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(on the cover):
Artemisia Gentileschi,
Penitent Magdalene
(c. 1618-20), oil on canvas,
57 1/2" x 42 1/2".
Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

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Even with the rising presence of art by women in museums and on bookstore shelves, *Woman's Art Journal* continues to find a receptive audience for its mission: recognition of women artists of the past and present. From the overwhelming number of books and submissions we receive, it's clear that interest in research in our field is also on the rise. This issue of *WAJ* is representative of the wide scope of topics under consideration. We are pleased to present a cluster of three articles on early-modern topics, including one by Ann Sutherland Harris, a leading scholar of art of 17th-century Italy and a pioneer in presenting the history of women artists. In 1976 Harris and Linda Nochlin curated the groundbreaking exhibition, *Women Artists, 1550-1950*, that brought four centuries of artworks by women to the public's attention. For the exhibition catalogue, among the first to document women's art from a feminist perspective, Harris and Nochlin's scholarship sowed the seeds for an expanding field of study that continues.

Here Harris returns to three of the most renowned women painters of 17th-century Italy: Artemisia Gentileschi, Elisabetta Sirani, and their predecessor Lavinia Fontana, to speculate on possible interactions of these artists. All had artist fathers and began their careers in the family workshop. Did they know, or more likely know of, one another through an "artist grapevine"? Did Gentileschi and Sirani seek out Fontana's paintings? Or did their fathers seek out Fontana's paintings as examples for their daughters? Harris offers new insights about how these women might have influenced one another, or even seen each other as rivals. She couches her arguments within the limitations society placed on young women that prevented them from going out on their own to view works of art by others.

Apart from the possibility of one woman's art influencing another's, the viewing of art was a potent teaching tool for young women of the Renaissance. Margaret Franklin demonstrates in her article the instructive force of visual representations of the Amazons based on Boccaccio's writings about these famous women warriors. Whether portrayed as maintaining their autonomy or relinquishing it to assume traditional female roles, "these contrasting representations nonetheless transmitted a consistent patriarchal ideology that was reinforced by fifteenth-century visual artists...."

Just as Fontana, Gentileschi, and Sirani launched successful careers from the family studio, we learn from Casey Gardonio-Foot how, a generation later in Spain, several "daughters of Seville," including the sculptor Luisa Roldán, negotiated their art careers within and apart from their family workshops. Detailed here are "the social and economic structures that made [women's] participation in artistic networks possible and desirable."

Chronicling the story behind Ellen Day Hale's "ground-breaking and transgressive" portrayal of herself as a New Woman, Tracy Fitzpatrick offers insights into the institutions that, by 1885, had replaced the family workshop as a training ground for young women artists. Hale had joined the throng of women art students from various countries that converged on Paris in the late 19th century. Fitzpatrick explores Hale's family history and correspondence to uncover factors that contributed to her confident—and historic—self-portrayal.

Contemporary artist Nancy Azara came of age as an artist in the early 1970s, an important moment in the feminist art movement. She joined with early feminists who encouraged self-awareness through consciousness-raising sessions. The healing she derived from this movement became intrinsic to her own art practice as a sculptor. Katie Cercone relates how Azara the artist, a founding member and instructor at the New York Feminist Art Institute (1976-90), shares her holistic, woman-centered philosophy of creativity.

Even with the slowdown of academic publishing due to economic circumstances, books about women were highly visible at the College Art Association's Book and Trade Fair in Chicago. Our review section is representative, ranging from the study of a Renaissance art program for a Dominican convent in Pisa, Italy, to a review of an unprecedented exhibition of contemporary women artists at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Reviewers encountered the theme of creating identity through visual imagery in a book on early modern women's portraiture in Europe, and again in a study of the black, African body throughout history. Politics takes center stage as a major component in a book on the life and work of California Chicana artist Yolanda López, and in a consideration of "performance as a political act" in a book on feminist performance art in North America. A volume of essays on the "New Woman" during the period between World Wars I and II highlights a variety of artistic and cultural contributions by women. During the same time, as chronicled in a new biography, the American heiress Helen Clay Frick was actively enhancing a family legacy that includes major art and research institutions.

Also on review are several books on impressionist topics that offer new insights into this much studied period. Two books focus on Mary Cassatt, Berthe Morisot, Eva Gonzalès, and Marie Bracquemond, detailing their relationships with family, with other women artists, dealers, and with Degas, Manet, and others. Another book uses the stylish veil as a point of departure to explore women's experiences and images in late 19th-century Paris, while authors of two others investigate how Manet, Rodin, and especially Cézanne used their wives as models, addressing what these images reveal about the women, the artists, and their time.

Research in our field abounds, and the number of unsolicited manuscripts we've received in the last year has more than tripled. Each submission is sent out to readers for review, and we regularly ask members of our Editorial Board, as well as scholars working in specialized areas, to evaluate these manuscripts. The process is often lengthy, and as the number increases, so does the difficulty of decision-making, as we don't have space to publish every worthy manuscript. We thank all who make submissions for their contributions to the *Woman's Art Journal*, we thank our reviewers for their generosity and wisdom, and of course, we thank our readers.

Joan Marter and Margaret Barlow, co-editors

ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI AND ELISABETTA SIRANI

RIVALS OR STRANGERS?

By Ann Sutherland Harris

In 1511, Michelangelo Buonarroti and Titian were both busy painting frescoes in prestigious locations. Titian was painting three miracles from the life of Saint Anthony of Padua in a large room attached to the huge church in Padua dedicated to their patron saint. It is his first documented work. Meanwhile in Rome, Michelangelo had completed the first half of the Sistine Chapel ceiling in 1510, when the scaffolding was taken down and moved to enable him to paint the second half. In that brief interval, a few artists, among them Raphael, managed to see what Michelangelo had done so far before access to the chapel was restricted once more. That the monumental scale and complex poses of the figures soon affected Raphael is common knowledge. Titian, however, did not visit Rome until 1545, when he saw the Sistine Ceiling for the first time. Nevertheless, he managed to learn something about this fresco and made use of it a few months after that brief partial unveiling. As is well known, the pose of the wife murdered by her jealous husband (and brought back to life by Saint Anthony) has an unusual *serpentinata* pose, clearly taken (but in reverse and varied slightly) from the pose of Eve in Michelangelo's *Fall of Man*.¹ Titian's adaptation is both obvious and a bit clumsy, for he was still a young artist with little experience in fresco or with foreshortened figure poses, but his desire to incorporate some element of Michelangelo's impressive work into his own is a telling sign of his own artistic goals and desire to succeed.

This well-known example of an ambitious younger artist taking a novel pose from an older, more famous artist and adapting it for his own purposes interests me in relation to the careers of two seventeenth-century women artists for several reasons. Italian artists were always borrowing ideas from each other and keeping close tabs on those getting the best commissions, the most generous payments and the most praise. They even occasionally accused each other of plagiarism. This case is different because Titian had not seen the Sistine Ceiling when he borrowed this pose, and his information about the work itself can only have been rudimentary—a quick outline sketch of the figure arrangement of Adam and Eve and a bit of description from his unknown informant. He heard about Michelangelo's new

work on the artistic grapevine, whose existence we can always assume but can rarely demonstrate in practice, as we can in this case. Titian must have been deeply impressed by the gossip about this extraordinary ceiling design and its powerful figures to make the decision to use one pose for a key figure in his own dramatic scene.

I usually refrain from suggesting that one artist has been influenced by another one, even if the visual evidence is compelling, unless I know that the influential work was accessible—i.e., ideally in a public place rather than a private location and in a city that the artist who adopted its style, or pose, or compositional structure, is known to have lived in or visited. For women artists, much less able to travel freely, especially in their early formative years when they were usually not married, firsthand information about the work of other artists, especially their female peers, even those in private collections in their hometown, was not easy to obtain. Thus they may have known little beyond the fact that a few women had shown such talent that they were rewarded with commissions from prestigious patrons, from kings and popes. Their painter fathers—if they had one—might describe or make sketches of what they knew, if they were supportive, and perhaps escort them to see works in churches and an occasional private setting. We know from trial records of Agostino Tassi's trial for the *stupro* (rape) of Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652/3) that Tassi encouraged her father to let Artemisia go for walks outside with the housekeeper Tuzia as chaperone, and later rented a carriage so she could visit some churches with Tuzia's relatives, though Tassi and his accomplice Quorli had other goals.² The accounts indicate that there was not time to do more than glimpse a few altarpieces in the church where they attended Mass, and the men's attendance was a constant and annoying distraction. Artemisia probably never saw the Sistine Ceiling!

More intriguing to consider is whether Orazio Gentileschi arranged a meeting for his daughter with Lavinia Fontana (1552-1614), the Bolognese painter who had settled in Rome in 1604 and died there a decade later, four years after Artemisia painted her astonishing *Susanna and the Elders*. That Artemisia was aware of Lavinia seems certain. Lavinia was invited to

Rome by Pope Clement VIII, given two major public commissions, that in Santa Sabina unveiled in the presence of the pope himself in 1600, the other in San Paolo fuori le Mura, one of the seven churches visited by every devout pilgrim who came to Rome. Such success and its financial rewards must have been discussed in the Gentileschi household. Lavinia's example presumably motivated Orazio to train his daughter once she displayed more aptitude for painting than her brothers did. According to Giovanni Baglione, Lavinia was something of a celebrity in Rome, with many visitors and prospective patrons for her skills as a portraitist, so that her house was "molto frequentata."³ It is not improbable that Orazio took Artemisia to meet Lavinia: Artemisia may even have brought a small example of her work to show Lavinia. I also wonder if Lavinia then came to see Artemisia, and was shown the *Susanna*.⁴ Did it provoke her to paint in response her strange *Athena Disrobing* of 1613 (Pl. 1), for Cardinal Scipione Borghese? Its discreet profile pose and lack of sensual appeal seems a rebuke to this provocative work by her young rival.⁵

What was the reputation of Lavinia Fontana in Bologna twenty-five years after Lavinia's death in Rome, that is, when Elisabetta Sirani (1638-65) was born? Baglione's *Vite* of 1642 discusses only Lavinia's last decade in Rome, and while noting the various honors paid to her, says that her altarpiece in Santa Sabina is her best work. His praise is half-hearted—"assai diligente, ben colorito" (quite diligent, nicely painted), and he is more openly critical of her *Martyrdom of St. Stephen* in San Paolo fuori le Mura, stating that such a large work was beyond the capacities of most artists (and evidently her as well), and that better artists could have been found for that commission, including by implication himself.⁶ Elisabetta was literate, as we know from her own careful records of her paintings. We also know that her father's library contained copies of Vasari's *Lives*, Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, and other relevant books for practicing artists, though not, apparently, Baglione's *Vite*.⁷ She could have consulted Baglione's text in the library of Count Carlo Cesare Malvasia, a friend of her family, who reprinted it later in his biographies of Lavinia and Prospero Fontana in his set of lives of Bolognese artists, the *Felsina Pittrice*, published after Elisabetta's death in 1678. Having already made clear in his introduction that he did not believe Prospero was a major artist, Malvasia quotes Borghini's description of her father Prospero as a "pittore pratico e diligente" (well trained and diligent, so more faint praise). He was more impressed by Lavinia's skills as a portraitist than by her public commissions, and also by her self-effacing modesty in the face of adulation by Bolognese noblewomen who sought her services, with an enthusiasm, he says, greater than that of patrons trying to hire Anthony Van Dyck and Justus Sustermans.⁸ Malvasia does mention her *Holy Family with the Sleeping Christ Child and Young St. John the Baptist*, commissioned by Philip II for the Escorial, quoting Ilario Mazzolari's description of the Escorial published in 1648. Mazzolari praises the work, says that it attracts more attention than any other work in its location but then notes that it is especially loved by "la gente ordinaria." The clear implication is that more knowledgeable viewers were less impressed by it.⁹ Only Francisco Pacheco's *Arte de Pintura* of 1649, mentions

Lavinia's payment of 1,000 gold scudi, but word of this lavish payment must have spread in Bolognese art circles.¹⁰

Elisabetta's painter father, Gian Andrea Sirani, a dutiful follower of Guido Reni who assisted Reni in his last years (Reni died in 1642), never developed a distinctive style of his own. By the mid 1650s, when his daughter signed and dated her first works, he was badly crippled by arthritis and she soon became the family breadwinner. Had he picked up some gossip about earlier women artists such as Sofonisba Anguissola, who became a lady-in-waiting at the court of Philip II with a life pension, and a handsome dowry when she finally married in her forties? He could have learnt little more than this from Vasari about her time in Spain.¹¹ Gian Andrea must have known about Lavinia Fontana, whose career was sustained primarily by her steady production of portraits in both Bologna and Rome. More important, did he take his daughter to see Lavinia Fontana's altarpieces as well as those by Raphael and Guido? Some scholars seem to assume that young unmarried women artists could move easily around their hometowns and see whatever they wished at that time, but custom did not permit a woman who wanted to preserve her reputation to leave the home without a chaperone, and there may not have been anyone suitable for that role in modest artists' households.

Malvasia claims that it was he who spotted Elisabetta's potential, encouraged her despite her father's initial objections to her career, gave her constant support and wise counsel, and spread the word about her talent.¹² He does not mention taking her to see altarpieces or private collections, however, and her father may even have forbidden expeditions of this kind, and apparently hardly ever let her leave the house. There is no evidence that she ever left Bologna. On the contrary, there is one touching note in which she declares that there is nothing she desires more than to travel and see other places.¹³ We must never forget how different the lives of all women were five centuries ago, and how social customs denied them access to much more of the culture of artistic practice than the chance to draw the male nude from a live model.

We must also remember how much more we know about the artistic production of all of these women artists than their contemporaries and successors did. Women of artistic gifts alive in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had only Giorgio Vasari's brief references to Sofonisba Anguissola's as a source, and, as mentioned above, he barely describes the two group portraits in the family's home in Cremona: the *Chess Players* (1555), and the full-length portrait of her father with her sister Minerva and brother Asdrubale (1559). He mentions the drawing of the boy pinched by a crab and two self-portraits but tells us nothing more about them.¹⁴ Her extensive and imaginatively varied production of self-portraits, now recovered, published, and analyzed by many excellent scholars, was thus little known, except as isolated examples in princely collections but not as an inspiring corpus demonstrating her powers of invention at a time when male artists rarely made more than one or two.¹⁵ The fact that none of her female Italian successors produced more than the occasional example suggests that information about her

achievements in this specialty was not circulating then on the female (or male) artistic grapevine. Had they seen how cleverly she reinvented the self-portrait every time she made one, others would have taken up the challenge too.

We have seen that Lavinia Fontana and Artemisia Gentileschi almost certainly knew about each other, and may even have met and seen a few works by each other. As a female artist working in Bologna, Elisabetta Sirani must have been aware of Lavinia Fontana's career, and must also have seen some of her public altarpieces in local churches. The geographical and chronological barriers between Artemisia and Elisabetta are, however, much greater than those between Lavinia and Artemisia, and it is possible that Sirani never knew about her Roman predecessor.¹⁶ When Elisabetta was born in Bologna in 1638, Artemisia, then forty-five, was either in Naples or en route to London, where her father was ill and where he died a year later. She returned to Naples soon afterwards and died there around 1654. Elisabetta made her first works in 1655, when she was 17, as was Artemisia when she painted her now-famous *Susanna and the Elders* in 1610.¹⁷ The only published text about Artemisia that Elisabetta could have consulted was Giovanni Baglione's short life of Artemisia's father, Orazio Gentileschi, published in 1642, which contains one brief paragraph about his painter daughter. It says that he trained her to paint "dal naturale" (from life), and that many princes and important people had patronized her and praised her work, in other words, nothing significant except that she had had some important patrons. Baglione does not even mention that her patrons lived in three different cities—Rome, Florence and Venice—facts that would have implied her travels, which were exceptional for a woman at that time. The longer biographies of both Gentileschi by the Florentine Filippo Baldinucci were published more than twenty years after Elisabetta's death. Thus I think it is legitimate to ask if Elisabetta Sirani had even heard of Artemisia Gentileschi. And if she did, what could she have learned about her, an artist now so famous that it is hard to imagine that she not enjoy similar fame in her lifetime?

Neither of the two works by or after Artemisia now in Bologna is known for certain to have been there in Elisabetta's lifetime. Artemisia's *Portrait of a Condottiere* was painted in Rome in 1622, and given to the city of Bologna (Museo Comunale) by the Pepoli family in 1920: its location between those dates is a mystery.¹⁸ More intriguing is the acquisition date of a good copy (in the Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna) of the first version of Artemisia's most violent image, the *Beheading of Holofernes* (c. 1612; Capodimonte, Naples). It came from the Zambeccari collection, where it was by the eighteenth century, when some grand tour visitors commented on it, but as a work by Caravaggio. It is far more likely to have been acquired before 1700 than afterwards, but no earlier inventories have been traced yet to prove this.¹⁹

The works by Artemisia Gentileschi that Elisabetta could most easily have seen, had she ever left Bologna, were in Florence, where three paintings in the Medici collections universally accepted as hers remain today: these are her second treatment of *Judith beheading Holofernes* (c. 1620; Uffizi), an

unusually large full-length depiction of *The Penitent Magdalene* (c. 1618-20; front cover), and a smaller canvas of *Judith and her handmaid preparing to escape from the enemy camp with the head of Holofernes* (c. 1615; Palazzo Pitti).²⁰ It is possible that someone who knew Elisabetta and had extensive contacts with the Medici court in Florence told Elisabetta about Artemisia Gentileschi's works made for the Medici in Florence, and named at least the subjects of these paintings. The violent moment chosen for Artemisia's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* would have attracted comment (as did the copy in Bologna), and the large scale, spectacular yellow drapery and prominent signature might have been mentioned even in a brief description of *The Penitent Magdalene*.²¹ The smaller image of *Judith* might have been cited as a clever variation of that common subject.

Elisabetta's largest and most impressive paintings of *Judith* and the *Magdalene*, to be discussed shortly, owe nothing to Artemisia's compositions, but their scale and ambition might have been noted by her informants and thus offered a challenge to her. No works by Lavinia Fontana, whose reputation in Bologna in her lifetime never achieved the heights that Elisabetta's did, seem likely to have affected Elisabetta's conception of her potential in the same way. As we have noted, Lavinia's biographers regarded her few public works as her least impressive achievements, seeing her primarily as an accomplished portraitist. Still, her forceful depiction of the moment just after *Judith* has severed the head of Holofernes from his body (1592-94; Pl. 2), may be the most violent made before Caravaggio painted the moment of death a few years later. The early history of this canvas is, however, not known, and it is now in Parma.²² Did Lavinia tell Artemisia about it when they met around 1611—as we have speculated earlier—after Lavinia had moved to Rome, and where both women learnt about Caravaggio's provocative interpretation? Whatever we conclude about that encounter, Elisabetta Sirani probably never saw or heard about Lavinia's canvas, and she chose to avoid such obvious violence in her own interpretation. Her decision to avoid making portraits most of the time, and to have added some allegorical content to them when she did do them, implies that she consciously chose to avoid that less prestigious specialty and to focus on history painting for both public and private commissions.²³ That decision also implies an awareness of Lavinia's career and a desire to surpass her Bolognese predecessor. Nevertheless Elisabetta demonstrated a degree of ambition beyond that of many male artists when she undertook several large, complex multi-figure compositions when she was only twenty.

The role of Malvasia as talent spotter and promoter merits further investigation, but at present we have only his own hyperbolic tribute to the young painter and his claims for his responsibility and no independent documentation or corroboration. His account is short on facts and long on elaborate tributes to her sweet nature, disciplined work ethic, and virtuosity with the paintbrush. He mentions Lavinia Fontana at the beginning of this panegyric but states that Elisabetta is "*di gran lunga sua superiora*" (by some distance her superior); he also lists all the legendary women painters of antiquity, who naturally are surpassed by *la Sirani* too.²⁴ The



Fig. 1. Elisabetta Sirani, *Baptism of Christ with Spectators* (1658), oil on canvas, 157 1/2" x 196 7/8". San Girolamo della Certosa, Bologna.

crucial years about which we need documentation are 1650 to 1655, that is when Elisabetta must have begun her training in her father's studio but before her first dated work. Malvasia was in Rome studying law between 1639 and 1647, when he returned to Bologna and began lecturing on law at the university. In Rome he befriended Cardinal Bernardino Spada (1594-1661), an important patron of Bolognese painters, including Reni, some of whose collection is still displayed in Palazzo Spada in Rome. It also contains two works by Artemisia, though the cardinal did not commission them. Malvasia, who had trained briefly as an artist before taking up the law and was already interested in the visual arts, might therefore have been made aware of Artemisia's career in Rome by these two canvases, unless they only entered the Spada collection after he returned to Bologna.²⁵ Malvasia probably bypassed Florence on his way south and his return north and had no extensive interaction with Florentine art collectors and intellectuals until after Elisabetta's death in 1665.²⁶ All we know is that he must have been on good terms with Gian Andrea Sirani by 1652, when he published an elaborate and flattering description of Sirani's huge canvas of *Christ in the House of Simon the Pharisee*, finished that year.²⁷ That publication, his first on the arts in Bologna, links him with their household three years

before her first dated works. He would not, however, have been an informed source then about Artemisia's Florentine years, and maybe not about her Roman activities either.

There are other possible sources of firsthand information about Artemisia's works in Florence available to Elisabetta before the documented contacts between the painter and the Medici that occurred at the end of Elisabetta's brief life. Political and commercial links between Florence and Bologna were extensive, as Edward Goldberg showed in his study of later Medici art patronage. There were regular contacts between Gian Andrea Sirani and members of the Cospi-Ranuzzi families, who functioned as art agents for the Medici as well as providing diplomatic services between the Medici and the city of Bologna.²⁸ Documented contacts between Gian Andrea and Medici agents occur in the 1650s, but documented contact with Elisabetta herself occurs only in 1662, when their local representative, Conte Ferdinando Cospi, mentions her in his letters to them and begins to promote her work to them.²⁹ He approached her about making works for the Grand Duke Leopoldo de' Medici in 1664, which she did, and she was working on others just before her untimely death in September 1665.³⁰ By 1662, however, her career was well established, and information about Artemisia that reached her then could only have affected works made afterwards.

While Count Cospi surely met Elisabetta in her father's home before 1663, evidently he was not sufficiently impressed by her paintings to order anything until then. He was a powerful man, much trusted by the Grand Duke, and Gian Andrea may well have been reluctant to promote his daughter to them without Cospi's support. Another possible source of information about Artemisia in the 1650s might have been Cospi's only child, his daughter Dorotea. She spent time in Florence as lady-in-waiting to the Grand Duchess Vittoria della Rovere before marrying the Bolognese Count Annibale Ranuzzi in 1652. He then served for a while at the Medici court in Florence before both returned to live in Bologna, where he functioned as an art agent for them.³¹ Elisabetta made an undated red chalk portrait drawing of him (now in Uffizi), and a portrait of his second son, Vincenzo Ferdinando Ranuzzi, as Cupid in 1663, when he was five. She also painted his sister Anna Maria as Charity with her two young sons in 1665. However, neither Dorotea's father, who paid the bills, nor her husband commissioned a portrait of Dorotea.³² Cospi was evidently more concerned to have images of his young male descendents than of his daughter. Elisabetta could have learned about the Medici collections from Dorotea, and perhaps from her husband as well, and in theory from her father, who collected drawings and prints and knew Florence well.³³ We know nothing about Dorotea, however. She may have been too busy with her children to befriend Elisabetta and tell her what she had heard about Artemisia, who left Florence in 1620, twenty years before Dorotea first lived there. Thus it is at present difficult to be certain that Elisabetta had heard anything significant about Artemisia. Nevertheless, like her, Elisabetta was clearly intent on being more than an outstanding woman artist. She chose to compete with her male contemporaries, going after large public commissions in prestigious locations, and taking up a far wider range of subject matter in her works for private clients than Lavinia Fontana did. And as the recent exhibition demonstrated, Elisabetta sustained a high level of accomplishment as well as an impressive rate of production.

1658, when Elisabetta was twenty, was her banner year. She painted the enormous canvas of Saint John the Baptist baptizing Christ amid a crowd (Fig. 1) for the church at the main cemetery in Bologna. She also painted a complex *Allegory of Painting as Clio* (Fig 2 and Pl. 3), then still a rare subject, and an over life-size treatment of the Triumph of Judith (Pl. 4).³⁴ She had already produced two other large multi-figure altarpieces for Bolognese churches, and several other smaller works in 1658 in addition to these three especially ambitious canvases. Her interpretation of Judith's triumphant return to Bethulia is among the largest canvases depicting Judith made in seventeenth-century Italy.³⁵ Its vertical format makes it an especially striking work to compare with Artemisia's vertical canvas of Judith and her handmaid shortly after killing Holofernes and preparing to escape home (c. 1625; Pl. 5). In addition, both are now widely regarded as each woman's masterpiece. Nice as it would be to think about them as the product of knowing rivalry, we cannot, because Artemisia's version was probably made in Rome around 1625 for a patron who took it to Naples.³⁶ Information about Artemisia's work there is unlikely to have reached Bologna.

Let us assume for sake of argument that members of the Cospi-Ranuzzi family, or her father, told Elisabetta a little about Artemisia's work in Florence: a rather violent depiction of Judith killing Holofernes, a spectacular Magdalene wearing a splendid yellow silk dress (front cover), and perhaps the smaller picture of Judith as well. Most artists who depicted Judith chose a moment after the brutal act had been completed. Artemisia took up the challenge of Caravaggio by depicting the actual moment of decapitation, but Elisabetta chose the far less violent and much less frequently depicted climax of the story, with Judith on a platform high above a large crowd of her fellow townspeople to whom she displays in triumph the severed head of Holofernes.³⁷ Elisabetta stresses Judith's chastity, which many who read the story of the beautifully dressed heroine plying the victim with wine and stories in his tent must have questioned. She does this by covering Judith's body with layers of clothing and putting the moon in the upper left corner. It alludes to the Virgin Mary shown on a half moon in images of her as immaculate, that is conceived without sin as well as sinless.³⁸ Thus Elisabetta depicts Judith as "a type of virtue," her original role in medieval iconography but one tarnished by many ambiguous representations in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century art.

This is a huge painting with a prominent signature along the lower edge shown in slight perspective, as if painted on the platform on which the heroine stands.³⁹ A later, even larger one now obscures her original signature on the Baptism, but Elisabetta certainly wanted viewers to know she painted both works.⁴⁰ Italian male artists by and large did not sign their works. Elisabetta often does, and in such a variety of ways that Babette Bohn could write an essay about them.⁴¹ These signatures are less obvious in her private works, where she makes them look like embroidery on a binding or along a neckline, giving the owner the fun of looking for them while admiring her ingenuity in concealing them. Obviously she did not want her work to be confused with that of her father or her Bolognese contemporaries, but the care she took to make them further proof of her powers of invention as well as her identity sets her apart even from other Italian women artists.⁴²

The two exceptionally ambitious treatments of the Penitent Magdalene by Artemisia Gentileschi (front cover) and Elisabetta Sirani (1660; Pl. 6) also invite speculation about Elisabetta's possible knowledge of Artemisia's canvas. Even if she only knew that Artemisia's saint was a seated full-length woman in a yellow silk dress looking up to heaven with her legs in a complex interlocking pose with one hand reaching towards a mirror in which a reflection of her pearl earring is visible, Elisabetta would have had some notion of the presence of this work: the painting of the golden fabric had to have caused comment, and the prominent signature would have insured that its authorship was known. Her informants might even have commented on the poorly understood foreshortening of the extended left arm, and even the distracting character of the shiny fabric. Elisabetta's full-length reclining Magdalene could hardly be more different. Artemisia's saint is shown at the moment of conversion surrounded by luxurious worldly possessions; Elisabetta's saint has retreated from the world to live in isolated poverty. She is



Fig 2. Elisabetta Sirani, *Allegory of Painting as Clio* (1658), oil on canvas, 44 7/8" x 33 1/2". Pushkin Museum, Moscow.

almost nude, her breasts exposed but her lower body obscured partly by shadows but also by a piece of artfully draped brown cloth. Her legs are extended in an elegant pose rendered with anatomical accuracy and subtle shading. She is sheltering in a cave of gray rocks with an opening on the right where a coastline, blue water, and sky are visible. She lies on a woven rush mat: Artemisia's Magdalene is seated on a chair with a back and seat upholstered with red velvet edged with gold fringes. Elisabetta's Magdalene has a crucifix, a book, a skull that she fingers absent-mindedly, and some root vegetables. Her most familiar attribute, an ointment jar, lies empty on its side near a knotted rope for use as a flail.⁴³ A much larger and more elegant jar is just visible on the lower right of Artemisia's picture.

Artemisia's work is clearly indebted to Caravaggio's innovations: the contrast of brilliant light on the foreground figure with a shallow setting of impenetrable gloom; the meticulous treatment of drapery folds (though his are never so elaborate); and the emphasis on the figure at the expense of a proper setting. Elisabetta's saint is rendered in the idealized visual language preferred in Bologna in the wake of Guido Reni's highly successful career, but like all his best followers, she found her own ways of making her figures beautiful without draining them of human emotion. Her composition makes better use of the picture format than Artemisia's does, the result



Fig. 3. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Allegory of Painting* (c. 1625 or 1638-39), oil on canvas, 38 7/8" x 29 5/8". Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Hampton Court.

of her regular practice of making preparatory drawings, and offers an extensive setting and many more attributes of the saint.⁴⁴ Thus both works reflect the artistic culture in which these artists were trained, which were, moreover, of different generations. We might interpret Elisabetta's *Penitent Magdalene* as a critical response to what she could have learned from descriptions of Artemisia's *Penitent Magdalene*, but it could also have been made without any knowledge of Artemisia's work. Guercino had recently painted four horizontal images of saints in landscape settings, including the Magdalene and Jerome, which remained in his own house. Gian Andrea was not on good terms with this rival of Reni, however, so may not have seen them and so been able to tell his daughter about them.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the horizontal format is rare for penitent saints unless they are small figures in a landscape.

The third work of particular interest in the context of Elisabetta's calculated debut performance as a major figure in Bolognese painting in 1658 is her *Allegory of Painting* (Fig. 2 and Pl. 3).⁴⁶ Like Artemisia's canvas of the same subject (c. 1625 or 1638-39; Fig. 3), it has been identified as a self-portrait of the artist, an identification now disputed in both cases.⁴⁷ If Sirani's *Allegory of Painting*, or *Pittura*, in Moscow is a self-portrait, then it is somewhat idealized, but the basic face—a long oval and a



Fig. 4. Elisabetta Sirani, *Self Portrait* (restored fragment of a lost full-length image of the artist as a saint) (1658), oil on canvas, 19 7/8" x 15". Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna.



Fig. 5. Elisabetta Sirani, *Self Portrait* (c. 1660), red chalk on beige paper, 9 3/4" x 8 5/8". Weld-Blundell Collection of Drawings, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.



Fig. 6. Lorenzo Tinti, *Portrait of Elisabetta Sirani* (1665), engraving, 10 13/16" x 10 3/8". Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna.

long, almost straight nose—conforms well with the painted fragment (1658; Fig. 4), the drawing in Liverpool (c. 1660; Fig. 5) and the engraved portrait of her made for the funeral publications in her honor (1665; Fig. 6).⁴⁸ Her idealized face also looks a lot like Judith in the Burghley House painting, which Bohn has suggested is a self-portrait image.⁴⁹ That Elisabetta would self-identify with the subject of *Pittura* is obvious, and that her modest nature would prevent her from making it a precise self-portrait seems self-evident too. The painting is superbly executed, with patterned fabrics, something that she reserved for special commissions, draped around the figure in complex folds, some lit, some in shadow. It is also given intellectual weight by including many of the attributes of Clio with those of Painting, making it one of most complex allegories of Painting created in the seventeenth century. If it is not literally a self-portrait, it is surely a metaphorical one that stresses the intellectual component necessary to great painting.⁵⁰

Did Elisabetta know anything about Artemisia's *Allegory of Painting*? *Pittura* was not a common subject, and Artemisia's painting, which she probably took with her to England as a gift, was never apparently in a Florentine collection, nor is it documented in a Roman one either. We know she made another painting of *Pittura* for a Spanish patron in 1637, but Sirani could not have learned about it either. But some rumor of the subject, which as an allegory was invented by Vasari for his own house in Arezzo, was all Elisabetta would have needed to develop her own virtuoso painting with its far more intellectually demanding content. The subject had, however, already been taken up in Bologna by Simone Cantarini (c.

1645; Fig. 7) several times, and once by her father, so she did not need knowledge of Artemisia's work to create her own.⁵¹ When she did, she produced a far more complex and ambitious treatment than those by Artemisia, Cantarini or her father. Here she is asserting both her intellectual preparation to be a major artist, and her high level of technical accomplishment, and thus her genius. The prominent signature in gold—not concealed but placed above her painting hand, on the edge of a table supporting two books where the glint of gold will quickly attract our eyes—asserts her authorship more forcefully than usual in her private commissions. She seems to be saying "I am Pittura," as Garrard argued Artemisia's image does.⁵² And does this inscription reflect knowledge of the prominent gold signature on Artemisia Gentileschi's *Penitent Magdalene*? Gilded inscriptions do occur on the works of Lavinia Fontana, for example on the chairs of her portrait sitters, but in smaller letters that are often hard to find in reduced scale reproductions.⁵³

Outdoing their male peers and outdoing each other: all ambitious Italian artists believed in competing against the best to establish their own reputations, and the women of that culture adopted it too. After Sofonisba Anguissola, it was not possible to make your way simply by being that curiosity—a woman painter. Unless you could paint as well as or better than your male peers, the critics would not praise you well enough for posterity to maintain interest in your achievements. How much "la Sirani" knew about "la Gentilesca" is impossible to know unless some undiscovered correspondence between Bolognese and Florentine art lovers



Fig. 7. Simone Cantarini. *Allegory of Painting* (c. 1645), oil on canvas, 44" x 38 9/16". Cavallini Sgarbi Foundation, Ro Ferrarese (Ferrara).

contains some fresh information about their public reputations and private lives. Even Sirani's brief but spectacular career did not preserve more than the basic outlines of her life after her death; but thanks to her own careful signatures, usually with dates, and her written record of her paintings and their patrons, we can assemble the evidence and get a good picture of her achievements. We still cannot do that for Artemisia, who rarely signed her works, unfortunately, and whose stylistic variability and production of autograph variants poses serious problems for the connoisseur-scholar. But we have learned enough to admire her courageous struggle to survive in the far more competitive artistic worlds of Rome and Naples. We also must not forget that these women were the path makers for all women who now go to art schools and universities and take up professions that were utterly unknown to women in past centuries. Every time we step outside alone, we are taking for granted a freedom to live our own lives without an ever-present male guardian, something still not available to millions of women in some parts of the world. •

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Notes

An earlier version of this text was delivered at the conference *Nuove prospettive di studio sulle artiste dal Rinascimento al Novecento*, held in Bologna in February 2009. I wish to thank Professor Vera Fortunati for inviting me to participate.

