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(on the cover) María Izquierdo,
Mis sobrinas (My nieces) (1940),
oil on plywood, 55 1/4" x 37 1/4".
Museo Nacional de Arte,
CONACULTA-INBA.
Photo: Museo Nacional de Arte.

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This issue brings into focus the lives of women (only one a self-described “feminist”), whose real feminism is defined by their exceptional visions of what they themselves could and would accomplish. The Mexico City gallerist Inés Amor (1912–80) introduced the world to a broader vision of Mexican modern art at a time when that term was synonymous with “mural painting.” Following the loss of their family’s fortune during the revolution—against the wishes of their mother, but with their father’s support—the Amor “girls” opened a gallery in the family home. “her profound understanding of the origins and evolution of Mexican modern art—both the murals and the easel paintings” eventually made Inés Amor and her Galería de Arte Mexicano “the Word and the temple to the faithful,” writes salomon Grimberg. she actively supported the careers of three generations of Mexican artists, men and women, including Frida kahlo, o lga c osta, and Maria Izquierdo. she also welcomed to her gallery r emedios Varo, l eonora c arrington, and other artists who sought exile in Mexico during the World War II years. Agreeing in 1940 to install an International exhibition of surrealist Art, she included Mexican easel paintings alongside those by e uropean artists, bringing long-lasting attention to Mexico and the Galería. For four decades, Amor tirelessly promoted the Galería artists, placing their work in important exhibitions and collections both in and outside of Mexico. Maria Izquierdo’s self-portrait with her nieces, our cover image, was the first painting purchased for Mexico City’s Museo de Arte Moderno.

the new York painter and poet Florine stettheimer (1871–1944) continues to capture the imagination and interest of art historians and literary critics. two articles in this issue explore facets of the work and reception of this recondite early modernist, whose provocative nude self-portrait (ca. 1915–16) suggests her willingness to share in a growing interest by women painters to depict their own bodies (suzanne Valadon, paula Modersohn-Becker, and Georgia o ’k eeffe are some contemporary examples). While preparing an incisive critique of stettheimer’s poetry, english professors Irene Gammel and suzanne z elazo uncovered new links between these “vivid and painterly poems of gently acerbic social critique that capture and create the plasticity of modernism” and her paintings, particularly the self-portraits and images of celebrity artists such as Marcel d uchamp. “the poems and paintings...are so diaphanous,” they write, “...effecting the potentiality of blankness in an attempt to write an aesthetics of cellophane: the poems are painterly and tactile, yet also sonic; transparent and light, and yet sealed from penetration.” In fact, cellophane, a recent invention, was readily adopted by stettheimer as “a metaphor of modernity,” which she employed most famously in the set and costumes she created for the 1934 production of Gertrude stein and Virgil t homson’s opera “Four saints in t hree Acts.”

Also writing on stettheimer, Alexander r ich notes that, except for some elaborately staged at-home showings, this artist exhibited her paintings publicly only once during her lifetime. A retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art mounted shortly after her death marked the first major showing of her work. since then, stettheimer’s work has

received periodic attention in conjunction with new exhibitions and books on the artist. r ich focuses on the commentary and critical writings that have accompanied these resurgences of interest in stettheimer’s work—the decade-by-decade “rediscovery”—of her art. Various descriptions of her art as being either “dated” or “ahead of her time,” r ich writes that “it may be the sheer uniqueness of stettheimer’s art that makes it so difficult to critique.”

c ynthia Fischer offers an article on the circumstances surrounding the conception of the *Titanic Memorial* (1916–31) in Washington, d.c. . r ather than presenting an account of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney’s (1875–1942) creation of this imposing stone monument, Fischer has written the story of its commission, a dramatic tale that involves a feud between two competing women’s organizations. the group that hired Whitney—who like its members was a “social elite”—insisted on commemorating the chivalrous men who died in the April 1912 *Titanic* disaster so that women and children could be saved. A second group (whose memorial plans were never carried out) wished to remember not just the men but the considerable number of women and children who also died when the ship sank. the story continues with a lengthy delay to erect the memorial on its chosen site, and its later removal to its current location. essential to Fischer’s account is the conflict between the traditional concept of male chivalry and the gender consciousness being stimulated by the new Woman and the contemporaneous struggle for women’s suffrage.

For figurative artist Juanita Mcn eely, feminism is at the very root of her provocative, expressionist paintings. Author sharyn Finnegan presents Mcn eely as actively engaged in the creation of her striking large-scale works, despite physical impairments. her art is shocking but authentic, rich in its exploration of health issues and painful situations known to many women, and it exemplifies her courage and determination in the face of adversity. Moving to new York City in the late 1960s, Mcn eely quickly found a home in the feminist artist movement. By then, Finnegan writes: “she was painting female-oriented sexuality, from a woman’s point of view, a subject with little precedent then....full of images that would recur over her entire career, expressing her tragic vision of woman.”

r ounding out the issue are insightful reviews of recent books and exhibition catalogues. these include monographs on pioneering feminist conceptual and performance artists Adrian piper, suzanne l acy, and Marina Abramović; on u.s. l atina artists Maria Brito and c elia Alvarez Muñoz; and on the sculptors l ynda Benglis and u rsula von r ydingsvard. exhibition catalogues investigate pop Art, the textile designs of sonia d elaunay, the drawings of r achel Whiteread, and the abstract paintings of d orothea r ockburne. We thank the reviewers who so generously share their expertise with our readers.

We continue to be pleased and amazed at the number of new submissions we receive. thanks to all of you who continue to send us new articles. If only we had space to accommodate more examples of your interesting, discerning research.

Joan Marter and Margaret Barlow, co-editors

INÉS AMOR AND THE GALERÍA DE ARTE MEXICANO

By Salomon Grimberg

"Inés Amor had bigness".

—Joy Laville¹

As director of the Galería de Arte Mexicano, Inés Amor (1912-1980) established the evolving Mexican art market from its inception. Simultaneously, she documented every step of the evolution of the post-Revolutionary Mexican iconography, building a comprehensive archive that surpasses—by far—any of its kind. Scholars from all over the world still come to Mexico City especially to work directly from these files composed of her gallery notes, catalogues, clippings, and sales records. Although, from the start, she believed that what she was doing had historical significance, she did it without pretense and in what would become her signature style: simply, logically, and methodically.²

In retrospect, the emergence of Inés Amor and creation of the Galería were nothing short of prodigious. Her work of forty years became the foundation on which expertise in the field was built. Without a precursor institution of its kind after which to model, or an art dealer from whom to learn, Inés Amor and the Galería became the Word and the Temple to the faithful. Her profound understanding of the origins and evolution of Mexican modern art—both the murals and easel paintings—its influences as well as its contributions, formed her expertise. It came to her directly from the artists, by speaking with them and getting to know them as they were making this art. The combination of this dynamic woman and Mexican modern art provided the ideal synergism—dealer and artists working together to promote a groundbreaking iconography, as when Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler introduced and promoted Cubism, or Julien Levy Surrealism. Like these pioneers, a self-assured Inés Amor promoted Mexican art with a fine-tuned grasp of its meaning, cautiously choosing artists, managing their work, and, through the exhibitions she organized in and outside of Mexico, providing standards that continue today to define quality in Mexican modern art. More than seventy-five years after the opening of the Galería de Arte Mexicano, her vision remains the litmus test against which those involved in the field are measured. Her original intention, to simply provide a service, never shifted, although it developed in many unexpected ways. Steadily and unstintingly, Amor gave more than she took; she thought of others before thinking of herself. And by providing a



Fig. 1. Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Bonito* (1941), oil on masonite, 21 5/8" x 17 1/8". Private collection. Photo: Crispín Vázquez, courtesy Galería de Arte Mexicano. © 2011 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

cornerstone on which to build Mexico's artistic milieu, she established a developing historical context for Mexico's post-revolutionary artistic community.³

Inés Amor exhibited many of the best Mexican artists of three consecutive generations, including those who had settled in or had some connection to Mexico. Those among the first generation were: Frida Kahlo (1907–54) (1941; Fig. 1), María Izquierdo (1906–55) (1940; front cover), Olga Costa (1913–93), Angelina Beloff (1879–1969), Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Juan Soriano, and Rufino Tamayo, Agustín Lazo, Carlos Mérida, and Antonio Ruiz.



Fig. 2. Inés Amor in her office at the Galería de Arte Mexicano on Milan 18 (ca. late 1950s-early 1960s). Photo: Lola Alvarez Bravo. Courtesy Galería de Arte Mexicano.

Leonora Carrington (1917-2011), Remedios Varo (1908-63), Cordelia Urueta (1908-95), Alice Rahon (1904-87), Wolfgang Paalen, Pedro Coronel, Rafael Coronel, Gunther Gerzso, Ricardo Martínez, Luis García Guerrero, and Olivier Seguin formed the second. And, among the younger painters of the third generation, she managed the work of Joy Laville (b. 1923), Alfredo Castañeda, Roberto Doníz, Luis López Loza, Emilio Ortiz, Fernando Ramos Prida, Juan Salazar, and Eduardo Tamariz. It is easily said that she “managed” these artists; what is difficult to imagine is the manner in which she conceptualized and carried out her program, when, before her, Mexican easel art was all but unknown. On her own, she developed a unique working style that made her instrumental in the formation of private and public Mexican art collections that entered institutions such as New York’s Museum of Modern Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the San Francisco Museum of Art, among others.⁴

When Amor was asked whether being a woman had made it more difficult for her as director of the Galería, she replied, “No, ‘I have never thought of myself as a woman art dealer. I only think about doing my best possible work.’”⁵ Yet, she never lost her coquettish sense of looking attractive, being careful to fix her hair and check her makeup before starting a meeting. Surely, in her time and place, she must have run into professional situations where someone took issue with her gender, but if so, it did not leave a mark in her memory. Although small in size, Amor was tall in stature. When she walked into a room, people took notice, not because of what she looked like but because her presence projected importance (Fig. 2).

Inés Amor held an endless fascination for the complex flow of the creative process. “Art is my *quinta esencia*,” she remarked, using the medieval term that describes the substance that permeates all nature, including celestial bodies. In drawings, she identified the original impulse as shaping the image as well

as the experience that generated it. Her admiration for drawings came from the awareness that they could not be altered without tampering with the original impulse. Her fascination with paintings was deciphering the process involved in making them: how the artist struggled, negotiating between conflicts, compromising to achieve a balanced composition. The process of painting meant continuously altering the image to make it look a particular way, effacing the original intent, transforming it into what the artist wanted us see.

In choosing which artists to exhibit, Amor sought three attributes: evidence of a personal style—one that came through regardless of whether the artist was under the influence of other painters (“that is how one learns,” she would say); a sense for adventure—the courage to delve intuitively into the invisible world; and mastery of craft—because a well-painted work, like a well-written text, expresses best what the artist has to say, *when something is there*. Amor told an anecdote that illustrates how these requirements came together in one of her artists, Carlos Mérida. He was a fountainhead of creativity,

and technically, he was as fine as fine can be. He was “a painter’s painter,” but the public was slow in catching on. Although she had difficulty selling his work during the first twenty years he was in the Galería, he never budged from pursuing his vision and she never complained. One day, he came into the Galería and sat weeping on the stairs: “Doña Inés, I am a failure,” he cried. “Why, Don Carlos?” “Because I don’t sell my work,” he replied. “Don Carlitos,” Amor said, “you are mistaken; you are a success because you are a good painter. It is I who is the failure because I am not selling your work.”

Julia Inés Amor Schmidtlein was the fourth of seven children born to Doctor (in Theology) Emmanuel Amor Subervielle and Doña Carolina Schmidtlein y García Teruel. The family history is significant as it explains the world out of which the Galería de Arte Mexicano emerged. The Amor family was descended from Don Pelayo, the king and founder of the kingdom of Asturias, and the earliest Amor family ancestor came to Mexico from Spain in the mid nineteenth century. On the maternal side, Inés Amor’s grandfather, Doctor Adolf Schmidtlein, arrived in Mexico (from Bavaria) as physician to the doomed Maximilian.⁶

By the time of the Mexican Revolution (1910), nearly half the State of Morelos, south of Mexico City, belonged to the Amor family. They lived in the palatial Hacienda San Gabriel, a former Franciscan convent built in 1529 under the orders of Hernán Cortés, amidst a grand collection of European antiques, colonial art, paintings, porcelains, silver, and oriental rugs. When the Zapatistas seized Hacienda San Gabriel and returned the land to the original indigenous landowners, the Amor family escaped to Mexico City, taking with them their servants and as many art objects as they could carry. They moved into a Porfirian-French style house on Abraham González 66, in the fashionable Colonia Juárez neighborhood, where Inés was born.⁷

Don Emmanuel and Doña Carolina wanted their children to receive a Catholic education. As this was outlawed by the revolutionary government, they sent Inés and her older sister Elena to New Orleans to study at the Academy of the Sacred Heart, where they learned English and earned high marks. At graduation time they were informed that, as pro-bono students, they were not entitled to receive a diploma. Shamed and in disbelief, the girls returned to Mexico seeking an explanation from their parents. They learned that the family was broke. Doctor Emmanuel had never recovered from the shock of losing the Hacienda, and Doña Carolina had been selling her jewelry to feed and clothe the family, pay for the children's education in the French School, and keep a few loyal servants (who sometimes times went unpaid). "Why is the house filled with priceless objects if the family is barely surviving day to day," the girls demanded, "and why isn't anybody earning an income?" The sisters drew up a plan. By opening an antique shop, they could sell consignments and family heirlooms to pay the family's debts and earn a steady income. (The first debt they paid was to the Academy of the Sacred Heart.) Doña Carolina was opposed, saying that girls from good families do not work as shop attendants; they marry well. But her daughters insisted that there was nothing wrong with making an honest living. The tables were turning as "The Girls" began asserting the single mindedness that eventually brought fame and honor to the family name.⁸

On March 7, 1935, Carito, Inés's older sister, left her position at Bellas Artes as organizer and promoter of experimental dance, chamber music concerts, and painting exhibitions and opened the Galería de Arte Mexicano in the den of the family home, a room set apart from the house with a separate entrance. Family friend and architect Juan O'Gorman refurbished the room to function as an exhibition space, with jute-covered walls, hardwood floors, and lighting designed to illuminate art. The idea to open an art gallery had come to Carito while working at Bellas Artes, where the artists she befriended spoke of the need for a commercial establishment to promote the art that was being produced in Mexico. Doña Carolina disapproved of her daughter's entering into a venture with "bohemians," as she referred to the artistic community; but Doctor Emmanuel gave Carito his blessing, writing *Sic itur ad astra* (This is how one reaches the stars), in a note to her which she held onto all her life.⁹

When the Galería de Arte Mexicano opened, what the world knew of Mexican modern art consisted of the muralists. With a larger than life immediacy, Orozco, Rivera, and Siquieros were narrating visually the struggles of Mexico as its sense of identity—which had progressively been eroded by foreign influences, beginning with the Spanish conquest—was reclaimed by the Revolution. At the same time, other artists were documenting in traditional easel painting images of Mexico's reclaimed identity. Their work also portrayed aspects of day-to-day life in Mexico: the personal and intimate, the poetic and mundane, and the unusual activities that informed the Mexican psyche, like its observance of the sacred, its dark humor, and its obsession with death. Thanks to Inés Amor, the world would soon discover this iconography as revealing, surprising, and unique.

The Galería had been open five months when Carito decided to marry, and Inés took on the directorship. She was twenty-three years old. From the start, she shaped the Galería with her unique combination of business acumen, personal charm, and an uncanny intuition for choosing artists. Without having formally studied art history or traveled extensively to visit museums, Amor had developed her aesthetic sense while growing up surrounded by museum-quality objects. Her eye was educated without anyone's realizing it, not even she. She learned to perceive the emotional content of paintings, to differentiate among artists and styles, and to appreciate composition, the essentials of craft, and what made some paintings finer than others. It was this "education" that informed her transition to gallery owner. In studying the new iconography created by young Mexican painters, Amor discovered that while it "looked" different from what she had grown up seeing, the emotional content "felt" familiar. She was open to this art that confronted a radically different emotional content, and she sought painters that fearlessly explored without knowing where the process would lead them.¹⁰

Although she liked every artist she exhibited, Amor had personal preferences. Above all, she was drawn to quiet art. Whether consciously aware or not, she often sought parallels between the emotional content of religious painting that she had loved growing up and what she was facing. At the time of her death, among the handful of works she acquired for herself, one she treasured was Jesús Guerrero Galván's *La Nanita* (1936), a small canvas of a young girl with an infant in her arms, a veiled image of The Virgin's childhood. She had sold it fresh off the easel, and then regretted having done so. But one day it came back to her, when an unknown person walked into the gallery wanting to sell the painting.¹¹

In the beginning, as director of the Galería, Inés Amor established its balance of priorities, and until her departure, even as she expanded her list of artists, she fine-tuned this balance: promoting the artists, establishing sales with prospective clients, and building relationships with members of the Mexican and international art communities. With the conviction that she was representing historically important art, for many artists she instilled the self-respect they did not have before she came along, reminding them—and the public—that their work had intrinsic value, and that they should be paid well for it. No one had ever said such a thing to them, and this newfound validation transformed their identity as artists. But the public was not accustomed to buying modern art, and early sales, made mostly to friends, were slow. The first work the gallery sold was a watercolor by Russian-born Angelina Beloff, which was priced around 40 pesos; watercolors by Rivera (to whom she had been married) cost 50 pesos (\$4), and drawings by Orozco were around 80 pesos.¹² Imbued with Amor's spirit, the Galería would steadily feed into a community of artists, critics, collectors, and others interested in exchanging different ways of thinking about art.

One of the regular visitors to the Galería was Diego Rivera, a great conversationalist who seduced with his charm, boundless knowledge, embellished stories and fabrications. Amor once told me, "You can have an exhibition of Diego's in



Fig. 3 Sixth International Surrealist Exhibition, January 1940. Photo courtesy Galería de Arte Mexicano.

which he will look like one of the hundred best painters of the century, or one of the hundred worst.”¹³ Yet, she was in awe of Rivera’s infinite talent, and believed that, even when he was not good, he always had something to say. In 1937, when the influx of Spanish refugee artists (thirteen women and twenty-five men) began arriving in Mexico escaping Franco’s regime, Amor softened the blow of their exile by opening the doors of the Galería and embracing several of them.¹⁴ She was the first to exhibit the work of Remedios Varo in Mexico, although it was within the context of Surrealism and not of the Spanish exiles. When a territorial Rivera reminded her that the Galería was established to sell and promote Mexican art, Amor stood up to him, saying that these painters were now Mexican.

Evidence of Inés Amor’s far-reaching vision was never more evident than on January 17, 1940, when, at 10 p.m., she opened the doors of the new location of the Galería de Arte Mexicano on Milan 18 for the Sixth International Surrealist Exposition (Exposición internacional del surrealismo). No other art event in the history of Mexico, before or since, caused such ripples that still reverberate today. Overnight she placed Mexico in the forefront of the international art scene. She took an educated chance, exhibiting Surrealist and Mexican art side by side.¹⁵ Now the world could decide the accuracy of Breton’s assessment, made two years earlier during a visit to Mexico, that the country was the surrealist place par excellence. Since the Revolution, Mexico had been so immersed in exploring its sense of *mexicanidad* that suggesting that its art resembled a foreign art movement was akin to walking on thin ice. Without taking sides, Amor provided a visual format to study both French and Mexican art and to show Mexican art’s independent development from Surrealism, even if at times it appeared to share points of reference with the French movement. Forty-eight artists were invited: thirty-eight “internationals” and ten Mexicans.

It was Wolfgang Paalen—the Surrealist artist and theoretician—who proposed holding the International Surrealist Exposition in the Galería. He, along with Surrealism’s “pope” André Breton and the Peruvian poet Cesar Moro served as the exhibition curators. Amor began to imagine the Galería becoming an international player, as had the New Burlington Galleries in London and the Galerie Beaux-Arts in Paris, where the two previous exhibitions were held. Paalen’s suggestion was too good to dismiss, and with the attention of the world on Mexico, she would display some of its finest easel art for the international—and Mexican—public to see. Amor’s intuition was correct. The exhibition brought the attention she imagined, and, indeed, much more. Suddenly, the whole city, the whole world, knew of the existence of the Galería de Arte Mexicano, and a space once rarely visited became a place to see and be seen, and to buy art.

Frida Kahlo, the sole Mexican woman, was represented by two self-portraits, *The Two Fridas* (1939; shown in Fig. 3) and *The Wounded Table* (1940). Among the other women artists with works included was Spanish-born painter Remedios Varo, whose painting *Recuerdo de la walkiria* (1938; Pl. 1), sold for 30 pesos. In this surrealist vision women, freed from the walls and corsets that bound them, struggle to keep their heads above water. Chilean painter Graciela Aranis-Brignoni (1908-96) later gained recognition with impressionistic landscapes but was painting biomorphism when she participated in the show. French photographer Denise Bellon (1902-99), best known for her portraits of members of the Surrealist Movement, exhibited photographs of the installations and mannequins from the 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition at the Galerie des Beaux Arts. Alice Rahon, a published poet in France, took to painting full time after arriving in Mexico, creating evocative works reminiscent of prehistoric art, work depicting startling contexts such as a bridge of calico cats (1957; Pl. 2) or a river. crossing a man as opposed to a man crossing a river. Eva Sulzer (1902-90), originally from Winterthur, exhibited documentary photographs of Amerindian Art. (Sulzer, along with Paalen and Rahon, had sought exile in Mexico at the invitation of Frida Kahlo.)¹⁶ Also from Switzerland, Méret Oppenheim (1913-85), whose *Object* (1936), the squirrel fur lined tea cup, saucer and spoon that historically may be the most controversial surrealist object, was represented by another work. In her *Ma Gouvernante* (My Nurse) (1936; Fig. 4), a pair of women’s high-heel shoes bound together with string rests on a plate in a position simulating a woman on her chest, the legs bent and spread, like chicken drumsticks dressed in frills. Among the international male artists introduced in Mexico that evening by the Galería de Arte Mexicano were Hans Arp, Hans Bellmer, Victor Brauner, Salvador Dalí, Giorgio De Chirico, Paul Delvaux, Marcel Duchamp, Gordon Onslow Ford, René Magritte, André Masson, Roberto Matta Echaurren, Joan Miró, Cesar Moro, Wolfgang Paalen, Francis

Picabia, Picasso, Man Ray, Kurt Seligmann, Yves Tanguy, and Raoul Ubac. Besides Kahlo and Rivera, the Mexican artists included in the exhibition were Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Agustín Lazo, Guillermo Meza, Roberto Montenegro, Moreno Villa, Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, Antonio Ruiz, and Xavier Villaurrutia.

Amor would have liked the attributes she sought in an Artist—personal style, vision, and virtuosity—to be present in equal measure in each instance, but this was not always possible. However, when the artist's personal contribution was there, which was hardest to accomplish, Amor believed the artist was on the right track and that with time and experience, the virtuosity would follow. She was always interested in new work brought to the gallery by the established artists, but her greatest fascination was with the work of the younger ones. In awe, she observed with her mind's eye the internal flowering of their creativity unfold. Still, no one knew why she decided to take on a new painter—It could be after studying his or her work over time, or after a single viewing.

At one point, Amor was promoting the work by the three top women artists of the time: Olga Costa, María Izquierdo and Frida Kahlo. All three came from the same post-revolutionary school of painting, all three moved within the same circles, and all three knew each other and were friendly. And although they shared a common passion for all things Mexican, from the landscape to the crafts to an attitude toward life, the three painters were radically different from one another. Each one's vision was generated not only from her personal history but also from the world in which she grew up and developed. Costa, originally Kostakovsky, was born in Leipzig to intellectual parents who were escaping the Russian pogroms. She was twelve years old when they arrived in Mexico, and fascinated by her new home she began painting what seemed like a magical universe to her. She produced images that enthralled her, initially as a pastime that became a passion. Her painting *El Duelo* (The Duel) (1941; Pl. 3), representing an unusual contest between two notoriously reckless courtesans, was inspired by Emile-Antoine Bayard's *Une Affaire d'Honneur* (1884) (reproduced on the box for *El Duelo* Cuban cigars). Amor reflected that "Olga Costa...will always remain, if not among the group of the great painters, certainly within the artists very loved by the people; I imagine that during many decades her still lifes, her portraits of women wearing regional costumes, her landscapes, the most evocative and poetic ones as well as the roughly abstract, will always be sought after and always guarded with devotion, whether in private hands or in museums, where I am certain they will end up."¹⁷

María Izquierdo was born in San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, surrounded by the soul of Mexico. Her evocative paintings bring up images that nurtured her childhood: Victorian fashions, post-colonial structures, country fairs, circus scenes, portraits and still lifes painted with the vision of someone who never lost her bright-eyed innocence. Inés Amor had great admiration for her iconography as well as for her craft. "She



Fig.4. Méret Oppenheim, *Ma Gouvernante* (My Nanny) (1936), white heels with paper ruffles presented on an oval platter, 5 1/2" x 8 1/2" x 13". Moderna Musset, Stockholm.

had intuition for painting....that pasty oil, of very Mexican color, rich in texture, was very much her own. There was no other painter, before her who had that type of craft...She also painted watercolor: precious watercolors, [also] pasty as if they were gouaches, but allowing always the transparency of the whites, which is what makes [them] very beautiful...What was original was her form of expression. There are some magnificent things, like portraits and [the] self-portrait with her nieces, which is a masterpiece of Mexican painting."¹⁸ The latter, *Mis Sobrinas* (My Nieces) (front cover), was the first painting acquired for Mexico City's planned but not yet built Museo de Arte Moderno, where it hangs today as a prized possession.

As with Costa and Izquierdo, Frida Kahlo's iconography was also generated by her particular set of circumstances and her attitude toward them. She was born in Coyoacán, a small town in the outskirts of Mexico City, the product of a profoundly Catholic mestiza mother and a staunch German atheist-Jewish father. Her feeling of being different was first crystallized following a bout with polio at age six and after a motor vehicle accident at eighteen that nearly killed her. After marrying Diego Rivera, whose penchant for drama pushed her to exploit her self-absorption using Mexican iconography, she began producing self-portraits and still lifes where her subject and her autobiography fused into one. Amor could see that Kahlo's art was extraordinary but also that she was "stuck." Yet she placed her works in major collections, including several with collector Marte R. Gómez, who Amor recalled "...liked very much the painting of Frida Kahlo, which was difficult to like";¹⁹ *Self-Portrait with Monkey and Parrot* (1942) with IBM, New York; and in 1941 a commission from President Manuel Avila Camacho of several still lifes for the dining room of the Presidential Palace. Amor had invited a group of artists



Fig. 5. Teresa Castelló, *Frijoles tiernos* (Tender beans) (1970), oil on canvas, 27 1/2" x 21 5/8". Private collection.

to the gallery to meet the President, including: Rivera, Orozco, Ruiz, Montenegro, Miguel Covarrubias, Kahlo, Izquierdo, and O'Gorman. Amor recalled on that occasion Kahlo looking beautiful in a black Tehuana costume, and, as usual, being irreverent. She was noisy and poked fun at others, including Amor and even the President. Toward the end of the event, when "Don Manuel asked if there was another group of artists worth meeting, Kahlo replied: 'Yes, Mister President, there is another group headed by Carlos Ruano Llopis, but he is not worth it and don't bother to see him.' After the President left, Frida says to [Amor]: 'What if the good ones turn out to be really those of the group of Ruano Llopis?'"²⁰ At the time, Llopis's painting of bullfights and matadors had earned him fame among lovers of the sport, but infamy among serious painters.

A painter who had neither personal style nor intuitive vision when Amor first saw her work was Cordelia Urueta. They met when Urueta was married to Gustavo Montoya, one of the Galería artists. Although her work was carefully crafted, Amor found her unimaginative style derivative of the Mexican School of painting and without a personal contribution and told Urueta so each time the artist approached her about joining the Galería. Amor also visited other galleries regularly in search of new talent, and one day she unexpectedly discovered new work by Urueta on display and loved it: non-objective metaphysical scenes, richly textured but in quiet colors, like nothing she had witnessed. This time, it was Amor who called Urueta, inviting her to join the Galería. Soon thereafter, in 1961, Urueta was representing Mexico in the VI Biennale of São Paulo, where she was awarded an honorable mention. When in 1969 Urueta's painting *Puerto desconocido* (Unknown Port) (1964; Pl. 4) was exhibited in France, André

Malreaux, taken by the work, exclaimed, "Voici, un peintre!" (Here is a painter!).²¹

Then there were the pretentious ones that not only had no talent but also tried pulling the wool over the eyes of those they thought credulous. When Maka Strauss invited Amor to see her work, Inés pulled no punches. "At that time I was able to say something quite drastic to a pseudo artist: that it was a crime that [she] wasted canvases and paint of such good quality when there were so many good artists that needed them. It is the cruelest [thing] that I have said, but she was so arrogant."²²

Amor loved observing the unfolding creative process of young painters. Her stronghold extended to the greater Mexican art market, and with new and established artists, she kept the Galería's growth steady. By introducing young painters such as Alfredo Castañeda, Fernando Ramos Prida, Juan Soriano, and Joy Laville, and exhibiting their work regularly, Amor established a visual dialogue between them and the public. She also knew that a painter's market takes on a life of

its own, and when allowed to grow steadily, it remains strong. Therefore, rather than trying to manipulate prices, she patiently chose the long road.

Introducing new or undiscovered talent remained at the forefront of Amor's thinking, even if it often meant accepting lower earnings for the Galería for a time. Amor took many artists by the hand and walked the mile with them. Their adventures became hers, and she knew how to guide without interfering, as she did with Joy Laville. When Laville entered the Galería, she was making pastels. They were beautiful and sold well. (Even Amor, who rarely bought anything for herself, acquired one from the first show, of a woman sitting at a table in a red room.) Overnight, Laville was a success with the critics and the public, and could claim to be the only artist in the Galería admired by the other painters. After two successful exhibitions and an acquisition prize in 1968, for her pastel, *Tres desnudos en la escalera* (Three nudes on the stairs) (1966; Pl. 5) from the Museo de Arte Moderno during the Exposición Solar, held during the Olympic games, Amor believed it was time for Laville to take her creative impulse further, and asked her: "When are you going to start painting in oils?"²³

For Amor, real success meant going beyond one's limitations, and Laville's early oil paintings were awkward. After a few years, though, she was creating exquisite paintings, finer than the pastels, but the new works were not selling. When Laville brought this up, Amor pushed again: "Make large paintings." When these works did not sell either, Amor was unconcerned. "It does not matter," she told Laville. "Keep painting them." In time, Laville came to understand Amor's unbending relentlessness: what mattered was her making them, and by then, Laville herself was pushing to explore new ways of saying more accurately what she carried

within. After mastering oils, she learned to use acrylics, producing fresh and immediate paintings. She also learned printmaking and made book illustrations and sculptures, until the day came when, without realizing it, she had stopped doing pastels.

In this way, Inés Amor was quietly available to all her artists, and this presence, sooner or later, manifested itself in their work. She lent a guiding hand not just to the floundering young artists but, when needed, even to the very best.

When selling a painting, Amor always insisted on learning where the art would be going, as she wanted to ensure it would be appreciated and cared for. Whether she liked a client or the client could afford a work was secondary. Clients that came in knowing what they wanted might be shown a couple of available works by an artist; but unique examples by that artist were kept back for the seriously interested. Amor wanted to sell, of course, but she also wanted to match the work with the collector. It was not always apparent what went into her decisions, and when asked, her reply was often silence: her approach was instinctual, and she rarely led on or erred. Amor felt a particular fondness for a growing group of Mexican collectors who bought from the heart. These collectors bought art with pleasure, lent when asked, and considered their paintings heirlooms rather than assets. If one of these individuals asked her to find a work by a particular artist, Amor would call not when she found *a* work by the artist but *the right* work. It could take years. One client for whom she had found several fine paintings wanted a Kahlo still life, something that was hard to come by. Eventually, a very fine one was brought in for sale, but it had a problem. Amor told the client: "I have the Frida painting; it is very beautiful but badly damaged. [The conservator, Roberto] Preux says he can restore it to look perfect, but it will always be a restored work. Do you want to see it anyway?"²⁴ Trusting Amor's judgment, the client acquired it, despite the problem.

Over the years, Amor came upon painters that she felt made a contribution and whose work she exhibited despite her knowing there would be no financial gain for the Galería. The exhibition of twenty-one still lifes by Teresa Castelló Iturbide during March 1972 was one such show. It brought together all the paintings produced by this completely unknown but—Amor believed—talented painter.²⁵ Castelló painted *bodegones*, Mexican kitchen scenes. Although somewhat reminiscent of still lifes painted in Puebla during the nineteenth century, they were clearly contemporary: sweet bread resting on a *talavera* plate, a fly overhead; a detail of a woman's hands peeling *nopales*; a stack of multicolored beans beside a spray of bright-yellow marigolds (1970; Fig. 5). Each held its own mystery. "I am going to be criticized a lot for the exhibition," she told me, "but what can one do, good painting is good painting."

One painter whose work was difficult to place—not only because of the subjects but also because of the person—was Frida Kahlo. Even before the Galería opened, her name was on the original list of painters whose work would be represented. But although Kahlo always seemed to be in financial straits, she was not always cooperative with galleries. Both difficulties

were foregrounded in an incident involving a painting purchased by Syrie Maugham, the British interior designer (and wife of the novelist Somerset Maugham), a friend with whom Amor had a strong working relationship. The first work by Kahlo that Amor sold to Maugham was *Portrait of the Deceased Dimas Aged Three* (1937). Also known as "Dressed for Paradise," the painting portrays the child Dimas dressed as St. Joseph, wearing a cape and crown and surrounded with flowers. Maugham had acquired it for her own apartment, and would rave about "the little sleeping king," until a guest brought to her attention that the image was of a dead child. (The title is inscribed on a ribbon at the bottom of the work.) Maugham was further horrified when the guest pointed out the barely perceptible trickle of dried blood emerging from one of the toddler's nostrils. Maugham wrote to Amor, eager to resell the painting. The Galería, open barely five years, was not yet in a position to buy works back, but the always resourceful Amor found a buyer. She wrote to Maugham that she had found a collector "who offered to pay \$175" and advised her to accept, as the subject of the painting was not likely to draw the interest of another buyer soon. Between owners, Amor arranged for the painting to be shown in the forthcoming exhibition of Mexican art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1943).²⁶ Meanwhile, Maugham, during her most recent visit to Mexico, had acquired Kahlo's *Self-Portrait with Bonito* (Fig. 1), and was eagerly awaiting its delivery, repeatedly asking Amor why the shipping was delayed. Apologetically, Amor had to explain, again and again, that Kahlo had not delivered the work to her and was not returning her many calls. When the painting finally arrived at the Galería, it was unframed, causing further delay.

As with the Dimas portrait, Kahlo's work was sometimes difficult to place. Although her iconography was unquestionably post-Revolutionary Mexican, it was also personal and sometimes considered "too intimate." Collectors wanted a Mexican image, but not one depicting the artist's physical ailments or masochism. Amor sold *Tree of Hope* (1946),²⁷ fresh off the easel to the major collector Dr. Alvar Carrillo Gil. This double self-portrait depicting Kahlo's spinal fusion, simultaneously dressed in her Tehuana costume and lying on a stretcher with the open wounds on her back, seemed a perfect match for the well-known physician. But Carrillo Gil tired of it after a few years and asked Amor to sell it for him.

This attitude changed, of course, and several works by Kahlo that were first exhibited at the Galería de Arte Mexicano later brought record prices for a Latin American artist at international auctions. In May 1990, *Diego y Yo* (1949), commissioned by Amor's art historian friend Florence Arquin for 2,000 pesos (\$160), sold at Sotheby's, New York, for \$1,430,000. A year later the *Self-Portrait with Loose Hair* (1947), which Amor sold in 1968 (fourteen years after Kahlo's death) for 120,000 pesos (\$10,000), sold at Christie's, New York, for \$1,650,000. And in May 1995, *Self-Portrait with Monkey and Parrot*, which Inés had sold in 1943 to IBM Corporation for 3,000 pesos (\$240), sold at Sotheby's, New York for \$3,142,500 (to Fundación Costantini Museum in Buenos Aires, Argentina).



