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(on the cover)
Grace Hartigan,
Bride and Owl (1954),
oil on canvas,
72 1/8" x 54 1/8".
Smith College Museum of Art.

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FALL / WINTER 2013 VOLUME 34, NUMBER 2

2 PARALLEL PERSPECTIVES

By Joan Marter and Margaret Barlow

PORTRAITS, ISSUES AND INSIGHTS

3 Grace Hartigan's *Grand Street Brides*:

the Modern Bride as Mannequin

By Aliza Edelman

11 Painting in the House of Solomon: Ellen K. Levy's Work revisited

By Bruce Robertson

21 in and Out of Shape: the Art of reva Urban

By Gerald Silk

29 Louise Jopling: a Gendered reading of late 19th Century Britain

By Patricia de Montfort

39 an art School of their Own:

Women's ateliers in England, 1880-1920

By Maria Quirk

REVIEWS

45 Michelle Stuart, *Drawn from Nature* edited by Anna Lovatt

Reviewed by Joyce Beckenstein

46 Rineke Dijkstra: *A Retrospective* By Sandra S. Phillips and

Jennifer Blessing Reviewed by Jayne Wark

48 Jay DeFeo: *A Retrospective* By Dana Miller, with contributions by

Michael Duncan, et al. Reviewed by Paul Sternberger

51 *Pairing of Polarities: The Life and Art of Sonya Rapoport*

edited by Terri Cohn Reviewed by Joyce Beckenstein

52 *Biala: Vision and Memory* By Diane Kelder

Reviewed by Monica L. Steinberg

54 *Re-viewing Documentary: The Photographic Life of Louise Rosskam*

By Laura Katzman & Beverly W. Brannan Reviewed by Robin Rice

56 *The Deconstructive Impulse:*

Women Artists Reconfigure the Signs of Power, 1973-1991

edited by Nancy Princenthal Reviewed by Karen Gonzalez Rice

58 *Sarah Angelina Acland First Lady of Colour Photography*

By Giles Hudson Reviewed by Jan Garden Castro

60 *Women Readers in French Painting 1870-1890: A Space for the*

Imagination By Kathryn Brown Reviewed by Heather McPherson

62 *Women and the Visual Arts in Italy c. 1400-1650:*

Luxury and Leisure, Duty and Devotion, A Sourcebook

By Paola Tinagli and Mary Rogers

Reviewed by Laura Rinaldi Dufresne

63 *Lynda Benglis: Beyond Process* By Susan Richmond

Reviewed by Victoria Thorson

64 *The Female Gaze: Women Artists Making their World*

edited by Robert Cuzzolino Reviewed by Rachel Schreiber

66 *Visualizing Beauty: Gender and Ideology in Modern East Asia*

edited by Ida Yuen Wong Reviewed by Sarah Frederick

67 *Gertrude Käsebier: The Complexity of Light and Shade*

edited by Stephen Peterson and Janis A. Tomlinson

Reviewed by Shana Lopes

68 *Whatever Is Contained Must Be Released: My Jewish Orthodox*

Girlhood, My Life as a Feminist By Helène Aylon

Reviewed by Stacy E. Shultz

Although recent issues of *Wa J* seem to have featured a predominance of living artists, we strive to achieve a balance between contemporary and historical topics and women working in a variety of media. Our current issue includes only one living artist, with two other articles discussing work by American women painters of the 1950s and 1960s, and two focusing on changes in professional practice and art education for women in Great Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Our contemporary artist, Ellen K. Levy, is closely identified with the impact of science and technology on recent art. Author Bruce Robertson begins his presentation of Levy's significant body of work by describing a groundbreaking installation Levy undertook at the National Technical Museum in Prague in 2001. Author and artist share an interest in the history of museums and the belief that "a painting is a museum," in that it reflects the entirety of art history in its making and being. In the mid-1980s, an installation at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C., based on the Palomar observatory, brought Levy to the attention of NASA, which named her one of a small group of "NASA artists" given access behind the scenes at the Kennedy Space Center. More recently, Levy has worked in collaboration with a noted neuroscientist in creating a series of works, including an animation, focusing on the 2003 looting and destruction of museums in Baghdad. Robertson writes, "new tools are available to shape visual language, and Levy does not hesitate to learn and use them when pertinent to her artistic investigations."

Liz Edelmann presents a fresh take on—and a more feminist dimension of—the painter Grace Hartigan (1922–2008), in her study of Hartigan's use of bride imagery and fashion in the 1950s. Rather than emphasizing her links to abstract expressionism, as does most of the literature on Hartigan, Edelmann shows Hartigan responding to cultural concerns of the postwar period, in particular, the overblown rituals of "the wedding." The popular press is combined with biographical details in this remarkable study. Edelmann observes that "[Hartigan's] paintings, from a moment in her career filled by personal and financial anxieties, shrewdly bring into focus the era's salient debates on the dilemmas and multiple identities of the 1950s Modern American Woman, many of which are centered on the cultural demands of 'feminine' consumption rituals, marital roles, and motherhood."

A contemporary of Hartigan's, Eva Urban (1925–1987), also emerged from abstract expressionist forebears. Her continued explorations in bold, vibrant means of expression led her to introduce shaped canvases as early as 1960. Author Gerald Silk comments that "Urban's shift to shape issued from the bursting potential of coiled vigor encapsulated in a gestural mix of body, form, color, and stroke that symbolized freedom from gender, health and aesthetic barriers."

We regularly receive submissions from outside the U.S., and in this issue, two authors—one from Scotland and one from Australia—present articles whose overlapping subjects shed light on each other. Patricia de Montfort, of the University of Glasgow, has written an enlightening study of Louise Jopling, a successful painter in late-nineteenth century Britain. On the one

hand, Jopling was "keen to promote the values of professionalism and industry," while on the other she became a public figure who was often written about and portrayed in the popular press. "Jopling's attitude," de Montfort writes, "opens up debate about a nineteenth-century doctrine of public and private spheres—the home the domain of women and family, the public sphere that of men."

University of Queensland doctoral candidate Maria Quirk offers a related study of several female-run, French-style atelier art schools in England during 1880 to 1920, which includes Louise Jopling's school. Quirk provides insights into how, in addition to "providing income to practicing women artists, these schools were unique spaces of female authority and autonomy."

As always, the book reviews indicate a healthy productivity of books on women artists and feminist topics. Among the books reviewed here on living artists, two are exhibition catalogues: one presenting works by Michelle Stuart, including drawings, earth art, sculpture and photography, and the other a retrospective of Rineke Dijkstra's photography and video projects. A scholarly monograph on Lynda Benglis focuses on the sculptor's early career and her role in promoting feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. Also reviewed is a biography of Sonya Rapoport detailing her transition from abstract expressionist to conceptual artist and her constantly evolving innovations, and an autobiography by pacifist-feminist artist Hélène Aylon.

Three photographers are the subjects of books under review, including two contemporaries—Sarah Angelina Cland (1849–1930) in England and Gertrude Käsebier (1852–1934) in the U.S.—who were pioneers in the early history of this art form. Interestingly, we learn that both took up photography in their forties. A book on Cland, who earned success quickly and by 1900 was writing and lecturing on the theory and complex processes of color photography, includes a large selection of excellent plates aimed at gaining wider recognition for her. A catalogue of an exhibition of Käsebier's photographs contains essays that provide insights not only into her subject matter and working methods but her efforts "as a self-assertive artist involved in contemporary gender debates." A book on Louise Rosskam separates her contribution to a lifetime of collaborative work with her husband Edwin Rosskam. As a team, with each contributing equally, they sought social reform through their documentary photos and photo-essays during the depression and the following war and postwar years.

Rounding out this section is a review of the first comprehensive monograph on Bay Area artist Jay DeFeo, including many previously unpublished works, as well as a number of reviews featuring a potpourri of interesting subjects ranging from women and art in Renaissance Italy to the empowering of women artists of the late twentieth century and since.

Our thanks, as always, to those of you who continue to support *Wa J* through your subscriptions, and especially to the authors and reviewers whose invaluable contributions have kept *Wa J* relevant as we enter our thirty-fifth year.

Joan Marter and Margaret Barlow,
Editors, Woman's Art Journal

GRACE HARTIGAN'S *GRAND STREET BRIDES*

THE MODERN BRIDE AS MANNEQUIN

By Aliza Edelman

Grace Hartigan's (1922–2008) epic *Grand Street Brides* of 1954 (Pl. 1 and Fig. 1) is an imposing figurative and Abstract Expressionist painting with equally significant implications for our understanding of the broader social dimensions of American womanhood following World War II through the 1950s.¹ A motley portrait of the “Modern Bride” with her bridal party accompaniments, set against wide glass panes in a bridal shop’s window display, *Grand Street Brides* (initially titled in her journals, “Bridal Store Mannequins”)—along with her contemporaneous bridal scenes from 1954, *Bride and Owl* (front cover), and the intimate *Interior with Bridal Gowns*—merit a long-overdue and expanded reading.² From her New York City studio at 25 Essex Street, Hartigan observed the unfolding dramas and market vendors in and around the gritty Lower East Side, recording the urban showcases along Grand Street’s “Bride’s Row,” as photographed by her friend, the talented photographer Walter Silver (Fig. 2).³ She even purchased a \$2 bridal gown from a thrift shop on Third Avenue, later modeled by the actress Marian Jim for *Bride and Owl*. Hartigan was attentive to notions of modeling and popular American fashion, window dressings, and mannequins—the latter derived from the Dutch *mannekin*, meaning little man or doll, and from the French, for a model employed to display clothes—all of which were the subjects of further experimentation in her studio through the artist’s reliance on a model and her own use of self-modeling and role-playing. Moreover, these paintings, from a moment in her career filled by personal and financial anxieties, shrewdly bring into focus the era’s salient debates on the dilemmas and multiple identities of the 1950s Modern American Woman, many of which are centered on the cultural demands of “feminine” consumption rituals, marital roles, and motherhood.⁴

As a young woman who had already experienced the complications attributed to multiple marriages, divorce, and the constraints of motherhood, Hartigan’s timely interest in bridal subjects lends itself to a fuller biographical reading.⁵ These works were initiated at the time of her professional



Fig. 1. Grace Hartigan, *Grand Street Brides* (1954), oil on canvas, 72 9/16" x 102 3/8". Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Gift of an anonymous donor 55.27. Photo: Geoffrey Clements.

turning point from a successful public persona in the art market—where she had identified herself as “George Grace Hartigan”—to embracing the name “Grace George Hartigan.” At mid-decade many critics and curators, including the influential Dorothy C. Miller, willingly acknowledged the artist’s use of a male pseudonym.⁶ Hartigan’s early success further solidifies this complex profile: By January 1951, the new and avant-garde Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York, led by the mercurial John Bernard Myers, held Hartigan’s first one-person exhibition, and by 1953 Alfred Barr had purchased for the Museum of Modern Art both *The Persian Jacket* (1952) and *River Bathers* (1953).⁷ Until this point Hartigan had embellished the use of clothing, costume, and masking in an ambitious struggle to position herself as a younger student of Abstract Expressionism, without sacrificing her ideas to its overall ethos of originality. A promising early series stylistically quoted European Old and Modern Masters, from Dürer and Velázquez to Manet and Cézanne. And in her



Fig. 2. Walter Silver, *Bridal Shop Window on Grand Street in New York* (c. 1954), gelatin silver print. Grace Hartigan Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library.

Matador series from the early 1950s she played with sexual identity through the articulation of the human form while elusively displaying the artist-as-model, who either acquired the guise of a male toreador or an espada, or as viewed in her seated portrait *The Persian Jacket*, where the strictly formal gesture and pose are reminiscent of Velázquez's *Pope Innocent X* (c. 1650). Hartigan was certainly not alone in her presentation of a creative identity imagined from multiple and referential sources, or in her playful, if not camp appropriation of the name George, as she was readily encouraged in this strategy through her personal and professional intimacies in the early and mid-fifties with the artist Larry Rivers and the poet and critic Frank O'Hara.⁸

While Terence Diggory frames Hartigan's experiences "through the lens of a gay sensibility," it is equally important to consider the function of contemporary characterizations of womanhood and the perception of merging gender roles.⁹ Along with fashionable discourse on the Modern Bride, countless studies investigated the topic of the Modern Woman's Dilemma, also known as the Woman's Problem or the Woman's Question.¹⁰ Women's identification with multiple roles and ambiguous models of womanhood, along with the appearance of their adoption of masculine behavior, invoked the frequent use—especially in the behavior of professional career women—of the postwar terms "masculinism" and "feminine ascendancy." These terms implied directed, successful, and authoritative women who, in their rejection of feminine, domestic, or biological roles, were portrayed as imitating men. Prewar notions of femininity and domesticity gradually transformed to include greater responsibilities outside the home; yet professional "lifestyles" for women were complicated by the social expectations of marital relationships

and motherhood.¹¹ In lieu of these changes, Hartigan's self-fashioning was poignantly modern and feminine, not simply because she liked, at times, to dress like a man, but also because she liked just as much to adorn herself as a woman. Her subjects, coupled with her self-styled gender role-playing, reinforce the tensions attributed to the Modern Woman's postwar transitions from masculine identities to feminine identities, and back again, reflecting this era's complex political and sexual climate.

In *Grand Street Brides*, Hartigan stages the bridal shop window as the primary site and entrance into the marital ritual—equivalent to a stage or screen—where the bride symbolically identifies with her supposed femininity and the display of feminine embodiment, thereby consuming through her viewing experience both popular fashion and the ceremony of marriage. In Hartigan's deliberation of the clothing and adornment of brides and bridesmaids, and in her adamant dismissal of the groom as unimportant, the artist continues to shape

her vision of clothing's transformative potential to articulate and to affirm the representation of the modern female body.¹² Hartigan was not the only female artist from this period to underscore the cultural and historical impact of dress and attire in the 1950s. Elaine de Kooning's portraits of men enhance the male body's innate capacity for abstract corporeality through the vertical and horizontal elements of the suit and tie, while the works' surface appearance as a suit of clothes informs the subject's gender identity.¹³ Yet it is in the circulation of images from a particular time in history, not in the images themselves, Annette Kuhn offers, where meaning resides.¹⁴ In Hartigan's relentless search to assimilate, as she frequently called it, "*my world of reference*," she proposed her subject material to be the "'façade,' the empty gesture, the dead ritual, the costume, the mask. Painting is not putting on a mask, but taking it off."¹⁵ Moreover, by linking the flourishing wedding business with her own historical culling of art history and portraiture, Hartigan reveals unexpected relationships between two seemingly conflicted but complementary worlds: between high culture, on the one hand, and postwar fashion and consumerism, on the other.¹⁶

In the United States after World War II, new meaning was attached to the concept and image of the bride as a culturally visible symbol and as an institutionally defined role. By the early 1950s, marriage was a revitalized aspect of American life, and the "U.S. wedding business," *Life* magazine announced, had become a \$3 billion-per-year industry. Dressing brides, bridesmaids, and brides' mothers grossed an unheard-of \$375 million annually, in addition to the cost of receptions and gifts.¹⁷ In effect, the postwar American bride had become a national phenomenon, meriting careful attention from targeted

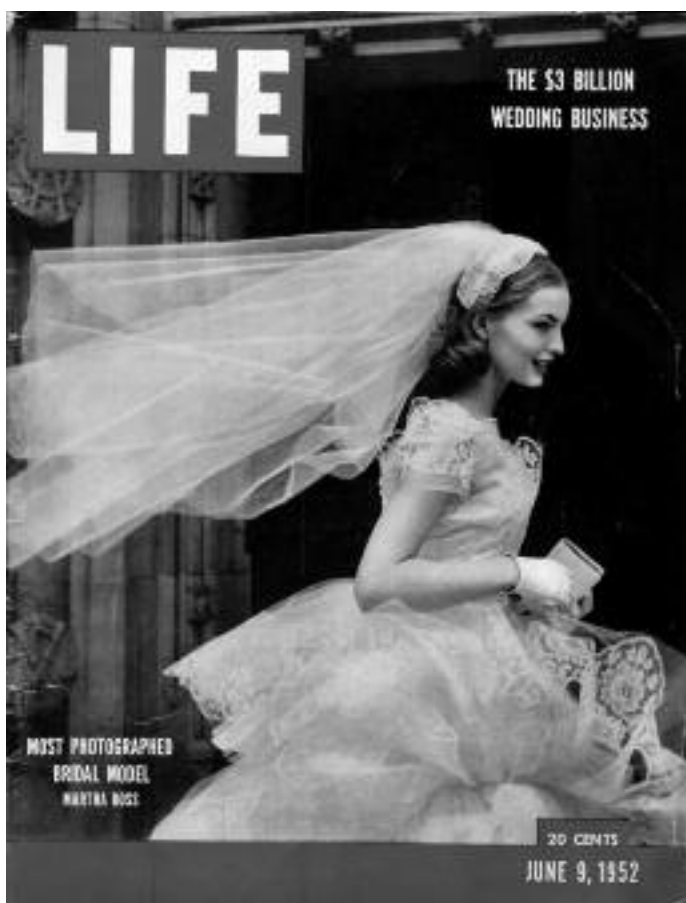


Fig. 3. Martha Boss as bridal model in "The \$3 Billion Wedding Business," *Life*, June 9, 1952, front cover. Photo by Leonard McCombe.



Fig. 4. Models show ready-made underpinnings in "The \$3 Billion Wedding Business," *Life*, June 9, 1952, p. 119. Photo by Leonard McCombe.

publications that included *Bride's*, *Modern Bride*, and *Bride and Home*, among other women's and fashion magazines.¹⁸ Bridal magazines, and the fashion industry's research on brides' buying habits, highlight the wedding dress, marketed as "ready-to-wear," as the most important article of women's adornment and thus a primary aspect of her identity or, one might say, bridal subjectivity.¹⁹ The groom was relegated to a marginal position as an unempowered, if not altogether reluctant consumer.²⁰ Vicki Howard's comprehensive study of the *Modern Bride's* social and commercial transformations shows how magazines after the war popularized ceremonies around the "white wedding" and its centerpiece, the gown, not unlike, one pre-war article claimed, "an artist painting a lasting picture." They marketed contents promoting both traditional and new customs, treating brides as "empowered" consumers, capable of individual approaches and creative acts.²¹

A striking 1952 cover from *Life* featuring the country's then top bridal model, Martha Boss—resplendent in her "working clothes" of nylon tulle and lace gown, cap, and veil—accompanies the magazine's instructional advice for the bride-to-be on registries, trousseaux, and invitations (including a section for those on a budget). Other posed models marking gentle stances in delicate crinoline petticoats and "ready-made underpinnings" illustrate editorial stories (Figs. 3 and 4).²² Like many artists, Hartigan was acutely aware of *Life's* pervasiveness, and

its illustrious design and advertisements directed toward the growing consumer—and specifically female-directed—domestic marketplace. Hartigan's bric-a-brac window display in her painting *Giftwares* (1955) could easily read as a collection of household items from the age of mechanically adept brides.²³ In her own studio Hartigan once hosted a bridal shower for Helen Frankenthaler during her engagement to Robert Motherwell, with various female artists and writers in attendance, including Elaine de Kooning and Miriam Schapiro.²⁴ An informal list from Hartigan's personal notes also suggests that she drew inspiration in her drawings and ideas from *Vogue* editorial photographs, high fashion, and movie glamour.²⁵

Many contemporary discussions on the subjects of fashion, ritualism, and consumerism persuasively indicate converging shifts in the postwar representations of the Modern Woman.²⁶ The topics of behavior and dress received marked attention in social science publications, the popular press, and book publishing—notably Arnold van Gennep's important 1900 study *The Rites of Passage*—and the betrothal and bridal portrait functioned as an important statement about the ritualistic stages in a woman's life, as well as, needless to say, her economic and cultural status.²⁷ In the 1950s, women's modern fashion and alleged "feminine" consumption were still dictated by their relationships to men, specifically husbands and fathers. For the early social scientist Georg Simmel, fashion was another form of imitation signaling women's "lack of personal freedom," while in the 1950s other scholars asserted that a woman's role to "perform the consumption function in general, the buying and wearing of clothes in particular" increases her social status as well as that of her husband.²⁸ In *The Second Sex*, first published in the United States in 1953, Simone de Beauvoir argued that a woman's "dressing-up," beauty care, and adornment provided at the minimum an act of self-possession, however governed by her social and marital situation, as a sign of "female narcissism," akin to the domestic domain: "Deprived of *doing* anything [to] feel that she expresses what she *is*," it is by her choices in fashion, just as in the careful care of her home, that a woman's "ego ... seems chosen and recreated by herself."²⁹



Fig. 5. Walter Silver, *Grace Hartigan Painting Bride and Owl with Marian Jim* (c 1954), gelatin silver print. Grace Hartigan Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library.

Yet it is in the particular power of the wedding gown to invoke a transformation in a woman's identity, a masking embedded in the transitional states of the bridal performance and consumption ritual, that Hartigan must have realized the possibilities for her subjects.³⁰ In their ritual-based analysis, Tina Lowrey and Cele Otnes characterize the wedding gown as a "producer of meanings," striking a pivotal connection between the bride and her dress as an instance of "semiotic expression" that recurs as part of a cultural and socialized performance: "Via its symbolic and rhetorical power, the wedding dress has the ability to articulate or display, to conceal or to hide or simply to blur emotions, attitudes and values. Further, the wedding dress, like all clothing, can be an effective medium to move people to act in culturally appropriate manners."³¹ The wedding dress as sign, symbolically elevated to "sacred object" or "ritualistic artifact," enhances the bride's performance in her bridal role and during the transition into her new social position as wife.³² A bride's costume and appearance reflect her personal style and perform an *other* identity, or "bridal mask," imbued with enormous power of fantasy to showcase an additional facet of herself, whether glamorous, beautiful, or even royal.³³ Masking, in the terms of cultural theorist Efrat Tseñlon's expansive discussions on gender identity and fashion, infiltrates our cultural belief sys-

tems to become a device of power: it can promote an authentic identity of self, at times concealed by the mask, or it can provide a "multitude of authentic manifestations," that is, a "multiplicity" of one's identity.³⁴ For Hartigan, who must have been innately sensitive to the professional ramifications of the term *mask*, and who parlayed its use in her own quotidian language, masking unified the varied fragments of her world to "make some kind of order, some kind of meaning"; and it gradually affirmed the artist's pivotal interest in the invention of transformational experiences and their inherent ritualistic passages from one boundary to another in both art and womanhood.³⁵

Hartigan recounted her inspirations for *Grand Street Brides* in an interview with Cindy Nemser:

I am very interested in masks and charades. It can be women or it can be something else—the face the world puts on to sell itself to the world. I have always been interested in empty ritual. I thought of the bridal thing as a court scene like Goya and Velázquez and I posed the bridal party in that same way.... Every morning I would go out and stare at the windows and then come in and paint.³⁶

At first glance the figures in *Grand Street Brides* project a festive atmosphere and appear photographically posed as dear friends on a stage or in procession. The royal court scenes of princesses and infantas, in the manner of Spanish Old Master paintings, are likewise auspiciously portrayed, and many royal portraits by Velázquez or his workshop, were created "within the context of the matrimonial politics" of the European courts.³⁷ A 1954 exhibition at Vassar College of Hartigan's bridal subjects—an interesting postwar showing for what was then a woman's college—lists a painting by the artist titled *The Infanta Margarita After Velázquez*, now lost.³⁸ Robert Mattison points out the similarities between Hartigan's formulaic arrangement of brides and Goya's overly posed and "conspicuously overdressed" figures in his *Family of Charles IV* of 1800.³⁹

In her slightly earlier *Bride and Owl* (front cover), and its accompanying photograph showing the artist with the model Marian Jim, at work in her studio (Fig. 5), Hartigan creates what she called a "strange combination of 'nature' and 'abstraction'" by structurally enclosing the bride's head and face in a black square, counter to the figure's "surging" upper body and the artist's aggressive application of paint.⁴⁰ Compositionally, Hartigan balances the model's strong vertical disposition and the white gown's expansive planar field against an architecturally framed background or window. While *Bride and Owl* brings to mind the refined influence of Manet's *Young Lady in 1866* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)—a titillating allegory of the senses displaying model Victorine Meurent, along with a parrot, in her fashionably soft pink and orange peignoir, Hartigan exchanges the peignoir's grace and fullness for her own bride's starkly compressed, angular sections; with the inclusion of an owl, symbol of solitude, darkness, or betrayal, Hartigan proposes a somber bridal companion.⁴¹

However, sustained viewing of *Grand Street Brides* creates an entirely new encounter with the bridal shop window, distinguished by its wide but compact, black planar surface.

The members of the bridal party reveal a range of expressions—from joyful and compliant to apprehensive and disaffected—combined with dynamic yet disturbing bodily proportions. Dense layers of paint and drawing—forcibly applied and tenaciously wiped down with rags and turpentine—blur and blend the gowns, made of traditional materials of soft organza, satin, and lace, into thick and richly colorful sections of burgundy, turquoise, vermillion, and yellow.⁴² Bodily forms entwine and contort: note the central two brides' merged arms, binding and disappearing; the veiled bride on the far right, flattened in gray and white, nearly collapses into the window; and the awkwardly posed hands on the far left and seated foreground are ungraciously rendered like claw-like appendages.

All the more intriguing, Hartigan accurately displays what the garment industry in the late forties through the mid-fifties called the popular "Sweetheart Line," worn by Hollywood actresses, princesses, and ordinary brides alike.⁴³ Observe Elizabeth Taylor's dresses designed by Helen Rose for the actress's own weddings and films, as well as the new market in ready-to-wear and bridal lines inspired by Grace Kelly's intricate lace gown in her fairytale ceremony—a style reinvigorated by Alexander McQueen and protégé Sarah Burton's recent design for Kate Middleton. A fashionable statement, the sweetheart-line dress exaggerates the soft curves of a woman's body, the neckline forming a heart-shape from the shoulders to the chest, elongating the torso, tightly cinching the waist, and hiding the legs under a full, billowing skirt. Film historian Maureen Turim writes that the Sweetheart Line was intended to "grace the young, to establish the transition to womanhood and marriage for women coming of age in the 1950s."⁴⁴

Hartigan's figures are mannequins, yet in the artist's emphatic relationship with her female subjects, and their evocative breadth of allegedly feminine attributes, *Grand Street Brides* has the capacity not only to attract the viewer's identification, in particular that of a female spectator, but even to defy it. In a letter to critic Harold Rosenberg in 1954, Hartigan attempted to explain her work: "I think some of my subjects are loneliness, alienation and anxiety. The figures in my paintings ask, 'What are we doing? What do we mean to each other?' The figures never look at each other, but have some personal meaning."⁴⁵ The same year Frank O'Hara wrote of the brides who "face without bitterness the glassy shallowness of American life as their showcase."⁴⁶ Another grouping of women as a social unit in Hartigan's *Showcase* (1955) foregrounds a fractured window-surface reflection with tailored mannequins wearing what suggests dress-pattern composites of blue and beige knee-length skirts and cinched blouses—a distant companion to the two stiff and angular suits portrayed in Willem de Kooning's earlier shop-window drawing *Manikins* (ca. 1939–42). Likewise, Hartigan turned to contemporary commercial culture to find her subject, but she distinctly drew upon marketing that was directed primarily to women.

In 1955, the critic and curator James Thrall Soby characterized *Grand Street Brides's* "strange rivalry of ugliness and hope," where "live beings have donned the mannequins' clothes" and a "quiet, tenacious drama unfolds."⁴⁷ Soby

strategically alludes to Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907)—a connection Hartigan had already made in her journals, along with oblique references to Larry Rivers and Francis Bacon—not only as a significant formal influence but as a masterpiece "freshened in impact" by Hartigan's "rereading of its meaning."⁴⁸ This so-called "rereading" might be extended to suggest that while both paintings take part in commodification as an active, spectatorial display of the corporeal, female body, Hartigan's *Brides* asserts a paradigmatic shift and a new claim on urban modernity, empowered by a female gaze and a financially more independent, female consumer, in contrast to a traditionally patriarchal male-female exchange.⁴⁹

While Hartigan implicates mass culture and consumerism as accomplices in the promotion of the compulsory marital ritual, *Grand Street Brides* recognizes the prominence of such rituals in the subtle and shifting negotiations embodied by the Modern Woman, and mirrors the contradictions to be found in women's adherence to societal pressures. Furthermore, the dilemmas implicit in the Modern Woman's performance of multiple roles—a topic exhaustingly deliberated in postwar female identity—were intentionally portrayed as a strong sign of her unhappiness, drawing attention to the endeavor to create gender distinctions between domestic roles and women's individual achievements.⁵⁰ With divorce an equally discussed stage in the marital ritual, authors attempted to explain not only why many career women considered matrimony to be insufficient but why divorce was a problematic solution to women's unhappiness.

Women's devotion to popular fashion merited significant focus as part of an extensive twelve-page *Life* magazine editorial from 1947 on the "American Woman's Dilemma," with photographs by Nina Leen. Author Frances Levison asserted:

... [W]omen seem obsessed to look and behave like the slim and fashionable manikins they see gliding before them on movie screens, magazine pages and poster advertisements. Last year U.S. women contributed \$650 million to cosmetics industries. "Women feel it necessary," complains one heckler, "not to improve on nature but to disguise it." Fed by Hollywood romances and impressed by the odd siren-housewives who star in soap operas, women dream their way into a life that contrasts unhappily with their own surroundings and prosaic relations with their husbands.⁵¹

Levison presented various case studies of real women, including the single career woman who intends one day to be married, the married career woman with family responsibilities, the housewife and mother with a part-time career, and the professional woman without a family. In view of all the media attention granted to the Modern Woman, Levison observed that women are never described as *individuals*; illustrating a related impression, Margaret Mead had earlier noted that "women—and men—in large numbers are confused, uncertain, and discontented with the present definition of women's place in America ... [Should] she see herself as a person or primarily as a

woman?"⁵² The marital relationship and its deterioration through divorce were leading criteria for the broader definitions of masculinity and femininity, inclusive of the social behaviors and attributes of the single and married, modern career women, and pointedly connected to contemporary debates on domesticity versus professionalism.

In Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg's problematic 1947 book, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, the "The Lost Sex" exemplified women deviating from allegedly normal behavior through the pursuit of "unhealthy" activities—professional or non-feminine pursuits—expressed through their performance as "male-emulating careerists, as over-doting, over-strict or rejecting mothers, or as combinations of career women suspiciously placing too much stress in one way or another on their entirely natural maternal functions. In short, they became neurotics on a wholesale [level]...."⁵³ In a woman's desire to be "a little bit of everything," she was "in fact disguising her 'nothingness.'"⁵⁴ Special attention was given to the gender-based hypotheses on the "masculinity complex" proposed in *The Psychology of Women* (1944) by the German-born psychoanalyst Helene Deutsch: the "masculine" woman maintained competitive relationships with men, whereas a "feminine" woman could identify with a man without challenging him. Women of the latter type, in Deutsch's view, thus proved "ideal life companions for men, if they possess the feminine quality of intuition."⁵⁵ In widespread discussions of the Modern Woman and sexuality, the woman who rejected her fundamentally female psycho-biographical role failed to experience sexual enjoyment and suffered from greater psychic disorders and difficulties.

Additional popular self-help books saturated the market with questions such as: "Why Are So Many Women Failures?," "What Does a Woman Need to Be Successful and Happy?," and "What Is Wrong with Women?"⁵⁶ The career woman and the "mythic" ideals of the "companionship" marriage thus resulted in new relationship categories.⁵⁷ Anthropologist and popular writer Ashley Montague offered that, upon marriage, women do not have the capacity for "dissociation that men display" because of their inability to separate the many spheres of their lives; in contrast, a man can lead "two separate existences by staking their whole career upon performance, which women rarely do."⁵⁸ Criticizing the use by Deutsch and others of strictly sexual terms to describe women's behavior, psychic disorders and neuroses, the influential Barnard sociologist Mirra Komarovsky argued that, in the nominal convergence of sexual roles and the appearance of an obliteration of sexual differences, women's lives had "much the same virtues, patterns of behavior, and attitude" as do those of men; Komarovsky referred to these standards as the "modern" role.⁵⁹

Underscoring this historical moment in 1950s culture, then, Hartigan's *Grand Street Brides* offers a penetrating assessment of women's relationships to the glorified wedding tradition and its implicit rituals, while perceptively conceding that those rituals engaged in the seductive pleasures and power of fashion—without necessarily characterizing either the tradition or its ritual as, in Mary Louise Roberts's terms, a "negative homogenizing force associated with mass consumer

culture."⁶⁰ Hartigan's captivating bridal pictures may be read as critical yet sympathetic reflections on the prominent bridal industry and the female consumer market, with its specialized bridal shops and on-site consultants for women at all economic levels. Yet *Grand Street Brides* evokes more than merely the irony of mid-century marriage. Hartigan's ingenious bodily construction of bridal party mannequins—carefully arranged in the manner of a shop window—virtually rehearses on stage for the viewer the multiple roles, expectations, and failures projected onto women. Through an affirmative process of performing "masculinity" and "femininity" throughout her career, Hartigan resourcefully portrays the key gestures and fashionable diversions then transforming the contemporary female body, and creates a calculating description of modern life in the postwar era. •

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Notes

1. In response to a formal questionnaire from the Whitney Museum of American Art upon its accession of *Grand Street Brides*, Grace Hartigan wrote on January 18, 1956: "My studio is near the lower East Side bridal gown district on Grand Street, where one may find 'shop after shop' displaying brides and brides 'maids' gowns. This painting is inspired by the 'attitudes' of the gowned mannequins in these shop windows. I worked the painting from memory and also from photographs." Object file, Grace Hartigan, *Grand Street Brides*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
2. In her journals, Hartigan calls this series her "bridal pictures," referring at times to *Grand Street Brides* as B.S.M., standing for "Bridal Store Mannequins," mentioning her purchase of a white bridal gown from a thrift shop, and including important notes on her working method of "looking at & not looking at the photographs" of bridal windows (as captured by Walter Silver) that hung in her studio, as well as occasional walks from her studio "to look at windows." Grace Hartigan, *The Journals of Grace Hartigan 1951-1955*, William T. La Moy and Joseph P. McCaffrey, eds. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2009), 128–33, hereafter, *Journals 1951–1955*.
3. Among the many photographs by Walter Silver are those of Hartigan in her studio modeling the cheap bridal gown mentioned here, and another group that shows the gown hanging amidst her abstract canvases. See The Walter Silver Collection, Gift of George and Carole Silver, 2000, Contact Prints and Ephemera, The Photography Collection, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, New York Public Library.
4. For an instrumental book framing historical constructions of the modern woman and the modern body in relationship to fashion and art, see Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer, eds., *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2003). See also Eugenia Paulicelli and Hazel Clark, eds., *The Fabric of Cultures: Fashion, Identity, and Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
5. Hartigan married after graduating high school and crossed the country to California, hoping to become a pioneer in Alaska with her husband; she became pregnant, experienced financial difficulties coinciding with the outbreak of World War II, returned to the East Coast, and divorced in 1947. Marriages to the painter Harry Jackson and gallery owner Robert Keene each lasted less than a year. In 1960,

- she began a successful marriage to Dr. Winston Price, a scientist, and moved to Baltimore. Hartigan said she had "two serious marriages and two frivolous ones." See Hartigan, transcript of an interview by Julie Haifley, May 10, 1978, p. 6, Oral History Program, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
6. In her later career, the artist repeatedly questioned the art world's feminist revisionism of her name, saying that she exhibited with a male name without intending "to disguise the fact that I am a woman." Cindy Nemser, "Grace Hartigan," in *ArtTalk: Conversations with 12 Women Artists* (New York: Scribner's, 1975), 166. In multiple letters between Dorothy C. Miller, then Curator of Museum Collections at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and Hartigan, the former wrote: "I do wish you would let us call you Grace Hartigan some time in print." Dorothy C. Miller to Grace Hartigan, June 8 and July 2, 1954, Grace Hartigan Papers, Syracuse Univ., George Arents Research Library, box 4, hereafter Hartigan Papers.
 7. With her first one-person exhibition in 1951, critics expressed how far Hartigan had progressed since her former group showings, especially in "the evolution of a personal style originally deriving from Pollock and de Kooning." J.F. [James Fitzsimmons], "Grace (George) Hartigan," *Arts Digest* 25 (Feb. 1, 1951): 18–19.
 8. Artists and writers in her wider circle also included Alfred Leslie, Jane Freilicher, Nell Blaine, James Schuyler, and Barbara Guest. In a series of fascinating letters between Larry Rivers and Hartigan during 1953–55 (Hartigan Papers), the artists adoringly address each other through various personalities and identities—Delacroix, Courbet, Corot, and Ingres. See also, Terence Diggory, "Questions of Identity in *Oranges* by Frank O'Hara and Grace Hartigan," *Art Journal* 32 (Winter 1993): 41–50; and Gavin Butt, "The Greatest Homosexual? Camp Pleasure and the Performative Body of Larry Rivers," in Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, eds., *Performing the Body/Performing the Text* (London: Routledge, 1999), 100–10.
 9. See Diggory, "Introduction," in *Journals 1951–1955*, xii.
 10. See for example, Marynia F. Farnham, M.D. and Ferdinand Lundberg, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1947); Sidonie Gruenberg and Hilda Sidney Krech, *The Many Lives of Modern Woman: A Guide to Her Happiness in Her Complex Role* (New York: Doubleday, 1952); and Paul H. Landis, *Making the Most of Marriage* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1955).
 11. The wartime image of Rosie the Riveter and the mythic projection of the female worker seemingly glorified in women the masculine characteristics of strength and virility, as long as women's attitudes and actual power were carefully constructed and controlled by the male-run womanpower campaigns. On these complex wartime debates, see Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne, 1982); and Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1984).
 12. Hartigan once said: "Everyone knows the groom is very unimportant." Artist file, *Bride and Owl*, transcript of a telephone conversation with Grace Hartigan, Aug. 4, 2000, Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA.
 13. See Elaine de Kooning, "Great Women in the Fine Arts Speak on Creativity," *University Women* 1, no. 2 (1962): 21.
 14. See Annette Kuhn's seminal text, *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6; J.C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: Hogarth, 1930); and Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni, *La Robe* (Paris: Seuil, 1983).
 15. Hartigan, *Journals 1951–1955*, 108 (Dec. 4, 1953), 138 (May 4, 1954); her emphasis.
 16. Designer fashion commanded an important space in Hartigan's life, even as a struggling young artist; according to her niece, she "wanted quality things, and she would eat oatmeal and then spend money on a mink. She would get really good pieces of clothing and she would buy classic, real designer stuff . . . If she would sell a painting, that's what she would spend it on." Donna Sese, interview with the author, Jan. 19, 2013.
 17. See "The Wedding Business," *Life*, June 9, 1952, 118–24, 127–30.
 18. See Nancy A. Walker, ed. *Women's Magazines, 1940–1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998).
 19. See popular etiquette guides in the postwar bridal market, for example, *The Must-Buy-Market: A Study of the Modern Bride* (New York: Ziff-Davis, c. 1954) [prepared by the magazine *Modern Bride*, based on a survey by Lloyd H. Hall Co.]; and Edyth Thornton Mcleod, *The Bride's Book: Be the Bride of Your Dreams! Modern Etiquette, New Wedding Dresses, the 1950 Trousseau, Today's Wedding Budget* (New York: Archway, 1950).
 20. Vicki Howard credits the growth in the "bridal shop idea" to *Bride's* influential place within the magazine industry, in her *Brides, Inc.: American Weddings and the Business of Tradition* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 83, 94.
 21. *Ibid.*, 4, 7. See also Virginia Pope, "Here Comes the Bride," *Bride's*, Autumn 1934, 5, 24, cited in *ibid.*, 93.
 22. Martha Boss's gown by designer William Cahill cost \$155, and the headdress by Robert Brodheim \$35, as noted in "The Wedding Business," *Life*, June 9, 1952, 29.
 23. See Ellen Lupton, *Mechanical Brides: Women and Machines from Home to Office*, exh. cat. (New York: Cooper-Hewitt National Museum of Design, Smithsonian Institution and Princeton Architectural Press, 1993).
 24. Elaine de Kooning, Miriam Schapiro, Musa Guston, May Natalie Tabak, and Barbara Guest are among the guests listed in Hartigan's datebook for April 4, 1958. Hartigan Papers, box 12. See also Daniel Belasco, "Between the Waves: Feminist Positions in American Art, 1949–62," (PhD diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York Univ., 2008), 44.
 25. Hartigan, *Journals 1951–1955*, 108.
 26. On the important relationships among ritualism, bridal identity, and consumerism, see for example, Howard, *Brides, Inc.*; Chrys Ingraham, *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008); and Katherine Jellison, *It's Our Day: America's Love Affair with the White Wedding, 1945–2005* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2008).
 27. The bride's ritualistic stages are presented as a journey from her status as a single woman participating in the profane world to the uniquely liminal position during her brief moment as bride, followed by her arrival at the final stage in her secure role as wife, in A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960), 116–45.
 28. See Georg Simmel, "Fashion" (1904), *The American Journal of Sociology* 62 (May 1957): 541; and Bernard Barber and Lyle S. Lobel, "'Fashion' in Women's Clothes and the American Social System," *Social Forces* 31 (1952): 126. For a further discussion of early influential studies of fashion in relation to modern class divisions and hierarchies, see Paul Sweetman, "Shop-Window Dummies? Fashion, the Body, and Emergent Socialities," in Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson, eds., *Body Dressing* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 59–77.
 29. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (1953; repr. New York: Vintage, 1989), 528–29; her emphasis.
 30. Through the ritualized consumption of fashion "each act of appropriation is a promise of transformation"; Benjamin Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), 348–49.
 31. Tina M. Lowrey and Cele Otnes, "Construction of a Meaningful Wedding: Differences in the Priorities of Brides and Grooms," in J.A. Costa, ed., *Gender Issues and Consumer Behavior* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 57. See also Cele C. Otnes and Elizabeth H.

- Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003).
32. Lowrey and Otnes, "Construction of a Meaningful Wedding," 61. "When wearing the wedding dress on the day of her wedding, a bride draws on the private meanings of the dress as a sign to enable her to perform a role she has never played before...." *Ibid.*, 64–65, 69.
 33. These ideas follow historian Mircea Eliade's writings on masks and ritual origins, in which the wearer of the mask is "projected beyond his personal temporal identity . . . even when the mask is his own portrait"; Eliade, "Masks: Mythical and Ritual Origins," in *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, ed. Diana Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 70–71. See also, David Napier, *Masks, Transformation, and Paradox* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986).
 34. Efrat Tseëlon, in Efrat Tseëlon, ed., "Reflections on Mask and Carnival," in *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on Gender, Sexuality and Marginality*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 19, 25; and E. Tseëlon, "From Fashion to Masquerade: Towards an Ungendered Paradigm," in Entwistle and Wilson, eds., *Body Dressing*, 103–17.
 35. Cindy Nemser, "Grace Hartigan," in *ArtTalk*, 166.
 36. *Ibid.*, 157; see also, Stephen Westfall, "Then and Now: Six of the New York School Look Back," *Art in America* 73 (June 1985): 119.
 37. In Javier Portús Pérez, *Manet/Velázquez: The French Taste for Spanish Painting* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2003), 456–57.
 38. The exhibition *Paintings by Grace George Hartigan*, at Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, NY, Oct. 25–Nov. 24, 1954, also included *Grand Street Brides*, *Bride and Owl*, and *Interior with Bridal Gown* (all 1954). Hartigan gave a gallery talk to accompany the exhibit, and subsequently a Vassar undergraduate student named Emily Dennis wrote a paper on these works that Hartigan appreciated. Artist file, Grace Hartigan, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
 39. Robert Saltonstall Mattison, *Grace Hartigan: A Painter's World* (New York: Hudson Hills, 1990), 34.
 40. Hartigan, *Journals 1951–1955*, 117, 131–32.
 41. See Gary Tinterow, "Édouard Manet: *Young Lady in 1866*," in Gloria Groom, ed., *Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2012), 26–31.
 42. Hartigan, *Journals 1951–1955*, 134.
 43. Maureen Turim, "Designing Women: The Emergence of the New Sweetheart Line," in Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog, eds., *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body* (London: Routledge, 1990), 212–28.
 44. Turim continues, "Upper class, middle class, even Hollywood in its real life, everyone . . . engaged in this extravagant costuming to celebrate the most important social ritual of the post-war years: the wedding"; in *ibid.*, 220.
 45. Grace Hartigan to Harold Rosenberg, Mar. 25, 1954, Hartigan Papers; also cited in Mattison, *Hartigan*, 34.
 46. Frank O'Hara, "Nature and New Painting," *Folder 2*, no. 1 (1954–55): n.p.
 47. James Thrall Soby, "Non-Abstract Authorities," *Saturday Review*, April 23, 1955, 52.
 48. Hartigan, *Journals 1951–1955*, 133 (April 6, 1954). Daring to privilege Picasso's influence on Hartigan over Matisse, Soby writes that her "rereading of its [*Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*] meaning is one more indication that masterpieces are often freshened in impact by the predilections of succeeding generations of artists"; Soby, "Non-Abstract Authorities," 52.
 49. See Anna C. Chave's expanded reading on Picasso in her "New Encounters with *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*: Gender, Race, and the Origins of Cubism," *Art Bulletin* 76, no. 4 (December 1994): 596–611.
 50. See Joanne Meyerowitz, ed. *Not June Cleaver: American Women in the 20th Century*, 204. During World War II, the soon-to-be dilemmas of and tensions regarding postwar definitions of womanhood were already a concern. See Harold L. Ickes, "Watch Out for the Women," *Saturday Evening Post*, Feb. 20, 1943, 19, 70; Elinor Goulding Smith, "The Undecided Ones," *Atlantic Monthly*, Feb. 1946, 141; Blake Clark, "The Girl Who Does a Man's Job," *Reader's Digest*, Jan. 1950, 94; and "Girl in the Back Room," *Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1952, 207.
 51. Frances Levison, "American Woman's Dilemma," *Life*, June 16, 1947, 101–12.
 52. Margaret Mead, "What Women Want," *Fortune*, Dec. 1946, 173. In 1949, Mead published her important study *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World* (New York: William Morrow, 1949).
 53. Farnham and Lundberg, *Modern Woman*, 123. On divorce, Lundberg and Farnham wrote that: "...more than twenty percent of all marriages in this country are headed for the scrap heap the moment they are made." *Ibid.*, 37.
 54. See Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak, *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 156. Noting the state of masculine anxiety in marriage, a Barnard College professor in 1953 argued that "the desire of married women to have a personal life distinct from that of the couple or family has tended to alienate men and to make them withdraw into a world of their own"; cited in Elizabeth Bragdon, ed. *Women Today: Their Conflicts, Their Frustrations and Their Fulfillments* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), 32.
 55. See Helene Deutsch, *The Psychology of Women: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, vol. 1 (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1944), 191–92, 289–91.
 56. Many texts addressed hypothetical case studies on women's various challenges, for example, "While their anxiety and unhappiness may rise and fall with changing events, they continually feel abused by the circumstances which surround their modern lives"; Metheny and Peterson, *The Trouble with Women*, 21. See also Gruenberg and Krech, *The Many Lives of Modern Woman*; Schindler, *Dr. Schindler's Woman's Guide to Better Living, 52 Weeks a Year*; and Leopold Stein, M.D., *Loathsome Women* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959).
 57. Ernest Haverman directs the strain and failure of the modern marriage toward the American wife, contending that women were "educated to be partner-wives, but at the same time they are propagandized to be companion-wives and the weight of tradition urges them to be old-fashioned wives"; "Amid Profound Change Personal Crisis," *Life*, Sept. 8, 1961, 114–16. See also Talcott Parsons, "The Social Structure of the Family," in Ruth Anshen, ed., *The Family: Its Functions and Destiny* (New York: Harper & Row, 1949); and Parsons, "Age and Sex in the Social Structure of the United States," *Essays in Sociological Theory* (New York: Free Press, 1954).
 58. For an important discussion of the controversial reception and preoccupation with human behavior and sexuality in Alfred Kinsey's scientific research, see Paul Robinson, *The Modernization of Sex* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976). See also, Ashley Montague, *The Natural Superiority of Women* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 137; and Montague, "The Triumph and Tragedy of the American Woman," *Saturday Review*, Sept. 27, 1958, 13.
 59. Mirra Komarovsky, "Cultural Contradictions and Sex Roles," *American Journal of Sociology* 52 (Nov. 1946): 184–89; and *Women in the Modern World: Their Education and Their Dilemmas*, ed. Ann Greer (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953). This book addressed arguments against Lynn White's thesis in his *Educating Our Daughters: A Challenge to the Colleges* (New York: Harper, 1950).
 60. See Mary Louise Roberts, "Samson and Delilah Revisted: The Politics of Fashion in 1920s France," in Chadwick and Latimer, *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars*, 69.

PAINTING IN THE HOUSE OF SOLOMON

ELLEN K. LEVY'S WORK REVISITED

By Bruce Robertson

Just over a decade ago I wrote an essay on a body of site-specific work by Ellen K. Levy called "Shared Premises: Innovation and Adaptation" that was going to be exhibited at the National Technical Museum in Prague.¹ This event took place a little over a month before the upheavals of 9/11. Both of us shared an interest in the history of museums as part of the larger history of ideas, particularly the history of science and technology, and that shared interest provided the platform for my essay.

One aspect of the particular historical moment and place of the exhibition was the uncanny convergence between some of the spaces and forms conceived in the paintings and the space and forms of the National Technical Museum, which was a version of the canonical science museum gallery of the nineteenth century (itself a reworking of the classic library gallery of the previous century): an upper gallery circumambulating a high, rectangular space crammed with cases and exhibits, some suspended from the ceiling (Fig. 1). These angular forms, deep spaces, and industrial surfaces were reflected in Levy's paintings; both were part of the same, continuous history, even if expressed in radically different material and epistemological modes. And, as the essay discussed, Levy's work self-consciously explored the issues of taxonomy and classification and collecting in museums, and the convergence of forms in the specimens, whether they were human-made or biological. Both interests, for Levy, fell under the umbrella of evolution, but they might just as easily have been seen as expressing the understanding that all collectible material and the sciences that study them precipitated slowly out of the original museum, the Wunderkammer, and have only slowly been crystallized into their current configuration of art, science, and technology, and natural history and history museums, just as the disciplines attached to these museums have for the most part arisen from natural history.

Since the essay was written and the works painted, there has been a radical discontinuity, and the world we live in is not a place we could have imagined at the beginning of 2001. What follows, then, is the original essay and then a reflection on the developments in Ellen Levy's work and in the museum world in general. But as I reflect on the status of museums and their



Fig. 1. National Technical Museum, Prague, 2001. Photo: Ellen K. Levy.

future, and the full richness of significance of Levy's work, I realize that framing it within the trope of the museum is insufficient, as is our notion of the museum itself. I would rather think of both as sitting within Solomon's House, an institution dedicated to the generation of all knowledge.

Ellen Levy once said to me: "A painting is a museum too."² We were looking closely at an area of one of her paintings that reminded me, in its color and paint handling, of Mondrian. She clarified what she meant: at this point in time no artist can put brush to canvas without history shaping the act. The painting inevitably becomes a collection of these art historical moments, a museum of the artist's involvement in the art of her time.

But Levy also paints images of museums—of multiple museums all gathered together—and exhibits her paintings in those same museums. Her paintings become a collection of collections. They are both a metaphor for the museum, its sign

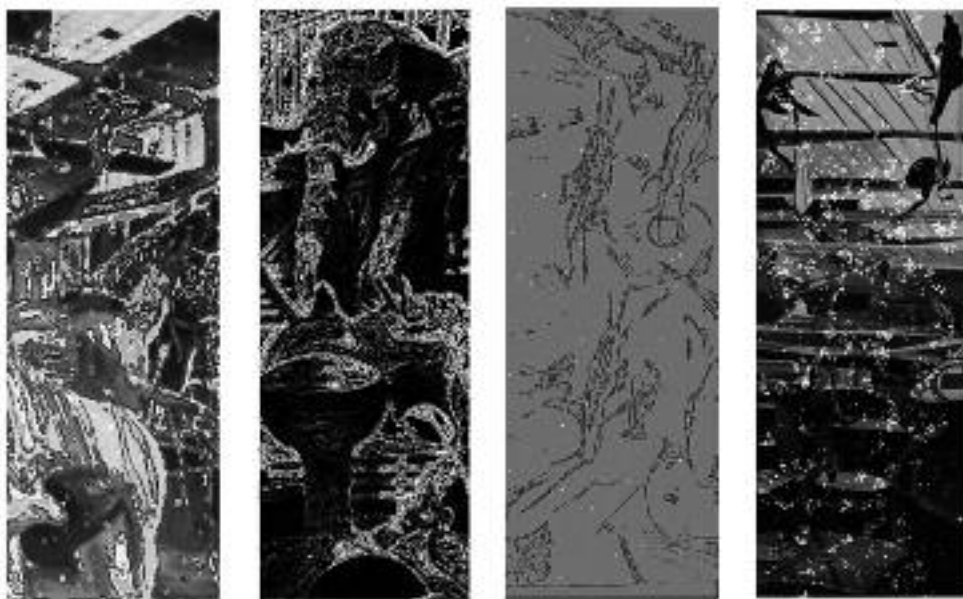


Fig. 2. Ellen K. Levy, *Untitled* (2001), four chromogenic prints mounted on metal, each 30" x 10". National Technical Museum, Prague. Photo: Peter Seidel.

and synecdoche, and the museum itself. They function as a microcosm in which all aspects of the macrocosm are reflected and collected. Since she fits her general work precisely to the particular circumstances of its location, one of the goals of the viewer of this exhibition is to see how she has brought her ideas about museums and painting to the history of transportation at the National Technical Museum.

What are her paintings really collecting? First, her painting concerns itself with basic scientific issues and theories of growth and chaos. These are questions of how intelligible form is created. Contemporary scientific theories suggest implicitly that form only takes shape in contrast to other forms or lack of form. There is no ideal form that exists independently in itself; today's theories of growth and chaos constitute the death of Platonic form. Moreover, form is now seen to be generated not geometrically but algorithmically, in a constant series of stages that succeed each other.

Perhaps the most important modern theory concerning the creation of form is evolution, the theory that explains how the most "perfect" form of all—ourselves—was finally made. But chaos theory has affected evolutionary ideas as well: no longer can evolution ever be seen as progress but instead it must be regarded as a byproduct of the algorithmic permutations affecting large communities. This enters Levy's work in a number of ways, but perhaps most dramatically in her works that are modeled on cellular automata.³ In these chromogenic prints, "genetics" becomes a mechanism for creating painterly form. She has applied algorithms of growth to scanned images of her paintings, using the computer not to generate order but to mutate it, so that the artwork itself is now part of an evolutionary order. Each of the chromogenic prints designated "Untitled" (2001; Fig. 2) is based on images from either natural history or technology displays.

Levy puts a further spin on evolution as she subtly juxtaposes the fin of a shark and the fin of an airplane. She reveals that

humans use the same algorithms to generate forms as "nature" uses to generate functional shapes in animals.⁴ But Levy pushes the notion of 'function' further than the obvious elements of locomotion and structure. She addresses questions of developmental biology through integrating painting, data visualization, and computational approaches in her installation (2001; Pl. 2). The forms in *Malevich's Tail: Brancusi's Bird* (1999) float in a medium that suggests water as well as air. By contrast, in *Christo's Tusks: Loewy's Propellers* (1999), the development of bicycle designs in the lower right-hand quadrant mimics the painted morphology of tusks. In *Damien's Gliders: Agassiz's Chart* (1999), Levy aims to compare evolutionary theories, juxtaposing Agassiz's evolutionary chart

in the left third of the composition with a cladistic-like series of branching lines on the right formed by the combination of lines from the ceiling and stacked airplanes. Through the constant process of visual rhyme—whereby the curve of a shark's mouth echoes the sinuous line of an elephant's trunk or a propeller—she reveals an order that underlies all the elements of the seemingly heterogeneous, unconnected objects she brings together.

This is the second thing that converges in Levy's work—her interest in classification, seriation, and organization. In gathering different creatures and machines, she classifies them



Fig 3. Ellen K. Levy, *Trophy* (1997), oil on wood, 72" x 72". Photo: Oren Slor. Private collection.

in an order that makes sense of some kind. There are several obvious ordering systems that are conventional in museums. Progress is the most constant—a line beginning from the earliest example and proceeding to the most recent. Or museums organize things into kingdoms and species, continents and regions, modes and uses. The impulse to arrange produces collections, and all collections suffer organization. Levy, by bringing together specimens from the Jardin des Plantes, Kennedy Space Center, and the National Technical Museum, for example, proposes an arrangement that harmonizes all other secondary classifications of time and space. This brings us to the third convergence. By gathering multiple collections in one unity, Levy recalls the history of museums.⁵ For example, *Trophy* (1997; Fig 3) exemplifies how an oil painting exhibited at Associated American Artists Gallery in 1998 reflects prior studies that Levy had made from displays in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris. The painting also contains additional elements such as paper clips and Damien Hirst's collection of sharks in glass cases. She regroups the dispersed elements of the first universal collections of all objects known to man, the curiosity cabinet or Wunderkammer of the sixteenth century, reuniting its primary division of *naturalia* and *artificialia*. All later museums descend from these microcosms of the universe. But where all later museums dismantle this microcosm into its separate parts, the Wunderkammer joined them firmly. The central function of the Wunderkammer was to explore similarity of form and, most particularly, the similarity between natural creations and humanity's, between *naturalia* and *artificialia*.

Levy has recuperated the fundamental epistemological maneuvers of the Wunderkammer: we know the world through the comparison and juxtaposition of like and unlike, by placing one thing next to another. She deftly conflates two kinds of juxtaposition—seriation (an Enlightenment, modern scientific tool) and adjacency (a technique of the curiosity cabinet). She collapses together, as she does the elephant and the airplane, the history of museums, even as she collapses ideas of history and progress and evolution in their seemingly different realms of technology (the history of things), human history, and natural evolution. In this maneuver, she is utterly postmodern, and is firmly in line with the new epistemologies of knowledge production being created (or recreated) by the Internet.

Levy does not so much write about these ideas as she paints them. And here she makes her most distinctive contribution, the point she made to me the first time I looked at her paintings with her. Understanding both the act of painting and the painting itself as a museum, she accomplishes several things. First, she knits all the disparate elements of the modern museum experience together. And she underscores their commonalities in the public performance of culture that constitutes the museum's characteristic involvement in contemporary society. Second, she begins to define the very act of making marks on canvas as an act of form creation, similar



Fig. 4. Ellen K. Levy, Installation at National Technical Museum, Prague (2001). Photo: Peter Seidel.

to those that scientists have agreed produce and shape meaning in the world. In other words, she suggests that artistic creation lies exactly on the knife edge between chaos and growth that her chromogenic prints illustrate. She unveils the truth that painting itself is an algorithmic activity of form creation that is both endless in its future and a product of its past. The profound importance of Ellen Levy's art lies in this demonstration, this unbaring of the deepest connections between the process of history, the progress of form development, and the activity of physical collecting.

Finally, one needs to say something about Levy's paintings at the National Technical Museum. The Museum is a specific place, above all dominated by the large gallery of airplanes, bicycles, automobiles, and other machinery of transportation. In that space one is faced with the usual contradictions of growth and chaos, between the orderly evolution and historical display of a particular machine type, and then, turning around, an amazing cacophony of objects, scale, uses, colors. One walks past a line of models, photographs, and text, all in a line on the balcony, and then sees, in a volume of space crowded with large machines of all kinds, the real thing, real wonders embedded in the amber of the museum.

Levy's installation recreated this fundamental experience of museums—and, one might add, science, art, and life itself. The installation (Fig. 4) shows three of the large-scale oil paintings that were just discussed, four chromogenic prints, a related animation, and a painted platform in the foreground that depicts some of the traffic underlying the museum and its displays. The orderly sequence of sixteen panels (not visible in this photograph) mimics the line of cases on the balconies of the transportation exhibit; but the view through them into the paintings themselves is a dizzyingly "accurate" recreation of the immediate impression of the whole exhibit. Only gradually does one recognize the affinities and rhymes of shapes, and the harmonies of human-made and natural forms. Slowly and carefully, progress and evolution are seen as systems of forms.



Fig. 5. Ellen K. Levy, with Michael E. Goldberg and Paul Sultan, still from *Stealing Attention* (an animated series) (2008).

The chromogenic prints and the four large oils frame these sixteen “windows” in another fashion, suggesting the two ends of the conceptual spectrum which Levy has brought together—the work in the laboratory and the collection of the museum. Finally, in the central sculptural installation, Levy works out of the transportation exhibit into the world outside the walls of the museum in her references to the city and its traffic patterns.

For that is the ultimate goal of Levy’s work, to situate the work of art—painting, the most traditional of Western civilization’s high art forms—in the realms of both the most abstract of scientific ideas and our daily experience of pattern making. The act of putting paint to canvas, she asserts, is as natural and as artificial as getting behind the wheel of a car, or of understanding the algorithms of life.

Since 2000 Ellen Levy has pursued her interests in the complexity of nature and culture, and the artist’s ability to address that complexity, in several different bodies of work. She has expanded into digital and video media and continues to experiment with installations. But she has returned to painting always, and to the ability of painting to absorb the most astonishing range of questions, motifs, and ideas. Painting can still function as a collection, a museum for her, but the work and the frame around the work have changed. In turn, installation and contextualization have become central strategies that enable her to extend the field of painting’s possibilities through focusing the viewer on the physical aspects of perception, especially its constraints.

Because the world of museums has changed radically, so has my reaction to her work. Museums now seem imperiled

institutions in a way that had been largely theoretical a decade ago. Then we were concerned about the inroads that both digitization and epistemological changes (arising within many disciplines from a focus on objects to a concern for process) had made on the goal of collecting, preserving, and displaying physical objects—the traditional core of the museum mission. In particular we chronicled the dismantling of natural history collections, their abandonment and occasional destruction, as it seemed that ecology had replaced taxonomy as the heart of natural history. Art museums, little more than a decade ago, were deeply reluctant to put images of their collections online, in case it should discourage people from visiting the museum because they would be content with a digital replica.

But we have also witnessed the wholesale physical destruction of art and archaeological collections: the museums in Iraq and Afghanistan most notably, but more recently the looting of the Cairo museums during the so-called “Arab Spring” of 2011, and even more recently the burning of historical libraries in Timbuktu early in 2013. We realize that we cannot just theorize about museums, but must actively work to protect them, if we value them. Even in this country, I find myself more interested in the pragmatic and ethical issues of cultural patrimony, the quickly evaporating boundary between the commercial art market and the museum exhibition, the distortions of the money and interest that surround contemporary art collecting and the continued relevance of historical collections, than I do about the epistemological status of collection and display practices. We may assert the continuing resiliency of museums within contemporary culture, but we must also acknowledge their fragility and mutability.

Levy’s art works reflect the deep changes undergone by museums: the shift from taxonomy to ecology, the pervasive influence of digitization upon archiving, and the distortions of the market. As Levy’s work alludes to iconoclastic acts of violence as well as the profitable trade in stolen antiquities, it embodies how the processes of evolution work their way on culture as surely as biology. Ellen Levy has explored just these issues most profoundly in a series of works entitled *Stealing Attention*.⁶ Focusing on the destruction and looting of museums in Baghdad, she ties these acts of violence to two larger forces in a different realm. While most of us would see these acts as political, theological, or cultural—that is to say, within the realm of the social—Levy is interested in how they play within the realm of biology. Specifically, she develops two threads: first, the ways in which inert objects themselves have a life, whereby they may be seen to migrate or replicate themselves; and second, how our attention to these events is shaped by the hard-wiring of the brain, as it has evolved over time.

Superficially, her consideration of provenance and the impact of political events on objects resembles the work of activists like Hans Haacke, and one cannot deny the value of Levy’s activism. However, the real frame of the work is more abstract and just as powerful. What Levy is getting at is the fact that our attention is not seamless but biologically constructed: there are gaps and holes in what we see in the world, as our brains put together discrete packets of data, file them away and retrieve them.



Fig. 6. Ellen K. Levy, L-R: *Conning Baghdad*; *Fleeced Chariot*; *Jack of Hearts* (all 2008), mixed media on wood, each 58" x 38". Photo: David E. Levy.

The work itself consists of an animation (the result of a collaboration between Levy and Michael E. Goldberg, Director of the Mahoney Center for Brain and Behavior, Columbia University), nine mixed media paintings, eight prints, and documentation, next to an empty shelf, in an installation. One of several large-scale mixed-media paintings, *Jack-of-Clubs* (2008; Pl. 3), depicts hands stealing relics and playing cards within a maze-like architectural space. The animation requests that we play a game of cards, counting the number of times the Queen of Hearts appears in each cycle; the hands displaying the cards flash rapidly and randomly over a matrix of black and white photographs of objects lost from the Museum in Baghdad in the looting after the invasion (Fig. 5).⁷ If we pay attention to the cards as we are supposed to, we don't notice that the objects are disappearing.⁸ The documentation consists of the catalogue data of the missing objects. The paintings are meditations on the objects, the cards, the destroyed museums and their archives, the invading troops; in other words, all the data that surround the incident. Levy poses a question through her installation: are the emotional, empathetic qualities of painting capable of recalibrating the viewer's vision? The task assigned to the viewers in the animation, which is placed at the entrance, nearly insures they will not see the looted objects in the background. Subsequently, as the spectator moves through the installation space, the artworks insist on the embodied qualities of paint and image to flesh out the theft of the antiquities. The three mixed-media works, *Conning Baghdad*, *Fleeced Chariot*, and *Jack of Hearts* (all 2008; Fig. 6), represent the theft taking place within the museum space. The bare wood of the painting support and the titles develop the issues of construction, destruction, and re-construction that

occur in the animation. If the viewer should watch the animation again before leaving the exhibition, she has a greatly increased chance of now seeing what had before been invisible—the removal of the antiquities.⁹ Painting stands for the real world of rich context, while the animation (essentially a distraction machine) reduces the situation to objects, hands, and cards. There are many ways we could look at this juxtaposition of media and event, but one way, surely, is the rich stillness of the paintings and the rapid firing tempo of the largely black-and-white animation.¹⁰ Or, framing it epistemologically and historically, one has all the incidental and pictorial qualities of art while the other embodies the deliberately reductive act a scientist goes through to conduct and experiment, selecting only those few basic elements she wishes to investigate.

In *Stealing Attention*, Levy also confronts the ubiquitous digitization of museum collections through juxtaposing digital with painted passages in collage on wood panels. She enables the eye to linger while it compares realistic renditions of a raided museum space (often identified by either printed or painted words) with impasto and depicted architectural passages. The digital collage requires viewers to actively rotate their heads to re-create how once unified forms have been split apart and to rely on their archival memory of salient art works. For example, the painting *3-Card Monte Projected* (2008; Fig. 7) includes patents and trajectories of the gaze, and features hands taken from Caravaggio's *The Cardsharps* (c. 1595) and George de la Tour's *The Cheat with the Ace of Clubs* (c. 1630–34) from the collection of the Kimbell Art Museum.

Not incidentally, however, Levy literally stages an experiment. By including painting, with its demand that we both

concentrate and expand our vision, she examines how she can affect our attention so that we do pay notice, so that the physiological processes of our brain are shaped by the medium the work is expressed in. In other words, she turns the installation into an experiment, not in the rather loose sense we all like to apply to our work, when we “try things out,” but in a more purely scientific sense, of containing the subject within precise parameters so that physiological change can be determined and measured.

As is typical of Levy’s work, she has placed these concerns within the frame of magic acts and illicit street action in the references to the cardsharp practices of three-card monte. Notably, magician’s tricks now function as excellent primers within the realm of neuroscience, of how attention, itself, works.¹¹ A context of moral outrage also exists since the antiquities can be seen as stand-ins for the collateral damage of war. In effect she has drawn a clear line between the political and cultural missteps of the Bush administration, which went so cavalierly into a country that it determinedly refused to learn anything about, and the larger psychological phenomenon of how we do pay attention to things, how easily distracted we are from what is important to pay attention to. But also her work allows us to learn what we habitually do, and thus avoid such mistakes in the future. In other words, her work is positioned not only as a political warning but as a model of knowledge production, one that is useful in all situations.

In subsequent artworks, such as *This Image is Unavailable #2* and *#3* (2012; Pls. 4 and 5) and *Molds and Memes: Cast of Thousands* (2013; Fig. 8) Levy continues to have the viewers focus on images of antiquities in the process of being stolen. They are portrayed under plastic wraps and/or being smuggled from their original habitats or else being replicated from casts. Upending expectations, Levy playfully comments that these fragile relics could instead be viewed as hardy, having solved some basic problems of life forms. Pretending these relics have agency, Levy depicts them in *This Image Is Unavailable #2* and *#3* as having “solved” the problem of transportation via human carriers while, in *Molds and Memes: Cast of Thousands*, she focuses on depicting the replication of the antiquities. She states that they have enticed us to become their accomplices; we commit theft on their behalf, viewing the pillaging of cultures as a form of unintentional tribute, and we humans provide for their transport and propagation (through the memes of casting and language). In this sense, she views herself as their human archivist.

Both groups of works, *This Image is Unavailable* and *Molds*



Fig. 7. Ellen K. Levy, *3-Card Monte Projected* (2008), mixed media on wood, 72" x 48". Photo: David E. Levy.

and *Memes*, portray the intersection of two worlds—the lichens that build a home on statuary and the migrating treasures of a fully globalized and monetized art world. Showing these treasures swaddled with plastic, Levy initiates a visual play of real and depicted transparency and opacity with painted illusion and cut mylar on paper. This time, however, the looted relics assume center stage while, in the background, near-invisible shifts of texture, value, and reflection take place while depicting the lichen and mold growing on the surface of the statuary. The subject remains inattention blindness, but the blindness is directed to the ominous changes in our environment. The lichens (known for longevity and as a barometer of environmental health) function as a microcosm that reflects on the human macrocosm of collected trophies from fragile and warring environments. As with the exhibition at Prague, Levy implements cellular automata studies using scans of the

developing art works, and she occasionally incorporates them within the art works. The proliferation of lichen that occurs over time is mimicked in paint by applications of impasto (modeling paste and gel) with knives, bubble wrap, and fabric over printing. Levy implicitly asks whether these antiquities (their memes consisting of descriptions, depictions, and imitations) can outlast the most fundamental and resilient forms of microbial life, deliberately equating or confusing again the human-made and the biological. The question intimated by the depicted lichen is whether these hardy forms can survive us and the changes we have wrought in the ecosystem.

Over the years, Levy, who has a B.A. in Zoology, has worked in laboratories and been immersed in the art and the neuroscience of attention, and has been engaged with a wide variety of major scientific research concerns, focusing on the nature of classification, the brain and visual perception, and genome research. Her art work has dealt with the subject of technological evolution by incorporating the patents from such industries as oil exploration and genomics and has portrayed the negative impact of corporate development upon the environment in *Sea Currents*, *DNA and Oil* (Chakrabarty), and *Quorum sensing bacteria*, all executed in 2005.¹² Most of these works date from 2001 to 2007. An early oil work on wood support, *Relentless* (1987; Fig. 9) animated a force field of automated energy and was inspired by a display at a science museum as well as by images of Russian constructivism. Prior to that, she had exhibited in a number of scientific institutions, including the New York Academy of Sciences (1984) and the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C. (1985). The works displayed at both locations focused on observatories. *Aperture* (1984; Pl. 6)



Fig. 8. Ellen K. Levy, *Molds and Memes: Cast of Thousands* (2013), Mylar, modeling paste, paint, and print, 60" x 40". Photo: Ellen K. Levy.



Fig. 9. Ellen K. Levy, *Relentless* (1987), oil on wood, 72" x 48". Photo: Oren Slor.

entailed a lengthy panel preparation involving sanding and casein layering to create a subtle emission of light. By contrast, the temporary ceiling mural, *Palomar* (1985; Pl. 7), consisting of eighteen units of archival paper pieced together, was exhibited on the rotunda portion of the ceiling of the exhibition space at the National Academy of Sciences. *Palomar* was two hundred inches in diameter, the same dimension as the famed Palomar mirror in California, and was instrumental in Levy's obtaining a commission from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) (1985) at the Kennedy Space Center. Levy became one of a small group of NASA artists. She described her experience of meeting with NASA engineers and astronauts and touring the facilities, sketchbooks and cameras in hand, while avoiding alligators attracted by the activity. She completed several casein on panel works as a result of her NASA commission; many such as *V.A.B.* and *Chrysalis* (1985; Fig. 10) were based on the vehicle assembly building where components of the space shuttle were assembled. A *New Yorker* blurb singled out such work for its vertiginous, Piranesi-like space.¹³ Levy had long been immersed in the lore of space travel and recalls eagerly signing her name to travel to the moon when she visited the Hayden Planetarium as a child. Like many, she was greatly saddened by the Space Shuttle *Challenger*

disaster (1986), the death of its seven crew members, including school teacher Christa McAuliffe, and the threats to the continuation of the space program. According to the artist, *Untitled (Challenger)* (1986) and *Structure + Failure* (2003) are expressions of fear and explore the structure of failure. Works subsequently shown at Drew University and in Hamburg and Cologne, *Disorder and Early Sorrow* (1987; Fig. 11), were named after a short story by Thomas Mann. In them Levy explored complex systems theory with models, drawings, and paintings of dominoes subjected to destructive forces. The placement and removal of the dominoes suggested architectural models of cities. Her system relied on a random number generator; although the randomness is only approximate, it visually suggested some of the circumstances that result in chaos.

One common thread in her diverse periods of work is her interest in the convergence of cultural and technological change with biological evolution. As she stated in a 2009 article about George Kubler's *The Shape of Time*: "Just as biology and technology have coevolved to forge a new industry, we contemplate new art forms that merge the biological with the technological."¹⁴ Given her fascination with complex systems, it was natural that she view its discoveries and technologies as compelling resources for artists.

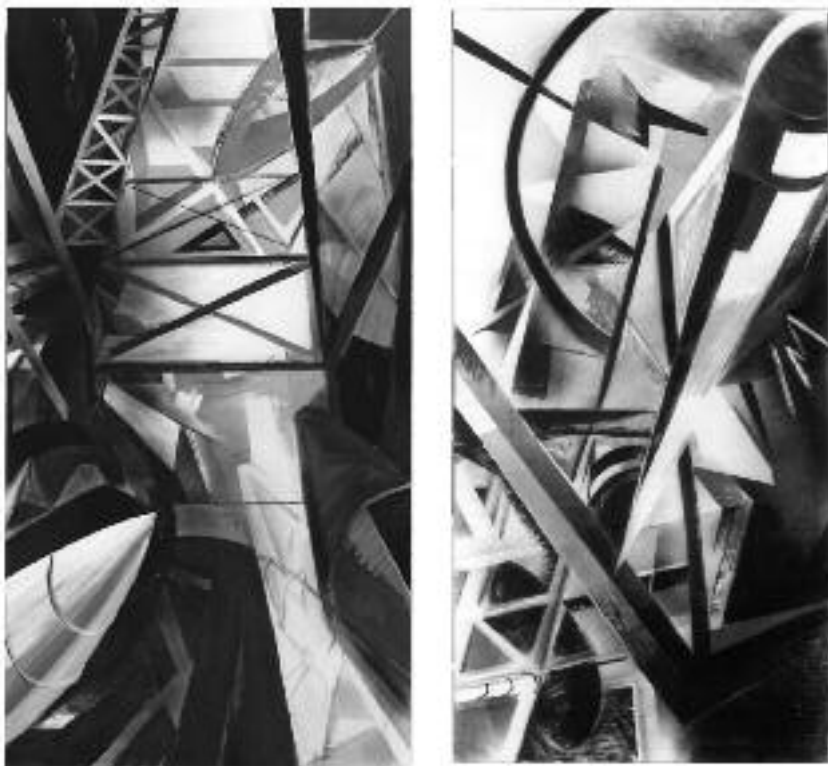


Fig. 10. Ellen K. Levy, L–R: VAB (Vehicle Assembly Building), *Chrysalis* (both 1985), casein on prepared panel, 60" x 30". Left, Photo and Collection the artist; Right, Photo and Collection NASA.

