality through her robotic-like appearance—and one wonders if this is Mori’s means to express an internalization of oppression. But the artist also includes a more subtle reference to the expectations of OLs serving tea within modern Japanese business contexts. The figure’s knees, upon close examination, are dirty, the result of her need to kneel before those to whom she offers a cup of tea.³⁷ Mori actually witnessed this act firsthand at a Japanese company office once, and when asked about her feelings on the matter, remarked, “There are opportunities for women, but employers take girls for granted.”³⁸

In addition to revealing the OL’s social limitations and expectations through the action of serving tea, Mori also exploits digital technology to formally express the lack of recognition and respect these women receive. When producing this image, the artist did not actually stand in this pavilion as these individuals passed by. Rather, she inserted herself into the image afterward through digital manipulation. Therefore, the visibly overt disjunction between the OL and the passersby is purposeful, and meant to express the general ignorance and disregard of these women by their male coworkers and superiors. This interpretation is supported by her appearance as a futuristic-looking OL. First, the outfit draws our attention to a person often ignored, again making the invisible highly visible. Moreover, the fact that the woman looks like an alien can be taken as a semantic expression through homonymic interpretation. Her outfit, as previously mentioned, is reminiscent of early alien-like creatures in Hollywood science fiction films. Could Mori be suggesting that this female identity, as an alien of sorts, is herself “alienated” within the corporate world of modern Japan? Dominic Molon agrees with this assertion, claiming that the “masquerade transforms her into a being that is irresolvably Other to the people on the street

through the incongruity of her bizarre appearance.”³⁹ Considering alienation in this context, a reference to feminist Marxist critique seems plausible: the capitalist explosion of the bubble economy and growth of Japanese business has led to exploitation and oppression of women in the corporate labor force. Through a clever artistic strategy that combines arguably anachronistic ritual and tradition within a changed Japanese economic and corporate society with extraordinary looking women, Mori creates a telling portrait of workingwomen in digital images that reveal an invisible and internalized oppression within the post-bubble social fabric of Japan.

In *Love Hotel*, Mori again appears as a futuristic-like female character, but this time younger and more innocent. Dressed in the traditional Japanese schoolgirl uniform, she kneels on a circular, pink and floral-patterned bed in a romantically decorated, miniature “love palace.” The bed is circumscribed with delicate, fluted columns and topped with a faux ceiling dome. Rococo decadence is updated to the affluence possible in modern Tokyo, where a lavish hotel room (by Japanese standards) reflects the pleasure of technological amenities—a minibar, television with remote control, and exquisite furnishings. Nothing in this image suggests the economic stagnation or growing cultural ennui of post-bubble Japan. Rather, much like the orchidaceous settings and frivolously erotic subjects of Rococo art that revealed nothing of the festering contempt and eventual revolt of the masses in late-eighteenth century Paris, *Love Hotel* exudes nothing of Tokyo’s economic wound hiding below its decadent cultural surface.⁴⁰ Yet, Mori’s choice to visually disrupt the logical order by again including an alien-like female character must serve a critical purpose. As Norman Bryson stated of these women, “by making so wide the gap between the fantasy-image and the real-world milieu that engendered it, Mori ensured that we would understand the work in a critical sense.”⁴¹

Considering the implications of the title phrase, “*Love Hotel*,” as well as the fact that Mori portrays a schoolgirl, it is likely that this is an artistic strike at Japan’s expanding sexual decadence involving teenage prostitution and the exploitation of adolescent girls in pornographic contexts. While a sexual encounter may not be visually explicit it is certainly implied; Mori’s character may be the only individual present within the frame of the picture, but an Other is implied through the title which references a sexual activity involving the female protagonist and, what appears to be a partly open door in the background. Yet what is most disturbing about this image is the expression on the face of this futuristic-like schoolgirl. She gazes at the viewer with a subtle smile that recalls the direct glare of Manet’s *Olympia*, but here the implication is less obvious. One wonders if this is an indication of what was earlier described as the post-feminist attitude of young women in Japan, where sexual freedom is taken for granted but lack of interest in feminist issues fuels supplemental patriarchal exploitation. While young women have gained freedom in expressing their sexuality in recent decades in Japan, the country’s traditional attitudes towards sexuality and women have also been transformed by recent cultural change. Yukihiro Murase, a lecturer in sociology at Hitotsubashi University, has

commented that, “Historically speaking, [Japanese] men have never had the mentality that buying women was a bad thing.”⁴² But while the men in Japan may feel comfortable buying sex, the introduction of feminism and the development and eventual bursting of the bubble economy has psychologically altered sexual attitudes and tastes. As a result of this economic shift, Japanese men began to experience what Murase calls an “identity crisis.”⁴³ Their once staunchly male-dominated society was beginning to change, and as women entered the workplace they became less reliant on men for financial support. As a result, Murase argues, “now men have to do a little more than that, and they aren’t used to it. That’s why they turn to the younger girls who they find easier to control.”⁴⁴

Images of teenage girls in school uniforms, such as the character Mori portrays in *Love Hotel*, are ubiquitous in Japan. According to Junko Miyamoto, a representative of a group lobbying to halt teenage prostitution in Japan, pornographic pictures of teenage girls sold in convenience stores and at newsstands on street corners fuel this demand. “When people see images of young girls,” she states, “they look for a place to act on their desires.”⁴⁵ In 1994, when Mori produced *Love Hotel*, teenage prostitution was legal in Japan; it was not officially banned until 1999. Encounters such as the one suggested in Mori’s photograph have continued, however, despite the law, in the form of “*enjo kōsai*,” or compensation dating (as it is euphemistically called), in which teenage girls answer ads from adult men for “dates” that usually begin with dinner and end with the exchange of sex for money. Murase laments, “I don’t know if the situation has become better. It has become less visible.”⁴⁶ Moreover, in the mid-1990s, when Mori created *Love Hotel*, the average age of teenage girls involved in prostitution and pornographic imagery was seventeen and eighteen, befitting of the female Mori presents in this image. Disturbing recent surveys indicate that the most common age bracket is now from twelve to fifteen years of age.⁴⁷ There is an interesting correlation between the cultural climate of post-bubble Japan and the rise of compensation dating that reflects the image of Mori’s schoolgirl in *Love Hotel*. One of the official economic strategies instated when the economic boom began to dissipate in the early 1990s was an exaggerated advertising and marketing campaign meant to create a system of hypercapitalism in which desire was fueled by a never-ending demand for up-to-date material goods. Recent surveys of teenage schoolgirls in Japan reveal that many have turned to prostituting themselves through *enjo kōsai* to support their consumer habits.⁴⁸ Sayaka, a fourteen-year-old girl, explained, “I want to wear trendy clothes, but they’re all so expensive...I want to buy a skirt (for 15,000 yen), but I’ve only got 10,000 yen, so I need to get the other 5,000 yen somehow.”⁴⁹ Statements from other teenagers, such as sixteen-year-old Aya, indicate both the disparity between Japan’s hurting economy on families and the country’s young, desirous, propaganda-driven generation, as well as its interrelationship to the newly economically independent female: “I had about 10 sessions during the summer vacation. I used the money I got to buy clothes, go on dates or to a karaoke box with my friends...I don’t want to be a nuisance for my parents. My motto is that is if you want to spend money you should make it yourself.”⁵⁰ Stories



Fig. 5. Naoko Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon 2* (Schoolgirl Usagi Tsukino transformed into “Superhero” Sailor Moon), from the comic series *Sailor Moon* © 1992 Naoko Takeuchi/TOEI Animation.

such as these indicate the mixture of positive and negative results of Japan’s cultural transformations on the most recent generation of Japanese women. With new freedoms have come new problems. As time goes by and Japan continues to transform, works such as *Love Hotel* become more interesting and relevant to feminist discussions about the status, role, and representation of young Japanese women.

The sexual lure of adolescent girls is also promoted through pop cultural manifestations in Japan such as manga (comics and graphic novels), anime (animations), and the television and music industries. Manga, which literally means “humorous picture,” is believed to date back to the twelfth century in Japan, where it emerged as a form of caricature, but it came to prominence through the printed work of the nineteenth-century artist Hokusai.⁵¹ After World War II, American comic strips and Disney characters influenced the structural format and aesthetics of manga, which has become increasingly popular and influential since the 1980s.⁵² Manga is “read in thick, dictionary-size volumes by men, women, and children of all ages”; it is Japan’s most popular printed media, claimed by some analysts to be more influential than television or newspapers.⁵³ Michael Darling describes the proliferation and manipulation of young female characters in manga and anime in an *Art Journal* article:

The presumed innocence of children is a contested concept in Japan, which has a thriving market for pedophilic manga cartoons. Characters with a child’s face (with big round eyes) and a woman’s body are ubiquitous in Japanese pop-cultural imagery. Preteen female characters proliferate in Japanese comics and animated films; they are often the creation of male cartoonists and aimed at a male readership.⁵⁴

Known as the “Lolita complex” or “Lolicom” for short, this phenomenon drives a double market: these female characters are admired by teenage girls for their supernatural abilities as heroines and adored by Japanese men for their sexiness.⁵⁵ Usually referred to as “*shōjo*,” these pre-adolescent girls, as John Treat explains in his essay on the subject, are *kawaii*, or cute: “A *kawaii* girl is attractive, and thus valorized, but lacks libidinal agency of her own.”⁵⁶ The “perfect non-threatening female,” the *shōjo* continues to be promoted and exploited in countless manga and anime productions.⁵⁷ As Napier points out, many of the narratives include female identities with “an enormous variety of superhuman powers plus a subcategory which might be called ‘cyborg women’: women (and young girls) who are linked with some sort of high tech or futuristic science fiction technology.”⁵⁸ Probably the most famous example of this type of *shōjo* is Sailor Moon (*Seeraa Muun*) (Fig. 4), a cartoon character invented in 1992 by the female manga artist Naoko Takeuchi.⁵⁹ A fourteen-year-old Japanese girl, Sailor Moon, along with four female companions, fights an array of evildoers through her ability to transform into a superhero. Sailor Moon appeared as a series in the girl’s magazine *Nakayoshi*, but was also published in book form and promoted through intense marketing campaigns that included “notepads, lunch-boxes, pen-sets...handbags, umbrellas, and t-shirts.”⁶⁰ When transformed into her superhero identity (Fig. 5), Sailor Moon’s “Lolicom” aesthetic becomes more obvious. “With her leggy slender body, long flowing blond hair, and the mini-skirted version of her outfit she acquires after morphing,” writes Anne Allison, “*Seeraa Muun* is also read as a sex icon—one that feeds and is fed by a general trend in Japan towards the infantilization of female sex objects.”⁶¹ A specific connection exists between anime characters such as Sailor Moon and the schoolgirl Mori portrays in *Love Hotel* that reveals an even more insidious cultural marketing strategy. Allison explains:

The fact that Sailor Moon not only wears a sailor outfit but is named for it is striking given that this is the uniform standardly worn by girls in junior and senior high school in Japan as well as clothing sexualized on young females to project a nymphet effect. The uniformed school girl is a dominant trope in pornography, comics, and sex culture in Japan as witnessed by the new, much reported-on trend of “*enjo kōsai*”—the practice of high school girls engaging in sexual relations, whether they are of phone sex or intercourse, with *saraiiman* (middle-aged, white collar workers).⁶²

Mori’s apparent interest in the construction of female identities that critique the representation and exploitation of the *shōjo* in manga and anime examples led to the production of another photographic work entitled *Play with Me*, in which she appears as the physical manifestation of one of these fictitious characters. In this image, Mori stands, waiting for someone (or so it seems) outside the entrance to a video game and toy store in the famous electronic market in the Akihabara district of Tokyo. Described as “the greatest sound-and-light show on earth,” Akihabara reinforces the portrait of Japan in the West as a country teeming with the production, exportation, and

consumption of electronic goods.⁶³ Once a black market, Akihabara became legitimate in the 1950s, and now offers thousands of electronics products sold at near wholesale prices, including computer parts, robotics, video games, phones, and appliances.

Play with Me expresses a feminist critique of the hidden agenda behind the façade of this electronic cornucopia. With long blue pony tails, and an outfit that combines a silver mini skirt, gloves, and body armor with a black vinyl body suit, Mori appears as a “sexy cyborg” character not unlike Sailor Moon herself; complete with a star-studded handbag and a gold star beauty mark on her left cheek.⁶⁴ It is important to acknowledge, once again, that as the artist, director, and designer, Mori has complete control over her medium, and therefore the inclusion or exclusion of people, as well as her appearance, pose, and gesture, indicates artistic intention. Therefore, it comes as little surprise that there are no women present in the photograph other than Mori’s cyborg girl (and what appears to be a woman working behind the register). This is largely a world of male entertainment; a world where the *shōjo* is not a role model for young Japanese girls so much as a sex object built into the system of virtual entertainment in which fantasy replaces reality for male consumers.

The title, *Play with Me*, reinforces the connection between this “sexy cyborg” and the video games for sale inside the store, also suggested by her position next to a Sega video game unit, as well as various posters advertising animated action heroes not unlike herself. As Jonathan Fineberg observes, Mori’s connection to this world is extended to include the “fantasy of her sexual availability in a utopia of pure, unemotional sexuality.”⁶⁵ Her adolescent naiveté, expressed in her outfit and makeup and reinforced by her pose, suggests the power of technological fantasy to construct identities that promote a sexual object for men that is vulnerable and innocent: the type of female profile promoted through post-bubble cultural developments manifest in both the virtual sphere through these forms of entertainment and the tangible world through the growing infantilization of young Japanese girls as sex objects.

Mori’s images during 1994 and 1995 represent an exciting, but also paradoxical, portrait of woman in post-bubble Japan that combine the imagined with the real, the virtual with the tangible, and the veiled with the visible. Her photographs are unique; they examine Japan from a feminist viewpoint at a time of intense change and crisis cloaked by cultural strategies of coping. Through a clever artistic program that includes purposeful temporal disjunctions between figures, subtle photographic inconsistencies, and imitations of cultural stereotypes, Mori successfully reveals invisible and internalized aspects of female oppression and exploitation in post-bubble Japan.

Mori’s artistic subject matter has broadened significantly since the mid-nineties, and she now addresses more multicultural topics that reflect the globally connected postmodern world. At the forefront of this new outlook is an interest in syncretic spirituality and contemporary science, and how these might be negotiated within the growing frenzy of techno-society and the

fancies of popular culture. The large-scale photographs of Mori in cyborg costumes in urban Tokyo that comprised the 1994-1995 series gave way to grander photographic images of the artist in natural landscapes and video sequences as a futuristic shaman, bodhisattva, and nature spirit in works such as *Nirvana* (1996-97), *Kumano* (1997-98), and *Esoteric Cosmos* (1996-98). In these later works, esoteric religious rituals, tea ceremonies, and Buddhist mudras replace the humorous, even trite, poses and expressions of the earlier photographic performances, and the artist's self-deification serves to offer us a spiritual awakening as we move into a new millennium.

More recently, Mori has removed her visual presence within her work, opting for the production of installations that offer viewers opportunities to engage spatially and conceptually with her new subjective focus: global humanity's past, present, and future place in the greater cosmos. Both *Dream Temple* (1999), a life-size, updated "transcription" of a famous Japanese Buddhist structure with added visionary applications in the form of new media technology, and *Wave UFO* (2003), a teardrop-shaped capsule that allows volunteers to take advantage of state-of-the-art computer and brainwave technology, mesmerize audiences and participants by their extravagant production and new-age experiences. In 2007, the artist created a variety of objects modeled off ancient Japanese ritual sites and Celtic "standing stones," entitled *Tom Na H-IU*. Literally connecting the macrocosmos of the Universe to the microcosmos of the art space of Deitch Projects in Chelsea, New York City, Mori had incoming signals of neutrinos (traces of dying stars—or stellar "souls") channeled from an observatory in Japan to a glass version of a "standing stone" in the gallery.⁶⁶ Upon receiving a signal, the glass monolith varied in illumination and changed color based on the type of neutrino that arrived. With Mori's impressive knowledge of the current science of astrophysics and its growing relationship to world religions, especially Buddhism, it is hard to anticipate where her austere aesthetic will find itself next. Works such as *Tom Na H-IU* serve to remind us that the technologically "connected" world of the twenty-first century holds our attention at a global level, perhaps distracting us from connections that reside beyond our immediate tangible and virtual world vision. Mori's self-appointed task, it seems, is to make sure that our universal (literally) consciousness is rendered both visible and beautiful. •

Jonathan Wallis, Assistant Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at Moore College of Art & Design, Philadelphia, wrote his dissertation on Mariko Mori. His chapter on Salvador Dalí and St. John of the Cross, appears in *The Dalí Renaissance* (2008).

NOTES

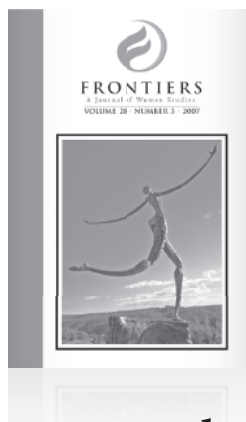
1. In an article for the Asahi Shimbun News Service, Miyuki Kondo states that Mori felt an "advantage of living abroad was that it enabled her to see the situation in Japan objectively." Miyuki Kondo, "Artist creates reflective shrine to ancient and modern spirituality," *Asahi Shimbun News Service*. <http://www.asahi.com/english/weekend/K2002020300051.html>, 5 January 2003.
2. Quoted in Kathryn Hixson, "Future perfect: an interview with Mariko Mori," *New Art Examiner* (December 1998/January 1999): 45.

3. Lesley A. Martin mentions Mori's goals in this series, stating that "Mori has called her work a social commentary and refers to her cool neo-human nymphs as analytical of the role of women in Japan." Lesley A. Martin, "Mariko Mori, Empty Dream: Brooklyn Museum of Art," *Aperture* no. 158 (Winter 2000): 79.
4. Margery King, "Mori Pop," in *Mariko Mori* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 35.
5. Yasue Kuwahara, "Kuwata Keisuke and the Postwar Japanese Popular Consciousness" in *A Century of Popular Culture in Japan*. Douglas Slaymaker, ed. (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 186.
6. Richard McGregor, *Japan Swings: Politics, Culture, and Sex in the New Japan* (St. Leonards, NSW, AU: Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1996), 19.
7. *Ibid.*, 23.
8. Gavan McCormack, *The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 3.
9. *Ibid.* These additional tragedies are mentioned by several writers, including McGregor.
10. McGregor, *Japan Swings*, 31.
11. McCormack, *The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence*, 288.
12. Catherine Morris and Ingrid Schaffner, "Curator's Statement" in *Gloria: Another Look at Feminist Art of the 1970's*, exh. cat. (New York: White Columns, 2002), 1.
13. Quoted in *Ibid.*
14. Quoted in *Ibid.*, from Elizabeth Hayt, "The Artist is a Glamour Puss," *New York Times*, Sunday, April 18, 1999, sec. 9, p. 1.
15. Neville Wakefield, "Interview with Artist Mariko Mori," *Interview* (June 1999): 109.
16. Eleanor Heartney, "Mariko Mori: In Search of Paradise Lost," *Art Press* 256 (April 2000): 40.
17. Wakefield, "Interview with Artist Mariko Mori," 2.
18. Robert Raczka, "Mariko Mori: The Andy Warhol Museum," *New Art Examiner* (November 1998): 46.
19. Susan J. Napier, "Vampires, Psychic Girls, Flying Women and Sailor Scouts: Four Faces of the young female in Japanese popular culture," in *The Worlds of Japanese Popular Culture: Gender, Shifting Boundaries and Global Cultures*, ed. D.P. Martinez (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 91.
20. Kanai Yoshiko, "Issues for Japanese Feminism," in *Voices from the Japanese Women's Movement*, ed. AMPO-Japan Asia Quarterly Review (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 3-4.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. Sandra Buckley, *Broken Silence: Voices of Japanese Feminism* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997), 47. This statement is taken from Buckley's interview with Sachiko.
24. Halldor Stefansson, "Media Stories of Bliss and Mixed Blessings," in ed. D.P. Martinez, *The Worlds of Japanese Popular Culture*, 155-56.
25. This is not meant to downplay the tremendous advances made by women in Japan in recent years. For an excellent statistical overview, see the introduction to Karen Kelsky's recent publication, *Women on the Verge* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2001).
26. Yoshiko, "Issues for Japanese Feminism," 3, 6.
27. *Ibid.*, 3.
28. Dike Blair, "We've Got Twenty Years," *Purple Prose* (Summer 1995): 100.
29. Rose Carter and Lois Dilatash, "Office Ladies," in *Women in Changing Japan*, eds. Joyce Lebra, Joy Paulson and Elizabeth Powers (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1976), 77.
30. Cherry Kittredge, *Womansword: What Japanese Words Say About Women* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1991), 103.

31. Carter and Dilatash, "Office Ladies," 76.
32. Statement by Prof. Jan Bardsley, from his course syllabus for "Women and Work in Japan," Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2001.
33. Yuko Ogasawara, *Office Ladies and Salaried Men: Power, Gender and Work in Japanese Companies* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997), 8-9. Ogasawara's thesis relies partly on this writings of Dorinne Kondo, who earlier suggested the exploitation of "motherly" power and rank to create this dynamic. Dorinne Kondo, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in the Japanese Workplace* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990).
34. *Ibid.*, 9. For an explanation of these strategies, see Ogasawara, *Office Ladies and Salaried Men*, Chapter 6.
35. *Ibid.*, 162.
36. Karin Higa, "Some Thoughts on National and Cultural Identity: Art by Contemporary Japanese and Japanese American Artists," *Art Journal* 55, no.3 (Fall 1996): 7.
37. *Ibid.* Higa makes this observation about Mori's outfit.
38. Kunie Sugiura interview with Mariko Mori, *Journal of Contemporary Art*, <http://www.jca-online.com/mori.html>, 5 June 2001, 1.
39. Dominic Molon, "Countdown to Ecstasy," in Mariko Mori (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 5.
40. Norman Bryson also mentions a parallel between the culture of the Rococo period and the works of Mariko Mori. See his "Cute Futures: Mariko Mori's Techno-Enlightenment," *Parkett* 54 (Dec. 1998/Jan. 1999): 76.
41. *Ibid.*, 77.
42. Quoted in Kazunori Takada, "Japan Tries in Vain to Stamp Out Teen Prostitution," *Reuters (Tokyo)* <http://www.le-national.com/crime-japan-prostitution.html>, 6 January 2003.
43. *Ibid.*, 1.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*, 2.
46. *Ibid.*, 1.
47. Ryan Connell, "Schoolgirl prostitution gets fresh facelift," Sept. 17, 2002, *Weekly Playboy magazine online*.
48. In Dike Blair's interview, Mori, speaking of *Love Hotel*, says just this: "The 'School Girl' cyborg, for example, is in a Love Hotel (also the title). There's a popular kind of telephone club (Telekura) for older business men who wait in the service's small offices for a call from a high school girl. The service distributes flyers to young girls on the street giving the phone numbers of the rooms where the business men wait—men with Lolita complexes—hoping to arrange a date, to meet for a coffee or dinner and, occasionally, paid sex with the girl. For the picture I wore a typical high school uniform and posed in a typical Love Hotel room." Blair, "We've Got Twenty Years," 100.
49. Connell, "Schoolgirl prostitution gets fresh facelift."
50. *Ibid.*
51. Masami Toku, "What is Manga?: The Influence of Pop Culture in Adolescent Art," *Art Education* (March 2001): 13.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Eastern Standard Time: A Guide to Asian Influence on American Culture: From Astro Boy to Zen Buddhism*. eds. Jeff Yang, Dina Gan, Terry Hong, et. al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 46.
54. Michael Darling, "Plumbing the Depths of Superflatness," *Art Journal* (Fall 2001): 81.
55. *Ibid.* Napier mentions the "double-attraction" of these female characters. Napier, "Vampires, Psychic Girls," 94.
56. John Treat, "Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home: Shōjo culture and the nostalgic subject," in *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture*, ed. John Treat (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1996): 281-82. Also quoted in Napier, "Vampires, Psychic Girls," 94.
57. Napier, "Vampires, Psychic Girls," 94. And, as Treat explains, "A *kawaii* girl is attractive, and thus valorized, but lacks libidinal agency of her own." Treat, "Yoshimoto Banana," 281.
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LATINA IDENTITY

Reconciling Ritual, Culture, and Belonging

By Stacy E. Schultz

The cultural traditions of colonial cross-fertilization and overwhelming machismo profoundly affect how Latina women see themselves. Performance artist Coco Fusco views the Latina body “as a decorative layer that conceals a non-identity.”¹ This is the result of the complexities that abound and create tension in defining identity: ethnic, racial, emotional, political, and geographic.² Hybridity with indigenous populations is consistent throughout Latin and Central America. Many people find themselves at physical, cultural, and metaphoric crossroads, because Spanish rule and the slave trade created diverse populations. Migration and displacement also influence people’s mindsets. The legacy of this process that exists in the performative works by artists from Mexico, Cuba, Costa Rica, and

Puerto Rico features a mixture of Western and non-Western art and ritual, high art, and popular culture as reflections of lived experiences between two or more worlds. The artists discussed here draw upon the interwoven iconographic traditions of Catholicism, Afro-Caribbean Santería and Palo Monte, and some ancient pre-Columbian religions.

Qualities that define Latin hybridity include the mixing of often divergent genres or approaches; references to the self, positioning the artist in the process of a journey of self-discovery; literal and figurative representations of the artist as dislocated or geographically estranged; recreating or contextualizing oneself in relation to a biological, created, or symbolic family; and the use of the media to address representation and alternative ways of seeing.³ By engaging one or several of these modes, Latina artists of different ethnic heritages are finding ways to define “Latin American.” The female body and traditional and religious expectations of demure and self-sacrificing femininity collide in their contemporary performance practices. The work of the seminal figure Ana Mendieta is especially significant in this regard. In searching for a sense of place in her own work within a specifically Latin American context while highlighting the female body, she paved the way for an ongoing investigation of



Fig. 1. Marta María Pérez Bravo, *Cultos paralelos* (Parallel Cults) (1990).

the intersections of Latin American culture and feminine identity. Latina artists continue to engage in a struggle at these crossroads of ancient and modern practices in their desire to break free from tradition and define themselves on their own terms: Marta María Pérez Bravo’s and Lorena Wolffer’s use of religious practice and blood sacrifice, death and burial imagery in which the body becomes one again with the earth by Coco Fusco and Merián Soto, and binding or entrapment by Coco Fusco and Elia Arce.

For Ana Mendieta, exposure to the Afro-Cuban religious practices of Santería during her childhood in Cuba was influential. Though she never directly witnessed or participated in any rituals, she was aware of some of the mystical

elements being discussed by servants working in the Mendieta household. Ana’s sister, Raquelín, remembers hearing maids “talking about their religious practices, about magic, about sex, about who was cheating on whom, about who needed a love potion. We were fascinated. Ana loved listening to this forbidden talk.”⁴ Their parents, however, looked down on Santería and considered it a superstitious outgrowth of Catholicism. While Mendieta let Santería inspire some of her work, she does not reference specific practices or rituals. Therefore, Mendieta’s interest in Latin American religious practice, whether contemporary or ancient, should be treated in a general manner.

Ana Mendieta and her sister arrived in Iowa in the early 1960s through the Peter Pan program, which sponsored, in conjunction with the Catholic Church, foster placement of Cuban children in the United States to escape the political instabilities in Cuba. The sisters spent years in the United States isolated from their parents, their culture, and the Spanish language. The experiences of separation, loss, and alienation fueled Ana Mendieta’s desire to become an artist and to investigate Latin American culture during several trips to Mexico while a student at the University of Iowa. The themes of blood sacrifice and a literal connection to the earth frequently appear in her work. Blood serves as a literal

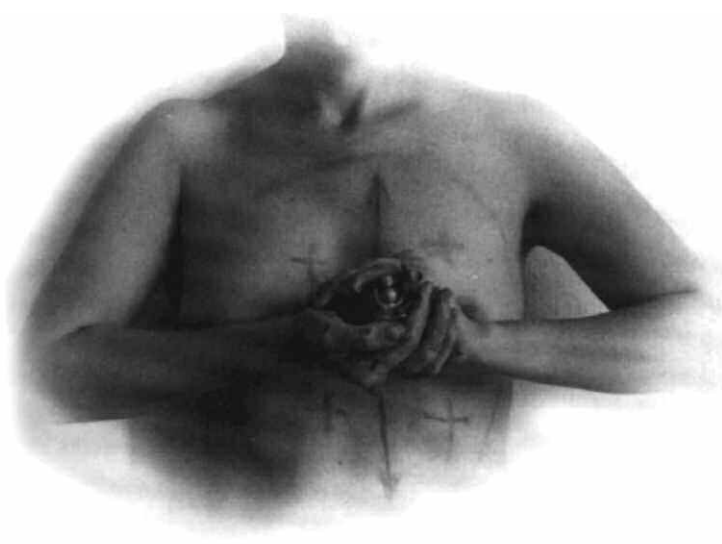


Fig. 2. Marta María Pérez Bravo, *Macuto* (1991).

manifestation of emotional pain. In addition, by blending ancient and contemporary Western and non-Western traditions, Mendieta could access an important realm and straddle powerful lines of demarcation. In tapping into the power of the crossroads, Mendieta revealed her belief in the potential for renewal and transcendence despite negative circumstances. In forging a connection between her physical body and the earth in several performances, Mendieta attempted to address her physical separation from Cuba and reconnect with her Latin heritage. By choosing the earth, Mendieta literally and metaphorically established roots to her origins. It is from these concerns with defining identity while maintaining ties to Latin America that contemporary artists have garnered influence and strength.

Slaves transported to the Caribbean, South America, and parts of the United States brought their religions with them. Because most slaves came from the West Coast of Africa, the traditions of the Yoruba people had the most profound impact. The Spanish required slaves to convert to Catholicism and forbade other religious practices. What emerged from this forced conversion was Santería in Cuba, or Candomblé in Brazil, a fusion of Catholic reverence for saints and use of devotional images, and Yoruba beliefs in multiple manifestations, or orichas, of Olodumare or Olofi, the Supreme Being. Thus Catholic saints and orichas, whose characteristics were viewed to be similar, could be uniquely blended. Other aspects of Santería that have particular relevance for Latina artists are attitudes toward the body, concepts of existence, and ashé, or life force.

Within Yoruba and Santería practice, the human body is considered to be a divinely inspired work of art. This view contrasts greatly with Judeo-Christian notions of the body, which emphasize denial of the physical body in attaining salvation. Sexuality and sexual expression, which are often contradictory in Western religious ideology, co-exist more easily within Afro-Caribbean practices. Artists who harness Santería spirituality explore the female body without shame, because it is divinely sanctioned.

The concept of ashé plays a significant role in Santería cosmology. Ashé, or ache, is considered to be a vital energy, a

force present in everything. Ashé can also be a transforming power varying in degree. The human body contains the potential to be a powerful site of ashé.⁵

Also relevant in exploring religious duality are the ideas surrounding human existence. Yoruba and Santería practitioners view life as occurring on two planes: the physical/tangible and the spiritual/intangible. These planes often intermingle, supporting a belief that seeming opposites can co-exist in harmony: life/death, sacred/profane, etc. The idea of the crossroads as the point of intersection between the two planes is especially powerful. It is within this realm that the artists addressed here have particular poignancy and explore problematic Judeo-Christian dualities. Whether through explorations of Catholic or Santería/Palo Monte imagery, ritual and blood are important elements for Latina artists. By using emblems that have powerful connotations in both religious and violent senses—positive and negative—artists are able to channel spirituality to make sense of their femininity and personal circumstances. By using symbolic elements of power, change, and liminality, artists reconcile tradition with contemporary life for women in an ever-changing world.

This spiritual communion can be seen in the photographs of Marta María Pérez Bravo, who enacts images of ritual by engaging the female body. Born in Cuba and now residing in Mexico, Pérez Bravo directly addresses the body as object. By photographing portions or isolated fragments of her body with traditional African ritual objects, she changes the context of both the objects themselves and her body in relation to them. She draws on the ritual objects and beliefs of Santería and Palo Monte, two Afro-Cuban religious traditions that draw from Yoruba (western Africa) and Kongo/Angola (central Africa) practices respectively. For both the Yoruba and the Kongo, the natural world is a sacred realm where the gods reside. Palo Monte traditions differ slightly in their focus on communication with the dead through spirit mediums. By focusing on her body as the container of her sacred power, her ashé, Pérez Bravo sheds new light on the power of the female form. She creates a space of transformation. Her body and the altar upon which ritual is performed become one. Like Mendieta, an important reference for Pérez Bravo, she also communes with nature in order to create new spaces for female empowerment.

In *Cultos paralelos* (Parallel Cults) (1990; Fig. 1), we see Pérez Bravo's upper torso. She leans toward the viewer, placing her breasts into offering cups placed on an altar. It is notable that Pérez Bravo was nursing her twin daughters at the time of this work. For both Yoruba and Santería religious practitioners, twins are especially significant because they are thought to possess unique magical powers. In Yoruba practice, if one twin dies, the parents commission a carved statue to take the place of the dead twin and to be cared for as if it were a live representation of the twin. In *Cultos paralelos*, we see Pérez Bravo engaging in her own form of twin worship. By placing her breasts into the two offering cups, she pays homage to the Ibeji, or twin gods. Pérez Bravo's body as a religious site is also significant in light of her personal connection to twin worship through her daughters. Thus, through her bodily connection to

the Ibeji, she becomes a priestess and shares a “transcendental power and knowledge based on her own body as a ... seat of her ashé, her personal sacred energy.”⁶

In another image that pays homage to the twin gods, Pérez Bravo creates *Macuto* (1991; Fig. 2). A macuto is a receptacle of power of Palo Monte. Within the object, Pérez Bravo places two dolls representing both the Ibeji and her daughters. Utilizing her breasts as a sacred space, she holds the macuto and the dolls against her torso at breast level. Within this ritualized drawing, we see the sign of the four moments of the sun. This graphic symbol is considered to be the foundation of everything and is a synthesis of Yowa or Kongo cosmography. The symbol activates a center of power. The center of the macuto represents the eye of the cosmos, its center. Within this realm, the living and the dead, the sea and the land, are joined together. Again we see an image at the crossroads, where the personal and sacred are joined within an emblem of power. By bringing the Ibeji within this powerful center, Pérez Bravo blends religious and personal attributes. The spiritual and everyday realms become one in the space created.

In *Caminos* (Roads) (1990; Fig. 3), Pérez Bravo moves from her upper torso to her legs as a site of exploration. In one image from this series, her legs are bordered by crossed sticks as her body emerges “from a base image of Elegguá, the Yoruba god of change and crossroads”⁷ and the messenger of two worlds. Pérez Bravo’s legs move from one world to another; her body leads her from one mystical realm to the next. The choice of title and its spiritual reference also speaks to the female body as a site at the crossroads between two worlds: as subject and object.