Fig. 6. Leonora Carrington *Un Petit déjeuner* (Breakfast) (portrait of Inés Amor), lost, statistics unknown. © 2011 Leonora Carrington / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Although Amor represented many artists, she managed only a few exclusively, including Alfredo Castañeda, the brothers Pedro and Rafael Coronel, Joy Laville and Fernando Ramos Prida. Many of the artists who showed at the Galería showed elsewhere as well, including once-exclusive artists such as Beloff, Costa and her husband José Chavez Morado, and Alice Rahon. Many artists also sold work through the government-subsidized Galería de la Plástica Mexicana, which charged a lower commission (20 percent compared with the Galería's 33 1/3 percent), although they kept their ties with the Galería, an institution to which many painters would have done almost anything to belong.

The Galería was managed as a family, with Amor as the matriarch. And like the good mother, she kept her children's external life organized and focused so they could paint without any worries. She was unconditionally available, but should her limits be tested, she could be merciless. The complexity of her character was portrayed by Leonora Carrington in a little known portrait, *Un Petit déjeuner* (Breakfast; n.d., lost; Fig. 6), a disturbing image of Amor sitting at the breakfast table, studying the heart she is about to eat.

Perhaps because she was so transparently selfless, Amor inspired people to respond with the best part of themselves. Artists would put aside their self-centeredness, and listen to her advice, trusting her completely. It was simple: she genuinely cared about them and their work; she wanted the best for them and for them to leave behind a legacy that would nurture future generations. Although Amor operated solely by instinct, she applied her intuition, and again and again, she was on the mark more often than not.

Leonora Carrington was a prolific artist who created art as naturally as others breathe—paintings, works on paper, objects such as masks, marionettes, or sculptures, or writing stories,

plays, or books. When in 1967 she appeared to have “gone dry,” Amor knew it was unlike her and that, clearly, something was going on. Not one to ask more than once, Amor assumed that Carrington had her reasons and would speak when she was ready. Meanwhile, without pushing or threatening, Amor put forward a plan to get Carrington working again. The São Paulo Biennale was an important show that would bring Carrington wide exposure, but it was necessary that she include fresh work in the exhibition. Carrington, accustomed to Amor's looking out for her best interests, acquiesced and delivered a series of drawings of wounded animals—some chained, and others attacked with arrows or by lances thrown by invisible enemies. Viewing works like *Skeleton* (1967), depicting a woman wearing a smiling mask to cover a painful grimace, Amor understood that what Carrington could not express with words she was saying through her art. Amor also understood that only through making art would Carrington work through the problem—whatever it was. So after São Paulo, Amor returned to Carrington with another request—for an exhibition. This time Carrington

resisted, saying she did not have it in her to prepare for a show. But Amor being Amor, she found a way. Because no one was as fine a draughtswoman as Carrington, Amor suggested that she could, at the very least, gather a group of choice works on paper. Leonora agreed, and this became the small exhibition presented in the branch of the Galería de Arte Mexicano, Florencia, two years later.²⁸ For the invitation Amor chose a work that displayed Carrington's trademark dark humor, *La Octava Sonrisa* (The Eighth Smile) (1969). An egg-like portrait of a perplexing personage with eyes closed, slightly smiling, quietly amused by something only he knows, it is very disquieting.

Amor was particular about presenting the work of her artists and personally designed frames that would best suit their art. (She believed that most artists had no idea how to frame their paintings and did a poor job of it.) Each new frame design would thereafter be referred to by the name of the painter for whom it was originally made: “frame Carrington,” “frame Castañeda,” “frame Joy Laville,” etc.

After a work was inventoried, Amor decided if it would remain upstairs in the showroom or go into storage. With her prodigious memory, she knew every painting in the gallery; she asked for them by name and kept notes for future reference. When someone brought in a particularly good work, to be sure the work stayed in the gallery, she paid the artist (or the collector, if it was brought on consignment). These choice works she put away to show when the right collector came along—to “place” rather than “sell,” where both artist and work would benefit. “Paintings,” she would say, “are looking for their owners.”

When one collector commented that a large painting he had seen before was still in the gallery, without missing a beat, Amor replied: “Yes, some the best paintings have a way of staying behind. The storage room is full of them.” Some excellent works

seemed impossible to sell. Amor might have been thinking of Kahlo's most famous painting, *The Two Fridas* (1939), which did not sell when she first exhibited it and was stored several years until Carlos Chavez, Director of INBA (Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes), acquired it directly from Kahlo for the Museo de Arte Moderno, paying 4,000 pesos (\$320).

Inés Amor felt most proud that her struggle to bring attention to Mexican modern art had been successful in many ways. She had established a gallery that was considered the source of some of the best art that Mexico had produced in the first half of the twentieth century. People who knew little about art but wanted the guarantee they would get quality came to the Galería de Arte Mexicano. Amor's major break paradoxically arose out of tragedy: Unable to travel to Europe during World War II, North American tourists came to Mexico instead, left grateful for what they had discovered, and returned again and again. In 1940, Canadian businessman Harold McLaine visited Mexico on vacation and curious about Mexican Art, he met Amor. She had just packed a show for the Royal Academy of Canada when he arrived at the gallery. "I tasted poison having to unpack the show, but when I finished showing it to him, my efforts were compensated. He bought the whole exhibition and donated it to the Royal Academy, where those paintings remain today, of which I feel very satisfied."²⁹ Also out of the War experience was born the 1940 Museum of Modern Art's exhibition in New York of "Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art," which covered pre-Hispanic times to the present, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art's 1943 exhibition "Mexican Art Today."

Inés Amor was responsible for placing, directly or indirectly, key works in major museums and corporate collections, often from museum exhibitions she had formed where a number of these works were available for sale. The University of Michigan Museum of Art acquired Julio Castellanos's *The Injured Eye* (1935). Among many others, The Philadelphia Museum of Art acquired Juan Soriano's *The Dead Girl* (1938); Antonio Ruíz's *Bicycle Race* (1938); Diego Rivera's portable fresco panel *The Liberation of the Peon* (1931); The Museum of Modern Art, N.Y. acquired David Alfaro Siqueiros's *Echo of a Scream* (1937) and Castellanos's *The Aunts* (1932) and *The Kidnapper Angels* (1938); The Dallas Museum of Art commissioned Rufino Tamayo's mural *Man* (1953); and The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C. acquired Francisco Zúñiga's *Seated Yucatan Woman* (1973).

Inés Amor moved between two separate worlds: the Galería and that of her family and children, Juan and Mariana, and the two rarely overlapped.³⁰ Both children inherited their mother's fine eye for painting. At fourteen, visiting the Galería while an Olga Costa exhibition was hanging, Mariana zeroed in on a small painting of a fruit bowl holding two watermelon wedges, the best work in the show. And when Juan admired a quiet landscape by Joy Laville, she told him to take it, but like his mother, he was pleased just to see the paintings and did not need to own them.

When Amor felt her time at the Galería was coming to an end and that she could not help her painters indefinitely, no

one picked up on clues she was sending out. Like when she told Guillermo Sepúlveda, the Monterrey art dealer who had followed in her footsteps in the north of Mexico, "Take care of Eduardo Tamariz; he is my youngest...."³¹ One evening in August 1976, following an unsettling fifty percent devaluation of the peso, Amor left the Galería as she had done for over forty years, but this time she did not return. She explained to her niece Alejandra, who assisted her in the gallery: "I spent my life giving, and when the time came to give to myself, I had nothing left."³² Alejandra and Mariana took the reins of the Galería, and as her health declined, Amor was pleased to see that together they rapidly filled her shoes.

After she retired, she still conducted some business here and there, like contacting the Dallas collector Stanley Marcus with an offer to buy from him Antonio Ruíz's *The Orator* (1939), one of the star paintings from the 1940 Surrealist Exhibition, for \$4,000 (a hefty amount in 1976). He refused, and in November 2002, when his estate was sold at auction, the painting brought \$317,500, though sadly, neither Amor, nor Marcus, nor Ruíz was alive to see it.

A smoker all her life, Amor suffered from emphysema. Staying at home, she saw few people, mostly family. She did not wish people to see her ill, so friends called but could not visit. After finishing medical school, Juan was to leave for a residency in England in the winter of 1978, but as the time grew close, he had second thoughts about leaving his mother so ill. She told him: "I have lived my life as I wanted; now it's your turn to live yours."³³ Shortly after his return, on October 5, 1980, with Juan and Mariana at her side, Inés Amor died of heart failure. It was the first time her heart had failed her. •

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Notes

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1. Information about Joy Laville, unless otherwise documented, was gathered from the author's many conversations with the artist beginning in 1970.
2. Starting on April 10, 1975, Inés Amor met weekly with Mexican art scholars Jorge Alberto Manrique and Teresa del Conde to dictate memories of her years as director of the Galería de Arte Mexicano (GAM). These informal talks took place in her home; she was quite ill by then. During each session, she addressed and elaborated on specific questions. After one year, her physical state grew worse, and further meetings were put on hold but, unfortunately, never took place. Amor had a prodigious memory, and she was an extraordinary raconteuse. But by the end of her life, the energy necessary to tell a story, even when dictating these memoirs, was

- very limited. Amor did not enjoy writing, which seems odd because the thousands of letters and even the brief notes she wrote showed extraordinary introspection and perceptiveness. One day, many of these will likely be published, and readers will gain a different perspective of this unusual woman. Her memoirs were "written" somewhat under duress only after a growing number of people who knew how ill she was began asking when she was going to write the story of the Galería. Not one to shy away from responsibility, she knew it had to be done; so she did it the best way she could, under the circumstances, near the end of her life. Amor requested that her sister Carolina (Carito) Fournier, who started the Galería and now was at the head of a publishing company, edit them, and that they be published after her death. The book is filled with information about the forty years the Galería had been open. Jorge Alberto Manrique [y] Teresa del Conde, *Una mujer en el arte Mexicano: Memorias de Inés Amor* (México: Univ. Autónoma de México, 1987). A reprint of the work is currently on the market. Henceforth, *Memorias*.
3. During 1985, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Galería, Amor's daughter Mariana Pérez Amor and niece Alejandra Reygadas Yturbe, now the gallery's directors, held four three-month exhibitions in which the four generations of artists who had exhibited during those years were shown again. The Galería also published a book that gathered oral history from many persons (artists, assistants, etc.) who provided information about the development of the Galería. It included a listing of every show the gallery had mounted, with dates and a bibliography of articles written on each show. See: Delmari Romero Keith, *Historia y Testimonios Galería de Arte Mexicano* (México: Ediciones GAM, 1985). Henceforth, GAM.
 4. In 1936, just one year after the Galería opened, Amor began organizing exhibitions outside of Mexico for museums and commercial galleries. A selection of the museum shows includes The San Francisco Museum of Art (International Exhibition of Painting by Mexican Artists, 1939); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art, 1940); Dallas Museum of Fine Arts (The Mexican Arts of Our Day, 1941); The Art Institute of Chicago (XX International Exhibition of Watercolors, 1942); Boston Institute of Modern Art (Modern Mexican Painters, 1942); Philadelphia Museum of Art (Mexican Art Today, 1943); VII Bienal de São Paulo (Rafael Coronel and Gunther Gerzso, 1965); Center of Inter-American Relations New York City (Leonora Carrington A Retrospective Exhibition, 1975-76). Among the commercial galleries were the Valentine Gallery, New York (15 Contemporary Mexican Painters, 1938); Pierre Matisse Gallery (David Alfaro Siqueiros, 1940); Perls Galleries, New York (12 Mexican Painters, 1941); Stendhal Art Galleries, Los Angeles (Alice Rahon Paalen, 1945), Martha Jackson Gallery, New York (Carlos Mérida, 1966). From some of these exhibitions Amor was able to place works, directly or indirectly, by modern Mexican masters, like Rufino Tamayo in the San Francisco Museum of Art, or a commissioned mural, also by Tamayo, in the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts; and paintings by Siqueiros in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and by Antonio Ruiz and Juan Soriano at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.
 5. Personal communication with Inés Amor, n.d. Leonora Carrington introduced me to Amor in 1967, and a rapport between us took place immediately. At her invitation, I began frequenting the Galería regularly, and before long, I was working there in various capacities: doing inventory, hanging shows, running errands, helping out with clients. In 1976, I organized the last show Inés held before leaving the Galería for good. My friendship with Amor also became an apprenticeship. From what I learned during those years, I have been able to write articles, books, and catalogs, about various aspects of the creative process as well as curate museum exhibitions. All quotes not otherwise sourced are from our conversations during this period and from our subsequent correspondence until her death.
 6. A fascinating narrative by an ancestor of the Amor family who arrived in Mexico as physician to Emperor Maximilian, fell in love with the country and with a woman and stayed can be read in the epistolary he wrote to his home in Germany. See José María Amor Schmidtlein, Introduction. *Un Médico Alemán en el México de Maximiliano Cartas de Adolfo Schmidtlein a sus padres 1865-1874* (México: Programas Educativos, S.A. de C.V., 1978).
 7. Some of this information was given to me by Amor's daughter, Mariana Pérez Amor, and her son Juan José Pérez Amor. However, some complementary information came from the biography of poet Guadalupe Amor, Inés's youngest sister. See Michael Karl Schuessler *La Undécima Musa Guadalupe Amor* Prólogo de Elena Poniatowska Amor (Mexico: Editorial Diana, 1995). For another helpful book on the subject of the family history, see (the autobiography) Guadalupe Amor, *Yo soy mi casa El relato de una vida fuera de serie*. (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1957).
 8. Inés Amor, personal communication.
 9. Interview between Delmari Romero Keith and Carolina Amor in GAM, 9-10.
 10. Inés Amor, personal communication.
 11. Inés repeated often, "Paintings are for selling." It took me many years to realize that a part of her repeated these words to convince herself, for she thought that accumulating objects was not the way to live. Occasionally, she expressed regret for having sold a particular work, such as the Galván. Another favorite expression of Amor's was, "Paintings are looking for their owners," and this painting had been looking for her.
 12. *Memorias*, 21.
 13. Inés Amor, personal communication.
 14. For example, Amor occasionally showed the work of Enrique Climent, who painted poetic reminiscences of medieval iconography and still lifes. She managed the career of Antonio Rodríguez Luna, who used black and dark colors to produce dramatic works that often dealt with the fall of the Republic under Franco's tyranny. She once exhibited the work of Ceferino Palencia, a more traditional painter who also wrote art criticism.
 15. In retrospect, it was an extraordinary move on the part of Amor, who at 28 and with no experience whatsoever or anyone after whom to model, leased a Porfirian house and refurbished it to look and function like a modern gallery before opening its doors with the groundbreaking show. Financially, the gallery was barely breaking even, but she believed she couldn't afford to not take the chance to find out whether the gallery would disappear, as had all the others before, or become an international institution.
 16. Rahon and Paalen married in France and were living in a long-term ménage a trois with Sulzer when they arrived in Mexico. Although Sulzer came from great wealth (her family was in the business of trains in Switzerland), she was unassuming, unpretentious and generous, often offering a helping hand. She never returned to Europe to live, became an active member of the Gurdjieff group in Mexico and a patron of Surrealist Art, collecting works by Leonora Carrington, Gunther Gerzso and especially by Paalen, Rahon and Remedios Varo. Very much in love with Paalen, she funded DYN, his surrealist publication and DYNATON, the art movement he attempted to get off the ground in California. After Paalen committed suicide in Taxco in 1959, she paid all his debtors and continued watching over Rahon until she died. Sulzer also funded the first film and monograph on Varo.
 17. *Memorias*, 75. Also, I am deeply indebted to Mary-Anne Martin for sharing with me her research on Bayard's painting and many other generosity.
 18. *Ibid.*, 45.
 19. *Ibid.*, 236.
 20. *Ibid.*, 113.

21. Quoted in Elisa García Barragan, *Cordelia Urueta y el color* (México: Univ. Autónoma de México, 1985), 49.
22. Ibid., 230.
23. Personal communication with the artist.
24. Interview with the private collector in the 1980s, while I was working on Frida Kahlo's catalogue raisonné.
25. Without pretense, Teresa Castelló Iturbide made a name for herself through her publications on various Mexican and pre-Hispanic subjects and children's books of traditional Mexican stories. When Amor saw Castelló's paintings, which included traditional Mexican foods, ceramic, and customs, she immediately saw iconography of something that was being lost without being documented and decided to do the show even if nothing sold. Regardless, she photographed each work.
26. Amor sold the painting to Ing. Eduardo Morillo Safa, probably the first of 30 works he acquired by Kahlo before his death. Today the painting belongs to the Dolores Olmedo Foundation Museum, Xochimilco.
27. On May 26, 1977, Sotheby Parke Bernet Inc., New York, held its first auction of Modern Mexican Paintings, Drawings, Sculpture and Prints. Lot 62 was Kahlo's *Arbol de la esperanza* mantente firme (1946). The work came from the famous surrealist collection of William N. Copley. He acquired the work from the Galería after Dr. Alvar Carrillo Gil had returned it. Copley paid 19,000 pesos (about \$1,500). Sotheby's estimated the painting at \$30,000-\$40,000, but it failed to reach its reserve estimate of \$20,000. The only person who bid on it, the well-known French publisher/collector of surrealist art, Daniel Filipacchi, got it for \$19,000. Filipacchi sold it recently for a reported \$13 million to an American private collector. This became the first painting by Kahlo that sold at a public auction, 31 years after the artist painted it and sold it through GAM for 3,000 pesos (\$240) minus 33 1/3 percent commission.
28. Preparations for the show were interrupted by Carrington's forced exile from Mexico in 1968, after she protested the government's killing of university student demonstrators prior to the Olympic Games.
29. *Memorias*, 231.
30. In 1940 Amor married the matador Rosendo Pérez. When he died in 1958, their children Juan (b. 1952) and Mariana (b. 1954) were quite young.
31. Guillermo Sepúlveda's extraordinary contribution to continue Inés Amor's work has yet to be appraised. He is currently working on his memoirs. Personal communication.
32. Alejandra Reygadas de Iturbe, personal communication.
33. Juan José Pérez Amor, personal communication. I am deeply grateful to him for many kindnesses and eye-opening conversations about his mother.

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WRAPPED IN CELLOPHANE

FLORINE STETTHEIMER'S VISUAL POETICS

By Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo



Fig. 1. Portrait of Florine Stettheimer leaning on sundial (1917-20). Florine and Ettie Stettheimer Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

New York painter, poet, and salonière Florine Stettheimer (1871-1944; Fig. 1) was, as Georgia O'Keeffe so aptly observed in the unpublished eulogy of her friend: "Fantasy and reality all mixed up. She was perfectly consistent with any of her inconsistencies."² It is that insistent mixture of fantasy and reality in Stettheimer's work, of glittering surfaces and light-hearted play, that is the underlying focus of this essay, for Stettheimer unabashedly blended life and art, reveling in her own whimsical self-

I was pure white
You made a painted show-thing of me
You called me the real-thing
Your creation
No setting was too good for me
Silver—even gold
I needed gorgeous surroundings
You then sold me to another man

—Florine Stettheimer,
"The Unloved Painting"¹

representation and self-transformation in a manner that defies any sense of stable identity and insists on a deliberate sense of surface. Over the last two decades Stettheimer's decorative paintings and designs have garnered considerable attention, including, in 1995, a retrospective at the Whitney Museum along with a major biography, Barbara J. Bloemink's *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*.³ Unapologetically domestic and *über-feminine*, Stettheimer's work has been variously described as "faux naïf," reveling in simplified shapes and Fauve-like colors;⁴ as "rococo subversive," embracing a camp sensibility;⁵ and as "temporal modernism," influenced by Bergsonian concepts of time as heterogeneous *durée*, aligning Stettheimer with Marcel Proust and other literary modernists.⁶ In his book *New York Dada*, art historian Francis M. Naumann perceptively noted that Stettheimer forged an independent style by exploring "emphatically personal subject matter" and "excelled at portrait painting," and especially group portraits.⁷ Likewise, the curators of the 2005 exhibition *Jewish Women and Their Salons: The Power of Conversation*, Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun, acknowledged Stettheimer as one of New York's leading salonières who, from 1915-1935, used her salon as a laboratory for new expressions.⁸ The salon Stettheimer hosted together with her sisters, Carrie and Ettie, was distinctly Upper West Side. Guests included art critic Henry McBride, writer Carl Van Vechten, Georgia O'Keeffe, notable European expatriates such as close friend Marcel Duchamp, as well as the Harvard modernists,⁹ many with ties to the museum and gallery circuit. In their salon, the Stettheimer sisters orchestrated among their glamorous guests essential connections that would result in some of the era's most significant artistic networks. In addition to providing subjects

for portraiture, the salon also created a select audience for Stettheimer's paintings and poetry, highlighting the intermedial exuberance at the heart of her oeuvre.

Although her poetry is often cited by biographers and art historians, the poems are generally relegated into a secondary, supportive role to the artist's visual art and design work.¹⁰ A rare engagement of the poetry *as poetry* is found in a 1983 article by Donna Graves juxtaposing Stettheimer with Emily Dickinson. For Graves, both poets paradoxically and successfully "integrated the childlike naivete associated with Victorian women (particularly unmarried women) into artistic personas that were ultimately affirmative of their own creative powers."¹¹ In fact, Stettheimer composed vivid and painterly poems of gently acerbic social critique that capture and create the plasticity of modernism, and much like her paintings, they often present single and group portraits; thus a close look at the poems reveals equally glittering surfaces and glossy protective veneers that we may find in the paintings. The poems were collected posthumously in 1949 by Stettheimer's sister Ettie and published in a private edition of 250. Entitled *Crystal Flowers*, the collection was intended for circulation among "Florine's Friends and the Friends of Her Paintings."¹² (A new edition of *Crystal Flowers*, containing also unpublished material and a textual apparatus illuminating the poems' evolution, appeared in 2010 under our editorship.)

In a lunar haze of glittering alchemy and insect wings, the poetry has the whimsical ring of an age transmuted by industry and consumer culture, as seen in the epigraph to this essay, which critiques concepts of art as commodity by making a painting the speaking and complaining subject of the poem. "Silver fringes" and "tinsel creations" are the staples of Stettheimer's poetry, most immediately confirming what Linda Nochlin, referring to Stettheimer's pictorial camp aesthetic, calls "'a certain mode of aestheticism,' of seeing the world in terms of a degree of artifice, of stylization."¹³ Thus the grammar of artifice is based on carefully editorialized juxtaposition designed to cultivate an acute awareness of aesthetic perspective in the reader. As we argue here, despite the fact that Stettheimer's poetry and her general aesthetic is so fey and ephemeral as to risk negation, we simultaneously affirm (taking our cue from Bloemink, Graves, Naumann, and Nochlin) that Stettheimer's was an art of presence—richly sensory and so corporeally charged—forcing her audiences to feel as she did. Like her paintings which are seemingly childlike, Stettheimer's formally simplistic poems reveal a depth and dimensionality that belie a first glance. The poems and paintings, we insist, are so diaphanous as to insinuate the artist's presence in a paradoxically assertive way, pushing against their own transparency, effecting the potentiality of blankness in an attempt to write an aesthetics of cellophane: the poems are painterly and tactile, yet also sonic; transparent and light, and yet sealed from penetration. Consequently, this essay is a call to read Stettheimer as a poet, and to urge



Fig. 2. Stage set for *Four Saints in Three Acts* showing Florine Stettheimer's "cellophane aesthetic." Photo: White Studio. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

viewers to approach even her paintings as visual poetry, for ultimately, it is the ironic and experimental play with surfaces that allowed Stettheimer to shape her poetics of modernity.

Cellophane, a portmanteau word composed of *cellulose* (an organic compound) and *diaphane* (transparent), was invented and patented by Swiss chemist Jacques Brandenberger in 1912, and used widely as wrapping for candy, cigarettes, and other consumer items. A curiously ambiguous material, it was waterproof but permeable to moisture, until a moisture-proof lacquer was used to seal it in 1927. "The new plastics made one, above all, modern," observes Judith Brown in a chapter devoted entirely to cellophane in her 2009 book *Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and the Radiance of Form*. As she explains further: "The paper-thin, impermeable layer of cellulose sheeting offered the modern imagination new ways of seeing the mundane world: the glassy sheen of cellophane provided a protective veneer from dusty reality, and, like lightweight and mobile glass, cellophane could wrap anything and thus transform it into a sparkling play of light." Even more important was cellophane's potential to function as a metaphor for language itself: "Crisp, smooth, clear, hygienic, even icy in appearance, cellophane was a wonder wrapping and metaphor for language remade, removed of all its 'words worn thin.'"¹⁴ Mixing Victorian lace with cellophane in her own interior decoration, Stettheimer clearly understood the cultural significance of cellophane and boldly used it as a metaphor of modernity.

In 1924, reviewer Penelope Redd was the first to observe that Stettheimer "carries the art of painting to its completest power in expressing a number of incidents occurring simultaneously."¹⁵ Marcel Duchamp would refer to this spatio-temporality in Stettheimer's painting as "multiplication virtuelle," a multidimensional narrative in time and space wherein distinct moments are represented on canvas as repetition, meant to be read as sequential narrative.¹⁶ Such

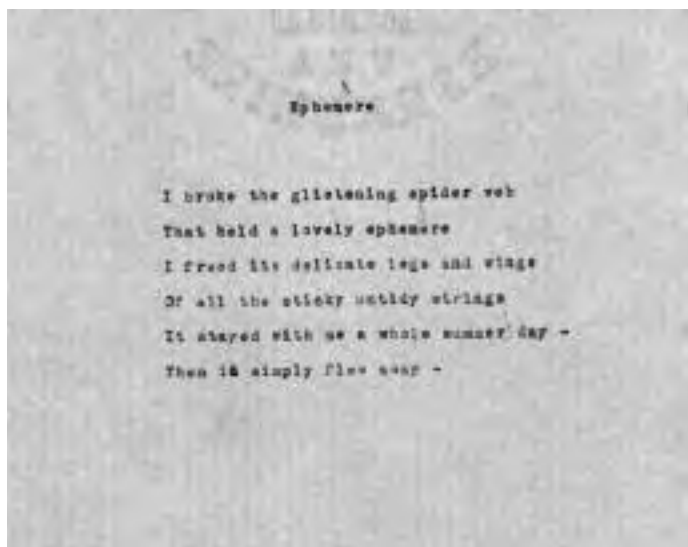


Fig. 3. Florine Stettheimer, "Ephemère," typescript poem. Florine and Ettie Stettheimer Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

simultaneity of the present moment, whereby the creator, the created, and the consumer merge, exemplifies Stettheimer's practice across artistic media and finds its synthetic analogue in the plasticity of cellophane used regularly in her designs. The most famous example of Stettheimer's use of cellophane is the stage sets and costume designs she produced for Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson's opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* (Fig. 2). The opera, which debuted in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1934 and opened on Broadway that same year, was an enormous critical and commercial success. Stettheimer's designs mirrored Stein's dissolution of scenic conventions, contributing to the promise of strangeness that was part of the opera's public appeal: "fifteen hundred square feet of sky-blue cellophane was draped from the sides and ceiling of the stage, creating a semitransparent cyclorama, glittering under bright white lights."¹⁷ The stage was adorned with lace; there was a towering tent made of cellophane, and there were palm trees with frilly canopies. Famously, the stage set for the opera was a redeployment of the designs Stettheimer created in her own home, particularly her bedroom. By bringing her bedroom to the stage, Stettheimer was able to insinuate herself onto the stage transparently, as it were, just as she had in the only solo show she had in her lifetime, at New York's Knoedler Gallery in 1916, where she had decorated the gallery to replicate the intimate setting of her own residence, covering the walls with white muslin material and adding "a cellophane fringed canopy similar to the bed she designed in her bedroom."¹⁸ In doing so Stettheimer controlled the context she believed was essential to the viewing of her work.

Replicating the domesticity of her home life, many of Stettheimer's poems read "As Tho' From a Diary" (as Ettie titled the final section in *Crystal Flowers*¹⁹), or as though she is gossiping in the reader's ear. Crucially, Stettheimer understood the cultural value and opportunity, as well as restriction of the domestic space for the modernist female artist. Living a feminist

matriarchal home life, Stettheimer's freedom was tempered by a mother whose ill-health required the presence of at least one daughter at all times, and so the sisters were on rotation for her care. Yet the paradoxical transparency of her poems can be seen as analogous to the "pure surface" of cellophane, which Brown describes as "plastic without depth that provides the transparent gloss and promises to perfect one's leisure." And like cellophane for Brown, Stettheimer's poems "offe[r] the modern imagination new ways of seeing the mundane world."²⁰

Thus Stettheimer's poetic portraits often include herself as observer in her work, signaling her splitting from the persona that interacted with the world. In one such playful poetic iteration of self, Stettheimer celebrates the diaphanous aesthetics of ephemerality. In her poem "Ephemère" (ca. 1923; Fig. 3), she plays with both meanings of the title, as a noun (denoting the flying insect that lives only one day) and an adjective (denoting what is of short duration, transitory):

I broke the glistening spider web
That held a lovely ephemère
I freed its delicate legs and wings
Of all the sticky untidy strings
It stayed with me a whole summer's day
Then it simply flew away—²¹

The poem aptly connotes the tension characterizing Stettheimer's visual and literary work, the antagonism between the too-fixed moment and the forever ongoing nature of the transitory. The poem is an ironic response to John Donne's "The Flea," in which the trapped insect suggests itself as metaphor for sexuality ("It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee, / And in this flea our two bloods mingled be. / ... / This flea is you and I, and this / Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is").²² In contradistinction, however, in Stettheimer's poem the broken spider web is an invocation of the virginity the Stettheimer sisters so touted in the many myths about them. Here, sexuality, rather than full of "untidy strings" connotes proximity, companionship, and freedom. The "mère" of "ephemère" asserts Florine's creative maternity—birthing multiple artistic progeny, while it simultaneously acknowledges that sexual reproduction is part and parcel "[o]f all the sticky untidy strings" of eroticism.

In the visual corollary and companion piece to "Ephemère," Stettheimer's 1923 painting *Portrait of Myself* (Fig. 4; Pl. 6), she paints a split self as a reclining young woman and as a delicately winged, red-tinted *éphémère*, swinging on the rays of the sun in the right-hand corner of the painting. Scholars have read the evocative painting alternately as inspired by Blake's eccentric visionary visual art,²³ as Stettheimer's assertion of herself as daring artistic innovator,²⁴ and as an Ikarus figure whose artistic and social ambition makes her fly too closely to the sun.²⁵ What scholars have not commented on is what seems to us the most crucially relevant inscription in this painting, namely, Stettheimer's diaphanous signature, which along with the sun occupies the top third of the painting. Consistently ephemeral, upon first glance the artist's signature is barely visible in what appears to be a generous allocation of white

space. The *éphémère* signals its identification with the painter in appending her swirling signature as if suspended in air. Given that the signature is a claiming of authorship, a crucial ritual in the construction of what Michel Foucault has termed the author function, this play with ambiguity is central to Stettheimer's aesthetics, simultaneously staging as an ostentatious display and a coy hiding, an asserting and melting away of self and authorial identity through the oversized yet diaphanous signature.

First adopted by Stettheimer in 1923, the same year as the painting's composition, the signature "F/lorine/ St" is artfully arranged like a visual poem, with the looped oversized "F" creating a large canopy-like arch, and with a dominant capital "S" supplying the arch's second arm, with the small-lettered but elongated "l" bending its stem like a supple backbone to provide an upswing for the red-tinted *éphémère* to pull up and kiss the sun. To complete this visual poem, the "orine" of Florine's name is placed on a separate line above the "F" and "St," whereby the top bar of the F serves simultaneously as the "l" of Florine's name, highlighting the fluidity of her movement, and reminding us also of the intricate signature self-portraits of New York Dada artist Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (1874-1927). The Baroness asserted identity in visual and poetic self-portraits through multiple arrangements of her elaborate name and title. The most poignant example is the vertical column of handwritten print decorating a photograph Man Ray had taken of her. However, whereas the Baroness highlighted her emotional gravitas and temper with the heavy print, Stettheimer revels in the lightness and milky whiteness of her artful hand, which is also referenced in the poem that begins "Casein was once milk" ("Casein looks like fresco," the speaker observes in the poem, and proclaims, "I shall paint the walls/ For tout New York").²⁶ The milky whiteness of the signature, its casein flourish against a grayish white background invites the discerning reader/viewer into a play with surfaces. Thus Stettheimer is also engaging in a game of hide-and-seek with the viewer/reader, evoking the pleasure of the "fort-da" game observed and described by Sigmund Freud.²⁷ Just as the little boy observed by Freud derives pleasure by repeating and proclaiming the act of making his toy disappear (he articulates a version of "fort" = away) and reappear ("da" = there), for Stettheimer, the signature symbolizes the author function as both present and absent, as a way of staging and controlling, through aesthetic means, this public role that caused anxieties.²⁸ As Foucault reminds us of the "author-function," "it is not formed spontaneously through the simple attribution of a discourse to an individual. It results from a complex operation whose purpose is to construct the rational entity we call an author."²⁹ Stettheimer artfully and playfully stages her identity in her cellophane aesthetic, as well as dissolving the borders of poetry and art, text and visual, artistic subject and object. Powerfully, the reclining artist in Stettheimer's self-portrait painting is herself dressed in what appears to be cellophane larvae wings, which hold her firmly in the glistening spider web of the poem.

The natural (if carefully cultivated) settings of Stettheimer's



Fig. 4. Florine Stettheimer, *Portrait of Myself* (1923), oil on canvas. Columbia University, New York. Gift of the Estate of Ettie Stettheimer, 1967.

poems and paintings include numerous depictions of flowers (Fig 5), and one section of *Crystal Flowers* is entitled "Nature Flora Fauna." For McBride, Stettheimer's flowers are, "mere points of departure," aiming as she did in her portraits for what Stein would theorize in her own writing as the "essence" of her subject.³⁰ Whereas, for Stein, one's essence or one's "bottom nature" emerges from the variations of insistence in repetition, for Stettheimer, essence has more precisely to do with a lack of fixity in representation. And so, as McBride notes, Stettheimer's flowers are "sufficiently botanical, but they are also unearthly," for Stettheimer "imbued them with the occult, something reaching out of this world to that other; ... the blossoms in her vases wriggled upward with a whimsicality in the stems that is not to be outmatched for waywardness in the 'automatic' paintings of Miro."³¹ This treatment as identified by McBride can be discerned in Stettheimer's previously uncollected poem "[All Morning]," wherein the seeming still-life portrait poem actually "reach[es] out of this world to that other," and wherein the mundane, as though wrapped in "the glassy sheen of cellophane," is



Fig. 5. Florine Stettheimer, *My Birthday Eyegay* (1929), oil on canvas, 38" x 26". William Kelly Simpson Collection.

liberated from "dusty reality" and "transform[ed] into a sparkling play of light."³²

All morning
for hours
I have been putting flowers
together
in vases
I strip them of their green
They look more brilliant—
become more effective
...
The bouquet I like best
I put on the dining room table
On the filet-lace round
On the light-grey painted board
It helps—It satisfies
But tomorrow
my flowers
will show the ravages of time
they will wilt

they will smell
I shall have a disgust for them
I shall dislike changing the water
And I shall feel sympathy
with Marcel
for preferring
artificial flowers³³

Like Mrs Dalloway in Virginia Woolf's eponymous modernist novel, published in 1925, the arrangement of flowers for Florine Stettheimer extends beyond the domestic into the realm of social and artistic relationality. When, in the novel's opening line, Clarissa Dalloway is described as insisting that she will buy the flowers for the party, she, as the consummate hostess, asserts her skill in compositional arrangement (a skill likened by Michael Cunningham in his novel *The Hours* to the role of a literary editor—someone with a keen eye for how textual and literary pieces work together in juxtaposition and union). Interestingly, on the manuscript draft of "[All Morning]," Florine's sister Ettie performed this editing function, noting both her dislike of the poem ("don't like this one EST"), as well as her sense that lines needed re-arranging: "Ought to be re-arrange[d]."³⁴

Indeed, throughout *Crystal Flowers* language itself figures as a curatorial practice. The words are arranged like the floral bouquets Stettheimer called "eyegays," in a deceptively simple, seemingly superficial presentation, but possess a depth capable of conveying a biting ironic critique of her subject.³⁵ The artist was an adept and consistent arranger of flowers, as her numerous still-lives attest. This dissolution of distance between creator and consumer is a central aspect of the ways in which the poems and paintings can be reciprocally enriching. As Bloemink articulates: "The objects and the surrounding space interpenetrate each other. By creating an interdenominative space where objects and surfaces imperceptibly blend, Stettheimer, like Matisse, gives equal importance to the tactile and the visible, investing both with expressive meaning."³⁶

[All Morning] is rich in its suggestion of sonic and ironic inversion in rhyme, with its dominant play on "morning/mourning"—the flowers subject to "the ravages of time," and the artist's preference (like Duchamp's) for the potentiality of artificiality, but also for its feigned preservability (a central function of cellophane). The poem's narrative meditation highlights why the artist was reluctant to be photographed, and why, throughout her career, she painted herself as in her thirties. Doing so endowed Stettheimer with a blankness on which to project whatever aspect of her multiplicity she chose to highlight in a given moment. Ironically, she would mark a number of her birthdays by painting still-life portraits of the bouquets she would arrange in ritual celebration. This projection of self as symbol of the kind of exaggerated femininity associated with floral imagery is consistent with the camp theatricality of Stettheimer's designs noted above. In "[All Morning]," too, the flowers/followers (in sonic play), like those appearing throughout her paintings, are her friends and foes who, under

the poet's critical eye would be pared down to their very essence: "I strip them of their green/ They look more brilliant/ become more effective," as she writes.