1. For a recent discussion, see Paul Joannides, *Titian to 1518, The Assumption of Genius* (London and New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2001), 115-18.
2. Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi, The Image of the Hero in Italian Baroque Art* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989), Appendix B, 403-87, esp. pp. 415 and 417. The accounts of different witnesses do not always agree, but it is clear that her father had to give his permission for her to go for chaperoned walks, and Tassi was anxious lest her father find out that he had joined them, and on one occasion got into the carriage hired for a trip to a nearby church and took them instead out to the countryside.
3. Giovanni Baglione, *Le vite de' pittori scultori et architetti Dal Pontificato di Gregorio XIII del 1572. In fino a' temi di Papa Urbano Ottavo nel 1642* (Rome: Andrea Fei, 1642), 143-44.
4. See R. Ward Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1999), cat. no. 2.
5. For an explanation of its emblematic source, see Lavinia Fontana, 1552-1614, catalogue for an exhibition curated by Vera Fortunati (Bologna: Electa, 1994), no. 74 (entry by Silvia Urbini). Garrard, in *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 136, 518-19, considered whether Artemisia might have met or been aware at least of Lavinia Fontana. She also noted that Giovanna Garzoni (1600-78), who had a successful career painting flowers and fruit on vellum for several Italian courts, was in Rome and Naples at the same time as Artemisia. She concluded that "each may have enjoyed the status of "token female," and may not have been anxious to cultivate associations with other women artists that would only have reinforced [their images] as... members of the exotic female sub-class."
6. Baglione, *Le vite de' pittori scultori et architetti*, 144.
7. Babette Bohn, "The antique heroines of Elisabetta Sirani," *Renaissance Studies*, 16: 1 (2002): 52-79, esp. p. 60. Bohn expands usefully on my comments about Sirani's paintings of exceptional women in *Women Artists, 1550-1950* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum, 1976), 147-50, without acknowledging my contribution.
8. C. C. Malvasia, *Felsina Pitttrice: Vite de' Pittori Bolognesi* (Bologna, 1678; edition cited edited by G. Zanotti, Bologna: Guidi all'Ancora, 1841), I, 173-80, esp. p. 177. Sustermans was the Flemish portraitist employed by the Medici court in Florence. In so describing Lavinia, Malvasia was following the accepted stereotypes about women artists not having the innate intelligence (*giudizio*) to do more than copy nature, which was how portraiture was then characterized, and thus what it was assumed they would do. Women were believed to be incapable of creating an imagined narrative composition containing many figures. A modest, deferential character was also admired in women; its opposite was, of course, a male preserve.
9. Malvasia, *ibid.*, 180. Such condescending attitudes towards women's achievements were commonplace.
10. Maria T. Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana Bolognese "pittora singolare"* (Milan: Jandi Sapi, 1989), 146. Fontana's painting is still at the Escorial.
11. *Le opere di Giorgio Vasari / con nuove annotazioni e commenti di Gaetano Milanese* (Reprint of 1906 edition, Florence: Casa Editrice le Lettere, c. 1998), V, 80-81 (in life of Properzia de' Rossi): She lives "appresso la reina con grossa provvisione e con stupor di tutta quella corte" (in the queen's household in luxurious conditions and to the amazement of the entire court"). *Ibid.*, VI, 498-500 (in life of Benvenuto Garofalo): Vasari mentions her paintings of three sisters playing chess and portrait of her father with his son Asdrubale and daughter Minerva. He praises the first for "tanta diligenza e prontezza, che paiono veramente vive, e che non manchi loro altro che la parola" (so much diligence and liveliness that they seem truly alive, lacking only the power of speech), and makes a similar conventional comment about the latter. He also reports that she has painted many works in Spain ("ha fatto assai ritratti e pitture che sono cosa maravigliosa" [has made a number of portraits and paintings that are marvelous]), a statement so vague that it is

unlikely to be based on any firsthand reports.

12. "Io fui, quell'io (posso ben dire) che volle assolutamente che il padre, per altro in ciò renitente, l'arricchisse a' penelli, io che l'anima sempre alla degna intrapresa, io insomma che fatto mi vidi più d'ogni altro poi degno d'ogni conferenza, e consiglio nelle più gravi occorrenze, e ne' più insigni lavori, che fu tromba viva, ed incessante per tutto del suo valore." Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, II, 385.
13. "Non desiderò cosa maggiormente che di viaggiare e di mutar paese." The text goes on to say her father promised that when a suitable opportunity arose, he would take her to France and Rome, whereupon she embraced him and was satisfied. The statement comes from Malvasia's unpublished notes for his lives: *Vite de' pittori bolognesi: Appunti inediti*, ed. A. Arfelli (Bologna, 1961), 100-01.
14. See note 11 above.
15. The best publication about Sofonisba Anguissola, her sisters, and their cultural environment is the exhibition catalogue, *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue sorelle*, Cremona, Centro Culturale "Città di Cremona" in Santa Maria della Pietà (Milan: Leonardo Arte, 1994). A German edition was published for the showing at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (1995), and a third, smaller one, *Sofonisba Anguissola: A Renaissance Woman*, for the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. (1995). This version lacks most of the essays, all the important new documentary material and the majority of the works illustrated or discussed in the Italian and German editions.
16. This was not what I thought in 2007. In my essay "Sofonisba, Lavinia, Artemisia, and Elisabetta: Thirty Years after Women Artists, 1550-1950" in *Italian Women Artists from Renaissance to Baroque*, curated by Vera Fortunati, Jordana Pomeroy, and Claudio Strinati, (Washington, DC: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 2007), 49-62, I stated: "It seems highly likely that Sirani had heard about Gentileschi, and also possible that she chose certain subjects because she knew Gentileschi had painted them" (57). Now, after exploring this subject more thoroughly, I am not at all sure that this was the case.
17. It is unlikely that Elisabetta Sirani knew anything about this work, whose first known owner was the painter Benedetto Luti (1666-1724). Despite the signature, Luti, who was then working in Rome, was hoping to sell the picture to a German collector in 1715 as the work of Orazio. See Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, cat. no. 2.
18. *Ibid.*, cat. no. 13.
19. *Ibid.*, 191-92.
20. *Ibid.*, cat. nos. 5, 10, 12. A fourth painting of hers, the *Allegory of Inclination* (1615-16), is in Casa Buonarroti (cat. no. 8).
21. Some scholars have argued that the inscription is a later addition, but its prominence, unusual character and elegance is too striking to have been an afterthought by another artist. Someone more skilled in handling gold leaf and lettering might, however, have been given the task of adding it under her supervision.
22. Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana Bolognese*, cat. no. 4a 67. The painting is not signed or dated; Cantaro's suggested date of 1592-94 is convincing. Caravaggio's *Judith beheading Holofernes* (Galleria Nazionale, Rome) is not dated but recent authorities prefer to date it around 1598-99. See Catherine Puglisi, *Caravaggio* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 135-38 and checklist no. 65 with further references.
23. Bohn, in "The antique heroines of Elisabetta Sirani," also makes this point (note 6). See also Angela Ghirardi's essay, "Con gli occhi al cielo. Elisabetta Sirani e il ritratto" in *Elisabetta Sirani: pittrice eroina (1638-1665)*, curated by Jadranka Bentini and Vera Fortunati (Bologna: Editrice Compositori, 2004); hereafter *Sirani*, 2004. This exhibition brought many unpublished or little known works by Sirani to the attention of a larger public along with more familiar canvases, some drawings and prints, and a selection of works by her father and contemporaries as well. A monograph on Sirani was also published in 2004 by Adelina Modesti. It is not indexed and is less lavishly illustrated, and so less accessible to English readers than the exhibition catalogue. Regrettably there is still no book on "la Sirani" in English.
24. Malvasia mentions only Bolognese women artists in the *Felsina Pittrice*.
25. Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, cat. nos. X-19 and X-28, rejected both, unaware of the fact that both were listed in an inventory of 1637 as her work, information discovered in 1992. They entered the Spada family collection between 1643 and 1686 as settlement of a debt incurred by their original owner, Alessandro Biffi (d. 1637), to the Veralli family, from whom they had passed by marriage to the Spada family by 1686. Thus they may not have been there soon enough to have drawn his attention to Artemisia if the transfer took place after 1647. For details of their history, further references, and many excellent color plates of works by father and daughter, see the exhibition catalogue by co-curators Keith Christiansen and Judith Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2002), cat. nos. 52, 63.
26. His first visit lasting a few days took place in late May and early June in 1666. See Giovanna Perini, "Carlo Cesare Malvasia's Florentine Letters: Insight into Conflicting Trends in Seventeenth-Century Italian Art Historiography," *Art Bulletin*, LXX, no. 2 (June 1988): 274.
27. *Lettera a Monsignor Albergati in ragguaglio d'una pittura fatta ultimamente da G. A. Sirani* (Bologna, 1652). For a color reproduction of Gian Andrea's painting, see E. Negro and M. Pirondini, eds., *La scuola di Guido Reni* (Modena: Artioli, 1992), 379, and pl. 360.
28. Edward L. Goldberg, *Patterns in Late Medici Art Patronage* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983), 34-53.
29. A letter about the talented young woman artist was sent to Leopoldo de' Medici in January 1658 by the Franciscan Bonaventura Bisi with a drawing by Elisabetta. "Forse sarà grato a V. A. S. il vedere questo poco di schizzo per essere di mano d'una putta molto valente et è la figliola del nostro Sirano da Bologna d'età d'Anni 19 in circa e dipinge da homo con molto prontezza et invenzione." (Perhaps this slight sketch will be pleasing to your highness as the work of a skillful young girl: she is the daughter of our [friend] Sirani from Bologna and is 19 years old.) Bisi himself was a miniature painter and regular correspondent on artistic matters with both the Medici and Este courts. See Ghirardi, in *Sirani*, 2004, 91, with further references. The gift did not immediately spark the Cardinal-Duke's interest in Sirani's work. To call Elisabetta a "putta" (female child) at the age of 19 seems patronizing, and dangerously close to "puttana," the Italian word for a prostitute. The letters sent to the Medici by Count Ranuzzi about Elisabetta discussed by Goldberg are full of condescension and sarcasm, as he notes.
30. Goldberg, *Patterns in Late Medici Art Patronage*, Chapter II: Bologna: The Cospi-Ranuzzi and the Sirani, esp. pp. 41-53. Her first Medici commission predates these letters: her list records a painting of Cupid made for the wedding of Cosimo de' Medici and Margherita Luisa di Borbone, daughter of Gaston d'Orleans and Marguerite of Lorraine in April 1661 (see *Sirani*, 2004, no. 84 cited in note 29).
31. Riccardi Carapelli, "Annibale Ranuzzi e i suoi rapporti con la Firenze medicea del '600," *Il Carrobbio*, X (1984): 70-79. The couple apparently lived in Florence between 1652 and 1656. The letters between Annibale and the Medici begin after his return to Bologna in 1656 (see esp. p. 70). Their four children were born between 1653 and 1659.
32. See *Sirani*, 2004, cat. nos. 49, 51 and 53 (entries by B. Bohn).
33. Malvasia's unpublished notes for his biography of Gian Andrea report that he spent time in Florence as a student when he copied works in the Medici collections, and made a small portrait on copper of Grand Duke Ferdinand II after seeing him once on his afternoon strolls in the galleries (Arfelli, *Vite de' pittori bolognesi*, 90). If Artemisia's paintings were displayed, he may have noticed them, but the Medici collections were extensive and Artemisia's few works could easily have been overlooked.

34. For the works cited, see Sirani, 2004, nos. 2 (*Allegory of Painting*), 61 (*Judith Triumphant*, cited briefly under discussion of companion painting of Timoclea, and illustrated on pp. 106 and 110), and 110-11 (*Baptism of Christ* and related drawing).
35. There may be larger frescoes of this subject, but there seem to be no larger treatments on canvas.
36. Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, no. 14. Its first owner was probably a Neapolitan, but little is known about its ownership before 1950.
37. See A. Pigler, *Barockthemen: eine Auswahl von Verzeichnissen zur Ikonographie des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, II (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1974), 191-98. Pigler lists about 150 examples of Judith and Holofernes in the tent just after she has beheaded him but only 38 of her triumphant display of his head. The only example by a Bolognese artist that he lists is a fresco by Domenichino in San Silvestro al Quirinale, Rome, which Sirani probably did not know.
38. Elisabetta must have read the biblical text before she made the painting. Judith addresses the crowd with these words: "The Lord has struck him down by the hand of a woman . . . It was my face that tricked him to his destruction and yet he committed no act of sin with me to defile and shame me." *Book of Judith (Apocrypha)*, XIII, 14-21. See also the more extensive discussion of this work and the companion piece depicting Timoclea, in Bohn, "The antique heroines of Elisabetta Sirani," 61-66, as in note 6.
39. Her father's *Feast in the House of Simon* (San Girolamo alla Certosa, Bologna) mentioned earlier is signed in the same way.
40. Sirani, 2004, no. 110. The entry reproduces a detail of the signature beneath which the much smaller letters of her original inscription

are just visible.

41. "Il fenomeno della firma: Elisabetta Sirani e le firme dei pittori a Bologna," in Sirani, 2004, 107-17.
42. Lavinia Fontana also signs and dates much of her work for private patrons, but not as consistently as Elisabetta does, as Bohn notes.
43. Sirani, 2004, no. 95. The companion painting, a reclining *Penitent St. Jerome*, was also exhibited there (no. 96). *The Penitent Magdalene* was supposed to be lent to the exhibition *Women Artists, 1550-1950* and appears in the catalogue (no. 30), but a smaller work by Sirani of this subject (no. 94 in Sirani, 2004) was substituted instead, too late for the catalogue to be changed.
44. Babette Bohn, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practice in Early Modern Bologna," *Master Drawings*, XLII: 3 (2004): 207-36. It is worth stressing that her father both collected and sold drawings, so Elisabetta would have seen many examples passing through their home, and occasional paintings too.
45. David M. Stone, *Guercino, Catalogo Completo dei Dipinti*, I *Gigli dell'Arte* (Florence: Cantini, 1991), nos. 280-82, especially 282 (*The Magdalene*). They are dated 1652-55. On her father's dislike of Guercino and the latter's futile efforts to make friends with him, see Arfelli, *Vite de' pittori bolognesi*, 108-13.
46. Sirani, 2004, no. 2 (entry by Victoria E. Markova). The patron was a notary listed by Sirani only as *Sig. Cavazza*. Markova believes that it is a self-portrait. Bohn did not include it in her essay "Female self-portraiture in early modern Bologna," *Renaissance studies*, 18:2 (2004): 239-86, because she did not believe that it qualified, although she did propose there that the Burghley House *Judith* is one (274-76).
47. On Artemisia's *Pittura*, see my comments in my "Sofonisba, Lavinia, Artemisia, and Elisabetta" (note 15), 55-56, with further references.
48. See *ibid.*, 58, and notes 70-72 for my discussion of the problems associated with most of the proposed portraits of Elisabetta. I believe that these three works are the only reliable records that we have of her features.
49. Bohn, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practice," 274-76. It is also a common facial type for many of her female figures, a fact that complicates the issue considerably.
50. See my "Sofonisba, Lavinia, Artemisia, and Elisabetta," 58, on the fusion of Cesare Ripa's instructions for depicting Painting and the muse Clio in Sirani's *Allegory of Painting*. Vermeer's *Art of Painting* (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum) is the only rival that comes to mind.
51. G. A. Sirani painted a double allegory of painting and music that was with Agnew's in London in 1960 (F. Frisoni in *La scuola di Guido Reni*, [cited in note 20], 366 [subject listed as Music and Poetry in error], 368, n. 12, and 369, and earlier in *Paragone* [1978]: no. 335, pp. 3-18, fig. 1). On Cantarini's treatments, see Pietro di Natale's lengthy catalogue entry in *Le stanze del Cardinale: Caravaggio, Guido Reni, Guercino, Mattia Preti*, (Caldarola: Palazzo del cardinale Pallotta, 2009), 88, no. 7.
52. Mary D. Garrard, "Artemisia Gentileschi's Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting," *Art Bulletin*, LXII (1980): 97-112. I no longer believe that this is a self-portrait, but showing a woman in contemporary costume painting remains a significant part of the picture's message. Bohn notes the more obvious placing of the inscription in her catalogue essay about signatures but not the use of gold in this case, which makes it far more visible than her signature on her *Allegory of Music*, and indeed on most of her private commissions in "Il fenomeno della firma: Elisabetta Sirani e le firme dei pittori a Bologna," 111.
53. See catalogue for "Lavinia Fontana of Bologna, 1552-1614," curated by Vera Fortunati, for National Museum of Women in the Arts (Milan: Electa, 1998), nos. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 10.

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BOCCACCIO'S AMAZONS AND THEIR LEGACY IN RENAISSANCE ART

CONFRONTING THE THREAT OF POWERFUL WOMEN

By Margaret Franklin

Warrior women, of the many exemplars extracted from the classical past for purposes either of emulation or disapprobation, presented Renaissance humanists with a unique site for addressing issues of gender and the role of women in society. Amazons, comprising as they did a complex amalgamation of qualities that were considered admirable in men as well as those considered admirable in women (but not necessarily in both), did not lend themselves to formulaic assessments of character. To their credit, they were not lascivious and were therefore considered admirable at a time when the natural inclinations of women were believed to be dangerously carnal.¹ Warrior women from the classical past either pledged eternal virginity or engaged in sexual relations only for the purpose of procreation. However, they did live independently of men, flouting the prerogative of fathers and husbands to direct female destiny; furthermore they dealt with perceived enemies according to their own, often violent, dictates.

The Renaissance reception of warrior women drawn from Greek and Roman antiquity was largely shaped by proto-humanist writers. Prominent among these was Giovanni Boccaccio, who, as Warren Ginsberg notes, "adjusted the imperatives of the past to meet needs of the present."² Boccaccio interpreted Amazon lore in two texts which, although written in different literary genres, were extremely popular with Renaissance readers, painters, and patrons: the *Teseida della nozze d'Emilia* (ca.1340-41), a vernacular epic poem with close associations to late medieval *cantare*, and *De mulieribus claris* (begun ca.1360), a contribution in Latin to the distinguished classical *exemplum* tradition. I will show that Boccaccio offers two very different constructions of warrior women in these works: Amazons who, in the *Teseida*, repent their sin and folly and happily reassume conventional female roles, vs. Amazons in *De mulieribus claris* who never relinquish their masculine activities and autonomy. I will further argue that these contrasting representations nonetheless transmitted a consistent patriarchal ideology that was reinforced by fifteenth-century visual artists who tailored images based on his texts to best communicate their shared concerns to diverse Renaissance patrons.³

The *Teseida* relates the conquest of Thebes by Theseus, Duke of Athens, and the subsequent love triangle that develops between two royal Theban prisoners and the sister of Theseus's wife. Modern criticism, following on David Anderson's persuasive study, has recognized parallels to and restructurings of Statius's *Thebaid* in the text.⁴ Robert Edwards notes, however, that while Statius's poem chronicling the tragedies of Thebes is an emblem of "rage encoded historically across generations," Boccaccio "fully inscribes a medieval aristocratic ideology in his classical world."⁵ The opening books of the *Teseida* depict an episode that was not developed by Statius but which situates the text in a milieu governed by courtly principles and fueled by chivalric heroism and conventional standards of feminine identity.

In Book 1, Theseus decides to attack a nation of women who, having killed their menfolk, govern themselves and make a practice of expelling any interloping men from their territory and exacting tribute from Greek ships. Determined to "avenge these crimes" (1.13), Theseus raises an army and sails to Scythia to wage war on the Amazons.⁶ Boccaccio introduces these warrior women as a tribe of "wild and ruthless" Scythians who murdered their husbands with "haughty proclamation ... that they would not be kept in subjection, but that they wanted to govern themselves" (1.6). This "foolish design" led to the election of Hippolyta as queen, since she was a "mistress of warcraft" (1.8). Learning of Theseus's plans, the Amazons prepare for war, and the Greeks are unprepared for the women's skill at arms: "I shall say nothing of the darts, arrows, and missiles with which the sky was darkened ... no battle was ever so cruel and so fierce, and no one [speaking of Theseus and his army] has ever suffered more in any other ... Even the bravest among them took cover now, so fearful were they of the women's arrows" (1.54, 56).

Theseus's army retreats to their ships, but he goads them into returning to the battlefield with a diatribe against the shame of being bested by women: "Better for you now to have suffered the pangs of death with honor than to retreat shamefully and allow girls to advance" (1.63). The tide begins to turn, and the women flee to their castle. Theseus attempts a



Fig. 1. Paolo Uccello, *Teseida: Battle of Theseus and the Amazons* (c. 1460), tempera on wood, 35" x 77 1/2" overall. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of the Associates in Fine Arts, Photo courtesy of the Yale University Art Gallery.

variety of siege maneuvers, but the women are "equipped with such intrepidity" (1.93) that nothing avails until he hits on a plan to undermine the castle walls. At this point Hippolyta sends him a message appealing to his honor: "To make war on women and win a victory is more to the shame than to the glory of the victor" (1.104). Theseus replies that his army will readily annihilate the Amazons as "It does not shame our hearts ... because we intend to humble your pride" (1.110). In response to this Hippolyta makes an abrupt about-face regarding the legitimacy of the Amazon way of life. When she initially rallied her women for battle she assured them that "The high gods smile on what we did and will always respect us the more for it, while they scorn those other women who continue to submit out of cowardice ... you must be brave if you want to be free" (1.30, 35). Now she advocates surrender to the Duke's forces as "Venus is angry with us with just cause ... It will not be a disgrace for us to be conquered by such an excellent man, since every man realizes that we are women, and so we are" (1.117, 121). Further, when the two sides meet, Hippolyta agrees to marry Theseus, and "many other women happily married the Greek knights" promising to "never return to their folly ... [and to] make up for the time they had lost when there were no men in their kingdom" (1.135, 138).

Paul F. Watson has shown that narratives deriving from the *Teseida* were popular with commissioners of Renaissance *cassoni*, or marriage chests.⁷ Two mid-fifteenth-century Tuscan *cassone* paintings are likely to be representative of a much larger body of lost works depicting the confrontation between Theseus and the Amazons (Pl. 7 and Fig. 1).⁸ In both panels the battle is portrayed as taking place on an area of land situated between a town secured by crenellated walls from whence the women have emerged and the anchored ships on which the men have arrived. This composition constructs a dialectic between the world of adventure and opportunity open to men

and the confined domesticity that is the rightful realm of women. In the spirit of unfettered conquest, male soldiers charge into battle fully armed and armored. In spite of having the advantage of being forewarned as to the men's intentions and of fighting on their own turf, the women, many of whom are shown either fleeing towards the safety of the castle or being beaten back (background and right foreground, are plainly not prepared for the conflict. In fact, it must be clear to any viewer that they were doomed from the moment they chose to wear long, heavy, jewel-toned gowns into battle.

In Plate 7 the viewer's gaze is riveted by the spectacle of twisted, bloody, female corpses; not only do the male soldiers enter with relish upon the task of killing the women, they do not scruple at trampling upon their maimed bodies. In spite of the fact that there are fully twice as many women as men, and that only the women have horses, the women are being routed, as evidenced by the greater number of female dead, the treatment of the female casualties (sprawling and mutilated across the battlefield as opposed to discreetly intact on the periphery), and the massive retreat of women taking place in the background. In the central foreground of Figure 1, the men have the distinct advantage, in close combat between cavalry, of being armed with lances rather than bows and arrows; in the right foreground the women, one of whom throws her arm up in despair, make a pathetic attempt to flee from the men who are menacing them with lances and swords.

Ellen Callmann, Paola Tinagli and others have recognized the role of *cassoni* narratives as providing moral guidance to husbands and/or to their wives.⁹ More recently Cristelle Baskins has presented compelling analyses of several *cassone* narratives which support her thesis that *cassone* scholarship is enriched by allowing for a multiplicity of readings which "take into account different interpretive communities."¹⁰ In her seminal discussion of Amazonian imagery and *Teseida*



Fig. 2. Roman, Amazonomachy, (c. 220-240 CE), marble sarcophagus relief. Vatican Museums, Photo courtesy of Vanni/Art Resource.

narratives, she argues for “a range of possible readings and gender codings,” which include Amazons “as models for filial transition from natal to conjugal families” as well as “the ability to leave behind a celibate life in favor of domesticity.” Husbands “are instructed not only to resist feminine consumption but also to curb their own sumptuary display ... [and] undergo a policing of desire in the service of the state.”¹¹ Baskins is extremely persuasive in asserting that the complexity of the Amazon literary tradition, as well as the varied audience for *cassone* painting, begs for multiple, simultaneously relevant interpretations. Once a painting has entered the consciousness of a viewer, the manner in which it is encoded will depend on education, experience, and a host of unidentifiable variables. Certain images, however, cannot help but be incorporated into the interpretational paradigm of all potential viewers of the *Teseida* panel: the men, who look like soldiers prepared for war, are winning a painfully one-sided battle against women who do not.

The greatest compliment Renaissance humanism could bestow on a woman was to liken her to a man; Yael Even has convincingly argued that some portrayals of *donne illustri* “were desexualized and masculinized,” reaffirming “the patriarchal belief that a female hero is not only an aberration but also a replication of a male hero.”¹² Before the final armistice between Theseus and Hippolyta, Boccaccio apportions the masculine qualities of bravery and military prowess in fairly balanced measure between the Greeks and the Amazons. This period of relative equality, which continues for several months in the text, is not communicated in *cassone* narratives derived from the *Teseida*. I would argue that, as the audience for *cassone* narratives comprised a varying body of viewers (those who had read the *Teseida*, those who had not, and those who had passing familiarity with the story), it was deemed more important to unequivocally communicate the Amazons’ failure than to faithfully convey Boccaccio’s account of their initial ascendancy. Other deviations from the text support this imperative: the men on the boats are fighting rather than retreating, and those

women not on horseback, far from being the fleet-footed warriors Boccaccio describes, appear as clumsy participants in a masquerade that has gone terribly wrong. Rather than comfortably arrayed in the confluence of feminine attire and armor common in Renaissance depictions of heroines famous for military success, most of the Amazons are protected only by a helmet, while a lucky few have armored sleeves and an occasional breastplate.

What is the significance of presenting the Amazons in these paintings as largely inept? Renaissance conduct manuals seeking to define decorous female behavior stressed the importance of *leggiadria*, which is characterized by “grace, modesty, gentleness, measure, and elegance in such a way that no movement, no action, shall be without moderation ... but ordered, composed, regulated, gracious.”¹³ Castiglione also insisted “a woman should in no way resemble a man as regards her ways, manners, words, gestures and bearing.”¹⁴ Comportment recognized as masculine was termed *gagliardo*, and as warrior women would clearly require a certain measure of this, writers in the *armata e bella* tradition struggled, as Margaret Tomalin notes, “to portray a woman who is ... equal in strength to the men, and yet beautiful in the delicate manner of the period.”¹⁵ Similarly, painters seeking to convey a pleasing degree of assertive *gagliardo* in their female subjects faced the challenge of constructing images that would not compromise their feminine allure. Sometimes this took the form of a stance, gaze, or raiment that would not have been employed in an image in which modesty was a paramount consideration.¹⁶ The awkward deportment of most of the *cassone* Amazons, in conjunction with a minimal use of armor, belies any legitimate claim to manly *gagliardo* while simultaneously negating feminine *leggiadria*. Thus, the artists have used the power of visual imagery to eliminate the suggestion that the warrior women had ever posed a substantive threat to male dominion.

If the portrayal of *cassone* Amazons does not reflect the pleasing appearance of Renaissance *guerriere*, neither does it

conform to the literary or visual imagery of Amazons in ancient art. Although numerous arguments have been forwarded to fine-tune the significance of the Amazon at different periods in Greek antiquity, at the most fundamental level they always presented a threat to the natural ordering of society that could be eliminated only through violence.¹⁷ Their appearance, therefore, was informed by the imperative of setting them apart from conventional women; Amazons in ancient Greece were often shown as muscular warriors wearing short tunics or, as Marina Warner observes, “close to the delirious undress” of the drunken orgiastic followers of Bacchus (Fig. 2).¹⁸ This manner of depiction conveyed a renunciation of female domesticity and the decision to enter into male realms of activity; not only did Amazons reject the spindle, but they engaged in activities—riding horses, throwing spears, shooting bows and arrows—that required clothing in which one could move freely.

Echoing ideas of Amazonian otherness passed down from antiquity, Boccaccio uses physical appearance in the *Teseida* to reinforce the differences in attitude and social position the Amazons embrace when their estrangement from men comes to a close. The envoys Hippolyta sends to make peace are “dressed in costly robes, unarmed” (1.97). Once the queen surrenders, accepting “to what a pass the gods have brought us, and not unjustly,” and Theseus takes her for his bride, the warrior women’s redemption in returning to conventional womanhood is manifested by a regularizing of external appearance: “The ladies had altered their appearance as they placed their weapons on the ground and returned to the way they used to be: beautiful, charming, fresh, and graceful ... and the modesty which they had discarded on that terrible night when they killed their husbands now returned to their fresh faces when they saw the men. ... they put on again the jewels they had set aside” (1. 116, 124, 132-4).

In her discussion of *Teseida cassoni*, Baskins identifies a panel that she convincingly argues to be a pendant to Plate 7 and which depicts the conquered Amazons once again in possession of the *leggiadria* they lacked while on the battlefield; having removed their helmets they queue sedately in anticipation of returning to the role of respectable matron. However, these women do not appear to have undergone any fundamental transformation, as, from beginning to end, they have been encased in the modest, constricting garb of patrician women. In the *Teseida*, Theseus killed women who had, externally as well as internally, abandoned their prescribed gender identities. In marked contradistinction, the original viewers of *cassoni* saw armed men slaughtering women who looked like their daughters, mothers, sisters, wives—or themselves. In refusing ever to allow the Amazons to appear as recognizably “other,” Renaissance artists better enabled spectators of a legendary battle that happened long ago and far away to better connect with the participants and thereby more readily to associate actions with consequences. One lesson is clear: You can take the girl out of the palazzo, but you can’t take the palazzo out of the girl. The presence of a few women on horseback might suggest a further warning: even women who are somehow better equipped than most to

compete with men will end up losing, and following their lead will end either in failure or destruction.

Twenty years after writing the *Teseida*, Boccaccio presented a different construction of Amazons in his *De mulieribus claris*, a biographical compilation that became popular throughout Europe and which drew primarily from ancient sources to serve as a vehicle for moralizing on the lives of notable women. Whereas the *Teseida* was written in the vernacular using a literary form that would appeal to a varied readership of both sexes, *De mulieribus claris* was written in Latin for highly educated men at a time late in the author’s life when, as Ginsberg notes, he wrote “with the civic-mindedness of a Livy, replacing fictions that pandered to desire.”¹⁹ I believe that Boccaccio’s fundamental ideology regarding the nature of women and their role in society remains consistent across the two works, but that he chose a new rhetorical strategy to communicate this ideology based upon the population he intended to reach.²⁰ While his approach to normalizing the problem of wayward women in the *Teseida* boils down to an assurance that even extraordinary women are, at bottom, only women, to the elite male readership of *De mulieribus claris* Boccaccio engages in stern discourse so as to warn against the very real capacity of women to usurp male authority. To this end, he retools his previous depiction of Amazons in order to render them more masculine, more virtuous, and hence more dangerous.

The Amazons Boccaccio chose to highlight in *De mulieribus claris* were not those who, like Hippolyta and her followers, marry and subordinate themselves to their male conquerors. On the contrary, of the five Amazons who are given their own biographies, two die fighting while the destinies of three are reported as unknown to the author.²¹ Notably, Hippolyta is only mentioned in order to extol the valor of Queen Orithya, who, upon hearing that Theseus had abducted Hippolyta, “summoned reinforcements and dared to wage war against the whole of Greece.”²² Stephen Kolsky’s reading of Orithya’s biography (which Boccaccio presents in combination with that of Amazon Queen Antiope) focuses on Hippolyta and argues that Boccaccio emphasizes “the inadequacy of the women” and “a return to ‘proper’ gender relations in which men restore their primacy in combat.”²³ This conclusion does not give due recognition to the fact that the account of the women who bow to male dominion is subsumed within the life stories of women who don’t—and it is the latter who merit their own biographies and are singled out for praise. In *De mulieribus claris* Hippolyta is no longer a worthy foe who has seen the light but one whose carelessness necessitates the intervention of an Amazon more formidable and daring, and although Orithya is unable to liberate Hippolyta (in part, Boccaccio notes, because she was abandoned by her allies), this failure does not result in the loss of her kingdom, to which she returns and over which she continues to rule.

Hippolyta’s devolution is an indicator that Boccaccio has reconceptualized the significance of Amazons in *De mulieribus claris*, a suggestion substantiated by his strikingly different account of the motivations of the founding Amazons. The women in his vernacular romance who “took up arms against

love" (1.24) and "spilt the life blood of [their] men ... leaving them in the icy embrace of death as the stone cold victims of [their] spite" (1.7) are, in *De mulieribus claris*, innocent widows who, having had no hand in the deaths of their husbands, seek vengeance against the men who did. Ultimately these women decide to avoid men altogether as, "if they entered into relationship with foreign males, they would be slaves rather than wives."²⁴ In the *Teseida* the Amazons "sinned against [their] men" (1.29); in *De mulieribus claris* they want to "avenge their dead husbands," and kill countrymen who survived the enemy invasion only "to remove the appearance that a kinder fate had been reserved for those women whose spouses Fortune had saved from the Scythians' massacre."²⁵

Thus, in terms of virtuous exemplarity, there is little or no correspondence between the Amazons of Boccaccio's two texts. In the *Teseida*, Amazons rebel against dutiful wifely behavior, and their standing as virtuous females depends upon the recognition of this error and a willingness to return to the status quo; in *De mulieribus claris*, Amazons seek retribution for their husbands' deaths, are lauded for refusing to submit to inappropriate male attention, and commit mariticide (killing one's husband) only when such action is required to avoid discord among women whose goal is to maintain widowed chastity. The Amazons in the *Teseida* embrace a return to conjugal relations; in *De mulieribus claris*, rising above female concupiscence (believed to pose an ever-present threat to the honor and dynastic ambitions of Renaissance families), Amazons either remain virginal (a sexual status unrivaled in terms of Renaissance notions of female virtue) or take a purely pragmatic, procreational attitude towards sex. The weight carried by this decision in the overall assessment of Amazonian virtue cannot be overestimated; Boccaccio's concern for patriarchy extends to the protection of patrimony, and his most biting invectives are against widows who remarry. In the context of *De mulieribus claris*, therefore, the Amazons of the *Teseida*, who ultimately and happily remarry after having murdered their husbands, would necessarily be anathema.

Why, in *De mulieribus claris*, did Boccaccio abandon the origin myth he propounded in the *Teseida*? In reconstructing the circumstances which led the first Amazons to adopt lives independent of men, Boccaccio created women who share the strong moral fiber of male heroes and who represent, as a consequence, a serious challenge to doctrines of male superiority. The *Teseida* Amazons, whose behavior was actuated by inherent female inadequacies, were women who could be subdued: driven by an emotional outburst fueled by the vice of "haughtiness," Hippolyta and her followers, perpetrators of the cowardly murders of their sleeping spouses, lacked the moral underpinnings to maintain their independence and ultimately rejoiced in returning to subjugation and sexual relations. Women of high moral principles who have no interest in sex are another matter, as Boccaccio stresses in the concluding paragraph of the Amazon Penthesilia:



Fig. 3. Marpesia and Lampeto from *De mulieribus claris*, published by Zainer (1473), woodcut, 4" x 2 13/16". British Library, London, by permission of the British Library, London.

