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(on the cover)
April Gornik,
Source (1989),
oil on linen,
77 1/2" x 86".

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In May of this year, the college Art Association Board of Directors honored WAJ with a special commendation for “thirty-five years of outstanding scholarship in the field of feminist art history,” noting “a high quality of scholarly articles that serve as a forum for re-examining feminist concerns of the women’s art movement.” We thank the CAA committee on Women in the Arts for initiating this special honor.

Over the years, feminist approaches to art history have resonated widely, and it is clear that feminist methodologies have surfaced in many countries. In recent months we have received submissions from Turkey, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, as well as Latin America and Europe. It is with great pleasure that we include some of these articles in this and upcoming issues.

Gülsün Karamustafa, a contemporary Turkish artist, is the subject of an article co-written by Solmaz Bunulday Hısgüler and Tuna Şare. A multi-talented artist who worked in the film industry as well as creating unusual mixed media installations incorporating everyday objects as well as photography and video, Karamustafa has found unique ways to demonstrate her concerns about significant political and cultural issues affecting her country and its peoples. Circumstances of history and events in surrounding nations have led to her concern with a topic she calls “boundaries.” The authors write, “the ambiguity of boundaries through the concept of migration and hybrid situations formed as a result of migration is one of Karamustafa’s major themes. She has discussed different kinds of boundaries—cultural, sexual, and territorial—and through her work has tried to show the hybridities within these boundaries.”

Since the advent of “Modernismo” in Brazil, almost a century ago, women artists have played a significant role in important Brazilian art movements. Unlike their U.S. counterparts who, beginning in the 1960s, readily adopted feminism, Anna Maria Maiolino, Lygia Pape (like many other Brazilian women artists), were “adamant about rejecting the feminist label,” according to our author Claudia C. Alirman. Nevertheless, in her article on their “‘epidermic’ and Visceral Works,” she argues that “both Maiolino and Pape were engaged in questioning and redefining constructions of women’s identity, a central feminist pursuit,” and “contributed seminal works to the feminist canon despite their professed lack of allegiance to feminism as a cause.”

In Germany, between the two World Wars, as the Bauhaus rose to prominence as a school for both fine and decorative arts, a few women came to play important roles in the school. Most, however, failed to get recognition for their achievements there, including Lucia Moholy. In this issue the distinguished scholar Rose-Carol Washton Long examines the life and photographic production of this trained photographer, who frequently collaborated with her husband, László Moholy-Nagy, during his tenure at the Bauhaus in the 1920s. It was Lucia who took many of the iconic photographs of Bauhaus architecture and design products—without credit. In her article, Long describes Lucia’s fight for recognition as a struggle only partially based on gender, writing: “I want to place the issue of Jewish identity into this mix and ask if Lucia Moholy’s reaction to her own and her husband’s assimilated Jewish background, compounded with problematic conditions for Jews at the Bauhaus, exacerbated her marginalization.”

Megan Brandow-Faller introduces WAJ readers to Vally Wieselthier, an innovative ceramic artist who was active during the

1920s in another well-known European art institution, the Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna Workshops). Despite Wieselthier’s often assuming “a self-constructed mask, parodying [a] childish feminine essence,” and playing the “naïf,” Brandow-Faller credits her with a greater seriousness of purpose. Through her ceramic sculptures, Wieselthier strove “to elevate female craftiness and vessel-based techniques into the realm of the monumental,” and became “the only practitioner of the new Viennese ceramics to be accepted as a sculptor in the United States.”

Our cover story, by Joyce Beckenstein, celebrates three decades of work by the New York artist April Gornik. In her poetic text, Beckenstein describes the artist’s “signature style” as: “working magic with oppositions, creating landscapes that are realistically surreal, toxically compelling, sensually distant, and objectively abstract.” “[N]o more a feminist artist than...a deliberate eco-artist,” for Gornik “the feminist self emerges through a larger identity that is inseparable from her creative artistic process,” writes Beckenstein.

Except for a single review of a slim catalogue on a single work—*Judith Slaying Holofernes*—of Artemisia Gentileschi, the significance of which reviewer Marjorie O’Ch calls “anything but slight,” our review section concerns artists working during the last hundred years.

Dina Comisarenko Mirkin reviews a book that is also dedicated to a single work, the Venezuelan artist Gego’s *Reticulárea* (1969), a site-specific, signature work that she then recreated in numerous other locations. *Untangling the Web, An Anthology of Critical Response* collects critical writings on this influential work, written over several decades, that will, among other benefits, bring forward “the aesthetic and the historical value of a creative artist who was able to produce a new visual language and a new notion of space...”

Essays in a major new catalogue on the Berlin Dada artist Hannah Höch, reviewed here by Elizabeth Otto, examine Höch’s unconventional life and singular oeuvre, including her “radicality,” “her feminism,” and her interest “in the profound ambiguities reflected in Weimar culture’s particular admixture of radical change, traditionalist backlash, and great uncertainty.”

Aliza Edelman reviews *Theresa Bernstein: A Century in Art*, devoted to this long-lived American artist, whose “painterly narratives” document modern life in the 1910s and 1920s, especially “urban interests, from music and opera, to immigration laws, parades, and the burgeoning suffrage movement.”

Additional catalogues under review document an exhibition of sculpture and works on paper by Marisol; Barbara Chase-Riboud’s monumental Malcolm X steles; a retrospective exhibition with photographs and tracings by Louise Lawler; and a major exhibition of collages and related works by Wangechu Mutu. Also reviewed is a monographic study on the environmental art of Patricia Johanson; and an anthology titled *Reconciling Art and Mothering* including compelling essays by artists and art historians on this universal topic, drawn from personal experiences as well as historical examples.

As we begin our thirty-sixth year, we again wish to thank our authors and reviewers, present and past, whose excellence was noted in the CAA commendation, and our subscribers, Rutgers University, and Old City Publishing for their continued support.

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

APRIL GORNIK

ACCIDENTAL LANDSCAPES

By Joyce Beckenstein



Fig. 1. April Gornik, *Storm and Plains* (2012), oil on linen, 74" x 103".

“A picture comes to me from miles away: who is to say from how far away I sensed it,” remarked Picasso about his cubist abstraction.¹ April Gornik would answer in kind about her realist landscape paintings and drawings. She finds her imagery everywhere, from her woodsy Long Island, New York backyard to China and Africa, to the Internet. But mostly she mines her memory for the stuff that comes at her sideways, images glimpsed peripherally by her mind’s eye. She photographed the sky in *Storm and Plains* (2012; Fig. 1) outside her home, its foreground light on a trip to Tanzania. Her painted light is a composite of these and other vaguely real and dreamlike worlds. During her thirty-year career she’s evolved a signature style working magic with

oppositions, creating landscapes that are realistically surreal, toxically compelling, sensually distant and objectively abstract. Recalling and affirming the great American landscape tradition in all its incarnations, her works embody Martin Johnson Heade’s transcendental luminism, Mark Rothko’s visionary veils of color, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s eco-politics.² Gornik’s art historical heft derives from her seamless layering of these formal and historical elements in ways that speak to an American relationship with nature that is as conflicted in its attitude today as it was the day the pilgrim felled a tree to build his shelter.

Light drives Gornik’s brush, a luminist light that appears to invade the painterly surface from the backcloth of the canvas,



Fig. 2 (top). April Gornik, *The Delicate Hour (for my Father)* (1984), oil on canvas, 48 1/2" x 108".

Fig. 3 (bottom). Martin Johnson Heade, *Sunset on the Marshes* (c. 1867), oil on canvas, 26 3/8" x 52 1/2". Private collection.



giving the work its iconic glow. "Seeing nineteenth-century luminist works was a wake-up call for me," she says, acknowledging the impact of American masters of the past.³ But Gornik takes traditional genre and illusionist space to its contemporary edge. Consider the differences between her *The Delicate Hour (for my Father)* (1984 Fig. 2) and Heade's *Sunset on the Marshes* (c. 1867; Fig. 3). Both images, horizontal in format, depict a sunset sky rich with deep golds and burnt oranges. Both artists punctuate their compositions with mound-like forms: Heade's haystacks in a marshy field, Gornik's iconic rock formations rising from a silent, motionless sea. Both feature a strong horizon line separating celestial space from the land or water below, and both evoke spiritual or meditative contemplation. But Heade's painting represents a particular place. Using stepped back planes, he zigs and zags the viewer's eye deep into space, propelling it from foreground clumps of biologically detailed foliage through diagonals of marshy shores towards the setting sun. His strategically placed haystacks follow the eye's journey towards cumulus and cirrus clouds afloat in a limitless sky. Luminist light permeating heaven and earth binds the moment to eternity and coalesces physical matter with ethereal sensation, reflecting Ralph Waldo Emerson's self-revelation in the presence of America's primeval wilderness: "I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see

all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part of God."⁴

In *The Delicate Hour (for my Father)* Heade's divine transcendentalism cedes to Gornik's unworldly metaphysics, his site-specific landscape to her collaged memory of an imagined place. Her horizon line cuts a sharp distinction between sea and sky. Instead of receding, space rises upwards like a Rothko cloud hovering above a thickened Barnett Newman line. Save for two mute boulders set apart from one another like twins reared by different families, Gornik's world is barren. Unlike Heade's breathy puffs, her clouds weigh heavy, converging as a single triangular scrim of tonal washes.

Roderick Frazier Nash discusses America's relationship with nature as an ambivalent one, tracing it to ancient beliefs about wilderness that Europeans brought with them to the New World. They thought the wilderness a place contaminated by Lucifer's progeny: lascivious satyrs, monsters and trolls of mythic legend,⁵ and believed it their God-given mission to weed clean unruly nature, to plant in this virgin land a new



Fig. 4. April Gornik, *Flood at Twilight* (1990), oil on linen, 68" x 84".



Fig.5. April Gornik, *Water Path* (1995), charcoal on paper, 43" x 36".

garden of Eden. An alternative argument suggesting a divine source for nature's dark side arose in the eighteenth century, when scientists discovered "a universe ... at once vast, complex and harmonious."⁶ In 1757, to reconcile science with creation, Edmund Burke posited the concept of the sublime. As counterpoint to notions of ideal beauty he described the immensity of an unfathomable beyond, a place painful and awesome in its darkness that nevertheless aroused ecstasy. Beauty—ordered, rational, and lucid had now to relate to its sublime opposite, agonizing, mysterious and foreboding. Heady stuff for art.

This dichotomy, codified in philosophy, rendered all experience divine and created a spiritual narrative for a devout Christian society. Artists and their public gobbled it up; beauty and the sublime were all there for the painting, from the Hudson River Valley to the Rockies. Thus was the Hudson River School, the first indigenous American landscape movement, born from a majestic natural environment in little need of tampering, just some theatrical drama—omnipotent storms relenting to tranquil skies—to seal in God's presence. But even then, artists knew something was wrong with the picture. Ironically, the mercurial light that locked in their commercial successes had at its back an in-kind materialistic back-story: The Romantic spirit urging humanity to find truth and solace in nature rode gunshot on the great American railroad transporting "Manifest Destiny" across the land. Here's where the incurable romantic met the Yankee entrepreneur. The two would cross swords evermore.

And dissonant—the axe—the unresting axe
Incessant smote our venerable ranks...

*Thomas Cole*⁷

As Barbara Novak noted, "that sound was, as de Tocqueville suggested, 'the noise of civilization and of industry.'"⁸ Her remarks trailed by twelve years Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a tell-all 1964 accounting of the contamination of our planet caused by DDT. Carson began her defining volume detailing what happened when the entrepreneurial spirit overtook Godly paradise with this line:

The sedge is wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing

*John Keats*⁹

Gornik came of age with environmental protectionists beaming dire prognostications on prime time news. Though she doesn't consider herself to be an environmental artist she is an unrelenting advocate for environmental causes, a saver of whales and trees who says, "I have no problem with people reading an ecological message into my work." Her concerns, particularly her "fear about the extinction of species" flows through a series of her flooded landscapes. There's no trace of Noah or the pairings in his ark in these stilled waters where trees stand-alone, their shadows collecting in inky pools. *Flooded Allée* (1988), *Still Flood* (1989), and *Flood at Twilight*, (1990; Fig. 4) are three serial-like progressions that recall Monet's impressionistic plein-air studies of haystacks painted under varying weather conditions at different times of day. Though an actual flood she saw along a walkway (allée) in France inspired these paintings, Gornik devised her own weather effects. In *Still Flood* a double line of planted trees sheds soft shadows in an illogical yellow sea where there are no atmospheric filters for the sun's unmitigated light. A skinny upright cedar placed middle ground plunges its reflection into the deep, like a knife blade. *Flood at Twilight* suggests the same



Fig. 6. April Gornik, *Border* (1990), oil on linen, 75" x 106".



Fig. 7. April Gornik, *Waterfall* (1995), oil on linen, 70" x 62".

scene described from a different imagined vantage point. As heavy clouded skies pour their reflections into milky lavender and blue waters, Gornik beguiles us with impeccably layered smooth vistas, delicious-to-behold color. But unlike Monet's flickering dabs of juxtaposed pigments setting nature all a-shimmer, and unlike Emerson's transparent eyeball experiencing the sublime in a leaf, Gornik's motionless world appears toxic: we're safer indoors. Sylvia Plath uncannily described the pain:

Although, I admit, I desire,
Occasionally, some backtalk
From the mute sky, I can't honestly complain:
A certain minor light may still
Lean incandescent

Out of kitchen table or chair
As if a celestial burning took
Possession of the most obtuse objects now and then¹⁰

Gornik wasn't interested in being a landscape painter until she became one. She recalls, as a student at the Cleveland Institute School of Art, passing an enormous luminist painting when scurrying between the African and Impressionist

galleries of the Cleveland Museum of Art. "I never stopped to study it," she says, explaining that she left her native Cleveland to complete her undergraduate studies at The Nova Scotia School of Art and Design because it had a strong conceptual art department. "I wanted to be smart ... a conceptual artist. I wasn't sure of myself when I made the first accidental landscape." In an interview with Dede Young she goes on to say that she ultimately felt uncomfortable with conceptual art, seeking something more poetic and culturally relevant,¹¹ aspirations that she remembers raised eyebrows when voiced publicly. She began to make symbolic drawings with light striking them, saying, "I was all over the place with it ... but had whittled my way down to an interest in light." Thereafter, whatever she did as a young experimenting artist, from making sculptural arrangements in sand to constructions on board, wound up looking like a landscape painting, a very unhip thing to do in the 1970s, when the art world had declared painting "dead" and when landscape art had gone the way of monumental Earthworks: Think Michael Heizer ... Christo ... Walter de Maria. "She boldly moved against the dictates of contemporary art dogma," says her art dealer, Renato Danese: "Gornik extended the possibilities of her subject matter—land, sea, sky, working fearlessly, unapologetically, always motivated by intuition and her inner core."¹²

By 1978 Gornik and the painter, Eric Fischl were living in New York. When the art dealer Ed Thorp dropped by to see Fischl's work, he eyed Gornik's and invited her to participate in a group exhibition. In 1981 he hosted her first solo exhibition. Ronald Reagan was president, a time that ushered in new conservatism, and with it the re-emergence of figurative and narrative art. Though feminism had already opened the gates for a prior generation of women artists with blatantly feminist agendas such as Carolee Schneemann, Judy Chicago and Lynda Benglis, others had a tougher time. One can't overlook the enormous boost for Gornik from the presence of male superstars, Fischl among them, and not find parallels with Lee Krasner and Elaine de Kooning, great artists who nevertheless worked, respectively, in the shadows of husbands Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. "It's a problem," notes Gornik: "Women artists still receive lower prices for their art and remain less shown than their male counterparts." Though an ardent supporter of the feminist cause, Gornik is no more a feminist artist than she is a deliberate eco-artist. She is, nevertheless, profoundly influenced by the feminist consciousness-raising that has impacted most women who lived through that historic period. For Gornik, the feminist self emerges through a larger identity that is inseparable from her creative artistic process, a familiar phenomenon for poets, including Emily Dickinson, who wrote:



Fig. 8. April Gornik, *Light Through the Woods* (2007), charcoal on paper, 36 1/2" x 50".