In a play on the trope of the still-life and its insistence on a focal point in time and in space, the "filet-lace round" of the poem, on which the narrator puts the bouquet, actually asserts the eventual compositional dissolve. The "filet-lace round" reminds the reader of the bouquet the painter places centrally in her bold, six foot long, nude *Self-Portrait* (1915-16; Pl. 7), which, in its richness of detail and color, serves to draw the eye away from the infinitely less-detailed, vaguely outlined sex of the artist, typically the focus of such a nudes painted by men (indeed of Manet's *Olympia* to which the self-portrait responds). This play of sight and sound, so subtle and fey as to be barely discernable, seems to register to the reader only unconsciously, the poet's diaphanous aesthetic becoming ever-present without seeming to be present at all. Through sight and sound, the reader's attention is called to the physicality of the text as capable of carrying its rhythm, substituting normative narrative progression within simultaneous moments. As in her paintings, the words in Stettheimer's poems are arranged to work in echo with each other in a kind of comparative relief so that the filet-lace round, for example, both reiterates and juxtaposes the dominant "o" sound of the poem's "morning," "flowers," "former," "tomorrow." The "o" sound also signals the potentiality of blankness (zero), of artificiality so celebrated elsewhere in the artist's cellophane designs, and her tulle and lace compositions.

Consider in this context also Stettheimer's sustained engagement with Marcel Duchamp, whose own play with identity and aliases similarly celebrated projection and blankness. Stettheimer's 1923 ironic *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* (Pl. 8), splits the artist into two figures, the first figure sitting in a chair in a dark business suit, yet without shoes, cranking up on a "cork-screw shaped device" his alter ego Rose Sélavy depicted "in her eponymous color," as Bilski and Braun observe.³⁷ In fact, the name Rose Sélavy, is printed in delicate rose tint on the rim of the elevated seat "she" is sitting on, adding to the figure's airy otherworldly flair, fairy-like with inflated shoulders suggestive of wings. Once again, Stettheimer interfaces visual and verbal texts, playfully complicating surface with intermedial texture. In reading this work as a visual poem, the eye is drawn to the stunning paratext located in the threshold space, the frame, which consists of a frieze composed of Duchamp's initials MD in silvery metal type, with each of the four corners topped by a single M, like the links in an endless chain (whereby the ensuing DMDMDM ironically also provide a sonic echo of "Dame"). Though partly covered by Duchamp's body, the same initials DMDMDM are inscribed by hand on the back of his chair, running in regular lines from top to bottom, as well as running discreetly down the side of the armrest, thus turning the mundane chair into a visual poem to be read and deciphered. Tucked away at the base of the chair is Duchamp's name fully scripted in rose tint along with Stettheimer's own proclamation of authorship in the same color, "Marcel Duchamp/ By Florine Stettheimer," her own name ironically

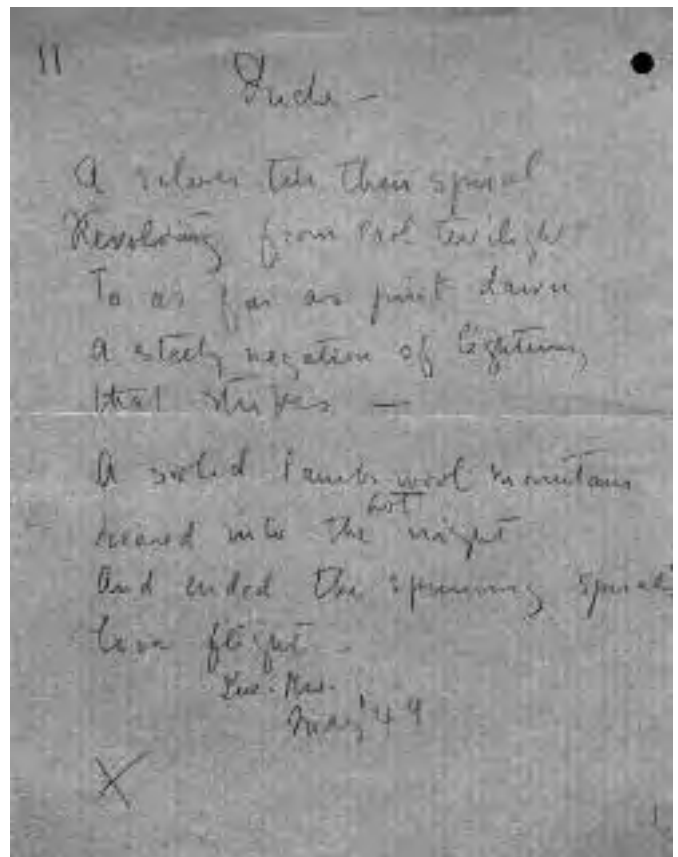


Fig. 6. Florine Stettheimer, "Duche," manuscript poem. Florine and Ettie Stettheimer Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

positioned behind Duchamp's shoeless foot. A carefully scripted capital M, composed of two upside down Vs, is prominently located above Stettheimer's signature, and is mirrored by the position of Duchamp's legs, which are sharply angled to form an M, just as his arms and the V neckline of his dark suit form yet another bodily letter M. The simultaneity of these distinct moments, analogous to the plasticity of cellophane, as we have argued above, also anticipates the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets of the 1970s and 1980s by drawing attention to the materiality of language itself, rather than emphasizing expressive meaning. Thus, as a visual poem, *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* asserts itself as a language game that is both cerebral and fun, the game itself being alluded to by the presence in the top left quadrant of the Knight, a piece from Duchamp's favorite game of chess.

Moreover, Stettheimer's poem "Duche" (Fig. 6), Duchamp's nickname, creates an intricate intertextual relationship. The poem's first line refers back to *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, by poetically reconstructing the portrait's enigmatic whirling spiral: "A silver-tin thin spiral/ Revolving from cool twilight/ To as far as pink dawn/ A steely negation of lightning/ that strikes—."³⁸ Evoking her own painting, the poem is an example of ekphrasis. That the whirling spiral is crucial to Stettheimer's intermedial aesthetic is also emphasized by her connection with and learning from her close friend, the Mexican artist and theorist Adolfo Best-Maugard, an

association that has been duly noted.³⁹ Famously, Best-Maugard's study and illustration of excavated materials from the Valley of Mexico, under the commission of anthropologist Franz Boas, led to his in-depth study of primitive and decorative arts outlined in his text *A Method for Creative Design*. Best-Maugard theorized seven consistent elements in the representation of the natural world, which he believed to be innate in the human consciousness. "Motion-Form," as Best-Maugard observes, "is represented in types of the Arch of motion, the whirling spiral." He also notes that a coiled wire can be projected two-dimensionally in a series of tangential circles, or undulating wavy lines; "seen more from the side we get a series of half-circles like a script 'm.'" ⁴⁰ In fact, the repetition of the "m" is clearly legible in "cork-screw spiral" in *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, with the spiral thus mirroring the "M"s in the frame but also marking the tension between the industrial print (so mirrored in the regularity of the clock, located just above the painting's center-point) in contrast to the rhythmic motion performed by the hand that holds the pen/brush in scripting text (Duchamp's and Rose Sélavy's right hands, strikingly white and feminized, are put in relief). Not only do Stettheimer's paintings demonstrate, redeploy, and integrate these decorative motifs, but her poetry relies on a similarly original use of formally simplistic, but not in the least facile, language, and composition.

Stettheimer created a context for the reception of her work as she had in her salon, in her constructions for Stein's opera, and in the mounting of her solo show, making audiences see as she does, sense as she does, reminding us of the many ways with which one engages with the world, and how meaning proliferates through perspective and context. Through a representation and performance of a permeability between private and public spaces, Stettheimer dissolves the normative boundaries between reader and writer, artist and audience, creator and created—insisting instead that art-making and poetry are intimately interlinked in that they are fundamentally a making of self. As a self-representational practice, Stettheimer's poetry and painting created a sophisticated grammar for various modes of visual/textual interface, exploring temporal, spatial, personal, relational, and cultural dimensions that will be the subject for further investigation. A constantly moving and changing target, the self in context is an exploration of Stettheimer as woman and artist in the modernist era. As Brown intones, the "blankness, absence and transparency" of cellophane exemplifies the structural emptiness of the modern condition, in which modern subjects can no longer rely on the old religious and enlightenment values such as an omniscient god or reason.⁴¹ Likewise for Stettheimer, cellophane and the sparkling poignancy of poetry also suggest the ambiguity of the material: icy cold, and yet radiant. Cellophane with its multiple and ambivalent connotations wraps itself around Stettheimer's work as a deliberate aesthetics, complicating our understanding of surfaces. In a letter of 1936, McBride describes "Florine's new sensational apartment," (when, following her mother's death in 1935, Stettheimer chose, not without contention from her sisters, to live alone) in what also

typifies the artist's poetry and painting: "There are oceans of shiny, transparent cellophane hangings, and the dining room glitters with gold cellophane curtains posed against white."⁴² Florine Stettheimer's entire oeuvre is an ocean of cellophane, of diaphanous whimsy and magic, crinkling and sparkling in the lightness of its being. •

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Notes

1. Florine Stettheimer, "The Unloved Painting," in *Crystal Flowers*, ed. Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo (Toronto: BookThug, 2010), 69. All citations are from this edition unless indicated otherwise.
2. Georgia O'Keeffe, "Florine Stettheimer Eulogy," typescript, Stieglitz/O'Keeffe Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (MSS 85, Box 100, Folder 2107), 4 (hereafter, YCAL).
3. Elisabeth Sussman with Barbara J. Bloemink, *Florine Stettheimer: Manhattan Fantastica* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995); see Sussman's "Florine Stettheimer: A 1990s Perspective," 41-67, for an excellent overview of the scholarly reception of Stettheimer's work until the mid 1990s. For other exhibitions and catalogues, see Henry McBride, *Florine Stettheimer* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946); and *Florine Stettheimer: An Exhibition of Paintings, Watercolors, Drawings* (New York: Columbia University, 1973). For biographies, see Barbara J. Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1995); Parker Tyler, *Florine Stettheimer: A Life in Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1963).
4. David Tatham, "Florine Stettheimer at Lake Placid, 1919: Modernism in the Adirondacks," in *American Art Journal* 31.1/2 (2000): 5-31. Tatham, like Bloemink (see note 6 below) also highlights Stettheimer's complex understanding of time, which was influenced by French philosopher Henri Bergson: "Bergson's arguments distinguished between duration—with its heterogeneous, overlapping events—and linear, measurable time," 21.
5. Linda Nochlin, "Florine Stettheimer: Rococo Subversive," in *Art in America* 68 (September 1980): 64-83.
6. Barbara J. Bloemink, "Visualizing Sight: Florine Stettheimer and Temporal Modernism," in *Florine Stettheimer: Manhattan Fantastica*, 69-95.
7. Francis M. Naumann, "The Stettheimer Sisters," *New York Dada* (New York: Abrams, 1994), 150, 152. As Naumann observes: "Whereas her earlier work owned an unmistakable debt to Symbolist painting, [...] she would dismiss all foreign influences, instead painting environments that were extensions of her life—mythic, almost ethereal spaces that were invariably populated by individuals she knew and cared for: her mother, her sisters, and her close circle of friends," 150.
8. Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun, "Florine Stettheimer: The Jewish Rococo," in *The Power of Conversation: Jewish Women and Their Salons* (New York: Jewish Museum; New Haven: Yale Univ. Press,

- 2005), 126-37. Bilski and Braun provide some excellent readings of Stettheimer's group portraits, such as *Soirée* (1917-19), as emanating from the group setting of the salon itself.
9. According to Steven Watson, the "Harvard Modernists" represent a collective that formed in the Fine Arts Department at Harvard University under the tutelage of Paul J. Sachs. The fraternity included, among others, Lincoln Kirstein, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Kirk Askew, Everett "Chick" Austen, and Julien Levy. "During the early years of the Depression this constellation utterly changed the landscape of modernist culture in New York and thus in America." Steven Watson, "Julien Levy: Exhibitionist and Harvard Modernist," in *Julien Levy: Portrait of an Art Gallery*, ed., Ingrid Schaffner and Lisa Jacobs (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 82.
 10. See, for example, Bloemink, McBride, Nochlin, Sussman, all cited above, notes 3, 5, and 6.
 11. Donna Graves, "'In Spite of Alien Temperature and Alien Insistence': Emily Dickinson and Florine Stettheimer," *Woman's Art Journal*, 3:2 (Fall 1982-Winter 1983): 24.
 12. Ettie Stettheimer's dedication, *Crystal Flowers*, ed. Ettie Stettheimer (New York: Privately printed, 1949), i.
 13. Nochlin, "Florine Stettheimer," 67. In this definition, Nochlin draws on Susan Sontag's seminal 1964 essay on camp.
 14. Judith Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and the Radiance of Form* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2009), 150-51.
 15. Penelope Reed, Review, in *Pittsburgh Sunday Post* (May 11, 1924), quoted in McBride, *Florine Stettheimer*, 53, unnumbered note.
 16. In a footnote to her essay "Florine Stettheimer," 66, Elisabeth Sussman writes: "Marcel Duchamp used this phrase in a letter to the Stettheimer sisters, May 3, 1919. Joseph Solomon, lawyer for the Stettheimer estate, kindly allowed me to consult the letter in 1979." Bloemink, "Visualizing Sight," 82, refers to this aspect of Stettheimer's paintings as being "zoned for time" and explains: "Stettheimer took her experimental mix of temporal moments a step further, to create paintings which are 'zoned for time' by the repetition of characters and the inclusion of sequential events within a single canvas. Since time cannot be 'seen,' it can only be experienced by the act of reading images across the surface of a painting. A person cannot be in two places at once; by repeating a figure within a composition, it becomes subliminally apparent to viewers that they are looking at distinct moments in time."
 17. Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions*, 145. For our description of the exotic stage setting, we rely on the detailed and fascinating book by Steven Watson, *Prepare for Saints: Gertrude Stein, Virgil Thomson, and the Mainstreaming of American Modernism* (New York: Random House, 1998).
 18. Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 73.
 19. Stettheimer, "As Tho' From a Diary," in *Crystal Flowers*, 121.
 20. Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions*, 150.
 21. Stettheimer, "Ephemère," in *Crystal Flowers*, 66.
 22. John Donne, "The Flea," in *Poems of John Donne*, vol. I, ed. E. K. Chambers (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1896), 1-2.
 23. Nochlin, "Florine Stettheimer," 67, writes that the painting "draws upon the eccentric and visionary art of William Blake, whose reversal of natural scale, androgynous figure style and intensified drawing seem to have stirred a responsive chord in Stettheimer's imagination."
 24. Bloemink, "Florine Stettheimer: Hiding in Plain Sight," in *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity*, ed. Naomi Sawelson-Gorse (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 499, notes that Stettheimer incorporates surreal elements such as the wide open hypnotic eyes as a way of signaling "the heightened vision of the innovator."
 25. Bilski and Braun, *Jewish Women and Their Salons*, 133, comment that *éphémère* represents "a poignant commentary on the risks of social and artistic ambition."
 26. Stettheimer, "Casein Was Once Milk," in *Crystal Flowers*, 130.
 27. Freud theorizes the game as a way for the young child to cope and control anxieties about loss (of the mother). Sigmund Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (Leipzig: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1921), 10-14.
 28. On at least two occasions in 1922, Marcel Duchamp encouraged Florine to sign her work, as he writes to her sister Ettie, referring to an unidentified and unsigned poem: "Thanks to Florine for the poem. But won't she sign it if I publish it in Paris in a Dada magazine? R.S.V.P. (She can sign it Florine if she doesn't want the family to be compromised)." Rrose [Marcel Duchamp] to Ettie Stettheimer, 9 July 1922, in *Affectionately, Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk Ludion (Ghent: Ludion Press, 2000), 118; see also 122, for another request for Florine's signature.
 29. Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), 127.
 30. McBride, *Florine Stettheimer*, 15. In her lecture "The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*" (in Gertrude Stein's *Lectures in America* [New York: Random House, 1935], 138), Gertrude Stein articulates this concept:
I began to get enormously interested in hearing how everybody said the same thing over and over again with infinite variations but over and over again until finally if you listened with great intensity you could hear it rise and fall and tell all that there was inside them, not so much by the actual words they said or the thoughts they had but the movement of their thoughts and words endlessly the same and endlessly different.
 31. McBride, *Florine Stettheimer*, 15-17 (quote separated by two full-page images).
 32. Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions*, 150-51.
 33. Stettheimer, "[All Morning]," in *Crystal Flowers*, 38-39.
 34. Stettheimer, "[All Morning]," *Florine and Ettie Stettheimer Papers*, YCAL (Box 8, Folder 134, 49-50), 2, 1.
 35. According to Bloemink, *Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 58, Stettheimer referred to her floral paintings as "'eyegays,' a word she invented to emphasize that her flowers were not for the nose but for the eye."
 36. Ibid.
 37. Bilski and Braun, *Jewish Women and Their Salons*, 133. Bilski and Braun, 134, read *Portrait of Duchamp* as mirroring Stettheimer's own portrait, explaining that the two artists were "engaged in a complicated dance of gender doubling and transmutation," though their friendship cooled after Duchamp's marriage of convenience in 1927. See also Naumann's discussion of this portrait, "The Stettheimer Sisters," *New York Dada*, 153.
 38. Stettheimer, "Duche," in *Crystal Flowers*, 55.
 39. Nochlin, "Florine Stettheimer: Rococo Subversive," 67-68, documents that Stettheimer's mature style was likely influenced by Adolfo Best-Maugard, whose portrait she painted in 1920 (reproduced in Nochlin, 68), yet Nochlin also reminds us that Stettheimer had acquired a thorough knowledge of European art.
 40. Adolfo Best-Maugard, *A Method for Creative Design* (New York: Knopf, 1926), 158-59, 157.
 41. Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions*, 158.
 42. Henry McBride, *An Eye on the Modern Century: Selected Letters of Henry McBride*, ed. Steven Watson and Catherine J. Morris (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), 283-84.

REDISCOVERING FLORINE STETTHEIMER (AGAIN)

THE STRANGE PRESENCE AND ABSENCE OF A NEW YORK ART WORLD MAINSTAY

By H. Alexander Rich



Fig. 1. Florine Stettheimer, *Family Portrait # 1* (1915), oil on canvas, 40"x 62 1/2". Columbia University, New York.

The mythical “rediscovery” of a long-forgotten artist makes for a compelling narrative. It invites a re-examination of not only the forgotten artist’s life but also the consequences that may have contributed to his or her becoming a footnote in the art historical record. A true rediscovery of an artist can lead to a critical fervor, hailing the revival of the resurrected artist as a missing gem in the existing artistic canon. As such, the vanishing act of a story presented by the life of the oft-described “eccentric” American painter Florine Stettheimer (1871-1944) has long seemed particularly enticing for narrative-seeking critics.

At the 140th anniversary of Stettheimer’s birth and the sixty-fifth anniversary of her first (posthumous) retrospective, it seems fitting to revisit Stettheimer’s complicated legacy. Although Stettheimer hosted one of early-twentieth-century New York’s most highbrow cultural salons along with her sisters Ettie and Carrie, her esteemed status as a maven of the art world failed somehow (and for a number of critically hypothesized

reasons) to translate into an illustrious career as a painter. Despite a prodigious work ethic and a devotion to her craft, Stettheimer’s paintings—whose whimsical style departed from that of any other artist of her time—never received great public attention. Although other external factors seem to have affected Stettheimer’s lack of celebrity, Stettheimer’s own actions did not help matters either. She exhibited solo only once in her lifetime, in 1916, before ever developing her inimitably signature aesthetic. At the time, a critic likened the seemingly outrageous color palette of a work like *Family Portrait # 1* from 1915 (Fig. 1) to an orchestra “when all the instruments are playing independently.”¹ This is not to say that there was no interest subsequently in Stettheimer’s more mature paintings nor that Stettheimer was shy about showing off her work; in fact, as many critics readily point out, Stettheimer staged elaborate unveiling parties for her newest paintings, albeit limiting her works’ exposure to a close circle of friends and salon attendees, who were themselves often the subjects of her fantastical portraits.

Intensely private, Stettheimer is said to have foresworn the idea of ever parting with a painting permanently, once declaring that “letting other people have your paintings is like letting them wear your clothes.”² Before she died in 1944, Stettheimer attempted to put the proverbial final nail in her muted career’s coffin by demanding that all her work be destroyed upon her death. Yet, even when her family shirked from Stettheimer’s request by selling many of her paintings and by displaying them two years later in her first retrospective—a memorial show at the Museum of Modern Art no less—any acclaim Stettheimer might have achieved seemed already to have been squandered. After that show, Stettheimer fell back under the radar, ostensibly where she had always preferred to be, at the very least, in her role as an artist.

That basic narrative, grasped at and re-treaded again and again in critical accounts of Stettheimer’s life, frames her as an overlooked artist who missed her moment and yet who is primed for her comeback. This melodramatic tale, wherein the heroine is ironically well-known and esteemed in one world sphere and yet dies as a virtual unknown in another, seems to beg for a final, uplifting epilogue. Subsequent critics have been more than eager to provide that happy ending.

In 1973, nearly thirty years after Stettheimer’s death, the critic Hilton Kramer first championed the great return of a long-forgotten American artist named Florine Stettheimer. In a quasi-religiously titled *New York Times* article proclaiming “Stettheimer Paintings are Revived,” Kramer ponders: “It looked for a while as if [Stettheimer’s] art, which once delighted some of the most knowledgeable connoisseurs on the New York art scene, was destined to become yet another casualty of short memories and shifting fashions.”³ He pauses for a beat: “Fortunately, this tendency to neglect one of our most individual and most fanciful modern painters has now been reversed.”⁴ There we have it: the time is nigh for the return of Stettheimer to her rightful place in American art history and, finally, in 1973, the too-long-awaited restoration can take place.

Just seven years later, though, in 1980, writing again in the *Times*, Kramer seems positively giddy when a long-forgotten artist by the name of—you guessed it—Florine Stettheimer is rediscovered for a new generation. As if a moment of critical déjà vu, he declares: “A revival of her art has been long overdue. I am glad to say that with the present exhibition...the rehabilitation of this interesting, off beat painter is off to a good start.”⁵ But hadn’t Kramer said all this once before, even hinging his pronouncement on the same key term “revival”?

Maybe this time the moment for Stettheimer’s return really is right. Perhaps the world is finally ready for Stettheimer’s so-called “eccentric” art. An artist not quite fit for her own era was perfect for 1980, when, as Kramer puts it, we “hunger...for a certain variety of style and vision, and art that is odd and personal, and even a little strange.”⁶ Her art seemed to fit the bill.

Or so it would seem. Come 1995, the headline to an article by Kramer, this time in the *New York Observer*, teases the rediscovery of “The Best Kept Secret in Art.” The headline, of course, refers once again to Stettheimer, whose paintings, now revived for a 1990s audience, have, in Kramer’s view, finally



Fig. 2. Florine Stettheimer, *Cathedrals of Fifth Avenue* (1931), oil on canvas, 60 1/8" x 50 1/8". The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig. 3. Florine Stettheimer, *Cathedrals of Wall Street* (1939), oil on canvas, 60" x 50". The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

been “given their due” in an exhibition that “at last does justice to her achievement.”⁷

She may be greeted with fanfare each time she reappears, but how many times will Stettheimer have to be “rediscovered” before critics and lay audiences alike accept her, once and for all, into the artistic fold? For that matter, why is Stettheimer so prone to a cyclical rise and fall in critical attention?

The bizarre trajectory of Florine Stettheimer in the criticism written about her mirrors the contradictory nature of her simultaneous presence in and absence from the art world in her own lifetime. As a result, the popular trope in most criticism of the artist surrounds one central question: who or what is to blame for Stettheimer’s decline into relative obscurity, not simply after her death in 1944, but also during her own lifetime as a professional painter? Despite the central agreement among critics that *something* stymied Stettheimer’s potential renown, their hypotheses as to *why* her virtual erasure may have occurred vary widely. For instance, was her initial poor reception in the 1916 show at the Knoedler Gallery—the success of which she summed up curtly in her diary as “Nothing sold”⁸—so off-putting to Stettheimer that she vowed never to exhibit solo again? Or might the experience of the 1916 show only have underlined a more deep-seated ambivalence Stettheimer already felt toward exhibiting her work publicly? Perhaps pivotal in these disparities is the inability of critics to truly figure Stettheimer out.

To be certain, the critics have struggled with what to make of her. Both as a woman and as an artist, Stettheimer remains a puzzlement for those trying to grapple with her career. She is a paradox of sorts: at once a socially influential, well-regarded and connected member of the New York intelligentsia and an artist who actively shied from public exhibition of her work. Likewise, assertions as to why her art failed to strike a popular chord in her own time present their own internal contradictions: was Stettheimer’s art too “dated” and nostalgic for her contemporary world, or was she instead ahead of her time, better understood in subsequent decades as a sort of proto-feminist or proto-post-modernist as some have put it? Her techniques, too, set her apart from her contemporaries. As the *New Yorker* pointed out on the occasion of her “one-man posthumous show” in 1946, Stettheimer “worked with a knife, not a brush, or else by pouring paint on canvas and spreading it with a cloth.”⁹ In this way, Stettheimer seems both a throwback to Courbet and a forerunner to gestural abstraction. Stettheimer and her sisters, critics have noted, also dressed as if out of an earlier era; Stettheimer’s paintings, too, with all their gaudy glitz and glamour—however satirical they may have been—may likewise have been out of step with the times.

The supposed explicitness of even Stettheimer’s earliest paintings’ “femininity” may also have been too abrasive and forward-looking for a pre-feminist era, critics like Barbara Zucker have suggested. Zucker quotes Henry McBride, a close friend of Stettheimer who prepared the catalogue for her posthumous retrospective: “There was already enough freedom and femininity in the work to bar it from the then open exhibitions: femininity when too openly avowed being almost as reprehensible in those days as freedom of expression.”¹⁰

While being “dated” and being “ahead of her time” seem at first descriptors at odds with one another, the apparent datedness of Stettheimer’s art in the 1930s—perhaps best characterized in her four *Cathedrals* scenes (produced between 1929 and 1942)—may help explain its reacceptance as “camp” in later years. What seemed out-of-touch in the 1930s—a last gasp of a bawdy, showy era only just past—becomes appealingly retro in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Stettheimer’s art, in fact, was doubly nostalgic. For critics today, it may hark back to a foregone era of New York high culture, but even in its own time, Stettheimer’s art was already nostalgic. After all, the 1930s, when Stettheimer painted her *Cathedrals* series, were not the most prosperous or joyful years for Americans in the wake of the Great Depression.

Yet, as their titles suggest, *Cathedrals of Broadway* (1929; Pl. 9), *Cathedrals of Fifth Avenue* (1931; Fig. 2), *Cathedrals of Wall Street* (1939; Fig. 3), and *Cathedrals of Art* (1942; Pl. 10) genuinely celebrate and somewhat cheekily poke fun at what Stettheimer saw as the four great “religions” of New York life: entertainment, consumerism, money, and art. Stettheimer cleverly comments on this odd cosmopolitan conflation of religion and secular urban pleasure in the compositions of the works themselves. The series is designed to resemble a multi-part altarpiece, not merely in terms of its scale and dimension (each work measures more than 50 inches wide and 60 inches high) but also in its ideal display, with all works shown together side-by-side as a quadtych. Yet, especially when seen together, each painting in the series also looks like the elaborate stage design for an over-the-top Broadway musical production number. (This anticipates Stettheimer’s actual costume and set design work for the 1934 Virgil Thomson/Gertrude Stein opera, *Four Saints in Three Acts*.) In *Cathedrals of Broadway*, for instance, the “set” comprises neon-lit theater marquees, with lines of dancers and a gold-clad usher in the foreground, who invites the viewer into the extravagant world of entertainment. Meanwhile in *Cathedrals of Fifth Avenue*, Stettheimer satirizes the rampantly commercial side of New York, wherein a bride and groom marry at the altar of consumption, literally the facades of Fifth Avenue stores, and where the sky is emblazoned with the retail names of Tiffany’s, Altman’s, and Delmonico’s. Perhaps most audaciously, in the final work from the series, *Cathedrals of Art* from 1942, the setting is the Metropolitan Museum of Art (in whose collection the painting belongs today). Here the Metropolitan Museum is reimagined as a pink chapel where Art is personified in the repeated form of a dancing putto and where Stettheimer herself appears at the bottom right as the “commere,” the mistress of ceremonies enticing viewers into her painted fantasy.

Of course, Stettheimer is being enormously tongue-in-cheek in these works, but for many critics it has been difficult to reconcile that the most iconic work from the series—its first, *Cathedrals of Broadway*—was completed in 1929, the year the stock market crashed. And while some Americans may have turned to entertainment as an escape during the period, the series’ high-swank factor and glittery emphasis on material wealth and sophistication seems to speak to a smaller, more

elite subset of Depression-era New York. As Anthony Bower (one of the few critics drawing any attention to Stettheimer during the sixties) contends in a 1964 *Art in America* article: "With the Depression [Stettheimer's] world fell apart, but economically she was virtually untouched and her work continued with no visible change of style or attitude, and there are several delectable canvases from the early thirties, identical in spirit with her earlier work."¹¹ And even as early as 1951, when *Art Digest* ran a review of a show of Stettheimer's portraits at the Durlacher Gallery, the critic read her pictures immediately as emblems of a moment in American history vastly unlike that of the country at mid-century: "The exhibition...creates a nostalgic atmosphere of the past, a past not so remote in time as remote in its gaiety of life from the disturbed, anxiety ridden world of today."¹² Or as Robert Hughes puts it more dismissively from his contemporary vantage point in 1995: "Nothing could have been less in synch with the industrial-strength seriousness of postwar American painting than the froufrou, gilt and needling little ironies of Stettheimer's style."¹³

Was Stettheimer simply out of another time as so many have suggested? Or might the worlds she described on her canvases have been too private, both in the sense of their autobiographical nature and in their depiction of the New York elite? Even before she fully harnessed what would become, for better or worse, her signature style, Stettheimer honed her interests on paintings of her own family, such as the 1915 *Family Portrait # 1*, wherein Stettheimer's two sisters sit with their mother, while Stettheimer herself stands beside them attending to a bouquet of flowers. The autobiographical nature of Stettheimer's paintings only increases from this earliest portrait, to the extent that all her pictures can be read in one way or another as personally meaningful images. Whether focusing specifically on family members or even the greater Manhattan scene, all Stettheimer's paintings return on some level to the painter's own intimate experiences. Even those most seemingly "public" Stettheimer paintings, her Cathedrals series with their presumably populist subjects like Wall Street and Fifth Avenue, are inflected with Stettheimer's own sense of the world. As Zucker asserts: "They are Florine's interpretations of prevailing values, attitudes and the 'new religion' of a high-toned Manhattan."¹⁴

Might the world just not have been ready for Stettheimer's quirky brand of art? Or, more pessimistically, was she simply a good yet not great painter, some of whose works succeeded more than others? On those rare occasions when Stettheimer did exhibit her work, with a painting or two shown within a group show, the critical reviews are decidedly mixed. Ranging from subdued appreciation to seeming befuddlement, critics appear not quite sure what to make of Stettheimer's unique style nor whether to receive its faux-primitivism as purposeful and satirical or as peculiar and indicative of an amateurish painter.

Writing in 1922, the *Times*' World of Art critic cites a certain "playfulness" in Stettheimer's painting *Russian Bank* (1921; Fig. 4), principally a still-life study of flowers on a table, with the Stettheimer sisters appearing in miniature in the background garden. Yet, this same critic hedges when it comes



Fig. 4. Florine Stettheimer, *Russian Bank* (1921), oil on canvas, 40" x 36". Collection, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA, Gift of Miss Ettie Stettheimer.

to fully praising the painting, calling it "a naïve picture with a pleasant full-grown twinkling naïveté that is amusing without becoming ridiculous."¹⁵ In 1929, though, Edward Alden Jewell more effusively lauds Stettheimer's similarly family-focused painting *Heat* (1919; Pl. 11), concisely deeming that work, which avoids the later *Russian Bank*'s rather awkward central still-life motif, "an amazingly successful affair."¹⁶ The same cannot be said of Jewell's reaction only three years later, however, when looking at Stettheimer's *Cathedrals of Broadway*, which she presented in the 1932 show of the American Society of Painters, Sculptors and Gravers. Jewell scoffs at his "shuddering at the too painfully vulgar tinsel of Florine Stettheimer's 'Cathedrals of Broadway,' with passages raised in relief, recalling Mr. Sargent's rococo prophets in the Boston Public Library."¹⁷ As Eleanor Heartney, writing in *Art News*, suggests in 1977, Stettheimer's style

just doesn't fit conventional notions about "important art" Her paintings, which are characterized by confectionary colors, an air of languid artifice, complex webs of iconographic references, and an apparently unschooled style, can't easily be assimilated into the standard account of modernist development. Because of these qualities in her work, Stettheimer has often been dismissed as a merely well-connected amateur.¹⁸

With her varied reception and scarce critical notice, it comes as little surprise, then, that Stettheimer's death was greeted with little fanfare in the popular press. Although she was a socialite

of sorts, she remained relatively cloistered in her private world, where her insular renown as a maven of high society eclipsed any broad public acknowledgement of her simultaneous career as an artist.

As her brief *Times* obituary suggests, Stettheimer's legacy as a painter had faded before she had ever truly begun to shine. Indeed, the major creative achievement noted in the obituary, and for which she was best known in her lifetime, was not her paintings:

Miss Florine Stettheimer, artist, whose home and studio were in the Beaux Arts Studios...died Thursday after a brief illness. Miss Stettheimer, who studied at the Art Students League, designed the stage setting for the Gertrude Stein opera 'Four Saints in Three Acts' and painted the portraits of many well known persons...Surviving are two sisters, Misses Carrie and Ettie Stettheimer, and a brother, Walter Stettheimer.¹⁹

Ironically, it was Stettheimer's non-canvas work for the 1934 opera by Stein and Virgil Thomson that garnered her the most attention she would ever receive as an artist during her lifetime, not to mention her best reviews.

It would take a resurrective effort to re-insert Stettheimer and her personal work into the critical discourse. The 1946 MoMA retrospective re-introduced Stettheimer to the public and, from some critics' perspectives, marked a turnaround for a painter who literally willed her own disappearance from the art scene. Even Jewell, reviewing Stettheimer's memorial exhibition, foresaw a new moment for Stettheimer: "The memorial show that opened last week at the Museum of Modern Art will serve to end a 'semi-obscurity' that Miss Stettheimer didn't in the least mind."²⁰ He goes on to point out exactly what may have hampered Stettheimer's wider reception during her lifetime, apart from her own ambivalence toward showing her work. Jewell suggests that a visitor to the memorial show should "sit down in some pleasant, quiet place and read Henry McBride's catalogue text, every word of it, before taking the momentous plunge... He makes Miss Stettheimer's art intelligible, whereas but for him some of the subtler aspects, surely, would be lost in a blaze of color-trumpets or in a mist of more reticent overtone."²¹ In other words, for all its charm, Stettheimer's work presents a daunting task for the lay viewer.