Some may marvel at the fact that there are women, however well armed, who dare to fight against men. But admiration will cease if we remember that practical experience can change natural dispositions. Through practice, Penthesilia and women like her became much more manly in arms than those born male who have been changed into women—or helmeted hares—by idleness and love of pleasure.²⁶

Thus Boccaccio employs Amazons as goads to rouse men from their complacency and come to the realization that all some women require to undermine male prerogatives is a little practice.

Even as artists who drew upon the *Teseida* for *cassone* narratives used the power of visual imagery to communicate the fundamental inability of women to successfully challenge the authority of men, so the anonymous but presumably German illustrators of the earliest printed edition of *De mulieribus claris* (Johann Zainer, 1473) created woodcuts of Amazons which support Boccaccio's warning that women have proved themselves capable not only of self-governance but of acquiring the physical and psychological strengths necessary to protect their independence.²⁷ In spite of the wide dissemination of the Zainer Latin edition throughout Europe, scant attention has been paid these prints by modern scholars. As concern over issues of women and power transcended geopolitical affiliation, the evaluation of Zainer's prints alongside Italian *cassone* imagery opens up a potentially fruitful approach to examining the ongoing Pan-European debate over the nature and role of women. As Ann Marie Rasmussen notes, debate over gender in medieval German literature was "omnipresent ... ubiquitous," and it is possible that the flourishing "Battle for the Breeches" and "World Upside Down" traditions paved the way to depictions of powerful women in nonhumorous contexts.²⁸



Fig.4. Penthesilia from *De mulieribus claris*, published by Zainer (1473), woodcut, 4" x 2 13/16". British Library, London, by permission of the British Library, London.



Fig. 5. Giovanni di Ser Giovanni, *The Triumph of Fame* (c. 1460), tempera on wood. Palazzo Davanzati, Florence. Photo courtesy of Scala/Art Resource, NY.

Approximately three-quarters of the Zainer biographies are accompanied by a printed image, and the three Amazons illustrated in this edition are Marpesia, Lampedo, and Penthesilia.²⁹ Each of these women, like Orithya and Antiope, was an early Amazon queen. The lives of Marpesia and Lampedo are combined in one biography and the two women share an illustration (Fig. 3). The view of Amazons that is communicated by this print contrasts strongly with that of the *cassone* panels, as there is no attempt to visually compromise their masculinity through inventive hybrid clothing ensembles or evident lack of military prowess. Here the two Amazon

queens, armed and astride galloping horses, are shown leading their band of warriors into battle. Although the text indicates that Marpesia was killed in battle, there are no dead or wounded Amazons in this picture; in fact, there is no indication that loss or failure has ever marred the confidence and competence that radiates from these women. Their bodies are entirely encased in armor, and the followers, fully helmeted, could be mistaken for men. The queens themselves wear crowns to indicate their rank, but from the neck down they too are indistinguishable from male soldiers. The fact that their long flowing hair is the only indicator that these are women is a visual wake-up call that perfectly encapsulates Boccaccio's warning: once these warriors put on their helmets, there will be no distinguishing between them and their male counterparts.³⁰

Boccaccio's construction of the life of the final Amazon in *De mulieribus claris* follows the pattern he set with the first four. Penthesilia "scorned her great beauty and overcame the softness of her woman's body ... in matters of strength and skill she dared to show herself superior to all previous queens."³¹ In addressing the life of Penthesilia, Kolsky argues that "the major incident of her biography is that she falls in love with Hector, thus forcing the reader's attention back on a more typical female mode of behaviour ... Penthesilia ... conforms more than the other Amazon queens to a more acceptable female role."³² I dispute this reading. Although Boccaccio writes that Penthesilia, having heard of the Trojan hero's prowess, falls in love with him, her decision to aid him in battle is not prompted by a latent longing to return to a conventional role as his wife but rather by the imperative to keep the Amazon nation strong: "She wanted as her successor an illustrious child fathered by Hector, and with this end in view she fell readily upon the chance to help him against the Greeks"³³ Penthesilia's desire for a powerful successor denotes her intention of returning to her throne and continuing to foster female autonomy. Further, unlike Hippolyta and her followers in the *Teseida*, Penthesilia did not revert to physical feminine allurements to win male approval but "wished to please Hector with her skill in combat rather than by her beauty."³⁴ Finally, Boccaccio notes that in some ancient accounts Penthesilia arrives after Hector's death but nonetheless does battle until she is killed.

Once again, the *De mulieribus claris* woodcut that seeks to distill the significance of Penthesilia's biography includes nothing that suggests weakness (Fig. 4). In this print the Amazon is depicted as a masterful soldier on horseback in the process of goring her male opponent in the chest. She is clad from head to toe in armor; as even her face is covered, the only hint to her sex is the hair that flows down her back. If, as in *cassone* images of Hippolyta and her Amazons, the artist's goal had been to

portend a desire to return to normative gender roles, Hector would surely have been included in the print. His exclusion is significant, as without him Penthesilia presents as an autonomous virago whose battle against the man she is slaying is not qualified as being waged for the benefit of another.

In comparing the *De mulieribus claris* woodcut of Penthesilia with a *cassone* painting depicting Petrarch's *Triumph of Fame* it once again becomes apparent that Amazonian imagery was tailored to its anticipated audience (Fig. 5). In this panel painted by Giovanni di Ser Giovanni, Penthesilia, unlike the male warriors with whom she rides, wears no armor whatsoever. The inconspicuous bow she wears over her elegant and modest raiment is the only testimony to her life as a warrior. Her long freely flowing hair (contrasting markedly with the covered hair of the married Dido and Lucretia), in conjunction with her proximity to Hector, suggests she is being honored for her virginity and the willingness to sacrifice herself for the man she loves. The warrior queen has visually joined the ranks of her female viewers, shedding the trappings that might suggest the will or ability to challenge male authority and assuming the role of chaste exemplar.

A crucial consideration in the decoding of quattrocento Amazon imagery lies in the recognition of its rejection of the antique practice of depicting such women as recognizably "other" and instead incorporating them, visually, into mainstream patrician society. In order to confront the threat that contemporary incarnations of the ambitious female spirit might pose to patriarchal societies, *cassone* Amazons were encased in the external trappings of womanhood. Their portrayal as incompetent and ridiculous provides visual reinforcement of the *Teseida*'s message that attempts by women to expand the prerogatives of their sex is justly punishable by death but subject to the corrective influence of marriage—a potent illustration of the patriarch's prerogative of wielding authority and a strict disciplinary hand over the female members of his household. The textual and visual portrayal in *De mulieribus claris* of Amazons as the female equivalents of male heroes sends a warning to the educated male elite that women, if allowed to get a foot in the door, present a viable threat to male authority. Power, in both instances, is considered to be a zero-sum game, and any advances on the part of women result in corresponding setbacks for men. Regardless of whether women are naturally limited in their abilities to function in a man's world or whether they have the capacity to acquire the tools needed to succeed in that world, the conclusion is the same: the power of women must be contained. •

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Notes

1. Scholarship relevant to the restricted lives of women in the Renaissance and the ideology which supported these restrictions is vast; see, for example, Ann Crabb, *The Strozzi of Florence: Widowhood & Family Solidarity in the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: Univ.

of Michigan Press, 2000); Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993); and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia C. Cochrane (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985). For an excellent study of exemplarity in the Renaissance see Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990).

2. Warren Ginsberg, *Chaucer's Italian Tradition* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2002), 184. For the *Teseida*'s affiliations with the *contare* tradition see David Wallace, *Chaucer and the Early Writings of Boccaccio* (Dover, NH: D. S. Brewer Ltd., 1985), 141-50.
3. For recent critiques of the social and sexual significance of the Amazons in the *Teseida*, see, for example, Robert R. Edwards, *Chaucer and Boccaccio: Antiquity and Modernity* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 17-43; and James H. McGregor, *The Shades of Aeneas* (Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1991), 46-50. This paper does not seek to situate Theseus's battle with the Amazons within the larger narrative of the *Teseida*; for a discussion of the leitmotif of obtaining women by force in the *Teseida* see Suzanne C. Hagedorn, *Abandoned Women: Rewriting the Classics in Dante, Boccaccio, & Chaucer* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2004), 82-84; for an analysis of the function of Amazonian rhetoric in the text see Eren Branch, "Rhetorical Structures and Strategies in Boccaccio's *Teseida*" in *The Craft of Fiction: Essays in Medieval Poetics* ed. Leigh A. Arrathoon (Rochester, MI: Solaris, 1984), 143-160 (153-4); see also Winthrop Wetherbee, "History and Romance in Boccaccio's *Teseida*," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 20 (1991-2): 173-84; and McGregor, *Shades of Aeneas*, 44-103.
4. David Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's "Teseida"* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1988). See also Edwards, *Chaucer and Boccaccio*, 19-23.
5. Edwards, *Ibid.*, 20, 30.
6. Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Book of Theseus*, trans. Bernadette Marie McCoy (New York: Medieval Text Assoc., 1974). For a review of ancient sources of Theseus's involvement with Amazons see Mandy Merck, "The City's Achievements: The Patriotic Amazonomachy and Ancient Athens" in *Tearing the Veil: Essays on Femininity*, ed. Susan Lipshitz (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 95-115 (esp. 101-06).
7. Paul F. Watson, "A Preliminary List of Subjects from Boccaccio in Italian Painting, 1400-1550," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 15 (1985-6): 149-66, and "Apollonio di Giovanni and Ancient Athens," *Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin* 37:1 (1979-80): 3-25.
8. I am indebted to Cristelle Baskins for her recognition of these panels as representing the battle of Theseus and the Amazons from the *Teseida* in her *Cassone Painting, Humanism, and Gender in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 26-49. The Indianapolis Museum of Art notes that Pl. 7 is a scene from Boccaccio and "pictures one of several legends which illustrate battles between the sexes, such as the abduction of the Amazon Antiope by Theseus, or the virtuous Camilla battling Aeneas." The Yale Univ. Art Gallery believes Fig. 1 to represent a battle between Greeks and Amazons before the walls of Troy, a reading difficult to support as 1) the Amazons are actually exiting from the city to engage in the battle, and 2) the scene only depicts men fighting against women, and the Amazons were but one of Troy's many allies. A reading of these images as deriving from the *Teseida* is consistent with both the setting and the antagonists in these two panels.
9. See, for example, Paolo Tignali, "Womanly Virtues in Quattrocento Florentine Marriage Furnishings" in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford, Legenda, Univ. of Oxford, 2000), and *Women in Italian Renaissance Art* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1997); Ellen Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).
10. Baskins, *Cassone Painting*, 16.

11. Ibid., 49.
12. Yael Even, "Andrea Del Castagno's Eve: Female Heroes as Anomalies in Italian Renaissance Art," *Woman's Art Journal* 14:2 (Fall 1993-Winter 1994): 37-42 (37); see also her "Mantegna's Uffizi Judith: The Masculinization of the Female Hero," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift* 61, 1-2 (1992): 8-20, and "The Heroine as Hero in Michelangelo's Art," *Woman's Art Journal* 11:1 (Spring/Summer 1990): 29-33. Constance Jordan considers this rhetoric to be a misogynistic "strategy of subversion"; see her *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990), esp. 37, and "Boccaccio's In-Famous Women: Gender and Civic Virtue in Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*" in *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Carole Levin and Jeanie Watson (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1987), 25-47. On the use and goals of this type of rhetoric see also, for example, Marta Ajmar, "Exemplary Women in Renaissance Italy: Ambivalent Models of Behaviour?" in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society* (Oxford: Legenda, Univ. of Oxford, 2000), 244-64; Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), and "Book-Lined Cells: Women and Humanism in the Early Italian Renaissance" in *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. Patricia H. Labalme (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1980), 66-90; and Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986), esp. 35-52.
13. Agnolo Firenzuola, *Dialogo delle bellezze delle donne* in *Opera scelte*, ed. Giuseppe Fatini (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1957), 509-10.
14. Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. and trans. George Bull (London: Penguin, 1976), 211.
15. Margaret Tomalin, *The Fortunes of the Warrior Heroine in Italian Literature* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1982), 15-16.
16. See Margaret Franklin, "A Woman's Place: Visualizing the Feminine Ideal in the Courts and Communes of Renaissance Italy" in *Gender and Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 189-205; Rona Goffen, "Lotto's Lucretia," *Renaissance Quarterly* 52 (Autumn, 1999): 742-81; and Sharon Fermor, "Movement and Gender in Sixteenth-Century Painting" in *The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture Since the Renaissance*, ed. Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), 129-45. On female beauty and decorum in the visual arts of the Renaissance see Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers, eds., *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998); Paolo Berdini, "Women Under the Gaze: A Renaissance Genealogy," *Art History* 21 (December, 1998): 565-90; and Elizabeth Cropper, "The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture" in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986), 175-90.
17. For arguments as well as overviews of Amazon-as-other criticism see, for example, Andrew Stewart, "Imag(in)ing the Other: Amazons and Ethnicity in Fifth-Century Athens," *Poetics Today* 16 (Winter, 1995): 571-97; Josine Blok, *The Early Amazons: Modern and Ancient Perspectives on a Persistent Myth* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publ., 1994); John Henderson, "Timeo Danaos: Amazons in Early Greek Art and Pottery" in *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture*, ed. S. Goldhill and Robin Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), 85-137; and Ilse Kirk, "Images of Amazons: Marriage and Matriarchy" in *Images of Women in Peace and War*, ed. Sharon Macdonald et al. (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1987), 27-39; and Merck, "Patriotic Amazonomachy."
18. Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (New York: Atheneum, 1985), 279. Warner discusses Amazon imagery throughout this work.
19. Ginsberg, *Chaucer's Italian Tradition*, 196.
20. See my *Boccaccio's Heroines: Power and Virtue in Renaissance Society* (Aldershot, Engl.: Ashgate, 2006). Boccaccio's text has been variously interpreted by modern scholars: Constance Jordan, "Boccaccio's In-Famous Women," reads the work as blatantly misogynistic; Pamela Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1992), 9-31, perceives a nascent feminism within its biographies; and Stephen Kolsky, *The Genealogy of Women: Studies in Boccaccio's "De mulieribus claris"* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), considers the text to reveal the author's conflicted attitude towards female heroism.
21. The five Amazons are Marpesia and Lampedo (Books 11 and 12), Orithya and Antiope (Books 19 and 20), and Penthesilia (Book 32). Marpesia and Penthesilia are killed in battle.
22. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, ed. and trans. Virginia Brown (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), 85.
23. Kolsky, *Genealogy*, 72.
24. Ibid., 53.
25. Ibid., 53.
26. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 131.
27. The following analysis is not meant to suggest that *De mulieribus claris* was never used as a source for paintings intended to be seen by women; indeed, I have argued that it was (see, in addition to previously cited works, my "Mantegna's Dido: Faithful Widow or Abandoned Lover?" *Artibus et Historiae* 41 (2000): 111-22. Most of the women praised in the text are paragons of conventional female virtue, which made the work an extremely convenient font of exemplars for Renaissance women. Further, since all heroines praised for masculine virtues had first to be models of female chastity, many could be visually adapted to further extra-textual agendas.
28. Ann Marie Rasmussen, "Thinking Through Gender in Late Medieval German Literature" in *Gender and Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 98. For "Battle for the Breeches" and "World Upside Down" prints see, for example, Christa Grössinger, *Picturing Women in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art* (Manchester: Univ. of Manchester Press, 1997), esp. 114-20. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for the observation that Zainer's prints merit further study in "an existing context of containment by inversion."
29. For a listing and reproduction of all images included in Zainer's 1473 edition see Kristina Domanski, *Lesarten des Ruhms: Johann Zainers Holzschnittillustrationen zu Giovanni Boccaccios "De mulieribus claris"* (Cologne: Boehlau Verlag, 2007), 283-5.
30. Domanski's brief discussion of the Marpesia/Lampedo print (ibid., 209-10) focuses on the fact that the Amazons are not portrayed in a battle scene although they appear to be planning to engage in armed conflict. She interprets this as a disinclination to allow women to be depicted as competing directly with men. This argument is weakened in the subsequent biography of the Amazon Penthesilia, who is in fact shown killing her male opponent.
31. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 129. Here Boccaccio echoes a previous description of Penthesilia in his *Amorosa Visione*, trans. Robert Hollander, Timothy Hampton, and Margherita Frankel (Hanover, NH: Univ. Press of New England, 1986), 37: "How bold and fierce she seemed to me, in arms, an arrow in her hand ... there was no one there who did not marvel at her indeed sovereign and lofty comportment."
32. Kolsky, *Genealogy*, 211.
33. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 131.
34. Ibid., 131.

DAUGHTERS OF SEVILLE

WORKSHOPS AND WOMEN ARTISTS IN EARLY MODERN ANDALUCÍA

By Casey Gardonio-Foat



Fig. 1. Luisa Roldán, *Virgin and Child with San Diego de Alcalá* (c. 1690-92), polychromed terracotta, 14 3/16" (without base). Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum.

The achievements of Spanish sculptor Luisa Roldán (1652-1706) justify her position as Spain's best-known woman artist of the early modern period. She proudly signed both her large-scale wooden figures such as Plate 8, and her small terracotta groups including Figure 1 and Plate 9, with her name and royal title, *escultora de cámara*, announcing her professional affiliation with the courts of Kings Charles II and Philip V of Spain. She was one of only three women—and the only Spanish woman—to merit her own entry in Antonio Palomino's eighteenth-century biographical compendium,

Lives of the Eminent Spanish Painters and Sculptors.¹ The high regard in which her contemporaries held her as well as the recent scholarly attention she has attracted attest to Roldán's professional success.² That she achieved this success in the medium of sculpture, in which exceptionally few women are thought to have worked, seems to make her doubly remarkable. Yet as a seventeenth-century Spanish woman, Roldán was not alone in pursuing a professional artistic career, creating sculpture, or signing her works. Indeed, a survey of biographical dictionaries of Iberian artists written from the

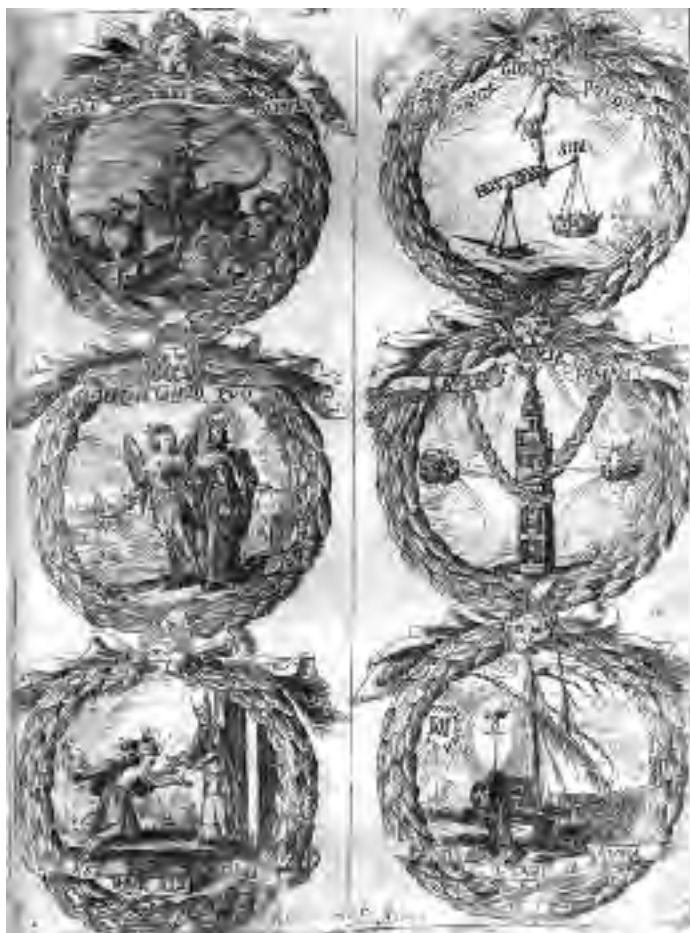


Fig. 2. Luisa de Morales, emblems, in Fernando de la Torre Farfán's *Fiestas de la Santa Iglesia metropolitana y patriarcal de Sevilla al nuevo culto del Rey San Fernando* (1671), engraving, 11 13/16" x 8 3/16". Courtesy of the Hispanic Society of America, New York.

eighteenth-century onwards produces more than ninety names of women said to have been active in the arts of Spain and Portugal during the early modern period.³ Their number raises the question of whether Roldán and her contemporaries may have benefited from an unusually high acceptance of women's artistic activity.

As Allyson Poska has noted, recent research is serving to "repopulate the streets of early modern Spain with women."⁴ Drawing on various archival sources, including notarial records and Inquisition trial documents, scholars are beginning to reveal how women's actual lives departed from the narrow prescriptions of manuals such as Fray Luis de León's *The Perfect Wife* (*La perfecta casada*, 1583) and Juan Luis Vives's *The Education of a Christian Woman* (*De institutione feminae Christianae*, 1523). While obstacles certainly existed for women wishing to pursue careers as artists, in considering their pursuits we should also take into account this new recognition of women's agency in early modern Spain. The "separate spheres" model of understanding women's history has been rejected by many scholars of women's history, yet in many ways it continues to shape our approach to women artists, leading us to frame our questions in terms of how



Fig. 3. Luisa de Morales, emblems, in Fernando de la Torre Farfán's *Fiestas de la Santa Iglesia metropolitana y patriarcal de Sevilla al nuevo culto del Rey San Fernando* (1671), engraving, 11 13/16" x 8 3/16". Courtesy of the Hispanic Society of America, New York.

particular individual women managed to achieve success against all odds. The traditional designation of art as "public" and thus off-limits to women, whose lives were confined to the "private" domestic sphere, has been most recently repeated with regards to Spanish women artists by Ana Aranda Bernal in her 2007 essay on being a woman and artist in early modern Spain.⁵ This artificial dichotomy of public and private spheres may actually hinder our understanding of women's achievements, however, leading us to describe professionally successful women as transcending a circumscribed domestic existence rather than acknowledging their careers as evidence that the boundary between public and private was less absolute than we have traditionally believed.⁶ While women's restricted ability to sign documents continues to make them less visible to our modern eyes than their male contemporaries, this evidence is not sufficient to conclude that they did not participate in early modern artistic production. Rather, when presented with evidence of women's artistic production, we should search for the social and economic structures that made their participation in artistic networks



Fig. 4. Luisa de Morales, emblems, in Fernando de la Torre Farfán's *Fiestas de la Santa Iglesia metropolitana y patriarcal de Sevilla al nuevo culto del Rey San Fernando* (1671), engraving, 11 13/16" x 8 3/16". Courtesy of the Hispanic Society of America, New York.

possible and desirable. One such structure was the family, and this case study examines how familial workshops facilitated several women's artistic careers in early modern Andalucía.⁷

It is widely recognized that most women artists of early modern Europe were themselves the daughters of artists. Under the supervision of guilds that prohibited women from becoming apprentices, artistic training was beyond the reach of women who could not study with a male relative.⁸ Yet, as Alfonso Pérez Sánchez pointed out in his 1984 study of Spanish women painters, the family studio model encouraged the participation of all family members—male and female—in workshop production.⁹ Because a studio could maximize production by employing family members, there was an economic incentive for male artists to include their daughters as well as their sons in artistic practice. Luisa Roldán's training in her father's studio exemplifies this, as Pedro Roldán instructed all of his children in sculpture and its polychromy, including Luisa's sisters María Josefa, Francisca, and Teresa.¹⁰ It is conceivable that the work of Pedro's sons and daughters contributed to the success and popularity of his studio, and it

is notable that, with the exception of Luisa, all of his children remained with his workshop until the master's death in 1699.¹¹

Relation to a master undoubtedly also led to the artistic activities of Luisa de Morales (b. 1654) and María de Valdés (1664-1730), the daughters of the Sevillian painter Juan de Valdés Leal and his wife, Isabel de Carasquilla, who Palomino reports was also a painter.¹² While Valdés Leal's studio passed to his son Lucas upon his death,¹³ Luisa also left autograph works, including several engravings published in Fernando de la Torre Farfán's *Fiestas de la Santa Iglesia metropolitana y patriarcal de Sevilla al nuevo culto del Rey San Fernando* in 1671 (Figs. 2, 3, 4).¹⁴ The inclusion of her signed works in this volume commemorating the canonization of San Fernando, which also featured engravings by her father and brother, testifies to her recognition as an artist as well as her cooperation in a familial artistic project.

Once initiated into the world of the studio, the wives of artists and artisans often gained agency under Spanish guild regulations and were permitted to oversee their husbands' businesses during their absences or following their deaths.¹⁵ Again, by making a wife's ability to participate in the family business a factor in the success of that business, such privileges would have provided an incentive for training women and normalized their active participation in the art market in spite of guild restrictions. Such provisions may have assumed additional significance in cities that sent many of their male citizens abroad in Europe or to the American colonies, as did Seville.¹⁶ The authority granted a widow to carry on her husband's livelihood permitted María de la Encarnación to complete the retablo of Seville's College of San Basilio Magno following the death of her husband, the sculptor Juan de Torres.¹⁷ While it is unclear whether Encarnación worked as a sculptor herself or merely managed the commercial aspects of her husband's studio, her involvement in the retablo's completion remains a noteworthy example of a woman operating independently in Seville's art market. Interestingly, while many cases indicate that widows retained authority over their late husbands' affairs only until they remarried or their children reached the age of majority, Encarnación apparently fulfilled the retablo contract after her remarriage to a master shoemaker in 1650, indicating that her authority persisted even after she joined another family.¹⁸

Recognizing the family studio as the locus of artistic production not only sheds light on women's participation, but also explains the absence of their names from the visual and written records. Public emphasis on the head of a workshop tended to mask collaboration with assistants, male or female. It is therefore hardly surprising that while several of Luisa Roldán's brothers and sisters are described as having been sculptors, no autograph works by any of them have yet surfaced. Indeed, it could also explain the dearth of autograph works by Luisa herself in her natal city. Although she signed sculptures in Cádiz and Madrid, in Seville our most secure attributions to Roldán rest on stylistic bases and contracts connecting them to her husband, the sculptor Luis Antonio de los Arcos. Again, these documents emphasize a nominal male workshop head—in this case Luisa's husband—obscuring evidence of female artistic



Fig. 5. Andrea de Mena y Bitoria, *Ecce Homo* and *Mater Dolorosa* (1675), polychromed wood, 6 11/16". Courtesy of the Hispanic Society of America, New York.

activity, and it is only because of Roldán's subsequent achievements that we are able to identify the likely products of her early career in Seville on stylistic grounds.

While many women appear to have created art under a father's or husband's supervision, fewer seem to have been able to break away to forge independent careers. The importance of skilled assistants—especially unpaid assistants, as was possibly the case with family members—may have made masters reluctant to let their daughters leave their studios. In Italy, we know this to have been the case with the talented painter, Marietta Robusti, the daughter of Jacopo Tintoretto, whose career was stunted by her father's refusal to let her leave his workshop.¹⁹ Likewise, while many biographers have speculated that Luisa Roldán's parents objected to her marriage to Luis Antonio de los Arcos because of his lack of talent or disagreeable personality, a simpler reason may have been that marriage, by facilitating Roldán's pursuit of an independent career, threatened to lead to her departure from Pedro's studio.

Entrance into a convent also increased the visibility of women artists in the historical record, as may have been the case for Valdés Leal's other daughter, María Valdés, also known as María de la Concepción. While she left no extant works, she is reported to have painted devotional works and portraits following her entrance into Seville's Cistercian convent of San Clemente at the age of sixteen.²⁰ Further afield, in Málaga, the sculptor Pedro de Mena's daughter Andrea (1654-1734) signed two sculpted busts of the *Ecce Homo* and *Dolorosa* in 1675 (Fig. 5). Their format and subject matter are typical of works made for private devotion and suggest that they were made for use within the convent of St. Anne, which Andrea and her sister Claudia entered in 1672.²¹ In the convent, the sisters also sculpted figures of Saints Benedict and Bernard. As some of the only known works of sculpture signed by women during the seventeenth century, their existence is further evidence that women worked in this medium in Spain.

Unlike some art created by nuns for their own devotional use, the quality of Andrea de Mena's sculptures suggests training outside of the convent, and it is tempting to consider how Pedro de Mena's daughters might have contributed to the output of his own very successful workshop in Málaga.

The centrality of the family in artistic production also led to the formation of so-called artistic dynasties in early modern Spain.²² Through marriage, artists were able to consolidate power and prestige within the family unit. Again, the Roldán family illustrates this tendency. All of Pedro's daughters married sculptors who previously had been members of his workshop and who continued to collaborate with him once they officially entered the family through marriage. María married the sculptor Matías Brunenque in 1670. In 1677, Francisca married José Felipe Duque-Cornejo, and Isabel married Alejandro Martagón. Teresa married Manuel Caballero in 1679 and remarried in 1701 to Pedro de Castillejos, following the death of her first husband.²³ The children of these unions also joined in the work of the studio, as in the case of Francisca Roldán and José Felipe Duque-Cornejo's son, Pedro. Born in 1678, Pedro Duque-Cornejo's childhood in the Roldán family studio blossomed into a successful independent career in the early eighteenth century.²⁴ Outside Seville, multiple marriage bonds linked the families of sculptors Pedro de Mena and José de Mora. In 1620, Pedro's aunt Cecilia married Cecilio López, a sculptor from Granada; her daughter Damiana married the sculptor Bernardo Francisco de Mora in 1641, making their sons José and Diego de Mora second cousins of Pedro de Mena. Another of Pedro's aunts, Francisca, married the sculptor Pedro de Herrera; her daughter María married the sculptor Juan de Mena in 1633, and María and Juan's daughter Luisa married José de Mora in 1685.²⁵ Such marriages transferred women from one artistic milieu to another, increasing the likelihood that their artistic skills would continue to be utilized.

Marital links such as those described above are indicative of the close-knit networks within which seventeenth-century artists operated, and it seems likely that such networks played a role in normalizing women's artistic activity. In this light, looking at the interpersonal relationships of the Andalusian artists discussed above reveals some interesting patterns with regards to the artistic training and activity of their female family members. For example, both Pedro de Mena and Pedro Roldán trained in the workshop of Mena's father, Alonso, before going on to incorporate their daughters into their own studios,²⁶ and Pedro de Mena's brother in law, Juan Pérez Crespo served as Luisa Roldán's godfather.²⁷ Pedro Roldán also collaborated with Juan de Valdés Leal, whose role as godfather to Roldán's daughter Isabel further testifies to their friendship.²⁸ Again, it seems noteworthy that in addition to commissions, these two artists shared a conviction in teaching their daughters to create art. The painter Josefa de Ayala d'Óbidos (1630-84) was also born into Seville's artistic networks, although her career took shape in Portugal. At her baptism at San Vicente in Seville, in 1630, Francisco de Herrera the Elder was named as her godfather.²⁹ The painter Bernabé de Ayala, thought to be related to Josefa through her mother,

Catalina de Ayala y Cabrera, attended Murillo's drawing academy with Pedro Roldán and later served as a guarantor for him in a 1674 real estate transaction.³⁰ While such links provide only circumstantial evidence, they do demonstrate that Seville's artists were linked by personal as well as professional interests. By promoting the value of women's participation in familial workshops, it is possible that the closeness of Seville's artistic community served a key role in leading to a greater level of acceptance of women artists first within the art world and then in society at large.

Despite indications that women played an active role in the art market of early modern Andalucía, through their contributions to family workshops, their roles in the formation of artistic dynasties and community networks, and even, in some cases, their independent careers, they remain frustratingly difficult to trace in archival sources and other documents. However, proscriptions against women's signing documents do not appear to have kept them from creating art, and examining artists' familial networks is a productive way of contextualizing their artistic activities. It also suggests a way of framing women's artistic careers that avoids the false dichotomy of public versus private. Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris noted in the catalogue to their groundbreaking 1976 exhibition, *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, that "As long as women were regarded primarily as bearers and rearers of children, as keepers of the domestic hearth, and as subordinate inferiors of men, both custom and prejudice kept them from even considering careers outside the home."³¹ However, the artistic work of the Spanish women discussed above can in many ways be understood as taking place *within* the home. On a literal level, the family workshop may have allowed some women to create art precisely because they did not need to physically leave the family domicile in order to do so, as has often been suggested.³² However, this working arrangement does not describe the situation of Pedro Roldán's family, whose living quarters were separate from the family studio.³³ But the family workshop also may have facilitated women's professional artistic activity on a conceptual level, by casting financially productive labor as a service to the family. Because her work contributed to her family's well being, the woman artist remained within the bounds of socially acceptable behavior.

Marta Vicente has convincingly identified this as the reason women textile workers in eighteenth-century Barcelona represented themselves in written documents as motivated primarily by concern for the good of their children,³⁴ and it is likewise within this rhetorical context that we should understand Luisa Roldán's references to her own children in letters related to her appointment as royal sculptor and the payment of her wages. In letters spanning the years 1693 to 1701, addressed to King Charles II, his second wife, Queen Mariana of Neuburg, and his successor, King Philip V, Roldán repeatedly frames her requests in terms of her children's needs.³⁵ For example, in a 1693 letter to the queen requesting lodging in the Casa del Tesoro, she writes that she is "poor and without a house for herself and her children to live in,"³⁶ while in a letter to Philip V requesting reinstatement as court

sculptor of July, 1701, she asks for a "house in which to live and a stipend with which to support herself and her children."³⁷ Scholars frequently have interpreted such references to her family's poverty as evidence that her royal title did not bring financial stability, which was likely the case considering the economic failures plaguing Spain at the close of Charles II's reign. However, Roldán was not alone in her financial plight, and so the fact that she contextualized her petitions in terms of her children's welfare should also be regarded as a rhetorical strategy. Notably, even though Roldán's husband, Luis Antonio de los Arcos, also petitioned the crown on his own behalf and in tandem with his wife, the couple's children are only mentioned by or with regard to their mother. That Roldán's petitions generally were successful demonstrates her success in leveraging a social convention—that a woman should be concerned primarily with the good of her children—in her favor.

