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(on the cover)
On the cover: Judy Dater,
Imogen Cunningham and
Twinka Thiebaud at
Yosemite (1974), gelatin
silver print, 14" x 11".

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This issue comprises a group of thought-provoking articles on 20th-century artists responding to the concerns and events of their times—politics and wars, science and space technology, and the advance of feminism. We are pleased to present this new work from both established art historians and their younger colleagues.

Cécile Whiting, author of *Pop L.A., Art and the City* (2006) and other publications, discusses here the French artist Niki de Saint Phalle's art production in California during the "anxious" postwar period of the 1960s. There, "she began to explore apocalyptic destruction as a media phenomenon ... drew upon Hollywood's cinematic vision of urban Armageddon, and set that apocalypse in New York City." In works like her *King Kong*, Saint Phalle "joined other artists, ... novelists, and filmmakers in picturing catastrophes during a period of heightened anxiety generated by the Cold War," writes Whiting. She also observes that Saint Phalle's constructions: "[s]een at the downtown gallery in Los Angeles ... relied on her play with cinematic precedent to introduce a note of irrational hilarity into a city whose very expansion during this period depended on the development and production of an increasingly sophisticated military arsenal."

Mona Adler, who has published widely on Lee Bontecou and other artists, writes here on the "dark and hallucinatory" drawings of Bontecou and their relation to images in popular culture. Adler argues that the artist's "soot drawings, or 'worldscapes,' begun after the launch of the Soviet satellite Sputnik in the late 1950s, responded to the astounding new imagery of a hitherto unfathomable space." Adler credits Bontecou with a "visionary imagination [that] dominates, above all, in her vast two-dimensional oeuvre, where the real commingles freely with the fantastic.... experimental, visionary, exquisitely rendered, and profound, her extensive graphic production ranges from the cosmic to the carnivalesque and ultimately points the way to new, more emancipated subjectivities."

Julie Nero, a recent Ph.D., writes a fascinating, rich account of popular images of boxers in 1920s Germany, where, although male athletes dominated the sport, "fight fans could also witness the spectacle of women boxing in the ring." It was widely believed that a society so devastated after defeat in wartime could be revitalized with the help of sports and fitness, which were associated with social progress and gained popularity among women who identified as "modern." Nero concludes that, "in Weimar Germany, the motif of the boxer ... functioned as an easy trope for masculine identity" and that women artists, including Hannah Höch and Marianne Brandt, "addressed the theme critically and with greater subtlety."

Another younger scholar, Sybil Gohari, argues here that the gendered criticism of New York artist Helen Frankenthaler's painting over many decades ultimately affected her standing and reception. "[r]eviews, articles, and comments about Frankenthaler's position in the history of art cast her as either a follower of Jackson Pollock...; a disciple of Clement Greenberg, the influential modernist theorist...; or an artistic link between the (male) artists of the New York School and color-field art..." These critiques, writes Gohari, "often belittled her creative output, pegging her as a follower and not fully crediting her as the innovator she was."

Last but not least is our "cover story" on the photographer Judy Dater. Author Donna Stein expanded her initial essay on Dater's *Memoir* project to create this profile of the artist. Featured on the cover is Dater's notable image that pairs model Twinka Thiebaud with the risk-taking photographer Imogen Cunningham, representing an earlier generation of women photographers that turned to the study of

the nude, appropriating a subject that was continuously favored by male painters, sculptors, and photographers. A student of Cunningham, Dater pays homage to her mentor while capturing the female nude for her own artistic production. As a feminist who photographed both male and female subjects, Dater believes that the nude stimulates the female gaze. In *Memoir*, writes Stein, which "includes references to the past, present, and future, [Dater's] biographical highlights intersect with transformational cultural changes."

Several of the books under review document exhibitions and expand our view of these artists' production. Reviewer William Kaizen describes the Nancy Grossman retrospective *Tough Life Diary* as "the broadest account of her work to date, both a festschrift and an archive." Grossman is best known for her signature leather-encased wooden heads, and although her personal diaries are used to mark the decades in this book, she purposely avoids personal references in her work, writes Kaizen.

Her "fur-lined teacup" is well-known, but the artist—surrealist Meret Oppenheim—is not. *Meret Oppenheim: A Retrospective*, documenting a major exhibition, provides an opportunity for reviewer Salomon Glimberg to present some facts about the life and work of this Swiss artist, and for distinguished essayists to "offer fascinating theories about Oppenheim's objects that [like the teacup] present a mysterious blend of opposites."

Two catalogues under review, on Lorna Simpson and Carrie Mae Weems, explore their distinctive and significant photography and video projects that variously explore issues of racism, gender, historical narratives, and African American lives. Of *The reckoning: Women Artists of the New Millennium*, featuring essays on 25 "boundary-expanding" post-1960s artists, reviewer Jan Gardencastro writes that the book "advances critical discussions of gender issues, feminism, art, marketing, geopolitics, perception and reception as it opens the door for ... further notions of what constitutes feminist art."

Reviewer Joyce Beckenstein writes of *Jennifer Bartlett: History of The Universe Works 1970-2011* that it elucidates how various elements in Bartlett's work "evolve a conversation between abstraction and figuration that ... informs [her] ambitious body of Post-minimalist drawings, sculptures, installations, and text-based paintings." Patricia Briggs found *Cristina Iglesias: Metonymy*, which accompanied a retrospective of work by this Spanish artist, impressive for giving the reader a sense of spatially encountering the artist's room-size *celosia* (latticework screen) installations, underwater "dwellings" and large public commissions.

Chronicling a celebrated "blockbuster" exhibition (in Paris, New York, and Chicago), *Impressionism, Fashion & Modernity* highlights "the central role of fashion in the works of the impressionists... from the mid-1860s to the mid-1880s, when Paris reigned as the fashion capital of the world," writes reviewer Heidi Strobel. Also included in this issue are a comprehensive monograph on German proto-expressionist Paula Modersohn-Becker; a book on the "role of audience interest and popular taste" in the reception of Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*; and more.

As always, we thank our authors and reviewers, our subscribers, Rutgers University, and Old City Publishing for their valued and continuing support.

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

THE ART OF JUDY DATER AND HER PHOTOGRAPHIC *MEMOIR*

By Donna Stein

Judy Dater's emergence as a photographer coincided with the blossoming of the Feminist movement in the late 1960s. At first she focused her large format Deardorff camera on women, keenly aware of stylistic precedents in the portrait photography of Julia Margaret Cameron, Edward Steichen, August Sander, Edward Weston, Richard Avedon, and her mentor Imogen Cunningham, as well as the modernist photographic techniques of the San Francisco photography Group f/64.¹ As a founding member of the San Francisco-based Visual Dialogue Foundation, she became known for her careful attention to print quality. Dater has never associated her work with that of Diane Arbus, even though early critics noted some similarities. She admires and relates to the work of painters Lucien Freud and Alice Neel, both of whom made portraits and depictions of the body.

Born in Hollywood, California, in 1941, Dater studied photography and earned her B.A. and M.A. degrees from San Francisco State University. She is best known for her intensely seen portraits and self-portraits in luminous black and white—most notably, her photograph of Imogen Cunningham encountering Twinka Thiebaud in a primeval redwood forest (1974; front cover).²

Through the years, Dater has experimented with landscapes, still life, computer-manipulated images, composite images, and photo collage and has worked in a variety of media, including printmaking, installation, video, and performance. She regularly keeps a diary, travelogues, and a notebook of her dreams, bits and pieces of which have been used in her work since the early 1980s. The breadth of her oeuvre is surprising, given the relative lack of critical response since the late 1980s, and she has never settled into a comfortable pact with the market or with the position the art photography establishment reserved for her.

From 1964 to 1967, Dater lived on Haight Street, in the heart of Haight Ashbury, where she photographed the “flower child” generation of young professionals and artists—friends or acquaintances close to her age that mirrored her life and what was going on around her. She saw in them a reflection of her own personality: women who stood out from the crowd—confident and daring about their sexuality. “They are distinctly marked by urban sophistication,” Anne Tucker wrote about these images in 1972, “as Dorothea Lange’s women were by simple country ways.”³ Like Edgar Degas in his photographs and monotypes, Dater went beyond the formal, public pose to



Fig. 1. Judy Dater, *Joyce Goldstein* (1969), gelatin silver print, 14" x 11".

discover women as they are to themselves.⁴ Positioning her subjects clothed and naked in everyday surroundings, Dater's portraits from the late 1960s and 1970s are character studies—personal, provocative, and often humorous. Like Cameron's portraits, they have a startling sense of presence and psychological connection with the viewer. They explore the new freedom of contemporary women.

Among her “nontraditional women” subjects was the prominent San Francisco chef Joyce Goldstein, whom Dater met when Goldstein was a docent at the San Francisco Museum of Art. Dater was invited to a reception at the chef's home in honor of the photographer Bruce Davidson. Dater photographed Goldstein (1969; Fig. 1) seated in her white tiled kitchen with the tools of her trade above her head. She recently recalled, “I was



Fig. 2. Judy Dater, *Cherie* (1972), gelatin silver print, 16" x 20".



Fig. 3. Judy Dater, *Nehemiah* (1975), gelatin silver print, 16" x 20".

fully aware of the kitchen utensils hanging behind her and their threatening medieval torture-like nature. I was questioning the role of the woman ... I wasn't interested in having children or being a "housewife" in traditional terms."⁵

Another free-spirited woman with a life of her own was the painter Maggie Wells, photographed by Dater in 1970. Shown nude from the hips up, she is seated in her garden in a rattan chair, casually smoking a cigarette and looking askance toward the camera. Dater's portraits, observed Tucker, "are important documents of young San Francisco women and they preserve that time and place as Brassai preserved people of the Parisian night."⁶

Also among Dater's subjects was Cherie Hiser, who in the late 1960s founded Aspen's legendary Center of the Eye

summer photography workshops. *Cherie* (1972; Fig. 2), is pictured in her living room as a frontal standing nude; she holds a vintage photograph of about one hundred World War I soldiers that normally hung over her fireplace, suggesting a provocative story in a single image. "Cherie and her soldiers," Dater explained, "was made with the idea that she was bragging about her conquests. I was keenly aware of the implications and was presenting a woman unafraid of her sexuality, and making what I considered a parody of a *Playboy* image, that is, a man and his conquests. Here the woman is nude, unafraid to show herself. A man would be bragging with his clothes on."⁷ This pictorial approach ultimately led Dater to incorporate words into some of her pictures as a way of elaborating on the embedded narrative.⁸

Like Imogen Cunningham's 1915 nude portraits of her husband, considered scandalous, Dater's portraits of men more than half a century later are both bold and intimate, reversing the usual gender-defined roles of (male) photographer and (female) model. She turned the male gaze with its objectification of the body and historical eroticizing of the nude on its head. In *Nehemiah* (1975; Fig. 3), a frontal nude portrait of a dancer and musician she met at a party in San Francisco, the subject confronts the viewer with a disconcerting directness that simultaneously reveals his physical presence, psychological strength, and vulnerability. Dater also photographed him from the back, emphasizing his musculature as light bounces across the dark surface of his skin.

The men Dater photographs are frequently friends, colleagues, and students, so they are relaxed and at ease with her, such as in the nude portrait of photographer Walter Chappell (1977).⁹ Similar in approach to her portrayal of Joyce Goldstein, *Sandy* (1975) shows the man Dater hired to trim the redwoods on her San Anselmo property with the tools of his trade, set against a towering redwood. Lit from the right, the subtlety of the photographic grey scale is featured in this concentrated composition.¹⁰

Despite an age difference of nearly sixty years, Imogen Cunningham (1883–1976) was Dater's mentor and became a close friend. Following her death, Dater honored the legendary photographer by publishing a very personal memoir *Imogen Cunningham: A Portrait*.¹¹ Through interviewing family members, friends, other artists, historians and critics who had known her, Dater illuminates Cunningham's work, her long life (she died at 93), and her unique personality. She brought her camera to their meetings and created compelling portraits of the individuals which add a lively dimension to this beautiful volume. Dater then selected sixty photographs from Cunningham's rich archive, half of them never before reproduced, to illustrate the span of her photographic career.

Although Dater has photographed acquaintances, friends,

and strangers encountered at home and abroad, from her earliest days as a photographer she was her own best model,¹² constantly probing and ultimately self-revelatory. Feeling especially isolated after a move to Santa Fe, New Mexico, with photographer Sam Samore in late summer 1980, she also felt liberated and made her time there productive artistically.¹³ Over the course of some ten trips into the national parks during 1980–83 she used her 4" x 5" camera, and most often a 90mm wide-angle lens, to make a Landscape series, actually a group of self-portraits. Each shot was methodically rehearsed; she had only 10 seconds after pressing the shutter release until the shutter snapped. She came equipped with props but didn't necessarily use them. The resulting photographs reside at the intersection of portraits and landscapes.¹⁴ They present a deeper understanding of herself as a woman. Metaphorically the terrain of self-revelation and self-discovery, the Southwestern landscape is where Dater confronted "the burden of establishment-dominated (i.e., male) artistic conventions and sensibility."¹⁵

A recurring theme in works such as *Self-portrait with Sparkler* (1980) or *Self-portrait Craters of the Moon* (1981) is the placement of a small human figure against a vast natural landscape.¹⁶ Her compositional choices often tested her nerve and put her in jeopardy—standing on the edge of a geyser hole of boiling water in Yellowstone, walking across jagged volcanic rocks in her bare feet, walking through tall grasses where rattlesnakes reside, or being discovered nude.¹⁷ Nevertheless, these forays made her feel more self-reliant and allowed her to freely associate autobiographical themes as she looked for sites to photograph.

In the only photograph in the series actually made in New Mexico, *Self-portrait with Petroglyph* (1981; Fig. 4), the snakelike imagery in the rock engraving suggests Dater's own symbolic meanderings—an umbilical cord, as if she is giving birth.¹⁸ By 1983, in *Self-portrait with white rock* and other photographs from that time, Dater was using her body more actively in the compositions, acknowledging her own growing sense of physical and mental strength. As the photographic historian and curator Michiko Kasahara noted, "She bears her loneliness and unease and allows herself no compromise as she struggles to answer unanswerable questions. In doing so, she leads us to places women have not ventured before."¹⁹ A West-Coaster, Dater always felt herself an outsider beside the overtly political feminist East Coast-based artists she admires like Ana Mendieta and Carolee Schneemann, who also made ritualistic earth performances.

Between trips to the national parks, Dater worked in or near her home in Santa Fe. Continuing the autobiographical themes she had begun to explore in the landscape, she constructed a shallow stage set with satin curtains in which she enacted some of the mundane activities of her daily routine—eating, cleaning, trying to stay in shape. Stunning color self-portraits like *Ms. Clingfree* (1982) are economically presented with typecast outfits and props, merciless in their portrayal of her own body and lacking any of the seductiveness or glamour for which her earlier portraits generally were known. By poking fun at popular stereotypes of women's roles and at herself,

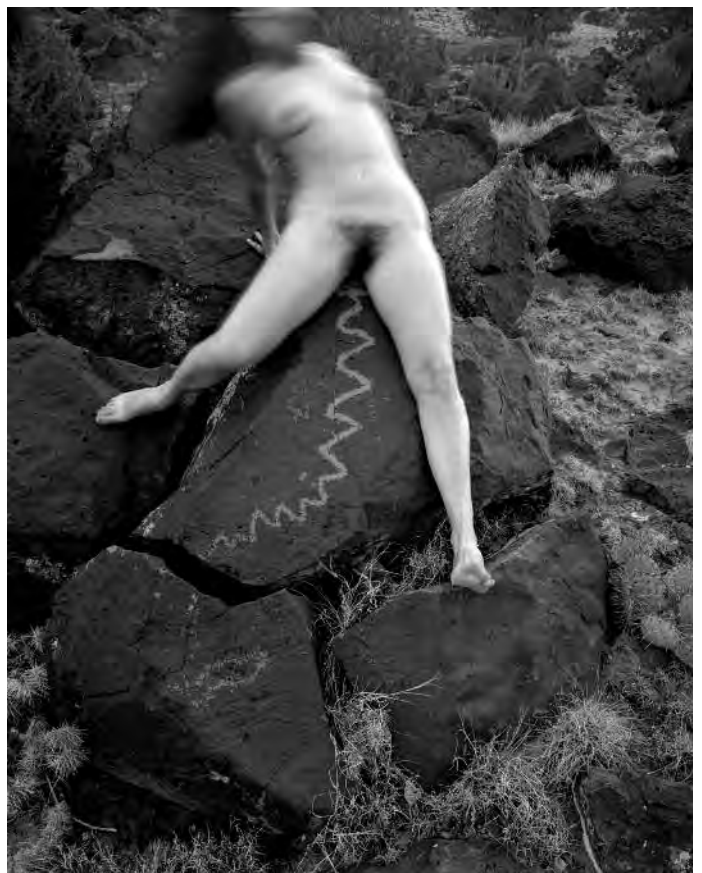


Fig. 4. Judy Dater, *Self-Portrait with Petroglyph* (1981), gelatin silver print, 20" x 16".



Fig. 5. Judy Dater, *Teenage Diary* (1982), installation view of 12 chromogenic prints, each 20" x 16" (original in color). Grapestake Gallery, San Francisco.

Dater was able to confront the dilemmas of the modern woman at the same time she was critically clarifying her own identity. James Enyeart was the first to recognize that the artist turned her emotional experiences into works of art that were internal self-portraits.²⁰

As Dater was moving away from iconic black and white portraiture, she began to experiment with color photography and sequences of images. She photographed the abandoned



Fig. 6. Judy Dater, *James Mason, at 13 He Was All She Ever Wanted Wanted Wanted Wanted Wanted* (1990), ink jet print, 11" x 8 1/2".

five-year diary she had kept as a young girl and created a suite of twelve simple, unpretentious chromogenic prints entitled *Teenage Diary* (1982; Fig. 5). Written in a determined schoolgirl hand, the excruciatingly ordinary adolescent autobiography unfolds: "I am finally a teenager... I am deeply in love with a man who is my social studies teacher... Perhaps I will go to college in Israel."²¹ Pre-Photoshop, Dater devised a way of photographing the imitation crocodile leather-bound diary so that it appears to be floating on the shimmering aquamarine surface of her parent's swimming pool. For gallery installations, the prints have been displayed next to the original diary resting on a satin pillow and placed in a Plexiglas box atop a white pedestal.²²

Dater continued to explore her memories, dreams and reflections in the *Love Letters* series (1984), her homage to Carl Jung. Using a Hasselblad camera, Dater arranged three groups of four prints: one image presents excerpts from an unsent letter describing a dream, another shows the actual letter burning in a ceremonial bowl, and the other two picture enactments or interpretations of the content. *Love Letters* #3 (Pl. 1) incorporates a list Dater wrote while talking on the phone to a friend about suffering caused by impossible love. The visual pairings in these four-image grids suggest a surreal atmosphere.

Invited to Aspen for a residency at Anderson Ranch in 1984, Dater created the overtly political *Fourth of July, State #4*, an ironic feminist statement in lithography that references George Orwell's book *1984*, and the idea that the future is now. Her image contrasts four views of a nude holding a bomb, with a

nude mother and child in the center of the sheet; "Mom Bomb" is written diagonally across the entire composition. Dater was drawn to the muscular body of the woman depicted, a potter who was on the ranch staff. She photographed her hoisting an empty torpedo shell found on the ranch—front, back and side views—as well as cuddling her child. Like a stage set with curtains at the edges of the frame (a subtle allusion to her earlier color self-portraits), the composition references a Greek cross, adding a religious dimension to the contextual reading of the imagery. Here, the woman, a symbol of hearth and home, is in control of the bomb but not using it for its destructive powers.

Dater moved to New York City in January 1987, and during that year she changed apartments eight times and made frequent trips home to San Anselmo to work in her darkroom. Adjusting to this chaotic lifestyle made her more internal and she began to write *Confessions of a Practical Hedonist*, a highly personal memoir, which included drawings of naked men she had known based on her original photographs. By then, she had thought a lot about narrating a life and began by pairing drawings with her own writings.

Dater was already making large black-and-white, combined-image tableaux (her response to her fractured existence) when she was invited to work with the large format Polaroid camera. She took advantage of the color potential of this unique camera by making still life collages that combined color materials from various sources. Using source material almost exclusively from the Museum of Natural History in New York City, she created *Cycles*, a nine-panel color work, and the multi-image black-and-white *End of Innocence* (both 1989), both chronicling the evolution of culture, starting with ancient civilizations.

After Dater was invited to participate in the workshop at which Adobe introduced Photoshop 1.0, she became interested in experimenting with this new software. She began to develop a modus operandi for a planned memoir project by scanning various materials, including pages with text, and manipulating them in Photoshop. The best of these studies was *James Mason, At 13 He Was All She Ever Wanted Wanted Wanted Wanted Wanted* (1990; Fig. 6).²³ Dater continued her internal projections about her life in other computer-manipulated photographs such as *New York Window*, about her life and old age, and *I Didn't Want to But I Did* (both 1991), revealing a psychological conflict about beginning an affair with a married man. These prints illustrate two distinct visual directions by adding words to help tell a story, juxtaposing the real with the voyeuristic. Dater later would revisit these and other subjects in *Memoir* (completed 2012).

Dater returned to California in 1991, and eventually started a project focusing on the variety of Asian people in her home state. She had been thinking about a different way of photographing people, and began these succinct portraits with men and women from her Tai Chi class, including the mysterious and beautiful *Chinese Woman* (1997), in which the light catches individual strands of the subject's white hair. Before completing her Asian portrait project, Dater left for two months in 1998 to be a visiting artist at the American Academy

in Rome, where she photographed archetypal Roman faces like *Jacopo* (1998) that suggest figures in Renaissance paintings.

After returning home, she divorced her third husband and in 1999 moved to Berkeley, where she built a custom studio designed to maximize the available light for her portraits, which had morphed into a series about the diversity of people in California. *Russ Ellis* (2003; Fig. 7) is among her favorite images from this group and clearly articulates her stylistic preferences: a light source coming from the right so that the left side of the face is in shadow and the right side is brightly lit. A rich black backdrop accentuates the intensity of facial expressions. Dater is the first to acknowledge that Julia Margaret Cameron's portraits of the late 1860s, such as those of John Herschel, Thomas Carlyle, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and others, where just a head and face emerge from the black setting, are the direct line of inspiration for these expressive portraits.

Dater's *Memoir*, begun in 2009 and completed in 2012, became the realization of her decades-long interest in combining words and photographs to more fully tell her stories.²⁴ Dater compares the urgency to take stock at age forty, which led her to create theatrical personas in color and the extended series of black and white self-portraits in the western landscape, to her desire at age seventy to reflect back on her life in *Memoir*. Going through all the possessions in her parents' home in order to sell it after their deaths, Dater unearthed boxes that turned out to be buried treasures. She uncovered long-forgotten photographs and souvenirs that helped her remember her past and visualize her story.²⁵

Once decided, one of the greatest obstacles Dater faced was the discovery that the silver-coated paper she had used for some thirty years to print her sumptuous black and white photographs had been discontinued.²⁶ Unable to find an acceptable replacement, she was forced to transition to digital photography—a hard adjustment for Dater, who had perfected her craft over forty years with gelatin silver printing. Digital imaging felt like starting from scratch, like learning a new language. It took about two years until she felt comfortable with the new technology and could move ahead with her project.

Memoirs reveal personal experiences and record events by someone who has intimate knowledge of them. As writer and memoirist Susanna Sonnenberg recently explained, "Memoir requires a rugged honesty of the self ... it forces us to think about 'truth'—each person has a different one—and about how the use of the self is a creative act."²⁷ In this way, personal meaning can distort the way we remember things, and memories can be partial, self-serving, or faulty. The necessity of telling a good story often requires the blurring of truth, fiction, and reality itself. The photographic memoir is an attempt to describe important life-passages using a combination of pictures and word captions. Such "autobiographical albums are like messages in a bottle ... as narratives they are easy to follow with dates and places often helpfully inscribed."²⁸

Dater's *Memoir* takes the form of scrapbook pages, for which she created a colorful trompe l'oeil effect using digitally collaged photographs, some old and some new, combined with sketches, newspaper clippings and other printed materials as

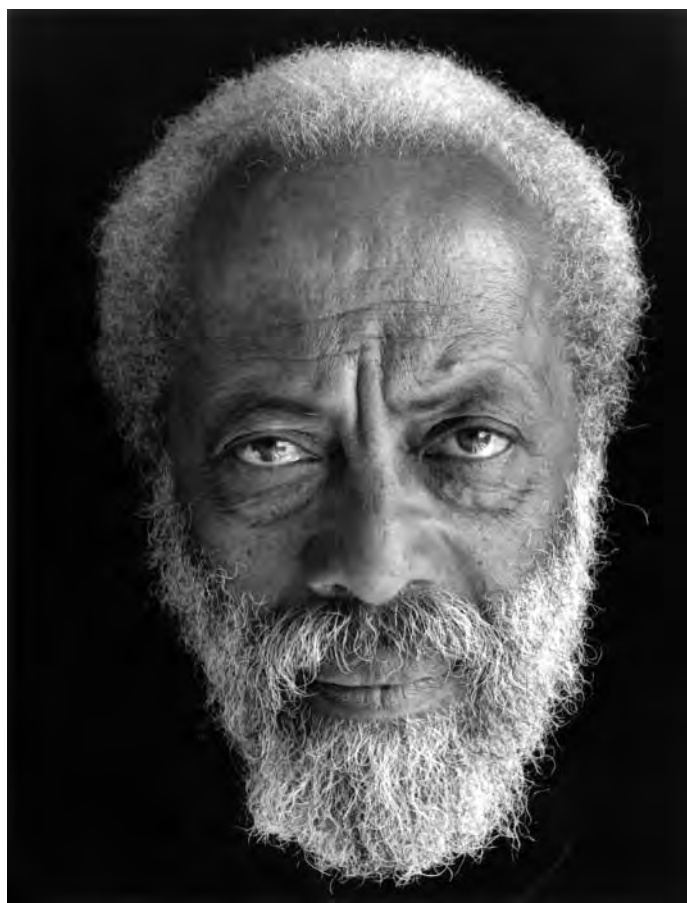


Fig. 7. Judy Dater, *Russ Ellis* (2003), gelatin silver print, 24" x 20".

well as snippets from the diaries she kept during her adult life. She captures interesting times photographically and sequences them into an anecdotal account that is intended for the future. Every print both summarizes and amplifies nearly five decades of her life and career as an innovative portrait photographer. The oversize scale of the scrapbook format (41" x 52") moves the portfolio beyond the realm of private personal object, which adds to the irony of the overall statement.

While photographs or objects inspired some of the pages, memories stimulated others. In the latter case, Dater would look for appropriate pictures in her image bank or would take new photographs. "Sometimes I had the concept or story and no pictures; occasionally, I had the pictures that suggested the page. Pictures jogged my memory and I could easily develop a narrative to pair with them."²⁹ In the portfolio, words get to the kernel of a situation while pictures illustrate the narrative. The scrapbook pages emulate a cinematic storyboard, recontextualizing existing materials and linking visual and textual clues to her life and passion for the movies as they influenced her creative approach and photographic production.

Memoir includes references to the past, present, and future. Biographical highlights intersect with transformational cultural changes (e.g., wars, politics and assassinations, feminism, abortion reform) to reveal how Dater has been shaped by the world. Beginning with 1941, her birth year, *Memoir's* thirty-six pages cover a full century, which immediately alerts the viewer

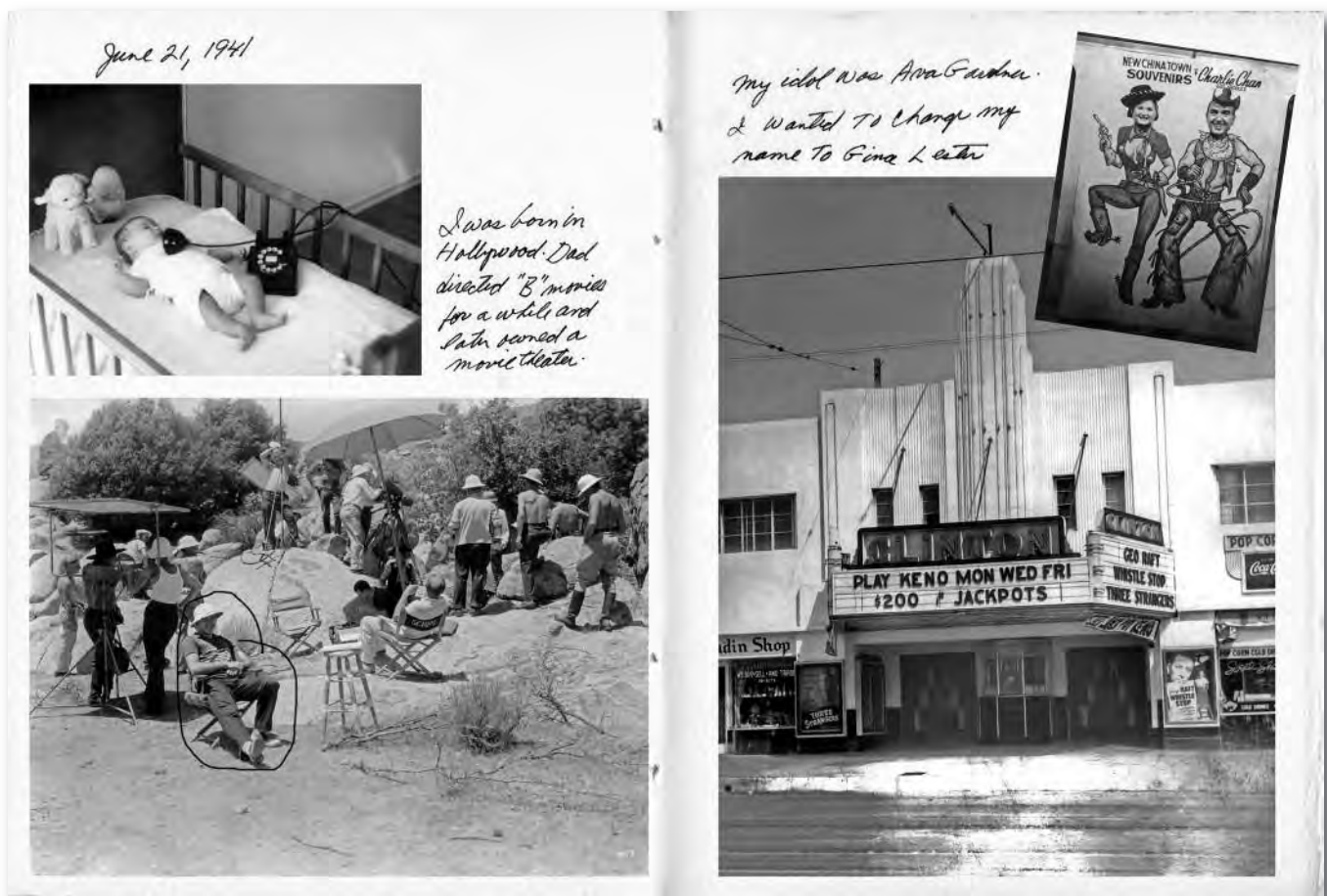


Fig. 8. Judy Dater, *Born in Hollywood* (from *Memoir*) (2012), archival pigment print, 41" x 52" (original in color).

that the chronological scope of this artwork, at the very least, blends fact and fiction. As Dater is quick to acknowledge, "The work is not about truth. It's about memory... it's based on the truth and my desire to be entertaining." Its appeal transcends gender, age, and race, because the experiences she presents are universal as they encompass a lifetime.

Before settling on the final portfolio box presentation, Dater tried several different covers, from a sober nineteenth-century-style leather binding embossed with gold lettering, to a risqué photographic image combining a favorite teddy bear and a lace thong. Likewise, she experimented with many ways of printing the text before deciding on the informality of hand writing the captions. The carefully calibrated colors and tones visually balance the two sides of the scrapbook pages; repetition is used to underscore ideas and for humorous effect; and many of the titles rhyme with the dates.

The portfolio opens to a composite photograph (2012; Pl. 2)—the nude from "Self-Portrait Sequence, No. 2, Yellowstone" (1980) and the swimming pool from "Teenage Diary" (1982)—which repeats the cover as a positive and sets the stage for the scrapbook pages that follow. The standing nude on a rocky outcropping is shown from behind, gazing into water, a reference to the unknown—the mystery of the past and its changeability. The expanse of water captures a subtle sense of movement, reticulation, not unlike a hologram. For Dater, this imaginary self-portrait signifies her personal experience of

memory. This project brought the realization that sometimes what she thought wasn't necessarily what was true: "Perception of memory changes over time. What you remember is what you remember and that is your story."

Dated June 21, 1941, the first scrapbook page (Fig. 8) begins with a photo of Judy as a baby in her crib talking on a telephone and the hand-written words, "I was born in Hollywood. Dad worked in 'B' movies for a while and later owned a movie theatre. My idol was Ava Gardner. I wanted to change my name to Gina Lester." In a few words and four snapshots, Dater provides historical context. She includes a carnival photo-op from Los Angeles's New Chinatown, where you stick your head through a hole in a painted board, here depicting a voluptuous cowgirl (Judy) and sexy cowboy (Dad). With this favorite family snapshot, she claims her western heritage. The other two images reference Hollywood and the derivation of her interest in the movies: her father on a film set and an old photo of the classic Art Deco Clinton Theater, which her father owned. Dater's mention of Ava Gardner references how, when she was a young girl, the actress was the ideal, the epitome of what a woman should be—sexy, beautiful and "hot."

"Uncle Julius Goes to War," the first of many pages with political themes—a way of inserting herself into memorable events—is dated April 1, 1944. Dater is pictured as a curly-haired, smiling three-year-old sitting in a wagon among war-related photos of her uncle. The caption reads, "Uncle Julius



Fig. 11. Judy Dater, *Women's Movement* (from *Memoir*) (2012), archival pigment print, 41" x 52" (original in color).

came to visit us. He wore his army uniform. Three days later he shipped out to the Pacific front." The page dated November 22, 1963, "President Slain" (Fig. 9) shows the front page of the San Francisco evening *News Call Bulletin* announcing the assassination of President John F. Kennedy paired with an early self-portrait in which Dater's hair completely obscures her face. Like everyone of a certain age, she remembered the moment: "I was at Marina Junior High, student teaching, when I heard the news. I went home to my tiny apartment and cried all weekend." A page titled "Deb-u-Teen" (Fig. 10) dated December 6, 1958, recalls a friend's abortion, communicating pregnancy fears associated with coat hanger abortions and trips to Tijuana, Mexico, for illegal procedures before *Roe vs. Wade*. The page also represents Dater's call for action regarding the contested nature of this political issue today. A page titled "Women's Movement" (Fig. 11), dated 1971, features a compendium of Dater's portraits of women, including Libby Butterfield, Anna Savoca, and Laura Mae Dunlap, with Dater's understated caption: "I was in the right place at the right time." On a page of her male portraits, many of which show frontal nudity, titled "Size Matters" (Fig. 12) and dated 1978, she states, "I started photographing men in 1964. Fourteen years later I got a Guggenheim, even so no one would publish the male nudes."

To understand how Dater constructed the pages of *Memoir*, "Date Shake" (Pl. 3), dated February 5, 1951, is instructive. With references to older pictures, she has created new

photographs to highlight private stories so that they reach beyond the purely personal. On the left side is a Chi Chi menu kept from a visit to Palm Springs that year. The naked woman on the cover had fascinated her, just as a reproduction of Thomas Hart Benton's painting *Persephone* (found in a book her parents owned)³⁰ had appealed to her and eventually was a source for *Imogen and Twinka*. On the right side of the page are three photographs taken during a 2011 visit to Palm Springs: the sky with a flying saucer-like cloud, a 1950s Cadillac, and a roadrunner. Her text, "All I wanted was a date milkshake" is carefully placed opposite the sexy, uninhibited woman, cleverly comparing "milkshake" with her bare breasts. The pages are filled with biographical insights, but also inform our knowledge of the culture as experienced by Dater.

The "James Mason" page (Fig. 13), dated February 13, 1952, reveals her crush on that actor using some of the "research" kept since childhood in a folder of photographs and newspaper clippings about her idol. Like Ava Gardner represented ideal womanhood to a six-year-old, Mason epitomized her male ideal at age thirteen. He was exotic; she loved his cultured English accent. However, it is the "killer charm" of the professor he portrayed in the film *Lolita* that is characterized in the newspaper clipping she reproduces, with his personality traits (excerpted from the clipping) listed on a green post-it note: "irresistible sadist, bewitching fiend, misogyny was once considered romantic, a man who detested women appeared to be desirable."



Fig. 12. Judy Dater, *Size Matters* (from *Memoir*) (2012), archival pigment print, 41" x 52" (original in color).

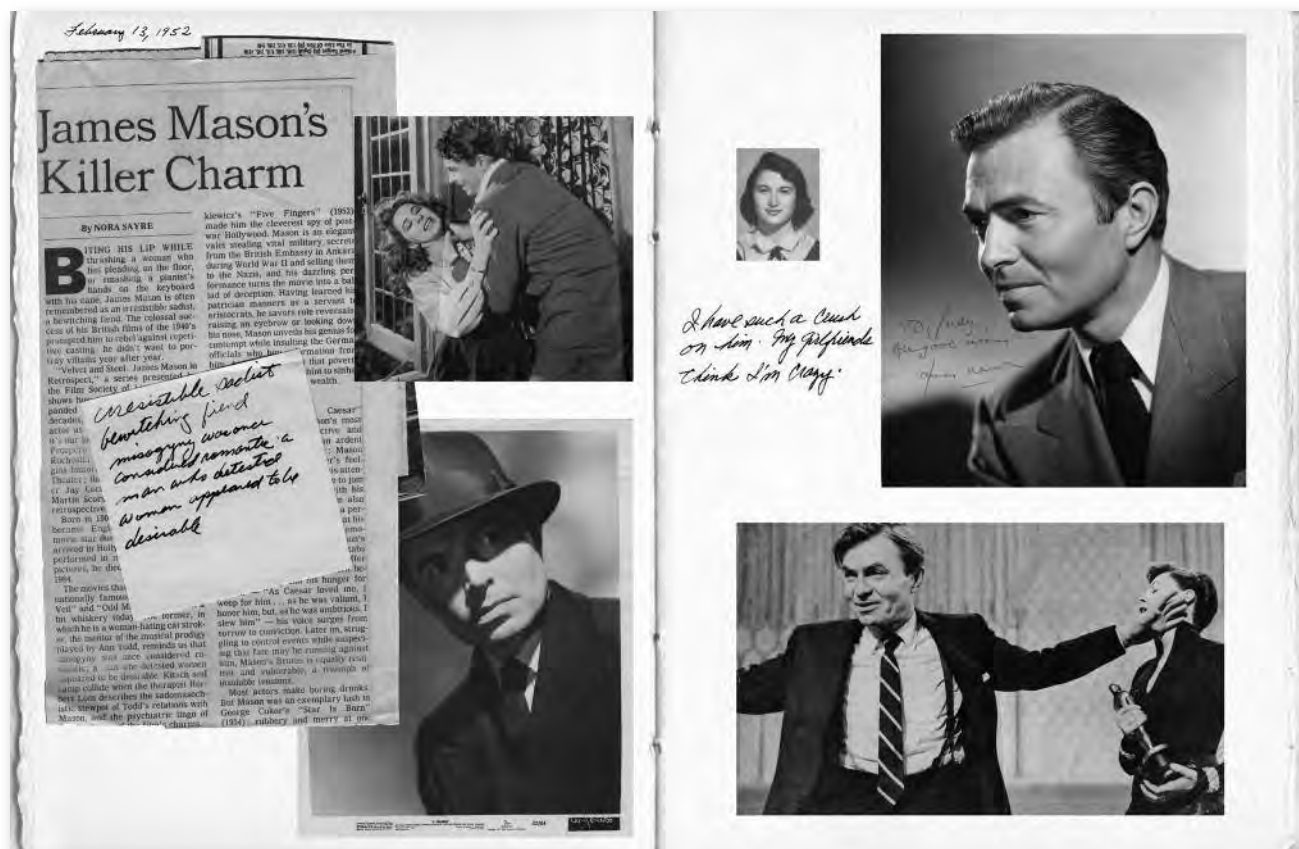


Fig. 13. Judy Dater, *James Mason* (from *Memoir*) (2012), archival pigment print, 41" x 52" (original in color).