Reviewing the criticism of Stettheimer, it is striking how great an impact a succinct dismissal of Stettheimer's work or a subtle vocabulary choice here or there by a critic can have on a reader's impression of Stettheimer and her images. A favorite term among critics—"eccentric," ascribed to both Stettheimer and her artistic style—connotes a certain kooky nuttiness about Stettheimer, as if she had a knack for all things odd. The more infrequent use of the term "esoteric," preferred by writers like Kramer, paints Stettheimer in a more positive light, as the term speaks more to the narrowness of her subject matter than to her own ostensible quirkiness. Yet, when described again and again as "eccentric" or even more euphemistically as an "Uptown bohemian," Stettheimer herself comes across in many articles as a bit batty and more a

sketchily drawn caricature than a living, breathing person. Perhaps Deborah Solomon puts this easy readerly misconception of Stettheimer best, writing in 1995 for the *Wall Street Journal*:

Even people who keep up with modern art are likely to have the vaguest sense of [Stettheimer], a vision of some odd-duck lady who lived in the 1920s and painted eccentrically naïve pictures of people socializing at parties. And we may recall hearing that she lived with her mother and sisters – a homely detail that makes her sound less like a legend of modern art than a creature from some 'little women' drama of her own devising.²²

Indeed, like that oddball relative who appears at family events, the "eccentric" Stettheimer becomes in many critical eyes the crazy spinster aunt, whom everyone loves but who is also accepted as a little "out there."

In fact, both Mark Stevens, writing in *New York Magazine* and Jed Perl, writing in *The New Republic*, describe Stettheimer just this way. For Stevens, Stettheimer is the "eccentric maiden aunt" who "is typically treated with condescension, especially when safely dead."²³ For Perl, Stettheimer occupies a related familial role as a woman lost to her own time but who has more recently become "The Mother of Us All."²⁴ Here, Stettheimer becomes a mythologized, vaguely asexualized, *extra*-motherly figure who does not bear children per se so much as a litter of contemporary artists who have been influenced by her flair for style and design. Neither Stevens nor Perl intends to debase Stettheimer by framing her as this outsider/insider character (indeed both offer positive reviews of her work), but their choice of language creates an image of Stettheimer as Other that translates into how one potentially receives Stettheimer's work.

In his 1964 feature on Stettheimer, Anthony Bower uses alternative terms like "aloof, aristocratic and intellectually proud"²⁵ to convey Stettheimer's persona. Likewise, Linda Nochlin, in her 1980 article "Florine Stettheimer: Rococo Subversive," also chooses to frame Stettheimer in a more positive light—as "refined, recondite, and personal" or as a "feminine feminist"²⁶—and is one of the few critics who delves more deeply into the Otherness that underlies Stettheimer's outsider/insider status. Nochlin explains that, regardless her social connectedness, Stettheimer was also doubly an outsider, not only in her being Jewish but also by being a woman artist at the same time. In this sense, the alternative "eccentric" conception of Stettheimer denies the more basic root of Stettheimer's Otherness and transforms her instead into an almost avuncular "auntie" figure, rendered endearing to all and essentially harmless, despite her hovering just outside the mainstream.

Critics do generally treat Stettheimer in this way. Rarely is anyone in her post-"rediscovery" criticism overtly critical of Stettheimer's art. On one level, the narrative of "rediscovery" itself depends on the idea that its subject and her art be worthy of revival to begin with. If Stettheimer were simply written off as a naïve artist, the involving narrative would be rendered moot, as her decline into obscurity would be deemed

understandable and her rediscovery viewed as little more than a momentary lark. Yet, it may be the sheer uniqueness of Stettheimer's art that makes it so difficult to critique. With nothing quite parallel with which to compare it, Stettheimer's art, for all its aesthetic wackiness, seems in modern criticism immune from full-throated reproach. Ironically, as a result, Stettheimer's work itself seems remarkably shielded from negative press. Much in this way, in 1995, the critic for the *New York Press* refers to the essentially saccharine charm of the art in Stettheimer's Whitney show, describing it as a "puff-pastry dessert"²⁷ in comparison to the contemporaneous Edward Hopper exhibition upstairs. Roberta Smith, reviewing the same show in the *Times*, takes this metaphor one step further, writing: "You almost expect the paintings to smell or taste good or to emit their own music."²⁸

At the same time, though, writers (and their readers through them) have a tendency to equate this ostensible sugariness and unconventionality of Stettheimer's art with the woman herself, and vice versa. Looking at her 1923 self-portrait (Pl. 6), Robert Hughes, writing in *Time Magazine*, does just that: "[The self-portrait] comes out as a yearning apotheosis of the Jewish-American princess, in a semitranslucent nightie from some celestial boutique, languidly holding a bouquet and wafted aloft. Above her is the sun, looking like an expensive Christmas ornament. An insect—winged, bifurcated, slender—is flying toward it, helplessly attracted. It is Florine's soul, rising to the empyrean."²⁹ And, making sure not to leave out how much Stettheimer apparently loved "girlie" things, Hughes adds: "Bendel's she loved; and next to Bendel's art."³⁰ Hughes unleashes a slew of new labels for Stettheimer here; as in her portrait, Stettheimer is not only a Jewish-American princess, but also more quintessentially a New York shopper, prior even to her being an artist. Writing in *Art in America*, Trevor Winkfield sees the 1921 *Spring Sale at Bendel's* (Fig. 5), the painting to which Hughes alludes, in a less condescending light, framing it as an alternatively *creative* apotheosis of sorts for Stettheimer's reaching her mature style: "All of Stettheimer's artistic traits—enthusiasm for things American, unpredictable choices of color, dislike of open spaces, a world espied through feminine eyes—come together in her 1921 parable of consumer dementia."³¹

However pseudo-primitive and unique her works may be, Stettheimer focused on a world that was itself not odd at all; in fact, it was the same kind of cultural milieu explored thoroughly by European artists before her and one she shared and enjoyed with so many members of the uptown Manhattan chattering classes. To describe Stettheimer as merely eccentric implies that she turned her focus toward perverse pleasures that others find less endearing. The truth of the matter is that, while her execution may have been inimitable and, yes, quirky, her themes are anything but comprehensible to her alone. As Heartney writes in *Art News*, even those paintings that at first seem to cater to a very specific audience can have larger

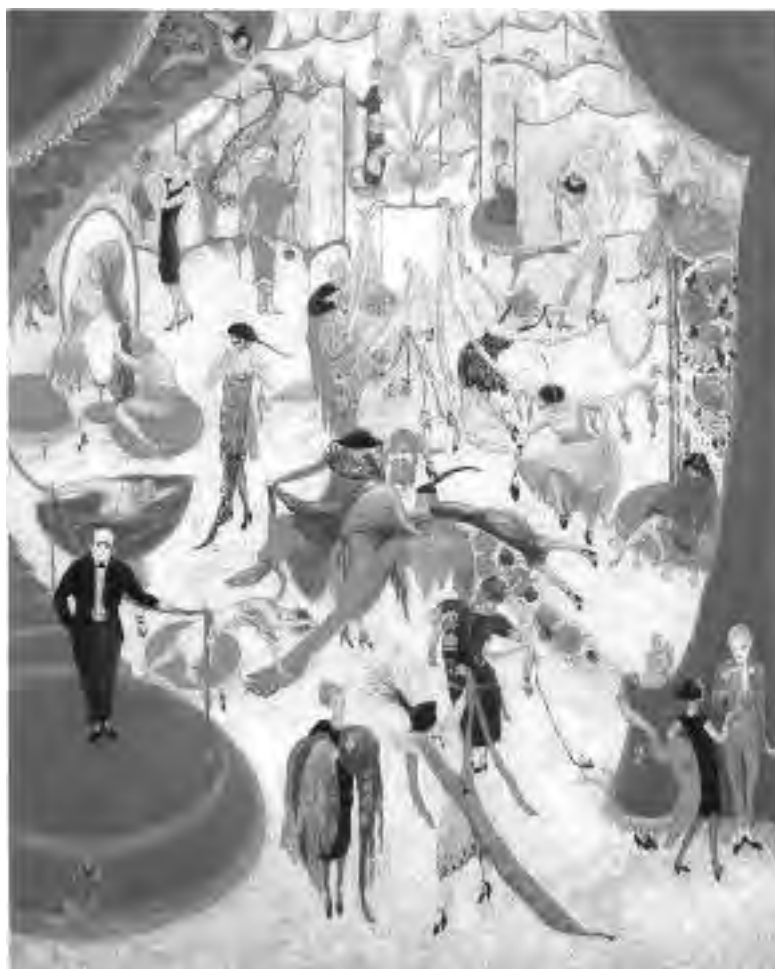


Fig. 5. Florine Stettheimer, *Spring Sale at Bendel's* (1921), oil on canvas, 50" x 40". Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

resonances. Looking at "Stettheimer's art world," Heartney writes: "Full of private jokes and topical allusions that can be only partially deciphered today, [*Cathedrals of Art*] has an overall scheme that is based on the traditional Nativity scene."³² Furthermore, Heartney argues, the "irreverent attitude" Stettheimer extends toward the art world in the painting "expresses an ambivalence that still strikes a responsive chord. Mixing nostalgia and comedy, irony and celebration, it suggests a gap between the art world we would like and the art world as it is."³³

For critics, too, Stettheimer's themes seem to offer a little bit of everything for everyone, remarkable for a woman whose art was once deemed not of its own time. In her catalogue entry for the Whitney Museum's 1995 Stettheimer retrospective, *Florine Stettheimer: Manhattan Fantastica*, Elisabeth Sussman attributes three factors to Stettheimer's amazing resilience. Wondering why Stettheimer has refused to fall permanent victim to the dark depths of art historical obscurity, Sussman points to gay liberation, pop art, and the women's movement as continually revitalizing forces for Stettheimer's art, allowing it to hover quietly below the surface for many years, steadily appreciated by its cult-like devotees but just out of view from critical attention.



Fig. 6. Florine Stettheimer, *Soirée/Studio Party* (1917), oil on canvas, 32" x 33 1/2". Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.

In her first revival, Stettheimer becomes a feminist for the 1970s, whereas by the 1980s she has become a goddess of all things "camp." In the 1990s' criticism, meanwhile, Stettheimer comes most often to be regarded as a deft satirist, whose humorous looks at the frivolity of high society rang especially profoundly in a decade marked by its rejection of 1980s materialism. And, more recently, Stettheimer has emerged from her formerly liminal state of Otherness to become, of all things, a New York Dadaist for the new millennium. In her most recent appearances in exhibitions like the 2006 *Daughters of New York Dada* at Francis Naumann, Stettheimer, once entirely distinct in her esoteric forms and execution, now joins an identifiable grouping of artists loosely similar enough to her—in some critics' eyes—to be labeled a Dadaist daughter herself. Has the mythical "Mother of Us All," whose figures float forever in their suspended states of gay effusion, finally come down to earth?

To be certain, when critics trace out all the potential influences and reverberations in Stettheimer's work with that of other artists, Stettheimer's Otherness slowly seems to fade away. When citing her Chagallesque figures or even the similarities between her paintings and covers of *The New Yorker*, critics may unwittingly attempt to reframe Stettheimer into a more conformist realm. Despite their lauding her defiance of norms, critics often fall into the trap of deconstructing her images at the same time. Roberta Smith, in the *Times*, writes: "Her wickedly vibrant palette plays

saturated against pastel, pure against jaundiced, and makes you reach back to van Gogh for precedent" and adds of Stettheimer's "drifting compositions": "With their strange distortions of space and perspective, their alternation of flat and deep...they can bring to mind Old Masters like Bruegel, modernists like Chagall and contemporary artists like David Salle or Robert Greene."³⁴ Were earlier critics too quick to overlook the resonances in Stettheimer's work with that of other better-known artists? Or might a little less eccentricity—to use the popular term—on Stettheimer's part have rescued her work from its descent into critical disregard?

Other critics have asserted that, in the end, Stettheimer's pictures may simply be too densely packed with visual information, much of it highly personal, to be readily understood by a lay audience. Oftentimes, a Stettheimer painting like *Soirée/Studio Party* (1917; Fig. 6) can read like a veritable "Who's Who" of the teens and twenties New York cultural scene. The 1917 painting captures what it must have been like to attend a Stettheimer salon and to have had the rare opportunity to see Stettheimer's work proudly on display. As such, while a contemporary viewer might be able to infer that the nude on the back wall of the room is a reclining self-portrait of the artist herself (see Pl. 7), that same viewer would be harder pressed to identify the party attendees.

For instance, the playwright Avery Hopwood and the art critic and collector Leo Stein (sitting on the floor) converse at the center of the painting, while artists Albert Gleizes and Gaston Lachaise appear as the consummate art connoisseurs thoughtfully examining a painting at the bottom left.³⁵

Likewise, although surely a member of such a Stettheimer salon would be able to point out that the "compere" and "commere" pair at the bottom left and right hand corners of *Cathedrals of Art* are Robert Locher and Stettheimer herself, or that the man at the upper left watching Baby Art dance on a Mondrian is Alfred Barr, Jr., what of a viewer less familiar with the inner sanctums of the art world? Did—and do viewers still—need a guide-map to enjoy fully one of Stettheimer's scenes? Vivien Raynor, writing in 1993, one of the few modern critics to look skeptically at Stettheimer's work, pinpoints *Cathedrals of Art* as indicative of what may ultimately account for Stettheimer's simultaneously witting and unwitting decline into obscurity. "As time wears on," Raynor writes:

Stettheimer grows more satirical (if that's not too strong a word), more childlike and a good deal fussier. The combination is never more grotesque than in 'Cathedrals of Art'...This features the Museum of Modern Art, epitomized by Picasso paintings, the Metropolitan Museum by a possible Rembrandt and an Etruscan horse, and the Whitney by an American eagle. The rest is a maze of inside jokes.³⁶

Nochlin, on the other hand, seems more forgiving about the elements of the painting that appear less than legible to the unknowing viewer. In this sense, she likens *Cathedrals of Art* to Courbet's *Painters Studio* in its use of "allusion and its sense of personal involvement."³⁷ While Nochlin by no means equates Stettheimer's painting's status to that of a masterpiece in Western art, she does effectively counter Raynor's gripe with *Cathedrals of Art* by implying that the "inside jokiness" of the painting, like Courbet's, does not detract from its general comprehension or its enduring enjoyment.

To be certain, nearly sixty-five years after her works' first truly public unveiling in her 1946 retrospective, the debate over Stettheimer's fate continues. As the ever-burgeoning (however intermittent) criticism of Stettheimer makes clear, the complexities of her images tied in with their alternately whimsical, satirical, proto-feminist, proto-post-modernist, eccentric, esoteric style invite and even demand their viewer's attention. Because Stettheimer painted in a "faux-primitive" style, her paintings do immediately imply their greater depth of sophistication than the surface imagery would suggest alone. If she paints in this way purposefully—critics assume—Stettheimer must be making some witty statement or satirizing some aspect of her own society, regardless whether that message is comprehensible to the lay viewer or not. The irony is that the very denseness of meaning amidst oddity of visual language that characterizes Stettheimer's art and which may have contributed to its short-lived appeal may be precisely that which makes it repel any heavy negative criticism today. Although her paintings may (justifiably) never be regarded as the most brilliant displays of artistic talent, Stettheimer's art is startlingly resilient: she may have effectively vanished from the art scene after her death, but her uncanny ability to reappear again and again and yet again sets her apart from any other artist of her time. Stettheimer's art, like her ethereally hovering figures, thus seems to exist in a sphere all its own. And although that same fantastical bubble that protects her pictures from being torn down critically seems to burst every few years, the generally glowing praise for Stettheimer upon each subsequent "rediscovery" enables her to rise once again. ●

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Notes

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MEMORIALIZING CHIVALRY

GERTRUDE VANDERBILT WHITNEY'S TITANIC MEMORIAL

By Cynthia Kaye Fischer

On April 14, 1912, the “unsinkable” ocean liner *Titanic* struck an iceberg in the North Atlantic and sank. A century later this maritime disaster in which 1495 men, women, and children were lost at sea remains in our collective memory and popular culture.¹ When the *Titanic* story is told, it often begins with detailed descriptions of the luxury and opulence enjoyed by the ship’s First Class passengers. The dramatic events then culminate in a scenario in which the men remain onboard the sinking vessel so that women and children can climb into the lifeboats and be saved, evoking notions of noble sacrifice and chivalry. Shortly after the disaster, a group of women conceived of a memorial to be placed in Washington, D.C., dedicated to the men who sacrificed their lives in this sensational story.

Serious scholarship has revealed, however, that this popular aspect of the *Titanic* story is actually a mythic saga, where certain facts are obscured and exaggerated. These misconceptions apparently took root immediately, instigating such actions as the memorial plan. The history of this memorial, as presented and analyzed in the following pages, reveals an uneasiness that seems inextricably linked with this notion of male chivalry. The values it was created to espouse expose early twentieth century issues of class and gender that are evident in both the history of the *Titanic Memorial* and the monument itself as conceived and executed by the American sculptor Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875-1942).

Writing in 1917 from her palatial Manhattan residence at 871 Fifth Avenue, Whitney described her figure design for the *Titanic Memorial* (1916-31; Fig. 1) as inextricably linked to the concept of sacrifice:

...a man standing with arms outstretched and the head thrown backward with an expression of sublime sacrifice. It has the monumental simplicity which belongs to the conception. The austere draperies hint at the shroud, yet stop short of its grimness. The figure is fifteen ft high, and the extension of the arms is also fifteen ft. It has been cut from a single block of granite and is destined to be erected in Washington as the Memorial of American Women to the devotion of men on the ill-fated *Titanic*.²

The lone figure stands upon a pedestal high above viewers wearing an expression of contemplation. The chin is tilted dramatically upward, and the eyes are closed (Fig. 2). The figure is not without tension, however, which can be seen in



Fig. 1. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, *Titanic Memorial* (1916–31), red granite, sculpture ca. 12' x 8' x 2', base ca. 5 1/2' x 4' x 4'. Waterfront Park, 4th and P Streets SW, Washington, DC.

the positioning of the feet that resemble those of a diver about to spring forth from his perch (Fig. 3). Whether viewers are to imagine the figure diving into the abyss or alighting into the heavens, he is on the precipice of this final act, this ultimate chivalrous sacrifice.

The semi-nude figure is tastefully covered by an amorphous drapery that seems to float weightlessly in some areas and hang with consequence in others (Figs. 1 and 4). The idealized, youthful male figure perhaps hearkens back to the Greek *kouros* tradition. The absence of extraneous anatomical details does not appear to have lessened what was certainly to have been an image of the ideal male body. Upon seeing an illustration of the memorial in a publication titled *Outlook*, Dr. Joel E. Goldthwait, a professor at Smith College, the Boston School for Physical Education, and “one or two other institutions,” wrote to Whitney requesting a photograph of the sculpture to use in his teaching. He thought the posture of the figure “seemed so splendidly fine that it would be the best sort of an ideal to hold up before these groups of young people.”³ This anecdote suggests that even before the monument was publicly erected, it was seen to embody the noble concepts of manliness and dignity. Such physical fitness was particularly meaningful at this time as American manhood was being increasingly defined by participation in sports, exercise and other “rugged” pursuits. Since 1900, a national health craze had driven men into gymnasias and sports clubs in order to “contribut[e] to and continu[e] the physical virility and vigor of the race.”⁴

One cannot help but make the inevitable connection between the figure’s cruciform posture and that of Jesus Christ on the cross; both seem poised to give their life to save others.⁵ This noble act of self-sacrifice, the intended meaning behind the memorial, is still easily perceived today. But even then, the concept of chivalry was problematic. Gail Bederman argues in *Manliness and Civilization* that in the early twentieth century, chivalry protected only certain women. Excluded were those viewed as lower or working class and “nonwhite women, whose menfolk were [classified as] barbarians or savages.”⁶ That left the elite, upper-class, white women as “worthy” of being protected (and saved). It was this limited group of women, who, for the most part, benefitted from the chivalrous acts in the history of the *Titanic* disaster that would take the major role in the history of the *Titanic Memorial*.

Furthermore, Michael S. Kimmel contends that, at the turn of the century, as men were feeling threatened by the entrance of the “New Woman” in the workplace, the following defensive position was taken up.

[Now] manhood was seen as noble sacrifice. Work [was] unpleasant, painful, difficult, and cruel—a dirty job someone has to do. Women should be placed on a pedestal glorifying feminine delicacy, for which men must sacrifice themselves. This was a new twist on the definition of manhood: It was no picnic of power and privilege; it was dirty and demanding, and men went through it because they loved their wives and children.⁷

By this logic, women should be thankful that men were saving them from having to do the “dirty work” in the office or



Fig. 2. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, *Titanic Memorial* (1916–31), detail, red granite, sculpture ca. 12' x 8' x 2'. Waterfront Park, 4th and P Streets SW, Washington, DC.



Fig. 3. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, *Titanic Memorial* (1916–31), detail, red granite, sculpture ca. 12' x 8' x 2'. Waterfront Park, 4th and P Streets SW, Washington, DC.

elsewhere. They should be grateful to the men who placed them on a pedestal, not as a reflection of their own masculine power, but as a sacrificial act done for the protection of women. As Edward Bok wrote in the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1893, “The number of women in business who lose their gentleness and womanliness is far greater than those who retain what, after all, are woman’s best and chief qualities.”⁸



Fig. 4. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, *Titanic Memorial* (1916–31), detail, red granite, sculpture ca. 12' x 8' x 2'. Waterfront Park, 4th and P Streets SW, Washington, DC.

From this one begins to discern how the *Titanic Memorial* was intended not only to recognize the lives of those men sacrificed aboard the famous ship but to address broader concerns over the roles of men and women in a changing society. By praising their heroics in the *Titanic* story, the memorial also boosted the morale of a somewhat threatened male populace. The story perpetuated the myth that men undertake the hard roles in life so that women don't have to and in order to shelter and protect women. The *Titanic* disaster and its memorialization thus represented an ideal opportunity to promote the values of male chivalry and feminine delicacy.

The lofty ideals presented in the statue itself are not reflected in its present site (Fig. 5).⁹ Sandwiched between two filthy, lollipop-shaped light-posts, it sits at the edge of the Washington Channel within a small promenade park. The Washington Monument is visible in the distance, while the immediate backdrop of the sculpture is Fort McNair. Across the narrow waterway are the comparatively greener pastures of Haines Point, with its handsome fences and carefully manicured grounds. This inauspicious location helps explain why this monument to such an iconic event is so little known and apparently uncared for. In fact this site is not the one that was carefully selected by the organization that unveiled the monument in 1931. Originally, the monument rose majestically above the banks of the Potomac River, near the intersection of E Street and New Hampshire Avenue.¹⁰ In 1966 it was removed to make way for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the shifting of Rock Creek Parkway that accompanied this grand new construction. For two years, it languished in storage awaiting a decision on a new site.¹¹

Perhaps some explanation for the fate of this all-but-forgotten monument lies in the fact that few Washingtonians met their end on the famous ocean-liner. A memorial fountain to the two prominent men from Washington who died with the

sinking of the *Titanic*, the Butt-Millet Memorial Fountain, located at the Ellipse was dedicated in 1913. Named for Major Archibald Willingham Butt, a military aide to two presidents, and the American painter and writer Francis Davis Millet, this memorial also remains relatively obscure in the monumental landscape of the District. However, while the fountain took only two years to erect, the women's broader memorial program had a protracted history over two decades, which, I suggest, displays some uneasiness over a perceived threat to the traditional notions of male chivalry.

The concepts of chivalry and heroic male behavior are crucial components in the study of this memorial, since it is specifically dedicated only to the men who died when the ship sank. The inscriptions on the pedestal read: (front; Fig. 6) "To the brave men who perished in the wreck of the *Titanic* April 15, 1912, they gave their lives that women and children might be saved"; and (back) "To the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the ignorant and the learned all who gave their lives nobly to save women and children."¹²

The *Titanic* disaster in 1912 and the memorial campaign that followed coincided with the women's suffrage movements in Great Britain and the United States. As debates and protests reached a fever pitch in the 1910s, issues of gender remained at the forefront of the public consciousness. Bederman recalls debates sparked by the women's suffrage movement that centered on chivalry—often a hot topic, as it was viewed as an honorable behavior to be bestowed upon worthy female recipients. In reaction to property destroyed by British suffragettes, Sir Almroth Wright, a British bacteriologist, viewed chivalry as "a contract between men and women," as Bederman explained it, "and as such, [it] could be broken."¹³ She argues that Wright's position was that if a woman broke the contract by being "violent, unrefined, ungrateful," or if a woman overestimated her own intellectual prowess, that she would be subject to "unfettered masculine violence."¹⁴ Perhaps taking his cue from Wright's published works, American epidemiologist William T. Sedgwick argued that men reverted to the state of brutes and savages when chivalry and civilization were eliminated.¹⁵ This discourse represented various attempts to quell the challenge women's suffrage and equal rights made on a patriarchal American society. The *Titanic Memorial* can thus be read as an act of appeasement, designed not only to praise the acts of men but to uphold both the longstanding "contract" between men and women and the conservative social order.

Issues relating to other aspects of manhood also play a role in the *Titanic* and *Titanic Memorial* histories. At the turn of the century, as vast numbers of "new immigrants" were arriving from Eastern and Southern Europe, white Anglo-Saxon men were viewed as "peculiarly masculine," according to Kimmel.¹⁶ Thus the *Titanic* disaster provided an ideal vehicle to honor not just chivalry but manhood in general, since even the Third Class passengers were overwhelmingly from the "old immigration" countries of Britain, Ireland, Scandinavia and Austria. Since the early nineteenth century, immigrants from

these regions had been arriving steadily and usually became permanent settlers in America. The “new immigrants,” who had only begun coming in great numbers to the United States in the 1880s, often viewed themselves as temporary residents who would eventually return to their native countries.¹⁷ Seen in this light, the *Titanic* story and its memorial could easily be used to honor the preferred exemplars of chivalrous behavior: white, generally Anglo-Saxon men.

What also made the *Titanic* so ideal for commemoration at this time was the clear distinction between the sexes so inherent to its story. It is well known that more men died than women, including some very famous men in First Class, such as the wealthy businessmen John Jacob Astor and Benjamin Guggenheim. Amid anxieties over the merging of the spheres of men and women at this time, even the slightest opportunity to demarcate one’s manliness was relished. Beards and mustaches, for example, were periodically popular “as one of the easiest ways to sharpen the distinctions between the sexes.”¹⁸ A contemporary treatise on proper dress and etiquette advised, “There is nothing that so adds to native manliness as the full beard if carefully and neatly kept.”¹⁹ At a time of such turmoil and uncertainty regarding roles of gender, the events surrounding the *Titanic* disaster thus offered a unique opportunity to not only exalt heroic men but also affirm traditional societal roles: men were the chivalrous, manly protectors, and women and children were weaker and dependent.

These ideas were quite well-defined and relevant when the *Titanic Memorial* was conceived and erected, between 1912 and 1931, and in his 1996 history of the *Titanic* disaster, Steven Biel offers numerous contemporary accounts. For example, Frances Wayne, writing in April of 1912, sent a surprising message to widows of the disaster:

Perhaps, some day, these widows will explain how it happened that they allowed themselves to be torn away from their husbands instead of going down with them...While men are men, and women are women; while there are ideals to be raised and followed; while there is dependence and courage; while the species continue[s] to be everything and the individual nothing in the scheme of nature, we shall have great, and strong and good men go down to sea in ships, after life boats have drifted away with weak and vain and frivolous, worthless and hapless women and little children.²⁰

With no intention of diminishing the very real sacrifice that many men made on that fateful night, this passage is problematic since she fails to recognize that it was these men who maintained control over the deteriorating situation and chose to place the women and children in the lifeboats. While this act was certainly brave and selfless, it should also be remembered that the women were blocked from taking significant actions of their own choosing, both by cultural norms and by masculine control of the situation. In other words, it was not their choice to board the lifeboats and leave the men to die. Ms. Wayne fails to acknowledge this suppression of agency on the part of the women and that the men may have acted out of propriety and not bravery.



Fig. 5. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (sculptor), Henry Bacon (base) *Titanic Memorial* (1916–31), red granite, sculpture ca. 12' x 8' x 2', base ca. 5 1/2' x 4' x 4' with reinforced concrete platform c. 50' x 13'. Waterfront Park, 4th and P Streets SW, Washington, DC.



Fig. 6. Henry Bacon, *Titanic Memorial* (base) (1916–31), granite, base ca. 5 1/2' x 4' x 4'. Waterfront Park, 4th and P Streets SW, Washington, DC.

The story of the *Titanic Memorial* began weeks after the *Titanic* disaster, when two women’s organizations were formed independently with the purpose of raising money to erect a *Titanic* memorial. The Woman’s *Titanic Memorial Association*, made up of “the most prominent society women in the country,” was headed by Natalie Harris Hammond, described as the “wife of the special ambassador to England at the coronation of King George in June 1911.”²¹ These well-to-do women were of the same social standing as the First Class

passengers on the *Titanic*, and their goal was to honor the men's chivalry. The second group, The National Titanic Memorial Association, formed with the intention of creating a monument to the men and women and children who lost their lives in the disaster, was led by Evelyn Gurley-Kane, described as a divorcée and actress from Iowa (who would later publish three volumes of poetry).²²

It was not long before the two groups clashed. In August 1912, a controversy arose when the Woman's Titanic Memorial Association requested that funds from a five-day fundraiser held by the National Titanic Memorial Association be withheld from that group. Hammond's secretary, Adolph Hoff, traveled to Washington from the Hammond home in Gloucester, Massachusetts, to claim on her association's behalf that the public had mistaken Gurley-Kane's group for Hammond's.²³ The dispute sheds light on the competing ideologies behind the two memorials, as Gurley-Kane was quoted in the *Washington Post* on August 6, saying:

I want the Woman's Titanic Memorial to keep their hands off of our memorial...I am strongly in favor of a memorial to be erected for the memory of the heroic women, as well as the brave men, who perished in the *Titanic* disaster. That is the purpose of our fund. They have no more right to demand part of the money which the national memorial has collected through its own efforts than we have to ask for a part of the sum that they have on hand...They came to me and made some suggestion of affiliation of the two bodies, but I told them if they were willing to enlarge their program so as to include the women and children as well as the men that I would willingly join with them, for that is the purpose for which we aim.²⁴

Six days later, in another article mentioning the support her organization had received from several governors and other prominent officials, Gurley-Kane declared that it was up to the people to decide whether their monument should honor all the *Titanic* dead or just the men.²⁵ By late September, Gurley-Kane had received her answer. After letters indicating that people favored a more "utilitarian" project, the decision was made to use the National Titanic Memorial funds to build a hospital for victims of catastrophic disasters.²⁶ Once again, she reiterated the belief of her group that the memorial should honor all those who died, not just the men.²⁷ (It is unclear whether or not this hospital was ever realized.)

Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney was informed that her design was selected by the Woman's Titanic Memorial Association in a letter dated January 6, 1914. Whitney's commission for the project was not to exceed \$43,000, which was paid to Whitney in two installments: \$25,000 on March 30, 1920, and \$18,000 on June 4, 1931.²⁸ Little is known about the competition and selection process, although "seven sculptors of prominence" also were in the running, according to the *New York Times*.²⁹

It is possible that Whitney knew of the association in 1912, at the time of the controversy between the groups, as she was of the same elite social class as Hammond and other group members. This possibility is significant in light of the fact that

Whitney's preference for memorial statuary was perhaps informed by the publicized squabbles related to the *Titanic Memorial*. In a 1920 article, Whitney advocated the creation of stand-alone memorials over utilitarian ones such as hospitals, claiming that because useful memorials serve multiple purposes besides their commemorative function, the heroes being remembered are inevitably forgotten.³⁰ (Well known for her philanthropy, she was not scoffing at helping the less fortunate but rather wanted to emphasize the value and superiority of a cenotaph over other forms of commemoration. In fact, Whitney believed in and donated to many worthy causes, including establishing and staffing a 225-bed hospital near the front lines of World War I in Juilly, France).³¹ Whitney's view that memorials should be artistic and separate from charitable endeavors was shared by Hammond and other members of the Woman's Titanic Memorial Association.

In her article, Whitney's statement that "Nowadays if one wants to influence the public one starts a propaganda,"³² may even be a late reference to the newspaper attention that Gurley-Kane had exploited in her attempt to sway public opinion. Whitney seems not only to be belittling the type of hospital plan the National Titanic Memorial Association had adopted but also condemning Gurley-Kane's publicly vocal role. This occurred at a time when etiquette dictated that a woman's name appear in the newspaper only twice: when she married and when she died (thus Natalie Harris Hammond sent her male secretary to speak publicly for her organization). And if Gurley-Kane was crossing boundaries of appropriate behavior for women of the day, it probably did not help that she opposed a memorial program honoring male chivalry in favor of one that included women and children. In light of Whitney's documented opinion on memorials, one begins to discern a double victory for Hammond and her association. The competing group had been forced to adopt a utilitarian plan, which Hammond's group could look down upon, thus reinforcing their elevated social status.

In marrying Harry Payne Whitney in 1896, Gertrude Vanderbilt had helped merge two of the most prosperous clans in American history. The elite American society in which the Whitneys and Hammonds circulated was worlds apart from that of Gurley-Kane.³³ Mrs. Hammond, for example, received a lengthy obituary notice (including a photograph).³⁴ It revealed unexpected biographical details for the wealthy socialite—that she had spent the early years of her marriage abroad with her husband, had fought to save his life in South Africa, and had "traveled with him over dusty highways... for days at a time, their only roof at night being the sky overhead."³⁵ Yet despite any suggestion that Hammond acted outside the proscribed roles for women, she did not relent to Gurley-Kane. She had no interest in a memorial honoring the women and children who died alongside the men, insisting on honoring the unspoken contract of chivalry. However, the power of even influential white society women at this time was quite limited. Despite the appearance of power, they lacked the authority (or will?) to espouse anything other than the traditional values of male superiority. To do otherwise, as Gurley-Kane had so passionately urged them to do, would have undermined their authority in future projects.

It is likely that this limited authority contributed to the nineteen-year delay from conception to unveiling of the *Titanic Memorial*. This struggle was unusual because it did not revolve around controversies related to the artistic program, choice of sculptor, or lack of funds. The Woman's Titanic Memorial Association was organized and unified from the start. It was formed within weeks of the disaster in 1912, and by 1916 had raised a total of \$46,887.16, which constituted the majority of the needed funds.³⁶ Donations came from women from all parts of the country, mostly in \$1.00 or \$5.00 increments, collected in person or by mail.³⁷ Although they had raised the necessary funds and chosen a sculptor who completed the main figure of the monument by 1916,³⁸ their program was slowed by the process of gaining official approvals for the site.

The Association met with a string of disappointments in securing their selected site near the intersection of E Street and New Hampshire Avenue. The required approvals were not forthcoming, as their congressional bill languished in various committees and commissions between February 1913, when the Association's resolution for permission to erect the *Titanic Memorial* went before both houses of Congress, and its final passage in 1922, Association members were called upon to fulfill various requirements, including approvals by the Commission of Fine Arts and the Joint Library Committee of Congress.³⁹ Hammond entreated Whitney herself, asking, "is there any influence you can bring to bear?"⁴⁰ This request underscores both the importance of Whitney's dual role as sculptor and advocate, and the women's ultimate dependence on men to complete their project. However, Whitney's influence, like any the Association members themselves could exert upon their husbands and male acquaintances within their elite social circles, made little difference.⁴¹

One further complication arose when Whitney refused to submit a design for the base, as required by the Fine Arts Commission. Whitney's secretary explained, "As the site in Washington has not yet been decided upon, it is quite impossible for Mrs. Whitney to send you the design for the base of the statue. The selection of the site does not rest entirely in her hands, therefore the delay is not her fault, and she is held up for the design of the base, until the decision has been made."⁴² As a result, the base was designed by Henry Bacon, the architect of the Lincoln Memorial.

As a letter of 1918 suggests, the women of the Association were sensing a diminishing interest in their project as time passed.⁴³ The *Titanic* disaster was fading in the public memory as they campaigned to have Whitney's sculpture put on public view in Washington.