The space of the crossroads is also relevant in relation to the work of Mexican artist Lorena Wolffer. Through positioning her body between the physical and the political, Wolffer’s performances serve as a metaphor for her country. By enacting varying “political tortures” on the “landscape” of her body, she emphasizes her own political commitments to the economic plight of Mexico and challenges the gaze of the viewer looking upon her attractive female body. In a performance of *Mexican Territory* (1995; Fig. 4) in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Wolffer enacted Chinese water torture on herself with drops of blood instead of water. A bag of blood was suspended above her nude body as she lay on a simple palette. The drops were positioned to fall onto Wolffer’s abdomen, the site of gestation. Like Pérez Bravo, Wolffer sees this area of the body as one burdened by feminine expectations. The Belfast piece lasted six hours, and as the work was unrehearsed for this length of time, Wolffer actually experienced the physical and psychological effects of torture while performing in real time. Audience members, who viewed the work for ten minutes to two hours—some of them several times during the course of the performance—were just as deeply affected by the piece. Wolffer said that several individuals, who only felt the courage to speak to her days after the performance, related the work to issues of torture in Northern Ireland.⁸ This level of response to Pérez Bravo and Wolffer seems to confirm the importance of the body as a site of reflection, be it political or spiritual.

The themes of sacrifice, death, and burial become especially relevant in connecting Latina artists to a long-standing



Fig. 3. Marta María Pérez Bravo, *Caminos* (Roads) (1990).

tradition in Latin Catholicism: Marianism. The concept of woman as self-sacrificing martyr is idealized in Latin cultures as the complement to male machismo.⁹ A woman can only assume power through rituals of submission that offer access to ecstatic states through sacrifice. In this regard, Latina women occupy a significant position in negotiating life, death, and femininity in performance. This is a direct result of the unique devotion to the Virgin Mary that developed in Latin America during the time of the Spanish conquest. Historically, the Virgin had been called upon as intercessor to defeat the Moors in Spain and as a symbol of strength, resistance, and hope in new lands.



Fig. 4. Lorena Wolffer, *Mexican Territory* (1995).



Fig. 5. Merián Soto, *Todos Mis Muertos* (*All My Dead Ones*) (1996). Photo: Geoffrey Miller.

The evolution of Marian devotion in Latin America stems from this Spanish reverence for the Virgin as nurturing protector. It is this view that enabled the process of mandatory religious conversion resulting in a conflation of the Virgin with the sacred feminine throughout pre-Columbian Latin America. The lasting appeal of the Virgin Mary was due in part to her singular, positive nature, as opposed to that of female deities such as the Aztec goddesses Coatlicue and Chalchihuitlicue, who possessed both life-giving and destructive qualities. More commonalities,

such as Coatlicue's virginal conception of Huitzilopochtli (the sun who is reborn through his mother each night), when a ball of feathers fell from the sky impregnating her, enabled further acceptance of Christianity. It is this fusion of traditions that occurred in colonial Latin America that can be connected to the common desire to explore death, Catholicism, and ancient cultures in the work of Merián Soto and Coco Fusco.¹⁰

In *Todos Mis Muertos* (*All My Dead Ones*) (1996; Fig. 5), Puerto Rican artist and choreographer Merián Soto created an homage to *Mamita*, her beloved grandmother. In making a work that reflected both the Day of the Dead traditions and personal experience, Soto sought to conjure the spirit of her grandmother through this performance:

As I began to think about the dead it was Mamita who came to me. Her memory is the stuff of which this piece is made. She was blind so I blindfolded myself. She knew me through touch so I touched audience members as I entered the performance space. She was kind and calm and balanced. The work is a movement altar to her memory and that of my father who passed in 1996. Her photos figure prominently on the basket I balance on my head. Through the work I attempt to enter and share with the audience an inner space and a way of communicating that I learned from her.¹¹

In preparation for the work, Soto invoked her memory, seeing the spirit of her grandmother as a yellow light. Yellow then became the primary color she used in the piece. Soto became an offering in yellow, with a yellow costume, yellow body makeup, and yellow flowers covering her headdress. She also blindfolded herself, further connecting to *Mamita*, who had lost her sight to cataracts in her later years. Soto sees the body in this performance as an offering in addition to the literal and physical offerings she carried with her into the space: bells, photos, a yellow chair hanging from one shoulder, a yellow pack holding dirt, a large skeleton child attached to her back, yellow flowers on her head, and her pockets filled with rum, cornmeal, bread, flowers, candles, and matches. The

performance space contained a video altar onto which the audience guided her. Images of hands digging up soil and then bones, photographs of the deceased, flowers, and objects/offerings make up the tripartite altar. Before the altar, Soto would be "saluting and invoking the four directions, honoring the earth, caressing/eating the soil, dancing with the dead (the skeleton figure), mourning, conjuring, eating, drinking, dancing, communing, and finally resting in the dirt."¹² By dedicating this performance to her grandmother, Soto was honoring her matrilineal heritage. She also was drawing upon the multicultural tradition of female mourners as she attempted to commune with the spirit of her grandmother in a space that honors life and death.

In *Better Yet When Dead* (1997; Fig. 6), Coco Fusco created the first of several performances and plays involving women and necrophilia. In this piece, she sought to produce an extreme expression of the feminine will by feigning death:

After the Tex-Mex singer Selena was shot and killed by a colleague last year, and the People Magazine bearing her image sold more copies than any other issue in the publication's history, I began to ask myself why Latino cultures in the north and south are so fascinated with female creativity once it has been forever silenced. Clearly, there are aspects of Catholicism that celebrate female suffering as a virtue, and which have often been used to encourage Latin women to accept mental and physical abuse; however it seems to me that the stakes are raised when female artists are involved in the equation, in that the very ambivalence toward ceding access to women in public life expresses itself perfectly in the sharp change in attitudes toward women artists before and after their death. It is almost as if a violent death makes them more acceptably feminine.¹³

Performed twice, once at the YYZ Artists Outlet in Toronto, Canada, and again for the Arts Bial of Medellin, Colombia, the piece involved Fusco being "on view" for several hours a day for three to four days in a coffin lined in satin and surrounded by roses. The Canadian audience was very somber and quiet. Few people touched or spoke to Fusco. The Colombian viewers, on the other hand, were extremely physical and emotional. From having prayers offered to having wine poured onto her lips, the Colombian experience very much reflected the Latin American belief in the mystical power of interactions with the dead. By controlling her breathing and muscular movement, Fusco entered the otherworldly realm of the female martyr.¹⁴

For *El Ultimo Deseo* (*The Last Wish*) (1997; Fig. 7), performed during the 1997 Havana Biennale in Cuba, Fusco again took death as her inspiration. Drawing on family memories and personal experiences in Cuba, Fusco held a wake in Old Havana. She laid herself out on the floor of the parlor wrapped in a white sheet. Radio Reloj, the Cuban radio station that marks the time by recounting historical events that occurred on that given day, played in the background. Though much more personally relevant—Fusco wanted to explore the unfulfilled wish for those

who were unable to be buried in their homeland, particularly her grandmother—the theme of burial site as culturally relevant resonates. Surrounded by flowers, the resemblance to Mendieta’s *Silhueta* series is striking, almost an homage. Indebted to this Cuban mentor, Fusco returned to Cuba to reconcile other issues not addressed by Mendieta, namely presence rather than absence. By physically occupying the space that Mendieta often left uninhabited, Fusco was able to connect herself to her predecessor’s search for identity in exile.¹⁵

Fusco further explored this connection in *El Evento Suspendido* (The Postponed Event) (2000; Fig. 8), performed at El Espacio Aglutinador in Havana, also during a Biennale. For this piece Fusco was buried in a vertical position up to her chest in the yard outside the gallery for three hours, beginning at sunset. During the period of her burial, she wrote the following letter (in Spanish) over and over, leaving copies for anyone passing by:

My dear ones,

I am writing this letter to tell you that I am alive. For many years I feared that if I told the truth you would suffer at the hands of those who buried another woman in my name. I can no longer stand not being able to tell you that I exist. Not a day has passed without my dreaming of you. Fortunately I can say that I recovered from the ordeal that resulted in my departure. I will send more news soon.

*With love, C.*¹⁶

Fusco intended to create a work dealing with the feeling of being buried alive that many Cubans experience. In a state of exile, separated from their homeland, they feel as if they occupy a state between existing and living. Like others born in the United States to a Cuban exile, Fusco was seeking a connection to a place she belonged to culturally but not physically. By returning to the earth in a literal or metaphoric manner through burial, the Latina artist sought to harness the seemingly incompatible states of life and death.

Through performative cosmic experiments, Merián Soto and Coco Fusco seem to invite, in the words of Mexican poet/humanitarian Octavio Paz, “disorder, reuniting contradictory elements and principles in order to bring about a renaissance of life. Ritual death promotes a rebirth.”¹⁷ Ultimately, they seek a rebirth of a redefined femininity.

The process of reconnection and redefinition continues in a performance by Elia Arce, *Stretching My Skin Until It Rips Whole* (1994), in which the artist actively confronts her Costa Rican familial past. Arce introduces the audience to her two grandmothers and her mother and reveals the difficulties she experienced both in becoming her own woman and breaking free from her cultural past. Slide projections and photographs of her family stand in as substitutes for the brunt of her anger. She recounts the disdain and misunderstanding she encountered in wanting to transcend a life as a dutiful and submissive Latina mother and wife. She condemns the middle-class values of her paternal grandmother, Helia, who kept pets while others existed in extreme poverty. Arce forcefully pulls feathers off a dead chicken held upside down before the audience in an accusatory



Fig. 6. Coco Fusco, *Better Yet When Dead* (1997). Photo: Peter Dako.



Fig. 7. Coco Fusco, *El Ultimo Deseo* (The Last Wish) (1997). Photo: Eduardo Aparicio.



Fig. 8. Coco Fusco, *El Evento Suspendido* (The Postponed Event) (2000). Photo: Juan Carlos Alom.



Fig. 9. Elia Arce, *Chicken Incantation* (1994). Photo: Andrew Perret.



Fig. 11. Elia Arce, *I Have so Many Stitches That Sometimes I Dream That I'm Sick* (1993). Photo: Martin Cox.



Fig. 10. Coco Fusco & Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit...* (1992).

incantation (Fig. 9) exposing the plight of the underclass: “hungry, hungry, very hungry”; “no soap, no soup ... growing mushrooms”; “broken pipes ... paper, paper, everywhere,” “fascism, fascism, fascism.”¹⁸ Though personal in nature, Arce’s chants and incantations of this performance as she shakes a dead chicken recall Ana Mendieta’s *Chicken Piece*.

A confined/caged/trapped bird also becomes a curiosity: a being denied fluidity or movement within predetermined parameters. Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña explored being caged or trapped in the collaborative performance *Two*

Undiscovered Amerindians Visit... (1992; Fig. 10), which debuted in September of 1992 at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Interested in exploring and exposing myths and stereotypes about Otherness, Fusco and Gómez-Peña decided to stage an exhibition of non-Westerners, much like those popular in the nineteenth century throughout Europe and the United States. The two lived in a golden cage for three days, presenting themselves as people from Guatínau, an undiscovered island in the Gulf of Mexico. Fusco and Gómez-Peña donned “authentic” native costumes for the display. A donation

box was set up so that in exchange for money Fusco would dance to rap music and Gómez-Peña would tell Amerindian stories in a nonsensical language. The two also posed for Polaroids for visitors. “Guards” stationed before the cage answered questions, took the artists to the bathroom, and fed them sandwiches and fruit.¹⁹

What was most surprising to Fusco and Gómez-Peña was the outraged responses of the audience. Many audience members felt betrayed over the misrepresentation of the display as authentic. Others found it cruel to cage “these

people" in such a manner. Most striking, though, were the experience of being displayed and the reactions of Fusco and Gómez-Peña. Looking back, Fusco felt that being looked at was easier for her than for Gómez-Peña. As a woman, a role that involves being on display and/or objectified, Fusco was better prepared to deal with the stares, jeers, and sexual comments directed at her.²⁰ Fortunately, no one threatened physical harm, although many of the Spanish men made explicit sexual comments about her body. Some onlookers bribed the guard with money to convince Fusco to reveal her breasts. Men used lewd language, taunted her, propositioned her, and blew kisses. For Gómez-Peña, visitors were more physically direct: they wanted to touch and physically interact with him.

From Minneapolis, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit...* traveled to Madrid, London and Sydney as well as to several U.S. venues, including Washington, D.C., Irvine, California, and New York for the Whitney Biennial in March of 1993. Unlike the original outdoor display, the gallery space of the museum offered new and different challenges for Fusco, Gómez-Peña, and the visiting public. Around the cage, background materials were displayed, including a map of Guatinau and a fake Encyclopaedia Britannica entry:

The female weighs sixty three kilos, measures 1.74 meters, and appears to be in her early thirties. She is fond of sandwiches, pad thai, and herb tea. She is a versatile dancer, and also enjoys showing off her domestic talents by sewing voodoo dolls, serving cocktails, and massaging her male partner. Her facial and body decorations indicate that she has married into the upper caste of he tribe.²¹

In addition, a chronology of the history of displaying non-Westerners was included. Establishing a history was especially important for Fusco and Gómez-Peña, because this practice of display dates back to the Spanish Conquest. The timeline cited examples from museums, royal court appearances, and sideshows. By drawing attention to this phenomenon with a live display, the artists wanted to highlight how Europeans have treated Otherness. Ethnographic displays have drawn attention to Eurocentric cultural and racial superiority, and seeing non-Western people in such a degrading light has deemed mutual understanding across cultures unworthy. For a female "specimen," the colonizing gaze is supported and left unchallenged. By seeing non-Western dress in an unnecessarily and overly sexual way, which may cover the female body to a lesser extent than Western attire, the European male can (still) easily justify his appetite for the exotic.

The use of a cage is not entirely unique in performance art; however, the themes of simultaneous display and entrapment carry much resonance when examined in a Latin American context. By focusing on what the cage may symbolize for the Latina artist, I hope to achieve an analysis beyond current references to Anglo- or Euro-centric performances. In her non-action prelude to *I Have so Many Stitches That Sometimes I Dream That I'm Sick* (1993; Fig. 11), Costa Rican artist Elia Arce placed herself within a large metal cage with a sign reading "Feed Me" attached to the top. Arce remained seated and motionless, with

her face looking downward for the entire period of this pre-performance "body installation." She did not speak or make eye contact with the viewers, and her long hair hid her face from view. Arce's brown body and the sign can be read as enabling agency, giving Arce the sustenance to assert herself as a Latina artist. The sign may also point to society's inability to "feed" her properly. She can only receive support while caged, thereby placing her in a double bind. To feed information, cultural or societal, is also a key consideration.²²

Arce's body is clearly on display, much like Coco Fusco's body in *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit...* Nudity is multi-layered in both cases because of ethnicity. What differentiates the two pieces, however, is the choice of whether or not to interact with the audience. Though both pieces give the artists the ability to communicate what is problematic about the non-Western body, speech is not always necessary. Elia Arce utilizes the body to comment on the cultural plight of the Latina body in American society. She is confined and makes no eye contact with the viewer. Arce's and Fusco's bodies subsist in a state that highlights their existence within the parameters of gendered/cultural/ethnic Other. What both ultimately convey is that it is American society that has caused the confinement.

By utilizing ritual, these artists are communicating the struggles of contemporary Latinas. Whether through Santería, Palo Monte, Catholicism, or Pre-Columbian religious traditions, the spiritual realm at the intersection of life and death invites their explorations of identity. By drawing attention to the site of the female body as a space of oppositional practice, they call colonial, racist, and patriarchal authority into question. Despite existing in seemingly perpetual states of duality, whether through religious or cultural beliefs, or physically through ties to an ancestral place fraught with political contradictions, Latina artists are able to triumph in the crossroads by creating new spaces for femininity. •

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NOTES

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17. Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, trans. Lysande Kemp (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 51.
18. Meiling Cheng, *In Other Los Angeleses: Multicentric Performance Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2002), 167.
19. Coco Fusco, "The Other History of Intercultural Performance," in *English Is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*. This essay also appears in *The Drama Review* 38, 1 (T141, Spring 1994). See also www.cocofusco.com and <http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/UndiscAmerind.html>.
20. See Coco Fusco, *English is Broken Here*, 57.
21. Ibid., 59.
22. This piece is discussed in detail in Chapter 4 of Meiling Cheng, *In Other Los Angeleses: Multicentric Performance Art*.

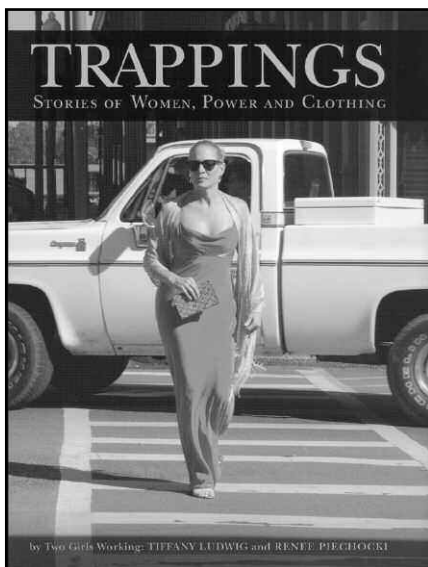


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TO PAINT THE UNSPEAKABLE

Mexican Female Artists' Iconography of the 1930s and early 1940s

By Dina Comisarenco Mirkin

Throughout the history of Western art, male artists have represented women from their own gendered perspective, creating paradigms that, though far removed from women's own experiences of womanhood, have influenced the social expectations of women's behaviors and feelings. An outstanding counter example of feminine voices bespeaking women's most intimate and painful experiences can be found in the works of art created by a group of Mexican artists active during the 1930s and early 1940s. Some of these artists are today well-known, such as María Izquierdo (1902-55) and Frida Kahlo (1907-55); others less so, including Rosa Rolando (1895-1970), Lola Cueto (1897-1978), Aurora Reyes (1908-85), Isabel Villaseñor (1909-53)¹ and Olga Costa (1913-93).²

Despite recent attention to the lives and works of Mexican women artists, the monographic methodological perspectives commonly used by art historians tend to emphasize the singularity of each artist, thereby diminishing the social and political significance of their coherent artistic production as a group.³ Here instead is offered a collective, comparative approach, based on their significant personal, social, and political connections, and considering the difficulties they faced as female artists in the highly patriarchal society of Mexico during the 1930s and early 1940s, which led them to develop, independently, a common iconographic repertoire.

Although these artists occasionally expressed joyful, confident images of themselves and other women, more frequently they focused on anguish caused by the social pressures imposed by the prevailing "machista" society. Through their selection of tabooed themes, among them unhappy brides, frustrated motherhood, miscarriage and infant deaths, and gender violence, these artists exposed not only their own private fears and feelings but common preoccupations and challenges posed to them by the social construction of gender roles in Mexican society. I contend that these artists chose such themes not only to work out some of their most subjective psychological torments at a personal level, but also as an effective political tool to publicly denounce some of the cultural bases that sustain the pernicious patriarchal gender paradigms in regard to what it means to be a woman.

The 1930s was a passionate time, both politically and artistically. The international context was marked by the 1929 crash of the United States stock market and the extraordinary economic depression that followed; by the Spanish Civil War, which mobilized people worldwide; and by the emergence of totalitarian regimes in Spain, Germany, Italy and the Soviet

Union that terrorized Europe. The serious economic problems faced by democratic governments throughout the world, marked by high unemployment, spurred a deep political consciousness among large portions of the population, with polarization between right- and left-wing ideologies, and agitated politics worldwide.

In Mexico, the long postponed social changes proposed after the Revolution of 1910 were finally coming to life. In 1934, when Lázaro Cárdenas was elected president, a position he held until 1940, new hope was born for neglected sectors of Mexican society, including women. Enormously popular, his progressive program included the implementation of so-called "socialist education" and great advances in land reform and social security. As workers' wages increased, the labor unions were revitalized. The oil expropriation of 1938, and subsequent foundation of "Petróleos Mexicanos" (PEMEX), was one of Cárdenas's most revolutionary and transcendental acts.

The movement in favor of women's rights also experienced an extraordinary growth, and many women began to take an active part in politics.⁴ Nevertheless, Cárdenas's 1934 effort to pass a law implementing female suffrage ultimately lacked sufficient support.⁵ In 1936, the Unique Front for Women's Rights (*Frente Único Pro Derechos de la Mujer*) assembled 50,000 women belonging to 800 organizations throughout Mexico. Their demands included extending maternity leave and legal recognition of breastfeeding time for mothers of infants; installing daycare centers near markets and other work centers; unionization of urban and rural working women; and a woman's right to vote and to be elected to public office.⁶ That same year, the women of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (National Revolutionary Party) gained the right to vote in internal party elections and were able to participate in the 1937 PNR national conventions. Several women campaigned to become the first female independent candidates to run for the PNR presidency. Such active participation of women in politics affected other cultural areas also all but closed to women, in particular, the art world.

By the 1930s the Mexican School artists had consolidated a tradition of political commitment. The so-called "great three," the muralists José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, were the national and international face of the Mexican Renaissance, with its challenging definition of public art, and its socially committed type of artist. The "great three" actually were part of a larger group of artists dedicated to using the power of their art to improve society. Members of the *Liga*

de escritores y artistas revolucionarios (LEAR) (League of revolutionary writers and artists), active between 1934 and 1937, and the *Taller de Gráfica Popular* (TGP) (Popular Graphics Workshop), founded in 1937 and productive until 1977, were able to exert significant influence on their society. Among the members of these progressive organizations were a number of significant female painters.

Many of the women artists being discussed here knew each other personally. Even those married to the male protagonists of the Mexican School,⁷ found themselves, as women, marginalized and outside the center of artistic practice. Additionally, with the exception of Maria Izquierdo and Aurora Reyes,⁸ most lacked traditional academic training and considered themselves as amateur rather than professional artists. At a social level, as a part of the most prominent Mexican artistic scene, these women frequently gained recognition, but as inspiring muses.⁹ Their male partners and others in their circle created some remarkable images of them—often personifications of the purest Mexican essence or the prototypical Mexican woman. When the women wanted to abandon their inspirational roles in favor of becoming active creators, they often struggled against the paradigms they incarnated in the collective imaginary. To oppose a well-established artistic iconography of themselves was one of the crusades they shared, consciously or not.

Most of the women experimented with artistic forms besides painting and engraving. Aurora Reyes was a well known poet; Isabel Villaseñor sang, wrote, and compiled traditional “corridos,” wrote plays, and acted; Rosa Rolando was a professional dancer, actress¹⁰ and photographer; and Lola Cueto was an important promoter and creator of Mexican puppetry,¹¹ produced tapestries, experimented with craft techniques, and wrote children’s plays; Olga Costa sang and played the piano.

The Surrealist movement found in Mexico a fertile terrain in which to breed. Beyond direct impact such as André Breton and Antonin Artaud might have exerted on Kahlo¹² and Izquierdo, respectively, there are some profound coincidences among Surrealism and female Mexican artists. For example, they shared an interest in non-rational, subjective experiences and the profound self-exploration and bold expression of feelings; gave enormous relevance to the fantastic; depicted apparently casual encounters of objects and persons characteristic of the world of dreams, and, in particular, explored the unconscious and childhood memories.

Through their expressions of intimate feminine experiences, these Mexican women artists created a highly original, authentic and provocative new imagery. Instead of focusing on the stereotypical abstract ideals about women’s “natural” abnegation and self-sacrificing happiness, they revealed profound, subjective, and sometimes conflicting feelings such as sorrow, desperation, and anger, which often are less acceptable to society.

Their new, more comprehensive interpretation of women’s experiences was meant to achieve a truer understanding of the complexities surrounding womanhood in modern society. One of their main objectives was to depict, communicate, and create awareness about the commonality of their “unspeakable”

female experiences. Painting served them not only to work out difficult personal challenges but also to denounce the cultural practice of silence that leads to erroneous beliefs in regard to women’s identities and their self-images.

The Unhappy Bride was one common theme. During the 1930s, an American traveler in Mexico, Verna Carleton Millan, observed the extraordinary weight of social expectations on women stemming from pervasive cultural roots. She wrote:

[T]he Mexican woman of today ... has this enormous burden of race and tradition upon her shoulders; product of a mestizo culture, she is caught in the mesh of not one but two traditions, both equally repressive. The Spaniards brought to Mexico the strict Catholicism that has held women in a subjective, passive role for centuries. On the other hand, the Indian tribes since time immemorial have crushed the spirit of their women beneath ironclad taboos and repressions ... Marriage is considered the supreme goal of every woman’s life. The mother’s marriage may have been a life-long tragedy, but she can conceive of no other fate for her daughters, on the theory that any kind of marriage is better than none because at least one thus fulfills the Christian command to multiply.¹³

In effect, the persistent influence of religious beliefs and rites upon the lives of women in traditional countries such as Mexico is very strong. The ideal of religious matrimony as the main existential objective of women’s lives is considerable even today. Reinforced by the seductive enchantments of popular childhood fairy tales and by other socialization practices, almost every little girl, even those raised in fairly progressive environments, dreams of a happy marriage and its obligatory dazzling wedding gown worthy of a “princess.” For many young women, frustrated by the lack of educational and professional opportunities, marriage becomes their main goal and reason for their existence. Idealism aside, the number of women who suffer the bitter disappointment of unhappy matrimony is considerable, marked by infidelities, domestic violence, and other degrading (and traditional) means of male dominance that brutally dissolve the childhood illusions.

In bold and original paintings on the theme of unhappy brides, some artists called into question deeply held beliefs. At the same time, they uncovered some of the social forces and interests that shape the traditions regarding marriage and male dominance.

Olga Costa’s *The Bride* (1941; Pl. 1), is a highly enigmatic painting¹⁴ that at first sight appears typical of the genre paintings that characterize the Mexican School. A closer look reveals details that call into question some marriage customs and beliefs. The bride, a short, round woman, occupies the composition as if the space is too small for her to breathe in. Rather than the more typical, young Mexican bride, she is a mature woman. Abandoning the traditional white dress as a symbol of her chastity, this mature bride wears pastel colors, suggesting that she likely is no longer a virgin or, perhaps, that her social condition made the “mandatory” white wedding gown unaffordable. Her melancholic expression, her modest

gaze, and her timid gesture stand in contrast to her prominently laced cleavage which leaves her upper body imprudently exposed.

She stands before a large armchair with claw feet and pompous festooned arms that confer it with an animated quality. A huge bouquet of colorful flowers tied with a large white ribbon fills the chair and the upper background. The flowers, ripped from their natural surroundings and incongruously standing on the chair, echo the incongruities of the bride herself. In Spanish, the word "*desflorar*," like its English counterpart, deflower, can express the loss of a woman's virginity. Here the large bouquet could thus speak metaphorically and ironically to the bride's mature and "impure" condition. Regardless, the painting seems to deconstruct the idealized, virginal, princess-like Mexican bride by depicting instead one more realistic, who, with her imperfections and ambiguities, offers a very moving and provocative image.

The Bride's Veil (1943; Pl. 2) by María Izquierdo may reflect the artist's personal experience of an unwelcome arranged marriage. After the artist's father died when she was five years old, she was raised for some time by her grandparents. When María was fourteen, her mother forced her to marry a much older military man.¹⁵ After a few years, she managed to escape with her two children, confirming the highly predictable suspicion that the marriage was an unhappy one.

Although she painted it many years later, it is easy to speculate that *The Bride's Veil*, with its clear reference to one of the most characteristic wedding symbols, may have served as a way for the artist to share some of her painful memories. In particular, the small size of the furniture, the low perspective, and the disordered elements of the composition call to mind the world of childhood that had been stolen from Izquierdo and many other young girls forced into arranged marriages in such a brutal way.

The most startling aspect of Izquierdo's painting is the absence of the bride, the owner of the veil who traditionally would have starred in the work. Her absence is compensated by the presence of numerous objects which suggest a very tense general mood: the ghostly veil, the bouquet also discarded, the wreath unceremoniously fallen onto the floor and the white gloves in the lower margin that appear ready to fall out of the painting. They populate the composition in a highly disordered way, unrhythmically leading the spectator's gaze toward a tiny opening in the center of the curtains. The spectator can peek into a dark background where barely visible fragments of a bedframe and its fringed bedcovers are suggested.

Besides the unveiling of the bride, symbolically ending her chastity, the chaotic composition suggests that the consummation of the marriage, the sexual act, is most likely taking place behind the curtain. On the right side of the composition, the red hat with colored laces, boxed jewels, half empty perfume bottle, enigmatic mannequin head with a black embroidered shawl—all sitting on a child-size boudoir table—

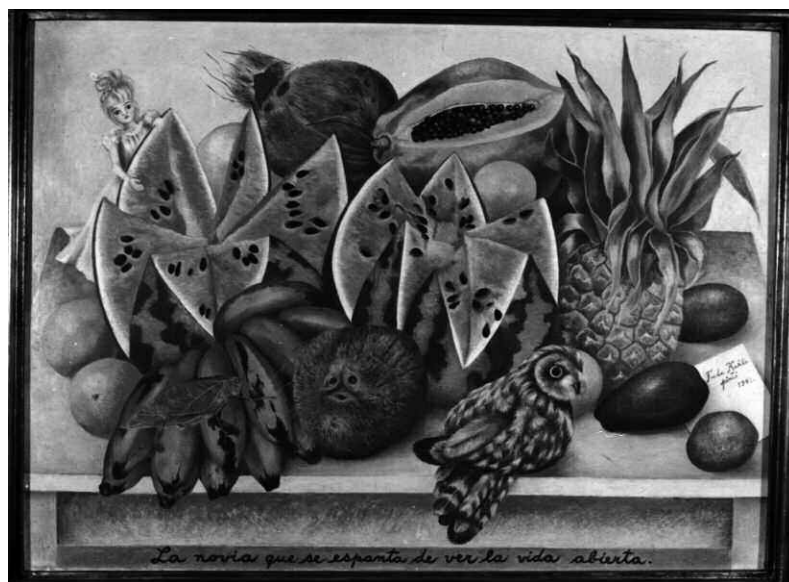


Fig. 1. Frida Kahlo, *The Bride Frightened at Seeing Life Opened* (1943), oil on canvas, 24 13/18" x 32". Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection, The Centro Cultural Muros, Cuernavaca, México. Photo: CENIDIAP/INBA. Biblioteca de las Artes, CENART (México).

and the red feather above the gloves on the floor contrast sharply with the traditional wedding symbols on the left. They deprive the painting of a traditional religious decoding and introduce instead some turbulent, more ambiguous hints. Through formal elements, Izquierdo seems to comment on the sudden sexual maturity violently imposed on the very young bride, demystifying in a forceful way romantic views about marriage.

Frida Kahlo's *The Bride Frightened at Seeing Life Opened* (1943; Fig. 1) also alludes to the fears, doubts and disappointments associated with bridal fantasies and marriage. Originally created in 1939 as a simple still life with colorful fruits, an owl, and a grasshopper, she later added the figure of a Victorian porcelain bride doll that she had bought in a Paris flea market,¹⁶ thus transforming it into an intriguing symbolic work.¹⁷

Salomon Grimberg convincingly interprets the painting as an allegory regarding Kahlo's friend, the French painter Jacqueline Lamba (1910-93), referring to the fear Lamba experienced when she asked her husband, the Surrealist leader André Breton, for a divorce and he threatened her with her "destruction." As is often the case with Kahlo's multilayered works, the painting admits other more universal readings.¹⁸

From a formal and thematic point of view, the composition is unusual for its bizarre combination of traditional still life genre with fruits and creatures on the one hand with the inanimate bride. A "doll" can be manipulated to participate in the game of life, but she has a passive nature, and does not have the power to decide. As suggested by Kahlo's revealing title, the tiny doll literally seems to glance at the disproportionately large and menacing fruits and animals that are frightfully displayed in front of her. This angelic figure does not seem prepared to deal with the exuberance and the cruelty of "open" life. She stands in a precarious, oblique position, as if already starting to fall from the devastating impression.



Fig. 2. Frida Kahlo, *Me and My Doll* (1937), oil on metal, 15 3/4" x 12 1/4". Private Collection, Mexico City. Photo: CENIDIAP/INBA. Biblioteca de las Artes, CENART (México).

The aggressive, angular shapes of the sliced watermelons with the characteristic colors of the Mexican flag, the hairy coconuts with humanized faces, and the open papaya that recalls a female sexual organ seem charged with a twofold nationalistic/sexual symbolism that creates a nightmarish atmosphere for the fragile, tiny bride. This intimidating environment is underlined by the distressful presence of a camouflaged grasshopper and an owl, symbols, respectively, of the plague associated with ethical torment in traditional Christian iconography, and a nocturnal, rapacious bird, which, according to Aztec mythology, symbolized death and hell. They are part of the macabre game in which the only outsider seems to be the bride. The exposed fruit seeds, traditional symbols of life's continuity, might allude to Kahlo's obsessive suffering in regard to her own infertility. Let's recall that, according to Christian dogma, sex without a procreative purpose is synonymous with sin, torment, and death.

The bride doll not only refers to Lamba or even to Kahlo herself but, at a more universal and profound level, to all women. Like the paintings of the unhappy brides by Costa and Izquierdo described earlier, Kahlo's work demystifies the illusions surrounding marriage and weddings while exposing some of life's many cruelties that display themselves before the bride's frightened eyes. As often occurs in real life, this bride is considered a doll, a beautiful toy that can be manipulated easily by the larger and more powerful fruit and animal characters. These symbols of male dominance remain

completely insensitive to the female's feelings and are ready to mortify and destroy her with the force of their unleashed, selfish powers. The pun implied by the painting's genre, which in Spanish is "naturaleza muerta," or dead nature, and the bride, who traditionally is said to come to life through marriage, is in itself highly provocative.

Frustrated Motherhood was another theme women artists treated. Motherhood is one of the most enduring paradigms of womanhood in Mexican culture. Images of motherly goddesses appeared frequently in Pre-Hispanic and Vice-regal times and continued to evolve. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, personifications of the motherland, metaphors for the purity of the Indian race, and genre paintings representing the daily life of the poor reinforced the maternal iconography which characterizes Mexican culture.¹⁹

In 1936, Mexico's first General Law of Population was sanctioned to stimulate needed demographic growth. Correspondingly, popular entertainment media began to glorify the image of the virtuous and prolific Mexican mother.²⁰ Books, movies, and art works, including Rivera's murals, celebrated motherhood as synonymous with womanhood.²¹

Painting was one of the few arenas in which women could carry out a self-analysis of the array of maternal experiences, and Mexican female artists managed to deconstruct one of the most pervasive paradigms of womanhood related to immaculate and idealized motherhood. They bespoke of the anguish and contradictory feelings implied in the real experience—the often tragically unfulfilled or frustrated experience of maternity so rarely acknowledged by society.

A woman's strong impulse to have babies is a natural human experience but not mandatory. Gender socialization, and in particular the maternal instinct, is reinforced through the use of pink clothes, bows, and dolls for girls, from early childhood. When as an adult, someone does not fulfill those deeply imprinted gender stereotypes, her sense of self-worth is questioned, and, in some cases, her gender identity, too.

Frida Kahlo's famous painting *Me and My Doll* (1937; Fig. 2), depicts a self-portrait of the artist seated on a rustic, child-size straw bed beside an articulated naked bisque doll with characteristic red cheeks, inlaid eyes, and modeled hair.²² The artist provocatively holds a cigarette with her right hand. She stares at the spectator with an intriguing grimace. According to Kahlo's biographer, Hayden Herrera, when the artist painted this self-portrait she must have recently experienced another miscarriage because the theme was reiterated several times during that year. In an earlier study, I related the painting to Diego Rivera's father's bizarre tradition of giving Diego's mother a doll after every stillbirth that she experienced, a tradition that the muralist probably continued with his own wife, Frida, following her numerous miscarriages.²³ Regardless, the doll clearly alludes to the baby that Frida wanted yet could not have.