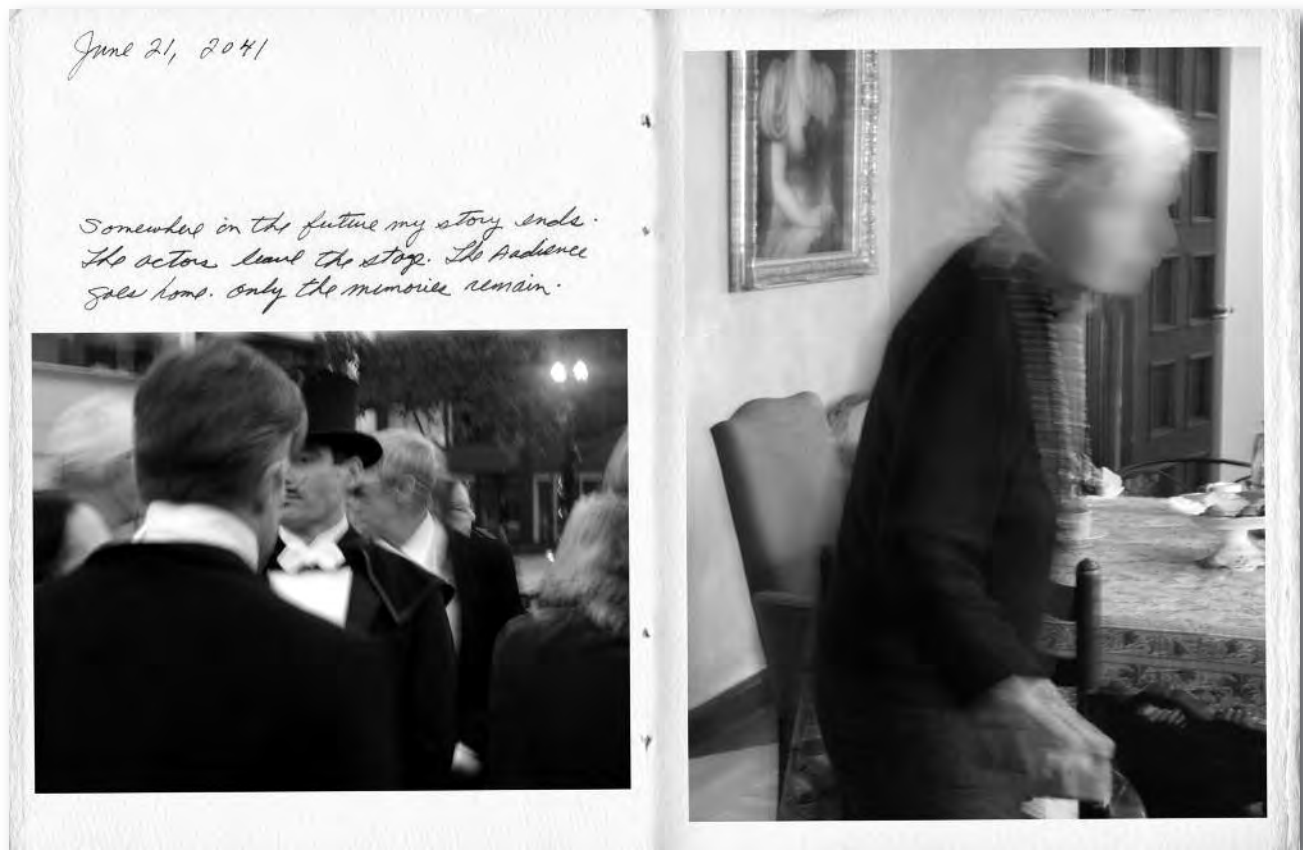


Fig. 14. Judy Dater, *Memories* (from *Memoir*) (2012), archival pigment print, 41" x 52" (original in color).

With hindsight, Dater finds many of her sexual exploits humorous. Using innuendo and an element of surprise, she describes clichéd human behavior, her male partners, loss of virginity, affairs, being caught-in-the-act, and a ménage-a-trois. Dater's style of black humor appears in "Just Act Natural" (Pl. 4), dated August 23, 1977, where, beside a photo on the left showing Dater in conversation with a man whose face is erased, the text says, "He whispered, 'my wife and daughters are here. Just act natural.'" On the right, next to a photo of Judy speaking with two women, the wife counters with, "Where did you get that dress? she asked. It's exactly like the one he brought home for the girls." Dater's response, beside a close-up of a martini is, "I needed a real drink." The ever hopeful Dater never gave up trying to find her life partner, and "The Fourth Wedding" page, dated February 17, 2007, captures the changes in style and officiates over time, from her first to her fourth ceremony—from traditional (Rabbi) to flower child (Judge), to casual (Justice of the Peace), and at last to her true happiness and glamour (Universal Life Church Ministers = friends).

The most romantic page in *Memoir* is "Moroccan Moonlight," dated July 27, 1980, which starts with the text, "We could hear the goatherd singing somewhere in the darkness, and the sound of the bells on the goats as they moved along the hillside beneath our window." Photographs of historical monuments and a self-portrait in a hotel room in Morocco combine with recent snapshots of goats she photographed in Mexico and a bedroom in Southern France.

The last three scrapbook pages are about aging. We see

Dater struggling to keep youthful and fit in "Burgers and Fries" (October 10, 2009). She keeps her sense of humor as she shows the aging of her body and deals directly with her sexuality. Similar to the color self-portraits, here she is seen laughing at herself. On the page dated May 5, 2011, she asks, what is life about anyway? "There are times when I just want to say 'fuck it.' Spend my days in the garden, my nights in the kitchen and my weekends at the movies." On *Memoir*'s last page, titled "Memories" (Fig. 14) and dated June 21, 2041—one hundred years after her birth—Dater's text reads: "Somewhere in the future my story ends. The actors leave the stage. The audience goes home. Only the memories remain."

Memoir recalls Dater's journals, her dreams and experiences of more than six decades, reimagining and reimagining her past. It is a powerful and amusing internal dialogue about age and womanhood. It is intensely personal, yet ironically feminist and universal. As Claire Sykes recently wrote, "All of Dater's photographs are self-portraits." Dater would agree:

Portraits I've done in the past I've always thought were a reflection of me. With *Memoir*, now it's just me looking at me, not at somebody else. The work certainly goes along with my other self-portraits. Like the black and white ones, it's introspective and serious; and like the color, it's also playful and satirical. And I think it also goes from the naïve to the knowing, to more of an acceptance of who I am and the reality of life in the moment.³¹

For Dater, *Memoir* is about female experience. From the beginning of her career, she focused on women, and her work has a narrative, whether within one picture or a combination of images. She's quick to say, "Everything I've done is Feminist"; though because of the freedom she expresses about sexuality and her sexual being, it is "post-feminist feminism." While trying not to offend, she wants to wake people up, saying, "I've consciously tried to be provocative and disturbing."³² As a result, Dater has been a part of the gestalt of her time, a product of her generation. The story of a free soul who never wanted to have anyone stick a label on her, the pages of *Memoir* document a life well lived. •

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Notes

My thanks to Judy Dater for providing all photographs for this article.

1. The group shared a common photographic style characterized by sharp-focused and carefully framed images seen through a particularly Western (U.S.) viewpoint and included seven photographers: Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, John Paul Edwards, Sonia Noskowiak, Henry Swift, Willard Van Dyke and Edward Weston. See Judy Dater and Jack Welpott, *Women and Other Visions*, (Dobbs Ferry, New York, Morgan & Morgan Publishers, 1975).
2. In 1974, Cunningham and Dater were teaching a workshop together in Yosemite on the nude in the landscape. Twinka (painter Wayne Thiebaud's daughter) was one of the models. Among the first of many references to this iconic work is Douglas Davis, "The Ten 'Toughest' Photographs of 1975," *Esquire* (Feb. 1976), 108–10.
3. Anne Tucker, "Judy Dater: Sexual Women and Fearsome Landscapes," *Afterimage* (Oct. 1972), 6.
4. Joan Murray, "Portraits of Women," *Artweek*, 4:23 (June 23, 1973): 11.
5. Judy Dater, e-mail to the author, June 19, 2013. This same questioning spirit is shown in some of the color self-portraits, including *Ms. Clingfree* (1982).
6. Tucker, "Judy Dater: Sexual Women and Fearsome Landscapes," 6.
7. Dater, e-mail to the author, June 19, 2013.
8. The earliest example of Dater's incorporation of words to expand the meaning of a photograph occurred in *Prayer* (1971), a tabletop still life photograph that includes a ceramic book open to the Lord's Prayer.
9. Shelly Rice, "Portfolio," *Ms.* 6:12 (June, 1978) 42–43.
10. This is the same redwood tree and virtually the spot where Dater captured the intense image of *Twinka Thiebaud, Actress, Model* (1970) that became the cover image of Anne Tucker's *The Woman's Eye* (New York: Knopf, 1973).
11. Judy Dater, *Imogen Cunningham: A Portrait* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1979).
12. Note the self-portrait from 1963 in *Memoir* on the right half of the diptych "President Slain," which has never before been reproduced.
13. Dater, email to author, Sept. 3, 2013.
14. Kate Bonansinga, ed. *Passing Through, Settling In: Contemporary Photographs of the Desert* (El Paso: Stanlee and Gerald Rubin Center for the Visual Arts, Univ. of Texas at El Paso, 2006), 50.
15. Janice Grover, "Shifts of Focus," *The Women's Review of Books*, vol. II, no. 10 (July 1986), 11–12.
16. Donna Stein, "Between Light and Dark: an Interview with Judy Dater," in *Cycles: Judy Dater* (Tokyo: Kodansha Ltd., 1992), 223.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Michiko Kasahara, "Dissonance," in *Cycles: Judy Dater* (Tokyo: Kodansha Ltd., 1992), 234.
20. James L. Enyeart, *Judy Dater, Twenty Years* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1986), xxiv. He refers to *Somewhere Over the Rainbow Blues*, an installation of sixteen 20" x 24" color prints (total 80" x 96") that Dater created in 1985 as a diary of her five weeks as a guest artist at the Kansas City Art Institute. Alternating captured video images and computer texts, Dater describes the experience living in two less than attractive dorm rooms with a shared bathroom down the hall, and muses about previous occupants. Only when she visited the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and encountered a compelling life-size, painted sculpture of Kuan-Yin, the god of mercy and compassion, was Dater able to achieve a sense of spiritual comfort and enjoy her time in the Midwest. An excerpt from one panel of the installation reads: *Her serene sensuous face and self-contained presence had me spellbound. She was magnificent, elegant, awesome, yet warm and human. I felt she could and would speak to me, comfort me, sustain me while I remained here.*
21. Donna Lee Phillips, "Personas of Women," *Artweek* (March 31, 1984) 15–16.
22. This work was shown at the GrapeStake Gallery, San Francisco in 1984 and at the Thomas Paul Gallery, Los Angeles in 2012.
23. Other early studies from 1990 include: *Socks, He Got Dressed in the Dark and When She Got Up a Few Hours Later She Discovered that in His Frenzy to Get Out of There he Had Put on One of her Socks by Mistake, Mistake, Mistake; It Occurred to Her That She Had Photographed All of the Men She Had Known Intimately in the Nude*; and *Clip-Art-John, "That was so great," he said. "I wish we could do that for a week." "Ha, a Week!" "Well, a Year," he said.*
24. *Memoir* is a limited edition portfolio of 38 individual scrapbook pages, digitally printed on 17" x 22" Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Duo paper. Each box contains a separate composite photograph of two pictures from 1982, which is a positive rendition of the negative image on the portfolio cover. The cover material, and the photograph were made especially for this portfolio and printed at Magnolia Editions in Oakland, CA. John DeMerritt Bookbinder in Emeryville, CA, created the portfolio box. Dater has also printed some of these pages as large-scale archival pigment prints (41" x 52"). In addition, she produced a 23-minute animated video of the portfolio pages in collaboration with filmmaker Eli Noyes in which she reads the text with deadpan innocence that emphasizes the humor.
25. Among the items that she included in the *Memoir* portfolio are a photo album from high school, her high school prom program, family photos including some from her first wedding, and the calendar girls from her father's old office.
26. Ilford Gallery Graded paper, 20" x 24".
27. Quoted in Jasmine Elist, "Her BFFs and Playmates," *Los Angeles Times* (Jan. 4, 2013), D10.
28. Martha Langford, "Telling Pictures and Showing Stories: Photographic Albums in the Collection of the McCord Museum of Canadian History" (online text), 2005, p. 8, see <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/>
29. Interview with the artist, July 24, 2012, Berkeley, CA. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from this interview.
30. A poster of this painting has long been a fixture in Dater's darkroom.
31. Claire Sykes, "Judy Dater: Seeing and Being Seen," *Photographer's Forum* (Fall 2012) 10–20.
32. Stein, "Between Light and Dark," 217.

APOCALYPSE IN PARADISE

NIKI DE SAINT PHALLE IN LOS ANGELES

By Cécile Whiting

In the 1960s Niki de Saint Phalle (1930–2002) journeyed twice with Jean Tinguely to Los Angeles, spending the spring of 1962 and the spring and summer of 1963 in the city. Los Angeles provided the setting for Saint Phalle's first *Tirs* (Shootings) in the United States, when she shot at packets of paint embedded below the plaster of her assemblages, thereby splattering color haphazardly over their white surfaces. In March 1962, with the sponsorship of the Everett Ellin Gallery in Los Angeles, she opened fire upon one of her constructions in a parking lot on Sunset Strip, and under the aegis of the Dwan Gallery, she subsequently carried out another *Tir* in the Malibu Hills. The Dwan Gallery also devoted a solo exhibition to Saint Phalle in January 1964, where she showed many of the works she had produced in Los Angeles. The centerpiece of this exhibition was the large assemblage titled *King Kong* (1963; Fig. 1), featuring Godzilla about to attack Manhattan. Other works in the show included studies for *King Kong* as well as a couple of smaller assemblages in the shape of hearts packed with skulls and mutilated dolls.¹ Responding to anxieties about the arms race by imagining the end of the world, Saint Phalle bore witness in her L.A. assemblages to the dark side of Paradise.

Secular representations of apocalyptic cityscapes date back to the eighteenth century. In her study of Hubert Robert, art historian Nina Dubin suggests that the artist's paintings from the late eighteenth century depicting urban cataclysms in the future were symptomatic of a culture that understood itself to be modern by virtue of its capacity to envision its own destruction.² In an era of revolution, collapse of authority, and urban renewal, Robert's scenes of real and imagined disaster and ruin permitted, according to Dubin, acculturation to a time of contingency.

An examination of *King Kong* by Saint Phalle allows an exploration of what happened to the apocalyptic imagination on the other side of the large-scale decimation of actual cities during World War II. In the early 1960s Saint Phalle joined other artists, including her partner Jean Tinguely, novelists, and filmmakers in picturing catastrophes during a period of heightened anxiety generated by the Cold War. In staging spectacles of destruction artists probed and protested the rhetoric both of the sublime surrounding photographs of atomic catastrophe and of rationally informed survival plans developed by the government in the case of nuclear warfare.

Some artists violently assaulted canvases with knife and paintbrush to produce metaphors of nuclear annihilation.³ Other projects, including Tinguely's *Study for an End of the World, No. 1* (1961) and *Study for an End of the World, No. 2* (1963) or the acclaimed 1962 novel *Failsafe* penned by Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler, imagined the destruction of worlds or cities instigated by human error and mechanical malfunction.⁴ Saint Phalle's *King Kong* incorporates multiple modes of viewing and enacting destruction, both accidental and planned. It asks the viewer to participate in the process and viewing of destruction and the toll it exacts on cities as well as on the traditional institutions of family, church, and government. Moreover, because Saint Phalle spectacularized destruction as a ludic experience, she proposed a survival plan of sorts for coping with nuclear anxiety, not through rational planning but through humorous acknowledgement of the inherent irrationality of the arms race.

When on August 20, 1945, *Life* magazine published the first photographs of atomic devastation at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it introduced language, both visual and verbal, that would in subsequent years continue to shape Americans' understanding of the destructive power of nuclear weapons. The photo-spread in *Life* contained a series of aerial views inviting viewers to look across at mushroom clouds and down onto Japanese cities targeted for destruction by fire bombs or atomic weapons. Clouds of smoke obscure cities onto which B-29s dropped incendiary munitions, while photographs of Hiroshima juxtaposed a bird's eye view of the city before the bomb against an aerial shot of the flattened and scorched city in the aftermath of the attack. "In the moment of its incomparable blast, air became flame, walls turned to dust," reads the caption below the photograph of the mushroom cloud rising above Hiroshima.⁵ Throughout the prose in *Life*, the rhetoric of the sublime—cataclysmic explosions, people shattered if not vaporized, inconceivable physical destruction—alternates with an administrative language of rationality, with its precise details of strategy and mission, intended both to explain the impact of the bomb and to justify its use. Comments about the awesome but terrible beauty of the mushroom cloud and expressions of overwhelming fear at the evidence of its sheer destructive power would continue well into the 1960s. When in 1962 the United States exploded a giant hydrogen bomb hundreds of



Fig. 1. Niki de Saint Phalle, *King Kong* (1963), paint, plaster and various objects on board, 108" x 240 ½" x 19". Moderna Museet, Stockholm. © 2014 Niki Charitable Art Foundation. All rights reserved/ARS, NY/ADAGP, Paris.

miles in space over the Pacific, one observer reported, "It was as if someone had poured blood on the sky."⁶

In the late 1950s and early 1960s the nuclear disarmament movement, responding with marches and protests to growing anxieties about the development of powerful new nuclear weapons, linked the devastation of the past with the potential for damage by atomic weapons in the present. As an editorial in the mainline Protestant *Christian Century* put it:

Eighteen years ago, August 6, 1945, mankind reached toward the ultimate in violence and destructiveness when an American-made atomic bomb obliterated Hiroshima, Japan, killing and wounding 100,000 people with a single blow.... Now we know that the atomic bomb which fell on Hiroshima, however terrible its portents, was miniature. In fantastic progression the power of that first atomic weapon has repeatedly doubled and in less than a score of years its prophecy of total destructiveness has become a fact.⁷

That the bombs available on both sides of the Cold War in 1963 were more powerful by orders of magnitude than the ones dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki certainly contributed to an acute state of anxiety at a time when the Cuban missile crisis had brought the United States and Soviet Union to the brink of war. Living in a state of suspense, and anticipating a tragedy even more overwhelming than the wartime bombings in Japan, many citizens of the U.S. prepared for survival. Tests of sirens meant to warn citizens of impending attack, "duck and cover" exercises in schools, the building of bomb shelters: all such efforts presumed rational ways to plan for atomic warfare and to survive its catastrophic consequences. Adding to such optimism, reports at the time of the twenty-year

anniversary of the end of the World War II emphasized the resuscitation of life and activity in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in spite of their unimaginable tragedy. In the 1960s, news magazines typically juxtaposed bleak, black-and-white photographs of Hiroshima in ruins with color photographs of shiny, multi-storied, glass-and-concrete buildings, modern airports, and wide thoroughfares, which had since sprung up in the city. The construction of new structures in Hiroshima and Nagasaki facilitated journalistic narratives of redemption with cities rising again like phoenixes from the atomic ashes.⁸ Token reminders of the past still dotted these cityscapes, most prominently in Hiroshima, where the preserved ruins of the Industrial Exposition Hall was subsequently renamed the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. Museums and monuments also memorialized the past in these cities, such as the Peace Memorial Park with the Statue of the Children of the A-bomb and the Memorial Museum in Hiroshima. Together, the ruined and new structures in these cities recalled the past, yet also signaled the capacity for modern humanity to persevere in the face of the atomic cataclysm. Such narratives about Hiroshima and Nagasaki contributed to the conviction in the 1950s and 1960s that survival plans could mitigate the devastation of nuclear warfare.

In California, optimism about the future depended less on survival plans and more on the continued growth of the defense industry.⁹ As the regional centerpiece in the nation's postwar economic boom, Southern California promised abundant jobs in the aerospace and defense industries, as well as affordable homes and a relaxed lifestyle to be enjoyed under the blazing sun. Situated near the Pacific theater during World War II, Los Angeles in the postwar era was located between the nuclear testing grounds on Bikini Atoll and those in the

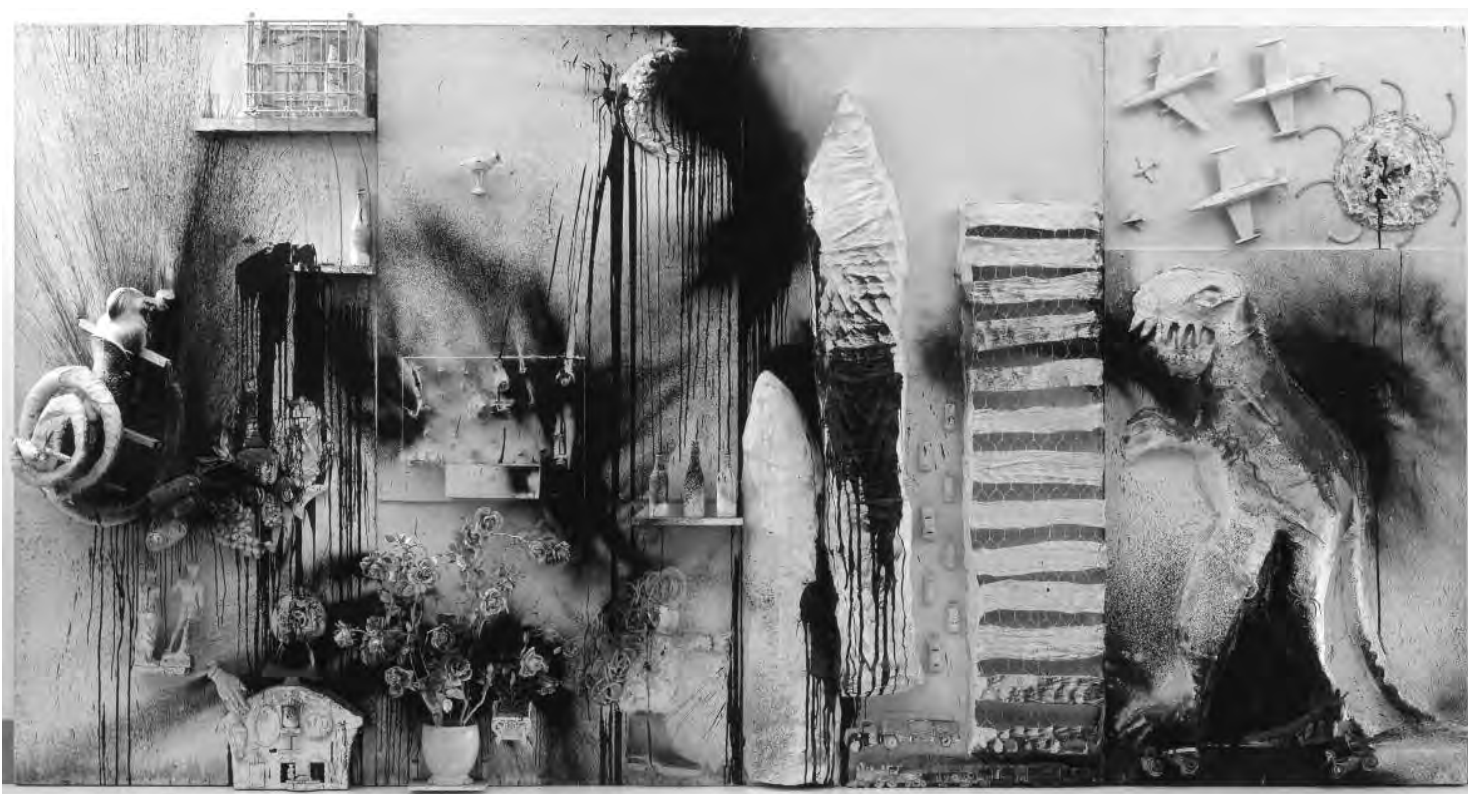


Fig. 2. Niki de Saint Phalle, *Gorgo in New York* (1962), paint, plaster, wire and various objects on plywood, 95 3/4" x 193" x 19 1/2". Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Gift of D. and J. de Menil. © 2014 Niki Charitable Art Foundation. All rights reserved/ARS, NY/ADAGP, Paris.

deserts of Nevada and New Mexico. The city's forward-looking growth depended not only on a war in the past when California first built its defense industry, but also on the continued expansion of what President Eisenhower had dubbed the military-industrial complex. The enormous development of the city in terms of population, jobs, and physical infrastructure placed emphasis on the benefits of the postwar economy rather than on the negative underside of militarization.

When Saint Phalle and Jean Tinguely arrived together in Los Angeles, they both constructed works about destruction and death, developing a theme that they had already begun to explore in Europe. Death haunts a number of Saint Phalle's collages done in France during the early 1960s. For instance, *Tu es moi* (1960; Pl. 5), which was included in the exhibition "The Art of Assemblage" at the Museum of Modern Art in 1961, translates as "you are me" but also sounds like "kill me" in French. This work contains a pistol; other Saint Phalle collages from this period combine revolvers, meat cleavers, and knives alongside more innocuous found objects. Saint Phalle also staged her first *Tirs* in Europe beginning in February 1961. Some scholars have linked the violence in her work to the French-Algerian war and the protests against the war in Paris at the time.¹⁰

After arriving on the west coast, Saint Phalle's artistic production developed in a new direction. Perhaps inspired by her relocation to Tinseltown, she began to explore apocalyptic destruction as a media phenomenon. Saint Phalle's most ambitious work produced in Los Angeles drew upon Hollywood's cinematic vision of urban Armageddon, and set

that apocalypse in New York City. *King Kong*, Saint Phalle's showpiece in her one-person exhibit at the Dwan Gallery in January 1964, self-consciously re-imagines the climactic scene from the famous horror film with a combination of white plaster and black paint, as if in homage to the black-and-white film (a touch of red paint also marks the woman giving birth). Originally released in 1933, *King Kong* concludes with the giant gorilla climbing the Empire State Building in an effort to save the heroine, played by Fay Wray, only to find himself battling away biplanes that attack him.¹¹ Despite the title, *Godzilla*, not *King Kong*, stands at the center of Saint Phalle's massive work, which measures nine feet by twenty feet long. In the 1955 film *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* (also in black-and-white), in which *Godzilla* made his debut in the United States, the prehistoric monster is awakened and given radioactive powers by weapon tests in the Pacific; he wreaks havoc on Japan in scenes patterned on the newsreel footage of Hiroshima. The American film *Godzilla* reworked the Japanese *Gojira* from 1954, which itself was based on *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* released by Warner Brothers in 1953. *The Beast* opens with an atomic blast and mushroom cloud, which awakens a giant lizard in the Arctic that goes ashore on Manhattan and inflicts damage. That Saint Phalle's construction features *Godzilla* rather than *King Kong* transforms the right-hand side of *King Kong* into the penultimate scene just before *Godzilla*'s annihilation of the city rather than a depiction of *King Kong*'s defeat atop the Empire State Building. Nonetheless, Saint Phalle's choice of title for her construction was actually not at odds with the overtones of nuclear warfare introduced by the

character of Godzilla, since by the early 1960s the name “King Kong” also had explicit associations with atomic tests. For instance, at the end of Stanley Kubrick’s 1964 film *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying And Love the Bomb*, the character named Major “King” Kong straddles a bomb as it is released from a B-52, riding it through the air to its target where he disappears in an explosion and mushroom cloud.¹²

King Kong was the third in a series of works completed by Saint Phalle in the early 1960s about urban destruction. The first was produced in New York City, when she and Tinguely traveled to the city after their visit to Los Angeles and the Nevada desert. *Gorgo in New York* (Pl. 6 and Fig. 2), which she worked on at the Chelsea Hotel in 1962, was included in her first one-person show in the United States at the Iolas Gallery in New York City that October, and *Pirodactyl over New York* (Pl. 7 and Fig. 3) was completed later that year in Paris. Both feature prehistoric monsters attacking skyscrapers. In *Gorgo* a Godzilla monster with airplanes flying over its head leans towards some tall buildings, while *Pirodactyl* more obviously refers to Manhattan by including the Empire State Building at the far right. Throughout her lifetime Saint Phalle spoke about her love of horror movies and monsters, and she channeled this passion into these three assemblages.¹³

Perhaps the timing of her visit to New York City, just at a moment when Robert Moses undertook a massive redevelopment of the Lower East Side, motivated her to begin a series on urban destruction in which monsters make cameo appearances. With her prehistoric creatures threatening chaos, Saint Phalle offered a possible riposte to Moses, suggesting that his determination to eradicate irregularity with his rationalized plans for urban renewal was ultimately doomed to failure. At the very least, her works put forth an alternative system for destruction. Or perhaps Saint Phalle simply meant her works to be a response to Tinguely’s *Hommage to New York*, in which machines self-destructed on the plaza of the Museum of Modern Art in March 1960. Hers was an homage not to New York per se but to horror films about Manhattan’s cataclysmic destruction. Or, perhaps Saint Phalle understood these works as metaphors for her own personal repudiation of her prior life in Manhattan. As a young child she had moved with her family, first in 1933 from France to the United States, and then in 1937 to the Upper East Side, where she attended the Convent School of the Sacred Heart and later the Brearley School. She made a first break with her past when she eloped in 1948 with author Harry Matthews; they settled in Paris in 1952. By the time she traveled to Southern California in February of 1962, she had left her husband and two children, become romantically involved with Jean Tinguely, and asserted her professional identity as an artist. When she returned to Manhattan, she lived downtown, in the Chelsea



Fig. 3. Niki de Saint Phalle, *Pirodactyl over New York* (1962), paint, plaster, wood and various objects, 98" x 122" x 12". © 2014 Niki Charitable Art Foundation. All rights reserved/ARS, NY/ADAGP, Paris. Photo: Laurent Condominas.

Hotel (home to many writers, artists, and musicians at the time), and as if to mark a final break with her past, she undertook three works about the destruction of New York City.

Whatever the inspiration for her constructions about New York’s destruction, Saint Phalle encouraged visitors to her one-person show at the Iolas Gallery to understand her monsters as metaphors for atomic disaster. In a drawing contained within the brochure printed to accompany her exhibition, Saint Phalle pictured two prehistoric monsters attacking one another before a cathedral (1963; Fig. 4). (The drawing was a study for *Hommage au Facteur Cheval* [Homage to Postman Cheval], a work ultimately destroyed.) Childlike handwriting scrawled over the scene identifies “atomic bomb exploding” next to an arrow pointing to the word “Boum!” contained within the outline of a mushroom cloud. Some of the motifs below the mushroom cloud resemble hands, arms, and legs. Others are identified by the text: “Mountain of objects. Remains of our civilization. Umbrellas—clocks, frying pan, toys, radios, rockets etc.” Moreover, in Saint Phalle’s appearance on television on the *David Brinkley Journal*, produced in conjunction with the exhibit at Iolas, she performed a *Tir* by exploding a little canon while yelling about bombs and the end of the world.¹⁴

King Kong, the final work in her series on urban disasters, refers to nuclear warfare by recasting the horror film as an episode in the Cold War. On the right side Godzilla steps towards Manhattan. One military jet and two missiles (not biplanes from the movie *King Kong*) emerge from the sky while a cloud containing the word “BOOM” hovers above several skyscrapers. The nose of the jet points down towards the

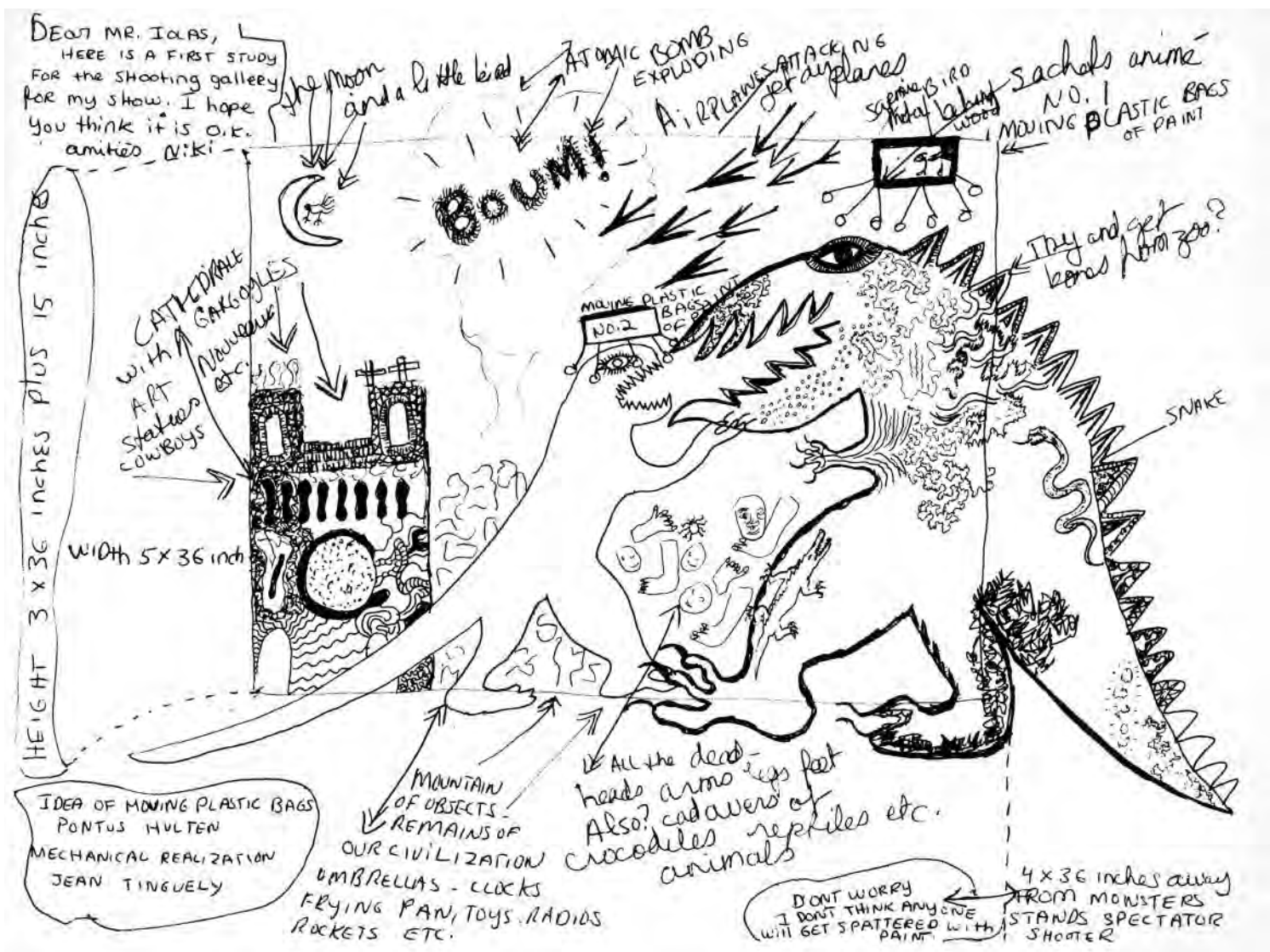


Fig. 4. Niki de Saint Phalle, *Dear Mr. Iolas* (1963). © 2014 Niki Charitable Art Foundation. All rights reserved/ARS, NY/ADAGP, Paris. Photo: © NCAF Archives.

skyscrapers, while the two missiles touch the top and side of what appears to be a stylized version of the Empire State Building. In all of the study drawings for the final work, the military aircraft, like Godzilla, assault the skyscrapers. Manhattan is under attack from ground and air, from prehistoric monsters and modern weaponry alike.

The left side of Saint Phalle's *King Kong* represents the modern social order threatened by, and responsible for, the threat of apocalyptic destruction. In preparing to make *King Kong*, Saint Phalle executed a series of studies, both drawings and self-standing objects. In one of the drawings she placed her projected motifs into separate compartments and labeled them: "birth" below a woman in labor, "games" below two children playing ball, "adolescence" below a boy astride a motorcycle, "the church" over a cathedral, "home" over a bride and groom, "work" over a wheel, and "subway" over a series of mustachioed male heads (1963; Fig. 5). In the final work she placed the wheel signifying "work" within the body of the groom, replaced the European cathedral with something closer to a New England church, and substituted two rows of

variegated and often recognizable heads for four columns of more or less identical mustachioed men. All of the motifs refer to the cycle of life—birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood—as well as to the traditional social institutions of marriage and church. Two significant additions attribute this social order to the United States within the Cold War era: heads (literally) of state—Castro, Kennedy, and Khrushchev can be easily identified—hover above an American flag stitched out of a piece of fabric. In Saint Phalle's vision of urban apocalypse, Godzilla, itself a freak of an atomic explosion, threatens to destroy the normative social order of the Cold War era.