The Woman's Titanic Memorial Association's bill was approved by the Fine Arts Commission on January 24, 1919, and by the Joint Library Committee of Congress on February 21, 1922.⁴⁴ Nine years had passed since the bill's introduction to Congress in 1913.⁴⁵ Before their memorial could be erected along the Potomac River near E Street and New Hampshire Avenue, the women faced one more hurdle: the construction of a sea wall was required to protect the sculpture's foundation.⁴⁶ In cooperating with the office of Public Buildings and Public Parks, as well as the Army Corps of Engineers, the Association

was at the mercy of government paperwork and funding as well as construction timetables, which delayed the project for nine more years. At an estimated cost of \$200,000, the construction of the sea wall was well beyond the Association's roughly \$50,000 fundraised dollars (including Whitney's \$43,000 and \$6,000 which had gone to a rubble foundation for the memorial). Finally, and fortunately, Col. U.S. Grant of the Army Corps of Engineers determined that the seawall that was necessary for the erection of the *Titanic Memorial* also was crucial for the safe construction of the new Rock Creek and Potomac Parkways.⁴⁷ The *Titanic Memorial* could finally be put in place.

On May 26, 1931, the memorial was unveiled at its original site above the banks of the Potomac River, very near the new Rock Creek Parkway.⁴⁸ Ironically, after nineteen years of toil and diligence, both Hammond and Whitney were too ill to attend the ceremonies. Nevertheless, the unveiling was well-attended by, among others, President Herbert Hoover and his wife, Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson, and U.S. Representative Robert Luce from Massachusetts, who delivered the celebratory address.

Luce's remarks seem to encapsulate the latent meaning of the memorial (and reflect the ideas presented in this article). He began by citing the survival statistics but excluding those for the Third Class passengers.⁴⁹ These are often excluded because they contradict the myth of *Titanic* chivalry. In detailing the story of the *Titanic* rescue, David Gleicher pointed out the disparities in the survival rates of the three classes. Of the women, four of 140 in First Class died that night (three refused to board lifeboats and one's death remains "unexplained"); thirteen of seventy-eight in Second Class perished; and fully one half of the 180 in Third Class died. As for the children, only one of the thirty-two in First and Second classes died compared with fifty-one of the eighty children in Third Class.⁵⁰ While more men perished than women and children, again the statistics change dramatically from class to class.

Luce in his address also downplayed any wrongdoing on the part of the officers or staff by stating, "Official inquiry here and in England disclosed slight ground for individual blame...Undoubtedly there were too few lifeboats and some of those at hand were not filled to capacity, but there were as many as the law required, and they seem to have been handled better than is often the case under such conditions."⁵¹ This "explanation" served to gloss over any unpleasantness in the *Titanic* story while upholding the idea that the men aboard this ship were entirely heroic and chivalrous, having sacrificed their lives for women and children.⁵² He went on to lament,

Thankful should we be for the proof that the noblest instincts of human nature cannot be destroyed by the baser influences of modern life...In our day, however, the spheres of men and women have been so largely merged that it may well be wondered whether true values of chivalry are not doomed to disappear...Sorry indeed will be the day, if it ever comes, when men cease to make home, and wife, and children, the chief object of their toil...⁵³

Subsequent uses of the *Titanic Memorial* continued to honor these “true values of chivalry.” The June 6, 1935, edition of the *Washington Herald* described how, at the foot of the *Titanic Memorial*, U.S. Representative Isabella Greenway of Arizona led a crowd of more than 500 in memorializing police officers and firefighters who had died in the line of duty that year.⁵⁴ As the elite women behind the monument wished to praise the heroic acts of men, so too did Representative Greenway use her elevated status to honor chivalrous males.

Each April 15, the anniversary of the sinking, a tuxedo-clad group called the Men’s Titanic Society gathers to commemorate the event. After dining on the same meal that was eaten by the First Class passengers on that fateful night, they assemble around the monument at one o’clock in the morning to “toast the courage of a group of men who died off the coast of Newfoundland in 1912.”⁵⁵ The ritual has a decidedly high toned aura, with waiters hired to keep the glasses full.⁵⁶ Fifty-seven years after Luce’s speech, the author who described this annual ritual stated that “bravery doesn’t get much notice these days, what with the general impression that nearly everybody is looking out for No. 1.”⁵⁷

Such uses of the *Titanic Memorial* show that the meaning of this memorial has remained fixed. Put forth by privileged society women, it was conceived as a public work of art that would praise the supposed chivalrous acts of 1336 men, including some of the wealthiest, most powerful men in the world. The 159 women and children who also perished, not then or now part of the elitist mythology that was subsequently created, are not honored by the *Titanic Memorial* in Washington.⁵⁸

In the century that has transpired since the sinking of the *Titanic*, chivalry has remained a contentious subject in American culture. The struggle over the meaning and value of chivalry was performed on the *Titanic Memorial* itself and throughout its history. If this memorial were to be erected in the twenty-first century, it is difficult to imagine that the above issues and debates would not similarly plague such a project. Although the alternate conception of the monument set forth by Evelyn Gurley-Kane was not realized, students of visual culture are fortunate that her unique voice was preserved in print. The message she set forth was clear and inclusive, and one that hopefully would have been heeded by twenty-first century readers and viewers. •

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Notes

1. There were 1,495 people who died in the *Titanic* disaster, including the passengers and the crew. For the basic statistics of the disaster see Philip Hind, ed., *Encyclopedia Titanica: Basic Statistics of the Disaster*, 1996-2002, <http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org>. For a more detailed analysis where the statistics are broken down by race, age, class, and sex, see David Gleicher, *The Rescue of the Third Class on the Titanic: A Revisionist History* (St. John’s, Newfoundland: International Maritime Economic History Association, 2006), 41-44.

2. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Letter to Mr. M. Worth Colwell, April 3, 1917, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 2368; hereafter, Whitney papers.
3. Dr. Joel E. Goldthwait, Letters to Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Oct. 4 and 24, 1916, Whitney Papers, reel 2368.
4. George Ruskin Phoebus, “Civilization—Physical Culture,” *Physical Culture* 3, 1900, 21-22; quoted in Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 86.
5. See for example, Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2009), 242.
6. Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), 163.
7. Kimmel, *Manhood*, 67.
8. Edward Bok, quoted in Kimmel, *Manhood*, 67.
9. The *Titanic Memorial* is often referred to as a forgotten monument. See, for example, John McKelway, “The Rambler Notes a Change Coming,” *Washington Star*, Dec. 1, 1964.
10. “Capital Constantly Being Improved to the Ideals of Its Founders,” *Washington Post*, July 17, 1932, 11.
11. Peter A. Jay, “Titanic Statue Headed for Mothballs While Search Goes on for New Site,” *Washington Post*, Jan. 6, 1966, B1. According to the Smithsonian Institution’s online inventory, the *Titanic Memorial* was installed at the current location in September 1968; see <http://www.siris-artinventories.si.edu>.
12. I was unable to find the author of these inscriptions; however, it is likely that the women in the association composed them because they are similar to quotes from them in the *Post* during the controversy over the memorial.
13. Sir Almroth E. Wright, *The Unexpurgated Case Against Woman Suffrage* (London: Constable, 1913), 19; quoted and discussed in Bederman, *Manliness*, 159.
14. Ibid.
15. Sedgwick’s views are described in George MacAdam, “Feminist Revolutionary Principle is Biological Bosh,” *New York Times*, Jan. 18, 1914, sec. 5, p. 2; quoted and discussed in Bederman, *Manliness*, 160-62.
16. Kimmel, *Manhood*, 63.
17. Gleicher, *Rescue*, xiii-xiv.
18. Kimmel, *Manhood*, 83.
19. C.S. Snyder, *Decorum: A Practical Treatise on Etiquette and Dress of the Best American Society* (Chicago: J.A. Ruth, 1877), 320; quoted in Kimmel, *Manhood*, 83.
20. Frances Wayne, “Women Must Explain Why They Abandoned Mates in Death,” *Denver Post*, April 18, 1912, 5; quoted in Steven Biel, *Down with the Old Canoe: A Cultural History of the Titanic Disaster* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 34-35.
21. “Seeks Titanic Funds,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 6, 1912, 3.
22. For reference to the divorce of Gurley-Kane, see “Genealogical Research for Joseph Lee Robinson Ancestors,” 263, www.planetnrielsen.com/joseph_lee_robinson/JLR_Research.pdf. For references to her acting career, see “Many Pay Tribute to Mrs. Howe’s Life,” *New York Times*, Nov. 13, 1910; “Miss Marion Everett Wise Bride of Mr. C.C. Glover, Jr.,” *Washington Post*, May 11, 1913, ES6; and “Services Tomorrow,” *Washington Post*, Oct. 18, 1924, 10. For Gurley-Kane’s poetry (Brown Univ. Library Collection only), see *The Homing-Call*, 1916; *The National Angelus: the Nation’s Tribute to our Boys over There*, 1918; and *Our Men Who Paid the Price*, 1919. Gurley-Kane’s father, Zenas H. Gurley, had lived in

- Washington for a time and was a former representative to the Iowa general assemblies and an Iowa State Prison warden. See "Zenas H. Gurley Dead," *Washington Post*, Dec. 23, 1912, 2.
23. "Seeks Titanic Funds," *Washington Post*, Aug. 6, 1912, 3.
 24. *Ibid.*, 3.
 25. "To Discuss Titanic Funds," *Washington Post*, Aug. 12, 1912, 10. Several weeks later, the newspaper detailed Gurley-Kane's second request that the groups unite. See "For One Titanic Fund," *Washington Post*, Aug. 29, 1912, 2.
 26. "For a Big Hospital," *Washington Post*, Sept. 23, 1912, 2. Gurley-Kane apparently remained bitter about this defeat, as evidenced by another *Post* piece she wrote herself almost a year and a half later in which she made the familiar argument for inclusion and also noted that other memorials dedicated to particular men who had died on the *Titanic* already existed, but the argument apparently fell on deaf ears. See Evelyn Gurley-Kane, "Honor for Titanic Women," *Washington Post*, Jan. 8, 1914. In 1913 the *Titanic Memorial Lighthouse* in Lower Manhattan was dedicated to all who died with the sinking of the *Titanic*, and the *Titanic Bandsmen Memorial* in New South Wales, Australia, honored the musicians who played while the ship sank. A memorial to the ship's captain, Edward Smith, located in Lichfield, Staffordshire, England was dedicated in 1914.
 27. Gurley-Kane, "Honor for Titanic Women."
 28. Natalie Harris Hammond, Letter to Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Jan. 6, 1914, Whitney Papers, reel 2368. For check payment details see Records of the Woman's Titanic Memorial Association, Library of Congress, Ac. 7124, Check Stub Book, 1912-24, and Correspondence 1914-31, hereafter WTMA.
 29. "Mrs. H.P. Whitney Wins," *New York Times*, Jan. 8, 1914, 5.
 30. These views are expressed by Whitney in "The Useless Memorial: Should We Give Mittens Instead of Medals to Soldiers?" *Arts and Decoration* (April 1920): 421.
 31. Juliana Force, *Memorial Exhibition: Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1943), 3.
 32. Whitney, "The Useless Memorial," 421.
 33. The Vanderbilts, including Whitney's husband and father-in-law, had worked on business projects with Hammond's husband, who wrote of them both fondly in his lengthy 1935 autobiography. John Hays Hammond, *The Autobiography of John Hays Hammond* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1935), 195, 489, 501-02, 520, 522, 741.
 34. "Burial Rites Today for Mrs. Hammond," *Washington Post*, June 19, 1931, 3.
 35. *Ibid.*
 36. "Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting of the WTMA," Nov. 13, 1916, WTMA, Ac. 7124, Correspondence 1914-31.
 37. Ledgers (Donor Records), WTMA, April 1912-May 1914; Subscription (payment) Card, WTMA, Ac. 7124, Correspondence 1914-31.
 38. See numerous related letters from February to April 1916, Whitney Papers, reel 2368.
 39. See Natalie Harris Hammond, Letter to the Chairman and Members of the Commission of Fine Arts, 26 June 1915; Whitney Papers, reel 2368. The 64th Congress passed a provisional bill on March 8, 1917, requiring that the U.S. government not incur any expenses for the project and that it gain approvals of the Commission of Fine Arts and the Joint Library Committee of Congress; see Cong. Rec., 64th Cong., 2nd sess., 1917, 39 Stat. 1046. Despite numerous entreaties from various Association members to members of the Library Committee and Fine Arts Commission, five years passed before the needed approvals were obtained. See for example, "Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting of the WTMA," 13 November 1916, WTMA, Ac. 7124, Correspondence 1914-31; Natalie Harris Hammond, Letter to Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 9 September 1916, Whitney Papers, reel 2368.
 40. Natalie Harris Hammond, Letter to Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 9 September 1916, Whitney Papers, reel 2368.
 41. See, for example letters exchanged between Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and U.S. Grant, III, 6 December 1929 and 7 January 1930, Whitney Papers, reel 2368. Such documents reveal that, although the bill was initially approved by Congress, it was not clear that it would gain approvals of the Fine Arts Commission or the Joint Library Committee.
 42. Secretary of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (no name listed), Letter to Mrs. Meeker, 14 October 1916, Whitney Papers, reel 2368.
 43. Mary C. Chew, Letter to Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 5 August 1918, Whitney Papers, reel 2368.
 44. *Report of the Chief of Engineers, U.S. Army, Annual Reports, War Department*, 68th Cong., 1st sess., 1923, H. Doc. 60, 21.
 45. Letters during this long approval process manifest the determination of the women of the association, but also the complexity of the project. In 1918, Hammond wrote to Whitney that "already by death and withdrawals from office we have lost twelve strong supporters [in congress!]" She also stated that "The acceptance of your design is still not legal, because the monument must be considered with completed setting before being voted on by the Fine Arts Committee. Our bill also cannot pass until the Fine Arts Committee have voted to accept your design. So you see, we are still up in the air." See Natalie Harris Hammond, Letter to Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 20 June 1918, Whitney Papers, reel 2368.
 46. "Titanic Memorial Start Soon Seen," *Washington Evening Star*, June 4, 1929. See also U.S. Grant, III, Letter to Mr. E.J. Stellwegen, 19 December 1925, WTMA Ac. 7124, Correspondence 1914-31.
 47. For estimated dollar amounts of the Woman's Titanic Memorial Association, costs of the foundation and sea wall, and testimony of Hammond, Grant and the Subcommittee, see Subcommittee of House Committee on Appropriations, *District of Columbia Appropriations Bill*, 69th Cong., 2nd sess., 1928, 712-13.
 48. Program of Exercises Attending the Unveiling of the Titanic Memorial, event program, May 26, 1931, Washingtoniana Division, Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library, Washington, DC.
 49. Robert Luce, "Address at the Unveiling of the Titanic Memorial, Washington, May 26, 1931," WTMA, Ac. 7124, Correspondence 1914-31, 1.
 50. Gleicher, *Rescue*, xvi-xvii
 51. Robert Luce, "Address at the Unveiling of the Titanic Memorial, Washington, May 26, 1931," WTMA, Ac. 7124, Correspondence 1914-31, 1.
 52. Luce, 2.
 53. *Ibid.*, 3 (incorrectly numbered as 2).
 54. "High Tribute is Paid to Peace-Time Heroes: Titanic Memorial Scene of Honor for Dead Police and Firemen," *Washington Herald*, 6 June 1935.
 55. William R. MacKaye, "J Street," *Washington Post*, 8 May 1988, SM17.
 56. *Ibid.*
 57. *Ibid.*
 58. Hind, ed., *Encyclopedia Titanica: Basic Statistics of the Disaster, 1996-2002*, <http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org>. Gleicher, *Rescue*, xvi-xvii.

JUANITA MCNEELY

ART AND LIFE ENTWINED

By Sharyn M. Finnegan



Fig. 1. Juanita McNeely, *Woman's Psyche* (1968), oil on linen, 146" x 126". Collection the artist.

New York feminist artist Juanita McNeely (b.1936) lives to paint. Her focus on the physicality of the human figure, often herself, with the figure as an active agent in interiorized expressionist images, is "both a response to and the starkest expression of women's burgeoning consciousness of their sexuality," according to April Kingsley.¹ While this is central to McNeely's work, she feels life, with *all* its manifestations, must be embraced, not avoided "to illuminate the act of living, the facing of death and, in between, the emotion and movement of life's journey."² No one paints the body like she does or with more imagination—gravity- and anatomy-defying, yet whole and completely believable with every muscle articulated. She trained herself to observe people and the way they move in detail. The inspiring personal journey of this artist has given shape to her intimately

entwined art and life. She has the Gaelic gift of storytelling both verbally and visually, and life gave her quite a story.

McNeely's most powerful work tells a survivor's tale in unflinching images of suffering, sometimes involving female genitalia emitting blood, still taboo in a culture that is often death denying. Even though violence suffuses popular media such as television and film, it is generally stylized and unreal, rarely dealing with truly painful consequences. This artist's candid and provocative work creates disquiet, addressing familiar wounds that need attending to.

Growing up in St. Louis, Missouri, during a time when women were supposed to have a family and settle down, McNeely wanted instead to go to art school. Winning an art scholarship for her first oil painting at fifteen convinced her she was an artist, and the basement of her family's home

became an art studio. It was also at that time that her health problems began. She lost a year of high school hospitalized with a terrifying case of excessive bleeding that, because of her young age, was perhaps more formative than later problems.

At the St. Louis School of Fine Arts at Washington University, one of McNeely's first teachers was Werner Drewes, one of several German expatriates, and in keeping with their Bauhaus training, the program was demanding, with classes six days and two nights a week. McNeely loved it. Drewes dressed in hand-woven fabrics made by his wife, Margaret Schrobsdorf, a textile artist, and lived in a home filled with art. Beyond exemplifying the sort of life McNeely longed for, Drewes contributed to her strong sense of composition. He was a strict, unrelenting taskmaster, "making my life hell with ruling pens."³ At the same time, he was supportive and encouraging; he made her believe that her strongly expressionistic work was valuable by asking her to trade paintings with him.

During her first year of studies, McNeely contracted cancer and was given a prognosis of three to six months to live. When her doctors recommended she do whatever made her happy, she went back to art school. She survived, but "that was the beginning of what really formed me as someone who spoke about the things that are not necessarily pleasant, on canvas, things that perhaps most people even feel uncomfortable about looking at, much less talking about."⁴ It was the beginning of the bond between her work and her life experiences.

McNeely's intuitive feeling for the figure, evident since childhood, led her during her sophomore year to ask if she could stop working from the model and work instead "from my head." She found looking at models painful, as they appeared to her "to have lost themselves." The professors granted her a two-month trial period, and she never used a model again. It seemed to set her free and was also the beginning of her multipanel works. Her understanding of the figure comes from her keen experience of her own body, enhanced by her quick grasp of anatomy and a strong visual memory that she has honed over time.

During breaks between classes, she learned a great deal walking around in the St. Louis Art Museum galleries. The works of Paul Gauguin became a primary influence: she found his paintings so beautiful, "they could make me cry, and it was a struggle not to be overwhelmed by them." From Matisse she learned how to draw and use underpainting to enrich color, and from Max Beckmann, in one of the largest collections of his work, she discovered how to find a visual vocabulary that could be an artist's own. She also found his surfaces and color exquisite, looking quickly done even when quite reworked. It was a standard she made her own.

Another valuable lesson for this innate feminist was administered by a male anatomy teacher, who took her aside after class, and with no preface, said, "Look, you will never make it as an artist...because you're too skinny and you don't look like a good fuck."⁵ McNeely thought then and now, "Best lesson I ever learned. The reality was that a woman was not looked at as anything but a supporter, a lover, a model, and she certainly wouldn't stay with art, regardless of talent. I

catalogued it at the back of my head and learned everything that they could teach me, and it was a lot."⁶ Early on, she decided that obstacles would not deter her and, if anything, they would only spur her on.

After a hiatus, including a long stay in Mexico, McNeely went to graduate school at Southern Illinois University, where she had the electrifying experience of doing a happening with Allan Kaprow, who clearly "got" her work. Their very first conversation seemed like a continuation of one they'd had before. He soon told McNeely, "You're a New Yorker, go..."⁷ Although not quite ready for that, she knew it was true, that being around people whose lives are about art, music, and literature, as well as living near great museums was important for her. McNeely's next move was to Chicago, where, after convincing The Chicago Art Institute administration that they'd never find a better teacher, they eventually gave her a teaching job and the chance to continue her professional career with solo and group shows. She loved teaching, finding it a mutual learning experience, and it was the beginning of a twenty-five year avocation. "As you explain to students, you are constantly checking your perceptions, asking yourself, 'Is that what I really think?'"⁸ With figure drawing, she fostered in them the same confidence and visual memory she valued, having the model move around the studio while the students drew the figure in motion. After a year and a half in Chicago, she married and followed her husband to Western Illinois University. While teaching there, she had an epiphany: she *had* to go to New York. So in 1967, she left for that city, with her husband following her this time.

Settling into a sixth-floor walkup studio in the East Village, McNeely experienced the area as lovely and volatile. She was painting female-oriented sexuality, from a woman's point of view, a subject with little precedent then. *Woman's Psyche* (1968; Fig. 1), a four panel work, is full of images that would recur over her entire career, expressing her tragic vision of woman. It deals with the violence of birth, the sexuality that is part of a woman's life and her monthly bleeding, addressing the primitive myths that surround these events in our society. Masks on some of the women emphasize their denial of these realities. The images display pain and desperation because these realities are neither acknowledged nor, for that matter, honored. She was setting out all the themes she would develop and honor in the coming decades. Blood was already a constant in her work, representative of both life and death, which she deals with simultaneously here. One panel shows a swollen woman giving birth to a blue baby, supporting herself with two black, biomorphic phallic symbols that tower over her head. Caught by the foot, it makes the lack of choice clear.

As she made the rounds of the galleries with her slides, the director at Knoedler Gallery found the work strong, and McNeely had to repeat "It's mine" three times before he was convinced the work could be by a woman. Suddenly, though, they were not so interested—at this time female artists represented barely two percent of exhibiting artists in New York galleries.

Over the next few years, McNeely moved away from her German-influenced rawness and dark palette, deciding that



Fig. 2. Juanita McNeely, *Chameleon* (1970), oil on linen, 70" x 70". Collection the artist.

painful images needed to be more "seductive" on the canvas, with beautiful color and a smoother surface. The imagery still came out of her experience, but now the central figure was more easily identified as the artist herself. The female nude had become personal with Paula Modersohn-Becker's self portraits, and was pushed further by Frida Kahlo to express her pain. Although unaware of Kahlo's work at this time, McNeely entered that tradition, creating active figures that were not only self-portraits but represented everywoman. *Chameleon* (1970; Fig.2) shows the artist lying stomach down, on a diagonally placed bed seen from above, fully occupying the canvas, in a radical departure from the Western tradition of the reclining female nude. Her turned head looks directly out at the viewer with alert cat-like eyes, fully aware of our gaze. Her bow-legs are spread, with one foot twisting inward in a bone crunching way, toes and fingers splayed. The contrasting pale sheets and dark green blanket with red blood emitting from her mouth swirl beneath her, graphically bringing out the vibrant, fully lit flesh tones. Her lover may have just left or be approaching, but this is no sweetly waiting woman. Her look challenges, while her active feet could propel her up at any moment. The artist seems to be saying that sex for a man may be about pleasure, but this is one woman who knows it is more complex, even as she is full of passion.

Around this time, McNeely found she had another tumor, and in the hospital, the doctors discovered that she was

pregnant. Abortion was then illegal, which inhibited their treatment of her. What followed was a journey to two hospitals in two states and numerous meetings among (all male) doctors trying to decide what course to take. She nearly died in the process before she was given the necessary surgeries. (One doctor presumed that she would prefer to save the child than to live.) The experience increased her awareness of how much control men had over the lives of women, and it fed her feminism. McNeely would express this frustration through her painting. In 1969 she was one of the first artists to take on the taboo abortion issue in a nine-panel painting, *Is It Real? Yes, It Is!*, a strong but violent work.

Also around this time McNeely moved to Westbeth, a new housing project for artists in the West Village. It was her kind of place, with a mix of writers, visual artists, musicians, dancers, and choreographers. During Westbeth's early years, there were four galleries on the ground floor where the visual artists could take turns showing their work. These simultaneous solo exhibits yielded friendships with other painters as well as attention from the *New York Times*. Hilton Kramer noted "...her energy and the reach of her imagination,"⁸ and Carter

Ratcliffe in ARTnews, describing *Is it Real? Yes, it Is!*, wrote vividly of her "...themes of birth and death, sex and pain, are followed across nine canvases, melting and distorting shapes, conjuring up mythical and ritual objects from bedroom and delivery room procedure...at its climax...as if terror were felt in a very specific personage."⁹

In 1971 came a call for the first open feminist art exhibit, produced by a member of the Redstocking Artists group, Marjorie Kramer, at Museum, a temporary space at 729 Broadway. The participation fee to cover expenses was \$1.50. McNeely carried in the four large panels of *Woman's Psyche*, with its arresting subject matter, and hung it on the wall herself. "I felt immediate love and at home," she said. "We women artists were no longer alone." Artists that participated included Alice Neel, Faith Ringgold, and over one hundred others. The lack of any hierarchy and the supportive community among the women artists would set the tone for the next decade of her life. She went to meetings of the Women Artists in Revolution (W.A.R.), Redstockings and other groups, believing that when women were able to be fulfilled, men would be much freer too.

Through her feminist friendships, McNeely became involved in the Figurative Alliance, an organization of figurative artists that met for panels and discussion Friday nights on the Lower East Side. She, Marjorie Kramer and Pat Mainardi, outraged at how little time was given to the women artists in the group,

proposed a women's panel on women artists' relationship to the male tradition of the nude, with McNeely as chair. She was tall and imposing, with a manner that didn't brook crossing. Despite this, there was a scramble to get the paintings hung around the room because the men did not want them up. McNeely said that, when the dialogue started:

If they'd had tacks, they would have thrown tacks at us. It was incredible. On the other hand, we had Alice Neel, sitting in those platypus shoes, looking like your grandmother. The only thing she didn't do was knit, because that's how she looked. But she had a mouth on her...Aristodemis Kaldis said the trouble with we women was that we didn't have any balls and we wanted them. Neel immediately responded, "Oh but dear, we do. We just carry them higher up and they're larger." That brought down the house and there wasn't a bitter or divisive moment from that point.

That was the beginning of the full participation of the women artists in those gatherings.

McNeely also joined an artists' cooperative, the Prince Street Gallery, in the then industrial section of SoHo, where she continued to express the "freedom to say what I had to say as a woman artist."¹⁰ Only in retrospect did she realize how absolutely crucial it was for her as a young artist to have this freedom to paint what she wanted, with the support of her fellow artists. She did not have to worry about sales or whether her work was "too difficult" for the public. The rare combination of independence and the opportunity to show anything she wanted was galvanizing. During the 1970s she had six solo exhibitions at the Prince Street Gallery, each with all new work, as well as three shows elsewhere. (Some members of that gallery became close friends, including this writer.)

"An amazing range of people came into our storefront gallery—factory workers from that neighborhood who might ask first if there was an admission charge, as well as wonderful critics like Lawrence Alloway, who wrote about the artists' work without regard to gallery status or gender. The exposure was great, and critical acknowledgment was key."¹¹ Alloway wrote, in one of her favorite reviews, "Juanita McNeely pursues an iconography in which she expresses the autonomy of fear and pain in creatures caught in extreme situations. She paints the human body like a stranded starfish dying in the sun."¹² Her final involvement in the cooperative gallery world was with SOHO20 in the early 1980s.

McNeely's subject matter led to her participation in *Fight Censorship*, a group formed in 1973 by Anita Steckel with other women artists who felt their work was being misunderstood because they were using the body in erotic, personal, or sexual art work from a woman's point of view. The erotic tradition had always been about the power of men over women, where the female's sexual experience is one of surrender. There was a new language of the body that critics and the public did not know how to process. McNeely, along with Judith Bernstein, Louise Bourgeois, Marty Edleheidt, Eunice Golden, Anne Sharp, Joan Semmel, and Hannah Wilke, found that often their



Fig. 3. Juanita McNeely, *Woman* (1975), cut paper, 40" x 30". Collection the artist.



Fig. 4. Juanita McNeely, *Birth* (1975), cut paper, 25" x 23". Collection the artist.



Fig.5. Juanita McNeely, *Moving Through* (detail) (1975), oil on linen, 8' x 34'. Collection the artist.

work was tagged as erotic or pornographic, which was not at all their intention. (When McNeely exhibited prints in a group show at a Long Island gallery, the works ended up in a closet, to be seen only by request.) These women artists wanted to take control over the way their work was presented in the media in a more active way, make it clear that theirs was a new perspective—a woman's viewpoint—but it was still about the art. They lectured and showed work together at New York University, School of Visual Arts, and The New School and participated in discussions on local television in an effort to change the discourse. For McNeely the attention and documentation helped to clarify what she was doing.

Describing an "Artists Talk on Art" panel in March 1976, where McNeely was a participant, Sharon Wybrants reported that

McNeely described a process in which she deals very consciously with her subject matter. She starts with a specific aspect of herself or a specific state of feeling in mind. Then she attempts to strip the cliché elements from the image. At this point she starts to play with the plastic qualities of the painting until she can identify totally and freshly with it.¹³

This process still forms the basis of McNeely's work. On the technical side, she starts with turpentine, a rag, and color on the brush, drawing and painting at the same time, wiping and moving and shifting continuously until the underpainting emerges. The heart of McNeely's practice is keeping it fresh-looking, so that even with constant changes within a piece, it never looks over-painted. Sometimes she lays the canvas flat on the floor, puts a little water on it and then drops oil paint into it, controlling it by blotting with a paper towel. The process of printmaking, especially monoprints—flicking, drawing, wiping with a cloth—enhanced her painting technique in a freeing way.

Along with prints and paintings on canvas, McNeely has also exhibited paintings on ceramics and cut paper work. These media in particular relate to working the surface in a different way. When at times, she would reach a point in her work on canvas where she felt she needed "to go someplace else," these other media would "shake up her mind and provoke new ways of dealing with the figure." Working on the round surface of a vase or drawing a line with scissors moving through paper (with no preliminary drawing) would suggest new forms to the artist. In 1975, the challenge of the cut paper work led her to create a new mode for this medium. She called it "exercises of the mind," seeing how many cuts she could make to get the imagery without the piece collapsing onto the floor. In these shadow-and-light drawings in space, the figure sits out from the surface, becoming almost a three-dimensional shadow-box paper hanging, quite

fragile. These paper works contributed to the stripping down of her compositions. The figures, such as *Woman* (1975; Fig. 3) were now white and alone on a white ground, everything else finally taken away. *Birth* (1975; Fig. 4) is held together by just a few inches of uncut paper around the four sides. A pear shaped portrait of a vagina giving birth to a woman giving birth to a baby utilizes the shadows to project the woman's legs and the small head and arm emerging towards us. It is an image of wholeness and connectivity, both within the medium and psychically. One reviewer wrote: "This sensual and macabre imagery, in combination with the white-on-white delicacy of these works, results in a technical tour de force."¹⁴ The images are both contained, barely, and released, as the light comes through the line and the bas-relief of the figure casts shadows. *Birth* most purely expresses the artist's desire for movement alone to show emotion.

The cut-paper images of figures floating seemingly with no support were of a piece with the artist's paintings that year, about what she was experiencing with a new bout of cancer, her last and the most difficult to beat. She went through a process of lightening her life, discarding possessions, dressing in white, simplifying, as if this lighter self could then fly through this illness. Amidst images of anger and pain, as in *Moving Through* (1975; Fig. 5 [detail]) is a strong woman

leaping in front of a beautifully shadowed blue and violet wall. An angled reflection of a window lined with lush plants fills the panel with light. This figure's connection with the other panels lies in the mysterious deep red veils on her chest and pubic area. She bears the marks of the experiences she flies above. The last panel, completely white, also shows a lone woman leaping. She is paradoxically aloft and strong, with no visible means of support.

In the 1970s, McNeely met Jeremy Lebenshon, a sculptor, writer, set designer and professor of art, who would become her second husband. Lebenshon was involved in the Open Theater with Joe and Shami Chaikin and the playwright Jean-Claude van Itallie, and McNeely felt they were doing on the stage what she was doing on canvas: working spontaneously to create work collectively that was full of movement and vibrancy. Dealing with emotions in a direct way, they staged their work in a style that was alive and expressionistic.

She and Lebenshon moved to France in 1982 for six months when McNeely had a teaching sabbatical—she painted while he made sculpture. Unfortunately, their stay ended when McNeely damaged her spinal cord when she bent over to shake hands with a small boy and tripped on an enthusiastic puppy. Over the years, radiation treatments had weakened her body, making her fall quite serious. After returning to New York, she was forced to use a wheelchair, and her recuperation required her to lessen her intense involvement in both feminist and artist collaborative communities¹⁵ and to reduce her teaching schedule. Painting, always a priority, now consumed her energy. Despite doctor's orders, and with Lebenshon's help, she continued working on large canvases—meeting each new challenge as it came.

Many of her paintings celebrated “outsiders.” One series of portraits from memory included French prostitutes and flamboyant characters from Greenwich Village and New York. Her color became jewel-like as she allowed herself to enjoy the act of painting, rather than being caught up in more personal subject matter. Portrayed with their most salient characteristics quite prominent, each personage is unique. Admittedly, she is drawn to people unafraid of expressing who they are, often people trembling on the edge. Her encounter with them can be minimal, as in *Tea at B. Altman's Palm Room* (1983; Fig. 6). A mother and a son are dressed fabulously for their weekly ritual of tea: he in a white suit and spats with a red toupee on top of his white curls, and she, belying her age, dressed in a frilly pink summer dress and gloves with a wide sunhat bedecked with flowers. He gently holds up a teacup to her lips while she holds a large stuffed animal with a matching dress. The colors are delicate, light and frothy—shades of pink, pale orange and white, with a spring green pattern behind them representing the palms. The surface movement is like the flutter of butterfly wings. The reality and the fantasy of this odd couple is brought to life. McNeely's power of visual memorization combines with her originality and emotional content to create human imagery of extraordinary energy and life.

Not until a few years after the accident in France did that experience become subject matter for McNeely. Beginning in 1985 she dealt with this life-altering moment in *Tryscadeckatick* (1985-86; Pl. 12 [detail]); her largest work, at 6' x 52' and



Fig. 6. Juanita McNeely, *Tea at B. Altman's Palm Room* (1983), oil on linen, 72" x 44". Collection the artist.

comprising thirteen panels, she worked on all the panels at the same time over a period of one year, wrapping them around her entire living space. It is a masterwork by an indomitable spirit, a bridge between her early and later work where she learned again to articulate the nude freely, as her own body no longer exemplified what a body could do. Despite the restrictions of the wheelchair, her body became flexible and moved across her large canvases. Small canvases, says McNeely, seem “impossible”—she needs the large arena for this sense of real physical movement. The large size, she says, enables viewers to imagine themselves walking into the worlds she creates—and for this reason she requires her work to be hung low. The panel paintings tell a story, made with color, form, and content, as the viewer moves from panel to panel.

Tryscadeckatick is organized rhythmically, square panels flanked by vertical panels, with a pulse of dark cypresses or diagonal black poles marching through some of the backgrounds, piercing the space around lighter, brighter human and animal figures in the foreground. Strong contrasts and an open, continuous composition tie the panels together with movement, a constant throughout. Human figures swing



Fig. 7. Juanita McNeely, *Tryscadeckatick, Ape* (detail) (1985-86), oil on linen, 6' x 52'. Collection the artist.



Fig. 8. Juanita McNeely, *I Saw* (2009), oil on linen, 40" x 42". Collection the artist.

and leap freely; a partially dismembered body hangs from a strap by the leg while another screaming figure spins on a disc. In the last panel, the open mouth of an ape fills the vertical canvas in what appears to be a bloodcurdling scream (Fig. 7). More drips and splashes heighten the energy of the paint as McNeely felt the need "to make the ugly and the terrible beautiful for myself." The delectable violet and turquoise hues and luminous flesh do this.