While Seville's position as a populous commercial center with a high concentration of artists is likely the primary explanation for the correspondingly high number of women artists recorded as having worked there, the family studio model that I have discussed does not seem to have been unique to Spain. Future research on the nature of collaboration within artistic studios may reveal similar levels of participation by the women of other European regions. While such discoveries might prove that early modern Spaniards were not exceptional in their acceptance of women's artistic activity, they would be welcome additions to our knowledge and understanding of the roles women played in the early modern art world. By unearthing the names of even more women artists and opening new avenues of research into their careers, such a focus on familial collaboration might ironically turn out to be a window on one of the ways early modern women could exercise their independence as artists. •

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Notes

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1. Antonio Palomino, *Lives of the Eminent Spanish Painters and Sculptors* (1794), trans. Nina Ayala Mallory, (repr. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 341-42. Of Palomino's other two biographies of women, one covers the Italian painter Sofonisba Anguissola (1532-1625), who served as lady-in-waiting to Queen Isabel de Valois at the court of Philip II, and the other describes a fictional character, "Sofonisba Gentileschi."
2. Most recently, Roldán has been the subject of a monographic exhibition in Seville and a small ongoing exhibition at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, California. See also: Antonio Torrejón Díaz and José Luis Romero Torres, eds., *Roldana* (Seville: Junta de Andalucía Consejería de Cultura, 2007), hereafter *Roldana* 2007. At this date, a catalogue has not been published in connection with the Getty exhibition, "La Roldana's Saint Ginés: The Making of a Polychrome Sculpture," organized by Jane Bassett and Mari-Tere

- Alvarez. However, the museum posted extensive exhibition-related materials to its website, which can be accessed at: <http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/roldana/> (accessed March 12, 2009).
3. Palomino, *Lives of the Eminent Spanish Painters and Sculptors*; Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez, *Diccionario Histórico de los mas ilustres profesores de las bellas artes en España*, (Madrid: La Real Academia de S. Fernando, 1800); José da Cunha Taborda, *Regras da arte da pintura*, (Lisbon: Imprensa Regia, 1815); José Parada y Santín, *Las pintoras españolas*, (Madrid: Impr. del Asilo de huérfanos del S.c. de Jesús, 1903); Carmen G. Pérez-Neu de Robla, *Galería Universal de Pintoras*, (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1964); Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, "Las Mujeres <<pintoras>> en España," in *La imagen de la mujer en el arte español*, *Actas de las terceras Jornadas de Investigación Interdisciplinaria*, (Madrid: Raiz Tecnicas Graficas, [1984]), 73-86; José Manuel Cruz Valdovinos, "La Mujer en el Arte Madrileño del Siglo XVII," in *La imagen de la mujer en el arte español*, *Actas de las terceras Jornadas de Investigación Interdisciplinaria*, (Madrid: Raiz Tecnicas Graficas, [1984]), 179-86; Noemí Martínez Díez, and Marián López F. Cao, *Pintando el mundo: Diccionario de artistas latinoamericanas y españolas*, (Madrid: horas y HORAS, 2000); Pilar Muñoz López, *Mujeres españolas en las artes plásticas. Pintura y escultura*, (Madrid: Editorial Síntesis, S.A., 2003); and Ana Aranda Bernal, "Ser mujer y artista en la España de la edad moderna," in *Roldana*, 2007, 33-51.
 4. Allyson Poska, "How Women's History has Transformed the Study of Early Modern Spain," *Bulletin of the Society for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies* 33, no. 1 (2008), <http://www.ucmo.edu/ssphs/2008/women.html> (accessed January 6, 2009).
 5. Aranda Bernal, "Ser mujer y artista," 44.
 6. Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of Englishwomen's History," *The Historical Journal* 36, no. 2 (June, 1993): 383-414; and Ruth MacKay, review of *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain: The Permeable Cloister*, by Elizabeth Leffeldt, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 37, no. 4 (2006): 1085-86.
 7. My focus on the family unit is inspired by Marta Vicente's work on the textile industry in early modern Barcelona. See especially Marta Vicente, *Clothing the Spanish Empire: Families and the Calico Trade in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006); and "Images and Realities of Work: Women and Guilds in Early Modern Barcelona," in *Spanish Women in the Golden Age: Images and Realities*, ed. Magdalena S. Sánchez and Alain Saint-Saëns (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996), 127-34.
 8. Guadalupe Ramos de Castro, "La presencia de la mujer en los oficios artísticos," in *La mujer en el Arte Español. VII Jornadas de Arte* (Madrid, Editorial Alpuerto, S.A., 1996), 169-70. Ramos de Castro notes that guild records in Valladolid seldom if ever list the names of women as apprentices or guild members, although they do mention the female relatives of male guild members.
 9. Pérez Sánchez, "Las mujeres <<pintoras>> en España," 73. This feature of Spanish workshops is often cited as the rationale for training women as artists, most recently by Aranda Bernal ("Ser mujer y artista," 34). See also Ramos de Castro, "La presencia de la mujer en los oficios artísticos," 169-72; and Pilar Muñoz López, *Mujeres españolas en las artes plásticas*, 57, 63. Vicente's work on the textile guilds of early modern Barcelona demonstrates that women faced similar circumstances in other artisanal professions; see "Images and Realities of Work," 127-28. The participation of women in familial workshops, especially in the physical production of artisanal objects for sale, is also in keeping with Katrina Honeyman and Jordan Goodman's description of women's participation in northern European labor markets; see "Women's Work, Gender Conflict, and Labour Markets in Europe, 1500-1900," *The Economic History Review*, New Series 44, no. 4 (Nov., 1991), 610.
 10. Muñoz López, *Mujeres españolas en las artes plásticas*, 74; and María Dolores Salazar, "Pedro Roldán, escultor," *Archivo español de arte* 22, no. 88 (Oct.-Dec., 1949): 323. Francisca specialized in painting sculpture, as revealed by her will of 1712, which states that she was paid for some work by the Caridad de Sevilla. María worked as a sculptor, and while no autograph works by her are known, it is thought that she and her husband, Matías de Brunenque, created the *Virgen de las Nieves* for the retablo of the Colegiata de Olivares. See also Jorge Bernal Ballesteros and Federico García de la Concha Delgado, *Imagineros andaluces de los siglos de oro*, (Seville: Editoriales Andaluzas Unidas, 1986), 64-65.
 11. Antonio Torrejón Díaz, "El entorno familiar y artístico de la roldana: el taller de Pedro Roldán," in *Roldana*, 62; the author does note that some of Roldán's children received independent commissions while working for their father, but concedes that their careers essentially took place within his studio.
 12. Carasquilla and her daughters are mentioned by Palomino in his biography of Juan de Valdés Leal in his *Lives of the Eminent Spanish Painters and Sculptors*, 301-04; see also Pérez Sánchez, "Las mujeres <<pintoras>> en España," 78; Aranda Bernal, "Ser mujer y artista," 46; and Martínez Díez and López F. Cao, *Pintando el mundo*, 169-70.
 13. Muñoz López, *Mujeres españolas en las artes plásticas*, 79.
 14. These extant engravings presumably led Ceán Bermúdez to include Luisa's biography in his dictionary of Spanish artists, although he does not include her sister or mother (*Diccionario Histórico*, vol. 3, 183). Martínez Díez and López F. Cao write that Luisa de Morales left two sheets of engravings, one dated 1671 and one dated 1672 (*Pintando el mundo*, 169), while Muñoz López cites three, all published in 1671 (*Mujeres españolas en las artes plásticas*, 78-79); see also Aranda Bernal, "Ser mujer y artista," 46.
 15. Ramos de Castro notes that in Valencia women whose husbands had traveled to the American colonies gained the same rights to act on their own authority that widows did ("La presencia de la mujer en los oficios artísticos," 169-70). Vicente observes similar privileges granted to Catalan women whose husbands were ill or deceased ("Images and Realities of Work," 132, 138, n.5). Mary Elizabeth Perry has observed that similar rights were granted to the wives and widows of Sevillian artisans; see: *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1987), 17. In this context, it is notable that Torre Farfán's *Fiestas*, in which Luisa de Morales's engravings appeared, was published by the widow of Nicolás Rodríguez.
 16. Perry, *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville*, 17.
 17. Aranda Bernal, "Ser mujer y artista," 40-41. Aranda Bernal cites a document in the Archivo Histórico Provincial of Seville (Protocolos Notariales, legajo 548, f. 433).
 18. Ibid.
 19. Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, eds., *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1976), 29.
 20. Palomino, *Lives of the Eminent Spanish Painters and Sculptors*, 304; Ceán Bermúdez, *Diccionario Histórico*, vol. 5, 107; Muñoz López, *Mujeres españolas en las artes plásticas*, 78; Pérez Sánchez, "Las mujeres <<pintoras>> en España," 78; Martínez Díez and López F. Cao, *Pintando el mundo*, 170. Unfortunately, we know of no autograph works by María. Aranda Bernal notes that Juan de Valdés Leal's 1681 labor on a retablo at the convent served as part of María's entrance dowry ("Ser mujer y artista," 47).
 21. Patrick Lenaghan, "106. Andrea de Mena y Bitoria (1654-1734), Ecce Homo and Mater Dolorosa, 1675," in *Tesoros* (New York: Hispanic Society of America, 2000), 324-25.
 22. Jonathan Brown, *Painting in Spain, 1500-1700*, (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1998), 99-100. Notably, Brown discusses such family dynasties in relation to the artistic companies that formed in seventeenth-century Seville as a response to a patron-driven art market. Vicente's work on Catalan textile producers

reveals similar companies as a key structure encouraging women's economic activity (see *Clothing the Spanish Empire*). This parallel further supports the idea that a focus on communal systems of art production can lead to a fuller recognition of women's role within the art market.

23. Muñoz López, *Mujeres españolas en las artes plásticas*, 74; Bernalles Ballesteros and García de la Concha Delgado, *Imagineros andaluces*, 64-65; and Torrejón Díaz, "El entorno familiar y artístico de la roldana," 62.
24. Ibid. Notably, Pedro Roldán and his wife also initially opposed Francisca's marriage, and like her sister Luisa she was removed from her father's house by court order on September 3, 1677, to stay in the home of Blas Antonio de Arévalo pending her marriage to José Felipe Duque-Cornejo (Torrejón Díaz, "El entorno familiar y artístico de la roldana," 61-62). Luisa and her husband's continued collaboration with Pedro Roldán further suggests that the couple may well have maintained a working relationship with Pedro and his shop despite his initial objection to their marriage.
25. Antonio Gallego Burin, "Tres familias de escultores: Los Menas, Los Moras y los Roldanes," *Archivo español de arte y arqueología* 1, no. 3 (Sept.-Dec., 1925), 326-27. While it has been thought that Pedro Roldán was also related to Pedro de Mena through marriage, because his wife's name has been recorded in some documents as "Teresa de Mena," Catherine Hall-van den Elsen confirmed this was not the case, as the couple's marriage certificate lists Teresa's parents as Juan de Ortega and Beatriz de Villavicencio; see Catherine Hall-van den Elsen, "The Life and Work of the Sevillian Sculptor Luisa Roldán (1652-1706) with a Catalogue Raisonné," (Ph.D. diss., La Trobe Univ., Bundoora, Victoria, Australia, 1992), 69, n.1.
26. Gallego Burin, "Tres familias de escultores," 330.
27. Hall-van den Elsen, "The Life and Work of the Sevillian Sculptor Luisa Roldán," 31.
28. Ibid.
29. Vitor Serrão, ed., *Josefa de Óbidos e o Tempo Barocco* (Lisbon: Impressão e Acabamento, 1993), 19; and Archivo de S. Vicente, Seville, Libro 14 de bautismos, 1630-35, f. 6 v.
30. Aranda Bernal, "Ser mujer y artista," 36; and Hall-van den Elsen, "The Life and Work of the Sevillian Sculptor Luisa Roldán," 30-31.
31. Harris and Nochlin, *Women artists, 1550-1950*, 13.
32. See, for example, Aranda Bernal, "Ser mujer y artista," 34.

33. Torrejón Díaz, "El entorno familiar y artístico de la roldana," 57. The family continued to live in the Plazuela de Valderrama even after Pedro relocated his workshop to the *collación* of San Juan de la Palma in 1668.
34. Vicente, "Textual Uncertainties: The Written Legacy of Women Entrepreneurs in Eighteenth-Century Barcelona," in *Women, Texts and Authority in the Early Modern Spanish World*, ed. Marta Vicente and Luis R. Corteguera (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 183-95.
35. Beatrice Gilman Proske was the first to publish excerpts from these letters, which are housed in the Archivo General de Palacio Real (Madrid, Personales, caja 914, expediente 29, "Luisa Roldán, escultora de S.M."); they were subsequently reproduced by Catherine Hall-van den Elsen in her doctoral dissertation. The following excerpts and translations are based on my own transcriptions of the documents, and the numbers following the citations refer to the order in which I found them during my research in September and October, 2006. See also Proske, "Luisa Roldán at Madrid," *Connoisseur* 155, no. 624 (February, 1964): 128-32; no. 625 (March, 1964): 199-203; and no. 626 (April, 1964): 269-73; and Hall-van den Elsen, "The Life and Work of the Sevillian Sculptor Luisa Roldán."
36. "Señora, El Rey tiene desde el berano dos quartos de Casa bacios en la Casa de el Tesoro y por hallarse Luisa Roldan que sirbe ha U[ue]s[tr]a Mag[est]a[d] con Plasa de escultora pobre y cin casa donde Vibir ella y sus Yjos..." ("My lady, since summer the King has had two vacant rooms in the Casa de el Tesoro and...Luisa Roldán, who serves His Majesty in the post of sculptress, is poor and without a house for herself and her children to live in..."; Madrid, Archivo General de Palacio Real, Personales, caja 914, exp. 29, document 19). In another letter to the Queen, this one dated July 5, 1697, she states that she "is poor and has two children" ("...estar pobre y tener dos yjos..."; Madrid, Archivo General de Palacio Real, Personales, caja 914, exp. 29, document 1).
37. "...por que esta pobre supp[li]cca a V[ue]stra Mag[est]a[d] se tenga por serbido onra la con la Plaza de escultora de Camara de V[ue]stra Mag[est]a[d] mandando se le de Casa en que vibra y Racion para mantenerse ella y sus yjos..." ("...because she is poor, requests that Your Majesty consider honoring her with the post of sculptor to the chamber of Your Majesty, which post provides a house in which to live and a ration for the maintenance of herself and her children..."; Madrid, Archivo de Palacio Real, Personales, caja 914, exp. 29, document 11). In another letter to Philip V, she requests aid so that she can "feed herself and her children" ("para poderse Alimentar ella y sus Yjos"; Madrid, Archivo de Palacio Real, Personales, caja 914, esp. 29, document 3).

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Finding Afghanistan

A Book of Real Flowers: In Search of My Afghanistan
by Nadine Fares
New York: Doubt Press, 2005, 400 pp., \$15.00, paperback

Reviewed by Denise Durkin

In 1978, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, and the country became a war zone. Nadine Fares, a Lebanese American, was born in Beirut, Lebanon, and grew up in a family that had fled the country during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. In her book, Fares shares her journey to find her roots in Afghanistan, a country she never knew. She describes the challenges she faced as a woman in a male-dominated society, and the impact of war on her family and community. The book is a powerful and moving account of a woman's search for identity and belonging.

Poetry

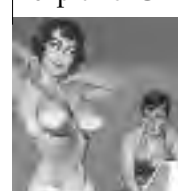
Suite For Eleanor



Eleanor Roosevelt

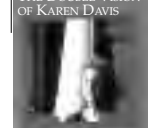
Essay

Pulp and Circ



Photography

THE DOUBLE VISION OF KAREN DAVIS



Karen Davis, self portrait

For the last 10 years, Karen Davis has been working on a project that is both a journey and a discovery. She has traveled to Afghanistan, a country she never knew, and has lived with the people who have lived there for centuries. She has seen the impact of war on a country and its people, and she has seen the resilience of the Afghan people. Her book, *Finding Afghanistan*, is a powerful and moving account of a woman's search for identity and belonging.



Karen Davis, self portrait

In *The Double Vision*, Karen Davis shares her journey to find her roots in Afghanistan, a country she never knew. She describes the challenges she faced as a woman in a male-dominated society, and the impact of war on her family and community. The book is a powerful and moving account of a woman's search for identity and belonging.

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ELLEN DAY HALE

PAINTING THE SELF, FASHIONING IDENTITY

By Tracy Fitzpatrick

In the mid-1880s, American artist Ellen Day Hale (1855–1940) painted a self-portrait (Fig. 1 and Pl. 10) that was ground-breaking and transgressive. Shown half-length with her head tilted slightly back, she is garbed all in black, wearing a dress with buttons and a fur collar, covered by a loosely draped jacket. Beneath a black hat with white trim, her hair is cropped short with bangs. From within a long, lace-trimmed sleeve, her attenuated right hand emerges, dangling slightly, sporting a gemstone ring. Along her left side is an elaborate ostrich-feather fan, and behind her is an Aesthetic style blue background dappled with gold and red patterns. Gazing confidently at the viewer, Hale renders her strength as a portraitist and her role as what would come to be known in the 1890s as the “New Woman.” While such bold representations of women were on the rise in the 1880s, it was rare for a woman to represent herself as Hale did—looking resolutely out at the viewer, without any tools identifying herself as an artist.

Almost all of the writings on the self-portrait describe it as a painting that Hale executed in Paris in 1885 and exhibited at that year’s Salon. While Hale did intend her bold canvas for the Salon, as indicated in her letters, it was not painted in Paris nor was it ever exhibited at the Salon, errors which appear throughout the literature on the artist.¹ More important, though, her letters reveal how the actual circumstances surrounding her execution and exhibition of the canvas evidence Hale’s critical perception of artists’ gendered roles and professionalization alongside an atelier system unable to support her radical approach to self-representation.

Female networks and role models threaded through Hale’s life and were critical to the way in which she thought about her practice and her self-representation. As an exhibiting painter, printmaker, book illustrator, and muralist, she followed the path of other women studying art. She began her formal training



Fig. 1. Ellen Day Hale, *Self-Portrait* (1885), oil, 28 1/2" x 39". Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Nancy Hale Bowers 1986.645. Photograph: © 2010 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

with William Rimmer and William Morris Hunt in Boston, not far from her family’s home in Roxbury, Massachusetts.

By 1877, at the age of twenty-two and with just three full years of formal training behind her, Hale’s correspondence reveals that she was supporting herself through her art: running her own portrait studio and routinely taking commissions.² Although her family was well-known and members of Boston’s elite class, they were not wealthy, and Hale was constantly concerned about

finances. To gain more commissions she sought additional training, traveling to Philadelphia in 1878 for life drawing classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA), and later studying in Paris. She described her experience at PAFA of painting from the female nude for the first time in a letter to her mother, Emily Baldwin Perkins: “I went with Meggy [her cousin, Margaret Lesley] to the early life-class this morning, and painted a dear little girl of fifteen or sixteen years old. I had never painted a woman in that way before, and found it hard but nice.”³

Arriving in Europe in April 1881 with Meggy and her friend and mentor Helen Mary Knowlton, an instructor at Hunt’s school, she traveled through Belgium, Holland, and Italy, painting and sketching. In November Hale arrived in Paris, filled with great dreams and ambitions. She enrolled in classes and spent her free time with American friends and family. Hale and her friends found the grand museums far more interesting than the repetitious exercises and drills their instructors proposed. She sketched in the Jardin du Luxembourg and copied at the Louvre where she discovered the works of Titian, Raphael, Correggio, Rembrandt, Velasquez, and Courbet.⁴

Hunt’s rather loosely structured school had not prepared her for the rigorous teaching style of the Académie Colarossi, where she found the “general work of the class ... neither interesting nor inspiring.”⁵ By January 1882, when Hale

entered the atelier of Carolus-Duran and Jean-Jacques Henner, the novelty of Paris was wearing thin as she felt the pressure of being a foreign student, considered lightweight and insincere by some instructors. Likewise, she was not satisfied with their instruction. She later faulted Carolus-Duran's atelier for its "neglect of the necessary points of drawing" and never having "the nude model," only the "head week in and week out, not even the hands..." At the same time, however, she appreciated "the inculcation of a broad and expeditious method of painting, with regard for light and simplicity,"⁶ referring to experimentation with Impressionism.

In September of 1882 she went to London to study briefly at the Royal Academy of Art, where she exhibited *A New England Girl* (unlocated) the following April.⁷ Returning to Paris in November 1882, she entered the Académie Julian for the first of several courses, during which her instructors included Rudolphe Julian, Tony Robert-Fleury, Jules-Joseph Lefebvre, Gustave-Rodolphe Boulanger, and Adolphe William Bouguereau. It was critically important to be associated with respected teachers, whose names could be cited in the Salon catalogue. Although, by the mid-1880s independent exhibitions were on the rise and the Salon's importance had decreased,⁸ Hale was well aware that exhibiting at the Salon would help her gain commissions back home. As art historian Kathleen Adler has observed, "Failure to meet the standards of the jury, and then to occupy a place where the work could be seen, was held to mean oblivion not only in Paris but on returning to compete in the art market in America."⁹

In 1882 she made her first submission to the Salon jury, two charcoal drawings, both rejected. The following year, she approached the Salon more confidently, gaining acceptance of a painting of a young boy titled *Beppo [Joe]*, described in an *Art Amateur* Salon review as "carefully and conscientiously painted, albeit a trifle muddled and indefinite in the modeling of the face..."¹⁰

Hale fell ill in the summer of 1883 and was retrieved from Paris by her father.¹¹ She did not return until late January or early February of 1885, taking up classes again at the Académie Julian. Of all the places she studied, she preferred Julian's, where she had collected a circle of friends that provided her a supportive environment. Among these classmates that Hale mentions in various letters are Anna Bilinska (1857–93), Elisabeth Boott (1846–88), Ida F. Clark (b. 1858), Rosina Emmet (1854–1948), Anna Klumpke (1856–1942), Mary K. Trotter (n.d.), and Dora Wheeler (1856–1940). Gabrielle De Veaux Clements (1858–1948), whom Hale met in 1883, would become her lifelong partner. Writing to her father, the well-known minister, author, and orator Edward Everett Hale, in June 1885, she confided, "The principal happiness, outside of my work, which I have at present is my new friendship with Gabrielle; Which is a great deal to me now and which is likely to be more."¹²

Hale's family had provided her with a network of strong women. Her great aunts included Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–96), the abolitionist and author known worldwide for her best-selling 1853 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; and Catharine Beecher (1800–78), an educator and social reformer whose 1841 *Treatise on Domestic Economy* advocated women's increased



Fig. 2. Photograph of Ellen Day Hale (c. 1884). Hale Family Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton

control over their domestic environments.¹³ Another great aunt, the suffragist Isabella Beecher Hooker (1822–1907), founded the Connecticut chapter of the National Woman Suffrage Association and lobbied Congress on behalf of the national woman suffrage amendment introduced by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, a distant relative of Hale's mother. Influenced by generations of activists, Hale herself, later, would lobby on behalf of woman suffrage, participating in 1913 in the founding of the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage (CUWS).¹⁴ Finally, one of Hale's first cousins was Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935), best known for her pivotal feminist novel, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1891).¹⁵

This remarkable network of strong and activist women likely informed Hale's sense of self and courage around the way in which she portrayed herself. Hale began painting her self-portrait sometime in 1884, working on it both at her family's home in Roxbury, and at their summer house in Matunuck, Rhode Island. Writing to her mother from Matunuck in September 1884 about her progress on the canvas, she observed: "Phil [her brother, the artist Philip Leslie Hale] likes my picture very much; it is certainly original, but queer enough and frightfully difficult business."¹⁶ She concluded with her plans for a brief visit home and an apology for staying away so long: "If nothing happens to prevent, or if I am not very much needed at home, I shall come back to finish my picture.... I feel very mean to stay away so long but I can't bear to leave such a piece of work undone."¹⁷ Hale felt compelled to the complete the painting, but staying away for so long to work on it seemed to her a selfish thing to do.

Hale's description of the canvas as "original," "queer," and "frightfully difficult business" suggests that she was weighing tough decisions around her self-representation and that she was

aware of its eccentric and radical nature. A photograph of Hale dated circa 1884 (Fig. 2), likely taken for the purpose of creating the self-portrait, provides insight into some of the choices Hale made in translating her features onto the canvas. The photograph shows Hale seated demurely with hands folded in a studio space. The blanket-draped back wall provided a clean backdrop against which to take the photograph, the same way a portrait might be painted against a blank background to be filled in later. Such a background reinforces the idea that this was a photograph from which to make a study, not a photograph taken for commemoration or display.

When compared with the photograph, it is clear that Hale altered some of her features for the self-portrait. In the photograph her bangs are “frizzled,” while in the painting her bangs are straightened and carefully arranged with only a slight gap just above the inner corner of her left brow. In the early 1880s, bangs had multiple connotations. On the one hand they were praised as a youthful way for a woman to wear her hair; at the same time, they could connote promiscuity. Bangs were referred to frequently as the “Langtry style” after the British actress Lillie Langtry, who famously wore her hair banged and who was the subject of numerous scandals. As explained in a March 1883 newspaper article entitled “The Girl Who Wears Bangs,” the banged girl may “try to be good and true, but it’s awfully hard work. When she looks at herself in the glass and sees the quarter of an inch of forehead, she says to herself: ‘I am dangerous; they want to look out for me.’”¹⁸

Given that by 1884, the year Hale executed the self-portrait, banging seems to have emerged as an accepted style both in New York and Paris, Hale seems to be making a fashion statement, although she was certainly walking a fine line between fashion and transgression.¹⁹ Fashion also dictated Hale’s choice of costume for the painting. In the photo, she wears a loose Aesthetic style dress, while in the painting she depicts herself theatrically in black. She is holding an ostrich-feather fan, a statement of fashion—particularly Parisienne fashion—reminiscent, for example, of portraits of women by Manet,²⁰ with whose work Hale was generally familiar.

Hale translated other features from the photograph more directly, for example, her looking directly at the viewer. Her expression in the painting is particularly piercing, as she appears to follow the viewer’s movements with her stare. Also, while her hand appears remarkably attenuated in the painting, the apparent distortion is, in fact, a straightforward reiteration from the photograph. Moreover, located almost directly at the center of the canvas and highlighted with bright pigment, the right hand dominates the image, carrying significant compositional weight.

The way in which Hale combined these two elements—her gaze and hand—is perhaps the most novel and critical construction in this self-representation, as it was quite uncommon for artists to portray themselves looking directly at the viewer without palette or paintbrushes in hand. In their self-portraits, two of her contemporaries, Marie Bashkirtseff (c. 1883; Fig. 3) and Anna Bilinska (1887; Fig. 4), as examples, show themselves staring directly at the viewer, but their gazes are filtered through their tools. They present themselves as artists

observing their subject, not like Hale, as a spectator. When Mary Cassatt, portrayed herself three-quarter length and with empty hands (1878; Fig. 5), she averted her gaze, positioning herself looking away from the viewer, into the distance.

It was uncommon as well for male artists to depict themselves looking directly out without the tools of their trade, an exception being Edgar Degas’s 1862 self-portrait in which he engages the viewer, with one hand in his pocket and the other holding his hat and gloves. On occasion, men painted each other in this way, such as John Singer Sargent’s 1879 portrait of his mentor Carolus-Duran. There is no evidence that Hale saw either of these works before starting her painting, but the comparisons provide insight into the ways in which Hale borrowed strategies typically reserved for the bohemian male artist, the *flâneur*. As he appeared in Charles Baudelaire’s 1859 essay, “Le peintre de la vie moderne,”²¹ the *flâneur* is never idle, but rather an active observer and participant in city life. A connoisseur of the fineries of Paris, he strolls its streets with a detached gaze, observing while being observed. He is distinctly male, defined by his mobilized gaze, looking as he walks, being observed as he looks. Only women of the *demimonde* could move freely through the streets like a *flâneur*, observing while being observed.²²

Hale did not represent herself as a *flâneur*, but rather adopted aspects of the construction of his persona in order to market a public personality that was novel and nonconformist, or as Hale put it, “original” and “queer.” Nor did she paint herself as a *flâneuse*—the female counterpart of the *flâneur*—which is a twentieth century theoretical construct that did not exist within Baudelaire’s concept.²³

Hale’s willingness to create and display such a frank, even daring, assertion of identity marks her approach to the self-portrait as significant. By 1884, Hale was well aware that professionalizing to gain commissions was not only about demonstrating skill and exhibiting broadly, but also about promoting oneself. As art historian Sarah Burns observed about the art market in the gilded age, an “expanding and increasingly specialized artist population ... creat[ed] severely competitive conditions in which great advantage could be won by achieving a high profile as an original, an innovator, a nonconformist.”²⁴ Writes Burns:

While the exotic studio was often the site of persuasion and seduction, the most dynamic form of advertisement lay in the construction of an intriguing public personality, a distinctive style, with the power to attract and hold attention on exhibition walls, in the social world, and on the pages of newspapers and magazines. The public self, of which the art product with its recognizable accent of personal style was an extension, became a commodity.²⁵

Having exhibited at the Salon in 1883, Hale understood that systems of spectacle and commodification worked in tandem. People came to the Salon not only to examine art sanctioned by the jury, but also to see and be seen by others, thus creating a form of sanctioned seeing.

Portraits played a critical role in this exchange. As art historian Lois Fink observed,



Fig. 3. Marie Bashkirtseff, *Self-Portrait with Palette and Harp* (c. 1883), oil. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nice.



Fig. 4. Anna Bilinska, *Self-Portrait with Apron and Brushes* (1887), oil, 35 3/8" x 46 1/16". National Museum, Cracow.



Fig. 5. Mary Cassatt, *Portrait of the Artist* (1878), oil and gouache, 23 5/8" x 16 3/16". Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Edith H. Proskauer, 1975 (1975.319.1).

Portraits at the Salon always attracted crowds of people who were ever fascinated by canvases representing the powerful and renowned of the day—officials of state, actors and actresses, military officers, women with interesting reputations. Famous subjects, who often turned up to see their images on view, became Salon attractions in themselves as excited visitors nudged their companions to gape at Sarah Bernhardt, Lillie Langtry, or the president of the Republic strolling by.²⁶

Sanctioned seeing sparked by celebrity at the Salon fostered fame for artists as well. According to Fink, "Salon exhibitions had made celebrities of living artists, and consequently their portraits now attained an unprecedented status."²⁷ The celebrated exhibition of Sargent's portrait of Carolus-Duran at the 1879 Salon is an example of the phenomenon. Given the nepotistic system of the Salon, where artists listed their teacher's names alongside their own in the catalogue, painting one's teacher or an artist peer was an effective means of promotion for both artist and sitter.

The exhibition of self-portraits at the Salon, however, was relatively untapped ground. While a few artists had exhibited these works there, no American woman had done so.²⁸ Such a painting



Fig. 6. Ellen Day Hale, *Fullam* (also *An Old Retainer* or *L'hiver en Amerique*) (1884), oil, 15 ½" x 11". Location unknown.

would have functioned as both spectacle and spectator. For Hale, had she shown her self-portrait at the Salon, it would have been an extraordinary attempt to demonstrate to viewers that she could skillfully fashion representations, even her own: the canvas designed as a construction of a powerful and distinctive public self as commodity.

After finishing the self-portrait in the fall of 1884, Hale returned from Matunuck to Roxbury, where she remained for the rest of the year, making preparations for her departure for Europe. She arranged to ship the painting to Paris, intending to gain the approval required to exhibit it at the Salon. Hale's letters are full of anxiety about presenting her portrait to her teachers. Soon after arriving in Paris, she wrote to her mother, "It will be horrid of course to shew [sic] my own portrait and consult Julian about sending it to the Salon. More especially as I have bound him by great oaths to tell me if he doesn't think it thoroughly worth sending; but I think I can stand that if he can."²⁹ Hale sent other works as well, including a painting of longtime family servant Abel Fullam (1884; Fig. 6), a more traditional canvas of a man seated by a window. The painting had received good notices when it was shown at the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association and the Boston Art Club,³⁰ and could serve as a backup, should her teachers say no to the self-portrait.

Hale had arrived in Paris by early February 1885 and received the shipment soon after:

I must tell you ... how delighted I was ... to see the commissaire appearing with my big box on his back yesterday afternoon; and then how very exciting it was to unpack it. Everything came in good condition; Gabrielle was dying to see them last night, but I wouldn't let her see

any but Fullam; and then this morning when my portrait was nicely arranged in a good light, she came up to see it, and was delighted with it. She was interested in my other things, but she liked the portrait best of all and was anxious to have me send it to the Exhibition.³¹

Hale waited anxiously for the opportunity to show the self-portrait to Julian and to Bouguereau, whose approval she needed to exhibit the canvas at the Salon. At this time, Bouguereau was the most famous artist in Paris and was known in Boston as well, having exhibited at the Boston Art Club in 1873. According to Alfred Nettement, the last *massier* to serve under Bouguereau before his death, he "was given a godlike status and was the object of a veritable cult" in the women's atelier at the Académie Julian.³² Hale and the other students were especially delighted with his tutelage, and she wrote home saying: "For now we all of us have a right to inscribe his name after ours in catalogues; and it will really be rather an advantage in America, where he has much more reputation—such as it is—than any of our other professors."³³

Finally, the day arrived, and Hale described Bouguereau's critique of her work:

Gabrielle and I waited by the door for ours [our turn] in a very trembling state I assure you; and at last there was a cry made of Hale and Clements, and in we went more dead than alive. On the way we met Julian, who on this day was in all his glory, showing people in and out, and facilitating things with all the tact he's master of. What have you got Miss Hale? said he: a drawing? No monsieur said I awfully frightened: it's but just come; ought I to shew [sic] it? Let's see, said he, and made Marie stick it up in the little paved entry; There are things that will shock him in it, said he, but I should shew it; then I gave him my Fullam which he said he should certainly shew and in we all went.

Describing the critique of the painting of Fullam, she wrote:

There was M. Bouguereau as cheerful as possible, sitting in the chair with another before him, in which the wily Julian immediately put my little Fullam. Oh, said Bouguereau: this is a foreign painting; Yes, said I. I did it in my country. Where is your country? Said he: Norway? No, America said I. He then criticized parts of it, like the head and the more evident hand, didn't like the coat-sleeve, but on the whole seemed to like it pretty well.

Bouguereau's criticism of the Fullam painting was mild. It was likely the strong light in the canvas that suggested to Bouguereau that she was Norwegian, as many Scandinavians were producing such works filled with very strong light at this time. Then he looked at the self-portrait.

By this time Julian had got my own portrait where he could see it, and said And then she's got this sketch; Bouguereau then turned his attention to that and asked me, among other things, why I had got my fan so big; said it detracted from my head and that the background came forward too much; then he attacked my hand, told

me I ought to have made it prettier; But they aren't pretty, really, said I; They're prettier than that, said he, suppressed laughter being heard from Gabrielle and Monsieur Julian; I'll tell you, said he, your hand might look tired if you held it a long time in that position, but you must do as fashionable ladies do, hold it up and let the blood run out of it; and he illustrated the process with a plump white hand which was very different from my uncomfortable bony one. He then proceeded to give me a detailed and very just criticism on my head. And finally ended with the *Voilà* with which a professor generally winds up.³⁴

Ultimately, Bouguereau would not give his imprimatur to the painting, making it impossible for Hale to exhibit the self-portrait at the Salon. When Philip Hale heard of Bouguereau's criticism of his sister, he wrote to their mother, "Nelly's experiences with Monsieur Bouguereau were highly interesting. I can easily imagine that her portrait with the fan should displease him; it's so entirely out of his line."³⁵

There is no evidence that Hale changed the scale of the fan in relation to the head, although it appears that she heeded Bouguereau's advice with respect to the background, which originally was brown. It is unknown when Hale changed the background, but at some point, she painted over the brown with blue, leaving areas of the brown exposed, looking like medallions in a field of blue with tiny red and blue flowers on top. The date 1885 is written directly on the canvas, thus it is possible that she changed it after hearing from Bouguereau, believing that the blue would recede better than the brown.

Bouguereau's most significant criticism pertained to the hand. As an academic who studied with Jacques Louis David's pupil Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, Bouguereau's criticism of Hale's hand would have been informed by academic traditions of *geste*, or gesture. Prior to the late eighteenth century, the French Academy held physiognomy as the primary means by which an artist could represent expression. Toward the end of the century, beginning mainly with David and his followers, gestures, or positioning of the head and hands, began to replace physiognomy as critical signifiers of expression. This tradition grew stronger in the early nineteenth century as treatises on *geste* became widely available and followed. Handbooks like Paillot de Montabert's 1813 *Theories du geste dans l'art de la peinture renfermant plusieurs precepts applicables a l'art du theatre*, which was incorporated into his 1829 *Traite complet de la peinture*, offered parameters for correct gestural attitudes.³⁶

By the late nineteenth century, although such rigid prescriptions became less widely followed, traditional academics still observed pantomimic gesture as a basic of artistic training. Seemingly haphazard positioning of a sitter's head or hands evidenced more than a lack of training, however. It also demonstrated a lack of understanding of the ways in which such gestures indicated social positioning. According to Bouguereau, Hale's depiction of her hand as masculinized and dangling was a distortion that could (and should) be corrected. Rather, she should make the hand "prettier" by doing "as fashionable ladies do, hold it up and let

the blood run out of it." Then, "*Voilà*," with a pretty, fashionable, and lifeless hand, she would be positioned correctly, having effectively drained not only the blood from her hand, but also the agency from her artistry.