The cigarette, an obvious phallic symbol, may refer to a girl's penis envy complex, famously described by Sigmund Freud, whose works Kahlo had read.²⁴ According to psychoanalytic theory, girls later on in their development replace such obsessions by their desire to have a child with their father, which

symbolically allows them to fully identify with their mothers and with the female gender as such. Kahlo's mature awareness, after so many unfortunate pregnancies, that she could not have a child, and, therefore, that she could not fully identify with her mother or with womanhood, might have caused her to revisit an earlier stage of her psychosexual development as a child and to reconsider her bisexual identity in adult life.²⁵

Rosa Rolando's *The Girl of the Doll* (1943; Pl. 3) relates to Kahlo's work at different and interesting levels of interpretation. Born Rosemonde Cowan²⁶ in Los Angeles, of Scottish and Mexican descent, Rolando was a professional dancer in New York, where she performed in 1916 for the Morgan Dance Company and later for the Music Box Revue created by Irving Berlin. It was in New York, in the early 1920s, that she met Miguel Covarrubias, by that time an acclaimed caricaturist, and later an illustrator, painter, amateur ethnologist, anthropologist, and dance promoter. They married in 1930 and began traveling all over the world, documenting the various customs of places they visited: Europe, Cuba, Bali, and China. By the mid thirties, they had settled in Mexico and become central figures of the Mexican artistic milieu along with Rivera and Kahlo, Dolores del Rio, Antonio Ruiz, Roberto Montenegro, and Carlos Chávez, among many others.²⁷

Rolando and Covarrubias had been introduced to Kahlo and Rivera in New York in the early 1930s by Nickolas Muray and had since become good friends. They shared their political allegiance to the left (although the Covarrubiases were never as actively militant as the Riveras), and a strong interest in Pre-Hispanic and Mexican popular art that led them to become important collectors in both areas. Also both couples were childless.²⁸

In Rolando's painting, a serious little girl, dressed in pink and bejeweled with a pink hair bow, is seated on a typical "equal" chair, symbol of the ancient Mexican culture. She holds a *tanguyu* doll, made of clay in Zapotec, a kind of toy usually given to children as gifts on New Year's Eve. These dolls are generally dressed with the characteristic tehuana costumes of the area,²⁹ and hold babies in their arms and baskets of fruits, and were originally given to Zapotec girls along with child-size kitchen utensils.³⁰ Since colonial times, *tanguyus* also began to include horsemen toys for boys, with stylized shapes, typically painted white with some sketchy brushstrokes in blue, red, yellow and green, much like the one depicted in the painting sitting at the little girl's feet.

The tehuana dress, a well established symbol of the independence and strong character of the Tehuantepec woman, was adopted in real life by both Kahlo and Rolando, becoming one of their most characteristic attributes.³¹ As Terri Geis has pointed out, the tehuana doll depicted by Rolando also displays the united eyebrows, one of the most iconic signs of her friend Kahlo.³² In regard to Kahlo's *Me and My Doll* painting, the doll theme in Rolando's work suffered an important transmutation, since now Frida herself has become the doll.

Geis has also pointed out that in this painting, "Rolanda closely follows a theme and style developed by Diego Rivera in images such as *Modesta* (1937) in which young, often indigenous children with wide, almond-shaped eyes and

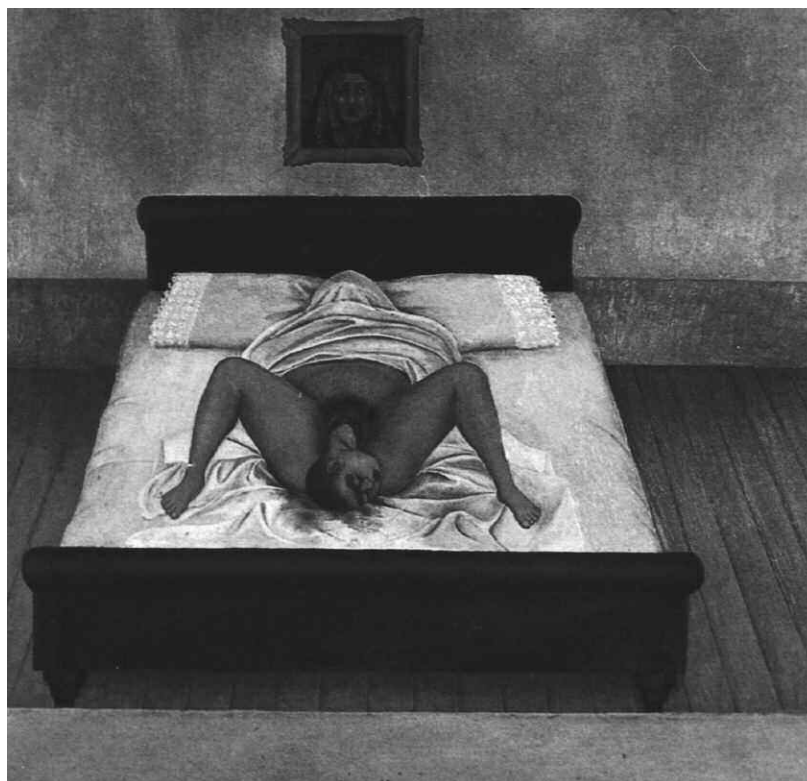


Fig. 3. Frida Kahlo, *My Birth* (1932), oil on metal, 12" x 13 3/4" . Private Collection, USA. Photo: CENIDIAP/INBA. Biblioteca de las Artes, CENART (México).

thickly rounded bodies—and often holding toys—are celebrated as the purest embodiment of the Mexican nation."³³ Such a clear allusion by Rolando to Rivera's iconographic tradition of children holding traditional Mexican toys³⁴ and other popular craft items such as rebozos and petates,³⁵ transformed by Rolando's original inclusion of the Frida doll, could be considered within the context of the theme of motherhood, that undoubtedly preoccupied both women.

In Rolando's painting, the theme of the socialization of young girls through their early adoption of pink bows and dolls, so characteristically alluded to by Rivera in his easel paintings, was unusually transformed. The barren yet forceful tehuana Frida doll,³⁶ symbolically dressed to visually and unmistakably express her independence and pride, became the highly unusual doll held by the Zapotec girl. The implication was perhaps to state that, since the indigenous girl this New Year's was going to play games other than motherhood, she may very well grow to fulfill a completely new and different paradigm of womanhood.

The horse and guitar-playing rider *tanguyu* depicted in the painting might also play an important symbolic role.³⁷ His hat identifies him as a "charro," the typical peasant with a pistol on horseback, a recognized sign of the stereotypical "macho" Mexican culture and its emphasis on masculinity, bravery, sexual potency, and physical aggressiveness. Because of its diminished size and "toy-like" connotation, his placement at the girl's feet, as if offering her a serenade, bespeaks humorously of the positive prospective of changing gender roles in Mexican society according to Rolando's progressive views.³⁸

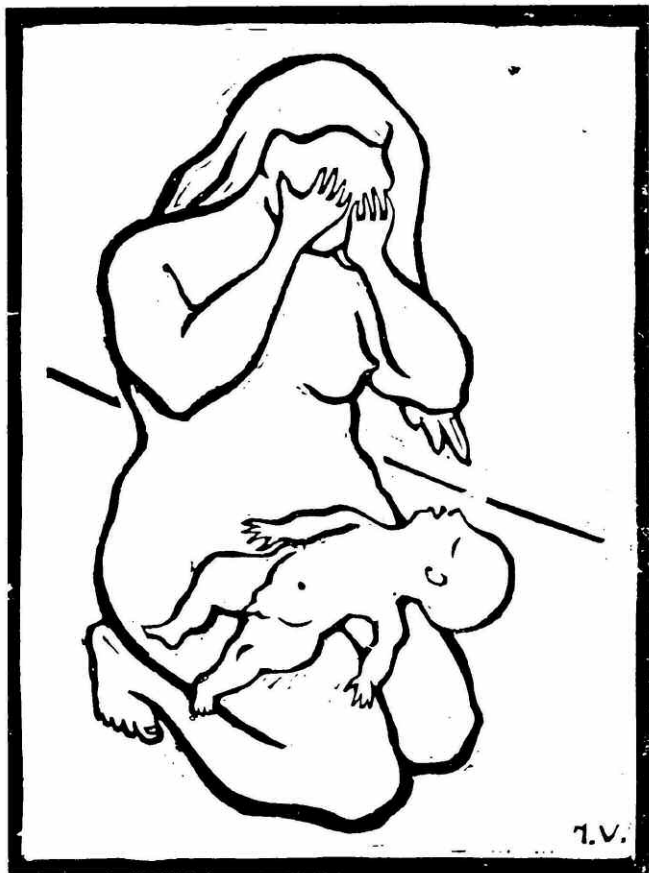


Fig. 4. Isabel Villaseñor, *Untitled* (1934), xylography, 7 3/8" x 5 3/4".

One of the earliest, most intriguing and influential paintings, which initiated the deconstruction of the traditional paradigm of motherhood, was Frida Kahlo's *My Birth* (1932; Fig. 3). Usually acknowledged as an autobiographical work related to both the artist's recent miscarriage in Detroit and her mother's death, the scene depicts the unsettling image of Frida's imagined birth as she emerges from her mother's dead body, covered by a white piece of cloth reminiscent of a burial shroud. The highly peculiar birthing scene is enigmatically presided over by a representation of the Mater Dolorosa. The opposition between Frida's visible face and her mother's covered one; the bodiless portrait of the Virgin and the faceless portrait of Frida's mother; the act of giving birth and mourning; the empty dedication scroll and the enigmatic presence of the religious image, greatly problematize the traditional iconography of motherhood.

In an earlier study of the painting, I suggested that Kahlo's fruitless attempts to become a mother, and, therefore, to continue the life and meaning of her own mother as a progenitor, did not allow the artist to psychologically reconcile herself with her mother.³⁹ The painting has also been interpreted as symbolically representing Kahlo's birth as a painter, as if her biological inability to procreate was at the origin of her drive to become an artist.

The simply framed, traditional Mater Dolorosa image and the embroidered pillowcase are the only ornaments within the otherwise sober room, furnished only with a rustic wooden

bed. Given the horrifying scene taking place, the religious image, more than a protective function, seems to act as a symbolic foreteller of the many pains endured by Kahlo throughout her life, beginning with the most terrible one, her unfulfilled wish to become a mother.

A painting with some interesting parallels with *My Birth* is Maria Izquierdo's *Consolation* (1933; Pl. 4), a highly mysterious work. In another austere room, a weeping woman lies on the ground, naked, covering her invisible face with her hands, while another nude female approaches to cover her with a white cloth, reminiscent of Kahlo's shroud. Behind her is a truncated reddish column, its cylindrical shape echoing that of the trumpet played by a winged cherub standing on the frame of an ambiguous window/picture.

Geis points out that "in keeping with the period's nationalist rhetoric, Izquierdo's painting was regularly read as deeply reflecting the authentic Mexican spirit."⁴⁰ Additionally, she says that the painting can be related, together with other works by Izquierdo from the same period, to the depiction of the destruction brought by the Mexican Revolution, and that it "may allude to the experiences of women," rhetorically asking herself whether "*Consolation* depicts some profound heartbreak or grief."⁴¹

Also noted by Geis, the spread-legged position of the reclining woman could relate the image to childbirth, while the shroud-like appearance of the white cloth and the angel relate to the theme of death. Based on some of the parallels that exist between *My Birth* and *Consolation*, I believe that the missing key to decoding the hidden meaning of this enigmatic picture may be a miscarriage or a premature infant's death.

Replacing Kahlo's Mater Dolorosa is Izquierdo's cherub, often used in Christian iconography to symbolize innocence. As God's little messengers, cherubs usually escort the deceased to heaven, sounding the trumpet or horn to announce the Final Judgment. Angels and cherubs are typical of Mexican popular art and culture, loved and reclaimed by Izquierdo in most of her paintings. The column, which reappears in other works by Izquierdo, may allude to the male presence, or in this case, because of its truncation, to a man's absence and lack of support.

Infant Deaths was another "unspeakable" theme related to the dramatic aspects of frustrated motherhood. Newborn mortality transcends social and economic barriers; however, in underdeveloped countries such as Mexico, particularly during the 1930s and early 1940s, the rate was particularly high. Extreme poverty and endemic social violence along with inadequate nutrition, sanitation, education, access to advanced medical technology, and prenatal and postnatal care were among the causes that increased the number of such tragedies. Once again, the personal, which originated the representation of infant deaths by Mexican female artists, is filled with social and political resonances.

In Mexico and other Latin American countries with similar cultural backgrounds, the theme of infant and child deaths had a well-established iconographic tradition, known since colonial times as "*la muerte niña*." The genre derived from popular religious beliefs according to which infants who died after

being baptized became little angels. Because their deaths implied their glorious entrance to Heaven, these children were not supposed to be mourned but celebrated instead, through joyful mortuary rituals. During the vigils, the “little angels” were dressed in beautiful clothing and surrounded by an abundance of colorful flowers that anticipated Paradise, where they were going to live forever. Painters and photographers were hired by the parents or families to record their last, glorious images. Among the Mexican School painters’ memorable traditional images in this genre are Kahlo’s *The Deceased Dimas* (1937)⁴² and Olga Costa’s *Dead Child* (1944), as well as David Alfaro Siqueiro, *Dead Girl* (1931), and Juan Soriano’s *The Dead Girl* (1938).

In spite of the spiritual relief offered by Christian dogma, the grief over losing a baby is one of the most intense and painful experiences that a human can suffer. These contradictory feelings, aggravated by a general intolerance of grief that characterizes contemporary society, makes the sadness even more difficult to overcome. Some artists consciously separated themselves from the established iconographic tradition and conveyed a more intimate and dramatic sense of the unsustainable pain involved in an infant’s death.

Isabel Villaseñor’s untitled wood engraving (1934; Fig. 4) is a moving image on this theme. At its origin is, once again, a personal tragedy, in this case, the premature death of Villaseñor’s and Fernández Ledesma’s first baby, documented to have occurred the same year in which the unsettling image was created.⁴³

Using simple yet persuasive formal means, Villaseñor expresses her desperate response to her infant’s death. The nakedness of both mother and child and the emptiness of the space around them emphasizes their vulnerability. Through their continuous, curvilinear silhouettes and the rhythm established between the concave and the convex shapes of both figures, Villaseñor stressed the unity that remains between mother and child in spite of the cruel separation inexplicably imposed by death.

As in Izquierdo’s *Consolation*, the mother dramatically covers her face with her hands, unable to hold her infant’s tiny body. Though not wanting to look upon the devastating image of her dead baby, she can still feel the child, who is falling away from her motherly lap. The broken diagonal line in the middle ground accents the physical and emotional plummet of the drama. The sense of profound pain and impotence are heartbreaking.

Aurora Reyes’s *Women of war* (1937; Fig. 5) takes a different approach, relating in both content and style to the artist’s passionate political commitment and conscious regard for the social/political function of art.⁴⁴ As a member of the Communist Party and of LEAR, Reyes supported the Republicans, and her painting clearly relates to some well-known Spanish posters on the theme of infant deaths, such as “Criminales.” Featuring an expressionistic image in which a desperate woman holds the dead body of her child while screaming “Criminals!,” the poster was created by the international branch of the *Socorro Rojo* brigades and the POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista). Reyes’s painting might have been intended to serve also as political propaganda in favor of the Spanish Republic.



Fig. 5. Aurora Reyes, *Women of war* (1937), oil on canvas.
Photo: CENIDIAP/INBA. Biblioteca de las Artes, CENART (México).

The wretched mother holding her dead child in her right arm recalls the religious iconography of the *Pieta*, although her angry gaze and strong-willed posture belie any sign of Christian resignation. Rather, an extraordinary rage seems to incite her—and everybody who dares to look at the scene—to fight for justice. Her infant is an innocent victim of war, and with the rifle in her other hand, she is ready to go to battle. One has no recourse to a natural death, but one caused by war is inadmissible. The grieving mother, having lost her beloved child, has nothing more to lose. Because she knows better than anyone else that those terrible things should not occur, the grieving mother goes to war to prevent it from occurring again.

Frida Kahlo entered this realm of the “unspeakable” through her unusual and shocking depiction of the lifeless image of the unborn baby she lost in 1932. In *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932), she portrays herself nude, alone, and hemorrhaging blood on a cold, unfriendly hospital bed. Objects with scientific appearances and organic elements with more or less openly sexual symbolism accompanied the very odd depiction of the fetus she had just lost.⁴⁵



Fig. 6. Isabel Villaseñor, *La güera Chabela* (1929), xylograph, 7 3/8" x 8 1/4".

Kahlo often referred to the unborn baby she frequently dreamed of as her little "Dieguito." As with most pregnant women, she became deeply attached to her unborn child. Naming and depicting him allowed Kahlo to materialize her high expectations as a mother-to-be and, consequently, to communicate the appalling sadness she experienced when the miscarriage abruptly cut them short. Since mothers who lose unborn babies are not even allowed to see their babies, much less to hold a funeral or perform any other established rite of mourning, the sense of unreality worsens the pain. Through painting Kahlo found a means to both openly acknowledge and share her grief.

Gender Violence, a serious and seemingly endemic social problem in Mexico, manifests itself in a multitude of ways, from verbal and physical domestic abuse to discriminatory punishments for equivalent transgressions committed by men or women, sexual harassment, rape, forced prostitution, even murder.⁴⁶ Although seldom used as subject matter for artistic works produced by male Mexican artists, with the extraordinary exception of José Guadalupe Posada's many engravings on the theme,⁴⁷ the torture and assassination of women⁴⁸ was forcefully denounced in works produced by their female counterparts during the late 1920s and 1930s.

With the intense growth of the capital city at the turn of the century, the indices of criminality increased notably, in particular crimes committed against women. The significance of gender violence was commonly diminished by the press, which appealed to widespread moral biases against women who deviated from the traditional paradigm of the virtuous wife. In several accounts of the so-called "red notes" of popular newspapers of the times, the reporters reduced the punishable implications of the tragic murders of women, transforming them instead into didactic stories, whose unfortunate outcomes almost inevitably were the results of the female's improper behavior and illicit relationships.⁴⁹

The same partial, highly machista views can be found in several popular *corridos*⁵⁰ of the time, in which the criminal was exalted to hero status. Some of the lyrics related to gender violence explicitly justify the male's criminal outbursts as an almost mandatory response provoked by women's allegedly provocative behavior. According to this perspective, murder was simply the punishment that any respectable male was due to impose on any woman who showed independence from male authority, particularly in regard to her sexuality. The moralizing nature of the *corridos* made the genre particularly dangerous, since it helped spread the highly pernicious gender biases and characteristic violence of Mexican society.

Isabel Villaseñor, who was a singer, composer, and connoisseur of *corridos*, engaged in dialogue with the genre in some interesting engravings in which she managed to expose the brutality of the murderers and the dramatic outcomes of their dreadful acts. Her *La güera Chabela* (Chabela the blonde) (1929; Fig. 6) was inspired by the popular *corrido* of the same title, whose lyrics clearly exemplified the pervading machismo. In particular, the moralizing message was made explicit in Chabela's last agonizing moments, when she has assumed her "guilt" and advises young girls not to live like she did so as to avoid her tragic end. The famous last stanza, which summarizes the popular belief that one dies according to the life one lived, was handwritten by Villaseñor as the epigraph of the print, which she dedicated to Ledesma, her husband.⁵¹

Villaseñor's image focuses on the victim's mourning family, challenging the message of the lyrics in a significant way. Chabela lies agonizing, her eyes closed but still beautiful and intact, with no visible signs of the brutal shooting she has suffered, according to the lyrics. Consciously, Villaseñor beautified the victim's death, thereby eliminating the dubious undertones that in the *corrido* had led the woman to her tragic death. The victim is peaceful, surrounded by her grieving parents and siblings, subtly evoking the mourning scenes characteristic of Christian iconography. By stressing the emotional pain of the mother, who holds her hands near her heart, and the devastated father, who covers his face, Villaseñor overturns the *corrido*'s emphasis on the alleged culpability of the young female victim, and transforms her into a secular saint, a heroine, a tragic emblem of the capriciousness and cruelty of gender violence.

Elena la traicionera (Elena the traitor) (1930; Fig. 7) was based on another popular *corrido*, which Villaseñor transfigured in her visual interpretation of the theme. The engraving was produced in the same year in which the artist also worked on the *mise en scene* and libretto of the original *corrido* with Ledesma and Graciela Amador.⁵² In her engraving, Villaseñor depicts the tragic moment when Elena's husband, Benito, having proved the unfaithfulness of his wife with the Frenchman don Fernando, is ready to kill her with a machete. However, the isolated image, removed from the context of the complete lyrics, pictures only the brutality of the femicide. The enraged husband is represented as the stereotypical Mexican male, complete with sombrero charro, bolero jacket, tight pants, and leather boots. In contrast, Elena wears a simple white dress, the color traditionally associated with purity, beauty and goodness. In the

background, another woman witnessing the tragedy gestures dramatically, her angularity contrasting with the victim's rounded forms and calmer attitude. A dislocated frame in the background echoes the disorder and violence of the scene.

A real femicide, of the type alluded to in the *corridos*, inspired Kahlo's painting *A Few Small Nips* (1935), specifically a newspaper crime report that a drunken man had stabbed his girlfriend twenty times. When interrogated by the judge, he defended himself by stating that he "only gave her a few small nips." The absurdity of the man's self-defense, written across a delicate banner held by two doves, contrasts with the bloody scene depicted. The victim lies naked on a bed with her body pierced by the fatal wounds. Her blood spills onto the bedclothes, the floor, the shirt of the murderer who still holds his weapon in one hand, and even onto the painting's frame, which was purposely pierced to emotionally amplify the "small nips."

Even though Kahlo stated that she painted the scene "because in Mexico, killing is quite satisfactory and natural" and because of her empathy with the murdered victim, for she herself had come close to being "murdered by life,"⁵³ the painting goes well beyond these autobiographical references. Implicit is her strong opposition to the moral biases assigned to the violent deaths of women, her protest against the unfairness of the social dictates used to justify gender violence. The empathy she experienced is not just personal; rather *A Few Small Nips* is highly political, since it denounces femicides in an open, bold, and persuasive way, uncovering male brutality and self-indulgence.

In *Attack on the rural teacher* (1936; Pl. 5), Aurora Reyes represented the heartbreaking murder of a female teacher at the hands of two mercenary assassins. The fresco painting, a deeply moving representation of gender violence, was inspired by an actual event that occurred when the mural cycle of the *Centro Escolar Revolución* was being planned.⁵⁴ On March 29, 1936, a Sunday:

[I]n the village of San Felipe Torres Mocha [later renamed Ciudad González] in the state of Guanajuato, some parishioners emerged from mass armed with stones, sticks, and pistols, and attacked the county cultural mission's celebration at the plaza, attended by teachers, peasants, and children. The newspapers reported that at least 16 people were killed during the assault and another 25 were seriously injured.⁵⁵

Through well-thought-out compositional tools, Reyes was able to transcend the specific historical event, transforming the tragic femicide into a symbol of capitalist exploitation and its characteristically unequal patriarchal order. The clear identification of the female victim as a rural teacher forcefully prevents the manipulation of the assassinations that were common in the newspaper reports.

Although best known for her naive portraits, sensuous still lives, and surreal circus scenes, during the 1930s María Izquierdo created an intriguing group of works on the theme of women's slavery and torture (Pl. 6), which generally has been overlooked in scholarly studies on the artist. To decode the deeply personal and profoundly disturbing symbols Izquierdo used, it is necessary to consider possible personal and artistic motivations



Fig. 7. Isabel Villaseñor, *Elena la traicionera* (1930), xylography, 8 1/4" x 7 1/2".

to express grief in such an enigmatic way. Chronologically, the series corresponds to the painful period in which Izquierdo had just broken up with the well known painter Rufino Tamayo, after four years of an amorous relationship. Stylistically, the group has been associated by Terri Geis with Surrealism and, particularly, with the possible influence of Antonin Artaud, a French Surrealist writer and a friend.⁵⁶ Luis-Martín Lozano points out that the series elaborates on Izquierdo's earlier iconographic circus repertoire but with a new, conceptual, and highly enigmatic approach that can be related to the preoccupations and anxieties Izquierdo experienced as a woman. Furthermore, Lozano points out that the group is original, with no equivalent in the history of Mexican art.⁵⁷

The watercolors and gouaches in this group have a series of common elements that Izquierdo combines in different arrangements that, within a ritualistic environment of the type evoked by Artaud in his different texts on the Tarahumaras,⁵⁸ denounce the historical abuse of Mexican women. The "mythical landscapes" where the scenes take place are characterized by wide, deserted spaces where barren hills enclose deserted valleys, subtly recalling the characteristic Mexican geography of the Tarahumaras region. Crescent moons and the sun recall the sexual symbolism clearly expressed in some pre-Hispanic rites of sacrifice. Jacques Soustelle points out, for example, that according to an ancient Teotihuacan tradition, men were sacrificed to the sun and women to the moon. Christian iconography, influential in several of Izquierdo's paintings, possibly reflected this symbolism because of its traditional association of Christ with the sun and the Virgin Mary with the moon.

The sacrificial mood of the paintings is reinforced by the depiction of enslaved women, shown nude or partially clothed

with their torsos exposed and their hands or entire bodies tied up with rigid ropes. Classical columns stand incongruously in desolate spaces. Traditionally, columns are interpreted as symbols of culture, and because of their phallic shafts, of manmade culture. Given that over time columns have also served as sacrificial stones, Izquierdo seems to have combined these various traditions to symbolically show women as the sacrificial victims of the dominant patriarchal culture.

The artistic dialogues established by these Mexican women artists through their paintings and engravings responded to a widely justified personal and political need to depict women's feelings in a new, straightforward, down to earth way. Many times, when faced with thorny and cruel human experiences, particularly when they result from difficult conditions suffered by women in patriarchal society, silence is culturally imposed. Certain themes and feelings are judged as so horrible and unnatural that they are tacitly classified as "unspeakable." Purposely ignored and silenced by society, women have no option but to suffer alone and in silence. Isolated from each other, and consequently inclined to believe their pain unique, an abnormal deviation from the natural norm, their tragic experiences become even harder to cope with.

To paint became the channel that these artists managed to open in order to publicly acknowledge and consequently share some of these traditionally "unspeakable" themes and feelings. Through the conformation of their unusual iconographic repertoire, filled with mutual references to each other, they were able to realize that their terrifying experiences and feelings were not unique, bizarre deviations of proper womanhood but, on the contrary, very natural—desperate—responses to cruel experiences aggravated by the silence that surrounded them. Through the mutual discovery and painterly acknowledgment of their shared sufferings—which extended to other experiences such as suicide, illness, isolation, and much more—they were able to come out of their shared alienation and begin to mitigate their pain.

The unmistakably biographical traces that appear in these works should not diminish their universal value. On the contrary, by their brave decisions to paint the unspeakable, these women transformed the subjective into strong public statements. The iconography of the unspeakable denounces some of the multifaceted restrictions and arduous social pressures exerted against women and, at the same time, it sustains the right of free expression and women's rights. Confirming one of the most important feminist slogans of the early Women's Liberation Movement, that "the personal is political," Mexican women artists made clear that even the most subjective and intimate experiences are influenced by social and political causes, and through their artistic works they called for social and political change.

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NOTES

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1. Raquel Tibol gives Villaseñor's date of birth as 1909, although other sources state that it was 1914.
2. Other well-known painters such as Remedios Varo (1908-63), Leonora Carrington (1917-), Alice Rahon (1914-87), and Angelina Beloff (1879-1969), and photographers such as Kati Horna (1912-2000), arrived in Mexico after World War II.
3. An important exception was "Kahlo's Contemporaries, Mexico: Women: Surrealism," the exhibition curated by Dawn Ades and Valerie Fraser, Oct. 3 - Nov. 5, 2005, at Essex University Gallery in the United Kingdom.
4. For a detailed study of the women's rights movement in Mexico, see Anna Macias, *Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982).
5. After this failed attempt, Mexican women's right to vote was not granted until 1958.
6. See Macias, *Against All Odds*.
7. María Izquierdo was amorously tied to Rufino Tamayo. Those married included Frida Kahlo to Diego Rivera, Isabel Villaseñor to Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, Olga Costa to José Chávez Morado; Rosa Rolando to Miguel Covarrubias, and Lola Cueto to the sculptor Germán Cueto. Aurora Reyes was the exception, although she was married briefly to the writer and journalist Jorge Godoy. It is interesting to note that even today, in dictionaries and books on Mexican art, in the biographies of women artists, it generally states to whom they were married, but in the case of male artists, the wives are omitted.
8. Izquierdo and Reyes, two of the most professional artists of the group, lived independently most of their lives. Both were married but later had to financially support themselves and their children.
9. For example, Isabel Villaseñor, particularly following her appearance as María in Sergei Eisenstein's film "Qué viva México" (1931), became a frequent model for painters including José Chávez Morado, Angelina Beloff, Fernando Leal, Juan Soriano, Alfredo Zalce, Olga Costa, Raúl Anguiano and Frida Kahlo, and for photographers such as Edward Tissé, Manuel Álvarez Bravo and Lola Álvarez Bravo. Rosa Rolando was painted by Miguel Covarrubias, Diego Rivera and Roberto Montenegro, and photographed by Edward Weston, Tina Modotti, Nickolas Muray, Carl Van Vechten, and Man Ray.
10. The archive of Rosa Rolando's photographs at the Universidad de las Américas, Puebla, has several images of Rosa acting in theater and films such as "Aloma of the South Seas."
11. The puppet company *Espiral*, under the direction of Lola and German's children, Mireya and Pablo Cueto, is still active today, continuing the family tradition.
12. Kahlo ironically once said, "I never knew I was a surrealist until André Breton came to Mexico and told me I was I paint always whatever passes through my head, without any other consideration." quoted in Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 254.
13. Verna Carleton Millan, *Mexico Reborn* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939), 148-58.
14. Sergio Pitó concluded that in the painting "nothing definitely means anything," since "it is just painting, and even though perhaps Olga Costa did not know it when she painted the work, it is that coherence among the gratuity which keeps conferring actuality to the painting,"

- See his *Olga Costa* (Guanajuato: Artistas de Guanajuato, Ediciones La Rana, 1998), 11-12 (my translation).
15. Martín Lozano points out that the artist rarely mentioned her mother, who had remarried, and that she hardly ever used her mother's last name. See Luis-Martín Lozano, *María Izquierdo*, (México, D.F., Editorial Océano de México, S.A. de C.V., 2003), 14.
 16. In a letter Frida wrote to Nickolas Muray from Paris in 1939, she described the bride doll, which she bought at the "thieves market": "The only things I bought here were two old fashion dolls, very beautiful ones. One is blond with blue eyes, the most wonderful eyes you can imagine. She is dressed as a bride. Her dress was full of dust and dirt, but I washed it, and now it looks much better. Her head is not very well adjusted to her body because the elastic which holds it, is already very old, but you and me will fix it in New York. The other one is less beautiful, but very charming...." See Solomon Grimberg, *I Will Never Forget You...Frida Kahlo to Nickolas Muray* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2004), 23.
 17. Considering that while in Paris, Kahlo became close with Marcel Duchamp, the painting could be related to his famous Dada work, *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even* (1915-23).
 18. Salomon Grimberg, lecture entitled *Pinto flores para que no se mueran*, June 14, 2007, Sala Manuel M Ponce, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City; also his "Frida Kahlo's Still Lifes: 'I Paint Flowers So They Will Not Die,'" *Woman's Art Journal*, vol. 25, no. 2 (Fall 2004/Winter 2005): 25-30; and "Jacqueline Lamba: From Darkness, with Light," *Woman's Art Journal*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2001): 5-13.
 19. For a detailed study of the subject of motherhood in modern Mexican art, see my dissertation, "The Representation of Motherhood in Twentieth Century Mexican Painting," (PhD. Diss., Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 1997). In the introductory chapters I traced the origins of the genre during Pre-Hispanic and Vice-regal times.
 20. Motion pictures included *Madre querida* (1935) by Juan Orol, *Mater Nostra* (1936) by Gabriel Soria, *Eterna mártir* (1937) by Juan Orol, *La cuna vacía* (1937) by Miguel Zacarías and *No basta ser madre* (1937) by Ramón Peón. Literary works included Amado Vicario's *Felicitaciones: alocuciones, versos, discursos y pensamientos para el día de las madres* (1931); María Refugión Ochoa's *A las madres* (1934); José Sánchez, ed., *Antología de la madre: 121 poesías seleccionadas cuidadosamente* (1931); Pedroo Pérez Pina, *Madre por derecho, novela mexicana* (1935); Lydia Blanca Trejo, *10 de mayo, poemas a las madres* (1936); Luciano Kubli, *Madre proletaria, madre campesina* (1936); Enriqueta de Parodi, *Madre, prosas* (1937), and Nellie Campobello, *Las manos de mamá* (1937).
 21. For a detailed study of Rivera's images which corroborate the statement and their influence on Frida Kahlo's self perception, see my "Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Tlazolteotl," *Woman's Art Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1996): 14-21.
 22. The doll was probably of German origin, as its features are similar to those produced by the Kammer and Reinhardt factory.
 23. See my "Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Tlazolteotl."
 24. Sigmund Freud, "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, London, Hogarth Press 1953-1974, Volume XIX (1923-1925), 241-258.
 25. Significantly, during Kahlo's convalescence from polio when she was a child, her father acted as her primary caregiver. Throughout her life she identified with her father, a distinguished photographer and free thinker. Frida and her mother, a devout Catholic, were never as close.
 26. The name Rosa Rolando was chosen for her by Covarrubias. Later, Diego Rivera drew a portrait of her, changing her name once again to Rosa Rolanda.
 27. See Peter Mears and Kurt Heinzelman, eds., *The Covarrubias Circle: The Nickolas Muray Collection of Mexican Art*, (Austin: Ransom Center and University of Texas Press, 2004).
 28. Miguel Covarrubias's second wife, Rocío Sagaón, once stated that she wanted to have a child but Miguel refused because he did not want the child to inherit his diabetes. Mary Carmen S. Ambriz, "Medio siglo sin *El Chamaco* Covarrubias," *Milenio*, Cultura, (11 de junio de 2007).
 29. Terri Geis, *Arte moderno de México. Colección Andrés Blaisten* (México City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2005), 260.
 30. Later these were popular souvenirs for various celebrations of the Tehuantepec region, such as fifteenth birthdays, and wedding anniversaries.
 31. Both women adopted the costume and were largely photographed and painted wearing dazzling tehuana attire. They also made some remarkable self-portraits as tehuanas, that although they were obviously modeled after the prototypes created by their male colleagues, also managed to confront them through the inclusion of some very significant personal attributes. Rolando was photographed as a tehuana with and without the "resplendor" or ceremonial headdress by Edward Weston and painted as a tehuana by Roberto Montenegro. She also produced an interesting self-portrait in which her tehuana image is repeated three times and accompanied by three alternating flower bouquets. Kahlo was photographed innumerable times in different tehuana costumes by Nickolas Muray and Manuel Álvarez Bravo, and she was painted as tehuana by Diego Rivera, for example in his mural *Pan American Unity* from 1940. Throughout her life, Frida painted many tehuana self-portraits and other allegorical works with the tehuana dress motif.
 32. Terri Geis, "Kahlo's Contemporaries: Women Artists in Mexico in the Postrevolutionary Period," in *Kahlo's Contemporaries. Mexico: women: surrealism*, (Essex: Univ. of Essex, 2005), 9.
 33. Ibid.
 34. It is interesting to note that in some villages, among some ethnic groups of Yucatan and Veracruz, newborn babies are given miniature objects that vary depending on their sex and expected occupation.
 35. See Xavier Villarrutia, "Los niños en la pintura de Diego Rivera," in *Diego Rivera, Cincuenta años de su labor artística, Exposición de Homenaje Nacional, Museo Nacional de Artes* (Mexico City: INBA, 1951), 211-34.
 36. Nowadays Frida dolls produced by the craftswomen of the Tehuantepec are popular souvenirs for tourists.
 37. The toy might also allude to Kahlo, since a similar horseman figure, made of "tule" or straw, was depicted in her *Four Inhabitants of Mexico* (1938), in which the little girl, probably a self-portrait as a child, wears a tehuana dress.
 38. A similar figure appears in María Izquierdo's *Portrait of Cibeles Henestrosa*, (1943, Private Collection).
 39. See my "Images of Childbirth in Mexican Art," *Woman's Art Journal*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Spring/Summer, 1999): 18-24.
 40. Terri Geis, *The voyaging reality: María Izquierdo and Antonin Artaud, Mexico and Paris*, *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 4, winter 2005.
 41. Ibid.
 42. Dimas was the son of Delfina, a woman who worked and posed for the Riveras.
 43. Two years later, in 1936, Villaseñor's husband, Fernández Ledesma, responded to the series with his own monotype known as *Lullaby* (Arrullo), clearly related to Villaseñor's imagery. In 1944 a new baby arrived, Olinca Fernández Ledesma, the only living daughter of the couple. Several years later, in 1959, Fernández Ledesma painted a highly impressive image, entitle *Dialogue of the Girl and Death*, which very probably drew on the artist's tragic experience.
 44. From the time she was very young, Reyes was an active member of the Mexican Communist Party. From 1938 on, she held influential posts in the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Enseñanza de la República Mexicana (Mexican Republic Teachers' Union, STERM) and in the Confederación Nacional Campesina (National Peasant's

Confederation, CNC). She forcefully defended the rights and political participation of women.