I dwell in Possibility-
A fairer House than Prose-
More numerous of Windows –
Superior – for Doors –

Of Chambers as the Cedars-
Impregnable of eye –
And for an everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky –

Of Visitors – the fairest-
For Occupation – This –
The spreading wide my narrow Hands
To gather Paradise –¹³

By its very nature the relationship between an artist and her medium is an intimate one. "I relocate myself every time I make a make a painting ... it's an exhausting process," remarks Gornik. Each relocation begins when she determines the size of the canvas she'll need to realize a composition. She's small and petite, while her paintings such as *Ekstasis* (1992; Pl. 1) are huge in size, sublime in their content. How much will she physically control? How much emotional self will she entrust to *Ekstasis*, where a range of mountainous rocks is either rising or drowning in a sea, light-flecked by rolling electric orange swaths of clouds? There's give and there's take as Gornik tackles an immense universe through a keyhole revealing a tiny chip of surreal space. Recalling Emerson's transparent eyeball, she then allows her signature style—an arduous dense layering of pigment to nearly "make transparent" her hand when the painting is viewed from a distance. This embrace of immensity through an intimate, almost self-effacing touch summons Gaston Bachelard, who wrote, "grandeur is most active in the realm of intimate space ... the unfathomable depths of vast thoughts."¹⁴ He then quotes



Fig. 9. April Gornik, *Sky Through Trees* (2002), charcoal on paper, 50" x 38".

Rainer Maria Rilke to explain how immensity is experienced as an extension of intimate space:

Space outside ourselves, invades and ravishes things:
If you want to achieve the existence of a tree,
Invest it with inner space, this space
That has its being in you.
Surround it with compulsions,
It knows no bounds, and only really becomes a tree
If it takes its place in the heart of your renunciation.¹⁵

From this perspective, does it matter whether *Ekstasis* represents a particular toxic sea, or earth birthing from its primal amniotic womb? When art suspends beauty within the sublime, impregnates the pleasurable in the unthinkable, does it not mimic nature gestating creation within destruction? Peter Matthiessen similarly discerned life's metaphysical evolution through time in his book *The Snow Leopard*, chronicling his odyssey across the Himalayas:

It is not so much that we are going back in time as that time seems circular, and past and future have lost meaning. I understand much better now Einstein's remark that the only real time is that of the observer, who carries with him his own time and space. In these mountains, we have fallen behind history.¹⁶

Some find paradox and irony in Gornik's oppositions of the immense and the intimate. She calls them binaries, dualities existing within the self and within nature. She offers few personal explanations for them, smartly so, because she knows that once a work of art is out in the world, the artist loses her proprietary right to its meaning. Gornik almost slyly advances such multiple interpretations by extending to the viewer many ways of entering her compositions. Approaching *Light After the Storm* (2012; Pl. 2) from the lower left leads to a comfortable stretch of powdery beach. Confronting choppy seas head on invites a march vertically up the canvas. Contemplating the seascape from afar creates the sensation of soaring above, like a gluttonous tern cruising until a few fat clams wash ashore. Such dislocations leave critics and viewers free to wander and wonder about all Gornik's compositional and symbolic devices.

Donald Kuspit suggests that Gornik's mirror reflections and double images "reflect her preoccupation with issues of identity."¹⁷ Only Gornik can attest to that, but she'd likely agree that her enigmatic imagery provides open-ended metaphoric opportunities for self-reflection. Rotate *Reflected Trees* (2002; Pl. 3) upside down and the inverted bright yellow foliage becomes a sun-drenched reflection. Its dark-sided alter ego—the fuzzy forms mirrored in water when the painting is viewed right-side-up—beyond describing the effects of natural light, deal with the optical and psychic dislocations of "mirror images." Gornik's twinned compositions similarly encourage Rorschach analyses. *Two Fires* (1983; Pl. 4), a double spout of flames erupting from inky waters, like *The Speed of Light* (1997; Pl. 5), where two lone trees impervious to whipping clouds look alike at first, though they are different. Both Gornik's mirror and twin forms portray illusions as delusions, akin to a mirror's half-truths. The mirror reflects the original as half its size; a shift in posture exaggerates or diminishes features, just as manipulated expressions reveal or conceal the inner self. Gornik's fascination with the double-entendres of twin and mirror iconography goes to the core of her primary fascination with perception and illusion-as-art object. The canvas is in fact her private mirror, and her personal identity finds expression in the marks, lines, and textures of the landscapes she projects on its surface.

Sexual identity as an extension of nature is art's most constant metaphor. During Upper Paleolithic times the vulva was portrayed as a supernatural triangle associated with aquatic symbolism.¹⁸ "Stone pillars were the male connections between earth and sky."¹⁹ In modern art Georgia O'Keeffe startled her public with her unapologetically sexual flowers, as Louise Bourgeois's domed marbles with their abstracted androgynous sexuality referenced the Delphic omphalos. But as Lucy Lippard points out, Bourgeois's art corresponds to the hidden rhythms of her life at the time, yet like ancient animistic artists abstracting from nature, she transcends individual experience to communicate collective emotion through form.²⁰ This is likewise true of Gornik's landscapes, where sexual identity emerges as a spontaneous outpouring of nature's anima/animus. Its energy establishes the strength of her phallic rocks rising from the sea, the ejaculating water spout of *Source* (1989; Front cover) and vulva-like formations of rivers and streams in *Diving Water* (1994) and *Water Path* (1995; Fig. 5).

Sexuality can be a subtle presence in Gornik's art, as it is in *Border* (1990; Fig. 6), a soft foaming cloud raining its life-giving waters on a stretch of green verdant land. It can be aggressively operatic as it is in *Brunhildes Wahl* (1990). One of Gornik's most epic works, it takes its title from the Germanic myth of a beautiful and powerful princess betrayed by her lover. Gornik's calamitous collision of sooty black and creamy white clouds creates a visual aria for Wagner's sublime score. *Moonrise* (1991; Pl. 6) suggests yet another metaphor for sensual lust. On the one hand it recalls Antonio da Correggio's famous *Jupiter and Io* (c. 1533), portraying Jupiter as a gigantic passionate mass of grey cloud extending a dark musty paw around an enraptured Io. Gornik paints light's lover as a darker, more ominous figure whose "hand," similarly extended, suggests he plans to deliver a one-two punch to day as she wanes in the moonlight. It makes one wonder if Correggio's seducer is no less the rapist, excused culturally by the artist's depiction of a responsive Io. Another read of Gornik's sensual pulse, as abstract as it is arresting, commands *Waterfall* (1995; Fig. 7), a drizzled stream of water held tight in the thigh-clutch of massive rock mountains. It's as explosively erotic as Seamus Heaney's poem:

So winter closed its fist
And got it stuck in the pump.
The plunger froze up a lump

In its throat, ice founding itself
Upon iron. The handle
Paralysed at an angle.

Then the twisting of wheat straw
into ropes, lapping them tight
Round stem and snout, then a light

That sent the pump up in a flame
It cooled, we lifted her latch,
Her entrance was wet, and she came.²¹

Beneath the surface of Gornik's metaphors, symbols, and depictions of light lives an artist who quietly finds the patterns of her life in the patterns of her art. Holding discipline and compositional integrity to a high standard but never losing the curious meandering of her creative eye to formula, she teases sensuality with control, ephemeral light with form, realism with abstraction, and metaphor with description. These elements, as finely tuned as a well-orchestrated symphony, are especially apparent in her charcoal drawings, her forest series in particular. Though related to her paintings, Gornik's drawings are works unto themselves, not preparatory sketches. She says, "They are more forgiving than painting because the blank paper gives me light; less forgiving because charcoal doesn't allow for too many changes of mind." In between all that forgives and does-



Fig. 10. April Gornik, *Light in the Woods* (2006), charcoal on paper, 34 1/2" x 50".

n't are wonderful light paths, each leading to another destination. In *Light Through the Woods* (2007; Fig. 8), a sturdy row of foreground trees stand like architectural sentries, portal columns beckoning the viewer to enter, to follow patches of light through nature's temple. *Sky Through Trees* (2002; Fig. 9) finds a slim cluster of delicate-limbed pines bending, twisting, and stretching like dancers prepping for a performance. Their poses draw an array of abstract shapes in the softly shaded white curtain of negative space. In *Light in the Woods* (2006; Fig. 10) circles of light on the forest floor appear as moon beams dropped from the sky, metaphysical footprints suggesting myriad routes for a meditative odyssey.

You can't excise the sensuality in Gornik's nature from her art, just as you can't remove the woman from the woman artist, or divorce her landscapes from their place in American landscape history. What then makes Gornik so unique? She's authentic: honest to the core in her life and in her art. The distinctive way she conveys light as a protagonist of form, space, color, and texture also charts her remarkable quest to carve her own path through mortal wilderness. In so doing she creates art that distills her immutable presence. Recalling Robert Frost's famous lines about roads diverging in a forest, the art of April Gornik always takes the next one, the one untraveled. •

Joyce Beckenstein is an art critic and writer living in New York.

Notes

1. Dore Ashton, *The Documents of 20th-Century Art/Picasso on Art, A Selection of Views*, (New York: Viking, 1972), 11.
2. Mierle Laderman Ukeles (b. 1939) is a feminist artist well known for her 1969 *Manifesto for Maintenance Art*. Her works merge feminist concerns with community and social issues that embrace sustainability.

3. All direct quotes by April Gornik are from a series interviews with the artist conducted in person and by phone between April and June 2014.
4. These lines are from Emerson's *Nature: Essays and Lectures*, publ. 1849.
5. Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and The American Mind*, 4th ed., (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1982), 11.
6. *Ibid.*, 45
7. This line is from Cole's "The Complaint of the Forest," in *The Knickerbocker: New-York Magazine*, June 1841.
8. Barbara Novak, "The Double Edged Axe," in *Art in America* (Jan.-Feb. 1976): 48.
9. John Keats, from "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," in *Selected Poems* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2007), 185.
10. Sylvia Plath, from "Years," in *The Collected Poems*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1981).
11. Dede Young, "Conversation," in *April Gornik Paintings and Drawings* (Purchase, NY: Neuberger Museum of Art & New York: Hudson Hills, 2005). 35.
12. This comment was made by Renato Danese, on May 1, 2014, during and interview and tour of April Gornik's solo exhibition, "April Gornik, Paintings and Drawings." Renato Danese is co-director of Danese/Corey Gallery, Chelsea, New York.
13. Emily Dickinson, "I Dwell in Possibility," in *Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little Brown, 1890).
14. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (first ed. 1958) (repr. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 92.
15. Rainer Maria Rilke, "Poem," 1924, in Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* (1994 ed.).
16. Peter Matthiessen, *The Snow Leopard* (first ed. 1978) (repr. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2008), 121.
17. Donald Kuspit, "Fictional Freedom: April Gornik's Landscapes," in *April Gornik: Paintings and Drawings*, (New York: Hudson Hills, 2004), 19.
18. Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), 98.
19. Lucy R. Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, (New York: New Press, 1983), 14.
20. *Ibid.*, 62.
21. Seamus Heaney, "Rite of Spring," in *Door Into the Dark* (London: Faber, 1969).

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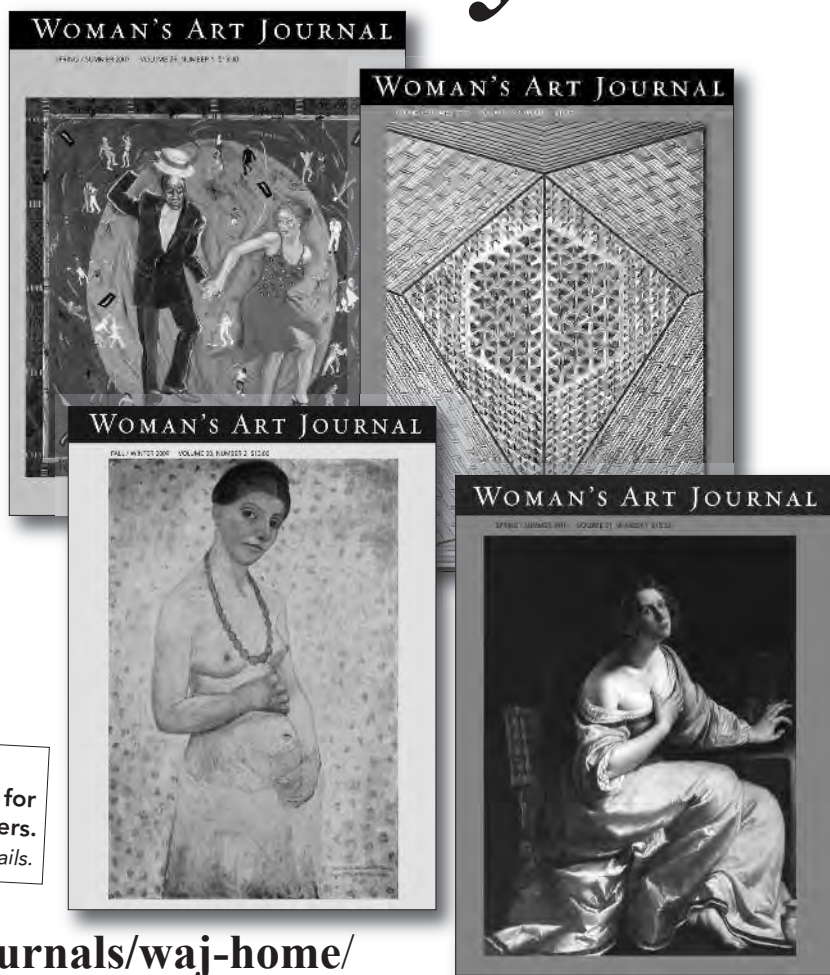
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GÜLSÜN KARAMUSTAFA

A VAGABOND, FROM PERSONAL TO SOCIAL, FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL

By Solmaz Bunulday Hasgüler and Tuna Şare



Fig. 1. Gülsün Karamustafa, *Mystic Transport* (1992), mixed media, 20 pieces, each 23 5/8" x 17 3/4" x 35 1/2". Third International Istanbul Biennial, Feshane, Istanbul.

The art of Gülsün Karamustafa (b. 1946) ranges from painting to multimedia installations to photography and video. Although her starting point may be local issues and her personal history, her works refer to larger concerns of the modern world. She told an interviewer, "My relation with art did not develop from personal satisfaction or from the need to glorify what I do. I have been carrying art as a heavy mission from the very beginning. I always have the thought that I need to produce and carry this production to a significant place."¹ These words underline that her works have social and political references and that change is a constant force.

Born in Turkey to a middle-class family, Karamustafa's father was a prominent radio host. She spent her early childhood in Ankara, where she received her early education

in painting. Later, with the support of her family she studied painting at Istanbul Academy of Fine Arts, graduating in 1969. As a painter, art director, and contemporary artist, she has witnessed the political events and economic upheavals that have done and continue to shape modern Turkey. Internal migration waves, especially from rural Central and Eastern Anatolia to urban cities like Istanbul and Ankara, started in Turkey in the 1950s. The military coups of 1971 and 1980, and their reforms were significant breaking points in Turkey.² After 1980, the application of neo-liberal policies and the intensity of militarist discourse affected artists, including Karamustafa, who tried to overcome feelings of being caught up in these issues by "taking refuge in production."³ The following decade, after the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, was marked by an external wave of migration to Turkey from economically



Fig. 2. Gülsün Karamustafa, *Stairway* (2001), video still, 4'46". Im Zeichen Der Stadt, Kunstmuseum, Bonn.

challenged Eastern Bloc countries and Russia. It can be said that Karamustafa's forty-year art career was formed by coups and socio-political changes in Turkey and their intersections with her personal history.

Thematically, Karamustafa's works fall into three main categories. First are her works that deal with the concepts of migration, identity, hybridism, memory, and boundaries. In the second category are works that explore her personal history and her own experiences as they relate to those themes in the first category. Finally, there are works about gender roles and femininity. Her works also can be classified based on their different materials, techniques, and methods. She uses many mediums in her works and installations, including canvas, ready-made objects, photographs, and video. Her first major experience in film, as the art director of the film "Bir Yudum Sevgi" (A Sip of Love) (1984), directed by the prominent Turkish film director Atıf Yılmaz,⁴ greatly influenced her future work. Although her later video projects may have different themes, they carry the traces of such earlier experiences with cinema.