King Kong is the most deliberately cinematic in Saint Phalle's series of three constructions about urban destruction. Adopting the proportions of cinemascope, *King Kong* has a ratio of 2.66:1 rather than the standard cinema ratio of the time, 1.37:1. Advertisements, posters, and postcards used to promote Saint Phalle's 1964 exhibition at the Dwan Gallery exaggerated the cinematic dimensions of *King Kong* by placing a miniaturized photograph of Saint Phalle below and in front of the construction so that her rifle appears to be pointed

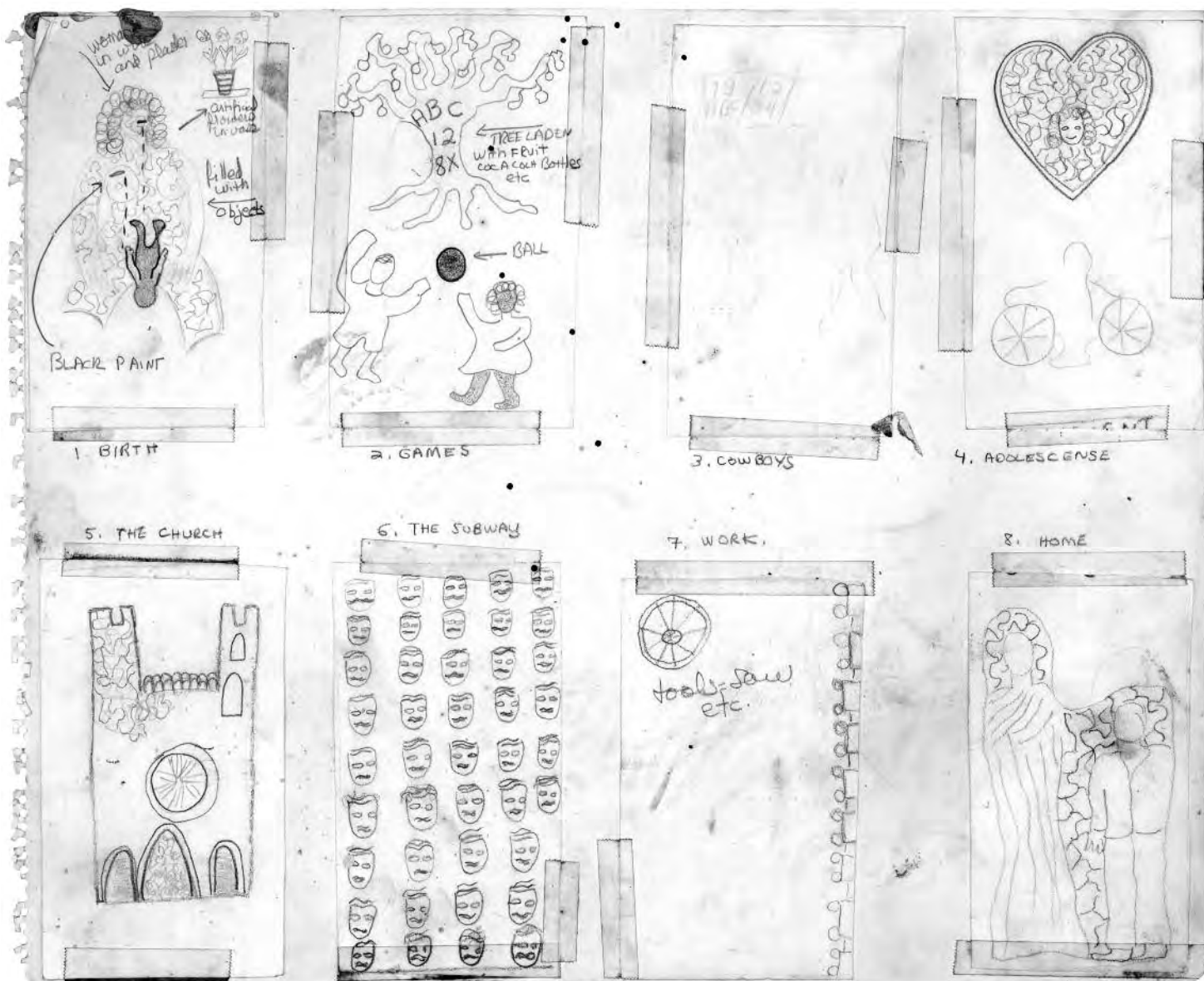


Fig. 5. Niki de Saint Phalle, *Study Drawing for King Kong* (1963), pencil on paper, 14" x 17". © 2014 Niki Charitable Art Foundation. All rights reserved ARS, NY/ADAGP, Paris. Photo: © NCAF Archives.

specifically at the bride and groom, icons of traditional marriage (Fig. 6). By comparison to the tiny figure of Saint Phalle, the construction *King Kong* looms gigantic, certainly at the scale of a movie screen. Saint Phalle's choice of scale in both the actual work and in its promotion may well have been inspired by the visual strategies of horror films. Film scholar Rhona Berenstein describes the way in which audiences thrilled to feelings of suspense and terror when horror movies such as *King Kong* debuted in the 1930s¹⁵; certainly, the continued production of such movies capitalized on special effects to manufacture thrills and to find new ways to terrify audiences. Given that watching monsters attack cities on the wide-angle screen was one significant way to enable audiences to experience the frisson of suspense, it is not surprising that Saint Phalle chose scale to underscore the drama of her scene.

At the same time that *King Kong* aspires to the scale of cinemascope, it also incorporates the aerial view of the military

planner. On the right side of *King Kong*, we look both across at skyscrapers and down onto cars moving on a vertical plane between buildings. Much like aerial photographs of cities bombed during World War II, *King Kong* presents the city as a distant target seen from on high. Commenting on the aerial attacks against cities in World War II, cultural historian Tom Vanderbilt writes: "The destruction of entire cities had progressed from a distant specter to a rational science. The aerial view was no longer a fleeting glimpse at an enemy, but a clinical crime-scene photograph of an urban space."¹⁶ After the war, magazines published aerial photographs of cities with rings around them to demonstrate the breadth of destruction that an atomic bomb would inflict on them.¹⁷ *King Kong* supplements the cinematic experience of *King Kong* by including the military planner's clinical perspective from above the city.

Finally, *King Kong* evokes God's view of the Last Judgment. The work, as we have seen, actually contains a small plaster



Fig. 6. Exhibition poster for the Niki de Saint Phalle exhibition, Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles (1964). Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution © 2014 Niki Charitable Art Foundation. All rights reserved/ARS, NY/ADAGP, Paris.

church in its left side, and, in fact, in the early 1960s many of Saint Phalle's small-scale assemblages as well as large-scale tableaux incorporated religious motifs. Beginning in 1962 she even did a series of altars and cathedrals made out of wood, plaster, wire mesh, and diverse objects, which she painted and often fired upon. In one photograph of a performance piece, Saint-Phalle, attired in her famous white pantsuit worn for *Tirs*, holds her .22 rifle and poses next to her assemblage *Cathédrale (Notre-Dame)* with the actual cathedral as a backdrop; both the art work and the cathedral appear to be going up in smoke. She also took aim at her large-scale tableaux containing religious motifs. As art historian Jill Carrick points out in discussing the artist's *Tirs* in the early 1960s, "Saint-Phalle's targets very often consisted of Catholic motifs—a reference, she has explained, to her convent education in New York by the Sacred Heart nuns before her eventual expulsion."¹⁸ The disposition of motifs in *King Kong* invites a comparison to tympanums depicting the Last Judgment placed over the central entrance to many French medieval cathedrals. Here, however, Saint Phalle has replaced the Christ in Majesty of the Last Judgment with a sun containing a grimacing gargyle; the menacing creature hovers right in the center of the canvas, overseeing the entire destructive scene with a malicious grin. To its right, in the space conventionally reserved in Last Judgment scenes for the depiction of devils carting off the damned, monster and missiles threaten Manhattan with annihilation. To the left tokens of the family and religious and political order take the place usually reserved for the depiction of the saved being led to heaven by angels.

In her eschatological fantasy of Manhattan's destruction,

Saint Phalle ultimately assumes the role of judge and condemns to damnation one and all, even those supposedly "saved." The heads of state, for instance, resemble nothing more than severed heads on pikes; the groom has a skull for his head, and the birthing woman lacks arms. Moreover, Saint Phalle, in the manner of her earlier *Tirs*, took aim at the construction with her .22 rifle and exploded packets of black paint hidden below the surface. As an agent of destruction, Saint Phalle caused the canvas to bleed, and the final work preserves the effects of Saint Phalle's gunfire. On the left, paint seems to have erupted from the woman in labor and dripped onto the children playing ball and the adolescent on a motorcycle. All of the elements of the social order—heart, bride, church steeple, heads of state, and flag—also have paint splattered across them. On the right, Saint Phalle shot the monster, the cloud containing the word "Boom," and the three military aircraft. The wide-ranging aim of Saint Phalle's firings released black paint to dribble and smear more or less equally over both sides of the canvas. If Godzilla and modern artillery attack Manhattan in particular, Saint Phalle shoots indiscriminately, inflicting disfigurement on motifs symbolic of family, church, state, urban life, and entertainment. Yet her work of art itself also falls victim to her indiscriminate rampage. Given that she took aim at the monsters and jet planes about to destroy Manhattan, it would seem that she stepped into the scenario as heroine, averting apocalyptic disaster while nevertheless killing off the social order as well as the painting itself. The "ruined" surface of *King Kong* capturing the consequences of Saint Phalle's iconoclastic attack

caused art critic Rosalind Whoden to refer to the canvas a “Tableau Mourant” (Dying Canvas), as if the painting was itself not only expiring but also anticipating the actual death and destruction of Manhattan, if not the world.¹⁹

Viewers of Saint Phalle’s *King Kong* can vicariously plan, experience, and enact destruction and death from three different perspectives: the movie viewer’s, the military planner’s, and that of the artist who also assumes the roles of judge and executioner. Yet, in a type of reverse iconoclasm, Saint Phalle released an abstraction from figuration. As the paint spurted from below the surface of the white plaster, it dribbled unpredictably over all the various motifs as if to literalize the purported spontaneity and violence of *Art Informel* or Abstract Expressionism.²⁰ The splatters not only desecrated the motifs, they also collapsed the distinction of figure and ground. Even her own white suit enacts this collapse: on the one hand Saint Phalle adopts the role of figure physically distanced from the surface of the canvas, dispassionately taking aim at it with a rifle; on the other hand, her body, clad in a white pantsuit, rhymes with the ground of the plaster canvas. As a palimpsest of different modes of planning and executing destruction, *King Kong* also offers a utopian hope, asserting the generative role of the artist who creates a surface covered with smeared ground and a plethora of exploded motifs.

At least one prominent critic of the day questioned the ethics of fictional enactments of apocalypse that indulged in an aesthetics of destruction. In “The Imagination of Disaster,” published in 1966, Susan Sontag assessed the political efficacy of science-fiction films in which nuclear testing played a central role. Summarizing the conventions of the wide-screen, science-fiction film produced after World War II, Sontag described the narrative development of the story: the arrival of the monstrous thing, a great act of destruction, national emergency, further atrocities, and final repulse of monster with a nuclear device. In other iterations of science-fiction film, nuclear testing led to the appearance of the monster and the development of a state of emergency. Atomic testing, in other words, functioned either as a cause of apocalypse or as a solution to it. Sontag noted that horror films such as *King Kong* shared narrative conventions with science fiction, and yet she distinguished between the naïve thrills of the former and the “decided grimness, bolstered by their much greater degree of visual credibility” of the latter.²¹ In fact, she went on to suggest that “science fiction films invite a dispassionate, aesthetic view of destruction and violence—a technological view.”²² Ultimately, she voiced concern about the ethical purpose of science fiction films that offer “the fantasy of living through one’s own death and more, the death of cities, the destruction of humanity itself,” concluding that “there is a sense in which all these movies are in complicity with the abhorrent. They neutralize it.”²³

And yet, Saint Phalle’s *King Kong* resists Sontag’s critique of complicity by juxtaposing different systems of apocalyptic destruction—horror film, military planner, Last Judgment, creative artist—each of which is recreated with tongue in cheek. The childlike motifs covering the surface of *King Kong*, many of which are themselves made out of toys, insist on the

comic mode. Although Saint Phalle had been incorporating found objects in her art for a number of years, she gave free license to her appetite for toys on the surface of *King Kong*. Embracing the cheap, mass-produced commodities found in Los Angeles, Saint Phalle went on scavenger hunts, collecting toys she subsequently integrated into both *King Kong* and her series of heart constructions. Ed Kienholz served as a tour guide to Saint Phalle and Tinguely as they visited dumps, hardware stores, and houseware stores in Los Angeles, while Virginia Dwan accompanied Saint Phalle to visit a wholesaler in cheap plastic dolls located in downtown Los Angeles. Dwan reported: “We were looking for lots of nasties, like rubber spiders and alligators and snakes and skeletons and so forth, which were all sold in plastic packages in huge bins.”²⁴ Saint Phalle brought her loot to a former welding factory rented by Dwan for Saint Phalle and Tinguely, where, according to Dwan, “Jean was welding away, and Nikki was pasting and gluing and painting and filling little bags with paint and pigment to shoot later.”²⁵ Like a child playing war games with toy soldiers, Saint Phalle recreated the apocalyptic destruction of New York City with toy planes, miniature cars and buildings, and a caricatured Godzilla; the missiles even recall the bulbous red rocket ship built by Tintin’s friend Professor Calculus at the Sprodj Atomic Research Center in *Destination Moon* (1953). The sun, the replacement for Christ in Majesty, reeks of caricature as well with its grinning gargoyle whose flames emerging from the mouth look more like buck teeth than dangerous rays of light. The sun also rhymes with the cartoon bubble containing the word “Boom.” A church whose columns are made of bowling pins, a smirking Santa Claus head, and toys galore are just some of the playful touches on the left side of the canvas. Moreover, when exhibited at the Dwan Gallery, *King Kong* was surrounded by studies for the final work as well as hearts that were also filled with toy soldiers, airplanes, and dolls. The abundant playthings led Whoden to conclude:

Romanesque *Last Judgment*, Goya’s *Disasters of War*, *Guernica*, even films like *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *On the Beach* are death shows scaled for the adult world; the price of admission to the Big Top is seriousness. Niki’s Punch-and-Judy massacres embody the disbelief of Tom Sawyer, home just in time to stare at his own funeral. She conjures last laughs, not last rites.²⁶

In fact the very pretense that Saint Phalle saves the day by firing shots at the evil forces of destruction so that all turns out well in the end (in this case culminating in a new work of art rather than a kiss, or a last laugh) itself harkens back to children’s fairytales.

It may well be that comic spectacles of annihilation such as that provided by Saint Phalle channeled atomic anxiety only to allay it. Yet, in foregrounding atomic culture as ludic spectacle mediated by the still or film camera, she produced works that distanced the viewer from, on the one hand, the conventions of media representation in which the atomic bomb provided a sublime experience, stunning observers with a stupendous display of the bomb’s sheer power, and, on the other hand, the

rational and dispassionate view (or in Sontag's words, the "technological view") of the military planner plotting targets for bombs and mapping potential aftereffects. Instead, *King Kong* transforms apocalyptic destruction into comic relief. With a childlike chortle, Saint Phalle imagines the future destruction of Manhattan by monster and by military planner and the city's last minute rescue by the marksman artist. Seen at the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles, Saint Phalle's construction relied on her play with cinematic precedent to introduce a note of irrational hilarity into a city whose very expansion during this period depended on the development and production of an increasingly sophisticated military arsenal. To foreground juvenile playfulness in imagining atomic disaster highlighted the monstrous irrationality of nuclear proliferation. •

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NOTES

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- Information about Saint Phalle's exhibition at the Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles, can be found in the Dwan Gallery Records 1959–71, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, as well as in *Niki De Saint Phalle: Catalogue Raisonné, 1949–2000*, vol. 1 (Lausanne: Acatos, 2001).
- Nina Dubin, *Futures & Ruins: Eighteenth-Century Paris and the Art of Hubert Robert* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), 1.
- Paul Schimmel, *Destroy the Picture: Painting the Void, 1949–1962* (New York: Skira Rizzoli; Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2012) explores the various ways in which some European, American, and Japanese artists assaulted the canvas as a means to come to terms with World War II and its aftermath.
- Extensive analysis of *Study for an End of the World, No 1 and No. 2* can be found in Pam Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 139–53 and in Stephen Petersen, *Space Age Aesthetics: Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, and the Postwar European Avant-Garde* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2009), 221–23.
- "The War Ends," *Life* 19 (Aug. 20, 1945): 26, with USAAF photographs.
- "First a Light Man Had Never Seen..." *Life* 53 (July 20, 1962): 31, with photographs by Leigh Winter.
- "Hiroshima Revisited," *Christian Century* 80 (Aug. 7, 1963): 971.
- See, for instance, "Japan: Tale of Two Cities," *Time* (May 18, 1962): 28; "Hiroshima 1964," *Saturday Review* 47 (April 18, 1964): 24–7; Richard Joseph, "Hiroshima, 1945," *Esquire* 64 (Aug. 1965): 62–66; and "Ground Zero at Hiroshima 20 Years Later," *Life* 59 (Aug. 20 1965): 32–33, with photographs by T. Tanuma.
- Michael Dear, "Peopling California," in *Made in California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900–2000*, ed. Stephanie Barron, Sheri Bernstein, and Ilene Susan Fort (Berkeley: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Univ. of California Press, 2001), 49–63.
- Meredith Malone, "Du Travail à l'oeuvre" (From Work to Art) in *Le Nouveau Réalisme*, ed. Cécile Debray (Paris: Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 2007), 90; Sarah Wilson "Tu es moi: the Sacred, the Profane and the Secret in the Work of Niki de Saint Phalle," in *Niki De Saint Phalle*, ed. Stefano Ceccheto (Milan: Skira, 2009), 34–35.
- According to Ray Morton, RKO theatrically re-released *King Kong* for the last time in 1956, and by the 1960s, when RKO began to license *King Kong* products, the film had become a cult classic. For information about the various iterations of *King Kong* and *Godzilla*, I am indebted to Ray Morton, *King Kong: The History of a Movie Icon from Fay Wray to Peter Jackson* (New York: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2005), 84, 122–23. See also Vivian Sobchack on "Monsters and Creatures" in *The Limits of Infinity: The American Science Fiction Film 1950–75* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1980), 43–55.
- In a longer version of this study in preparation, I examine in greater depth Peter Sellers's iconic film as itself an instance of a ludic response to the nuclear threat.
- Saint Phalle wrote in her autobiography: "I was also fascinated by monsters and prehistoric creatures which I could buy at the five and dime store. I still collect them today. I saw a lot of monster films too. I have made many monsters throughout the years." Niki de Saint Phalle, *Traces: An Autobiography Remembering 1930–1949* (Lausanne: Sylvio Acatos, 1999), 75.
- Brochure from the Niki Charitable Art Foundation Archives, Santee, CA. Jill Carrick suggests that Saint Phalle created the *Shooting Gallery or Homage to Postman Cheval* (1962) in New York during the year of the Cuban Missile crisis and described it to gallery owner Alexander Iolas as addressing the threat of nuclear war. Jill Carrick, *Le Nouveau Réalisme, 1960s France and the Neo Avant-Garde: Topographies of Chance and Return* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 111. See also Jill Carrick, "Phallic Victories? Niki de Saint-Phalle's *Tirs*," *Art History* 26 (Nov. 2003): 707.
- Rhona Berenstein, *Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality, and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1996).
- Tom Vanderbilt, *Survival City: Adventures Among the Ruins of Atomic America* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002), 59.
- Daniel Cordle, in discussing maps of cities with concentric rings of nuclear destruction imposed on top, comments: "Such mapping provides a double coding of the city. It reproduces it from the point of view of the military planner: the city from above, as a target; a problem for demolition. It also implies its opposite: the view from below." Daniel Cordle, *States of Suspense: The Nuclear Age, Postmodernism and United States Fiction and Prose* (Manchester, UK: Manchester Univ. Press, 2008), 66.
- Carrick, "Phallic Victories? Niki de Saint-Phalle's *Tirs*," 707.
- Rosalind Wholden, "Puerealism: 'The End' with Innocence," *Artforum* 2 (Sept. 1963): 30.
- The exhibition of American art in Paris, including "The New American Painting" in 1959, and Saint Phalle's friendship with Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and Larry Rivers made her aware of aesthetic developments in figuration and abstraction in the United States even before she visited New York and Los Angeles in the 1960s.
- Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Delta, 1966), 215.
- Ibid.*, 216.
- Ibid.*, 212, 225.
- Transcript of oral history interview with Virginia Dwan, interviewed by Charles Stuckey (March 27, 1984), 24. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. See also Wholden, "Puerealism," 30.
- Wholden, "Puerealism," 24.
- Ibid.*, 33.

LEE BONTECOU AND DRAWING

FROM THE REAL TO THE STRANGE

By Mona Hadler

“A strange naturalist” is what one critic called Lee Bontecou, and indeed she is just that, a strange naturalist in the age of technology and mass culture.¹ The “natural world with its visual wonders and horrors” and the province of “man-made devices with their mind-boggling engineering feats and destructive abominations” are one to her.² Combining the natural and the artificial, she has produced a cabinet of wonders replete with frightening creatures and suspended cosmologies. Her visionary imagination dominates, above all, in her vast two-dimensional oeuvre, where the real commingles freely with the fantastic. The deep blacks in these works produce cosmic holes, floating eyes, gas masks, and bleak terrains populated by frankenflowers and cyborgian creatures that break boundaries between humans, animals, plants, and machines. Experimental, visionary, exquisitely rendered, and profound, her extensive graphic production ranges from the cosmic to the carnivalesque while crossing boundaries that open doors to new subjectivities.

Bontecou’s drawing practice recalls but pushes to a hallucinatory extreme the nuanced visual style of Vincent van Gogh, whom she admired.³ “You can travel miles within a drawing and not have to take all the baggage along. I always envied poets because of that fact.... I can’t stress drawing enough.... You can work from your inner world rather than always the external world.”⁴ Like poetry, she mused, drawing is produced with a pencil.⁵ Unencumbered by the intense physical labor that her particular sculptural practice involves, drawing affords more direct access to the imaginary.⁶ In taking up the pencil for graphic freedom and as a conduit to the unknown, she follows in the tradition of a wide range of sculptors, including Abstract Expressionists David Smith and Theodore Roszak. Yet Bontecou, with her deep space and haunted imagery, stayed significantly far from engaging in the debates on flatness in the early 1960s as her works matured. While drawing is central to her production and functions not only as inspiration for her early three-dimensional constructions but also as a central component of

those works, it remains to this day a key practice of hers in its own right, and one that privileges the inner eye.

“Black” started it all: “Getting the black ... opened everything up.... It was like dealing with the outer limits ... with a square of black on the soot.... I can push it.... I had to find a way of harnessing it.”⁷ In these oft-quoted words, Bontecou describes the excitement she felt when she began in the late 1950s to produce drawings with black soot by turning the oxygen down on an acetylene torch (1958; Fig. 1). She stretched paper on the studio wall and worked on a large scale, moving quickly, and, with agility and bodily

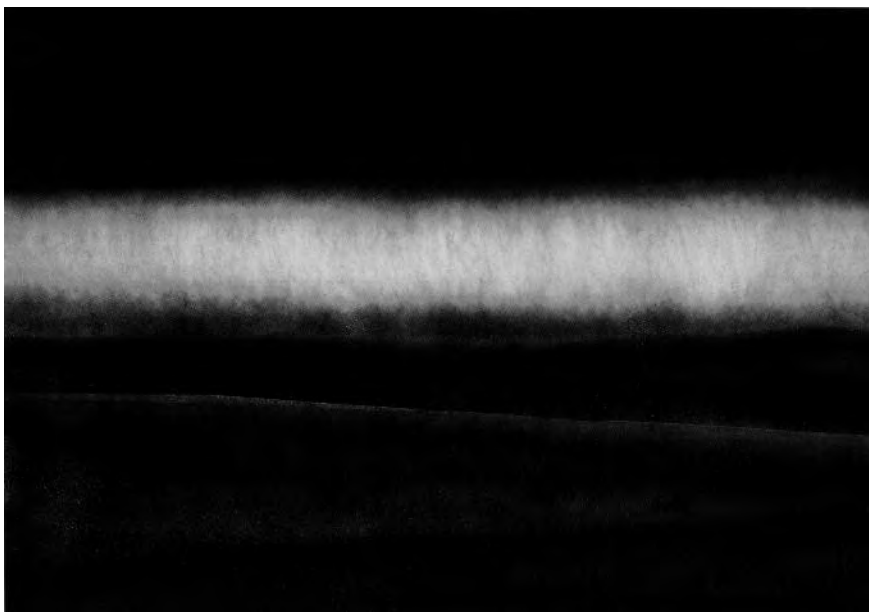


Fig. 1. Lee Bontecou, *Untitled* (1958), soot on paper, 27" x 39", Collection Gail and Tony Ganz.

coordination, adjusting the torch’s speed and proximity to the paper to avoid burning the image, to minimize the destructive potential of the technique, and to produce drawings that mediate the rough and the beautiful. Her practice recalls the violence of French artist Antonin Artaud, who attacked images of himself with lit cigarettes, as well as the transgressive dirt that Susan Sontag relished in the Happenings of the early 1960s, which Bontecou also attended.⁸ She witnessed, for example, Red Grooms’s 1959 Happening *The Burning Building*,

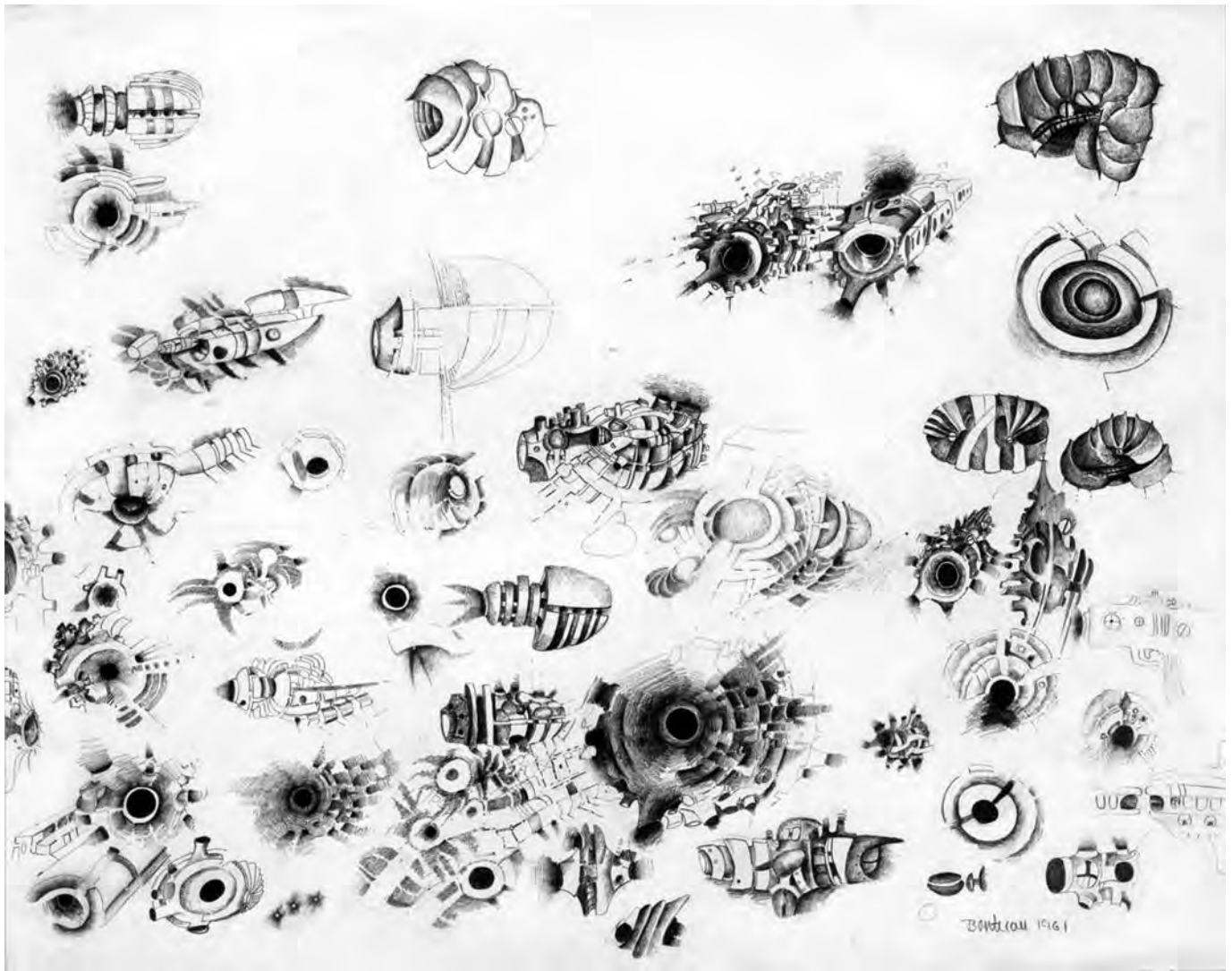


Fig. 2. Lee Bontecou, *Untitled* (1961). charcoal and graphite on paper, 22 5/8" x 28 1/2". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of John S. Newberry (124.1962).

staged in his studio.⁹ At the same time, Bontecou's soot drawings anticipated those of the late-sixties drawings by Process artists.¹⁰ "It's nice to work large in the sense that ... there's a physical feeling that comes and you kind of can work with your whole body," she later observed in relation to sculpture, but these words also harken back to the soot drawings and to the many performative practices she admired in her younger years.¹¹

Subsequent to her soot-drawing breakthrough, Bontecou applied the same technique to canvas conveyor belts, first darkening them with the soot of the torch and then fastening them to her metal frames with wire, which added the subtlety of shading to the overall brutality of her welded constructions such as *Untitled* (1961; Pl. 8). Bontecou, whose work has always ranged between two and three dimensionality, had previously experimented with techniques evoking those of drawing and printmaking in her sculptures to incorporate gradations of light and dark. For example, she placed folded mesh inside small welded boxes in an attempt to open up the

surface of sculpture, comparable to the way Brancusi used reflection to undermine the solidity of polished metal. Sculpture in this manner, she contends, parallels the painter's ability to produce illusionistic space.¹² She has compared the shadings that the mesh produced in her sculpture to the effects of layering in her lithographs, "a superimposing of something over something else."¹³ Similarly, when engaged in printmaking, she has stated a preference for etching because it has allowed her to go back into the plate.¹⁴ Both graphic and sculptural, the process produces a flat image and an incised plate that is beautiful in its own right. Furthermore, one could characterize her late hanging sculptures as demonstrating a sophisticated form of drawing in space, which follows in the tradition of earlier welders, such as Julio González, one of her favorites.¹⁵

Bontecou's well-known large constructions such as Plate 8 from the early 1960s are amalgams of painting and sculpture, as they exploit line and shadow, edge and interior shading. While their linear welded armatures support canvas covered

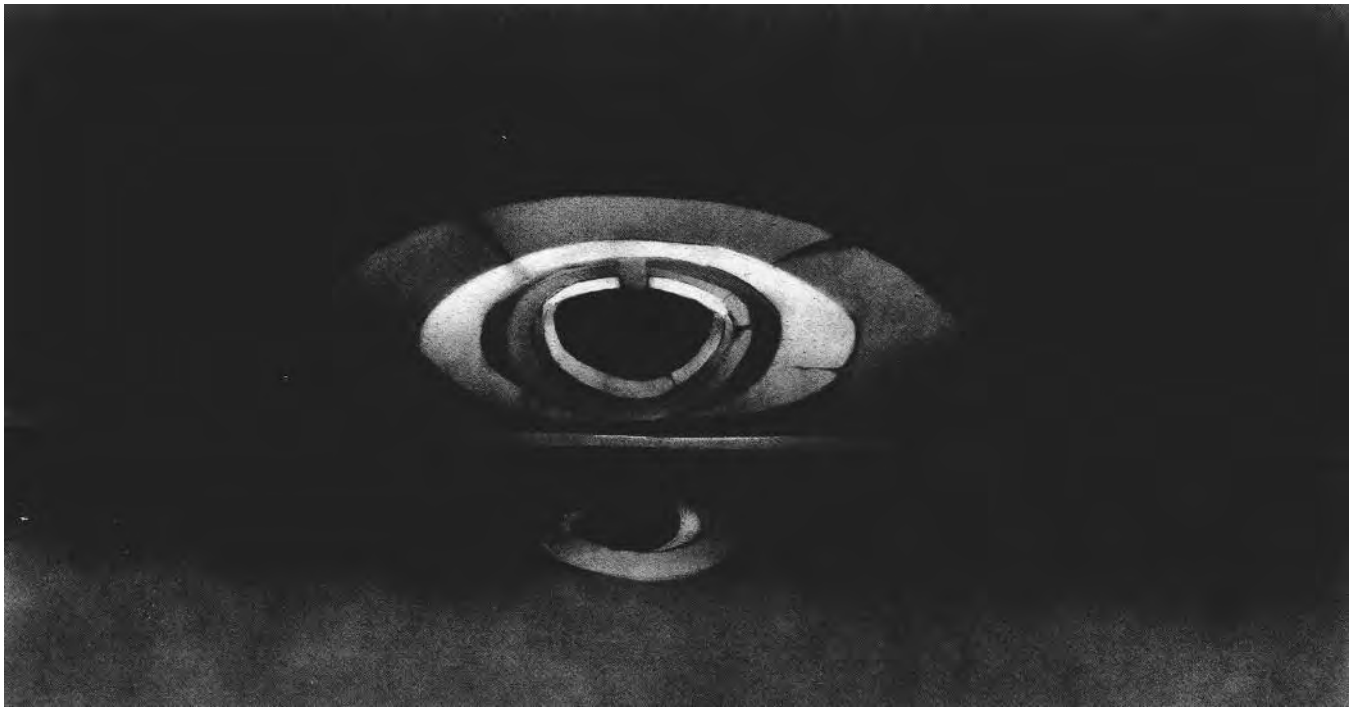


Fig. 3. Lee Bontecou, *Untitled* (1963), soot on muslin, 11" x 19". Private collection, Los Angeles.

with nuanced shades of soot, their forms advance out of or recede into openings as dark as the black of her drawings. She often thinks in terms of values even when working with color. When using blue jeans as a medium in the mid-sixties, for example, she assiduously selected parts of faded denim based on subtle differences in shade. The jeans, she recalled, were her own, and she would look carefully at the gradations of blue, even unfastening seams to vary the values.¹⁶

In a fluid, nonhierarchical manner, the artist moves between media, alternating between drawing and sculpture: "I had a thing in mind and went to sculpture, then if there [was] a problem I drew it out, or I might be drawing and like an image."¹⁷ And, indeed, the imagery of her drawings often accords with her sculpture; for example, when she was making assemblages with military equipment, gas masks populated her picture space. The drawing process spawns the emergent imagery that critics ceaselessly discover in her constructions. Even Donald Judd, who so praised her work for its status as object, waxed eloquent on its references.¹⁸ The drawings help Bontecou solve formal problems in a sculpture and conjure imagery through an automatist practice (albeit a labor-intensive one), which enables her to work from what she called her inner world.

Just as Bontecou interrogates dimensionality in her constructions, she experiments with space in her graphic production. Many of her drawings fall into roughly two categories. In one (1961; Fig. 2), she engages a more traditional sketching strategy, drawing fragmentary imagery on white paper and disregarding the background as part of the composition. These sketches often give rise to fanciful metamorphic images that conjoin the organic and the inorganic. In another large group of drawings, she activates

the entire page, often resolving its composition. Here, she either divides it in a grid-like manner or produces illusionistic space. At times, she defines a horizon line (as in the early soot drawings such as Figure 1) or uses a dark, murky matrix to create deep space, still marking the picture plane with a rich materiality. In the late 1960s, Bontecou began using black paper to arrive at a comparably cavernous spatial terrain and has continued to use the medium in this manner for decades now. She populates her more recent dark pictorial spaces, which are often marked by internal framing devices, with strange aquatic or extraterrestrial creatures culled from her imagination. Drawing, in both modes, forms the seedbed for her emergent and phantasmal imagery. Although her sculptural process is more intuitive than conceptual, and therefore allows for surprise and innovation while she works, she relies on drawing for access to the mind's eye.

The soot drawings, or "worldscapes," begun after the launch of the Soviet satellite Sputnik in the late 1950s, responded to the astounding new imagery of a hitherto unfathomable space.¹⁹ It was, as John F. Kennedy was soon to proclaim, "The New Frontier," with its "unchartered areas of science and space."²⁰ Conjuring, in fact, microscopic or telescopic Surrealist worlds, Bontecou's ensuing compositions, often bifurcated by a horizon line, commingle notions of landscape, inscape, and worldscape. Swirling holes emerge from tenebrous depths, forming apertures that impart eyes floating in deep space or resting gently on the borders between land and sky (1961; Fig. 3) and encourage comparisons to Odilon Redon and Symbolist drawings, which she admires. This imagery lends credence to Dore Ashton's 1963 revisionist essay on Bontecou, which was the first to read the forms as cosmic rather than suggestive of the sexual or threatening body.²¹

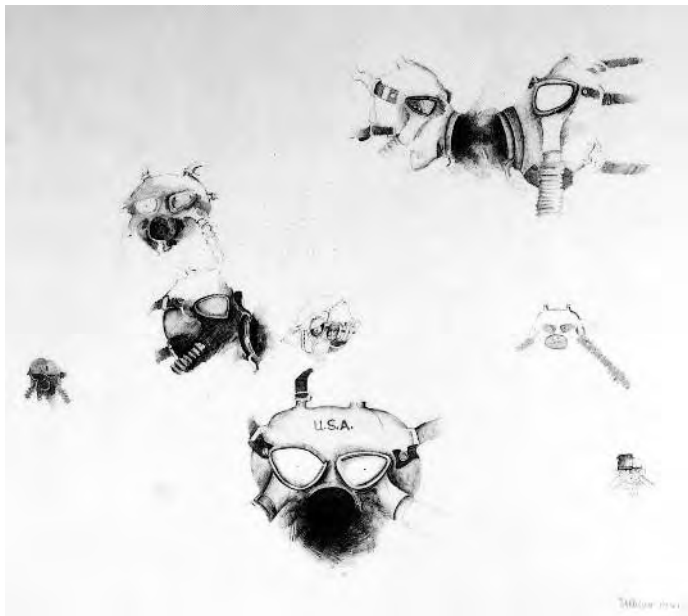


Fig. 4. Lee Bontecou, *Untitled* (1961), graphite on paper, 22 5/8" x 28 3/4". The Menil Collection, Houston.