45. See, for example, Hayden Herrera, *Frida Kahlo, The Paintings* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 73, n. 84, for a description of the objects.
46. The more than 400 murders of women recently committed in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, still not properly investigated by the local authorities, is one of the most shameful examples of the dramatic contemporary reality of the tragedy.
47. For example, Posada based his series Los Crímenes del Chalequero degollador de mujeres (The Crimes of El Chalequero Slayer of Women) on the murders of the serial killer Francisco Guerrero, compared in the Mexican press with Jack the Ripper.
48. Gendercide is a neologism coined by Mary Anne Warren in her book *Gendercide: The Implications of Sex Selection* (Totowa, NJ: Roway & Littlefield, 1985), used to refer to the systematic killing of female victims, synonymous with femicide.
49. See Elisa Speckman, *Guerra, Crimen y castigo. Legislación penal, interpretaciones de la criminalidad y administración de justicia (Ciudad de México, 1872-1910)*, (México, El Colegio de México/Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2002).
50. Corridos are Mexican ballads derived from the Spanish romance tradition. Particularly popular were the ones about the Mexican

Revolution that served both a commemorative and didactic function.

51. The phrase was also cited as the title for a work on the subject of corridos and gender violence by Gabriela Nava, "Pongan cuidado, muchachas, miren cómo van viviendo" *Los feminicidios en los corridos, ecos de una violencia censora, Revista de literaturas populares*, año III, no. 2, (julio-diciembre 2003).
52. Their theatrical adaptation was musicalized by Silvestre Revueltas.
53. Hayden Herrera, *Frida. A Biography of Frida Kahlo*, 180-81.
54. For a thorough interpretation of the mural see my "The First Mural Created by a Mexican Female Artist: Aurora Reyes's *The Attack on the Rural Teacher*," *Woman's Art Journal*, vol. 26, no. 2 (Fall 2005/Winter 2006): 19-25.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 22
56. Terri Geis, "The voyaging reality," *Papers of Surrealism*, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 1-12.
57. Luis Martín Lozano, *María Izquierdo*, 26-27.
58. Antonin Artaud, *La Montagne des signes* (1936); *Le Rite du Peyote* (1943); *Tutuguri* (1948).

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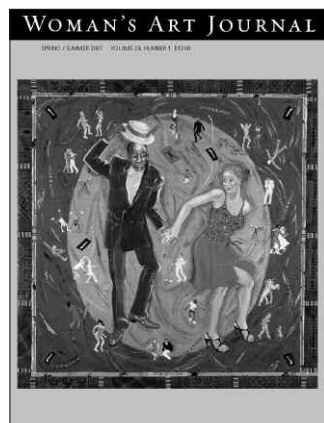
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REDISCOVERING HELENE FUNKE

The Invisible Foremother

By Julie M. Johnson

Helene Funke (1869-1957) was an Expressionist painter whose first documented exhibitions were with Matisse and the Fauves in Paris. Little is known about her life, because nearly all of her personal papers were destroyed or lost during World War II.¹ What we do know is that, in aesthetic terms, Funke was among the most radically avant-garde painters in Vienna, which became her adoptive home after 1911. She is now widely acknowledged to have been one of the earliest and strongest interpreters of the modernist principles of Matisse and the Fauves in Austria. In a recent exhibition catalogue devoted to the reception of French art in Austria, Matthias Boeckl writes that “it is significant for (Broncia) Koller and Funke (and for the Austrian art scene) that it is precisely two women who worked most intensively with the most radical tendencies of newer French painting.”² He goes on to note that “neither artist had the possibility of showing her work in a public forum—not even at the Secession—to bring about a public debate.”³ This actually misstates the role that these artists took, while it generally reflects the invisibility of women artists in the better known studies of fin-de-siècle Vienna. Both artists exhibited their work publicly and were reviewed in newspapers and journals; Funke showed two works at the Secession, which she had sent from Paris on the occasion of the first international exhibition of women’s art (1910). She was highlighted at the second exhibition of the Austrian Women Artists Union (held at the Hagenbund in 1911) with thirteen oil paintings and four engravings.⁴ So great was her exhibition activity with the various new art unions in Vienna that she has been called the “Grande Dame” of the interwar years in that city. Austrian painter Herbert Boeckl acknowledged her presence and influence in 1945, proclaiming her “significant for the entire artistic community.”⁵ Yet after the war Funke was quickly forgotten, only to be rediscovered and forgotten once again, a cyclical problem shared by many women artists.⁶ Funke’s fate is paradoxical, given the aesthetic value system of modernism, for she was more mainstream than Gustav Klimt, who practiced the allegorical brand of modernism predominating in Vienna. Her nudes and still lifes are not allegorical, and call attention to the production of art in the space of the studio. For example, in *Seated Nude with Fan* (1908-10; Pl. 7), she employs the wild expressionistic brushstroke and classical subject matter of the Fauves. To focus on Funke’s aesthetic production is to establish her place as a forerunner of a more international modernism. During her life, however, the discourse around genre (especially still life) and concepts like the decorative took a decisively gendered turn in Central European art criticism.

In one of the few photographs that remains of Funke, she wears a kimono and reads a book while posing on the terrace of her new studio space in Vienna; here she will experience art world success, win prizes and the honorary title of professor, endure two World Wars, inflation, poverty, and work as a cleaning woman.⁷ The date is 1913; she is 44 years old, and at this time, she could already look back on an exciting life in Paris. She had been part of Matisse’s circle, and shared the same address as Gertrude and Leo Stein, whose contemporary art collection and Saturday evening salon made 27 rue du Fleurus a center for the avant garde. Funke, who was not Jewish, remained in Vienna during the two wars and interwar years. She presents an unexpected contrast with Marie-Louise von Motesiczky (1906-96), who was Jewish and emigrated to London in 1938. Motesiczky had the means to keep and store her belongings, including the complete correspondence with her lover, the Nobel laureate Elias Canetti. An estate administered her work and papers, and helped support a recently published biography.⁸ Funke’s life story, on the other hand, has been pieced together without any of the personal correspondence and papers that are necessary to write a biography. Her various addresses are known because artists listed this information in exhibition catalogues, enabling art historians to reconstruct her movements through such external facts.⁹ The primary source of information about Funke comes from her aesthetic practice—the works themselves and the documentation associated with her art exhibitions.

Funke was from an upper-middle-class family in Chemnitz, an industrial city in Eastern Germany. She was the second of five children and the only girl, all born within a span of eight years. Her father, Hermann Funke, was a businessman who had moved to Chemnitz in 1860 from Leipzig for a job in a store that sold knit stockings, which he soon took over. Her mother, Auguste Amalie Eleonore Helene Maria, came from a Huguenot family, and married Hermann in 1860 in Dresden. The family lived in a fashionable area of Chemnitz.¹⁰ Little else is known about the first thirty years of her life before 1899, when she moved to Munich to study art at the Munich Women’s Academy. By then she had perhaps withstood the common parental pressure to marry.¹¹ In 1905 she moved to Paris. Her earliest known works are from her years in Paris, where she already showed an active intellect and willingness to experiment with technique and composition.

Still life, “the overlooked” genre,¹² is key to Funke’s lifelong practice as an artist: it is a genre in which she could easily



Fig. 1. Helene Funke, *Still Life with Two Fish* (Stilleben mit zwei Fischen) (1920), oil on canvas, 15" x 18 1/4". Private Collection Schächter, Vienna.



Fig. 2. Helene Funke, *Still Life with Hyacinths* (Stilleben mit Hyazinthen) (1937), oil on plywood, 34 1/2" x 26 3/4". Austrian Gallery Belvedere, Vienna.

experiment with modernist ways of seeing and painting. Her still lifes are best read as formal experiments in which the artist uses color dissonances and harmonies to build her compositions. Funke does not paint imaginary buffets or Baroque allegories but objects as they might be set up in an art studio. She cuts off pitchers and cups at the edges, uses wrinkled drapery to create an

aesthetic space, and places raw fish next to teacups in *Still Life with Two Fish* (1920; Fig. 1). The objects seem to be chosen for their colors, textures, and ability to inspire; and as in *Still Life with Hyacinths* (1937; Fig. 2) they appear scattered haphazardly across the tabletops. The virtuoso brushwork and emphasis on process call attention to the spontaneity of an artist responding to her everyday surroundings, always painting, composing, seeing. *Still Life with Fruit and Vessels* (1931; Pl. 8), for example, is a study in which the artist lays in flat areas of color to compose a picture; line is produced by the white spaces left in between the laid in color. The still life objects mutate into the purely aesthetic realm of color relationships. For Funke, still life was intimately connected to her artistic practice.¹³ It required no human models, but simply the space to paint.

The genre of still life painting has existed since ancient Rome, and is most often associated with rhopography, the small, incidental, everyday things in life, where nothing significant is happening—the opposite of megalography, history painting and great heroic deeds.¹⁴ In its long history, the genre has also been associated with women flower painters and ranked as the lowest in the hierarchy of genres. In the German-speaking world, designers of art school curricula deemed still life an appropriate genre for women artists because it was associated with copying and detail work.¹⁵ Griselda Pollock and Roszika Parker argued early on that the codification of still life as ‘low’ within the hierarchy of the genres was a response to the large number of women practitioners.¹⁶ Still life continued to be associated with feminine space and the everyday world of domesticity into the twentieth century. As late as 1952 one historian wrote that “flower painting demands no genius of a mental or spiritual kind, but only the genius of taking pains and supreme craftsmanship.”¹⁷ So there may seem nothing remarkable that a woman artist worked in the genre throughout her life. But Funke’s still lifes consistently reveal her to be artist of aesthetic daring and formal innovation, placing her at the center of modernist developments. The genre of still life is now seen as significant for key developments in the history of modernism and the autonomous work of art, as well as an ancestor to postmodern concerns with using real objects in art.¹⁸

Few of the German Expressionists, most of whom were male, devoted a significant amount of their creative efforts to still life,¹⁹ although in France, Matisse, Picasso, and their respective avant gardes, the Fauves and the Cubists, worked some of their major canvases in this genre. Like these artists, Helene Funke painted aesthetically daring canvases whose subjects fall within traditional genre categories, primarily the still life and the figure. She painted ordinary, recognizable objects in a way that called attention to the internal pictorial syntax of her compositions, while at the same time affirming a dialogue with the history of art, its traditions and Old Masters.

Funke exhibited with Matisse and the Fauves in Paris in 1907 and 1908, and she no doubt saw the Cézanne retrospective in 1907.²⁰ Being at the center of modernist developments in Paris, she brought these discoveries into her painting. She experimented with a Cézannesque treatment in *Still Life with Jug, Blue Vase and Dish with Onions* (1910-19; Fig. 3). The onions, books and ceramics sit on a flowered tablecloth, while the

pattern of a textured wall behind them wittily calls attention to the surface of the canvas by sharing the same plane as the flattened vases. Like Cézanne, she used crinkled drapery to create visual excitement, and to turn what might look like an edible offering in another still life into an aesthetic spectacle in works such as *Peach Still Life* (1918; Pl. 9). The subject matter is a studio composition, and its form and content are about art-making rather than creating the illusion of a delectable buffet or kitchen scene. Her strength as colorist is evident in the early, brilliantly colored still life from 1907, *Still Life with Book, Dishes and Apples* (Fig. 4), with its hot and cool lavenders, jade greens and crimson reds. The surface of the tabletop alone is as colorful as the skin of a Rubens nude. Funke uses color at the edges to animate the fruit and blue porcelain plate whose decorative arabesques were sought after by the Fauves. This studio still life composition is more open on the left side, and Funke changes her paint application within the painting, a harbinger of her life long desire to experiment with the genre.

Based on the little information uncovered about Funke's years in Paris, we know that in 1906 and 1907 she lived at the same address as artist Martha Hofrichter (1872-1960), who also exhibited with the Fauves during this time. The address they shared was rue des Fleurs 27, a five-floor building whose ground floor apartment was occupied by Gertrude and Leo Stein.²¹ The Steins opened their famous art collection for general viewing on Saturday evenings, beginning in 1905, and their circle was frequented by Picasso and Matisse. Their art collection alone would have offered Funke access to the latest avant-garde currents in Paris, with works by Cézanne, Gauguin, Monet, Renoir, Picasso and Matisse.²² Funke's known paintings from this time indicate that she saw and reacted to the works of these artists, for example, adopting as subjects the dancers, the opera loge and cultures of looking, nudes, still lifes, and landscapes. She reworked not only these themes associated with the late nineteenth century, but also the techniques of modernism. In her rendition of a Degas-like subject—a set of awkward ballerinas—she incorporates the arm gestures and poses of Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*.²³ Combining realist subject matter with expressionist brushstrokes, Funke demonstrates an independent, ambitious, and intellectual engagement with French avant-garde art.

While her name appears in the exhibition catalogues of the Salon d'Automne, no critical mention of her has been found in France.²⁴ But this also was the case for the women Fauves, despite their formal daring. According to Gill Perry, the French women artists who painted with the Matisse group and in the Fauve style were often hung separately. It was not a matter of exclusion by the Fauves, who could only be identified as a group in the loosest sense (they were given their name by the critic Vauxcelles), with Matisse their reluctant leader. Perry notes that the women did not seek to be included with the male Fauves—a marginal relationship was the cultural norm.²⁵ Also possible is that, with the exhibits hung five to six paintings deep, those that were high up—as the women's likely were—often went unnoticed. If few traces of Funke's life in Paris have been found, the work itself serves as testimony that she deserves a place in a history of modernist aesthetic developments in Europe.



Fig. 3. Helene Funke, *Still Life with Jug, Blue Vase and Dish with Onions* (Stillleben mit Krug, blauer Vase, und Schale mit Zwiebeln) (1910-19), oil on canvas, 22 3/4" x 28 1/2". Collection Willi Hoffinger, Vienna.



Fig. 4. Helene Funke, *Still Life with Book, Dishes and Apples* (Stillleben mit Buch, Teller und Äpfeln) (1907), oil on canvas, 24" x 19 3/4". Collection Willi Hoffinger, Vienna.

Among the Paris Fauves, Funke's colorful, expressive canvases were wild among the many, but in Vienna, they were too singularly wild even for a critic who championed other women artists. When she exhibited thirteen oil paintings, including five still lifes, at the second exhibition of the Union of



Fig. 5. Helene Funke, *Still Life with Rose Basket* (Stillleben mit Rosenkörbchen) (1910-19), oil on wood, 21 1/4" x 24 1/4". Private Collection, Vienna.

Austrian Women Artists at the Hagenbund in 1911, she shocked Viennese art critic Adalbert Franz Seligmann with her "horrific 'Vangoghification.'"²⁶ As Sabine Plakolm-Försthuber notes, the comment was meant in the pejorative sense, but there is truth to the comparison.²⁷ Like Van Gogh, Funke painted flowers with an expressive brushstroke, and in two later examples, a vase of lilies is whimsical and exuberant, while her potted amaryllis (c. 1918-20; Pl. 10) is suggestively dark.²⁸

Modernist artists experimented with still life painting for three reasons that are interconnected. First, it lends itself to two-dimensional space; this was true even in the Baroque period.²⁹ Second, it is related to a way of seeing that emphasizes observation, description, and seeing. Svetlana Alpers has famously argued that Dutch still life painting was primarily about vision.³⁰ Third, in the early twentieth century, modernists disrupted traditional genre categories through form rather than content. The familiar repertory of still-life objects—books, glass and china or pottery, fruit and edibles, flowers, etc.—is timeless. The relatively unchanging forms of ceramics, books, and flowers in *Still Life with Hyacinths*, for example, provide a recognizable schema for Funke's formal experimentation. Paul Connerton, a historian of memory, proposes that "prior to any single experience, our mind is already predisposed with a framework of outlines, of typical shapes of experienced objects. To perceive an object or act upon it is to locate it within this system of expectations."³¹ The modernist still life depended on the fact that we locate our perceptions in such systems of expectations; its familiar touch points allowed the artist freedom of practice to focus on internal syntax, rhythm, color, and form. This, perhaps, is why still life became a preferred genre (along with the nude) of Picasso. As Norman Bryson has noted, Cubism "relies on the forms of still life to provide stable, legible anchor-points for the fragmented planes and spatial torsions it cultivates."³² For Funke, the crinkled cloth in *Peach Still Life* emphasizes the spectacle of

the fruit, just as Cézanne's linens possess a "dislocating function: they hide the space where the objects might exist for their own sake and convey them into aesthetic space, where they become objects uniquely destined for the gaze."³³

The genre of the still life has been seen as a vehicle for modernist daring and experimentation when artists like Manet or Picasso were involved. It has also been connected with antimodernist values of copying and non-originality, particularly when practiced by women. But Funke has not been connected discursively to copying, so aesthetically daring was her work in the context of Austria.³⁴ Her inclusion of Biedermeier subject matter in *Still Life with Rose Basket* (1910-19; Fig. 5) is a witty take on traditional subject matter for a woman artist in the German-speaking world;³⁵ rather than functioning as proper subject matter for a dilettante, the books and basket of roses serve as anchors for dynamic, experimental arabesques. Here Funke worked with a fresh, quick brushstroke, sometimes using a knife edge, leaving the paint thick on the canvas, underscoring the dynamic movement of her brush with dashes of black paint. The virtuoso approach to the normally still and quiet subject matter animates it: the rose basket and its ribbon seem to dance. Within the muted palette, mauve and golden ochre paint passages become nearly illegible without their surroundings. Funke begins to achieve in *Still Life with Rose Basket* what Pollock was looking for in the 1930s (his 1934-35 *Going West* for example): the emphasis is entirely on the internal rhyming and a linear, rhythmic effect that produced its pictorial syntax. Funke's playful take on traditionally feminine subject matter makes it all the more ironic that the rhetoric about women artists encouraged still life painting for its association with copying and detail work rather than as a site for aesthetic daring and formal experimentation.

In *Still Life with Fish* (1920; Pl. 11) Funke depicted fish, laid out as Manet had done, in a studio composition rather than as a kitchen scene.³⁶ Alive with hot color, the shimmering golden bodies of three fish are surrounded by fresh pale blue wrapping, a green vegetable, a cut-off blue porcelain vase, goblet, and red cloth. Just as the still life, or nature morte, contains within its nomenclature the paradox of life within death, so does Funke's imagery: the dead fish are vigorous, even lively, animated with red and outlined with blue brushwork.³⁷ In another canvas, *Box with Red Fruits and Vase* (n.d.) Funke lays in her color with fresh ease, contrasting the red fruit with a cool white and blue background.³⁸ Behind this composition, which at first glance seems so simple, spontaneous, and haphazard, the artist used a repeating triangle to give the composition unity: in the angles of the box cover, the blue triangle at the bottom, red at left and vee-shape of the urn. The color has the freshness and clarity of a watercolor, but the paint itself is applied with a thick impasto.

The transformation of still life as not only a genre for experimentation but as a subject for modernist practice had begun many decades earlier. Art historian Jeannene Przyblyski notes that still life in France in the 1860s "was asked to stand as the genre of intransigence and avant-garde aspirations" even as it functioned as a genre of limitations for artists who lacked thorough academic training.³⁹ Emile Zola, for example, understood Manet's modernism as an attitude connected to still life:

His approach to figure painting is like the approach to still life taught in art schools; I mean that he groups the figures before him a bit haphazardly, and then he is concerned only to fix them on the canvas just as he sees them, with the lively contrasts they produce by their juxtaposition. Ask nothing of him other than a literally accurate translation. He would not know how to sing or philosophize. He knows how to paint and that is all.⁴⁰

Zola elevates the descriptive materiality of objects over any meaning, thereby elevating the lowliest genre over history painting and its philosophical tendencies. This attitude toward the still life formed the basis for an emphasis on form, the decorative and internal rhyming characteristic of early-twentieth-century art.

The decorative was an essential concept for modernist artists who were working in an increasingly abstract manner. The Fauves used the terms “decorative” and “arabesque” admiringly, referring to an emphasis on the internal rhyming of the composition.⁴¹ Funke’s canvases are decorative in this abstract (and modernist) sense, where the surface and internal rhythms take precedence over the legibility of the object. In *Still Life with Pheasant, Hunter’s Head and Dog* (1922; Pl. 12), for example, she depicts dead game, a traditional subject, centered around the bird’s glorious plumage, with hunter and dog visible in the foliage. In a composition as frontal as a Mannerist painting by Pontormo or Bronzino, everything is brought to the fore of the picture plane yet executed in the thickly laid brushstrokes of a Fauve. Surrounding the brilliant plumage of the pheasant is a profusion of exuberantly colored plants: fiery hot red, orange, fuschia, lemony yellow, emerald green, and icy Mediterranean blue cover the canvas. These are the same plants depicted in *Still Life with Tropical Plants* (c.1914; Fig. 6). In the latter especially, the “arabesque,” a decorative line quality, creates an even pattern moving over the surface of the canvas.

Though a notable component of modernism and its developments, the decorative was suppressed in subsequent accounts of significant male artists because of its associations with femininity. Modernists preferred to be associated with Orientalism, as was the case with the Austrian artists association “Freie Bewegung”, which translates as “free movement” or “free motion.” Funke was active in the group and exhibited two oil paintings in its 1918 exhibition in Vienna. Bewegung’s stated goal was “to completely reject any small decorative or naturalistic tendency and to subordinate all collective intent (Wollen) to the singular goal of the architectural unity of the work of art.”⁴² It held the Gothic and the Orient to be its “guiding stars.”⁴³ This tendency to move away from the decorative toward Orientalism as a source for art was widespread. Jenny Anger has demonstrated how this worked in the careers of Klee and Matisse, arguing that such shifts away from associations with the decorative proved a concerted strategy to rescue these artists from a concept that had become entangled with concepts of femininity in rhetorically negative ways.⁴⁴ In fact, Anger has uncovered a significant blind spot in modernism—she tracks how and why the close aesthetic relationship between abstraction and the decorative that Klee and Matisse once embraced was later



Fig. 6. Helene Funke, *Still Life with Tropical Plants* (Stillleben mit tropischen Pflanzen) (c.1914), oil on canvas, 23 3/4" x 28 3/4". Private Collection Vienna, Courtesy Wienerroither & Kohlbacher, Vienna.

denied by the artists. Modernist critics and historians came to accept the idea that the decorative is not essential or internal to the work of art.⁴⁵ The hierarchical split between what is viewed as the essential work of art and the add-on (the ornamental or decorative) has deep philosophical connections that go back to Immanuel Kant, who described the difference between the *ergon* (the work of art itself) and the *parergon* (that which can be removed, is extraneous to it, or merely points to it).⁴⁶ Anger’s discovery has implications for reexamining the history of modernism, whose aesthetic system pretended to be based only on quality but was, in fact, deeply gendered.

Funke was an artist who worked with the decorative as formalist abstraction, but who (unlike Matisse and Klee) would not be rescued from the pejorative shift of the term.⁴⁷ Her reception was affected by the discourse on the decorative and its increasingly negative connotation as frill, add-on, non-essential, and feminine. Fin-de-siècle Vienna was a center for this discourse against ornament. Numerous newspaper and journal articles were written on the theme, with Adolf Loos as one of the better known proponents of these ideas. The decorative came to be extremely problematic for artists. Witness Franz Ottmann’s review of Funke’s work in a retrospective exhibition that took place when she was eighty years old. The critic connected her artistic development to mosaics and Gobelin tapestries—hardly negative comparisons in and of themselves—but his meaning becomes clear in his concluding remarks: “A calmness presents itself in (Funke’s) recent paintings, and perhaps for the first time the artist’s true essence has opened its eyes to see everywhere a soulful representation of what it is to be human—but at the same time (Funke) cannot hold herself back from her feminine delight in the decorative.”⁴⁸ Ottmann went on to praise the exhibition of the Art-Club for deepening its sense of space, line, form, and color play, without *falling into the decorative* (emphasis mine).⁴⁹

In another review Ottman compares Funke's concept of the decorative with that of Matisse:

We find her at the beginning of a trail that Matisse blazed with more self realization, precision, and broader consequences: to put the decorative element into the picture completely, elevating it to an essential part of the composition. In subordinating the composition of the picture to internal correspondences, parallel syntaxes and the like (also practiced in older art), Helene Funke has perhaps surpassed him.⁵⁰

The reviewer made these claims at a time when artists throughout Europe were distancing themselves from the decorative in their discursive practices (artist and group statements), if not in actual aesthetic production.

But this alone is not enough to explain why an ultra-modernist artist like Helene Funke has not found her rightful place in histories of modernism. When Herbert Boeckl acknowledged Funke as "significant for the entire artistic community" in 1945, there was no preexisting framework that would make comprehensible the art of a woman as a producer of new forms.⁵¹ It was entirely unexpected to place a woman in the role of a foremother, a transmitter of and producer of the most modernist art in Austria, or anywhere else, for that matter. Funke's importance is only now being established in her adoptive country, with the 2007 retrospective at the Lentos Kunstmuseum, and a role in the 2007-08 "Wien-Paris" exhibition at the Belvedere, where she is represented by several works. But she has yet to be integrated into a participatory role in histories of Viennese modernism. Even in the "Wien-Paris" exhibition, both she and Broncia Koller have been misrepresented as isolated practitioners of modernist principles.⁵² As Tobias Natter and Veronica Wolf recently wrote in 2005: "Funke holds a special place in Austrian art history, not only as one of the few successful women painters, but also because of her intense involvement with French art."⁵³ What needs to be stated more emphatically, however, is that Funke was an active participant in the Viennese art world; she interpreted and transmitted modernist developments to Vienna, which had its own, allegorical brand of modernism.⁵⁴ To belatedly acknowledge priority in Funke without restoring her real presence in public debate and in artistic circles is to silence the influence that she had in her adoptive city.

Viennese modernism, never as autonomous as the French version, in part because of the allegorical content that Klimt, Schiele, and Kokoschka maintained, has gained international fame with the advent of postmodernist critiques of modernist ideology, and a renewed fascination with allegory. Helene Funke's brand of modernism is more French: her subject matter—whether nudes, still lifes or a combination—calls attention to the production of art in the space of the studio. Still life in particular provided a studio-centered genre through which modernist discoveries could take place. In 1907, Picasso was still working with allegorical content, which he all but erased in the final version of the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, which consists of nudes, masks, a still life element, and drapery. Like Picasso, Funke removes allegorical content, painting only figures and a still life

element in *The Dreamers* (1913; Pl. 13) and *Fruits* (1919).⁵⁵ *The Dreamers* (retitled *Dreams* in 1918) alone shows that Funke's work belongs in a history of modernist painting, with clear influences from Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Matisse.

The stunning production of Helene Funke brings one of the ironies of Viennese modernism to the fore: while the Secessionists styled themselves as heirs to Manet and Van Gogh in their ambitious exhibition program,⁵⁶ women artists like Helene Funke could make even stronger claims about their close connections to the international avant garde. Vienna was a city of such contradictions: women aristocrats were powerful, but the women's movement lagged behind other European cities; the city was open and cosmopolitan, but its citizens elected an anti-Semitic mayor. In Vienna, it was women who were the earliest interpreters of a more autonomous modernism, but the heroes of the avant-garde were all men. Aspects of Funke's life and career are not unique to Vienna, however: being forgotten, even within a cycle of rediscoveries, has been the fate of many women artists who lacked the publicity machines and repetitions to ensure their place in art historical memory. One of the most important ways in which artistic repetitions occur is through influence—other artists call attention to a master or figure of influence, as did the Secessionists with Van Gogh and Manet. Helene Funke's role as forebear and figure of influence has been quieted in the gendered narratives of artists and art historians, but it has not been silenced. •

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NOTES

1. Peter Funke sums up the situation in three words: "verbrannt, zerstört, verschollen." (Burned, destroyed, disappeared). "Die Rätsel im Leben und Werk der Malerin Helene Funke," *Helene Funke 1869-1957*, ed. Elisabeth Nowak-Thaller (Linz: Lentos Kunstmuseum, 2007), 23. (All translations by the author.)
2. Matthias Boeckl, "Durch das Andere zum Eigenen: Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte der Moderne Frankreichs in Österreich," *Wien-Paris, Van Gogh, Cézanne und Österreichs Moderne 1880-1960*, ed. Agnes Husslein-Arco (Vienna: Austrian Gallery Belvedere, 2007), 27.
3. Ibid. Together, the sentences read: "Signifikant für Koller und Funke (und für die österreichische Kunstszene) ist, dass es gerade zwei Frauen waren, die am intensivsten die zu dieser Zeit zweifellos radikalsten Strömungen neuer französischer Malerei rezipierten. Ihnen wurde jedoch in Wien kein Forum geboten—nicht einmal in der Secession—auf dem sie diesen Ansatz mit größerer Öffentlichkeitswirkung zur Debatte hätten stellen können."
4. According to Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber, it is difficult to determine when Funke left Paris: she registered to live in Vienna in 1911 but was still sending works from Paris until 1912. In 1913 she listed a Florence address in an exhibition catalogue at the Deutscher Künstlerbund at the Kunsthalle Mannheim and also had a residence with a terrace studio in the Langegasse in Vienna's eight district. Plakolm-Forsthuber, "Die Malerin Helene Funke und ihr künstlerisches Umfeld," *Helene Funke 1869-1957*, ed. Nowak-Thaller, 77.
5. "vorbildhaft für die gesamte Künstlerschaft." Jorg Lampe, "Malerin Helene Funke 85 Jahre," *Die Presse*, September 3, 1954, as cited in Plakolm-Forsthuber, *Künstlerinnen* (Vienna: Picus, 1994), 128.