The ambiguity of boundaries through the concept of migration and hybrid situations formed as a result of migration is one of Karamustafa's frequent themes. She has discussed different kinds of boundaries—cultural, sexual, and territorial—and through her work has tried to show the hybridities within these boundaries.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the artist questioned and interpreted social and cultural events first in paintings and later in tapestries. She combined sacred images belonging to different cultures and time frames, and used Istanbul as a bridge for uniting West and East. She incorporated items of kitsch in her works to reflect the cultural corruption that occurred as a result of internal migrations in the 1970s and 1980s, especially from rural eastern Turkey to the western cities. By 1985, these kitsch images had become three-dimensional objects aimed at revealing information about Turkey as a new Arab-influenced lifestyle was becoming increasingly popular and a hybrid culture was being formed by people that had migrated to the cities.

Although Karamustafa included kitsch objects as they are in everyday life, she distanced herself from these materials to evoke various interpretations. For example, in *Mystic Transport* (1992; Pl. 7 & Fig. 1),⁵ colorful blankets in large baskets typically used for moving made reference to the lives of people who had to migrate but belonged nowhere. The migration theme reoccurs in several works that were exhibited in international shows. *Heimat Ist wo Mann Isst* (Homeland is not where you are born, but the place that feeds you) (1994)⁶ consisted of three pieces of spoons wrapped in gauze and under which was written "Heimat Ist wo Mann Isst." For her video *Stairway* (2001; Fig. 2), she recorded the work conditions of a group of gypsy children who had migrated from Eastern Europe. The "stairway" of the video was built in the 1850s by Abraham Salomon Kamondo, an important Jewish broker of Istanbul's Karaköy district. The children made music and collected money at this spot. They had come with their families for three months (the length of their visas) to Istanbul, where they lived in poor conditions and earned money before having to return to their home countries.

Related to the concept of migration is hybridization, and among Karamustafa's works on this theme is *Genealogy* (1994;



Fig. 3. Gülsün Karamustafa, *Post Position* (1995), textile collage, 5 pieces, each 49 1/4" x 39 3/8". Foreign Services Exhibition, Shedhalle, Zurich.



Fig. 4. Gülsün Karamustafa, *Etiquette* (2011), mixed media installation. Solo für ... Exhibition, IFA Gallery, Stuttgart.

Pl. 8). While searching for the identity of Zeynep Sultan, an Ottoman princess, for a movie project for the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), she found the Sultan family tree, which inspired this work. She listed the royal women's birth names and their Ottoman names, given to them when they became members of the Ottoman harem; she showed that Byzantine names such as Asporça, Efrandize and Halifira were replaced in time by Islamic names such as Hüsnümelek, Nevfidan, and Hayrandil. She placed ribbons on a small piece of acetate, referring to these women by name. Karamustafa tried to present the place of women in Ottoman culture through a sociological approach. There was tension over the differences in names between Ottoman emperors' wives, whose names had meanings about their beauty, and their daughters, whose names were mostly taken from Koran. The artist said that her work was "based on the observation of legitimacy."⁷

For another work about cultural hybridization, *Post Position* (1995; Fig. 3),⁸ five framed tapestries were presented as Byzantine icons.⁹ Although displayed as carpet-like objects typical of a predominantly Muslim society, these tapestries incorporated religious and cultural motifs belonging to Christianity and Western society, such as the images of Christ as a shepherd and Elvis Presley.

The relationship between the center, the periphery, and postcolonial approaches in art was the theme of *Presentation of an Early Representation* (1996) and *Trellis of My Mind* (1998).¹⁰ *Trellis of My Mind* presented overlapping Jewish, Christian, and Islamic images and writings as if they represented a single religion. Other artists in this exhibition included Ghada Amer, Mona Hatoum, and Shirin Neshat, all of whom have become well known in the West. *Presentation of an Early Representation* was based on a sixteenth-century watercolor by an anonymous German painter that, despite its early date, resembled the orientalist paintings of the nineteenth century. In Karamustafa's painting, European women, including a black

woman, appear as if they are in a slave market, where eastern men are choosing women by touching their breasts or putting their hands under the women's skirts. Her painting carries almost all of the elements of an orientalist painting, but by basing her work on a sixteenth-century work that represents a much earlier western outlook towards the East, Karamustafa is questioning the eastern identity as presented by a westerner.

A later work, *Fragmenting/Fragments* (1999; Pl. 9),¹¹ is about the deconstruction of this orientalist view. Karamustafa reproduced female figures from nineteenth-century orientalist paintings and then cut them into pieces and recombined the fragments.

She combined feet, breasts, hands, and pieces of faces in a close-up style. In this way, the images of women in the paintings and the meaning attributed to them by the orientalist view—as women who were desired and waiting to be possessed—was literally shattered. She also criticized the orientalist approach in her 1999 *Reinforcement Series for Oriental Fantasies*.¹² Here she enlarged details taken from orientalist paintings by the French artist Gérôme and presented them side by side as double images removed from their contexts to create an ironic reference to this outdated, outmoded view of women.

Karamustafa continues to explore this theme in recent works such as *Anti-Hamam Confessions* (2010), a video presenting the hamam (Turkish bath), a common subject of orientalist painters, in such a way as to turn western fantasies upside down. To deconstruct (and destroy) the orientalist view



Fig. 5. Gülsün Karamustafa, *The Notebook* (1993), detail. Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi (Women's Library and Information Center Foundation), Istanbul.

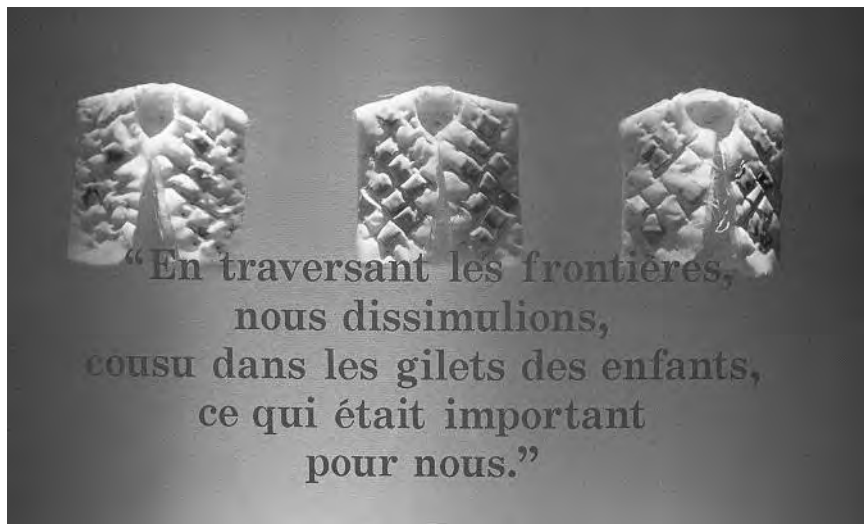


Fig. 6a. (L.) Gülsün Karamustafa, *Courier* (1991), mixed media installation, 3 pieces, each 15 3/4" x 15 3/4". Memory-Recollection Exhibition, Taksim Art Gallery, Istanbul. 6b. (R.) detail.

of the Turkish bath, she used a historic bath building in Tahtakale in Istanbul, designed by the Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan, which resembles neither the hamams represented in orientalist paintings nor the modern hamams used by tourists. For an installation titled *Etiquette* (2011; Fig. 4), also on this theme, the starting point was a 1933 book in the Ottoman language in which French-style etiquette was applied to Turkish society. Karamustafa prepared a dinner table based on illustrations showing proper western-style table settings with glasses, plates, and napkins. Most of the table was white, except for gold leaf designs on the plates and glasses to give the idea of an upper-class table. The western style clothes and attitudes of the male and female figures in the pictures on the labels seem far removed from the Turkish society of that era, and reflect the idea of a “nowhere” society stuck between Ottoman traditions and modern (1930s) Turkey.

During the 1990s, Karamustafa presented works in which she used personal objects and images to relate her own experiences to the social transformations she had witnessed. As she questioned concepts of time, memory, and migration on the basis of her own personal history, she superimposed social issues using her autobiography like a “personal healer.”¹³ For *The Notebook* (1993; Pl. 10 & Fig. 5), the first of these works, she used her primary school notebook from 1953–54. In it were sentences dictated by her teacher imparting militaristic ideas, for example, “Soldiers protect the borders and they use their bodies as shields in order to protect the country.” The pages also were filled with colorful flowers and decorative letters spelling her name. For the installation, she hung photographs of herself as a child over the notebook on the wall of the exhibition hall. By emphasizing the contrast between the flowers and militaristic sentences, she drew attention to the clash between the tough prescriptivism and childhood innocence. *My Roses My Reveries* (1998) again used a photograph from the 1950s, this one showing her saying goodbye to her father, who was going off on a business trip and looking back at her from a train window. The digitally enlarged photograph (118" x 75") was placed in a wide niche of the Maçka Art Gallery (Istanbul), where viewers could feel the mood of that moment, of a child being separated from



Fig. 7. Gülsün Karamustafa, *The Apartment Building* (2012), mixed media installation. National Museum of Contemporary Art - EMST, Athens.

her father because of his job. On the exterior of the building, on the inside walls, and on the ceramic floor tiles, the artist distributed popular rhyme couplets from poems of that era that were easy to remember. The exhibition space was used like a playground and elicited various readings.

Karamustafa's grandmother was among the thousands of Ottoman Turks who were forced to migrate from Bulgaria to Turkey in 1893, during the nationalistic upheavals in the Balkans.¹⁴ She once told Karamustafa, “As we were crossing the borders, we hid our important belongings in the inner



Fig. 8. Gülsün Karamustafa, *A Playground in the Net of Gendered Relations* (1996), mixed media and video installation. Kültür-Shedhalle, Zurich.



Fig. 9. Gülsün Karamustafa, *Unconsolidated Visions* (1998), laser printing, 9 pieces, dimensions vary. Roman Theatre, Sagunto, Valencia.



Fig. 10. Gülsün Karamustafa, *Objects of Desire, Suitcase Trading (Limit 100 Dollars)* (1998), performance. Money-Nation Exhibition, Shedhalle, Zurich.

pockets of the children's [shirt] waists." This became the basis of *Courier* (1991; Fig. 6a-b).¹⁵ Small, folded papers with writing on them were placed on children's shirts, which were mounted on clear Plexiglass stands. Referencing her grandmother's memory, she was stating that people who belong nowhere carried what they could on their bodies and in their clothes. This installation, which resembled a mausoleum, transformed the artist's personal memory into social consciousness. For an exhibition in Canada, she added two items of clothing to the work. These were sewn completely closed so that they could not be worn and stood for the country that people had to leave with no chance of returning; these were hung on the wall beside a photograph of her grandmother.

A related piece, *The Settler* (2003), also very personal, appeared in an exhibition titled "Blood & Honey." Translated into Turkish as "Kan & Bal," when the two words are reversed, it becomes Bal & Kan, a reference to the Balkan region. This exhibition dealt with the socio-political events in the Balkans.¹⁶ Karamustafa's work related to the issue in terms of her family's migration, addressing social issues such as forced migration and the population exchange based on her personal history. This work comprised two videos with nineteenth-

century picture postcards as backgrounds—of Bulgaria in the first video, and Turkey in the second. In each, women wearing folkloric clothes typical of their culture look happy at first. As they become sad, the colors fade and the furnishings change, and after awhile they must leave their home country and move on to the "other side." The other side is a place where they can never feel at home although they now must live there.

The Apartment Building (2012; Fig. 7) is based on the building where Karamustafa has lived since 1991. Located in Cihangir, one of the most popular areas in Istanbul, it was built in 1931 by a Greek family named Vaslamatzis, which later fled to Greece after nationalist attacks against Greek, Armenian, and Jewish citizens in Turkey during September 6–7, 1955. The artist was very much affected by their migration story and prepared her work as a "gift" to the Vaslamatzis family, whom she had met from time to time. She made a model of the building, almost two meters tall, which she delivered to the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens, where the model was placed in the center of a room surrounded by wall photographs, including images depicting the story of the family and some of the events of September 6–7. With this "symbolic act of return,"¹⁷ Karamustafa underlined the idea

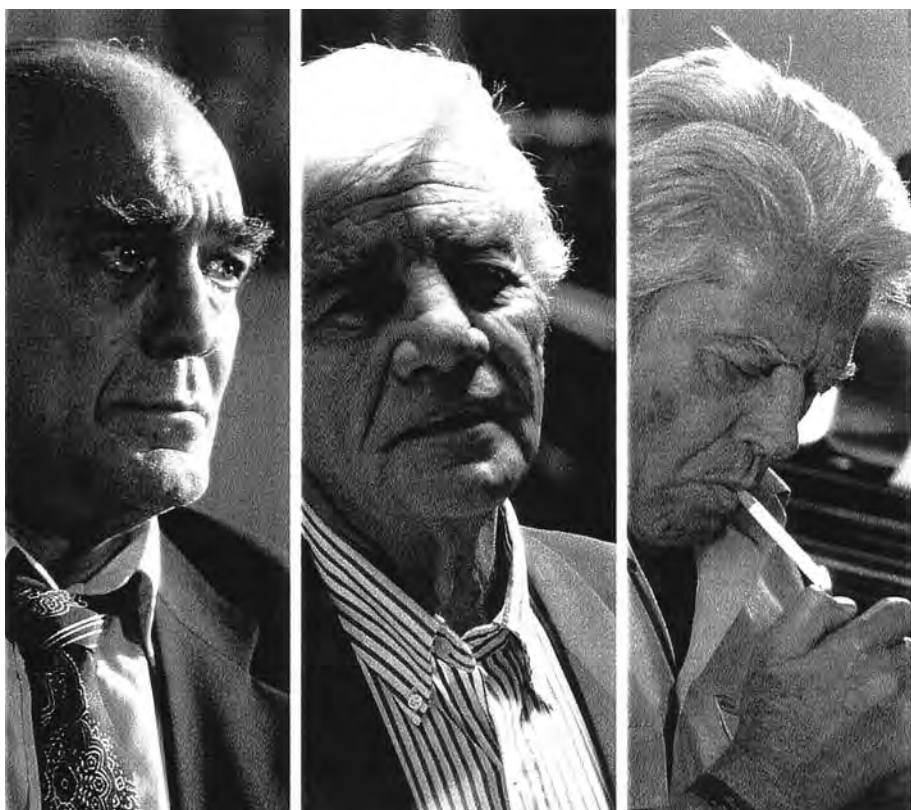


Fig. 11. Gülsün Karamustafa, *Men Crying* (2001), 3 screen video, 3', 1'47", 2'16". Proje 4L, Istanbul.

monitors played simultaneously, one showing the singer Bülent Ersoy, and the other the singer and showman Huysuz Virjin. Their popularity indicated that, despite viewers' varying backgrounds (religion, gender, culture, etc.), they liked these shows. Karamustafa wrote that, "In an environment where transvestites and transsexuals struggled for their life under brutal conditions and had to organize to defend their rights, the popular interest of both men and women in these shows revealed the social hypocrisy towards transvestites and transsexuals."²⁰ The artist wanted her piece to expose the hypocrisy of their situation. The television programs did not show the real lives of transvestites and transsexuals, which were lived under very different conditions in which they were exposed to violence and exclusion and suffered discrimination. Her piece was intended to point up the fact that these kinds of shows were not reflective of real life but rather "playgrounds" where actors played. Similarly, for *Unconsolidated Visions* (1998; Fig. 9) she presented close-up photographs of transvestites and transsexuals taken in Istanbul

and Valencia, Spain. Referring to the tradition of painting the underside of Spanish balconies, she installed these photographs on the undersides of balconies of a Roman theatre in Sagunto. Her choice of location, said Karamustafa, was that balconies are "inter-locations"; they are neither inside nor outside, like transvestites.

that we should face history and not bury it, since the nationalistic attacks during the events of September 1955 and their consequences were rarely recognized in the history of modern Turkey.

Women and gender roles is the third major theme which Gülsün Karamustafa has confronted. *New Orientation* (1995; Pl. 11) remembers the prostitutes of the Galata neighborhood who met the sailors as their ships came into port, and the women in Istanbul listed in official police records as "Missing."¹⁸ For the Fourth Istanbul Biennial, the work was exhibited in storehouse number 3 at Salıpazarı (today's Istanbul Modern Museum), which was located close to the brothel. Reflecting the excitement of their first encounters with the incoming sailors, Karamustafa used flying ribbons to symbolize the Galata women. By also incorporating personal records of "missing" women on the ribbons, she referenced both the brothel and the individual women. She researched police records and stamped on the ribbons their initials and the dates they were "lost."