In the early 1960s, however, Bontecou sketched many fragmentary forms with holes that suggest the carnal as well as the cosmic (as in Figure 2). To my eye, the permutations of these compositions summon Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophical matrix that situates the body, with its permeable boundaries, between the cosmic and the physical:

All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and an interorientation. This is why the main events in the life of the grotesque body, the acts of the bodily drama, take place in this sphere. Eating, drinking, defecation ... are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world.... In all these events, the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven.²²

The grotesque body swells, erupts, and merges with the world and, in so doing, critiques confining systems of order.²³ Likewise, Bontecou's art rails against control and oppression. In her art, the cosmic, carnal, and historical conjoin in the manner mapped by Bakhtin, and the grotesque body, in part, mediates this synthesis. Her work, I argue here, speaks to the sense of liberation and regenerative powers in the grotesque as theorized by Bakhtin, but prevalent in other authors too such as Baudelaire in his writings on Hogarth and Goya.²⁴

The large constructions of the early sixties with embedded military equipment resemble grinning or smirking creatures with grotesque bodies. Holes in the compositions become eyes, saw blades morph into teeth, and bars become armor. Although she did not mention Bakhtin to me and was not consciously interested in the carnivalesque or the posthuman, these works frighten and amuse with a form of monstrous beauty—"inexhaustible beauty" to quote Alfred Jarry on

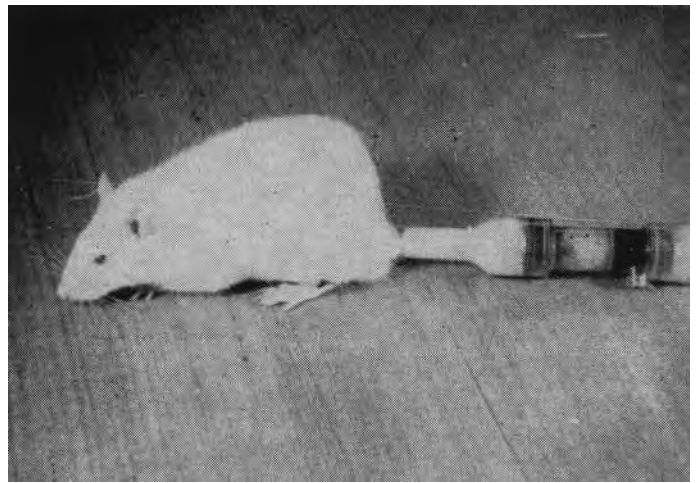


Fig. 5. Cyborg mouse, in Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Cline, "Cyborgs and Space," *Astronautics* (September 1960): 27.

monsters—and anticipate many works by more recent artists and authors who, in attacking a modernist and humanist crusade that advocated purity and strict rationality, similarly explore hybridity, the monstrous, and the abject. But Bontecou's fusions of humans, animals, plants, and machines significantly predate these artistic developments. Her welded constructions are part animal—part machine. She has likened the mottled shades of canvas, chamois cloth, and leather to markings of an insect, and at times she has even included animal remains, such as horseshoe crabs.²⁵ When asked why she left the printed word "domestic" on a piece, she responded that her sculptures were domesticated animals.²⁶

In the early 1960s, when she produced her most aggressive welded work, Bontecou filled pages of drawings with war equipment; but here also the forms mutate. Gas masks and helmets morph into aviator goggles with bug eyes (1961; Fig. 4). In other sketches, phallic screws become insects or flying machines, while circular shapes conjure the then newly discovered black holes of outer space.²⁷ These drawings must be contextualized in the post-World War II era. Born in 1931, Bontecou was obsessed in the late fifties and early sixties, as were others of her generation, with both the positive and the negative consequences of scientific progress, with the excitement of outer space, and the fear of nuclear devastation. Her drawings of this period coupled animals with machines, just as, she recalls, scientists had based the designs of nuclear submarines on dolphins, and of satellites and helicopters on dragonflies. These drawings with their menacing, machine-man-insect hybrids relate back to the Dada works of George Grosz and others.²⁸ They nod to Surrealist art in their fusion of the natural, violent, and abstract (Arshile Gorky's drawings are particularly relevant here)²⁹ and prefigure the utopian and dystopian visions of technology rampant in European art of the late 1960s, such as the startling environment-transforming helmet "Flyhead," designed by the Viennese collective Hans-Rucker-Co.³⁰

In the postwar context, Bontecou's works' closest siblings can be found in emerging images of what became known as the "cyborg," a term that was first coined in 1960 to describe a

man-machine system designed to live in outer space. A picture of the first cyborg, a white laboratory rat whose tail was implanted with a control device that could inject chemicals to allow the animal to survive in extraterrestrial environments (Fig. 5) hit the popular press in 1960, and still today is startling in its transgressive fusion of the organic and the inorganic.³¹ The media abounded with pictures of exoskeletal suits (1965; Fig. 6), which strapped airmen to machines, and early space suits that were strangely similar to Bontecou's carapace-like structures.³² Bontecou herself loved reading about the space race and astronauts and, according to Tom and Jane Doyle, who were present at her home at the time, Bontecou, like most people at the time, watched the 1969 landing on the moon with inexhaustible curiosity and excitement.³³ These images of actual airmen in their paraphernalia replaced the pictures of the cyborgian astronaut in his silver suit that illustrated the science fiction of Bontecou's youth. Her drawings are a key site for motifs that share with the altered rat and metallic spacemen a connection to an androgynous human-animal-machine construct. The importance of the cyborg here, however, is not in its link to science fiction but in its new articulation of subjectivity.

Donna Haraway, whose 1985 "Cyborg Manifesto" has become canonical, includes the enhanced rat in her clan of cyborgs born of the Cold War and the space race.³⁴ Bontecou told me she was not interested in cybernetics and unaware of Haraway, who is thirteen years her junior, but Haraway's writings, which developed in the aftermath of World War II with its geopolitical battles and monstrous machines, profoundly resonate with Bontecou's art. Haraway calls early cyborgs "the illegitimate children of militarism and patriarchal capitalism." They are the positive progeny of this era. In their fusions, they offer a way out way out of the "maze of dualisms ... building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships." A cyborg world, as she famously writes, is one where "people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints."³⁵

Though Bontecou's art, like the notion of the cyborg, was born of postwar politics, I believe that, she, like Haraway, transcends the systems of control that attended the nascent science of cybernetics and the growing military-industrial complex. She, again like Haraway, found more in the "valley of the monster."³⁶ In blurring the distinctions between humans, animals, and machines, Bontecou's work moves beyond postwar quandaries and unintentionally enters the realm of genomics. It relates to the evolutionary process that biologist Lynn Margulis calls symbiogenesis, whereby all complex life forms are the products of endless replication and multidirectional acts of mutation.³⁷ And, since ingestion plays a key role in this process, Margulis's theories further resonate with the wide-open, seemingly voracious "mouths" in Bontecou's sculptures and drawings.

In the early 1970s, Bontecou startled the art world by exhibiting large plastic flowers and fish replete with sharp teeth and undigested prey visible in their bellies. Plastic offered her the ability to make lighter and more open forms

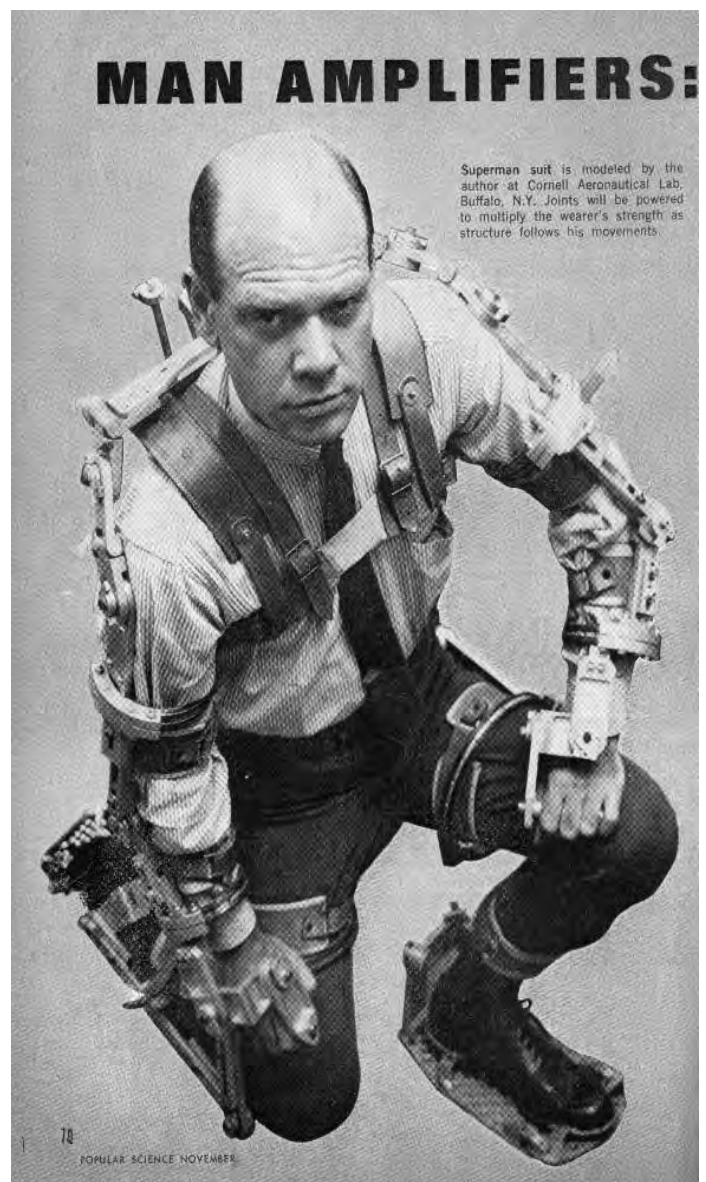


Fig. 6. Wallace Cloud wearing a superman suit created by Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory, in Wallace Cloud, "Man Amplifiers: Machines That Let You Carry a Ton," *Popular Science* (Nov. 1965): 70.

which she desired,³⁸ but it also afforded a new element of literalness. These sculptures come the closest to a form of Verism in her work. The spectator stands face to face with the oversize fish, which hang from the ceiling, and is forced to confront them on equal terms, as documented in a 1971 installation photo (Fig. 7). In this regard, they might be seen in relation to the recent field of "animal studies" that respects animals' "otherness." Bontecou is indeed an animal lover and naturalist,³⁹ but she does not anthropomorphize her fish, nor are they like pets. They are emblematic neither of a child's perspective (as is, for example, the character Sebastian in Disney's *The Little Mermaid*) nor of voices of adults. Instead, they contribute to what has been called the "unmeaning" of animals—that is, they value animal otherness and do not render animals meaningful in human terms.⁴⁰ As installed, the

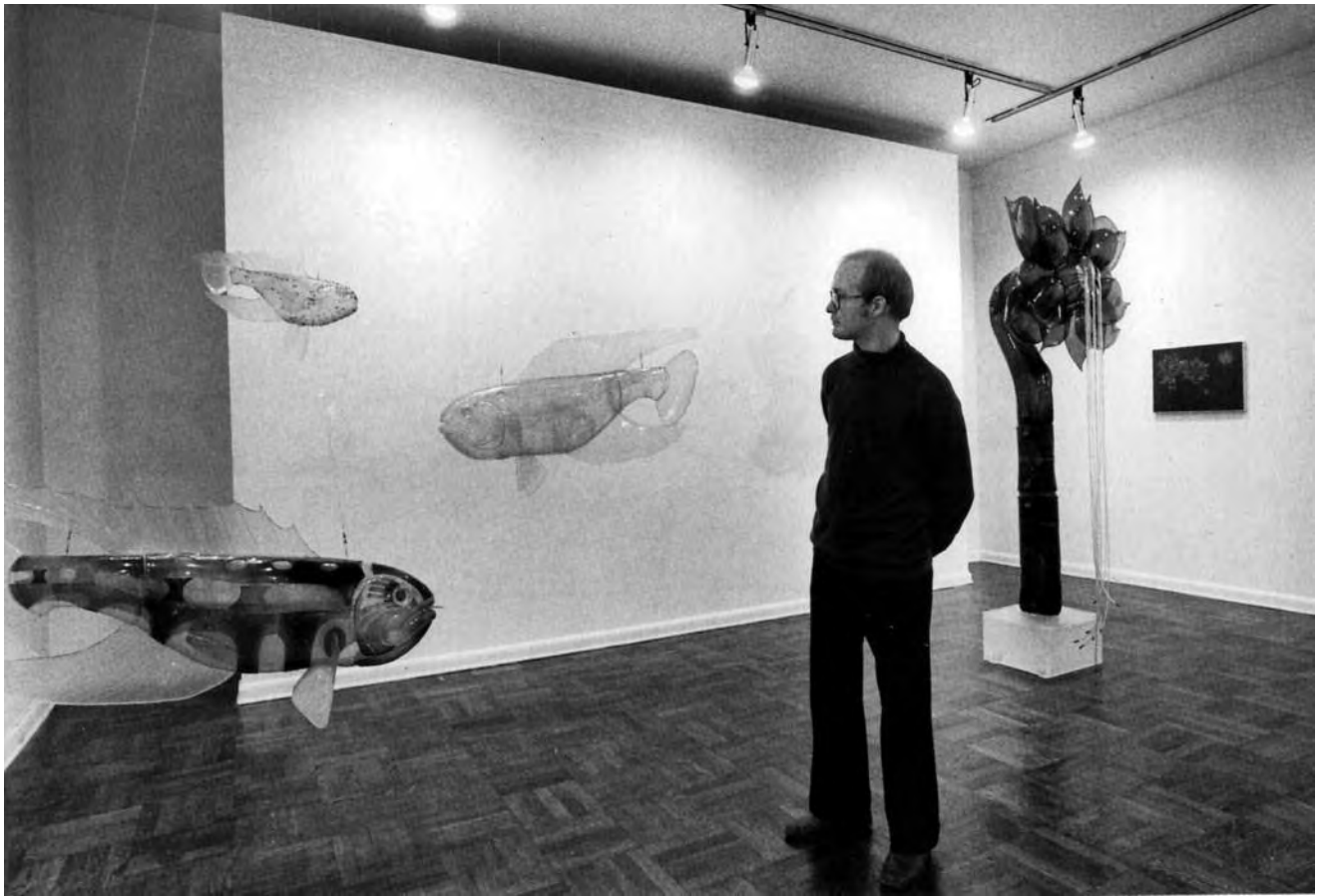


Fig. 7. Lee Bontecou, Installation view at Leo Castelli Gallery, New York (1971).

works point to a contemporary and radical desire for a new subjectivity that takes its power from its association with an identity of otherness—to be other than human.

Yet the fish and flowers, with their synthetic membranes and their positive and negative connotations, remain connected to the world of the cyborg. Yellow, orange, and clear pieces of plastic—like flayed skin, half natural and half artificial, beautiful and sinister—are fastened on with screws. With tentacular test tubes reminiscent of the rat's prosthesis, they are plastically altered, techno-mutant flora and fauna. Ambivalent creatures, they resemble atomic mutants and spacemen with external hoses. They are frankenfish and frankenflowers—at times human-scaled and encased in what could be called a recombinant plastic membrane—that point to liberating new subjectivities and life forms, while also functioning as critique and as testament to Bontecou's growing ecological concerns. As to Bontecou's own intentions at the time, she has underscored that she saw the fish and flowers as a commentary on nuclear fears and on the environment. They were "anti-pollution oriented,"⁴¹ and in that regard her concerns dovetail with the whole earth environmentalist agenda of 1960s leftists. Her attitude aligns with the humanism that attended the critique of the bomb in the postwar era. I argue here, however, that Bontecou's work anticipates later concerns voiced by Haraway and others.

Bontecou's plastic material produces strange associations with the body: her sculptures with synthetic "skins" and plastic

tubing hanging from central "eye" forms can be compared to works by Eva Hesse and other artists whom critic Lucy Lippard linked together under the label "eccentric abstraction."⁴² Both her choice of materials and her hands-on engagement encouraged German artist and critic Rolf-Gunter Dienst to place Bontecou's work in a similar context: he claims Lucas Samaras and H. E. Kalinowski, with his employment of dead skin, to be her strange bedfellows. Dienst's essay is indicative of the enthusiastic reception Bontecou received in Germany (more so than in Latin America⁴³). Indeed, Dienst correctly calls Bontecou's work a protest against Minimal and Systemic art; similarly, it is also distant from industrially finished products and does not address concerns over mass communication and consumerism, common themes among her contemporaries.⁴⁴ The plastic work, which Bontecou fabricated herself, continues along this trajectory, just as her painstakingly rendered drawings counter Conceptual practices.

While Bontecou produced relatively few plastic sculptures, she explored their subject matter in countless drawings. Often rendered on black paper in silver pencils or white charcoal, the imagery alternates between nightmarish flowers looming like sentinels in postapocalyptic landscapes and mutated fish with luminescent exoskeletons glowing in what might be radiated waters (1970; Fig. 8). The black paper of certain drawings emulates the darkness of outer space and the recesses of the ocean floor. Silvery lines form the contours of the fish, while

revealing their intestines. Bontecou voraciously read fiction and nonfictional tales of the sea including adventure stories or ones that provided detailed descriptions of boats and sea life such as *Kon-Tiki* or Peter Freuchen's 1957 *Book of the Seven Seas*, which describes countless underwater creatures that live in blackness and develop enormous telescopic eyes, emit light with built-in torches, or squirt luminous fluids.⁴⁵ As Bontecou is known to have spent innumerable hours observing wildlife in her rural home and in museums of natural history and, similarly, aquatic life in the aquarium or in museum dioramas, she saw fish comparable to Freuchen's descriptions, such as angler fish that glow in the dark and resemble many of her fish forms. Echoing these aquatic creatures that shimmer like ghosts in dark waters, the motifs in her drawings blend the real and the implausible.⁴⁶

The black drawings simulate the dark ocean floor and dimly lit displays in natural history museums and aquariums. These institutional displays engender complex forms of spectatorship similar to those of her art. The hanging fish looks the observer in the eye as in an aquarium or diorama. The welded sculptures function somewhat differently. While their aggressive advancing forms seem to physically threaten the viewer, their apertures beckon, luring her in with a tempting voyeurism.⁴⁷ "I like space that never stops. Black is like that. Holes and boxes mean secrets and shelter," she tantalizingly offered in 1960.⁴⁸ We peer into her drawings as if to catch a glimpse into the dark, secret recesses of her sculpture, and we discover luminescent fish radiating in the paper's darkness. The inclusion of an internal frame in some drawings of the late 1990s (1999; Pl. 9) redoubles this effect.⁴⁹ We gaze with wonder into the ocean depths where these fish reside.

Indeed, for Bontecou, the oceanic rivals the cosmic as the site of "visual wonders and horrors." Wavelike forms are ubiquitous in her drawings—she could observe the waves all day since they change, she reminisced⁵⁰—and her tonal variations recall the fog which she loved as well. Spending summers in Nova Scotia at her grandmother's house, Bontecou's passion for the sea began at an early age. Her mother's family is from the sea, as she put it.⁵¹ Her cousin remembers her as an ardent naturalist when they summered together in Nova Scotia as children, collecting butterflies, snake skins, and rocks and crouching over tide pools to observe aquatic life.⁵² The beauty of the terrain, the lure of the sea and the rugged individualism of the island's inhabitants were etched indelibly into her imagination. Her encounter with the ocean's powerful forces and rich underwater life compounded with the tales she read of sightings of strange creatures to fill her with a sense of marvel. Bontecou's drawn fish are as close to sea monsters as her flowers are to space-suited moonwalkers. They conjoin the familiar and the strange, as do the fictional and nonfictional accounts of the sea that she has voraciously continued to read over the years. As late as 2007, she was obsessed with articles about sea monsters. A man had sighted one during World War II, she remembered. "You can harpoon it but not shoot it," she explained. "Who knows?" she asked.⁵³ The famed Loch Ness Monster was, in fact, a popular subject in the news during the late sixties and

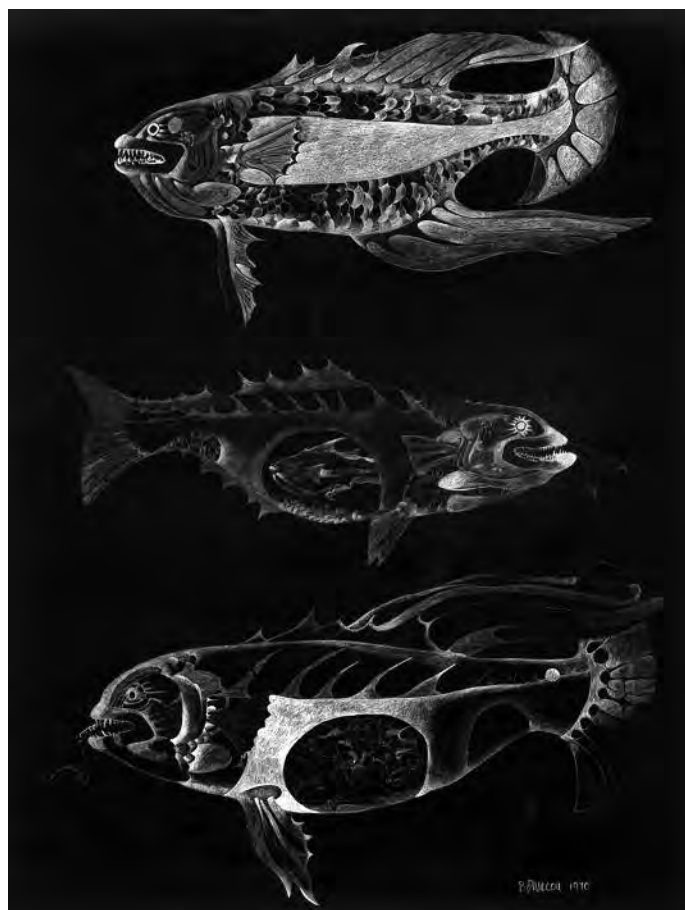


Fig. 8. Lee Bontecou, *Untitled* (1970), colored pencil on black paper, 26 1/8" x 20". The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

early seventies, when scientific teams tried to establish the truth of its existence and the authenticity of disputed photos showing the long-necked creature.

Attracted to the monstrous as well as the natural and the marvelous, Bontecou relished the bizarre, quirky, and androgynous and often found it humorous. Not surprisingly, when questioned, she recalled the graphic style of and amusing characters in the comic illustrations of her youth. For example, she jokingly likened the irregular shapes of her favorite cactus plants to "The Powerful Katrinka"—a woman with a small head, a large body, and a crop of children of varying sizes and shapes under her wing—who appeared in Fontaine Fox's comic-strip "Toonerville Folks," which ran in newspapers from 1908 to 1955.⁵⁴ Katrinka was especially celebrated in the 1920s, when Wilna Hervey, a six-foot-three-inch, three-hundred-pound actress played her in a film.⁵⁵ More recently, during a visit to the 2004 Carnegie International, Bontecou seemed amused by the idiosyncratic and androgynous body types in Polish artist Kataryna Kozyra's 1999 video installation, *The Rites of Spring*. Across nine screens, elderly nude dancers parody their youthful counterparts, while wearing prosthetic genitalia and wigs on their pubic areas as a subversive form of "cross-dressing." Without essentializing any reading of Bontecou's work, an appreciation of the bawdy is evident. Her own dual-gendered language of

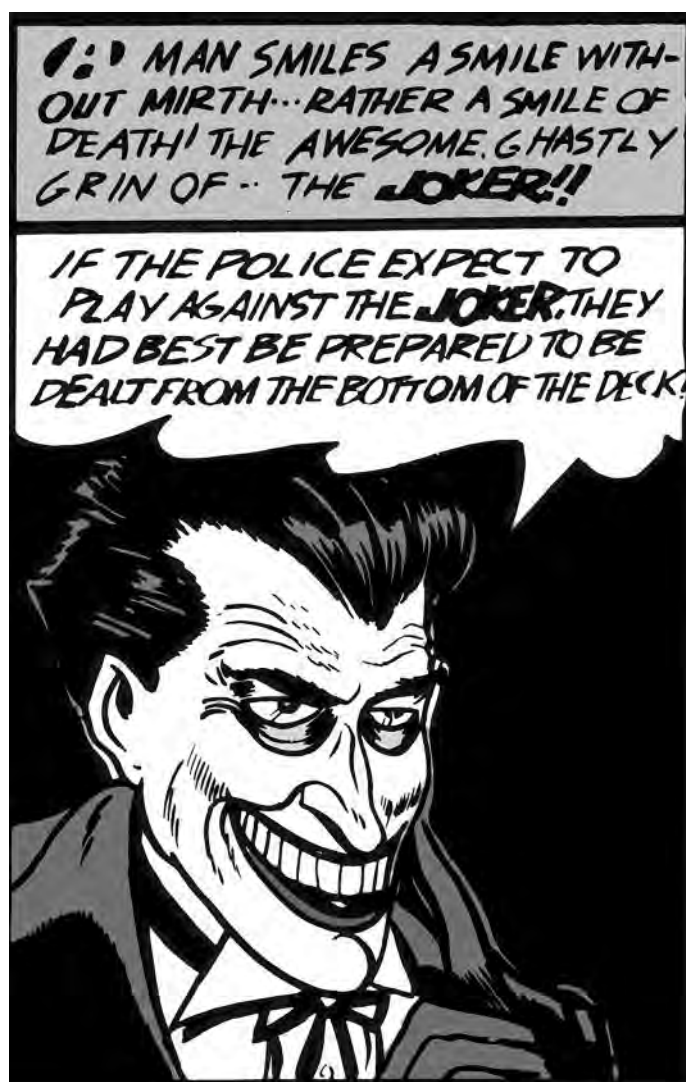


Fig. 9. Robert Kane, *The Joker*, in *Batman* 1, no. 1 (April 1940).

the body, which takes the form of a quirky, carnivalesque, grotesque realism with aggressively projecting and receding forms, was noted early on in the criticism of her work: Annette Michelson, writing in the mid-1960s about Bontecou's work, admired its provocative celebration of opposites, of attraction and repulsion.⁵⁶ Just as Bakhtin eludes simple binaries in his references to orifices and protuberances, Bontecou's work too embraces a slippage of categories and a destruction of binaries.⁵⁷ Her humor is omnivorous and androgynous: the polymorphous perverse greets the carnivalesque.

In the same exhibition, Bontecou saw and seemed drawn to the same qualities in the work of Robert Crumb. She expressed admiration for his crude humor. His women, whose caricatured protruding buttocks and overly muscular torsos angered some feminists in the seventies, amused Bontecou. She looked at Crumb's expressive line and use of black and white, but it is his combination of carnivalesque humor, grotesque realism, political commentary, and psychosexual content that I believe comes closest to her spirit.⁵⁸

Bontecou has shared that the humor and superb graphic style of comic-book artists, such as the early black-and-white

Popeye drawings by E. Z. Seghers⁵⁹ or those of Robert Kane, the creator of *Batman*, appealed to her. Kane did not traffic in talking anthropomorphic mice, like those of Walt Disney, but instead used a fierce form of comic abstraction that frightened and amused. Bontecou remembered collecting *Batman* comics as a young girl and gravitating to the Joker, the brainchild of Kane, whose leering grin both scared and fascinated her (Fig. 9). She related the Joker to Grimm fairy tales in the way they trigger the childhood imagination: "As a child you look, and you see more."⁶⁰ With ghastly white skin and lurid green hair, the Joker is perhaps most identified by his red lips and hideous large, grinning teeth—recalling the ubiquitous grin that would appear in and haunt a range of Bontecou's works, from those that incorporate saw blades reminiscent of teeth to her plastic fish and drawn creatures with gaping mouths. Bontecou is not an avid fan of the comics, did not read or collect them as an adult, and is by and large more of a naturalist. But as a consummate graphic artist who saw herself as an outsider to the art world and to canonical modernism (like Philip Guston whom she admired), she was a kindred spirit to these draftsmen, and certain qualities of their work are significant: the dark humor of Kane and the grotesque realism and comic body language of Crumb.

Bontecou's drawings have grown increasingly dark and hallucinatory over the years, a development encouraged in part by her isolated living conditions and her reading of visionary poets such as William Blake.⁶¹ At the same time, she has produced a startling oeuvre of hanging work, in which visions of oceanic space or solar galaxies are evoked and where delicacy has replaced the heavy mass that characterizes earlier work. Freed from the wall and other enclosing elements, they realize her cosmic vision: the worldsapes, which were conjured in the interior spaces of her earlier sculpture and dark soot of her drawings, now fill galleries with boundless beauty. These late sculptures are expansive and, for some viewers, calming. Their tranquility, however, must be considered in tandem with the disturbing graphic imagery that she simultaneously produced (1996; Pl. 10, and Pl. 9). Swarms of teeming creatures that bring together the organic and the bizarre are pulled to the surface of the drawings often by a frame within a frame; they tease us to peer into their dark—seemingly dank—worlds. Intricate, fine lines and subtle shadings both define and disperse their forms. Beaks, claws, teeth, and eyes commingle in the blackness of an underwater/outer space matrix, which reminds us that "Life is a verb and... the actors are not all human."⁶² We look into this world of creatures that break boundaries in a monstrous and libidinous manner and recall Bontecou's youthful musings on how black "opened everything up." It impelled her to make her sculpture and fostered a riveting graphic production that ranges from the cosmic to the carnivalesque, and ultimately points the way to new, more emancipated subjectivities. •

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Notes

I would like to thank the Wolfe Institute at Brooklyn College for awarding me a Faculty Fellowship in the Humanities for my continued work on Lee Bontecou. A version of this paper was delivered at the College Art Association in 2012 and at the Menil Collection in April 2014.

1. James R. Mellow, "Bontecou's Well-Fed Fish and Malevolent Flowers," *New York Times*, June 6, 1971, D19. My text here follows extensive writing on Bontecou in four essays published from 1992 until 2007 (cited below). In July 1986 Lee Bontecou and I spent a weekend at the Giles-Bontecou farm in Pennsylvania photographing her work. Much of the primary information in this essay comes from taped interviews from this time, as well as from many subsequent informal interviews between 1986 through 2007 (often in telephone calls initiated by Bontecou herself), which I have dated when possible. After decades of scholarly study, I have developed ideas and readings of her work in this essay that draw upon and extend this earlier material.
2. Lee Bontecou, "Artist's Statement" (2003), in *Lee Bontecou: A Retrospective*, ed. Elizabeth A.T. Smith (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, and Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2003), n.p.
3. Bontecou recalled visiting a Vincent van Gogh show with her mother and marveling at his fields rendered in varied strokes, Bontecou, interview by the author, July 1986. Bontecou also talks about Van Gogh's drawings in her interview with Dore Ashton, Oral History Interview with Lee Bontecou, Jan. 10, 2009, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
4. Bontecou, lecture presented at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, New York, 1988, Skowhegan Lecture Archive, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 11.
5. Bontecou, in Tony Towle, "Two Conversations with Lee Bontecou," *Print Collector's Newsletter* 2, no. 2 (May–June 1971): 25. Bontecou began to make prints in 1962, with Tatyana Grosman at Universal Limited Art Editions.
6. Although her drawings are also the products of arduous labor, she considers drawing a much freer process than sculpture. See her discussion of this in *ibid.*
7. Bontecou, interview by the author, July 1986.
8. Susan Sontag writes about Antonin Artaud's significance at this time in "Happenings: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition" (1962), in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), 272–74. Bontecou liked and attended several Happenings and performances in New York and mentioned to me that she loved their humor and spontaneity.
9. Wilhemina Van Ness, e-mail to the author, April 7, 2009. Bontecou also went to Claes Oldenburg's Ray Gun Theater performances. See Elizabeth A. T. Smith, "All Freedom in Every Sense," in Smith, ed., *Lee Bontecou: A Retrospective*, 172. Bontecou also saw Jean Tinguely when she visited Paris during an exhibition of her work at the Sonnabend Gallery. Bontecou, interview by the author, Oct. 16, 2003.
10. In fact, one of Bontecou's soot drawings was included in the exhibition "Live/Work: Performance into Drawing," organized by Cornelia H. Butler, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2007.
11. Bontecou, Skowhegan lecture, 5.
12. Bontecou, interview by the author, July 1986. See also my essay, "Lee Bontecou's Worldsapes," in Smith, ed., *Lee Bontecou: A Retrospective*, 203.
13. Bontecou, interview by the author, July 1986.
14. Bontecou, in Towle, "Two Conversations with Lee Bontecou," 27. Linda Owen, in an article on the soot drawings, describes Bontecou's comparable process of working back into the black residue with razors, in "Fire and Paper: An Examination of the Materials and Techniques of Lee Bontecou's Soot Drawings," *The Book and Paper Group Annual*, no. 27 (2008): 50. As early as 1975, Richard S. Field compared her etched lines to her welded skeletal frames and her aquatints to the canvas inserts, in his *Prints and Drawings by Lee Bontecou* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Univ., Davison Art Center, 1975), 8.
15. Bontecou, interview by the author, July 1986.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. Donald Judd, "Lee Bontecou," *Arts Magazine* 39, no. 7 (April 1965): 20. Alex Potts argues that Judd, in his essay "Specific Objects," tried to "have it both ways" by stressing both formal and metaphoric elements. Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination, Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), 274–78. For a discussion of Judd's writings on Bontecou, see Jo Applin, "This Threatening and Possibly Functioning Object: Lee Bontecou and the Sculptural Void," *Art History* 29, no. 3 (June 2006): 488–89.
19. Bontecou first used the term "worldsapes" in Towle, "Two Conversations with Lee Bontecou," and I have focused on the concept in "Lee Bontecou's Worldsapes," 200–11; and in the earlier essays "Lee Bontecou's Warnings," *Art Journal* 53, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 56–61; and "Lee Bontecou: Heart of a Conquering Darkness," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 12, no. 1 (Fall 1992): 38–44.
20. John F. Kennedy, acceptance speech for the Democratic Party nomination for the Presidency of the United States, Memorial Coliseum, Los Angeles, July 15, 1960, "The American Presidency Project," <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25966>. David Anfam relates the reading of Abstract Expressionism as the "abstract sublime" to this speech. Anfam, "Transatlantic Anxieties, Especially Bill's Folly," in *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context*, ed. Joan Marter (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2007), 61. Bontecou acknowledges her admiration for Abstract Expressionist artists in similar terms: that she is inspired by their "boundless freedom." Bontecou, "Artist's Statement" (2003).
21. Dore Ashton, "Illusion and Fantasy: Lee [Magica Fantasia di Lee]," *Metro*, no. 8 (April 1963): 29. Bontecou mentioned repeatedly her gratitude to Ashton for moving the discourse on her work into new directions.
22. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984), 317. Robert Storr was the first to connect Bontecou with the grotesque. See his essay "Seek and Hide," in Smith, ed., *Lee Bontecou: A Retrospective*, 191.
23. For a discussion of Bakhtin and Soviet Socialist Realism, see Michael Holquist, prologue to Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, xiii–xxiii.
24. See Geoffrey Galt Harpham's discussion of Bakhtin and Baudelaire in, *On the Grotesque, Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 70–74.
25. Bontecou, Skowhegan lecture, 5.
26. Bontecou, interview by the author, July 1986.
27. Bontecou connects the black of the worldsapes to world politics and events. See my "Lee Bontecou's Worldsapes." Jo Applin suggestively compares Bontecou's use of black to Theodor Adorno's characterization of black as antiutopian. Jo Applin, "Surviving Reality: Lee Bontecou's Worldsapes," *Tate Papers*, no. 14 (Oct. 2010): 12; online at <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/taterearch/tatepapers/10autumn/applin.shtm>.
28. Bontecou admired George Grosz during her early years at the Art Students League. See my essay, "Lee Bontecou: Plastic Fish and Grinning Saw Blades," *Woman's Art Journal* 28, no. 1 (Spring–Summer 2007): 17.
29. See Michael R. Taylor, "Gorky and Surrealism," in *Arshile Gorky: A Retrospective* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2009), 94–138.

30. See Jane Pavitt and David Crowley, "The Hi-Tech Cold War," in *Cold War Modern, Design 1945–1970* (London: V & A Publishing, 2008), 180.
31. Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline, "Cyborgs and Space," *Astronautics* (Sept. 1960), reprinted in *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray (New York: Routledge, 1995), 30. Bontecou never mentioned to me seeing this image. For more on European artists' responses to the cyborg, including Archigram's Suitaloon project, see Pavitt and Crowley, "The Hi-Tech Cold War," 174.
32. Wallace Cloud, "Man Amplifiers: Machines That Let You Carry a Ton," *Popular Science*, Nov. 1965, 70–72. The suits, if motored, would have allowed a person to lift a thousand pounds with one hand, like Superman, the author quips.
33. Tom and Jane Doyle, interview by the author, New York, March 25, 2009.
34. Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" (1985), in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
35. *Ibid.*, 151, 154, and 181. Quoted in part also in Hadler, "Worldscapes."
36. Donna Haraway, "Birth of the Kennel," lecture at the European Graduate School, August 2000; <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/donna-haraway/articles/birth-of-the-kennel>.
37. Haraway discusses Lynn Margulis's writings in *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008), 31. In this book, Haraway elaborates her more recent thoughts on companion species and the intersections of biology and technology in the current economic and industrial context.
38. Bontecou frequently mentioned lightness and translucency to me and others in relation to her use of plastic. See, for example, Ashton, Interview with Bontecou, Jan. 10, 2009.
39. According to her neighbors in Pennsylvania, in addition to pet dogs, Bontecou and her husband William Giles cared for a three-legged deer; they once also rescued a young hawk, which lived in a beautiful cage until it was old enough to set free. Tom and Jane Doyle, interview by the author, New York, March 25, 2009.
40. See Stephen Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion, 2000), 94. Baker relies heavily on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who insisted in their concept of "becoming animal" that there should be no symbolism, allegory, or metaphor in relation to the animal world (120).
41. Ashton, interview with Bontecou, Jan. 10, 2009.
42. Lucy Lippard included Bontecou in her article "Eccentric Abstraction," *Art International* 10, no. 9 (Nov. 1966): 28, 34–40.
43. Bontecou exhibited internationally in the sixties in Germany and in Latin America as early as 1961 in the Sixth São Paulo Biennale. The connection to Brazil is intriguing with its politics and aesthetics of the garbage heap albeit in relationship to colonialism. At this point, however, I have found no critical response to her work in Brazil from that exhibit. I would like to thank Agnaldo Farias and Paulo Miyada at the archives in São Paulo for their help with this information.
44. Rolf-Gunter Dienst, "Lee Bontecou, Oder Anmerkungen zur Amerikanischen Kunstsituation" (Lee Bontecou, or observations regarding the American art scene), in *Lee Bontecou* (Berlin: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, 1968). Bontecou, H. E. Kalinowski, and Lucas Samaras showed their work together in New York. See Charlotte Willard, "In the Galleries: New Forms, New Values," *New York Post*, Oct. 22, 1966, 46.
45. Peter Freuchen, *Peter Freuchen's Book of the Seven Seas* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 1957), 62. Bontecou conversation with the author, Oct. 10, 2005. She also read the works of Patrick O'Brien, and Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*.
46. In a humorous parallel to my argument here, the inventors of the enhanced rat likened themselves to fish, schooled in cybernetics and intelligent enough to invent the needed apparatus to thrive out of water; see Clynes and Kline, "Cyborgs and Space," 29.
47. Applin subtly problematizes the sculptural encounter with its multiple dynamics of desire and aggression in her article "This Threatening and Possibly Functioning Object."
48. Bontecou, quoted in Charlotte Willard, "Women of American Art," *Look*, no. 24 (Sept. 27, 1960): 75. One also thinks of the dynamics of vision in the work of Joseph Cornell, whom Bontecou called the "master of mystery." Bontecou, interview by the author, July 1986. Cornell kept correspondence and note files on Bontecou (some under her original name, Nathalie Bontecou), Joseph Cornell Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
49. See Donna De Salvo, "Bontecou's Sculpture through Drawing," in Smith, ed., *Lee Bontecou: A Retrospective*, 219.
50. Bontecou, interview by the author, Sept. 22, 2006.
51. Bontecou, interview by the author, Oct. 10, 2005.
52. Dora Flash Bourne, interview by the author, New York, March 17, 2007.
53. Bontecou, interview by the author, Feb. 11, 2007.
54. Bontecou, interview by the author, Oct. 10, 2005. See Herb Galewitz, introduction to Herb Galewitz and Don Winslow, *Fontaine Fox's Toonerville Trolley* (New York: Scribner, 1972).
55. See Joseph P. Eckhardt, "The Biggest Girl: Wilna Hervey, Actress and Artist," Betzwood Archives, <http://faculty.mc3.edu/jeckhard/biggestgirlarticle/thebiggestgirl.html>. Katrinka might also have appealed to Bontecou as a no-nonsense, unglamorous folk heroine, who, like Bontecou's Canadian relatives, took matters into her own hands and broke binary, male-female stereotypes.
56. Annette Michelson, "Lee Bontecou," in *Lee Bontecou* (Paris: Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, 1965).
57. Robert Stam discusses this aspect of Bakhtin, in his *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1989), 162–63.
58. Bontecou and I saw the art of Robert Crumb and Kataryna Kozyro in 2004 at the Carnegie International, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, where a section of the exhibition was also devoted to Bontecou's work. Crumb's crude humor and ambiguous satirical stance, simultaneously endorsing and mocking hippie culture, in many ways mirrors her position as someone who admires aspects of technology yet enjoys her rural and isolated home in Pennsylvania.
59. A documentary on Seghers reminded her of an earlier excitement over these drawings. Bontecou, interview by the author, April 10, 2004.
60. Bontecou, interview by the author, July 22, 2004. Appearing in 1940, when Bontecou was nine, the Joker has by now terrorized generations of children with his cruel humor.
61. Bontecou, interview by the author, Feb. 11, 2007.
62. Haraway, "Birth of a Kennel."