- Plakom-Försthuber assesses Funke as the “Grande Dame” of the interwar years in “Die Malerin Helene Funke und ihr künstlerisches Umfeld,” *Helene Funke 1869-1957*, ed. Nowak-Thaller, 78.
6. The art historian and art dealer Ursula Hieke has also discovered and documented many works by Funke. Sabine Fellner and Gabriele Nagler wrote in 1995, that Funke, along with other women like Broncia Koller (1863-1934), who also traveled to Paris, is part of an “Austrian avant-garde waiting to be rediscovered.” “Vier Österreicherinnen in Paris: Die fauvistische Malerei und Helene Funke, Helene Taussig, Emma Schlangenhausen und Broncia Koller,” *Weltkunst* 20 (October 15, 1995): 2761.
 7. The honorary title of professor is given her by the President of Austria in 1955. Peter Funke, Unpublished manuscript, 2001. In Vienna she will count among her closest friends Ninon and Hermann Hesse, to whom she wrote, “I am also such a lonely Steppenwolf.” Schweizerisches Literaturarchiv, Hesse-Archiv, Ms L 81, cited by Elisabeth Nowak-Thaller, “Helene Funke—vergessen und verschollen?” in *Helene Funke 1869-1957*, 15.
 8. Jill Lloyd, *The Undiscovered Expressionist. A Life of Marie-Louise Von Motesiczky* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2007). The estate also helped with the production of a catalogue for a traveling exhibition (Tate Liverpool, Museum Giersch, Wien Museum, Southampton City Art Gallery): *Marie-Louise Von Motesiczky 1906-1996: The Painter/Die Malerin* eds. Jeremy Adler and Birgit Sander (Munich: Prestel, 2006).
 9. The process of reconstructing her life began with art historian Sabine Plakolm-Försthuber’s 1994 publication *Künstlerinnen* and has been pursued by Funke’s nephew, Prof. Peter Funke and now Tamara Loitfellner, who is writing her dissertation on Funke.
 10. Peter Funke, “Die Rätsel im Leben und Werk der Malerin Helene Funke,” *Helene Funke 1869-1957*, ed. Nowak-Thaller, 24.
 11. Plakolm-Försthuber, “Die Malerin Helene Funke und ihr künstlerisches Umfeld,” *Helene Funke 1869-1957*, ed. Nowak-Thaller, 71.
 12. The phrase pays homage to Norman Bryson’s very helpful collection of essays on still life painting, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990). This portion of the essay is an expanded and revised version of my catalogue essay in “Helene Funkes Stilleben: Ein Blick auf das Übersehene,” *Helene Funke 1869-1957*, ed. Nowak-Thaller, 135-41.
 13. Funke’s still life paintings have long been recognized as a significant part of her oeuvre, as witnessed by the important collections to which they belong (of the four paintings owned by the Austrian Gallery Belvedere, three are still lifes).
 14. Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 61.
 15. Barbara Doser, “Das Frauenkunststudium in Österreich 1870-1935” (Ph.D. diss., University of Innsbruck, 1988).
 16. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 54.
 17. Maurice Grant, *Flower Painting Through Four Centuries* (Leigh-on-Sea: F. Lewis, 1952), 21, quoted in Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses*, 54.
 18. Paul Moorhouse, “Still Life, Object, Real Life,” *Tate Modern: The Handbook*, eds. Iwona Blazwick and Simon Wilson (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2000), 58-73.
 19. Gabriele Münter is the best known exception. Reinhold Heller, *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (Munich: Prestel, 1997), 102. While Austrian Expressionists did paint in the genre of the still life, it did not become key in the practice of most artists until the next generation of artists were reinterpreting French modernism. For several illustrated examples, see *Wien-Paris, Van Gogh, Cézanne und Österreichs Moderne 1880-1960*, ed. Husslein-Arco.
 20. Her name appears in the catalogues of the Salons d’Automne (1907, 1908) and the Salon des Indépendants in 1907, 1910, and 1911. Peter Funke, Unpublished manuscript, 2001.
 21. Loitfellner has attempted to find mention of Funke in Stein’s papers, and even her rental agreement, but has found nothing. Tamara Loitfellner, “Zu den Frauenbildern Helene Funkes,” *Helene Funke 1869-1957*, ed. Nowak-Thaller, 174.
 22. Ibid.
 23. Ibid., 167.
 24. Peter Funke, Unpublished manuscript, 2001.
 25. Gill Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1995), 49.
 26. “schreckliche Vangoghiade.” Quoted in Plakolm-Försthuber, *Künstlerinnen*, 130. Funke’s work was highlighted in this exhibition and appeared on the cover of the catalogue, which was designed by Martha Hofrichter, whom she knew in Paris. Both artists were active, founding members of the VBKÖ (the Vereinigung bildender Künstlerinnen Österreichs), the first women’s art union with public rights in Austria, founded in 1910.
 27. Ibid.
 28. *Stilleben mit Calla* (1923), oil on canvas, 34 1/4” x 25”. Austrian Gallery Belvedere, Vienna, pictured in *Helene Funke 1869-1957*, ed. Nowak-Thaller, 161.
 29. Hanneke Grootenboer, *The Rhetoric of Perspective* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), 165.
 30. Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983).
 31. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), 6.
 32. Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 84.
 33. Ibid., 82. In another spectacular display of fruit, Funke uses a deep marine blue cloth to place peaches and grapes in the aesthetic realm. *Still Life with Peaches and Grapes* (Stilleben mit Pfirsichen und Weintrauben) (1910-19), oil on canvas, 19 1/4” x 23 1/2”. Collection Dr. Hainz, Vienna. Pictured in *Helene Funke 1869-1957*, ed. Nowak-Thaller, 150.
 34. A.F. Seligmann did, however, accuse Funke and other women artists of primitivist incompetence on the occasion of the second exhibition of the new women’s art union: “Feuilleton. Hagenbund,” *Neue Freie Presse*, Sept. 17, 1911, 1-3.
 35. Ursula Hieke pointed out this “fast biedermeierliches Motiv” in *Helene Funke 1869-1957 Paris-Wien* (Vienna: Kunsthandel Hieke, n.d.), n.p.
 36. For example, Édouard Manet, *Still Life with Fish* (1864), Art Institute of Chicago.
 37. Van Gogh also outlined objects in blue, making the inanimate furniture and still life objects in his *Bedroom at Arles* (1889), Art Institute of Chicago, seem to come to life.
 38. *Schachtel mit roten Früchten und Vase* (n.d.) oil on wood, 11 1/2” x 15 1/2”, Collection Willi Hofinger, Vienna. Pictured in *Helene Funke 1869-1957*, ed. Nowak-Thaller, 139.
 39. Jeannene M. Przyblyski, “The Makings of Modern Still Life in the 1860s,” *Impressionist Still Life*, eds. Eliza Rathbone and George T. M. Shackelford (New York: Abrams: 2002), 29.
 40. “Il traite les tableaux de figures comme il est permis, dans les écoles, de traiter les tableaux de nature morte; je veux dire qu’il groupe les figures devant lui, un peu au hasard, et qu’il n’a ensuite souci que de les fixer sur la toile telles qu’il les voit, avec les vives oppositions qu’elles font en se détachant les unes sur les autres. Ne lui demandez rien autre chose qu’une traduction d’une justesse littérale. Il ne saurait ni chanter, ni philosopher. Il sait peindre, et voilà tout.” Emile Zola, “Une nouvelle manière en peinture: Édouard

41. Roger Benjamin, "The Decorative Landscape, Fauvism, and the Arabesque of Observation," *Art Bulletin* 75:2 (June 1993): 295-316.
42. "auf jedes kleinlich dekorative oder naturalistische Bedürfnis völlig verzichten zu lernen und alles Wollen dem einzigen Ziele der letzten überindividuellen architektonischen Einheit des Kunstwerkes unterzuordnen." H.G., "Ausstellungen," *Cicerone* 10 (1918): 219.
43. Ibid.
44. Jenny Anger, *Paul Klee and the Decorative in Modern Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 161; 191-98.
45. See also Anger's nuanced reading of Greenberg on the decorative. Ibid., 192-93; 286-87.
46. Jacques Derrida finds contradictions in Kant, particularly an inconsistency in where the artwork begins and the boundary with the frame ends. Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987), 59-60. Anger agrees with Derrida that the frame is a kind of *parergon*, but proposes that it is an "example of a larger category, namely the decorative;" Kant, after all, did mention "the foliage, the design on the frame, along with designs *à la grecque*, and even *wallpaper*, the stuff of the everyday interior." She suggests that the decorative "behave[s] parergonally:" it appears to be "extraneous and yet simultaneously inhere in art and consort with the stuff of life." Anger, *Paul Klee and the Decorative in Modern Art*, 8-9.
47. For more on rescuing artists from narrative trouble, see Linda Nochlin, "The De-Politicization of Gustave Courbet: Transformation and Rehabilitation under the Third Republic," in *October* 22 (1982): 65-75.
48. "In den Bildern der letzten Jahre zeigt sich eine Beruhigung, in der vielleicht erst das wahre Wesen der Künstlerin die Augen aufschlägt, das überall zu einer beseelten Darstellung des Menschlichen drängt, zugleich aber der weiblichen Freude am Schmuckenden nachzugeben sich nicht enthalten kann." Franz Ottmann, "Herbstbogen der Wiener Kunst-Ausstellungen 1948," *Kunst ins Volk* (1949): 95-98.

49. The complete sentence reads: "Der gesamte Charakter vertieft sich immer mehr im Sinne von Raum- und Linien-, Formen- und Farbspielen, ohne doch ins Dekorative zu geraten." Ibid.
50. "Wir finden sie hier am Anfang eines Weges, den dann Matisse mit hellerem Bewusstsein bestimmter und weiter ausgreifend siegreich durchsturmte: das schmuckende Element ganz ins Bild hineinzuziehen und es so zu einem wesentlichen Bestandteil der Komposition zu erheben. In der Durchorganisation des Bildes nach Entsprechungen, parallelen Ausbiegungen und dergleichen (auch von der alten Kunst viel geübten) Beziehungen aller Art ist Helene Funke vielleicht noch weiter gegangen." Franz Ottmann, "Kunstaustellungen," in *Kunst ins Volk* (1949): 284.
51. Jorg Lampe, "Malerin Helene Funke 85 Jahre," *Die Presse*, 3 September 1954, as cited in Plakolm-Forsthuber, *Künstlerinnen*, 128.
52. See note 2.
53. *The New Austria*, eds. Günter Dürig and Gerbert Frodl (Vienna: Austrian Gallery Belvedere, 2005), 72.
54. Even the new "Wien-Paris" exhibition implies that Funke worked through French modernist tendencies *after* she saw exhibitions of French art in Vienna, several of which were sponsored by the Secession, although it is clear that she moved to Vienna only after having painted in the Fauve style with the Matisse circle. Her birthdate is misstated by thirty years in the catalogue's compilation of artist biographies. *Wien-Paris, Van Gogh, Cézanne und Österreichs Moderne 1880-1960*, ed. Husslein-Arco, 410.
55. These paintings are read differently in Plakolm-Forsthuber, *Künstlerinnen*, 132-36, and Plakolm-Forsthuber, "Malerinnen der Zwischenkriegszeit," *Jahrhundert der Frauen*, ed. Ingrid Brugger (Vienna: Kunstforum Wien und Residenz Verlag, 1999), 135 and Loitfellner, "Zu den Frauenbildern Helene Funkes," *Helene Funke 1869-1957*, ed. Nowak-Thaller, 180-81, who reads the still life element not as the subject matter of a more autonomous modernism, but as a symbolic element, connecting it to Picasso's allegorical study (early 1907) for the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*.
56. Julie M. Johnson, "Athena Goes to the Prater: Parodying Ancients and Moderns at the Vienna Secession," in *Oxford Art Journal* 26:2 (2003): 63-64: 67-68.

Italian Women Artists from Renaissance to Baroque

by Claudio Strinati, Jordana Pomeroy, et al
Skira, Milan, 2007

Reviewed by Katherine M. Poole

Pope Urban VIII (r. 1623-1644) infamously belittled the achievements of “girls who painted,” (49) insisting that their supporters were overly enthusiastic in their praise of these limited talents. “Italian Women Artists from Renaissance to Baroque,” an exhibition held from March to July 2007 at the National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) in Washington, D.C., and the corresponding catalogue offer the rare opportunity to judge for oneself the veracity of this dismissal. The richly illustrated 271-page catalogue testifies to the impressive scope of women’s artistic accomplishment during the early modern period, showcasing fifteen artists and sixty-seven individual object entries, ranging from the traditional—manuscript illuminations, prints, and oil paintings—to the extraordinary—a cherry stone pendant carved with over one hundred heads and encrusted with gold and precious gems. The catalogue’s eight essays, contributed by eminent scholars including Carolyn Murphy, Sheila ffolliott, Ann Sutherland Harris, Vera Fortunati, Carole Collier Frick, and Alexandra Lapierre, considerably enrich one’s understanding of the individual objects, covering topics from the contemporary fascination with the “woman artist” to the unique financial and professional struggles faced by these pioneering women.

The introductory essays contributed by exhibition curators Claudio Strinati, Head of the State Museums in Rome, and Jordana Pomeroy, NMWA Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture before 1900, familiarize readers with the world of the Renaissance and Baroque woman artist. Strinati highlights how often the cultural influence and contributions of early modern women have been hidden or lost to history and acknowledges the profound impact of these artists, patrons,

and even subjects of art. Pomeroy’s succinct overview of the female artistic experience provides the necessary socio-cultural context for understanding the forces that shaped the lives, careers, and oeuvres of women labeled marvels of nature by their contemporaries. Owing to gender-based assumptions and standards of propriety, these women encountered constraints and limitations not experienced by their male counterparts. The codes of “proper” behavior and decorum for women were fundamentally at odds with the aggressive public promotion required of the successful professional artist. And yet, as the catalogue clearly demonstrates, women transcended these societal barriers to achieve flourishing careers.

The strategies women employed to achieve financial success is the subject of Carolyn Murphy’s essay, “The Economics of the Woman Artist.” As she explains, financial concerns, from dowry payments to daily household expenses, often precluded women’s strict adherence to traditional gender roles. Monetary realities led some fathers to support the artistic training of their daughters, as was the case with Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana. Artemisia Gentileschi, as the sole breadwinner in a household saddled with debts and the costs of raising her two daughters, had no choice but to employ aggressive techniques in soliciting commissions, possibly even exaggerating her prices to secure higher fees from prospective clients (28-29). Because of the social stigma attached to gainful employment for women, they often did not sell their paintings but presented them as gifts, a practice geared towards securing social advancement, a court appointment, or an advantageous marriage, and by extension financial security. Anguissola survived not on the sales of her work, but on the stipends and bonuses she received as lady-in-waiting to the queen at the Spanish royal court, while Elisabetta Sirani’s principal income derived from her operation of an art school for girls. Some women artists did achieve financial success through the traditional public art market, notably Fontana, though due in no small part to the active role taken by both her father and her husband in her career, further



Fig. 1. Barbara Longhi, Saint Catherine of Alexandria (c. 1579-82), oil on canvas, 16 1/4" x 13 1/4". Museo d'Arte della Città, Ravenna.

illustrating the characteristic financial uncertainties women faced.

In “Wife, Widow, Nun, and Court Lady: Women Patrons of the Renaissance and Baroque,” Sheila ffolliott shifts her focus from the women holding the paintbrushes to those holding the purse strings. Like their artistic counterparts, female patrons in early modern Italy overcame the societal constraints imposed on their sex and commissioned a wide range of works that testify visually to the beliefs, values, and wishes that comprised the fabric of their daily lives. ffolliott’s essay demonstrates the profound cultural power wielded by female patrons in both the religious and secular spheres. They championed rising art stars of the likes of Raphael and Parmigianino, and were the earliest supporters of fledgling religious orders such as the Jesuits in Counter-Reformation Rome. Women also played a crucial role in internationalizing European court culture, as the alliances forged for them by their fathers, brothers, and other male relatives resulted not only in the exchange of brides, but also of art and ideas. Although ffolliott cautions against seeing a “proto-feminist” (38) sisterhood where none existed, I believe patron/artist pairings such as that of Giovanna Garzoni and the Grand Duchess of Tuscany Vittoria della Rovere hint

at female networks worthy of further exploration.

Bologna produced a significant number of successful women artists, and Vera Fortunati, herself a professor at that city's university, investigates three of the most famous, Lavinia Fontana, Elisabetta Sirani, and Caterina Vigri, in "Towards a History of Women Artists in Bologna between the Renaissance and the Baroque: Additions and Clarifications." Fortunati examines Fontana's mythological narratives, like the recently discovered *Apollo and the Muses (Parnassus)* on view at NMWA, as well as her "secret" production of erotic nudes. She reveals an artist who, like her male counterparts, smoothly transitioned between the sacred and profane in Counter-Reformation era Bologna. A portrait of Sirani painted shortly after her death and assigned by Fortunati to one of her pupils, the little known Ginevra Cantofoli, celebrates a gifted teacher (47-48). Fortunati's attribution is significant in that it opens the door for further discussion of Sirani's private academy, a topic long overdue for scholarly attention. In my mind, this visual evidence of a female artistic genealogy provides a revealing counterpart to Anguissola's well-known depiction of a pupil/teacher relationship in her self-portrait with Bernardino Campi, prominently featured in the exhibition. As a Clarissan nun, Vigri was sequestered from the Bologna of Fontana and Sirani, but as Fortunati argues, her religious identity also separated her stylistically from her artistic counterparts (41-43). She points to Vigri's illuminated miniatures of Christ that bear striking formal similarities to the Veronica's veil "portrait," believed by the faithful to record the imprint of Christ's face prior to his crucifixion. Through her illuminations Vigri became a modern Veronica, revealing the "true face" of Christ to her sister nuns. The three case studies chosen by Fortunati plainly demonstrate the impressive range of these Bolognese women's artistic production and experiences. Unfortunately, the case study format also prevents Fortunati from achieving the stated goal of her essay's title, as the works of art appear as isolated achievements rather than as integral contributions to a larger history of women artists in the city, leaving readers to draw

their own connections and conclusions about the larger context.

In "Painting Personal Identity: Costuming of Nobildonne, Heroines, and Kings," Carole Collier Frick examines clothing practices and trends as depicted in portraits and historical narratives of the Renaissance and Baroque periods. An individual's dress conveyed not only wealth and status but also strategic political alliances and civic identity. The ability to capture precisely the elaborate costumes worn by their sitters made skilled portraitists such as Anguissola and Fontana indispensable to a European elite eager to formulate and disseminate a public identity for themselves. Frick also cites costume as an important vehicle of artistic agency (70). Women artists employed clothing in fashioning their own public image, as witnessed by Fontana's decision to embrace the elaborate dress of the Bolognese noblewomen she hoped to attract as clients. Additionally, costume provided an important creative outlet (71). The popular taste for biblical and mythological heroines freed women artists from the constraints of decorum and convention that ruled traditional portraiture, and they responded by garbing their exceptional female subjects in equally exceptional clothes, indulging their desire for the exotic, the fantastic, and the theatrical.

The contributions to the catalogue by Ann Sutherland Harris and Alexandra Lapierre depart from these more strictly historically based studies. Referring to the groundbreaking survey she and Linda Nochlin organized in 1977, Harris's essay, "Sofonisba, Lavinia, Artemisia, and Elisabetta: Thirty Years After *Women Artists, 1550-1950*," summarizes the substantial progress achieved in the study of Renaissance and Baroque women artists over the past three decades, highlighting key scholarly contributions to the discourse surrounding this famed quartet. Especially illuminating is Harris's discussion of the impact the members of this exclusive "sisterhood" appear to have had in shaping each other's professional identities, strategies, and career paths. As Harris notes, Fontana's arrival in Rome in 1603 certainly would

not have escaped the attention of Orazio Gentileschi, a savvy businessman who no doubt saw in the highly successful Fontana a model for his daughter Artemisia (54). A generation later, it was Sirani who eyed Gentileschi as a model, a connection forged through their respective dealings with the Medici grand dukes in Florence (57).

Women artists of the early modern period are currently enjoying unprecedented levels of visibility, not only in art historical scholarship, but also as the subjects of films, plays, and popular fiction. Their broad appeal to contemporary audiences along with questions of how the artists themselves "fictionalized" their own experiences and identities are among the topics addressed by Alexandra Lapierre in "The 'Woman Artist' in Literature: Fiction or Non-Fiction." Lapierre makes a key observation when she points out how a radical breaching of the boundaries has occurred recently in the study of the "woman artist," resulting in a blurring of fiction and non-fiction. The use of "historical evidence to authenticate an imagined past" (79) is a technique employed by the author herself in her novel *Artemisia*, a work that fuses biography, fiction, and art historical documents. However, Lapierre ultimately misses the opportunity to assess critically the impact of this trend on the art historical discourse. One of the pitfalls of this newfound celebrity is that the dramatic and often salacious details of their lives threaten to overwhelm their artistic achievements—a disservice to the real accomplishments of real women.

The comprehensive nature of this volume, from its range of artists and artworks to its extensive bibliography, makes it an invaluable resource for the study of women artists of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. The inclusion of a full-page color plate alongside each catalogue entry is also worth highlighting, as many of these works of art are published here for the first time. The catalogue is a welcome complement to existing monographs on some of the better known artists, and its discussions of lesser known talents such as Barbara Longhi (Fig. 1), Eufrosia Burlamacchi, Lucrina Fetti, and Chiara Varotari will surely invite additional

research. The fifteen artists highlighted in this exhibition are united by the common theme of gender, and each was duly affected by the well-known expectations and limitations society placed on them. While the variety of objects comprising their collective oeuvre reflects that sociocultural reality,

it also importantly insists on a richness of individualized expression that defies easy categorization. *Italian Women Artists from Renaissance to Baroque* is a significant contribution to the study of women artists and to the early modern art historical discourse in general, bringing new insight to established debates as

well as opening up new avenues for scholarship and exploration. •

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Shifting Priorities: Gender and Genre in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting

by Nanette Salomon
Stanford University Press, 2004

Reviewed by Martha Moffitt Peacock

Few scholars are better situated to write a text on the confluence between gender and genre than Nanette Salomon. In fact, not many in this field of study have as lengthy a record of feminist-centered interests. Her analyses are truly feminist encounters with art, rather than merely superficial treatments of women as subject matter without any meaningful theoretical engagement. Indeed, Salomon's keen interest in feminist theory is demonstrated not only by this anthology of essays written between 1983 and 1998, but also by her important articles on the Venus Pudica as male discourse and on the chauvinist agenda of the art historical canon.¹

Shifting Priorities: Gender and Genre in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting is a fresh contribution to the numerous studies—articles, exhibition catalogues and books—that have appeared in the last few decades on the subject of Dutch genre imagery. The essays are organized to demonstrate the changes that occurred in Salomon's methodological and theoretical practice over fifteen years. Her earliest essays—what she calls "pro/visions"—employ traditional iconographic analyses in the manner of Erwin Panofsky and Eddy de Jongh. Thus her first three essays, one on Jan Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance*, another on Jan Miense Molenaer's *Musical Duet*, and lastly one on Gerard ter Borch's pendants of

drinking men and women, all employ conventional iconographic practices of symbolic identification via comparative analysis with other images and literary sources. Interestingly, such methods still form the basis for much of the analysis being conducted over genre imagery.² She asserts that this induction into symbol identification was useful in that it also provided the insights needed to help her move away from this established practice.

It was not until Salomon began writing the essays in her second set, grouped here as "re/visions," that her thinking became influenced by feminist theory. She particularly acknowledges her debt to European feminism and semiotics, especially the pioneering studies of scholars like Griselda Pollock and Mieke Bal. Therefore, these essays, all of which deal with the household paintings of Jan Steen, attempt to define the discursive significations of domesticity and woman in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. Importantly, she turns now from obvious identifications to creative semiological investigations of space in relation to the female figure. She moves from a limited methodological practice centered mainly on art to "reading" images as part of an entire visual culture. In particular, the last essay of this section, "Jan Steen and the Invention of the Modern Woman," analyzes Steen's painting *Morning Toilet* as a formulation of the sexualized subject denoting modern, urbanized identity. She contends that through the discourse of both the past and contemporary popular culture, Steen creates a new signification of woman:

The modernity of this fashionable young Woman as a sign of

contemporary urban bourgeois society is thus identified through the scopically displayed evidence of consumption. The construction of that modernity is built on a series of interconnecting visual references that are retained as memory but are inflected and refashioned in what is ultimately an image very different from the various works that inform it. These histories are referentially pieced together and crafted into a new "whole," which takes on a variety of quite different implications (73).

In the final three essays, which she calls "tele/visions," Salomon becomes overtly feminist in her stated goals. Indeed, the phrase "tele/visions" is used to indicate the significant connections between seventeenth-century social, political, and psychoanalytical dimensions and those of our own time. The first essay discusses the bordello scene as a multi-dimensional sign that helped shaped definitions of male versus female, and insider versus outsider. According to Salomon, the popularity of the bordello image was linked to the beginnings of Dutch national identity formation that began to promote a type of sexual tourism and that also asserted the presence of female power over men. The second essay continues with the structuring process of the signs of masculinity and femininity in relation to domestic space via the fatherhood prints of Adriaen van Ostade. She claims that these unusual situations of men in the home performing domestic tasks were experiments that eventually failed in the prescribing of normative gender roles in

the Dutch Republic. Then, in an appropriately unifying return to her roots, Salomon's final text traces the development in Vermeer's art away from the sexual signification of woman to her use as sign for civility. She concludes this essay with a declaration that encapsulates both the trajectory of her theoretical development and her modern feminist aims:

As the heirs of early modern ideologies and their communicative structures, we welcome the opportunity to permit his (Vermeer's) paintings and their exhibition to channel communication between and among us. His works allow us to tell each other about ourselves by giving color and form, both literally and figuratively, to our values and feelings. Here, too, we can shift endlessly between the sensuousness of the paint and the women, their glistening eyes and moist lips, to the cool, controlled order of the rooms, the light and pictorial design that forever locks the figures in their environment... Vermeer allows us to find ourselves through his paintings as sexual and civilized beings (116).

This text is valuable to Dutch seventeenth-century art historical studies not only for its analyses of several genre images, but also because it should help to establish as significant a theoretical model that diverges from those still used by many scholars in treating genre imagery. For many years, two predominant approaches have guided the understanding of these works. The first views them as mirrors of daily life that celebrate the verisimilitude achieved through the craft of the oil paint medium. The second involves a decoding of the objects to reveal underlying meaning and usually revolves around identifying moral lessons of virtue and vice. While there have been some attempts at poststructuralist and feminist interpretation, they have not had a profound impact on the field as a whole.

It is for this reason that Salomon devotes a great deal of her discussion to liberating herself from the morality functions of genre imagery. While she

does not disallow the validity of the iconographic methods, she greatly enriches the interpretive possibilities for these images. Even more specifically, those of us with feminist interests in this field can only hope that this text will engender future discussion. Early initiatives on feminist inquiry of gender and seventeenth-century Dutch genre imagery did not gather much momentum. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard's important first collection of feminist writings, *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (1982) contained two essays dealing with gender and genre, by Svetlana Alpers and Frima Fox Hofrichter, that established an important foundation for future studies.³ A few scholars took up the challenge of feminist inquiry,⁴ but without the hoped-for impact. (As evidence, Broude and Garrard's last two anthologies contained no essays on seventeenth-century Dutch art). An attempt to redress this lack of attention to feminist studies in Northern European art history appeared in *Saints, Sinners, and Sisters: Gender and Northern Art in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (2004), a collection of essays edited by Jane Carroll and Alison Stewart.⁵ It remains surprising, however, that a field which would seem ripe for feminist study—particularly in terms of subject matter—has been so slow to adopt such analyses. Thus, feminist theoretical models have evolved very slowly in seventeenth-century Dutch art historical studies compared to nineteenth- and twentieth-century or even Italian Renaissance and Baroque studies. Salomon's text undoubtedly could help the field begin to establish a theoretical model on which other feminist scholars can build, and from which to provide new critiques.

In light of this demonstrated need for a feminist paradigm in the field, it would have been helpful if Salomon had provided an even broader theoretical discussion of her feminist agenda. While the ten-page introduction is useful as a prologue to her own personal journey, it does not detail the theoretical contributions of scholars like Pollock and Bal whom she credits as contributing to her development. Introductions to each of her three

sections also would have been useful, with indications as to the date and theoretical thrust of each essay and some discussion of how each essay corresponded to her notions of pro/visions, re/visions and tele/visions. Creating these perspectives would have allowed Salomon to elaborate on specific contributions by other feminist scholars, furnishing further evidence for her own conclusions. For example, Pollock's discussions of painted architectural space as a socially inscribed sign reflecting acceptable gender behavior in a patriarchal society obviously influenced Salomon's readings of Steen's paintings and emerging definitions of domesticity and femininity.⁶ Equally important to these interpretations must have been Bal's various readings of the nude female form as a series of male-produced signs.⁷

As the book is primarily concerned with Salomon's shifting theoretical models, it also would have been interesting to understand how Salomon situates herself vis-à-vis other feminist theorists. Is she an anti-essentialist who views woman as merely a socially and politically produced sign? How does she react to the theories proposed by scholars like Homi Bhabha, who suggest that women, as a marginalized group, had the potential to resist the types of male signifying she suggests are present in genre painting?⁸ How does she view her interpretations in relation to much of 1990s feminist scholarship which proclaims a greater agency for women historically than Salomon seems willing to acknowledge? With definitions of domesticity at the heart of so many of her analyses, I was curious about her views on various anthropological studies which suggest that our modern concepts of this construction are Victorian in origin and do not particularly describe earlier or non-Western conceptions.⁹ If this is so, modern feminist views of the domestic sphere as a powerless domain of low status may not be an accurate sense of the perspective of seventeenth-century men or women. Indeed, as she briefly intimates in the essay on bordello scenes, Netherlandish women generally appear to have enjoyed a rather authoritative reputation. How, then, would such

women have regarded the images she asserts were attempts at limiting their power? Most of Salomon's readings appear to assume a male viewer, although it is in no way certain that viewers of Dutch genre imagery were predominantly male.

This last consideration points to the rather significant general omission of a seventeenth-century female perspective in Salomon's text. She concludes that most of the definitions regarding signs such as "woman" and "domesticity" were male constructions, as if women had no input into the discourse. It is important to acknowledge, however, that some of the earliest renderings of the woman in the home were created by female artists such as Judith Leyster and Geertruydt Roghman. It is surprising that a text on gender lacks emphasis on female creators of genre imagery. Moreover, Roghman's prints are known to have influenced the perceptions of male artists that followed, as is obvious from their domestic paintings.¹⁰ This female perspective is significant for Salomon's conclusions, as it takes place at the important mid-century moment that she associates with a genre imagery shift from sexual to civil. Thus, it would seem paramount to further consider the effects of both female viewing and female creation in relation to genre imagery.¹¹

These are not so much criticisms of the text as they are suggestions for further feminist inquiry. It is important to keep in mind while reading Salomon's text that this is not intended as a survey of the subject. The essays were separate studies united through Salomon's personal theoretical development and feminist journey. It is both beneficial and informative to have a number of her important essays published together in a handsome paperback volume with almost a hundred clearly produced black and white images.

Salomon's project was courageous in view of the criticism it will likely engender in a field not yet enamored of poststructuralist or feminist theory. It is to be hoped that her contribution will demonstrate the enlightening possibilities for future scholarship in the field and will bring its feminist contributions into the wider arena of general art history. •

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Notes

1. Nanette Salomon, "The Venus Pudica: Uncovering Art History's 'Hidden Agendas' and Pernicious Pedigrees," in Griselda Pollock, ed., *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London: Routledge, 1996), 69-87; "The Art Historical Canon: Sins of Omission," in Donald Preziosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 344-55.
2. One can find many such interpretations in Wayne Franits's recent *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting: Its Stylistic and Thematic Evolution* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2004).
3. Frima Fox Hofrichter, "Judith Leyster's Proposition—Between Virtue and Vice," and Svetlana Alpers, "Art History and Its Exclusions: The Example of Dutch Art," both in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 173-81 and 182-99.
4. For a discussion of both the sparseness of feminist studies in the field and a list of the few scholars that have been pursuing these investigations see Mariët Westermann, "After Iconography and Iconoclasm: Current Research in Netherlandish Art, 1566-1700," *Art Bulletin*, 84, no. 2 (2002): 361 and n. 90.
5. Jane Louise Carroll and Alison G. Stewart, eds., *Saints, Sinners, and Sisters: Gender and Northern Art in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).
6. Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), 50-90.
7. For examples see Mieke Bal, *A Mieke Bal Reader* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006).
8. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
9. See for example Louise Lamphere, "The Domestic Sphere of Women and the Public World of Men. The Strengths and Limitations of an Anthropological Dichotomy," in Caroline B. Brettell and Carolyn F. Sargent, eds., *Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1993), 67-77; Henrietta Moore, *Feminism and Anthropology*, (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1988).

10. For examples of such compositional borrowings by Jacobus Vrel, Pieter de Hooch, Caspar Netscher and others, see my, "Domesticity in the Public Sphere," in Carroll & Stewart, eds., *Saints, Sinners, and Sisters*, 44-73; see also my "Geertruydt Roghman and the Female Perspective in 17th-Century Dutch Genre Imagery," *WAJ*, vol. 14, no. 2 (Fall 1993/Winter 1994): 3-10.

11. For further discussion of a female perspective on domesticity and domestic genre imagery see Svetlana Alpers, "Picturing Dutch Culture" and Elizabeth Honig, "The Space of Gender in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting," both in Wayne Franits, ed., *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art*, (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 57-67 and 187-201; and 187-201; and my "Domesticity in the Public Sphere."

Miss Angel: The Art and World of Angelica Kauffman

by Angelica Goodden
Pimlico, 2005

Angelica Kauffman: Art and Sensibility

by Angela Rosenthal
Yale University Press, 2006

Reviewed by Heidi Strobel

Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807) achieved a remarkable degree of international success. The Swiss-born artist became a member of the Academies in Florence and Bologna (1762), Rome (1765), and London (1768) while still in her twenties. Her patrons included aristocrats and royals in multiple European countries. Kauffman was particularly adept at garnering the support of powerful women, including Lady Bridget Wentworth, and Queen Charlotte of England and her mother-in-law, Princess Augusta of Saxe-Gotha. Lady Bridget, wife of the British Resident in Venice, encouraged Kauffman to leave Italy for England, where royal support heralded a new level of artistic achievement. In London Kauffman's circle included prominent



Fig. 1. Angelica Kauffman, *Zeuxis Choosing the Models for His Painting of Helen of Troy* (1775-80), oil on canvas, 32" x 44". Brown University Library, Providence, R.I.

male supporters, such as businessman George Bowles and Royal Academy president Joshua Reynolds, whose *Discourses* were intended to encourage a British school of history painting. Denied access because of her gender to the cornerstone of history painting, the life study class, Kauffman's prodigious production of works in this genre is all the more remarkable.

In *Angelica Kauffman: art and sensibility*, Angela Rosenthal examines "issues of subjectivity and the artful formation of identities" in the portraits and history paintings created by this eighteenth-century artist (3). Rosenthal's definition of portraiture as an evolving social and cultural practice allows her to question how the dynamics of this genre are altered when a woman is its practitioner rather than its subject. Furthermore, she argues that Kauffman's subjective approach to history paintings reveals how she fashioned a feminine identity in an overwhelmingly masculine art world. In her investigation, Rosenthal focuses on "how Kauffman negotiated—through composition, figural style, narrative codes, choice of subject matter, and her allegorical and mythological self-fashioning—the public and presumed masculine pursuit of painting, and her role as woman artist and arbiter of

private taste" (3). This approach underscores new and novel aspects of Kauffman's self-fashioning in the age of sensibility when domesticity and sentimentality characterized the ideal eighteenth-century female.

In 1781, the Danish Ambassador to London, Count Gottlob Friedrich Ernst Schönborn, described Kauffman's popularity, stating that "the whole world is angelicamad." One could say the same thing about recent art-historical scholarship on the Swiss artist, who has been the subject of five exhibitions and seven texts (including the two monographs under review) in the last fifteen years. While previous book-length studies of Kauffman have accomplished the important task of historical recovery, they lack the theoretical rigor of Rosenthal's writing.¹

Rosenthal begins her introduction with an analysis of Kauffman's history painting, *Zeuxis Choosing the Models for His Painting of Helen of Troy* (1775-80; Fig. 1), which familiarizes the reader with the concept of female agency. In his quest to paint the world's most beautiful woman, Zeuxis peruses four variously posed models. A fifth model, who is located close to Kauffman's signature, picks up the artist's tools and moves towards the canvas. According to Rosenthal, this

figure represents Kauffman's proxy: a female who takes an active role in the creation of art. Like Rosenthal's text, Kauffman's innovative approach examines the role of a female as maker, rather than merely subject, of an artistic creation. Rosenthal enlivens the traditional monographic genre by organizing her chapters thematically, and she effortlessly weaves the ideas of eighteenth- and twentieth-century theorists such as William Hazlitt, Denis Diderot, Sigmund Freud, Judith Butler, and Julia Kristeva into her text.

In Chapter 1, "Penelope and the Weaving of Narrative," Rosenthal examines how Kauffman's experiences as a woman artist influenced her multiple images of Penelope, the heroine of the *Odyssey*. In at least six of her history paintings, Kauffman shows Penelope at her home, which for Rosenthal represents a creative locale under the heroine's control and highlights the role of female agency. Thus, Kauffman's images provide a space for alternative narrative, or the unraveling, of the diegetic *Odyssey*. Kauffman's frequent and unique paintings of Penelope also depict her as a pivotal figure whose savvy actions prepare the way for her husband's victorious return. Rosenthal describes these depictions as a type of artistic *écriture féminine*, featuring innovative and sometimes unruly artistic motifs as a means of combating the masculine art world. This point is supported by the observation that even in Kauffman's portrayals of Odysseus, Penelope retains a central role (24). Furthermore, Rosenthal suggests that Kauffman's Penelope also presents the art historian with a means of dismantling the traditional canonical narrative.