But what then does art offer? Why not continue the laboratory work? Or, to put it another way, how does painting actually embody research activity: what is the divide between measuring response or visibly compelling response? In other words, what are the relationships among the experiments and research, the creation of algorithms to trace networks in databases, the creation of digital media, chromogenic prints, and Levy's handsomely crafted, complex, and compelling paintings?

A decade ago I made the claim that Levy was arguing that painting at the end of the twentieth-century was a museum, a repository of the gestures, interests, and subjects of painting over the previous century and before. I argued, implicitly, that any painter today, in putting paint on canvas, did so from the position of a curator, that the painting was inevitably an exhibition, a sort of curated visual space. Now, however, I would make a larger and, I hope, more compelling claim, that Levy has argued successfully that painting is the House of Solomon, a space where all the world's knowledge resides and where knowledge workers—both artists and viewers—make use of that storehouse to discover the world anew and learn new things about it.

Solomon's House, while referring to the Temple Solomon built in Jerusalem, more specifically is the institution imagined by Francis Bacon as the heart of his utopian island in *The New Atlantis* (published in 1627 after Bacon's death). In this fantasy, Bacon imagines the perfect society, one guided by knowledge and reason, and untainted by the violence, disease, inefficiency, and irrationality of the Europe he knew. The island of Bensalem is governed by a ruler who is advised and

led by a group of wise scholars gathered together in Solomon's House, which includes laboratories, classrooms, storerooms, botanical gardens, and workshops. At the center of the institution, which is essentially the whole island and society, are two galleries, one which contains models of all the major inventions and discoveries, and the other with the images of the scientists who discovered them. This is a model of a museum which lies at the core of an enormous knowledge enterprise: the museum is the totality of the activities and structures of the House, and is also a microcosm of the whole, reflecting back to all participants the essential elements of the institution. As Bacon says of the House itself, the same may be said of the museum galleries: "which house or college ... is the very eye of this kingdom."¹⁵

This dream of a center of knowledge production that encompasses the world is age-old, from the first known "museum," the Library of Alexandria, to places like the Smithsonian or the modern research university. Bacon's formulation had a particular potency, and was a touchstone for the actions of generations of institution builders, from the Royal Society in the 1660s to the South Kensington Museums (which grew to include the University of London

at one point) in the 1860s, both of which explicitly evoked Bacon's term as their ideal. Ellen Levy's body of work has the same ambitions for her art and succeeds in both "exploring the similarities of the social, the biological, and the technological with the pictorial,"¹⁶ as Sara Henry asserts on her website, and arguing that the pictorial is a ground or matrix in which all the other modalities may be accessed and understood.

Let me conclude by remembering a peak experience visiting museums, in 2002, when on a dreary afternoon in New York, I trudged through two major exhibitions: the Renaissance tapestry exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Gerhard Richter retrospective at MoMA. The first demonstrated how insignificant oil painting, particularly easel painting, was at the height of the Renaissance: Raphael's art existed to provide designs that could be turned into tapestries that were infinitely more useful, more impressive and a lot more expensive than most of his paintings. Tapestries trumped oil painting hands-down, just at the point in the narrative of the Western canon when art historians trumpet its triumph. At the Richter exhibition, in contrast, I was thrilled at the way in which Richter met the challenge of every other mode of image production and reproduction and mastered them in oil painting: the extraordinary technical control exhibited in the abstract works in particular resulted in surfaces that no other medium could match or even approach. Here, I thought, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, was the painter who has most profoundly fended off the challenges of other media, and defended the centrality of painting more completely than any of his contemporaries, in the debates about the status of art within the



Fig. 11. Ellen K. Levy, "Disorder and Early Sorrow" installation (1987), L-R: Untitled, work on paper, 37" x 24"; Model, dominoes; Untitled, painting on panel, 12" x 16". Photos: Ellen K. Levy. All Private Collections.

expanding realm of visual technologies that has been going on since the invention of photography (and even earlier). Richter, ever expanding his art, also investigated the possibilities of the digital print in a 2012 exhibition at Marian Goodman Gallery.¹⁷

It seems to me that Ellen Levy has been engaged in a similar kind of investigation, assertion, and challenge, not so much about the relationship of painting to other image technologies, but the place of painting in the realm of knowledge production itself. Scientific inquiry has enabled Levy to intimate questions through her artworks: To what extent do cellular automata work like evolution? How does culture spread? Cultural evolution is considered to occur more rapidly than natural selection, but, now that biology can be manipulated, can its evolution proceed at a faster pace? When words describe antiquities or replace them, do we actually visualize the same images?

How does an artist assert the power of art within a world dominated by the claims of science to know the world more certainly and thoroughly than any other mode of knowing? Levy suggests that an artist's proper concern is all-encompassing and that the *qualia* of affect and concrete sensation that are basic to art cannot be ignored by science; this knowledge is part of what art offers science. As Bacon says: "The End of our Foundation is the Knowledge of Causes, and Secrett Motions of Things; and the Enlarging of the bounds of Humane Empire, to the Effecting of all Things Possible."¹⁸ As it concerns Levy, the point is that the House of Solomon was a storehouse of rich potential.

Two final points are worth making. We take for granted the differing claims of Art and Science, the major disciplinary division invented in the nineteenth century at the same time, not coincidentally, that museums became a primary feature of cities: science and art have fundamentally different ways of knowing and knowledge production. It's useful, however, to remember that the very word "scientist" was modeled explicitly on the term "artist."¹⁹

Most attempts in the humanities to "theorize" are rather sloppy imitations of scientific theorizing, just as the urge to incorporate quantification and measurement are largely meaningless (and forgetful of Duchamp's *3 Standard Stoppages* (1913–14). Levy, however, is no stranger to actual science; she is as grounded in the work and mentality of science and scientists as any artist living. She is informed in the scientific

fields she references (and having sat on several academic research committees I know that a geologist has no more understanding of theoretical physics or genetics than I do, and vice versa).²⁰ Her interests span Richard Dawkins' work on memes, D'Arcy Thompson's work on morphology and form, George Kubler's meditations on the shape of time, and L. Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza's examination of how genes and languages spread. The context of art and science interactions within which Levy functions has in recent years become increasingly compelling to artists, sparked perhaps by some of the spectacular developments that have taken place, like the cloning of Dolly. It has become virtually commonplace for artists and scientists to work together and to explore aspects of complex systems and genomics. Levy has a distinctive and important place in this interdisciplinary terrain. She is credited with bringing issues of genomics and art to a wide academic audience years before the Genome Project was concluded.²¹ She speaks now of a related, but far more complex project underway in brain research that is also likely to have a profound effect on the art community.²² New tools are available to shape visual language, and Levy does not hesitate to learn and use them when pertinent to her artistic investigations. However, whereas much media art focuses on new technologies, Levy concentrates on scientific theory and methodology. Of those artists that address art and science, many now use biology in the most literal sense, employing biological processes in the creation of work. Early on Levy made bacterial paintings while employed in a microbiology department,²³ but she sees the aesthetic presence of painting and visual metaphors as resources worthy of continued exploitation, often in juxtaposition with other media. Her work on paper *Outnumbered* (2000; Pl. 8) results from implementing a cellular automata program. What initially looks like expressive abstract forms related to pointillism derives from the application of a computer program to a scanned drawing. She explains that the initial drawing incorporates the image of bacteria that she grew by "painting" it on agar and then photographed. The drawing also incorporates references to the deadly prion virus causing Mad Cow disease, alluding to the emergence of its human spin-off as it entered the food chain. Form creation is once again a key to her approach; prion theory holds that a misfolded form has

caused the human disaster. Her art is evidence of both her success in integrating the two epistemological modalities, but even more important, the convincing and substantial proof of her claim that painting may function both as a container of knowledge and a device to sort it out, but also a means for generating knowledge, itself.

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Notes

1. "Shared Premises: Innovation and Adaptation" was the title of several varied exhibitions of Levy that compared technological with biological evolution, including the National Technical Museum, Prague, Czech Republic (2001), the New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, CT (2001), Trans Hudson Gallery, New York City (2000). The first of these exhibitions was at Skidmore College's Saisselin Art Building, Saratoga Springs, NY (1999), where Levy was a Distinguished Visiting Fellow in Arts and Sciences, a position funded by the Luce Foundation.
2. All unsourced quotes are from my conversations with Ellen K. Levy over the many years of our being friends and colleagues.
3. Stephen Wolfram defines cellular automata (CA) as self-organizing groups of cells that develop in accordance with rules; the cells form patterns based on the instructions received. Their behavior changes depending on neighboring cells. Scientists use them to study complex systems in order to understand interrelationships between the individual elements and the whole. Wolfram implies that the CA mechanism can explain certain recurrent patterns in nature such as that of mollusk shells.
4. John Holland introduced genetic algorithms (GAs) in the U.S. in the 1970s, and designers now use them widely. GAs are modeled loosely on the principles of evolution via natural selection. They work very differently from cellular automata and are used by industrial engineers to design engines. The engineers seek efficiency whereas the artists using them tend to explore the possibilities they permit.
5. Levy used displays at the Jardin des Plantes as the basis for an exhibition, "Cabinet of Wonders," at the Institut Cochin de Génétique Moléculaire, Paris, France (1997). The documentation and drawing conducted while a NASA artist served as the basis for work included at the Kennedy Space Center, Cocoa Beach, FL (1986). The exhibition in Prague included images from collections not only from the National Technical Museum but from the other museums as well.
6. *Stealing Attention* was exhibited at several venues. It was first exhibited in a solo exhibition at Michael Steinberg Fine Arts, (2009), then in a group exhibit, "Resurrectine," at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, both New York City (2010), at another group exhibition, "Neurodiversity," (curated by K. J. Baysa), Museum of Modern Art of Ukraine, Kiev (2011), and in two solo exhibitions at the Nanobiology Institute, Univ. of California Los Angeles (2011), and at the Univ. of Washington Medical School, St. Louis (2011).
7. URL for a looped version of the animation: www.complexityart.com/subs/images/flash/stealing_attention_feldman.mov
8. Inattention Blindness is the inability to see something directly in front of you due to distraction.
9. The animation was loosely modeled after "Gorillas in our midst: sustained inattention blindness for dynamic events," a study conducted by Daniel J. Simons and Christopher F. Chabris (1999), but with important differences.
10. The flash animation originally shown also incorporates chance as an element since it is unpredictable where the Queen of Hearts will next appear.
11. Randi the Magician has worked with neuroscientists to understand perception. See S.L. Macknik et al. "Attention and awareness in stage magic," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 9 (Nov. 2008): 871–79.
12. Her solo exhibitions, "Metaphors for the 21st Century," at Rider University, Lawrenceville, NJ (selections 2000–08, curated by H. I. Naar) (2009) and "evolution," at the Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery, Wesleyan University (curated by N. Felshin) (2005), incorporated images and text from industrial patents.
13. "On Paper" *The New Yorker* (Aug. 10, 1998, reprinted throughout August), 14.
14. Ellen K. Levy, 2009, "Classifying Kubler: Between the Complexity of Science and Art." *Art Journal*, vol. 68, no. 4 (Winter, 2009): 98.
15. Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis* (publ. 1627); see for example, Project Gutenberg ebook http://www.fcsh.unl.pt/docentes/rmonteiro/pdf/the_new_atlantis.pdf, p. 8.
16. "Disorder and Early Sorrow" was the title of a traveling exhibition that focused on complex systems, including Drew University, Korn Gallery, Madison, NJ (1993), and Galerie Wild, Frankfurt, Germany (1993–94). It used dominoes to embody chance events and referenced domino theory in the political as well as scientific sense.
17. Gerhard Richter's digital works were exhibited at Marian Goodman Gallery, New York City (2012).
18. Bacon, *The New Atlantis*; http://www.fcsh.unl.pt/docentes/rmonteiro/pdf/the_new_atlantis.pdf, p.19.
19. The term was invented in the early summer of 1833 as a response to a challenge from the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Attending as a guest of honor the third meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science at Cambridge University, Coleridge challenged his hosts to invent a better term than "natural philosopher" to describe this new, emerging beast—of which he considered himself one, just as he thought of himself as a poet and philosopher. William Whewell, a geologist and general polymath (he also wrote about Gothic architecture), answered with the word "scientist," modeled explicitly on the term "artist."
20. Levy supported her art by lab work in the Pharmacology Department at Harvard Medical School at a time when David Hubel and Torsten Wiesel were conducting pivotal experimental work on vision. She pursued these interests through private study and later earned a doctorate for research in art and neuroscience from the University of Plymouth, U.K. (2012) following her term as elected CAA President (2004–06).
21. Levy was Guest Editor, "Contemporary Art and the Genetic Code," *Art Journal*, vol. 55, no. 1 (Spring 1996), with B. Sichel; contributors included S.J. Gould, R. Hoffmann, J. Davis, D. Nelkin, and D. Kremers.
22. The NIH Human Connectome Project is an ambitious effort to map the neural pathways that underlie human brain function.
23. While working at New York Hospital's microbiology department Levy became aware of the microbial paintings of Alexander Fleming (discoverer of penicillin). He created them on agar plates, (see <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/Painting-With-Penicillin-Alexander-Flemings-Germ-Art.html>). Levy experimented growing images in a related fashion on occasion.

IN AND OUT OF SHAPE

THE ART OF REVA URBAN

By Gerald Silk

In the late 1950s and the 1960s, Reva Urban (1925–87) found success in the art world of New York and beyond, especially with her idiosyncratic “shaped” canvases. Ultimately adopting the single name “Reva,” she had a distinguished exhibition history that included a room in 1964 at “Documenta III,” the prestigious art international in Germany. Her art garnered enthusiastic reviews and entered many notable collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago, Los Angeles County Museum, Museum of Modern Art in New York, University Art Museum at Berkeley, and University of Pennsylvania.

Her shaped canvases, dating from as early as 1960, first appeared in a 1961 solo exhibition at the Gres Gallery in Washington, D.C. These works were an outgrowth of the forceful energies found in her rectangular canvases from the late 1950s exhibited in one-person shows at New York’s Peridot Gallery and other venues, including the Corcoran Biennial, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, several USIA-sponsored exhibitions in Europe, two Salzburg Festivals, and the Pittsburgh International (now the Carnegie International). Many critics, including Dore Ashton, characterized Reva’s late 1950s art as Abstract Expressionist in style.¹ I contend that her work demonstrates how art linked to Abstract Expressionism provided a pathway to her shaped pieces. Reva, attuned to issues of gender and art, also challenged stereotypes by employing this gestural style to co-opt its masculinist associations and harness its vitality, often applied to anatomical motifs that intermingled correspondences between male muscularity and female sensuality.

Promenade (Pl. 9) and *Concrete Red* (Fig. 1) (both 1961) exemplify the shaped work on view at Gres. For example, *Promenade* (also displayed at Grippi & Waddell in New York in 1965) contains a centrifugal profusion of brightly colored, turbulent brushstrokes that define forms hovering between abstract pneumatic shapes and bulging body parts. Multiple viewpoints function at the service of these outward-twirling elements. Sweeping, dynamic arcs of form—crimson, deep magenta, and saffron—extend past the edges of the support, where Reva affixed painted strips of wood, giving these propulsive elements a place to go. Her labor-intensive



Fig. 1. Reva Urban, *Concrete Red* (1961), oil on canvas and wood, 79 1/2" x 71". University of Pennsylvania Art Collection.

technique, indebted in part to Abstract Expressionist athletic processes, coupled with anatomical depictions that can conflate and confuse the sexes, interrogates conventional gender roles assigned to the artist and art production.

In language with corporeal, formal, psychological, and gendered implications, Reva offered impassioned explanations of this fresh approach: she felt that her work had been “choked by the straight edge of the rectangular canvas.” The way out, the “appendage” technique, as she dubbed it, was “a bursting form of sensuous energy. I was free after years and years of butting up against those darned edges.”² This practice not only constituted aesthetic liberation, but may have also symbolized emancipation from constrictions she felt as a woman artist.



Fig. 2. Reva Urban, *People in the Presence of Music* (1958), oil on canvas, 56" x 56". University of Pennsylvania Art Collection.

Born Rita Rosenbaum in Coney Island, New York, her family moved to Pasadena, California, where she began art studies in high school, graduating at fifteen and then apprenticing in a commercial art studio.³ At sixteen, a determined and independent Rosenbaum returned to New York, where she lived by herself near Washington Square, a popular artists' haunt. For two years, she trained at the Art Students League on a Carnegie Scholarship, and unable to make ends meet, she worked nights as a soda jerk. "I was to be another Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Van Dyck, without a beard of course," she recounted.⁴

This grueling schedule led to hunger, exhaustion, and tuberculosis, forcing Rosenbaum to quit school and seek work as a commercial artist. She quickly realized that "commercial art was a man's profession."⁵ She began using a male agent as an intermediary and signing her work "R. Bernard" (her brother's first name), hiding both her gender and Jewishness. The June 1949 issue of *Studio News*, billed as the "complete newsmagazine for Art Directors, Models, Illustrators and Photographers," featured the fashionable young Rita Bernard in its "Upcoming Artist" section, as one of her illustrations graced its cover. The article probed feminine roles, addressing issues of talent, independence, and beauty: "*Studio News* doesn't write many stories of twenty-three year old artists, who, in their teens, were turning out commercial art for national advertisers. Believe it or not, here's a girl who was doing full color spreads for such clients as A&P and General Electric when only nineteen."⁶ In many ways, her career plots a trajectory of the shifting and challenging position of women, especially in the arts, in the post-World War II years.⁷

Rita Bernard married the German-born artist Albert Urban in 1949. Having studied with Max Beckmann and Willi Baumeister, Urban started out as an expressionist, went through a surrealist phase, and arrived in the 1950s at a unique form of abstraction. In Europe he had appeared in group shows alongside Beckmann, Georges Braque, Marc Chagall, and Pablo Picasso, before being condemned a "degenerate artist" by the Nazis. In the U.S., he achieved some success in the 1950s (he died in 1959).

For two years, beginning in 1954, they operated Urban Gallery, first on 58th Street, then on 76th Street, next to the old Parke-Bernet Galleries. Rita served as gallery director and wrote most of its copy, announcing the goal to display "unknown" artists in the "great conviction ... that we present the men and women of tomorrow."⁸ In addition to selling modern master prints, Urban Gallery held stimulating shows, including Allan Kaprow's early paintings and drawings (1955 and 1956), abstract paintings by Therese Schwartz, and paintings by Julian Beck.⁹

In her first display as a fine artist, part of a 1955 group show at their gallery with Kaprow, her husband, and others, she adopted the "Reva" appellation.¹⁰ As Reva (a common Hebrew name meaning "young girl" or "woman"), Rita Rosenbaum Bernard Urban signified her independence, crystallized her artistic self, and re-embraced her gender and religion. In her entry about her own work for this show, she admitted difficulty in talking about it, concerned that words might "disturb its enigma, or its depth of feelings." Still, she acknowledged that at "moments ... when I paint ... the outer shell of things seems to become transparent and I penetrate into the interior structures," trading in ideas about the importance of inner feelings and the unconscious, in line with the discourse surrounding Surrealism and Expressionism.¹¹

In 1958, Reva had her first one-person show at Peridot (now Washburn) Gallery in New York, followed by a second in 1960. Peridot opened in 1948 under the stewardship of Louis Pollack, who showed a mix of artists that featured some established European modernists but focused on younger New Yorkers, including several women.¹² Reviews of the 1958 show mention or reproduce three works, all from that year: *Parade*, *Gypsy*, and *People in the Presence of Music* (Fig. 2), which typifies her art from this time.¹³ This square piece is composed of stridently colored, juicy gestural strokes that seem to offer, at points, glimpses of exuberant body parts, especially two white shapes at center and upper left. Overall, the body allusions, along with more abstracted elements, produce an insistent centrifugal energy that the "appendage" format will eventually accommodate. This outward vortical thrust also relates to the work of Reva's husband, who was featured in several major exhibitions at the time, including Dorothy Miller's landmark "16 Americans" at the Museum of Modern Art in 1959.

The *Arts* reviewer wrote about the "robust energy" of Reva's work, saying, "Whether the original inspiration be drawn from jazz, from nature or from a chaotic and boisterous

street scene ... she achieves a continuous celebration of the sensual."¹⁴ In *ARTnews*, the respected critic and artist Fairfield Porter, who considered her an "action painter," observed that "American painting in general is weak in color," but Reva "seems about to break this color barrier in American sensibility."¹⁵ Dore Ashton, writing in the *Times*, described "flamboyant canvases" in which "Reva ... has taken with aplomb to the loose large format of deKooning's derived abstract expressionism."¹⁶ Ashton, an authoritative voice about the New York School, was not alone in comparing Reva's work to Abstract Expressionism in general and to Willem de Kooning in particular. De Kooning had a powerful influence on gestural painters working in New York in the 1950s, some of whom were dubbed second generation Abstract Expressionists. As the definition of Abstract Expressionism has become more expansive and inclusive in recent decades, it seems fair to embrace Reva Urban's late 1950s and early 1960s expressionistic art as part of the New York School.

While Reva's involvement with action painting can partly be attributed to her working in a contemporary vanguard manner, this style must have held special attraction because of certain assumptions surrounding Abstract Expressionism. Focus on its muscular artistic process as an expression of inner feelings masculinized art practice, which in America was sometimes seen as a feminized pursuit: now male action painters could be real artists and real men, too.

"I admired their bold stroke," she later articulated, but qualified this, since she felt their space related more to "landscape or cityscape," whereas "flesh as space, the sensuous vital human organic form, seemed to me ... a greater energy."¹⁷ This re-orientation of subject matter, though not unconnected to de Kooning, provided Reva with the opportunity to enlist this style to explore and complicate gender attitudes about art production.

For her 1960 solo at Peridot, most of the work comprised lush, vibrantly hued, high-velocity brushstrokes defining a range of forms, often eliciting anatomical parts. Words related to signage appeared in some, and titles, such as *Concrete Beach* and *Harlem Haircut*, indicate the role that city life played in her work, even as the body remained a central element.¹⁸ *Les Girls* (1959; Pl. 10), mentioned in the *Arts* review as "female nudes ... in a Rubensesque carnival of flesh,"¹⁹ helps situate Reva's work at this time, especially in relation to that of de Kooning. The title comes from George Cukor's popular 1957 film, and Reva may have been intrigued by this story of assertive, attractive, and artistic women. Her interest in popular culture corresponds to that of de Kooning, who filched from cigarette ads or alluded to contemporary pin-ups and movie stars. The title is scrawled across the painting as if with lipstick, interweaving drawing, writing, doodling, graffiti, signage, and cosmetics.

Les Girls, like de Kooning's paintings of women, displays a preoccupation with "flesh as space," where carnal curves and dimpled depressions function as jostling carriers of pictorial



Fig. 3. Reva Urban, *Cyclist #2* (1959), oil on canvas, 54" x 54". University of Pennsylvania Art Collection.

space that could collapse inward, pressure outward, and spread laterally. Reva's forms here have a curvaceousness that differs somewhat from the clashing strokes that lend ferocity to de Kooning's work, though in some of her pieces, such as *Dancers #2* (1957; Pl. 11), the pulchritudinous and pugilistic cohabit. On the one hand, these outward-gushing forms imply liberation. On the other, as balloonish dolls, these depictions seem pejoratively objectifying. This conflict embodies much of Reva's work from this period, including the explicitly titled *Burlesque* (1958; Pl. 12), which makes blatant the concept of women on display, intensified through body fragmentation.

Again, critical reception was generally warm. Phrases like "hurricanes of paint," and "brush athletics" supported classification of the work as "Abstract Expressionist" and "action painting."²⁰ *Arts* and *ARTnews* reproduced *Cyclist #2* (1959; Fig. 3), characterized in the former as "a small violent canvas," and in the latter as having "the shocking coolness of a dash into the snow straight from a Finnish bath."²¹ While the piece retains some of the whirlpool force emblematic of her work, there is vigorously foreshortened movement from upper right to bottom left. The mysterious, nearly demonic-looking bicyclist, defined by sweeps of blue-black strokes, hunches forward over the handlebars, as wheels appear destined to break through to the viewer's space, as if predicting Reva's canvas extensions soon to come.

Typical of some gestural art, the boundless tumult of Reva's paintings—which "seem to scream with energy, frustration and anguish," as one critic heatedly put it—could make the



Fig. 4. Reva Urban, *Blue Field #2* (1961), oil on canvas and wood, 68" x 75". University of Pennsylvania Art Collection.

edges of the support feel like barriers blocking explosive elements.²² As described earlier, this sense of confinement led in 1960 to a new approach that gave this dynamism a place to go. She attached painted pieces of wood at junctures along the canvas edge, in works such as *Promenade*, *Concrete Red*, *Dissonant Wheels* (1960; Pl. 13), and *Blue Field #2* (1961; Fig. 4). When this unusually contoured art first appeared in the 1961 Gres Gallery solo show, a *Washington Post* profile of the artist explained: "Mrs. Urban picked up a scrap of wood formed like one of her brush strokes that had been stopped at canvas' edge ... nailed the scrap to the canvas, giving birth to the 'appendage' technique."²³ Most of the works in the show had squarish supports housing buoyantly colored brushstrokes and shapes, oscillating between abstract organic forms and pulsing, sometimes nude, body parts. Along with shifting viewpoints, these combine to produce whirling energies that drive past the canvas edges at points.

Reva's exhibition of shaped works (and related pastels) "is making tongues wag all over Washington," wrote *Washington Post* critic Leslie Judd Ahlander, who also invoked the spirit of Rubens and de Kooning.²⁴ The critic Frank Getlein emphasized the near scandalousness of Reva's enterprise, interpreting it as if fulfilling an "adolescent's daydream" of "showing the authentic, deliriously sexy world behind the Can-Can," and making a bad sexist joke associating the "broad strokes...to the great broads themselves."²⁵

In a slim catalogue for the Gres show, Peter Selz, then a MoMA curator and Reva's most ardent and influential supporter, extolled her work as a "highly original statement of astounding force [and] significant innovation" that "ha[s] some

of the greatest dynamic effects I have seen in contemporary art." The extensions "grew organically out of the Abstract Expressionist idiom," Selz observed, speculating that Reva's method, like that of Pollock, Kline, and de Kooning, might soon attract imitators.²⁶ A Selz endorsement carried considerable weight, even though several reviewers took issue with his panegyrics.²⁷

Hardly a new sensibility, shaped art resurfaced with a vengeance around 1960. Some of it became intertwined with multimedia and sculptural pursuits, such as polychrome reliefs and free-standing and wall-based combines and constructions, a development addressed and codified in William Seitz's seminal 1961 MoMA show, "The Art of Assemblage." Perhaps the most critically touted type of shaped canvas was by Frank Stella, in which cool, non-painterly, symmetrical geometric abstraction, in concert with notched, thick supports, emphasized non-illusionism, objecthood, and the expunging of Abstract Expressionist metaphysical and subjective connotations. Reva's work, instead, demonstrated that shaped work could issue from Abstract Expressionism, by mining, amplifying, and extending its gestural and coloristic power, drama and heft. In the catalogue for its landmark 1970 Stella retrospective, William Rubin, MoMA curator, cites

Sven Lukin and "Riva [sic] Urban" as artists "who explored shaped fields in the late fifties and sixties," contending, however, that both stuck to a more traditional rendering of pictorial space.²⁸

Other contemporary developments may have influenced Reva's new direction. The "16 Americans" exhibition at MoMA, which included her recently deceased husband, featured works by Ellsworth Kelly, who had already done shaped pieces (though none were in the show); Wally Hedrick, Robert Mallary, Robert Rauschenberg, and Louise Nevelson, who made constructions, reliefs, and distinctively shaped or proportioned paintings; and Stella (who had yet to make shaped supports).²⁹

A Tamarind lithography workshop fellowship in 1962 in Los Angeles resulted in a print suite entitled "Trembling Then..." (which entered MoMA's collection in 1967).³⁰ Consisting of fourteen sheets: seven color and two black-and-white images related to shaped canvases, four pages of her own poetry, and a colophon, it was done after her first of three bouts with Hodgkin's disease. The graphic medium encouraged a visual simplification that would soon inform her contoured canvases.

Her shaped pieces appeared in several shows that placed her work alongside the most important artists of the time, including the 1962 "Continuity and Change: 45 American Abstract Painters and Sculptors," held at the Wadsworth Atheneum, and the 1963 "Women in Contemporary Art" at Duke University, among an international roster, where Reva showed *Blue Field #2*. Discussing Reva's work, along with that of Grace Hartigan, Helen Frankenthaler, and Joan Mitchell, in

the Duke catalogue, Leslie Judd Ahlander noted that the women exhibitors' "common denominator is—not their sex—but their high level of competence and the important role they play in the art of their time."³¹

In 1962, Reva began adding three-dimensional painted forms to, puncturing holes in, and slicing shapes out of the rectangular support, and pushing the canvas out from behind to create swells and protrusions, though she insisted that these works remained "paintings" and were not "combines" or "reliefs." "Once I destroyed the conventional straight sides of my canvases," she said, "it was a natural consequence for me to begin using actual sculptured forms, embedding them into the canvas, or having them extend toward the onlooker."³² The U.S. entries for the 1964 "Documenta III" in Kassel, Germany, included Reva along with Lee Bontecou and Louise Nevelson, who each displayed wall pieces blending painting and sculpture.³³ Reva's *Blue Machine is Man* (1963; Fig. 5), like Bontecou's work, incorporates projections and cavities that carry a host of associations, including anatomical references. A few years later, Selz placed both artists' work on the same page of the catalogue for the multi-gallery New York show "Seven Decades 1895–1965: Crosscurrents in Modern Art."³⁴

At "Documenta III," Reva had an entire room devoted to her new work in a section called "Aspects," for which Selz was a juror. Her piece most often cited there was *Siegfried on 10th Street* (1963; Pl. 14). A dramatically foreshortened, pumped-up, athletic figure pictured from above is rendered through fewer, broader, and less-brushy components, more in line with contemporary developments in Pop, minimalism, and hard-edge. Reva, who one commentator called a "staunch feminist," may have been expressing identification with the struggling vanguard artist, using pulsating, nearly female forms that might imply both gender rivalry and the fierce battles faced by women artists.³⁵ The critic for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* commented: "one should be grateful for the confrontation with the works by New York painter Reva Urban. Her solid works of art in the grand manner put to shame and transcend the modish publicity world of 'popular art' ... and one should not be silent about this."³⁶

A two-gallery New York solo at Grippi & Waddell and Jason Gallery in 1965 featured work in a variety of media, including the shaped canvases, pastels, the Tamarind suite, relief paintings, and free-standing constructions. Selz noted in the catalogue: "If her 'shaped canvases' of the late fifties involve the viewer in their own dynamic oscillations, Reva's recent 'sculpted canvases and cabinet paintings'—more quiet, controlled, and transcendent in their power and energy—absorb us with their intriguing iconography and brilliant formal solutions."³⁷ The show met with mixed reviews, with one critic acknowledging her early involvement in shaped and three-dimensional canvases, and another comparing her art to the commingling of painting and sculpture in Jasper Johns and Marisol.³⁸ A single, continuous photograph, serving as the

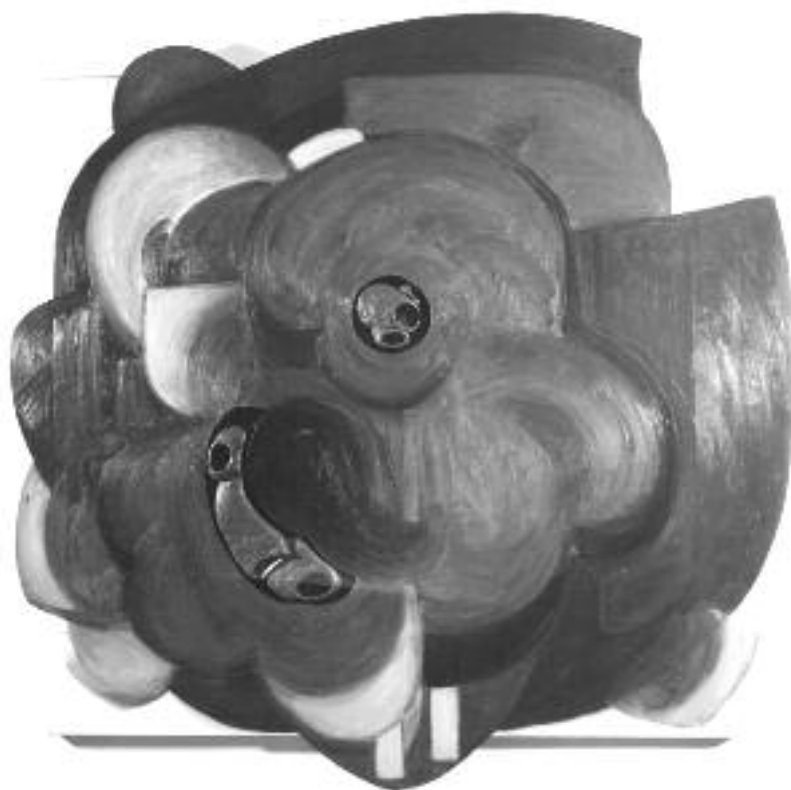


Fig. 5. Reva Urban, *Blue Machine is Man* (1963), mixed materials, 72" x 72". University of Pennsylvania Art Collection.

front and back catalogue covers, pictures a diminutive Reva in her studio amidst grand output in different media, suggesting versatility, vitality, and prolixity. Power tool in hand, she is at work on one of her free-standing assemblages, *Hugo's Cabinet* (1965). Reva strove to replace social constructions of female roles with an identity built around the idea of a tough and independent artist, as her art became her "progeny" issuing from "labor."³⁹ (She remarried in 1966, but had no children.)

She continued to experiment, fabricating spatially forceful reliefs, detaching pieces from the wall in free-standing work that remained compositionally frontal, and introducing hinged and operable compartments and enclosures and hidden artificial lighting.⁴⁰ Titles indicate that the subjects of maternity, virginity, and female strength and martyrdom occur regularly in Reva's art, especially in the mid to late 1960s. Protuberant wall pieces such as *Samson and Delilah* (1965), shown at Grippi & Waddell, and *Hide and Seek* (1966; Pl. 15) addressed themes of gender, potency, conflict, and identity fracturing and concealment, as masks indicate role-playing, disguise, and combative, warrior-like might. Compartments and body fragments functioned at the service of self-inquiry. In works like *Portrait of Myself* (1966, Fig. 6), Reva separated painted wood head, hands, and breasts, placing them on shelves and in openings, like a body on a bier, to question how one reconciles intellectual, artistic, manual, and sexual activities and demands.⁴¹

One of Reva's more aggressive shaped canvases from this time, *The Bridge Between* (1967; Fig. 7), is defined by a jutting, magenta-pink central form that cleaves the canvas and

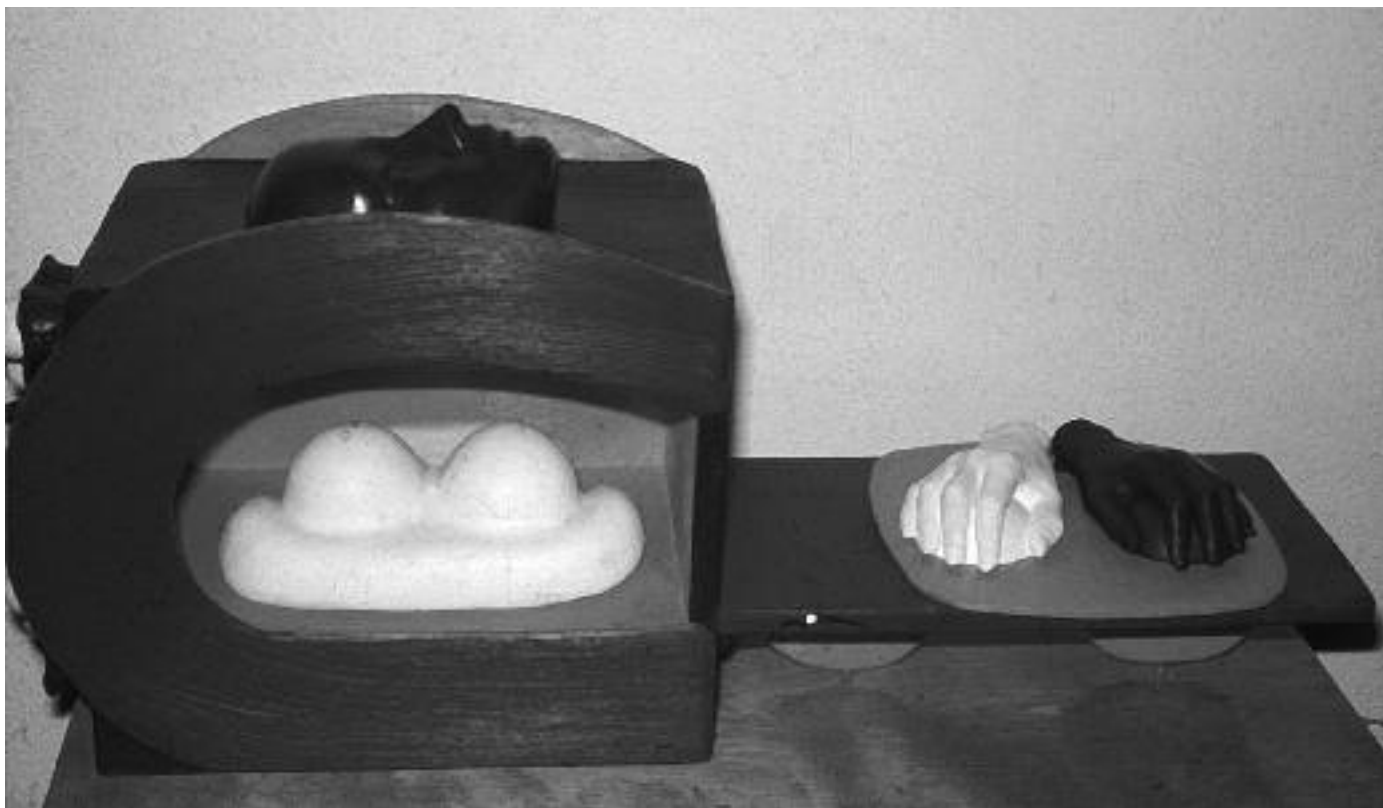


Fig. 6. Reva Urban, *Portrait of Myself* (1966), mixed materials, 16 1/2" x 36" x 10 1/2". University of Pennsylvania Art Collection.