GENDERED RECEPTION: THERE AND BACK AGAIN

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF HELEN FRANKENTHALER

By Sybil E. Gohari

Over the course of her career, Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011) had a dynamic and complicated relationship with art critics. In their interpretations of her nonfigurative paintings, reviewers frequently infused contemporary notions of gender and gendered stereotypes.¹ Such critiques often belittled her creative output, pegging her as a follower and not fully crediting her as the innovator she was. A contemporary reading of her critical reception can contribute to a re-assessment of Helen Frankenthaler in American art history (1956; Fig. 1). Analyzing how gender was often used to exclude the artist from the core of the avant-garde art world during the course of her career and a close consideration of her reception are essential to a broadened appreciation of this artist. An examination of the mechanics of her relegation will reveal how critics perpetuated such notions throughout her career.

While concerns about gender are ever-present, they fluctuate in the reception of Frankenthaler between overt and indirect manifestations, illuminating the fact that gender is malleable and plays varying roles in the reception of the artist. The definition of gender in this article is subtle, nuanced, and historically shaped, and regardless of how Frankenthaler defined herself—she did not embrace feminism or the women's art movement—conceptions of gender affected interpretations of her creations. Mid-century viewers instilled contemporary notions of gender into the inherent qualities of her nonfigurative output, and subsequent critics and scholars constructed meaning based on past critiques, the conditions of their engagement with the objects, and current approaches to identity. As critics infused gender into their readings of her work, such reception took hold in the art world.

Gender has long been intertwined with art world access. Society's approach to men and women as individuals as well as to their roles within society has been culturally determined and changes from one historical period to another. The characteristics and attributes ascribed to males and females, thereby comprising gender, have altered throughout our history to accommodate the shifting needs of the culture-at-large.² Gender is neither fixed nor "natural" or inherent but deter-



Fig. 1. Helen Frankenthaler working in her West End Avenue studio, New York (1956), © Burt Glinn / Magnum Photos.

mined by the repetition of culturally constructed acts, which change throughout history depending on what a particular society in a certain time deems acceptable.³ Further, gender rarely exists in a vacuum but incorporates the social understanding of other aspects of identity, such as race and class.

The shifting views on gender throughout the twentieth century affected the critical view of Helen Frankenthaler. She was cast as an artistic link, a follower, not central to any art movement, a position which, ironically, enabled her fame, success, and inclusion in "the narrative of modernism."⁴ As such, through her development of the soak-stain technique, critics and scholars credited Frankenthaler with initiating an art form, Color-Field painting, later fully realized and honed by male artists. Frankenthaler thereby received recognition—

albeit often with somewhat condescending undertones—seldom imparted to female artists of the period. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard explain how some female artists in the 1950s were able to attain recognition and praise. They argue that contemporaries such as Grace Hartigan (1922–2008), Joan Mitchell (1925–92), and Frankenthaler achieved “unusual visibility and recognition ... in part because they had cast themselves—and were being cast by critics—as disciples and followers of the innovative male founders of the ... Abstract Expressionist movement.”⁵ And since curators included so few women in exhibitions and group shows, the competition for inclusion and recognition was tremendous.

Issues of gender and biological associations between an artist and her creations are inaccurate social constructions, according to Linda Nochlin, who wrote, “Women artists are more inward-looking, more delicate and nuanced in their treatment of their medium, it may be asserted ... if daintiness, delicacy, and preciousness are to be counted as earmarks of a feminine style, there is nothing fragile about Rosa Bonheur’s *Horse Fair*, nor dainty and introverted about Helen Frankenthaler’s giant canvases.”⁶ Additionally, she underscores that things ‘feminine’ in art have the implication of being received as maintaining less impact when applied to female artists.

Exploring the consistent negotiation between interpretations of femininity and masculinity in the critical discourse on Frankenthaler and her contemporaries, Lisa Saltzman argues that: “The critical tendency to perceive and locate gender in the all-over canvases of the New York School painters can be read as an almost desperate, albeit unacknowledged, attempt to identify and establish difference and maintain order, at precisely a moment when aesthetic practice and social structures emerged radically altered from the Second World War.”⁷ Such gendered interpretations of the formal properties in her works painted Frankenthaler in a less favorable light, while it elevated her male contemporaries by reinterpreting their paintings to align with a masculinized artistic narrative. Writers devised such interpretations, Saltzman contends, by first associating painterly qualities with bodily fluids, and then distancing works by female artists like Frankenthaler from those of male artists like Pollock. Saltzman explains, “Pollock may have flung paint about in a bacchanalian frenzy, but that was part of his mythic, male genius, his actively creative artistic persona, impregnating the virgin canvas with his life-giving seed. Frankenthaler, in contrast, merely allowed accidents to happen, passively staining the linen canvases with the seep and ooze of bodily fluids.”⁸ E.C. Goossen’s 1961 statements on Frankenthaler illustrate this observation: “Frankenthaler’s painting is manifestly that of a woman ... Without Pollock’s painting hers is unthinkable. What she took from him was masculine; the almost hard-edged, linear splashes of duco enamel. What she made with it was distinctly feminine, the broad, bleeding-edged stain on raw linen.”⁹

In interviews, Frankenthaler indirectly confronted the correlation between her sex and artistic creations. Asked regularly about what her art reveals and represents in this regard, Frankenthaler, who rarely discussed her work, commented on the ‘meaning’ of her art: “My answer to that

would be the same as my answer to your question about nature or landscape, and my talking about the *self*. That is, every fact of one’s reality is in one’s work: age, height, weight, history, nationality, religion, sex, pains, habits, attractions, and being female is one of many in this long list for me.” She went on to note, “What you call ‘female quality’ is a serious fact that I enjoy, and part of a total working picture.”¹⁰ Here, Frankenthaler conflated her identity with all aspects of her approach to painting. As a result, critics could not dismiss her work solely on account of its ‘femininity.’ Thus, in what appears to be an attempt to decrease such direct correlations, Frankenthaler avoided specific connections based on personal traits that might stereotype, categorize, or pigeonhole her.

In spite of her evasive replies to such queries, critics continued to underscore ideas about her gender in their readings of her work. By eliding the issue, Frankenthaler did not encourage further writing on the subject, nor did she contribute to the rhetoric, publicly ignoring the issue and instead emphasizing the formal qualities of her paintings.

Writing about female Abstract Expressionists and their attempts to eliminate the “self” from their painting, Michael Leja explained that “Elaine [de Kooning, 1918–89] and other female Abstract Expressionists were structurally excluded from the construction of subjectivity embedded in the full experience and production of Abstract Expressionist art.”¹¹ Frankenthaler and other mid-century women artists shared a similar challenge of obscuring personal aspects that critics could interpret as underscoring their ‘femininity.’¹² Frankenthaler, for example, may have shifted her palette and form during the late 1950s and early 1960s, in works such as *Yellow Caterpillar* (1961; Pl. 11) and *Small’s Paradise* (1964; Pl. 12), in order to evade correlations between her gender and her output in terms of ‘female qualities.’¹³ Critics read the light, muted colors and loose forms and application of paint in her early 1950s paintings as indicative of her sex, and by extension, her perceived femininity, as in *Shatter* (1953; Pl. 13). Her early 1960s style, on the other hand, in which she utilized a bold, deep palette and blockier forms, could be interpreted as a coded expression. Rather than taking a man’s name, using only initials or some other form of concealment, such stylistic alteration may be interpreted as a way for the artist to have emphasized her works’ gender neutral / gender irrelevant qualities, thereby redirecting critical focus away from ideas about her sex.

An overview of critical writings reveals that reviews, articles, and comments about Frankenthaler’s position in the history of art cast her as either a follower of Jackson Pollock, expanding upon his ideas; a disciple of Clement Greenberg, the influential modernist theorist with whom Frankenthaler had a five-year relationship during the early 1950s and through whom she gained access to artists in the inner circles of Abstract Expressionism; or an artistic link between the (male) artists of the New York School and Color-Field art, where Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland reigned. Her painting *Mountains and Sea* (1952; Pl. 14) had become the marker of a new style. James Schuyler, for example, noted in a review of a 1957 exhibition of Frankenthaler’s work at Tibor de

Nagy Gallery, “To sum up at the beginning: it is in work of this quality that the continuity of free abstract painting, the kind associated with Jackson Pollock, is found.”¹⁴ William Berkson noted a few years later that “having taken a clue from Pollock’s blotted calligraphy of 1951–52, she invented what has been called the ‘stain gesture’ in a large, airy painting called *Mountains and Sea*; and there has been no end of reference to the influence it had on at least two painters, Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland.”¹⁵ These reviews emphasized influence—Pollock’s on Frankenthaler, and hers on Noland and Louis, underscoring the value of male creation over female innovation, whether Frankenthaler was inspired by, or inspired, male artists.

As recently as 1998 David Rimanelli wrote about an exhibition of her work at the Guggenheim Museum, “Frankenthaler’s innovation wasn’t really innovation: CG [Clement Greenberg] had probably alerted her to the way the oil in certain 1951 paintings by Jackson Pollock had seeped into the cotton duck, becoming ‘one’ with it.”¹⁶ About that same exhibition, Roberta Smith noted, “She had taken Pollock’s dripped-paint technique and de Kooning’s open-ended improvisation, along with Arshile Gorky’s overripe organicity, adding paint thinned to a watery liquid ... in saturated or pale colors that seemed innately hot and new.”¹⁷ Once again, these critics deemphasized Frankenthaler’s artistic innovations to focus primarily upon male artists whose paintings apparently enabled her creativity. In fact, Frankenthaler acknowledged not only the inspiration she took from de Kooning, Matisse, and others but her indebtedness to Pollock, with whom she became friendly through Greenberg and had opportunities to watch working in his East Hampton studio. The negativity in these reviews, however, stems from the identification of Frankenthaler principally in relation to others, with the effect of downplaying her originality and agency, and positioning her as a talented follower.

Frankenthaler was neither a first generation Abstract Expressionist nor a Color-Field artist, and yet her art is rarely considered without direct comparison to members of these movements that preceded and followed her, respectively. Her contribution is generally correlated to its influence on key Color-Field painters, to the peripheral role of inspiring male artists’ creation. The reception of her male contemporaries, including Louis and Noland (who, upon Greenberg’s urging, visited her studio to view *Mountains and Sea*), reveals a different tone, generally recognizing Louis for the powerful effect of his works, and Noland for his risk-taking in creating his new style.¹⁸ In 1969, Edward Henning, for example, described “the sheer visual impact” of Louis’s work,¹⁹ while Charles Millard noted his “aggressive black outlining” and “manipulation of color,” describing it as “magical,” and positioning Louis as an artistic explorer.²⁰ Millard wrote that Louis’s “hues were not used as fields but as atmospheres, atmospheres that eventually resolved themselves into their various color components,” concluding that Louis’s output



Fig. 2. Gordon Parks, *Helen Frankenthaler*, from *Life* 42, no. 10 (May 13, 1957), Time Life Pictures / Getty Images.

represents “a microcosm of the passage from dramatic, freely drawn, large-scale canvases to the more contemplative, not always so large, but nonetheless powerful work of the generation after Abstract Expressionism.”²¹ David Carrier argued in 1986 that Louis’s paintings “are hard to see away from the powerful rhetoric which celebrates them.”²² Noland was hailed as “a dean of American Color Field abstraction by some critics,”²³ who noted the extraordinary effect of his work. For example, Al Brunelle proclaimed: “Kenneth Noland has entered a new elite of unforeseeable men ... The pleasure of your encounter with his work will not depend on mine. It will be the gift of Noland’s confidence to your own.”²⁴ The tone, tenor, and basic focus of these reviews stand in stark contrast to critics’ consideration of Frankenthaler.

The critical construction of femininity and masculinity in mid-century abstract art created clear, binary delineations. Saltzman writes, “In their attribution of masculinity to canvases painted by male artists and femininity to those painted by female artists, critics asserted the fundamental primacy of sexual difference, and did so at precisely the moment when gender boundaries were seen as being in

danger of disappearing, both artistically and socially.”²⁵ Thus, despite many similar formal choices, critics ostensibly dissociated mid-century male and female abstract artists by marking their creative endeavors necessarily divergent. The example of Frankenthaler and Louis proves valuable. Saltzman explains, “That Louis’s painting, despite fundamental indebtedness and similarity to Frankenthaler’s stain painting, could be constructed as supremely and singularly masculine, was a critical fiction that persisted despite the more nuanced interpretations of later critics.”²⁶

Broude and Garrard illuminate Frankenthaler’s position connecting major arts movements: “Greenberg positioned Frankenthaler not as the innovative leader of a new school of painting, but as a precursor, a link between the first generation of male Abstract Expressionists and the male painters of the Washington Color School, thereby providing her with the only credentials that would at the time have allowed her inscription, albeit marginally, into the annals of ‘his-story.’”²⁷ Critics validated Frankenthaler’s success because of her influence on Louis and Noland, artists deemed, along with Frank Stella, Jules Olitski, and Barnett Newman, to have “established a new direction in American abstract art in the 1960s.”²⁸ This view of lesser female creativity, as expressed in the compliment that Hans Hofmann paid to Lee Krasner (1908–84) in the late 1930s, proclaiming that her work was so good that one could not believe that it was painted by a female artist, persisted even thirty years later.²⁹

Frankenthaler also was defined by her status as Robert Motherwell’s wife; they were married from 1958 to 1971. A 1969 *Time* magazine article, entitled “Heiress to a New Tradition: Frankenthaler’s Floating Radiance,” noted, “In Manhattan’s close and somewhat clubby artistic community, nearly everybody knows Helen Frankenthaler as a charmer, a hostess and a presence ... For the past eleven years, she has been the wife of Robert Motherwell, and in a sense, Helen always seemed in the artistic shadow of her husband and other ‘first generation’ Abstract Expressionists. Thus it came as something of a discovery to learn that Helen really can paint”³⁰ (1957; Fig. 2).

In a 1965 interview with Henry Geldzahler, Frankenthaler provided a rare discussion of her views on gender discrimination, proclaiming, “I wonder if my pictures are more ‘lyrical’ (that loaded word!) because I’m a woman. Looking at my paintings as if they were painted by a woman is superficial, a side issue, like looking at Klines and saying they are bohemian. The making of serious painting is difficult and complicated for all serious painters. One must be oneself, whatever.”³¹ Frankenthaler was nevertheless deeply involved

in the New York art world, associating with members of The Club, including many of the major Abstract Expressionist artists and critics (1951; Fig. 3).³²

James Schuyler recognized Frankenthaler’s dilemma when he wrote in 1960 that “the part of Frankenthaler’s special courage was in going against the think-tough and paint-tough grain of New York School abstract painting. Often pale (not weak), soaked in (only sometimes), quickly dwelt upon—she ... chanced beauty in the simplest and most forthright way.”³³ Her ‘courage,’ however, led to alienation in that the manner in which Frankenthaler combined various elements in her paintings kept her on the periphery of the two major artistic camps, gesturalism and formalism.³⁴

Frankenthaler fused the two artistic approaches, and as a result, their primary advocates—Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg, respectively—could not fully support her without appearing to validate the ideas of the other camp.³⁵

After creating *Mountains and Sea*, Frankenthaler continued to develop the soak-stain technique. Critics often took a disrespectful tone in describing early works in which she employed the same technique, using terms such as, “reckless,” “thin,” “uncontrolled,” “uncomposed,” “lacking in impact,” and “too sweet in color.”³⁶ B.H. Friedman wrote in 1966: “It was appropriate that she adopted this particular technique [soak-staining]. It is free, lyrical and feminine—very different from the more insistent and regular rhythms of the best and most typical Pollocks of the late ‘40s and early ‘50s.”³⁷ Friedman goes on to note, “indeed, as this kind of art is completely involved with the physical act of painting ... we recognize a sexual analogy. Her palette, too, is seductive and feminine....”³⁸ These comments illuminate the prevalence in art criticism of such gendered associations, correlating the use of pale pinks and

blues commonly used by Frankenthaler in the early 1950s, for example, with notions of seduction and femininity.

The general outlook on art during this period, in which ‘tough’ was the laudatory term, reflects the inherent negativity of such descriptions.³⁹ Re-examining mid-century buzzwords in 1981, Carl Belz noted that the art world prized “muscular paint application at the start of the decade and cool-headed lucidity at its end.”⁴⁰ Thus, in the 1960s, when Frankenthaler shifted to broad, bold patches of well-defined, all-over color, critics responded more positively, noting the works’ “hard-edge” and “bold and aggressive tones.”⁴¹

Continuing their use of gendered language, critics were now simply employing terminology interpreted as aligning with ‘masculine’ attributes. Donald Judd asserted in a review of her 1962 show at the Emmerich Gallery that “these paintings show



Fig. 3. Poster for exhibition, Ninth Street Show (1951).

an improvement, an intensification, of elements of Miss Frankenthaler's work. There are fewer lines and stains in each work, and these are in greater contrast to one another."⁴² Lawrence Campbell, writing for *Art News*, poignantly described the qualities that critics acclaimed in the early 1960s: "Her work was never clearer nor more mysterious ... Her clear piercing colors drenched the surfaces and seemed organically part of the paintings. Some were quite cool and remote."⁴³ Using terms such as 'cool,' 'hard-edged,' 'tough' and 'aggressive,' to describe her newly intense, bright, saturated colorations, crisp, well-defined outlines, and simplified, sparse paintings, reviewers ascribed value to these associations. She was even included in a list of "cool" painters in Rosenberg's *Art & Other Serious Matters*.⁴⁴ This particular accolade from a reviewer who previously disparaged her work, was especially meaningful.

By the 1970s, critics focused on incorporating Frankenthaler's paintings into the larger purview of American art, categorizing her works as "landscapes," and describing works such as *Royal Fireworks* (1975) as "pastoral" and "lyrical."⁴⁵ John Russell, for example, asserted, "She is also very cunning indeed at judging precisely the format that best suits each idea."⁴⁶ Such undertones continued, and though less overt, the effect was still cutting, as when Sanford Schwartz wrote, "The young Frankenthaler flirted with many artists without giving herself to any," and that, "From the vantage point of 25 years later, her youthful confidence is attractive, even moving."⁴⁷ Although the review was intended as positive acclaim, concluding that Frankenthaler "reduces painting to a few alternatives and resolves all of them ... with a bravura, and frequently monotonous, simplicity,"⁴⁸ when Schwartz penned this review in 1978, Frankenthaler was a twenty-eight-year veteran of the art world with many accomplishments, and such an emphasis harkens back to the 1950s categorization of Frankenthaler as a less than serious painter.⁴⁹

Critics during the 1980s solidified Frankenthaler's position in the arts community, based on both her influence on later artists and those members of the arts community who had influenced her. Hilton Kramer, for example, defined Frankenthaler by her relationship with Greenberg, clearly a carryover from the earliest reviews of her work. Furthermore, he claimed that after Frankenthaler met Pollock, "her own style was formed" but "under Pollock's influence."⁵⁰ Perhaps attempting to make a positive association between Frankenthaler's 1950s works and Abstract Expressionism, he proclaimed of her paintings, "It was as if Abstract Expressionism had been put on a diet," and described them as "lighter, slimmer, and more quickly legible."⁵¹ Writing a few years later in "Motherwell: Driven to Abstraction; How a fervent soldier in the art wars fought the esthetic battles of his generation," Kramer underscores that artist's strength, as opposed to Frankenthaler's more demure qualities.⁵² Michael Brenson called Frankenthaler's "paintings ... less heroic, less intense, more interior than those of Pollock and Willem de Kooning."⁵³ Claiming that her works imply "interior landscapes and private chambers,"⁵⁴ Brenson conjures up imagery of a bedroom or boudoir, representing an updated version of the sexualized connotations prevalent in the earlier critical language.

Writing at the tail end of the 1980s, Amei Wallach responded to Frankenthaler's "inheriting" from Georgia O'Keeffe and Louise Nevelson the title of "greatest living woman artist."⁵⁵ Frankenthaler, who disdained the appellation "woman artist," would never have accepted such a title. With great irony, Wallach asserts, "There is not a greatest living man artist, of course, and to even suggest one seems absurd ... But curators, historians, collectors, and dealers are intent on making women battle it out among themselves, as if, like women athletes, they could never compete with the big guys on their own turf. The thing is, Helen Frankenthaler has."⁵⁶ She goes on to say that Frankenthaler "at the very least serves as an example of how the rules have been skewed against women.... In those art history books that have only recently been rewritten to include women, men usually win on the grounds of creativity as the ground-breakers.... The women are the interpreters, the solidifiers. They keep the home fires burning, while the men ignite them."⁵⁷ Discussing Frankenthaler's involvement in the development of her own career, Wallach cites several examples of her agency, including Frankenthaler's choosing male mentors throughout her life.⁵⁸

Throughout the 1990s, critics continued to incorporate commentary on the trajectory of the artist's career and legacy into their critiques. For instance, Holland Cotter wrote in 1992, "Because Ms. Frankenthaler works on a heroic scale, the work has tended to look 'important,' though in fact it got by largely on elegance and seemingly effortless charm." As if removing all agency from Frankenthaler, he goes on to say that it is "as if the paint itself was making the expressive decisions," concluding that "little of that charm is in evidence in her recent paintings" and that the result "could be one of Jackson Pollock's bad dreams."⁵⁹ Cotter's use of the term "charm" with regard to Frankenthaler's paintings is a direct borrowing from previous criticism. He exemplifies the tendency of those writing on Frankenthaler to favor language that suggests the work is not to be taken too seriously.

The political historian Zillah Eisenstein wrote that, "However differentiated gender may be, gender oppression exists. The dynamics and contexts of the oppression can shift, taking on different meanings, but it is still oppression."⁶⁰ Indeed, the arts community constructed and interpreted Frankenthaler through multiple viewpoints, transformed over the decades by changes in critical language and consideration; but the common denominator is gender, and the social construction of her sex.

Critics largely opted for gender- and value-laden descriptions that conjure up an image of a beautiful Park Avenue heiress—which she was, as opposed to other first-generation Abstract Expressionist painters who had experienced Depression-era poverty—who amused herself with her paintings, and now and again haphazardly created something that male artists could better elaborate upon in their work. Assessing this trend in Frankenthaler's reviews, Carter Ratcliff noted the irony when he wrote that the "flagrant beauty of her paintings made the 1950's a difficult time for her."⁶¹ (He might have mentioned that her physical beauty also may have affected her being taken seriously as a

young artist.) “[O]f course,” he added, “those forbidden adjectives were precisely the ones that have always been applied to Frankenthaler’s work.”⁶² Such descriptions have continued to find their way into writings about Frankenthaler’s work. E.A. Carmean Jr. wrote in 1978 that, in spite of Frankenthaler’s exposure, she nevertheless was a little-known significant post-War artist, stating, “We have very little in the way of detailed and considered analysis of exactly what her art is,” noting the “absence of a significant body of critical literature.”⁶³ In many respects, Carmean’s observation over thirty years ago remains apt, in that there have been only a few attempts to probe the artist’s style, output and innovation.

Since the commencement of Frankenthaler’s career, those writing about her have employed, consciously and not, constructions of gender as a prism through which to interpret her artistic output. This examination of the nuanced ways critics viewed her work presents a crucial appreciation of the mechanics of gender in the reception of an important artist working in the mid-century American art world. While gender has remained a central factor in how critics examined Frankenthaler, this element has evolved as society and the art world recycled the concept of gender through shifting ideas about feminism and new criticism, and the fact that gender-based concerns permeated the readings of Frankenthaler shows the extent to which identity became an essential component in twentieth-century art criticism. •

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Notes

1. I describe the abstracted styles of Frankenthaler as “nonfigurative,” as opposed to “abstract,” to specify the kind of depictions she pursued. While nature and natural forms often inspired the artist, she excluded figurative forms from her works and portrayed her ideas without direct reference to the physical world. Therefore, she did not make the decision to abandon all reference to nature in favor of total abstraction.
2. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).
3. See these important texts on the social construction of gender: Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1989); Whitney Davis, “Gender,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1996, 2003), 330–44, and Judith Lorber, “Believing is Seeing: Biology as Ideology,” *Gender and Society*, 7 (1993): 568–81.
4. See Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, “Introduction: Feminism and Art in the Twentieth Century,” in *The Power of Feminist Art, The American Movement of the 1970’s, History and Impact*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 16.
5. *Ibid.*, 17.
6. Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*, Linda Nochlin (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 149.
7. Lisa Saltzman, “Reconsidering the Stain,” in *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2005), 379.
8. *Ibid.*, 376.
9. E.C. Goossen, “Helen Frankenthaler,” *Art International* 5, no. 8 (Oct. 20, 1961): 78.
10. Cindy Nemser, “Interview with Helen Frankenthaler,” *Arts Magazine* 46, no. 2 (Nov. 1971): 54.
11. Michael Leja, “Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Gender and Subjectivity,” in *Pollock and After, The Critical Debate*, 2nd. ed., ed. Francis Frascina (London: Routledge, 2000), 357.
12. See Anne M. Wagner, “Lee Krasner as L.K.,” *Representations* 25 (Winter 1989), 42–57, reprinted in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Nashville: Westview Press, 1992), 422–35.
13. Writing in 1970, Carter Ratcliff suggested that Frankenthaler altered her late 1960s work from the previous period as a result of art world anticipation. See Carter Ratcliff, “New York Letter,” *Art International* 14, no. 1 (Jan. 1970): 95.
14. James Schuyler, “Helen Frankenthaler,” *Art News* 55, no. 10 (Feb. 1957): 11.
15. William Berkson, “Poet of the Surface,” *Arts Magazine* 39, no. 9 (May/June, 1965): 49. See also James R. Mellow, “New York Letter,” *Art International* 13, no. 5 (May 1969): 56; Paul Richard, “A Painting of Influence,” *Washington Post*, January 16, 1975.
16. David Rimanelli, “Helen Frankenthaler, Guggenheim Museum,” *Artforum International* 36 (March 1998): 93.
17. Roberta Smith, “Showing the Way to the Vanguard at 23,” *New York Times*, Jan. 16, 1998; E–39.
18. See Charles W. Millard, “Morris Louis,” *The Hudson Review* 30, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 257–58 and Diane Waldman, “Color, format and abstract art: an interview with Kenneth Noland,” *Art in America* 65 (May 1977): 100.
19. Edward B. Henning, “Morris Louis, Number 99,” *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 56, no. 2 (Feb. 1969): 85.
20. Millard, “Morris Louis,” 253, 256, 258.
21. *Ibid.*, 257–58.
22. David Carrier, “Morris Louis 1912–1962. New York. Museum of Modern Art,” *The Burlington Magazine* 128, no. 1005 (Dec. 1986): 926.
23. Jonathan Goodman, “Kenneth Noland at Ameringer/Howard,” *Art in America* 89, no. 5 (May 2001): 170.
24. Al Brunelle, “The Sky-Colored Popsicle,” *Art News* 66, no. 7 (Nov. 1967): 43.
25. Lisa Saltzman, “Reconsidering the Stain,” 379.
26. *Ibid.*, 378.
27. Broude and Garrard, “Introduction: Feminism and Art in the Twentieth Century,” 16.
28. Stephen Polcari, “Kenneth Noland: Independence in the face of conformity,” *Art News* 76, no. 6 (Summer 1977): 153.
29. Broude and Garrard, “Introduction: Feminism and Art in the Twentieth Century,” 13.
30. “Heiress to a New Tradition: Frankenthaler’s Floating Radiance,” *Time* 93, no. 13 (March 28, 1969): 64. In line with references to her status as a “charmer” and “hostess,” Fairfield Porter suggested that Frankenthaler “does not seem deeply involved,” writing, “in the large pictures fresh air and good luck are not enough.” [Fairfield] P[orter], “Helen Frankenthaler,” *Art News* 51, no. 10 (Feb. 1953): 55. William Berkson concluded his 1965 article on Frankenthaler by claiming that “she has a sobriety that is uncommon among attractive women ... both as a painter and a woman, she gives you a sense of luxury, which rougher-edged Bohemians can’t understand

- and which bourgeois Bohemians ... resent." Berkson, "Poet of the Surface," 50. See also, for example, Jerry Bowles, "Helen Frankenthaler at the Whitney," *Arts Magazine* 43, no. 5 (March 1969): 20. Sidney Tillim wrote that Frankenthaler "will dress up a canvas," and that her subject matter reflects "the influence of her husband, Robert Motherwell." S[idney] T[illim], "Helen Frankenthaler," *Arts Magazine* 33, no. 8 (May 1959): 56.
31. Henry Geldzahler, "Interview with Helen Frankenthaler," *Artforum* 4, no. 2 (Oct. 1965): 39.
 32. E.A. Carmean Jr. aptly described the art world's recognition of Frankenthaler, explaining, "Helen Frankenthaler's work occupies a curious position in the history of recent art. Her paintings have wide recognition ... Yet, in spite of this exposure, Frankenthaler remains the least known of the major figures in post-War art, in terms of any extended critical discourse. We have very little in the way of detailed and considered analysis of exactly what her art is— what it consists of, how it functions, and in what ways it has developed both formally and thematically." E.A. Carmean Jr., "Of Five Paintings by Helen Frankenthaler," *Art International* 22, no. 4 (1978): 28. Instead, formal analysis of her painting shows the properties having been interpreted along gendered lines. Paint color and intensity, detail and form, are made to reflect Frankenthaler's 'natural' character as a woman, or are read as her attempt to infuse her work with 'masculine' characteristics, including strength, clarity, and resolve.
 33. Quoted in Carl Belz, *Frankenthaler: the 1950's*, exh. cat. (Waltham, Mass.: Rose Art Museum, Brandeis Univ., 1981), 11.
 34. See for example, Broude and Garrard, "Introduction: Feminism and Art in the Twentieth Century," 16.
 35. Rosenberg outright rejected Frankenthaler's creations, noting that her "compositions fail to develop resistances against which a creative act can take place. The result is a distressing flabbiness ... of too little out of too much ... In their lack of purpose, her runs and blots often touch the edge of the absurd." Harold Rosenberg, *The De-definition of Art* (New York: Horizon, 1972), 65–66. In part due to the manner in which she applied paint to the canvas in the soak-stain technique, which naturally emphasized the canvas as a primary material of painting, Rosenberg may have associated Frankenthaler's creations closely with Greenberg's ideology. Additionally, the fact that she had an intimate and personal relationship with the leading advocate of flatness almost automatically alienated her from Rosenberg's camp. Greenberg praised her not for her ability as an artist, but for her role as a follower of Pollock and a precursor to Louis, providing him with the raw materials to actively and innovatively create.
 36. Barbara Rose, *Frankenthaler* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1970), 12. Additionally, Fairfield Porter described Frankenthaler's paintings as having a "thinness of substance." P[orter], "Helen Frankenthaler," 55. Frank O'Hara described her "sensitivity to nature." F[rank] O'H[ara], "Helen Frankenthaler," *Art News* 53, no. 8 (Dec. 1954): 53. Laverne George asserted that Frankenthaler's paintings are "too free," noting, "for some reason their impact is always in danger of flowing across the canvas and out of sight." L[averne] G[eorge], "Helen Frankenthaler," *Arts Magazine* 30, no. 6 (March 1956): 58. Elaine Gottlieb commenced her review of Frankenthaler's work by noting, "the colors are sensitive and the paint thin." E[laine] G[ottlieb], "Helen Frankenthaler," *Arts Magazine* 32, no. 4 (Jan. 1958): 55.
 37. B.H. Friedman, "Towards the Total Color Image," *Art News* 65, no. 4 (Summer 1966): 32. Further, Dore Ashton wrote that "nearly every criticism of Frankenthaler's work during the fifteen years she has exhibited professionally incorporates the epithet 'lyrical.'" Dore Ashton, "Helen Frankenthaler," *Studio International* 170, no. 868 (Aug. 1965): 52.
 38. Friedman, "Towards the Total Color Image," 32. In a similar vein, Parker Tyler described Frankenthaler's "main strength" as "her sensuous empire over emergent forms," and included in his concluding remarks, "her works excite without quite satisfying." P[arker] T[Tyler], "Helen Frankenthaler," *Art News* 54, no. 10 (Feb. 1956): 49. John Russell described a 1971 painting (entitled *Chairman of the Board*) by Frankenthaler as "one of the most seductive paintings in the show." John Russell, "In 40 Ways, the Big Picture of Helen Frankenthaler," *New York Times*, June 2, 1983, C-22.
 39. Belz and Elderfield discuss the term 'tough' as praiseworthy in the 1950s. See Belz, *Frankenthaler: the 1950's*, 11 and John Elderfield, *Frankenthaler* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 140–41.
 40. Carl Belz, "Helen Frankenthaler's *Eden*, A 'joyously involved creativity,'" *Art News* 80, no. 5 (May 1981): 157.
 41. "Heiress to a New Tradition: Frankenthaler's Floating Radiance," 69.
 42. D[onald] J[udd], "In the Galleries," *Arts Magazine* 36, no. 4 (January 1962): 38–39.
 43. L[awrence] C[ampbell], (Review), *Art News* 64, no. 3 (May 1965): 10.
 44. Harold Rosenberg, *Art & Other Serious Matters* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985, 1967), 65.
 45. See Lawrence Alloway, "Frankenthaler as Pastoral," *Art News* 70, no. 7 (November 1971): 67–68; Hilton Kramer, "Art: Lyric Vein in Frankenthaler Paintings," *New York Times*, November 15, 1975, 21.
 46. John Russell, "Art: Helen Frankenthaler at Corcoran," *New York Times*, May 2, 1975, 20.
 47. Sanford Schwartz, "Helen Frankenthaler at Emmerich," *Art in America* 66, no. 3 (May/June 1978): 115.
 48. Ibid.
 49. Evoking earlier criticism about Frankenthaler as hostess, John Russell concludes his 1975 article on Frankenthaler's paintings by noting, "they convey a sense of fulfillment that makes us feel a good 10 pounds lighter when we walk down the grand staircase and out the door." Russell, "Art: Helen Frankenthaler at Corcoran," 20. Even if intended to be complimentary in nature, Russell's particular choice of words taps into and thus perpetuates earlier pejorative comments about Frankenthaler.
 50. Hilton Kramer, "Helen Frankenthaler's Art in the 50's," *New York Times*, June 7, 1981, D-31.
 51. Ibid.
 52. Hilton Kramer, "Motherwell: Driven to Abstraction; How a fervent soldier in the art wars fought the esthetic battles of his generation," *New York Times*, July 28, 1991, H-1.
 53. Michael Brenson, "Art: The Tightrope Helen Frankenthaler Walks," *New York Times*, December 9, 1983, C-30.
 54. Ibid.
 55. Amei Wallach, "Arts and Craftiness," *Ms.* 1-2, (July 18, 1989): 25.
 56. Ibid., 24
 57. Ibid.
 58. Ibid., 25.
 59. Ibid.
 60. Zillah R. Eisenstein, *The Color of Gender: Reimagining Democracy* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994), 8.
 61. Carter Ratcliff, "Living Color," *Vogue* (June 1989): 246.
 62. Ibid.
 63. E.A. Carmean Jr., "Of Five Paintings by Helen Frankenthaler," 28.

ENGAGING MASCULINITY

WEIMAR WOMEN ARTISTS AND THE BOXER

By Julie Nero



Fig. 1. *Sport und Sonne* (Sport and Sun). Berlin (January 1927). Sportbibliothek, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, Münster. From Eric N. Jensen, "Belle of the Brawl: The Boxer between Sensationalism and Sport," in *Body by Weimar: Athletes, Gender, and German Modernity* (2010), p. 94.