In the late 1990s, more complex compositions emerged, filling the canvas, often depicting flooded interiors with the figure perched precariously on a ladder or swing. Trapped in the studio by now, her experience of being closed in is expressed clearly in these paintings. Increasingly a more symbolic context emerged, distilling reality and making the statement fresh. She continually strove for rich surfaces and color that sings, sometimes with a clashing chromatic range, as is often the artillery of expressionist painters of difficult work. *Ladder* (1999; Pl. 13) in her *Window Series* shows a female figure falling towards the water below, surrounded by an enclosing room held up by a metronome-column. Blues and greens with dark shadows in the background help bring the figure forward. Tilted black ladders and lattices in the foreground frame and contain her as she floats in mid-air. Through a push-pull dynamic, McNeely is dealing with fears and nightmares that many of us have and are not easy to face.



Fig. 9. Juanita McNeely, *Free Figure Series: Life* (2009), oil on linen, 44" x 50". Collection the artist.

McNeely's activism took a new turn when she became a spokeswoman for Very Special Arts, founded in Washington, D.C., by Jean Kennedy Smith and internationally by a committee of ambassadors' wives. McNeely participated as a judge in their shows, including the White House 200th Anniversary Art Exhibition in 1992. The experience was inspiring for the artist—an opportunity to take part in an international community, to meet people from different cultures for the purpose of broadening the exposure of all artists, disabled or able bodied. Kara Kennedy filmed the artist in her studio for a PBS special on the organization.¹⁶

Recently, in more daringly executed works, McNeely has returned to simpler compositions, with canvases dominated by washes of color and masterful drawing for a dynamic effect. These works, done with a feeling of speed and confidence, have great spirituality, as in *I Saw* (2009; Fig. 8), a work sparked by the death of friends. A large monkey seems propelled backwards, as if recoiling from something seen off canvas; open mouthed, its hunched shoulders are pulled back by long arms between extended tapered, diagonal legs. This large sienna-tinted C-shape vibrates on a canvas still largely white, surrounded by rapid, emanating strokes and radiant cerulean streaks. Animals are subject matter McNeely finds powerful, and she often devotes entire canvases to them as metaphors for the inexpressible aspects of our human experiences. They can be put into positions that would be either too brutal or raw for a human, yet they allow powerful, primal emotions to be expressed.

Viewers find McNeely's work either violent or exciting; there seems to be little in between. Her simplified recent work still contains fantastic, acrobatic, leaping, struggling figures, with strong physicality everywhere. This is how she reaches ultimate transcendence. "My goal is painting. I'm in love with painting and with the imagery and with what you see and feel."¹⁷ She directly addresses this in the painting *Life* (2009; Fig. 9) from her Free Figure Series, a thinly painted image of the nude artist, seen from the back, with her hands madly smearing red paint or, more likely, blood, onto the canvas within the canvas. Vibrating lines around the torso and her swirling hair make the movement vivid. *Life* succinctly expresses what Juanita McNeely has in fact been doing for fifty years: becoming one with her painting. Says the artist, "If you lined up all my work, you'd have my life." •

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Notes

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4. Juanita McNeely, Video interview with Kate Leonard, New York City, December 2006.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Hilton Kramer, Review, *New York Times*, (October 31, 1971): D21.
9. Carter Ratcliffe, Review, *ARTnews*, (February, 1971): 23.
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11. Ibid.
12. Lawrence Alloway, Review, *The Nation* (April 22, 1978): 486.
13. Sharon Wybrants, "Painting Oneself," *Women Artists Newsletter*, (May 1976): 2.
14. Madeleine Burnside, NY Reviews, *ARTnews*, (Summer 1978): 203.
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16. Kara Kennedy, "A Very Special Arts Story—Freedom of Expression," Very Special Arts Production, Washington, D.C., October 25, 1992.
17. McNeely, Video interview, Kate Leonard.

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Fig. 1. Adrian Piper, *Catalysis IV* (1971), photography by Rosemary Mayer, one of five 16" x 16" black and white photographs. Generali Foundation Collection, Vienna.

Adrian Piper: Race, Gender, and Embodiment

by John P. Bowles
Duke University Press, 2011

Reviewed by Stacy E. Schultz

Though Adrian Piper's work is well known within the African American and feminist art communities, it is John Bowles's assertion that the artist's stylistic evolution as it relates to her philosophical interests and emerging political consciousness deserves greater evaluation, which is exactly what this study provides. In tracing the development of her work between 1965 and 1975, and making contemporary connections between the worlds of Conceptual Art, Minimalism, feminism, the Vietnam controversy, and the Black Power movement, Bowles situates Piper's artistic production at the center of significant crossroads. Her challenge to find a place for herself as a black woman torn between racial and gender identifications in the New York art world was also affecting other black women artists. However, because of Piper's interest in language, as opposed to African and/or feminine craft, her path to negotiating an artistic self took a particular direction. Piper's appearance played a significant role in this regard, a point

Bowles emphasizes with a compelling analysis focused on a specific body of work. Slender and light-skinned, Piper was often mistaken for white and became aware at an early age of the problematic nature of her appearance.

Piper first gravitated toward the neutrality of Minimalism and Conceptual Art as a way to de-emphasize both her race and gender. Spelling her first name in the masculine form, as opposed to Adrienne, which she claimed in high school, provided a temporary solution, as viewers and critics read her work as being produced by a man (a position she would later explore in the *Mythic Being* series). Also, her close identification with Sol LeWitt, enabled her to understand the allure of the abstract "construction" that pointed away from the artist's identity and the value of the concrete art object. She learned to prioritize ideas and divorce herself from a physical connection to the artwork. Still, once they met her in person, many critics, dealers, and other artists responded differently to her work, as both race and gender would shift their reception.

In the acknowledgements, Bowles establishes a guiding principle that serves to organize his analysis of specific work during the late 1960s and early 1970s. For him, the question: How do we accept responsibility for the world in which we live? (xi) underlies Piper's development throughout this crucial initial period as it encompasses three key themes: race, gender, and embodiment. The preliminary attraction to the forms of Conceptual Art, Piper's synthesis of it as a model in relation to a crisis of individuality, and her increasing physical awareness of herself, are detailed in the first two chapters. "Section 1: 1965-1970: The Paradox of the Black Woman Conceptual Artist" evolves in a complex manner as Piper grappled with reception and self-definition. Over time, she understood that physical presence, and subsequently the problems of objectivity versus subjectivity, had to enter her work. "Section 2: 1970-1975: Personal Politics and Performance Art" addresses the performative experiments and series in which she tackles these issues.

In Chapter 1, Bowles's analysis connects Piper's direct experiences to Anna

Chave's discussion of Minimalism in her 2000 *Art Bulletin* article, "Minimalism and Biography." Anonymity is identified as a masculine attribute (38), and by extension, the promise of universalism offered by Conceptual Art would short-circuit once Piper realized how differently the work and the artist are received. Also significant was Conceptual Art's connection with the imagination as opposed to the physical objects of Minimalism. Chapter 2 focuses on how Minimalism's prioritization of the viewer in investigating the material conditions of perception expanded the possibilities of making art from any "material," including ideas (69). Bowles positions LeWitt's *46 3-Part Variation on 3 Different Kinds of Cubes* of 1967 as a critical departure point for Piper, prompting her to investigate scale, scope, and systems in a series of map and model projects that would lead to her *Hypothesis* series. Bowles interprets the work as a feminist critique of Minimalism's universalist ideals through the integration of Piper's burgeoning political self-consciousness.

In Section 2 Bowles shifts to works that feature Piper's body, with separate chapters devoted to three series: *Catalysis* (1970-1971), *Food for the Spirit* (1971), and *Mythic Being* (1973-1975). Chapter 3 contextualizes the year 1970 in relation to art and activism, citing specific historical circumstances and artists' responses to the Vietnam war and Civil Rights struggle. Piper's increasing engagement with the ideas of Immanuel Kant, such as the mind/body divide, highlight noteworthy differences in her viewing of the Other, and of herself as an African American woman. In response, her *Untitled Performance for Max's Kansas City* (1970) set the stage for the further analyses of presence in later series (discussed in the following chapters).

Catalysis consisted of a series of experiments involving public perceptions of Piper's body. The word "catalysis" describes a chemical reaction caused by a catalytic agent that remains unchanged, and Piper viewed her audience's reaction as the unaffected agent (181). Circulating around New York City, Piper moved out of the gallery/museum space to test the five senses of onlookers in relation to her physical body. *Catalysis IV* (1971; Fig. 1)

took her onto the city buses, although *Catalysis VII* and *IX*, as discussed by Bowles, were the most instrumental to Piper's conscious evolution as a woman artist of color. These pieces, which address gender and racial perception by viewers on the subway (general public) and in a museum (cultural elite), intersect with class dynamics in unique and unanticipated ways. The manipulation/degradation of her body with bubble gum or a putrid mixture of chemicals was still read as sexual, whether or not Piper was provocatively dressed.

Piper engaged in an ongoing dialogue about her pieces in both the general New York press and in art journals. In *Food for the Spirit* (discussed in Chapter 5), as part of a private loft performance Piper photographed herself with a Brownie camera while looking in a mirror as she experienced physical and spiritual changes over a two-month period of juice and water fasting, yoga, and reading Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. In a graduate course paper on Kant at the City University of New York (then a significant site of student political protest), Piper revealed that the intensity of the intellectual, spiritual, and bodily experience threatened her sense of self and reality: perhaps she would transcend embodiment. She also wrote about the experience years later, and details as to how the series morphed to either include or not include nude images of Piper requires a close reading of both the text and endnotes to help clarify the multiple manifestations of this work. Bowles also reproduces several images from the series that are part of a notebook, one of which includes the now infamous nude photo of Piper paired with a page from Kant's *Critique*, with her handwritten notes in the margins.

The nude image in isolation has been written about extensively by African American artists such as Lorraine O'Grady, feminist artists such as Joanna Frueh, and the performance-art historian Amelia Jones. Bowles relates their commentary to Piper's larger search for embodiment. He critiques Jones's framing of Piper as "a black woman who could pass for white, and a philosopher who doesn't 'look like one'" (211), and emphasizes the decisive

cropping and segregation of the image as problematic. However, the fact that Piper had a modeling background, is a vegetarian, and continues to practice yoga should be discussed more fully in this chapter, even if the project was deemed by Piper to be ultimately unsuccessful. This point becomes even clearer when the nude image is considered in relation to Piper's "Notes on the Mythic Being, I: March 1974" and *Talking to Myself: The Ongoing Autobiography of an Art Object* (1974-75), since the Mythic Being series forms the last part of Bowles's discussion.¹

Chapter 6, "Acting Like a Man": The Mythic Being and Black Feminism," at the end of Section 2, is one of the strongest chapters in the book, and here Bowles closes on a truly exemplary note. An extensive examination of the literature on the Mythic Being series is featured. Several elements of the series have long been considered problematic, particularly by feminist writers. Why did Piper choose to become a man? Was this not counter-productive to the goals of the feminist movement? What Bowles so adeptly brings to light is how differently African American men and women would have read public space at the time of the series' creation, saying that "Piper's Mythic Being performances interrogate the silence surrounding the sexuality of black women at the same time that her project embraces the sometimes paradoxical possibilities for expression" (233). He reads the series as a black feminist parody of the predatory, hypersexual African American male and as a way for Piper to access Black Power.

Bowles then proceeds to review the various stereotypes that have evolved as part of the 1970s cultural milieu, particularly Michele Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (1979). He introduces the archetype of the bulldagger, a masculine black female Blues figure of the 1920s and 1930s that Anne Stavney describes as neither male nor female, unhinging essentialist concepts of sexuality and gender,² as the most effective position from which to analyze Piper's progressive body of work between 1970 and 1975. The bulldagger refuses to pass, breaking down Jones's assessment. Piper is not attempting to deceive anyone in a

desperate attempt to assimilate (240). Thus, the Mythic Being series constitutes a unique attempt to investigate what it meant to be a black woman in the early 1970s. In gauging public response and contemporary politics, Piper became physically aware of the problems of both race and gender simultaneously. In concluding his study, Bowles cites Josephine Withers to sum up Piper's performative strategy. Performance in public spaces became a tool "to examine and reflect back the barriers that surrounded her and, I would add, surround all of us,"³ challenging audiences to rethink essentialism (260).

With a well-organized index and bibliography, this monograph will be useful for specialists in contemporary African American art. An examination of Piper's sophisticated work and writing would make a challenging graduate seminar for students of art history or ethnic/women's studies. •

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Notes

1. The excerpt that appears in both publications reads as follows: "During that month, the mantra and the autobiographical situation which provokes it become an object of meditation for me. I repeat it, re-experience it, examine and analyze it, infuse myself with it until I have wrung it of personal meaning and significance. It becomes an object for me to contemplate and simultaneously loses its status as an element in my own personality or subjecthood.... The experience of the Mythic Being thus becomes part of public history, and is no longer a part of my own." The mantra Piper mentions is "I asked my mother to stop buying crackers, cookies, and things but she does so anyway and says they're for her, even though I always eat them. And so I've decided to fast." Though food and fasting are not the overall focus of Bowles's examination, the fact that they are mentioned in *Food for the Spirit* and *Mythic Being* does warrant further investigation.
2. Bowles parallels Piper's practice to Anne Stavney's discussion in "Cross-Dressing Harlem, Re-Dressing Race," *Women's Studies* 28, no. 2 (March 1999): 127-56.
3. Josephine Withers, letter, *Women Artists News* 12, no. 4-5 (Fall-Winter 1987): 58.

When Marina Abramović Dies: A Biography

by James Westcott,
MIT Press, 2010

Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present

edited Klaus Biesenbach, essays by
Arthur C. Danto, Chrissie Iles, *et al.*
Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2010

Reviewed by Elizabeth Otto

Marina Abramović's (b. 1946) performances are legendary. Their daring has pushed the artist and her audiences to many brinks—violent actions, contradictory emotions, new perceptions, and alternative forms of consciousness. Drawing on powerful imagery and ideas from an array of religions and taking the body as a base unit for inquiry into human existence, Abramović's works provoke discussions relating to the sacred and the profane within us all, the fundamental qualities of human interaction, the purpose of self denial, the apprehension of the pain of others, the universality of experiences, and the location of the border between art and life, to name a few. Her re-performances of other artists' works and other performers' recreations of hers have brought to a head a number of questions with strong implications for contemporary art: what is performance art and where is the line between it and theater? What is the significance of an artist's original intention and what does a recreation of a performance actually mean? *New York Times* critic Roberta Smith described the title piece of Abramović's retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, *The Artist Is Present*, as "hold[ing] a staring contest with Ms. Abramovic in the museum's atrium," and Smith gave this as a central example of how "participatory art" in museums was a defining characteristic of the exhibitions of 2010.¹ Indeed, Abramović's work is a flashpoint for multiple points of meaning in art of recent times. Two recent books expand on the already substantive body of literature on Abramović by shedding clear

light on her life, work, and ideas. Together, these books provide a fascinating portrait of one of the most influential and thought-provoking artists working today.

James Westcott's biography, *When Marina Abramović Dies*, is illuminating, well illustrated (100 photographs), and extremely thorough. It is also a great read. Westcott's fascinating account chronicles Abramović's life and is based on extensive and careful research of her exhaustively complete archives as well as interviews with friends and relatives who have known her over the decades and around the world. Westcott is sympathetic to the artist; as he reveals in the last portions of the book, he has worked for her directly (writing transcripts of her performances, for example) and has participated in one of her intense workshops in which she teaches performance art. Despite his friendly connections with her, Westcott is clear from the outset that he had total access to any information on her that he sought, and that she had no say in the book's text or content. This honesty pays off in a book that is always compassionate with and often admiring of its subject but does not shy away from describing her foibles and failures either.

Accounts of Abramović's life and work are most often divided into three periods: the early years in Yugoslavia (1946-75), the time in which she lived and worked with Ulay (Uwe Laysiepen) (1975-88), and her solo career after the end of that relationship (1988 to the present). Both of the books under review here stick largely to these chronologies, though they use different strategies to draw connections across the span of Abramović's life. In Westcott's book, these sections reveal an artist who was passionate and driven from the beginning and a deeply committed pioneer in the medium of performance. They also show a private person who chose to shape her life around this art, even though that has meant personal sacrifices along with rewards.

Westcott does a great job of exploring the collaboration between Abramović and Ulay, the latter of whose work Westcott reveals as severely under-studied. He shows how the work that both artists were making prior to their rela-

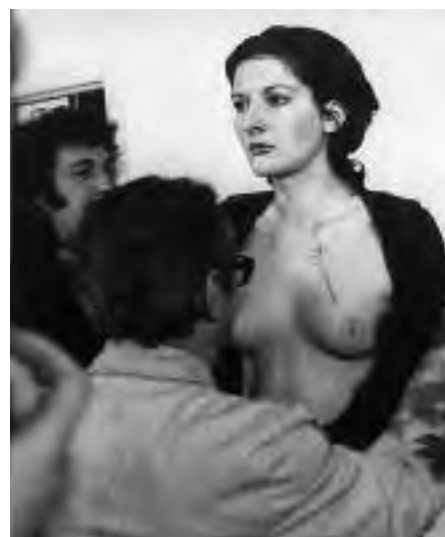


Fig. 1. *Rhythm 0* (1974), Six-hour Performance (8 p.m.-2 a.m.), Studio Morra, Naples.

tionship set them up for explosive synergy once they began collaborating and how, during their initial years, they brought out each others' strengths. Ulay seems often to have been the practical and technical partner, while Abramović handled the contacts and gallerists. A list of directives in "Art Vital," their early manifesto for life and work together, suggests the purity and asceticism of their approach; it includes "permanent movement," "no rehearsal," "no predicted end," and "extended vulnerability" (Westcott, 109). A deliberate form of this last in particular seems to be a hallmark of Abramović's work both before and after Ulay, as in her 1974 piece *Rhythm 0* (Fig. 1), in which the audience was given a selection of seventy two objects to use on the artist as they chose, or in her ongoing (and problematic) project of presenting an allegorical version of her life as theater in *Biography*. This "extended vulnerability" is also evident in the way that she has allowed Westcott and thus the reader to know so much about her.

Westcott's thoughtful account reveals myriad issues for the historical consideration and interpretation of Abramović's work. As he points out, performances that may have created a serious and charged atmosphere can come off as merely silly in their documentation. This was the case with Ulay and Abramović's *Charged Space* of 1978, performed at the Brooklyn

Museum. Over and over, they joined hands and spun as fast as they could, lurching towards paintings and falling down while Ulay repeatedly barked “move” in his German accent. Viewers at the time found the piece electrifying, but the video of it is oddly “hilarious” (Westcott, 140-41). In other cases, documentation was remade—we might even say restaged—after the fact, as happened with Abramović’s iconic *Art Must be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful* of 1975 (Westcott, 95-96).² Westcott also probes the issue of the boundary between performance and theater in Abramović’s work, as in her and Ulay’s problematic and largely unsuccessful—“underwhelming” says Westcott—theater piece of the mid 1980s, *Modus Vivendi*, which sought to translate their interest in archetypes into a staged and tightly controlled piece (Westcott, 188).

The genre of biography calls for an intense focus on a particular person, and a riveting personality like Abramović’s surely augments this tendency. Given that, Westcott’s account is balanced and nuanced. Still, there are points at which the greater picture suffers slightly from the magnetic pull of Abramović’s charisma. For example, *The House with the Ocean View* (2002)—her 12-day performance living in a series of three open-faced boxes suspended off the ground in the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York—was an explicit response to the events of September 11, 2001. Its connection to the defining event of the new millennium in Abramović’s recently adopted city is not mentioned in Westcott’s account. Thus, in Westcott’s description of it, *The House with the Ocean View* is again about Abramović’s transformational suffering and her connection with her audience rather than being a piece in which suffering and interconnectedness are part of a larger collective tragedy or related to global politics. Still, this reinforces one of the ideas that is clear throughout Westcott’s book: because of the merging of art and life performed by Abramović, her work will almost inevitably be seen primarily in relation to the artist herself. His attention to both the details of her life—from her childhood among political elites in

Tito’s Yugoslavia, to her winning of the Golden Lion for best artist at the Venice Biennale and beyond—and the ways that this life has made her the artist that she is—are at the heart of this outstanding biography.

Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present is the catalogue to the artist’s 2010 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the most comprehensive retrospective of her work ever mounted. This stunningly beautiful book ranges from the start of her career to the present. It is full of illustrations—345 of them—primarily photographs but also a selection of drawings and paintings, and it includes scores for performances and a few transcripts of those performances in which words played a crucial role. (The partial transcript of Abramović’s re-performance of Vito Acconci’s *Seedbed* is, for example, an eye opener.) This catalogue is certainly the most impressive of a number of stunning books on Abramović’s work to emerge of late, and it gives readers a great overview of the scope and import of her art.

One particularly wonderful aspect of *The Artist Is Present* is the inclusion of a CD audio tour given by Abramović herself. She speaks to you and thus seems to engage the listener as an audience member, directly and in the moment.³ The CD begins with instructions for the listener to enact her own small performance. Abramović tells the reader to sit down in a comfortable seat and “drink glass of pure water. Relax. Breathe slow, and close your eyes for several moments, until I count to seven. [...] Open your eyes. Let energy flow. Now we are ready to start.” The rest of the audio tour is filled with personal stories and explanations of selected works, providing an alternative and complementary narrative to the book’s essays. Abramović’s idiosyncratic use of English, often commented upon as integral to her work, is an element of the CD that would have been lost in a simple artist’s essay. The disk also allows the reader to be walked through the catalogue as a surrogate for the show, thus giving this exhibition a wider geographic range and a longer life.

Not merely based in documentation of works from the past, key to the exhibition

and its catalogue are the performances that took place in MoMA during the three-month duration of the show. Performers who had studied with Abramović recreated many of her and her and Ulay’s most iconic works. Further, Abramović herself was indeed present every single day and hour that the show was open for *The Artist Is Present*, the one completely new work in this otherwise retrospective exhibition, in which members of the public, one by one, could sit across from her for as long as they liked.⁴ One of the best essays in this book, by Chrissie Iles of the Whitney Museum, focuses in particular on this piece as what Iles calls a “theater of exchange,” which echoes minimalism in its stark simplicity and emphasis on presence. Iles also explores how this piece echoes the dialogues that Abramović created first with Ulay in their extended series of performances in the 1980s, *Nightsea Crossing*, and subsequently in other works which engaged viewers even as they used Brechtian techniques of distancing to heighten viewers’ awareness.

Other catalogue essays present a range of new scholarship on Abramović, though there is some overlap in the material that they discuss. Editor Klaus Biesenbach’s wide-ranging essay relates Abramović’s work to broader themes of sculpture, rhythm, and the loop; he also explores what he calls the “fourth chapter” of her life, the period since 2001 in which she has been based in New York. An essay by Jovana Stokić focuses on Abramović’s complex and often antithetical relationship to the Balkans. Arthur C. Danto’s “Danger and Disturbation” situates Abramović’s radical performances in relation to questions of display and audience perception: how does performance art or even simply documentation of it fit into the museum’s space? Can we, as Abramović does, see performances as having a score—like music—that can be played again by others? Related questions are taken up in Nancy Spector’s essay on *Seven Easy Pieces*, Abramović’s 2005 recreations of seven iconic examples of performance art at the Guggenheim, where Spector is curator. Spector argues that, rather than

seeing these as attempts at either pure restagings of the original works or as mere recreations of the documentation we have of these works—two ways that this work has often been interpreted—in *Seven Easy Pieces* Abramović in fact creates a third term: embodied documentation that is responsive and malleable, “a poetic, nonauthoritative (though respectful) means to keep the work alive and relevant” (*Artist Is Present*, 30). Together, the five essays in this exhibition catalogue contribute a body of excellent new scholarship on Abramović’s work.

For all of their strengths, these books also left me with questions. One relates to Abramović’s appearance as she ages, or rather as she seems hardly to age at all. She is often referred to as an “art-world diva” or described—as by Peggy Phelan—as posing in recent photographs for her work “more in the mode of a movie star than an ordeal artist.”⁵ This increasing glamour does not seem to always sit well with the goals of Abramović’s work over decades, in which she has asserted her body not as a vehicle for her stardom, but as a site of pared-down truth. While Abramović performed (and reperformed) the cutting of a star into her own flesh as powerful political symbolism, the cuts of a cosmetic surgeon’s scalpel on her body (and likely her face) remain nearly invisible in the literature. Westcott’s is the rare text that directly addresses the fact that, apparently on a whim, Abramović had breast augmentation surgery in the early 1990s while in Brazil; he links this choice to what many perceived as her increasing interest in appealing to her public through her beauty (Westcott, 229). Abramović has never claimed to be a feminist; in fact she often states that Yugoslav women were always “at the same level as the men,” (*Artist Is Present*, 24, n. 11). Yet the performances and images she has produced have given us a very new kind of visual archive which is key to feminist art history in the way it repositions issues of violence, the female nude, and gender difference. As her work is addressed by feminist art historians—or by any scholar—questions of the ageing female body and elective medical interventions

should be a part of the discussion rather than surrounded by polite silence.

In addition, in writings on Abramović’s investigations into world religions and ways of living, terms like “primitive cultures” or “ancient wisdom” tend to creep into the discourse unchallenged (e.g., Westcott, 218, and *Artist Is Present*, 19). Likewise, Abramović’s more recent works that call up imagery of Serbian nationalism or the ethnic cleansing and war which took place in Yugoslavia in the 1990s are complex and often extremely troubling, but many authors discuss them in vague terms of “critique” that are unconvincing.⁶ A more sustained and critical investigation of these aspects of Abramović’s work would have been welcomed, particularly in the MoMA catalogue.⁷

With her oeuvre still unfolding and the longevity that runs in her family, it is to be hoped that many years of Abramović’s challenging and thought-provoking work lay before us. Both of the books under consideration here are clearly enduring contributions that shape the study of Marina Abramović, certainly one of the most fascinating artists alive today. •

Elizabeth Otto, Associate Professor of Modern Art in the Department of Visual Studies at the University of Buffalo, SUNY, recently co-edited *The New Woman International: Representations in Photography and Film from the 1870s through the 1960s* (2011).

Notes

1. Roberta Smith “When the Art Stared Back and Other Trends,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 19, 2010, Arts and Leisure section, 24.
2. This double performance is rarely mentioned, but it is not a secret either. On the CD included with *Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present*, Abramović also tells the story of how she re-performed this work without an audience immediately after she first performed it, since the initial video documentation was wholly unsatisfactory.
3. This prerecorded CD does not, of course, allow for any kind of interaction with Abramović as she speaks, an essential difference between live and recorded performance. See Peggy Phelan, “Marina Abramović: Witnessing Shadows,” *Theater Journal* 56:4 (Dec. 2004): 569-77, particularly her argument that “one of the

most politically radical aspects of live art is its resistance to commodity form” (571).

4. Abramović’s work and presence made this exhibition one of the top three most visited shows at MoMA—drawing over half a million people—in 2010, MoMA’s busiest year yet (“MoMA Attendance Hits Record High,” Artforum.com, 6.30.10).
5. David Ebony has written that “if anyone can rightly be called an art-world diva, it’s Marina Abramović” (“Marina Abramović: an Interview by David Ebony,” *Art in America*, [May 2009]: 112). Phelan, “Marina Abramović: Witnessing Shadows,” 570.
6. See for example Stokić’s statement in relation to the pagan rituals that informed *Balkan Erotic Epic* of 2005, that these images “are not in search of supposed authenticity” (*Artist Is Present*, 26), a point that could have borne further explanation, since many talk about this piece in very different terms.
7. An excellent essay in relation to these topics is Kristine Stiles, “Cloud with its Shadow: Marina Abramovic,” *Marina Abramovic*, Stiles et al, eds. (New York: Phaidon, 2008), 33-95.

Suzanne Lacy: Spaces Between

by Sharon Irish,
University of Minnesota Press, 2010

Leaving Art: Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics 1974-2007

by Suzanne Lacy
Duke University Press, 2010

Reviewed by Brenda Mitchell

California artist Suzanne Lacy’s (b. 1945) nearly four-decade-long artistic career, from her undergraduate days through the late 1990s, is chronicled and analyzed in *Spaces Between*. Although Lacy has often appeared in studies of feminist art, her social activism, collaborations, conversations, and performances do not easily fit conventional categories of art history and criticism. *Spaces Between* addresses the difficulties inherent in interpreting works that exist mostly temporally, as experiences documented in photographs and descriptions from the memories of the artist and participants. Sharon Irish has

organized this challenging material into meaningful themes, exploring each through sources and influences, and Lacy's relationships to other artists who were exploring similar methods and meanings. Instead of presenting an exhaustive catalogue, Irish focuses on a few of Lacy's most important works, addressing both "successes" and "failures," revealing thoughtful reflections by the artist and the author. Irish examines Lacy's work in relation to feminism, essentialism, "Whiteness," "somaesthetics" and "dialogical aesthetics," among other ideas, noting that both the artist and writer exist within these networks and "cannot observe networks from outside" (6).¹ Although the later chapters describe Lacy's activities in the 1980s and 1990s, *Spaces Between* largely focuses on the 1970s, including a history of the feminist movement and the arts in California during that decade.

A section titled "Positionality, Performance, and Participation" explores some of the challenges associated with writing about Lacy's work from her formative years, the heady years of the ERA movement and ferment among "second-wave" feminists, through the late 1990s—a body of work that defies neat categorizations and definitions partly because of Lacy's resistance to existing societal and art-world structures and systems. Irish explains that the "'spaces between'—self and other, art and life, and the body and urban physical structures in the work provide the focus for this book" (1). The author therefore devised her own framework, based on "three P's: positionality, performance, and participation" to replace the existing labels of "body art, conceptual art, performance art, feminist art, political art, and new genre public art," that only partially, and still incompletely, helped locate Lacy's work in the complex world of contemporary art (3). Lacy often used the human body, both her own and others', involving them in aspects of performance and action rather than the making of a precious object. She drew her subjects, often centered on violence, oppression, economics, and power relations, from politics and various feminisms. Lacy

herself coined the term "new genre public art" to describe her work, a term Irish prefers, because "it captures her commitment to insert art into the public arena, using whatever genres best serve her aesthetic and political goals, and it is a flexible phrase that allows what is 'new' to change over time" (5). Furthermore, Irish employs the idea of a "network of nodes" as a conceptual model for representing "the complex interactions of creation, responses, and further creation that particularly characterize Lacy's art," citing Foucault's notions of this era's condition of "simultaneity," "juxtaposition" and dispersal. She quotes Foucault's statement that "We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" (5).²

Under the first theme, "Visceral Beginnings," Irish outlines Lacy's early biography and academic training in California, including an undergraduate degree in biology and zoology with a minor in chemistry, followed by a stint as a VISTA volunteer, after which she began graduate studies in psychology. Lacy wrote of her dual interests in art and science, "I found the insides of bodies incredibly beautiful—an aesthetic response" (23). Also detailed in this chapter are Lacy's associations (through her studies at Cal Arts during 1971-73) with Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, and her encounters with Fluxus artists and Allan Kaprow, whose explorations of "how body language conveys meanings within different social groups" led to similar explorations in her own work (29). Lacy's stint as a teaching assistant for Sheila de Bretteville in the Cal Arts Social Design program further informed her activism and collaborative approach to art-making (30) *Ablutions* (1972), a performance with Judy Chicago, Sandra Orgel, and Aviva Rahmani, involved a



Fig. 1. Suzanne Lacy with Leslie Labowitz and others, *In Mourning and In Rage*, Los Angeles (1977). Photo: Maria Karras.

"ritualistic healing ceremony for victims of rape and violence against women," using beef kidneys, eggshells, and recordings of women recounting their experiences with rape (33). According to Irish, "*Ablutions* recognized that we must *feel* the anxiety and pain of rape, but to heal afterwards, we must not be overwhelmed by the trauma" (34). Recalling not only Faith Ringgold and Ana Mendieta, who were also making work that dealt with issues of rape and violence, but also Joseph Beuys' actions of the late 1950s and 1960s, Lacy's work similarly confronted repressed trauma, both political and personal, in order to begin the transformative process of healing.

After earning her MFA from Cal Arts in 1973, Lacy moved to Los Angeles, where she became "embedded in the women's art community" (39). As part of the Woman's Building, Lacy helped start the Feminist Studio Workshop with Judy Chicago, Arlene Raven, and de Bretteville, with the goal of connecting "people all over the city and thereby aiming to create more equitable systems." (39). Influenced by Raven and Mary Daly, she performed *One Woman Shows* (1975), in which she symbolically embodied a rape victim, a prostitute, and a lesbian, referring to prescribed societal roles for women (47).

During 1974-78, Lacy performed and produced handmade books, and in *Anatomy Lesson #2, Learn Where the Meat Comes From* (1976), a 14-minute color

video, Lacy wrestled with a lamb carcass as part of the process of making a lamb roast. Her performance drew on texts from Adelle Davis, Julia Child, and even Jack LaLanne's exercise regimens. She started the performance wearing a set of plastic teeth and finished it wearing Halloween vampire teeth (52). Exploring violence and sacrifice as parts of patriarchal gender domination through the early video medium, Lacy worked within the broader context of current trends in art, much like Martha Rosler, whose 1975 video *Semiotics*, mentioned by Irish, also addressed gender roles in cooking and parodied TV cooking shows, while differing greatly from Carolee Schneeman's earlier, more erotic and sensual *Meat Joy* (1964).

"The Urban Stage" chapter focuses on Lacy's further explorations of issues surrounding violence against women, particularly rape. She collaborated with Leslie Labowitz in 1977, on *In Mourning and In Rage* (Fig. 1), criticizing the sensationalized media coverage of the infamous "Hillside Strangler" murders. In 1978 they established Ariadne: A Social Art Network, a coalition of artists and activists that "aimed particularly to undermine sexually violent imagery in cultural production" (74) through performances, public actions, and other activities that helped "frame rape as... an act of power symptomatic of patriarchy" (76).

The next chapter, "Convergences," discusses Lacy's social and political activism and attempts to bridge economic, racial and ethnic divides during the 1980s, through the notion of "converging bodies in spaces, both as an artistic as well as a social form" (83). These "spaces between" involve cultural shifts such as changing and expanding feminisms and social theories. In *The Dark Madonna* (1986), for example, Lacy investigated the power relations inherent in locations through attempts to bring diverse women together, especially black and white women living in different areas of Los Angeles. "Power relations" surfaced when some white women refused to travel to Watts after the black women from that area had traveled to predominantly white, upper-class Pasadena (85). In *Freeze Frame: Room for Living Room* (1982), seventeen groups of

women came together to talk about survival. This work included interdisciplinary artists and women from diverse backgrounds as well as sound, voices, movement, and living bodies, and attempted to transcend the spaces of the "art" and its "viewers." In this piece, members of some groups felt as though they were put on display and tensions arose from the situation of a white artist "directing" women of color (88).

The final sections, "We Make the City: the City Makes Us," "Turning Point," and "Teen Violence" deal with Lacy's work in various urban environments, including Chicago, Vancouver, Oakland, and the San Francisco Bay area, as well as her involvement with groups of urban teens, which provided the focus of her "turning point" in the 1990s. While expanding on the themes, methods, and practices of her earlier work, Lacy has continued exploring the unmapped "spaces between" that she discovered early in her career. In *Suzanne Lacy: Spaces Between*, Sharon Irish has also devised new conceptual methods of inquiry that expand, rather than limit, categories for exploration. Her book establishes a strong foundation for future studies of Lacy and other feminist artists, no simple task. What remains is to broaden and deepen interpretations of the individual works and to explore further connections to contemporary art and feminist theories, such as Julia Kristeva's writings on women and abjection, beauty and horror, and the monstrous.

An anthology of writings spanning four decades, Suzanne Lacy's *Leaving Art* provides a collection of thirty essays by the artist, grouped into four parts chronologically and thematically: "Learning to Look: The Seventies," "Political Performance Art: The Eighties," "Debated Territory: The Nineties," and "Leaving Art: After 2000." Each section has an introduction by Lacy. The final essay, "Tracing Allan Kaprow," pays homage to her teacher, friend, and most important influence, shortly after his death.

Moira Roth, a close friend and colleague, has written a succinct and insightful introduction to the book, providing a historical overview of

Lacy's work and its social and political contexts. Kerstin Mey's afterword, "In/ter/ceptions and In/tensions: Situating Suzanne Lacy's Practice," further contextualizes the work and practice and elaborates on its theoretical underpinnings. An appendix outlines a chronology of selected performances and installations. This collection offers the contemporary art audience—those interested in collaboration and performance, feminists and the power dynamics of economics, gender, and community—an opportunity to gain perspective on the thought processes of an activist artist, teacher, and administrator as she develops and reflects on her practice over forty years.