Fig. 7. Reva Urban, *The Bridge Between* (1967), mixed materials, 64 1/2" x 67" x 4". University of Pennsylvania Art Collection.

possibly functions as a barrier between two individuals, but more likely between parts of a single female figure, one half of which is also turned upside-down. In a more recent showing of this work, one critic analyzed it as "suggestive of two figures seen from above, even as other readings simultaneously assert

themselves—a broken heart, a woman's genitalia, a mask."⁴² Urban's anatomical sectioning and gynocentric iconography link her to Judy Chicago's art and debatable ideas about centralized imagery by women. Reva's ruptures and slicings may imply the fragility of the body or even medical procedures related to her recurrent grave illnesses. By the late 1960s, she had to abandon artmaking altogether, and by the early 1970s, the exhibition of her work essentially came to a halt.

In 1980, she began to paint again, but physical weakness made it impossible to return to her taxing constructions. She made three series: *Fantasy* (1980–81), done in a macabre Pop-Surrealist style, and *Human Targets* (1982–85) and *Painter*, (1985–86), in an often anguished and menacing neo-expressionist manner. What unites them are motifs of identity and victimization that convey the artist's concern about illness, diminished artistic output and reputation, and death.

How much influence Reva's innovative, organic exploration into shape may have had on later artists is uncertain. The wedding of shape, abstraction, representation, and expressionism grew in popularity starting in the late 1970s, and in particular, Elizabeth Murray's art comes to mind. In the early 1990s, I curated a concise exhibition at the University of Pennsylvania on Reva that received good notices.⁴³ Her unique shaped canvases, growing out of Abstract Expressionism, expressed release from the formal limits of the rectangular support. Along with her physically demanding art facture, the work symbolized freedom from constraints she experienced as a woman artist, in rivalry with the archetypal "strong" male artist and in defiance of strength-sapping illnesses. Her focus

on the body, intermingling voluptuousness and muscularity, and her use of fragmentation, compartmentalization, hybridity, and disguise, re-inscribed how identity was central to her art. Even without a single definition of feminism on which to rely, one could argue that Reva Urban addressed a host of concerns and issues in her art that anticipated and ultimately participated in major themes and motifs fundamental to feminism in the visual arts. ●

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Notes

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1. Dore Ashton, "Art: Water-Colors, '25-55." *New York Times* (Nov. 6, 1958), 34.
2. Luther P. Jackson, "Lumber Yard Created New World for Artist," *Washington Post* (Oct. 27, 1961), A3.
3. In a 1949 radio interview, Rosenbaum, then going by the name of Rita Bernard, recalls winning first prize in an art contest for portrait sculptures she made at age ten. "From then on," she said, "I was determined that nothing would stop me. I'd be an artist and I wanted to work at it for the rest of my life." Reva Urban, radio interview by Nancy Craig, July 12, 1949, 1:15-1:45 pm, transcript of "The Women of Tomorrow by Nancy Craig," (New York: WJZ), 3.
4. *Ibid.*, 5.
5. She recalled her disastrous first job interview, at which the employer simply muttered, "A girl artist...and a baby girl at that." *Ibid.*, 7.
6. "Upcoming Artist: Rita Bernard," *Studio News* (June 1949), 11.
7. In the WJZ interview, Bernard herself observed, "Times are changing ... one reason, I think, is that during the war women took on gigantic responsibilities and carried them through successfully," 7.
8. Mrs. Albert O. H. Urban, "Introduction to the Urban Gallery," in *Urban Gallery: Contemporary Art—1954-1955* (New York: Urban Gallery, 1955), n.p. See also *Howard Daum* (New York: Gallery Urban, 1954), n.p. The space began as Gallery Urban. Its move from a 58th Street below-level locale to upper Madison Avenue was considered a step up. Now called Urban Gallery, in September 1955, it was re-named Bernard-Ganymede Gallery. Noted critic, writer, and painter Ethel Schwabacher wrote material for the gallery. Paul Goodman, the important intellectual and author of the seminal 1960 book, *Growing Up Absurd*, as well as playwright whose works The Living Theatre performed, authored the pamphlet essay for the Julian Beck show at Urban.
9. Schwartz, an artist, writer, and feminist, authored the important 1971 four-part *Art in America* series, "The Politicization of the Avant-Garde." Julian Beck is best known for founding, with Judith Malina, The Living Theatre.
10. She later clarified: "my ... husband used the name [Urban] and had prior right to it." Reva Urban letter to William S. Rubin (July 29, 1970), 6. "Reva Urban Artist Files," *University of Pennsylvania Office of the Curator*.
11. Mrs. Albert O. H. Urban, "Reva," in *Urban Gallery: Contemporary Art—1954-1955*, n.p. Reva's oil, *Bird God*, reproduced in the catalogue, is currently unlocated. The reproduction is difficult to read, though the work has a generally gestural Abstract Expressionist look, with a hint of avian imagery, suggestive of Morris Graves (though more thickly brushed), Richard Pousette-Dart, and Wols, as it looks ahead to Milton Resnick.
12. The stable included artists such as Ruth Asawa, Rosemary Beck, Louise Bourgeois, James Brooks, Philip Guston, Philip Pearlstein, James Rosati, and Esteban Vicente.
13. Titles referencing music occur throughout her career and include: *Bagpipe Players* (1957), *Five Spot* (1958), *Homage to W.C. Handy* (1958), *Spirit of '76* (1959), and *Brown Jazz* (1961).
14. [H.D.M.], "In the Galleries: Reva," *Arts Magazine* (Nov. 1958), 63.
15. Fairfield Porter, "Reviews and Previews, New Names this Month: Reva," *ARTnews* (Nov. 1958), 17.
16. Ashton, "Art: Water-Colors, '25-55," 34.
17. "Reva Urban [Artist's Statement]," in *Art in Process: The Visual Development of a Painting*, ed. Elayne H. Varian (New York: Finch College Museum of Art, 1965), 15.
18. The urbanscape is a subject in other works from this period, some of which were exhibited in key venues and also may have been in either of the Peridot shows: *Toilers, Players, Sleepers* (1957; 1958 Pittsburg International); *City Streets* (1957; 26th Biennial Exhibition, Corcoran, 1958); *Five Spot* (1958); *One Way Downtown* (1958); *Apple Cart* (1959); and *Orchard Street* (1959).
19. [H.D.M.], "In the Galleries: Reva," *Arts Magazine* (Jan. 1960), 51.
20. Reviews included: [H.D.M.], "In the Galleries: Reva," (Jan. 1960); [L.C.], "Reviews and Previews: Reva," *ARTnews* (Jan. 1960), 13; Stuart Preston, "Art: Decorative Action, Explosive Works of Reva on Display," *New York Times*, (Jan. 23, 1960), 19.
21. [H.D.M.], "In the Galleries: Reva," 51; [L.C.], "Reviews and Previews: Reva," 13.
22. [L.C.], "Reviews and Previews: Reva," 13.
23. Jackson, "Lumber Yard Created New World for Artist," A3. *Dissonant Wheels* is not listed among the works on display at Gres.
24. Leslie Judd Ahlander, "Art in Washington," *Washington Post* (Nov. 5, 1961), G30.
25. Frank Getlein, "Gres Gallery," *Washington Sunday Star* (Oct. 29, 1961).
26. Peter Selz, "Reva Urban: New Painting," (Gres Gallery: Washington, D.C., Oct. 18-Nov. 18, 1961, and Chicago, Jan. 11-Feb. 10, 1962), 4, 12-13. Selz's text derives from "a panel discussion broadcast over WKCR, Columbia University," 4. The show traveled to the Gres Gallery outpost in Chicago in early 1962.
27. Getlein punned on the curves in her art and the misdirection of the rhetoric surrounding it, mistakenly chiding "the impressionable doctor [Selz]" for focusing on the formal rather than the sensual. Frank Getlein, "Somebody is Throwing a Curve," *Washington Daily News* (Nov. 1, 1961). Some of the reporting does not jibe with Selz's catalogue text, which may indicate a press release (currently unlocated).
28. William S. Rubin, *Frank Stella* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 50. Correspondence between Reva and Rubin began on July 29, 1970, and continued until April 23, 1971, "Reva Urban Artist's Files." Reva challenged Rubin's conclusion that Stella was more vanguard and invited Rubin for a studio visit, which he promised to make, but never did. Earlier, Lawrence Alloway curated the 1964 Guggenheim exhibition, "The Shaped Canvas," an all-male, five-artist lineup that included Stella and Lukin. Reviews of the show, including ones written by Jill Johnston and Lucy Lippard, ignored its absence of women.
29. Urban Gallery's inaugural show included Mallary in a painting that had a somewhat protuberant quality because of the use of polyester resin. Throughout his career, he experimented with innovative materials and techniques as spatial tools.

30. A work from the series appeared in "New Dimensions in Lithography" at the Fisher and Quinn Galleries of the University of Southern California, in Fall 1964.
31. Leslie Judd Ahlander, "Women in Contemporary Art," in *Women in Contemporary Art*, ed. Gaillard F. Ravenel, II, (Durham, NC: Woman's College Gallery, Duke Univ., 1963), n.p. Reva's biography in this catalogue states that two of her works were on display at MoMA in 1962, but this cannot be corroborated.
32. "Reva Urban [Artist's Statement]," 15.
33. They were the only women among 26 U.S. artists. A 2003 article about Lee Bontecou's MoMA retrospective stated that Bontecou was one of only two North American women in Documenta III, misidentifying the second as Louise Bourgeois and omitting Nevelson and Urban. Lyle Rexer, "Lee Bontecou Returns From Her Faraway Planet," *New York Times* (Oct. 5, 2003), AR34.
34. Peter Selz, ed. *Seven Decades 1895–1965: Crosscurrents in Modern Art* (New York: Public Education Assoc., April 26–May 21, 1966), 177. A reproduction of a John Chamberlain sculpture shared a page with works by Bontecou and Reva, as his colorful automobile scrap assemblages offered another, more abstract route from Abstract Expressionism to three dimensions.
35. Jackson, "Lumber Yard Created New World for Artist." What in 1961 the reviewer meant by the term "feminist" is indeterminate, though I would argue, as is the intention of my essay, that Reva's art and life were deeply affected by her gender.
36. Albert Schulze Vellinghausen, "Aspekt auf die documenta-Aspekte: Ein Nachtrag von weitem," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Aug. 6, 1964). Quoted in "Reva Urban (critics comments)," compiled by George Robert Carley, "Reva Urban Artist's Files" (see also note 43). I found no mention of her in American reviews of "Documenta," only in German ones. See also Bernhard Boie, "Die neue Wirklichkeit: Die 'Aspekte' der Kasseler documenta III/Vielseitig und lebendig," *Recklinghäuser Zeitung* (Aug. 15, 1964), which concisely described Reva's work and reproduced *Grace and the Wheel* (1963).
37. Peter Selz, *Reva Urban—5 Years 2 Galleries* (New York: Grippi and Waddell Gallery and Jason Gallery, Oct. 19–Nov. 6, 1965), 1.
38. James R. Mellow, "New York Letter," *Art International* (Dec. 1965), 43. For other reviews, see for example: "Art in New York: Reva Urban," *Time* (Oct. 29, 1965), NY1; "Reva Urban," *ARTnews* (Oct. 1965), 11; [A.G.], *Arts Magazine* (Dec. 1965), 62. See also Lil Picard, "From ABC to Camp Art: New York Report," *Das Kunstwerk* (Nov.–Dec. 1965), 58–59; "Around the Galleries," *Art Voices* (Fall 1965), 43.
39. Reva's desire to project a strong persona is confirmed in an earlier article: "Mrs. Urban's biceps have been hardened by the carpentry work of sawing and nailing.... She said that a physician's needle broke off in her arm recently when he tried to give her an influenza shot." Jackson, "Lumber Yard Created New World for Artist." Even the article's title reinforces notions of masculinist labor.
40. Dan Flavin, for whom artificial light was the primary element, was a friend of the Urbans; he may have been influential on Reva, even as some of Flavin's early work may be indebted to Albert and Reva.
41. Reva's *Frankie and Johnny*, *Grace and the Wheel*, *Two Faces of Eve*, *The Gentle Nun*, *Cassandra at Dawn*, *Prisoner of my Own Shell*, *The Virgin*, *Maternité*, *Hellenic Woman*, and *Pink Medusa* are among the many works from this period (1962–69) that treat female roles and identity.
42. Mary Murphy, "Reva Urban," *New Art Examiner* (Oct. 1991), 40.
43. Gerald Silk, *Reva Urban: Shaping Things to Come* (Philadelphia: Arthur Ross Gallery of the Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1991). The exhibition grew out of the donation of much of Reva's oeuvre to the University by her second husband and Penn alumnus, George Robert Carley. See also, Burton Wasserman, "Exhibitions in Sight," *Art Matters* (Sept. 1991), 3; Edward Sozanski, "Rediscovery of an innovative, but overlooked artist," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Aug. 1, 1991), D3; Mary Murphy, "Reva Urban."

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LOUISE JOPLING

A GENDERED READING OF LATE 19TH CENTURY BRITAIN

By Patricia de Montfort

*"Do not let Mr. — into your room
when he brings you the turpentine."*

In 1871, early in her career, the artist Louise Jopling (1843–1933) wrote to a confidante apologizing for her tardiness as a correspondent. Alongside the daily discipline of the studio was the serious business of leisure and being seen:

Half-past five comes, and it is dark. I have but little time to clean my palette and brushes, and to dress at half-past six, for the dinner here; and after that, *que voulez vous?* Six nights out of the seven we [...] are out at a theatre, or concerts, and when we are home, music, singing, and talking goes on, that it becomes next to impossible to sit down quietly and write.¹

While the letter extract appears in her memoir, *Twenty Years of My Life* (and one is thus conscious of Jopling as narrator many years later), it does hint at a duality that was a marked feature of her professional and social life.²

Born in Manchester, Jopling (née Goode), later Jopling-Rowe, studied art in Paris under the Romantic portrait and landscape painter Charles Chaplin during 1867 and 1868.³ She also attended Leigh's School of Art in London. She first achieved recognition at the Royal Academy with a *Japonais* subject *Five o'Clock Tea* (1874), going on to establish a professional career as a painter, chiefly of interiors, genre, and portraits, such as *Serenity* (1885–92; Fig. 1). By the end of the decade Jopling was celebrated as a leading female artist in Victorian London who mixed in the most advanced artistic circles of her time. Her patrons included Sir Coutts and Lady Lindsay, founders of the Grosvenor Gallery, and her confidantes James McNeill Whistler and John Everett Millais, both of whom painted portraits of her.

Over the course of the late nineteenth century, Jopling learned to negotiate her way around the literal and figurative spaces of British cultural life. She was an adept participant in its celebrity culture. As the *Lady's World* remarked in 1887:

She is continually written about, talked about, drawn and painted. One year we have her portrait, magnificently sketched by Millais, adorning the walls of the Grosvenor; next season she figures as the heroine of a "society" novel from the pen of a popular writer. One



Fig. 1. Louise Jopling, *Serenity* (1885–92), oil on canvas. Private collection.

week we see her salon drawn by Mr. Du Maurier in *Punch* [1878; Fig. 2] with sketches from life of herself and her friends; the week after, she appears under another name as the heroine of one of those quasi-malicious town and country tales which amuse the readers of a society paper.⁴

By this time, Jopling knew she had arrived in the rarefied category of "a famous woman who lives and has lived amongst famous people."⁵ She cultivated a professional attitude to her pursuit of artistic and commercial success alongside the habits of a social butterfly.

On the one hand, as Deborah Cherry has remarked,⁶ Jopling projected herself as a respectable middle-class woman, keen to promote values of professionalism and industry; on the other, she became a public figure, much portrayed and quoted, whose private life was often troubled. She became a skilled creator of social masks, allowing multifarious versions of herself to appear in visual and textual form in which dress and the body were crucial props. Cherry sums up her attitude well: “She cultivated her social skills and composed her costumes with care, for the feminine body, its apparel and disposition, bore the burden of successful career management.”⁷ This dichotomy invites further investigation, perhaps more so than current theorizations of femininity have allowed. Jopling’s attitude suggests a more fluid notion of femininity that strayed beyond that defined by its isolation from typical male experiences of class and modernity.

Jopling’s attitude also opens up debate about a nineteenth-century doctrine of public and private spheres—the home the domain of women and family, the public sphere that of men. As Griselda Pollock asserts in *Vision and Difference*: “Woman was defined by this other, non-social space of sentiment and duty from which money and power were banished.”⁸ This doctrinal legacy has tended to shape modern day readings of women’s cultural products and cultural consumption. Yet it is more historically limited than is sometimes assumed.⁹ Janet Wolff has demonstrated both the pervasiveness of an ideology of separate spheres (that was validated culturally by such figures as Carlyle and Ruskin) and its inconsistencies. She points out that middle-class women did work outside the home and “many people, of both sexes, subscribed to some sort of equality of men and women, in education and more generally.”¹⁰ Similarly, Cherry demonstrates the existence of expanded pathways of female artistic practice in mid-century London, that alter “preconceptions of secluded women and rewrites scripts about leisured women with time to spare to sample the visual and consumer pleasures of the modern city.”¹¹

From the beginning, Jopling’s career contested spatial definitions; educated by a governess in the private space of the home, she commenced her Parisian training in the late 1860s as a married woman in a public studio, intent on training to a level that exceeded genteel pre-marital accomplishment. While she observed social propriety on her journeys to the studio (she was chaperoned each day by her young children and their nurse), she could still claim the sphere of the atelier as a space for otherness in which the development of one’s talents was expected and ambition tolerated. “Only abroad,” she declares in her memoir, “can a working and a domestic life be carried on simultaneously with little effort. In France one is expected to cultivate what little talent one possesses.” She sought professional status for herself, although her English relations, she claims, would have “thought me little less than mad, to entertain the idea of becoming a ‘professional’—I, a married woman!”¹²

By the 1890s, the pace had intensified; artistic women actively created (often multi-layered) spaces for professional and social purposes, whether this meant solo exhibition ventures, open studio events, or press interviews. As Lynne

Walker has shown, “creative middle-class women redefined the middle-class home, a space more usually associated with passive modes of femininity and artistic practice for private consumption, to a space that was also about furthering ‘social, political and artistic projects and [...] cultural change.’”¹³ Jopling herself participated in this through her artistic practice, her social networking and later on, her social activism. But does her attitude represent a distinct reconfiguration of late nineteenth century middle-class femininity? Or was her attitude merely representative of this? This essay considers these questions. First, it seeks to better understand Jopling’s dualistic attitude. It examines her attempts to negotiate social and gender boundaries in her daily artistic practice and the kinds of problems she encountered. The second part investigates the spaces she inhabited in relation to notions of public and private then current. Finally, I shall consider Jopling’s contribution to the emergence of new and more publicly lived spaces of femininity.

In *Japonais* works like *Five o’Clock Tea* and *Blue and White* (1896; Pl. 16) and in the press, Jopling identified with progressive middle-class taste and this became the locus from which she pursued visibility and social connectedness. But it might also be claimed that disconnectedness and the economic disenfranchisement of the middle-class woman shaped her attitude to social relations and spatial boundaries.

From the very beginning, she experienced a disrupted existence. The daughter of Thomas Smith Goode, a railway contractor, the family lived a peripatetic life between England, Wales, and Ireland at the height of the mid-century railway boom in Britain. In early adulthood, however, her father’s business failed and, distracted by events, he virtually abandoned Jopling and her sisters, leaving them in an uncertain social and economic position without a permanent home. Her first marriage to Frank Romer, a lowly civil servant with a gambling habit and a roving eye, did little to alleviate this insecurity. While Jopling’s artistic career flourished for a time in Paris under the patronage of her husband’s employers, the Rothschild banking family, by 1868, the family had returned to London in disgrace, after Romer was found to have been speculating on the Paris Bourse.¹⁴ By 1871, separated from her husband, she found herself alone in London, aged twenty-seven, with two small children. Thus, if Paris had been about freedom and self-discovery, London came to be about the serious business of art—carving out a profession and making an income.¹⁵ Survival demanded formidable networking skills and the retrieval of her by now-bruised social status. Jopling exploited her social connections where she could, seeking the advice and patronage of male mentors. Mark Lemon, a Romer family connection, commissioned drawings for decorative initials for *Punch* magazine;¹⁶ William Powell Frith recommended the names of suitable models;¹⁷ Tom Taylor, the influential *Times* critic, purchased one of her Royal Academy pictures, *La Mantille Blanche*.¹⁸

By 1874, Jopling’s entry to more advanced artistic circles was secured through her second marriage to Joseph Middleton Jopling, a civil servant and accomplished amateur



Fig. 2. "Music at Home" (caricature by George du Maurier of one of Jopling's studio soirées), *Punch*, March 30, 1878. L to R: Whistler, Millais, du Maurier.

watercolorist, whose intimates included Whistler and Millais. Millais visited her studio and became a source of encouragement and artistic critique.¹⁹ Jopling admired his work, echoing his eighteenth-century-inspired portraits²⁰ of the 1880s and 1890s in her own romanticized portraits of women and children. At the same time, she was well versed in Whistler's theories of art, claiming in a lecture, in Whistlerian vein, that "one of the first qualifications of a Painter" was that "he must be able to see Nature in a new light, passing it, as it were, through the alembic of his mind and giving the World something fresh and original in his rendering of what he saw."²¹ She also claimed kinship with Whistler's Peacock Room (1877), a decorative scheme for the dining room at Prince's Gate, London home of Liverpool ship-owner Frederick R. Leyland,²² and that she had been permitted to paint "one corner of the celebrated room."²³

While, in close-up portraits like *Stella* (ca. 1907; Pl. 17) and *Serenity*, Jopling shares a taste with Whistler and Millais for plain backgrounds and aestheticized treatment of the subject, she was careful to assert artistic values in her work and writings that were about skill and labor and, therein, economic value. In interior subjects like *Five o'Clock Tea* and *Blue and White*, especially, she invites the viewer into a dreamy, imaginary world that focuses on spectacle rather than personal

space as explored by Parisian contemporaries like Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt. Her attitude was understandable. The traditionally high status of history painting in the art world (and its technical demands which made it inaccessible to most women), diminished that of other genres. As Lynda Nead points out: "The spectre of history painting was constantly lurking, threatening to discredit the claims of genre, but one way in which genre painting could be rescued from the accusations of mediocracy and popularism was in relation to a concept of work and the values of industry, skill and finish."²⁴

Jopling was also keen to assert masculinized values of self-discipline and self-sufficiency—she worked, one interviewer quoted her as saying, "like a man in the City, and seldom goes out of doors while daylight lasts."²⁵ This concern to project herself in the press as intensely businesslike is counterbalanced by the oft-remarked gentleness of her manner and appearance.²⁶ She knew that interviews with women, whether in women's magazines or elsewhere, came loaded with cultural expectations. Signs of femininity were indicated to readers, as was evidence of devotion to home and hearth. When, later on in her career, she was interviewed for the *Windsor Magazine*, her firmly held views on women's art education and frustrations about her own career were treated



Fig. 3. Louise Jopling, *Miss Mabel Collins* (1887), pastel. Now known only through reproduction in Jopling, *Twenty Years of My Life, 1867 to 1887*, p. 278.

lightheartedly, possibly with the complicity of the artist herself: "Mrs Jopling-Rowe herself feels the disabilities of her sex light.[sic] In the controversy that waged a short time ago in the *Daily Graphic* on the theme, 'Do Women Fail in Art?' womanlike, she propounded and answered the question, 'Why women do not oftener succeed in art,' rather than the one under discussion."²⁷ Controversial views, as Jopling knew well, could be aired successfully if masked by norms of genteel feminine manners. By contrast, the tone of her own writing is noticeably shriller.²⁸ Eager to convey her progressive social views via a mass public forum, she learned to modify her style according to the subject in hand and the context in which it was being presented.

Jopling's pursuit of artistic success in the late nineteenth century thus demanded flexibility and an appetite for performativity.²⁹ Her diaries and studio notebooks have left us vivid glimpses of her busy daily routine—visits to the Royal Academy Private View with Constance de Rothschild (later Lady Battersea), the Grosvenor Gallery and art salerooms; transporting pictures, hiring models.³⁰ It involved not only regular criss-crossing of London's vast metropolis, but



Fig. 4. Louise Jopling, *Lady Colin Campbell* (1891), pastel. Now known only through reproduction in Maud J. Vyse, "Mrs Jopling's School of Art," *Atalanta* (Aug. 1, 1897), p. 639.

frequent rail journeys across provincial Britain—from Edinburgh to Liverpool. Portrait commissions often meant lengthy stays out of town—as a house-guest of leading patrons like Sir Coutts and Lady Lindsay at Balcarras, their Scottish country home, or the Anstruthers at Balcaskie—where work was combined with social networking.³¹ Similarly, during 1876–77, Jopling worked on portraits of the two Rothschild daughters, Constance and Annie, at Aston Clinton, Buckinghamshire, home of Sir Anthony Mayer and Lady de Rothschild. She took a house nearby, and Joseph Jopling later joined her there. The situation was a viable one for a woman artist—the Rothschilds were an established social connection; Jopling worked on the portraits in her own domestic surroundings and, on occasion, at Aston Clinton itself.

But, on the other hand, the reality of portrait practice could also present Jopling's hosts with an unfamiliar situation: the presence in the household of an economically independent, professional female, neither related to the family nor tied by duty to it. The possibility of awkward social encounters arose. In her memoir, Jopling cites an incident early in her career when she was summoned to paint a "a man and his wife, and their little child" at their country house in Wiltshire.

I painted the wife and the boy first, and then returned to town, and went down later to paint the husband's portrait. The wife, I found, had had to remain in town, and in her place, to play propriety, was the husband's stepmother. [...] One evening, just before going upstairs to bed, I happened to tell my host that I was in want of some turpentine. "All right," he said, "I will bring it up to your room," which he promptly did, handing it in to me at the door. When I was half-way through my toilet for the night, I heard a timid knock, and in entered the stepmother. With many hesitations, she said: "I hope you won't mind my asking you, but please do not let Mr.— into your room when he brings you the turpentine."³²

Not only had Jopling's male patron allowed himself to be painted in his private domestic surroundings by a woman artist but he had taken turpentine to the door of her bedroom in the absence of his wife. In the event, Jopling claims that she advised her hostess-chaperone that her host had not entered her room. At the same time, she is keen to tell us about another incident during her stay involving a transgression of minute social rules. Dressing for dinner in a fashionable evening gown, she purposely omitted to wear a velvet neck ribbon (then thought to be a modesty-protecting accessory to the low, square-cut bodice of the dress), claiming that, observing her reflection in the mirror, she had been struck by "how very much more attractive a bare throat looked."³³ This drew a horrified reaction from her hostess (if that of her host was rather more approving). Hence, Jopling's identification with middle-class respectability is double-edged; here, in the self-rationalizing context of her memoir, she pits a rational, independent minded version of herself against what she portrays as the irrationality of middle-class social codes.

This rational, socially and intellectually engaged model of the woman artist correlates with her portraits of women in established spheres of middle-class female employment, such as literature and journalism, that include lively portraits of Australian novelist Rosa (Mrs Campbell) Praed (1886) and the journalist Mabel Collins (1887; Fig. 3). Shakespearean subjects, like *Ellen Terry as Portia* (1883) and *Mrs Langtry as Rosalind* (1882–85), document women's increasing visibility in the theatre as well as a public appetite for images of female celebrity that engaged the skills of numerous artists, including Millais, G. F. Watts and Anna Lea Merritt (1844–1930). Conversely, her pastel portrait of author and journalist Lady Colin Campbell (1891; Fig. 4) is a reminder of the limitations of legislative reform for women.³⁴ However, Jopling confines overt commentary on gender questions to historical figures such as Charlotte Corday, "although ... a murderess, she murdered 'with good intent'"³⁵ and Queen Vashti, who she claims, "always had a great attraction for me, as the originator



Fig. 5. Louise Jopling, *An Anglo-Japanese Treaty* (ca. 1906), oil. Now known only through reproduction in Austin Chester, "The Art of Louise Jopling," *Windsor Magazine*, vol. 24 (Sept. 1906), p. 378.

and victim of 'Women's Rights.'"³⁶ Rather, she concentrates on mood, drama, and characterization, qualities that were picked up by critics and defined in gendered terms—"she feels as well as understands her subject [...] it is as a woman she receives and arranges her impressions; as a woman produces her effects and records their results."³⁷ Her French-inspired technique, on the other hand, was often described in masculinized terms; critics admired the "bright and vivid colouring" of *Five o'Clock Tea* and "the broad and masterly manner in which it is painted." This correlates with the vigorous, muscular qualities that French and British critics claimed to admire in the work of Rosa Bonheur (1822–99) and American portraitist Cecilia Beaux (1855–1942), artists with whom Jopling shares her strong professional focus and capacity for self-presentation.

Jopling intensifies her approach in close-up studies like *Stella*, or *An Anglo-Japanese Treaty* (ca. 1906; Fig. 5) that are about both seeing and looking. They hint to us, in an aestheticized fashion, the interior life of the subject. At the same time, in an 1877 self-portrait (Pl. 18), Jopling gazes directly and unflinchingly at the viewer, scrutinizing her own image and how it appears to the world. By contrast, as she engaged with an increasingly image-laden print culture of the 1880s, her image became not only widely circulated but more visually complex. Jopling was, for example, often interviewed (and photographed) in her studio in accordance with a, by then, established tradition of interviewing and photographing artists at home.³⁸ Photographic and other modes of graphic representation show her surrounded by things—whether the latest fashion or accessory or the trademarks of her decorative taste. At the same time, she strived to create a visual balance between jovial images of her as a popular celebrity and as a serious artist. A large photograph of her, published in an



Fig. 6. Louise Jopling in her studio. Photo by R. W. Thomas, reproduced in Austin Chester, "The Art of Louise Jopling," *Windsor Magazine*, vol. 24, (Sept. 1906), p. 369.

interview with *Windsor Magazine* (1906; Fig. 6) offers glimpses not only of domestic intimacy but industry and professionalism—she is shown at work in her studio on a child's portrait, surrounded by her productions that include portraits of the Italian cellist Alfred Piatti and the actress Marion Terry. In contrast to contemporaneous photographic images of Leighton and Millais, both of whom pose in a patrician fashion in elegant surroundings, the tools of their trade barely visible to the spectator, Jopling is in the act of painting (or at least pretending to be as she studies her palette). The artist herself is at the forefront of the image rather than the sitter. On the other hand, fellow British painter of portraits and literary subjects Henrietta Rae (1859–1928) is a background presence in a photograph of her at work on a portrait of Lord Dufferin and Ava (Fig. 7). Its exaggerated viewpoint ensures that eminent sitter rather than artist dominates the foreground. Jopling thus creates a spectacle of the late nineteenth century female artist that both seeks acknowledgement of her established professional status and to be on terms of familiarity with us. I shall go on to consider whether this contributes to a reconfiguration of spaces—public and private—for femininity in the next section.

Jopling lived at numerous London addresses from the early 1870s onwards. All were concentrated within a narrow geographical area of Kensington and Chelsea,³⁹ within walking distance of each other. Other local inhabitants included Frederic Leighton, President of the Royal Academy from 1878, G.F. Watts, and other artistic lions of the day, all of whom built their own large studio houses. This represented a shift of the London artistic map westwards from districts like Marylebone and streets like Newman or Berners, and Fitzroy Square.⁴⁰ Jopling's semi-detached villa at Clareville Grove and a later house, No. 8 Cranley Place, lay in close proximity to the Old

Brompton Road and the smart new stucco-fronted houses of terraces like Queen's Gate that would have been occupied by patrons and friends.⁴¹ Nor was she far from the demi-bohemia of Tite Street that was inhabited by the likes of Whistler and Oscar Wilde. Such proximity was important for business, as she was well aware.⁴²

But with the notion of women out and about in the city came an ever present fear of chaos—that their actions might dissolve an ideology of separation between public and private space. Old anxieties about art as a profession for women were rooted, as essayist Dinah Craik put it, in "the course of education necessary for a painter, [...] the not unnatural repugnance that is felt to women's drawing from 'the life', attending anatomical dissections and so on"⁴³ and the need for a woman to obtain these skills outside the home. This problem was magnified should she become a fully fledged artist with a studio and clients of

her own. Portraiture, more than most other forms of artistic practice (such as illustration), demanded technical and self-promotional skills. It also required extensive social interaction with clients, sitters, and models. To redraw gender-defined boundaries between public and private life was desirable where one could. But this process could be daunting: Fellow portrait painter John Shirley-Fox, an art student in Paris during the 1880s, cites an incident in which the mere appearance of a young woman exhibitor on the steps of the Paris Salon building was enough to provoke a boisterous reaction from a crowd of young (male) artist onlookers.⁴⁴

Arguably, the tight geographical focus of Jopling's existence on the inner, western suburbs of middle and upper middle-class London means that her need to do so was limited in any case. The largely respectable streets of Kensington and Chelsea could be cast in the same mold as parks and department stores that, as Elizabeth Wilson suggests, were public spaces "pretending to be a private interior." Suburban west London was rapidly becoming an extension of the West End—a feminized space for shopping and clubland activity. As Erika Rappaport has documented extensively, the career of William Whiteley, a leading department store baron, centered not on Regent Street but on the more suburban landscape of Westbourne Grove.⁴⁵

But where might boundaries between gendered spaces be said to begin and end anyway? Helen Blackburn highlighted the problematic relationship between women workers and the domestic space in 1874, when Jopling first enjoyed major success at the Royal Academy:

We are told that women's work lies at home [...] What is included in "home"? Is all that can be performed within its four walls home work? Can work said to be home work, which, while performed outside, bears directly on

the needs of the interior in its results? Or which whether performed within or without, only bears indirectly thereon? How many modes of the exercise of the intellectual and moral faculties are to be cut off as not reacting with sufficient directness on home! Domestic life for women, public life for men; home for women, the State for men, are but repetitions without elucidation.⁴⁶

Too often, as Blackburn indicates, the domestic space was a continuum into which women and all classed as “other” to middle-class men were merged.

But in the end, a nineteenth century ideology of separate spheres only succeeded in proving the impossibility of isolating private life from public life entirely. As Richard Dennis has pointed out more recently, the notion of separate spheres can be contested without difficulty through readings from the period across the spectrum of newspaper coverage and etiquette advice.⁴⁷ As he goes on to remind us: “Women have always been traversing city streets, but always for a reason, with a fixed destination in mind.”⁴⁸ Thus, in going about one’s business in the city streets—purchasing materials, organizing the exhibition of one’s work was a clear-cut matter. A measure of freedom could be enjoyed provided she avoided straying from her journey: Jopling presents us with a pattern of her daily activity in the 1880s that moves seamlessly between studio, dealer’s shop, soirée, and gallery:

In the afternoon I went to Wallis’s Gallery. He was very gracious. I met there Mr. Burgess (R.A.) and a Mr. Williams. They were going on to Goupil’s to see some French pictures, and they asked Percy and me to join them. [...] After luncheon we went and had tea at Morris’, whose Studio is next door. Such a nice one. Then we went to the Grosvenor Gallery, where we found a congregation of swells to meet the Prince and Princess.⁴⁹

In this Jopling might be said to be contributing to a purposeful vision of the independent woman in the city, contributing to its economic life. At the same time, Jopling’s activities reflect the visible presence of the *flâneuse* in the London metropolis. As Rappaport has shown, from the 1860s, magazines like the *Queen* assumed its readers to be “urban spectators and rambles” and provided “numerous articles, probably written by male journalists, on London’s shops, exhibitions, amusements, and streets” that represented the city as a “great exhibition.”⁵⁰

Jopling’s greater task, in any case, lay in the semi-public arena of her studio: Like her artistic and literary friends Whistler and Oscar Wilde, she recognized that cultural capital could be acquired by merging one’s identity with one’s own artfully constructed surroundings. “The conservatory, with its pretty dim lighting, and the garden with its Chinese lanterns were great attractions,” reported a journalist of one of Jopling’s studio events during the mid-eighties, and “Mrs Jopling looked charming in black with a parure of real crimson roses.”⁵¹ As Whistler’s libel case against John Ruskin demonstrated in 1878, while debate persisted about the



Fig. 7. Henrietta Rae, *Henrietta Rae painting a portrait of Lord Dufferin and Ava in G. F. Watts’s studio* (n.d.), photogravure. Trustees of the Watts Gallery, Compton, Surrey, Rob Dickins Collection.

relationship between labor and transactional value, a shift in emphasis had begun that sought to present the work of art as an expression of the aesthetic mindset of the artist. Blurring boundaries between productivity and consumption, Jopling allowed herself to be portrayed in the press as a model artistic chatelaine, at one with her aestheticized surroundings (Fig. 8). Minutely detailed descriptions of her surroundings are combined with expressions of admiration for her taste:

The artist’s studio is a handsome apartment, decorated in shades of yellow and white; at one end is a picturesque gallery, and in the corner a circular window, with cushioned seat, near which is drawn that most charming piece of modern domestic furniture – the tea-table. Another recessed seat by the fireside, and luxurious chairs and couches give an air of comfort often wanting in rooms of this description. A grand piano and parquet floor are suggestive of impromptu dances, when, doubtless, the drawing-room, which adjoins the studio, is pressed into service.⁵²

Though Jopling’s studio is portrayed as a fashionable aesthetic interior, attention is also drawn to reassuring elements of conventional feminine domesticity—the cushioned seat, the tea-table, “the air of comfort.” Reflected too, perhaps, is what

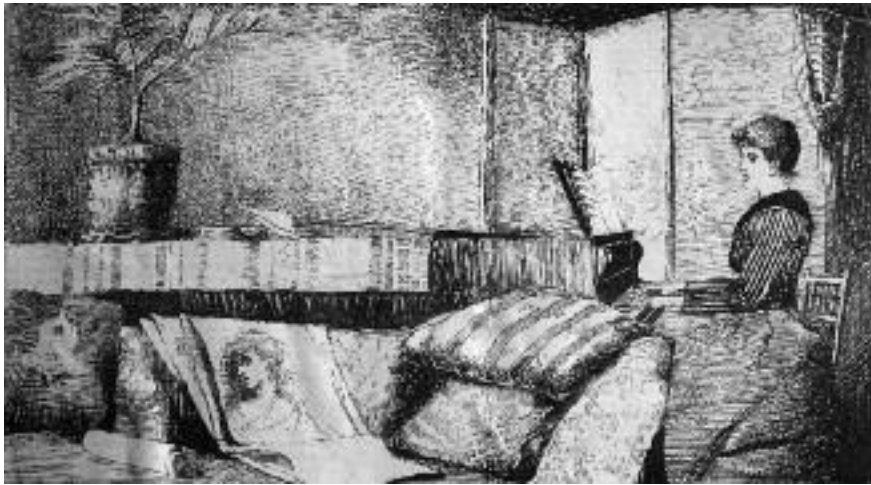


Fig. 8. Anonymous, Louise Jopling in her studio (n.d.), black and white drawing. Private collection, Jopling press-cuttings, PC3, 47.