A month after Bouguereau's criticism, Hale reported to her mother that she had been asked by Julian to practice drawing the female hand and wrist "from the plaster," a method of study through which students learned how to render parts of the body as sanctioned by the Academy. She elaborated, however, that Julian had made this request "with apparent diffidence" and that it "has been the occasion of endless jeering from Gabrielle and Miss Trotter ever since."³⁷ And while it seems that Hale changed the background of the canvas in response to Bouguereau's criticisms, it does not appear that she changed the positioning of the hand in any significant way. Analytical study of the painting through X-radiology shows no significant *pentimenti* as evidence that Hale shifted the original position of the hand. Thus, while she was kept from exhibiting the work at the Salon by Bouguereau, she was not persuaded by his criticism to deviate from her original intention. Again, negotiating the line between fashion and transgression, Hale portrayed herself garbed elaborately and fashionably, but painted the hand her way—without regard for idealized, academic notions of beauty.

When Hale exhibited the self-portrait in Boston, perhaps for the first time, in 1887, a Boston reviewer described the painting as "refreshingly unconventional and lifelike," writing that Hale "displays a man's strength in the treatment and handling of her subjects—a massiveness and breadth of effect attained through sound training and native wit and courage."³⁸ The critical reception of the work acknowledged the uniqueness of the canvas, framing Hale's artistry as strong and as distinctly American, a far cry from the reproach she had received about the canvas only two years earlier. In her own country, where the Academy held less sway over taste, the canvas was seen for what it really was: a bold and courageous twist on self-representation.

Presenting a new chapter in the history of self-portraiture, Hale's early adoption of aspects of the construct of the *flâneur* demonstrates an ambitious and informed approach to self-representation. She was aware that what she was doing was radical. Thus she safeguarded herself by shipping not only the self-portrait, but also "my Fullam" to Paris, a strategy that provided her an alternative Salon entry. While Hale may have altered the background of her self-portrait, she did not change its key features in any significant way, despite the advice of her teachers. Nevertheless, their criticisms likely affected the course of her career. Hale's experience demonstrates the difficulty for artists—male and female alike—obliged to participate in, and adhere to, institutions unwilling to accommodate aesthetic and conceptual shifts. Hale did not realize her ambition for her self-portrait, as articulated in her letters. Its execution, exhibition, and critical reception—both by her teachers and her American critics—however, contribute in significant ways to a better understanding of women's self-representation in the gilded age, the history of the professionalization of women, and the broader history of gendered frameworks of self-representation. •

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Notes

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- For accurate accounts, see Tracy B. Schpero, "American Impressionist Ellen Day Hale," (M.A. Thesis, George Washington Univ., 1994), and "About the Cover: The Art of Ellen Day Hale," *Women in the Arts* 14 (Spring 1996): 4-5. Also see Erica E. Hirshler, *A Studio of Her Own: Women Artists in Boston, 1870-1940* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2001).
- Throughout her letters from this period, Hale references various sitters who come to her to have their portraits painted.
- Margaret Lesley is now better known by her married name, Margaret Lesley Bush-Brown. For Hale's letter about the female nude, see Ellen Day Hale (hereafter EDH) to her mother, Emily Perkins Hale (hereafter EPH), Philadelphia, March 19, 1878, Hale Family Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College (hereafter HFP).
- EDH to EPH, Paris, Nov. 22, 1881, HFP; and EDH to My dearest People, Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 24, 1881, HFP.
- EDH to My dearest Family, Paris, November 7, 1881, HFP.
- EDH to Alice Curtis, Boston, May 14, 1887, HFP.
- EDH to Edward Everett Hale (hereafter EEH), Paris, April 23, 1882, HFP.
- Lois Marie Fink, *American Art at the Nineteenth-Century Paris Salons* (Cambridge and Washington, DC: Cambridge Univ. Press in association with National Museum of American Art, 1990), 122.
- Kathleen Adler, "'We'll Always Have Paris': Paris as Training Ground and Proving Ground," *Americans in Paris: 1860-1900* (London: National Gallery Co. Ltd., 2006), 40.
- "Pictures by American Women in the Paris Salon," *Art Amateur* (August 1883): 45.
- "Edward Everett Hale," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 18, 1883.
- EDH to EEH, 13 rue d'Alger, June 15, 1885, HFP.
- Sisters Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe also co-authored *The American Woman's Home; or, Principles of Domestic Science* (1869).
- For Hale's participation in the CUWS, see "Mr. and Mrs. Taft issue Last Official Invitations," *Washington Post*, January 31, 1913; "Suffrage War Anew," *Washington Post*, January 10, 1914; "Woman Make Threat," *Washington Post*, January 12, 1914; and "Suffragists on Warpath," *New York Times*, January 12, 1914.
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman also received international recognition for her *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Relations* (1898). As children, Ellen and Charlotte spent time together during Charlotte's extended visits to the Hales' home in Roxbury, Massachusetts.
- EDH to EPH, Matunuck, Sept. 21, 1884, HFP.
- Ibid.
- See "Frizzles and Bangs," *Washington Post*, Aug. 14, 1882; "The Girl Who Wears Bangs," *Washington Post*, March 18, 1883; and "'The Langtry Shingle,'" *Washington Post*, Oct. 2, 1883.
- "The Fashions," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 11, 1884.
- See Erica E. Hirshler, "At Home in Paris," in *Americans in Paris*, 79.
- Manet's use of black has been treated by several scholars. See, for example, Carol Armstrong, *Manet Manette* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2002).
- "Le peintre de la vie moderne" was written in 1859 and published in *Le Figaro* as a series on Nov. 28 and Dec. 3, 1863. This was one of Baudelaire's most important writings and influenced generations of writers and artists.
- See Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, "The flâneur on and off the streets of Paris," in *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).
- For the conceptualization of the flâneuse, see Janet Wolff, "The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2, no. 3 (1985): 37-46. For more on the flâneuse, see *The Invisible Flâneuse?: Gender, Public Space and Visual Culture in Nineteenth Century Paris*, ed. Aruna D'Souza and Tom McDonough (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2006).
- Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press), 232.
- Ibid.
- Fink, *American Art at the Nineteenth-Century Paris Salons*, 236.
- Ibid., 245.
- According to the compilation, "List of American Exhibitors and Their Works, 1800-1899" in Fink, *American Art at the Nineteenth-Century Paris Salons*, the first American woman since 1800 to exhibit a self-portrait at the Salon was Cecile Payen in 1887. She was followed by Harriet Campbell Foss in 1889, Mary-Louise Fairchild [MacMonnies] and Kate Augusta Carl in 1890, Lucy Lee-Robbins in 1892, and L. Smith in 1897.
- EDH to My dearest Friends, Paris, Feb. 5, 1885, HFP.
- Her "Fullam," then titled *An Old Retainer* but exhibited at the 1885 Paris Salon as *L'hiver en Amerique*, was awarded a medal and purchased by the Massachusetts Mechanic's Association. See "Art Notes," *New York Times*, Nov. 10, 1884, and Philip Leslie Hale (hereafter PLH) to EDH, n.d., New York, HFP. Regarding the exhibition of the painting at the Art Club, Philip wrote to his sister, "I saw in the paper that Miss Hale's thing was one of the six attractions of the impromptu Art Club Exhibition. Papa says it's the Fullam." PLH to EDH, Dec. 14, 1884, HFP.
- EDH to My dearest Family, Paris, Feb. 27, 1885, HFP.
- For critical reception of Bouguereau's work in Boston, see Eric. M. Zafran, "William Bouguereau in America: A Roller-Coaster Reputation," in James F. Peck, *In the Studios of Paris: William Bouguereau & His American Students* (Tulsa, OK: Philbrook Museum of Art, 2006), 21. Regarding *Nettement* see Alfred *Nettement*, "William Bouguereau," *L'Academie Julian*, January 1906, 3, quoted in Damian Bartoli, "William Bouguereau the Teacher," in Peck, *In the Studios of Paris*, 52.
- EDH to My dearest Family, Paris, March 1, 1885, HFP.
- Ibid.
- PLH to EPH, St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 1885, HFP.
- Translated as "Theories of gesture in the art of painting and their relationship to the art of theater," and "Comprehensive treatise on painting." See Dorothy Johnson, "Corporality and Communication: The Gestural Revolution of Diderot, David, and *The Oath of the Horatii*," *The Art Bulletin*, 71, no. 1 (March 1989): 113, n. 99.a
- EDH to EPH, Paris, April 26, 1885, HFP.
- Greta [Margaret Curzon Marquand Hale (1829-1903)], "Art in Boston," *Art Amateur* (January 1887): 28. Greta is identified in the HFP Finding Aid. A well known critic at the time, she later married Ellen Day Hale's brother, Herbert Dudley Hale in 1892.

THE HEALING ART OF NANCY AZARA

By Katie Cercone

*The anxiety and pleasure of feeling plants live
I have not experienced best at the movies, but
through my feeble but complete senses, shored up
by one another, not by saturating, madly
reinforcing, my sight.*

—Colette¹

Nancy Azara (b. 1939) set out as an artist in the late sixties. When conditions were less than favorable for women working in the arts, she found a place for her work within an alternative, grassroots feminist network. From the beginning, Azara's reverence for nature and the meaningful women and deities in her life informed her sculpture: tall, organic wood forms dressed in gold leaf and encaustic. Her primary medium, fallen trees, emerged as a metaphor for the human self, in addition to being a timeless symbol of transformation.²

Azara collects found wood from the streets, often utilizing battered and unattractive pieces cast aside in her urban environment. "When I carve into it," she says, "I reveal the beauty within...the carving resuscitates the life that has been held in stasis. The tree becoming sculpture represents a way for me to parallel or illustrate our history and our voice as women."³ She thrives on the interchange between her hand and the tree during the carving, and even claims to sense a metamorphosis, whereas the tree becomes a type of surrogate self.⁴ This transformation that occurs through Azara's intuitive connection to nature, embodied in her working rhythm, exemplifies what Australian feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz identifies as the corporeal impact of art: "[Art] is the most vital and direct form of impact on and through the body, the generation of vibratory waves, rhythms, that traverse the body and make of the body a link with forces it cannot otherwise perceive and act upon...culture's most intense debt to the chaotic forces it characterizes as nature."⁵ Grosz's argument is one way to frame the spiritual impact of Azara's work. This idea of the "vibratory," sensory impact of art and nature is helpful in terms of understanding Azara's radical artist project, which has rendered her a vital presence in the feminist art world.

Nancy Azara was born into a middle-class southern Italian family in Bayridge, Brooklyn. She attended an all-girl Catholic school.⁶ Although her family held conventional values that

excluded art as a vocational goal, Azara remembers the time spent in her grandfather's garden in Dyker Heights as having foundational creative influence upon her, helping develop her keen sense for observation and an appreciation for solitude. "I used to lie on the grass under the flowers, pressing my body into the damp earth as I watched the daily comings and goings of garden life," she wrote in 2002.⁷ She began to wonder about the nature of art and its connection to the rhythm of the seasons.⁸

Following high school Azara attended a two-year program in Fashion and Merchandising at Finch College in New York City. It was there, encouraged by Christine Block, one of her instructors, that she first seriously considered becoming an artist. Upon graduation Azara worked as a costume designer for a theater company in Manhattan, but she quickly grew tired of the position and longed for a freer, more artistically challenging environment.⁹

Azara attended the Art Student's League for three years, beginning in 1964, studying painting and drawing. Art education in the 1960s was still traditional and conservative, and while she welcomed her newfound creative community and the camaraderie it inspired, the overall experience was full of disappointments. One instructor, Edwin Dickinson, now known for his psychologically charged self-portraits and landscapes, was an important source of encouragement and inspiration to Azara during this confusing and challenging period.

In 1967, Azara moved with her musician husband to Italy, where she found the atmosphere for a woman artist unwelcoming. When she returned to New York City in late 1969 and sought out galleries to show her work, she found artist collectives and cooperative galleries the most receptive. One commercial gallery was interested until the owner stopped by to look at her work and abruptly desisted the deal, crying out, "Oh my god all those hooves!," responding to Azara's pink carved shapes, a reference to vaginas. Even four decades later, a review of Azara's exhibition of *Maxi's Wall* (2007; Pl. 11) at A.I.R. Gallery described how her vivid use of color seemed "almost perverse."¹⁰ On this subject, Azara draws a comparison to the daring use of color by the pre-World War II German Expressionists, which she credits with inspiring her practice. She also admits to being influenced by the practices of Medieval painters, especially in terms of her pairings of gold and green or gold and red, a technique these artists used to make gold leaf



Fig. 1. Nancy Azara, *Shadow Book* (1982), paint, pastel and cutout on paper, 10" x 15". Photo: Emily Harris.

appear more lustrous. A more appreciative 2000 review of her color scheme noted its "Byzantine or South Asian splendor."¹¹

Following her return from Italy, Azara joined several consciousness-raising groups, including Redstockings, one of the founding women's liberation groups. Consciousness-raising involved women sitting in a circle and sharing their personal experiences, informally analyzing their lives in the absence of men. This new practice upended a tradition of isolation and silence for many women bound into their domestic spheres and led to political mobilization around collective women's issues. This period of personal growth during the early 1970s laid the foundation for Azara's thinking about empowering, women-only art spaces, and would lead to the creation of the New York Feminist Art Institute (NYFAI), a place where women could make art for and about themselves. In 1977, with artist Miriam Schapiro of Womanhouse and the CALArts feminist art program, Azara set out in search of like-minded artists. "I must have called 150 women," she recounted. Out of this effort came a dedicated group of feminist art professionals, including Lucille Lessane, Irene Peslikis, Carol Stronghilos, and Selena Whitefeather, who would serve with Azara and Schapiro as NYFAI cofounders.

Keeping to their feminist model, NYFAI used consciousness-raising as a primary technique in developing women's experiences into art. At that time it was the only school on the east coast to combine both art and feminism, a holistic educational institution which nurtured the artist as a person, particularly as a woman.

Working as a part of a women-run artist community gave Azara a much needed sense of freedom. She began experimenting with adding paint to her sculpture, laying the foundation for her characteristically adventurous palette.¹² She experienced a recrudescence of her most personal, innermost forms, and developed a process she would use as a leading philosophical component in teaching students. In her popular Visual Diaries class at the Institute, women sat in a circle and

took turns drawing and consciousness raising, alternately listening, drawing, and speaking. The classroom became a nurturing atmosphere where women could let go of constricting self-judgments and internalized sexism. On the transformation both she and her students experienced during the Visual Diaries course, Azara later wrote:

Making forms and images is a very valuable thing for you and you shouldn't throw it away and follow the formula you learned in art school. Good art breaks the formula. During the process of consciousness raising and drawing things would appear that [the students] ordinarily would erase. Instead of erasing them they would honor them, often it would be like a root or a road, a door that would open to their own personal forms. The most important thing was to be genuine, to be true, to their own ideas and images, forms, colors and shapes.¹³

Shadow Book (Fig. 1), a Visual Diary Azara made in 1982 using pigment and paper cut outs, is part of a larger series she has been developing since 1979. In January of 2010 more than thirty visual diaries made in Azara's workshop were part of an exhibition at the Rutgers University Archibald S. Alexander Library called *Bridging Generations: Women Artists and Organizations from Rutgers' Collections*.¹⁴

Through both her teaching and learning at NYFAI, Azara gradually developed a moving visual language and spiritual practice that she believes transcends the limitations of the material art world and harkens back to ancient Shamanic traditions of art making as healing. To explain her working perspective, she often uses the favorite proverb of her Sicilian grandfather: "See the world with one eye open and with one eye closed."¹⁵ This proverb helps unpack the dualities inherent in Azara's work, specifically the way her work hovers at the interstice of inward- and outward-bound vision. This type of sensory intuition is echoed in the opening epigraph by Colette (1873-1954), a prolific French novelist who developed her own alphabet based on women's pleasure as a process of sublimation carried out under the influence of plants, beasts, and flowers.¹⁶ Azara makes a similar decree regarding her trees and the undulating current of unconscious energy—her own arcane, natural source of nourishment—that drives her carving.

For nearly thirty years Azara has been fashioning talismans or shields—constructed sources of protection and wells of female power. Cassandra Langer, a feminist art historian and NYFAI colleague, described Azara's intentions in writing about *Wrapped Yellow Stick* (1985) and *Whip Stick* (1986):

"The wrapped magic divining rods become staffs of power, witch sticks, shafts of support radiating with cosmic energy....Azara is a woman who is struggling for her own image to express feelings that feel outside the reference points of a patriarchal tradition. It is the

language of emanation, creation and spiritual healing...[restoring] the continuum of mind and body as a transcendent harmony.¹⁷

In 2006, Azara created another talisman with *Broken Red Leaves* (Pl. 12), a wall mounted sculpture she made to counter the emotional and physical effects of an illness that affected her fingers. Here she invokes the human tree metaphor by replacing her own hands with the correlate part of the tree: its leaves. The brightly painted purple and crimson relief in the shape of handprints along the base functions as a radiant emblem; a cathexis Azara utilized as a healing wish for the health of her hands.

Thematically, hands are a compelling and repeated instrument of expression in Azara's sculptural work. Other recent works, including *Hickory with Hands* (2004; Pl. 13) and *Fern with Hands* (2004; Fig. 2), *Lily/Hand* (2003), and *Hand Garden* (2004; Pl. 14), a large piece commissioned by the Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, involve images of nature and hands, made from diverse materials such as cast aluminum, cast bronze, and carved and painted wood.

For Azara, hands suggest a human presence and healing, while they bear further significance as the very vehicle of her artistic medium. Her ritual shaping and "dressing" of wood is ultimately a physical manifestation of Azara's own sensuous relationship to natural matter and the space left around it for the human spirit. Hand-made tempera paint and gold leaf adorn the wood so that Azara's handiwork takes on the appearance of a garment, significant in light of her previous vocation in costume design. Commenting on Azara's hyper real palette and carved patterning, critic Janet Koplos wrote: "[I]t's as if the wood wants to burst out of its jacket."¹⁸

In 1996 Azara completed *Circle with Seven Hands* (Fig. 3), a six-foot high enclosed cylinder enhanced with tree limbs cut to resemble arms. The piece was designed with slats in the middle so viewers could peer in and catch a glimpse of the sacred circle of hands inside. Azara complained that some tall men at the exhibition "invaded" by looking over the top; however, this instance of "peeping toms" reflects the dialectical nature of much of Azara's life work in terms of her creative output and administrative role at NYFAI, particularly the way in which her projects address the condition of women within carefully designed "outsider" (women only) spaces. Is there a place for men in Azara's constructed world? Should they hover above? Are they allowed to look? To be in conversation with the work? A hard lesson Azara and her cooperative learned is that a non-profit arts organization like NYFAI could not sustain without the support of larger (patriarchal) institutions; and after eleven years NYFAI closed its doors.

Another theme that has run through Azara's work from the beginning utilizes the language of folklore to expose cross-cultural biases regarding gender and age. For example, Azara described a plant called "'mother-in-law plant' or 'dumb cane,' which, if you bite it numbs your mouth so that you can't speak for several weeks." In her piece titled *Widows Tongue* (1974; exhibited in 2006), named after the colloquial term for another plant, she depicted its long, snake-like tip in a monument



Fig. 2. Nancy Azara, *Fern with Hands* (2004), carved and painted wood with gold leaf, 5' x 3' x 1" (three panels). Photo: Christopher Burke.

honoring Indian women who were traditionally thrown on the funeral pyre of their husband. In a large (7' x 10' x 4") work based on an ancient story, *For Lady Tashat* (1984), Azara used bleached and painted fir and pine to render a tender and tragic sculpture honoring the ravished soul of the teenage daughter of the treasurer of Amon in Egyptian Thebes, believed to be one of the few educated women of her day.¹⁹ Azara's work of this period attempted to interject such historical instances of female "loss" into the popular consciousness.

Azara believes that her use of homemade tempera paint, a pigment made from egg that keeps its color for centuries and achieves a multihued, otherworldly effect when applied to wood, is especially apt for making sculpture concerning spirituality and women's history. At the same time her spiritual content conveys a certain sense of timelessness, Azara's focus on aging reflects her sociopolitical values and becomes a thread she follows as she explores life cycles in a more autobiographi-



Fig. 3. Nancy Azara, *Circle with Seven Hands* (1996), carved and painted wood with gold leaf, 5' x 40" in diameter. Photo: Christopher Burke.

cal manner. In *Changes* (1998-2006; Pl. 15 and Fig. 4) and *Passages* (1999; Pl. 16), for example, her work provides a counterpoint to popular historical narratives that encourage female sexual objectification in youth and thrive on the careful positing of a naïve, pretty heroine against an aging, haggard villainess. Both works explore aging as a cycle, a passage, a becoming—one that puts equal emphasis on the beauty of youth and the wisdom of experience—and recall Azara's childhood time spent in the garden observing the natural cycle. For Azara, a realistic revisioning of women in all stages of life is deeply necessary to the feminist project and an area where her work can soar.

Goddess imagery employed by Azara during this same period—often an identification with the Goddess through bodily metaphors²⁰—makes an equally sharp jab at quintessential Western cultural values, specifically, the general belief in an omnipotent singular male God. Azara's piece about the Hindu Goddess Kali, commissioned by therapist Pamela Oline in 1978 and pictured in "The Great Goddess" issue of the now-defunct feminist art journal *Heresies* that year, was part of a collective effort on the part of women at that time to address spirituality in terms of gender. The Goddess issue also featured works by Louise Bourgeois, Mary Beth Edelson, Carolee Schneemann, and Hannah Wilke, among others. For Azara, the imagery is less about religious or spiritual affiliation than another metaphor for self-image, much like the tree. When dependence on an authoritative male God slips away, one is able to recognize omnipotence and wisdom that is self-

generated. Says Azara, "In my New York City loft, I make pieces in reference to [the Goddess], I make shamans, I make ritual pieces. I do spirit healings by reading and sending light through the chakras and I struggle to reclaim places which reflect the unspoken and the unseen inside of me, to give material presence to the shape and form and color of consciousness."²¹ Her exploration of this process by invoking the divine feminine connects back to her discoveries of innermost personal forms in the Visual Diary course at NYFAI and her critical break with the art methods she learned during her formal art school education. Azara's focus on the Goddess in her early sculptural work was a crucial departure point in terms of rethinking female power.

In the same spirit Azara has since the late sixties crafted tributes to close female family members, including *Leaf Altar for Nunzia* (2007; Fig. 5), a large altar for her mother; *Birthpiece* (1967) for her daughter; as well as *Maxi's Wall* for her granddaughter. Linked to her Italian American heritage, such works also speak to a cultural legacy of shared experiences and strong family ties.

Changes (begun 1998) is an ongoing series about her life and her process of aging. Its sixty interchangeable wooden panels are designed to be arranged at will by the curator, so that the work evolves over time into an open, shifting dialogue between artist, curator, and viewer. In it she incorporates the spiral—a serpentine shape used cross-culturally to connote a journey into the unknown. Coincidentally, the spiral is also linked extensively to Louise Bourgeois, one of the few female sculptors to gain widespread notoriety in the sixties and seventies (and an honored guest at one of NYFAI's many open houses).

During 1999-2000, Azara worked collaboratively with poet Judith Barrington on *Passages*, another semi-autobiographical narrative series. On hinged wooden blocks (the piece opens to 18 feet) Azara's carved and painted imagery is interspersed with Barrington's ruminations on the female body and the passage of time. The artist's use of red in this work references the biological cycle of menstruation (and menopausal rites) as well as blood circulation as a means of transporting and expelling vital substances to and from the body.²² Both *Changes* and *Passages* exemplify how Azara's ritual "dressing" of wood pays homage to womanliness as an expressive and shifting subject-body.

Azara's spiritually generated personal forms, whether expressed as large scale talismans, panels, or altars, portend a kind of living ritual she enacts with the tree. Her collecting and intuitive carving of the wood is a type of "passage" into unconscious imagery that she believes springs from a regenerative energy source. When Jenifer Borum commented that "Azara's work, with its stubborn but dated Jungian underpinnings, seems more than a little anachronistic" and that "any attempt to view her work as a politically charged spiritual brand of feminism...is frustrated by the new age rhetoric that surrounds it,"²³ she missed that the ultimate end of Azara's work is not a saleable object imbued with ideological or political content, feminist or otherwise. While Borum adopted the art market view concerning the obsolescence of creative products, Azara, on the contrary, draws upon timeless reserves of women's power.

Like an ancient healer, Azara plays with the metamorphic



Fig.4. Nancy Azara, *Passages* (1999), carved and painted wood with gold, aluminum leaf and encaustic (18 panels), 15" x 18' x 1", closes to 19". Photo: Christopher Burke.

capacity of the female body, evolving a relationship with the tree, sometimes, as with *Sun Goddess* (1983), living with the wood cum art for a decade.²⁴ Clearly it is this dialogue, the slow process of Azara's hands carving out the flesh of discarded wood using a few chisels and a mallet—its rhythm, its noise, its ephemeral tribute to the work at hand—which is the hallmark of a creative practice ill-suited for an age governed by commercialism. Azara says that she prefers found objects; she is drawn to the energetic qualities that emerge in her work when the raw wood has been transformed by wind, sun, and rain. By carving through this residual skin she reveals the essence, or "flesh," of the tree that has been adulterated over time.

Azara's atavistic focus on elemental features of the natural world is perhaps best exemplified in *Fern with Hands* and *Hickory with Hands*. In these three panel sets, Azara used gold leaf and encaustic to capture the restorative imprint of sunlight falling through trees—her signature gold leaf, she maintains, is the best means of portraying sunlight. Indeed, what might appear as (paradoxically) anachronistic and new age is a timeworn technique. Azara's sculptures rely on one simple truth—that there is something powerfully nourishing about a human body that is present and in harmony with the natural world, and that this source of energy is free, immediate, and infinite.

Azara often works from psychic imagery she has released during chakra-oriented bodywork:

I do this work visually all the time, and putting it into words is very hard. I feel myself painfully dragged out of the depths when I must talk about what I discover quietly, softly, secretly—sometimes sweetly... the visual presence is unsubstantial, but the words have a false ring to them because of their concreteness and finality. Maybe I should use a poetic expression like, "Diving, diving."²⁵

A theory which seems relevant to this discussion is Deleuze and Guattari's radical refiguring of ontology, as presented in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) and appropriately subjected to a feminist reading by Elizabeth Grosz.²⁶ Philosophers Deleuze and Guattari rewrote body and the self/other dichotomy in terms of



Fig. 5. Nancy Azara, *Leaf Altar for Nunzia 1913-2004* (2007), carved and painted wood with aluminum leaf, 80" x 53" x 17". Photo: Fernando Natalici.

networks and flows of intensities that Grosz claims have been falsely hierarchized and "inscribed" by Western biology and medicine;²⁷ the solution being in the destratification of subject/object relationships, and in "freeing lines of flight."²⁸ Grosz's texts pay special attention to the consequences upon the female body where flow has been stopped or dried up through the inscription of social power upon the female body.²⁹

This theory relates to Azara's chakra work, with its yields of involute imagery that have led to her creation of a transposable visual economy concerning herself, her trees, and the coterie of women memorialized in her work. The spiral she invokes so frequently in her work also references the geometric shape of energy flowing through chakras where a "flight line" has been freed.³⁰ In her 2002 book, *Spirit Taking Form: Making a Spiritual Practice of Making Art*, Azara uses this same flight metaphor, instructing the reader to "imagine yourself with your out breath gliding on the wings of a

beautiful bird" during guided meditation.³¹ This process is perhaps a good indication of how her feminist practice, which began as an exploration of female subjectivity and loss of power, has evolved into a type of healing bridge.

As a cultural producer Azara is devoted to helping women examine and expand their own creative vision. At times she has put less emphasis on promoting her own work in order to develop her art as healing method and to share it with other women, through the Visual Diaries project at the New York Feminist Art Institute, workshops, and *Spirit Taking Form*.

Nancy Azara's legacy is not only an impressive body of work created over three decades but an embodiment of the matrix of creative women whose lives were transformed by their association with the New York Feminist Art Institute. As her trees—as both medium and metaphor—continue to conduct important revelations concerning the tripartite emotional, physical, and spiritual health of women, Azara's life's work is both a physical memorial to the totality of the female subject and a haven for her further growth and development. It is proof of the unique power of the vision this artist has cultivated using her hands and her heart. •

Katie Cercone is a visual artist and writer and has published in *Bitch Magazine*, *Utne Reader* and *N.Paradoxa*.

Notes

1. Colette, "Flor et Pomone" in *Gigi*, Pl 4:527, as quoted in Julia Kristeva, *Colette* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2004), 210, 344.
2. Elise La Rose, "Nancy Azara" *Arts Magazine* (September 1984): 18.
3. Nancy Azara, "Nancy Azara," *Feminist Foremothers in Women's Studies, Psychology, and Mental Health*, eds. Phyllis Chesler et al. (New York: Haworth, 1995), 33.
4. Nancy Azara, Artist talk on February 11, 2009, Suffolk Community College, Long Island, New York.
5. Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2008), 23.
6. Nancy Azara and Darla Bjork, "Our Journey to the New York Feminist Art Institute" *From Our Voices: Art Educators and Artists Speak Out About Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Issues*, ed. Ed Check and Laura Lampela (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 2003), 161.
7. Nancy Azara, *Spirit Taking Form: Making a Spiritual Practice of Making Art* (Boston: Red Wheel, 2002), 15.
8. *Ibid.*, 16.
9. Quotations and statements from the artist come from several interviews with Nancy Azara between July 28, 2008 and February 23, 2010.
10. Harriet F. Senie, "Nancy Azara," *Sculpture Magazine* (March 2009): 71.
11. Holland Cotter, "Nancy Azara" *New York Times* (Feb. 4, 2000).
12. Hope E. Ferguson, "Sacred Spaces: The Art of Nancy Azara" *Empire State College News*, 24: 2 (Summer 1998): 12.
13. *Ibid.*, 8.
14. The exhibition originated at Rutgers University Archibold S. Alexander Library, New Brunswick, NJ, Jan. 2010, and traveled to Suffolk County Community College, Brentwood, NY, March 17 – April 17, 2010, and Farleigh Dickinson Univ., Teaneck, NJ, Nov. 15 – Dec. 22, 2010.
15. Nancy Azara, *Spirit Taking Form*, 1.
16. Kristeva, *Colette*, 2.
17. Cassandra L. Langer, "Nancy Azara," (unpublished mss, 1988).
18. Janet Koplos, "Nancy Azara at Donahue/Sosinski," *Art in America* (June 2000): 122.
19. Lady Tashat's story is significant for what was found with the discovery of her remains. X-rays revealed to archeologists remnants of her smashed skull and a man's skull placed between her legs. Harriet Lyons, "Carved in Wood" *Womanews* (Sept. 1984): 21.
20. Elinor W. Gadon, "The Tree: Universal Symbol of Regeneration," *The Once and Future Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 335.
21. Nancy Azara, "Nancy Azara" *Gallerie: Women's Art Winter Issue*, 1:3 (Dec. 1988): 22. Chakra translates to "wheel" and refers to one of the seven Hindu centers of light and energy in the body.
22. Harriet F. Senie, "Nancy Azara," *Sculpture Magazine*, 19:6 (July–Aug. 2000): 65.
23. Jenifer Borum, "Nancy Azara," *Artforum* (Spring 1995): 93.
24. Harriet Lyons, "Carved in Wood," *Womanews* (September 1984): 21.
25. Nancy Azara, "Nancy Azara," *Free Spirit Magazine* (Oct. – Nov. 1998): page unknown.
26. Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994), 161; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987), 9.
27. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 116.
28. Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*: 52–62.
29. *Ibid.*, 25.
30. *Ibid.*, 26.
31. Azara, *Spirit Taking Form*, 10.



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Dominican Women and Renaissance Art: The Convent of San Domenico of Pisa

by Ann Roberts
Ashgate, 2008

Reviewed by Sarah Wilkins

In this volume in Ashgate's Women and Gender in the Early Modern World series, Ann Roberts, an art history professor at Lake Forest College, Chicago, examines the patronage of the convent of San Domenico in Pisa from its founding at the end of the fourteenth century through the sixteenth century, and in some instances beyond. The convent's collection, now dispersed, boasts no masterpieces of Renaissance art. This may unfortunately lessen the book's interest for some readers, given the bias towards the work of famous artists dating back to Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* in the sixteenth century. But contemporary art history is moving away from this approach, looking to contextualize works of art and understand them as they were understood in their own time. And for this enterprise San Domenico is ideal, thanks to a plethora of documents pertaining to the convent.

Roberts relies on an early-nineteenth-century inventory, old catalogues, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century guidebooks, and a 1914 monograph on the founder of the convent, Chiara Gambacorta (1362-1419), containing no longer extant archival material, as well as visual analysis of the works. From these sources she convincingly argues that the patronage patterns established during Gambacorta's tenure as abbess set a pattern for both the style and content of the artworks commissioned for the convent that was preserved throughout the quattrocento and into the next century. She also provides insights into how the nuns and other viewers would have understood and interacted with the paintings, and makes strong arguments for the agency of the nuns themselves in the patronage and even the creation of the works of art that surrounded them.

Each of the book's seven chapters opens with a clear and succinct statement of Roberts's aim. This is key, as her organization is thematic rather than strictly chronological, and these synopses are critical to elucidating her arguments and organizational choices. Each chapter is then subdivided, which breaks up her often-complex analysis into smaller sections for easier digestion. Also included are a catalogue of the Renaissance paintings from San Domenico arranged according to medium and subcategorized by iconography, six appendices, and an extensive bibliography. Given the author's reliance on documentary and archival sources and her interest in context, in addition to including the aforementioned inventory, the appendices contain census information from the founding of the convent through 1582, a list of the prioresses serving during the Renaissance, a partial list of the nuns of San Domenico from the founding to 1510, seven letters from or about the nuns, and a list of relics held by the convent by 1557.

After an introduction, in which Roberts discusses her aims, methodology, and sources, the first two chapters supply the necessary background for Roberts's contextual analysis of the works. In chapter one she provides a brief account of the life of foundress Chiara Gambacorta and introduces the Observant reform movement of the Dominican Order, to which the convent of San Domenico belonged. She also gives a succinct account of the political and economic troubles of Pisa from the late fourteenth century until 1509, which impacted the fortunes of the convent. Chapter two deals with the physical environment of San Domenico, both its location within the city, which she argues was due to its connection with the important Pisan Gambacorta family, and its architecture, which she links to the convent's Observant bent, with its strict interpretation of the idea of cloister. This was presented in the larger context of the concept of, and approach to, cloister for nuns in the period.

The third chapter focuses on the person and patronage of Chiara Gambacorta, whose aims and personality Roberts sees reflected in the initial paintings commissioned for the convent.