In Chapter 2, "Intersubjective Portrayal," Rosenthal investigates how the dynamics of gender affect the genre of portraiture. What happens when the tables turn, and men, who comprised a majority of eighteenth century portraitists, become the subject, and women assume the role of creator rather than subject or muse? According to Rosenthal, the portrait painter's studio was a social environment which sometimes became sexual as artists and

subjects exchanged prolonged gazes. The virtue of a female artist was especially suspect in these liminal locations, which were often part of her home. Prior to scrutinizing Kauffman's portraits, Rosenthal describes the way that other eighteenth-century artists, such as Elisabeth Vigée-LeBrun (1755-1842), circumvented the psychic tension of the portrait studio. Rosenthal's definition of portraiture as "an intersubjective process of self *production*, for the sitter and the artists, but also, potentially, for patrons and viewers that is unfinished, social, and ever-changing" (48), allows a contemporary reader to understand the historical context and reception of Kauffman's paintings in the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries.

The highlight of the second chapter is the analysis of Kauffman's portrait of the actor David Garrick, produced after the actor's 1764 visit to Naples. As Rosenthal points out, this painting was a particularly crucial one for the artist, as it was the first of Kauffman's works to be exhibited in England, predating her 1766 arrival in that country. Previous scholarship has noted that the informally posed portrait indicated the artist's familiarity with a Dutch, and more specifically, Halsian, component of British portraiture. The casual pose may also suggest the informal and "natural" style of acting that Garrick brought to the British stage. Unlike Reynolds's and Gainsborough's portraits of the actor, however, Kauffman's version is more austere, and without overt references to his occupation. According to Rosenthal, the sparseness of this painting provides the viewer with a more genuine and timeless depiction of the actor. Traditional gender roles have been reversed, however, for he is no longer in control of an audience, but is the subject of Kauffman's gaze. On January 20, 1767, Garrick published a poem to Kauffman in the *St. James Chronicle* which underlines the tension of this inverted relationship: "To Angelica, the celebrated Paintress, now in England, painting the Author's Picture/ While thus you paint with Ease and Grace,/ And Spirit, all your own;/ Take, if you please, my Mind and Face, But let my Heart alone" (67).

In "Sentimental Spaces," the third chapter, Rosenthal focuses on the studios of eighteenth-century artists, such as Gainsborough, Reynolds, and Kauffman, as a means of self-expression. She explores how Kauffman was affected by working in a malleable environment that blurred the boundaries between male and female, domestic and professional. In this transitional space, Kauffman developed innovative depictions of femininity and masculinity, as seen in her sensitive portraits of Garrick, Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1764), and Reynolds (1767). These images underline the intersubjectivity of portraiture, where a likeness conveys information about both the sitter and artist (107). Additionally, Kauffman's studios in Rome and London were primarily decorated with her own work, which served as a means of advertising her painting ability. Her visitors, however, might also hear her reciting poetry or playing music, skills that demonstrated the diversity and sensibility of this artist. Thus, this setting also "represent(ed) an ideal social and intellectual community, with Kauffman at its center, as its Muse" (91).

The fourth chapter, "The Inner Orient," is an exploration of Kauffman's portraits of women in Turkish dress, the majority of which were produced in the 1760s and 1770s. While these images reflect the eighteenth-century popularity of Turkish fashion, they present a primarily female utopian environment of female creativity, similar to Kauffman's studio or contemporary salon gatherings. These Levantine images were quite often commissioned by women, which reinforces the relationship between female agency and Kauffman's oeuvre. While Rosenthal contextualizes these paintings within the European *Turquerie* movement, she also provides a useful guide to the different parts of Turkish costume.

In Chapter 5, "Kauffman's Helicon," Rosenthal continues her examination of women as patrons and muses by focusing on several key royal and aristocratic figures who commissioned both history paintings and portraits. Recent art-historical scholarship has begun to focus on the phenomenon of female patrons encouraging female

artists such as Kauffman. Kauffman's paintings of her patrons and fellow artists, writers, and performers emphasize the creativity and intelligence of her subjects. According to Rosenthal, "these paintings reflect Kauffman's own desire to produce a circle of creative peers, and an exchange between the arts" (169-70). Like the artist's *Turquerie* paintings, this circle provided a space, real or imaginary, where women were not criticized for their participation in the masculine arenas of art, theater, and literature. For the émigré Kauffman, these paintings were also a way of creating an artistic genealogy and were evidently important to her, for she kept copies of them in her studio (170).

Rosenthal examines Kauffman's conceptions of gender in her portraits of male sitters such as Winckelmann, Johann Gottfried Herder (1791), and Antonio Canova (1795-96) in Chapter 6, "Civilizing Femininity." Although they are often described as androgynous, Rosenthal argues that these portraits "allowed the represented men to obtain an ideal image of themselves as virtuously cultivated" and thus, participants in the age of sensibility (221). She also considers a series of Kauffman's history paintings that feature cross-dressing, such as *Athena Taking Up Arms* (1768) and the *Ossianic Trenmor and Inibaca* (1772). Rosenthal concludes that Kauffman adopted narrative cross-dressing and activities in these paintings as a means of escaping traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity.

Rosenthal's final chapter, "The Image of Angelica," begins with a concise summary of the challenges—charges of dilettantism, limited access to educational institutions, and being the subject of satirical prints—that faced eighteenth-century female artists and authors. While the latter might use a preface to explain their reason for writing, their sister artists more likely used self-portraiture as a way to validate their participation in the masculine world of art. This was an important genre for Kauffman, who produced more than twenty self-portraits and numerous copies of them (231-32). These portraits are not merely likenesses, but also reveal her reactions to the aforementioned challenges. The pinnacle

of this chapter is Rosenthal's analysis of one of Kauffman's self-portraits, *La Speranza or Hope* (1763), which was submitted to the Accademia di San Luca in Rome upon her election to this institution. According to Rosenthal, this practice followed artistic tradition and signaled Kauffman's professional pedigree, but its allegorical language also tempered the artist's potentially threatening participation in the masculine world of art. This reasoning is supported by Kauffman's use of allegory in other images such as *Self Portrait between the Arts of Music and Painting* (1794-96) and *Queen Charlotte Awakening the Genius of Fine Arts* (1768).

While Rosenthal's text, which focuses on Kauffman's professional years, is best-suited for an academic audience, Angelica Goodden's biography, *Miss Angel: The Art and World of Angelica Kauffman*, is intended for a more general one and chronicles the artist's entire life. Her purpose is to discern whether Kauffman's fame came from her skill or from her exceptional status as a successful professional female artist (9). Although a conventional biography may seem old-fashioned in the postmodern world, Goodden argues that hers is a valid way of assessing Kauffman's accomplishments in a male-dominated field. Surprisingly, Goodden uses several outdated conventions in her text, such as referring to Kauffman by her first name throughout the text and employing chapter titles such as "Pretty Women" and "The Sweetness of Life." Furthermore, her ultimate conclusion that "Angelica" "was a remarkable painter who did not belong to the first rank of artists" seems both conservative and contradictory (327).

The strongest chapters in Goodden's book focus on Kauffman's financial success and her relationships with family and friends. In the second chapter, she describes the close relationship between the artist and her father, Johann Joseph Kauffman, a journeyman painter. Goodden's account of Johann's neglect of his wife and son in the pursuit of his daughter's training is particularly fascinating. The next three chapters, "A Little German Paintress," "Italian Journeys," and "Celebrity and Scandal," describe Johann Kauffman's strategy for

his daughter's professional debut. His promotional efforts, coupled with his daughter's talent and ambition, resulted in Angelica's commercial success in England and Italy, which is the focus of the sixth, seventh, and eighth chapters of the biography. The eleventh and twelfth chapters provide a full and engaging analysis of Kauffman's Continental friendships with fellow Germans such as Goethe, Herder, and Anna Amalia von Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach. In her concluding chapter, Goodden introduces, but does not expand upon, the enticing idea of Kauffman, who was skilled in both fine and decorative arts, as possibly the first female creator of an artistic *Gesamtkunstwerk* (336).

While a theoretical approach like Rosenthal's is not always necessary in a modern biography, Goodden's text frequently lacks cogent analysis. She uses vague terms to describe Kauffman's work, such as "an aura of individuality" and "decorum," which also seem to be catchall explanations for Kauffman's professional and personal choices (128, 157). Furthermore, her descriptions of Kauffman, who "prosper(ed) by virtue of being a female artist of whom certain things would not be expected and in whom certain things would be more or less easily tolerated" are similarly unsatisfying (177).

On the other hand, there are only a few deficiencies in Rosenthal's text. A clearer definition of the key concepts of subjectivity would be helpful, especially for those readers who are unfamiliar with feminist scholarship. Her arguments would also be reinforced by a discussion of Kauffman's Neopolitan commissions of the 1780s and 1790s (although this omission may be due to extensive consideration by other scholars). As if to make up for Rosenthal's lack, the ninth and tenth chapters of Goodden's biography provide a thorough examination of the artist's time in Naples. Overall, however, *Miss Angel: The Art and World of Angelica Kauffman* is similar to the gossipy eighteenth-century diary of Joseph Farington and, as such, seems (anachronistically) part of an older generation of Kauffman scholarship.

Rosenthal's text offers critical contributions to the field of eighteenth-century studies, the study of Kauffman, and some

of her lesser known contemporaries. Frances Reynolds (1729-1809), Catherine Read (1723-78), and Anna Dorothea Therbusch (1721-82), for example, receive sorely needed scholarly attention in *Angelica Kauffman: art and sensibility*. Furthermore, Rosenthal's definition of portraiture as an intersubjective and unfinished process provides the reader with a tantalizing concept that surpasses mimesis. *Angelica Kauffman: art and sensibility* is generously illustrated, theoretically rigorous, and its English publication provides a vital synthesis of the most avant-garde English and German scholarship on this remarkable and timely artist. •

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NOTES

- 1 The most recent retrospective, "Angelika Kauffmann: A Woman of Immense Talent" (Bregenz, Vorarlberger Landesmuseum, June 14 - November 5, 2007), marked the bicentennial of Kauffman's death. The exhibition in Bregenz provided a broad overview of Kauffman's oeuvre while the simultaneous exhibition at the new Angelika Kauffmann Museum in Schwarzenberg focused on the artist's relationship to this Austrian village in the Bregenz Forest where her father was born. (Schwarzenberg was her father's birthplace, but Kauffman claimed it as her own, portraying herself in native costume at least three times during her life.) Contributors to this exhibition catalogue include Rosenthal, renowned Kauffman scholars Wendy Wassyng Roworth and Oscar Sandner, and Waltraud Maierhofer, who published critical editions of the artist's letters in 1999 and 2001. Kauffman has also been the focus of exhibitions in Brighton and Milan (1992), and Chur and Munich (1998). Contributors to these exhibition catalogues include Roworth and Bettina Baumgärtel, who, along with Sandner and Peter Walch, have provided the first critical analyses of the artist and her position in the Neoclassical movement. Rosenthal's previous publications include English and German articles on Kauffman, as well as *Angelika Kauffmann: Bildnismalerei im 18. Jahrhundert* (1996), which focuses on her portraits. Previous book-length studies of Kauffman include those by Frances A. Gerard (1892); Victoria Manners and G.C. Williamson (1924); and Dorothy M. Mayer (1972).

Tempo, Tempo! The Bauhaus Photomontages of Marianne Brandt

by Elizabeth Otto
Jovis Verlag, 2005

Reviewed by Melissa A. Johnson

Photomontage has become synonymous with the modernity of the 1920s. Mention of the medium brings to mind the wide-ranging work of the Berlin Dadaists John Heartfield, Raoul Hausmann, and Hannah Höch, the Hannover Merz of Kurt Schwitters, and the Constructivism of László Moholy-Nagy, El Lissitzky, Alexandr Rodchenko, and Gustav Klucis, to name only some of the best known individuals. (There was also the enormous commercial output of graphic designers.) For these artists, photomontage constituted an important and central focus of their practice; for others it was more marginal. Yet as the legitimacy of photomontage has been recognized, so has the importance of these images. Photomontage was not central to the practice of Marianne Brandt (1893–1983). Throughout the years of the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) design formed the core of Brandt’s production, and she was extremely successful: the teapots and lamps she designed at the Bauhaus today are icons of modernist design. Brandt studied with Moholy-Nagy in the metal workshop beginning in 1924, and when her teacher left the Bauhaus, Brandt became the workshop’s acting director. After leaving the Bauhaus in 1929, Brandt worked first in furniture and interior design in Walter Gropius’s Berlin studio, and then, from December 1930 to 1932, in metal design with the Ruppelwerk Metal Products Factory in Gotha. Yet during her first year at the Bauhaus, and continuing until 1931, Brandt constructed a body of highly sophisticated, dynamic photomontages that resonate with the social, cultural, and political events of the Weimar era. These montages have, until now, remained relatively unknown, but the 2006 exhibition at the International Center for Photography (ICP), “Tempo, Tempo! The Bauhaus Photomontages of Marianne

Brandt” and the accompanying catalogue have provided a welcome and significant introduction to Brandt’s work in this medium.¹ Elizabeth Otto, assistant professor of art history at the State University of New York at Buffalo, curated the exhibition and wrote the catalogue.

Otto makes it clear that she views Brandt’s practice as a means to work through both personal issues and formal aesthetic concerns. Brandt, trained as a painter, was so impressed by the first major exhibition of the Bauhaus in Dessau in 1923 that she renounced painting and resolved to enroll at the Bauhaus. The first two photomontages Brandt made were entirely abstract and clearly reflect the influence of Moholy-Nagy’s teachings. No photomontages by Brandt exist from 1925, but in Paris while on leave from the Bauhaus, from July 1926 to April 1927, she turned again to montage, and over the following six years she produced forty-eight additional works.² Three small photomontages she made in Paris speak to a more personal nature, for they contain specific autobiographical references. In each of these—the two-sided *Bull – Ass – Monkey* and *Modern Idols*, and *Can One... His Fate* (all 1926)—Brandt pasted snapshots of herself, her husband, Erik, and her sister, Susanna Liebe. She also incorporated handwriting and appropriated text into the works that, along with the snapshots, speak to the relationship among the three. Subsequent photomontages are less autobiographical and instead refer more broadly to cultural, social, and political issues that were having an impact on Brandt. While Otto makes specific connections between these larger issues and Brandt’s personal life, she also demonstrates how Brandt worked through formal concerns related to her Bauhaus studies and to broader currents in graphic design and International Constructivism.

The decision to stop creating photomontages in 1931 may have had something to do with Brandt’s new job at Ruppelwerk, but we do not know, as the artist said very little about her work in photomontage. Otto’s quotation of Brandt’s one extant statement, made in 1967 to Bauhaus historian Eckhard

Neumann, bears repeating: “Why I ‘produced’ this kind of thing is difficult to know now. Why does one paint? And naturally (or probably) Moholy’s photomontages stimulated me. Who knows? Not me” (6). As frustratingly short and recalcitrant as this statement is, it is all Otto has from Brandt to find meaning in the photomontages. Yet, of course it is not all she has; Otto also has Brandt’s photomontages, the writings of contemporary cultural critics, and the photomontages of other artists, many of whom Brandt knew personally. Through the exhibition and the catalogue, Elizabeth Otto offers a lively and fascinating account in which Brandt’s photomontage oeuvre is brought together for the first time, thus deepening our understanding and appreciation of the cultural productions of the Weimar Republic, and, in particular, of women artists working during this time. Otto’s accomplishments are to be commended, and I want to make very clear how highly I regard her work. I will, however, raise some questions regarding aspects of how Brandt’s work was presented in this exhibition and the accompanying catalogue, and point to what I feel are some shortcomings of the exhibition catalogue’s format.

The exhibition was located on the lower level of the ICP in two rooms painted red and white. All of Brandt’s photomontages were hung at eye-level, except for the double-sided *Bull – Ass – Monkey/Modern Idols* (1926), which was displayed in a frame atop a podium, allowing the viewer to walk around the work. The exhibition commenced with the photomontages hung in chronological order, beginning with the first two entirely abstract photomontages that Brandt made at the Bauhaus in 1924—*Montage I* and *Montage II*. It then continued with the three small autobiographical works and several others from 1926, but then jumped to 1929, and from there zigzagged back and forth among the various years through 1931. These jumps prompted me to look for Otto’s curatorial intention, but this hanging order never was made clear. Informational wall texts provided a brief description and interpretation for each montage, and for those desiring more information, a copy of the catalogue was



Fig. 1. Marianne Brandt, *Es wird marschiert* (On the March) (1928), photomontage of newspaper clippings. Reproduced with permission from the Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin, and the Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr, Dresden.

on hand. Photomontage, in general, demands careful looking, and Brandt's are no exception. Visually striking, they at first bring to mind Walter Benjamin's observations on Dadaist photomontage. Benjamin wrote that the Dadaists valued their work for "its uselessness for contemplative immersion" and the "destruction of the aura of their creations."³ In both, he noted, the Dadaists anticipated the shock effects of film. Dadaist photomontage, like film, "became an instrument of ballistics. It hit the spectator like a bullet, it happened to him, thus acquiring a tactile quality."⁴ Though Brandt was not a Dadaist, her relatively large and highly graphic photomontages provide this initial visual and tactile jolt. Our gaze does not settle easily in just one place, rather, as Benjamin quotes Georges Duhamel, we "can no longer think what [we] want to think. [Our] thoughts have been replaced by moving images."⁵ Only with attentive examination do the complex combinations of images—the layers, cut edges, different media sources—become apparent. This is somewhat paradoxical, of course, because the point of much 1920s photomontage, Brandt's included, was to reflect the chaotic and ephemeral nature of modernity. Brandt's photomontages both reference and reject Dadaist practices at the same time. They seem simultaneously

to invoke, yet halt, the perpetual movement of 1920s modernity to provide a means of analysis. Upon the image-filled surface of her photomontages Brandt often provided a central figure, or sometimes several figures, gazing out at the spectator, offering a locus of contemplation and entry into the photomontage.

Tempo Tempo!, the catalogue, is beautifully produced, with side-by-side texts in German and English. Its main elements are a preface, an introductory essay, individual catalogue entries with descriptive texts, color plates for each photomontage (except for two known solely through black and white photographs), the first full biographical account of Brandt's life, and a catalogue raisonné. An intriguing, but entirely unaddressed, last page is an undated "collection of word- and phrase-cutouts from the 1920s." It is curious and quirky, and I want to know more.

In her short introductory essay, Otto sets up the theoretical framework that she will use to address each photomontage. She explains that she will examine Brandt's photomontages in relation to Walter Benjamin's work on allegory, Siegfried Kracauer's critique of Weimar culture in relation to female mobility and *flânerie*, and László Moholy-Nagy's theories of the formal properties of

photographs and his interest in Alois Riegl's theories of the haptic and optic. It is Otto's contention that these played an important role for Brandt and thus will help her to illuminate the subjects she pictured: the militarization of technology, the engineer, the speed of modern life, and stereotypes of gender, both male and female (12). With these frameworks in place Otto turns to discuss the photomontages.

Otto works to convey the nuances and complexities of each photomontage, and as we read each entry the reproduction is in front of us. This is especially helpful with photomontages that are extremely detailed or that contain aspects we may not readily grasp through reproduction, and Otto draws our attention to both. In *Untitled (with Anna-May Wong)* (1929), for example, Brandt mounted pieces of glass and celluloid onto the surface to emphasize issues of spectacle, temporality, and depth in two-dimensional media. This three-dimensional aspect, so important to an understanding of this work, becomes flattened through reproduction. By honing in on the individual work Otto helps us to attend to the details, and thus bring a critical and contemplative eye that allows for an understanding and analysis of each work. Her interpretive analyses also provide what Otto aptly refers to as "a constellation of ideas" that permits her to range over a broad array of topics (9). What Otto achieves is a vignette of each work in which she closely describes the work's formal qualities, and depending on the length of the entry, uses the theoretical framework set up in her introduction.

In several instances, focusing on each work in isolation becomes a disadvantage, as Otto can not fully weave together and address the thematic and conceptual aspects she sets forth. A number of the entries are very brief, and in these Otto's writing is mainly descriptive. To be fair, at times she does dig in and connect formal and conceptual issues across different works and refer to other artists and other photomontages within the individual entries, but the degree to which she does this is limited by the segmented format of the catalogue entries. I would have preferred a single long essay, accompanied by a catalogue

with brief descriptive entries, for this would have allowed Otto to group the works together conceptually and to explore the constellations of thematic and formal concerns as they appear in Brandt's photomontages.

Otto's command of her subject is perhaps best demonstrated by her utilization of Walter Benjamin's writings on allegory as an interpretive framework. She handles this skillfully and so offers an example of how a longer essay might have allowed her to provide a more sustained examination of Brandt's work. After introducing Benjamin on allegory in her introductory essay, she returns to the subject in her extended discussion of the photomontages *On the March* (1928; Fig. 1) and *Good Day, Lady/That's the Way the World Is* (1929). As Otto explains, allegorical works are "those that have a surface or superficial meaning, but also a deeper significance. Different from symbols, the fragments in allegorical works do not lend themselves to immediate interpretation, and they always remain ambiguous" (12). Otto sees specific resonances between Benjamin on allegory and Brandt's work, and she notes that photomontages such as Brandt's are especially suited to an allegorical reading for they comprise fragmented images from contemporary culture that also refer to the past. These fragments, when pieced together into new constellations, can, through an engaged, yet contemplative viewer, give knowledge of the future. In both *On the March* and *Good Day, Lady/That's the Way the World Is*, a female figure functions as allegory and Brandt references concerns that faced the Weimar New Woman; Otto points out how Brandt also has turned back to the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth century prints of Albrecht Dürer.

On the March presents the female figure as a New Woman, or more specifically the fashionable *garçonne*, but Brandt removes her from the mass media context and, in Otto's words, "activates this *Garçonne* and makes her melancholic gaze historically relevant" (98). Otto then relates her pose and gaze to the figure of Melancholy in Dürer's *Melancholia* (1514), a work to which Benjamin also refers in his *Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928). The Dürer

and Brandt have much in common: pose, figures, and details of landscape. These commonalities allow Otto to bring them together and interpret Brandt's photomontage as an allegory in which the main female figure possesses knowledge about world matters, yet is incapable of effecting any change. Likewise, Brandt's photomontage, *Good Day, Lady/That's the Way the World Is*, has at its center an allegorical female figure—a "nostalgic ideal of femininity" rather than a New Woman—surrounded by contemporary males, four wearing suits and one wearing running clothes (108). Otto relates the female to the allegorical Christian figure of "Frau Welt" (Dame World), and again to Dürer, this time to his engraving *Fortuna* (c.1500). Brandt's "Frau Welt" is Dürer's *Fortuna* in reverse, notes Otto (109). If the winged *Fortuna* "stands on a globe and floats above the world," "Frau Welt" has the weight of the world on her head and holds a dove—a symbol but not an instrument of peace (108). This is the status quo, states Otto, and she relates this photomontage to the difficulties Brandt experienced at the Bauhaus as acting director of the Metal Workshop. As a woman Brandt was constantly challenged by her male colleagues, friends included, as to her fitness for a job traditionally held by men. Like her female allegory, Brandt had made it to the top but was trapped by old-fashioned, bourgeois notions regarding femininity and the place of women.

If Benjamin on allegory functions for Otto as the theoretical framework in which to locate meaning in Brandt's photomontages, László Moholy-Nagy's fotoplastiks and his teachings at the Bauhaus provide Otto with an aesthetic and formal framework. Moholy-Nagy was one of Brandt's teachers, but he was also a colleague and good friend, and it is clear that he had an enormous impact on her. In his courses Moholy-Nagy emphasized the importance of Alois Riegl's notions of the haptic and the optic, and Otto demonstrates how Brandt incorporated these ideas into her photomontages. This is perhaps most explicitly addressed in Otto's entry on *Contrasts – Structure, Texture, Fracture* (1928). Otto also discusses the influence of Moholy-Nagy's fotoplas-

tiks, in which he often positioned a few figures in an expanse of white space and connected the figures with lines. Except for her earliest compositions, Brandt's photomontages also are characterized by an expanse of space in which figures, or clusters of figures, are suspended, sometimes along a diagonal axis, or grouped into inverted pyramids or dynamic constellations. Sometimes this space is white, but Brandt also used dark colors such as olive-green, gray, or black. *With all Ten Fingers* (c.1930) has two figures placed in a large field of white: a kneeling woman with uplifted arms at the lower left, and a businessman at the top right. Connecting lines between them make it appear as if the man is manipulating the woman like a marionette. Otto reads this photomontage as a way for Brandt to "problematize the predicament of women in the unstable conditions of the last years of the Weimar Republic" (114). Like other historians of photomontage, Otto has researched Brandt's source images. The female image was taken from a *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* cover depicting a woman auditioning for an acting role, and Otto places the image and related article in the context of the late 1920s crisis of the *Angestellten* (white-collar workers), when an economic depression caused workers, male and female, to lose their jobs. The phrase "with all ten fingers" refers to a fully capable individual, but in this photomontage the capable woman is rendered helpless. Otto again makes connections between Brandt's photomontages and her personal life: just as at the Bauhaus, Brandt had to prove herself capable of performing her job at the Ruppelwerk metal factory, where she had begun working in December 1929.

That Otto draws on Benjamin and Moholy-Nagy—skillfully and to great effect in her account—is to be praised; their work is well suited to an interpretation of Brandt's photomontages, and Otto's discussions are extremely persuasive. Puzzling, however, is Otto's claim in her introduction that Siegfried Kracauer's writings will form a significant framework for an understanding of Brandt's photomontages in relation to female mobility and *flânerie* (12). In her entry on the photomontage *Parisian Impressions* (1926), however, where Otto

addresses these topics, not once does she mention Kracauer. This is disappointing, for Kracauer's writings on Weimar mass culture are rich in this respect and could have been used to great effect.⁶ Furthermore, Otto could have utilized Kracauer's insistence on interpreting the "inconspicuous surface level expressions" of a culture over the major political or cultural events in conjunction with Benjamin's work on allegory and his characterization of an allegorical work as one having a "surface or superficial meaning, but also a deeper significance" (12).⁷ Otto does refer to Kracauer in her discussion of three of Brandt's photomontages, including *This Is How We Live* (1926) and *Behind the Scenes* (1927). The discussion she begins in her entry on *It's a Matter of Taste* (1926) is, to my mind, the most interesting. Here she points to how Kracauer, in *The Detective Novel: a Philosophical Tractatus* (1925), presented the detective novel as a reflection of the 1920s. Otto writes that he "emphasized the importance of the arrangement of objects as a narrative device. In both the genre of the detective novel and Brandt's montages of this period, mere *things* situated in imagined spaces become *clues* that punctuate the story and lead to our understanding" (49). Unfortunately, Otto ends her entry with this statement and does not return to this idea in her discussion of other photomontages, for it is a persuasive way to think about this medium that seems to fit well with her interpretations of Brandt's other works.

I am aware that in her doctoral dissertation Otto provided an extended and sophisticated discussion with links between Brandt's photomontages and the theoretical frameworks she sets up in the introduction to *Tempo Tempo*—how, for example, Benjamin framed a discussion about the "breaks and blank spaces" found in avant-garde photomontage as moments of abstraction that defy direct, symbolic interpretation so that the allegorical work remains open.⁸ It is likely, therefore, that her summary treatment in the catalogue is the result of editorial restrictions and space limitations. Her introductory essay to the catalogue seems too short and the individual entries too isolated for her ideas to be played out fully. Yet despite this, the exhibition at the

ICP and the catalogue are both wonderful introductions to the photomontages of Marianne Brandt, and, despite the shortcomings of the catalogue format and the lacuna with respect to Kracauer, it is clear that Otto holds a sophisticated grasp on Brandt's work. Perhaps I am too hungry for what I sense Otto is capable of: a sustained and complex account of Brandt's photomontage work. We are offered a preliminary taste in the catalogue and exhibition. I look forward to Otto's future publications on Brandt's photomontages, for these are works that engage with an ongoing dialogue between scholars of German culture and art historians around the importance of photomontage, the history of the Bauhaus, and the role of women during the interwar years in Europe. •

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NOTES

1. The exhibition originated at the Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin (Oct. 12, 2005 – Jan. 9, 2006), then traveled to the Busch-Reisinger Museum at Harvard University (March 11 – May 21, 2006), and finally to the ICP (June 9 – Aug. 27, 2006).
2. All of the photomontages from 1926 would have been made while Brandt was in Paris, as well as a number from 1927. Brandt appears to have focused her energies on photomontage most intently during the time she was in Paris: she made 15 in 1926, 8 in 1927, and 9 in 1928. The numbers diminish after this: 4 in 1929, 5 in 1930, and 1 in 1931.
3. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), 237-38.
4. *Ibid.*, 238.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Otto could have culled from any number of Kracauer's essays—"Travel and Dance" (1925) or "The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies" (1927)—come to mind, for the critic's thoughts on the increasing and, in Kracauer's mind, problematic mobility and presence of the New Woman.
7. Kracauer's phrase, the "inconspicuous surface level expressions," is from his essay "Mass Ornament," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 75.
8. Elizabeth Otto, *Figuring Gender: Photomontage and Cultural Critique in Germany's Weimar Republic* (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2003), 9.

Paths to the Press, Printmaking and American Women Artists, 1910-1960

edited by Elizabeth G. Seaton
Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art,
Kansas State University, 2006.

Reviewed by Marilyn Symmes

Books on American women print-makers are still relatively few. The innovative graphic work of celebrated women artists, such as Mary Cassatt (1844-1926), Blanche Lazzell (1878-1956), and Louise Bourgeois (b. 1911), are well documented in easily available publications. The careers of lesser known graphic artists are not as well known, however, and as they often are featured in monographs, articles, and catalogues issued by dealers and regional museums, they are not widely available. *Paths to the Press, Printmaking and American Women Artists, 1910-1960* competently addresses this scarcity with an admirably researched catalogue that features five essays; excellent biographical summaries for eighty-three artists, with illustrations for each and interpretations of one or two prints, and a selected bibliography; and an appendix citing 400 women print-makers active in the United States during this period. Anyone who has had difficulty obtaining information about under-recognized twentieth-century print artists such as Ida Abelman (1910-2002), Pele DeLappe (1916-2007), Sue Fuller (1914-2006), Marion Greenwood (1909-70), Riva Helfond (1910-2002), or Margaret Lowengrund (1902-57), to name just a few, will applaud the achievement of Elizabeth G. Seaton, the editor and primary author.

Although this book is an exhibition

catalogue of prints derived predominantly from the Chicago-area private collection of Belverd and Marion Needles, it is an invaluable, pioneering contribution to scholarship on women printmakers.¹ One need only to consult this 261-page volume (with 67 color and 155 black- and-white illustrations), generously populated with detailed footnotes, to learn about American women printmakers—how they developed their careers, where they exhibited their prints, their participation in etching societies and print clubs, their vital role in teaching printmaking in different regions of the country, as well as how their prints contributed to depictions of daily life and abstraction. The entire book also contextualizes prints by better-known artists, such as Isabel Bishop (1902-88), Bourgeois, Cassatt, Dorothy Dehner (1901-94), Mabel Dwight (1875-1955), and Louise Nevelson (1899-1988), within a broader national graphic arts spectrum, and those by regional artists such as Caroline Durieux (1896-1989) of Louisiana and Janet Turner (1914-88) of California.

Seaton's introduction, "Connecting Paths, American Women Printmakers, 1910-1960," begins by citing the first major American institutional exhibition devoted exclusively to prints by women. In 1887, the Boston Museum of Art presented "Women Etchers of America," a display of 388 prints by twenty-three artists. Apart from an expanded showing in New York the following year, it was not until decades later that another American museum would undertake such a large-scale, national exhibition. Thus, Seaton develops a brief history of women's creative and technical role in American printmaking by connecting various personal and professional accounts. Many early women artists learned printmaking informally from another artist or by experimenting on their own, since formal classes existed sporadically until 1922, when Joseph Pennell established a printmaking program at New York's Art Students League. For example, in 1879, Mary Nimmo Moran (1842-99) was encouraged to try etching by her artist husband, Thomas Moran, and a year or so later, her proficiency was recognized when she became the first female

member of the New York Etching Club. In the 1890s, Chicago-based Bertha Jaques (1863-1941) sought color etching advice from printmaker Helen Hyde (1868-1919), who later went to Japan to learn traditional color woodcut process, and whose Japanese-inspired color woodcuts subsequently influenced American printmakers. Despite this historical prelude, Seaton explains that "1910" was chosen as the formal beginning for the book's survey because it was the date when Bertha Jaques co-founded the Chicago Society of Etchers, which avidly promoted printmaking as a fine art.

During the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration-Federal Arts Project (WPA-FAP) provided printmaking opportunities for many women artists, a number of whom are represented in this book (e.g., Ida Abelman, Riva Helfond, Claire Mahl Moore [1912-88], and Elizabeth Olds [1896-1991]). Outside the WPA, others like Wanda Gág (1893-1946) and Clare Leighton (1898-1989) managed to sell their prints and obtain book illustration commissions. The remainder of Seaton's text sets up the other essays, which further highlight the work and careers of dozens of twentieth-century American women printmakers, who are also featured in the individual entries.

The second essay, "Color and Line, Early Twentieth-Century Printmaking and American Women Artists" by Belverd E. Needles, Jr. and Christopher Mack, addresses America's revival of printmaking as a fine art. The authors summarize previous scholarship on the revival of etching and color woodcut processes, including the aesthetic influence of traditional Japanese prints and Arthur Wesley Dow's inspired teachings and writings. Their historical account emphasizes the graphic innovations by Moran, Cassatt, Jaques, and Hyde as well as Edna Boies Hopkins (1872-1937), Bertha Lum (1869-1954), Peggy Bacon, the Gearhart sisters (Frances [1869-1958] and May [1872-1951]), and the group of women artists active in Provincetown, Massachusetts, from around World War I to the 1930s—all of whom helped to increase the visibility of women printmakers.

Mark B. Pohlad's essay, "Workmates and Soulmates, American Women Printmakers and their Relationships with Men" begins by asking, "What is to be gained by examining women printmakers' relationships with male peers, teachers, lovers, and spouses?" Since printmaking is fundamentally a collaborative process, Pohlad argues that undertaking such an examination is essential for understanding women's participation and history in the medium. Among the notable women artists who benefited from male mentors, he cites Cassatt and June Wayne (b. 1918). Cassatt learned intaglio processes from Edgar Degas and Marcellin Desboutsins starting in the late 1870s and went on to make admirable drypoints and color aquatints. Beginning in 1948, Wayne's professional relationship with lithography printer Lynton Kistler provided the creative and technical support for her own lithographs. She went on to found the Tamarind Lithography Workshop in Los Angeles in 1960, later renamed the Tamarind Institute (which relocated in 1970 to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque). This printmaking studio played a key role in revitalizing contemporary lithography by inviting painters and sculptors to work in the medium, as well as training many of today's leading master printers. In between, through the WPA-FAP, approximately 200 women artists gained access to printmaking workshop equipment in several major cities, where they were able to share technical information with male artists and be financially supported as equals.

The second half of Pohlad's essay examines the impact of marriage on the careers of women printmakers. Some, like Wanda Gág, believed that "two [married] artists would get along just horribly.... Why, we would be forever criticizing each other's work" (39). Peggy Bacon spoke charitably of her twenty-year marriage to fellow artist Alexander Brook, declaring, "We helped each other a great deal in our work.... [W]e worked together and we pooled our resources and we brought up the kids together" (39). Others, including Jaques, Helfond, Hopkins, and Gene Kloss (1903-96), enjoyed the support



Fig. 1. Pele DeLappe, *Street Scene* [Market Street, San Francisco] (1937), lithograph, 16 1/2" x 9". Collection of Belverd and Marion Needles. Photo: Jim Prinz.