In 1996, Karamustafa was one of eight women from different professions—including a sociologist, film director, textile supplier, and other artists—to collaborate on a project titled "Culture/A Portrait of Gender from Istanbul," focusing primarily on migration, feminism, and identity.¹⁹ Karamustafa's video contribution, *A Playground in the Net of Gendered Relations* (Fig. 8), was about the very popular shows of transsexuals and transvestites on Turkish television at the time. Two

The place of women in a changing world is of great importance to Karamustafa, and a symbolic catalyst for change was the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Her performance piece titled *Objects of Desire, Suitcase Trading (Limit 100 Dollars)* (1998, Fig. 10)²¹ was about the emerging issues in the aftermath. Economically challenged women from Romania, Moldavia, Russia, and elsewhere traveled to Turkey carrying suitcases filled with goods to sell. They brought goods from home as if they were their personal belongings, and refilled their empty suitcases with cheap Turkish products to market back home. The cycle, known as suitcase trading, continued for a long time as part of an informal economy. Because the practice was very profitable, some women sold their bodies to earn money to use as capital, and as prostitution increased, suitcase trading became a large operation run by various crime organizations. In *Objects of Desire, Suitcase Trading (Limit 100 Dollars)* Karamustafa referred to both women and goods as similar objects of desire. Women can be bought and sold; they can be exchanged in order to buy another object. The artist set out to experience suitcase trading personally and started her project with 100 dollars, as this was the least amount paid for prostitutes in that period. She used the money to purchase various objects such as music boxes, artificial flowers, men's

monitors played simultaneously, one showing the singer Bülent Ersoy, and the other the singer and showman Huysuz Virjin. Their popularity indicated that, despite viewers' varying backgrounds (religion, gender, culture, etc.), they liked these shows. Karamustafa wrote that, "In an environment where transvestites and transsexuals struggled for their life under brutal conditions and had to organize to defend their rights, the popular interest of both men and women in these shows revealed the social hypocrisy towards transvestites and transsexuals."²⁰ The artist wanted her piece to expose the hypocrisy of their situation. The television programs did not show the real lives of transvestites and transsexuals, which were lived under very different conditions in which they were exposed to violence and exclusion and suffered discrimination. Her piece was intended to point up the fact that these kinds of shows were not reflective of real life but rather "playgrounds" where actors played. Similarly, for *Unconsolidated Visions* (1998; Fig. 9) she presented close-up photographs of transvestites and transsexuals taken in Istanbul

and women's underwear, makeup kits, and plastic kitchen equipment to take across the border. She opened a stall at each city she visited and documented the objects she sold with Polaroid photographs and placed them next to the stall. She added a movie showing markets in Istanbul. Karamustafa also met with different consumer groups to examine the differences in habits and preferences in different locations. *Unawarded Performances* (2005), a film made for the "Projekt Migration" exhibition in Köln, describes another group of women from Eastern Europe who came to Turkey after the fall of the Berlin Wall. These highly educated women, who had good lives before the crisis, tell about their experiences in Istanbul working as nannies, sick-nurses, or housekeepers.

At the same time that women's lives were changing, they were staying the same. In her video *Personal Time Quartet* (1999), she used her house as the location and showed a girl in various acts: arranging clothes, folding clothes, skipping rope, polishing her nails, etc., all actions typically attributed to women. The unifying theme was the unchangeableness of typical women's roles despite the various cultures and geographies that shape the female identity. In another video series, *Men Crying* (2001; Fig. 11) she dealt with the gender roles attributed to men. In collaboration with Atıf Yılmaz,²² she recorded three important actors of Turkey in 1960s and 1970s crying after they were left by their lovers. The videos were meant to contradict the common expression, "men don't cry."

It can be said that Karamustafa's works are generally based on the idea of the outcast, namely "the other": it might be a person who is forced to migrate, someone who is not easily defined in terms of gender or who is different, or who is "the other" as a woman. An analysis of her oeuvre reveals that she addresses the determined, solid, and masculine form of modernity through other identities. For example, her video *Tailor Made* (2005; Fig. 12) shows singers and belly dancers in pavilions and nightclubs walking on a runway like supermodels. At the same time she makes an analogy between the club stages and fashion runways, she also draws attention to the contradiction between what is seen on the runway and the lives lived behind that stage.

Gülsün Karamustafa began her career in 1980 as a painter but throughout her career she has created a variety of works using her strong observation skills and intellectual richness. Although varying in theme and medium, each of her works intertwines with another and presents continuity as she deals with concepts that broaden with each work. In her own words: "I can say that each of my works is within another, it is as if one work is opening up and explaining another."²³

The artist is clear and direct when presenting works that are based on her memories, and she has the ability to capture the moment where these reminiscences have universal reach. The concepts she explores are related in that they reflect social transformations and changes in terms of contradictions and contrasts, as when she draws attention to the problem of identity resulting from hybridization after migration by relating this to the concept of kitsch and the uncertainties in identity, gender, and boundaries within the process of globalization. While she has exhibited her works in many



Fig. 12. Gülsün Karamustafa, *Tailor Made* (2005), video installation, 5'34". Second Video Film Biennale, Mechelen.

places in Europe, the place that sustains her is Turkey, especially her cultural environment of Istanbul, where she is influenced by the cultural paradigms that form it and the synthesis/hybridities created by these paradigms. In Istanbul, which is both a bridge and a geographic point of separation between East and West, the mix of religious, political, and cultural contrasts, contradictions and hybridities inform her work, and one could say that Istanbul is the hybrid which is central to Gülsün Karamustafa's art. •

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Notes

1. Levent Çalıkoğlu, ed., *Çağdaş Sanat Konuşmaları 3, 90'lı Yıllarda Türkiye'de Çağdaş Sanat Konuşmaları (Talks on Contemporary Art 3, Contemporary Art in Turkey in the 90s)*, (Istanbul: YKY, 2008), 54.
2. The objective of the 1971 military coup was institutional reform, and the 1980 coup was intended to reinforce the reforms of the earlier interventions. Karamustafa and her husband were sent to prison for a while after they were accused of complicity in 1971 and they were unable to obtain passports for 16 years after that time.

3. Barbara Heinrich, *Gülsün Karamustafa, Güllerim, Tahayyüllerim*, (My Roses My Reveries) (Istanbul: YKY, 2007), 16.
4. Karamustafa was the art director for *Asılacak Kadın* (Woman to Be Hanged) (1986), *Kupa Kızı* (Queen of Hearts) (1986), and *Gecenin Öteki Yüzü* (The Other Side of Night) (1987). She was also the art director for *Benim Sinemalarım* (My Movies) in 1990 with Firuzan.
5. Exhibited in the Third Istanbul Biennial, 1992.
6. Shown in the 1994 "İskele" (Dock) exhibition in Stuttgart's IFA Gallery.
7. Legitimacy is based on ancestry through the father.
8. Shown in the 1995 "Foreign Services" exhibition in Switzerland.
9. Thin carpets hang on the walls. There are pictures on these carpets and they are used for decoration.
10. *Presentation of An Early Representation* was shown in the 1996 "Inclusion/Exclusion" exhibition in Graz, and both were included in the 1998 exhibition "Echolot" in Kassel, curated by René Block.
11. Shown in the 1999 "Stills, Cuts, and Fragments" exhibition in Stuttgart.
12. Presented in the 1999 "Ulema" exhibition in Berlin.
13. Erden Kosova, "Gülsün Karamustafa ile Söyleşi," (Conversation with Gülsün Karamustafa), *Art-ist 4* (2001): 33.
14. Due to nationalistic upheavals, the Balkan states of the Ottoman Empire started to declare their independence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Bulgaria, for example, declared its independence in 1908. Muslim Ottoman Turks, once living in the Balkan states, were forced to migrate to Istanbul and to other cities of Anatolia, which were still part of the Ottoman Empire and later became modern Turkey.
15. Deniz Şengel, "Hafıza-yı Beşer ya da 'Anı Bellek' Sergi Dizisi" (Exhibition Series on The Recollection of Memory), *Arredamento Dekorasyon 34* (1992): 150–51.
16. In the early 19th and 20th centuries, Balkan wars and the formation of nation states led to the migration of thousands of people of various races from the Balkans to different countries. In the 20th century, the demolishing of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the nation-states also greatly affected the Balkans, this time leading to migrations of Balkan peoples to other countries of Europe due to economic challenges.
17. Yasemin Bay, "Apartmanı Sanat Eseri Olarak İade Etti" (She Returned the Building as an Art Object) *Milliyet*, February 19, 2012. Accessed on April 16, 2012, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/apartmani-sanat-eseri-olarak-iade-etti/pazar/haberdetay/19.02.2012/1504960/default.htm>.
18. Anonymous, "4. Uluslararası İstanbul Bienali, Paradoksal Bir Dünyada Sanatın Görünümü" (Fourth International Istanbul Biennial, Art in a Paradoxical World), *Milliyet Sanat 368* (September 1995): 38–39.
19. Earlier, in 1987, she made a work called *Double Reality*, which presented a mannequin as a transvestite as a way to deconstruct the social definitions of gender. The mannequin was framed with different colored bars signifying both social and cultural references to gender identity.
20. Gülsün Karamustafa, "Cinsiyetlendirilmiş İlişkiler Ağında Bir Oyun Alanı" (A Playground in the Net of Gendered Relations)—*İstanbul'dan Bir "Toplumsal Cinsiyet" Projesi* (Zurich: Verlag Shedhalle Zurich, 1997), 78.
21. The piece was initially part of a project called "MoneyNations" (1998) that traveled to various cities of Europe (Zurich, Rennes, Hanover) during 1998–2001. She donated the money she earned to the women of the cities where she performed. After 2001, she continued to travel but changed her performance by replacing the basic goods in her suitcase with luxury items.
22. Karamustafa had worked with Atıf Yılmaz (one of the significant directors in Turkey) as the art director of his movie "Bir Yudum Sevgi" (A Sip of Love), in 1984.
23. Hüseyin Alptekin, "Gülsün Karamustafa: Kumaşlar, Melez İmajlar, Kişisel Defterler" (Gülsün Karamustafa: Textiles, Mixed Images, and Personal Notebooks), *Anons 53–54* (1995), 18–19.

INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN AND ART RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

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“EPIDERMIC” AND VISCERAL WORKS

LYGIA PAPE AND ANNA MARIA MAIOLINO

By Claudia Calirman

As feminism gained ground in the United States in the 1970s, its ideology and terminology were called into question by many leading artists in Brazil.¹ Lygia Pape (1927–2004), one of the most prominent female Brazilian artists of the twentieth century, was among those who rejected the nomenclature, stating she was not interested in “any ideological feminist discourse.”² The work of Anna Maria Maiolino (b. 1942) from the 1960s seemed to be motivated by experiences such as women’s daily lives. She recalls that many critics considered these themes prosaic, banal, and obvious.³ Such domestic subjects have long been critically and popularly disallowed in women’s art, and to a large extent remain so today. Though adamant about rejecting the feminist label, both Maiolino and Pape were engaged in questioning and redefining constructions of women’s identity, a central feminist pursuit.

Despite their professed lack of allegiance to feminism as a cause, both artists contributed seminal works to the feminist canon. Though both Pape’s and Maiolino’s artistic practices were rooted in the Brazilian Neoconcrete movement from the 1950s and 1960s,⁴ the focus here is on these artists’ later “contaminated” production, their so-called “epidermic” or visceral works addressing the abject and the sensorial. Through these themes, they were able to question traditional gender roles and introduce topics related to women’s constructed identity in Brazilian art without any overt engagement with the discussion of gender.

This separation, while subtle, likely represented an important tactical gambit: in Brazil and elsewhere, women artists who addressed feminist issues frequently found themselves pigeonholed or critically lambasted. In the 1993 exhibition catalogue *UltraModern: The Art of Contemporary Brazil*, Aracy Amaral states: “It seems quite clear to me that, at the moment, any artist who represents social problems in his or her works will always be discriminated against in Brazil by the country’s formalist critics.”⁵ These critics have also dismissed the multiculturalism that has permeated visual art criticism since the 1990s, accusing it of being an imported fashion from the United States, and disdaining it as part of the minority quotas program and the politically correct mindset.

Despite their lack of embrace of feminism, women artists have enjoyed a predominant role in Brazilian society since the advent of what is known in Brazil as Modernismo. In 1917,

Anita Malfatti (1889–1964) was instrumental in introducing Expressionism to Brazil. In the 1920s, Maria Martins (1894–1973) explored Surrealism, and Tarsila do Amaral’s (1886–1973) paintings powerfully evoked the notion of *Antropofagia*, or cultural cannibalism, as described by her partner, the poet and writer Oswald de Andrade, in his “Anthropophagite Manifesto” (1928).⁶ The 1960s saw a veritable explosion of prominent women artists, including Lygia Clark (1920–88), Lygia Pape, Anna Bella Geiger (b. 1933), Anna Maria Maiolino, and Regina Silveira (b. 1939), among others.⁷ In more recent generations, Jac Leirner, Beatriz Milhazes, Rosângela Rennó, and Adriana Varejão—all born in the 1960s—have gained marquee status in the international art market and in global exhibitions. The discussion in Brazil has never been based on the same issues raised by Linda Nochlin’s seminal 1971 essay, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” since women artists have had a seat at the table for over a century. A more compelling question, then, is why so many leading women artists so vehemently rejected feminist discourse, even as their works addressed the same issues tackled by their feminist counterparts in the U.S. and elsewhere.

For the art critic Paulo Herkenhoff, Brazilian artists, regardless of gender, have always striven not to be considered derivative of hegemonic centers of artistic production; therefore the discussion of center versus periphery was always more salient than the debate on gender issues. Herkenhoff points out that artists from Latin American countries are “constantly being pressured with the burden of proving that they are not mirrors but full individualities, perfectly capable of participating in the contemporary system of symbolic exchanges.”⁸ From this perspective, the desire to bridge the confining territory of “Latin American art” and to participate as “equals” on the international scene was always a more important issue for these artists than inwardly focused discussions of identity politics. As Lygia Pape said, “I think it is outrageous that an exhibition can still be titled *Latin American Art*.... This is self-discriminating, it is very reductive.”⁹ The art critic Guy Brett concurs: “No European artists are asked that their work give proof of their European identity, but this is always the first thing expected of a Latin American.”¹⁰ Brazilian artists constantly sought to singularly define themselves by the quality and innovation of their work,



Fig. 1. Lygia Pape, *Caixa de Formigas* (Box of Ants) (1967), live ants, acrylic glass, meat, mirror, c. 13 3/4" x 13 3/4" x 13 7/8". ©Project Lygia Pape. Photo: Paula Pape.

independent of any specific context or culture. However, as the cultural theorist Nelly Richard astutely claims,

[T]he judgment of "quality" seeks to make itself trustworthy (equitable) by pretending to rest on the neutral institutional recognition of women and men with works of equivalent merit. But how can we not doubt this judgment when we know that the formalist category of quality is not neutral (universal) but rather forged by a prejudicial culture that defends among other interests, masculine supremacy as the absolute representative of the universal?¹¹

As Latin Americans, then, women artists in Brazil already faced certain unwanted and unwarranted expectations about what their art would stand for; to adopt a feminist identity in their practice would only add another, potentially narrowing stamp. In attempting to avoid any specific label, many women artists understandably opted out of feminist discourse. In time, discussion of feminist art in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America became all but taboo.

Amaral suggests an additional explanation for the lack of feminist interests in Brazilian art, writing:

In reality it is necessary to recognize the practical reason why women in Brazil had so much availability to dedicate themselves to the arts. The presence, even today, of one or more domestic helpers in the household providing services for the middle class and the upper middle class always gave Brazilian women the possibility to dedicate themselves to the arts, a condition that their North American counterparts could not afford in contemporary times.¹²

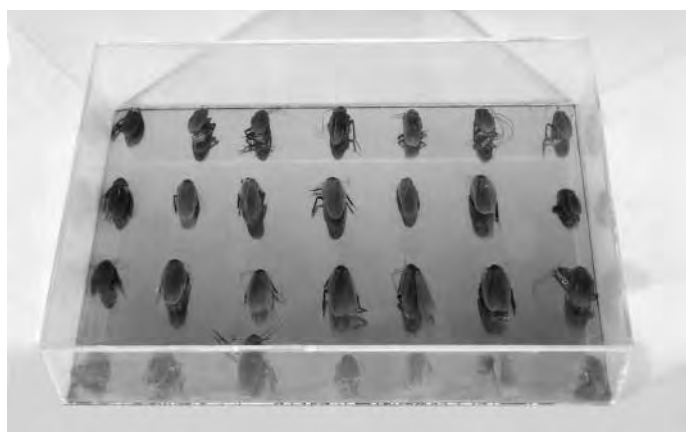


Fig. 2. Lygia Pape, *Caixa de Baratas* (Box of Cockroaches) (1967), cockroaches, acrylic glass, mirror, c. 13 7/8" x 13 7/8" x 10". © Project Lygia Pape. Photo: Paula Pape.