Fig. 1. Bara of Chiara Gambacorta (detail of the tomb) (c. 1420), Convent Church of San Domenico on the Via della Faggiola, Pisa. Photo: Ann Roberts.

Following a discussion of works that she believes were commissioned during the foundress's lifetime, Roberts turns to the images of Chiara created after her death up until the eighteenth century, linking these representations to the veneration of Chiara as a *beata* within the convent and in Pisa more generally, and to the struggle to have her canonized. Especially interesting is Roberts's discussion of how Chiara's image (c. 1420; Fig. 1) changed over time in response to the changing criteria for being named a saint.

In chapter four Roberts turns to a group of fifteenth-century images of saints commissioned after Gambacorta's death, which she believes were created for the convent audience (as opposed to the lay audience which would have had access to images in the main church) and attempts to uncover the meanings they would have had within the convent. She also argues that the foundress's own patronage "established an iconographic and visual tradition in the convent that later generations respected and enlarged" (123). One of the paintings discussed is a *Resurrection of Lazarus*, which she compares with both Giotto's version in Padua and one by the workshop of Fra Angelico. In arguing that the role of Mary

and Martha is unusually prominent in the San Domenico image, and linking this to the ability of women, like the nuns themselves, to persuade Christ to action, Roberts takes its context into consideration. But her two comparisons are found in quite a different context—Christological cycles. I propose the *Resurrection of Lazarus* tentatively attributed to the workshop of Giotto in the Magdalen Chapel (the funerary chapel of the Franciscan Bishop Teobaldo Pontano) in the Lower Church of the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi (c.1307) as a closer comparison. As part of a cycle of frescoes depicting the life of Mary Magdalen, it already displays the same emphasis on the two women that Roberts identifies and finds unusual in a work dated approximately 150 years later.

Chapter five treats several fifteenth-century paintings from the convent in terms of their Dominican, and as the century progresses, explicitly Observant messages. Among the works discussed is a second altarpiece following the format of the altarpiece for the high altar commissioned during Gambacorta's prioracy, in which two of the four flanking saints are unidentified. While lacking evidence to support a firm identification for either figure, Roberts's discussion of the possibilities, especially for the Dominican *beato*, is intriguing and reflects the depth of her knowledge both about the Dominican Order in the period as well as the convent and milieu for which the altarpiece was created. In a discussion of the refectory frescoes, dated to the last decade of the cinquecento, Roberts succinctly describes a change in administration in this period that officially linked the convent with the Observant branch of the Order. She notes how this Observant identity is reflected in the paintings, explicitly relating them to earlier images by Fra Angelico in the Observant monastery of San Marco in Florence.

Chapter six investigates the connections that remained between the cloistered nuns and the greater world, and how these links were expressed in the commissioning of paintings. The theme is a broad one, and does not always hold together coherently. The section on "family ties" revisits information from prior chapters, and the new material might have been

more effective were it incorporated into the earlier discussion. The aim of the regrettably brief "clients and patrons" section is not entirely clear. And while the last section, on the nuns' navigation of the turmoil in Pisa in the latter years of the sixteenth century, includes new information and new works, it would benefit from being more fleshed out.

The final chapter, titled "Patrons and Painters," presents perhaps the most original and thought-provoking aspect of Roberts's argument, that the nuns themselves acted as painters. While there is no documentary evidence to suggest that the nuns of San Domenico painted anything but miniatures, Roberts makes a compelling argument that this was indeed the case. Using close visual analysis of several paintings from San Domenico, she argues that they were remade after their arrival at the convent. Given the styles and models followed, she makes a convincing case that this was done by the nuns themselves.

Roberts's approach to the organization of the book gives a sense of how these paintings functioned in their environment and were understood by various audiences, particularly the nuns and the patrons who paid for them. However, this means that some works are discussed in several places, leading to repetition, and diminishing the integration of the various points of view from which she approaches the works. The book also ends weakly. Instead of an independent conclusion, there is a one-page section in the final chapter which provides a perfunctory summary. The beginning of that chapter, where Roberts summarizes the evidence for the nuns' patronage, would have been more effective as part of a conclusion to the book as a whole.

There are some issues with the visual support in the volume. While generally well illustrated, the absence of color plates detracts from Roberts's discussion of the paintings. This is especially true in those passages where she discusses the repetition of colors found throughout the panels of a triptych, as the harmony she describes is not visible in the black-and-white reproductions. Additionally, although all the extant works from San Domenico are illustrated, Roberts often makes

comparisons with paintings elsewhere that are not reproduced in the book, making it difficult to follow her analysis and lessening the effectiveness of her arguments. Another issue is the absence of keys for the plans for both the church (2.8) and the convent as a whole (2.3). Without these aids, the convent plan, referred to throughout the book, is difficult to interpret; and although letters for identifying the various parts are present on the church plan, without a key they are meaningless.

While the book is copiously annotated, there are oversights. In chapter four, for example, several statements lack necessary citations, as when Roberts states "The association of virginity with illness has been remarked in the visionary literature of religious women of the late Middle Ages," continuing on, "As historians have demonstrated..." etc. (133), but gives no sources for either the visionary literature or the historians. Similarly, in the same chapter she discusses a sermon by Giordano of Pisa on Saint Ursula (130), without a citation directing the reader to the sermon.

Roberts nevertheless provides a valuable contribution to Renaissance studies. As interest in the patronage of women in the Renaissance increases, readers will appreciate this in-depth account of the patronage patterns of a single convent over an extended period of time. The volume is significant in its masterful balance of the documentary evidence with that provided by analysis of the paintings themselves, to determine what the nuns of San Domenico were trying to express in the art they commissioned. Roberts makes a strong case for the agency of the nuns, not only in determining the iconography and style of the images found in the convent, but even in the creation of works of art themselves. Given the current interest in female artists, and the dearth of known female artists in the Renaissance, these conclusions are exciting and should provoke further debate. •

Sarah Wilkins is a PhD candidate in late medieval and Renaissance art at Rutgers University. Her dissertation investigates the use of painted narrative cycles of the life of Mary Magdalen to promote the Magdalen cult in late medieval Italy.

Women and Portraits in Early Modern Europe: Gender, Agency, Identity

edited by Andrea Pearson
Ashgate, 2008

Reviewed by Katherine M. Poole

Comprising nine essays whose subjects span the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries and are drawn from Italy, France, England, and the Low Countries, *Women and Portraits in Early Modern Europe* is the sixth volume of Ashgate's "Women and Gender in the Early Modern World" series. The book originated with a session organized by editor and contributor Andrea Pearson in 2005 for the College Art Association. Pearson invited scholars to "explore more deeply the use of portraits by women to negotiate the boundaries of gender" (1), employing female agency and gender identity as primary tools of inquiry. The resultant essays collectively illuminate the study of female portraiture through a number of recurrent themes, including self-representation, the construction of gender identity, the possibilities and limitations of female agency, and the destabilization of gender roles and hierarchies. To provide a larger theoretical framework for the essays, Pearson's introduction offers a brief historiographic overview of agency and identity as categories of feminist analysis, specifically as they relate to portraiture studies.

The role of agency in constructing female identity dominates the portraits discussed by Andrea Pearson, Ann M. Roberts, and Katherine A. McIver. In "Productions of Meaning in Portraits of Margaret of York," Pearson challenges the long-held belief that the duchess was solely responsible for the creation of her image. Focusing on a pair of illuminated manuscripts commissioned by Margaret shortly after her marriage to Charles the Bold in 1468, Pearson argues that the courtier Nicholas Finet was responsible for constructing a didactic portrait model for the duchess to follow as she transformed herself into an ideal wife and ruler. Importantly, however, Pearson proposes a type of

alternative agency rooted in the tradition of gift-giving that seems fertile ground for further research, not just for Margaret but early modern women in general. Through the presentation of copies of these manuscripts to other powerful ruling women, Pearson argues that Margaret regained control of her image through her decisions regarding spectatorship. A study of the effect of these gifts, specifically those bearing Margaret's image, on their recipients would open up additional areas of inquiry with regard to female agency and identity construction.

Roberts and McIver, in "The Posthumous Image of Mary of Burgundy" and "Daddy's Little Girl: Patrilineal Anxiety in Two Portraits of a Renaissance Daughter," respectively, consider how portraits of courtly women were manipulated to secure power for and promote the ambitions of another, in both cases, a prominent male figure. Roberts offers a cautionary tale about the vulnerability of a woman's image. Following Mary's death, "[t]he active figure presented in the seals she used in her lifetime were replaced...with the passive figure constructed in...profile images" (64). For her husband, Maximilian I of Austria, this format encoded "references to antiquity and authority, at the same time that it depict[ed] Mary as the virtuous, passive bride, whose wealth he possesse[d]..." (64). These images privileged indicators of status and wealth over personality, emphasizing links to the powerful Burgundian court that made Mary's posthumous portraits a valuable diplomatic tool.

In contrast to Mary of Burgundy, Barbara Pallavicina never was given the opportunity to exert her own agency in the construction of her image, which was entirely subject to her father's control. Rolando Pallavicino, marchese of Roccabianca—lacking a son to carry on his lineage—employed unorthodox imagery to position his eldest daughter as his legitimate heir and successor. In Francesco Zaganelli's altarpiece of 1518, Barbara appears not alongside her mother as was the norm for a female child, but instead occupies the privileged position next to her father, that of the first-born son.

Rolando also commissioned more traditional portraits of Barbara. These images utilized standard female marital iconography, highlighting Barbara's piety and modesty as well as her expensive clothing and jewels, in order to advertise her desirable personal qualities and her financial and social status to prospective husbands.

In "All the Queen's Women: Female Double Portraits at the Caroline Court," Jennifer L. Hallam illustrates how the "unified and interdependent network" (137) of women that surrounded the queen, Henrietta Maria, constructed and celebrated a group identity through portraiture that accentuated female bonds of friendship and mutual support. These unique portraits by Anthony Van Dyck of members of the English court serve as tangible, permanent artifacts testifying to the importance of the female alliances facilitated by their queen, as well as illustrate the subtly transgressive ways in which the queen and her ladies asserted their power and agency through art. Hallam cites the example of sisters Dorothy and Lucy Percy, the latter of whom was a close friend to Henrietta Maria. At the time of their double portrait commission, Dorothy, Countess of Leicester, faced an uncertain economic future due to her husband's extravagant spending as English ambassador to France. Assisted by her well-connected sister, the countess actively petitioned the queen to bring her errant spouse closer to home. The portrait thus immortalizes the Percys as a "united female front" (141), women who relied not on men, but on each other. Hallam illustrates how the female bond of sisterhood is depicted taking precedence over that of husband and wife, with Lucy even adopting a masculine presence through subtle iconographic choices in dress and setting (142).

Like Hallam, Bret Rothstein considers portraits in which non-traditional gender markers are used to evoke power and privilege in "Gender and the Configuration of Early Netherlandish Devotional Skill." Using Rogier van der Weyden's Vienna *Crucifixion* (1443-45) as a case study through which to explore the issue of "devotional competency" (15), Rothstein positions the double portrait of the altarpiece donors, a husband and



Fig. 1. François-Hubert Drouais, *The Young Spaniard Playing the Guitar/Madame Du Barry Playing the Guitar* (1765), oil on canvas. Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama. Eugenia Woodward Hitt Collection.

wife, as representative of the two primary models of piety: emotional and intellectual. Strikingly, it is the male half of the pair that adopts the more emotive model of worship, one traditionally associated with female devotion. Emotional piety was considered the more effective spiritual response by vernacular devotional writers of the period and thus, according to Rothstein, the husband was forced to adopt traditionally female behavior in order to occupy the more powerful devotional position. Although subordinate, the wife still had a key role to play. Mirroring the interdependency of the donors' marital partnership, these two types of devotion were complementary, with ideal piety only achieved through their union.

Melissa Lee Hyde also examines the ways that portraiture can challenge and subvert gender norms and markers. The intersection of transvestism, theater, and portraiture at the court of Louis XV in eighteenth-century France is the subject of "Troubling Identities and the Agreeable Game of Art: From Madame de Pompadour's Theatrical 'Breeches' of Decorum to Drouais's *Portrait of Madame Du Barry En Homme*." At a time of intense debate among Enlightenment philosophers over the growing homogenization of the sexes and the inherent threat this loss of "natural"

gender difference posed to society, two of the royal mistresses provocatively embraced masculine dress—Madame de Pompadour on stage, and Madame Du Barry in paint (Fig. 1). Rather than these instances of transvestism proving troubling or destabilizing, Hyde convincingly argues that it was precisely this fluidity of gender markers and identity that appealed to Rococo audiences. Her provocative essay offers numerous possibilities for further inquiry, of which one, of particular interest to this reviewer, is the extent to which Mesdames Pompadour and Du Barry played a role in the construction of their "masculinized" selves.

Portraits that fail to achieve their purpose are discussed by contributors Allison Levy and Christiane Hertel. Countering her previous assertions that portraits of widows played a key role in recording masculine memory, in "Effaced: Failing Widows," Levy concludes that these portraits in fact simultaneously fail to commemorate their female subject and to memorialize adequately the husband she is charged with remembering. As Levy notes, images of widows produce a "double void" in which "the dark flat surface of her gown marks her as one man's mourner, [while] that same identifying abstraction ironically erases her" (71). In addition, Renaissance didactic texts urged widows to adopt the masculine role vacated by her dead spouse, a transgression from gender norms that was expected but also deeply unsettling in terms of her role as chief preserver of her husband's memory. Levy's use of a post-structuralist framework to focus on the ambivalence of these images and the general anxiety surrounding widowhood in Renaissance Italy highlights the "precarious position of both male and female bodies—and their representations—within the early modern memorial process" (74).

Hertel, in "Engaging Negation in Hans Holbein the Younger's *Portrait of Christina of Denmark, Duchess of Milan*," also considers a widow's portrait, that of Christina of Denmark, commissioned by that notorious collector of wives, King Henry VIII of England, during his ultimately unsuccessful marriage

negotiations with the duchess. Contrary to previous scholarship, which privileged the artist and patron over the subject, Hertel restores to Christina her agency, crediting the sitter with a significant role in shaping the image presented to the king. Christina had little interest in becoming Henry's wife number four, and "the transitory character of her pose, gestures and facial expression" (116), among other visual clues, assign her a liminal presence that directly contribute to the portrait's "failure," according to the author. However, Hertel also suggests the complicity of Holbein, whose aesthetic choices created a representational tension that signaled a woman whose presence was fleeting, not one who intended to marry the king. The possibility of complicity between artist and subject adds a provocative dimension to this painting, and one wishes that Hertel had pushed the implications of this further, as it seems unlikely that Holbein would risk endangering his artistic livelihood by consciously creating an unsuccessful portrait—at least in Hertel's mind—in which the desires of his subject trumped the wishes of his powerful patron.

Finally, as Heather McPherson's title, "Sculpting Her Image: Sarah Siddons and the Art of Self-Fashioning," suggests, her protagonist, the English actress Sarah Siddons, took the most "hands on" approach to shaping her image of all of the women discussed in this volume. Using Siddons's own letters and writings, McPherson reveals her as a woman preoccupied with and in control of her public image. Siddons was unique in her ability not only to take charge of her portraits, even when they fell outside the scope of her patronage, as most did, but also in her decision to become a sculptor herself, allowing her to quite literally fashion her public persona with her own hands. Through her choice of a classical style, Siddons reinforced the majestic stage presence she so carefully cultivated, recalling the antique tradition of the portrait bust and the associated timeless values and durability.

A chief strength of *Women and Portraits in Early Modern Europe* is its scope and the

sheer breadth of material covered by its authors. It also succeeds in achieving Pearson's main goal, to illuminate and expand our understanding of the intersection of gender, agency, and identity as it pertains to the portraiture of early modern women, offering fresh approaches to more familiar works while introducing the reader to lesser-known objects. Individually the nine authors contribute rich new material to their respective fields, while the themes that resonate through multiple essays suggest shared areas of inquiry applicable to the field of early modern studies as a whole. The extensive bibliography will be useful to specialists as well as those with a more general interest, and the over sixty illustrations included, while black and white, are of generally good quality. Since by and large the portraits discussed are mainly painted images, and all are focused on elite secular women, these essays offer the promise of future exploration on a range of related, interdisciplinary topics, some of which are highlighted by Pearson in her introduction and include strategies of gift-giving and display, group portraits, female spectatorship, and reception, among others (13). •

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Women Impressionists

edited by Ingrid Pfeiffer & Max Hollein
Hatje Cantz, 2008

Painting in a Man's World

edited by Ingrid Pfeiffer
Hatje Cantz, 2008

Reviewed by Heidi A. Strobel

According to Griselda Pollock, "to be a woman artist in the nineteenth century was to be on the margins of culture but also at its center" (154). "Women Impressionists," a

2008 exhibition at Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, and the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, centered on the work of four female Impressionists, Mary Cassatt (1844–1926), Berthe Morisot (1841–95), Eva Gonzalès (1847–83), and Marie Bracquemond (1840–1916). The goal of the exhibition and accompanying catalogue was to reassess the role of these artists, often treated as marginal to the Impressionist movement.

Schirn Kunsthalle Director and catalogue co-editor Max Hollein described the exhibition as "four retrospectives rolled into one" (8). Its extensive size surpassed previous exhibitions, such as "Las Mujeres impresionistas" (Bilbao, 1992) and "Les Femmes impressionistes" (Paris, 1993). The exhibition catalogue, *Women Impressionists*, is richly illustrated, reproducing roughly the same number of images by each artist. This is particularly helpful for those interested in Gonzalès and Bracquemond and the various media in which they worked. When these four women are grouped together, Gonzalès and Bracquemond are frequently overlooked, as Cassatt remains the best-known female Impressionist in the United States, while Morisot has the most European name recognition. Here, too, while the scope of the exhibition is wide-ranging, the catalogue itself gives more attention to these two artists than to Gonzalès and Bracquemond. This criticism may perhaps reflect the state of current research, but it is frustrating to see these two women so consistently even more marginalized than their Impressionist "sisters."

The catalogue's organization reflects this Cassatt-Morisot bias, for its eight essays include two apiece on Morisot and Cassatt, one each on Gonzalès and Bracquemond, and one that describes the reception of female Impressionists. Rounding out this collection is a group of previously unpublished letters from Cassatt to Morisot and her daughter, as well as an essay describing the professional status of women in the nineteenth-century art world. Most of the essays in the catalogue are geared to the general public or undergraduate audience, although scholars of the period will also learn from them.

In the first essay, "Impressionism is Feminine: On the Reception of Morisot, Cassatt, Gonzalès and Bracquemond," catalogue co-editor Ingrid Pfeiffer examines the ephemeral success of these four female Impressionists by juxtaposing their reception in the late nineteenth century and in subsequent decades. By the beginning of the twentieth century, German and French art historians had established an Impressionist canon, one that neglected or ignored all four of these female artists. These omissions are especially startling as all four were included in the first round of books dedicated to women artists and were regular contributors to the eight Impressionist exhibitions between 1874 and 1886. According to Pfeiffer, the painterly style and domestic subject matter of Impressionism has often been described as feminine, which has contributed to the marginalization and ambivalent critical reception of these artists. One of the most fascinating (and underpublished) facts about each of the four artists in the exhibition is that they all had female siblings who doubled as their sisters' chaperones, nursemaids, and models. Pfeiffer comprehensively discusses the significance of these siblings, as well as how Morisot's and Gonzalès's stints as Edouard Manet's model diluted their professional success. The influence of Morisot and Gonzalès on Manet has been neglected by scholars, yet Pfeiffer offers a couple of tantalizing examples that deserve further examination.

Pfeiffer also revises some of the myths involving the female Impressionists, including the purported rivalry between Morisot and Gonzalès and the misogyny of Edgar Degas, who actually invited Morisot, Cassatt, and Bracquemond to take part in the Impressionist exhibitions. She concludes by describing how various galleries and collectors, such as Paul Durand-Ruel and Georges Petit, helped disseminate the work of Cassatt, Morisot, and Gonzalès. Pfeiffer's essay is a good starting point for the more specialized information that follows.

The second essay, Linda Nochlin's "Morisot's *Wet Nurse*: The Construction of Work and Leisure in Impressionist Painting," was first published in *Women*,



Fig. 1. Eva Gonzalès, *The Morning Toilette* (c. 1875-76), oil on canvas, 19 2/3" x 24". Private Collection.

Art, and Power and other Essays in 1988. Nochlin's goal here is threefold: to determine what *Wet Nurse and Baby* (Julie Manet) (1879) tells the viewer about nineteenth-century female workers, to examine the role of work in Impressionist painting, and to situate this painting within the context of wet-nursing. Morisot painted a wet nurse nursing her own daughter, Julie Manet. Nochlin reminds us that the painting, while thematically jarring, is also stylistically unsettling, featuring "a facture so open, so dazzlingly unfettered as to constitute a challenge to readability" (46). She posits that the painting's chaotic facture reflects the tension between artist as mother and artist as professional (46). Instead of nursing her own child, Morisot is painting a woman who is paid to feed the artist's daughter. In comparison to Gonzalès's more linear work, Nochlin's description of Morisot's painterly style reminds us of how different these women were from one another. The inclusion of Nochlin's essay in the catalogue broadens its audience, for it marks the first time that it has been translated into German.

In "'Catching a touch of the ephemeral': Berthe Morisot and Impressionism," Sylvie Patry underlines Morisot's key role in the development of the Impressionist movement, for she attended, organized, and helped finance seven of the eight exhibitions.

Patry argues that Morisot played a key role in the redefinition of Impress-

ionism during the 1880s and 1890s as a subjective, rather than objective, observatory style. She believes that paintings such as Morisot's *Dreaming Girl* (1877) are comparable to Symbolist-inspired "reveries" like Manet's *Portrait of Stéphane Mallarmé* (1876). Morisot also helped to broaden the scope of the Impressionist movement by visiting the studios of Georges Seurat and other young artists and encouraging them to participate in the group's exhibitions. Patry's essay provides

an exciting and original contribution to Morisot scholarship and illustrates the continuities between the Impressionist and Symbolist movements.

Hugues Wilhelm's section of the catalogue also highlights an understudied area in Morisot scholarship, namely the relationship between her and Cassatt. Seven previously unpublished letters from Mary Cassatt to Berthe Morisot and her daughter clearly demonstrate these two artists' support of one another and indicate some of their common interests. In an autumn 1879 letter, Cassatt told Morisot: "I am so pleased that you have been working a lot; you are going to make a brilliant return to the exhibition and I assure you that I am really envious of your talent" (122). In an April 1890 letter, Cassatt expressed happiness that they would be summer neighbors, and invited Morisot to lunch and afterwards to join her in seeing the Japanese prints at the École de Beaux Arts, ending the letter with, "You must see the Japanese. Come as soon as you can" (123). The translation and inclusion of these letters in this catalogue is an exciting development, but further analysis must occur. For example, two of Cassatt's letters likely provided an important professional boost to Morisot, for they were sent in late 1879 and early 1880, a difficult but rewarding time for Morisot. Her daughter was born in November 1878, but this birth rendered Morisot unable to participate in the 1879 Impressionist exhibition.

In the catalogue's fourth essay, "Mary Cassatt: The Touch and the Gaze,

or Impressionism for Thinking People," Griselda Pollock argues that Cassatt attempted to create paintings of women as subjects, rather than objects. Examining the placement of figures in Cassatt's paintings, she describes "the nature of subjectivity portrayed by creating a sense of mutual distance between the painted personae" (154-55). We must also consider the "means of making the image," which she describes as "physically bold and brave, the perfect material counterforce to the risk of too much tenderness" (166).

Pollock debunks several myths about Cassatt, including her indebtedness to Degas and the idea that the artist celebrated motherhood. It is more accurate to describe Cassatt as a painter of children and mothers, but not of *maternité*, or motherhood. Cassatt's style changed during the 1880s, as her figures became more monumental and introspective, which made her work more attractive to the Symbolists of this decade. Pollock argues that these works, "by virtue of their depth and monumentality—are only found again in Picasso's pre-1907 work" (155). In comparison to the other essays in this catalogue, Pollock's language and terminology here are geared towards a specialist audience, so the lay reader may struggle with the theoretical sections of her argument.

Both Pollock and Pamela A. Ivinski, author of "'So Firm and Powerful a Hand': Mary Cassatt's Techniques and Questions of Gender," discuss the artist's mixed critical reception in the nineteenth century. Art critics believed that as a woman, Cassatt was best suited to images of mothers and children, but were troubled by the fact that her bravura technique did not conform to the softer, gentler stroke expected of a female artist. For example, in 1873, a Philadelphia critic described Cassatt's "vigorous handling which ought to put to shame the feeble work of some of our male artists" (179). Ivinski divides her artistic overview between Cassatt's images of women and children and single figures.

Ivinski's inclusion of newly discovered or infrequently discussed Cassatt works is helpful to the specialist: *Young Woman with a Mandolin* (1876) is

used to trace the artist's evolution from her study of Spanish painters such as Velázquez and Murillo to Impressionism, while *Young Women Picking Fruit* (1892) is described as a synthesis of Japonism, Post-Impressionism, and the early Italian Renaissance. This section of the catalogue is beautifully illustrated, for it contains fourteen color images of Cassatt's *japoniste* drypoint and aquatint prints from 1890–91. Ivinski concludes that throughout her life, Cassatt “moved fluently between aesthetic trends, historical references, mediums and above all techniques, thoroughly refusing reductive expectations of the woman artist” (179).

Although Marie-Caroline Sainsaulieu's essay, “Expressive Red: Eva Gonzalès and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec,” provides some important information to art historians, such as a correction of the artist's birthdate from 1849 to 1847, ultimately some specialists may be disappointed in this essay from the co-author of the 1991 catalogue raisonné on Gonzalès. It is frustrating that the sole Gonzalès essay in *Women Impressionists* is a formalist one that focuses on the use of red by Gonzalès and Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, two artists whose paths never crossed. While formalism should not be done away with, one wishes that Gonzalès's work also be viewed through the prism of social art history or psychoanalytic theory. Sainsaulieu argues that both of these artists used red to underscore a color scheme or emphasize an idea. Many artists, however, use red in these ways. Furthermore, when considering formalist issues, it makes more sense to compare the work of Gonzalès and her teacher, Edouard Manet. While several Gonzalès scholars have indicated her indebtedness to Manet, it is hard to imagine that the teacher did not learn from his student as well. Fortunately, this section is richly illustrated, containing nineteen reproductions of Gonzalès's pastels and oil paintings.

Jean-Paul Bouillon's essay “Marie Bracquemond: The Lady with the Parasol” is particularly helpful to the specialist, for little has been written on this artist. He outlines Bracquemond's production and dates her Impressionist period to 1875–90, with its high point from 1885 to 1887. Even her works from

this period, Bouillon argues, reveal an indebtedness to linearity learned in her early training from Ingres, who also taught Bracquemond's husband, Félix. Bouillon contends that two factors in the late 1870s were responsible for her Impressionist phase: her attendance at (and eventually participation in) the Impressionist exhibitions, and her ceramic decorations for the Haviland Company at Auteuil, where Félix ran an experimental workshop (234). Her ceramic plates reveal a loose brushstroke quite different from her work of the early 1870s. Bouillon utilizes these changes to explain Marie Bracquemond's next major project for the Haviland Company, a large (c. 10' x 23') ceramic tile panel entitled *The Muses*, which was submitted to the 1878 World Exposition in Paris. Only drawings and photographs of the project's cartoons are still extant. Sculpture, Architecture, Painting, Poetry, and Music are flanked by Comedy and Dance, a composition which Degas described as “superb. What pleasing arrangements of figures and fabrics” (235). This encounter led to Degas's 1879 and 1880 invitations to Bracquemond to participate in the Impressionist exhibitions. Bouillon's essay is helpful in its explanation of Bracquemond's enigmatic works like *The Muses*, but it also offers a less strident image of Félix Bracquemond, who is often criticized for obstructing his wife's artistic production.

In the last essay of the catalogue, “A Call to Arms: Women Artists' Struggle for Professional Recognition in the Nineteenth-Century Art World,” Anna Havemann traces the exclusion of women from official schools of art in England, France, Germany, and the United States. By the end of the nineteenth century, many European art academies allowed women students, but as Linda Nochlin demonstrated in her 1971 essay, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” various obstacles to equal study (such as exclusion from life classes) still existed. Female artists found various ways of circumventing these obstacles, such as turning to female patrons and establishing organizations such as the Society of Female Artists,

founded in London in 1857, where they could hire their own models. Of the four artists in *Women Impressionists*, only Cassatt was able to study at an art academy, a privilege that Havemann argues aided her professional success. Furthermore, in the early 1860s, Cassatt profited from attending the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, which had allowed women to attend anatomy lectures and participate in life drawing classes with a fully dressed model (284). The same privileges were not granted by the Royal Academy and École des Beaux Arts until the beginning of the twentieth century. Given these limitations, it is indeed surprising that there was not a reverse exodus of female artists from Europe to the Pennsylvania Academy, whose ground-breaking faculty members included Thomas Eakins and Cecilia Beaux (1855–1942). Havemann's comparative analysis of art academies is comprehensive and provides important background material and, as such, should have been placed earlier in the catalogue.

Ingrid Pfeiffer also edited *Painting in a Man's World*, an anthology published in conjunction with the 2008 exhibition. For it, she gathered four fictional stories inspired by biographical information on these four artists. In comparison to *Women Impressionists*, these enjoyable novellas are geared to a less scholarly audience. In “Her Life, Not Her Picture,” Alissa Walser explores Morisot's relationship with her sisters, Yves and, in particular, Edma. Edma envied Manet's attention to Berthe, and this emotion is a strand that runs throughout this story. Morisot's friendship with Edouard Manet and eventual marriage to Manet's brother, Eugène, are also part of this story.

Like Edma and Berthe Morisot, both Eva Gonzalès and her younger sister, Jeanne, wanted to become artists. In Noëlle Châtelet's “The Bridal Gown,” the author imagines the collaboration between the Gonzalès sisters on a pastel, *The Favorite Plant*. This story was inspired by the relationship between the sisters and engraver Henri Guérard, who married Eva in 1879. Following Eva's 1883 postpartum death, Jeanne took over the care of her infant nephew and married her sister's widower five years

later. In her story, Châtelet suggests that Eva had a premonition of her fate, and asked her younger sister to don the wedding dress for a modeling session. While the stories by Walser and Châtelet are intriguing, they seem to dwell in familiar territory—the relationships between these women and the men in their lives rather than one another. Similarly, in “Where White Leaps into Purple,” Annette Pehtnt recreates the turbulent nature of Bracquemond’s relationship with her husband, a topic that has been frequently discussed by Impressionist scholars.

On the other hand, Diane Broeckhoven’s “Clair-obscur,” offers the reader a vivid description of Mary

Cassatt’s last days. Through Cassatt’s failing eyes, we re-examine her friendships with banker James Stillman, artist Edgar Degas, the art collector, philanthropist, and feminist Louisine Havemeyer (1855–1929), and most important, Cassatt’s own caretaker, Matilde Valet. Valet’s relationship with Cassatt may be particularly intriguing to those interested in issues of class.

Impressionism, as described by both Pollock and Pfeiffer, was the first movement that was truly accessible to female artists. This availability partially explains the spotlight on these four artists. While the *Women Impressionists* catalogue provides a substantial contribution to Impressionist scholarship,

the idea of grouping artists together because of gender is somewhat artificial, as male artists are not studied in the same way. Furthermore, their styles are nowhere near uniform. As Pfeiffer reminds us in her introduction, “just as striking as what they (Cassatt, Morisot, Gonzalès and Bracquemond) have in common is how much their works differ in terms of composition, choice of motif, and style” (22). •

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Cézanne’s Other: The Portraits of Hortense

by Susan Sidlauskas
University of California Press, 2009

Reviewed by Matthew Simms

This is the first scholarly study to focus solely on the paintings Paul Cézanne made of his wife, Hortense. These canvases have generally been discussed as examples of Cézanne’s overall stylistic development and not in terms of a coherent body of spousal portraits. Moreover, the long-standing but essentially undocumented belief that Cézanne’s wife was a thorn in his side has given rise to interpretations of these portraits as expressive of the artist’s supposed contempt for a dull and unyielding woman. Such interpretations speak volumes about the assumptions of the scholars or critics who have voiced them, but capture none of the intersubjective specificity of these important portraits. Focusing on twenty canvases, dating from 1883 to 1894, in *Cézanne’s Other: The Portraits of Hortense*, Susan Sidlauskas argues that Cézanne’s portraits of his wife were, for this eleven year period, the artist’s primary site for a thoroughgoing investigation into the boundaries between self and other, between subjectivity and objectivity, and between masculinity and femininity. Far from negligi-

ble, these canvases, she writes, allowed Cézanne to “test the boundaries of how the self, along with the non-self who confronts and resists it, is defined, contained, and represented” (8).

The book’s first chapter addresses the critical (mis)fortunes of Cézanne’s portraits of Hortense. If these canvases have at best been met with bafflement and at worst with what Sidlauskas appositely refers to as the “scolding” prose (187) of authors who take issue with Hortense’s unexpressive appearance, this is largely because Cézanne’s portraits of her refuse a few key conventions of the genre. In contrast with spousal portraits by artists ranging from Peter Paul Rubens to Edouard Manet, Cézanne’s paintings of Hortense offer none of the usual clues to sympathetic feeling or unified mood. They also present no consistent sense of likeness from one canvas to the next. As Sidlauskas explains, it is as if the painter were reinventing his wife and his relationship to her anew with each of these singular canvases. Finally, and perhaps most disturbing in relationship to the conventions of the genre of the wife or muse-portrait, is the fact that these canvases withhold any sense of idealized femininity through the mixing of gender associations. Taken together, these three breaks with conventional practice help explain the descriptions of Cézanne’s wife, as depicted in these canvases, as variously

mute, distorted, and unbeautiful. These three themes—the novel approach to rendering emotion, the elasticity of Hortense’s appearance, and the blurring of genders—are the main themes of the three following chapters.

Chapter two focuses on Cézanne’s manner of rendering emotion in his portraits of his wife. During Cézanne’s lifetime, the successful expression of emotion in art was generally understood to require complete legibility, whereby facial contractions become the external signs of identifiable internal emotional states. Already in the seventeenth century, Charles Le Brun had sought to codify the passions betrayed by characteristic facial expressions in a series of now-famous drawings. The importance of emotional legibility in painting and sculpture was built into academic pedagogy in part through the “expressive head” competition, which remained a key element of academic training in France well into the twentieth century. Sidlauskas’s central claim in this chapter is that Cézanne made a fundamental break with the convention of depicting emotional unity and legibility in portrait painting. Emotion is registered in Cézanne’s portraits of his wife not as singular moods that can be identified and decoded but as a buildup of fluctuating and mixed experience captured through multiple sittings. Cézanne’s treatment of emotion as mixed and accu-

mulative corresponds to views held by contemporary scientific psychologists who argued that emotions, although analyzable into specific categories, were never experienced singularly but rather as complexes of intermingled and transient emotional states. Although Sidlauskas does not claim that Cézanne was familiar with the treatises on scientific psychology in which such claims were advanced, she does argue that his paintings realize a similar view of emotional experience as a complex intermingling and aggregate of feelings rather than as a series of discrete and delineated feelings. Sidlauskas points in her close visual analyses to a range of partial emotional indicators, including sensual mouths, melancholy frowns, and baleful eyes. But if one part of Hortense's face seems to suggest reproach, she suggests, another will hint at a more sympathetic response. Much of what the author terms the "diffusion of expression" (67) in Cézanne's portraits of Hortense takes place through harmonious and discordant color contrasts, a series of mixed and pulsating emotional indicators that flicker across her countenance. Rather than decoding a unique mood, the viewer of these portraits, writes Sidlauskas, "is encouraged to sense bodily a complex variety of shifting emotions" (96). "Color does not simply picture the nuances of emotion," she writes, "color enacts them" (91).