“Boxing is for men, and is about men, and *is* men,” wrote the grande dame of American literature Joyce Carol Oates, adding, it is a “celebration of the lost religion of masculinity, all the more trenchant for being lost.”¹ In a similar vein, art historian David Bathrick remarked that boxing “is and always has been more than just boxing.”²

After World War I, the boxing arena “was to leave the ghetto of strictly lower class amusement and rapidly achieve acceptance as a respectable form of public entertainment.”³ This development was especially evident in Germany, where sports and the athletic body became emblematic of profound social and political transformation. Eric N. Jensen, a scholar of Weimar sport, explains that, “In the aftermath of what many Germans saw as an emasculating military defeat and in the midst of economic and social transformations that seemed to render men increasingly redundant, the pugilist represented something essentially male: the genuine hard guy,” establishing an ideal for the man who had grown soft in the modern metropolis.⁴ Because boxing, more than other sports, was linked to idealized masculinity and, metaphorically, with national strength, Weimar representations of pugilism generally reflect masculinist attitudes and, as will be seen, were not antithetical to fascist ideologies.⁵

Boxing also appealed to German women, both as spectators and as participants. And as women took up the sport, several women artists in Berlin executed works in a variety of media which explored pugilism from a range of perspectives. Before examining these developments, it is helpful to address briefly the boxer’s iconic status.

During the 1920s, the once marginal, rough and tumble boxer became a respected social figure.⁶ In 1921, leading Berlin art dealer Alfred Flechtheim expressed his esteem for the sport in his newly launched journal *Querschnitt* (Cross-section). He wrote, “We consider it our duty to promote boxing in German artistic circles as it has been the case elsewhere. In Paris, Braque, Derain, Dufy, Matisse, Picasso, and Rodin are all enthusiastic boxing fans.”⁷ While Weimar Germany is the focus of this essay, Flechtheim’s words indicate that, at the time, the boxer enjoyed international esteem.

Flechtheim’s tribute to boxing (coupled with his preeminence as a cultural trendsetter) clearly inspired a number of artists—especially those associated with his gallery—to engage with the theme. The legendary German boxing champion of the day, Max Schmeling, contributed to the motif’s popularity.⁸ A passionate fan, Flechtheim ultimately made Schmeling’s acquaintance, and soon the prizefighter was “chosen to join the coterie of luminaries at his frequent soirées.”⁹ The admiration was apparently mutual, as in 1928, Schmeling declared, “If I was a painter, I’d want to be

in Flechtheim's stall [stable]."¹⁰ Painter Georg Grosz met Schmeling in Flechtheim's drawing room and was not only a fan but, along with the Berlin Dadaist John Heartfield, had taken up boxing.¹¹ In his 1926 painting *Max Schmeling*, Grosz depicted his subject as a virile "man's man," in step with mainstream associations and Flechtheim's editorializing.¹² In his portrait, the artist traced and exaggerated the rugged contours of Schmeling's body, conveying an almost sensual appreciation of the fighter's muscular physique. Clearly empathizing with his subject, Grosz claimed psychological parallels between pugilism and his own creative activity.¹³

While male athletes and commentators dominated the world of German boxing, "they did not monopolize it ... fight fans could also witness the spectacle of women boxing in the ring."¹⁴ From the late nineteenth century, fighting women were a burlesque form of erotic entertainment geared to a raucously appreciative male public and even found expression in visual art. Despite their popularity in Hamburg's red-light district, "boxing matches between muscular women" were considered "too scandalous" and declared illegal there in 1927.¹⁵ Although presented "under the guise of contemporary realism," Jean Veber's 1898 painting *Women Wrestlers in Devonshire*, depicting "two nude working-class women with harsh faces and pulpy bodies wrestling with each other for coins," carries prurient undertones.¹⁶

Such sordid associations faded as respectable, even fashionable German women took up boxing during the 1920s.¹⁷ Among other self-styled modern urban women, the actress Marlene Dietrich and novelist Vicki Baum trained alongside professional male athletes.¹⁸ The smiling young woman wearing boxing gloves featured on a 1927 cover of *Sport und Sonne* (Sport and Sun) (Fig. 1) reflects this trend. While her kohl-rimmed eyes and limp arm suggest she may be an aspiring actress rather than a serious athlete, the image clearly melds boxing with feminine allure. The sport's growing popularity among women also reflected their changing social roles and "provided a remarkably masculine standard of self-sufficiency, free of reliance on male protection."¹⁹

During the 1920s, German women, as in other western countries, flocked to urban centers in search of employment and independence. Dubbed *neue Frauen* in the German press, or New Women, they were imbued with an aura of radical modernity and in step with the spirit of optimism and rationalization that characterized Weimar culture. Also at this time, *Körperkultur* (Body-culture), a fitness mania promoting outdoor athletics, swept through Germany.²⁰ Adherents of *Körperkultur* were convinced society could be revitalized with the help of sport. Similar to the New Woman, *Körperkultur* was associated with social progress and enhanced the popularity of sport among women who identified as modern: a discursive link reinforced constantly in the media.

Weimar advertisements targeting female consumers ubiquitously featured images of women in motion. Countless mid-1920s images representing women as physically dynamic visually restate the tenets of *Körperkultur*. The underlying narrative of such ads is clear: exercise makes women "modern" and attractive.²¹ Comparable messages linking



Fig. 2. Valeska Gert, *Boxen* (Boxing) (1927), From Frank-Manuel Peter, *Valeska Gert: Tänzerin, Schauspielerin, Kabarettistin: eine dokumentarische Biographie* (1985), p. 41.

physical fitness and professional success for women were echoed by female writers, further strengthening associations between New Women and Weimar *Körperkultur*.²²

Valeska Gert (1900–78) was a Weimar-era performance artist who explored the limits of gendered representation.²³ Born in Berlin to a German Jewish family, Gert first appeared on the stage at the age of seventeen and quickly became a sensation.²⁴ Her desire to "cross every border and violate every boundary in art" reflected contemporary interdisciplinary avant-garde trends and implicates other Weimar artists and genres.²⁵ One baffled Berlin spectator of a 1917 performance asked, "Is this dancing? Is this theatre? What is this?"²⁶ Gert's savage clowning and portrayal of bizarre states and human types suggest that she did not subscribe to the wholesome tenets of *Körperkultur*. Nor did the fiercely independent Gert abide by gender conventions.²⁷ She often parodied gender in her performances and underscored her impish persona with a hallmark boyish haircut.²⁸

In her 1927 performance *Boxen* (Boxing) (Fig. 2), Gert played on the sport's popularity and mimed the pugilist, though, by



Fig. 3. Renée Sintenis, *Boxer* (Erich Brandl) (1925), bronze, 16". Photo: Lyman Allyn Art Museum, New London, CT.

dint of her sex and androgynous appearance rendered the boxer genderless. Absent a sparring partner, she positioned the figure in a social vacuum.²⁹ Her open-ended, non-climactic performance emphasized the boxer's isolation, laying bare the figure's fragility as a masculine (or trendy feminine) icon.

The sculptor Renée Sintenis and photographer Frieda Riess also implicated the New Woman and *Körperkultur* as they engaged with the boxer, creating works which differed conspicuously from mainstream representations. Renée Sintenis (1888–1965), one of Flechtheim's protégés,³⁰ gained success initially executing bronze busts of prominent contemporary individuals, but became best known for her animal-themed sculpture.³¹ Her 1925 bronze *Boxer* (Fig. 3), somewhat anomalous within her oeuvre, clearly reflects the sport's popularity. In contrast to Grosz's portrait of Schmeling, which accentuates the subject's virility, Sintenis's *Boxer* seems to minimize it. In some respects, Sintenis's *Boxer* anticipates her 1933 *Selbst-Porträt* (Self-Portrait), a disembodied bronze mask which bears her features and exemplifies the artist's characteristically gender-neutral representations. While masks traditionally imply the artifice of identity, art historian Erich

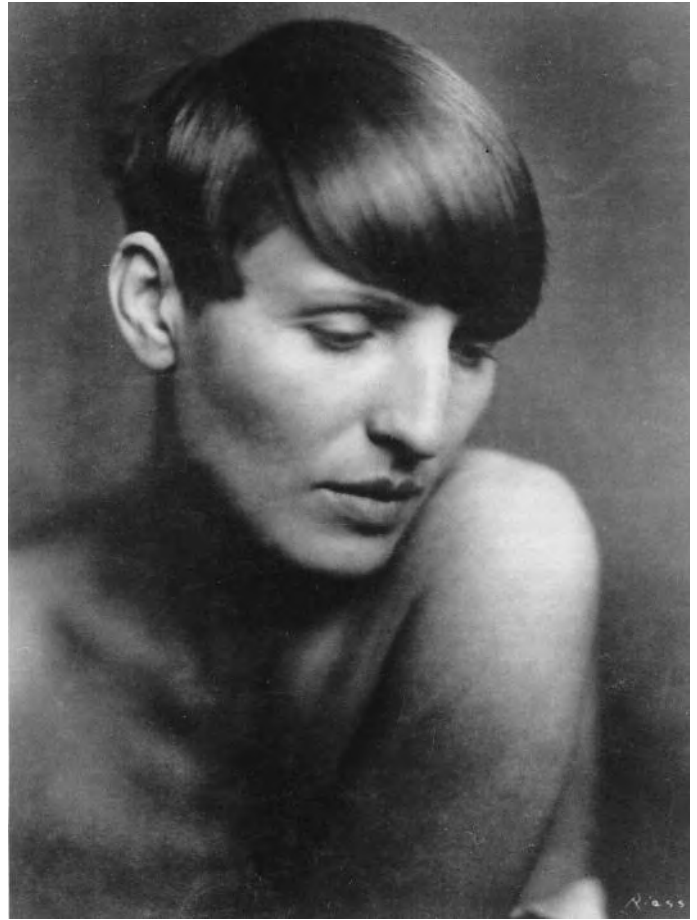


Fig. 4. Frieda Riess, *Renée Sintenis, Bildhauerin* (Renée Sintenis, *Sculptress*) (1925). Photo: Ullstein Bild.

Ranfft observed that Sintenis's *Self-Portrait* "exudes a definite androgynous quality through its look of boyish adolescence."³² This quality is similarly evident in Frieda Riess's 1925 photographic portrait of Sintenis (Fig. 4), which portrays her boyishly coiffed, posed with closed arms that hide her breasts. In tune with Sintenis's self-projected androgyny, a cursory examination of the artist's graphic oeuvre reveals a reluctance to sexualize her subjects.

Leaning slightly backwards in animated mock readiness, Sintenis's boxer—whose lanky nude body, were it not for his genitals, suggests a well-trained, androgynous young woman—is poised to meet an invisible opponent. The *Boxer*, like many of the artist's works, downplays gender and mature sexual allure.³³

Frieda Gertrud Riess (1890–1957), born in the Prussian city of Czarnikau, arrived in Berlin at age eight, when her widowed mother moved the family there. Riess studied sculpture with Hugo Lederer before training as a photographic assistant at Berlin's *Photographische Lehranstalt* (School of Photography). In the winter of 1917, Riess opened a studio on the Kurfürstendamm, a prestigious address in the heart of Berlin's shopping district,³⁴ where the socially ambitious Riess hosted tea-parties regularly in an effort to attract prominent clients.³⁵ Through Flechtheim, her dealer, Riess gained access to an impressive roster of elite subjects.³⁶

Like Flechtheim, Riess was a boxing fan. An anonymous 1927 photograph (Fig. 5) pictures her holding a large box-camera and clowning with three bare-chested athletes wearing boxing shorts: the German prizefighters Hermann Herse, Max Schmeling, and Ensor Fiermonte.³⁷ Playfully, yet strikingly, the image reverses age-old gendered viewing constellations in which nude or semi-nude women are pictured alongside clothed men. In this vein, Riess's photographs of boxer Eric Brandl (1925; Fig. 6) also dramatically reverse traditionally gendered viewing conventions (i.e., male subject/object), and are among her most erotically charged images.

Although Riess's subjects were typically clothed,³⁸ she produced four images depicting nude women for Dr. Peter Landow's 1925 book, *Das Weib, Natur und Kultur* (Woman, Nature and Culture).³⁹ Copiously illustrated (with 120 photographs), *Das Weib* outlines the relationship between ethnicity and physiognomy, reflecting the hegemony of patriarchal and, above all, racial thinking in Weimar.⁴⁰ Riess's "artistically posed" female nudes are pristinely articulated. Like the other quasi-scientific images in *Das Weib*, Riess's are clearly in step with *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), a dominant aesthetic trend in 1920s Germany which stressed unmitigated visual truth. For example, the pale body of Riess's *Französin, Mutter Deutsche* (French Woman, German Mother) (Fig. 7) is generously framed in a cool field of grey. Its combination of "artistic" nudity with technical representation (despite the subject's airbrushed pubis), is clearly in line with the volume's editorial intent.⁴¹



Fig. 5. (anonymous) Frieda Riess, Hermann Herse, Max Schmeling, and Ensor Fiermonte (1927). Photo: Ullstein Bild.

In contrast to the forlorn, bashful-looking *French Woman*, Riess's nude portraits of Erich Brandl suggest relaxed intimacy. The boxer's skin seems to dissolve in a dusky haze of light, conveying the photographer's appreciation of her subject's muscular physique. Riess closely cropped Brandl's sensuously modeled torso, enveloping him in velvety darkness unlike the hollow space surrounding *French Woman*. This highly unconventional optic—more indicative of

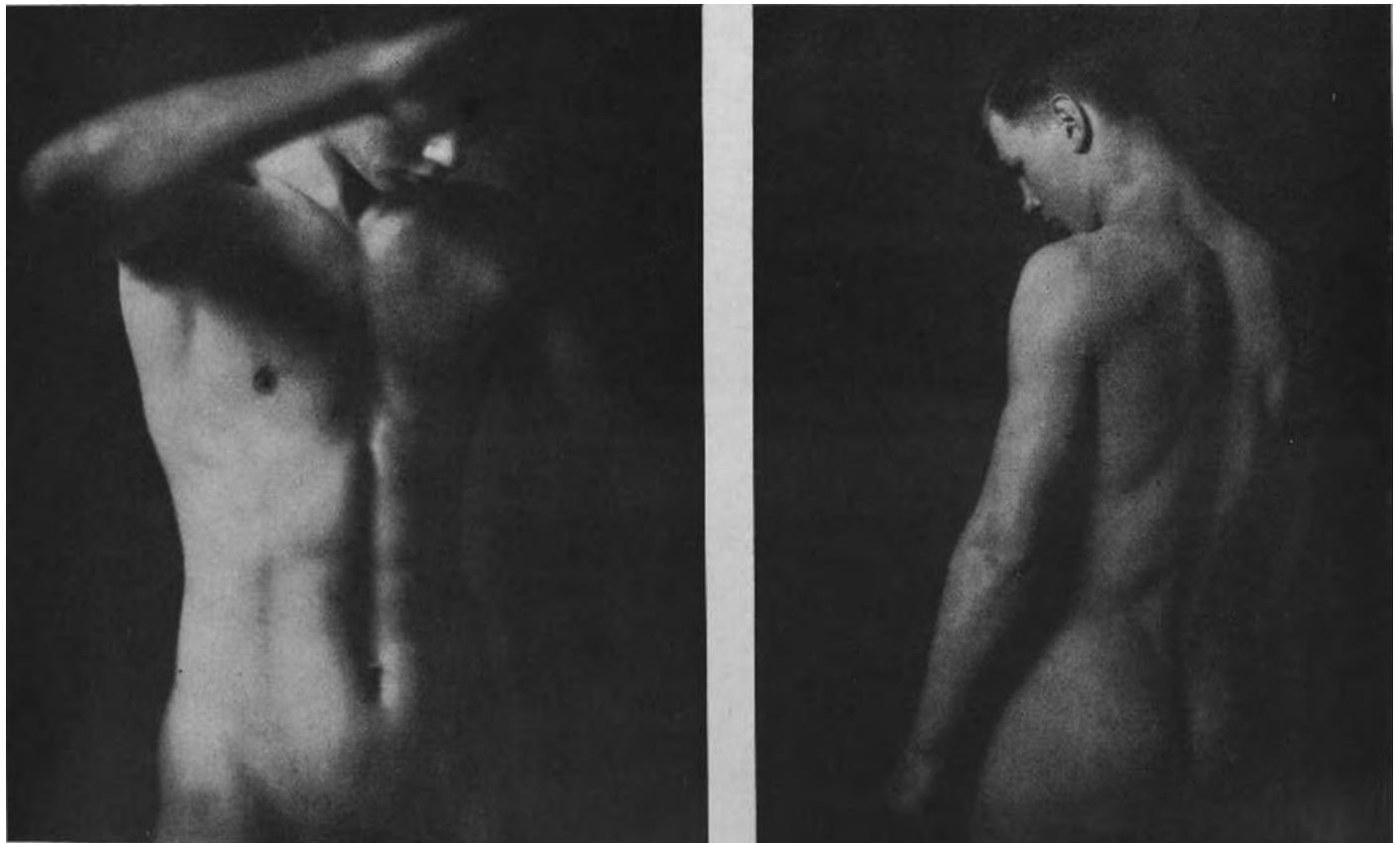


Fig. 6. Frieda Riess, *Der Boxer Erich Brandl* (Boxer Erich Brandl) (ca. 1925). From *Der Querschnitt* 5 (Sept 1925).



Fig. 7. Frieda Riess, *Französin, Mutter Deutsche* (French Woman, German Mother) (ca. 1925). From Peter Landau, *Das Weib, Natur und Kultur: 120 Akt-Aufnahmen ausgewählt von Dr. Peter Landau* (Woman: Nature and Culture, 120 Photographs of Nude Women chosen by Dr. Peter Landau) (1925), pl. 83.

intimacy than studio portrait photography—eroticizes the boxer's body and, to a degree, objectifies him. Uncharacteristic for a prizefighter, Brandl's lowered eyes indicate passivity instead of watchful, coiled dynamism. Yet, despite this, his demeanor, unlike that of *French Woman*, does not suggest coquetry. Riess's photographs of Brandl are rare examples of a female artist exploring male nudity. Frankly erotic, they are easily distinguished from comparable contemporary images of boxers (and almost a century later remain evocative). While Riess eroticized and, to a degree, "feminized" her male subject, she nonetheless, imbued him with virile integrity.



Fig. 8. Marianne Brandt, *Boxkampf, Gegensätze* (Boxing Match, Opposites) (1929), Photomontage, 19 1/8" x 10 3/16". Photo: Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin (No. 3650/3).

Marianne Brandt and Hannah Höch each engaged with the sport in at least one of their photomontages. The Bauhaus artist Marianne Brandt (1893–1983) is known as a designer of utilitarian metal objects as well as a creator of photomontages.⁴² Like the minimalist materiality of her legendary product designs, Brandt's photomontages are characterized by visual balance and restrained elegance. Born Marianne Liebe into a prominent Chemnitz family, Brandt originally trained as a painter before enrolling at the Weimar Bauhaus in 1924 to study metal working. Her teacher there, László Moholy-Nagy, became Brandt's loyal friend and mentor, and in 1927, he hired her to run the *Metall-Werkstatt* (Metals Department) at the Dessau Bauhaus.

Brandt's 1929 photomontage *Boxkampf, Gegensätze* (*Boxing-Match, Opposites*) (Fig. 8) reworked popular visual materials documenting a German heavyweight match.⁴³ *Boxkampf* reflects mainstream representations of boxing as a man's sport, a masculinist spectacle, depicting the ring as a homosocial sphere separate from any feminine realm. The title of the work itself references polarity: a quality underscored by the artist's dramatic use of black and white. *Boxing-Match* is anchored visually by three distinct views of the ring, which suggest, in turn, sharp blows and choppy cinematic framing. In contrast, a woman in an evening gown steps daintily through the image. Divided from the heated action by a long vertical line, the lone figure balances the composition, while her lighthearted movement and diaphanous clothing counter the raw intensity of the ring. Amplifying gender difference, Brandt's *Boxing-Match* brings the disparity between masculine and feminine cultural spheres into high-relief.

Hannah Höch (1889–1978) also redeployed mass-mediated materials to engage with pugilism in her 1931 photomontage *Die Starken Männer* (*The Strong Men*) (Pl. 15). Unlike Brandt's *Boxkampf*, which replicates and hyperbolizes mainstream representations of the manly boxer, Höch's photomontage jumbles gender and confounds masculinity.

The Strong Men features a head with a face that is half male and half female floating inside Max Schmeling's silhouette. Safely enclosed (or hidden?) within the boxer's galvanized contour, the grimacing face appears trapped within his muscular frame, as if denoting inner disharmony. As Jennifer Valcke observes, "Ambiguity is thus served. The virility praised by avant-garde artists, with their clear masculine bias, is shattered here."⁴⁴ A hallmark of Höch's collages, critical deconstruction of gender was among the artist's favorite themes. In addition to disrupting stereotypical concepts, the work's mysterious title indicates multiple subjects and suggests a broader context than the boxing arena. In this aspect, Höch's collage implicates volatile Weimar attitudes regarding masculinity and may be linked to related social and political discussions.

In 1931, Schmeling and the Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini, Il Duce, were each the focus of German documentaries. Advertisements promoting both films appeared on the same page of *Das 12 Uhr Blatt* (*The 12 o'clock News*), a popular Berlin newspaper (Fig. 9). An apparent coincidence, the page may easily be characterized as a montage of contemporary masculine types. Höch was a resident of Berlin at the time and likely was familiar with these ads, as she collected popular print magazines avidly to use as raw material for her collages.⁴⁵

Schmeling and Mussolini were arguably two of the world's most prominent "strong men" at the time. Literally featured head-to-head on the page, both ads reflect late Weimar associations linking the athletic body, military power, and idealized manliness. In the ad for *Das neue Italien* (*The New Italy*), Il Duce's oversized head floats above silhouettes of three soldiers with arms raised in a Nazi-style salute. Somewhat disturbingly, the ad reveals the entertainment value and seductive allure of these politics.⁴⁶



Fig. 9. *Neue Berliner Zeitung, Das 12 Uhr Blatt* (Berlin) (July 24, 1931). Photo (microfilm): Center for Research Libraries, Chicago.

The juxtaposition of Schmeling and Mussolini suggests that by this time discursive boundaries between male strength and fascist politics were becoming blurred.⁴⁷ Indeed, athletic bodies were central to right-wing propaganda,⁴⁸ a development which, a number of scholars argue, found consummate expression in Leni Riefenstahl's film *Olympia*, documenting the 1936 Munich Olympic Games.⁴⁹ Boxing, both competitive and supremely brutal, appealed to fascist ideologues: "both Hitler and Mussolini saw boxing as a particularly wholesome antidote to what the former called 'peaceable aesthetes and physical degenerates.'"⁵⁰ Hitler was, in fact, one of Max Schmeling's greatest fans and sent him social invitations on a regular basis.⁵¹ At a much publicized luncheon held at the Chancellor's palace in July 1936, Hitler eagerly listened to Schmeling relate details of his recent victory over the African American prizefighter Joe Louis.⁵² Although Höch's *Strong Men* is dominated by Schmeling's silhouette, it is interesting to note that, among contemporary supporters and detractors alike, Hitler was referred to commonly as Germany's "Strong Man."

Although the newspaper ads featuring Schmeling and Mussolini confirm a popular preoccupation with the definition and representation of masculinity, they are not the only male images on the page. They appear above (what in visual terms traditionally denotes hierarchal superiority) a drawing of an elegantly dressed man (with a woman on his arm). The three male types: boxer, fascist leader, and sophisticated (or is he soft?) gentleman enroute to the opera reflect ongoing renegotiations of gender roles and relations in Germany, which in the wake of the international economic collapse after 1929, were informed increasingly by reactionary trends. In the face of economic uncertainties, recently established democratic and egalitarian standards (including strides related to women's

employment and reproductive rights) came under virulent attack and the threat of reversal, processes signaling the demise of the Weimar Republic and the rise of fascism.⁵³ Höch's *Strong Men*, a heroic male figure whose smooth exterior is coupled with an anxiously discordant interior, suggests gender-based conflict and may reflect these developments.

In Weimar Germany, the motif of the boxer, as discussed above, functioned as an easy trope for masculine identity. In line with the zeitgeist, the boxer was generally represented by male artists as unambiguously virile. Women artists, by contrast, addressed the theme critically and with greater subtlety. Their pugilist-themed works differed markedly—from one another and from mainstream representations.

While Valeska Gert's *Boxing* and Renée Sintenis's *Boxer* counter popular Weimar notions of unabashed virility, Riess's photographs of Erich Brandl eroticize a male subject and radically reverse gendered viewing traditions. Marianne Brandt's *Boxing Match*, on the other hand, amplifies masculinity as she sequesters her boxers in a boisterous homosocial realm where women are clearly outsiders. Hannah Höch's *The Strong Men*, by co-mingling the masculine and feminine, visually disrupts a clear representation of gender. Moreover, Höch's suggestive title connotes an ominous fascist discourse which associated manliness with military strength and violence. •

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NOTES

- Joyce Carol Oates, *On Boxing* (Garden City, NY: Dolphin Doubleday, 1987), 114, 72.
- David Bathrick, "Max Schmeling on the Canvas: Boxing as an Icon of Weimar Culture," *New German Critique* 51, Special Issue on Weimar Mass Culture (Autumn 1990): 135.
- Bathrick, "Max Schmeling," 118.
- Eric N. Jensen, "Belle of the Brawl: The Boxer between Sensationalism and Sport," in *Body by Weimar: Athletes, Gender, and German Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 50.
- Timothy S. Brown writes, "Fascism's celebration of physical activity and action for its own sake was explicitly understood as celebration of a masculine ideal of physical prowess." See Timothy S. Brown, "Faces of Social Militarism in the Weimar Republic," *Weimar Radicals: Nazis and Communists between Authenticity and Performance* (New York: Berghahn, 2009), 37.
- Jensen, "Belle of the Brawl," 50. In 1926 Bertolt Brecht planned but never completed *The Reknown*, a novel based on the rise of a successful boxer.
- Flechtheim founded *Querschnitt: Mitteilungen Galerie Flechtheim* (Cross-section: Announcements of Gallery Flechtheim) in 1921 and acted as its editor until 1923. The magazine was published in Berlin and for a time, marketed as "a journal for artists and friends of boxing." See Bathrick, "Max Schmeling," 119 and 119n22; "Ist der Boxsport Roh?" (Is Boxing Raw?) *Querschnitt* 1 (1922): 221.
- Max Schmeling (1905-2005) was famous in Europe as a boxing champion before defeating Joe Louis at New York's Yankee Stadium for the World Title in 1936; he later lost to Louis in a 1938 match.
- Bathrick, "Max Schmeling," 121.
- Marion Beckers and Elisabeth Moortgat, eds., *Die Riess: Fotografisches Atelier und Salon in Berlin 1918-1932* (Reiss: Her Photo Studio and Berlin Salon, 1918-1932) (Berlin: Das Verborgenen Museum, 2008), 103.
- Bathrick, "Max Schmeling," 121.
- George Grosz, *Max Schmeling* (1926), oil on canvas, 42 15/16" x 31 1/8". Collection Axel Springer Verlag, Berlin.
- Bathrick, "Max Schmeling," 129-30.
- Jensen, "Belle of the Brawl," 51.
- See Roger Salardenne, *Hauptstädte des Lasters: Eine Reportage aus den Vergnügungsvierteln der Weltstädte* (Capitals of Vice: A Report from the World's Erotic Entertainment Districts) (Berlin: Auffenberg Verlagsgesellschaft, 1931), 68-69. This form of erotic entertainment persisted into the late 1920s. Hamburg's St. Pauli district—then and now—is the capital of the German sex-industry, and it is likely that if women's [sexualized] boxing "shows" were outlawed in libertine St. Pauli that other German cities would soon have followed suit, whether through unofficial compliance or actual law.
- Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in fin-de-siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), 286.
- For a seminal discussion of female boxing and boxers in Germany, see Jensen, "Belle of the Brawl."
- Ibid., 96. Sabri Mahir ran Berlin's most reputable gym. Austrian novelist Baum wrote, among other books, the novel that was the basis for the American movie *Grand Hotel* (1929).
- Ibid., 97.
- The title of the previously mentioned journal *Sport und Sonne*, invokes athletic outdoor activity and reflects the tenets of *Körperkultur*.
- One such undergarment ad that appears in nearly every mid-1920s issue of Germany's most popular pictorial *Berliner Illustrierter Zeitung* (Berlin Illustrated Newspaper or BIZ) features a drawing of a leaping woman and is captioned, "So beweglich, anmutig und schön nur mit Hautana" (So flexible, graceful and beautiful only with Hautana).
- The cold showers and daily gymnastics of Irmgard Keun's pulp-novel heroine Gilgi, New Woman and Berlin office worker, reflect, almost verbatim, the directives of feminist Herta and Pauline, who, in 1928, emphasized the importance of daily gymnastics. Herta and Pauline, "Richtiges Lüften und Frauenturnen," (Correct Ventilation and Women's Exercise), *Frauen Liebe und Leben: Organ des Deutschen Freundschafts-Verbandes* (Women Love and Life: Organ of the German Friendship Union), no. 2 (Berlin 1928): 5. See also Irmgard Keun, *Gilgi-eine von uns* (Gilgi—one of us) (Reprint 1931, Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 1990).
- Gert was born Gertrud Valeska Samosch in Berlin. See Frank-Manuel Peter, *Valeska Gert: Tänzerin, Schauspielerin, Kabarettistin: eine dokumentarische Biographie* (Valeska Gert: Dancer, Actress, and Cabaret Artist; a biographical Document) (Berlin: Fröhlich & Kaufmann, 1985). The Jewish Gert spent the war years in the United States. She opened "Beggar Bar," a bar and cabaret, in New York's Greenwich Village and was an artist's model at Hans Hofmann's Provincetown studio.
- For a rare English-language discussion of the dancer, see Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker, "Valeska Gert," *The Drama Review* 25, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 55-66.
- Ibid., 58. These include Dadaist multimedia performances. For an extended discussion of cross-disciplinary artistic trends in Weimar, see Isa Partsch-Bergsohn, *Modern Dance in Germany and the United States: Crosscurrents and Influences* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994).
- De Keersmaecker, "Valeska Gert," 56.
- These works include "Death," "Samurai Warrior," "Japanese Grotesque," "Clown," "The Baby," "The Procuree," "Wet Nurse,"

- "Archangel," "Nervousness," and "Charleston."
28. In 1931, critic Fred Hildenbrandt characterized Gert as grotesque and demonic, but also lauded her (along with Mary Wigman and Niddy Impekoven) as one of the three greatest living dancers. See Fred Hildenbrandt, *Tänzerinnen der Gegenwart: 57 Bilder Erläutert von Fred Hildenbrandt* (Women Dancers Today: 57 Photographs explained by Fred Hildenbrandt) (Zürich: Orell Füssli, 1931), 13.
 29. De Keersmaecker, "Valeska Gert," 56.
 30. At Flechtheim's suggestion, Sintenis replaced her given name, Renate Alice, with the more exotic and androgynous Renée. For a rare English language discussion of Sintenis, see Erich Ranfft, "German Women Sculptors, 1918–1936: Gender differences and status," in *Visions of the Neue Frau: Women and the Visual Arts in Weimar Germany*, Marsha Meskimmon and Shearer West, eds., (Aldershot, GB: Scolar Press, 1995), 48–52; See also, Stephanie Barron, *German Expressionistic Sculpture* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1983), 196–97.
 31. E. M. Benson, "Modern German Sculpture: A Discussion of Contemporary Trends," *Parnassus* 5, no. 3 (April 1933): 11.
 32. Ranfft, "German Women Sculptors," 51.
 33. Renée Sintenis's reluctance to signal gender in her work is unsurprising in light of her sexually ambiguous biography. Although married, the artist's lesbianism was an open secret. Animal figures, such as her 1939 bronze *Vollblutfohlen* (*Thoroughbred Foal*) are depicted as young (i.e., pre-sexual): a quality praised by her contemporary, German poet Oskar Loerke who claimed Sintenis' animal-themed works exude a "joyful cleanliness and an unencumbered sensuality freed from restrictive social conventions." Loerke, "Wächterin am Tierparadies," in *Hausfreunde: Charakterbilder von Oskar Loerke* ("Guardian of the Animal Paradise," in *Friends of the Family: Character Studies by Oskar Loerke*), (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1939), 128.
 34. For a monograph and biography of Riess, see Beckers and Moortgat, *Die Riess*.
 35. *Ibid.*, 103.
 36. Among others, Riess photographed Benito Mussolini, actor Emil Jannings, writers Colette and Klaus Mann, artists Marie Laurencin and Fernand Legér, and dancers Anna Pavlova and Serge Lifar.
 37. Pictured in Beckers and Moortgat, *Die Riess*, 104.
 38. This, however, comes as no surprise when one considers that Riess's subjects were prominent, highly respected, and generally senior, cultural luminaries.
 39. Peter Landow (aka Peter Landau), ed., *Das Weib, Natur und Kultur: 120 Akt-Aufnahmen ausgewählt von Dr. Peter Landau* (Woman: Nature and Culture, 120 Photographs of Nude Women chosen by Dr. Peter Landau) (Berlin: Gesellschaft zur Verbreitung klassischen Kunst, 1925). Riess's photographs appear along with those of others, including E.O. Hoppé and František Drtikol.
 40. Photographs Riess contributed to *Das Weib (Woman)* are reprinted in Beckers and Moortgat, *Die Riess*, 150–51.
 41. To a degree, the photographs in *Das Weib* are comparable to those published by prominent contemporary Berlin sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld. However, while gender deviant subjects pictured in Hirschfeld's copiously illustrated publications are occasionally masked to conceal their identities, photographs of their bodies are never airbrushed or retouched, nor do their poses ever suggest 'art' photography.
 42. For a biography of Brandt and a discussion of her photomontages, see Elizabeth Otto, *Tempo, Tempo!: Bauhaus Photomontagen von Marianne Brandt* (*Tempo, Tempo!: the Bauhaus Photomontages of Marianne Brandt*) (Berlin: Bauhaus Archiv, 2005). For a discussion of Brandt's iconic design classics and career at the Bauhaus, see Ulrike Meyer, *Bauhaus Women: Art, Handicraft, Design* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005), 118–25.
 43. Otto, *Tempo, Tempo!*, 111. In *Boxkampf*, Brandt used press photographs published in a 1925 *Berliner Illustrierter* documenting a title match between Hans Breitensträter and Paul Samson-Körner.
 44. Jennifer Valcke, "Static Films and Moving Pictures. Montage in Avant-Garde Photography and Film" (PhD. diss., University of Edinburgh, 2009), 116.
 45. See Hannah Höch, *Album (Scrapbook)*, Gunda Lyken, ed. (Berlin: Berlinische Galerie, Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst, Fotografie, und Architektur; Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2004).
 46. Walter Steinthal, Review of film "*Das neue Italien: Weltaufführung im Mozartsaal*," (*The New Italy: World Premiere in Mozart Hall*) *Das 12 Uhr Blatt*, July 18, 1931 (Berlin).
 47. Petra Maria Schulz, *Ästhetisierung von Gewalt in der Weimarer Republik* (The Aestheticization of Violence in the Weimar Republic) (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2004), 198; 251n157. Physical uniformity and bodily perfection were central to fascist propaganda. One Stormtrooper (member of the Nazi Sturmabteilung, or SA) reports that after an injury prohibited him from walking fully upright, he was barred from marching in a January 1936 military parade because his handicap "disrupted the picture." See also Gigliora Giro, "Model of Masculinity: Mussolini, the 'New Italian' of the Fascist Era," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 16, 4 (December 1999): 43.
 48. Brown, *Weimar Radicals*, 38–39. Militant masculinity in Weimar Germany was not confined to the political right. The "celebration of 'masculine strength and bravery' was a key component of the Communist self-image as well." By 1932, over one million German men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five (of diverse political stripes) were active members of paramilitary organizations.
 49. The fascist (and racist) implications of Riefenstahl's *Olympia* have long been controversial topics. A number of scholars claim the film seamlessly merges an aesthetic appreciation of the perfectly trained athletic body with Nazi ideology. See Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 73–105. See also, Graham McFee and Alan Tomlinson, "Riefenstahl's *Olympia*: Ideology and Aesthetics in the Shaping of the Aryan Athletic Body," *International Journal of Sport* 16, 2 (June 1999): 86–106.
 50. Bathrick, "Max Schmeling," 128, 128n37. Bathrick cites Hitler's remarks regarding boxing at length. "One sport in particular should not be forgotten, which in the eyes of many 'folkish' minded people is considered vulgar and undignified: boxing.... There is no sport that so much as this one promotes the spirit of attack, demands lightning decisions, and trains the body in steel dexterity." Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 409–10.
 51. For Hitler's fascination with Schmeling, see <http://diki.heliohost.org/schmeling.htm> (accessed May 30, 2013). According to Schmeling, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was also a fan, which clearly complicates the issue of the sport hero's relationship to fascism and fascist ideology. "It seems that FDR stopped by Schmeling's training camp ... in 1930. Their conversation was brief but friendly—Roosevelt even spoke German." Theodore F. Rippey, "Athletics, Aesthetics, and Politics in the Weimar Press," *German Studies Review* 28, no. 1 (Feb. 2005): 85, 102n1.
 52. For photographs of the July 6, 1936 luncheon (Collection Bettmann/CORBIS), see <http://www.corbisimages.com/stock-photo/rights-mar> (accessed May 30, 2013).
 53. After the economic collapse of 1929, salaried employment became increasingly scarce in Germany. Reactionary voices argued that women, in deference to men, should abandon the workplace and return to traditional (unpaid) domestic roles as wives and mothers. This attitude was cogently expressed in the popular Nazi dictum, *Kinder, Küche, und Kirche* (Children, Kitchen, and Church).

Nancy Grossman: Tough Life Diary

edited by Ian Berry
Prestel, 2013

Reviewed by William Kaizen

Nancy Grossman once again gets a career-spanning exhibition with her second retrospective and its accompanying catalogue, *Tough Life Diary*.¹ More than an exhibition catalogue and the broadest account of her work to date, it is both a festschrift and an archive, with new essays by critics and scholars reflecting on all periods of her work, tributes from fellow artists, and an extensive archival collection of older reviews and essays.

The title is drawn from a series of diary works that Grossman began in the late 1960s in parallel to her better-known series of leather-clad heads. These are medium- to small-scale collages featuring to-do lists she makes and then scratches out as she accomplishes various daily tasks. It is difficult to make out all the details of the lists in the reproductions of these works in the catalogue, but this is also true when seeing them in person because she leaves very few words unconcealed. Although titled with the word “diary,” these works reveal no intimate secrets. They largely consist of words whose meaning has been canceled by flurries of densely scribbled black lines indicating completed tasks. In the piece *Tough Life Diary*, which inaugurated the series by collecting lists made from 1967 through 1973, at least three-quarters of the words are illegible. Phrases that are not crossed out refer almost entirely to due dates for work, work-related tasks, and people to contact, presumably also in relation to her work. Other iterations of these works, made around the same time, share a similar appearance.