(financial and emotional) of husbands who understood their artistic needs and even, on occasion, assisted in their printmaking efforts.

Pohlad describes the collaborative art partnerships and marriages of Elizabeth Catlett (born 1915) and her second husband, Francisco Mora, a Mexican painter and printmaker; the Chicago-based printmakers Eleanor Coen (b. 1916) and Max Kahn; and Bernarda Bryson (1903-2004) and social realist artist Ben Shahn. Bryson-Shahn's experience is a typical one. Prior to the 1936 birth of the couple's first child, she had capably managed the lithographic workshop for the Resettlement Administration in Washington, D.C. Afterwards, she managed to continue her own creative pursuits but only after helping her husband with his art projects and caring for the children (43-45). While Bryson-Shahn's work recently has had some attention, Ben Shahn's career has

been amply documented.

Other women featured in the book struggled similarly to balance art careers with traditional expectations of a wife and mother. The talented wood engraver Grace Albee (1890-1985) managed to evolve her art career despite the encroachment of motherhood—she had five sons—and household chores. Barbara Latham (1896-1989) (married to painter Howard Cook), and Marguerite Zorach (1887-1968) (married to sculptor William Zorach), each produced a striking body of prints, albeit in the shadow of her husband's career. Minna Citron (1896-1991) opted for divorce in order to devote herself more fully to her work. Generally, though, Pohlad conveys that women's interactions with male colleagues, teachers, printers, and partners often provided them beneficial access to the professional art world.

Helen Langa's essay has a tantalizing title, "Bold Gazes, Lively Differences, Women Printmakers' Images of Women," and she opens with some intriguing questions:

What does it mean to be a woman artist? Are there obvious or subtle gender-inflected ways in which women encounter the world around them differently than men? If so, how might such differences shape the way women artists record their perceptions?... To what lengths did they have to go to demonstrate professional equality with men? And in what ways could they, at the same time, revel in the positive qualities that marked them as both female and feminine in a gender-divided culture? (51)

This author identifies provocative thematic categories exemplified by women's prints: "women's faces as social symbols," "representations of motherhood," "artists at work and other workers," and "aspects of modern social life." Anticipating a vigorous discussion of various approaches and answers to her questions, this reviewer was dismayed when Langa's text failed to grapple with the issues she raised. Additionally, some of the prints she cited—selected from the 104 catalogue entries in the book—did not serve well to illustrate her themes and

points. For example, Langa only partially explores representations of motherhood, a topic which has been richly represented by many printmakers, both female and male. She interprets several prints, including Hyde's color woodcut *The Bath* (1905), showing a Japanese mother tenderly holding her infant above a wooden tub, Dorothy Rutka's (1907-85) *Striker's Wife* (c. 1937), and Blanche Gramb's (b. 1916) *Mother* (1936), both bleak black-and-white portrayals of poor working class women (55). Langa does not allude to the broader context of prints depicting mothers and children, notably by Cassatt, other images by Hyde, or Catlett, each of whom created iconic images of maternity; neither does she offer insights into what is distinctive about women printmakers' depictions of motherhood. In the category she designated as "aspects of modern social life," Langa cites an atypical pair, Cassatt's *In the Opera Box* (1878-80) and Maud Hunt Squire's (1873-1954) *In a Beer Garden* (c. 1910), to exemplify images of women alone in a public setting; both depict a past era, so neither truly characterizes how later women printmakers portrayed modern women. For images depicting groups of women, Langa discusses Barbara Latham's 1943 print of Red Cross volunteers folding bandages, Doris Lee's (1905-83) 1942 print showing women preparing Thanksgiving dinner in a rural kitchen, and Minna Citron's lithograph, *Dress Circle, Carnegie Hall* (1936), among others (59-61). Again, many other prints by Bacon, Bishop, Citron, Durieux, Mabel Dwight (1875-1955), and others—for example, Pele DeLappe's 1937 *Street Scene* (Fig. 1)—would have conveyed more convincingly how women artists vividly capture (or evoke) scenes of modern life. Moreover, it would have been instructive to compare women's prints on various subjects with specific prints by their contemporary male artists such as George Bellows, Adolf Dehn, John de Martelly, Reginald Marsh, John Sloan, or Raphael Soyer. It is left to future scholars to explore these questions further as well as the contributions of women printmakers to the graphic arts history of landscape, city views, or satire (all subjects amply represented in this book).

"Running the Presses, Women Printmakers as Teachers, 1945-1960," an outstanding essay by Cori Sherman North with Susan Teller, recounts for the first time women's major role in disseminating printmaking knowledge in various regions of the country. As the authors note, nearly three-quarters of the women represented in the catalogue taught art, and approximately half taught printmaking, including some who founded printmaking departments. For these women, teaching was either integral to their careers or provided income to support their own creative pursuits. Prior to World War II, there were few places outside of New York where printmaking was taught. Among these were Rhode Island School of Design, where Eliza Draper Gardiner (1871-1955) taught, and Cleveland School of Art, where Bryson-Shahn studied. The authors emphasize the WPA's role in encouraging women to learn printmaking, particularly lithography and screen printing. In the 1940s, Stanley William Hayter's Atelier 17 workshop, which had relocated to New York from Paris, became a center for both men and women modernists—including Sue Fuller, Worden Day (1916-86), and Louise Bourgeois—to learn and experiment with intaglio printmaking. Fuller went on to teach printmaking at universities in Minnesota and Georgia as well as in New York at Pratt Institute and Columbia University Teachers College; Day taught in various educational institutions in Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, and Wyoming. North and Teller describe the influential graphic arts teaching of, among others, Blanche McVeigh (1895-1970), who promoted printmaking in the Fort Worth area; Constance Forsyth (1903-1987), who established the print department at the University of Texas; Caroline Durieux, Louisiana's WPA-FAP supervisor, who later introduced printmaking classes at Louisiana State University; Janet Turner, who established the printmaking program at California State University-Chico; and Sister Mary Corita (Kent) (1918-86), who taught printmaking in Los Angeles in the 1950s and 1960s. "The women in this exhibition [and catalogue] have had a remarkable influence on those who came after them through their teaching of printmaking and their

creating new printmaking environments for artists," the authors write. "These women forged new paths to the press for others, earning their places in the pantheon of American printmakers and art educators" (78).

While my overall response to this ambitious publication is definitely positive, I do have some quibbles. Although the title indicates the start of the survey as 1910, the book includes biographies of and works by several women printmakers active before that date (Seaton's game explanation to justify their inclusion notwithstanding). Coordinating essays and biographical material by multiple authors is always a challenge, so it is not surprising to find instances of repetitious overlap. The catalogue would have benefited from more rigorous editing to eliminate repetitions as well as to correct a number of factual errors and inconsistencies.² Overall, however, the general factual and art historical reliability of the text is not in dispute.

The addition of certain types of information would have enhanced the biographical entries, for example, the total number of the artist's prints (if known), whether the artist made her prints over the course of her career or during a specific period, and whether the artist was a prolific printmaker or made a few prints or small editions. Such additions would have augmented our understanding of the overall "population" of American prints.

The overall reproduction quality is good, although most of the prints are reproduced as a half page or smaller. Of nine full-page illustrations, six are feature details and three are photographs of artists at work. It was disappointing that, since so few of these prints created by women are known, there were not more of the larger reproductions, which could better have conveyed the creative achievements of individual artists, as well as providing a stronger visual survey of American women's printmaking history.

Despite these relatively minor criticisms, this informative book will long stand as a significant resource. It also provides a strong contextual foundation for future studies, especially

on the hundreds of American women printmakers active before 1960 who were not discussed. Among those women artists whose early prints are featured in *Paths to the Press* are some whose impressive creativity helped to define contemporary American printmaking since 1960, including Louise Bourgeois, Elizabeth Catlett, Ynez Johnston (b. 1920), Clare Romano (b. 1922), Ellen Lanyon (b. 1926), Deborah Remington (b. 1935), and June Wayne. I look forward to a similar, comprehensive history of women's contributions to printmaking post-1960. •

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NOTES

1. Between September 2005 and March 2008, the exhibition traveled to the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois; Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum, San Antonio; Louisiana State University Museum of Art, Baton Rouge; the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, Kansas State University, Manhattan, where the exhibition was organized and the catalogue published; and the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, New York.
2. For example, the subject of women printmakers involved in the WPA-FAP is discussed in four places (in the essays by Seaton, Langa, Pohlad, and North with Teller); also, similar information about several artists appears throughout the text (e.g., Moran's beginnings as an etcher intertwined with her duties as artist's wife and mother is covered in both Seaton's and Pohlad's essays, as well as in Moran's biography; likewise, similar information about Bryson-Shahn and Zorach appears in several places). Among the "oops" errors to be corrected: Ilya Bolotowsky (a man) is cited in the "Appendix of Women Printmakers active between 1910-1960" (251); and in Pohlad's essay, the name of a writer on Jackson Pollock is cited as married to him, instead of Lee Krasner (39).

June Wayne: The Art of Everything: A Catalogue Raisonné 1936–2006

by Robert P. Conway
Rutgers University Press, 2007

Reviewed by Donna Stein

June Wayne turned ninety this March, and it is fitting to have a grand catalogue raisonné to celebrate the life and work of this consummate artist. Few living American women artists have been the focus of the sustained study required by a catalogue raisonné. Moreover, while most books in this genre are assembled after an artist's death, here the biographers and compilers had the artist's full participation as well as access to her knowledge.

With more than 450 pages, this large, square-format book needs a table to rest on for comfortable reading. Agnes Anderson, the book's designer, realized its elegant production, which is carefully paced with an eye toward the scale and visual balance of each page and its many two-page spreads. Interspersed throughout the book are numerous pictures of the artist in her studio, excellent color reproductions, and details of specific artworks.

Part One includes two highly readable essays: *June Wayne en Collage* by her biographer Robert P. Conway, and *June Wayne: A Life in Work* by Arthur C. Danto, the philosopher and art critic for *The Nation*. This reviewer recommends beginning with Danto's brief essay. His astute discussion and understanding of this independent minded artist through the literary thread of her interests in Franz Kafka, John Donne, and Marcel Proust is brilliant. Independent scholar Robert Conway, former director of Associated American Artists print gallery in New York, tape-recorded interviews with Wayne over two years. He thoughtfully discusses individual aspects of her life and work—*Strange Moon*, *The Messenger*, *Sixti-Sexate* and *Anki*, *Visa Series* and *The Dorothy Series*—never intending a comprehensive view. Instead, he illuminates various facets of her vision, her experimental working

method, and her consciousness of the past as well as engagement with the present. Conway's conception of Wayne's central theme as "the identity of the individual within a world of cosmic, social and genetic randomness" (11) is a profound distillation of her ideas.

Part Two contains the catalogue raisonné itself, a chronological listing of 478 paintings, drawings, prints, and tapestries, grouped according to thematic series and including reproductions of lost works. Virtually all the Mexico and WPA materials from the second half of the 1930s, for example, are known only from photographs. Against Wayne's better judgment, Conway also includes artworks that she consciously destroyed. Detailed entries contain complete technical information as well as an exhibition, collection, and publication history. The artist's comments for individual catalogue entries enrich the discourse and carefully decode the linkages between series and their related meanings.

The supplementary materials in Part Three comprise an excellent chronology with essential biographical data and numerous previously unpublished photographs, a compendium of public exhibitions, an extensive bibliography of writings about Wayne, and an impressive list of films, interviews, speeches, and writings by the artist.

It is clear from the catalogue raisonné that Wayne methodically maps out her ideas thematically. She pursues a subject in whatever medium is best suited to its realization, working on several images simultaneously, with each example expanding upon the other, like a conversation in time. She fully mines the expressive potential of an idea by editing, rethinking, remaking, reproofing, and reusing materials and objects, introducing color to a monochromic image or changing the scale. "I feel that when I have made an image, it's mine. It's part of my vocabulary, and I re-visit it until I have exhausted its possibilities," Wayne explains (208). "Sometimes I return to something that I meant to do and didn't get around to doing. I did that with *Nacelle* (1996)...I don't feel as though I'm going back to something, I feel as though I'm just finishing something that had unused potential" (401).

Wayne is an autodidact, having left high school to find her way in art. An avid reader, particularly of science and literature, her lifelong friendships with scientists and scholars have helped her create a body of work that does not easily fit into any standard art historical narrative. A drive through a Los Angeles tunnel awakened her curiosity about optical phenomena and became an exciting new focus for her work after a hiatus of several years during World War II. *First Tunnel*, a painting from 1947 later destroyed by the artist, was the first of many works to explore the tension between focal and peripheral vision and the illusion of movement. Wayne's paintings from 1946–47, of which mainly preparatory drawings remain, examined reflections, overlapping fields of binocular vision, optic effects in a static environment, and multiple foci and their intervening peripheries. Her 1947 self-portrait, the first of many produced over the decades, has two focal points and shows an awareness of Pablo Picasso's portraits from the late 1930s. *Strange Moon* (1951) and related formal experiments anticipated Op Art by more than a decade.

Among the discoveries of great importance stimulated by the catalogue raisonné is the extent to which literature has had an important impact and influence on Wayne as a source for allegory, style, symbols, and techniques. While she never illustrated specific details of Kafka's writings, Wayne, who began reading the author in her early teens, kept *The Trial* and *The Castle* with her from the time she left Chicago in 1939. Kafka's specificity, each word "as hard and precise as a diamond" astounded her and made her want to achieve something comparably economical with her images (98). Beginning in 1948, Wayne immersed herself in Kafka's comical and menacing world, inventing her own style of narrative painting. She developed a symbolic lexicon of ideograms, some of which referenced his texts, which guided the eye according to a predefined storyline and sequence of forms moving in space. In the *My Palomar* portfolio of nine abstract lithographs from the mid 1980s, we see Wayne still interested in

controlling the scanning eye of a spectator by animating the movement of a square along a sine curve.

Another book cited as having an enormous impact on Wayne was art historian Sir Herbert Read's allegorical novel, *The Green Child*. Not only did she refer to the protagonist Olivero in her Donald Bear Series (1953) and the acrylic and styrene paintings of her later Quake Series (1995), but her use of crystalline grids and tessellation in the early 1950s, especially in lithographs, drawings, and paintings like *The Bride*, *The Suitor*, *The Advocate* and *The Dreamers* from the Justice Series, derive from Read's notions of truth, beauty, and the perfection of crystals.

In the mid 1950s Wayne began to work with philosopher Abraham Kaplan on a portfolio of fables combining his texts and her lithographs. Although never completed, that project led her to a profound engagement with the poetry of John Donne through a famous recording by the English actor Christopher Hassall. *John Donne Songs & Sonnets: Lithographs by June Wayne*, her only *livre d'artiste*, was completed in 1958, after an intense and fulfilling experience working in Paris with the French master printer Marcel Durassier. This extremely beautiful book, illustrated with romantic and moody lithographs, provided the research, technical knowledge, and inspiration that propelled her in 1960 to establish Tamarind Lithography

Workshop, devoted to the revival of the art of lithography in America.

After Tamarind was transferred to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque in 1970, Wayne began collaborating with three of the finest traditional French tapestry weavers, transforming compositions first realized in lithographs such as *At Last a Thousand* (1965) and *Verdict* (1970; Pl. 14) into a grand scale. From this process she learned that "it's harder to believe something that's human scale: better to scale either much bigger or much smaller" (212). Based on full-scale cartoons, the twelve exquisitely wrought tapestries executed over a five-year period demonstrate the power and majesty of her style and Wayne's lifelong commitment to collaboration.

In retrospect, Wayne's esoteric artistic interests now seem prescient. She repeatedly addressed the human condition through the great themes of our times: scientific subjects such as genetics, astrophysics, planetary gravities, and atomic particles; natural phenomena such as tidal waves, winds, and earthquakes; gender roles from a feminist viewpoint; and the nature of justice and the visual expression of passion through the veil of literature. As a young woman during the Great Depression and a witness to the McCarthy era, Wayne was inspired by her family's political awareness and absorbed their humanist values. In her defining role as an artist in society, she transformed complex subjects into

visions of beauty. It was only with the last entry in her catalogue—*Sects in the City* (2006)—that Wayne summoned all her technical skill and wit to create an explicitly political work of art addressing the separation of church and state.

Another insight gained from the catalogue is that collaboration with highly skilled artisans and technical experimentation are two recurring trends in Wayne's long career. Not only does she exhibit impeccable technical control in her work, but it is evident in her commentary that she has especially enjoyed pushing the possibilities of whatever medium she employs. Her quick mastery of lithography under the initial tutelage of Lynton Kistler, beginning in 1948, influenced her painting, disciplined her experience with color, and ultimately transformed her life.

Wayne's public personae are well known, particularly her roles as an important advocate for the arts and as the founder and director of Tamarind Lithography Workshop. But first and foremost, June Wayne is an inventive, intellectual, and passionate artist, and in this superb catalogue raisonné, we finally see the trajectory of her ideas and feelings across media and time. •

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The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson: Constructing a Legend

edited by Brooke Kamin Rapaport;
essays by Arthur C. Danto, Brooke
Kamin Rapaport, Harriet F. Senie, and
Michael Stanislawski
The Jewish Museum of New York, 2007

Reviewed by Mona Hadler

A major and long-overdue retrospective of Louise Nevelson's work opened at The Jewish Museum in New

York City in the summer of 2007. This commanding show and its important catalogue go a long way toward recontextualizing Nevelson's elegant, challenging, and, in its own way, problematic production. Her work (and she herself) accrued a great deal of fame during her lifetime, rising to near-canonical status during the late fifties and sixties, with major benchmarks of success: a spate of one-person shows in New York to critical acclaim, the purchase of *Sky Cathedral* (1958) by the Museum of Modern Art in 1958, an exhibition at the American Pavilion of the 1962 Venice Biennale, and a retrospective at the

Whitney Museum of American Art in 1968. This work, however, has always fit uncomfortably within the dominant discourses of the history of post-World War II art, and the critical literature on it has dwindled dramatically in recent decades.

During the fifties, in the heyday of abstract painting, Nevelson was twice marginalized—as a woman artist and as a sculptor. Her preference for wood over welding contributed yet again to her sidelining. Similarly, in the sixties she was too elegant, relational, emotional, and self-referential for the cooler Minimalists, as works such as *Mrs. N's Palace* (begun

1964) suggest. And these very elements—perhaps above all her elegance—led yet again to her marginalized position in feminism, where the privileging of the transgressive and the body has held sway. It is time now, however, to reconsider her art in the light of a wealth of writing on the construction of identity, the masquerade, women and Minimalism, Minimalism itself, the role of sculpture in the late-twentieth century, Jewish identity and the issue of biography, feminism and psychoanalysis, public sculpture—the list grows.

The fine essays in this catalogue address many of these problems and begin a welcome reassessment of Nevelson's position in these various discourses. Brooke Kamin Rapaport, curator of the exhibition and the catalogue's editor, characterizes its four essays as follows: her own considers Nevelson's independent iconography, Michael Stanislawski uses the artist's biography as a window into her self-conceptualization, Arthur C. Danto examines the use of monochrome color in modern art, and Harriet Senie places Nevelson's outdoor sculpture in the context of the public art movement of the seventies (xvi). As a coda to the texts, three contemporary artists, Chakaia Booker, Mark di Suvero, and Ursula von Rydingsvard, attest to the continuing influence of this towering figure.

Rapaport is to be credited for conceiving this timely project that forces us to reconsider Nevelson's production. Her essay, "Louise Nevelson: A Story in Sculpture," presents a broad overview of the artist's work, tracing biography, iconography, influences, working procedures, materials, and reception. While benefiting from Nevelson's autobiographical memoir, *Dawns and Dusks* (1976), edited by Diana MacKown, as well as the research of prior authors, such as Arnold Glimcher, Laura Lisle, and Laurie Wilson, Rapaport's essay is peppered with new information and insights, the results of her own in-depth research. For example, in a small but intriguing aside, she credits Hans Hofmann with introducing Nevelson to the "discipline" of using black and white (219)—a refreshing break from his ubiquitous "push and pull" dogma. The thrust of Rapaport's thesis has to do with

autobiography and, in her words, "the singular ability to endow formal abstractions with a life story—her own" (3). She ends the essay's last section, titled "Return to the Self," with an imaginative reading of Nevelson's late work, *Mirror-Shadow VII* (1988), as a summation of the artist's life's work, capped by an inward-facing, yet empty, chair.

Stanislawski, a professor of Jewish history at Columbia University, problematizes the notion of the "self" in his valuable essay, "Louise Nevelson's Self-Fashioning: 'The Author of Her Own Life.'" He addresses issues of the construction of identity in *Dawns and Dusks*, which was culled from taped interviews recorded by MacKown. An expert on autobiography, he positions the conceit of Nevelson's self-fashioning between two literary traditions: one involving the denial of the importance of one's own history (as Nevelson wrote on the book's title page, "this is not a biography, this is a gift"); the other, the postmodern "denial of the very existence of the 'self'" (36). In the end, he places her self-conception squarely in the camp of "High Romantic" modernist notions of the creativity of the lone artist.

We can, however, reposition Nevelson's writings and public persona within the feminist discourse of the masquerade and construction of identity, as Anne Wagner did with Eva Hesse's journals and Georgia O'Keeffe's work.¹ We are left to consider further how this discourse affects our reading and reception of the works themselves or provides a framework for engaging the seemingly endless photographs of the artist adorned with her signature eyelashes. A particularly evocative medley of such photographs, by noted artists ranging from Lotte Jacobi to Robert Mapplethorpe, introduces the book and problematizes, in its own way, the issue of the body, identity, and the masquerade.

As a scholar of Jewish history, Stanislawski understandably leaves the visual ramifications of this probing of identity to others, making room for continuing work in this area. He concentrates instead on correcting repeated historical misconceptions in the literature. He enumerates in his footnotes a long list of what he sees as particularly egregious ones

(222). In the text, he singles out errors that are significant for Nevelson scholarship on her family history. One that remains rampant among the progeny of Eastern European Jews living in the United States today is the assertion that Jews were forbidden from owning land in Russia. He counters that claim and verifies that for centuries Jews were the mainstays in the timber industry in Ukraine, a fact of significance for Nevelson's assertions about her father's history in the lumber business in Ukraine and his subsequent choice of profession in Maine. Stanislawski's much-needed corrections are of importance not only to biographers working on Nevelson, but also to those who may choose to view the family drama from a psychobiographical or feminist lens. In this respect, his essay opens the door, as well, to reconsiderations of the role of her Jewish identity in her work itself.² Indeed, some of her more effective public work in the seventies was created for houses of worship, including Temple Beth-El in Great Neck, Long Island, and St. Peter's Lutheran Church in New York City.

It fell to Harriet Senie, a historian of public art, to consider the thorny problem of Nevelson's public production, which, as she notes, has been "largely ignored by the art world or compared unfavorably with her museum work" (63). In her excellent essay, "Louise Nevelson's Public Art," Senie places Nevelson's work in the public art revival beginning in the late sixties. Her text engages various aspects of Nevelson's public production, distinguishes between public and private commissions, and traces their reconfiguration and re-siting over the decades, the result of the impact of materials, patronage, and post-9/11 directives to redesign urban spaces in line with new government-mandated safety measures. Senie's expertise comes into play in a fascinating discussion of the reconfiguration of Louise Nevelson Plaza in Lower Manhattan. The new design does not, in Senie's estimation, reflect the artist's original conception and is a prime candidate for assessing First Amendment rights in the realm of public sculpture (227).

Tracing her work through civic, corporate, and religious commissions, Senie concludes that Nevelson's sculpture, like that of many others, has been used as "an

emblem of urban renewal, enlightened corporate practice, and spiritual focus" (63). She attempts to find a place for Nevelson in a genre that ranges from once being "condemned as 'plop art' (an art object without any relationship to its site), or a misuse of art in the service of establishment powers" (63), to work created for specific locations which emphasizes the public component of public art and has, as we know, often been a tool for political engagement. Senie argues that Nevelson's commissions are not site specific, but they are adapted to the site through placement or configuration (64) and are an outgrowth of her ongoing engagement with sculptural environments.

By indicating Nevelson's position as the sole woman artist in the public art revival of the sixties, Senie opens the door to a discussion of gender in her work—a complex question for women who came of age prior to the Women's Movement. She nods to gender obliquely by quoting provocatively from *Dawns and Dusks*: "I found that in my hands . . . it [metal] was almost like butter—like working with whipped cream on a cake. I was using steel as if it was ribbon made out of satin."³ She addresses the issue more directly in her last paragraph, stating that Nevelson, "unlike her male counterparts" (64), was more involved in creating environments than art objects, and that her public sculpture continued this tendency. While feminist considerations form a subtext that awaits further scholarship, it is here, in Senie's concluding sentences, that she singles out the real strength of Nevelson's public sculpture as its environmental focus: Nevelson, Senie asserts, "thought like an 'intuitive architect' in terms of total setting" (64). These environmental considerations are a leitmotif in the artist's work, dating to her large indoor installations, such as *Moon Garden + One* (1958).

Danto profoundly engages the transformative, or alchemical, property of Nevelson's work in his important essay, "Black, White and Gold: Monochrome and Meaning in the Art of Louise Nevelson." He singles out the artist's early installations, such as *Moon Garden + One* or *Dawn's Wedding Feast* (1959; Pl. 15), which force one to "feel transfigured, as

one would have felt among the great monoliths of Stonehenge or the heads on Easter Island" (47). Beginning his essay with her exegesis on the properties of black, whose essence she calls alchemy (39), Danto muses on what that could mean in relation to monochrome. He concludes provocatively that it is not, in fact, about fixed symbolic meaning, but is meant to "induce a sort of alchemical transformation in work and viewer together" (39). Nevelson used black as a prompt for the imagination, in the way that black letters or black-and-white illustrations function on a page. Black is not sepulchral, but nullifies color in the service of the imagination. Black paint neutralizes color, as it does the wood itself, and in this way Nevelson's painted sculpture veers from the truth-to-materials ethos of the fifties, by which the aesthetics of the grain or woodiness came to the fore. Danto reviews here her uncomfortable fit with the critical discourses of her time: nodding to assemblage, countering formalist conventions and privileging emotionalism over a Minimalist aesthetic, yet remaining too mainstream for the identity politics of the seventies. But in the end, he concludes that it is the monochrome that distinguishes Nevelson's work and its ability to "divert the viewer from the surface of the components in an environment, to transform them and the environment into something like the stone gardens of Japan, a site of spiritual encounter" (47).

The issue here is not that Nevelson does not fit—a tired trope at best—or that she fits the lone-artist paradigm. By embracing Surrealism and Cubism, her early work grows out of the "mythic forties" in the manner of Louise Bourgeois, David Smith, and others, and furthers on some level the Abstract Expressionist quest for the timeless and tragic. The problem arises with her elegant signature style, which hovers somewhere between the denial of meaning, as in Smith's Cubis, and the embracing of the body evidenced by Bourgeois's abject language. It is this hybrid space that demands interrogation. Nevelson's work fits other contexts as well, including discussions of Cubism, Surrealism, assemblage, or the Duchampian tradition of the object—all

surveyed in Rapaport's essay. And her legacy points to the complexity of her artistic process. Comments by the three artists interviewed for this catalogue, Booker, di Suvero, and Rydingsvard, are peppered with references to found objects, painted wood, Minimalist qualities, and the artist's larger-than-life persona. To these, we can add the reminiscences—including a discussion of her influences on them—of the six artists featured in a video presented in the exhibition. For Jean Shin, Nevelson was the urban scavenger; Willie Cole likened her rhyming forms to jazz; R.M. Fisher pointed to her ability to invest objects with a new life; Jessica Stockholder found ordered systems in her work; Alice Aycock liked her architectural constructions; and Jonathan van Dyck pointed to her use of materials. Other artists weigh in as well. For Karin Giusti, a contemporary public artist, Nevelson is important for "her classical sense of order that borders on chaos. She builds with materials like a poet builds with words."⁴

With this important legacy, and her undeniable achievements, it is indeed time to revisit Nevelson's work. While many aspects of her practice bear further discussion, key among them is the question of the environment. Revisiting this experiential component of her work is an especially timely endeavor today, with the reemergence of a multitude of performative strategies. Danto in particular foregrounds this issue and discusses her alchemical environments, with their power to engage the viewer in a transformative and magical experience. In her own designated incarnation as the "grandmother of the environment,"⁵ Nevelson produces work that moves our focus from the object to the experience, from autobiography to reception. •

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Notes

1. See sections on Eva Hesse and Georgia O'Keeffe in Anne Middleton Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism in the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1996).
2. Jewish identity played a role in Nevelson's

self-fashioning. One chuckles at her retort to the advances of the French author, Céline. When she learned of his anti-Semitism, she observed that he was worth more to her dead than alive. Louise Nevelson, *Dawns and Dusks*, edited by Diana MacKown (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), 49.

3. Nevelson, *Dawns and Dusks*, 171. Gender issues surface in Laurie Wilson's discussion of royalty, marriage, and Nevelson's artistic practice of mocking the homemaker by reconfiguring furniture and planting row upon row of cooking utensils in her garden. See Wilson, *Louise Nevelson: Iconography and Sources* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1981), 126–27.
4. Karin F. Giusti, in conversation with the author, October 11, 2007.
5. Nevelson, *Dawns and Dusks*, 130.

The Sculpture of Ruth Asawa: Contours in the Air

edited by Daniell Cornell
University of California Press with the
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2006.

By Midori Yoshimoto

*I no longer identify myself as a Japanese or
American, but a citizen of the universe.*

– Ruth Asawa

Onion-like forms of various dimensions neatly align themselves along a vertical line as they hang from the ceiling (Fig. 1). Made of looped wires, these structures are transparent, some of them revealing smaller bulbous shapes within. In a photograph of Ruth Asawa's studio/home of forty years in San Francisco, dozens of such organic sculptures animate the ceiling of the living room, giving an impression that they grow like seaweeds in the ocean or orbit like planets in the universe. It seems natural that the creator of such a world of ethereal beauty considers herself a "citizen of the universe" who transcends earthly boundaries of race, nationality, and cultural difference.

Reflective of this belief, Ruth Asawa's (b. 1926) art and life have a universal appeal. Any reader—whether an art lover or a scientist—could easily find an inspirational quote or learn something of life by reading this joyful book. *The Sculpture of Ruth Asawa: Contours in the Air*

contains a medley of contributions from nine scholars who have carefully studied Asawa's art and life and written thoughtfully from multiple angles. In this era of art show saturation, one rarely finds an exhibition catalogue of such caliber and integrity. The book accompanied Asawa's first comprehensive retrospective exhibition, of the same title, which was held at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco in late 2006 and traveled to the Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, the following spring. In addition to fifty-two sculptures and forty-four works on paper, documentary materials such as notebooks and photographs on display further illuminated the artist's long and distinguished career. Daniell Cornell, the curator and catalogue editor is Director of Contemporary Art Projects at the de Young Museum, where fifteen of Asawa's wire sculptures have been permanently displayed in the lobby of the Education Tower since 2005.

This exhibition and publication comprise the first major efforts to reevaluate the art of Ruth Asawa, a California-born, Japanese-American artist who is best known in and around her home city of San Francisco. Even though her sculptures won major acclaim through some exhibitions and magazine reproductions in the 1950s, they were often regarded as craft or interior decoration and thereby excluded from art historical recognition. Emily K. Doman Jennings's insightful study, "Critiquing the Critique," provides a contextual analysis of Asawa's early critical reception. Citing several exhibition reviews from the mid-1950s, Jennings points out the overwhelming tendency to "classify Asawa's sculpture in relation to her ethnicity, gender, and process" and to overlook "her artistic concerns and stylistic ingenuity" (128). A January 1955 *Time* magazine review ("Eastern Yeast"), for example, referred to Asawa as a "San Francisco housewife," though comparing her with Isamu Noguchi and concluding that the two artists shared "one quality of Oriental art that Western artists often lack: economy of means" (130). Although stylistic affinities between Asawa and Noguchi may be worth further consideration, such a typical account bespeaks the art establishment's tendency to marginalize artists of ethnic

minority by typecasting them by their race before carefully examining their true artistic origins. While Noguchi and Asawa are Americans of Japanese ancestry, their artistic foundations were built firmly on Western modernism. Unlike Noguchi, Asawa has never even visited Japan, and her artistic core was nurtured in the liberal atmosphere of the now legendary Black Mountain College (BMC) in North Carolina immediately after World War II.

Throughout the catalogue, Asawa's education at BMC is emphasized in order to reclaim the artist as an American heir to European modernism. This rightful cause is most successfully achieved by Mary Emma Harris in a well documented essay about how Asawa came to the school, her courses and activities there, and what she gained from her three-year involvement with this exceptional creative community. Harris being a devoted BMC historian, she was able to interweave an otherwise straightforward narrative with freshly dug personal anecdotes and real details of BMC teaching. One gem-like anecdote has Asawa dancing with Robert Rauschenberg in Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* during Merce Cunningham's dance class. The essay is useful in understanding not only the process of Asawa's formation as artist, but also the creative pedagogical principles and methods practiced at BMC during its peak years. Asawa was one of the most promising students, absorbing every inspiration provided by such renowned European émigré teachers as Josef Albers and Buckminster Fuller, both of whom became her lifelong mentors. Her notebooks were filled with Albers's quotes, such as "Art experience is not merely a matter of painting, but mainly of seeing" (56). Many of her drawings and paintings done in Albers's classes are included in the exhibition and catalogue. After completing her studies, she married classmate Albert Lanier, an architect, in San Francisco, where their marriage was celebrated by many of their BMC faculty and friends. (Fuller sent a wedding ring that he had designed for them and had crafted by BMC students.) The couple's lifestyle—integrating art with their raising of six children—was a direct manifestation of the BMC philosophy about imparting students with the foundation for a lifetime of learning.

For Asawa, BMC was more than a school; it became more of a mother ship from which she embarked her own boat to explore the world. Moreover, it was there that she realized the importance of her East Asian heritage for the first time. Recalling Albers's influence, Asawa commented: "His whole teaching was Taoism, yin, yang, negative, positive, hot, cold... That's the whole basic study of the Japanese mind I think" (51). In a fascinating set of interviews the Smithsonian's Paul Karlstrom conducted with Asawa and Lanier, she also confirmed that ethnic minorities such as Asians and African Americans were treated very well inside the BMC community under its strong belief in egalitarianism. While Asawa has embraced this egalitarianism and believed in art's universal values, her formative experiences as a Japanese American, nonetheless, shaped the core of who she has become, as elucidated in an elegant essay by Karin Higa, curator of the Japanese American National Museum.

Ruth Asawa was born in Norwalk, California, in 1926, the fourth of seven children. As portrayed by Higa and in Jacqueline Hoefler's detailed biography, Asawa's childhood on a thriving family truck farm formed her laborious work ethic, which laid ground for her long artist's career. During World War II, Asawa's father was arrested by the FBI and taken to detention camps while family members were stripped of their possessions and sent to internment camps, first in Santa Anita, and then to Rohwer Relocation Center in Arkansas. Amidst the worst situation possible, Asawa adapted to making the best of what she had. She stated that she did not want to feel victimized by incarceration, but "wanted to be on top of it" (121). Luckily, she was able to learn drawing from interned Japanese American artists, some of whom had worked for the Disney Studio. Asawa's teachers at Rohwer further imparted to her creative thinking and methods, inspiring her to become a teacher herself. A scholarship from a Quaker organization allowed her to leave the camp in 1943 to study at Milwaukee State Teachers College. When she was told she would be never able to find a teaching position in Wisconsin because of her Japanese ancestry, she headed to BMC, where a few of her classmates at

Milwaukee had spent the summers.