Though this argument does not explain the phenomenon, it does raise an interesting point about the discrepancy of class in Brazilian society. It is only now, in light of the recent massive street demonstrations in Brazil in response to the government's lavish expenditures to host the 2014 World Cup, that this gross social and economic inequality is being publicly challenged.

A complete account of the lack of interest in gender issues in Brazil throughout the 1970s must also take note of the country's history of brutal social and political realities. In the late 1960s and 1970s, Brazil was in the midst of the most repressive years of a military dictatorship that came to rule the country for twenty years (from 1964 until 1985). In December 1968, the military regime decreed the AI-5, Institutional Act #5, which abolished civil rights in the country, instituted censorship of the media and the arts, and implemented torture as a practice of the state.¹³ All attentions were turned towards the struggle against the repression and censorship imposed by the military regime, overshadowing other important debates such as gender differences, social inequalities, and racial discrimination. In the wake of globalization, Latin American artists became better known, yet for the most part, the work of Latin American women artists from the late 1960s and 1970s—a period characterized by both artistic innovations and political repression—remains largely unexamined.¹⁴

Born in Rio de Janeiro, Lygia Pape participated in the seminal 1967 exhibition *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* (New Brazilian Objectivity) organized by Hélio Oiticica at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro (MAM/RJ). Pape contributed two sculptures to the exhibition: *Caixa de Formigas* (Box of Ants) (Fig. 1) and *Caixa de Baratas* (Box of Cockroaches) (Fig. 2), both from 1967. In *Box of Ants*, an acrylic box encloses a piece of raw meat being devoured by live ants, laid on top of a mirror placed at the bottom of the box. Inside the box, three painted circles bear the inscription "a gula ou a luxúria" (gluttony or lust). *Box of Cockroaches* is also an acrylic box with a mirror affixed to the bottom—this one containing a grid of dead cockroaches, with the larger ones glued to the bottom of the box.



Fig. 3. Lygia Pape, *O Ovo* (The Egg) (1967), black & white photograph, c. 7 1/8" x 9 3/8". ©Project Lygia Pape. Photo: Maurício Cirne.

At the time, these sculptures were interpreted as a critique of museums, and the stagnant, “dead” art contained therein. In retrospect, however, *Box of Ants* and *Box of Cockroaches* were also significant in their attempt to break with the reigning constructivist order promoted by the São Paulo-based Concrete movement, which favored geometric abstraction, rationality, and mathematical order. By provoking disgust and repulsion in the viewer—whose face is reflected among the dead cockroaches in the mirror at the bottom of the box—these works offer a stark repudiation of the rationality promoted by geometric abstraction. For Herkenhoff, “These works contaminated the aseptic constructivist project, through the parochial female fear of cockroaches and its scatology.”¹⁵

A year later, Pape participated in the Happening “Apocalipópese” (in Portuguese, a combination of the words “apocalypse” and “hypothesis”)—a weekly series of outdoor artistic interventions at Aterro do Flamengo, in the outskirts of MAM/RJ.¹⁶ At this event, Pape performed *O ovo* (The Egg) (1967; Fig. 3), which centered on metaphors of birth and destruction. *The Egg* incorporated a series of giant wooden cubic structures (not ovoid-shaped, as the title might suggest) covered with colored plastic. From inside these breakable boxes, members of a samba school burst out dancing and playing music in a clear analogy to a birth.¹⁷ The surface of the cube, which was made of a thin plastic material, acted like a second skin or epidermis, and was easily torn apart by the dancers in a visceral act. The violence and spirit of

transformation implicit in the act also referenced the political repression of the times, and the need to break free. Like *Box of Ants* and *Box of Cockroaches*, *O ovo* also functions as a critique of geometric abstraction, since the participant has to break the box, violating the cube to be “reborn.”

The sensorial experience of breaking through a surface to create a transformative state was similarly promoted by Pape’s *Divisor* (Divider) (Pl. 12), first performed in 1968, and since then re-performed several times in multiple venues. *Divisor* consists of dozens of people poking their heads through gridded holes made in a large sheet of white cloth. The piece is a collective and amorphous moving body, a kind of expanded ghost figure moving in space, with multiple heads and openings like a monstrous Greek Hydra. Speaking simultaneously to the one and the many, Pape’s *Divisor* resonates with Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt’s notion of the “multitude,” which those authors describe as an organization based on the free singularities that converge in the production of the common.¹⁸ The multitude is neither fully a collective agent nor a collection of individual agents—it takes shape mainly as agency, a “productive potential” of human life for those who perform through or within it. The symbolic meaning of Pape’s *Divisor* changes every time it is performed and shifts based on the viewer’s individual experience; this is intentional, as the artist was more interested in proposing ideas than authoring a finished work of art. *Divisor* has a transformative power, suggesting a change of perception once the participant is immersed in its collective experience.



Fig. 4. Lygia Pape, *Eat Me* (1975), film still, 16mm, 35mm transferred to HD Video/color. © Project Lygia Pape.

Divisor also suggests a figure come to life, sharing a sensibility with Mikhail Bakhtin's description of "grotesque realism"—a grandiose, exaggerated body that is not individualized but rather hybrid and social.¹⁹ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White suggest that, in order "to complete the image of the 'grotesque realism,' one must add that it is always a figure in process, it is always *becoming*. It is a mobile and hybrid creature, disproportionate, exorbitant, and outgrowing all limits, decentered and off balance, a figural and symbolic resource for parodic exaggeration and inversion."²⁰ For Bakhtin, the grotesque realist body violates classical aesthetics, which favors a unique, individualized, autonomous, closed, polished, proportionate, and symmetrical body.²¹ If anything, *Divisor*, like her earlier works *Box of Ants* and *Box of Cockroaches*, also represents a contamination of the classical order, a bold challenge to the prevailing claim of formalism and modernist autonomy in the visual arts in Brazil.

In her seminal film *Eat Me* (1975; Fig. 4),²² Pape once again provoked sensations of attraction and repulsion. Here the viewer is confronted by a close-up of a female and a male mouth, suggestive of a vagina, sucking and expelling objects, partially inviting and partially threatening. In one shot, a mustached, lipstick-covered mouth—incidentally belonging to the artist Artur Barrio—fills the entire screen. It sucks a red stone (actually an object made of plastic), which soon changes color, becoming blue. This image cuts to a female mouth sucking on a sausage smothered in ketchup, and then goes back to the cavity of the man's mouth. Male and female mouths are alternated among voices in different languages rhythmically uttering the phrase "a gula ou a luxúria?" (gluttony or lust?).²³ The growing sound of female groans, sexual in nature, culminates with a scream, creating an unsettling experience for the viewer. At the end of the film, an abrupt transition to the sounds of an advertisement suggests an interrupted sexual consummation.

Playing even further with notions of bad taste, debauchery, and kitsch, the following year Pape created the installation *Eat me: a gula ou a luxúria?* (Eat Me: Gluttony or Lust?) (1976; Fig. 5), which referenced and strongly criticized the idea of women as



Fig. 5. Lygia Pape, *Eat me: A gula ou a luxúria?* (Eat Me: Gluttony or Lust?) (1976) installation at Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro. © Project Lygia Pape. Photo: Paula Pape.



Fig. 6. Anna Maria Maiolino, *Monumento à Fome* (Monument to Hunger) (1978), two bags of 1 kg each, rice & beans over black cloth in table; performed at empty lot in Rua Augusta, São Paulo, 51 1/8" x 25 1/2" x 25 1/2". Courtesy of the artist.

both objects and agents of consumption.²⁴ Tents containing small white paper bags carried the inscription "objects of seduction." Inside the bags were kitschy objects—calendars with naked women, pubic hair, aphrodisiac lotions, peanuts, and mirrors. She stamped the bags, kissed them with red lipstick, and then signed them. Everything could be bought by the audience at the bargain price of one *cruzeiro*—the Brazilian currency at the time.²⁵

When the installation was later re-created at MAM/RJ, viewers were once again invited to inspect and purchase vulgar objects of desire—dentures, wigs, eyelashes, apples, miniatures of fake female breasts bearing the word "darling," red lipsticks with the inscription *promessa* (promise). Pape defined these items as instruments from daily life and offered them to the



Fig. 7. Anna Maria Maiolino, *Estado Escatológico* (Scatological State) (1978), public Installation/performed at the event "Mitos Vadios" (Vagrant Myths) in São Paulo, toilet paper, newspaper, branches, and leaves against wall. Courtesy of the artist.

public as a critical vision of debauchery and consumerism.²⁶ By mimicking salacious trinkets sold by street vendors, Pape sarcastically exposed female strategies of seduction, unmasking false promises of ideal female beauty in society.

This installation is even more striking when considered within the context of the "economic miracle" that was underway in Brazil at the time, with sales of consumer goods for the lower middle class soaring even as the military regime was at its most repressive. Pape points to the impoverished aesthetic of kitsch pervasive in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro, stressing issues of class difference and inequality through the cheapness of the objects and their discarded quality. Summoning the comic-tragic, Pape's installation offers a sardonic view of the beautification of women as objects to be desired, and as avid consumers of objects of seduction.

In 1976, a version of the project *Eat Me: Gluttony or Lust?* was published in the second issue of *Malasartes*, a celebrated (albeit short-lived) journal in Brazil that disseminated theoretical and visual projects by artists.²⁷ In the pages of *Malasartes*, Pape elaborated on the concept of *epidermização* (epidermization), emphasizing the sensorial aspect of her work as opposed to a rational one. She wrote: "It is not a discourse or a thesis. I unfold the project at the level of an epidermization of an idea, the sensorial as a form of knowledge and consciousness."²⁸

Pape's 'epidermic' works dealing with the body through notions of the abject and contamination, the breaking of the cube/skin, and consumptive desire go beyond the discussion of women's construction of identity in society. Her feminist legacy, even if she did not intentionally embrace it, belongs to a larger critical project—one that reminds us that consumerism and mechanisms of seduction can unleash desire, but cannot ever fulfill it.

For Anna Maria Maiolino, as for other artists enduring the climate of fear and self-censorship under Brazilian dictatorship, the notion of "viscerality" was a poignant and common theme: works dealt with body parts, viscera, and the fragmented and dilacerated flesh. According to Herkenhoff, "In Brazilian art milieu the words 'visceral' and 'viscerality' were used [by many artists] to indicate the body's expressive intensity; as well as the organic production of meaning."²⁹

In Maiolino's visceral pieces from the 1960s, this concept came through the connection of food and excrement. In one of her earlier works, the soft sculpture titled *Glu, Glu, Glu...* (1966; Pl. 13) (made of upholstery stuffing), a male torso above bears the inscription *Glu, Glu, Glu*. In the lower section, padded volumes depict digestive organs, including the stomach and



Fig. 8. Anna Maria Maiolino, *In/Out (Antropofagia)* (1973–74), film still, Super 8 transferred to DVD, black and white and color, sound. Courtesy of the artist.

the intestines. These body parts, nakedly protruding out in space like overexposed viscera, alluded to the torture inflicted on political prisoners during the military regime in Brazil.

Born in 1942, in wartime Italy, Maiolino immigrated with her family to South America at age twelve, living first in Venezuela and then moving to Rio de Janeiro in 1960. Like many European artists from her generation, Maiolino lived through the experience of war, exile, and the need to adapt to new environments. From 1968 to 1971, she lived in New York City, where she felt once again like a displaced immigrant, writing, “Without a green card, without anything, I am but one more ‘illegal’ in the American paradise.”³⁰ Also during this time, overburdened by household tasks and the obligations of motherhood, she produced no new work. Eventually, following a suggestion by Oiticica, she began taking personal

notes and commenced a fertile period of writing poetry. In her interviews about those years, there is a sense of silently bearing the unspeakable, deprived of her personhood and her voice. Of this difficult yet formative period, Maiolino wrote: “The words, with their weight and meaning, originated metaphors of sentiments, in angst to find answers to the many questions from my personal life and also to constitute a way to elaborate my reencounter with the military dictatorship upon my return to Brazil.”³¹

In 1978, back in Brazil, Maiolino was invited by Oiticica and Ivald Granato to participate in the Happening “*Mitos Vadios*” (Vagrant Myths) in a vacant lot in Rua Augusta, in São Paulo. The title was a direct response to the I Bienal Latino-Americana, concomitantly inaugurated in São Paulo, which was one of the first important international cultural events held during Brazil’s transition back to democratic rule. The I Bienal Latino-Americana was called “*Mitos e Magias*” (Myths and Witchcraft), an allusion to the predominance of magic realism and surrealism in Latin America, a trend frequently pilloried by many artists as regionalist. Maiolino participated in this Happening with two installations: *Monumento à Fome* (Monument to Hunger) (Fig. 6) and *Estado Escatológico* (Scatological State) (Fig. 7). *Monument to Hunger* consisted of two sacks, one filled with white rice and the other with black beans. The sacks were tied together with a ribbon and placed on a table covered by a black cloth. In this work, Maiolino addressed the food staple of the lower class in Brazil: rice and beans. In *Scatological State*, she displayed various types of toilet paper on the wall, arranged from the cheapest to the most expensive, and humorously included a newspaper and a plant leaf. With these two works, Maiolino connected the ends of the digestive system—ingesting and excreting food. She implied that what enters the body must subsequently be eliminated. In associating food to excrement—she comments on the masses



Fig. 9. Anna Maria Maiolino, *Entrevidas (Between Lives)* (1981), eggs, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 10. Anna Maria Maiolino, *Muitos (Many)* (1995), clay, dimensions variable, installation at the Kanaal Art Foundation, Kortrijk, Belgium. Courtesy of the artist.

of flotsam and jetsam, the discarded items—or in this case, people—left adrift at the margins of society.

Likewise, her later installation *Arroz e Feijão* (Rice and Beans) (1979) remade for the 29th São Paulo Bienal (2010), also addressed disparate social access to consumerism, discriminating high from low, those with means from those who are disenfranchised from consumer society. It consists of a large table covered with a black cloth set up for a meal. Seeds of rice and beans germinate from white plates filled with soil. Hope and hunger are intertwined.

The art critic Frederico Moraes ironically noted that it is precisely in the excremental function of the body that low and high meet indiscriminately, with no class distinction.³²

Maiolino's work draws on the notion of abject art: the abject occupies the place of unfulfilled desire. She writes, "The intestine is a cavity that we never can fill in, in the same way that we can't fulfill desire."³³ From the mid to late 1930s, Georges Bataille wrote about the abject in a group of unpublished texts under the title "Abjection et les formes misérables,"³⁴ as a way to describe attraction to the rotten and



Fig. 11. Anna Maria Maiolino, *Mais de Mil (More than One Thousand)* (1995), clay, dimensions variable, installation at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. Courtesy of the artist.

the wasted. For Bataille, "What the system cannot assimilate must be rejected as excremental."³⁵ In examining Bataille's writings on the abject, Rosalind Krauss pointed out their association not necessarily to bodily abjection but instead to social exclusions. According to Krauss, "These texts identify social abjection with a violent exclusionary force operating within modern State systems, one that strips the labouring masses of their human dignity and reproduces them as dehumanized social waste."³⁶ Krauss claims that much of abject art is founded in the multiple forms of the "wound," which is always the place of the feminine. She asserts that "whether or not the feminine subject is actually at stake in a given work, it is the character of being wounded, victimized, traumatized, marginalized that is seen as what is in play within this domain."³⁷ Indeed, underlying Maiolino's practice is a pervasive sense of the precarious, the fragile, the visceral, and the sensorial: for better or worse, all qualities traditionally related to the female body.