In her diary works, the “tough life” Grossman refers to seems to be a semi-ironic public nod made by a feminist artist whose fortunes were on the rise. At least from the surface of these works, her life was only tough inasmuch as she was becoming successful and had a multitude of work-related duties to accomplish. These diaries are not so much an agony



Fig. 1. Nancy Grossman, L to R: *Head Number One* (1968), wood, dyed leather, metal, paint, epoxy and thread, ca. 16" x 6 3/4" x 8", Collection of Willi Kemp; *Head Number Two* (1968), wood, dyed leather, metal, paint, epoxy and thread, ca. 16" x 6 3/4" x 8". Private collection.

column as a celebration of her busy schedule. This spirit is evident in her black erasures that playfully become explosions, arabesques, arrows, and hearts, exuberantly protuberating beyond functional tick marks.

The playfulness of the diary collages also serves as a counterpoint to the sculptures she began making at the time and continued making until relatively recently (Fig. 1). These consist of carved wooden heads encased in tightly fitted leather masks with only their noses, or occasionally eyes and mouths, left exposed. The noses are painted white, or sometimes black, and highly polished to a porcelainized sheen. Grossman takes pre-constructed pieces of leather horse tack and motorcycle jackets that she cuts, de-stiches and recombines into genuinely frightening configurations. Reins buckle across eyes and mouths. Mouths are stitched together with leather cord or zippered closed. Harness-boot rings are strapped over ears. Some feature dastardly horns or viciously pointed metal spikes. At least one has a gun strapped to its head, pointing outward at the viewer with the barrel extending from its eyes, its gaze become deadly.

Grossman's heads are gothic nightmares that, from the moment she began making them, transcended their origins in the violence of the late 1960s. Their power lies in her ambivalent positioning of the viewer both inside the mask as a trapped soul condemned to a hell of senseless confinement, and outside the mask as the quarry of whatever horrible vengeance the soul trapped inside is about to unleash. She positions the viewer as both victim and victimizer, creating a sense of pathos and ethical tension that abounds in literature but isn't widely found in the visual arts.

A number of essays in the book refer to her personal life in a diaristic manner, which she purposely avoids in her work. These biographical tidbits recur in section introductions and several of the new and archival essays. The question that nags at me is why does an artist's work have to be discussed in relation to biography? Grossman only ever flirted with the kinds of biography and diaristic art-making that were crucial strategies of second-wave feminist art. While her own reflections on her work raised the specter of biography, as when she often said regarding her heads that they were self-

portraits, the work itself never suggests this reading, and even her diary works deny the specifics of self-portraiture.

Nevertheless, for the benefit of the unfamiliar reader and in light of its discussion throughout the catalogue, I cursorily offer her biography once again. Grossman was born in 1940 to a Jewish/Italian family that owned a garment factory in upstate New York where she worked as a girl, acquiring skills she would later employ in her artwork. By her mid-twenties she won a Guggenheim Fellowship in painting and was having an affair with David Smith, who gave her a bundle of leather farm goods to work with just before he died from which she made assemblages. These led to her heads, which became icons of Sixties sculpture. She settled into a lifelong relationship with feminist critic Arlene Raven and continued to produce her heads, which take over a year to complete, until recently, when aging has caused her dexterity to falter. While tangentially related to her work, these facts shed little light on its power. The essays included in the catalogue, new and old, do so with varying degrees of success.

Following retrospective protocol, the catalogue moves through her work on a decade-by-decade basis, tracing her beginnings as a gestural painter, through her early relief assemblages, to several decades of her heads, to her return to collage and assemblage in the 1990s. A newly commissioned essay accompanies each phase. Art historian David Getsy does an admirable job writing about Grossman's relief assemblages, made from 1965–67. These are powerful works that directly precede her heads, and Getsy evokes a number of sources on which she drew. First and foremost was the work of Smith, who didn't live to see the work he inspired. Drawing on queer theory, Getsy gives a virtuosic reading of the bisexuality of *The Bride* (1965), a rondo whose lower element consists of a white leather seam opening onto an oxblood vaginal interior, but whose upper half features brown leather straps and swatches, making any clear reference to gender ambiguous. Getsy leads from her reliefs into the heads with a detailed account of the social role played by leather wear and motorcycle jackets in

particular, whose aura Grossman drew upon so heavily in both bodies of work.

Getsy's essay is both the longest and most developed of the new group. Writing about Grossman's heads, visual artist Nayland Blake picks up on the theme of gender ambiguity tackled by Getsy. While Blake provocatively mentions the strap-on as a significant trope in Grossman's work, he leaves a deeper discussion of identity and its prostheses hanging. Painter Carrie Moyer discusses her diary collages as a variant on process art rather than an expose of personal feelings. I agree with her assessment but wanted further analysis along these lines, which her brief essay does not provide. Two, more general essays follow. Critic Robert Morgan sails across Grossman's entire oeuvre in a discussion that ranges from Franz Xavier Messerschmitt's eighteenth-century character heads, to Arthur Rimbaud's proclamation that "I is another," to Richard Lindner's robotically sexual paintings. The new essays conclude with Grossman's personal friend, choreographer Elizabeth Streb, whose impressionistic and exclamation-filled reflections on Grossman's work are vague ("it is what it is") and serve largely to celebrate her accomplishments.

While the archival essays return to the details of her private life, they also provide some much-needed depth by situating her work in its historical context. Reviews written at the time of her exhibitions offer critical reflections made in the moment, linking her work to trending topics in the art world of the day. Two pieces offer particular depth, while spending considerable time on her personal life. One was written by Raven for Grossman's first retrospective in 1991. The other is an interview conducted by Cindy Nemser in 1975. These both dance delicately between Grossman's personal life and the broader themes evoked by her work. The latter is especially good at connecting Grossman's work to issues raised by second-wave feminism.

There are many non-biographical avenues that Grossman's work travels down that the essays in the catalogue leave un- or underexplored. These include the relationship of her work to the psychoanalysis of sexual power, from

S/M to eroticism and the pull between the Eros and Thanatos. The context of assemblage in the 1950s and 1960s, including the pioneering work of artists such as Louise Nevelson, Jean Follett, and Lee Bontecou, is also overlooked. So are her links with the political movements of the Sixties, which are largely glossed over but seem crucial for understanding the original context of her work. The psychosexual ethics of her work and the positioning of the self as simultaneously both I and other, which Morgan's essay provocatively hints at, seems particularly significant to me and could use further elaboration. This only means that more occasions are needed for reflecting on her work. Despite assembling the most comprehensive collection of Grossman's work to date, the exhibition's organizers were unable to secure touring venues for it. It is unfortunate, although not unusual, that a woman artist of significant accomplishments would still have trouble finding locations for a retrospective. But there will undoubtedly be more opportunities in the future to delve deeper into Grossman's tough body of work, beyond the particulars of her personal life.

A final note about the reproductions of Grossman's art in the catalogue. They are superb, especially the heads, which have been shot against white seamless backgrounds. Despite their black on black color scheme, they are lit so that details such as stitching and the even wrinkles stand out. The images alone will be a useful reference for scholars of her work. •

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Notes

1. The exhibition was curated by Ian Berry for the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Gallery at Skidmore College, and ran from February 18 through May 20th, 2012.

Carrie Mae Weems: Three Decades of Photography and Video

edited by Kathryn E. Delmez
Frist Center for the Visual Arts in
Nashville and Yale University Press, 2012

Reviewed by Jennifer Zarro

For thirty years, Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953) has focused her lens and art projects on issues of racism, gender, identities, historical narrative, and African American lives. She remains one of the most inquisitive and dynamic contemporary artists of our time. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his Foreword, describes her as an artist who “asks inconvenient questions and comes up with unwelcome answers. For that alone, no contemporary artist’s work is more important” (ix). Now, finally, there is an authoritative document which allows us to relish the breadth and impact of Weems’s work. *Carrie Mae Weems: Three Decades of Photography and Video* is a stunning book. Gorgeous images, erudite essays, and ample commentary on Weems’s major projects to date form a fitting scholarly complement to the mid-career museum retrospective of Weems’s work organized by the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville.

The majority of the publication, some 184 pages (of 271 total), consists of high-quality color plates of the artist’s works from 1978 to the present, with commentary by exhibition curator Kathryn E. Delmez, who edited this excellent volume. Weems’s groundbreaking works such as *The Kitchen Table Series* (1990), or *From Here I saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995–96) are presented in their entirety. Because these serial works are generally reproduced partially or as single images extracted from the context of the whole, it is possible to realize how crucial the text portion of *The Kitchen Table Series* is, for example. This publication is thus a definitive reference.

Following the curator’s Introduction are four critical essays, by Delmez, Robert Storr, Deborah Willis, and Franklin Sirmans. The artist who emerges is a pioneer who employs vast

pluralistic approaches to great ends which at once illuminate and re-write history and our understanding of its consequences. The authors consider various themes, such as Weems’s folkloric methods, her mining of history, her focus on desire, beauty, and politics, and her consistent incorporation of performance. This last category, which seems to be a more recent topic of investigation, proves necessary, as so many of her photographs feature the artist herself, as an actor performing in a storyline or as an observer leading us through the world. The essay contents frequently overlap, as major works such as *The Kitchen Table Series* are discussed by each of the authors, as are biographical details. Images from throughout Weems’s career sprinkled throughout the essays add to the visual richness of this catalogue.

Delmez’s Introduction summarizes major themes and projects by Weems and points us in the directions that the essayists will take. She begins by introducing us to a significant aspect of Weems’s work: “to bring ignored or erased experiences to light,” and to “spur greater awareness and compassion” (1). These themes reverberate throughout this book, beginning with the artist’s earliest project, *Family Pictures and Stories* (1978–84), which “bestows value on her family and ... other underrecognized peoples” (2). Weems focuses on the personal in ways that ultimately allow specific black experiences to represent the whole of humanity.

Weems’s graduate study in folklore is cited as a strong influence in Delmez’s essay, “‘Real Facts, by Real People’: Folklore in the Early Work.” She shows keenly how Weems explores vernacular expressions and everyday lived stories as a means to recognize a unique heritage or to de- and then reconstruct derogatory stereotypes. For *Family Pictures and Stories*, essentially a project of folklore as fine art, Weems aimed to counter the 1965 Moynihan Report, which described the “deterioration of the Negro family” (11). She defies this study by showing her father, sisters, and mother enacting and enjoying their everyday lives. They smile but make no

special effort to hide their arguments and other routine trials. Far from showing “deterioration,” these photographs illustrate abundance. Zora Neale Hurston, author and folklorist, is another inspiration for Weems’s methods. The artist’s 2003 series of photographs of Hurston’s hometown of Eatonville, Florida, is a love letter of sorts; in the photographs, we read that Hurston was Weems’s “guardian angel leading me along the dust tracks in the road & back to the meaning of myself” (12). Weems’s folkloric projects reveal “real facts, by real people,” which at once disrupts any possibility of furthering false stereotypes (19). Delmez outlines convincingly how Weems’s use of photography, video, and language are “themselves forms and vehicles of folklore that are inherently accessible and direct” (19).

Robert Storr’s essay, “Any Way I Want It,” considers the artist in relation to the documentary and naturalist approaches that have dominated the arts and letters of the African American experience. He notes that the goal of the documentary style is to “shed light on dark corners,” while the aim of the naturalist approach includes holding up “positive examples of some aspect of the same reality” (21). Typically, writes Storr, these styles present straightforward and uplifting representations, as for example, *The Sweet Flypaper of Life*, a 1955 collaboration with photographs by Roy DeCarava and words by Langston Hughes. Weems’s work is presented as a foil to these established modes. As a performer in her own contrived fabrications, Weems may utilize the styles of the documentary and naturalistic approaches but only to confirm that “identity is inherently performative” (24), writes Storr. For Weems, naturalism is a “stage set,” and her documents are highly scripted, as exemplified in *The Kitchen Table Series*, where what appears to be a documentary narrative is at the same time a contrived commentary on the style. Storr arrives at a reading that shows Weems as “an agile manipulator of tropes,” one who mines the styles and histories of previous representations of blackness in order to show us how rich the “critical possibilities” can be when

an artist “challenges the conventions of straightforwardness” (31).

As a leading scholar of photography and Weems’s longtime friend, Deborah Willis’s contribution to this publication, “Photographing Between the Lines: Beauty, Politics and the Poetic Vision,” is essential. It is worth noting just how instrumental both women are to our present understanding of photography, contemporary art, and African American life. For decades, their projects have unearthed images that would have otherwise remained buried in the archives, such as Willis’s *Posing Beauty: African American Images from the 1890s to the Present* (2009), which presented a wide range of images from popular magazines to fine art photographs. Here she invokes “beauty” as a tool to understand Weems’s projects and works of art. In *Not Manet’s Type* (1997; Fig. 1), and *Ain’t Jokin* (1987–88), Weems poses before mirrors and considers her physical appearance; she too seems to be looking for beauty, or perhaps acceptance. Willis describes the use of mirrors in Weems’s body of work as evidence that the artist is “searching, exploring, and examining, looking for answers and asking questions” (37). In the second panel of this project, Weems writes, “It was clear, I was not Manet’s type, Picasso—who had a way with women—only used me & Duchamp never even considered me.” But instead of focusing on this rejection, Weems sets up a challenge, daring us to rethink the positioning and glorification of the male artists themselves. In, *Mirror, Mirror*” from her *Ain’t Jokin* series, an African American woman holds up a mirror and asks, “who’s the finest of them all?” The mirror replies, “Snow White you black bitch, and don’t you forget it!!!!” “Black beauty is denied” in this work, Willis writes, but again, rather than accepting this, the black woman averts her attention from the reflection and is already moving toward “other avenues through which to recognize beauty” (37–38). In *Not Manet’s Type* Weems tells us that, “there were other models by which to live.” By doing so, she makes new spaces and possibilities for self-actualization far from the too often assumed western, white norms. Near

the end of her essay, Willis points out just how cutting-edge Weems’s work is, citing her as a pioneer in incorporating text with images prior to digital media, and as someone who greatly expanded the ways in which we consider portraiture by including into this age-old genre sound, installation, and performance.

All of the essayists mention performance as a consistent element throughout Weems’s career, but Franklin Sirmans focuses on it outright in “A World of Her Own.” In 1970, when Weems was seventeen, she began dancing in Anna Halprin’s multiracial Dance Workshop in San Francisco. Sirmans writes that, “the act of dancing taught her to perform. Surely, her early experiences as a dancer gave her the nurturing aspect of practice to go along with a natural sense for using her body to carry a range of emotions with subtle gestures that are frozen in the frame of a still photograph” (44). Sirmans effectively mines the artist’s biography to formulate a portrait of an artist for whom performance is central to her art and her life. In the 1980s, Weems began “to employ her own body directly in the photograph, as subject and performer” (46). Combining these images with text and narratives, her work such as *The Kitchen Table Series* became expansive tableaux, “drawn from life experience though clearly a constructed fiction” (47). Weems’s later series such as *Roaming* (2006) or *Constructing History: A Requiem to Mark the Moment* (2008) are also performance based. *Roaming* shows the artist looking at and considering historical monuments. She uses her body to lead the viewer into contemplation of ancient Roman sites. Dressed in black and seen only from behind, she is at once herself and our stand-in as we consider how monuments, history, and space have affected our bodies and lives. In *Constructing History*, the artist directs students and Atlanta residents to re-enact potent historical scenes and events. The construct of these performed re-presentations is made clear by including in the photographs evidence of the photography set, such as studio lighting and camera tracks. Weems shows us how history itself is a performance, one



**IT WAS CLEAR,
I WAS NOT MANET’S TYPE
PICASSO -- WHO HAD A WAY
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Fig. 1. Carrie Mae Weems, *Not Manet’s Type* (detail, from a Photo Series of five images) (1997), pigment ink prints.

that plays on repeat, or changes according to viewpoint and presentation.

Slow Fade to Black (2010–11), the most recent series included in the exhibition and this catalogue, is evidence of the artist’s powerful use of appropriation. The many images that make up this series show blurred publicity photographs of some of history’s most notable black female performers. The extensive blurring of their faces and bodies comments on our fading memories of these pioneering figures and on the invisibility often felt by black women in history. Though faded and blurred, this project brings into sharp focus what Weems accomplishes with her art: to wade through the layers of history in order to shine a bright spotlight on lives which have historically been relegated to the shadows. We are smarter, more aware, and more compassionate because of her work. •

Jennifer Zarro is an art historian in Philadelphia.

Jennifer Bartlett: History Of The Universe Works 1970-2011

by Klaus Ottmann, with Terrie Sultan
Parrish Art Museum, 2013

Reviewed by Joyce Beckenstein

This short volume about Jennifer Bartlett's (b. 1941) art has a long reach. Taking its title from the artist's first major museum survey, an exhibition curated by Klaus Ottmann for the Parrish Art Museum, in Watermill, New York,¹ it contains Ottmann's thought-provoking essay, an interview with Bartlett by museum director Terrie Sultan, and excerpts from Bartlett's 1985 novel, *History of the Universe*. In addition to twenty-two full-page plates of works included in the exhibition, this catalogue also features vivid images of Bartlett's pivotal work, *Rhapsody* (1975–76), plus photographs of her stunning studios in Brooklyn, New York, and Amagansett, Long Island. An extensive bibliography and artist's biography complete this skeletal but nimble text-as-guide for those wishing to delve further into Bartlett's world.

Ottmann's essay, titled "Repetition and Variation: Bartlett's Universe," begins with a flashback to *Rhapsody*, Bartlett's groundbreaking installation. It belongs to the Museum of Modern Art, and is not included in this current exhibition. An iconic grid of painted enamel on 987 one-foot-square steel plates, *Rhapsody* is based on four minimal signs—house, tree, mountain and ocean; three shapes—circle, square, triangle; and four lines—vertical, horizontal, curved and diagonal. Ottmann elucidates how these elements evolve a conversation between abstraction and figuration that in turn informs Bartlett's ambitious body of Post-minimalist drawings, sculptures, installations, and text-based paintings.

In his contextual discussion about the impact of mathematical thinking—its rational logic and counterintuitive mystery—on Minimalism, he cites Bartlett's interest in Sol Lewitt's "Sentences on Conceptual Art" (1969). After paying further homage to the

cultural and intellectual theories of French Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, American pragmatist Charles Sanders Pierce, and philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Ottmann states, "For Bartlett, a system is never the content of the work, but only a means to express ideas" (22). All of which left this reader dashing for the endnotes, searching for a clearer sense of how *Rhapsody* unfurls these ingenious art historical theories.

Ottmann does make clear that the grid helps Bartlett tidy up what she terms painting's "messiness." It prevails everywhere from assertive roof tiles on *Double House* (1985) to the subtle scaffolding in *Something Is Wrong* (2005–06). Each iteration of the grid serves a different purpose; a schematic "house" may be defined by a simple triangle atop a square, a psychological home by light and dark patches trespassing through an enigmatic garden. Ottmann locates such tensions in *Air: 24 Hours* (1991–92), a series of twenty-four large gridded paintings representing each hour in a day (Fig. 1). They're filled with commonplace, sometimes grim objects and figures, emotive elements that Ottmann links to Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* (1958) and "Ludwig Wittgenstein's language games, describing the paintings as "a participatory space that actively provokes perception and thought" (25).

Terrie Sultan's deft interview with Bartlett grounds Ottmann's conversations about place and space to the artist's Amagansett and Brooklyn studios, habitats that integrate her working environments with her coveted gardens. Bartlett, who alternately paints from life, photographs, and drawings, is always searching for a perspective "...like a stereopticon, only off-kilter" (30). She describes working with a graining brush; "a tool with several brushes on one handle" (32) that produces gauzy surfaces through which space simultaneously recedes and advances. Both techniques are apparent in *Amagansett Diptych #1* (2007–08), a landscape simultaneously depicting



Fig. 1. Jennifer Bartlett, *Five A.M.* (1992) (from *Air: 24 Hours* series), oil on canvas, 84" x 84". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

eastern and western views of a local beach.

Excerpts from Bartlett's novel echo the banalities dispersed within her psychologically charged grids, as the grids mirror her deadpan but disturbing staccato descriptions:

The skin on the soles of my feet is rough, I am inclined to alcohol, anxiety, nervous stomach moods, tentative optimism and inflammatory infections. I have been analyzed unsuccessfully though we both tried; the same is true of marriage (86).

Though brief and brisk, in contrast with its expansive title, this well-considered text provides a satisfying index to a woman artist who, like others of her gender, awaits a fuller retrospective of her pioneering, influential accomplishments. •

Joyce Beckenstein is an arts writer living in New York.

Notes

1. The exhibition first opened at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (June 17–Oct. 13, 2013). The Parrish exhibition runs from April 27–July 13, 2014.

The Reckoning: Women Artists of the New Millennium

by Eleanor Heartney, Helaine Posner,
Nancy Princenthal, and Sue Scott
Prestel, 2013

Reviewed by Jan Garden Castro

This collection featuring essays on twenty-five post-1960s artists is a follow-up to *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art* (2007). It focuses on boundary-expanding artists in its four sections—"Bad Girls," "Spellbound," "Domestic Disturbances," and "History Lessons." Eleanor Heartney, Helaine Posner, Nancy Princenthal, and Sue Scott, all seasoned curators and art writers, each introduce one section and divide the artists among themselves. The book's point of departure is a 2007 quote from New York Times art critic Holland Cotter:

One thing is certain: Feminist art, which emerged in the 1960s with the women's movement, is the formative art of the last four decades. Scan the most innovative work, by both men and women, done during that time, and you'll find crafts-derived art, performance art and much political art would not exist in the form it does, if it existed at all. Much of what we call postmodern art has feminist art at its source (7).¹

Introduced by Heartney, the first section, "Bad Girls," features short essays on women artists who break the boundaries of correctness: Ghada Amer, Cecily Brown, Tracey Emin, Katarzyna Kozyra, Wangechi Mutu, and Mika Rottenberg. Amer's use of pornographic female images is discussed in the context of the artist's education in Nice, where she was excluded from painting classes reserved for male students, which led to her development of a layered technique that "critiqued Western painting as a male domain by feminizing the aggressive, ejaculatory drips associated with Abstract Expressionism" (26). Amer's mix of

European and Arab sources includes her embroidered art after a twelfth century *Encyclopedia of Pleasure*. Her twenty-year career combines feminist subversive erotic art with a strong aesthetic.

Cecily Brown's large scale, gestural art has connections to the art of Francis Bacon, complicated by the fact that Bacon's leading art critic, the family friend David Sylvester, turned out to be Brown's father. Tracey Emin's bad girl reputation is epitomized by her 1998 exhibition of her slept-in bed; by 1999 she was short-listed for the Turner Prize. Emin is known for her keen sense of humor and her way with words. Katarzyna Kozyra is "one of the leading representatives of Polish Critical Art," according to Heartney. Mika Rottenberg, born in Argentina, was raised in Tel Aviv, now lives in New York, and is known for her videos featuring physically exceptional women doing something absurd. Wangechi Mutu, born in Kenya and with art degrees from The Cooper Union and Yale University, creates hybrid creatures and combines drawing and collage to undermine pornography and sleek advertising images and to critique Western stereotypic views of "the noble savage." Covering these exemplary "bad girls" in just over fifty pages containing both text and provocative color plates, gives just a taste of each artist's body of work.

Nancy Princenthal's "Spellbound" section takes its title from a Louise Bourgeois quote that distinguishes between Surrealist dream images and spells: "The dream blinds you, the spell does not."² Bourgeois's latex and mixed media 1974 work *The Destruction of the Father* is strange even today. Princenthal discusses gender issues in the work of Surrealist artists and discusses the gendered uses of symbolism by Bourgeois, Dorothea Tanning, and later artists. Helaine Posner's essay on Janine Antoni, Heartney's on Cao Fei and Lisa Yuskavage, Princenthal's on Nathalie Djurberg, and Sue Scott's on Pipilotti Rist and Jane and Louise Wilson discuss the origins of each artist's provocative spells and symbolism. Scott examines,



Fig. 1. Pipilotti Rist, *Ever is Over All* (still, detail) (1997), video installation with sound. Courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustie, New York, and Hauser & Wirth.

for example, Rist's 1997 video in which a young woman in a gauzy blue dress smashes a series of car windows with a big flower:

The benign flower has magically been imbued with a strength which the heroine uses to destroy the machine, here not only a symbol of capitalism but of masculine power...(100).

The Rist image (Fig. 1) is the cover photo for *The Reckoning*.

The "Domestic Disturbances" section features an opening essay by Sue Scott and individual essays on artists Kate Gilmore, Justine Kurland, Klara Liden, Liza Lou, Catherine Opie, and Andrea Zittel. "History Lessons," introduced by Helaine Posner, covers Yael Bartana, Tania Bruguera, Sharon Hayes, Teresa Margolles, Julie Mehretu, and Kara Walker. Many artists in *The Reckoning* have received solo museum exhibitions and art awards including the MacArthur.

This book covers artists as different as Julie Mehretu, whose gestural yet empirical mappings of topographic sites have graced the Guggenheim Museum and Asia Society, and Lisa Yuskavage, whose super-bosomy fantasy women startle moralists and appear in numerous art books and solo exhibitions. These two artists are at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of subject matter;

Mehretu's meticulous architectonic forms seem far from Yuksavage's near-or-clear pornography, and neither artist conforms to traditional notions of feminism. A series of Appendices at the end shows that men far outnumber women in terms of number of solo gallery and museum exhibitions.

The Reckoning will add to art history courses and diverse libraries. As this book shows, women are pioneering art that urges viewers to become more involved in their own and in regional and world histories. Clearly, this list is somewhat arbitrary and features mostly artists who show in New York. The women artists in this book, those in *After the Revolution* and those missing from that previous book (The Guerilla Girls, Ursula von Rydingsvard, Yayoi Kusama, Bettye Saar, Faith Ringgold, Maren Hassinger) and this new book (Mariko Mori, Alison Saar, Arlene Shechet) all have their own books, for those who care to read/learn more. *The Reckoning* advances critical discussions of gender issues, feminism, art, marketing, geopolitics, perception, and

reception as it opens the door for more women artists and further notions of what constitutes feminist art.

At the same time, feminism is missing entirely from some discussions, such as those on Julie Mehretu and Teresa Margolles. The introduction covers this by saying that feminism is "increasingly plural" and that some artists "choose not to speak of it at all" (9). The distinction between art by women and feminist art needs to be clearer in the next book. I'm not convinced that Rist's 1997 video of a female smashing car windows with a big fake flower and Teresa Margolles's *Lengua* (2000)—the pierced tongue of a heroin-addicted teen killed in a street fight—are feminist. Andy Warhol famously used fake flowers as sexual metaphors, and Blaine de St. Croix and Ian Hughes have used tongues symbolically in art, for example. How is an addict's tongue related to women or feminist art? In the context of this book, the deadpan humor, bodily signs, self-awareness, and sheer audacity in Tracey Emin's "soiled and unmade" *My Bed*

(1998), with its "empty liquor bottles, used condoms, dirty underwear," etc., rises in my estimation. Like Louise Bourgeois's art, it zeroes in on physical and psychological signs of self and gender in relation to others. •

Jan Garden Castro lectures and writes on interactive, multicultural, interdisciplinary arts. Her books include *The Art & Life of Georgia O'Keeffe* (1985, 1995) and *Sonia Delaunay: La Moderne* (2002). See www.jancastro.com and "In the Studio" blog at www.sculpture.org.

Notes

1. Holland Cotter, "The Art of Feminism as it First Took Shape," *New York Times*, March 9, 2007.
2. As quoted from Louise Bourgeois, *Destruction of the Father, Reconstruction of the Father; Writings and Interviews 1923-1997*, eds. Hans Ulrich Obrist and Marie-Laure Bernadac (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; London: Violette Editions, 1998) 160.

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Cristina Iglesias: Metonymy

edited by Lynne Cook
DelMonico Books, Prestel, 2013

Reviewed by Patricia Briggs

This catalogue for the 2012 retrospective organized by the Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, and curated by Lynne Cook is a gorgeous book with more than a hundred pages of photographs generously documenting the work of Cristina Iglesias (b. 1956). *Cristina Iglesias: Metonymy* masterfully presents this artist's gallery installations and impressive public commissions and collaborations with architects. Designed to give the reader a sense of spatially encountering Iglesias's works, the book presents full spread and full-page overview photographs of gallery installations, followed by pages of nearer view shots and close-ups of surface details. Five superb essays—by noted scholars Russell Ferguson (UCLA), Estrella De Diego (Universidad Complutense, Madrid), Gertrud Sandqvist (Lund University, Sweden), Giuliana Bruno (Harvard University), and Cook (Andrew W. Mellon Professor at the Center of Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery, Washington, D.C.)—position Iglesias as a perceptive inheritor of feminist post-structuralist discourse.

Ferguson's statement that "[w]hile Iglesias has rarely articulated an explicitly feminist content in her work, it can be argued ... that her formal choices do nevertheless participate in an alternative system of rhetoric, in which the forceful, authoritative, and compelling are downplayed in favor of a different vocabulary that leans towards the open, inviting, and suggestive" represents the scholarly consensus presented here (14). Together these essays provide a critical overview of Iglesias's work from 1986 to 2012, drawing from both European and U.S. perspectives. I pored over this catalogue and read every word of these essays with great interest. *Cristina Iglesias: Metonymy* is valuable not only because the work of this artist is not well represented in the United States, but also because its careful

design truly gives readers a meaningful way of encountering Iglesias's rather subtle art.

Because the sources of Iglesias's inspiration are not easily identified, she has been described as an "isolated figure who emerged sui generis on the international stage" around 1993, when her work was included in "The Sublime Void," an important exhibition at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp, and she was one of two artists chosen to represent the Spanish pavilion at the Venice Biennale (49). Lynne Cook, in "Alone or Aligned? An Aesthetic Identity in Formation," tackles the issue of tracing an account of Iglesias's formation as an artist. She explains how Iglesias developed outside, but alongside, the fashionable debates and critics' groupings of artists during the 1980s. Cook writes that Iglesias "deliberately put herself at a tangent to the prevailing discourse" on art of the early 1980s when she "relocated from her hometown in San Sebastian in the Basque country to London" to study ceramics at Chelsea School of Art, eschewing "colleges like St. Martins and Goldsmiths then at the forefront of disciplinary debate" concerning contemporary sculpture (50–51). She traces Iglesias's independent discovery of books about Eva Hesse and sculpture in an "expanded field" by artists like Robert Smithson, Giovanni Anselmo, and Walter De Maria whose work she saw exhibited in London. By the late 1980s, when she returned to Spain and settled in Madrid, Iglesias had cultivated a "robust self-sufficiency" and was developing a "distinctive idiom" that wove together aesthetics strategies of "stacking, leaning, piling, propping" drawn from her study of Arte Povera and Post-Minimalist sculpture and a taste for the scale and starkness of modernist architecture (52–53). By 1993, not only was she representing her country in Venice, but Iglesias had gained a commission for a major public art installation in a remote area of northern Norway and had begun the first of a series of collaborative projects with Belgian architects Paul Robbrecht and



Fig. 1. Cristina Iglesias, *Corredor suspendido I-II-III* (Suspended Corridor I-II-III) (2006), Installation view at Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 2006.

Hilde Daem. The Guggenheim Museum in New York presented Iglesias in her first significant museum show in 1997–98 (48).

Perhaps Iglesias's most characteristic form is the *celosia* (latticework, also, *jalousie*). These semi-transparent partitions, or screens, made of braided metal wire are hung from the ceiling to form rooms or "suspended corridors" (Fig. 1), or are built up from stoneware ceramic or molded resin or concrete to form elemental enclosures. The catalogue traces the symbolic and phenomenological richness of Iglesias's *celosia*, first by illuminating its morphology in relation to the louvered windows behind which women are sequestered in the Mediterranean world, where Muslim and Spanish "ladies reveal themselves without ever truly revealing themselves" (34). Iglesias weaves stylized letterforms that spell out poetic and historical texts into these screens. Estrella De Diego notes that while the letters and words of these texts are readable in the artist's sketches, "in the three-dimensional work, they hide, [and] slip away" (26). Embedded with the artist's idiosyncratic, illegible ornamental script, Iglesias's *celosias* bring to mind Hélène Cixous's ruminations about writing as a form of

drawing, as they demand “a kaleidoscopic eye with which we are always seeking the right word, which, just as it comes into view, slips away from us so that we have to run breathlessly after it,” writes De Diego (26). Finally, in “The Thickness of Surface: Projections on a Screen-Wall,” Giuliana Bruno argues that Iglesias intentionally invokes the double meaning of the word *celosias*, as both lattice and *jealousie/jealousy*, to denote a thing, a screen, and at the same time, to connote “an affect” (70–71). For Bruno, Iglesias’s *celosias* are lattice windows or portals that conduct emotional projections “that enable imaginary access into the architecture of interiority” (71).

Iglesias’s extraordinary outdoor projects, sometimes located in far-flung places that are nearly impossible to visit, usually incorporate water. *Underwater Dwellings* (2010) is a series of *celosias* forming rooms built fifty feet below the

surface of the water at the bottom of the Sea of Cortés in Baja California Sur, Mexico, where only fish and an occasional diver can see it. Carefully designed to serve as an artificial reef able to withstand the environment without harming the UNESCO World Heritage Site, *Underwater Dwellings* incorporates a section of *The Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, written by the Jesuit priest Jose de Acosta during the sixteenth century about his time spent in New Spain (186).

Wells and fountains are forms or structures favored by Iglesias. Since about 2009 she has installed several versions of *Towards the Ground*, a well with cast interior lining encrusted with leaf or root patterns that mysteriously appears to send a flow of water down deep into the earth. Gertrud Sandqvist’s essay explores the “bilabial economy” of feminine fluidity and maternal earthiness in

Iglesias’s work, which is most monumentally embodied in *Deep Fountain* (1997–2006), a 46’ x 108’ rectangular fountain commissioned for the entrance of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp (43). Here Iglesias reverses the spouting logic of the familiar garden feature by directing water downward between two lips of a narrow slit at the center of the fountain, where it flows into the labyrinthine “maternal darkness” of the womblike earth (43).

Before picking up *Cristina Iglesias: Metonymy*, I did not know this artist, but going forward I will surely include Iglesias in my next lecture on contemporary art or feminist aesthetics and encourage others to do likewise. •

Patricia Briggs is Director and Curator, Weeks Gallery at Jamestown Community College, in Jamestown, New York.

Lorna Simpson

by Joan Simon et al
Prestel, 2013

Reviewed by Vittorio Colaizzi

The images and essays in this catalogue, which documents Lorna Simpson’s (b. 1960) first museum exhibition in Europe,¹ trace an increasing emphasis on the enigmatically personal at the expense of the linguistic, although her work remains concerned with the discursive behavior of images as they reveal assumptions about race and gender. Simpson, as the author and contributors show, activates looking by short-circuiting the possessive aspects of the gaze.

Curator Joan Simon provides a brisk but insightful survey of Simpson’s works to date, which vary remarkably from the 1980s text-and-image juxtapositions to the more recent and relatively lush video works that inhabit the spaces between personal and historical memory. Four concise essays follow that examine phases or specific works, and after a section of plates, the book is rounded off by an interview in which Simpson discusses

her education, her processes (both mechanical and conceptual), and ruminates on the emotional weight of her subjects.

Recurring themes are the inadequacy of photographs to truly convey experience and the related problem of African-American subjectivity. Essayists Elvan Zabunyan and Thomas J. Lax critique the tendency to read any black image or voice as a stand-in for all. At the same time, the assertion of black agency is by nature a defiant political act. Zabunyan shows how Simpson’s early images assert this agency by refusing to subject themselves to the gaze, initiating a long concern with elliptical communication and meaningful non-communication. Marta Gili, in her essay, describes this happening in the video *Corridor* (2003), in which concurrent sequences of a well-dressed African American woman attending to daily tasks in historically preserved homes are separated by two hundred



Fig. 1. Lorna Simpson, 1957–2009 (2009) (detail), gelatin silver prints, 299 prints, each 5” x 5”. Rennie Collection, Vancouver.

years but united in their unreality, as the protagonist would have been excluded from such sites of privilege.

Recently Simpson has incorporated found sources, most notably a stack of glamour-tinged photos shot by an unknown black couple in Hollywood in 1957 (Fig. 1). Moved by the poignant desire for unachieved (and largely

socially prohibited) celebrity that infuses these images, Simpson chose to display them alongside her own inexact re-enactments of both male and female roles. Such re-enactment, as Lax points out with regard to the video *Momentum* (2010)—this one growing from a childhood dance recital—cannot be a duplication but a layering of additional context and meaning onto a referent from the past. Further, according to Lax, this constitutes a liberating deconstruction of rigid concepts of cause and effect.

Lax also places Simpson's work in a rich historical context that includes minimalist and post-minimalist objects and performance, Yvonne Rainer's de-hierarchical choreography, the deliberately

indistinct self-portraiture of Adrian Piper, and Jacques Derrida's notion of inscription as absence. These connections, along with Naomi Beckwith's invocation of surrealism and dreams, re-energize a body of work that has arguably been canonized for viewers educated after 2000.

Beckwith's essay offers an excellent summary of Simpson's place in photography's late 20th century ascendance as a tool for skepticism as to the transparent truth of images. She also cautions that an overly semiotic reading undercuts the importance of the viewer's body and subjectivity. As Beckwith argues, Simpson's career began with a conflation of words and

images that showed how images can be read like texts. By dispensing with actual words, Simpson shows, as Roland Barthes pointed out, that like texts, images can also be "played."

Vittorio Colaizzi is a critic, curator, and Assistant Professor of Art History at Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, where he is working on a study of abstract painting since 1970. •

Notes

1. Minneapolis: Foundation for the Exhibition of Photography; Paris: Jeu de Paume, in association with Haus Der Kunst, Munich, 2013.

The Dinner Party, Judy Chicago and the Power of Popular Feminism 1970–2007

by Jane F. Gerhard
University of Georgia Press, 2013

Reviewed by Joanna Gardner-Huggett

This captivating read aims to restore "the role of audience interest and popular taste in the success of *The Dinner Party*," which the art establishment held in low regard or used as evidence of its flaws (284). Feminist scholars will find the first two chapters of *The Dinner Party, Judy Chicago and the Power of Popular Feminism 1970–2007* dedicated to the history of the Feminist Art Program and *Womanhouse* familiar territory; likewise the published critiques of *The Dinner Party*'s essentialism, lack of diversity and its place in the culture wars of the 1990s addressed in chapters six and seven.¹ However, author Jane Gerhard, a feminist historian, offers a new dimension to *The Dinner Party*'s history by drawing from financial records that remain in Chicago's possession, as well as numerous interviews with Chicago and her collaborators, and *The Dinner Party* archives held at Harvard.