Wolff has termed a “trend to private leisure”⁵³ that focused on the home—the references to the piano and parquet floor, “suggestive of impromptu dances.”

Jopling also created multi-layered spaces for social networking within the private space of her home, and her social diary is sprinkled with references to “At homes” and *causeries intimes* (informal occasions for talk and discussion).⁵⁴ By 1887, her status as a hostess was acknowledged when, as a subject of the series “London drawing-rooms and their chatelaines” for the *Lady’s World*, her studio was described as having “been for some years the recognised rendezvous of smart Bohemian society.”⁵⁵ These occasions were not only decorative in their intent; Jopling also seems to have thrived on orchestrating encounters between contrasting worlds and ideas. With this came a more intense focus on social activism that began with her decision to open a Parisian-style atelier for women students in the late 1880s. By the 1890s, she was hosting meetings of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union and lecturing there on such subjects as “What Women have done in Art.” In a similar vein, she became a founding member of “The Immortals,” a circle of self-improving women of advanced literary taste that met every three weeks to discuss the works of famous authors. She also demonstrated vigorous (if mostly backroom) support for suffragist causes, her studio becoming the site of meetings of the Woman’s Franchise League, and the Women’s Suffrage Society.⁵⁶

Jopling’s open-house strategy created a club-like ambiance that connects to a late nineteenth century phenomenon of women’s clubs. While some were essentially outgrowths of the shopping culture of the West End (it is notable that the site of a proposed club in 1876 was Westbourne Grove, a suburban shopping hub),⁵⁷ many were semi-public meeting places for working women, often with libraries, exhibition spaces, and dining facilities. The *English Woman’s Journal* (later *Review*) charts their rise, noting, for example, the establishment of a literary and artistic club at 9 Berners Street, long a hub of the London art world.⁵⁸ Amongst Jopling’s portrait clients was Emily Massingberd, suffrage campaigner and founder, in 1892,

of the Pioneer Club, which operated as a space for women to debate political and social questions of the day.⁵⁹ Such facilities met the desire of their users for sites of discussion and creativity in settings far apart from conventional sites of female habitation. All contributed to a process of opening up of new imaginative and intellectual spheres for women that were not necessarily defined by male norms.

Jopling could, of course, be said to have been following an established tradition amongst women artists and writers to transform their homes into sites of cultural and political activism: As Lynne Walker has noted, artist and suffragist Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (well over a decade older than Jopling), used her domestic space “to produce an identity as a professional,

cultured woman active in public affairs.” She pursued a social and political agenda via a network of homes in London, Cornwall, and Algeria. Bodichon also designed her own house and studio near Hastings, Sussex, that became known as “a site of feminist friendship, discussion, and identity”⁶⁰ as early as 1863. But for Jopling, to inhabit the public domain as artist and taste-maker became an integral part of her profession. From the early days of her friendship with Sir Coutts and Lady Lindsay when she painted portraits under the curious gaze of house party guests at Balcarres, to the eighties when she attended the literary salons of her friend Rosa Praed, she lived a highly visible and constructed existence, turning her studio into a faux intimate setting through which social and cultural elites could parade and mingle. She wrote and lectured on art, even taking elocution lessons from the American actor (and fashionable voice coach) Hermann Vezin “to test my capacity for making people hear me.”⁶¹

Could it be argued, then, that Jopling’s approach set a new paradigm of female networking and creativity? That she conducted them for purposes that were increasingly related to public activism would certainly seem to indicate a shift in position. But this is not about claiming a role for Jopling as some kind of social actor. Rather, her activities reflect a late nineteenth century convergence of personal and professional life. It was also about the convergence of the idea of domestic life as woman’s proper habitat and the public domain that of man’s. This threatened the long-established hegemony of the Royal Academy and other cultural institutions given that, as Wolff has rightly argued, “the institutions and discourses of culture in the nineteenth century operated in such a way as to aid in the construction and maintenance of the ideology of the separation of public and private spheres, and of women’s domestic role.”⁶² By the end of the century, institutional validation had come to matter less as the influence of the academy waned. Mindful of this, Jopling aligned herself with new specialized exhibition societies such as the Society of Portrait Painters, becoming one of its earliest members. Her attempts at self-commodification and privatization of cultural

and social life created new settings for women's economic activism and cultural life that are, perhaps, in need of further investigation and contextualization.⁶³ This is not to claim an overarching role for Jopling in this capitalistic process but that a need existed for its reinforcement.⁶⁴

A skilled participant in late nineteenth century print and celebrity culture, Jopling expanded the discourse of women's cultural and economic life via her promotion of a feminized sociality. This is reflected in her later memoir *Twenty Years of My Life*, in which public and private domains collide. Extracts from her correspondence create the illusion of the private confessional and vindicate her opinions and working practices. She relates her efforts to negotiate an identity for the late nineteenth century professional woman artist (what was she supposed to look like? how was she supposed to behave?). She relates stories of her struggles with social convention, accompanied by asides like "This is how we thought in the seventies!"⁶⁵ Jopling continued to maintain this dialogue between the public and the private to the end of her life: "Here I am writing about myself!" she opens her memoir, "I have the feeling, however, that I am describing the life and adventures of some one else."⁶⁶ •

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Notes

- Letter to Albert Fleming, c. February 1871, in Louise Jopling, *Twenty Years of My Life, 1867 to 1887* (London, John Lane and New York, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1925), 29, hereafter Jopling, *Twenty Years*.
- Also in her private papers—press-cuttings, books, correspondence, and diaries, now in the collection of family descendants, hereafter "private collection."
- Louise Abbéma, Madeleine Lemaire, Eva Gonzales, and Mary Cassatt all attended his atelier at one time or another. Cassatt attended Chaplin's studio for a time in 1867, but it is unclear whether she and Jopling ever met there. See Cassatt and her circle: *selected letters*, Nancy Mowll Mathews (ed.), New York: Abbeville Press, 1984, 39, 43–44.
- Anon., "London drawing-rooms and their chatelaines. Mrs Jopling's," *The Lady's World* (August 1887): 340. John Everett Millais painted Jopling's portrait in 1879 (now in the National Portrait Gallery, London). In her occult inspired novel *Affinities: A Romance of Today* (London: Richard Bentley, 1885), Rosa Campbell Praed drew upon her friendship with Jopling for the figure of Christine Borlase, a central character in the novel, whose worldly wise ways contrast with those of the naive young heroine Judith Fountain. Praed and Jopling later worked together on a stage adaptation of the novel.
- Georgia Pearce, "Mrs Jopling Rowe," *Women Folk, incorporating The Woman Worker*, (June 1, 1910), 1017.
- See Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 89–90.
- Ibid.*, 90.
- Griselda Pollock, *Vision and difference: feminism, femininity, and histories of art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 68.
- As Amanda Vickery points out, later Victorians and Edwardians contributed significantly to this legacy themselves. Amanda Vickery, "Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history," *Historical Journal* 36: 2 (June 1993): 388.
- Janet Wolff, "The Culture of Separate Spheres: The Role of Culture in Nineteenth-Century Public and Private Life" (1988), republished in Janet Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995 ed.), 17.
- Cherry is thinking here of women like Margaret Gillies (1803–87), Laura Herford (1831–70) and Emily Osborn (1834–13). Deborah Cherry, "Going Places: Women artists in central London in the mid-nineteenth century," *London Journal*, 28: 1 (2004): 73.
- Jopling, *Twenty Years*, 5.
- Lynne Walker, "Women patron-builders in Britain: identity, difference and memory in spatial and material culture," in D. Cherry & J. Helland, eds., *Woman Artists in the nineteenth century* (Aldershot & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 121.
- Romer was dismissed by the Rothschilds in Spring 1869.
- While French art remained a reference point in reviews of Jopling's art, London defined her strategies as a professional artist. However, unlike Parisian contemporaries like Morisot and Cassatt, she never appears to have developed satisfactory commercial dealer relationships and she relied heavily on traditional selling methods—commissions obtained through social contacts and exhibiting her work within the public exhibition system.
- Mark Lemon, humorist, dramatist and editor of *Punch*, was an uncle of Jopling's by marriage.
- These references are in two MS letters from Frith to Jopling, dated respectively Aug. 3 and Nov. 18, 1871, private collection.
- Unidentified press-cutting dated May 14, 1871, private collection. The location of this painting is unknown.
- Jopling, *Twenty Years*, 63.
- These portraits manifest Millais's newfound interest in Joshua Reynolds. Discussed further in Peter Funnell, Malcolm Warner, et al, *Millais: Portraits* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999), 124.
- Quoted in "The Unity of Art," lecture given at the Chiltern Art Club, c. 1910. Jopling press-cuttings, private collection, PC3.
- It was intended to be the setting for Leyland's collection of blue and white porcelain.
- Jopling press-cuttings, private collection.
- Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality. Representations of women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 19.
- Helen C. Black, *Pen, pencil, baton and mask: biographical sketches* (London: Spottiswoode and Co., 1896), 331.
- As in F.M.G., "Famous Women. Lady Artists at Home: Mrs Louise Jopling," *Ludgate Monthly*, 5 (May 1893): 197.
- Austin Chester, "The Art of Louise Jopling," *Windsor Magazine* (Sept. 1906): 370.
- For example, "Interview of the week. Mrs. Jopling," *Ladies' Gazette*, Nov. 21, 1896): 21–22.
- Cherry and Beckett highlight how the expansion of 19th century metropolitan life mobilized the careers of many women artists. See Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry, "Modern women, modern spaces: women, metropolitan culture and Vorticism," in *Women artists and modernism*, Katy Deepwell, ed. (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1998), 41.
- Her expenses for Jan. and Feb. 1875 include hefty cab fares to the Royal Academy, the Dudley Gallery and salerooms. Jopling account book, private collection.
- From Jopling's social diary (1876–83), private collection.
- Jopling, *Twenty Years*, 43–44. The commissions seem to have been for the Benett-Stanford family of Pythouse, Wiltshire.

33. Ibid.
34. Like Jopling, Lady Colin Campbell (née Gertrude Blood) obtained a judicial separation from her husband in 1884 on grounds of cruelty. In 1886 she petitioned for divorce. However the case, which caused widespread scandal and placed her reputation under harsh scrutiny, was dismissed by the court.
35. Jopling, *Twenty Years*, 279.
36. Ibid., 32.
37. Chester, "The Art of Louise Jopling," 382.
38. This was a popular format in the 1880s and 1890s, notably in periodicals like the *Magazine of Art* and the *Strand Magazine*.
39. Jopling lived at No. 28 Beaufort Street, Chelsea, from c. 1879 to 1886.
40. For example in Giles Walkley, *Artists' houses in London 1764–1914* (Aldershot & Brookfield, VT: Scolar Press, 1994); Kit Wedd et al., *Creative quarters: the art world in London from 1700 to 2000* (London: Merrell, 2001) and more recently in sociological studies like John Montgomery's *The New Wealth of Cities: City Dynamics and the Fifth Wave* (Aldershot & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).
41. A diary entry dated May 13, 1878, records a visit to the McLean family at Queen's Gate to paint their three children, private collection.
42. "Being so near Queen's Gate, I considered myself in the midst of the fashionable world," Jopling, *Twenty Years*, 52.
43. Dinah Mulock Craik, "A Woman's Thoughts About Women" (1857), repr. in *Maude* by Christina Rossetti, "On Sisterhoods" and "A Woman's Thoughts About Women" by Dinah Mulock Craik, Elaine Showalter, ed. (London: William Pickering, 1993), 84.
44. See John Shirley-Fox, *An Art Student's Reminiscences of Paris in the Eighties* (London: Mills and Boon, 1909), 153–54.
45. See Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for pleasure: Women in the making of London's West End* (Oxford and Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), Ch. 1.
46. Helen Blackburn, "Art. I. The Pursuits of Women," *English Woman's Review*, 20 (Oct. 1874): 238.
47. Richard Dennis, *Cities in Modernity: Representations and productions of metropolitan space, 1840–1930* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 152.
48. Ibid., 157.
49. Letter to J.M. Jopling, [May/June] 1878, repr. in Jopling, *Twenty Years*, 121. The Joplings married on Jan. 24, 1874.
50. Rappaport, *Shopping for pleasure*, 117.
51. Incompletely identified press-cutting, *Life*, (1884/85), private collection, Jopling press-cuttings, PC1.
52. "F.M.G.," "Famous Women. Lady Artists at Home," 199.
53. Wolff, *Feminine Sentences*, 22.
54. Extract from Jopling's social diary (1876–83), private collection.
55. Anon., "London drawing-rooms and their chatelaines. Mrs Jopling's." *Lady's World* (Aug. 1887): 340. For more on Jopling's French-style atelier for women students, see in this issue of *WJAJ*, Maria Quirk, "An Art School of Their Own," pp. 39–44.
56. While she held memberships of a number of suffrage organizations, I have found little sign of Jopling in visible campaigning roles, though she was a signatory to the Declaration in Favour of Women's Suffrage in 1889.
57. [Anon.], "Another proposed Ladies Club," *English Woman's Review*, 38 (15 June 1876): 268.
58. [Announcement], *English Woman's Review*, 26 (June 1875): 286.
59. Anon., "People, Places, and Things," *Hearth and Home* (Aug. 8, 1897): 908.
60. Lynne Walker, "Locating the Global/Rethinking the Local: Suffrage Politics, Architecture, and Space Author(s)," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 34, 1/2 (Spring-Summer, 2006): 185. Visitors included Mary Howitt, Elizabeth Siddal, Marianne North, George Eliot and Gertrude Martineau.
61. Jopling, *Twenty Years*, 280.
62. Wolff, *Feminine Sentences*, 28.
63. Research for this paper suggests that, so far, comparative analysis of cultural clubs/settings conceived by women artists is outweighed by that on literary women. See for example, Linda Hughes, "A Club of Their Own: The 'Literary Ladies,' New Women Writers and 'Fin-de-Siècle' Authorship," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 35, 1 (2007): 233–60.
64. As Denise Riley points out, well into the 1920s, women remained less "the submerged opposite of man [...] they formed rather, a kind of continuum of sociality against which the political was set." See Denise Riley, "Am I that name?" *Feminism and the category of 'women' in history* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 15.
65. Jopling, *Twenty Years*, 33.
66. Ibid., 1.

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AN ART SCHOOL OF THEIR OWN

WOMEN'S ATELIERS IN ENGLAND, 1880–1920

By Maria Quirk



Fig. 1. Elizabeth Adela Forbes, *The Minuet* (1892), oil on canvas, 47 5/8" x 35 7/16". Private Collection & Cornwall Council, on loan to Penlee House Gallery & Museum, Penzance.

In 1898 journalist Ralph W. Maude was tasked with conducting one of *The Strand Magazine's* "Illustrated Interviews" with the famed artist and teacher Henrietta Ward. He arrived at Ward's studio early. The afternoon drawing class was still in session and, as men were not allowed to take part, he waited outside, listening to the faint hum of voices emanating from the workroom. After class ended, and the flock of chattering young women had dissipated into the streets of Chelsea, Maude entered. "Surely

there could not be a more business-like looking studio than Mrs. Ward's," he noted with surprise.¹ The workroom was crowded with easels and canvases of various sizes and shapes, busts, plaster models, and animal casts, along with paints, pencils, oils, charcoal, and drawing pins. Also on display were the works of pupils, awaiting criticism from Ward and one of the visiting academicians that attended the school regularly. Radiating enthusiasm, Ward was at home within the chaos. "Isn't this place a terrible mess?" I am always trying to keep it tidy; but it's quite impossible."² This scene of chaotic artistic industry is at odds with the image of female-run art schools as places of upper middle class amateurism.

In 1872, *Magazine of Art* declared that art teaching "is universally admitted to be women's special work, and we should naturally expect to find women teaching drawing and painting as generally as they teach music."³ Even so, such professional opportunities for women remained circumscribed. At government schools of design and large private academies, women were largely confined to junior and entry-level positions. Rarely progressing to senior roles, they were not able to influence educational systems or guide the development of their female students. The greatest opportunities for female art teachers were found in private schools founded or co-founded by such women artists as Ward, Louise Jopling, and Elizabeth Armstrong Forbes of the Newlyn School (Fig. 1). Inevitably, these schools faced criticism, as they were largely seen as more interested in catering to wealthy "accomplishment" students than providing a rigorous art education. However, as well as providing income to practicing women artists, these schools were unique spaces of female authority and autonomy. While government art schools and large private academies often treated women as "other," prejudging their talent and potential as artists, female run art schools adopted a more individualized approach, encouraging and mentoring talented women students. These institutions, as discussed here, were established by professional women artists, in part, to pass on their knowledge and experience to the next generation. Drawing on the methods of French ateliers as well as their own educational experiences, they opened their personal studios to students, providing individualized supervision in an intimate, familial environment. Teaching brought to a number of women opportunities for status and a secure income while allowing personal time to maintain exhibiting careers.

The “master and disciple,” or atelier, method of teaching originated in Italy, evolving out of the apprenticeship system, and took root firmly in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. “In France it is almost as incumbent upon a great man to have a studio full of pupils as to paint pictures,” noted Thomas Ward in 1887.⁴ Although near ubiquitous on the Continent, this teaching method was never as popular in England.⁵ While a number of female art teachers adopted atelier methods, little has been written on the subject in histories of women artists or art education in England. Deborah Cherry notes the increase of female run art classes in the late nineteenth century, but she does not comment on their use of atelier methods.⁶ Enid Zimmerman and Graeme Chalmers mention Louise Jopling’s and Henrietta Ward’s schools briefly in their studies of female art education but do not discuss their teaching methods.⁷ Charlotte Yeldham acknowledges that Jopling based her school on the atelier style but does not consider the rationale behind her decision or the extent to which other female art teachers shared this preference.⁸ There is space within this literature for a reappraisal of female run art schools at the turn of the twentieth century, and the educational and artistic significance of these institutions.

Henrietta Ward (1832–1924) and Louise Jopling (1843–1933), both leading female artists of late Victorian England, relied on art as their primary source of income. Their schools were intended to supplement revenue from picture sales but were also underpinned by a serious interest in female education and professionalism.⁹ Jopling was a vocal advocate of suffrage and women’s economic independence. She received her initial art training in Paris in the 1860s at the atelier of Charles Chaplin, a painter who encouraged serious academic study and gave his female students access to the nude model, a rarity in England before the 1890s.¹⁰ Following her return to London and second marriage, Jopling’s art became her family’s principal source of income, requiring her to constantly seek out new commissions and clients and to exhibit frequently. She believed that “every girl should have a vocation, either artistic or otherwise, by which, if the necessity arose, she could earn her own bread, and be independent,” and she did all she could to encourage this end, publishing books and lectures with practical career advice to female art students.¹¹ Although Mrs. Jopling’s School of Art was an economic necessity, it also gave her the opportunity to put into practice her ideas about art and art education, and to encourage professionalism for female art students.

In creating her curriculum, Jopling drew on her experiences with Chaplin, whose atelier was one of the few that catered exclusively to women, ensuring, in Jopling’s words, that “careful mothers could send their daughters there without complication between the sexes.”¹² The school’s popularity was also due to the familial atmosphere Chaplin created within the studio, which facilitated his personal, individualized teaching method. Students felt themselves part of an artistic community, and Chaplin encouraged his pupils to define themselves as professionals, and to forge an original style that would make them successful in the art marketplace.¹³

Jopling’s school replicated both the atmosphere of Chaplin’s atelier and the French style of teaching art, which privileged practical experience in the studio and drawing from a live model. In England, art students started by drawing “from the antique,” that is, copying from plaster casts of classical statuary. Drawing “from the life” was typically reserved for older and more advanced students who had proved their technique in the antique room. Both the Royal Academy (RA) Schools and the Slade School, considered the most progressive art school in England, followed this convention. However, Jopling’s students, regardless of age or experience, worked from living models from the beginning. Jopling believed she could better “judge the capacity” of her students through their study of a living model, and arranged for a model to sit in costume for three days a week, and nude for the remaining three classes.¹⁴ As in Paris, all classes were under the immediate supervision of the principal, and Jopling visited the studio with “strict regularity several times during the day,” acting as judge and critic as well as demonstrating techniques and skills on her easel placed in the midst of the class.¹⁵ She often asked students to complete life studies of the model, and then to draw the “same figure again with all the muscles to teach anatomy.”¹⁶ Jopling found that teaching in this way not only improved her own technique but, more importantly, it encouraged students to take the study of art “severely.”¹⁷

By 1895 Jopling employed three female teaching assistants: Miss Bell taught sculpture, and Miss Collie and Miss Speckman instructed the watercolor class.¹⁸ An all-female staff was rare, and indicates the importance of women principals in guiding the professional progression of younger teachers. The originality of the Jopling School’s program was noted in the contemporary art press. *Artist* magazine commented on the success of Jopling’s novel methods, which saw students “begin, continue, and end from the life.” The work of the students and “lady teachers” displayed on the studio walls was praised for its freshness, originality, and occasional humor, a trait women were not “generally credited with.”¹⁹ Jopling considered the study of art a serious endeavor, which required patience, perseverance, observation, and a well-developed memory, the kind of mental discipline associated with mathematics.²⁰ Her school formed an intimate nucleus of art education which emanated a singular influence to students.

Henrietta Ward, another strong advocate for female education and professionalism, was born into an artistic dynasty. Her grandfather was the famed animal painter James Ward RA, and both her parents were practicing artists. A supportive and liberal environment in their home “brought out [her] many gifts at an early age.”²¹ Ward received most of her art education from her mother. This one-on-one instruction echoed the intimate atmosphere of an atelier, and resulted in Ward exhibiting her first painting at the Royal Academy at age fifteen, attesting to the seriousness of her education and intentions. She and her husband, the Royal Academician E. M. Ward, were well-known figures in London’s art circles.

Ward established her school after the death of her husband in 1879, and claimed that it was “the only one of its kind in

London.”²² Her professional interactions with the royal family, including several commissions, and her reputation in elite cultural circles made the school popular with members of the aristocracy and the daughters of the city’s upper classes. Ward decried the view that gender put restrictions on talent, imagination, or originality. She spoke of the “pure [male] selfishness” that restricted women from membership of the Royal Academy, and in her own career she modelled the determination and professionalism so often described as lacking in female artists.²³ Ward “was never an amateur anything,” saying “I believe in good, serious drawing, and I don’t believe a bit in tricks.”²⁴ Her pupils may have lacked an economic imperative to study art, but they were expected to take their lessons seriously and practice in earnest. “No one has a higher standard,” noted one journalist.²⁵

Surveying London art schools in 1899, Frederick Dolman noted that Louise Jopling started her school “in the spirit of the old masters, who admitted pupils to their studios and in them preserved some of their inspiration for future years.”²⁶ Ward, too, approached teaching in this way. Women had long prospered under the mentorship and supervision of other women, and before women gained entry into the Royal Academy schools, many were taught by distinguished female art “mistresses.”²⁷ The relationship between teacher and student at the Jopling and Ward schools was familial, referencing the dynamic of personal tuition in a collegial setting. A journalist visiting Jopling’s Kensington studio in 1893 reported that the artist acted as a “guide, philosopher and friend” to her “earnest” students, who regarded their teacher with “loving respect and reverence.”²⁸ Theirs were unique spaces of female autonomy, where the influence and authority of women was privileged.

In the first decades of the twentieth century the number of classes and schools directed by women increased marginally. Most were small operations, offering instruction in just one style or discipline, and run by a single artist seeking additional income. Emily Beatrice Bland (1864–1951) advertised summer classes in sketching and landscape painting in 1913. A graduate of the Slade School, Bland’s intelligent studies of nature, which “wrestl[ed] with the difficulties of rendering the effects of sunlight and shade” in the open air were exhibited at the Royal Academy and the New English Arts Club in the 1890s.²⁹ The miniaturist Josephine Gibson taught pupils privately as well as holding regular larger classes at her studio in Ladbroke Grove. A regular exhibitor at the Royal Academy, she was on the Council of the Society of Miniature Painters, limited to fifty professional artists.³⁰ An “expert in facial modelling,” she received regular commissions from aristocratic clients.³¹

As well as supplementing their income from art sales, teaching also gave these women a degree of authority and influence. Art was a precarious profession for both sexes, but for women, facing additional prejudices and constraints, it was especially rare to experience professional stability or control. Teaching, even on a small scale, allowed women to manage



Fig. 2. Students work in the life room at the Bushey School of Painting. Photographic illustration for “Where To Study Art—The Bushey School Of Animal Painting,” *Every Woman’s Encyclopaedia* (1913) digitized by chestofbooks.com.

their own careers and to set their own conditions and wages. Opening their studios to students may have been an economic imperative, but it also allowed artists like Bland and Gibson to create “little commonwealths” where their ideas held sway.³² They could influence students in a way near impossible in large private academies or government schools.

In 1879, the art patron, artist, and owner of the Grosvenor Gallery, Sir Coutts Lindsay, argued that the prescriptive, standardized methods of England’s major art schools had left the nation’s art students isolated and neglected. The Royal Academy Schools, Lindsay contended, had failed in its duties to the nation; its foundation and structures were “petrified.”³³ Government schools of design, meanwhile, privileged manufacture over art, and any hope that the institutions might develop into worthy national schools of art had withered. Students felt unsupported and disconnected from the traditions of the nation’s artistic heritage. The solution, wrote Lindsay, was for England’s established artists to open their studios, to “transmit their art and reputation to a younger generation.”³⁴ The male artists Lindsay named in his article did not answer his call.³⁵ Rather, it was women whose atelier style classes reflected Lindsay’s reasoning. Barred from election to the Royal Academy and from positions of prominence in the RA schools and other major art institutions, it is not surprising that the atelier system seemed attractive to women artists and teachers seeking authority, autonomy, and influence, even if only among a small group of students.

Lucy Kemp-Welch’s (1869–1958) Bushey School of Painting was one of the largest female run art schools of the early twentieth century. A successful animal and figure painter, Kemp-Welch established the school in 1905, when she took over the studios of Hubert Von Herkomer, the German painter largely responsible for Bushey’s reputation as an artistic enclave.³⁶ The school’s premises were vast; new students worked from plaster casts and costumed models in the large preliminary studio, built to accommodate fifty students—men and women—and their easels (Fig. 2) Professional models were used in the life room, where, in a reversal of the



Fig. 3. Animal painting in the glass house studio at the Bushey School of Painting. Photographic illustration for "Where To Study Art—The Bushey School Of Animal Painting," *Every Woman's Encyclopaedia* (1913), digitized by chestofbooks.com.

traditional power dynamic, two male teaching assistants were employed as aides. Pupils were housed in rented rooms in the village, and had access to a school library, reading room, tennis court, and smoking room. Fancy dress and garden parties were held in the summer term, and musical and dramatic entertainments were staged throughout the year, events that contributed to the esprit de corps associated with Parisian ateliers.³⁷ As well as designing the curriculum and supervising students, Kemp-Welch oversaw every aspect of the school's management, from the distribution of prizes to its extra-curricular and student activities. In doing so, she occupied many of the gatekeeping positions from which women had traditionally been absent in educational institutions, while continuing to pursue her own artistic work.

Kemp-Welch drew on her experiences at Herkomer's atelier-style school to inform her teaching.³⁸ Herkomer prided himself on encouraging the individualism of his pupils. "The world cannot recognise my pupils in their works, and it will probably be said that I have left no 'school' behind me," he commented after his retirement.³⁹ In the 1890s Kemp-Welch had flourished under this method of instruction; her work was known for its freshness and originality and for refusing to occupy itself "with the clichés of styles at all."⁴⁰ The Bushey School advertised that "only such students are accepted as intend to make art a profession," and students were required to attend classes six days a week, with absences accepted only in the case of proven illness.⁴¹ Kemp-Welch added a focus on animal painting, her specialization, to the curriculum, supervising the classes herself, and taking special care to aid her students' progress. Live animals were sourced from the local village as models, and in good weather the students practiced equine painting and large-scale studies in the open air, where a "picturesque horse [was] tethered up to a post for a morning sitting" (Fig. 3), sometimes accompanied by a village model in costume.⁴² She believed that the best way to learn animal shapes and anatomy was through modelling

figures in clay and introduced this method to her students in thrice weekly modelling sessions. While Kemp-Welch continued to draw on the Herkomer tradition, her Bushey School, like Jopling's, imparted a deeply personal educational experience to students.

Another way for women to attain authority in art schools was through spousal partnership, where married couples shared the responsibilities of teaching and management. Two of the most successful art schools established by artist couples were located outside of London. In the 1880s Newlyn, a small village on the west coast of Cornwall, became a hub for artists pursuing painting *en plein air* in the tradition of the French impressionists. At the center of the Newlyn community were the artist Stanhope Forbes and his wife, Elizabeth Armstrong Forbes.⁴³ The Canadian-born Armstrong was a confident artist with a successful exhibiting career. She had attended art school in England before moving to New York at age eighteen to study at the Art Students' League, known for its liberal program and inclusion of women.⁴⁴

Armstrong then spent time in Munich and Pont-Aven before arriving at Newlyn in 1885, where she found inspiration in the varied landscapes and seaside light.⁴⁵ Forbes and Armstrong married in 1889, the same year they founded the Newlyn School, and their home became a center for this artist colony.⁴⁶

Elizabeth Armstrong Forbes had a strong reputation with contemporary critics. Her work "does not ask you for any of that chivalrous gentleness which is in itself so derogatory to the powers of women," noted *Studio* critic Norman Gastin. "As an artist she stands shoulder to shoulder with the very best...."⁴⁷ Her teaching style reflected her progressive education. She supervised classes personally and provided individual critiques and guidance, using flexible teaching methods adaptable to each student's work.⁴⁸ Her devotion to the Italian masters and fifteenth century sculptors informed both the atelier style of the school and its focus on draughtsmanship (Fig. 4).⁴⁹ The Forbeses created an intimate, familial atmosphere at the Newlyn School, personally approving student accommodations in the village and organizing dances and concerts during the winter months. "The life of an art student at Newlyn...is very pleasant," noted one journalist.⁵⁰

The Newlyn School's opening was greeted with enthusiasm. "The announcement will be received with great satisfaction by a large numbers of persons, if only because what may be called the master-and-disciple system of teaching has been so little practiced in England," observed *The Academy*.⁵¹ In working closely with Elizabeth Forbes, the predominantly female student body observed in detail the work of a woman who had gained the respect of the artistic establishment (Fig. 1), and who in turn took the "keenest interest and pleasure" in providing guidance to her pupils. Among those who were drawn to the Newlyn artist colony were Harold and Laura Knight (1877–1970). In a 1913 *Self-Portrait* made during her time in Cornwall, Knight portrayed herself painting a female nude. Although the painting was



Fig. 4. Elizabeth Forbes posing a model. Photographic illustration for "The Newlyn Art School," *Every Woman's Encyclopaedia* (1913) digitized by chestofbooks.com.

considered shocking, even vulgar at the time, her statement is clear about the importance to a serious artist of working "from the life."

In Montmartre, the center of Paris's bohemian artistic milieu, where studio schools were common, the Scottish artists and designers Jessie King and E.A Taylor opened the Shealing Atelier in 1911. A graduate and former teacher at the Glasgow School of Art, King subscribed to that institution's "total design" ideology, which promoted synthesis between fine art and applied design. The Glasgow School's principal, Francis Newbery, encouraged students to pursue original and authentic design aesthetics, and King's production, which ranged from book decoration and embroidery to jewellery making and illustration, was praised by *Studio* as "delicate, refined, imaginative and brimming over with playful detail."⁵³ In designing Shealing's curriculum, King drew on her experience as an instructor in bookbinding and ceramic design and decoration.⁵⁴ Students were encouraged to become proficient in a variety of disciplines, including mural decoration, stained glass, furniture design, and poster illustration.⁵⁵ King and Taylor emphasized that pupils would receive "individual tuition in the various mediums" to ensure that "their own personality [is] assisted in its development."⁵⁶

King, Taylor, and their students became involved in the artistic community of Montmartre, and leading French and expatriate artists regularly provided critiques to the Atelier students.⁵⁷ King gained a reputation for her warmth and generosity towards students. In the summer months they invited students on sketching tours to their Scottish home in Kirkcudbright and to the island of Arran, an isolated community that allowed female pupils a freedom not found in the urban environment. King and Taylor continued to exhibit,

exemplifying for students the very ideas they transmitted through their school, about the value of "total design" and the artist/craftsman ideal.

In conclusion, these art schools founded or co-founded by women artists were unique in giving their students, both female and male, models of artistic professionalism. They enabled women art professionals to balance teaching with active exhibiting careers, and to reap the benefits of the artist/teacher ideal long enjoyed by their male counterparts. There was no question of whether art was a suitable profession for women or doubts over their creative and intellectual capacity, and female artistic talent and ambition was noticed, encouraged, and mentored without condescension. Significantly, these female-run schools adopted an atelier-style method of teaching art that fostered creative individualism at a time when English art education still emanated from a few major institutions where teaching was highly standardized. In opening their own studios to pupils and taking on the direct supervision of a body of students, women like Louise Jopling, Henrietta Ward, and the others quietly challenged the prescriptive methods of England's major art schools. By establishing sites of female intellectual and artistic authority, these artist/teachers modelled a female professionalism that ultimately would enable barriers of prejudice to fall. •

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Notes

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1. Ralph W. Maude, "Illustrated Interviews: Mrs E.M. Ward," *The Strand Magazine*, 26, no. 94 (1898), 363.
2. Ibid.
3. "Art Work for Women Part One: The Work to be Done" *Magazine of Art* (March 1872), 65.
4. Thomas Humphry Ward, *The Reign of Queen Victoria; A Survey of Fifty Years of Progress*, vol. 2 (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1887), 535.
5. See for example, Richard and Samuel Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters* (London: Phaidon, 1947), 31. Many contemporary scholars credit the Slade School of Art with bringing the atelier system to England. Its first director, Edward Poynter, was a strong advocate of the atelier system of drawing, which privileged study of the live model above drawing "from the antique." Although the Slade's curriculum was inspired by French methods, it was a large institution based at a university and did not provide the intimate, personal environment of a true atelier school.
6. Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London: Routledge, 1993), 60.
7. Graeme F. Chalmers, *Women in the Nineteenth Century Art World: Schools of Art and Design for Women in London and Philadelphia* (London: Greenwood, 1998), 62; Enid Zimmerman, "Art Education for Women in England from 1890-1910 as Reflected in the Victorian Periodical Press and Current Feminist Histories of Art Education," *Studies in Art Education* 32, no. 2 (1991): 109.
8. Charlotte Yeldham, *Women Artists in Nineteenth Century France and England* (London: Garland, 1984), 36.