In chapter three, Sidlauskas explores the familiar theme of the intertwining of touch and vision in Cézanne's art and gives it a novel and compelling treatment through a discussion of the intersubjective relationship between the painter and his sitter. Sidlauskas questions the frequently repeated notion that Cézanne was a misanthrope and suggests instead that, far from being a loner with no interest in social relations, the artist was highly attuned to his relationships with others and used painting as a primary means to negotiate them. In reported dialogues with the younger poet Joachim Gasquet, from which Sidlauskas cites extensively but with appropriate caution given their apocryphal nature, Cézanne can be heard waxing philosophical about the merging of self and other in the process of painting portraits. The surrogate "fragile skin

of pigment" (54) on the canvas surface, as Sidlauskas puts it, becomes the site where self and other intertwine. Following the gist of the book as a whole, the author argues that it was in Cézanne's portraits of his wife that this negotiation took on greatest intensity and intimacy. Because each portrait becomes a new opportunity to negotiate the intersubjective links between husband and wife, and because these mutate from moment to moment, Hortense's appearance changes subtly each time Cézanne paints it, resulting in an absence of stable likeness between paintings. Likeness, argues Sidlauskas, is withdrawn from the sitter and is transferred to the manner of engagement itself, which is a dialogical process of painting, seeing, and feeling. She reminds us, however, that this process was always inflected with ambivalence for Cézanne, and she notes that the unfinished and outsized hands in Cézanne's portraits of his wife and other sitters suggest lingering anxieties about the risks inherent in human contact.

Chapter four turns to the question of gender. It takes as its starting point the claim once made by an art historian that Cézanne's portraits of his wife depict her as "mannish" (166). Just as Cézanne defied conventional expectations about expression and likeness in his spousal portraits, argues Sidlauskas, so too did he refuse conventional gender expectations in these same canvases and, indeed, in his art broadly speaking. Cézanne appears to have treated gender as an elastic category in his "ambisexual" (145) nude bathers, which seem to switch between male and female without changing body type, as well as in his drawings after sculpture in the Louvre, in which he feminized masculine figures and rendered masculine feminine figures. Such gender elasticity is nowhere clearer, Sidlauskas suggests, than in the portraits of Hortense, which present her not as an image of conventional femininity, the norm for artists' portraits of their wives or muses, but as a shifting mixture of masculine and feminine traits. To bolster this line of argument, Sidlauskas sets Cézanne in the context of current psychological studies of sexuality and gender. In late nineteenth century France, she explains, gender was not

neatly polarized into masculine and feminine, but was treated as a sliding scale between these poles. Cézanne's "androgynous ideal" (189), as she puts it, emerged in a culture that embraced fluid gender associations. Close visual analysis allows Sidlauskas to tease out the shifting ratio of masculinity and femininity in individual canvases and between canvases. In some of these canvases, we read, "Cézanne effects a visual conjoining of the masculine and feminine without grace, elegance, or subtlety: the seams show" (183). In others, conversely, and especially *Madame Cézanne in the Conservatory* (1891-92; Fig. 1), which Sidlauskas subjects to extensive hermeneutic pressure, we reportedly witness the full flowering of "Cézanne's idiosyncratic ideal, formed from equal parts male and female, which are now impossible to pry apart" (196).

Sidlauskas succeeds in convincing us that Cézanne's portraits of his wife have often been misunderstood and that they deserve renewed attention, free from the biases that have colored much earlier scholarship on the artist. The general assumption that these canvases are unemotional is powerfully debunked by Sidlauskas's analyses, which are supported by her linking of Cézanne to a broad discourse rethinking the status of emotion in late nineteenth century France. Her eloquent and penetrating visual analyses are a pleasure to read, whether or not the reader fully agrees with all of the conclusions Sidlauskas draws from them. Whether Cézanne truly harbored an androgynous ideal is hard to confirm, for instance; but that he was not afraid to bring out the "masculine" look of his wife in portraits of her is beyond doubt. One of the most important contributions of this book, for this writer, is its dispelling of the old cliché of Cézanne as a misanthrope. In letters in his late life, Cézanne frequently referred to the sympathy that he cherished from friends and supporters. As Sidlauskas shows, Cézanne was deeply sensitive to intersubjective relationships. His enthusiasm for sympathy and harmony ultimately transcends the portraits of Hortense, however, as his many references



throughout his career and in a range of different contexts to harmony of color, sympathetic identification, and emotional fusion with the landscape indicates. In this impressive and

Fig. 1. Paul Cézanne, *Madame Cézanne in the Conservatory* (1891-92), oil on canvas, 36 1/4" x 28 3/4". Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Stephen C. Clark, 1960 (61.101.2). Photo courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art.

important book, Sidlauskas demonstrates that Cézanne's portraits of his spouse were one of the most important sites where he explored and affirmed the broader network of sympathetic (and antipathetic) forces in nature. •

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Hidden in the Shadow of the Master: The Model-Wives of Cézanne, Monet, & Rodin

by Ruth Butler
Yale University Press, 2008

Sheer Presence: The Veil in Manet's Paris

by Marni Reva Kessler
University of Minnesota Press, 2006

Reviewed by Nancy Mowll Mathews

Delving into the under-reported story of how women shaped the art world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ruth Butler has taken on the special category of artist's wives who were also significant models for their husbands. She definitely chose the most difficult part of the story to tell. The lives of artists' wives tend to be poorly documented: compared to their husbands' letters, for instance, theirs are seldom saved. They also frequently suffer from the hostility of the art world, especially after the artist dies and the widow proves to be a good curator of the estate, disappointing avaricious dealers and the prying eyes of sensationalizing biographers. At the point when they become

very visible in the art world, their business sense and managerial talents are considered annoying impediments, resulting in unflattering descriptions or complete dismissal by early writers on their husbands.

The three artists' wives that Butler has chosen to juxtapose have all suffered from such neglect or disdain by historians. Mesdames Cézanne and Rodin, who lived to witness the international fame of their husbands, were not extensively interviewed, nor were their own private papers extensively preserved. Madame Monet, of course, died almost fifty years before her husband, so it is not surprising that little documentary evidence survived. Yet the writers on Monet during his lifetime missed the opportunity to gather important information about his most famous model before that generation passed away. It is a tribute to Butler's skill as a researcher and historian that she was able to overcome these lacunae to bring the three women to life.

It is natural that the most vivid picture is of Rose Beuret, Auguste Rodin's longtime companion and professional partner, who was known as Mme. Rodin and became so legally a few weeks before her death in 1917. As a Rodin scholar and author of the acclaimed biography, *Rodin: The Shape of Genius* (1996), Ruth Butler had decades of biographical research and contemplation to draw on for her chapter on Rose Beuret. In addition, Beuret was part of Rodin's public sculpture business, which

Butler nicely distinguishes from the solitary practices of a fine art painter. She was known to generations of Rodin's students, studio assistants, and secretaries, many of whom recorded their thoughts about her in their memoirs. Butler writes evocatively about the stolid yet attractive woman from the wine country who ran the studio in Rodin's absence (and to a large extent during his presence). In addition, with reliable evidence at hand, she is able to characterize Beuret's work as a model for Rodin in the development of several important early sculptures and show us how the two worked together. In her preface to the book, Butler discusses the potential for artist and model to contribute jointly to the creative process (11) and Beuret's practices seem to embody this synergy.

The other two chapters are less successful in getting at the persona of either Hortense Fiquet (Mme. Cézanne) or Camille Doncieux (Mme. Monet), although they are also valuable in understanding the place of the wives within the course of the husbands' careers. Butler tries to overcome the dearth of documentary evidence on these women by casting a wider net. She has reconstructed the sociological and artistic milieu of their neighborhoods, family, and friends, using the cadastral and census records so lovingly preserved in France, as well as all available accounts by historians and literary naturalists such as Zola and the Goncourts. This information is fascinating and a real contribution to nineteenth-century studies in general. A wonderful

appendix, called “The Value of Money,” provides monetary information about wages and expenses (such as rent) from the 1860s to the 1890s.

As important as it is to have an account of Fiquet and Doncieux in the context of their husbands’ art and the wider circumstances of an historical era, I still wish for a more forceful presence of the heroines of these chapters. And perhaps this is where I differ from Butler in methodological approach. She treats all three women with the respect they have seldom been accorded; but fundamentally, she sees them as victims rather than heroines: “these are all tales about pain and adversity in a time when most women had little power to determine their own lives” (11). Without minimizing their “pain and adversity” it is possible to see them also as effective agents within the heady sphere of the Paris art world. Even Hortense Fiquet, about whom the least is known, was a partner with her husband in establishing relationships with potential patrons (67) as well as the manager of the household in which he painted and received art world figures. Even though they were often apart, she, like Rose Beuret, had a managerial role in the family’s well being. The charming Camille Doncieux, in addition to running the household, was also called upon for the social networking that is the driving force of the art world of any era. We find Doncieux going to Courbet (148) and Manet (175) for money—an act that must have taken all of her diplomatic talents. These activities would broaden the wives’ contributions beyond modeling and make the resulting representations of them more interesting to read.

It is telling that in Butler’s bibliography there are very few publications on women in this period. Although none of the artists’ wives she chose were known to be artists themselves, there were enough well-documented women artists, collectors, and writers in their circle to make this a valuable avenue for research. Even the literature on artistic partners might have widened Butler’s view of her chosen subjects beyond their services as models. Gail Levin’s *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (1996) or my own *Paul Gauguin:*

An Erotic Life (2001) widen the common perception of the powerless artist’s wife. Although Mette Gauguin certainly suffered “pain and adversity,” she was also a dynamic personality in the modernist art circles of Paris and Copenhagen on her husband’s behalf and her own.

Marni Kessler’s book, *Sheer Presence: The Veil in Manet’s Paris*, also addresses female experience seen in the Paris art world of the second half of the nineteenth century, but it is on the opposite end of the methodological spectrum. It too explores the complexities of the *bonne bourgeoisie* as seen in the lives of women and how they are portrayed in modern art. While Butler’s project is to evoke for us three artists’ wives within a straightforward social history, Kessler takes the metaphorical path of using an item of female clothing—the stylish facial veil—as a nexus for the upheavals in modern urban life that led to the formation of modern culture. Her book, which is based on her dissertation, lays out four ways in which veils are a useful point of departure: the changes in Paris and resulting public health concerns caused by demolition dust; the “veiling” of the face and practices in make up and modern painting; the specific example of Edouard Manet’s portraits of Berthe Morisot and her contrasting self portraits; and, finally, an examination of race and identity through the interrelationship of European and Muslim veils.

She begins her book with the stunning comparison of the new, grid-like Haussmann-ized Paris to the woman’s veil in Caillebotte’s *Le pont de l’Europe* (1876). Making the point that the woman wearing such a veil sees the city through a similar grid of the veil’s netting, Kessler complicates the expectation that modern city design and modern clothing styles are both about clarity. Instead, she demonstrates that the new city and new styles cause confusion about directions and identities (e.g., is the woman a prostitute or merely a fashionable *bourgeoise*?), and veils, like the dust arising from the construction rubble, blur modern vision at the very moment we expect it to be crystal clear.

With this nicely laid out metaphor, Kessler is able to go on to her explorations

of public, private, individual, and ethnic consequences of the veil through a feminist lens. The rich layering of meaning is based on her broad research that ranges over the history of costume and adornment, public health policy, ethnic displays of international expositions, and the political ramifications of orientalism. Her examination of the portraits of Berthe Morisot by herself and her colleague and rival, Edouard Manet, is provocative. She posits that Manet deliberately “hid” her face because of his own competitive feelings about a female professional, while Morisot “corrected” his portraits: “She cleaned away the excess *matière*, she allowed the fabrication to show through, and in the end she removed some of the veils” (93).

Because Kessler’s view of the veil within nineteenth century French culture is so broad, it is surprising that she did not include one more point on the spectrum: the female makers of veils who belonged to the huge labor force of piece workers, which included a high percentage of the women of Paris. Although she illustrates Algerian women at the loom (33), and interprets the cloth they are making as a “veil,” she does not go on to what might have been a fifth chapter about the relationship between maker and wearer of those elegant bits of sheer fabric. No doubt this occurred to her, and perhaps I missed her explanation of why she decided to exclude this avenue of inquiry. In comparison to recent influential studies of American art, such as Margaretta Lovell’s *Art in a Season of Revolution: Painters, Artisans, and Patrons in Early America* (2005) or Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s work such as *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (2001), Kessler’s lack of attention to the material reality of actual veils and the circumstances of their production seems unusual.

Nevertheless, both Butler and Kessler have taken previously unexplored aspects of women’s history and brought them to us through their extensive research and vivid writing on the resulting works of art. This formative moment in the history of modern art continues to inspire new perspectives,

particularly when the women, who play such a large role as subjects, become the focus of serious and complex study. •

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Fig. 1. Théobald Chartran, *Portrait of Helen Clay Frick* (1905) oil on canvas. 71 1/2" x 39". Collection of the Frick Art & Historical Center, Pittsburgh.

Helen Clay Frick: Bittersweet Heiress

by Martha Frick Symington Sanger
University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008

Reviewed by Betsy Fahlman

This remarkable monograph by the great-granddaughter of Henry Clay Frick offers a fascinating portrait of his daughter, Helen Clay

Frick (1888–1984), the author's great-aunt.¹ Her achievements intersect the history of art, collecting, museums, women, philanthropy, and historic preservation. Long overshadowed by her industrialist father, Helen's central role in her family's legacy is restored.

Sanger chronicles the often conflicted personal journey of an independent, intelligent, and strong-willed individual. The book is chronologically organized in ten major parts, each charting Helen Clay Frick's evolving familial and public roles.

Born into the "wealth and privilege of a steel fortune" (3), she grew up at Clayton, her family's Pittsburgh Victorian mansion, one of three children. The excruciatingly painful illness endured by her sister Martha between 1887 and her death four years later at the age of six was traumatic for Helen and her parents. For the rest of his life, Henry Clay Frick sought "ways to reconnect with his lost child" (16), either through personal mourning rituals or the purchase of works of art that evoked her memory.

Helen grew up in an atmosphere infused with sorrow. A new brother died a month after his birth in 1892, visiting further tragedy on the Fricks. Labor tensions in the steel industry had flared during this period, and after her father's attempted assassination, security at home was tightened, intensifying Helen's isolation and familial sense of fear. Anxious and depressed, her mother Adelaide was "emotionally absent and chronically ill" (42), and as she gradually abdicated "her role as his companion and wife" (23), Helen became her father's closest confidant at a young age. That she began to take an interest in her father's "growing interest in art collecting" (31) further bonded father and daughter. Gradually he molded her as his "sounding board and heir" (33), and for the rest of her life Helen worked to shape "her father's destiny, and not her own" (33).

Painted in 1905, the year the family moved to New York, Théobald Chartran's flighty rococo image of Helen at the age of seventeen (Fig. 1) was gradually replaced by a serious individual highly knowledgeable about art as a result of regular trips to Europe. When she turned twenty-one, she commenced a lifetime of

philanthropy, beginning with efforts to improve the lives of mill girls from the Boston area by establishing a place where they could spend several weeks in the country each summer. Helen's approach to social philanthropy was private and conservative; she had no interest in the "deep economic-social reforms required to reverse the unhappy futures in store for these young women and millions of others in their situation" (75).

In 1914, as Helen entered early womanhood, the Fricks moved into their new mansion on Fifth Avenue, and as she became absorbed in her father's art collection, she began forming one of her own. Henry Clay Frick died late in 1919, and his will made his daughter "the chief beneficiary of his estate not left to charity" (123). At thirty-one, Helen became "America's wealthiest unmarried woman." Thereafter, Helen devoted herself to "the preservation and promotion of her father's legacy" (132). But she also had cultural ambitions of her own, and while on a European research trip, she was inspired to establish what became the Frick Art Reference Library (which opened in 1924). But a much less positive idea became firmly fixed in her mind: a lifelong hatred of Germans as a result of seeing how devastated France had been as a result of World War I. Thereafter, she adopted an "inflexible and extreme" (148) personal policy that barred any Germans from using the library, from visiting the collection, and from publishing research on works in the collection (this would include scholars who fled Hitler during World War II). Ironically, her own family roots were German, despite her claims that they were Swiss.

With Adelaide's death in 1931, the Frick Collection made the transition from a private to a public museum, and at the age of forty-three, Helen was finally "on her own" (the title of part six of the book). The next period of her life was marked by an increasingly adversarial relationship with her fellow Frick Collection trustees. Certainly gender politics played a role with a group of men who were not used to dealing with a strong-minded woman who was more than willing to go to

court in an attempt to enforce her wishes. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., chairman of the board, reminded Helen that while Henry Clay Frick's descendants obviously had "an intimate knowledge of the Founder's feelings, thoughts and ideas such as no other Trustee can have in the same degree...that there was nothing in the trust instrument to indicate" that her father wished that "his Trustee descendants should have any different voice...than the other Trustees" (199). Helen bristled at such a suggestion, remaining adamant that as she alone possessed "superior knowledge of her father's intentions," she was therefore "the true repository of his unexpressed wishes" (216). The role she had assumed as her late father's interlocutor hardened over time. Unfortunately, she remained unwilling to engage in the negotiations and compromises her role as trustee necessarily demanded.

Throughout the forties, the subject of the chapter titled "War," Helen grew increasingly obsessed with the possibility of the Frick Collection's losing its "unique character" as "the display of one man's taste" (235), opposing what she regarded as inappropriate acquisitions either through purchase or as gifts and bequests, especially from those she did not like. Helen was not, however, categorically opposed to new acquisitions, but felt strongly that anything entering the collection should both be of the highest quality and harmonize "with the tastes and intentions of the Founder as expressed by his own selections" (262).³ Finally, in 1961 she resigned from the Frick Collection board after forty-one acrimonious years.

As the world whose parameters had once seemed so certain changed, Helen Clay Frick felt increasingly embattled, a situation illuminated by her volatile philanthropic relationship with the University of Pittsburgh. Since 1925, she had given support to its fine arts department and library. But when displaced German scholars came to America during World War II, their presence at the universities where they had secured teaching positions transformed "the discipline of art

history in America" (279), replacing the connoisseurship favored by Helen with more interdisciplinary approaches. The cornerstone for the Henry Clay Frick Fine Arts Building was finally laid in 1963, but her ongoing desire to control the department, her antipathy to German scholars, and her opposition to the teaching of modern art, meant her relationship with the institution deteriorated beyond repair. Finally breaking with them, she constructed her own museum on the grounds of Clayton to house her personal collection.

Her health in sharp decline, in 1981 Helen returned to Clayton, where she died three years later at age 96. Her will endowed the Frick Art Museum (now, with Clayton, the Frick Art & Historical Center), but left nothing to the Frick Art Reference Library, placing "its financial burden squarely on the shoulders of the Frick Collection trustees" (333), whom she felt had thwarted her wishes for so long. Clayton was restored and opened to the public in 1990.

In her Epilogue, Sanger observed that the quiet family plot in Pittsburgh's Homewood Cemetery suggests "buried dreams, loves gone wrong, lives broken and unfulfilled, and hopes lost" (341). Helen Clay Frick's dislikes were unwavering and lifelong: Germans, modern art, Democrats, and Andrew Carnegie. Her legacy "left a wake of mixed and real successes; controversy, disagreement, perhaps even failure within a divided family, but also a mark on the world that cannot be erased" (341). These include the Frick Collection, the Frick Art Reference Library, the Frick Art & Historical Center, the Henry Clay Frick Birthplace, and the Henry Clay Frick Fine Arts Building. These remain "tangible evidences of her taste, her intelligence, her strong opinions, her love for family and friends, and, above all, her quest to please her father and carry out his wishes" (341).

Sanger's superb text, which has drawn on a wealth of primary archival material, is supported by excellent supplementary material. A genealogy is helpful in clarifying family relationships, and an Appendix chronologically lists Helen Clay Frick's art purchases and gifts. Sanger's bibliography has been

organized into categories that suggest the broad thematic modes of analysis the author has employed: Art History; Autobiography, Biography, Memoir; Death, Dying, Mourning, and the Afterlife; History; Psychiatry, Psychology, and Spirituality; and Women's History, suggesting a veritable seminar inspired by Helen Clay Frick. The 408-page volume is beautifully illustrated throughout, with family photographs as well as art works, most in color.

Sanger has deftly woven the private and public strands of her fascinating subject into an absorbing chronicle. With this handsomely produced volume, Helen Clay Frick can now reclaim "her rightful place in women's history and be fully celebrated for the critical role she played in extending her father's cultural legacy" (xiv), and establishing her own. •

Betsy Fahlman is Professor of Art History at Arizona State University. She is the author of *James Graham & Sons: A Century and a Half in the Art Business* (2007), and is writing a history of Kraushaar Galleries.

Notes

1. Sanger has been an excellent scholarly steward of her family's history, and is the author of an excellent biography, *Henry Clay Frick: An Intimate Portrait* (New York: Abbeville, 1998), as well as *The Henry Clay Frick Houses: Architecture, Interiors, Landscapes in the Golden Era* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2001).
2. A romance begun when she was twenty-eight was sabotaged by her brother. It is hard to imagine her controlling father releasing her to marriage.
3. About a third of the current collection was acquired after the death of Henry Clay Frick.

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Black Womanhood: Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body

edited by Barbara Thompson
University of Washington Press, 2008

Reviewed by Jennifer Heusel

Countering centuries of negative images, icons, and ideologies is daunting because the process that singles out and dehumanizes is the same process that defines “normal.” Thus, re-imagining alternative and more pluralistic narratives as normal is complicated by determining how to approach negative historical representations and what to do with prevailing social attitudes. The exhibition catalogue *Black Womanhood: Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body* attempts to nuance the process that has shaped and continues to shape global understandings of black womanhood.

There may never be an appropriate time for an art exhibition to unpack and inventory the history of Western colonization that contributed to negative and idealistic images of black womanhood. From a desire to reconcile historical and contemporary depictions of the black female body, this catalogue documents the genealogical and geographical overlaps in such representations. Barbara Thompson writes: “This catalogue exposes not only the multiplicity of art forms... but also a multiplicity of perspectives...” (16). What is important for Thompson is the “inclusivity of multiple voices—even when these may conflict with each other or with other existing theories” as a way to “crack open” this complex subject (16). With nine interdisciplinary essays, 128 full-color plates, and several poignant artist “exchanges” featuring excerpts from artist statements and interviews, *Black Womanhood* exposes over two centuries of negative and painful representations of the black female body, and directly engages multiple juxtapositions that reinforce dehumanizing stereotypes.

The catalogue opens with a statement by Moroccan artist Lalla Essaydi about developing, controlling, and recovering representations of black womanhood. She invites readers to take part in the process of re-making black womanhood in the

global imagination, which is a significant goal of the catalogue. Divided into three parts, the catalogue’s interdisciplinary essays share a thematic concern: how best to decolonize and then empower black womanhood? Throughout, the essays demand reader interaction—turning pages to seek out an image or reference, or making other connections, as the intermittent “exchanges” explore how and why colonial influences of black womanhood develop and persist.

Thompson’s introduction lays out the framework for studying the durability of black female stereotypes and the “multiple—also contested—forces that have shaped Western constructions of the black female body” (15). Presenting contradictions as well as overlaps, the essays and art works “(re) read” dominant narratives about black womanhood (21). The authors and artists interrogate from a variety of starting points the racial, gendered, and sexualized baggage carried on the shoulders of the iconic black female body.

The three essays in Part One, “Iconic Ideologies of Womanhood: African Cultural Perspectives,” discuss general colonial history and specific African traditions. Thompson’s essay, “The African Female Body in the Cultural Imagination,” contextualizes discrepancies between the stories about specific African social group practices and colonial descriptions of “the exotic African female body” (29). She describes how black female bodies were publicly displayed and then ridiculed. Beginning with the visual narrative of Saartjie Baartman, who was brought to Europe from South Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century and put on display as the Hottentot Venus, and detailing the publicly consumed photographs of African peoples, Thompson’s essay highlights the challenges of combating two centuries of dehumanizing stereotypes.

The remaining essays in this section explore issues of power, patriarchy, and the silencing of women’s voices. In “African Women’s Body Images in Postcolonial Discourse and Resistance to Neo-Crusaders,” Ifi Amadiume, a Nigerian poet and professor at Dartmouth College, argues that discrepancies between African and Western

representations of women contribute to a patriarchal circumvention of feminine power. Amadiume advocates for a “matriarchal scholarship” in which an organized and preferably female voice actively controls the direction and dissemination of women’s stories in order to challenge patriarchal and colonial influences (62). Central to this scholarship are body art and traditional African iconography, which communicate the tensions between traditional and colonial influences. In “*Les Parisiens d’Afrique: Mangbetu Women as Works of Art*,” Enid Schildkrout, chief curator of the Museum for African Art in New York, discusses persisting colonial representations of “the African woman [as] beautiful, yet ‘deformed’” (71). “One way of looking at Mangbetu art,” writes Schildkrout, “is as a discourse, written in objects made by Africans and in images made by Westerners, on the topics of power and sexuality” (85). She describes how the iconic image of

the Mangbetu woman, with her elongated head, halo-coiffure, bare breasts, ... body painting, and scarification, was a major trope in the industry of inventing Africa. It not only influenced the Western image of Africa, but also the work that African artists were producing to represent themselves (84–85).

The essays in Part Two, “Colonizing Black Women: The Western Imaginary,” incorporate stunning visuals illustrating the widespread preponderance of dehumanizing colonial icons. Here Christraud Geary, curator of African and Oceanic Art at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, describes how the dissemination of postcards reinforced and continues to influence Western and African conceptions of race and gender. In “The Black Female Body, the Postcard, and the Archives,” she outlines the history of photographic postcard images as a form of visual public address, discusses the variety and purpose of postcards depicting African women, presents contemporary “dignified” portraits as counter-narratives, and, finally, questions the value of republishing negative images. Her

concern with republication is that contextualization is not enough to dispel their dehumanizing history. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, in "The Body of a Myth: Embodying the Black Mammy Figure in Visual Culture," describes this dynamic icon as conflating race and gender (163) as well as representing harmony between social castes at the same time it was used to justify racial inferiority in the United States (164–65). The mammy has taken new directions in contemporary artistic expressions, and her essay concludes with an examination of contemporary artists such as Kara Walker, and Joyce Scott, whose *Mammy/Nanny* series "gives a voice to both Mammy and her often-invisible biological children" (174).

In Part Three, "Meaning and Identity: Personal Journeys into Black Womanhood," four essays explore contemporary artistic journeys to re-image black womanhood. Artist and historian Deborah Willis argues that photography presents the difficult balance of racial uplift and idealized—and thus untenable—feminine beauty in the U.S. in the early twentieth century. Her essay warns that challenging the mammy and other subordinating icons will always be problematic, and she writes that the contemporary photographs featured in *Black Womanhood* create "a new awareness and historical consciousness, exemplifying pride and determination that has the power to rewrite history" (242). Also in this section, photographer, Carla Williams contributes a brief essay on two early twentieth century African American artist models, Maudell Bass and Florence Allen. Through their mostly nude posing, these two trailblazers "enacted and defined a new, modern definition of the black woman that moved beyond the discourse of slavery, sexual degradation, and stereotype," writes Williams (247).

Ayo Abiétou Coly's dynamic essay in this section discusses how the Western appropriation of the black female body continues to dictate racial identity in Europe, and especially France. Coly positions Sarah (Saartjie) Baartman and Josephine Baker as traveling "bodies" (much like the colonial postcards) that fulfilled the Western erotic craving for

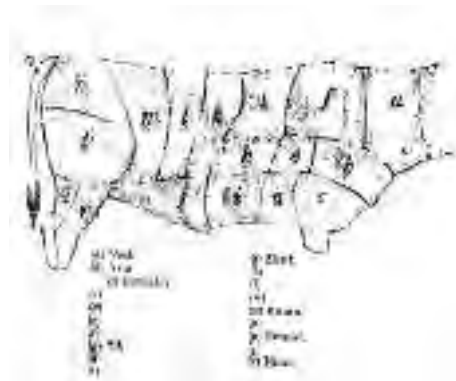


Fig. 1. Carla Williams, *Untitled* from *How to Read Character* (1990-91), gelatin silver print, photocopy transfer. Deborah Willis Collection. Photo: courtesy Carla Williams.

"otherness." This legacy continues today and is challenged in various ways. The Cameroonian writer living in France, Calixthe Beyala, is often accused of creating "stereotypical images of Africans and ... pornographic exhibitions of African women in her novels (262). Using the theoretical frameworks of Michel de Certeau and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Coly reads Beyala and her characters as "tricksters" who repeat differently the gaze of the colonizer (270). She finds similar strains in the work of contemporary artists such as Jamaican Renée Cox and Sudanese Hassan Musa, describing ways in which they visualize "the black female body inhabiting Western space without it being inhabited by Western space" (271).

Thompson concludes the catalogue with an examination of techniques and tactics contemporary artists employ to re-image the black female body (279). In "Decolonizing Black Bodies: Personal Journeys in the Contemporary Voice," Thompson revisits icons explored in the various essays, such as the Black Venus, the mammy, and the odalisque. With a special focus on contemporary artists, such as Carla Williams, who in works like her *How To Read Character* series (Fig. 1), disrupt societal norms that retain negative associations with these icons, her conclusion fulfills the missions of the exhibit: to highlight and address overlaps, mergers, and co-existing features despite geography and the passage of time.

Throughout *Black Womanhood*, two general tensions exist. The first is "beau-



ty" as a way to rectify, decolonize, or empower images of black womanhood. Often, when figures exhibit grace, beauty, and nurturing, they are said to convey a visual sense of "empowering" or "giving voice" or "revealing context" or "conveying self-worth." However, in many cases it remained unclear to this reviewer how outward marks of idealized beauty served to mirror the woman's inner beauty or strength of character. While several authors argue convincingly how physicality—scarification, dress, pose, and accessories—communicate cultural specificity, unfortunately, these physical accouterments empower because they are socially sanctioned and followed. Thus the trouble with "beauty," despite a correct context, is that it has a social function, and involves pain and risk when *not* followed. The second tension is the productive evocation of the "familiar," which Geary correctly identifies as legitimizing illicit pleasures and colonial ideologies of racial hierarchy (152). Working within familiar or "legitimate" narratives can cultivate alternative narratives, whereas "true" contexts may never appeal to personal missions toward empowerment. We may never be able to dis-empower these images, and no one will ever have full authority to speak for the experiences of the past.

Black Womanhood nevertheless provides visual and textual tactics for subversion. One productive route practiced by the contemporary artists in this catalogue is demonstrated in the "exchanges." Not simply artist statements, these brief expressions by about half of the two dozen contemporary artists represented in the book juxtapose words with images and represent a significant value of this catalogue: How to reference the colonial familiar differently? Thompson highlights in her conclusion that "the very same clichés that oppressed, misrepresented,

and objectified black womanhood throughout history now serve as some of their most effective tools in disarming the racist ideologies that they embody" (308). Each exchange corresponds in some way to an image, and as such reinforces the way stereotypes of the past continue their hurt today. For example, Angèle Etoundi Essamba writes that she purposefully uses stereotyped images to re-imagine a different and more humanizing perspective (190). The exchanges do not deny the impact of harmful cultural representations, but tactfully plot an "artistic

defense" in order to decolonize social norms (127). Rather than recycling the colonial approach to power and subjectivity, which defines the self through the ridicule of the other, *Black Womanhood* provides various textual, visual, and personal tactics that can contribute to re-imagining a more humane way forward. •

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Essays on Women's Artistic and Cultural Contributions 1919-1939: Expanded Social Roles for the New Woman Following the First World War

Edited by Paula Birnbaum and Anna Novakov
Edwin Mellen Press, 2009

Reviewed by Rachel Epp Buller

The New Woman of the interwar period has received much scholarly attention over the last twenty years, particularly in her German context but elsewhere as well. International historians examine the cultural specificities of the New Woman, *neue Frau*, or *garçonne*; sociologists discuss how her traits are shaped by her environs; art historians investigate her divergent representation by male and female artists; while gender historians sometimes debate the mythical qualities of her very identity. A new collection of essays, edited by Paula Birnbaum and Anna Novakov, brings together a diverse group of historians who examine the role, the context, and the identity of the New Woman in the artistic and cultural production of varied global settings. Born out of an interdisciplinary symposium, the anthology exhibits a two-pronged focus: while some essays expand upon the history of women in avant-garde artistic movements, others explore non-canonical forms and media to "re-define

the meaning of cultural production from a gendered perspective" (4).

The interdisciplinary nature of Birnbaum and Novakov's anthology is one of its greatest strengths, as is the way in which this diversity is contextualized. Flavia Marcello's excellent foreword, which functions more like a concise introduction and overview, sets the stage for the fascinating range of expressive forms to be examined. Marcello argues that the goal of scholars should not be to insert more women into an existing canon, instead posing two questions that will be answered by the volume's essayists: "1) how can we re-define art so that it can tell us untold stories of women's lives; and 2) what was peculiar about the socio-political context of the interwar years that allowed women to express themselves in this way?" (i). As such, it ends up seeming perfectly natural to find side-by-side essays on Claude Cahun and Camp Fire Girls. In their expanded introduction, Birnbaum and Novakov position this diversity of production as a form of resistance, as women of the interwar period rejected procreation as their sole means of creation. Further, like other feminist art historians before them, Birnbaum and Novakov assert that the essayists challenge canonical art history's tendency to heroicize the individual (male) artist, raising up instead the power and ability of groups, rather than individual geniuses, to shape history.

Despite the diversity of topics among the essays, Birnbaum and Novakov manage to identify a surprising number

of common themes, which they use as a basis for dividing the writings into five discrete sections: "Reconfiguring Girlhood," "Modernity and Visual Culture," "Re-Imagining Gender and Race," "Craftswomen and National Identity," and "Women in Public Spaces." The first section contains two particularly innovative perspectives on cultural production. Looking at interwar girlhood and body culture in New Zealand, Charlotte Macdonald investigates the competitive sport of girls' marching. In a complexly layered analysis, Macdonald positions the marching girls as rationalized, modern bodies, both martial and feminine, whose aesthetic sporting performances simultaneously signified larger socio-political connections to the "outside" world. Similarly, Jennifer Helgren situates the American Camp Fire Girls club at the center of an interwar political and cultural discourse about women's proper place in society. Despite the connotations of the outdoors that the group's name implies, the founders of Camp Fire Girls emphasized girls' domestic responsibilities (the 'fire' in fact referred to home and hearth) and envisioned the group as a wholesome antidote to what they perceived as the dangerous freedoms of modern girlhood (39). Combined with her socio-political analysis of the Camp Fire Girls, Helgren investigates the club's material culture, such as letters and scrapbooks. Helgren carefully examines the scrapbooks as examples of collaborative, rather than individual, production, commemorating group experiences.