The artist's career after settling in San Francisco is charted by both Hoefer and Cornell, whose essay focuses on her sculptural installations. The looped wire technique that Asawa learned from basket weavers during a stay in Mexico in 1947 opened the door to her career as a professional artist. At first, this work was not readily accepted by museums because of its unconventional hanging format. The 1950 San Francisco Art Association Annual Exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Art almost rejected her piece because it did not stand on its own. Once her hanging sculptures were reproduced on the cover of *Arts & Architecture* in 1952 and *Vogue* the following year, Asawa's exhibition opportunities dramatically increased. By 1955, the year after her first exhibition in New York, the Rockefellers and Philip Johnson, among others, were purchasing her sculptures. One factor that played a role in promoting Asawa's art was her collaboration with her friend Imogen Cunningham, the photographer. Cornell describes how Cunningham's evocative photographs of Asawa sculptures emphasized their contour lines against the background, often incorporating their shadows. While continuing to create hanging looped-wire sculpture, in the early 1960s Asawa began adding to her visual vocabulary with "tied-wire sculptures." Resembling bonsai trees or snowflakes, they are made by tying all the intersections with multiple wires.

In 1963 Asawa received the first of many commissions to create large public sculptures in the San Francisco area, and the last section of the catalogue sheds light on Asawa's work as a public art advocate through three essays written by colleagues and collaborators. Sally B. Woodbridge, who co-founded San Francisco's Alvarado School Arts Workshop with Asawa, details its history. They met when their children were attending the Alvarado Elementary School. Disappointed in the lack of good art classes, in 1968, the two parents proposed a volunteer-based community arts and crafts program to the school administrators. Asawa and Woodbridge ran the Workshop until 1973, raising public awareness for the need for art education. When the Workshop was discontinued, its spirit lived on in the U.S. government-funded CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act)

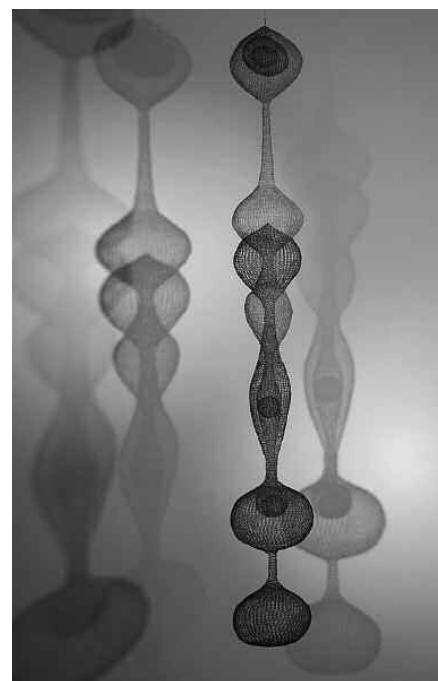


Fig. 1. Ruth Asawa, *Untitled* (c. 1955), iron and galvanized steel wire, 138" x 17" x 17".
Photo: Laurence Cuneo.

initiative, which John Kreidler discusses in his essay. Finally, Susan Stauter shares her experience of working with Asawa on the task force for the city's School of Arts.

A chronology and bibliography help round out the full picture of Ruth Asawa's richly varied career. Undoubtedly, the exhibition and beautifully produced catalogue were landmark efforts to secure her place in the canon of American art history, which excluded her for decades for both her identity as an Asian woman and her close ties to craft. This catalogue will serve to give weight and purpose to Asawa's lifetime of creative experimentation and formal explorations with form, color, and materials. Her signature looped wire works demonstrate visual affinities with the void sculptures of Moholy-Nagy, mobiles of Alexander Calder, and akari lantern series of Isamu Noguchi. Perhaps this introduction to her art will inspire further examination and place her art firmly among that of her contemporaries. •

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Betye Saar: Extending the Frozen Moment

Essays by James Cristen Steward, Deborah Willis, Kellie Jones, Richard Cándida Smith, Lowery Stokes Sims
University of California Press and
University of Michigan Museum of Art,
Ann Arbor, 2005

Reviewed by Robin Rice

In 1923, three years before Betye Saar's birth, the United States Senate voted to authorize a national monument to the "Faithful Colored Mammies of the South." Although protests by the African American press happily derailed the project, Betye Saar in a sense finished it almost half a century later (25). Against a backdrop of pancake packaging, Saar's iconic assemblage, *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972), enshrines a ceramic "collectible"—a grinning, pop-eyed "Mammy" with a broom in one hand and a rifle, thoughtfully provided by Saar, in the other. In the foreground is yet another vintage caricature of a jaunty, almost flirtatious Mammy, one arm balancing a wailing white child against her corseted hourglass waist. In her forty-year career, Saar has often reprised her groundbreaking appropriation of "Mammy" and of other racial stereotypes with incisive and witty revision. In works like *Black Crows in the White Section Only* (1972), a wood-framed window divided into nine leaded panes with various print images mounted under the glass, and *Blackbird* (2002; Fig. 1), which includes a framed photograph of schoolchildren in 1911 taught by Saar's great aunt, she simply allows the derogatory images to speak for themselves.

Saar's work involving photographs, snapshots, studio portraits, advertising, and other print materials is the subject of "Betye Saar: Extending the Frozen Moment," the exhibition organized by the University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor. While not a full-scale retrospective, it is a fine opening to a broader consideration of Saar's contributions. With work in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and



Fig. 1. Betye Saar, *Blackbird* (2002), mixed media assemblage on vintage blackboard, 23 1/4" x 23 1/4" x 2 3/4". Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Henry D. Gilpin Fund, 2005.6.

other permanent collections, this artist surely merits continuing study. From Michigan, "Extending the Frozen Moment" traveled to the Norton Museum in West Palm Beach, Florida, and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia (PAFA), where I saw it. Saar's work with photographs tends to be small. Lights in the PAFA galleries were dimmed to protect evanescent materials. This shadowy context and the necessity of getting close to see subtle details enhanced the sense of literally looking into the past to retrieve fading memories, simultaneously beautiful, nostalgic and searingly painful.

The catalogue for the show includes essays and thoroughly annotated photographs of the works in it. In most of these images the artwork is silhouetted on the gleaming white page without background or border, a strategy nicely calculated to emphasize the object-ness of collages and assemblages. (Installations are appropriately shown in situ.) Frames and boxes used by Saar are brought into view in a manner that underlines their active roles, but, unfortunately, not all the reproductions are first rate.

The Band at The Libya (2002) is a real violin collaged with a photocopy of a picture taken in The Libya, a posh Harlem restaurant owned by "Robert

Keys, the second husband of Saar's great-aunt Hattie," and other nearly flat materials, like the gilt book spine running along the back of its neck (131). The curvy violin shape is emphatic in a catalogue reproduction that captures many of the qualities of vintage photographs. However, one of those qualities, a pervasive brownish tone, seems to have invaded this and other reproductions, to their detriment, muting Saar's canny use of color in works like *Bittersweet* (Bessie Smith) (1974). *Bittersweet* is composed in an open hinged box. In the compartment, deep red velvet roses, paler red silk flowers, pink feathers, green leaves, beading, and a jeweled brooch encircle a faded sepia photograph of two young women in elaborate headdresses. Their finery is slightly reminiscent of the fancy crown worn by the smiling "Empress of the Blues" in a handbill pasted inside the lid of the box. In a characteristically meticulous and insightful catalogue entry, Exhibitions Assistant Kate Derosier Weiss, writes, "Like many of Saar's boxes, this piece acts as both a shrine and a coffin" (106).

Saar often uses real clocks to suggest the passage of time and did so in *Bittersweet*. Unfortunately, the white clock surround reproduces as light grey (107), an indication of how much the

color throughout the reproduction is compromised. In a detail of the same work, colors seem marginally fresher (21). Only a small portion of the reproductions suffer from this murky filtering. Taken as a whole, the catalogue is a pleasure to see as well as to read.

In an introductory statement, Saar writes, "When the camera clicks, that moment is unrecoverable. It is gone yet remains, frozen in time and space on a piece of paper. The photograph can reveal many things . . . and yet it still has secrets. There is a mystery with clues to a lost reality." She presents her use of found materials and the ideas suggested by them as "an alternative reality" which is both "an unraveling and a piecing together" (9).

Exhibition curator and director of the University of Michigan Museum of Art, James Christian Steward, discusses Saar's subject matter in the essay "'Lest We Forget': The Liberating Art of Betye Saar." He begins with a dualism in the work of Jules Lion, "a freeman of color," whose 1840s New Orleans daguerreotypes depicted both low minstrel-show stereotypes and the realities and aspirations of black life (13). An artist of Irish, Native American, and African American ancestry, Saar mostly focuses on black life. Like Lion, she incorporates high and low and positive and negative aspects in her work. Steward lauds her "continuing engagement with images of racial stereotyping. . . . [and her work's] power to dispel stereotypes, unravel personal histories, and signify the spiritual potency of the past" (12). In addition, "Saar creates something whole in a healing act," Steward writes, and by "rummaging through American society's collective attic [is able] to create haunting visions that suggest both the tragedy of a fragmented history and a way forward, one that is recombinative and that merges the personal with the collective" (15). He concludes that her use of objects and images associated with suffering is shaman-like in its healing power (17).

Saar has long been a collector of old photographs and incorporates her own family photographs in a few works. She was one of the first artists in the 1960s to appropriate advertising imagery. Steward believes that seeing Joseph Cornell's

work for the first time in 1967 was for Saar a validation of impulses and strategies she already had begun to use (16). He discusses Saar's interest in mysticism (a term used here in its vaguest sense), the mythology and the spiritual practices of many cultures, and popular occult practices like astrology, the Tarot, and palmistry, and her use of imagery and artifacts associated with all of these.

In her essay, "Looks and Gazes: Photographic Fragmentation and the Found Object," Deborah Willis, Professor of Photography and Imaging at New York University, locates Saar in the context of African American art, especially art by women, some of whom were photographing their families in the 1920s. Willis notes the autobiographical nature of much of Saar's work and identifies it as having a wider meaning as a "collective autobiography" (22). Saar's grandparents, a mixed-race couple, left Louisiana. Although Saar's mother was born in 1901 in Iowa, and the artist was born in Los Angeles and grew up in Southern California, Willis finds "a distinctly Southern black sensibility" in her work (24).

Willis traces several intriguing themes running through Saar's oeuvre including her interest in "pairs, couples and doubling . . . hinting at the often illicit nature of love"; ladylike gloves representing hands; "the celebration of beauty and the trappings of femininity" (*Bittersweet* is a good example); and "re-interpreting the working-class woman" (23-25).

In "To/From Los Angeles with Betye Saar," Kellie Jones, Assistant Professor of the History of Art and African American Studies at Yale University, discusses Saar's early career. Before becoming an artist, Saar, then the unmarried Betye Brown, with her partner Curtis Tann, crafted jewelry under the name Brown and Tann. They exhibited and sold it in small boutiques and the homes of acquaintances. Their work was mentioned in a 1951 *Ebony* magazine. Saar was also a social worker, occasional interior designer, and greeting card designer. In the late 1950s, although she now had two children, she returned to college to earn teaching credentials and by 1960 was involved primarily with

printmaking. Jones places Saar's early work in a city undergoing dramatic social change. The Watts riots shocked the nation in 1965, and Black Power was an important force.

Saar had been familiar with Simon Rodia's Watts Towers from childhood, and they are among the works which inspired her use of cast-off materials. Jones points out that Saar's engagement with representations of women anticipated by a decade 1970s feminist art (32). By 1975 Saar had received national recognition, including a show at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Jones makes a strong case for Saar's leadership in the development of a stylistically identifiable West Coast art. In particular, she influenced a cluster of younger artists who use disparate materials including David Hammonds, Houston Conwill, Maren Hassinger,¹ and Senga Nengudi.

Richard Cándida Smith considers a variety of sources for Saar's work in "Reverencing the Mortal: Assemblage Art as Prophetic Protest in Post-World War II California." In addition to Saar's appropriation of a variety of physical objects, Smith, Professor of History at the University of California, Berkeley, recognizes an assemblage of expressive modes in her work which encompass Dada-like surrealism, spiritual concerns, and pointed social critique.

Smith differentiates New York assemblage artists like Robert Rauschenberg from those in the California school. East Coast assemblage placed Pop Art elements in a context of cool intellectual detachment; West Coast assemblage addressed clearly defined contemporary social issues, including capital punishment and militarization. In 1966, Saar turned to assemblage with a political, civil rights agenda. She and Marie Johnson were the only African American women among the Los Angeles mixed media artists, although there were many young men, including Noah Purifoy (46). Saar adapted stock black characters: Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, Stepin Fetchit, as well as Mammies and Sambos. Smith understands the passionate nature of this West Coast art: "The core act of the assemblage artists' politics was to provoke a new way of reacting to the

world, a new way of thinking of others, a new way of thinking of the desires coursing through the self, through their sources and through the effects they have" (49).

Lowery Stokes Sims, Director of the Studio Museum, Harlem, discusses Saar's installations as well as her assemblages in "From Frozen Moment to Spectator Participation: Assemblage and Installation in the Oeuvre of Betye Saar." The artist did most of her installation work between 1977 and 1990. Sims considers the relatively recent *I'll Bend but I Will Not Break* (1998) in some detail. The impatient viewer might miss the ironic white-on-white KKK embroidered on the sheet hanging behind the old ironing board. Sims points out that the "'bright white' condition of the laundry functions as a double entendre" (54). On the ironing board itself, the infamous 1789 diagram for human storage in a middle passage slave ship fits with sinister precision. The pattern is partly occluded by a dim photograph of a woman ironing, placed about where her shadow would fall. This is an image Saar has used repeatedly, notably among photographs of black women doing laundry placed on old wood and metal washboards in the contemporaneous series *Workers + Warriors*, *the Return of Aunt Jemima*.

An antique flatiron is chained to the ironing board, a stand-in for the laundress. To Sims, the installation suggests that the viewer might actually pick up the iron and use it: "This opportunity for 'spectator participation' is germane to the course of installation and environmental work starting with Kurt Schwitters's *Merzbau*" (54).

Look closely at any of Saar's pieces and you will recognize her sensitivity to the gleams of human individuality within the broad strokes of history. *A Loss of Innocence* (1998) consists of a long white christening gown hung above a tiny chair made for a child. On the seat is propped a photograph of a child. To the fabric encircling the long, traditionally trailing skirt, "Saar has attached labels on which are written in various fonts pejorative names for black children such as 'Pickaninny,' 'Tar Baby,' 'Niggerbaby,' and 'Coon Baby.' These jarring epithets serve to offset the seeming placidity of the christening dress and its evocation of the promise of a life just coming into focus by alluding to the realities to be faced by this innocent young child once out in the world," writes Sims (57).

Even though Saar's work embodies nearly every kind of pain imaginable, from slavery and lynching to broken families and failed romance, it can be so brilliantly conceived and executed that

the perception of beauty, as well as occasional laughter, offer a momentary respite. More than one writer in this catalogue mentions that Saar's continuing aim is to create beauty which transcends the temporal evils she often addresses.

The Frozen Moment catalogue is a significant contribution to scholarship on Betye Saar. It is also germane to the understanding of art in the United States during the second half of the twentieth century, especially assemblage and collage, art on the West Coast, and the art of social conscience. The book has an excellent chronology of the artist's career and an index. Although there are occasional problems with images, the essays and selection of works with their catalogue entries ensure it a place in the literature on this major American artist. •

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Note

1. On Hassinger, see Maureen Megerian, "Entwined with Nature: The Sculpture of Maren Hassinger," *WAJ*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Fall 1996/ Winter 1997): 21-25.

WARM: A Feminist Art Collective in Minnesota

By Joanna Inglot
Minneapolis: Weisman Art Museum
and University of Minnesota Press, 2007

Reviewed by Joanna Gardner-Huggett

In 1973 the Women's Art Registry of Minnesota (WARM) was founded in Minneapolis as a slide registry to promote women artists. Three years later, the group added a gallery. *WARM: A Feminist Art Collective in Minnesota* documents the exhibition at the Weisman Art Museum, June 9-September 17, 2006, focusing on the artwork of twelve of WARM's long-term members. For the catalogue, Curator

Joanna Inglot, an Associate Professor of Art History at Macalester College in St. Paul, prepared a historical essay on the collective's activities during 1973-1991, which situates WARM within the larger history of feminist art, followed by entries on each exhibiting artist. Augmented by archival material and interviews with members, the text highlights WARM's critical role in raising the visibility of women artists and feminist art and theory.

The treatment of collaborative practice, particularly the history of women artists' collectives, remains limited. For example, *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution* (2007) devoted one section to "Collective Impulse" and illustrated the work done in groups like *Where We At Black Women Artists*, while

doing little to illuminate their impacts.¹ Due to the lingering myth of the individual artist and creative genius, art history still seems to struggle with how to explore the ways in which artists' identity might be formed or developed within a larger group. Inglot notes that the few group histories that do exist "are of anecdotal or promotional nature, often written by members of the organization or published as short summaries in articles or exhibition catalogues" (3). Further, she points out that WARM has received little attention because of a "prevalent assumption that the contemporary art scene in the Midwest, including Minnesota, was parochial, derivative and unworthy of close scrutiny" (2). Playing a critical part in

filling that void in feminist art history, the catalogue helps remedy the fact that feminist art and activism have “been unevenly integrated into the panoply of theory and scholarship that constitutes the interdisciplinary field of Women’s Studies,” as recently argued by Mary Jo Aagerstoun and Elissa Auther in a special issue of *National Women’s Studies Association Journal* devoted to Feminist Art.²

Inglot first frames the collective’s history within a larger discussion of the mission and activism of women artists’ cooperatives, particularly Womanspace and A.I.R. This is familiar territory for anyone who has read Judith Brodsky’s essay, “Exhibitions, Galleries and Alternatives Spaces,”³ but it is important to determining what WARM shared with its predecessors philosophically, and even more so for distinguishing what was unique to this Minnesota collective. “Minnesota had been a leading center for a cooperative movement rooted in agrarian-populism. Swedish, Norwegian, and Finnish immigrants in the nineteenth century achieved great success in establishing and operating local organizations, creating models for the state and for the country” (33), writes Inglot. In addition, the College of St. Catherine, located in the Twin Cities, became a key site for radical feminist art, another catalyst in WARM’s founding. Faculty members Carole Fisher, Sister Judith Stoughton, and Sister Ann Jennings initiated a series of feminist immersion courses, with featured guests such as Judy Chicago, Arlene Raven, and Ruth Iskin. In 1975 the college launched its Arts Core Program for Women, open also to students at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and Metropolitan State University. Although it only lasted a year, it generated great interest in feminist art and ultimately attracted more artists to WARM (19-21).

Numerous examples of WARM’s contributions to disseminating feminist agendas, offered by Inglot, illuminate a critical role of women artists’ collectives.



Fig. 1. Harriet Bart, *Garment Registry* (1999 and 2006), mixed media installation, Weisman Art Museum. Photo: Rik Sferra.

The Feminist Perspectives series, founded in 1980 by members Patricia Olson and Joyce Lyon, brought in scholars in feminist theory and art, ranging from Germaine Greer to Betye Saar, who introduced members and others in the community to varying modes of feminist practice (51-53). The *WARM Journal* (published 1980-87), which reached 5,000 subscribers at its height, documented these programs but more importantly introduced visual artists, writers, and poets not addressed in mainstream media and tackled second wave feminist discourses like female sensibility, women’s spaces, the goddess, finding our foremothers, food and art (59). Inglot reports how these efforts culminated in WARM’s multidisciplinary conference *The Contemporary Woman*, which took place in October 1986 in downtown Minneapolis and cemented the group’s national influence by featuring leading feminist voices, such as June Wayne, Janet Wolff, B. Ruby Rich, Joanna Frueh, Judith Wilson, Betsy Damon, Elsa Honig Fine, and Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (65).

Also highlighted is WARM’s grassroots history. Inglot describes the group’s

participation in an outreach program that “brought art education classes and workshops for K-12 students, art teachers and others” (71), and its mentorship program for young women artists that is still in existence (62-63).⁴ In discussing the problems that can arise in running a consensus-based organization, Inglot is refreshingly honest. Although the women generally shared similar backgrounds—white, college-educated, and middle class—there were disagreements, and change was difficult. Issues arose including greater sensitivity to inclusion of “marginalized” communities, including those with disabilities, eventually leading to an amendment to the collective’s stated mission” (60-62). She details how implementing ideological change in a cooperative setting often came slowly and with painful consequences for the individuals who raised these difficult issues.

Finances proved to be another ongoing problem, and although WARM was successful in obtaining grants for events such as the 1986 conference, in some cases the funds were spent before the event took place (67). Further strains, as Inglot demonstrates, were tied to larger economic downswings and political changes (73), and like many alternative spaces, WARM ultimately was a victim of its own success. After contributing to the gentrification of the Warehouse District of Minneapolis, it could no longer afford to stay there once that goal had been achieved and sports bars replaced art galleries (74).

In curating the exhibition as well as in writing the cooperative’s history, Inglot faced difficult questions of who and what to include and leave out. Ultimately, she focused on twelve artists (Harriet Bart, Hazel Belvo, Sally Brown, Elizabeth Erickson, Carole Fisher, Linda Gammell, Vesna Kittelson, Joyce Lyon, Susan McDonald, Patricia Olson, Sandra Menefee Taylor and Jantje Visscher) who represented the range of cultural feminist issues and thematic preoccupations addressed by the group as a whole: Self-Portrait, Nature, Sexuality, The Body, Presence and Absence, Home,

Spirituality, Rape, Land, The Personal is Political, Identity, and Abstraction. In this section, Inglot counters the negative effects of collective histories by individualizing each artist with her own entry that frames her work within both feminist and contemporary art discourses. The last section of the catalogue presents color plates of all the works shown in the exhibition, subdivided by the above-named themes. Harriet Bart's mixed-media installation, *Garment Registry* (1999; Fig. 1), for example, represents Presence and Absence. The fact that most of the exhibit's fifty-one art works are in the collections of the artists—with the exception of three in the Minnesota Museum of American Art and three in private collections (188-89)—points to the reality that women's cooperatives were not always successful in bringing women artists visibility in mainstream art institutions.

The catalogue's innovative design complements the text. The book jacket unfolds into a poster that becomes a light table covered in slides of the works in the exhibition, placing the reader in Inglot's role as curator. The essays are interspersed with full-page black and white photographs, some tinted with saturated reds and yellows, illustrating the labor, camaraderie, and range of exhibitions at WARM. A minor complaint is that the footnotes in the historical essay and the photographic

captions are printed in red and can be difficult to read.

Overall, Inglot's accessible text is useful for a range of levels from the undergraduate to the specialist in art history or women's and gender studies. She beautifully balances the collective history of WARM and the individual narratives devoted to its members, while deftly interweaving the impacts of Minnesota history and larger feminist debates, to construct a social historical analysis that will serve as a model to future scholars writing about women artists' cooperatives. Very few of these feminist collectives are still in existence, and the publication of *WARM* underscores the urgent need for historians to address this critical aspect of feminist history. •

Joanna Gardner-Huggett, Assistant Professor of Art History at DePaul University, teaches courses in twentieth century art and women's and gender studies. She is writing a book on two women artists' cooperatives in Chicago.

Notes

1. Jenni Sorkin's essay "The Feminist Nomad: The All-Women Group Show," in the exhibition catalogue *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Los Angeles and Cambridge: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and MIT Press, 2007), 458-71, provides some historical context for the dissemination of feminist agendas through women artists' cooperatives, publications,

and exhibitions. The dearth of scholarship in this area was further emphasized by Judith Bernstein, an original member of A.I.R. Gallery in New York, in the question and answer session of "Activism/ Race/ Geopolitics" held at the conference *Feminist Future: Theory and Practice* at the Museum of Modern Art on January 26, 2007, where she announced that no historical account of A.I.R. had been written and asked that any interested scholar contact her. Audio documentation available: www.wps1.org/include/shows/momah-tam/#feminist_future.

2. Mary Jo Aagerstoun and Elissa Ather, "Considering Feminist Activist Art," *NWSA Journal* 19 (Spring 2007): xii. Also see Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette's anthology, *Collectivism After Modernism, The Art of Social Imagination After 1945* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007), and T.V. Reed's *The Art of Protest, Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2005) for further discussion of why collectivist and activist projects in the arts find limited discussion in academic scholarship.
3. Judith K. Brodsky, "Exhibitions, Galleries and Alternative Spaces." In *The Power of Feminist Art, The American Movement of the 1970s History and Impact*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Abrams, 1994), 104-19.
4. For more information on the current program see <http://www.thewarm.org/pages/mentorprogram.php>.

Pat Steir: Installations

by Doris von Drathen
Edizioni Charta, 2006

Reviewed by Robin Rice

For decades—certainly, since the early 1970s—Pat Steir's interests have been remarkably consistent, though her choice of imagery and approach has varied considerably. That variety, however, illustrates one of the artist's principal ideas: as Steir (b. 1940) says, "Everything is linked, everything is the

same but different: change as well as consistency make art" (48). She believes that imagery, symbolism, signs, art styles—systems of communication in general—have multiple potential meanings that are culturally constructed. Through juxtaposition, conflation, and transparency, her work seeks to facilitate the penetration of veils of illusion, leading the viewer to experience the void where "nothing but white noise can be perceived" (23). Steir is by no means a proselytizer or promoter of a particular belief or religion; rather, like Agnes Martin, she regards her work as "a spir-

itual exercise: 'My life is a product of my pictures and not the other way round'" (10).

Doris von Drathen's essay, "The Spatialization of Experience" (translated from the German by Matthew Partridge), is the primary text in *Pat Steir: Installations*. Von Drathen, who believes the artist's installations deserve more critical attention, addresses central issues in these and describes each in detail. Von Drathen and Steir, speaking for herself in an accompanying Q&A interview, present Steir's practice as a spiritual and mystical one.

Installations dominate the text, with generous, well-photographed illustrations, but von Drathen does not overlook the importance of singular paintings to Steir's more expansive, site-specific work. Her 1971 *Looking for the Mountain* (Fig. 1) is presented as "a touchstone for disparate work over subsequent decades" (18). Elements in this painting, such as an emphasis on the axes of horizontal and vertical, reoccur in different forms throughout Steir's work. These visual anchors and concepts relating to them are generally agreed to have universal resonance; nevertheless, even as Steir acknowledges this, she is at pains to avoid the error of identifying "a certain arrangement of lines" as embodying meaning. In many contexts and with different phrasings she insists on a layered and provisional understanding: "That is the main subject throughout my work: drawing and painting can seem to be representational and not representational at the same time" (24-25).

In 1992 Steir enacted this idea in two similar linear installations. *The Heart Line*, a multi-room, site-specific work in what was then a deserted depot in Grenoble, France, consisted of a single blue, seemingly unbroken line. Von Drathen likens the line to "Ariadne's thread" moving over red walls depicting a series of labyrinthine diagrams and images from sources as diverse as Nazca and Leonardo da Vinci (25). That year, Steir reprised the work in Berlin as *Heartline*, tracing a red line through rooms of grey gridded space and concluding with a central narrow red waterfall. Signs (alphabetic) and symbols were part of the undated timeline of "pictorial stages" (25). The installations included large sculptures suggesting a vocabulary of basic shapes.

The smorgasbord of imagery in the *Heartline* series was prefigured by the more overtly art historical *The Brueghel Series (A Vanitas of Style)* of 1982-84. In these multi-panel painting installations, Steir superimposed a grid on a Brueghel still-life, then enlarged and executed every square in a different historical style. Steir's frequent use of grids is but one way she considers the enduring juxtaposition and polarity of horizontal and vertical.

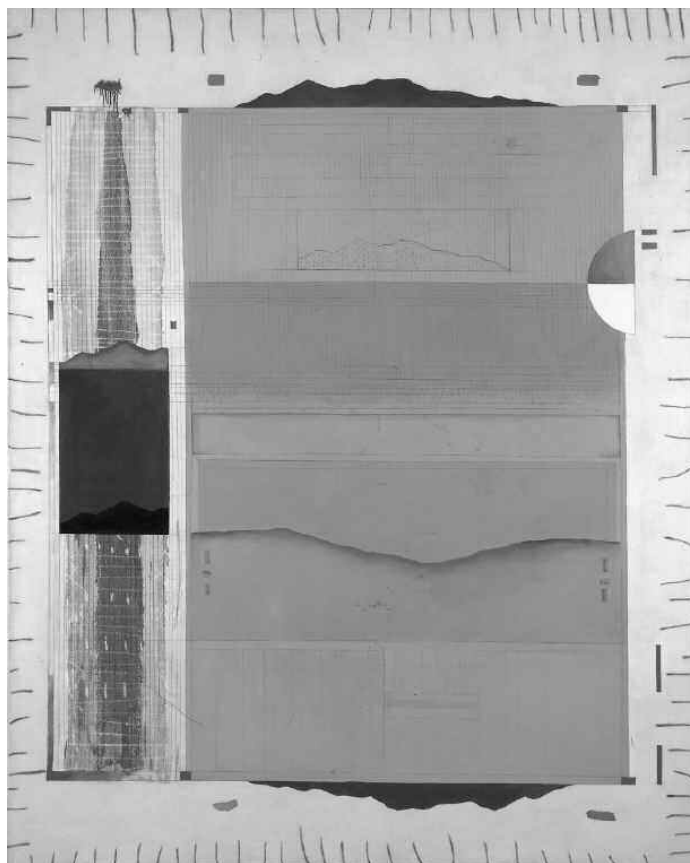


Fig. 1. Pat Steir, *Looking for the Mountain* (1971), oil, crayon, pencil, ink on linen, 90 1/2" x 74 1/2". Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York.

Portrait of a Waterfall (1987-88) expands an element from the 1971 mountain painting. In Steir's work, verticality is often implied by a waterfall (a potent gravity-linked feature of the mountain). Perhaps Steir's most popular and successful subjects, her waterfalls made by flinging or pouring paint, record the action of gravity and imply the unrepresented gravity-defying mass of the geological structures which underlie them. One of von Drathen's thoughtful ideas is that Steir's installations evoke a kind of mimesis in the viewer. They have, she feels, a kinetic spatial dimension constructed through the unanchored character of the paint Steir hurls onto the walls and the viewer's internal physical response to this record of the artist's energetic and surprisingly precise movements.

As a way to maximize spatial dissolution, Steir has worked on transparent scrims. For *Documenta IX* (1992), repeating a strategy from a 1985 *Mirage*, Steir placed waterfall scrims where they

merged with the surrounding landscape. From the late 1980s, she experimented with panorama-like circular structures, an example of her interest in historical painting, as well as the dissolution of the painting surface into an experiential whole. In *Panorama* (1990, Newcastle, England), she commissioned and painted on concave canvases that formed a circle around a raised platform. The viewer entered through a central opening in the floor and emerged surrounded by waterfalls and an implied horizon. The installation included a sound track of rushing water, and Von Drathen describes the experience of being encircled by these paintings as a "time loop" (9, 10).

Waterfalls superimposed on photographs of Venice for the unrealized *Venice Veils: A Dream Project* (1999) integrate the immediate and organic. In drawings, the accidental qualities of Steir's pours on translucent scrims merge with the aging, carefully wrought architecture of Venice, exaggerating the

juxtaposition of water and human artifice which is one of the fascinations of the city. When asked by von Drathen about the difference between her paintings of waterfalls and her waterfall installations (several are called *Mirage*), Steir replied that the paintings "are not waterfalls: they are paintings, objects. . . . The *Mirage* paintings live in actual nature, they appear to be nature, they are mirages because they appear to be what they are not" (46-47).

In addition to the ubiquitous grid, von Drathen identifies a circle as Steir's "own particular motif" (27). It can describe the pupil of the eye, the sun, the cycles of life and death, stability, a passage, and other forms. It is a key symbol in the six installations comprising the *Self-Portrait* series (1987-91). The artist drew on her impressive knowledge of art history and the history of ideas in devising these installations based on the Romantic notion of a universal, nonhierarchical soul. Borrowing the conventions of Western illusionism, she isolated and enlarged facial features a hundred times and distributed them over walls. Von Drathen describes this fragmentation as a "quest for wholeness, for a single universal Self common to thousands of faces and various forms of being, the search for some all-embracing formula. . . ." (28). Diagrams in these installations illustrated "ideal" human proportions. The personal idiosyncratic quality of line, the universality of the Vitruvian man, and the mutability of representational space are among the concepts Steir and von Drathen cite.

Individual paintings begin to flow:
a stream of beings appears to fan

out over their surface: the eyes mutate into waves with crests formed by the eyelashes, the ears become spiraling labyrinths, rampant vegetational growths with fleshy blossoms on the brink of being sexual organs; the noses and mouths flow into this endless stream of universal organs. Yet for all their mutability and organic abundance, the geometric grid scans these unequal forms like a metronome in an attempt to order or even classify them (28).

The stream of image fragments has, von Drathen says, "a dynamism similar to that of a waterfall. . . ." (28)

Many of Steir's recent and rather similar abstract installations emphasize color, and, by analogy, systems and theories of color symbolism. They include *Ghost Moon*, *Mountain Water* (1998) and *Red, Yellow, Blue I Love You* (2001). *Likity Split* and *Topsy Turvy* (2000), permanent installations in an Embassy Suites hotel,¹ are composed of singular, drippy, occasionally horizontal but slightly more often vertical (waterfall-shaped) brushstrokes on walls painted with a contrasting bright color. Though von Drathen recognizes that Steir is thinking of the 1960s with her title reference to Barnett Newman's 1966 painting, *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow, and Blue?*, and probably is aware of a manifesto of the same name by Newman, Mark Rothko, and Adolf Gottlieb, surprisingly, she resisted the temptation to link Steir's oversize brushstrokes to Roy Lichtenstein's *Brush Stroke* paintings and prints of the later 1960s.

She does address Steir's methods and metaphors through a dizzying litany of literary and cultural perspectives, including E. H. Gombrich, the mystical Jewish Hekhaloth scriptures, Hermann Hesse, Lao T'zu, and Zen master Tonzan. Perhaps von Drathen crafted her writing to mirror Steir's many-faceted work. Certainly, author and subject are well matched. Reading the text and looking at images of Steir's installations is symphonic. Major themes are introduced and reworked in different moods, rhythms, voices, and harmonies. One finishes the book with a sense that one does indeed have a deeper and better appreciation of the artist, and that words, like line, can both do and be as the author or the audience wills.

Von Drathen's examination of Steir's work is amplified and underlined in the lengthy Q&A interview with the artist that follows the primary text. The usefulness of the book would be enhanced by the addition of an index. Though several items omit location information, there are chronological lists of Steir's exhibitions and installations. •

Robin Rice is Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia and co-author of both *Philadelphia Murals and the Stories They Tell* (2002) and the sequel, *More Philadelphia Murals* (2006).

NOTE

1. The location is not identified, but I believe it's the Embassy Suites in Manhattan.

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