9. Katy Deepwell has argued that the dual role of artist and art teacher, a central feature of the successful male artist's career, was largely unavailable to women, because teaching was recommended to them as a full time career rather than a means of supporting artistic practice. Katy Deepwell, *Women Artists Between the Wars: 'A Fair Field and No Favour'* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2010), 59.
10. "Well Known Women: Mrs Louise Jopling-Rowe" *The London Journal* 31, no. 798 (1899), 272. See also Patricia de Montfort, "Louise Jopling: A Gendered Reading of Late 19th Century Britain," on pages 28-39 of this issue of WAJ.
11. Louise Jopling, "On the Education of the Artistic Faculty, Education and Professions," *The Women's Library* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1893), 102-71; Louise Jopling, *Twenty Years of My Life, 1867 to 1887* (London, John Lane and New York, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1925), 29, 266. "No woman has done more to encourage art among women than Mrs Louise Jopling," "Mrs Louise Jopling Rowe," *Every Woman's Encyclopaedia* 4 (1912).
12. Jopling, *Twenty Years of My Life*, 3.
13. Chaplin believed that the reputation of his students would outlive his own: "My only claim to fame will be that of having been their master!" Marie Adelaide Belloc, "Lady Artists in Paris," *Murray's Magazine* 8, no. 45 (1890), 374.
14. Jopling, *Twenty Years of My Life*, 267; Tessa Mackenzie, *Art Schools of London* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1895), 55.
15. A. De Grasse Stevens, "Mrs Jopling: A Monograph," *A Novel Review* 1, vol. 8 (1892), 728.
16. Mackenzie, *Art Schools of London*, 55.
17. "Mrs Louise Jopling," *The Strand Magazine*, 16, no. 92 (1898), 196.
18. Mackenzie, *Art Schools of London*, 55. The teachers' full names are not recorded.
19. "Personal Notes and Studio Gossip – The Jopling and Winchester Schools," *Artist*, 19 (1897): 178.
20. "First Impressions," *The Speaker: A Liberal Review*, 3 (1891), 174.
21. I.G. McAllister, "Mrs. E.M. Ward," *English Illustrated Magazine* (August 1913), 411.
22. Henrietta Ward, *Memoirs of Ninety Years* (London: Hutchinson, 1924), 196.
23. *Ibid.*, 59.
24. McAllister, "Mrs. E.M. Ward," 414.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Frederick Dolman, "Among the London Art Schools," *The Windsor Magazine* (June 1899), 100.
27. Helen Clayton, *English Female Artists* (London: Tinsely Brothers, 1876), 78, 125.
28. F.M.G., "Famous Women: Lady Artists at Home," *The Ludgate Monthly*, 5 (1893), 200.
29. P.G. Konody, "Miss Beatrice Bland's Exhibition," *The Observer* (May 9, 1913), 8.
30. "The Society of Miniature Painters," *Glasgow Herald* (August 20, 1896), n.p.
31. "Painters in Water Colour," *The Morning Post* (March 20, 1899), 3.
32. "French Studios," *British Architect*, 13, no. 3 (1880): 26.
33. Coutts Lindsay, "Art Education in Great Britain," *Time*, 25 (March 1879), 60.
34. *Ibid.*, 62.
35. In his article Lindsay calls upon "such men as Millais, Watts, Burne Jones, Sir J Leighton, Poynter, Hook" to open their studios to students.
36. Gladys Beattie Crozier, "Where to Study Art – The Bushey School of Animal Painting," *Every Woman's Encyclopaedia*, 1 (1910), n.p. When Herkomer re-purchased the site and demolished the studios in 1912, Kemp-Welch moved the school to her home at Rudolph Road, bringing one of the original, glass-walled studios with her, and continued to teach for another 20 years.
37. "French Studios," 26.
38. "Mr Herkomer has ventured to introduce the Continental system, and to set up a school of his own at Bushey"; Ward, *The Reign of Queen Victoria: A Survey of Fifty Years of Progress*, vol. 2, 536.
39. Hubert Von Herkomer, *My School and my Gospel* (New York: Doubleday, 1908), 15.
40. Marion Hepworth Dixon, "Our Rising Artists: Miss Lucy Kemp-Welch," *The Magazine of Art* (January 1899), 232.
41. Prospectus reprinted in Grant Longman, *The Herkomer Art School and Subsequent Developments 1901–1918* (Bushey: E.G. Longman, March 1981).
42. Crozier, "Where to Study Art – The Bushey School of Animal Painting."
43. Frederick Dolman, "Illustrated Interviews: Mr Stanhope Forbes, ARA," *The Strand Magazine*, 22, no. 131 (1901), 484.
44. Gladys Crozier, "Elizabeth Stanhope Forbes" *Art Journal* (December 1904), 382. See also Kirsten Swinth, *Painting Professionals: Women Artists and the Development of Modern American Art, 1870 – 1930*. (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2001), 31.
45. Lionel Birch, *Stanhope A. Forbes, A. R. A. and Elizabeth Stanhope Forbes, A. R. W. S.* (London: Cassell, 1906), 33.
46. Norman Gastin, "Stanhope Forbes," *Studio*, 23, no. 100 (1901), 81.
47. *Ibid.*, 88.
48. Gladys Beattie Crozier, "The Newlyn Art School," *Every Woman's Encyclopaedia*, 1 (1910), n.p.
49. *Ibid.*
50. TKC. "At a Cornish Art School," *Good Words*, 46 (1905), 535 – 36.
51. "Memoirs of the Moment," *The Academy* (Sept. 1899), 293.
52. Crozier, "Elizabeth Stanhope Forbes," 382.
53. "The International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art at Turin – The Scottish Section," *Studio*, 26 (1902), 99.
54. *The Annual Report of the Glasgow School of Art, 1900–01 and 1906–07*, Glasgow School of Art Archive, GSAA GOV 1/2 and GSAA GOV 1/3
55. *Studio*, 54, no. 223 (1911), xvii.
56. "Shealing Atelier Advertisement," Glasgow Univ. Special Collections, MS GEN 1654/1284.
57. "Studio Talk – Paris," *Studio*, 54, no. 225 (1911), 231; *Studio*, 54, no. 223 (1911), xvii.



Woman's Art Journal archives are available online

Michelle Stuart, Drawn from Nature

edited by Anna Lovatt
Hatje Cantz, 2013

Reviewed by Joyce Beckenstein

“We imprint and are imprints of all that came before,” says Michelle Stuart (9). So opens the impressive catalogue accompanying the exhibition, “Michelle Stuart: Drawn from Nature.” Edited by Anna Lovatt, who also curated the exhibit, it spans the near-five-decade-long career of an unconventional artist whose collective memories and insatiable curiosity course through her lifetime body of drawings, earth art, sculpture, and photography. Five essays, taken together with an ample selection of black- and-white and color plates, document Stuart’s intricate layering of these media and connect her transient imprints with the ineffable archetypal human marks etched through eons of time. A chronology and excellent bibliography round out this large-format volume.

Lovatt’s essay considers Stuart’s “imprint,” with its many incarnations, as an index related to photography. She follows its ‘indexical’ path from the early *Earth Diptych: Self Imprint/No Imprint* (1969), a small sculpture contrasting Stuart’s handprint with an empty surface, to her large frottaged scrolls. Stuart created these variants of the imprint as earth drawings by rubbing graphite onto heavy muslin-backed rag paper placed over the landscape, sometimes pounding pulverized earth directly onto the paper. For her site-specific *Niagara River Gorge Path Relocated* (1975; Fig. 1), Stuart unfurled a mega-sized scroll down a 460-foot barren escarpment, a geological homage to the extinct great falls once spilling into the Niagara River below.

This ephemeral work, originally encrusted with sensuous pink and earth-textured hues, now survives as a photograph of a slim paper strip bounding down a hillside. A banal endnote-as-conventional-photograph of an epic work, it heightens our appreciation of Stuart’s



Fig. 1. Michelle Stuart, *Niagara River Gorge Path Relocated* (1975), red Queenston Shale from gorge site, 460' x 62". Temporary land work along the Niagara River at Artpark, Lewiston, NY. © Michelle Stuart.

unconventional photography, something she pursued to exploit the dislocations inherent in the media. Lovatt makes this point by following the imprint’s “indexical logic” in the Avebury series. Here, the juxtaposition of relief rubbings made at the site with photographs taken of the site establishes two different realities of place. One exudes its physical essence, the other its topographic details; neither reveals a complete sense of place.

While Lovatt tracks Stuart’s surface imprint as an index evolving through photography, Nancy Princenthal follows a metaphysical path indexed to Stuart’s wanderlust. In her essay, “Michelle Stuart: Horizon Effects,” she remarks how “Stuart has stared down long axes of time and space” (25), and traces her early moon drawings to her stint working as a cartographer, and to 1960s NASA photographs of the moon. Then she takes a conceptual leap, relating Stuart’s cosmic mappings to the lunar cycle, part of a woman’s sensibility, and to the gravitational pull of feminism running “deep in Stuart’s work...but never programmatically” (26).

Drawing a wide arc around Stuart’s intellect and insatiable thirst for knowledge, this essay explains the stretch of Stuart’s vision to far-away

places she first visited through books: Australia, Nepal, North Africa, Central and South America, the moon ... Woodstock, NY. So was Stuart intrigued with writers, poets, and philosophers—Jorge Luis Borges, Gaston Bachelard, and Herman Melville—and fascinated by explorers, whose intrepid itineraries lured her gaze to the starry universe charting their journeys. Princenthal finds a wondrous layering of all these influences in a single work, *Sacred Precincts from Dreamtime to the South China Sea ... Mariners Chart* (1984), a fanciful constellation drawing mapping the lamentable voyage of a whaler lost at sea that comesling history and culture with fantasy.

Mining the universe for informational scraps, factual or imaginary, Stuart stored them in the substrata of her collective memory, each intuitive shard a supporting stone linking things ongoing with histories past. These creative archives authored her many artist’s books, wordless tomes that Princenthal richly describes as “buffed and rubbed, ashy, tomblike, and embedded with wax images”(27); some bare stony scars, but all stories told as visual poetry of evanescent journeys taken resurrect lives lived, and lost. Enlarging the con-

text for these books, Princenthal regards them as sculptural forms inspired by a desire to restore intimacy to the book, something sorely lost by the “glut” of electronic information that “divorces data from physical experience” (27). In these books as in more recent works, such as *Ring of Fire* (2008–10), she sees sensitivity to the fragility of all things, a sense of nostalgia, concern for the future and a “consummate grace that is firmly grounded in the present” (30).

Much of Jane McFadden’s essay, “A Passage Out, and Not a Voyage Complete: On the Journeys of Michelle Stuart,” covers now familiar ground. Of interest is Stuart’s 1976 participation in a cooperative workshop sponsored by four colleges. Stuart asked participants to choose a site in nature and “record the physical presence in terms of personal or autobiographical experience, scientific facts or observation, aesthetic response or

historical and mythical significance” (94). Clearly, Stuart practiced as she preached; this layered agenda consistently structured all her works since then.

The artist’s own words are always refreshing, especially when they come from Stuart, well known for her unpretentious candor. Asked in an interview with Julie Joyce to respond to what others have said about influences—color field painting, conceptual and land art, and feminism, Stuart gives succinctly thoughtful answers that underscore her independence, quipping “Once you have to think too much, your ride has left the station” (123).

Alicia G. Longwell, Chief Curator of the Parrish Art Museum, knows Stuart for years, and writes a fitting end piece for this catalogue based on her many visits with the artist at her summer home and studio in Amagansett, New York. “Incidents of Conversation in the

Studio” offers a charming glimpse of this East End, Long Island, paradise, magically bathed in resplendent light, surrounded by the sea, and steeped in Native American and colonial history. What exists without illuminates the inner sanctum of Stuart’s studio space, where natural finds beyond her doorstep—seeds, pods and lily pads submerged in beeswax—cohabit happily with oddities toted from far-away places.

Those familiar with Stuart’s art will find this volume a well-deserved affirmation of an artist whose personal voyage traverses mythic and real time and whose personal imprint is one with the archaic human footprint. Those less familiar can embark on an art journey well worth taking. •

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Rineke Dijkstra: A Retrospective

by Sandra S. Phillips and Jennifer Blessing
Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation,
2012

Reviewed by Jayne Wark

The Dutch photographer Rineke Dijkstra (b. 1959) acquired international renown in the 1990s for her psychologically penetrating portraits of adolescents posed monumentally on the beach. The catalogue documents a retrospective exhibition produced in 2012 by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.¹ In addition to essays by Sandra S. Phillips and Jennifer Blessing, the Senior Curators of Photography at these respective institutions, the catalogue includes an interview with Dijkstra by Dutch art historian Jan van Adrichem.

Ninety full-page color plates are grouped into the thematic portraiture series for which Dijkstra has become well known, such as the Beach Portraits, New Mothers, Israeli Soldiers, and the teen dancers from The Buzz Club and The Krazyhouse. Sandra Phillips’s curatorial

essay, “Twenty Years of Looking at People,” locates Dijkstra’s practice within the reality-based tradition of photography along the lines of August Sander, Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander, Weegee, and Diane Arbus, as well as within photography’s emergence in the 1980s as a form of postmodern art. In this latter context, Phillips quotes Marvin Heiferman, curator of “The Real Big Picture,” a 1986 exhibition of large format photography at the Queens Museum of Art in New York, as saying, “Artists use photography rather than revere it. They make pictures—not photographs, objects—not images” (17).² Phillips accordingly designates Dijkstra as an artist and aligns her with the conceptually based work of photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher and their prominent students such as Thomas Struth, Andreas Gursky, and Thomas Ruff (17). Phillips’s designation of photography as art is cursorily made, however, and though she acknowledges that it has to do with elevating photography to the status of art and “the opening of that market,” she leaves unexamined the many complex issues that continue to perturb the relationship between photography and art (18).³

Despite having made this (perhaps obligatory) claim for Dijkstra’s status as an artist, Phillips makes it clear that she regards Dijkstra primarily as a photographer, one who, moreover, “maintains unshakable ties to more traditional photography” (26). She places Dijkstra squarely within the reality-based tradition of photography that seeks “to record facts and to derive meaning from sensitive responsiveness to what is in front of the camera” (14). She notes the particular importance Diane Arbus’s work had for Dijkstra, whose art school thesis paper focused on Arbus’s use of the camera to examine the tensions between her subjects’ authentic naturalism and their self-conscious attempts to control their self-presentation to the camera (16).

Dijkstra’s own work emulates these tensions in her choice of portrait subjects who are caught on a threshold between uncertainty and self-possession. These include awkward adolescents whose gangly bodies and nascent adult identities are exposed on the beach or at the dance club; women registering the shock, exhaustion, and euphoria just after delivering their first child; bloodied bullfighters emerging

from the ring still pumped with adrenaline; youths recruited to disciplinary institutions such as the French Foreign Legion and the Israel Defense Forces; and her “time-lapse” tracking of the Bosnian refugee Almerisa (2000; Fig. 1) from her arrival in Holland in 1994 at age five, to 2008 and her eventual assimilation into European culture as a mature woman and mother.

Dijkstra’s laborious technique also contributes significantly to the tensions in her photographs. As she explains in her interview with Jan van Adrichem, her process begins when she identifies a subject of interest to her—typically an ordinary person in whom she recognizes some ineffably distinctive quality—and then asks that person to pose for her (45, 50). Because she uses a large-format camera on a tripod, often with special lighting, the time-consuming nature of the process causes her sitters to acquire an uncomfortable self-consciousness as they prepare to be photographed. As Dijkstra says, however, she waits for the moment when they display a certain introversion while concentrating on being photographed (47). In Phillips’s estimation, this scrutiny of details is what enables Dijkstra to capture the psychological intimacy that distinguishes her work from the more abstract and phenomenological portraits of her contemporaries such as Struth or Ruff (20, 25–26).

Jennifer Blessing’s essay, “What We Still Feel: Rineke Dijkstra’s Video,” shifts the focus to Dijkstra’s work in video, for which she has received wide acclaim despite having used it only intermittently since 1996. As Blessing notes, Dijkstra’s video works extend her exploration of portraiture into the temporal realm by incorporating bodily movements and voice while still retaining the close concentration on the individual subjects that characterizes her still photography (29). The subjects of her videos are more uniform, however, in that they are all in varying stages of adolescence. The focus on this age group enables Dijkstra to capture the uncertainties of youths struggling to find and project their developing identities. Given that gender and sexual identity are crucial factors for this age group, Blessing’s

essay devotes much consideration to these aspects. She points out, for example, that the thirteen-year old girl in Dijkstra’s eponymously titled video, *Anne-miek (I wanna be with you)*, exhibits a gender ambiguity typical of her age as she lip-syncs to a popular Backstreet Boys song (30), whereas the slightly older dance club habitués featured in *The Buzz Club, Liverpool, UK/Mystery World, Zaandam, NL* (1996–97) and *The Krazyhouse (Megan, Simon, Nicky, Philip, Dee), Liverpool, UK* (2009) demonstrate much more rigidly defined gender identities (33–34).

In these two dance club videos, which are projected life-size in darkened gallery rooms, teenage girls and boys are shown dancing in isolation before a plain white background in a space outside the club’s main dance floor. Their initial self-consciousness is palpable, but as they warm up to the music, and probably fueled by the effects of drugs and alcohol, they are transported to a state of abandonment that Dijkstra identifies with as her own “desire for rapture” (34). But even in this uninhibited state the girls and boys hew closely to socially codified gender norms, with the girls swiveling languidly in their skimpy dresses and the boys frenetically fist-thrusting in their T-shirts and baggy pants.

Blessing’s assessment of Dijkstra’s video is not restricted to the emerging awareness and adoption of gender codes among adolescents, but it is especially perceptive in that regard. She is even attuned to its most subtle manifestation in the two videos Dijkstra made of visits by uniformed Catholic school children to the Tate Liverpool gallery in 2008, namely *Ruth Drawing Picasso* and *I See a Woman Crying (Weeping Woman)* (39–40). These children, all about eleven years old, are filmed in a state of deep concentration on works of art rather than upon themselves. Because of this absorption in a task that takes them outside themselves, the videos of these children strike me as qualitatively differ-



Fig. 1. Rineke Dijkstra, *Almerisa, Leidschendam, The Netherlands* (March 19, 2000), chromogenic color print, 13 3/4" x 11". Museum of Modern Art, New York. © 2013 Rineke Dijkstra.

ent than those of the dance club teens, whose striving to project their identity through over-determined and clichéd sexual signifiers is painful to witness. On these grounds, I have to disagree with Blessing’s claim that what prevents Dijkstra’s portraits from becoming cruel or voyeuristic exposés of adolescent vulnerability is her personal identification and empathy with her subjects (31). I would suggest that the empathy we feel for Dijkstra’s subjects might be due at least as much or more to a discomfort with the power imbalance implicit in their naïve subjection to her sophisticated aesthetic control and technical expertise. These questions of empathy versus exploitation are central to our understanding of the work of Dijkstra and other portrait photographers, and the failure to grapple with them in any substantive way is a key weakness in this otherwise excellent publication. It is a valuable supplement to the retrospective exhibition of Dijkstra’s most well-known photographic series and videos, and its various essays and interviews provide an insightful introduction to and discursive context for the work in relation to both art and photography. •

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Notes

1. The Rineke Dijkstra exhibition was supported by non-profit organizations including

the Mondriaan Fund, the William Talbott Hillman Foundation and the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

2. Marvin Heiferman, "Essay," in *The Real Big Picture* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1986), n.p.
3. For example, Phillips invokes the importance of conceptual art for instigating the acceptance of photography as art, but she does not address the fact that conceptual artists embraced photography

precisely because it was *not* art, but rather, as David Campany has argued, the "artless mass medium" of commerce, reportage, and documentation; see David Campany, "Conceptual Art History or, A Home for Homes for America," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 124.

Jay DeFeo: A Retrospective

by Dana Miller, with contributions by Michael Duncan, Corey Keller, Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, and Greil Marcus
Whitney Museum of American Art;
distributed by Yale University Press, 2012

Reviewed by Paul Sternberger

Jay DeFeo's best-known painting, *The Rose*, is over ten feet high and encrusted with nearly a foot of oil paint, mica, and wood. The painting was a Herculean task, taking eight years of working and reworking beginning in 1958, and requiring a forklift and the dismantling of an exterior wall of the artist's studio to finally remove it for exhibition. Not only do the scale and effort in completing *The Rose* make it tempting to take as an easy representative of DeFeo's oeuvre, its history provides a seductive metaphor for the highs and lows in the artist's career—after being exhibited at a couple of venues in California, it ended up, in 1969, in a newly constructed conference room at the San Francisco Art Institute. By 1974 the work was sealed with a protective layer because of its deteriorating surface, and it was later entombed behind a false wall, remaining out of public view until 1995, the year it was acquired by the Whitney Museum of American Art. Indeed, the Whitney itself has played a role in the mythologization of *The Rose*, giving the newly resurrected painting a primary place in the 1998 exhibition "Beat Culture and the New America: 1950–65," and in 2003–04, making it the subject of an in-focus exhibition accompanied by a catalogue of essays extolling the work.¹ For the current recon-

sideration of the artist, a catalogue accompanying a major retrospective exhibition, Whitney curator and primary author Dana Miller takes on the task of looking much deeper than the predominating *Rose*-centered narrative of DeFeo's career.²

Miller meticulously describes DeFeo's career beyond *The Rose*, revealing the many creative paths the artist forged for herself, adroitly building a context for her life and oeuvre. Through careful research, Miller portrays an artist that was consistently self-reflective about the progression of her work, yet also shifting in the rhythms and motifs of her output, her scale vacillating from minute to vast, her forms blurring the biomorphic and the inorganic. Miller's essay is punctuated by insightful observations about DeFeo's formal process, often using deftly fashioned descriptions of specific works in particular media to point out subtle formal and conceptual connections between different bodies of work and recurring references over the course of the artist's career. DeFeo, whose range of media, scale, and references varied intensely, would often reengage themes and imagery in her work that had lain dormant for long periods.

Miller traces DeFeo's education through graduate studies in art at the University of California, Berkeley, a program heavily influenced by Hans Hofmann, where she was taught a keen formal awareness of the materials and structure of painting. At the same time, DeFeo's art historical studies intensified her interest in prehistoric and indigenous cultures whose emblematic imagery resonated with DeFeo's own mystical inclinations. In addition, she gained an awareness of East Coast

Abstract Expressionism through publications and friends at the California School of Fine Arts (CSFA) (16). According to Miller, a 1952 travel fellowship proved to be a seminal experience for DeFeo, highlighted by a half year in Florence making hundreds of quickly rendered tempera paintings that integrated Abstract Expressionist techniques with archetypal imagery she had distilled from her study of prehistoric art (16–18; 62–63). Miller describes the slowly building momentum of DeFeo's career upon returning to Berkeley in 1953, when the artist began exploring a variety of media and scales. This narrative works hand-in-hand with other valuable elements of the catalogue, such as a detailed chronology compiled by Diana Kamin and Meredith George Van Dyke, as well as an extensive bibliography and exhibition history.

The milieu of San Francisco looms large in DeFeo's biography as told by Miller and her fellow essayists. Michael Duncan's essay analyzes the larger context of the San Francisco cultural scene, and in his compelling analysis of DeFeo's place in the American art scene, he points out how different DeFeo's lyrically symbolic work was from that of many of her contemporaries. In contrast to the distanced, cool conceptualism of Frank Stella, Carl Andre, or Jasper Johns, DeFeo embraced what Duncan identifies as literary, psychological, and humanistic aspirations (61). Duncan explores these differences in aspiration as a factor of the context of San Francisco in the 1950s and early 1960s, with its unique economic, social, and literary forces that helped shape the art scene there. In 1954 DeFeo joined with

fellow artists, including her future husband Wally Hedrick, to found the collaborative Six Gallery. Both Miller and Duncan explain how Six Gallery would become a focal point of activity for the city's avant-garde, not just in visual art, but in literature, film, and music, with readings and performances by the likes of Kenneth Rexroth, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg (*Howl* was first read there) (19–20; 63–64). DeFeo and Hedrick's apartment and studio on Fillmore Street also was a hub for an enclave of artists, writers, musicians, and gallerists, and Duncan underscores the vitality of DeFeo's influential friendships with artists such as Joan Brown, Bruce Connor, and Wallace Berman.

DeFeo began to be invited to exhibit works in groundbreaking shows in Los Angeles and San Francisco, and she often made large scale paintings and drawings that included imagery that she would return to periodically throughout her career: mountains, botanical forms, and themes gleaned from literature and past religious art. Just as important as any imagery in DeFeo's work of the period are the intense textures and surface topographies of her paintings. The subtlety and variety of these features are described in eye-opening detail by Carol Mancusi-Ungaro in "When Material Becomes Art," an essay with passages as vividly crafted as the paintings themselves.

It was a key moment in DeFeo's career when her densely drawn works on paper and heavy, textural surfaces on canvas drew the attention of Dorothy Miller of the Museum of Modern Art as she scoured the West Coast looking for artists who merited inclusion in what would become the 1959–60 "Sixteen Americans" exhibition. DeFeo earned her place in the show, sharing the walls with artists such as Johns, Stella, Robert Rauschenberg, Ellsworth Kelly, and Louise Nevelson. Despite the curator's pleas to include the still-unfinished *Rose* (which at that point was called by its working title *Deathrose*), DeFeo refused to send the work to MoMA—a puzzling decision, then and now. In her essay describing the MoMA show in the context of DeFeo's career, Dana Miller



Fig. 1. Jay DeFeo, *Traveling Portrait (Chance Landscape)* (1973), photo collage with synthetic polymer and glue on paperboard, 14 1/2" x 19". Jay DeFeo Trust, Berkeley. © Jay DeFeo Trust.

takes the opportunity to question oft-made speculations about the significance of DeFeo's refusal to send *Deathrose*, as well as DeFeo and Hedrick's decision not to attend the opening (his work was also in the show). Some have stated that the artists gave away the airplane tickets MoMA provided (as Hedrick himself later claimed) and snubbed the museum as an act of disdain towards the New York art scene. Miller recounts that careful review of the lengthy correspondence reveals no evidence of plane tickets having been sent or any sign of antagonism toward the museum. More likely, Dana Miller suggests, financial restraints best explain the couple's absence at the opening, a speculation that Duncan restates (21–28; 68). DeFeo stayed in touch with Dorothy Miller, hoping that when *The Rose* was finally complete, the museum would purchase it. Nonetheless, as the catalogue reveals elsewhere, DeFeo and many of her friends did seem hesitant to embrace the opportunities offered them by the museum and commercial worlds, a tendency Duncan finds worthy of exploration. Perhaps in part the legacy

of the cantankerous CSFA faculty member Clyfford Still, skepticism of established institutions gripped many of the young San Francisco "No Generation" artists, as Duncan calls them, including DeFeo's friends Joan Brown, Connor, Berman, and Hedrick. Duncan depicts DeFeo and her colleagues as idealists, not particularly concerned with careerism (62, 68).

After the MoMA show, for much of the first half of the 1960s, DeFeo worked and reworked *The Rose*, applying paint, scraping and carving it away, thinking and rethinking the work that finally approached completion in 1965, just as a five-fold increase in rent forced DeFeo and Hedrick to leave Fillmore Street. In recounting the story, Miller underscores the significance of Bruce Connor's film *The White Rose*, which documented the extrication of the huge painting from the Fillmore studio. The film's brooding melodrama helped shape the *Rose*-centered mythology of DeFeo's life and work (30–31). Several unproductive years in the late 1960s and early 1970s are indicative of the ebb and flow of DeFeo's career. Despite some highpoints such as the long-incoming exhibition of

The Rose, this period was a dark lull punctuated by an ended marriage, illness, depression, and drinking.

The momentum of DeFeo's output began to build again in the early 1970s, with paintings and drawings of abstracted organic forms, including a series of eerie works inspired by DeFeo's own dental bridge (she suffered from severe periodontal disease). Both Miller and Mancusi-Ungaro point out that when painting primarily in acrylic as she did in the 1970s, DeFeo's works tended to create a sense of space through more traditional modeling rather than through the sculptural surface of her earlier oil paintings, though Mancusi-Ungaro underscores the often unconventional lengths that the artist took to retain a sculptural quality in her paint (34–35, 83). This rendering of volume, coupled with DeFeo's career-long preference for a restrained palette, offers continuity among the growing array of media DeFeo explored more intensely in the 1970s.

Some of DeFeo's most intriguing work was created when she set her paint and pencil aside. As early as the mid-1950s, she had been making Dada-like collages with found photographic materials. Decades later, in the early 1970s, she renewed her exploration of collage and added photography to her repertoire as well. Photography seems like an apt medium to have captured DeFeo's attention at this point: its subtle tones resonate with her restrained palette, and it is decidedly nontextural, a contrast to the highly sculptural oil paintings of the previous decade. DeFeo's engagement of photography, a facet of the artist's oeuvre that has received relatively little attention, is the focus of Corey Keller's essay. Keller explores DeFeo's use of the medium not only to create dialogues with works in other media, but to create stand-alone photographic works of art. Supported by a 1973 National Endowment for the Arts fellowship that allowed her to purchase a medium format camera, DeFeo examined enigmatic subject matter in often surreal photographs, photocopies, and collages. Her imagery varied, from abstract photograms and

arrangements of unidentifiable fragments of older works of art, to ordinary objects extricated from her everyday life. Keller sensitively describes how DeFeo's use of straightforward photography, double exposures, solarization, and photo collage allowed the artist to bridge the objective and the subjective and to build symbolic resonances both internal and external (75–77). Banal objects, as Greil Marcus points out in his essay, were explored by DeFeo with a fetishistic intensity that perhaps reached its most surreal heights in works such as her 1973 *Traveling Portrait (Chance Landscape)* (Fig. 1), in which she photographed and collaged her own disembodied teeth and dental bridge (57–58). As he addresses DeFeo's bursts of photographic activity, Marcus's essay is more exuberantly written than others in the catalogue, celebrating the artist's own exuberance that resulted in eruptions of creative activity and sometimes provocative titles (55).

In the mid- 1970s, DeFeo's experimentation in increasingly varied media informed her work in paint, where forms and images of familiar objects from photos and collages inspired those in painting and drawing such as her *Loop*, *Tripod*, and *Shoetree* series. While her investigation of new media had led DeFeo on some new and promising paths through the 1970s, she still struggled professionally, straining to make ends meet with teaching jobs and finding little consistent support from dealers or grants. By the early 1980s, things had begun to shift as DeFeo enjoyed more commercial success, received prestigious awards and exhibitions, and landed a full-time teaching position at Mills College. At this time color and texture play larger roles in her work as she re-engaged oil painting on canvas, having abandoned it nearly a decade and a half earlier. As once before, travel abroad helped shape DeFeo's interests. Time in Asia intensified her interest in Japanese armor and woodblock prints and inspired abstract compositions of geometric and organic forms. And a trip to Africa with a stay, en route, back in Florence, led her to explore landscape metaphors in her late 1980s work. These

landscape references, particularly of mountains meant to be ascended, are poignant at a time when DeFeo had just been diagnosed with lung cancer and was managing to make works as she underwent a grueling regimen of treatment. Following her sixtieth birthday, she embarked on a series of works that built upon directions that punctuated her career: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. As with so much of her work, grand abstracted forms found influence in modest small-scale objects, here a small pink cup made by a friend. The series possesses a theme and title inspired by literature, in this case T. E. Lawrence's autobiography, and includes works of various scales and media. Even as she succumbed to the illness that would take her life in November 1989, DeFeo continued to explore new directions in imagery, texture, and expressive potential (42–47).

In his foreword, Whitney director Adam Weinberg underscores the museum's mission "to amplify," to champion and raise awareness of artists of lasting importance (7). While that recognition, as Weinberg acknowledges, can be late in coming, *Jay DeFeo: A Retrospective* insightfully, intelligently, and emphatically confirms DeFeo's rightful place among key American artists of the second half of the twentieth century. •

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Notes

1. Jane Green and Leah Levy, eds. *Jay DeFeo and The Rose*. (Berkeley and London: Univ. of California Press; New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2003).
2. The exhibition opened first at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Nov. 3, 2012 to Feb. 3, 2013, and then at the Whitney, Feb. 28 – June 2, 2013.

Pairing of Polarities: The Life and Art of Sonya Rapoport

edited by Terri Cohn
Heyday, 2012

Reviewed by Joyce Beckenstein

Sonya Rapoport is among the twentieth-century's most inventive Conceptual artists. This compact, illustrated, soft-covered book of essays, edited by art critic and art historian Terri Cohn, outlines how Rapoport found, in the language of science and computer technology, a potent resource for creating distinct, timely art. Finding bizarre links—between bagel slicing and gene splicing, for example—Rapoport, with disarming wit, presents her compelling aesthetic in a technological, data-based format. She may be the first artist to do so.

Cohn's introductory essay traces Rapoport's evolution from an Abstract Expressionist to a pioneer Conceptual artist whose works derive from the 1970s Conceptual Art movement. She compares Rapoport's installations to those of Hans Haacke, whose *MoMA-Poll* (1970) anointed the audience as an active participant, instrumental to the outcome of a work of art. But Rapoport was clearly different from her peers, pre-empting by more than a decade the technology-as-art explosion as we know it today. Her earliest works derived from the twentieth century's "new ephemera"—punch cards, computer printouts, encoded databases. As her multi-media works evolved into interactive and web-based installations, she evermore inventively embraced technology as a means of joining disparate cultural, biological, and spiritual worlds.

We learn from Hava Rapoport's essay about her mother, "Interfacing Art, Life and Family: Some Views from Close at Hand," that Sonya's art proceeded much like the family dinner hour, when small talk about one's day generated exponentially larger conversations. In much the same way, says Hava, each of Rapoport's seminal series of works evolved over many years and proceeded from "unpretentious belongings and

experiences" (18). For *Objects on My Dresser* (1979–83), *Shoefield* (1982–88) and *The Transgenic Bagel* (1993–96; Fig. 1), Rapoport respectively considered nostalgic collections, shoes, and breakfast food as contextual and aesthetic ideas. Were they amenable to color, shape, and design? Did they merge in unexpected ways, universal in their themes, complex in their aesthetic layers?

Rapoport's art unfolds from a mind ricocheting between scientific logic, domestic tranquility, order, and surrealist intuition, a combination generating many iterations of a single conceptual work. To fully grasp them, in the artist's own words, jump ahead to the two chapters presenting interviews with her: a 1995 interactive art conversation with Anna Couey and Judy Malloy, and a 2005 interview with Ernestine Daubner. Doing so also provides a chronology of Rapoport's evolution.

Rapoport attributes her "break-through in the printout idiom" (79) to her 1970 find of old geological survey maps that she used as backgrounds for her abstract drawings. She then decided to instead mine discarded computerized research data, in endless supply at the University of California at Berkeley, where her husband, an organic chemist, taught. Daubner discusses Rapoport's curiosity about the meaning of this coded language and her subsequent search for "authentic research projects ... with captivating pictorial subject matter" (81). By example, she cites *Goethe's Urpflanze: The Primary Plant* (1978). Here Rapoport juxtaposed computerized data from a 1978 study of the effect of pollution on bean plants with Xerox transfers of Robert Fludd's seventeenth century occult drawings tying all human experience to the workings of the universe. Another image of string beans from a commercial food package and text, some written with archaic typewriter font, some with hand-applied graphite stencils, further animate this 88-inch scroll on obsolete printout paper, its punch holes intact. It is through such layering of high-tech with timeworn that Rapoport achieves her timeless art-science-as-art mystique.

Rapoport's discussion with Couey and Malloy about *Objects on My Dresser* describes how this layered imagery

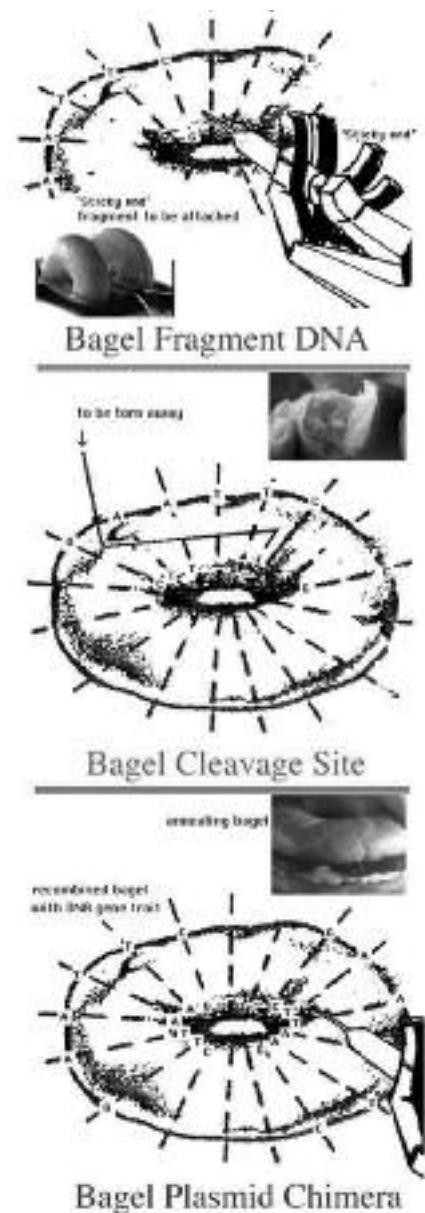


Fig. 1. Sonya Rapoport, *The Transgenic Bagel* (1993–96) (website).

evolved from her early interactive installations and database analysis. This eleven-phase project, predicated on twenty-nine random items on her dresser—glass doorknobs and gifts from children among them—was paired with another twenty-nine objects she psychologically connected with the original memorabilia. These combinations generated a complex series of interactions between Rapoport, a psychologist-consultant, and audience participants. The interactions in turn led to a series of NETWEBS, spider-like diagrams of a particular group's response to the images. NETWEBS comprised the core

content of the eleven incarnations of the project. Note that Rapoport coined the term long before the words “net” and “web” had currency with the general public.

Before reading about Rapoport’s actual web-based art, read Richard Candida Smith’s “A Throw of the Dice: Between Structure and Indeterminacy” for his enlightening contextual thoughts about the work thus far. Smith details Rapoport’s formalist training at Berkeley, where Erle Loran’s course on Cézanne’s techniques was required curriculum. Smith makes a credible case for the impact of Loran’s diagrams—delineating the grammar and structure underlying Cézanne’s paintings—on the diagrammatic underpinnings of Rapoport’s NETWEBS.

“What is aesthetic about her responses to scientific data?” (51), asks John Zarobell in his essay, “Sonya

Rapoport: On Drawing and Data.” Much, he suggests, comes from her ability to perceive in technology’s language the kinds of hidden meanings found in Native American pottery sherds and textile designs. Creating unexpected amalgams between the two in *Anasazi Series Panel II* (1977), Rapoport authors a new and a vibrant visual language, a Rosetta Stone of neo-cubism and ancient and data-based signs and symbols.