In addition to such varied examples of cultural production, the book includes a number of strong, more strictly art historical essays. Paula Birnbaum's exposition on the *Société des Femmes Artistes Modernes* explores how themes of the modern Madonna depicted by the women of this French art collective can be understood as socio-political commentary. Though only a short excerpt from her forthcoming book on French interwar women artists, Birnbaum's essay provides a concise overview of the ways in which the work of the FAM intersected with contemporary political and cultural debates surrounding modern motherhood, including pronatalism, breastfeeding, and popular ideologies of femininity.¹

In the essays grouped as "Re-Imagining Gender and Race," Celia Stahr offers a critical re-reading of Frida Kahlo's 1932 *Self-Portrait on the Border Line between Mexico and the United States*. In an engaging cross-cultural comparison, Stahr draws parallels between the New Woman and Kahlo's "New Mestiza Woman" to examine how Kahlo played with gender stereotypes across cultures. Stahr further positions the painting as a critique of the American Ford industry, and in doing so links Kahlo's work to that of Georgia O'Keeffe, a connection that, Stahr argues, has been too long overlooked. Stahr's multilayered discussion newly situates Kahlo's painting within American art of the 1930s and presents the work as an outsider perspective on American economic and cultural issues of the time.

The most compelling essay of the entire collection is Despina Stratigakos's investigation of women architects in the

Weimar Republic. Stratigakos spells out the conflicted nature of women designing primarily domestic interior spaces as she asserts that "women architects walked a tightrope between staking a claim to the burgeoning housing industry and a desire to avoid gender stereotyping" (210). In addition to highlighting several architects and designers and the narrow path of opportunity offered to them in this overwhelmingly male field, Stratigakos offers a fascinating literary parallel as well. Analyzing the 1932 debut novel by Swiss writer Johanna Böhm, *The House of Single Women*, Stratigakos argues that Böhm acknowledges and draws out the contemporary cultural tensions around the idea of women as architects. Perhaps inspired by Frankfurt's Home for Professional Women and its protagonist loosely based on architect Grete Schütte-Lihotzky, Böhm's novel speaks to the problematic and gendered assumptions, and even the "deviant morality," associated with single women in the field of architecture (211).

Paralleling the broad scope of materials addressed, the collection surveys a wider geographic area than simply the expected regions of Western Europe and the United States. Laura Allen presents a case study of Japanese painter Yoshida Fujio in part to elucidate how early-twentieth-century Japanese women who made the controversial choice to paint in a Western style (*yōga*) found ways to promote their cause. Tusa Shea investigates how women artists in British Columbia appropriated Aboriginal textile motifs, offering a complicated look into the gendered and transculturated spaces of craft. Anna Novakov examines the street pho-

tography of Yugoslav artist Ivana Tomljenovic, although admittedly, most of the discussion focuses on Tomljenovic's years at the Bauhaus.

Unfortunately, the appearance of the book does not equal the caliber of the scholarship. The relatively unimaginative title effectively encompasses the wide-ranging essays of the volume but does nothing to sell the book. Many of the essays contain typographical errors, and the images are disappointing—relatively few are reproduced, all in black and white, and in many cases they are no better than poor-quality photocopies.

Despite its aesthetic shortcomings, however, *Essays on Women's Artistic and Cultural Contributions 1919-1939* offers a geographically and materially expanded investigation into an already much-examined time period. Not simply seeking to raise up and insert historical women into an existing canon of artists, most of the essays aim instead to enlarge and even redefine our understanding of cultural production and its location. Birnbaum and Novakov's interdisciplinary approach pushes art historians to consider the larger category of material culture, and in doing so provides a welcome addition to the existing scholarship on women artists in the interwar period. •

Rachel Epp Buller is a feminist art historian and artist. Her essays can be found in *Mothering in the Third Wave* (2008), and elsewhere. She is currently editing a volume titled *Reconciling Art and Motherhood*.

Notes

1. Paula Birnbaum, *Women Artists In Interwar France: Framing Femininities* (Burlington and London: Ashgate, forthcoming).

Yolanda M. López

by Karen Mary Davalos
UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center
and University of Minnesota Press, 2009

Reviewed by Dina Comisarenko Mirkin

The publication of a book on Yolanda M. López (b. 1942), one of the most prominent artists of the Chicano civil rights movement, was

a long overdue scholarly debt. Karen Mary Davalos, an associate professor of Chicana and Chicano studies at Loyola Marymount University who has published extensively on Chicano Art,¹ proved to be a fitting choice to fulfill this important academic project. This laudable book sets the foundation stone for the enriching analysis of López's highly iconic work.

Davalos's methodological approach

combines firsthand, very personal biographical information on the artist, with whom she worked closely, with the semiotic analysis of some of López's works. The author's clear and direct language makes the reading of the book a pleasurable experience for academic and nonacademic audiences alike. The unusual methodological perspective proves particularly apt to exemplify the intimacy of the artist's private and



Fig. 1. Yolanda M. López, *Self-Portrait* (from *Tres Mujeres/Three Generations* series) (1975-76), charcoal on paper, 4' x 8'.

public realms of action, establishing a theoretical prototype that could be extrapolated to study other socially or politically active artists.

The book starts with a preface written by Chon A. Noriega, director of the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, who recognizes López's transcendent work in regard to both the Chicano civil rights movement and women's struggle. The heart of the book is comfortably organized into six concise, well-illustrated chapters that allow readers to follow the evolution of López's career. Within these chapters, interesting and helpful interpretations reflect on some of the complexities of paradigmatic examples of her conceptual production, imbued by postmodernist artistic strategies. Rounding out the volume are a well-documented exhibition history, and a complete listing of bibliographic and other sources that constitutes an invaluable tool for other researchers wishing to pursue further, more specialized studies.

In her introduction Davalos lays out keys that allow readers to understand López's works. First is the simultaneity of her arrival to art and politics, from her early participation in the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) at San Francisco State College (now University) and in the streets of the Mission District of San Francisco. Second is the complexity of her artistic production, whose different components should not be isolated but, on the contrary, seen as complementary tools used by López to fight against patriarchy, racism, and inequality. Davalos mentions as well that López is "her own best art historian, offering conceptual and historical analysis of her work in interviews, pamphlets, and brochures that have accompanied exhibitions" (3). In fact, as is often the case with contemporary artists, López assumed this role because her firm theoretical background allowed her to do so, but also because of the fragmentary quality of the few and belated scholarly examinations of her work, even the most paradigmatic series including the *Guadalupe* triptych (1978).

The first chapter, "From la frontera: Family and Courage in San Diego," bespeaks the weight of her family history in her artistic approach. Based on López's childhood memories and family mythology regarding her grandparents' migration from Mexico to the United States—their crossing the Río Bravo by boat and miraculously escaping the bullets of the Texas Rangers—the chapter offers a revealing antidote to the more popular, romanticized views of the Mexican Revolution. Within this context, and as Davalos points out, López's portrayal of family members and self-representations that would characterize her mature work have not only a self-referential quality but a symbolic one. This allows the artist to represent and reflect on the painful collective experience of her displaced people and of so many other oppressed groups around the world, especially women. López's straightforward artistic approach, intended not to glorify but to express the dignity of her characters, as Davalos rightly points out, finds its roots in the artist's painful family history. In another insightful section Davalos also describes the unusual life of López's mother, Margaret,

a hard working, activist, creative woman—of a type not circumscribed within the stereotypical mold of Mexican abnegated motherhood—as an influential figure for López, who learned from her dignity, a love of beauty, and to challenge traditional gender expectations.

Next, in "In the Trenches: Development of a Political Artist," Davalos traces López's involvement in the Bay Area Chicano civil rights movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Departing from López's paradigmatic poster *Free Los Siete* (1969), Davalos makes enlightening comments regarding the importance that visual arts played within political movements, not just for López but for other Chicana and Chicano artists as well. She demonstrates how, in spite of low expectations of them, women care about politics and create works of art intended to be politically and socially influential. Davalos also points out that the artist was deeply satisfied by the wide circulation of the poster as opposed to the limited exposure of more traditional works by other contemporary Chicano artists, meant to be exhibited in museums and art galleries. It would be interesting to pursue some of the possible connections with contemporary political and artistic works by tracing some of the probable inspirational sources for López's poster, for example Faith Ringgold's *God Bless America* (1964), since both works share compositional and expressive contents.

In this chapter Davalos continues tracing López's process of political awareness through her active participation in the TWLF at San Francisco State College, particularly in regard to the group's demand for the creation of an ethnic studies program. The experience of hopeful and idealistic militancy of Latin-American youth meeting the brutal repression of the government marked not just López but also the lives of her generation as a whole. Once again, Davalos's account, undoubtedly based on López's personal memories, reflects a profound empathy that allows the reader to understand the strong and lasting impacts of such dramatic experiences. One of the most outstanding merits of the books resides in Davalos's extraordinary sensibility in tracing the origins of the artist's interest

and later approach to artistic expression. She makes it clear that López's works, as with those produced by other political artists, are not the result of a spontaneous and arbitrary choice but the culmination of a process that has to do with transcendental life experiences—not just individual but collective. Davalos's account of López's awareness of her lifelong feeling of difference and exclusion, as well as the realization of the social constructions that defined the differences, and the overarching need to have the "other's" own version of history, is an extraordinary text whose interest surpasses the book's explicit subject.

In "Finding a Language: Deconstruction, Semiotics, Social Change," Davalos follows López's training in conceptual practices, mainly through her art classes with Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula. In this chapter, Davalos analyzes López's contribution to feminism and Chicano art history by focusing on two series, *Tres Mujeres/Three Generations* (1975-76; Fig. 1) and *¿A dónde vas Chicana?* (1978), and on the installation *The Nanny* (1994). All are concerned with the invisibility of migrant working women and represent important and paradigmatic contemporary works. Davalos analyzes issues related to material, scale, and posture that clearly unravel some of López's strategies to resist sexism and to help in creating a new, dignified collective imagery of Chicano women.

In the chapters titled "Guadalupe as Feminist Proposal" and "Collecting and Exhibiting Mexicana," Davalos concentrates on López's most famous series on the Virgin of Guadalupe (1978-88), and on videos and installation pieces such as *When You Think of Mexico: Images of Mexicans in the Media* (1986), *Things I Never Told My Son About Being a Mexican* (1985), and *Cactus Hearts/Barbed Wire Dreams* (1988). Although the introductory pages are quite promising, since the author sets herself the task of exploring how the artist deconstructed the popular religious image in order "to see how we represent ourselves" (81), the analysis seems to lack some cultural references that could have enriched her study. It is in fact worth mentioning that the Virgin's enormous popularity, both in Mexico and in the Chicano community

in the United States, is related to several profound reasons, such as her original appearance to an Indian, Juan Diego; the dark color of her skin; and her close association with the Mexican War of Independence. López seems to draw on this tradition of ethnic identity and freedom and take it to a new level of contemporary presence and democratization, suggesting that every Chicana now embodies her precious attributes. Comparisons might be made with *La Virgen de Guadalupe defendiendo los derechos de los Chicanos* (The Virgin of Guadalupe defending the rights of Chicanos; 1974) by Ester Hernández, and George Yepes's mural at St. Lucy's Church in Los Angeles (1995) in evaluating the history of the appropriation of the sacred image in the modern world. On the other hand, Davalos's recognition of the complex and polyvalent levels of readings interwoven in López's later installations and video works produced since the mid 1980s is once again stimulating and revealing. In her analysis of López's conceptual production, for example *Things I Never Told My Son about Being a Mexican*, Davalos successfully studies the complex issues of identity, assimilation, stereotypes, and cultural change that the powerful media can impose upon people and that are resisted and challenged in López's works, accurately establishing, once again, revealing connections among personal, political, and artistic realms.

The last chapter, "Yolanda's Got a Brand New Bag," is disappointingly short. After briefly reflecting about the origins of a series López was making inspired by Mexican tourist art—such as the tooled leatherwork portrayed in *Mexican Bag* (2003)—and launching questions related to her ideas about beauty, authenticity, and historical processes that determine how culture, heritage, and tradition pervade one's life and art, Davalos suddenly ends. The abrupt closure could be interpreted perhaps as a sign of López's ongoing, thriving career, and as an invitation to pursue further, more specialized studies that attempt to answer these and many other questions intelligently presented by Davalos in this groundbreaking book on Yolanda López's life and work.

Yolanda M. López is the second volume of the very commendable educational project entitled "A Ver: Revisioning Art History," launched in 2007, by the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center and the University of Minnesota Press. The endeavor is devoted to presenting Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican and other U.S.-based Latino artists, as a first step toward rescuing memories and calling attention to the historical transcendence of significant alternative creators absent from most art historical narratives due largely to their national origins.

As a part of this series and in general, Davalos's exploration of López's personal experiences and of Latina representations is an important contribution to our understanding of how images work within political struggles and how gender, racial, and cultural identity continue to be significant issues in our contemporary world. Davalos exposes the complexity and richness of this artist's work, the importance of her contributions to Chicano, feminist, and conceptual art, and some of the complex and fascinating issues related to the politics of representation. Both well-versed feminist readers and the general public will find this book immensely revealing and thought-provoking with regard both to the construction and representation of gender, racial, and cultural identity, and to López's extraordinary and significant artistic production. •

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Notes

1. Also by Davalos are *Exhibiting Mestizaje: Mexican (American) Museums in the Diaspora* (2001), and *The Mexican Museum of San Francisco* (2007).

Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America

by Jayne Wark

McGill-Queens University Press, 2006

Reviewed by Karen Gonzalez Rice

That feminist performance art influenced feminism itself is the ambitious claim that Jayne Wark sets out to establish in *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America*. Additionally, she attributes to feminist performance art broad shifts in art practices, from aesthetic to everyday realms. Wark's project—based on her 1997 dissertation—is to demonstrate the mutuality of performance and political actions, and the impact of feminist practices on mainstream art practices. Unfortunately, these stated goals remain unsupported outside of her introduction. Instead, the book offers an extended literature review of 1970s feminist art and performance, and inconsistencies that hamper the effectiveness of her argument. Specifically, her inadequate definition of “politics,” her ambivalence toward gender essentialism, and methodological problems related to the project's amorphous geographical boundaries and to her limited primary research diminish the impact and usefulness of Wark's text.

Framing her goals in terms of politics, Wark writes that “feminist performance played a decisive role in negotiating a new relationship between art and politics” (3). A clear conception of politics is thus crucial to her argument. However, despite carefully defining concepts such as “feminism” and “performance art” through exhaustive analyses of texts by scholars from a variety of fields (art history, critical theory, and performance/theater studies), she never clarifies her understanding of “politics,” and her delineations of political versus nonpolitical art shift according to the expedencies of her argument. When Wark writes of feminist artists' political investments, for example, “politics” signals women's involvement with local and personal concerns. “Political” art by male artists and women outside of

feminist circles, on the other hand, must demonstrate direct, “legible” engagement with national social, economic, and political issues (21). This double standard allows Wark to emphasize “the personal is political” approach of 1970s American feminist artists in stark contrast to what she considers the politically ambivalent attitude of other male and female American artists. However, this false dichotomy neither reflects the complex realities of these artists' political investments nor communicates the power and pervasive impact of feminist ideas.

Wark's double standard leads to some inaccurate claims. She argues, for example, that “most American artists were reticent to make... direct political references in their work” and that they betrayed a “profound ambivalence about art's capacity to bring about liberating change” (22). She supports these surprising statements using an article published in *Artforum* (September 1970), in which the editors questioned several successful American artists about their attitudes toward art and political responsibility. Artists including Donald Judd, Jo Baer, and Robert Smithson, all working in the mainstream of the art market, revealed compromised relationships to political action due to the exigencies of their economic interests, while the editors' attention to marginal art practices and practitioners would have yielded more complex understandings of artists' politics. Dismissing experimental artists as nonpolitical, Wark then claims that Fluxus, for example, did not “really challenge...the essential principle that art should remain autonomous and apart from the contingencies of social life and politics” (19). This startling claim ignores George Maciunas's charge, in his Fluxus Manifesto, to “FUSE the cadres of cultural, social & political revolutionaries into united front and action”¹ and Dick Higgins's observation that artists' “central problem is now not only the new formal one of learning to use [non-traditional aesthetic forms], but the new and more social one of what to use them for?”² She also overlooks art historian Hannah Higgins's arguments for the political efficacy of Fluxus artists' radical, experiential practices.³

In the service of defining the 1970s art world as a political vacuum in which only feminist artists acted, Wark unnecessarily simplifies the complicated symbiosis of art and politics during what was actually a profoundly rich period. Wark does not address West Coast Funk artists at all—perhaps because the direct, immediately “legible” social and political commentary of artists such as Edward Kienholz and Bruce Conner contradicts her claims. Similarly, the explicitly political mural and poster projects by African-American, Chicano, and Latino artists in California and in Chicago are also absent from her discussion. Ultimately, she conflates feminist performance with politics, leaving her central claims unsupported, and concludes that “it may not be possible to identify how feminist performance art has contributed directly to policy change and political action” (123).

Wark suggests that some feminist artists are more political than others. Initially, she contextualizes gender essentialism in 1970s feminist art as “strategic... [and] necessary at the time in order to develop feminism as a political practice with which a wide spectrum of women could identify” (7), an attitude that fairly assesses these artists' intellectual milieu. Later, however, Wark acts as an apologist for postmodern ideals, measuring so-called essentialist artists against postmodern criteria. She identifies postmodern tendencies in the usual suspects—Eleanor Antin (128-32), Adrian Piper (139-44), Martha Rosler (112-15), and Martha Wilson (145-50)—while deriding others—Judy Chicago (83), Mary Beth Edelson (64-65), and Betsy Damon (63-64). Wark particularly targets nature- and goddess-themed artworks like those of Edelson, Damon, and other artists included in Lucy Lippard's *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (1983).

Certainly, these artists' appropriations of non-Western cultural forms might cause discomfort for scholars current in post-colonial theory. But these ahistorical assessments obscure more fundamental, and more productive, questions, such as why narratives and images of non-Western spirituality were so powerful for American women artists

in the 1970s. Wark does not acknowledge the serious pursuit of theological and cosmological significance that these works represented, and she fails either to account for the persistent power of these subjects or to excavate the meanings and development of their essentialist ideas in terms of cultural and personal history. Interestingly, Wark exempts Ana Mendieta's female-goddess-themed works from her critique because of the artist's "specific identification as a woman of Latin American descent" (71). The result has highly problematic implications—that Mendieta's Cuban heritage lends authenticity to her Taíno-inspired works. This position overlooks the important distinction between Mendieta's Latina heritage and the native Taíno culture that she appropriated, and it disregards art historian Jane Blocker's observation that Mendieta's work was "a synthesis of the investigations [of] artists like Betsy Damon, Mary Beth Edelson, and Jane Ellen Gilmore."⁴ Despite her criticism of essentialist artistic strategies, Wark herself recapitulates gender and cultural essentialism.

In her discussion Wark uses male artists instrumentally, rendering such important and innovative male artists as Chris Burden, Vito Acconci, and Paul McCarthy as flat, two-dimensional foils for feminist performance artists. Wark argues that

when performance artists like Acconci or Chris Burden explored such concepts as power relations, risk, and vulnerability, they did so from a social position always already certain of its own power and authority and thus oblivious to what it might be like for those whose own social positions were defined by subordination and real powerlessness (90).

In this way, she not only denies male artists the intellectual and psychological depth, social complexity, and progressive possibility that she reserves for female artists, but neglects their own real struggles with patriarchy and personal traumatic experience.

Wark's methodology compounds the internal inconsistencies of her text. One might assume from the Canadian

publisher and the inclusion of the term "North America" in the title that the author addresses continental rather than nation-based performance activities. While she takes the significant step of extending the feminist canon to include Canadian women artists and includes an excellent set of images supporting this claim, she only briefly describes Canadian political contexts, feminist organizations, and artistic circles, reserving in-depth, thick descriptions for U.S. contexts. Outside of her brief discussion of Ana Mendieta, Wark fails to mention the considerable contributions of feminist performance artists in Mexico and Central America. If Wark's expertise does not extend to these regions, as the broad claim of her title suggests, her bibliography might have included the noteworthy scholarship of Josefina Alcázar, Coco Fusco, Mónica Mayer, Joseph Roach, Diana Taylor, and others. In a book with an explicit, geographic focus, a cursory treatment of Canada and a neglect of Mexico and Central America reflect the continuation of regional blind spots evident in much performance art scholarship.

Further, as noted above, rather than conducting substantial primary research, Wark relies heavily on other scholars for everything from theoretical explanations to descriptions of artworks. Her first several chapters serve as extended literature reviews, and even her analyses of individual artists and artworks cite a set of familiar interpretations: Maurice Berger on Adrian Piper, for example, and the work of Arlene Raven, Moira Roth

and Lucy Lippard on a variety of feminist artists. Wark's own direct research with artists is limited to a handful: Martha Rosler, Martha Wilson, and a few Canadian artists. At the same time, she offers consistently decontextualized readings of scholarship by Kristine Stiles, Amelia Jones, and others. The discussions are illustrated throughout with black and white images. Wark's book provides a historical survey for others to build on, but—as with many other recent texts in the field—it would have benefited from more careful attention to the contexts in which scholarly ideas are presented, greater willingness to represent the complexities of history, and a concerted effort to support ambitious, worthwhile, potentially field-changing claims.

Karen Gonzalez Rice is a doctoral candidate in Art, Art History & Visual Studies at Duke University. Her dissertation is entitled "Enduring Faith: Christianity and Traumatic Experience in Contemporary American Performance Art." •

Notes

1. George Maciunas, "Fluxus Manifesto (1963)," in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1996), 727.
2. Dick Higgins, "Statement on Intermedia (1966)," in *Theories and Documents*, 729.
3. Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002).
4. Jane Blocker, *Where Is Ana Mendieta? Identity, Performativity and Exile* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1999), 18.



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Fig. 1. Sigalit Landau (2001), *Barbed Hula*, Video installation.

Women Artists: *elles@centrepompidou*

Introduction by Camille Morineau
Centre Pompidou, Paris (2009)

Reviewed by Britta C. Dwyer

“**W**ow!” What better way to begin my discussion of this groundbreaking exhibition dedicated to the works of women artists from the Centre Pompidou collection? Referring to it as an “exhibition-collection,” to use the neologism that the curators suggested, this show offered an international array of works in every imaginable media, including paintings, sculptures, installations, drawings, photographs, prints, videos, furniture and architectural models, all documented in an impressive catalogue. The exhibit, which ran from May 2009 until May 2010, foregrounded over 200 artists and 500 works. In January 2010, a third of the exhibition was renewed to involve more artists.

The 380-page exhibition catalogue, published in French and English editions, tries to capture the breadth and scope of the exhibit, if not its scale. All works are reproduced in high quality color or black and white along with full quotations by each individual artist. Nine thematic chapters follow the exhibit arrangement; each contains a

brief essay on the theme followed by the works and artist statements. Featured next are a dozen topical essays by an international array of art historians.

In her introduction, “*elles @ pompidou: addressing difference*,” Camille Morineau, a curator at Centre Pompidou, begins with some loaded questions: Why do it? Why now? How can it be done? Or to be more specific, from which viewpoint? (14). One of her criteria, she points out, was to showcase the concentrated purchase of works by women during the last five to six years. Yet, the purpose was not to adopt a feminist perspective—not all women are feminist—but to highlight the place of women in art in the twentieth century. She concludes, “Favoring themes rather than chronology was one of the strategic decisions designed to ‘ruffle’ the idea of gender, to ‘unhinge’ preconceptions of ‘women’s art’” (18). The thematic arrangement allowed for artists to be represented by works in more than one section of the catalogue.

Morineau was the driving force behind this ambitious project. It all began in the United States, she explains, when she studied art and women’s studies at Williams College in Massachusetts over twenty years ago and “discovered” an alternate history and feminist viewpoint.¹ Back in France she taught at l’École du Louvre for ten years where

she tried to create a gender studies program. “Impossible,” she says. When she started working at the Pompidou six years ago she brought up the idea of an exhibit by women. But putting on a show of only women’s work was a very un-French thing to do. Nobody in France counts the number of men and women in exhibitions. This was for her the reason above all for this project, and working together with Alfred Pacquement, director of the museum, the impossible was made possible.

Visitors to the exhibition were greeted at the entrance by French artist Agnès Thurnauer’s “Life Size portraits” (2007–08), twelve giant, bright-colored “buttons” hung against a mauve background. All but one name female versions of famous male artists—Annie Warhol, Jacqueline Pollock, Marcelle Duchamp and Sandra Botticelli, while the name of Louise Bourgeois has been changed to Louis. A visual pun of gender disparity.

The exhibition was spread across two floors and organized chronologically and thematically. The fourth floor was dedicated to *elles*, contemporary women’s art (from 1950’s to present), while on the fifth floor works (paintings, sculptures, photographs) by avant-garde women, for instance French artists Suzanne Valadon, Marie Laurencin, Sonia Delaunay, Germaine Richier, Dora Maar and Mexico’s Frida Kahlo, were integrated with works by their contemporaries, Picasso, Matisse and Man Ray. This intentional separation served as a sobering reminder *from whence ‘we’ (women artists) came* (author’s italics).

Prominently positioned in the main hallway a poster by the Guerilla Girls criticized the phallocentrism of artistic institutions, “Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?” Throughout the show, as in the catalogue, selected quotations allowed the artist “to speak for herself.” Wall texts, reproduced in the catalogue, drew on the reflections by contemporary writers and historians, for example Linda Nochlin, Judith Butler, Joan Scott and Virginia Woolf. The Anglo-American presence was strong. Powerful, shocking, confrontational, humorous and

genial (to use a French term) the exhibit was all that *and* revolutionary for the Pompidou and France.

The catalogue's first chapter, "Pioneering Women" by Cécile Debray, is historical, trying to summarize a period fraught with conflict and contradiction. Included here are the "fifth-floor" artists. As has been said elsewhere, the experiences of most early-twentieth-century women artists indicate that for them access to a space of recognition—of visibility and validation—was often subject to both professional and sexual negotiation. Though Debray addresses many of the significant issues, she does not seem to be on familiar ground. (For example, Gill Perry's 1995 publication on avant garde women artists is sorely missing in an altogether dated bibliography.)

The next chapter, "Fire at Will" by Quentin Bajac, as the title indicates documents a section that is militant and confrontational. Here are works such as Valie Export's "Genital Panic" (1969), showing the Austrian performance artist "dressed in a sweater and pants with the crotch completely cut away" and carrying a machine gun. Critical of the male chauvinist attitudes of her contemporaries in the Viennese Actionist group, Export "states her intentions by reclaiming complete control over her body" (48). Working in warring zones, Israeli artist Sigalit Landau in "Barbed Hula" (2001; Fig. 1) reveals the scars of conflict metaphorically in a video installation in which she spins inside a hoop of barbed wire, an act that is viscerally painful. In her statement, the artist explains: "Careful observation shows that the wire spikes are turned outwards and thus are nearly harmless" (69). Others among the three dozen artists included in this section are Niki St. Phalle and Annette Messager (France), Hannah Wilke and Nancy Spero (U.S.), and Shirin Neshat (Iran).

For the chapter titled "The Body Slogan," Emma Lavigne references the women artists from the mid-1960s who in performance art used their bodies as the material of the artwork itself. One of the star exhibits here is Czech-Canadian Jana Sterbak's pioneering

Vanitas, Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic (1987). Writes Sterbak, "When the dress was first exhibited it was made of raw beef. By the time the show closed the dress had taken on the appearance of dried out leather. Then everything becomes acceptable" (94). Sterbak is concerned about transformation and how time changes our perception of works. Also included here are seminal works by Carolee Schneemann (U.S.), Marina Abramović (Yugoslavia), Ana Mendieta (Cuba-U.S.), and others.

Camille Morineau's chapter title "Eccentric abstraction" takes its name from a term credited to Lucy Lippard in defining broadly an art form that is "Visual, tactile and visceral" (119), as in Eva Hesse's resin and fiberglass "Seven Poles" (1970) and "Extreme Tension" (2007) by Louise Bourgeois. Here, too, Egyptian Ghada Amer's canvas "Big Pink" (2002), a sexually charged collage, combines paint and embroidery in images of women taken from pornographic magazines for men. Writes Amer, "I am here participating to the double submission of the woman, i.e. the woman sewing and the woman sewing her own distorted image" (127). Yayoi Kusama (Japan-U.S.), Lee Bontecou (U.S.), Lygia Clark (Brazil), and Vera Molnar (Hungary) also are among the thirty or so artists with works in this section.

"A Room of One's Own" by Emma Lavigne discusses space and the individual from a phenomenological and/or heterotopic approach drawing on Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault. While the essay is dense, the artists speak clearly for themselves, Korean Koo Jeong-A declares "Space is just everywhere" (168), and Swiss Pipilotti Rist presents a playful audiovisual installation "A la Belle étoile" (2007), where "Viewers are supposed to arrive at a state of flux" (173). Also in this group of around twenty are Louise Nevelson and Dorothea Tanning (U.S.), Mariko Mori (Japan-U.S.), Sophie Calle (France), and Mona Hatoum (Lebanon-U.K.).

In "Words at work" Morineau explores the various uses of language in art. In some pieces words are the

principal medium, for example in Barbara Kruger's declarative poster-like statement, "What big muscles you have" (1986). In *Passage II* (2002) Spain's Cristina Iglesias traces out a journey in a room where a superimposed canopy of mats—hung from a ceiling—throw shadows of text on the walls and ground. Fascinating and ingenious, it felt like getting lost in a maze of words where the work was as tangible and clear as it was evasive and inaccessible. Also in this large group were works by three dozen artists representing more than a dozen countries.

"Immaterials" by Quentin Bajac focuses upon the effect of "dematerialisation of the work" in a variety of materials and media, from paint and glass to photography and video installation. "Rubble" (2006–08), an architectural installation by Polish artist Monika Sosnowska, "imagines the exhibition site as a mental space to be reconfigured" (221). A captivating work (a bombed-out house?), its architectural structures are unfinished, destroyed, and troubling.

Valérie Guillaume's "elles@design" begins by analyzing the minimal presence of women designers in the collection and the industry, and introduces subjects aimed at starting a discussion of how theoretical debates on gender may apply to the history of industrial and graphic design. (The chapter also includes a brief history of women and design, 1945–65, by Patrick Favardin, with examples from the exhibition.) The final chapter "Architecture and Feminism?" by Aurelian Lemonier explores a range of ideas from practice by couples to the semantics of gender and queer theories in architecture. Both Guillaume and Lemonier take on burgeoning topics with limited space in which to do them justice.

The last twelve essays, by mostly European scholars, provide another example of women artists' "plurivocality" (19) by extending the problematics of visual arts into other fields, such as philosophy, sociology and politics. A "Chronology" by Nathalie Ernault provides two useful timelines spanning the

period 1900 to 2009: "Society," which highlights European and American events, and "Art" which retraces major artistic events in the history of art and women. A select bibliography and a list of women artists in the Pompidou collection round things out.

To summarize, this is a handsome if not excellent catalogue. Drawing on Anglo-American scholarship, the research is mainly French-based, a refreshing and new addition to the study of women and art. It would serve scholars and the general public alike as a valuable resource and reminder of a remarkable exhibition.

I began by applauding this venture, yet, it is bound to get mixed reviews. Disapproving of its segregation, some

will accuse the show of ghettoizing women. "Why not a comparison rather than *un bannissement talibanesque*?" one reviewer asked.² Morineau is not concerned. From the onset, she decided not to worry about criticism too much. Polemics are beneficial, desirable, welcome. Nobody thought about the lack of women in the Louvre, and now they are starting to talk about it. More broadly, the gesture seems to have inspired the Museum of Modern Art in New York, with plans to mount a show of its women artists.³ Time will tell if others will follow. •

Britta C. Dwyer is an independent art historian living in Cambridge, England. She has published on Anna E. Klumpke

and more recently on Doris and Anna Zinkeisen. She is a regular reviewer for *The Art Book*.

Notes

1. Interview with Camille Morineau, by Nicole Salt, 5 June 2009 and *Wanderlust*, no. 24, Aug. 7, 2009 (no author); both sources from the internet.
2. Internet review Almanart www.almanart.com/exposition.elles-pompidou, July 2009.
3. *Modern Women: Women Artists at The Museum of Modern Art* is scheduled for publication in June 2010. Editors are Cornelia Butler and Alexandra Schwartz, with introductions by Aruna D'Souza and Griselda Pollock, one of the essayists in elles@centrepompidou.



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Pl.1. Lavinia Fontana, *Athena Disrobing* (1613),
oil on canvas, 102 ½" x 74".
Galleria Borghese, Rome.



Pl. 2. Lavinia Fontana, *Judith
beheading Holofernes* (1592-94),
oil on canvas, 86 11/16" x 67 ¾".
Galleria Stuarda, Parma.



Pl. 3. Elisabetta Sirani,
Allegory of Painting as Clio (1658),
oil on canvas, 44 7/8" x 33 1/2".
Pushkin Museum, Moscow.



Pl. 4. Elisabetta Sirani, *Judith Triumphant* (1658),
oil on canvas, 93" x 72". Collection Marquis of
Exeter, Burghley House, Stamford.



Pl. 5. Artemisia Gentileschi,
*Judith and Maidservant with the
Head of Holofernes* (c. 1625),
oil on canvas, 72 1/2" x 55 3/4".
Detroit Art Institute.



Pl. 6. Elisabetta Sirani,
Penitent Magdalene, (1660),
oil on canvas, 46 7/8" x 61 3/8".
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna.



Pl. 7. Artist unknown, *Teseida: Battle of Theseus and the Amazons* (c. 1450), tempera on wood, 16 7/8" x 58 5/8".
Indianapolis: Indianapolis Art Museum, Photo courtesy of the Indianapolis Art Museum.



Pl. 8. Luisa Roldán and Tomás de Los Arcos (polychromer), *San Ginés de la Jara* (c. 1692), polychromed wood (pine and cedar) with glass eyes, 69 1/4" x 36 3/16" x 29 1/8". The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.



Pl. 9. Luisa Roldán, *Death of Mary Magdalene* (c. 1692-99), polychromed terracotta, 12". Courtesy of the Hispanic Society of America, New York.



Pl. 10. Ellen Day Hale, *Self-Portrait* (1885), oil, 28 1/2" x 39". Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Nancy Hale Bowers 1986.645. Photograph: © 2010 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Pl. 11. Nancy Azara, *Maxi's Wall* (2007), carved and painted wood with gold, silver, palladium leaf and encaustic, 10' x 12' x 3'. Photo: Nick Ghiz.



Pl. 12. Nancy Azara, *Broken Red Leaves* (2006), carved and painted wood with gold leaf with palladium leaf and encaustic, 43" x 11" x 2". Photo: Christopher Burke.



Pl. 13. Nancy Azara, *Hickory with Hands* (2004), carved and painted wood with gold leaf, 5' x 3' x 1" (three panels). Photo: Christopher Burke.



Pl. 14. Nancy Azara, *Hand Garden/Doctors Wall* (2004), carved and painted wood with gold leaf and encaustic, 6 1/2' x 24' x 8".
Photo: Ricardo Barros.



Pl. 15. Nancy Azara, *Changes* (2006), carved and painted wood with gold, aluminum, palladium leaf and encaustic, 12" x 12" panels.
Photo: Christopher Burke.



Pl. 16. Nancy Azara, *Passages* (1999), carved and painted wood with gold, aluminum leaf and encaustic (18 panels), 15" x 18' x 1", closes to 19". Photo: Christopher Burke.

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