Lacy explains that she "left" art in the 1990s, "in a sense, spending more and more of my time engaged directly with local communities, rather than exhibiting in museums and galleries" (160). Her work during this decade involved a series of education, criminal justice, health, and local governance projects, "an endeavor that taught me much about the alignments of political forces around/against race and class" (160). Noting that much of feminist art explored themes similar to the 1970s, but did not call for action, Lacy asks "what is public what is private, and what are the rights and responsibilities within these sectors?" (169). Furthermore, she notes that the "result of the disengagement of theory from action is loss of a sense of ethics. To what end do we analyze? For what reason do we act?" Lacy continually seeks to challenge definitions of "art" and its role in society.

Lacy found some answers in what she calls "engaged Buddhism," a term first used by Thich Nhat Hanh "to describe our inescapable involvement in the world" (286). She further explains, "there is unity on one point: the existence of suffering evokes an understanding of universal responsibility that compels action to alleviate that suffering" (287). The artist's practice of "engaged Buddhism" led to her collaborative project with the sculptors Susan Steinman and Yutaka Kobayashi and the Elkhorn City (Kentucky) Heritage Council (2000-05). Elkhorn City (Lacy's father's birthplace) is historically the site of coal

mining and other energy industries. Its residents are mostly poor, working-class “mountain” people with a distinctive local culture. The land and people exemplify the kinds of power relations that have always interested Lacy: big energy companies strip mining, blasting off mountain tops, their drilling and mining rights superseding those of local landowners, a large percentage of workers suffering from black lung, cancers, and other often fatal diseases caused by environmental pollution. The project involved performances of music, storytelling, and two hundred church choir members walking toward the bridge that spans the Big Sandy River. Lacy wrote that this

performed photograph is virtually motionless, the narrative moment subtle: the sun sets, the river flows under the bridge, the music’s rhythmic trajectory, and the unexpected improvisations of CSX locomotives passing up the canyon. As sunlight moves up the

hollow and out of the valley, the bridge slowly lights up, long purple shadows interrupted by circling beams that replicate a runaway train engine (317).

Lacy’s career is still moving forward. Moira Roth concludes her Introduction by saying “...I am deeply interested in what she will do in the future with her brilliant imagination, her constant curiosity, her restless energy, and her engaged politics (xli). In the Afterword, Kerstin Mey writes that “Suzanne Lacy’s practice both typifies and probes contemporary preoccupations with dialogic, relational, and socially engaged aesthetic strategies and expanded art praxis in the public domain. The title of this book—covering her work to date—signals in programmatic terms a decisive departure from the territory of ‘institutionalized’ art” (327).

Leaving Art adds to the scholarship of contemporary art and feminist studies by gathering in one place essays and

projects by this prolific writer and artist, as does Sharon Irish’s *Spaces Between*. Both will interest and benefit scholars, students, and the general public who are drawn to socially engaged art and explorations of power. •

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Notes

1. The racial dimensions in Lacy’s work” are based on the ideas of philosophers Alison Bailey and Marilyn Frye, which focus on “whitely behaviors” and “whitely” ways of being in the world (10). Similarly, she adopted Richard Shusterman’s “somaesthetics,” referring to the role of the body in “creation and appreciation of art,” as well as Grant Kester’s “dialogical art” that “foregrounds interchange and process” (11,15).
2. Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16 (1986); quoted in Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, (Malden, MA and Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), 155.

María Brito

by Juan A. Martínez
UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center
Press, 2009

Celia Alvarez Muñoz

by Roberto Tejada
UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center
Press, 2009

Reviewed by Tatiana Flores

Reading these two books from the *A Ver: Revisioning Art History* series together prompts a reconsideration of the medium of the monograph, especially in relation to the emerging field of Latino/a art history. In the traditional discipline, the monograph is rarely questioned, as it is assumed that all canonical artists merit a platform for showcasing their individual production. In the absence of an established canon of U.S. Latino/a art, the monograph serves the role of anointing artists in a manner that risks replicating mainstream structures of an

art history founded on Renaissance values, where authorship is tantamount. Nevertheless, the monograph format is justified by the series editors, based on “the conviction that individual artists and their coherent bodies of work are the foundation for a meaningful and diverse art history” (ii).¹ Both *Maria Brito* and *Celia Alvarez Muñoz* make strong cases for this vision from very different perspectives.

Juan A. Martínez approaches his subject biographically. María Brito (b. 1948) left Havana at age thirteen through Operation Peter Pan, an initiative wherein Cuban parents sent their children to the United States to shield them from the Castro regime. (Ana Mendieta was another Peter Pan child). The story of Brito’s displacement is gripping and compelling, as Martínez brings the reader to empathize with his subject while introducing a critical experience that would inform her work. Brito’s heritage is also crucial in the development of her art, as illustrated in her enigmatic installation *Come Play with Us, Childhood Memories* (1984), in which a



Fig. 1. Maria Brito, *El Patio de Mi Casa* (1991), acrylic on wood and mixed media, 95” x 63” x 68”. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C..

squarish crib (resembling a cage) sits on a wooden floor of a cut out room. Two small ladders, one leading to the crib and

the other propped up against the wall punctuate the space. A mirror and a framed photo of the piece hang on the wall, along with many painted eyes. Martínez relates the piece to Brito's sheltered upbringing in a conservative Cuban-American community, positing that the artist's experience as a mother of teenage boys "prompted [her] to reflect on her own childhood" (8).

Martínez's biographical structure also divides according to Brito's primary mediums. "Boxes, Interiors, and Objects: Assemblages, 1980-2000" is a discussion of her original mixed-media constructions, which he calls "assemblages" (23). He relates them to tendencies in American art, comparing Brito to such artists as Robert Rauschenberg, Louise Nevelson, and Joseph Cornell. This chapter is well argued and illustrated, and successfully presents Brito's most complex body of work. Her early boxes, especially, owe a debt to Cornell, though Martínez is careful to point out that hers are more autobiographical. The author quotes extensively from Brito's own descriptions of her pieces, effectively capturing her thought process and providing a comprehensive interpretation in her own words. He notes that *Self-Portrait in Grey and White* (1982) was "her earliest self-portrait, a subject that she later fully developed in painting" (29). Martínez also reads Brito's large-scale assemblages autobiographically. In *El Patio de Mi Casa* (1991; Fig. 1), for example, exterior and interior space are collapsed with a nightmarish bed painted on what would be a backyard, opposite a diminutive kitchen space with sundry objects including a lamp, photographs, and a plaster cast of Brito's face. The author offers both the artist's assessment—"it is the breaking off from the past"—as well as other interpretations to illustrate the work's multivalence (41). Martínez's sensitive reading underscores the relevance of Brito's piece as paradigmatic of the American immigrant experience, arguing convincingly that drawing on her own life is not a hermetic, individualistic practice but rather an exercise in the creation of community. Such a view paves the way for a discussion of her more overtly socially oriented constructions. *Pero Sin Amo* (1999-

2000) memorializes the plight of the *balseros*, those Cubans who attempt to reach Florida in makeshift rafts, with a wooden maze "of coffinlike boxes covered in transparent vinyl, offering glimpses of sand-covered shoes, glasses, and body parts" (49). Platforms on either side with binoculars allow spectators to interact with the piece.

Shifting to self-portraiture and painting in the next section, "Self-Portraiture: Paintings, 1983-2002," is a challenge, and Martínez wisely reproduces *Self-Portrait*, a 1989 construction—making for a smoother transition—before delving into a discussion of Brito's paintings. These are strongly based on Renaissance models and employ an abundance of Catholic iconography. *The Juggler* (1989), the book's cover image, depicts the artist as the Madonna juggling a baby boy, wood spheres, and a small house against a background that reproduces Mantegna's *Madonna and Child with Cherubim* (c. 1485), and with a painted mask on a dark backdrop below. While Brito's portraits depict the challenges that gender constructions and her Catholic heritage have imposed upon the artist, here the central figure appears in control of the objects in the air, introducing "a good dose of ambiguity," in the author's words (67).

Brito's more recent production (covered in "Sculpture, 2004-2006") and her legacy are evaluated in the final chapters of the book. In the past decade, she has taken a more pronounced role as social critic, veering away both from the autobiographical and mixed media constructions. Brito's primary medium has become white polymer clay, which she models to form small scale figures. Attempting to reconcile pieces such as *Of Mice and Men* (2005) and *Las Goyescas* (2005-06), inspired by Goya's *Caprichos* (1799)—elaborate, detailed, and realistic—with her earlier production, Martínez writes: "[h]er figurative sculptures...synthesize her enduring attraction to surreal situations and her expressionist approach to form" (80).

Martínez is a generous writer. He dedicates a good deal of space to Brito's own testimonies, and in his final chapter, "Breaking Barriers," gives due credit to critics and art historians who have addressed her production and

evaluates how her work has been framed. While citing that Brito herself does not want to be pigeonholed exclusively as a Cuban American artist, he also notes that much of her recognition coincides with the embrace of multiculturalism in the American art world. Through his careful assessment of Brito's oeuvre, Martínez weaves a compelling narrative whose relevance extends beyond her particular work. He convincingly argues for Brito's recognition as an American artist, and in so doing advocates for a more plural understanding of "American" art.

Roberto Tejada's monograph on Celia Alvarez Muñoz (b. 1937) also sheds light on the complexities of defining the "American" artist in the twenty-first century. Playing off of Alvarez Muñoz's background as a teacher, Tejada structures his narrative as a lesson plan, covering: Geography, Language Arts, Home Economics, and Civic Studies. In his introduction, titled "Enlightenments: A Lesson Plan," he makes clear his resistance to a "developmental account" of Alvarez Muñoz's oeuvre in favor of establishing "evocative relationships" between the artist and her work, "not obligatory ones" (4-5). Thus, he introduces the artist through suggestive anecdotes: a childhood memory of walking down the street with her mother and nervously watching her fend off an intrusive ogler; a dream in which she floats above a marching band; a poem/artist's statement that evokes the peculiar dynamics of her bicultural background in the border city of El Paso, where she was born. Rather than a conventional chronological survey, Tejada's narrative offers a creative series of interconnected essays that illuminate the complex, multifaceted production of a fascinating artist, "viewed from the perspective of Chicana and U.S. Latina vanguard practices, and from the standpoint, too, of mainstream American art produced during the social debates of the 1980s and 1990s" (3).

Tejada characterizes Alvarez Muñoz's oeuvre—which comprises photography, writing, drawings, and installation—as "postminimalist and postconceptual" (3). By discussing a small number of her

works but giving comprehensive interpretations of them, he calls attention to their conceptual depth. The first chapter, "Geography," is primarily devoted to "Abriendo Tierra/Breaking Ground" (Fig. 2), her 1991 exhibition at the Dallas Museum of Art. Here the artist made a significant intervention into the museum space. In the courtyard, she placed an octagonal architectural structure made of wooden beams over a reflecting pool. Within it were suspended two red neon bulbs in the form of an X. The exhibition curator interpreted this as "mark[ing] her own spiritual place" and compared it to Native American dwellings. Tejada concludes that "[a] second glance at the octagonal structure...reveals the artist's vigorous response to th[e] barefaced collusion between the industrial façade and the colonizing enterprise of U.S. cultural expansion" (12). For the interior, Alvarez Muñoz painted opposite walls in yellow and pink and drew figures on them that evoked both popular culture and ancient traditions. Between them stood a glass wall with a bilingual poem describing the border crossing of the artist's grandparents and their first impressions of El Paso. The visual and verbal tropes of the piece as a whole are eclectic and purposefully obscure: a monument evoking high modernist abstraction is paired with a kitschy colored walls and cartoon-like figures; the outlaw space of the border is brought into the sacrosanct halls of the museum. Given these enigmatic references, Tejada's interpretation of *Abriendo Tierra* is masterful. Drawing on postwar American art, the objects in the museum's collection, the artist's family's past, and the historically contentious relationship between Mexico and the United States, he convincingly argues that the piece "produced a staged reading of national and art historical conflicts" (20) while also engaging in a complex institutional critique. My only criticism is that I would have liked to have seen more details of the piece reproduced. Comparative material by other artists is indeed valuable but becomes redundant when it occupies space that should have been granted to Alvarez Muñoz. Tejada devotes a great deal of attention to *Abriendo Tierra* because he considers it to offer "a

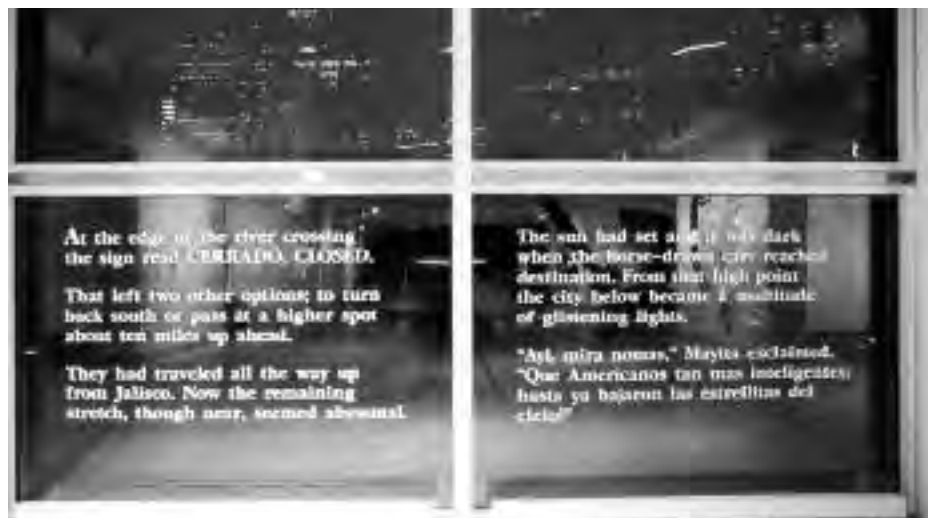


Fig. 2. Celia Alvarez Muñoz, *Abriendo Tierra/ Breaking Ground* (detail) (1991), mixed media installation, Dallas Museum of Art. View of text on glass wall. Photo: Celia Alvarez Muñoz.

palimpsest of time and place that can serve as a model for looking at her work before and after" (20). As the artist explores "nonlinear locations that [allow] the viewer to move between contradictory layers," so the author takes the reader on unexpected journeys (20).

The next chapter "Language Arts" begins, of all places, with the exile of General Antonio López de Santa Anna (notorious for ceding a large portion of Mexican territory to the U.S. during the Mexican-American War) in Snug Harbor, Staten Island. There, he met the entrepreneur Thomas A. Adams and gave him a piece of natural gum. The exchange resulted in a new confection, chewing gum, which Tejada relates to military history, recounting how soldiers in World War I chewed gum. Eventually, the story comes back to Alvarez Muñoz: her father was deployed in World War II and brought her back a small Nazi propaganda booklet from Germany. In her artist's book *Enlightenment #2: Double Bubble & WWII* (1980-82), the Nazi propaganda pictures are interspersed with Double Bubble comics and accompanied by a text recalling the artist's childhood memories of buying chewing gum. Tejada brings the story back full circle to Mexico: during the Second World War, many Mexican Americans enlisted, creating a shortage of agricultural laborers that led to the establishment of the Bracero Program, which brought a new generation of Mexican migrant workers

to the United States. These intricate, bizarrely interconnected narratives call attention to how personal and community histories intersect with world events. This and other pieces from the Enlightenment series discussed in the chapter also comment on the relation between text, image, and subjectivity. *Enlightenment #4: Which Came First?* (1982) is a series of photographs of five eggs in a row with two lines of text underneath, one printed and another in a child's cursive writing. On one level, the story illustrates the challenges of learning English. Digging deeper, Tejada shows how it engages with mainstream feminism of the 1980s, "questioning how the subject of feminism 'must be positioned' also 'in relation to social relations other than gender'—wondering which comes first, so to speak, especially when a sense of self is simultaneous and indissoluble" (48).

The art works discussed in the "Language Arts" chapter call attention to the deeply personal nature of Alvarez Muñoz's practice. The chapter is also the most biographical. Raised in El Paso, she married Andy Muñoz before attending Texas Western College. The couple moved around as a result of Andy's engineering career and eventually ended up in Arlington, Texas. Alvarez Muñoz pursued a graduate degree in studio art at North Texas State University, studying with Al Souza, a conceptual photographer, and Vernon Fisher, a mixed media

artist who wed text and image. Tejada traces their influence on Alvarez Muñoz and also discusses the mainstream art world of the 1970s, effectively setting up a critical framework around which to evaluate her early practice. The following chapter "Home Economics" fast forwards to the 1990s and focuses on a body of work exploring gender and labor, "address[ing] manufacture and consumption on a transnational level as well as in terms of artistic production" (55). Tejada discusses at length the artist's book *If Walls Could Speak* (1991), of women factory workers from Los Angeles and El Paso in the 1930s and 40s, and *Fibra and Furia: Exploitation Is In Vogue* (1999-2002), a mixed media installation which featured rolls of cloth, shoes, and garments exhibited alongside a horrific picture of the legs of a murder victim to protest the serial killings of women in Ciudad Juárez.

Demonstrating the uncanny coincidences that recur in Alvarez Muñoz's work, the final chapter "Civic Studies" takes the reader back to Snug Harbor to explore the piece *Stories Your Mother Never*

Told You (1990), which the artist exhibited in a group show there. A wooden dental cabinet was filled with sundry objects and "became the centerpiece for stories amassed over time and submitted by the artist and members of the communities that hosted the installation" (77). Thus, history was shown to be both contingent and communal: "material objects and memory were interreliant fragments in the discontinuous experience that produced knowledge" (82). This and the installation *El Límite* (1991), are the main subjects of this section. *El Límite* featured wall drawings based on photographs of the Mexican Revolution as well as two large-scale photographs, each with a poem, of a toy train made of recycled cans. Multilayered and complex, *El Límite* references Aztec motifs, typographic history, the railroad culture of El Paso, and the artist's father. Tejada weaves a captivating narrative around the piece to explore themes related to "technologies of vision," political geography, and globalization. He effectively demonstrates how Alvarez Muñoz's critical dialogue with mainstream art and its institutions expos-

es "features of a culture often neglected by histories of art founded only on aesthetic form" (94).

As part of the A Ver: Revisioning Art History series of the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press,¹ *María Brito* and *Celia Alvarez Muñoz* both live up to the promise made by the series editors in that they form the basis for a meaningful art history. As such, they help to redefine contemporary "American" art in more inclusive terms and lay the groundwork for a comprehensive history of U.S. Latino/a art. •

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Notes

1. For Dina Comisarenko Mirkin's review of Karen Mary Davalos' *Yolanda M. López* (2009), also part of this series, see *WAJ* (Spring/Summer 2010): 57-59.

Rachel Whiteread Drawings

by Allegra Pesenti
Prestel, 2010

Reviewed by Melissa Johnson

Drawings, for Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963) have been private. She calls them "doodles" (27) that function as "a diary of my work" (9). They are a place where she "worries" and "plays" with ideas (10). *Rachel Whiteread Drawings* is the catalogue for an exhibition held during 2010-11.¹ While Whiteread previously showed her drawings after a 1993 DAAD residency in Berlin, this exhibition marked the first museum retrospective of the drawings, which constitute an archive in her studio and a trace of the process of her sculptural work, although there is not a literal relationship between the two. The catalogue includes two beautifully illustrated

essays, 125 color plates organized according to the subjects of Whiteread's work and specific projects, and a visual essay curated by Whiteread comprising objects she collected throughout her career. This essay appeared in the exhibition as a series of objects in vitrines.

The primary essays, by Allegra Pesenti, curator of the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts at the Hammer Museum, and Anne Gallagher, Head of Collections (British art) at the Tate, are in some respects, very similar. Pesenti and Gallagher each comment on the same bodies of Whiteread's work, yet their foci and their writing styles are very distinct, and so the two offer different perspectives, giving the reader a greater understanding of why works on paper have been so important for Whiteread.

Pesenti, in "Like Shallow Breaths: Drawings by Rachel Whiteread," writes with a succinct yet elegant sparseness, poetically illuminating Whiteread's work and studio practice with a beautiful

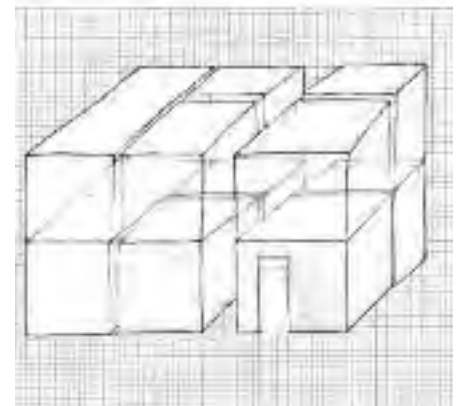


Fig. 1. Rachel Whiteread, *Ghost* (1990), ink and acrylic on graph paper, 11 1/4" x 8 5/8".

clarity. She connects Whiteread's drawings back to fifteenth and sixteenth century Renaissance master drawings by sculptors such as Michelangelo, and traces this practice through to the twentieth century, referencing artists such as Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Alison Wilding, Richard Tuttle, Eva Hesse, and

Agnes Martin, for example. Pesenti quotes Whiteread, but also addresses the artist's work obliquely by referencing other artists and writers (Louise Bourgeois and Susan Sontag, for example) to supplement her account.

Gallagher's "Drawing Form" is a more descriptive and straightforward account of Whiteread's works and working process. Gallagher speaks to many of the same concerns and works as Pesenti, but enables the reader to see the works anew through a more frontal or head-on gaze. Pesenti, for example, addresses Whiteread's most recent work on paper, her collages, mainly within the context of other artists' practice, while Gallagher speaks more directly to these works and at greater length. Gallagher also discusses the importance of postcards and found objects for

Whiteread's practice. (Whiteread has a large collection of postcards and has also created a series of drawings on postcard-size pieces of paper.)

While the essays beautifully contextualize the works that were shown in the exhibition, it is to the plates and illustrations to which I keep returning. The catalogue documents the exhibition, including the vitrines of objects curated by Whiteread, as well as some sculptural works. Of course, without seeing the actual drawings or three-dimensional works it is difficult to gauge how closely the illustrations match their originals, but their color and clarity make it feel that the drawings especially have been tipped onto the pages.

For scholars interested in Rachel Whiteread and contemporary works on

paper, this catalogue beautifully documents the artist's earlier career with drawings that are integrally related to her well-known sculptural work such as a *Ghost* study (1990; Fig. 1), and also presents newer work in the form of collages and small drawings that, while related to the sculptural work, seem to stand independently from it. •

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Notes

1. The exhibition opened at the Hammer Museum (Los Angeles, CA, January 31–April 25, 2010), traveled to the Nasher Sculpture Center (Dallas, TX, May 22–August 15, 2010), and to Tate Britain (London, UK, September 8, 2010–January 16, 2011).

Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists: 1958–1968

edited by Sid Sachs and Kalliopi Minioudaki
University of the Arts, Philadelphia,
and Abbeville Press, 2010

Power Up: Female Pop Art

by Angela Stief
Kunsthal, Vienna, and Dumont
Buchverlag, 2010

Reviewed by Donna Gustafson

The definitions of Pop Art and the permeable boundaries around the movement seem to be even more contested now, fifty years after the fact, than they were at Pop's height in the 1960s. Much has been written about Pop—from what it is and its relationship to popular culture and commercial media, to what roles American politics, corporate business principles, nostalgia, sociology, and gender played in its creation, presentation, and reception. Recent discussions have moved beyond the Anglo-American sphere of classic Pop and the decades of the 1960s and 1970s to include discussions of proto-Pop,

global Pop, and comparisons between the 1960s and contemporary art's ongoing and continually unfolding critique of the mediated world that capitalism has spread across national boundaries. Two recent publications, catalogues for exhibitions in the U.S. and in Austria, dramatically take the conversation about Pop Art and its relationship to second wave feminism (the two movements in art history that bracket the decade of the 1960s) in a new direction—no small feat in fields awash with fifty years of significant critical discourse by some of the most important writers on contemporary art.

Both books focus on expanding the definition of Pop to include women artists. There is overlap in that both books contain essays by Kalliopi Minioudaki and Sid Sachs, and both are valuable compilations of information about some artists who have been neglected by history and forgotten by the public. The appendix of *Power Up* provides biographical notes and exhibition histories for the artists in question. *Seductive Subversion* includes an excellent documentary DVD with interviews with artists and authors and views of the exhibition in Philadelphia. Both books are filled with large, full-color reproductions and provocative documentary photo-

graphs of exhibitions, installations, performances, and the artists themselves. One of the most intriguing photo sets documents Kiki Kogelnik performing with her silhouettes on the streets of Vienna in 1967 (PU, 36–37). How the press with the collusion of the women artists constructed a feminine artistic identity that was young, hip, and sexy (although not-quite-equivalent to the male pop artist's persona) provides a fascinating subtext that percolates to the surface as these books are read side by side. Many images of the women artists are clearly staged for press purposes; perhaps not surprisingly, they are often photographed in states of undress. Christa Dichgans is shown reclining naked with the toys that she painted (PU, 114); Evelyne Axell is photographed working in her studio garden wearing a man's hat but nothing else (PU, 44–45), and again fully naked with her legs provocatively spread (SS, 134); and Pauline Boty is photographed cheekily pulling her dress up to reveal undergarments to match a painting in her studio of a girl in the process of pulling her dress over her head (SS, 130). The most significant difference between these two books, however, is in their revisions of the canon. Only Axell, Rosalyn Drexler, Jann Haworth, Marisol, and Niki de Saint Phalle are



Fig. 1. Idelle Weber, *Munchkins I, II, III* (1964), acrylic on linen, 72" x 214". Courtesy the artist, New York.

included in both volumes. *Power Up* curator Angela Stief's focus is narrower and includes additional artists Christa Dichgans, Dorothy Iannone, Kiki Kogelnik, and Sister Corita (Kent). Sachs's larger roster also includes Jo Baer, Boty, Vilja Celmins, Chryssa, Letty Eisenhauer, Dorothy Grebenak, Kay Kurt, Yayoi Kusama, Lee Lozano, Mara McAfee, Patty Mucha, Barbro Östlihn, Faith Ringgold, Martha Rosler, Marjorie Strider, Alina Szapocznikow, Idelle Weber, Joyce Wieland and May Wilson. Such difference raises many questions about the defining characteristics of Pop.

It is not quite accurate to review these two catalogues as focused exclusively on Pop Art, for second wave feminism also comes in for a serious and critical review. Pop and feminism have never been linked together except as two extremes of the same decade; Pop has been consistently portrayed by traditional art history and feminist art writers as transparently misogynist in the same way that pop culture of the 1960s has been characterized as misogynist. Pop Art is often read as being in collusion with pop culture in its denigration of the feminine; Tom Wesselmann's *Great American Nudes* are an irresistible target. Feminism on the other hand, is the antithesis of Pop Art in its desire to destabilize pop culture's presentations in order to make its misogyny apparent. These two publications ostensibly about Pop are really driven by new research undertaken by Minioudaki, Sachs and Stief in feminist art history. Minioudaki, whose dissertation, "Women in Pop: Difference and Marginality" (2009), was

written under the direction of Linda Nochlin, Professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, is a contributor to *Power Up: Female Pop Art*, published to accompany the exhibition organized by Stief. She is also co-editor of *Seductive Subversion*, which accompanied the traveling exhibition organized by Sachs, Director of the Rosenwald Gallery at the University of the Arts.¹ Her essays in both books are similar, and she notes in *Power Up* that her text draws heavily upon the earlier publication. Her argument, well-researched and thoughtfully constructed, is that women artists who worked in the modes of Pop were neglected by both traditional and feminist scholars because they could not be accepted in a style that had been so strictly defined as masculine (by the traditionalists) and misogynist (by the feminist writers). In feminist art history's view, and in the view of the second wave feminists who have written the history of feminist art, feminism only begins in 1969, thus women working in Pop art before the official start of feminism were not feminists (Minioudaki is forced to call them "proto-feminists"). Women Pop artists were thus ignored first by the critical establishment and later by feminist writers.

Seductive Subversion includes eight essays. Sachs's wide-ranging essay incorporating history and first-person recollections aims to "reconstitute some of the historical situation of this era, to ascertain some mechanisms of restriction, and to present positively an alternative to a strictly en-gendered Pop" (SS, 18). Patty Mucha (remembered

primarily for her participation in Happenings and for her sewing skills) writes about her collaborations with her husband Claes Oldenburg to create the soft sculptures. Martha Rosler's 1983 essay, "The Figure of the Artist, The Figure of the Woman" is reprinted here. Bradford Collins writes on Drexler; Sue Tate on British Pop and women artists; and Annika Öhrner's essay focuses on Barbro Östlihn, the wife of the better known Pop artist Oyvind Fahlstrom. Reflected in the book is the exhibition's uneven distribution of work, with some artists being represented by a large number of works and others by one or two pieces. While this is understandable in such a pioneering exhibition, it also makes it difficult to judge the relative importance of each artist to the larger framework of art history. Among the standouts in the exhibition, however, was Idelle Weber's monumental triptych, *Munchkins I, II, III* of 1964 (Fig. 1).

In *Power Up*, Stief presents a more focused view of women and Pop Art. In her essay she states that the nine artists "created works in the sixties that critically reflect current events and issues of gender in the style of Pop and helped to grant visibility to a presentation of women that had long been considered politically incorrect" (PU, 79). Her definition of Pop depends on a representation of the "participation of women in the economic boom, in politics, technological innovation, new materials, consumerism, and the star cult" (PU, 79), and she includes discussions of how women used new materials, examined technology, and

interrogated the nude. Her purpose is to read the 1960s “laterally from a different point of view” and re-evaluate it “retrospectively in the sense of contemporary enrichment” (PU, 80). For Stief, then, it is not a matter of regaining a lost history or redressing wrongs, but of looking at the past for innovation and significant influence through the prism of the present in order to construct an alternate history. Her subheadings that help to organize her definition of Pop include Consumer Aspects, High and Low, Mediated Reality, and Appropriation. The second main essay, by Minioudaki, is very much along the lines of her essay in *Seductive Subversion*, taking the second wave feminists to task for contributing to the lack of research in the area of women and Pop: “Their omission from art history, however, is a symptom of both Pop’s critical (mis)construction and the eruption of feminism in the arts, which rendered them the repressed of both Pop’s and feminist art’s discourse for more than twenty-five years” (PU, 135). The remaining short essays—by Anke Kemkes, Martin Walkner, Belinda Grace Gardner, Sid Sachs, Aaron Rose, Thomas Miessgang, and Mark Rappolt, are on the individual artists. The title, *Power Up*, as Stief relates, comes directly from a poster printed by Sister Corita (Kent), a Catholic nun in Los Angeles whose visually compelling screen prints combined consumer imagery with sacred texts urging Americans to join the battles for civil rights, stop the bombing in Vietnam, and hold their political leaders accountable.

As a vision of a new and expanded Pop roster, Stief’s focus on nine artists presents a more unified constellation, compared with that of Sachs. The wider view of *Seductive Subversion* begins to break down the boundaries between Pop, Fluxus, Performance, and the politically motivated art of the period and fails to provide a clear understanding of what defines Sachs’s expanded view of Pop. Is it really possible to include Martha Rosler’s collage series “Bringing the War Home” (1968–74), which she herself described as “agit-prop” in Pop? How are we to understand Rosler’s appearance in

Seductive Subversion as a Pop artist and as a feminist theorist when her 1983 essay emphatically declared that “there was no space for women in Pop. Its main tasks required a silencing of women that was related to its ambiguous theater of mastery...” (SS, 182). Sachs quotes from his 2005 correspondence with Rosler to show us that she “thought of them in a Poppish context” (SS, 78). But does a “Poppish context” make it Pop? Does it serve Faith Ringgold to set her work within the circle of Pop? Are her dramatic representations of the embattled state of race relations in the U.S., as seen in a painting like “The Flag is Burning” or “The American People Series #20: Die” (1967), works of Pop Art or are they personal (eminently not cool, aloof, media saturated) images that have been inflected by Ringgold’s knowledge of Pop without being absorbed by Pop? Similarly, I found it hard to agree that May Wilson’s hilarious series “Ridiculous Portraits” (1966–69) fit within the context of Pop; rather, her singular vision seems to me to be aligned with the practice of the Fluxus artists that she associated with in New York. While it is fascinating and historically important to see the wide range of works produced by women that reflect on politics, consumerism, the home, and celebrity (and much credit goes to Sachs for uncovering these artists), the lack of clarity in the aesthetic and conceptual structure defining Pop Art made me wish that the title had not promised Women Pop Artists, but simply women artists working in multiple styles between 1958 and 1968.

To the credit of all involved, both books begin a necessary revision of the masculine and exclusive arena of Pop. Was the irony and sophisticated critique of the most successful Pop Art really beyond the feminine experience? If Andy Warhol’s strategically gay persona could fracture the masculine construction and allow him to become a major player in Pop stardom, why wasn’t it be possible for a woman to make significant Pop Art? One of the painful questions for feminist art historians that Minioudaki raises is why the feminist search through the history

of art to find ancestors and develop an alternative canon—so important to the movement in its early days—did not lead to any discoveries in Pop Art? Her unflinching examination of the feminist revision of history reminds us of the dangers of writing history from the perspective of any ideology or critical discourse that prohibits our looking in the corners for the exceptions. Of course, there were feminist artists outside of the feminist camp. Was feminism so wrapped up in the necessity of building a canon, so embattled, that it restricted its membership to those with an ideology that matched the dominant strain, and if so, is it time to revise the history of the 1960s to find a way to talk about women in Pop Art and feminism before 1969 as has already been done in the conversations about Fluxus?

Both of these forward looking catalogues should encourage future scholars of Pop to stretch the definitions of Pop beyond the current roster of male artists. Appropriately, an essay by Linda Nochlin titled “Running on Empty: Women, Pop and the Society of Consumption” acts as an introduction for *Seductive Subversion* and frames the context for the project from the perspective of a pioneer of feminist art history. Nochlin confronts the paradox of women in a consumer society as both consumer and product and suggests that the discovery or recovery of these women artists who worked in a Pop sensibility makes a reassessment of Pop Art necessary and, indeed, inevitable. I agree. ●

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Notes

1. The exhibition opened at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, and traveled to the Sheldon Museum of Arts (Lincoln, NE), Brooklyn Museum of Art, and Tufts University Art Gallery (Medford, MA).



Fig. 1. Ursula von Rydingsvard, *Droga* (2009), cedar and graphite, 4'6" x 9'7" x 18'3". Photo: Rosalyn and Michael Bodycomb.

Ursula von Rydingsvard Working

by Patricia C. Phillips
Prestel, 2011

Reviewed by Jan Garden Castro

Ursula von Rydingsvard is driven to create timeless yet deeply intimate art that defies classification into existing fields. Since her monumental cedar sculpture never has—or could—all be seen in one location, its collection in *Ursula von Rydingsvard Working* provides an evocative, visually exciting event. Patricia Phillips's book-length essay examines four decades of the artist's sculpture chronologically, using the humanist and psychoanalytical contexts pioneered by Hannah Arendt and Sigmund Freud as markers that suggest the artist's values and directions. Over 150 high-resolution illustrations, many full-page and in color, bring Phillips's nuanced text to life, showing the artist's work, processes, studios, and varied sites in relation to her work. Phillips first discusses Arendt's classic book *The Human Condition* (1958) to draw correspondences between work, humans, nature, and culture that coalesce in von Rydingsvard's work. She concludes by suggesting that the paradoxes and incongruities in the

artist's production are "brave and persistent," and similar to the poet Carolyn Forché's "desire 'to understand the impress of extremity upon the poetic imagination'" (175). Von Rydingsvard's sculpture has been the subject of thirteen monographs, written by Dore Ashton, Arthur Danto, Michael Brenson, Avis Berman, and Phillips, among others, but this is the most imaginatively written and comprehensive study to date.

In her first chapter, "A Wild Enterprise," Phillips draws parallels between the ways that Freud invented psychoanalysis and the ways von Rydingsvard's work has expanded the field of sculpture. Her overall point about the artist is better than this analogy. Phillips uses 'wild' three ways: first, to quote Freud's view of improperly trained practitioners; second, to discuss psychotherapist Adam Phillips's suggestion that Freud may have been the 'wildest' practitioner of all, since he entered heretofore unexplored territory (24); and, third, to extrapolate that von Rydingsvard is among those few artists whose "'wild' assault of convention and protean curiosity for formal, conceptual, and material experimentation has changed the way we think about art" (24). The overall point that von Rydingsvard broadens the boundaries of her field is important and deserves further consideration and further specificity.