Meredith Tromble’s “Turning Point: The Advent of Symbolism in the Art of Sonya Rapoport” directs readers to the website sonyarapoport.net, for a metaphoric giggle playing games. The Transgenic Bagel, for example, by turns hilarious and sublime, asks the player to choose a biblical character associated with some trait, e.g., Rachel, associated with a tortoise embodying tenacity. The player points and clicks away, genetically

extracting the tenacity gene from the tortoise and embedding it into a bagel. Eating the bagel (with cream cheese, of course) absorbs the trait. Thus can tenacity be transmitted to all humanity.

Pairing of Polarities is a fascinating read that’s challenged by its brevity, and by redundancy on the part of different essayists who address the many iterations of Rapoport’s prolific output from different perspectives. Some of those perspectives, especially Ann Vikram’s chapter, “The Woman’s Place Is in the Studio,” with its focus on feminism, begs for more.

But in light of Rapoport’s daunting output and daring, this is all a quibble. Sonya Rapoport is a cutting edge artist who has not fully received her due. She deserves a bigger book. So do we. •

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Biala: Vision and Memory

by Diane Kelder
Godwin-Ternbach Museum, Queens
College, CUNY, 2013

Reviewed by Monica L. Steinberg

A most fascinating, yet difficult character to situate within the fluctuating canon is Janice Biala (1903–2000). This comprehensive text, *Biala: Vision and Memory*, on the peripatetic artist known as simply as “Biala,” served as the catalogue for the first retrospective exhibition of her work held at the Godwin-Ternbach Museum at Queens College in New York. Both the exhibition and catalogue made abundantly clear that, despite her infrequent showings and consequent marginalization, Biala and her work were solid presences amidst the mid-twentieth-century art worlds of both New York and Paris. Diane Kelder—guest curator and catalogue author—positioned Biala’s work within a complex web of historical conditions, social relationships, and inflections of memory and nostalgia.

The text builds on existing literature, which, until now, has either consisted of

exhibition reviews and articles, or positioned Biala as a character within larger narratives of the famous figures with whom she associated: her artist-brother Jack Tworokov, her eight year relationship with the writer Ford Madox Ford, and her decades-long marriage to painter/illustrator Daniel “Alain” Brustlein. The catalogue reorients this perspective, placing agency with Biala and examining her life and career as a complex engagement of transatlantic art scenes and a visual navigation underwritten by aspects of memory. Ultimately, the catalogue represents the most complete, historical examination of Biala’s life and work to date, replacing earlier, brief overviews with a thorough and well-researched text that teeters between comprehensive source and reverential tribute.

As the title suggests, a play between vision and memory informed Biala’s approach to art, as well as Kelder’s approach to a discussion of the artist’s work. The text begins by establishing Biala’s situation as a “constant-immigrant”—a state that positions aspects of memory, nostalgia, and home as a central concern. This thematic address is divided into three distinct

sections: her early career and aspects of her identity as a Polish immigrant in New York, her life and work with Ford, and finally, her work post-1940 and engagement with the burgeoning New York scene.

Building on much documentary research, Kelder opens the book by dissecting the complicated nature of Biala’s name and itinerant condition: she was born Schenehia Tworokovsky in the Polish city of Biala Podlaska, then under Russian rule. Immigrating to New York in 1913, she lived under the surname Bernstein, assuming the name of a sponsoring relative. As a young adult she went by Janice Tworokov, eventually settling on “Janice Biala”—after her birth-city—in the mid-1920s. This itinerant namesake, coupled with a nomadic lifestyle and precarious economic situation, made for an artist whose notion of identity fluctuated according to locality. In an interview with critic Michael Brenson, Biala stated: “I’ve always had the feeling that I belong where my easel is... I always felt that wherever my easel was, that was my nationality”¹

Kelder next traces the chapter of Biala’s life with Ford Madox Ford,

whom she met in 1930 during her first trip to Paris. Throughout their eight-year relationship, they divided their time between Paris and Provence, with interludes in America. Kelder highlights how Biala's early output during this period reflected their many travels. She created illustrations and dust jackets for Ford's numerous publications and exhibited paintings that revealed a substantial and dynamic range of skill. Kelder notes the dynamism apparent in of Biala's paintings from the early part of the decade and the glowing reception they consistently received, including a particularly laudatory review of the artist's 1935 show at the Georgette Passedoit Gallery in New York: "Biala has an original talent...she can do a painting of a cat in iridescent tonalities, or she can produce a dark and really moving nocturne" (5).

Under the ever-encroaching cloud of war, Biala and Ford moved to America in the latter part of the decade, dividing their time between New York and Olivet, Michigan, where Ford maintained a lecturer position. Kelder notes Biala's work became increasingly concerned with the medium of paint itself, a shift most likely influenced by her expanding social circle. During their various stays in New York, the couple hosted afternoon teas that were frequented by William Carlos Williams, Marsden Hartley, Constantin Brancusi, and others. Archived letters and lectures record the artist's increasing focus on material, such as a 1937 lecture in which she stated: "The subject of a picture...is the paint itself" (6).

Following Ford's death in 1939, Kelder stresses how Biala became progressively ingratiated in both an investigation of memory and the politics of the New York Abstract Expressionist scene. She discusses the artist's continuing interest in paint, and her increasingly formal investigation of aspects of memory. The author highlights how Biala's numerous shows at the Bignou Gallery throughout the 1940s presented paintings depicting veiled views of the places the artist had called home: Paris, Provence, Manhattan. The compositions captured the essence of a diaspora of memory—scenes of home

that unfolded through the superimposition of recollection. Sadly, rather than fleshing out the intricacies of paintings formed from memories of a multi-city notion of home, and an identity as a constant-immigrant, Kelder moves on to situate Biala firmly within the dynamics (and polemics) of the New York and Paris Schools.

Kelder's discussion of Biala's life during the forties and fifties focuses more on the artist's friendships and relationships, constant movement between continents, and engagement with contemporary painting. The text not only displays the depths and degree of primary research necessary to document an understudied life, but also the extent to which Biala engaged with the early-polemics of the emerging Abstract Expressionist scene. Biala married Brustlein in 1942, and despite maintaining a transatlantic lifestyle, was able to foster contacts with key figures in New York, including Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, and Ad Reinhardt, among others. Additionally, her participation in shows at the Stable Gallery put her in touch with the influential critics Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg. Despite this early engagement with Abstract Expressionism, Kelder strongly notes that Biala expressed, on numerous occasions, increasing reservations regarding the direction of painting: "Like many of us, I was raised on the notion of 'painterliness'...I wonder if painterliness is not meant to serve something beyond itself" (7).

Finally, Kelder reaches the point for promoting Biala's engagement with, and connections to, the New York art scene. "Although she regarded herself as a figurative painter, the consistent frontality and spatial ambiguity of Biala's works challenge this characterization" (8). She argues that the artist's permanent move to Paris in 1960, her distinctive adherence to figuration, as seen in *Blackbird* (1956; Fig. 1), and the rise of, what the author terms: "fashion and market-driven priorities" distinctly and adversely affected Biala's career (4). Ultimately, the book presents the most complete account, to date, of Biala's life and work. And although this reader felt



Fig. 1. Janice Biala, *Blackbird* (1956), mixed media collage, 61 1/2" x 36 1/4". Estate of Janice Biala, Courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.

the absence of a deeper discussion of nostalgia, *Biala: Vision and Memory* functions most effectively as a collection of well-documented facts: concerning her immigration to America, work and relationship with Ford, and work and engagement with the New York Abstract Expressionist scene. In the end, it opens up the field for a deeper investigation of notions of nostalgia and memory that could be positioned along the lines of scholarship discussing Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, and aspects of home and identity. •

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Notes

1. Janice Biala, quoted in Michael Brenson, "Three who were Warmed by the City of Light," *New York Times* (June 25, 1989), H31–32.

Re-viewing Documentary: The Photographic Life of Louise Rosskam

by Laura Katzman and
Beverly W. Brannan
Penn State University Press and the
American University Museum, 2011

Reviewed by Robin Rice

Thanks to the efforts of Laura Katzman and Beverly W. Brannan, Louise Rosskam (1910–2003) may begin to claim a well-deserved place in the canon of American documentary photographers. Katzman, associate professor of art history at James Madison University, and Brannan, senior curator of photography at the Library of Congress, make a strong case for Rosskam's important contributions to social reform photography in *Re-viewing Documentary: The Photographic Life of Louise Rosskam*. This catalogue for a posthumous solo exhibition at the American University Museum, Washington, D.C., contains over a hundred photographs contextualized by the authors' discussion of the opportunities and challenges facing a woman photographer of the Great Depression, World War II, and postwar decades. These were times when documentary photography made great strides technically and popularly in magazines like *Life* and *Look* and in the new genre of broadly marketed photo-books. Rosskam's

compelling images helped to shape this influential mode [of documentary photography] from the 1930's through the 1960's via their publication in nationally circulated newspapers, big picture magazine, premier art journals, and popular photo-books on great American cities and American history (11, brackets mine).

In the title essay, Katzman and Brannan present a concise overview of Rosskam's life and consider issues behind the lack of recognition she has received in a genre which routinely celebrates contemporaneous practitioners

like Dorothea Lange, Marion Post Wolcott, and Margaret Bourke-White. Rosskam herself was partly, perhaps largely, responsible for this low profile. She saw herself not as a unique eye and interpreter but rather as part of a team headed by her husband, photographic teacher and working partner, Edwin Rosskam (1903–85). The authors report that she was "insisting through her last interviews that Edwin was the artist of the team and she the documentarian, accepting a separation between art and documentary that has long been recognized as a false dichotomy" (12). Edwin taught Louise photography. His name alone appears on many joint projects and publications for which she took numerous self-selected subjects and compositions.

The idealistic opposition to class and economic inequities shared by the Rosskams and their milieu perhaps harmonized with Louise's intrinsic lack of vanity. She and Edwin both regarded their documentary work as a "collaboration between subject and photographer" (28, 29). Katzman and Brannan, however, observe that Rosskam behaved independently as an individual maker in terms of composition and other aesthetic considerations (12) and "could also think critically about photography as a tool of communication" (6). They also report,

Ultimately she did want to set the record straight in the years leading up to her death ... [S]he began to write playful yet touching letters to the Library of Congress to claim as hers specific works in the Library's collection that had long been assigned to Edwin (13).

Rosskam grew up in Philadelphia and studied biology at the University of Pennsylvania. Her scientific training was useful to her later photographic work. Undertaken against the wishes of her Hungarian-American father, her studies were self-financed after her father's bank failed in 1931 (13). She earned a BS in 1933 but struggled to find jobs in science or teaching because she

was a woman and Jewish (16). She met Edwin and moved to New York City, where she discovered a Bohemian lifestyle and found her *métier*. "Filling her head with philosophical concepts about the nature of perception and reality, she said these artists 'wrecked my concepts of biology,' leading her to abandon the microscope for the camera" (17). "Being a photographer has been a whole way of life for me," she told the authors (28).

Edwin was a photographer, filmmaker, writer, and novelist. Among many significant projects, he collaborated with Richard Wright on *12 Million Black Voices* (1941). Katzman and Brannan successfully resist an obvious temptation for his story and accomplishments to upstage their discussion of Louise Rosskam's life and work. Rosskam described Edwin as a "dynamo" and "the idea man." He was sophisticated, an intellectual, a student of art and philosophy. He had traveled and spent time in Paris, where he knew leading artists like Man Ray (25, 26, 27). By the time Louise met him, he had a well-developed commitment to Marxist thinking that she came to share. They were working together by 1936, the year they married, and in 1937 they were commissioned by *Life* magazine, then a new publication, to document a trial in Puerto Rico. Although the conservative magazine did not publish their left-wing photographs, the job introduced them to a place that would be of lifelong importance to both (17). At the time, though, they returned to Washington D.C. It was the New Deal era, and there were jobs for women in an environment keen to document Depression-blighted sectors of society.

Eight compact essays by Laura Katzman, accompanied by generous portfolios of photographs, each link a period of Rosskam's career with a particular body of work. The unique photographs in "Washington in Color" are reproduced in color in the catalogue. In 1942 Rosskam and a few other photographers working under the much-admired chief of the Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Roy Stryker were asked to explore the potential of a new film. This was Kodachrome, which came to be

regarded by many as the best color film until it was reluctantly discontinued in 2009 due to the utter dominance of digital photography. In 1942, though, color was considered frivolous. "Like many of her generation, [Rosskam] came to identify black and white images as 'truthful,' serious records and color pictures as 'lighter' documents, lacking the gravitas that we associate with the New Deal and wartime eras," but when Stryker asked, Rosskam stepped up (57). In images somewhat reminiscent of Edward Hopper, she recorded row houses and businesses in Washington, D.C., catching the sun at the best angle above the narrow streets. Rosskam effectively utilized the slow Kodachrome range of clear blues, bright reds and sallow yellows. She finds lively compositions playing a little girl's red dress off nearby Coca-Cola signs or emphasizing the blue sleeves of a pale Vermeer-ish young woman in a window (61, 65).

From around the same time (1941–42), a more intimate black and white image of "Children in doorway at Barney Neighborhood Settlement House" (68 and cover) illustrates Rosskam's characteristic felicitous interaction with her subjects. The children are relaxed but aware of the camera. They are posing but also uniquely themselves; each is appealing as an individual in a setting that is not appealing. As so often, Rosskam made a virtue of necessity, using the central glare of the flashbulb to isolate the doorway that frames the group and shadows the grubby, enclosing walls.

At a turning point in their careers the Rosskams accepted a job with big business "to tell the human story of oil in America." Standard Oil Company was not the employer they would have chosen. In 1943 it was perhaps hoping to rehabilitate a "tainted reputation" due to its prewar association with Germany (79). The Rosskams, however, had nominal creative freedom in their assignment to show happy healthy workers, a pervasive mid-century theme. Edwin took the more general, panoramic views of work situations and Louise often worked more directly with people.

Towboat River (1948), the Rosskams' "most extensive, carefully planned and insightful book collaboration," united cultural anthropology with regionalism in a multifaceted depiction of modern life on the Mississippi River (93). Photographs interspersed with text, often based on recorded interviews, are given equal and independent importance. In researching the book the Rosskams lived and traveled on the boats. "The interesting thing about [being a photographer] is you have to be where the photograph is" (28, brackets mine). Rosskam loved life on the boat, and her photographs of her fellow workers, especially the women, convey striking empathy. The book was widely praised "for its authenticity as well as for its poetic qualities" (95).

A move to Puerto Rico in 1945 began what was probably the most satisfying period of their careers. "[W]hile the Rosskams left Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico never left them" (107). Recording all segments of society with, on Louise's part, an occasionally satirical eye for society ladies, it was important, they believed, to document "a Spanish-speaking people on a Caribbean island, who, despite their status as American citizens, were culturally distinct from people in the States" (107). "It is clear that [Rosskam] had mastered a classic FSA approach to documenting people in need. She took her subjects straight-on and in ways that elicit from viewers empathy as opposed to pity" (107). Memorable images range from agricultural families silhouetted against the clouds in the mountains (1947; Fig. 1) to a young worker surrounded by shelves of tiny figurines in a doll factory. Reluctantly, in 1953 the Rosskams left the island, although they returned during 1958–59 and remained engaged with Puerto Rico.

Back in the U.S., in Roosevelt, New Jersey, Rosskam completed some interesting photographic projects and taught children. In 1967 Louise worked with migrant families and photographed students as they completed a summer education program. Nevertheless, there is a slight sense of anti-climax about Rosskam's later work.



Fig. 1. Louise Rosskam, *Rural Family*. Near Tao Alto, Puerto Rico, February, 1947, gelatin silver print, 7 7/8" x 7 7/8". OIPRX1960. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.

In 1996 Katzman and Brannan began a series of interviews with the photographer that stretched over six years. In 2002 they organized Rosskam's first solo show at the Maier Museum of Art at Randolph-Macon Woman's College (now Randolph College), and later a show at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. The historical context of Rosskam's life is of particular interest today, as her century and its conflicted engagement with social reform vanish from living memory. The idealism of New Deal programs and the dynamic personalities associated with them, as well as the wrangling, violence, and compromises that accompanied Puerto Rico's evolving status, found unique, thoughtful expression in the work of Louise Rosskam. Her story is compelling enough to perhaps justify a biography. The functional usefulness of this particular volume could be significantly enhanced by an appendix clarifying the chronology of Rosskam's life and career. She and her husband moved around a lot in the early decades and worked for a number of different employers and publications. Perhaps it has not always been possible to nail down specific dates.

From a broader perspective, the Rosskams were characteristic New Deal documentary photographers in subject matter, technology, philosophy, method-

ology, and audience. Roskam “could articulate the ideals of the documentary mode but could also think critically about documentary photography as a tool of communication” (6). The flip side to the New Deal artist’s commitment to accuracy and insight was the contemporaneous audience’s acceptance of a photograph’s validity as a record, a willingness to accept the truth of the world the photographer con-

structs. This shared vision was especially resonant in a mid-twentieth century society where the print medium was a dominant and an increasingly sophisticated mode of communication. In the half-century since then, much has changed. New perspectives on communicating the “truth” endlessly evolve. It’s a provocative moment for *Re-viewing Documentary*, and this book is a good place to start. Although it presents a

comprehensive and satisfying sampling of Louise Roskam’s work, *Re-viewing Documentary* leaves the reader wanting more. •

Robin Rice, an art writer, has authored and co-authored numerous books, essays, and articles, and is working on the third volume in a series about Philadelphia murals for Temple University Press.

The Deconstructive Impulse: Women Artists Reconfigure the Signs of Power, 1973–1991

edited by Nancy Princenthal
DelMonico Books, 2011

Reviewed by Karen Gonzalez Rice

In 1983, art historian and critic Craig Owens observed that art-world discussions of postmodern theory overlooked sexual difference. Looking at artworks by Cindy Sherman, Mary Kelly, and others, he argued that “women’s insistence on difference and incommensurability may not only be compatible with, but also an instance of postmodern thought.”¹ In his important essay “The Discourse of Others: Feminism and Postmodernism,” Owens identified what he called “the deconstructive impulse” in contemporary women’s art, and it is this concept that frames the diverse essays collected here. Like Owens, the authors of *The Deconstructive Impulse* insist on deconstructivism as a gendered practice formed visually, verbally, and in writing among artists, art historians, and art critics—especially women. In the book’s essays, five distinguished feminist art historians circle the intriguing, if amorphous, set of ideas suggested by Owens’s phrase: postmodern theory, feminism, psychoanalysis, appropriation, new media, consumerism, domesticity, desire, melodrama, visual pleasure, collage, masquerade, institutional critique, and more. While ranging widely across these topics, the essays center on the art practices of twenty-two female artists, with par-

ticular attention to artworks by Cindy Sherman, Louise Lawler, Martha Rosler, and Carrie Mae Weems. The book accompanied an exhibition of the same name, curated by Nancy Princenthal and Helaine Posner and organized by the Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University of New York. As a touchstone for the authors’ varied approaches, a set of specific artworks, illustrated in 77 pages of excellent full-color reproductions, usefully roots the conversation in particular art practices.

In “Hot and Cool: Feminist Art in Practice,” Helaine Posner articulates the book’s central project: a critical investigation into how “feminist and deconstructive impulses drove the influential media-based conceptual work commonly known as appropriation,” with attention to women artists in North America who “employ the visual languages of the mass media to unveil its codes and reveal embedded gender, sexual, and racial, and class-based inequalities” (11). In this way, Posner connects artworks like Mary Kelly’s *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79), Judith Barry’s *Casual Shopper* (1981), and Carrie Mae Weems’s *Untitled (Kitchen Table Series)* (1990; Fig. 1), in which female figures confront the viewer’s gaze, “gain[ing] our empathy while simultaneously revealing the artifice of their social construction” (14). Posner identifies the work of Weems and others as parallel examinations into the social structures defining and enforcing sexual difference. Grounded in this expansive project, *The Deconstructive Impulse* presents an evocative history that maps new relations among well-known artists, authors, and ideas.

Nancy Princenthal’s “In Theory: Postmodernism and Polemics” traces how deconstructive strategies circulated among North American art historians and critics. Rich with quotes from important texts and visual analyses of key artworks, this essay serves as a concise historiography at the intersection of feminism and deconstruction. It provides an essential foundation for readers and supports the book’s valuable, if abbreviated, bibliography of exhibition catalogues and critical texts. Princenthal’s brief intellectual history is both much-needed and accessible. A senior colleague once told me that, in the 1990s, she assigned Foucault in an undergraduate art history seminar. Students in her class were disappointed—they read Foucault in their other classes, they said; and they asked to read postmodern texts written by art historians. Had it been available then, Princenthal’s brief intellectual history would have provided these keen students with an excellent overview of the subject. Its coherent narrative, clear language, and deft connections among artworks, texts, and ideas recommend its inclusion in syllabi for advanced undergraduate seminars or graduate courses.

Voicing a conviction seeded throughout the book, in “What Women Want: Psychoanalysis and Cultural Critique,” Griselda Pollock insists on the deconstructive possibilities of the visual field. She argues, “Let me be clear. Artists were not doing deconstructive theory in art; their art was in itself, as art, indicative of working with the very contradictions that Derrida named philosophically as *Abbau*: deconstruction” (70). Echoing Owens’s assertion that the deconstructive impulse in women’s art

must be considered “an instance of post-modern thought,” Pollock maintains that these artists were not simply applying postmodern theories: “I want to sweep away any suggestion that after 1970 a number of artists turned away from art to ‘theory’ and imposed its alien intellectuality upon the virgin aesthetic field” (75). Instead, these artists’ appropriation and manipulation of images were, in themselves, intellectual acts of postmodern experimentation, always already embedded in contingent, subjective networks of making, viewing, and being.

Pollock observes that artworks included in the book deconstruct by “becom[ing] performative actions refusing to repeat the fixed positions reinforced by the image world and its dominant ideologies” (81). In “Home Alone: ‘Reversal of Positions of Presentation’ and the Visual Semantics of Domesticity,” Kristine Stiles suggests that the power of these performative actions derives from their actual, lived circumstances in the context of artists’ biographies. In particular, Stiles reconsiders the motives usually ascribed to Lousie Lawler in *Three Women/Three Chairs Arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine* (1984) and other photographs of the Tremaine’s art collection. Dispelling common assumptions that the artist critiqued, subverted, and ridiculed the Tremaines as crass consumers, Stiles shows that Lawler’s process actually drew on the sardonic, critical sensibility of the collectors themselves (53). Further, Stiles mines Lawler’s writings to reveal the artist’s ambivalence about postmodern theory. In a letter to a friend, Lawler wrote, “[Hal Foster’s *The Anti-Aesthetic*] is about the only one of the books I’ve read, even though I know I should [have read more]... I’m just somehow resistant” (54). In this way, Stiles gestures to the complex, contradictory nature of the deconstructive impulse and the necessity of historical, biographical specificity in making sense of artworks in the context of postmodernism.

The vast territory surveyed by *The Deconstructive Impulse* calls for a conceptual map, thematic sections, or



Fig. 1. Carrie Mae Weems, *Untitled (Woman and daughter with makeup)* from “Untitled (Kitchen Table Series)” (1990), silver print, 27 1/4” x 27 1/4”. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

other topical organization. While the exhibition design may have oriented viewers to the relationships among artworks spatially, these complex associations are less visible in the book. Even enriching the index to include concepts (rather than simply artists and artworks) could have clarified the relations among the book’s disparate approaches and themes. At the same time, the authors’ spirit of open-ended inquiry suggests exciting new directions for research. For example, Tom McDonough’s essay “Feeling Things: Fetishism and the Sex Appeal of the Inorganic” considers the fusion of object and subject as a deconstructive visual strategy. The author’s theorizations of fashion, desire and media in Cindy Sherman’s *Untitled Film Stills* (1977–81) suggest a productive approach that might be applied to other artworks. Similarly, several authors, including McDonough and Pollock, invoke Pop Art, Dada, and Surrealism in their discussion of women artists’ uses of mass media. Many artworks in the book, for example those by Sarah Charlesworth and Laurie Simmons, explicitly reference Pop, Dada, and Surrealist pieces, and these visual

relationships demand further attention. Other questions raised by the book, ripe for further research, include how regional dynamics impacted the circulation of postmodern ideas among women artists in specific communities; how artists on the margins of the book’s time frame, before 1973 and after 1991, participated in these postmodern dialogues; and how deconstructive strategies interacted with the political content of some of these artworks. Pollock notes that “any feminist deconstructive impulse takes infinitely variable forms” (81). The diverse artworks, theories, critical approaches, and questions raised by *The Deconstructive Impulse* contribute to this multiplicity. •

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Notes

1. Craig Owens, “The Discourse of Others: Feminism and Postmodernism,” in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1985): 62.

Sarah Angelina Acland First Lady of Colour Photography

by Giles Hudson
Bodleian Library, 2012

Reviewed by Jan Garden Castro

Sarah “Angie” Acland’s (1849–1930) contributions to black-and-white and color photography are a little-known chapter in the history of photography. This monograph mentions the progressive attitudes toward women in Oxford, England, at the close of the nineteenth century, the other women then active in the field, and the many advances in photographic processes credited to Acland’s circle of acquaintances that occurred between the inventions of Louis Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot and the early stages of color photography.

The beautiful plates and Giles Hudson’s meticulously researched text make this both a collector’s item every library should own as well as a reminder that the early history of photography leaves out most women. Acland grew up in the most prominent circle of photography advocates in Oxford; as a child, in 1856, she was photographed by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) and others. An albumen print by Hill & Saunders (c. 1868) shows her as an invalid in the family drawing room on her nineteenth birthday. Hudson barely notes that Acland was a sickly child from age nine with a nervous condition in her legs and that sometimes she was in a wheelchair. Evidently, her condition improved around the time that her mother died in 1878. Despite health concerns, she participated in the arts and in the scientific inquiries of her day. In memoirs written late in her lifetime, Acland recalled an exchange around 1868 in their drawing room between Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–79) and John Ruskin, a family friend whom Acland later photographed. Ruskin was upset by the staged photo of Sir John Herschel “in which his hair all stood up like a halo of fireworks,” and Cameron replied, “John Ruskin you are not

worthy of photographs” (9). Hudson does not tell us what Acland herself thought about this disagreement, only that she knew Cameron’s work well before she herself became known for photographing her eminent father and family friends, and for her contributions to color photography. Although Acland’s photographic style is less drama-tinged than Cameron’s, both took up photography later in life—Acland at age 42, in 1891, and Cameron at 48, and only for eleven years (1864–75).¹

Growing up in a household with seven brothers (one died at age 22 in Ceylon) and a dozen servants, Acland became known for her culture and learning; in later life, both experts and amateurs consulted her. Her physician father, Sir Henry Wentworth Acland, rose to influential university posts, including Regius Professor of Medicine and Curator of the University Galleries (now the Ashmolean Museum). In 1860, he created a new Oxford museum now called the University Museum of Natural History. In brief, Acland grew up surrounded by great thinkers in the arts and sciences. At age 15, she had already begun watercolor painting with her father, knew Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, and Holman Hunt, and began formal art lessons with William Riviere. She also became close with John Ruskin, who stayed with the Aclands while he was Slade Professor of Art at Oxford in 1869.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the latest advances in photography were being debated at Oxford by professors of chemistry, botany, and art, and Ruskin was using Daguerreotypes, calotypes, and albumen prints as teaching aids. Acland’s father gave her a Kodak #3 camera for her forty-second birthday, in 1891. By the following year, she had purchased a Watson half-plate ‘Acme’ camera, which used glass plates, and had created a much-praised photograph of Prime Minister William Gladstone. Among several photographs of Ruskin and her father, the 1893 lantern slide of John Ruskin and Henry W. Acland is notable not only for the three-quarter profile poses of two friends engaged in a

conversation but also for the range of tonalities and textures in her father’s tweed suit, the mens’ topcoats, shiny shoes, gray hair, and features as well as their outdoor setting—the leafy hedge behind them, Ruskin’s wicker chair, and the gravel at their feet. The portrait is intimate in mood, and the clarity of the varied details is remarkable. By 1893, Acland had won a photography medal.

By the 1890s, there were three camera clubs in Oxford; in 1894, the year of this self-portrait (Fig. 1), Acland was the first woman elected to join the Oxford Camera Club, and in 1899, she was elected a member of the Royal Photographic Society. She gave lantern slide lectures on photography at both clubs. Between 1898 and 1900, Acland began learning about Edward Sanger Shepherd’s Spectrum Plate color photography from James Cadett to the extent that she was soon busy writing and lecturing on its theory and practice. This time-consuming three-color process involved making orthochromatic plates using three filters; the multiple negatives then had to be combined into lantern slides. In passing, Hudson mentions a few better-known women photographers born during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, including Etheldreda Janet Laing (1872–1960), Lena Connell (1875–1949), and Clara Cooper (1877–1927).

Although Giles Hudson does not estimate the artist’s total photographic output, he relates that 750 monochrome photographs and 350 color plates presently “survive” and that

The significance of Miss Acland’s colour photography with the Sanger Shepherd process is difficult to overstate. Her slides made her a household name among photographers, created an appetite for colour in the lecture-going public, and remained a point of reference for years to come (41).

The book’s 220 photographs begin with 120 monochrome portraits and landscapes, most produced in actual sizes. Each is described in detail as well. In addition to important men in Oxford, Acland photographed everything from

one of her grey horses standing in profile to Miss Eleanor Smith, in 1895, a year before her death. Miss Smith looked after the Acland children, including Angie, and devoted her life to women's education and health care for the poor; her lace cap, wire-rimmed glasses, stout body sheathed in a knit shawl, and wry expression are loaded with character. A photo of Sir Henry Acland in his black doctoral gown (c. 1896) shows his stature and the wispy hair and furrowed brow. Mrs. Barney (c. 1897) is a half-plate negative of the widow of a chimney sweep; she experienced deep poverty but is shown with "great tenderness" in a close-up staring straight ahead; her dark hat and textured coat frame her slightly-shadowed face and gray hair. *Muckle's Hut, Boars Hill* (1899) shows the very old, light-hued dwelling with a steeply pitched roof which the Aclands rented to escape the social whirl in Oxford. The house is surrounded by dark trees, including one whose trunk leans southwestward, a thatched hut, and, in the foreground, fields of grass. Plate 107, *Trooper Sidney Peel* (1900), shows the grandson of former Prime Minister Robert Peel as a slightly slouching man with a large mustache in a uniform after his return from the Boer War in South Africa. The details in this photo are in sharp focus, including the shiny rifle in his lap and the slight shadow from the round of ammunition slung over his shoulder. In 1903 the artist photographed two eagle-owl chicks, and in 1921 she captured an eclipse of the sun and moon.

The death of her father in 1900 disrupted her life and required Acland to move to her own residence. In general, the monochrome portraits of Oxford and its citizens seem more historically significant to me than the color work from 1901–1919. For the color plates, Acland used a range of cameras and processes, including the Sanger Shepherd three-color separation process, Autochrome, Omnicolor, Dufay Diophtichrome, and Paget Colour plates. In general, these are perfect compositions with remarkably vivid color and "house beautiful" subjects, such as a 1900 print from a three-color

separation negative called *Crimson Rambler in New College Gardens*—a view of roses climbing a metal gate at the garden entrance. Some images are exotic, such as two 1903 photos taken in Gibraltar's Mount Garden of Conda the Moor. *A Market Woman* (c. 1910) is an Autochrome portrait of a colorfully dressed woman with a basket on her arm against a light-hued wall; flowers cascade over the wall as it recedes into the distance. The woman's shadow and the receding wall form a V framing the woman. Some photos show aging, youth, gardens, and still lifes. The vista in *Reids Palace Hotel* (1908) is extraordinary for its depth, for the Cézannesque geometries of the fields in the foreground, for the tiny buildings on a hill overlooking sea and sky, and for its overall composition.

Giles Hudson offers only a little evidence about Acland's scientific accomplishments. Even though she was in the vanguard of color photography around 1902–03, her

colour photography has largely been ignored by historians, the Sanger Shepherd process faring little better. In the orthodox account of the history of photography the birth of colour is said to have taken place at the Photo-Club de Paris on 10 June 1907, credit for the first commercially successful colour process going not to Sanger Shepherd but to Auguste and Louis Lumière, for their Autochrome process. This is clearly incorrect. The first practicable system of colour photography was an English rather than a French achievement... (35).

Acland's remarkable depth of field, clarity, hues, and framing of images all suggest an exacting attention to a number of aesthetic choices and scientific processes. Her photographs demonstrate that showing character in one's photos is also an art.

Even with this beautiful book, Acland's full body of work is largely



Fig. 1. Sarah Angelina Acland, "The Operator" (Oct. 1894), half-plate negative. Bodleian Library, Minn negative 201/8.

unknown. I happen to know about the unknown Britton sisters, two prolific St. Louis photographers who took thousands of photographs in the U.S. and in Europe after World War I. No doubt, there are many unknown women in the history of photography. •

Jan Garden Castro is a Brooklyn-based author, art historian, poet, and speaker (jancastro.com).

Notes

1. Julia Margaret Cameron's work gained wider exposure when the Hogarth Press published her photographs in 1926 with her great-niece, Virginia Woolf, writing the introduction. The Metropolitan Museum of Art is exhibiting Cameron's work from August 19, 2013 through January 5, 2014.

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Women Readers in French Painting 1870–1890: A Space for the Imagination

by Kathryn Brown
Ashgate, 2012

Reviewed by Heather McPherson

Although the *liseuse* (woman reader) was a familiar figure in nineteenth-century French art, this book argues for the theme's heightened significance and multivalence in the 1870s and 1880s and its ties with widespread concerns about female literacy and controlling what women read. This is the first monograph to critically examine how depictions of reading women contributed to changing notions of female agency and gender roles and the blurring of distinctions between public and private spaces. Drawing on a wide array of literary and historical sources and recent studies of literacy, Kathryn Brown maintains that artists undermined the transparency of the female reader by exploring different modes of literacy and testing the limits of observation and claims to knowledge in painting. By examining depictions of readers in different media by a range of artists—Mary Cassatt, Jules Dalou, Edgar Degas, Edouard Manet, James Tissot, Auguste Toulmouche, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec—the book repositions the *liseuse* as a contested theme that challenges conventional stylistic divisions and posits alternative ways of conceptualizing the spaces of modernity that undercut the separation of public and private spaces. Brown's ambitious study reinterprets the image of the reader within the broader context of late-nineteenth-century debates about female literacy and the impact of reading on women and contemporary studies of socially defined reading practices.

The book, which is thematically organized, consists of six chapters and a brief coda. Except for the beautiful color reproduction of Eugène Carrière's *The Morning Read* (1880) on the dust jacket, the illustrations are in black and white and vary in quality. Including a few key color plates would have strengthened the book's visual arguments about the



Fig. 1. Berthe Morisot, *The Mother and Sister of the Artist* (1869–70), oil on canvas, 39 3/4" x 32 3/16". National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC/The Bridgeman Art Library.

depiction of space and relationship of figure and ground. The extensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources and note citations attest to the breadth and depth of the author's research. The French quotations are translated in the text directly below, giving the reader the welcome opportunity to read either or both. The book's title is slightly misleading since the examples discussed in the text do not all fall within the 1870–1890 time span, and the chapter titles and headings sometimes seem overly generic.

Chapter One, which focuses on avant-garde painting of the 1870s, argues that reading came to function as a form of portable privacy. A quotation from Marie Bashkirtseff introduces the gender stereotypes commonly associated with the *liseuse*, such as passivity and downcast eyes. Evoking the imaginative privacy associated with

reading, Brown contrasts the defenseless exposure of the female body in works such as James Tissot's *Abandoned* (c.1881–82) with the more active agency depicted by Berthe Morisot and Eva Gonzalès, in which fashionable accessories are discarded and a sphere of privacy is created around the absorbed reader. Brown further maintains that female reading, when associated with public visibility, could serve as a form of portable privacy, revealing the porous boundaries between public spaces and private interiors. This is evidenced in works such as Edouard Manet's *Woman Reading* (c. 1879–80), in which the *liseuse* blends into the surroundings and resists precise interpretation. Through strategies of pictorial resistance and physical indeterminacy, the extent of "knowability" is explored and the viewer's position of control is undermined.

The newspaper industry and women's evolving relationship to it is the focus of Chapter Two. Questioning in particular the gendering of newspaper reading as masculine, Brown argues that by the 1870s a mass female audience existed for newspapers and that the newspaper reader effectively displaced the *flâneur*. Newspapers, with their non-hierarchical, seemingly random array of information and *faits divers*, became an extension of the street that embodied contemporaneity and the flux of modern life. Drawing analogies with department stores, Brown asserts that newspapers fostered a highly selective, idiosyncratic mode of consumption closely akin to shopping. Democratic in their reach and threatening to displace books, newspapers appealed to a broad cross-section of readers cutting across conventional distinctions of class and gender, as depictions such as Henri Gervex's *Ballerina Reading Le Figaro* (c. 1885) demonstrate, and contributing to the erosion of distinctions between public and private life.

Chapter Three examines the social anxieties surrounding the effect of reading women and draws parallels with the regulation of women's labor. Female readers, like female workers, were frequently perceived as morally vulnerable and in need of familial surveillance and protective oversight. As Brown notes, women were rarely represented reading as part of their work, with the notable exception of teachers, attesting to the fragile connection between female literacy, labor, and financial independence. When we do see working women reading, it is generally interstitial, as in depictions of artists' models in the studio or Edgar Degas's *Dancer Resting* (c. 1880), which depicts a dancer perusing a newspaper as she warms herself at the stove. Due to educational reforms, the opening of libraries, and the spread of print culture in rural France, women of different classes gained access to books, giving rise to depictions of rural female readers such as Léon Caille's *The Lesson* (c. 1887) that foreground maternal instruction.