The feminine struggle against the male, patriarchal, and univocal sense of order is also played out in Maiolino's work through language (or better, the lack of proper language). Maiolino similarly attests to the utterance of language as an impossible task, an unfinished business, in her super-8 film *In-*

Out (Antropofagia) (1973–74; Fig. 8). Two mouths, one female and one male, alternately occupy the full screen. At the beginning, a black adhesive tape covers the mouth on screen, like a censor box, making the act of speech impossible. The mouth then tries to convey some sound, to formulate a sort of speech, to no avail. In subsequent shots, non-linear images unfold: menacing teeth, a mouth ingesting a long black thread, lips spilling colored filaments, a mouth holding an egg. Despite their articulation of different bodily motions such as eating, talking, and arguing, ultimately, these mouths are stripped of an important function: the ability to articulate cohesive linguistic meaning. There is nothing epic about these mouths' movements; on the contrary, they are banal, non-eventful, mere exercises in space. They attest to the failed attempt to communicate through language. The anthropophagic act of cultural cannibalism is also evoked through word (the title) and image (the mouth). As in Pape's 1975 film *Eat Me*, the mouth devours and swallows, appropriates and regurgitates back creating symbolic meanings. The verbal and the pre-verbal, nature and culture, images and words are intertwined in a disruptive way. Both films generate a state of chaos and confusion undermining qualities predominantly associated with masculinity, such as efficiency and clarity. They also allude to the mouth as a means for consumptive unfulfilled desire which relentlessly cannibalizes us.

Also like Pape's 1967 *The Egg*, Maiolino's 1981 installation *Entrevidas* (Between Lives) (Fig. 9) tidily knits notions of birth and destruction. Consisting of a floor dotted with hundreds of eggs, which the audience is invited to walk through, this fragile egg carpet acts as a minefield potentially charged with the possibility of birth and annihilation. The eggs also represent the passage from nature into the symbolic order existing in a transitional space. According to Herkenhoff, this work occupies an area "between the pre-verbal (the egg as a metaphor for life before birth), and the non-verbal (the growing fear of experiencing a space of insecurity and alienation)."³⁸ It is a visual poem alluding simultaneously to fear and censorship, to fragility, precariousness, and temporality.

In the early 1990s, Maiolino further explored the notion of banality, repetition, and the tedious manual labor of women's daily domestic tasks: waiting, passing time, knitting, cooking, and preparing food. She adopted handmade unfired clay as her main medium. Abandoning the mold and shaping forms with her own hands, she worked with large amounts of clay, manipulating them on site and letting them dry out without firing them. In the installations *Muitos* (Many) (Fig. 10) and *Mais de Mil* (More than One Thousand) (Fig. 11), both 1995 and from the series *Terra Moldada* (Modeled Earth), Maiolino repeatedly emphasized the gesture of creation. Produced in succession, each of these objects bears the mark of the artist's hands, what the art critic Paulo Venâncio Filho called "The Doing Hand."³⁹

In a 2002 interview, Maiolino stated: "The installations of unfired clay were the result of the desire to make sculptural works with more hand-molded parts in less time, thus enabling a greater accumulative potential, greater entropy.

Once formed, the clay does its natural duty: it dehydrates, petrifies, goes back to the state of being potential dust."⁴⁰ Maiolino's thousands of handmade pieces made of raw clay, called *Rolinhos e Cobrinhas* (Little Rolls and Little Snake-Shaped Coils), (1993–2007), are unformed, fluid, and amorphous. At dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel (2012), the artist filled a small house with myriad unfired clay pieces in different shapes. The installation *Here & There* exuded the same sense of precariousness and fragility from her early works. These multiple little coils and rolls were taken as reminiscent of food or excrement—handmade pasta from her childhood memories or simply waste. Food and intestines were again entwined.

Though gender difference was not a priority, it is time to revisit the prevailing idea that there was no feminist art coming from Brazil. The works presented here by both Pape and Maiolino incorporate the notions of "viscerality" and "epidermization" through their insistence on ingestion and its expulsion, contamination, failed attempts to communicate through language, metaphors of birth and destruction, and through the vulnerable and the precarious. These works bring an exquisite (dis)order and debasement to the prevailing masculine logical discourse, becoming, despite their utterly negation, a hallmark of Brazilian artists' take on feminism in their own terms during this period. ●

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Notes

This article is part of a larger upcoming publication focusing on women artists from Brazil and Chile from the 1970s and 1980s, thanks to a 2013 Art Writers Grant I have received from Creative Capital/Warhol Foundation.

1. A few important publications have included the work of some historical Latin American women artists. Among them are: *UltraModern: The Art of Contemporary Brazil*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1993); curated by Susan Fisher Sterling with essays by Aracy A. Amaral and Paulo Herkenhoff; *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art In, Of, and From the Feminine*, Catherine de Zegher, ed. (Boston: The MIT Press; 2nd edition, 1996); *Manobras Radicais: Artistas Brasileiras*, Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda and Paulo Herkenhoff, eds. (São Paulo: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, 2006); *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Cornelia Butler, ed. (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007); and *Elles @centrepompidou: Artistes femmes dans la collection du musée national d'art moderne, centre de création industrielle* Camille Morineau, ed. (Centre Pompidou, 2009). "Re.act.feminism-a performing archive" is a comprehensive archival website and travelling exhibition for women performing artists. It has an accompanying book *Re.Act.Feminism-a Performing Archive*, edited by Bettina Knaup and Beatrice Ellen Stammer, with the essay "Performing Feminist Archives: a research-in-process on Latin American performance art" by Eleonora Fabião (London: Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg and Live Art Development Agency, 2014).
2. Denise Mattar, *Lygia Pape: Intrinsecamente Anarquista* (Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 2003), 85.

3. "Helena Tatay conversa com Anna Maria Maiolino," in *Anna Maria Maiolino* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2012), 37. Translated by the author.
4. Lygia Pape was a major exponent of the Neoconcrete movement, along with Hélio Oiticica (1937–80) and Lygia Clark (1920–88). The Neoconcrete artists moved away from the finished object of art and embraced the idea of art as process or experimentation. Based on the "Neoconcrete Manifesto" written by Ferreira Gullar (1959), they moved away from the rigid geometric abstract forms of the São Paulo Concrete group, creating a more tactile, perceptual, and sensorial art. Ferreira Gullar, "Manifesto Neoconcreto," *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, Suplemento Dominical, 22 March 1959); and Ronaldo Brito, *Neoconcretismo: vértice e ruptura do projeto construtivista brasileiro* (Neoconcretism: Vertex and Rupture of the Brazilian Constructivist Project) (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 1985).
5. Aracy Amaral, "Brazil: Women in the Arts," in *The Art of the Ultramodern: Contemporary Brazil*, 23.
6. See Gillian Sneed, "Anita Malfatti and Tarsila do Amaral: Gender, Brasilidade and the Modernist Landscape," *WAJ* 34, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2013): 30–39.
7. A few recent exhibitions have cast light on prominent Brazilian women artists from the 1960s. Among them, *Mira Schendel*, Tate Modern, London (September 2013–January 2014); *Lygia Clark: The Abandonment of Art, 1948–1988* (May–August 2014), The Museum of Modern Art, New York, with an accompanying retrospective of films and videos "On the Edge: Brazilian Film Experiments of the 1960s and Early 1970s" (May–July, 2014) featuring works by Anna Bella Geiger, Sônia Andrade, and Leticia Parente; Anna Maria Maiolino: *Between Senses at Hauser and Wirth Gallery*, New York (May–June, 2014); and a solo project by Regina Vater organized by São Paulo's Galeria Jaqueline Martins at Frieze Art Fair, New York (May, 2014).
8. Paulo Herkenhoff, "The Contemporary Art of Brazil: Theoretical Constructs," in *The Art of the Ultramodern: Contemporary Brazil*, 108.
9. *Lygia Pape: Entrevista a Lúcia Carneiro e Ileana Pradilla* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Aguilar, 1998), 60. From the series *Coleção Palavra do Artista*. Translated by the author.
10. Guy Brett, "Border Crossings," in *Contemporary Art in Latin America* (London: Black Dog, 2010), 189.
11. Nelly Richard, *Masculine/Feminine: Practices of Difference(s)*, trans. Silvia R. Tandeciarz and Alice A. Nelson (Durham, NC and London: Duke Univ. Press, 2004), 30.
12. Aracy Amaral, "A Mulher nas Artes," in *Textos do Trópico de Capricórnio, Artigos e Ensaios (1980–2005)*, v. 3 (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2006), 222. Translated by the author.
13. For a detailed discussion on the artistic responses to the military regime, see Claudia Calirman, *Brazilian Art under Dictatorship: Antonio Manuel, Artur Barrio, and Cildo Meireles* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2012).
14. A long overdue exhibition on Latin American women artists is being organized at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles in 2017 by Cecilia Fajardo-Hill and Andrea Giunta. *The Political Body: Radical Women in Latin American Art, 1960–1985* promises to break new ground in the study of feminism in Latin America. *The exhibition is part of the Getty Foundation's Pacific Standard Time: Los Angeles/Latin America initiative*.
15. *Manobras Radicais*, Buarque de Hollanda and Herkenhoff, eds., 77.
16. "Apocalipopótese" was coordinated by Oiticica and featured the participation of a number of artists. It was born of the artist's desire to break the boundaries between the work of art and the public.
17. Lygia Pape et al., *Lygia Pape* (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 1983), 46.
18. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 211.
19. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984), 19.
20. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), 9.
21. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 25.
22. *Eat Me* (1975) was originally shot in 16mm and later remade in 35mm, 10 minutes, and in color.
23. Eugênio Puppo, ed., *Cinema Marginal Brasileiro: Filmes Produzidos nos Anos 60 e 70* (São Paulo: Heco Produções, 2004), 135.
24. *Eat me: a gula ou a luxúria?* (*Eat Me: Gluttony or Lust?*) (1976) was first exhibited at Galeria Arte Global in São Paulo.
25. Denise Mattar, *Lygia Pape: Intrinsecamente Anarquista*, 84.
26. In the outdoor space of MAM/RJ, a film showed the artist seductively inviting the viewers to enter the installation.
27. Despite the brevity of its existence (only three issues between September 1975 and June 1976) and its relatively small run of five thousand copies per edition, *Malasartes* became one of the most celebrated artists' journals published in Brazil during the mid-1970s.
28. *Malasartes* no. 2, (1976), 22–23. Translated by the author.
29. Paulo Herkenhoff, "A Trajetória de Maiolino: Uma Negociação de Diferenças," in *Anna Maria Maiolino, Vida Afora/A Life Line*, Catherine de Zegher, ed. (New York: The Drawing Center, 2002), 328.
30. *Anna Maria Maiolino, Vida Afora/A Life Line*, 264.
31. "Helena Tatay conversa com Anna Maria Maiolino," in *Anna Maria Maiolino*, 42. Translated by the author.
32. Frederico Moraes, *Do Corpo à Terra: Um Marco Radical na Arte Brasileira*, n.p. In an audiovisual work from 1970, Moraes relays a quote from the head of the Buckingham Palace garbage collectors, justifying their five-week strike in London: "The garbage of the Queen is like everybody else's: if it is not quickly collected, it will start smelling badly."
33. "Helena Tatay conversa com Anna Maria Maiolino," in *Anna Maria Maiolino*, 39.
34. Bataille also wrote on the abject in some of his essays first published (posthumously) in English as *Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and Taboo* (New York: Walker and Co., 1962). Originally published as *L'Érotisme* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1957) and later published as Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and Taboo*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986). See Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 217–21.
35. Georges Bataille, "The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade," *Georges Bataille, Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, Allan Stoekl, trans. and ed. (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1985), 91–102.
36. Rosalind Krauss, "Informe without Conclusion," *October* 78 (Fall 1996), 89–105. Reprinted in *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, 2nd ed., Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung, eds. (London: John Wiley and Sons, 2013), 119.
37. *Ibid*, 121.
38. Herkenhoff, *The Art of the Ultramodern: Contemporary Brazil*, 63.
39. Paulo Venâncio Filho, "The Doing Hand" in *Anna Maria Maiolino, Vida Afora/A Life Line*, 284. Reprinted in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art In, Of, and From the Feminine*, de Zegher, ed., 441–44.
40. "A Conversation between Holly Block and Anna Maria Maiolino," in *Anna Maria Maiolino, Vida Afora/A Life Line*, 353–54.

FEMININE VESSELS

THE CERAMIC SCULPTURE OF VALLY WIESELTHIER

By Megan Brandow-Faller

At the height of her career in the late 1920s, internationally acclaimed Viennese ceramicist and Wiener Werkstätte [Vienna Workshops] designer Vally Wieselthier (1895–1945) relocated to New York. Although her memoirs presented the decision to emigrate as undertaken spontaneously, the artist arrived with a clear motive in mind: to rebrand herself as a ceramic sculptor, free of the dialectic surrounding the female-dominated Werkstätte. Part and parcel of her strategic reinvention—Wieselthier’s self-presentation to the New York art world as a naïf whose works had, in her own words “no deep message to give to the world save that of their own beauty”—was a deliberate strategy to diffuse the controversy surrounding her earlier work.¹ Wieselthier catapulted into the spotlight for her contributions to the 1922 Werkbund Fair at Frankfurt and the 1925 Exposition des Arts Industriels et Décoratifs in Paris, where her porcelain figural group *Vanity* (1924; Fig. 1) won a gold medal. Wieselthier’s Viennese work defined what critics perceived as the ‘feminine’ aesthetic of the new field of Viennese Expressionist Ceramics: roughly modeled, unevenly glazed and brightly painted ceramic vessels and small sculptures with exuberant surface ornamentation that revealed an excitement about process and the spontaneity of firing. Flirting between utility and ornament, surface and expression, the decorative and meaningful, Wieselthier’s ceramic heads (or *Frauenköpfe*) in this style were notable for their formal asymmetries and imperfections, with faces painted to look deliberately ‘made-up,’ in an almost childlike fashion. Yet, despite such subversive undercurrents, critics were often dismissive, calling the work “playful ... naïve ... and enticing as a bunch of flowers, careless as a butterfly and merry as a child’s smile.”² That Wieselthier mined the same trivializing stereotypes—i.e., the image of the interwar *Kunstgewerbeweib* (artist-craftswoman) as a childish dilettante—used as ammunition by her critics has been widely neglected in secondary literature on the artist.³ So successful was Wieselthier’s reinvention as a happy-go-lucky child-woman that it is often difficult to separate the art from the mask, the artist from her reflection.⁴

Engaging the artist at her own game of hide and seek, this article analyzes Wieselthier’s Viennese and early New York ceramic sculptures: works which aspired to elevate female ‘craftiness’ and vessel-based techniques into the realm of the monumental. While scholars have read the ceramic heads and



Fig.1. Vally Wieselthier, *Vanity* (1924), porcelain figural group. 7" x 6 3/4". Vienna Augarten. Photo: Erich Lessing Art Archive, Vienna.

figures largely as mirror images of the artist’s own reflection, it is my argument that these figures served as parodic appropriations of societal standards of feminine beauty and women’s connection to the decorative.⁵ Collectively, what is striking is the works’ mask-like qualities: both the life-size figures and *Frauenköpfe* convey little individual characterization. In her life and her art, Wieselthier assumed a self-constructed mask, parodying the childish feminine essence she played to critics. Indexing what critics perceived as her quintessentially ‘feminine’ style, a situation not without similarities to the work of her contemporaries, Florine Stettheimer (1871–1944) and Marie Laurencin (1883–1956), Wieselthier’s ‘feminine vessels’ served as powerful interventions against the imbricated discourses of craft and the decorative woman.⁶

Crucial to understanding the subversive thrust of Wieselthier’s work is the popular ambivalence surrounding

the figure of the interwar Viennese *Kunstgewerbeweib*, as encapsulated by a passage from Joseph Roth's 1938 novel *The Emperor's Tomb*:

[A] craftswoman. Do you know what that is? She designs, or rather carves, in fact—crazy necklaces and rings, modern things you know, all corners, and clasps of fir. I believe she can also plait straw mats. The last time she was here she gave me a lecture, like a professor, about African art....⁷

Like her fictional counterpart 'Elisabeth' in Roth's novel, artist-craftswomen like Wieselthier explored the possibility of expressionism in the applied arts, creating objects with a *Formwille* (will-to-form) beyond their function that aspired to the pure aestheticism of easel painting. In blurring the boundary between the decorative and the meaningful, the field of expressionist ceramics pioneered by Wieselthier threatened to overturn the gendered hierarchy of art and craft, which, as Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock famously argued in *Old Mistresses*, categorized women and their art as decorative, domestic, and derivative.⁸ Expressionist ceramic art like Wieselthier's—which one critic admitted "extended, with its sculptural works, into the realm of high art"—would prompt misogynist critics like Arthur Roessler and Armand Weiser to call for a clearer separation of art and craft, expression and function.⁹