While audience reception is Gerhard's focus, she also captures the reality of Chicago's studio when the romance of feminist rhetoric fades, by



Fig. 1. Photo. The loft was crowded with large embroidery frames where workers could see and evaluate the runner as a whole. The frames and stands, made at the studio specifically for the runners, disallowed a common practice of rolling up large work on a small frame and stitching small sections at a time. Note the hanging runners in the background. Each runner was covered and stored at night by Susan Hill. From left, Pat Akers, Susan Brenner, Terry Blecher (1977). Courtesy of Through the Flower.

highlighting the voices of the paid staff and volunteers (122). Gerhard vividly describes graffiti in the studio bathroom that derides seventeenth century embroidery techniques utilized for banners, and addresses the conflict between volunteers taking pride in their art, yet being required to relinquish authorship (125) (Fig. 1). The author quotes Terry Blecher, who worked on the runners, as saying, "I felt a conflict of ownership for the first time ... I was

angry at Judy for having the final say at *The Dinner Party* when I had made all the decisions on the piece ... not feeling the confidence to just do it" (126). Further, Gerhard illuminates the many personal and financial sacrifices unpaid volunteers made to participate in the creation of *The Dinner Party* by quoting the studio's *Survival Guide*, including how to apply for welfare and other subsidized city and state services (90). Fourteen black and white photographs

augment this section by illustrating the intensity and varied tasks performed in Chicago's studio.

By "following the money" (ix), in chapters five and six Gerhard expands our knowledge of Diane Gelon's central role in orchestrating fundraising for both the completion and tour of *The Dinner Party*. Gelon implemented creative strategies for donations from individuals by personalizing the effort. For example, a donation of "\$5.00 will provide funds to make a porcelain tile for the floor, \$10.00 will provide an embroidered napkin" (159), etc., anticipating today's popular crowd sourcing sites like Kickstarter. Gerhard also traces the extraordinary ticket sales and profits from souvenirs, the *Dinner Party* book, and audio tours. The significant income generated by this "feminist blockbuster" did not go to Judy Chicago, but was returned to each city where the installation was shown for further investment in future feminist and cultural endeavors (205-08).

In the book's conclusion, Gerhard raises an important question for feminist historians in a "post-feminist" age, namely, "how can historians of feminism address their topic outside of social protest or a social movement?" (287), particularly in the realm of the popular. Gerhard's careful analysis of the comments books from each showing of *The Dinner Party*, in chapter 7, becomes a model of how to extend historical evaluation of large-scale collaborative practices beyond critics' biases and adherence to questions of aesthetic "quality" that are used to exclude artists informed by feminism. While not dismissing the need for a feminist movement that challenges gender roles, the organization of family, or heterosexual sex, Gerhard reminds us how feminist cultural products like Chicago's *The Dinner Party* potentially transform, one encounter at a time (289-90).

Published as a paperback, *The Dinner Party, Judy Chicago and the Power of Popular*

Feminism 1970-2007 is an affordable and excellent text for undergraduates and graduate courses in feminist art history and contemporary art. Gerhard provides useful footnotes for readers, but no bibliography, which would have revealed the broad scope and depth of Gerhard's research. •

Joanna Gardner-Huggett is an associate professor of art history at DePaul University and writes on feminist and collective art practices.

Notes

1. For example, Gerhard draws heavily from the following books in the first two chapters: Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (New York: Penguin, 1975); Gail Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago: A Biography of the Artist* (New York: Harmony Books, 2007); and Laura Meyer, ed., *A Studio of Their Own: The Legacy of the Fresno Feminist Experiment* (Fresno: Press at the California State University, Fresno, 2009).

The Fertile Crescent: Gender, Art, and Society

by Judith Brodsky and Ferris Olin
The Rutgers University Institute for Women and Art, 2012

Reviewed by Brenda Mitchell

This richly illustrated catalogue documents an ambitious collaborative exhibition with accompanying programs organized by Judith Brodsky and Ferris Olin for The Rutgers University Institute for Women and Art. Evolving over a seven-year period, *The Fertile Crescent: Gender, Art, and Society* includes works by twenty-five artists, and the programs involved numerous individuals and institutions, including Rutgers and Princeton Universities. Some of the artists represented, such as video/installation artists Mona Hatoum and Shirin Neshat, are already well-known in the United States, while others such as Hayv Kahraman, Monira Al Qadiri, and Parastou Forouhar (Fig. 1) will most likely be new to American art audiences. The catalogue contains an essay by Brodsky and Olin, essays by

Margot Badran, Kelly Baum, and Gilane Tawadros, and biographical material on the artists and other participants.

The title *The Fertile Crescent* plays as a pun on both the essentialist view of women and its Orientalist associations derived from the University of Chicago archaeologist James Henry Breasted's use of the term early in the twentieth century. Brodsky and Olin's essay applies the rubrics of "unavailable intersections" (3) and transnationalism, citing the "unfixed identities and fluctuating social contexts" (3) of the artists and their work. The authors' intention is to "present critically insightful explorations into the complexities of the intersections of contemporary culture, history, gender, and power, revealing that these considerations result in 'unavailable intersections'" (3).

The Fertile Crescent offers space and time for critical dialog concerning the complexities of developing understandings of Middle Eastern cultures in the West. Its publication was especially timely and important in view of ever-changing political and social events in the Middle East and parts of Africa. Most importantly, it provides a forum for hearing women's voices that are often lost in



Fig. 1. Parastou Forouhar. *Swanrider IV* (from the four-part *Swan Rider* series) (2004), Digital C-print mounted on alubond, 31 1/3" x 31 1/2". Courtesy of the RH Gallery, New York, and the artist.

the din of political rhetoric and selective journalism. •

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Méret Oppenheim: Retrospective

edited by Heike Eipeldauer, Ingrid
Brugger, and Gereon Sievernich
Hatje Kantz, 2013

Reviewed by Salomon Grimberg

An ambitious project built on previous exhibitions,¹ *Méret Oppenheim Retrospective* sets out to “discover one of the most famous female artists of the twentieth century” (7) and to celebrate the artist as one of the greatest female Surrealists and a feminist. Like the exhibitions, this comprehensive catalogue follows the career of one artist who was likely among the most complex connected with the Surrealist Movement—male or female. It comprises a collection of long and short scholarly essays, poems, writings by and about the artist, biographical materials, and 264 illustrations of mostly works by the artist—drawings, paintings, mixed media and found objects—many full page and full color, with some comparative works.

Since her early years among the surrealists, Oppenheim represented herself as androgynous. With her boy’s haircut and slender figure, she could be mistaken for a young man. In her famous portrait by Man Ray, *Untitled (Érotique voilée)* (1933), made when she was 20, it is unclear whether the model is male or female. Oppenheim stands strategically beside a printing press, her pubescent breasts concealed by the wheel; its handle sticking out in front of her hairy crotch like an erect phallus. Man Ray had integrated opposites, male and female, human and machine, into a new context, a theme that underlies Surrealist art. Interestingly, Oppenheim, who retained the androgynous look all her life, was also bisexual.

Méret Elisabeth Oppenheim (1913-85) was born in Berlin-Charlottenburg, the oldest of three siblings, to a Swiss mother, Eva Wenger, and a German Jewish father, Eric Alphonse Oppenheim, whose religious roots would become a liability for the family. After World War I was unleashed the year following her

birth, her father, a physician, was conscripted to serve as a medical officer at the front, and her mother took one-year old Méret to her parents’ home in Switzerland. In her maternal grandparent’s home, she was exposed to intellectual friends, Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Carl Burkhardt, and Herman Hesse, who was briefly married to her maternal aunt. Her grandmother had been a suffragette, studied art in Dusseldorf, and illustrated the famous children’s book *Joggeli söll go Birli schöttle* (*The Story of the Celebrated Swiss Nursery Rhymes*), still popular in Switzerland. From an early age, the young Méret suffered from depressive episodes—at thirteen, she was drawing suicides—but grew up with a clear sense of who she was and how she got there. Méret began painting at age eight, and at eighteen she informed her father—who loved her and encouraged her choices even when he did not quite understand them—that she wanted to be a painter, and that year she moved to Paris to study art. Until then, she had been primarily interested in German Expressionism and did not know Surrealism, the cutting edge art movement in France. Only much later, after producing *Objet* (Object) (1936; Fig. 1), did she learn that what she had done playfully, gluing gazelle fur to a cup, saucer, and spoon, had integrated opposites and unintentionally created an object that reflected Freud’s theories of the unconscious—on which the movement was founded. Producing *Objet*, as well as the rest of her oeuvre, later made her reflect, “There is a part of my nature which is, how could I put it, surreal or surrealist.”²

It must be unbalancing to have an unexpected event in our life rob us of our identity, forcing us to live with a false replacement, a label to make us question who we are and redefine us in the eyes of others. This form of madness was unleashed upon Méret Oppenheim in 1936, when she first exhibited *Objet*, the fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon that made her famous overnight. Oppenheim was twenty-two and her life would never be the same. Thereafter, it would be an uphill battle, but despite setbacks, she would not be deterred.

Throughout, Oppenheim clung to a belief that eventually saved her life: regardless of what anyone said, she was free, and no one—not even herself, during her darkest moments of despair—was going to take it away from her: “Freedom is not given to you. You have to seize it!” (270). The struggle began almost immediately following André Breton’s attempt to rename her work *Déjeuner en fourrure* (Luncheon in Fur), a title that integrated two opposites, a painting and a novella: Edouard Manet’s 1863 *Le déjeuner sur l’herbe* (Luncheon on the Grass) and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s 1870 *Vénus en fourrures* (Venus in Furs).

One less sure of herself might have been flattered by the attention given to her work by Surrealism’s pope, but not Oppenheim. She outright rejected Breton’s title because she could see how it spoke about him but not about her or the work. In a period of only eight months, after being admired by Breton, *Objet* was exhibited in three groundbreaking exhibitions: in Paris, at the *Exposition surréaliste d’objets* in the Galerie Charles Ratton; in London, at the *International Surrealist Exhibition* in the New Burlington Galleries; and in New York City, in the *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, where Alfred H. Barr acquired it for “study,” afraid it was too revolutionary to be included in the permanent collection. Disturbed by too much attention focused on her, a shaken Méret Oppenheim, barely four years after arriving in the French capital, and the youngest member of the surrealist group, returned home to reexamine her life and work. It was then that her father introduced her to Carl Jung’s writings. This depressive period lasted seventeen years, until 1954, during which she destroyed much of the little art she produced. At the time, Oppenheim could not have imagined how, thereafter, sustaining her sense of self would entail a life-long struggle of refusing to accept *Objet* as her best work or to let it define her—opinions that intangible forces had coerced her and the public to embrace. In 1975, forty years after her self-imposed exile, when she received the City of Basel Art Prize,

Oppenheim was still struggling with the burden that sudden fame—or notoriety, if you had asked her—had had on her life: “I thanked the city for the award and went on to say how difficult it is for a woman to receive such attention.”³

Throughout her life, Oppenheim stubbornly refused to make concessions as a person, as a woman, or as a painter, points made by several essayists in the handsome hardback exhibition catalogue. Authors offer fascinating theories about Oppenheim’s objects that present a mysterious blend of opposites, such as *Table with birds feet* (1939), *Bicycle Seat Covered with Bees* (1952), *Gloves* (in which stitches are blood vessels) (1985), among many, as her leitmotif. Yet none links her own androgynous looks and bisexuality to these objects.

Heike Eipeldauer explores Oppenheim’s work as transformations of the self to create self-inventions that, like androgyny, blur gender boundaries. In another essay, she also notes that Oppenheim returns in her “cryptic self-portraits” (68) to certain leitmotifs to develop them further. By focusing on Oppenheim’s dream diary and her poetry, Christianne Meyer Thos concludes that Oppenheim’s creativity stems from a desire to reconcile contradictions. For Elisabeth Bronfen, one is limited in perceiving the transformation process in Oppenheim’s work, although its creative urge is readily recognizable as “the idea reveals itself in the act formation...” (37). Abigail Solomon-Godeau opens with Naomi Schor’s question about “how an unconscious but paradigmatic male fantasy could be internalized, experienced, or even articulated by a woman” (45)⁴ to explore Oppenheim’s interest in fetishism, without considering that is an impossibility, for regardless of the finest empathic attunement, everyone’s psyche is completely unique and different, like a fingerprint. Matthias Frehner’s study of the early work by Oppenheim led him to conclude that, “Her oeuvre lacks any thematic, stylistic, or technical coherence and if there is a unifying principle at all, it is that of simultaneity” (59). In one of two essays, Isabel Schulz explores the correlation between Oppenheim’s dreams and her art, preferring Jung’s interpretation used for “solving the fun-



Fig. 1. Meret Oppenheim, *Object* (1936), fur-covered cup, saucer and spoon, cut 4 3/8" diam., saucer 9 3/8" diam., spoon 8". The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

damental questions of life” (107), rather than Freud’s, who focused on sexuality. In a second essay, Schulz reveals Oppenheim’s interest in natural objects as key inspiration for her work for dealing with the mystery of life and death. Ingrid Brugger’s fascinating essay, “The Invisible in the Work of Meret Oppenheim,” explores Oppenheim’s sublime visualizations of unresolved mysteries, of that which cannot be explained but only intuited. Therese Bhattacharya-Stettler believes that Oppenheim’s “fabulous fantasies” surge from the unconscious world of dreams (168). Kathleen Bühler, in her first of two essays, correlates elements of transformation in Oppenheim’s work to motifs gathered from archaic civilizations. Her following essay explores Oppenheim’s “uninhibited approach to the erotic” (206). And Belinda Grace Gardner attributes Oppenheim’s rich imagination to her “penchant for playing” (246). A most interesting perspective, written by Lisa Ortner-Kreil, shows how Oppenheim’s work is interwoven with layers of text and image.

In the end, Oppenheim remains a mysterious figure who withholds keys to who she is and what the art she produces is about, and she is not sharing them. Which is the way it needs to be. •

Salomon Grimberg, M.D., is Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Southwestern Medical Center, Dallas. He writes on various aspects of the creative process and has published books on Frida Kahlo, Leonora Carrington, Jacqueline Lamba, and other artists.

Notes

1. The exhibit opened at Bank Austria Kunstforum, Vienna, March 21–July 14, 2013, and traveled to Martin-Gropius Bau, Berlin, Aug. 17–Dec. 1, 2013.
2. Robert J. Belton, *Interview with Meret Oppenheim* in Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli, and Gwen Raaberg, *Surrealism and Women* (Cambridge, MA and London England: The MIT Press) 68.
3. Ibid. 69.
4. Naomi Schor posed her question with regard to the French writer George Sand.

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Paula Modersohn-Becker: The First Modern Woman Artist

by Diane Radycki
Yale University Press, 2013

Reviewed by Jennifer Griffiths

Twenty-four years ago Carol Duncan drew our attention to the fact that the story of modernism, as told by New York's Museum of Modern Art, is a story about men painting women,¹ and today the art of women still comprises less than eight percent of its permanent collection.² To this day MoMA owns no paintings by the German proto-Expressionist Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876–1907). Thirty years after Alessandra Comini first argued for her importance,³ the release of Diane Radycki's new monograph underscores the significance of this omission.

Having translated and edited the first English edition of the artist's letters and diaries, Radycki, Associate Professor of Art at Moravian College, was perhaps uniquely situated to take on the task of reassessing Modersohn-Becker's life and legacy.⁴ Her argument for seeing this painter as "the missing piece in the history of twentieth-century modernism" (5), the first modern woman artist, makes essential reading. She goes well beyond the standard biography to examine the artist's formal development, consider the timing and implications of her critical reception, and provide an analysis of the artist's most revolutionary images.

The scholarly importance and inevitable public appeal of this publication are reflected in the decision to produce Radycki's 256-page book as a hardcover edition that is lusciously illustrated with 64 color and 80 black-and-white images. Eleven full-page reproductions allow the reader to meditate more fully on the visual power of several key works, and extensive direct quotations from letters and diaries help to conjure a sense of intimacy. Radycki sets out the logic of her narrative in the introduction and provides a helpful chronology, family

tree, and index, but no bibliography. Her carefully constructed account maps the life and afterlife of the artist in four parts and ten chapters.

The story begins with the artist's difficult birth, as described in a letter from her mother, Mathilde Becker, and outlines her family origins and early childhood experiences. The subsequent chapter charts her posthumous rebirth within key literary publications and exhibitions, a rise to prominence that began in 1908 with the publication of *Requiem for a Friend* by poet Rainer Maria Rilke on the first anniversary of her death. An extensive description of Modersohn-Becker's artistic formation and formal training in Dresden, Bremen, London, Berlin, and Worpswede is followed by consideration of her formative experiences in Paris. In the French capital the artist could devote herself to anatomical drawing and nude study at the Académie Colarossi and École des Beaux Arts. She spent considerable time at the Louvre, examining the work of her predecessors, and kept abreast of contemporary developments in the galleries of Rue Laffitte and the studios of Montmartre. Her culturally sophisticated urban escapes to Paris in 1900, 1903, and 1905–06 are juxtaposed with the parallel life she lived at the Worpswede art colony. While its founders Fritz Mackensen, Heinrich Vogeler, and the artist's husband, Otto Modersohn, remained rooted in the romanticized traditions of landscape, her own artistic interests were shifting noticeably toward Paris and causing her to feel increasingly alienated.

In the second half of the manuscript Radycki turns her attention to the artist's oeuvre of over 700 paintings, considering the formal risks and innovations that identify Modersohn-Becker's figure paintings, portraits, self-portraits, nudes and still lifes such as Figure 1. While the artist has often been defined as a painter of women and children,



Fig. 1. Paula Modersohn-Becker, *Still Life with Sunflowers, Hollyhocks, and Dahlias* (1907), canvas, c. 36"x 26". Kunsthalle Bremen. Der Kunstverein in Bremen.

Radycki disputes this simplistic categorization by pointing out that the subject constitutes less than four percent of her oeuvre (124). Illustrating the influence of Cézanne, Degas, Gauguin and van Gogh on Modersohn-Becker's stylistic development, Radycki also indicates significant ways in which her own work prefigures Picasso and Matisse. Even as she absorbed the stylistic tendencies of other modernists, she was replacing the familiar subject of MoMA's "hot mama" with "the postmenopausal old woman and premenstrual girl" (113). A unique biographical picture emerges as self-portrait and portrait images are set beside letters and memoirs to piece together the nature of the "emotional storms" that beset the artist in her final months (142). She fled Worpswede and her unconsummated marriage on a cold night in February 1906, wishing to pursue an independent path in Paris. During this final Parisian escape Modersohn-Becker worked feverishly on life-size nude images and became the first woman artist to paint a nude self-portrait. Her

female nudes “privileged neither the siren’s pubic hair nor the saint’s nurturing breast” and are best understood as a precedent for later twentieth-century body imagery (180). The difficult circumstances of her new life eventually compelled a reconciliation with Otto Modersohn in September 1906, and, as a condition of her return, the artist wished to become a mother. In the final section of the book we pick up the chronological thread of critical reception, following it into the interwar period of National Socialism, when the artist’s works were declared degenerate and hung alongside those of August Macke and Franz Marc in 1937. The story closes with an account of the artist’s final months and comes full circle in detailing her unexpected, tragic death of an embolism eighteen days after giving birth to a daughter, Mathilde, named for the artist’s mother.

Radycki’s book clearly challenges the idea that there have been no great women artists and she succeeds in seizing the masculinist narrative of modernism by the horns. Not only does she make a convincing case for the importance of this artist, but she demonstrates how much must yet be done to recuperate and reevaluate women’s actual contribution to the arts.

Nevertheless Radycki’s gripping account ultimately feeds our predictable appetite for mythical heroism and reveals the enduringly seductive power of the Great Artist who, as Linda Nochlin once warned, “suffering the slings and arrows of social opprobrium ... ultimately succeeds against all odds—generally, alas, after his death—because from deep within himself radiates that mysterious, holy effulgence: Genius.”⁵ If Paula Modersohn-Becker’s tale is so evocative of this powerful yet problematic heroic construct, then one might rephrase Virginia Woolf to ask, “who will blame her if she does homage to the beauty of the world?,” for here is a story about a modern woman painting women. Modersohn-Becker’s legacy has been greatly underestimated, particularly outside Germany, and the fact that such an apparently well-documented woman artist has been so marginalized from the mainstream modernist narrative indicates the depth of the lacuna that exists. Let us remember, however, that by admitting her to the pantheon of Great Artists we run the necessary risk of legitimizing its authority. •

Jennifer Griffiths teaches for The American University of Rome and the

Iowa State University Rome Program and writes for the American Academy in Rome. She is currently researching and writing a collection of critical essays on women artists of Italian Futurism.

Notes

1. Carol Duncan, “The MoMA’s Hot Mamas,” in *Art Journal* 48:2 (Summer, 1989): 171–78.
2. Jerry Saltz, “My Final Word on MoMA’s Woman Problem,” *Vulture*, Nov. 20, 2013, accessed Dec. 20, 2013, <http://www.vulture.com/2013/11/jerry-saltz-final-word-on-momas-woman-problem.html>.
3. Alessandra Comini, “Gender or Genius? The Women Artists of German Expressionism,” in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 277.
4. Diane Radycki, trans. and ed., *The Letters and Journals of Paula Modersohn-Becker* (Metuchen, NJ, and London: Scarecrow Press, 1980). See also *Woman’s Art Journal*, vol. 30, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2007), which was entirely devoted to Paula Modersohn-Becker, with articles by Radycki, Anne Higonnet, Rainer Stamm, Michelle Vangen and Monica J. Strauss.
5. Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” (1971), in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1988), 155.

Impressionism, Fashion, & Modernity

edited by Gloria Groom
Yale University Press, 2012

Reviewed by Heidi Strobel

Contemplating the expansion of the bourgeoisie under Louis Philippe’s July Monarchy (1830–48), Honoré de Balzac declared that “fashion is the expression of society ... fashion is, all at once, a science, an art, a custom, a sentiment” (18). One could say the same of the Impressionists, with their adherence to color theory and devotion to images of modern life.

Impressionism, Fashion, & Modernity, the 2012–13 exhibition at the Musée D’Orsay, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago for which this catalogue was compiled,

highlighted the central role of fashion in the works of the Impressionists and their contemporaries from the mid-1860s to the mid-1880s, when Paris reigned as the fashion capital of the world. This unprecedented exhibition featured eighty figure paintings paired with period costumes, accessories, fashion plates, photographs, and popular prints.

While the catalogue’s thirteen chapters are primarily written for specialists, the case studies that follow almost all of them are aimed at an audience outside of academia. Similarly, the pairing of fine art (paintings) and material culture (period costumes, accessories, fashion plates, photographs, and popular prints) both broadens the appeal of this catalogue and provides an innovative way of looking at the endlessly popular art of the Impressionists, many of whom (Claude Monet and Auguste Renoir, among others) were married to women who were

involved in the fashion industry. A majority of the chapters focus on fashionable femininity, rather than masculinity, a disappointing feature that is perhaps partially due to many portraits of women and a surplus of feminine accessories.

The first essay, “The Rise and Role of Fashion in French Nineteenth-Century Painting,” by Gary Tinterow, serves as both an anchor and introduction to the catalogue, particularly in its description of the role of fashion in French portrait painting prior to the Impressionists. The favorite portraitist of the July Monarchy, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (who was married to a milliner), created portraits that emulated dressmaker’s patterns with their attention to dress seams, construction, fabric, lining, and accessories (19). Ingres’s success in portraying the bourgeoisie in the first half of the nineteenth century (for example *Madame de Senonnes* of 1814

and *Portrait of Monsieur Bertin*, 1832) was succeeded by Édouard Manet's portraits of modern women, in particular *The Parisienne* (1875, cat. 33). Ruth Iskin, in her 2007 book *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting*, described the significance of this woman to the Impressionists: "the stereotype of the chic Parisienne played an important role in the shaping of femininity as integral to modernity and the nation... [her] national role was both as a symbolic icon and as a consumer of French goods"¹ The Parisienne became an icon for the Impressionists, who were particularly interested in utilizing fashion as a means of making and marketing their work.

In "The Social Network of Fashion," editor Gloria Groom equates Paris to a cultural wheel whose spokes include the Parisienne, the fashion industry, and the avant-garde (33). This essay provides a comprehensive description of the Parisienne, variations of whom were painted by Manet, the Impressionists, and their more orthodox contemporaries such as Alfred Stevens. These portraits often feature a fashionably dressed beautiful young woman whose pose is related to either fashion plates or *carte de visite* photography; the mass and/or cheap production of both made it possible for the Impressionists to incorporate this popular imagery into their paintings. Thus, relatively lowbrow source material, current fashion, and avant-garde Impressionist painting united to form an image of a modern woman. In Manet's *Parisienne*, we see another facet of modernity, the role of celebrity, for the actress Ellen Andrée was the model for this portrait. In it, she wears a thoroughly up-to-date *robe de promenade* (walking dress) of black silk, both signifying wealth and physical mobility. Its sheath-like fit and lack of bustle closely resemble the *amazone*, a riding habit whose name also implied a new, more autonomous role for women (40).



Fig. 1. Berthe Morisot, *Young Woman in a Ball Gown* (1879), oil on canvas, 28" x 21 5/16". Musée d'Orsay.

As Françoise Tétarte-Vittu indicates in her case study on Manet's *Parisienne*, this urbane archetype became "synonymous with fashion" (80). In his seminal *The Painter of Modern Life* (1859), Charles Baudelaire decreed that fashion was an indicator of character, an ideological thread that runs through most of the essays in this catalogue. Because of this, the disturbingly modern Parisienne and her sister, the liberated New Woman, were also targeted by authors threatened by increasing feminine independence and agency during the second half of the nineteenth century (58).

The Parisienne was one of the actors in the making of fashion, a process thoroughly described by Tétarte-Vittu in "Who Creates Fashion?" Innovations such as fabric samples, ready-made dresses, catalogues, and mail order sales contributed to the flourishing of the fashion industry during the second half of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, newly popular department stores such as Le Bon Marché and Les Grands Magasins du Louvre encouraged the publication of fashion magazines,

plates, and patterns. These images were studied by women in search of the latest fashions as well as artists like Renoir and Paul Cézanne. Fashion publications became a part of the Impressionists' working process, as both Tétarte-Vittu and Birgit Haase demonstrate. Haase offers a compelling argument for how Monet's *Women in the Garden* (1866) served as a "manifesto of avant-garde figure painting *en plein air*" that featured the psychological detachment and calculated casual poses also seen in contemporary fashion illustrations (103). Yet in the hands of the Impressionists, these conventional features were united with avant-garde pictorial strategies such as loose brushstrokes, cropped scenes, and close-up views.

A proximate and corseted view of nineteenth-century actress Henriette Hauser is just one of several reasons that the Salon of 1877 refused Manet's *Nana*, which was eventually exhibited (and perhaps marketed) in the window of Giroux et Cie, a dealer who specialized in objets d'art and luxury items. Valerie Steele's essay on this painting provides a long overdue analysis of the role of the corset and other undergarments in the paintings by Manet and the Impressionists. This scholarly neglect is particularly surprising, as the annual corset production was estimated at a staggering one million in late nineteenth-century Paris. While dresses such as the *amazone* and *robe de promenade* featured a simplified silhouette that facilitated movement, corsets became more ornate, perhaps as a lingering symbol of femininity in the age of the modern woman. Steele offers compelling descriptions of this "*cuirasse esthétique*" (133) to nineteenth century authors and artists like Manet, who suggested that "the satin corset may be the nude of our era" (124).

Although the corset signified a liminal and erotic state between feminine dress and undress, men abandoned this undergarment in the second half of the nineteenth century

even though a streamlined and virile body characterized the model urban silhouette. For example, Frédéric Bazille's 1867 portrait of a casually posed Renoir (cat. 71) features an image of modern masculinity—the lean artist is dressed in a casual short frock coat, fashionable light-colored trousers, and ankle boots with elastic inserts. While the domestic scenes favored by the Impressionists provide a catalogue of various types of female dress and undress, there are fewer corollary images of men, as Philippe Thiébaud indicates in his essay “An Ideal of Virile Urbanity.” Unlike women, who had a variety of outfits for different times of the day, an urban man could survive with two sets of monochromatic clothing: his daytime outfit and his evening clothes (137). Because a majority of the nineteenth-century fashion industry in Paris was focused on women, there are fewer connections that can be made between fashion plates and patterns, *nouvelle peinture*, and male fashion, whose epicenter was London.

One of the fortes of *Impressionism, Fashion, & Modernity* is its treatment of male artists not traditionally associated with the Impressionist movement such as Jean Béraud and the better-known James Tissot. Their group portraits (*A Ball*, 1878, cat. 90, and *The Circle of the Rue Royale*, 1868, cat. 73) provide a wealth of visual information about masculinity in late nineteenth-century Paris. While Béraud's style is closest to that of the Impressionists, he never exhibited with them. Tissot had more connections to the movement, for Degas painted his portrait in 1867–68 (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art). Tissot also looked to fashion plates for inspiration, as is demonstrated in his *Portrait of Mademoiselle L.L.* (1864). Another strength of the catalogue is its juxtaposition of photographs and Impressionist paintings (of and by Berthe Morisot for example), which convincingly argue for the role of popular imagery in the development of this artistic movement. Similarly, fashion plates sometimes mimicked the poses in Impressionist portraits like Morisot's *Young Woman in a Ball Gown* (1879; Fig. 1), which features a

proximate view of a fashionable young woman. In her essay “Photography, Fashion, and the Cult of Appearances,” Elizabeth Anne McCauley shows how the Impressionists absorbed the poses and general layout of *carte de visite* images in their portraiture (201).

At first glance, Gustave Caillebotte's *Paris Street; Rainy Day* (1877), which was also indebted to photography, seems united in its architecture, fashion, and sociology. As Aileen Ribeiro indicates, however, part of the delightful attraction of this painting is its discordant painting of a (male) *flâneur* and (female) *bourgeoise* in its foreground. Ribeiro also provides an insightful and concise description of the great masculine renunciation of menswear in this painting, demonstrating how fashion can both signify one's conformity and individuality (190). Caillebotte's best-known paintings focus on Parisian streets, which were expanded by Baron Haussmann under the direction of Napoleon III. In “Spaces of Modernity,” Groom describes how these streets acted as large scale stages for the performance of fashion. Yet their shops and stores, which were likened to museums by several contemporary visitors, were rarely depicted by the Impressionists. Both Groom and Tétarte-Vittu succinctly explain this omission by reminding the reader that these venues often sold more mainstream Realist and conservative paintings that were diametrically opposed to both the subject matter and style favored by the Impressionists (174).

One of the most striking features of *Impressionism, Fashion, & Modernity* (both the exhibition and catalogue) is its union of painting and textiles. Both Albert Bartholomé's 1881 portrait of his young wife (*In the Conservatory*, cat. 28) in a stunning white and purple dress and the garment itself are included in the exhibition. For the prematurely widowed artist, the dress served as a relic of his wife, but it reminds today's viewer of the interwoven realms of painting and fashion in late nineteenth-century Paris. Similarly, Sylvia Patry's essay on the elegant Madame Marguerite Charpentier (the subject of Renoir's 1878 portrait in the Metropolitan Museum of Art)

provides a compelling reassessment of her role as a *salonnière* who entertained the Impressionists and along with her husband became some of this group's first known collectors (247). While *Impressionism, Fashion, & Modernity* offers a modest contribution to the existing scholarship on the under-studied Eva Gonzalès, her fellow Impressionist Marie Bracquemond, who, although mentored by Monet and Degas, is never mentioned in the catalogue. Ultimately, in this account of Impressionism and fashion, male artists such as Manet, Degas, and Renoir assume the more active role of *flâneur*, while a majority of the female painters and sitters are often objectified in the more passive role of Parisienne. •

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Notes

1. Ruth Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 223.

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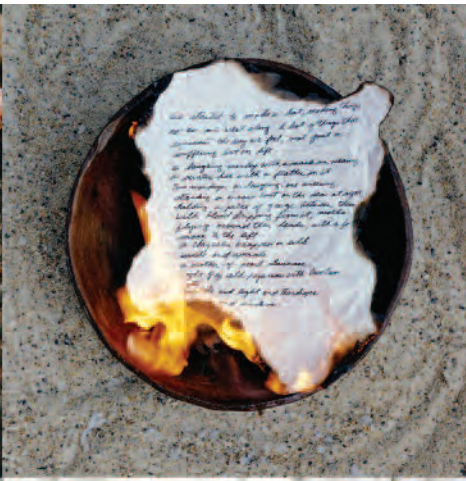


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Pl. 1. Judy Dater, *Love Letters #3* (1984),
4 chromogenic prints, each 15" x 15".



Pl. 2. Judy Dater, *Positive composite photograph* (from *Memoir*) (2012),
archival pigment print, 20" x 24".

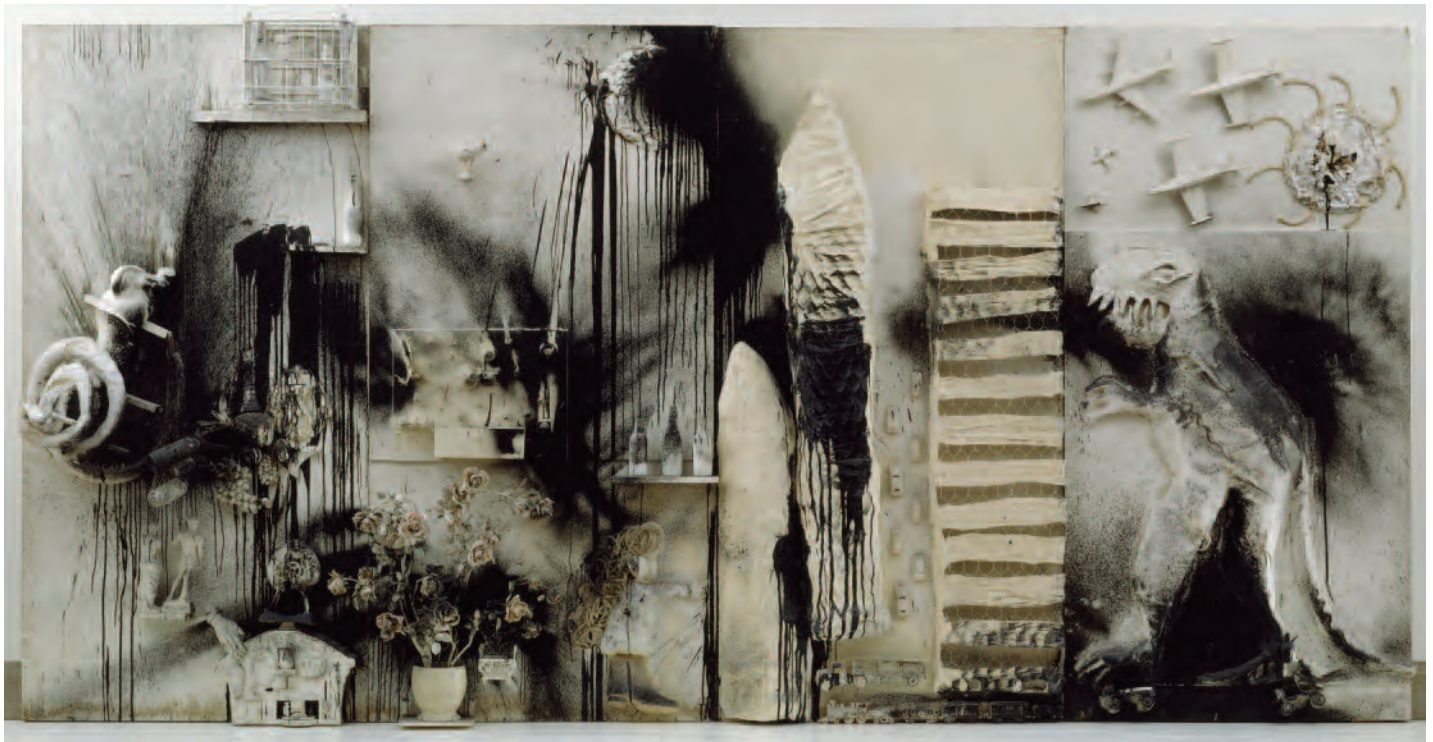




Pl. 5. Niki de Saint Phalle, *Tu es moi* (1960), objects, wood, plaster and paint, 31 5/16" x 23 5/8" x 1 3/16". Gift of Irma S. Seitz for the William C. Seitz, Graduate School Class of 1955, Memorial Collection, Princeton University Art Museum/Art Resource, NY. © 2014 Niki Charitable Art Foundation. All rights reserved/ARS, NY/ADAGP, Paris.



Pl. 7. Niki de Saint Phalle, *Pirodactyl over New York* (1962), paint, plaster, wood and various objects, 98" x 122" x 12". © 2014 Niki Charitable Art Foundation. All rights reserved/ARS, NY/ADAGP, Paris. Photo: Laurent Condominas.



Pl. 6. Niki de Saint Phalle, *Gorgo in New York* (1962), paint, plaster, wire and various objects on plywood, 95 3/4" x 193" x 19 1/2". Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Gift of D. and J. de Menil. © 2014 Niki Charitable Art Foundation. All rights reserved/ARS, NY/ADAGP, Paris.



Pl. 8. Lee Bontecou, *Untitled* (1961). welded steel, canvas, wire, and rope, 72 1/2" x 66" x 25 3/4". Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Purchase 61.41.



Pl. 9. Lee Bontecou, *Untitled*, (1999), colored pencil on paper, 24" x 18". Collection of the artist.



Pl. 10. Lee Bontecou, *Untitled* (1996), pastel and colored pencil on black paper, 20" x 26". Private collection.



Pl. 11. Helen Frankenthaler, *Yellow Caterpillar* (1961), oil on canvas, 93 3/4" x 120". Private Collection.



Pl. 12. Helen Frankenthaler, *Small's Paradise* (1964), acrylic on canvas, 100" x 93 5/8". Smithsonian American Art Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Gift of George L. Erion.



Pl. 13. Helen Frankenthaler, *Shatter* (1953), oil on canvas, 48 1/2" x 54". Private Collection.



Pl. 14. Helen Frankenthaler, *Mountains and Sea* (1952), oil on canvas, 86 5/8" x 117 1/4". Collection of Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc., on extended loan to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Pl. 15. Hannah Höch, *Die Starken Männer* (*The Strong Men*) (1931), photomontage, 9 5/8" x 5 5/16". Photo: Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, Stuttgart.

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Tapestry Two: Yukiko Sugihara

Much has been written about Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese diplomat in Lithuania who saved several thousand lives by issuing transit visas, so Jewish refugees could travel to Japan. Little is written about his wife, Yukiko Sugihara, who was the primary influence on her husband to issue these visas, and who stayed on to work with him—at great risk—through the chilling times of German atrocities. Yukiko co-wrote “Visas for Life,” a moving account of what it was like to have thousands of Polish Jews converge upon the Japanese consulate, begging for visas to escape Poland through the Soviet Union to Japan. “I wasn’t frightened by the crowd, they all looked so sad. Some women were looking right at me with great sorrow. Some of them had their hands together begging. I could see how they came there depending on us....I will not forget their eyes for the rest of my life.”

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