Women readers are posited as metaphoric extensions of female moral

influence, and even linked with Marian motifs in Chapter Four. While novel reading was frequently attacked as frivolous and morally suspect, moralists, such as Monseigneur Félix Dupanloup, recommended serious reading for self-education and as an antidote to distraction. Fantin-Latour's repeated portrayals of absorbed readers were widely admired as exemplars of virtuous bourgeois domesticity that cultivated visual concentration on the part of the viewer. However, this idealizing form of "contagion" was countered by the dangerous example of depraved readers such as Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Zola's *Nana*. Brown goes perhaps too far in seeking to align Monet's depiction of his wife posing in a garden in *Springtime* (1872) with Renaissance depictions of the pure unsullied Virgin. This chapter at times seems somewhat subjective in its interpretations, which run counter to Impressionist painting practices. Brown introduces the concept of subterfuge near the end of the chapter but does not develop it.

Chapter Five focuses on the sexual pleasure of secret reading, especially as embodied in the naked female reader, which, Brown suggests, becomes a metaphor for thought. She compares Jules Dalou's *Nude Woman Reading* (1878) with Boucher's *Reclining Nude* (1751) and analyzes the erotic potential of bedroom reading, noting the anxieties about secret reading as a trigger for masturbation. By contrast, Jean-Jacques Henner's dematerialized nude female *Reader* (1883) was praised for its luminosity, ivory flesh, and evocation of private reverie, aligning it with Symbolism. Brown also discusses the parallels between female flesh and books which figure in descriptions of bibliophilia. Finally, she examines Degas's strictly private monotypes of women readers which, through their anatomical distortion and animality, both invite and invert erotic enjoyment and thematize the problem of reading and seeing by collapsing the boundaries between the visual activities of artist, subject, and viewer.

In the final chapter the theme of female sociability and informal net-

works is considered, contrasting the exchanges created through sharing and discussing literary texts with the isolated reader discussed previously. Brown introduces the theme of shared reading in a domestic context, in particular the theme of doubling in works by Fantin-Latour and Morisot's *The Mother and Sister of the Artist* (1869-70; Fig. 1), in which reading may be interpreted as a form of companionship or a mode of separation or withdrawal and commentary on the monotony of female domestic life. Brown also considers depictions of shared reading in relation to issues of interpretation and authorship and the popularity of doubling and splitting in late-nineteenth-century literature. Furthermore, the resemblance of the figures and the merging of bodies in depictions of shared reading appears to symbolize commonality of interests in contrast to the New Woman, who is characterized by autonomy and singularity. The introduction of the concept of the New Woman at the end of the chapter to close the narrative seems over-determined and does not adequately address her relationship to the reader theme.

The book's principal value lies in its detailed examination and complication of the reader theme. It highlights the broader socio-cultural signification of reading as an index of female agency and a transportable form of intellectual privacy with broader implications for the historiography of nineteenth-century painting. Most important, perhaps, it challenges us to reconsider the spaces of modernity and women's often ambiguous relationship to and incursions into the public sphere. As Brown convincingly shows, newspapers, in particular, were a more gender inclusive space than has often been assumed. While attesting to the spread of literacy, depictions of women reading also encapsulate the tensions between modern and non-modern practices. Although Brown briefly considers earlier depictions of readers, arguably, the theme is richer and more diverse and covers a considerably broader chronological swathe, stretching from the eighteenth century well into the twentieth century. Excerpting the period 1870-1890 from

the longer and wider history of the reader theme raises intriguing questions about periodization and the lasting popular appeal of the *liseuse* in French art and culture. •

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Women and the Visual Arts in Italy c. 1400–1650: Luxury and Leisure, Duty and Devotion, A Sourcebook

by Paola Tinagli and Mary Rogers
Manchester University Press, 2012

Reviewed by Laura Rinaldi Dufresne

Paola Tinagli and Mary Rogers have published widely on the Italian Renaissance, both separately and together. In their first paired endeavor, *Women in Italy, 1350–1650: Ideals and Realities, A Sourcebook* (2005), through period sources, the reader explores the lives of women within the context of their private and public lives in Renaissance Italy. The book reviewed here is their second, intended as a companion to the first. This book has a narrower focus, as it is geared specifically to scholars interested in material culture. Both are anthologies of translated sources, the majority of which were previously unavailable in English.

Women and the Visual Arts in Italy is divided into four parts. The first, “The material worlds of women,” consists of contracts, letters, inventories, and descriptions of buildings, interiors, and objects in the home. Included are observations from the era concerning women, clothing, and sumptuary laws, as well as remarks on or by women as they travel or participate in a variety of ceremonies and related activities. For example, G. Camposi informs us that Lucretia Borgia brought fifteen tapestries including “One Tapestry with the story of the Conception of Our Lady, 10 *braccia* long and 5 wide” when she travelled from Rome to Ferrara to marry Alfonso d’ Este in 1502 (58). Tinagli and Rogers add that to move all of her belongings, including the tapestries, required 150 mules!



Fig. 1. Anonymous, *Saint Verdiana at her Devotions* (c. 1440s), embroidery. Photo: Victoria and Albert, London.

In Part II, “Women, secular art and artists,” we are treated to documents on women who commissioned buildings, palaces, gardens, and portraits of themselves, their children, or favorite saints. Christiano Pagni, Secretary to Eleanor of Toledo (the wife of Duke Cosimo de’ Medici), writes to Major-domo Pier Ricio, “My Duchess has told me to write to you to order Messer Bronzino to come to her, so that he can make a portrait of Don Giovanni (her 2nd son) to send to the Pope, which she wants dispatched as soon as possible” to help secure his cardinalship (176). Agnolo Bronzino was one of the finest portraitists of the sixteenth century, renowned for his portrayal of aristocratic wealth and cool demeanor amidst the symbols and trappings of the educated elite. This and similar other documents help define the role aristocratic women played in the politics of securing power for future generations of their families.

Part III, “Women, devotion and art,” addresses works of private and communal devotion and patronage. This chapter includes a selection from the Carthusian prior Giovanni di Dio’s *Decor puellarum* (1471), a treatise for girls written in the Venetian dialect, directing them to “Make yourself an altar which you will take delight in decorating with beautiful and pious images, with beautiful ornaments or embroidery or some of your own handiwork” (204). This is exactly what one of the eleven illustrations included in the book exemplifies. *Saint Verdiana at her Devotions* (c. 1440s; Fig. 1) is an embroidered panel probably created by a Vallombrosan nun, perhaps for her own personal use. In the embroidery the saint meditates on an image of Christ. She is accompanied by two snakes, which are believed to have crept into her walled room (she was an anchorite) unbeknownst to anyone until her death (hence she is invoked as protector against snakebites). No doubt we

see her apotheosis above, for it is said that on her death the bells of Castelfiorentino miraculously rang unaided by human hands. The male authorities, both secular and ecclesiastic, are there to officially validate her sanctity in the eyes of the community and the church, perhaps representing the movement to have her canonized, which occurred in the following century. In this embroidery, in a typically woman's medium, we find a representation of a female role model, Saint Verdiana, intended to inspire nuns. We are given details of her accommodations, dress, taste in religious art, all under the approving eyes of the male authorities. Additionally, Saint Verdiana is known to have advised and influenced powerful individuals in her own day, including influential civic

leaders, as well as Saint Francis of Assisi himself.

In the final section, "Female artists, crafts women and writers," we find poems to still life painter Fede Galizia (1578–1630), letters of recommendation for painter Giovanna Garzoni (1600–70), a critique of the painting nuns in the Florentine convent of Saint Catherine of Siena, as well as a letter from Sofonisba Anguissola (1532–1625) to her painting teacher Bernardino Campo from 1561. Together these diverse sources provide the reader with evidence of women as both creators and patrons of painting, sculpture, architecture, and all variety of crafts, including furniture making, weaving, clothing, embroidery and other applied arts. We also read, often in their own words, the trials and

tribulations of a woman organizing special events for herself, her family, the church, or the city at large. These extend from complicated festivities to long pilgrimages to the details of her everyday life to rituals of private devotion. Tinagli and Rogers's array of documents are of value to students and scholars alike, as they facilitate our understanding of women as both participants and contributors to Italian Renaissance culture. •

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Lynda Benglis, Beyond Process

by Susan Richmond
I.B. Tauris, 2013

Reviewed by Victoria Thorson

This scholarly monograph by the feminist art historian Susan Richmond focuses on the early career of sculptor Lynda Benglis (b. 1941) and her role in furthering recognition of women artists during the formative years of the feminist movement. *Lynda Benglis, Beyond Process* chronicles Benglis's artistic life from the time she arrived in New York City in 1964 through the 1970s. A small format reference book, the volume is just under two hundred pages with fifty-six black and white illustrations, a section of twenty-five color plates, extensive chapter notes, and a list of selected published sources.

Although Richmond raises questions posed in the 1970s about the usefulness of the monograph as a form—historically associated with male artists—that presupposes genius and success, she recognizes that monographs are needed to further women artists' careers. In utilizing this format, Richmond organizes Benglis's oeuvre, not by an inclusive discussion of works by period, but by grouping selected works by

topics. Descriptive chapter headings like "Boundless Forms and Continuous Imagery" (chapter 1) and subdivisions such as "fallen paintings," "fling, dribble, and dip," and "plastic tensions" are helpful in drawing attention to the artist's style, images, process, multiple meanings, and critical commentary on her work.

Richmond introduces each new group of works on its own terms with lively descriptions and interpretation:

It was not long before Benglis began to twist and tie the totems into knotted configurations, a decision that immediately shifted the works' figurative associations.... The knotted sculptures also possess a pneumatic quality: some appear to inflate, others to compress in a way that stresses the complex relation between interior and exterior, surface and form (101).

The author surveys Benglis's early period as a pivotal time in the emergence of a generation of maverick women artists like Eva Hesse, Judy Chicago, and Miriam Schapiro. Benglis's innovative style and bold strategies, seen in her infamous ad for the November 1974 *Artforum*, her six films from 1972–76, and sculptures like her hot pink polyurethane corner piece



Fig. 1. Lynda Benglis, *For Carl Andre* (1970) acrylic foam, 56 1/4" x 53 1/2" x 46 3/16". Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, ©Lynda Benglis.

for a private collector, position her work at the vortex of controversy about gender perceptions in art (41). The *Artforum* ad, in which Benglis appears nude, is a prime example of gender performativity. The materials Benglis chose for her sculptures, and her explicit references to the body assured attention for her work but a mixed reception. Richmond also points out dual aspects of Benglis's attitude of engagement: as part of the feminist maelstrom and at the same time immersed in the New York avant-garde through her astute

grasp of contemporary developments and her association with artists such as Robert Morris, Barnett Newman, Jennifer Bartlett, and others.

Benglis's involvement with up-to-date currents in sculpture is evidenced by works such as her floor sculpture *For Carl Andre* from 1970 (Fig. 1). She had recognized the originality and elemental strength of Carl Andre's 1966 *Lever*, as explained by his words: "'priapus is down on the floor'" (35), when she saw the brick floor piece in the exhibition "Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors" at the Jewish Museum in New York. While Benglis's liquid medium and her visceral, lumped expression are radically different, her sculpture represents an homage and an intrepid counterproposal to Andre's work.

Benglis's latex floor pieces, such as *Fallen Painting* (1968), and *Bullitt* (1969), were seen in the context of process art, which developed from the influence of Jackson Pollock's drip and pour technique. In contrast, Benglis's bright colorations that appear to lift off or bounce back at the viewer create their own brilliant subversion of Pollock's paintings. Richmond gives thorough coverage to these works and their critical reception, including the two photo-shoots of Benglis creating the pieces. One photo, used in the *Life* magazine article titled "Fling, Dribble and Dip" (February 27, 1970) catches Benglis as she steps into the space of the work. She strikes a pose similar to Pollock's in a well-known 1950

photograph (reproduced in the article). The fortuitous comparison fueled a critical buzz and left the impression that Benglis was the acknowledged successor to Pollock.

The book's subtitle, *Beyond Process*, delivers the imperative to look beyond the artist's process-oriented working method and her place as heir to Abstract Expressionist image-making strategies. While the *Life* photos, republished in numerous journals and art surveys, did much to propel Benglis's working process into the limelight and boost her artistic reputation, her success as an artist stems both from her progression of tough innovative works and her resolute confidence in putting her self forward. Richmond's analysis of the early works includes the small relief paintings on masonite using a buildup of encaustic paints that Benglis later referred to as the "two-brushstroke paintings"; the large installations of pigmented polyurethane foam built on armatures that project from the wall; and the knotted sculptures formed from cotton bunting and aluminum screen, some overlaid with gesso on plaster, glitter, and metallic sprays.

In the final chapter, Richmond considers the last three decades of Benglis's work, pointing to new directions while tracing them to the artist's earlier objectives. In regard to Benglis's unapologetic exploitation of the stunningly beautiful in later works like the pleated, gold winged sculpture *Kaudi* (1980) and *Eclat* (1990), Richmond discusses the critical

controversy surrounding notions of beauty and classification in art. For the polar opposite, the book illustrates such burrowing, interlaced worm-like forms as the bronze *Pollen* (1999) and a bright pink polyurethane organism titled *Swinburne Egg I* (2009). These and other post 1970s works (that are outside the main focus of the book) await more extensive coverage. Other notable examples from the book include glass pieces such as the incandescent black, blue, and golden handblown *Blansko* (1996) and the elemental, encrusted *MI* (1984). Benglis also produced an underrepresented body of ceramic work reminiscent of Paul Soldner's handbuilt pieces. Richmond writes that Benglis's ceramic work "forms an important precedent for the equally self-conscious category-bending work of such contemporary artists as Nicole Cherubini, Sterling Ruby, and Rebecca Warren" (134).

Overall, Richmond furnishes a good introduction to an artist whose expressive range can shift from excessive beauty to limpid embryonic formations.

Lynda Benglis's serious contributions to process art, such as her poured latex sculptures and her wax paintings, along with her skillful use of new media and frank sensuality have combined to create a singular artistic legacy. ●

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The Female Gaze: Women Artists Making Their World

edited by Robert Cozzolino
Hudson Hills, 2013

Reviewed by Rachel Schreiber

This large-scale, color catalogue accompanied an exhibition of the same title mounted at The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA) from November 2012 through April 2013. The exhibition commemorated the artist and collector (Linda) Lee

Alter's major gift to that institution of her excellent collection of art by women. Copiously illustrated with high reproduction values, the catalogue features short essays by an impressive array of scholars.

Lee Alter is an unusual collector. An artist herself, she decided early in her collecting career to focus exclusively on women artists. From the beginning, her intention was to eventually give all of these works to a public institution, thereby fleshing out an institutional collection with works by women. The collection includes works by internationally recognized artists such as Louise Bourgeois

(1911–2010), Elizabeth Catlett (1915–2012), Viola Frey (1933–2004), Alice Neel (1900–84), Louise Nevelson (1899–1988), Gladys Nilsson (b. 1940), and Faith Ringgold (b. 1930). Also represented in her collection are lesser-known artists, including women of color and regional artists, and herein lies its strength: the collection is remarkably diverse in terms of the race and ethnicity of its artists. The media represented are typical of those chosen for ease of collection and investment value, with an emphasis on paintings, prints, small sculptural works and photography. (There are, however, no works in video, performance, or other

“new” genres representing many important contributions by feminist artists of the last half-century.)

A fitting testament to Alter’s decades-long collecting strategy and commitment to advocating women in the arts, the catalogue documents works by a broad range of women artists. At the same time, catalogues that are based on one collection will always be limited in that they showcase only a singular vision—in this case, an admittedly admirable vision that seeks to even out the gender imbalance of works in museum collections. *The Female Gaze* is one among a growing number of catalogues accompanying exhibitions that have, since the turn of the twenty-first century, focused on women artists and feminist art, including *Women Artists: elles@centrepompidou* (2009); *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (2007); and *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art* (2007). These catalogues document the curatorial premises of their exhibitions and include essays that investigate gender and contemporary art in novel ways. By contrast, a catalogue based on one collector’s selections, such as *The Female Gaze*, isn’t able to offer such a critical engagement. Despite its title, which might lead one to think that the book investigates a distinctly female view of the world in contradistinction from the highly theorized “male gaze,” *The Female Gaze* presents, quite simply, an assortment of art made by women.

Assembling works based solely on the criterion that they are all made by women is an example of reclamation—a second-wave feminist project that conducted a scavenger hunt through history to find those exceptional women who disprove the idea that there could be no great women artists (to invoke Linda Nochlin).¹ To be sure, this was an important project that exposed long-buried but important and fascinating female artists. But third wave feminism ultimately identified severe limitations of the reclamation project. For one, such an approach essentializes the very category of “women” or “female” artists.² Additionally, rather than interrogate the idea of canonization, reclamation often simply extends the

canon by narrating a history of women artists that parallels that of men.

Because of these limitations and the focus on one collector, it wouldn’t necessarily be reasonable to expect the catalogue of Alter’s collection to contribute meaningfully to the scholarship on the history of women artists or feminist art. Nevertheless, the book will surely be an invaluable resource for students of art and feminism, both as a document of the collection and for a few key contributions found in its essays.

The book’s essays mostly fall into one of three categories. The first is a chronological account of PAFA’s role as an important Philadelphia institution. Anna Havemann’s interesting account demonstrates PAFA’s attention to women as artists, students, and educators throughout its history. Those in the second category have a thematic emphasis, for example, Anna C. Chave’s “Feminism, Identity, and Self-Representation: Self-Portraiture Reimagined,” and Joanna Gardner-Huggett’s “Sisters Doin’ It For Themselves: Collaborative Practice in the Linda Lee Alter Collection.” These themes feel arbitrary as choices for emphasis, as other themes appear equally in the Alter Collection, such as aging, motherhood, and domesticity.

A third category of essays focuses on regionally based histories, with an understandable focus on Philadelphia and its environs. This group includes Curator Robert Cozzolino’s two essays, one on women artists in Chicago and the other a valuable investigation of FOCUS, a little-known women’s art festival that took place in Philadelphia over two months in 1974. Exhibitions, screenings, and lectures during FOCUS featured feminist luminaries including Judy Chicago, Marcia Tucker, and Lucy Lippard. Cozzolino calls the interdisciplinary character of the festival, the range of participating institutions, and the sheer scope of the event “staggering” (208).

Some of the most compelling essays illuminate understudied artists in Alter’s collection, such as Beatrice Wood



Fig. 1. Elizabeth Catlett, *I Have Studied in Ever Increasing Numbers* (1946), linocut on paper, 5 1/2" x 5". Art © Estate of Elizabeth Catlett/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

(1893–1993), a friend of Marcel Duchamp and regular attendee at the salons of Walter and Louise Arensberg; and the Chicago surrealist painter Gertrude Abercrombie (1909–77). Of particular note is the welcome attention given to the work of African American/Mexican artist Elizabeth Catlett, who figures prominently in the Alter collection. Though certainly not unknown, Catlett, as Robert Berling writes, “might be included among those senior artists whose reputation has greatly increased with age.”³

Art historian Melanie Herzog focuses her essay on Catlett’s extraordinary series of 15 linocuts titled *Negro Woman* (1946–47; Fig. 1). Catlett’s work mixes personal and historical narratives that illuminate histories of oppression but also show her figures to be resistant, powerful, and even celebratory. Each of the linocuts features depictions of African American women as monumental, beautiful figures. Herzog identifies Catlett’s legacy, formally and conceptually, in the works of key African American women artists including Faith Ringgold, Betye Saar (b. 1926), Alison Saar (b. 1956), Emma Amos (b. 1938), and Kara Walker (b. 1969). Catlett presaged discussions of race as not a fixed category, because her representations—though clearly depictions of women of color—nevertheless evidence some ambiguity regarding race and ethnicity.

Herzog demonstrates Catlett’s importance in the history of art by African American women. And yet,

Glenn Adamson, in one of the most provocative of the book's essays, indirectly challenges the premise of Herzog's essay. Adamson asks whether it's possible that, given the lessons learned from postmodernism's distrust of narratives of progress, we might stop "bemoaning the fact of marginality itself" (230). What Adamson is getting at is that maybe some works are interesting precisely because of the fact that they operate from marginal spaces. He is, of course, quick to contextualize his own comments—this idea "neither wipes away a history of prejudice nor the reality of ongoing gender inequality" (233). Yet, ultimately, "the lesson is that there is much pleasure to be found in the free spaces outside the central precincts of the art world" (233). Seen through this lens, the identification of Catlett as the predecessor for a lineage of art-world-successful artists runs the risk of repeating the shortcomings of the reclamation project, in that it seeks to identify a grand narrative of women

artists of color alongside that of dominant art history.

Herein lies the central conundrum of *The Female Gaze*: if its central aim is understood as an attempt to shift previously marginalized works into central institutional spaces, then do we risk losing sight of such artists' unique abilities to locate agency, or at the very least to pursue their practice, from such marginal spaces? Such a conundrum is obviously irresolvable, though useful to consider. •

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Notes

1. Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (1971): 229–33.
2. Though space here does not permit a

more full discussion, it is worth noting that the category "women artists" is over-simplified in this exhibition and catalogue (and hence, in this review as well). It is nevertheless important to pause and ask, what definition is being used for categories such as "woman" and "female." Pertinent questions would be: Who authorizes individuals to be included in this category? Has this collector included works by transgender artists, either knowingly or unknowingly? What are the shortcomings to the continued classification of artists within a male/female binary? In short, what essentialized assumptions are made when we group these works together by virtue of the sex and/or the gender of their makers?

3. Robert Berling and Elizabeth Catlett, "Elizabeth Catlett," *Art Journal* 53, no. 1 (April 1, 1994): 29. *Woman's Art Journal* published an article on Catlett in 1983: Thalia Gouma-Peterson, "Elizabeth Catlett: 'The Power of Human Feeling and of Art'," *WAJ* 4, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1983): 48–56. Also see: Melanie Anne Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, annotated edition (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2005); Samella Lewis, *The Art of Elizabeth Catlett* (Prescott Valley, AZ: Snowfire Pub LLC, 2001).

Visualizing Beauty: Gender and Ideology in Modern East Asia

edited by Aida Yuen Wong
Hong Kong University Press, 2012

Reviewed by Sarah Frederick

This is a fascinating collection of essays on beauty in the culture and ideology of East Asia during the first half of the twentieth century. While many thematic East Asia edited volumes contain a set of disparate essays on Japan, China, and Korea that do not speak to each other, here a real effort is made to address intraregional connections with attention to people, products, and images crossing borders (often borders monitored and determined by empire). The mission to discuss East Asia in an integrated way is set up explicitly and thoughtfully in the introduction by Aida Yuen Wong. Some individual essays work more in the intra-Asian mode than others, but read as a whole the volume succeeds in this ambition. For

the most part, the essays engage directly with the category of "beauty," although there is some variation in the degree to which this is true.

Working across geographic areas, the collection also addresses the fluid border between modernity and pre-modernity and how conceptions of beauty might travel across it—especially essays by Lisa Claypool and Francesca Dal Lago. Claypool's chapter explores how Shanghai painting manuals of the Republican period participated in what might seem an aesthetically and politically conservative exercise of compiling ideal and codified images, often from pre-modern materials. She goes on to demonstrate that these efforts were truly modern in the way they engaged with their context of a crisis in genre and gender and often worked as a counter-representation to the consumer iconography of the "modern woman" from the same era. Dal Lago shows how modern representations of a single gesture, "crossed legs," drew upon premodern erotic Chinese imagery even as they also reworked them to reflect new degrees of



Fig. 1. Na Hye-seok, *Two Dancers* (1927–28), oil on canvas. National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea.

regard for Western body types. An essay by Hung-yok Ip on beauty in Chinese communist culture, makes a similar move across pre- and post-Cultural Revolution China, considering how con-

ceptions of feminine beauty, sometimes associated with bourgeois culture and an “unwelcome outcome of gender oppression,” and yet was invoked in creative ways in the revolutionary process, including a “revolutionary aesthetic of femininity” (73). Meanwhile Yisoon Kim’s account of 1930s “good mother” images in Korea demonstrates the political reasons for a more conservative and motherly conception of beauty in the colonial context. In each of those cases, the chapters take a nuanced look by considering when categories often treated intuitively as binaries (modern/premodern, conservative/ radical, sexual/political) are navigated and, in the process, questioned by the discourses on female beauty.

Every essay is theoretically informed and well-researched. While covering broader issues, each also contains its own gems of quite specific original research and analysis, and usually ties these details back again to the general themes of the volume. Particularly intriguing in “Beauty Battle” by Karen M. Fraser on an international beauty contest (run by *The*

Chicago Tribune) is the gaze from Chicago as mirrored back in Japanese views of the contestants. Given the place in this collection, it would have been interesting to see whether there were Chinese or Korean entries to the contest, and how Asian beauty and Japanese beauty might have operated as categories in the U.S. context. Kojima Kaoru’s essay on Fujishima Takeji’s paintings of Korean women that were influenced by his exposure to French Japonisme is thought-provoking about intra-Asian dynamics, and how those interacted with and differed from European orientalism, including analogies between Italy and Korea drawn by Fujishima. This case moves us beyond the binarisms often attached to orientalist and colonialist writings, without giving up the analytical power of those categories. There is attention to the sorts of cosmopolitanism of the period that interacted with the ideologies of empire and gender. Yeon Shim Chung’s discussion of “modern girl” paintings in Korea also takes into account the complex interactions among East Asian images of the

“modern girl” and the artist Na Hye-seok’s own experiences in Paris (Fig. 1).

Gender is largely attached to women’s culture and femininity in this collection. However, Sarah Teasley’s analysis of the gender of architecture moves beyond equating the category of beauty to the physical beauty of women’s faces or bodies, to consider how conceptions of public and domestic architectural beauty are gendered and affect the design principles of men and women designers in early-twentieth-century Japan.

Significant color and black and white illustrations are provided on good quality paper. Most impressive of all is the uniformly high quality and intellectual coherence of this edited volume. ●

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Gertrude Käsebier: The Complexity of Light and Shade

edited by Stephen Petersen and
Janis A. Tomlinson
University of Delaware Press, 2013

Reviewed by Shana Lopes

Although the American pictorialist Gertrude Käsebier (1852–1934), considered one of the most influential photographers of the early twentieth century, is well known for her oneiric photographs of motherhood, she trained her camera on a range of subjects, from animals to moody landscapes. As the high-quality reproductions in *Gertrude Käsebier: The Complexity of Light and Shade* also reveal, she used a range of photographic techniques, from velvety, detailed platinum prints to painterly gum bichromate photographs, as in her 1907 portrait of the painter John Sloan (Fig. 1). Käsebier’s negatives represented only a

starting point for artistic expression; her darkroom legerdemain was expressive. In conjunction with an eponymous exhibition at the University Museums of the University of Delaware, this catalogue draws from that institution’s considerable holdings of Käsebier’s photographs and papers, allowing the organizers insight into the artist’s vision.

Curator Stephen Peterson’s essay constitutes the bulk of the publication. He examines Käsebier’s work in light of the shifting terrain of photography at the turn of the century, when the tenets of Pictorialism and straight photography went head to head. A founding member of the Photo-Secession, Käsebier was championed by Alfred Stieglitz, who included her photographs in his publication, *Camera Work*. While Peterson astutely frames her oeuvre within artistic and professional circles, his incorporation of photographic evidence—hers or that of her contemporaries—is sparse. More intriguing for the expert than the layman, photography conservators Debra Hess Norris, Jennifer Jae



Fig. 1. Gertrude Käsebier, *Portrait of John Sloan* (1907), gum bichromate print, 8 7/8" x 5 7/8". University Museums, University of Delaware, Gift of Helen Farr Sloan, 1978.

Gutierrez, and Greta Glaser study Käsebier’s darkroom experimentation through scientific analysis, providing a

rare opportunity for readers to gain insight into the processes of conservation and preservation. Perhaps of particular interest to feminists is Margaret Stetz's essay, which tells the story of a self-assertive artist involved in contemporary gender debates. While inspiring young female photographers such as Laura Gilpin, Käsebier also helped establish the Women's Professional Photographers

Association. Stetz mines Käsebier's photographs, finding agency in the artist's attention to body language.

This first in-depth examination of Käsebier's photographs in two decades will appeal to scholars and the general public alike, given its excellent reproductions and informative essays. Painting a picture of a talented artist, a successful professional portraitist of

such renowned artists as Auguste Rodin and Robert Henri, a humorous and driven individual, and a progressive activist, this volume expands Käsebier's legacy. •

Shana Lopes is a doctoral student in Art History at Rutgers University, The State University of New Jersey, where she focuses on the history of photography.

Whatever Is Contained Must Be Released: My Jewish Orthodox Girlhood, My Life as a Feminist Artist

by Helène Aylon
Feminist Press, 2012

Reviewed by Stacy E. Schultz

Within the context of feminist art, Helène Aylon (b. 1931) is known for ecofeminist projects and critiques of patriarchal religion. Her background and perspective are acknowledged in the subtitle of this autobiography: *My Jewish Orthodox Girlhood, My Life as a Feminist Artist*. Aylon allows the reader into a world in which religious tradition dictates the direction of life.

Early on, Aylon began to question the limited roles of women in this religious tradition:

A daughter is a deceptive treasure to her father because of anxiety on her account: he cannot sleep at night when she is young, lest she be seduced; when she reaches puberty, lest she play the harlot; after she is grown, lest she fail to marry; after she is wed, lest she have no children; when she is old, lest she practice witchcraft (11–12).

In detailing her early life, Aylon acknowledges the community that produced her, and how, attempting to conform to tradition, she married a rabbi and became a mother. After her husband died prematurely at age 30, the role of widow prompted a shift in how others viewed her, leading the widow Fisch to transform her life with art and a new surname, Aylon—an abbreviated version of Ayllona or Helène in

Hebrew—to proclaim her independent identity as an artist.

Filled with humor and personal anecdotes, this unique autobiography communicates the struggle to reconcile Jewish tradition with feminism. Several significant examples of Aylon's work are illustrated and discussed at length. Her first professional commission was a mural for the Jewish chapel at the John F. Kennedy Airport in 1966, which enabled her to express her faith. A single word made up her design: *Ruach*. Composed of three letters, *Reisch*, *Vav*, and *Chet*, they translate as spirit, breath, and wind. Ultimately, the commission was not fully realized, when Aylon refused to include the donor's name on the synagogue doors she also designed. This sense of determined resistance would follow her into a number of other projects, such as *The Liberation of G-d* (1990–96), where she highlighted problematic words in the Torah and inserted vertical pink lines where the female presence was omitted, significant feminist gestures.

The power of women would also guide two important projects: *The Breakings* of 1978 (Fig. 1) and *Sand Gatherings and Sand Carrying* (1980–81). For *The Breakings*, Aylon poured gallons of oil over panels, so that the top layer of oil would form a skin that dried over time, while the wet oil beneath would pool. When the panels were ready to be lifted, she instructed a group of female “midwives” to break the sacs that had formed. Collaborations with other women as an extension of her feminist consciousness also incorporated sand, earth, and stone sacs. The earthen materials in bags related to environmental and antiwar themes, including nuclear toxicity in the earth in California and



Fig. 1. Betty Parsons with Helène Aylon at 112 Workshop viewing *Breaking with Jagged Edges* (1979). Photo: Gwen Metz.

resolution between Jewish and Arab women in Haifa. Other projects such as *Earth Ambulance* (1982) and *Current: two sacs en route* (1985) continued these concerns.

Though the desire to question was not always understood by her family, Aylon persisted in her efforts as a pacifist and a feminist. The book ends with the death of her mother, a crossroads for Aylon: the image of burning candles representing life and signaling the *Shabbos* draw Aylon's story to a close. Illustrated with images of Aylon's artworks and personal photographs, this volume conveys the importance of art in grappling with internal struggle. Although organized in an unorthodox manner without chapters, this story's layout fits the nature of the contents. This book would be a welcome addition to the syllabus of a course on Jewish and/or Feminist Art. •

Stacy E. Schultz is an Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of Texas at El Paso. She is currently completing *Subversive Language and Contemporary Women Artists of Color*, to be published by Ashgate Press.



Pl. 1. Grace Hartigan, *Grand Street Brides* (1954), oil on canvas, 72 9/16" x 102 3/8". Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Gift of an anonymous donor 55.27. Photo: Geoffrey Clements.



Pl. 2. Ellen K. Levy, L to R: *Malevich's Tail*; *Brancusi's Bird*; *Christo's Tusks*; *Loewy's Propellers*; *Damien's Gliders*; *Agassiz's Chart* (all 1999), oil on wood, each 96" x 60". Installation at National Technical Museum, Prague (2001). Photo: Peter Seidel.



Pl. 3. Ellen K. Levy, *Jack of Clubs* (2008), mixed media on wood, 72" x 72".
Photo: David E. Levy.



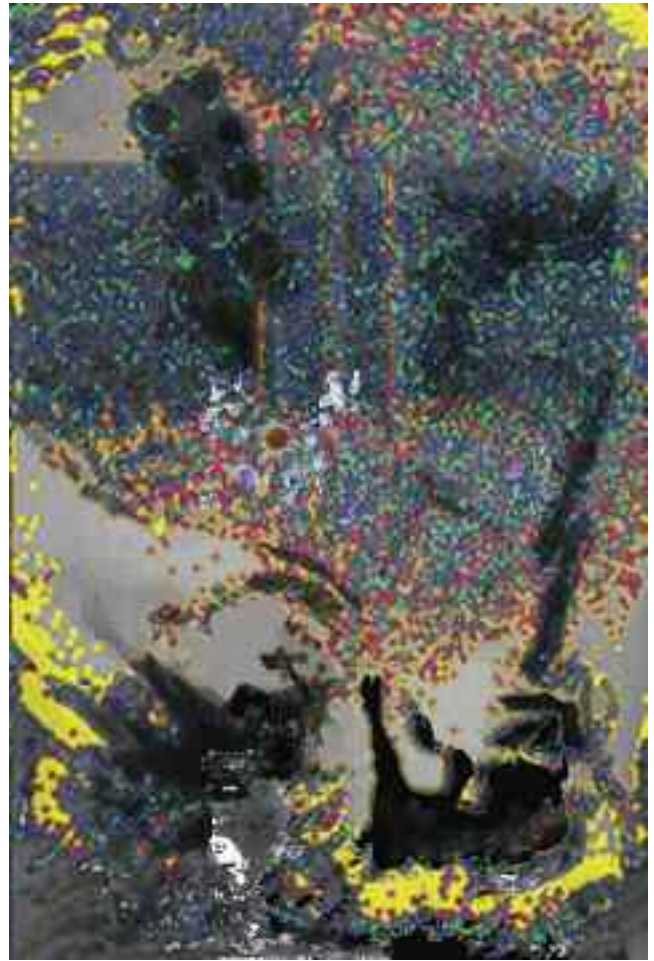
Pl. 4. Ellen K. Levy, *This Image Is Unavailable #2* (2012), mylar, modeling paste, paint, and print, 60" x 40". Photo: David E. Levy.



Pl. 5. Ellen K. Levy,
This Image Is Unavailable #3 (2012),
mylar, modeling paste, paint, and print, 60" x 40".
Photo: David E. Levy.



Pl. 6. Ellen K. Levy, *Aperture* (1984),
casein on panel, 60" x 30".
Photo: David E. Levy.



Pl. 8. Ellen K. Levy, *Outnumbered*
(2000), Iris print, cellular automata
applied to scanned drawing on
paper, 37" x 24". Photo: David E.
Levy. Private Collection.



Pl. 7. Ellen K. Levy, *Palomar* (1985),
spray paint on paper, 200" diam.
From the 1985 installation at National
Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C.
(destroyed in fire, 2013).
Photo: Ellen K. Levy.



Pl. 9. Reva Urban, *Promenade* (1961), oil on canvas and wood, 68 3/4" x 73". University of Pennsylvania Art Collection.



Pl. 10. Reva Urban, *Les Girls* (1959), oil on canvas, 74" x 65". University of Pennsylvania Art Collection.



Pl. 12. Reva Urban, *Burlesque* (1958), oil on canvas, 68" x 71". University of Pennsylvania Art Collection.



Pl. 11. Reva Urban, *Dancers #2* (1957), oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, University of Pennsylvania Art Collection.



Pl. 13. Reva Urban, *Dissonant Wheels* (1960),
oil on canvas and wood, 84 x 76".
University of Pennsylvania Art Collection.



Pl. 14. Reva Urban,
Siegfried on 10th Street (1963),
mixed materials, 74" x 70".
University of Pennsylvania Art Collection.



Pl. 15. Reva Urban, *Hide and Seek* (1966),
mixed materials, 66 1/2" x 65 1/2".
University of Pennsylvania Art Collection.



Pl. 16. Louise Jopling, *Blue and White* (1896), oil on canvas, 48 5/8" x 33 1/16". National Museums, Liverpool.



Pl. 17. Louise Jopling, *Stella (Portrait of a Young Girl)* (ca. 1907), oil on canvas, 14 3/16" x 11 1/4". Torre Abbey Historic House and Gallery, Torquay, Devon.



Pl. 18. Louise Jopling, *Self-portrait* (1877), oil on canvas, 8" x 5 15/16" Manchester City Art Gallery.

HOLOCAUST HEROES: FIERCE FEMALES

TAPESTRIES BY LINDA STEIN

12 Tapestries: Each 5' x 5'; Leather, Metal, Canvas, Fabric and Mixed Media



Tapestry One: Nancy Wake, French Resistance Hero of World War II

"Ms. Wake, a onetime freelance journalist whose life careered along a path that Hemingway might have sketched, from impoverished childhood to high-society hostess in the south of France to decorated heroine of the French Resistance during World War II...was credited with saving the lives of hundreds of Allied soldiers and downed airmen between 1940 and 1943 by escorting them through occupied France to safety in Spain. With the German invasion of France, Ms. Wake's wealth and social standing gave her a certain cover as she began helping members of local Resistance groups." — New York Times Obituary 8/14/11

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