The daughter of Jewish court attorney Wilhelm Wieselthier and Rosa Winkler, Vally [Valerie] Wieselthier's privileged upbringing typified the upper-middle-class milieu typical of the *Kunstgewerbeweib*.¹⁰ In her memoirs, the artist portrayed herself as a precocious child who rejected conventional gender roles to seize on the sort of 'masculine' habits satirized in Roth's portrayal of "Elisabeth," who, like the real-life Wieselthier, often preferred male clothing.¹¹ A champion swimmer, diver, skier, hockey and tennis player, the "Wiesel" shocked her parents with her ambition to become a professional artist; after much argument, she extracted a promise from her father that she could pursue her ambitions and would never have to marry. During 1912–14 Wieselthier attended Vienna's Art School for Women and Girls, co-founded by Rosa Mayreder (1858–1938) and Tina Blau-Lang (1845–1916), followed by the Imperial School of Applied Arts (1914–20), known for its progressive faculty (dominated by members of the Vienna Secession and so-called "Klimt Group") and teaching methods based on the interdisciplinary workshop principle.¹² There she studied with Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser, co-founders of the Wiener Werkstätte (1903–32), the well-known applied arts workshops, and fellow Secessionist Franz Cizek.¹³ She initially hoped to work in fashion but in 1917 was recruited by Hoffmann for the Werkstätte's experimental Artist Workshops. As she recalled, "I got by chance a lump of clay" and spontaneously modeled a figure, causing Hoffmann to declare, "Now at last I know that Vally is a sculptor."¹⁴ Wieselthier pursued further studies with Michael Powolny, the artist-potter responsible for the Secessionist Renaissance of ceramic figuration in early Werkstätte interiors.¹⁵ Above all, it was the freedom and



Fig. 2. Vally Wieselthier, Vase (1926), glazed earthenware, 17 3/4" x 17 3/8".

experimental atmosphere of the Artist Workshops, which the artist later likened to an Arcadian paradise inhabited almost exclusively by women, that fostered Wieselthier's expressionist approach.¹⁶ In 1922, a fall-out with the new business manager, Hoffmann student Philipp Häusler, prompted Wieselthier to leave the Werkstätte and to mount an exhibition on her own at the Frankfurt Werkbund Fair.¹⁷ From 1922 to 1927, the artist oversaw her own workshops, the "Keramische Werkstätte Vally Wieselthier" at Esterhazygasse 8 in Vienna's Vith District, enjoying a brisk international business and regular coverage in Central Europe's major art and design periodicals.

The artist's mature Viennese work troubled classifications of ceramic art as mere decoration. Wieselthier's functional objects and small-scale figurative sculptures were marked by formal irregularity and asymmetry; spontaneous design processes and brightly-colored glazes; discord between form and elaborate surface decoration conveying energy and movement; and a proliferation of female subjects. As illustrated by the display vase in Figure 2 (1926), Wieselthier eschewed the potter's typical concern for smoothly wrought surfaces in favor of emphasizing direct contact with the plastic medium. She detailed her process in a series of articles in *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*: "I place absolutely no weight on achieving a smooth, uniform surface glaze, but mix the glaze in all possible nuances and let the fire reign."¹⁸ What critics described as a "free, voluptuous handling [of clay]" embracing the unpredictability of glazing and firing resulted in a design language that bristled with excitement about the process of making. Wieselthier

Fig. 3. Vally Wieselthier, *Flower Vase* (1927), glazed earthenware, 15 1/2" x 9 1/8".

privileged a working process based on principles of spontaneity and intuition. As the artist explained: "only when I feel what can be formed at the wheel can I design a form ... what I can form with my fingers from clay will never be bad, because the material tells me what I am allowed to do."¹⁹ Ceramic form, she believed, "must always grow out of the material, i.e., it must be made in the same manner as the pot, hollow inside, worked from within to the outside, not modeled in the round from the lump."²⁰ She shunned mold-forming and modeling-in-the-round, which limited clay's expressive possibilities, favoring the hollow-molding method characteristic of the Viennese school. Such principles lent ceramics the possibility of possessing, in the artist's own words, "a decorative value even apart from their purpose" which could be as powerful as a "grand sculpture in a salon."²¹

While Roeßler and Weiser likened the new ceramics to a form of seductive coquetry—teasing viewers with expressive or intellectual content but ultimately collapsing back into the decorative—critics like Ludwig Steinmetz and Max Eisler defended the possibility of meaningful artistic expression in a ceramic medium. Steinmetz maintained that, so long as their construction was informed by intense yet abstract emotions, ceramic objects could achieve an expressive monumentality every bit as potent as an easel canvas. But such potential hinged on the intensity of an expressive *Formwille*, which, while serving practical utility, was not conceived out of "cold reason" or "pure geometrical construction" but "born of an exhilarating, imaginative conception imprinted on the object that lives on eternally as an animated energy in the obtained form."²² The baluster-shaped display vase in Figure 2 gives visual currency to the centrality of gesture, spontaneity, and a Rococo-like sense of playfulness in Wieselthier's work. The artist exploits the tension between the object's highly-formal, classicizing shape (a baluster-form vase resting on a tapered conical base) and the seemingly casual and spontaneous nature of its painted decoration and overglaze. Like similar works from the period, the vase's smooth surfaces are disturbed by a fragmentary abstract ornament which bursts to the surface in a staccato rhythm. Vaguely evocative of Rococo design, delicate curlicue dolphin-form handles lend the object a playful effervescence characteristic of its maker. Underscoring all of these design elements was the gestural virtuosity by which the brightly-colored glazes were left to drip down the vase's surface.

From the same period, a flower vase (Fig. 3) and fruit dish (Pl. 14) (both 1927) illustrate similarly expressive tendencies as



well as the artist's dialogue with contemporary art and design. Resting on a bell-shaped base, the wheel-thrown, trumpet-form vase again demonstrates Wieselthier's problematization of functionalism in favor of pure aesthetic expression. In this case, the object's utility is called into question by the placement of extraneous handles intended for aesthetic enjoyment rather than ease of handling. Combining angularity with sinuous, rippling undulation, the handles seemed to mock the sobriety of the vessel's simple shape. Like the baluster-form vase, the earthenware surface was covered with a white slip, glazed and over-painted using Wieselthier's self-described 'primitive' methods. The overpainted surface of the fruit dish, with its high-keyed complementary colors, lends support to her biographer's supposition that the artist was influenced by the simultaneity of Sonia Delaunay's textile designs during the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris, where both artists were exhibiting.²³ In typical Wieselthier fashion, achieved by the interplay between its dynamic color

harmonies and the carefully balanced asymmetry of the handles and broken-through ornamental base, the work pulsates with a syncopated, jazz-like rhythm suggesting the artist's exhilaration about process.

Setting off a chain of events that prompted her move to New York, the 1925 Decorative Arts Exhibition represented the peak of Wieselthier's fame in Europe.²⁴ At the Austrian Pavilion, organized by Hoffmann, she was granted two large vitrines in the first display room. In addition, she exhibited a large ceramic oven, executed in an idiosyncratic 'X' form, a menorah/candelabra, as well as her porcelain group *Vanity* (Fig. 1), produced by the Viennese Manufactory Augarten, which was awarded a gold medal. A common subject in Rococo figural porcelain, *Vanity* offered a reworking of the theme of woman's narcissistic obsession with her own reflection: a nymph-like female figure seeming to hover uncertainly between the Rococo era and the present, exuding the playful sensuality of the latter. Even as the work teeters perilously close to stereotypes of female vanity, Wieselthier's Neo-Rococo figurine was endowed with a connotative resonance at odds with its smooth, porcelain surface: namely, as art historian Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber has rightly argued, a critical "allegory for [the idea of] female creativity limited to mimesis."²⁵ That Wieselthier scholarship—most prominently the only major monograph on the artist—all too readily accepts what Marsha Meskimmon calls 'the logic of the mirror' and assumes that the artist's female figures unproblematically represented the "type of the self-assured, elegant [modern] woman" has obfuscated an understanding of



Fig. 4. Vally Wieselthier, *Frauenkopf* (1928), glazed red earthenware, 14 1/2" x 7 1/2". Photo Courtesy Galerie bei der Albertina Zetter.

the subversive content of Wieselthier's work.²⁶ Rather, building on Plakolm-Forsthuber, it is my argument that Wieselthier turned the mirror on critics like Roeßler who found "what women are" more interesting than "what they make."²⁷

Reviving the debates on utility and standardization in the applied arts that had first surfaced in the immediate postwar period, the critical fallout surrounding the Paris Exposition prompted Wieselthier to redouble her position in defense of the *Kunstgewerbeweib* and expressivity in craft. Paying little attention to Wieselthier's porcelain figures, reviews lampooned the artist's over-exaggerated freedom from utility in, for instance, designing a ceramic oven in an X-shape totally unsuited to the purpose of heating, as well as tea services too heavy and awkward for drinking.²⁸ The capstone of anti-feminist attacks on the *Kunstgewerbeweib* and the new ceramics was Adolf Loos's infamous "Wiener Weh" (Vienna Woe) lecture of April 1927, in which he attributed the Austrian Pavilion's commercial and artistic failure in Paris to its proliferation of "painting, embroidering, ceramic-making, valuable-material wasting dilettante daughters of senior civil servants ... who regard craft as a way of making pocket change before walking down the aisle."²⁹ To critics like Loos and Roeßler, the idea of expressivity and individuality in the applied arts was an impure cross-pollination of 'art' and 'craft'; handcraft should be liberated, as Loos famously polemicized, from women's impure decorative impulses.³⁰

It was, in part, such hostility towards expressionist ceramics and the 'feminized' applied arts that precipitated Wieselthier's 1927 decision to sell and incorporate her workshops into the Wiener Werkstätte. The financial security and workspace provided by her new position as head of the Werkstätte Ceramics Department allowed her to undertake works on a



Fig. 5 (right). Kiki Kogelnik, *Curl* (1974). Photo Courtesy Galerie bei der Albertina Zetter.

hitherto unprecedented scale. At the same time, Wieselthier's production of her trademark *Frauenköpfe* reached an artistic climax. She had, in dialogue with her Werkstätte female colleagues, created the unique heads since 1919, typically in the guise of mythological nymphs, bacchantes, and goddesses. But by this time the heads were entirely stripped of any such references, and offered up as parodic appropriations of the modern-day 'goddesses' as seen in the fashion magazines. The low-fired, white-slip glazed red earthenware heads, like the 1928 *Frauenkopf* (Fig. 4 and Pl. 15), were made using her characteristic method of hand-formed hollow modeling, with applied decoration (delicate, flower-like asymmetrical berets, beaded necklaces, stranded hair) and elongated, wheel-thrown necks. Here, Wieselthier's vessel-based technique plays on the traditional practice of equating parts of thrown-pots with parts of the body (proceeding, from top to bottom, from 'neck' to 'foot'); yet her 'neck' is in the wrong place, suggesting all the more potently the transgression of creating a pot that was not a pot but a pot masquerading as a glamorous woman. As was typical, Wieselthier signs her work with hand-modeled interlocking 'VW' initials in relief, playing with the collapse between object and subject and ideas of female narcissism that viewers anticipated. Marked by formal choppiness and a deliberate crudeness that left the artist's thumbprints visible, the head's painted decoration suggests heavily applied makeup, in which the childlike application of heavily rouged cheeks,



Fig. 6. Vally Wieselthier, *Garden Figure with Flower Pot* (1927), 43 3/8" x 14 1/2".

stylized eyebrows, and garish blue eye crayon borders on the grotesque. The heads figure the artificial 'makeup' of the new woman's canon of feminine beauty in no uncertain terms.

These are not uncomplicated self-portraits. Indeed, the heads need to be understood in the context of the critic Roeßler's trivializing notions that women's reproductive capacities precluded them from originality in painting and sculpture, and that 'true' women's art lay in fields in which women "decorate" themselves. The subversive thrust of Wieselthier's work is all the more poignant when her preferred medium is considered: not porcelain—which, as literary scholar Elizabeth Kowalski-Wallace has argued, served as a trope for femininity with its smooth surfaces, delicacy, and fragility—but the more quotidian, low-fired earthenware. Figural porcelain in its eighteenth-century heyday at the hands of the famous Central European *Modellmeister* had clearer claims to status as 'fine' art, whereas, with certain exceptions, earthenware was largely associated with domestic usage. Mirroring her artistic ambitions more broadly, Wieselthier created 'pots' that rose above domestic utility, painted clay surfaces that were detached from, but yet seemed to play on, nineteenth-century stereotypes of amateurish china painting, and 'the decorative woman': ideas that profoundly foreshadowed Judy Chicago's description of china painting as "a perfect metaphor for women's domesticated and trivialized circumstances."³¹ Such messages are clearly apparent in Austrian pop artist Kiki Kogelnik's (1935–97) homage to Wieselthier (1974; Fig. 5), whose work confronted similar issues of superficiality in media images of women.³² Precisely by objectifying her female figures, keeping them entirely at the level of the decorative, did the mask-like qualities of Wieselthier's art frustrate attempts to locate the mysterious feminine 'essence' that Roeßler sought in women's art.

Wieselthier's late Viennese work became increasingly monumental in scale as her interest in large-scale ceramics not only riposted the increasing critical hostility to the *Kunstgewerbeweib*, but complemented her plans to reinvent herself as a ceramic sculptor in the United States. Even as the

artist presented her decision to attend the landmark International Exhibition of Ceramic Art (1928–29) as impromptu, Wieselthier's decision was not as accidental as suggested in her memoirs. She had previously shown busts and large-scale earthenware sculpture, for instance, at the 1920 and 1927 Vienna *Kunstschau* exhibitions as well as at the 1925 *Deutsche Frauenkunst* (German Women's Art) show; but her late Viennese work brought together her proclivity for abstract surface painting and dripped glazes (as in Figs. 2 and 3) with the stylistic tendencies of the *Frauenköpfe*. This transposition of the design principles of her small sculpture to monumental proportions was noted by critics; *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* featured an article on the artist's new style, including an illustration of a garden sculpture (1927; Fig. 6) (now lost). Even as the assembled wheel-thrown parts denied their status as pots, the female figure—a creature of ceramic artifice referencing her own construction—remained unconvincing as a classical nude. The surface of her body was overwhelmed with an abstract geometrical ornament; predictably, the figure was objectified, with an impenetrable mask-like painted face. That the figure languidly reclines on a pot, from whose 'mouth' an elongated tongue seems to protrude, only underlines its ironic, literally tongue-in-cheek status as an artificially constructed feminine 'vessel.' Finding "nothing more feminine in contemporary art than the work of Vally Wieselthier," one critic noted the playfulness of the work, which seemed to "make superficiality into a worldview."³³ Hovering uncomfortably between the decorative and the meaningful, between surface and expression, Weiser likened such work to a form of female seduction, denying "that which remains hidden behind playful masks," suggesting that he too sensed something deeper was beneath the decorative surface.³⁴ Wieselthier's bold defense of the artistic merit of her work in her series of essays in *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* vindicated Weiser's suspicion that such 'toys' masked more ambitious critiques.³⁵

Against the grain of criticism reducing her work to a form of seductive coquetry—taunting the male viewer but parodying the expected feminine essence—Wieselthier seized the opportunity to re-brand herself as a ceramic sculptor, free of the gender dialectic surrounding the *Werkstätte* artist-craftswoman. The chance presented itself in 1928, when Wieselthier was invited to show her work at the International Exhibition of Ceramic Art: a landmark travelling exhibition of contemporary ceramic art originating at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.³⁶ While other female practitioners of the "New Viennese Ceramics" (recognized in the exhibition catalogue for their naïve and playful approach to the medium) also participated, only Wieselthier exploited the opportunity to achieve credibility as a sculptor.³⁷ Using contacts forged in Paris, particularly Charles Richards, President of the American Federation of Arts, Wieselthier arranged for the first of a series of solo exhibitions at the New York Art Center. Riding the coattails of the International Exhibition's mid-October opening, Wieselthier's one-woman show the following month presented something more than the functional vessels and small-sculpture displayed at the Metropolitan: ceramic vessels that strove towards the monumental.