Studying the artist's psychoanalytical directions could be productive as well.

In her second chapter, "The Artist," Phillips reviews the artist's early life. She describes her experience during 1945-50 in eight different German camps for Polish refugees as "an environment of impoverishment, austerity, uncertainty, and unexpressed emotional complexity" (27). She discusses the artist's New York years, beginning in 1973, when she was a graduate student at Columbia University and single parent (following a second period of severe emotional and financial hardship). Phillips sums up diverse artistic directions in New York in the 1970s and the roles of Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, and feminism in raising "questions of seriality, theatricality, and production. Feminist theory highlighted questions of work and labor, art and craft, the body and sexuality, iteration and process, and daring material experimentation. Women artists, in particular, began to work beyond their perceived limits..." (33).

Phillips does not elaborate on her own points, which add to Dore Ashton's earlier, more anthropological view in *The Sculpture of Ursula von Rydingsvard* (Hudson Hills, 1996):

Von Rydingsvard works, as do all intelligent artists, from out of her culture—the culture she experienced as an artist in a certain place, New York, and the culture she has nurtured for herself from countless sources ranging from poets, to museums, to her personal history (9).

Future biographers would do well to offer an even fuller picture of the artist's childhood and first New York years, and art historians could try to examine why the artist's work packs such a strong emotional punch.

This is the only chapter in which Phillips mentions feminism, and only in relation to the art of others. She does not link it to implicit and explicit gender associations in the shapes, titles, themes, and processes in the artist's work. Two among dozens of examples of the artist's gendered associations are *mama, your legs* (2000), a cedar and metal

construction with chunky, moving “legs,” and *Ogromna* (2009), a Polish word for a large feminine presence and the title for the small-waisted, tornado-like towering sculpture created for the North Carolina Museum of Art. By keeping the focus on the art itself, Phillips lets readers draw their own conclusions about each work. She does not pull together the ways that gender, scale, timelessness, and sensory experiences develop chronologically in the artist’s *oeuvre*.

In all, Phillips discusses over sixty-seven individual works and their materials and processes. She shows the artist’s experiment using co-polyethylene and aluminum to create *Katul Katul* (1999-2002) for the atrium space inside the Queens Family Courthouse in Jamaica, New York, and notes that von Rydingsvard recycled the cedar from that work into *Can’t Eat Black* (2001-02). Phillips closes *Working* with close-up views of von Rydingsvard’s monumental outdoor work *Luba* (2010), an expressive bronze and cedar sculpture whose curves frame the allée of trees in the fields below the Storm King Art Center building. Her monumental indoor cedar

works include *Wall Pocket* (2003-04) and *Blackened Word* (2008). *Droga* (2009; Fig. 1) carries the artist’s innovative vertical construction processes in new horizontal directions. There is more to von Rydingsvard’s work than Phillips’s essay has the space to consider, but her essay, like this review, can’t cover everything. *Working* is an engagingly written, visually powerful, art-filled volume—a “must-have” for all art libraries.

Phillips’s essay has contributed to my further conclusions that, in some ways, the artist’s work centers around the body—the ways that its inner workings, skin, and its most basic needs, like air, space, water, shelter, and food, are a gigantic metaphor that, by extension, alludes to how families, cities, civilizations, and even forces of nature function. In other ways, the artist’s work is a dialog about making art that literally combines drawing, painting, sculpture, and art history. The artist’s original explorations of these two different paradigms—bodies and arts—have evolved as a direct result of the opportunities she found as a graduate student in New York City starting in 1973. Thanks to the feminist

currents of that time, women including Dore Ashton and Jean Linder were teaching at Columbia. Most art historians, including Patricia Phillips, have not yet examined the body paradigm in von Rydingsvard’s work, in part because it is an extended metaphor that simultaneously exists on several levels, and in part because the artist’s cedar “bodily” forms are filtered through the lenses of post-minimalism and abstraction, as seen, for example, in Eva Hesse’s *Repetition Nineteen III* (1968). Von Rydingsvard’s complex ideas embedded in her language of forms deserve further consideration. In addition, the artist’s style of managing her studio—from the workers’ safety equipment and health insurance policies to their daily home-cooked lunch together around a big wooden table—speaks volumes. •

Jan Garden Castro is author of *The Art & Life of Georgia O’Keeffe* and *Sonia Delaunay: La Moderne*. Her essays and interviews with Ursula von Rydingsvard have appeared in *Sculpture* magazine, for which she is a Contributing Editor.

Lynda Benglis

edited by Frank Gautherot, Caroline Hancock, and Seungduk Kim
Les presses du réel. 2009

Reviewed by Corinne Robins

This extensive monograph documents the forty-five-year career of Lynda Benglis (b. 1941), and serves as a sumptuous publication for her solo exhibitions in four countries. Beginning in 2009 her work was shown at the Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, the Netherlands; the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; and Le Consortium of Dijon, France. The show then opened at the New Museum in New York and, finally, at the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design in 2011.

At 455 pages, this handsome hard-cover monograph is far more than an exhibition catalogue. In addition to new essays by art critic Dave Hickey and

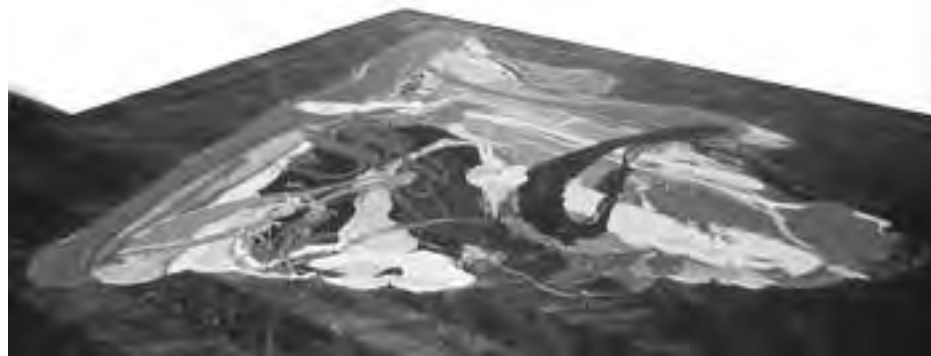


Fig. 1. Lynda Benglis, *Bounce I* (1969), poured pigmented latex, 180" x 169". Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, MA.

curators (from the various venues) Elisabeth Lebovici, Judith Tannenbaum, Franck Gautherot, Laura Hoptman, and Caroline Hancock, it includes reprints of

articles published in *Artforum* by Robert Pincus-Witten and Richard Meyer. Seungduk Kim’s lively and informative conversation with Benglis is included as

an interview. Diana Franssen's impressive chronology includes listings of all of Benglis's solo and group exhibitions and visiting artist appointments. The absence of an index, however, makes it difficult for readers and researchers to locate specific images or materials.

Dave Hickey's introductory essay, "A House Built in a Body: Lynda Benglis's Early Work," describes the artist's sculpture beginning in 1966, particularly her many pigmented polyurethane lava pours. Hickey also includes Benglis's early lozenge-shaped wax landscape paintings, whose arm's-length vertical forms are directly related to the body, says Hickey (14). The works also suggest the importance of Benglis's use of industrial materials and the impact of Jackson Pollock's working on the floor. Pollock's fusion of painting and sculpture had already taken place in the late 1940s, when he drew with paint by dipping sticks into cans of commercial enamel. Benglis's *Bounce I* (1969; Fig. 1) incorporated a similar blending of paint and latex as a three-dimensional floor piece. Although *Bounce I* was selected for the Whitney Museum's 1969 *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/ Materials* exhibition, at the last moment she removed it from the show. Hickey argues that

...all of Benglis's work from this period points away from the chaste academic mainstream toward which Augustan minimalism aspired, whose approval it actually achieved, and whose attention it commanded for thirty years.... With a brighter, looser, sexier and more profligate idiom at play in the discourse, the underground would have been better insulated against academia. This didn't happen but it could have (18).

Robert Pincus Witten's essay is a reprint of the critic's 1974 *Artforum* article: "Lynda Benglis: The Frozen Gesture." Pincus Witten describes Benglis's use of such nontraditional art materials as latex. He also posits that Benglis followed Pollock in her experimentation with liquid rubber to create three dimensional urethane pourings in a free-flowing latex mass. In her poured works, such as *Bounce I* it

was important for Benglis (like Pollock) to be inside the painting—inside the work placed on the floor. Pincus Witten also noted that Benglis's wax paintings made of long vertical forms were directly related to the body and the association of the artist's body with the sculpture (53). Following the article are reprints of "Letters to the Editor" which appeared as reactions to Benglis's notorious naked centerfold in the November 1974 issue of *Artforum*.

Aware of feminism in the 1960s, Benglis was interested in what other women artists were doing, and before she began to exhibit her work, she met Eva Hesse and questioned her about her art. From 1969 through 1971, Benglis's work moved from freestanding objects on the floor to rows of flying configurations adhering to the wall. The wall pieces were made by pouring pigmented polyurethane over a chicken wire armature that was removed when the pieces were finished.

Outstanding among the other essays in the book is Caroline Hancock's "Medusa in Ecstasy," which considers the importance of Greece as a constant source of inspiration for Benglis, whose family are first generation immigrants from Kastellorizon, a southeastern Greek Island on the southern shore of Turkey near Rhodes (133). Benglis began her exploration of plasticity with her use of rubber and wax, materials whose lifelike qualities reminded her of wax death masks. Benglis's subsequent Knot series clearly had classical references. Titled after the Greek alphabet, the Knots resemble handwriting and signatures, reclaiming the artist's physical gesture. According to Benglis, knots in popular culture function as a memory trigger. Hers also refer to types made by sailors or fishermen (140).

A series of artists' statements add an amusing, more casual flavor to a book of art historical essays. For example, video and light artist Keith Sonnier observes:

Thank goodness for Ms. Lynda...who dropped the drawers on the art world which really needed it at the time. Lynda Benglis and I go way back as artists and friends [and] have some

similar roots and interests. We're both from Louisiana but she somehow developed more of the Greek aspect of her heritage whilst I took up the Acadian slack (373).

Cindy Sherman, Annette Messager, Ron Gorchov, and John Baldessari are among the other artists offering tributes.

The text is lavishly illustrated, mostly in full color, with all of the historical images associated with Benglis's early career, including the famous naked centerfold, which was financed by the artist (47), and reprints of pages from *Artforum*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *Art in America*. The final twenty five pages of knotted forms that the artist made in the 1970s feature wall pieces—made of sprayed aluminum and zinc on plaster and cotton, and acrylic paint, gold enamel and sparkles on cotton bunting and aluminum screen. *Knossos* (1977) made of gold and sparkling knots, fills several of these pages.

In the past decade, small catalogues on Benglis have been published to accompany exhibitions in commercial galleries in New York and Philadelphia. This book, therefore, is a singular contribution to the literature on Lynda Benglis. •

Corinne Robins is an art critic and poet. Among her five books of poetry are *One Thousand Years* (2004) and *Facing It Again* (2009).

Color Moves: Art & Fashion by Sonia Delaunay

edited by Matilda McQuaid and Susan Brown. With contributions by Matteo de Leeuw-de Monti and Petra Timmer
New York: Smithsonian, Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, 2011

Reviewed by Jan Garden Castro

Everything Sonia Delaunay (1885–1979) created was art. She was among the first, from her earliest art studies in Germany and Paris until her death at age ninety-four,

to literally spend every day making art in a range of media. *Color Moves: Art & Fashion by Sonia Delaunay* is the catalog of the exhibition held at New York City's Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in 2011. Like the exhibition, the catalog mainly features the textile, fabric, and photo collection of Matteo de Leeuw-de Monti, the grandson of the founder of Metz & Co., a trend-setting department store in Amsterdam that commissioned original fabrics from Sonia Delaunay, chairs and tables by Rietveld, rugs by Bart van der Leek, and other innovative art/design work during the 1930s. The catalog presents color images of a handful of the artist's art and fashion from the 1920s, but mainly presents textile swatches, bolts of fabric, documentary photographs, work by a few other Metz & Co. artists, and other historic materials. The catalog design and layout, starting with a close-up cover image of green, blue, and red shapes on a thinly-woven fabric and full-page reproductions of fabric designs, are exemplary in highlighting textile production as an aspect of Delaunay's artistic output.

This is the ninth book and exhibition since 1992 on which Matteo de Leeuw-de Monti and Dutch Curator Petra Timmer have collaborated and the first American publication of these materials. Substantial essays by these two principals follow a short introductory summary of the artist's fashion career by Matilda McQuaid, Cooper-Hewitt's Head of Textiles and Deputy Curatorial Director. McQuaid presents some basics regarding Delaunay's historically significant work, *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France* (1913). Delaunay's vividly hued abstract design is coupled with Blaise Cendrars' rambling poem about a train ride from Russia to Paris, which is set in varied hues and varied sizes and faces of type. This pioneering collaboration of abstract art and poetry unfolds to "stand" tall—a human-sized vertical work that symbolically "joins" visual and verbal languages in a sort of embrace.

Petra Timmer's essay on Delaunay's fashions and fabrics is an introductory primer on the subject, taking the reader from the artist's birth to her first textile

art objects in 1911, including an abstract baby quilt for her son Charles. Delaunay's "Simultaneous Dress" of 1913 is mentioned but not illustrated, nor are the simultaneous vests Delaunay made for her artist husband Robert Delaunay and their artist friends. The outbreak of World War I found the family in Spain and Portugal, where the artist founded Casa Sonia, her first attempt to produce fashions and home décor for clients including Sergei Diaghilev and his Ballets Russes company members. Timmer's comments on Delaunay's textile productions in Portugal and Spain, her return to Paris in the 1920s (Fig. 1), and her simultaneous fashions in the 1920s are summarized in short chapters. A 1923-24 wool embroidery-on-cotton coat for Gloria Swanson is one highlight of this section. Starting on page 42 and continuing to the end of the 204-page book, the bulk of the illustrations and text focus on Delaunay's textile designs of the 1930s. Timmer summarizes design highlights between 1911 and 1936 and the artist's relationship with Metz & Co. Much of this information appears in her books in Dutch, Portuguese, and other languages.

About halfway through the color-filled catalog, Matteo de Leeuw-de Monti takes over, providing two essays on Delaunay's designs for Metz & Co. and the dating of her fabric designs. His friendship with Sonia Delaunay since he was a boy, and his deep familiarity not only with the materials his family collected, which are now preserved in several institutions, but also with the artist's daily journal, a handwritten, multi-volume record housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, is evident in his essays, which are a highlight of the book. Metz & Co. has had American imitators (if we consider Martha Stewart and Isaac Mizrahi retail items as such), but Metz was remarkable for commissioning what is now museum-quality work from Marcel Breuer, Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, René Lalique, and many artists starting in the 1920s. De Leeuw-de Monti is passionate about Delaunay's roles both as an artist for Metz & Co. and as a friend of the family. He also offers an oblique



Fig. 1. Two models in Sonia Delaunay's boulevard Malesherbes studio (1925). Photo: Germaine Krull. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

reference to his grandfather's romantic attraction to her, for which he cites one of her journal entries—without, however, revealing the entry's contents.

In sum, *Color Moves: Art & Fashion by Sonia Delaunay* chronicles an important chapter in Sonia Delaunay's art-filled, eventful life, giving readers a good idea about how she earned her living supporting her husband and son as a couturier and fabric designer during the 1930s, which was a difficult time for the arts. It skims over the first part of the artist's career, and, except for *La Prose du Transsibérien*, keeps the focus on the artist's fashions and textiles. It includes one painting from 1939 and one from 1946 but does not discuss the artist's innovative paintings or prints or anything after 1936. Delaunay's body of work foreshadowed the twenty-first century view that great art should not be limited to painting. •

Jan Garden Castro is a New York City-based curator, author, and arts consultant. Her exhibition and catalog *Sonia Delaunay: La Moderne* traveled to four venues in Japan and to the Jane V. Zimmerli Museum at Rutgers University in 2002.

Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art

edited by Cornelia Butler and
Alexandra Schwartz
Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2010

Reviewed by Nina Gara Bozicnik

In 1984, the white, male-dominated roster of MoMA's exhibition, "An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture," enlivened Linda Nochlin's famous 1971 inquiry: "Why have there been no great women artists?" The exhibition invited protest over the proportionally small number of women included in MoMA's collections and programs, and it inspired the founding of the artist-activist collaborative, the Guerilla Girls, in 1985. In 2007, MoMA invited this group along with acclaimed scholars, historians, artists, and curators to participate in "The Feminist Future: Theory and Practice in the Visual Arts" symposium, part of its Modern Women's Project, a collection-based research initiative and program series aimed at examining the role of gender in modern and contemporary art, scholarship and the museum. Featuring over fifty essays and more than three hundred artists, the publication moves beyond the dated discourse of women's exclusion and proposes alternatives to the problematic measure of merely inserting women into the existing modernist narrative. Instead, as art historian Griselda Pollock asserts in her essay, "The Missing Future: MoMA and Modern Women," the goal is to reorganize the whole structure of

modernism by "understanding that modern art was created by diverse men and women, side by side, in various forms of conversation, rivalry, and difference" (51). Pollock's text provides a foundation for *Modern Women*, chronicling the gendering of modernism and subsequent practices at MoMA that persisted despite women's fundamental role in creating modern society.

Additional essays examine the institutionalization of feminism and complicate its working mechanisms, posing methodological, theoretical, and practical platforms from which feminist perspectives might operate within scholarship and museums. In "Fundamental to the Image: Feminism and Art in the 1980s," Johanna Burton reconsiders the crossroads of feminism and postmodernism in the work of artists including Sherrie Levine (b. 1947) and Cindy Sherman (b. 1954). She argues that pictures by these artists evoke pleasure and desire, qualities often overlooked in previous critical reception that privileged these artists' analytic use of appropriation and deconstruction of images. In "How to Install Art as A Feminist," Helen Molesworth questions the insertion of female artists into traditional "chronological" (typically all-male) galleries, at the same time dismissing women's ghettoization in isolating rooms. As a departure from the traditional Oedipal narratives of artistic triumph and replacement, she proposes an installation model based on lateral alliances across spatio-temporal divides to create new and revealing conversations among artworks—a Willem de Kooning adjacent to works by Amy

Sillman (b. 1956) and Eva Hesse (1936-70), for example.

These essays are in the book's "Contemporary" section, which like the two other chronological divisions, "Early Modern" and "Midcentury," features brief, single-artist exposés followed by expanded thematic essays spanning a range of subjects and employing diverse strategies, methods, and approaches. The profiled artists are predominately Western. They range from Jodi Hauptman's examination of Sonia Delaunay-Terk's (1885-1979) collaborations with avant-garde writer Blaise Cendrars and her experiments with simultaneity to Andres Lepik's abbreviated survey of Zaha Hadid's (b. 1950) architectural renderings and realized buildings. Some snapshot profiles verge on the overly celebratory and lack historical, contextual, or theoretical tooth.

The book's 528 pages include a useful index and many high-quality images of works in MoMA's collection as well as archival photographs and comparative works. A list of short biographies for some of the women who have shaped MoMA's history includes the institution's three founders Lillie P. Bliss, Mary Quinn Sullivan, and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. Although *Modern Women* in part functions as a symbolic show-and-tell of MoMA's commitment to collecting work by women artists, its critical essays chart a valuable road map for future feminist practices and inquiry inside and outside the museum. •

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Dorothea Rockburne: In My Mind's Eye

by Alicia Longwell, David Anfam,
Stéphane Aquin, Robert Lawlor
Parrish Art Museum, 2011

Reviewed by Joyce Beckenstein

Documenting the first full retrospective of Dorothea Rockburne (b. 1932), *In My Mind's Eye* journeys through the painter's fifty-year

career. This well laid out itinerary is paved free of gnarly misconceptions that have for years labeled the artist's oeuvre a disparate progression of styles. Here, curator Alicia Longwell seamlessly joins the many incarnations of her sensuous surfaces in ways that make sense of their scientific and mathematical infrastructures, and impassioned processes.

But take Rockburne's oft-quoted quip, "...you don't have to know the composition of water to swim in water"

(34), to mean that there is no straight path through those technical underpinnings. They're tough to grasp, and the full-color, 160-page catalog with critical essays waxes helpful and wanes obtuse. Robert Lawlor's "Number and the Ancient Mind in the Work of Dorothea Rockburne," for example, helps readers do some math, but only grazes the non-Euclidian disciplines that Rockburne so arduously studied. The catalog's best parts are found in

Rockburne's refreshing, unvarnished notes. They reveal what makes her tick.

But even these notes pale in the presence of the works themselves. Better to see reason ebb and intuition flow as they ripple through Rockburne's art, from the minimalist Locus series (1972) of scored white etchings with aquatint, to the Pascal Paintings (1986-87), intricate assemblages, hotly hued and densely textured, then on to Geometry as Stardust (2009-10), a series emitting metallic sparks of cosmic energy.

The Montreal-born Dorothea Rockburne remembers Saturday children's classes at the École des Beaux Arts, where she learned classical disciplines—tempera, watercolor, oil, buon fresco, and figure drawing—and where she first discovered how the Golden Mean generates the mystery of infinity.¹ What later followed—the folding, rolling and layering; the club-sandwiching of Euclidean geometry with contemporary topology, cosmology, and astronomy, were, for Rockburne, reinventions of those ancient processes, updated in her personal quest to find within nature's hidden order a modernist's route through the unknown.

Stéphane Aquin's essay, "Dorothea Rockburne—The Formative Years in Montreal," chronicles that city's modernism. It arrived late, during the war years, when an influx of French intellectuals rocked the provincial Art Association of Montreal, forever tethered to the Catholic Church. He vividly contrasts the ensuing viscous academic rivalries with the gentler teachings at the École du Musée, where Rockburne, just sixteen, was a student. While he credits the rebellious mood of the day with juicing the teen's naturally independent spirit, he specifically targets her teacher Gordon Webber, a former student of László Moholy-Nagy, for helping her see "...abstraction as a way of understanding dynamic structures of the universe" (26). More important, Webber told her to leave Montreal.

She arrived in 1950 at the legendary Black Mountain College, in North Carolina, where she studied art with Phillip Guston and Franz Kline, took

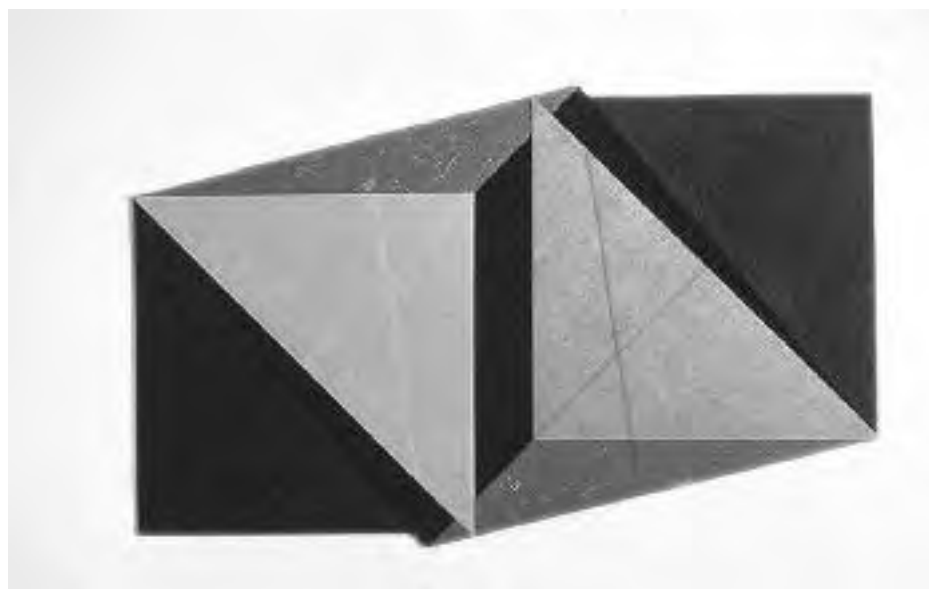


Fig. 1. Dorothea Rockburne, *Sepulcro* (1976), gesso, oil, paint, varnish, glue, and blue pencil on linen, 32" x 55".

music classes with John Cage, and learned dance with Merce Cunningham. But Max Dehn, the renowned German mathematician, was her most consequential mentor. Delighted when she confessed her lack of math background—she had not been "poisoned"—he invited her on morning hikes where he taught her mathematics through observations of nature.

She must have felt like Masaccio, strolling with Alberti, opining how a spot on the horizon was not an endpoint but a marker of infinite space. But Renaissance masters were figurative artists. Their narrative subjects stood firm on orthogonals that swept from the footlights of their illusionist stages clean through the eye of Christ, nailing into focus the dynamic center of the human spirit. Rockburne's art, equally as impassioned and grounded in geometry, keeps mathematical abstractions more elusively abstract.

Alicia Longwell's essay, "Dorothea Rockburne: In My Mind's Eye," discusses the impact of Renaissance masters, while Rockburne, in her notes, describes their seduction. She writes of the heart-stopper Giotto's exquisite series of frescoes covering the entire interior space of the Arena Chapel in Padua (ca. 1305). Awestruck, she wondered "...how, using color and structure, had he created...a new

humanist language while also reinventing the pictorial plane?" (64).

Longwell highlights Rockburne's interpretations of Masaccio's *The Tribute Money* (1425) in her *Sepulcro* (1976; Fig. 1), and Giotto's *Kiss of Judas* in her *Arena drawings* (1978). Rockburne distills the masters' architectural planes, overlapping drapery and lines of communicating gestures into abstractions that lilt, tilt, and echo their obsessions with the mathematics of harmony—that elusive essence that goes by names spiritual, metaphysical, and transcendental. Longwell also mentions the oft-made comparisons between Rockburne and the Minimalist generation, but argues against the label, explaining that "she has never worked on a grid...the visible side of the object. Her preoccupation is with the material of the surface and its mutability" (48).

Mutability is indeed the operative word in Rockburne's oeuvre, and David Anfam, in his essay "The Harmony of the World" searches for the "thread" that connects Rockburne's seemingly disparate styles: *Ineinander Group* (1971), made with crude oil and cup grease; the chromatic opulence of the *Pascal Group* (1986-88) and the gyrating curves, arabesques and ellipses of her later works. He locates this thread in Gaston Bachelard's concept of "intimate immensity."²

For example, her Angel series inte-

What is missing, though, is a cultural

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1. The Golden Mean was considered a "divine proportion" by the ancient groups because it represented the harmony in the universe. This proportion, 1:1.618 describes the golden rectangle found in Greek and Renaissance architecture and a set of relationships found throughout the universe.
2. Gaston Bachelard, *"The Poetics of Space,"* translated by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 201, 203.
3. Ibid.
4. Dictionary.com defines topology as "the study of those properties of geometric forms that remain invariant under certain transformations, as bending or stretching. Also called point set topology, the study of limits in sets considered as a collection of points."

Pl. 1. Remedios Varo,
Recuerdo de la valquiria
 (Memory of the valkyries)
 (1938), gouache on plywood,
 15" x 13". Private collection,
 Mexico. Photo: Courtesy
 Alexandra V. Gruen.



Pl. 2. Alice Rahon, *El Puente de los Gatos* (The Bridge of Cats)
 (1957), oil on canvas, 19" x 23". Col. Mary-Anne Martin/Fine Art.
 Photo: Courtesy Mary-Anne Martin/Fine Art, N.Y.



Pl. 3. Olga Costa, *El Duelo* (The Duel) (1942), oil on canvas, 15 3/4" x
 18 7/8". Col. Mary-Anne Martin/Fine Art. Photo: Courtesy Mary-Anne
 Martin/Fine Art, N.Y.



Pl. 4. Cordelia Urueta, *Puerto Desconocido* (Unknown port) (1964), oil on canvas, 43.1/4" x 55 1/8".
Museo Nacional de Arte, INBA. Photo: Museo Nacional de Arte.



Pl. 5. Joy Laville, *Tres desnudos en la escalera* (Three nudes on the stairs) (1966), pastel on paper, 24" x 17 3/8".
Museo de Arte Moderno INBA. Photo: Francisco Kochen, courtesy the artist.

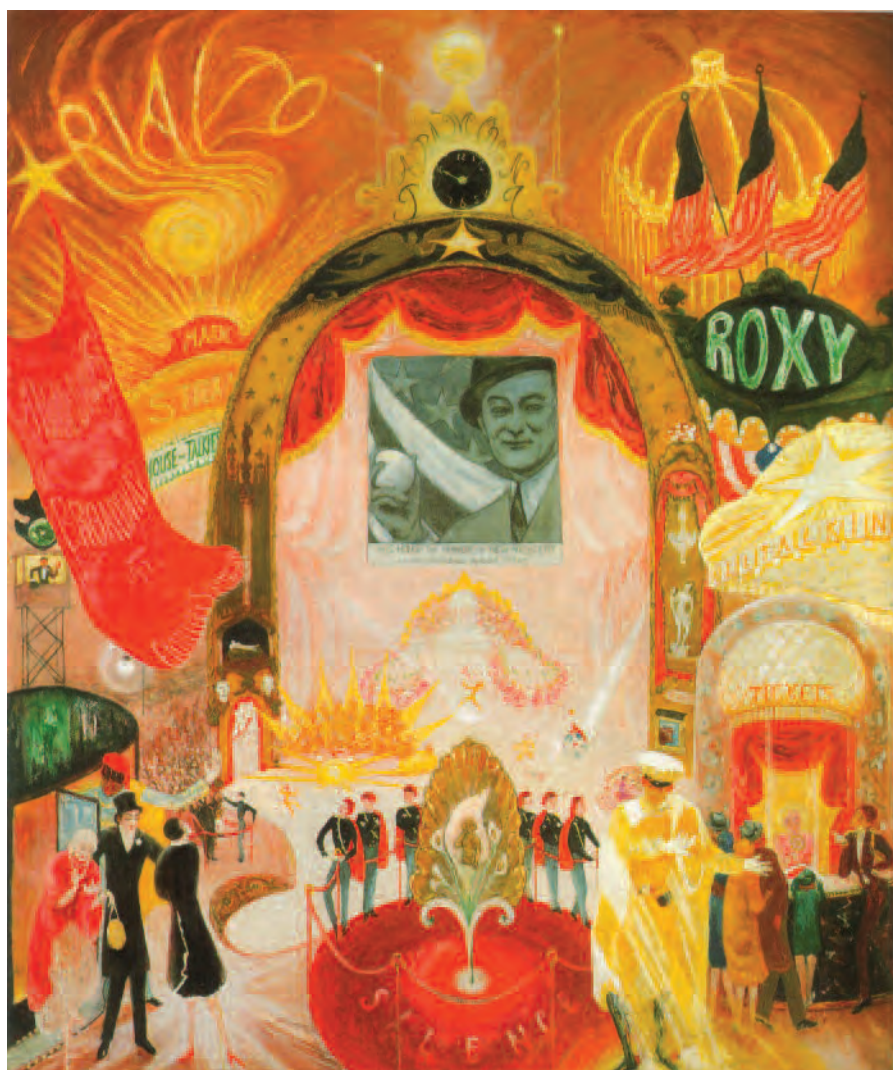
Pl. 6. Florine Stettheimer,
Portrait of Myself (1923),
 oil on canvas, 40" x 26".
 Columbia University, New York.
 Gift of the Estate of
 Ettie Stettheimer, 1967.



Pl. 7. Florine Stettheimer,
Self-Portrait (nude)
 (ca. 1915-16), oil on canvas,
 47" x 67". Columbia University,
 New York.



Pl. 8. Florine Stettheimer,
Portrait of Marcel Duchamp (1923),
oil on canvas, 30" x 26".
William Kelly Simpson Collection.



Pl. 9. Florine Stettheimer,
Cathedrals of Broadway (1929),
oil on canvas, 60 1/8" x 50 1/8".
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Pl. 11. Florine Stettheimer, *Heat* (1919), oil on canvas, 50" x 36 1/2". Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York, Gift of the Estate of Ettie Stettheimer.



Pl. 10. Florine Stettheimer, *Cathedrals of Art* (1942), oil on canvas, 60 1/4" x 50 1/2". The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Pl.12. Juanita McNeely, *Tryscadekatick* (3 panel detail) (1985-86), oil on linen, 6' x 52'. Collection the artist.



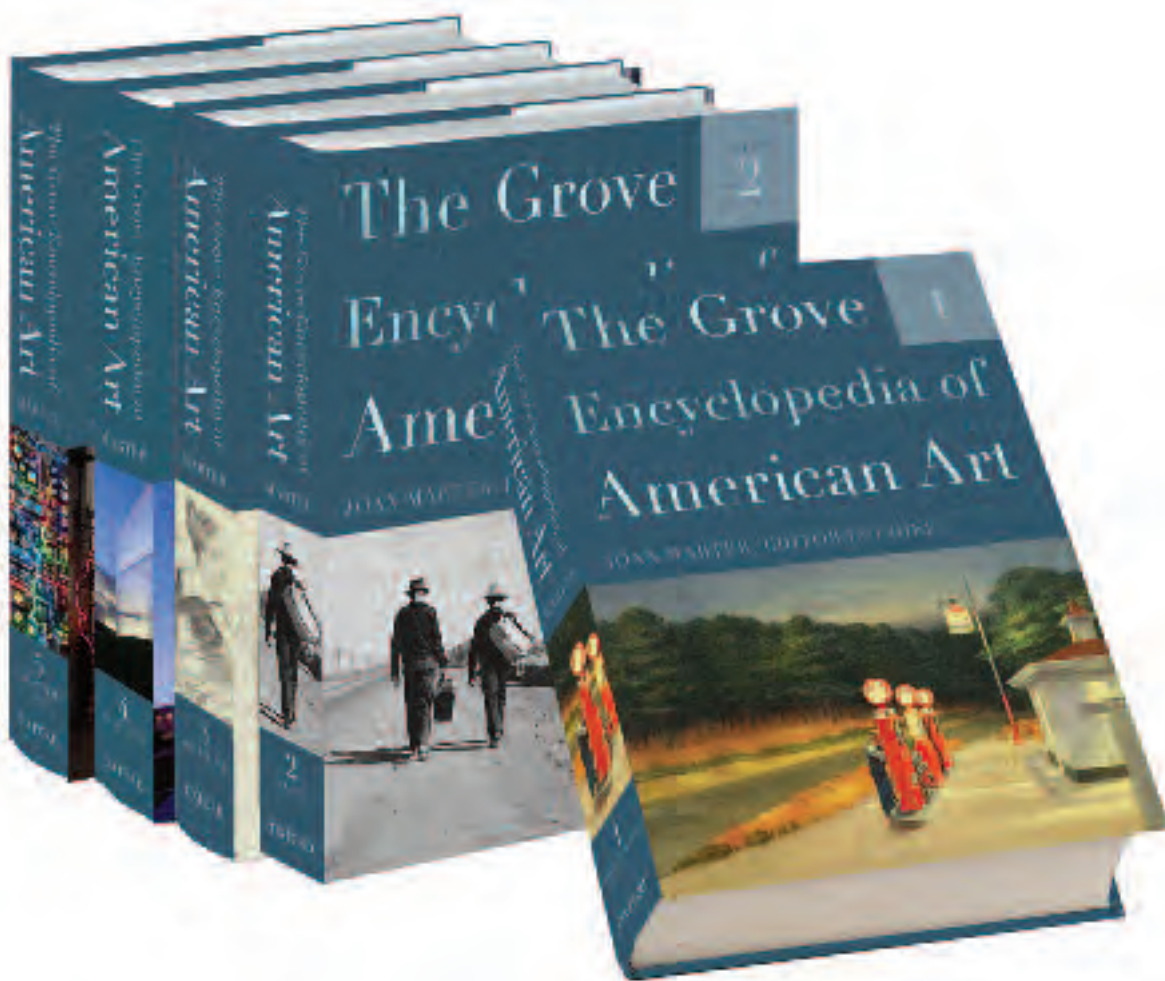
Pl. 13. Juanita McNeely, *Window Series: Ladder* (1999), oil on linen, 72" x 72". Collection the artist.

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