Part and parcel of this transformation was Wieselthier's appropriation of the trivializing stereotypes clinging to her work. Wieselthier assumed the mask of the innocent child-woman, far-removed from the theories (i.e., kineticism, simultaneity, and, most fundamentally, the Secessionist fusion of art and craft) that guided her work. The artist's self-constructed image in her autobiography—best described as a burlesque of self-stylized naïveté—casts her move to New York as a capricious accident. In a thick Viennese accent caricatured by journalists, the artist peppered interviews with patronizing anecdotes on the 'fairylane' theme parties at the Wiener Werkstätte, her fondness for playing dolls and inability to concentrate in one genre, and a working method summarized by her "philosophy of fun."³⁸ But the knowledge that Wieselthier followed the Metropolitan show as it travelled around the country, forged contacts with similar-minded American potters (particularly members of the Cleveland School, striving to stimulate interest in figural ceramics), staged further one-woman shows, and accepted numerous commissions tells a different story. Indeed Wieselthier's 'performance' while in America was so convincing that, as suggested at the beginning of this essay, it is often difficult to separate the artist from the mask, the real woman from her public persona.

Works shown at her first solo exhibition in New York show the artist's proclivity for self-reflexive parody at its height. Standing at over two meters tall, *Modern Youth* (1928; Fig. 7) impressed viewers with the achievement of creating a massive figure of low-fired, highly fragile earthenware. The monumental figure was made through a combination of hollow-molding and throwing, then fired and assembled. The artist reported that she "closed off herself for four weeks" before the opening, but it is unknown whether the figure, now lost, was actually made in Vienna or New York.³⁹ Like her trademark ceramic heads and the companion work *Flora* (1928; Pl. 16), also exhibited at the Art Center, the construction and decoration of *Modern Youth* is animated by a transparent artificiality that troubles the idea of the eternal feminine and 'natural' feminine beauty. This is particularly apparent in *Flora*, where the artist, playing on the idea of face painting and the 'makeup' of the female identity, has left the raw earthenware visible beneath the white clay slip and free-flowing blue and orange overglaze.⁴⁰ Likewise, the strongly proportioned limbs did not hide their vessel-based method of construction. In particular, the exposed seams of *Modern Youth* (where the vessels fused into a woman) lent the figure a mannequin-like quality, further emphasized by the childishly applied painted makeup. American critics, unaccustomed to such non-traditionalist pottery, groused at the choppiness of the fragile figure's exposed seams, which indeed the artist could have easily covered with clay slip. One commentator found the artist unfit for monumental proportions, suggesting that her window designs and papier-mâché fashion mannequins were sturdier than the 'serious' sculpture.⁴¹

In fact, the overall impression of these monumental figures as fragile mannequins was entirely deliberate and aimed at modernist discourses associating women with impure decoration.⁴² The figures' almond-shaped eyes, thinly-arched



Fig. 7. Vally Wieselthier, *Modern Youth* (1928), dimensions unknown.

eyebrows, slim, almost androgynous bodies, and lacquered nails referenced images from contemporary fashion advertising in an ironically campish fashion, not, as often assumed, as an emancipatory self-portrait of the new woman. In both *Flora* and *Modern Youth*, Wieselthier offers a conceit for the essentialist formulas of women's art held by critics like Roeßler: dismissive stereotypes confining women's art-making to 'making up' themselves rather than meaningful, original expression. The fear that the woman artist would collapse into her own reflection is clearly figured in the contrast between the figures' monumental forms and transparent frangible structures, an idea shrewdly appropriated in the artist's self-constructed image. The contours of my argument come into high relief when viewed in combination with the artist's publicity photographs from the exhibition (1928; Fig. 8, also Fig. 7): the fashionably dressed woman artist wittingly scrutinizing her reflection in the mask-like artificiality of the woman as a work of art. If we understand Wieselthier's penchant for play-acting, we are in on the joke.



Fig. 8. Vally Wieselthier and Ceramic Masks (ca. 1928), publicity photograph.

Vally Wieselthier was the only practitioner of the New Viennese Ceramics to be accepted as a sculptor and the only member of the Wiener Werkstätte, male or female, to lead a successful career in the United States. Enjoying a distinguished exhibition record of one-woman shows and regular participation in group exhibitions, for instance the 'Ceramic Nationals' at the Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts, Wieselthier was celebrated in the Austrian press as "conquering the new world" and "teaching America a lesson" about the expressionist possibilities of the medium, most readily taken up by the Cleveland School of ceramic sculptors.⁴³ But Wieselthier's reception in New York was never as smooth as she made it out to be in her memoirs. As in Vienna, critics called her work frivolous and urged a more functional approach.⁴⁴ Such criticism, as well as the different firing qualities of the American materials, prompted Wieselthier to abandon her experimentation with surface ornamentation to produce what some critics described as more 'serious' work in unglazed terracotta, treated only with oil and black and red wax. Unveiled at a solo exhibition at New York's Weyhe Galleries in 1930, the new style emphasized smooth forms over decorated surfaces in a transparent attempt to be taken earnestly as a sculptor. Lacking the critical edge of the likes of "Modern Youth," these works, ironically, seem less charged than her overtly decorative Viennese style.⁴⁵ Wieselthier seems to have transferred her interest in masks—the idea of the decorative and

artificially constructed nature of the modern woman—to her own persona, marketing herself through the sort of playful self-referentiality demonstrated by her publicity photographs.

In her last decade, Wieselthier gravitated towards her characteristically ironic Viennese style. *Salome* (ca. 1938; Pl. 17), for example, shown at the artist's last solo exhibition before her premature death to stomach cancer at age 50, was made of unglazed terracotta accented with gilding.⁴⁶ The visible shovel marks and highly worked turbulent surface evoke notions, as her biographer Marianne Hörmann has rightly observed, of unfinished spontaneity. Given the artist's own role in furthering a slippage between object and subject, between the artist and the work—and perhaps the resonance of the *Salome* theme to women artists throughout history more broadly—it is tempting to insert the artist in the place of *Salome*, standing triumphantly over John the Baptist (in the guise of the male critic). But throughout this article, I have cautioned against such reductive readings, urging readers to find meaning in humor and the parodic. One of the more memorable quotations from a review on the ceramic sculpture of Gudrun Baudisch, Wieselthier's apprentice and protégée in the Werkstätte ceramics workshop, summarizes the idea that ceramic sculpture was nothing more than a flirtatious, but ultimately empty, profligation. "[C]eramic sculpture can not really be a bearer of ideas...playing with the forms of plastic expression ... is no different than the moods of a beautiful

woman."⁴⁷ In typical Wieselthier fashion, the artist plays on the stereotype of the feminine art of seduction. In transgressively rising above the mere decorative, Salome figures in the clay the idea that ceramic sculpture could render impotent misogynist male critics who preferred that women and their art remain decorative. As if echoing the bubbly laughter American journalists associated with the artist, the subversive edge animating *Salome* and much of Wieselthier's late Viennese and early American work serves as a powerful intervention against trivializing stereotypes of 'women's art.'⁴⁸ •

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Notes

1. After her success at the 1922 Werkbund Fair in Frankfurt, Alexander Koch featured regular articles on Wieselthier's work in his influential journals *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* (German Art and Decoration, hereafter, *DKD*) and *Innendekoration* (Interior Decoration), and invited her to expound her views on the unity of art and craft, the progressive workshop principle, and her own working methods in a series of essays.
2. H.R., "Neue Keramik von Vally Wieselthier," *DKD* 61 (1927/28), 309–10.
3. While Wieselthier is routinely included in histories of the Wiener Werkstätte, such literature rarely considers individual designers' work in the broader context of international trends. The most important work on the artist to date is Marianne Hörmann's monograph *Vally Wieselthier: Wien—Paris—New York/ Keramik Skulptur Design der zwanziger und dreißiger Jahre* (Ceramic Sculpture Design of the 20s and 30s) (Wien: Böhlau, 1999) and an exhibition catalogue from the 1990s, *Expressive Keramik Der Wiener Werkstätte*, ed. by Bärbel Hamacher, 1917–1930 (München: Bayerische Vereinsbank, 1992). See also Elaine Levin, "Vally Wieselthier, Susi Singer," *American Craft* 46 (Dec. 1986/Jan. 1987): 46–51; Elisabeth Michitsch, "Dekorative—Volkstümlich—Poetisch: Die Keramikerinnen der Wiener Werkstätte." (Decorative—Folkish—Poetic: The Ceramic Artists of the Wiener Werkstätte) *Parnass* 1 (1995): 78–84.
4. Existing secondary literature on Wieselthier succumbs all too easily to the artist's game of hide-and-seek, reductively assuming that the artist's preoccupation with her own image explains the predominance of flapper-like women in her oeuvre. Observations that "[her Frauenköpfe] undoubtedly resemble her" do little to untangle the issues of female subjectivity and masking explored in her work. Quoted from Isabelle Anscombe, *A Woman's Touch: Women in Design from 1860 to the Present Day*. (New York: Penguin, 1984), 107.
5. Here, my interpretation draws on Marsha Meskimmon's readings of female self-portraiture in *The Art of Reflection* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993), as well as Moira Vincentelli's *Gendered Vessels: Women and Ceramics* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2000).
6. In drawing attention to the active social criticism behind Stettheimer's feminine style, particularly her well-known Cathedral series now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Linda Nochlin's classic 1980 essay, "Rococo Subversive," was crucial in spearheading the Stettheimer revival. As Nochlin surmises the seeming incompatibility of Stettheimer's floral feminine style with her work's subversive content, "Stettheimer's style, at first glance, hardly seems an appropriate vehicle for the rhetoric of social message." It is my argument that similar observations can be made for much of Wieselthier's 'decorative' work. Nochlin, "Rococo Subversive," in *Florine Stettheimer: Manhattan Fantastica*, Elisabeth Sussmann and Barbara Bloemink, eds. (New York: Whitney Museum, 1995), 99. First explored by Gill Perry, much of the recent work on Laurencin has highlighted the artist's role in crafting a highly marketable image as "child-woman." See, for instance, Gill Perry, *Women and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1995), especially 109–10; Paula Birnbaum *Women Artists in Interwar France* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011); and Elizabeth Kahn Marie Laurencin: *Une femme inadaptee* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003).
7. Joseph Roth, *The Emperor's Tomb*, John Hoare, trans. (London: Granta, 1999), 97–98. The novel was first published in 1938.
8. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, "Crafty Women and the Hierarchy of the Arts" in *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 50–81.
9. Max Eisler, "Die Wiener Werkstätte," *Dekorative Kunst*, 34 (1925/26), 223.
10. Marianne Leisching, *Berichte über [Reports on] die Wiener Werkstätte* (Amsterdam: De Gouden Reel, 1959), 26.
11. Vally Wieselthier, *Biography of Miss Vally Wieselthier*, Courtesy Galerie St. Etienne, New York, 2.
12. Co-founded in 1897 as a remedy to women's exclusion from the Austrian Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna's Art School for Women and Girls (later renamed Viennese Women's Academy) offered a unique modern curriculum integrating the fine and applied arts. Many of Wieselthier's colleagues in the Wiener Werkstätte also studied there. For more on the 'separate but equal' debate surrounding the school, see my article "Tenuous Mitschwestern: Mobilizing Vienna's Women Artists, 1914–1920," *Austrian Studies*, 21 (Fall 2013): 142–62.
13. For more on Franz Cizek and his influence on interwar Austrian design, see *Wiener Kinetismus: Eine bewegte Moderne* Viennese Kineticism: A Turbulent Modernism), Gerald Bast, ed. (Wien: Springer, 2011).
14. Wieselthier, *A Few Dates About Myself*. Courtesy Galerie St. Etienne, New York, 1.
15. Yet, in contrast to Powolny's popular putti and nostalgic 'crinoline' figures, which largely catered to conventional tastes, Wieselthier's works were emotionally charged and thematically provocative. On Powolny, see Elisabeth Frottier, *Michael Powolny* (Wien: Böhlau, 1990).
16. Founded in 1913, the Artists' Workshops allowed young artists from the School of Applied Arts to produce applied arts designs in various media, unencumbered by concerns of utility. Artists worked on an honorarium basis (receiving compensation for unique pieces sold on commission by the Werkstätte or, less commonly, for designs for serial production) and enjoyed freedom to set their own working hours. As Wieselthier remembered: "we had a huge studio, each one of us got a key for himself, and we had all the workshops [and materials] imaginable for our free use." Wieselthier, *Biography*, 3.
17. She later described Häusler's efforts to reform the Artists' Workshops along more 'rational' lines, quashing experimentation in favor of standardization and uniformity: "our paradise was lost...." Wieselthier, *Biography*, 4. Nearly all of the Workshop's female designers joined Wieselthier in opposing Häusler's reform efforts.
18. Vally Wieselthier, "Zu meinen keramischen Arbeiten" (On My Ceramic Works) *DKD* 50 (1922), 237.
19. Vally Wieselthier, "Der Reiz der Keramik" (The Appeal of Ceramics) *Innendekoration* 36, no. 4 (1925), 151.
20. Vally Wieselthier, "Ceramics," *Design* 31, no. 5 (Nov. 1929), 101.
21. Ibid.
22. Ludwig Steinmetz, "Neue Kunstwerke der Wiener Werkstätte," *DKD* (1926/27), 59, 61.

23. Hörmann posits that Wieselthier may have seen Delaunay's well-known *Boutique Simultané* at the Paris Exposition in Vally Wieselthier, 62. Wieselthier rented a studio in Paris between 1925 and her emigration to the United States and stayed there for long periods, but there is no precise documentation on her personal and professional contacts in Paris. On Delaunay and the 'decorative,' see Clare Rendell, "Sonia Delaunay and the Expanding Definition of Art," *WAJ* 4, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1983), 35-38.
24. Originally planned for 1915, the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* was a landmark exhibition of architecture, applied arts, and design that was intended to demonstrate and further French supremacy in the luxury industries. The main criteria for inclusion were that submitted works should be original and reflect the modern spirit. Austria was included but Germany was not, due to lingering tensions after the Great War. Significantly, as Tag Gronberg has argued, the Exposition promoted the notion of Paris as a 'woman's city'—defined by luxury, fashion and the seductive boutique—in opposition to Le Corbusian ideals of standardization and mass production. See her *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting the City in 1920s Paris* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1998).
25. Sabine Plakolm Forsthuber, *Künstlerinnen in Österreich* (Women Artists in Austria) (Wien: Picus, 1997), 105.
26. Marianne Hörmann, "Die Wiener Werkstätte oder Kunsthandwerk der Frauen" in *Jahrhundert der Frauen* (Century of Women), Ingrid Brugger, ed. (Wien: Kunstforum, 1999), 175.
27. Arthur Roeßler, "Die Frauen und die Kunst" *Stickerei-Zeitung und Spitzen Revue*, 14, no 7 (April 1914), 179.
28. Max Ermer, "Wo stehen wir nun wirklich? Gedanken über die österreichische Kunstgewerbeausstellung in Paris und Zukunft unseres Kunsthandwerks," *Der Tag* 25 (June 1925), 2.
29. Adolf Loos "Ich—der bessere Österreicher" in *Kontroversen: Im Spiegel der Zeitgenossen*, Adolf Opel, ed. (Wien: Prachner, 1985), 100.
30. "Whenever I abuse an object of daily use by decorating it, I shorten its life-span through the demise of the style in which it is decorated. This waste of good material can be justified only by womanly caprice and ambition...." Adolf Loos, "Ornament and Education," in *Ornament and Crime*, Adolf Opel, ed. (Riverside, CA: Ariadne, 1998), 187.
31. Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party: A Symbol of Our Heritage* (New York: Anchor, 1979), 10.
32. On the Wieselthier-Kogelnik connection, see Petra Schröck, "Kiki Kogelnik's künstliche Verführungen," in *Jahrhundert der Frauen*, 234-41 and Thomas Zaunschirm, *Kiki Kogelnik Ceramic Sculpture 1989/90*, (Wien: Ritter Verlag, 1990).
33. H.R. "Neue Keramik von Vally Wieselthier," *DKD* 61 (1927/28), 310.
34. Armand Weiser, "Zu den Arbeiten von Vally Wieselthier," *Dekorative Kunst* 33 (1925), 179.
35. "In my work, in no way should the 'artistic' be thought of as separate from the 'craft' [aspect] ... I am proud that I am a craftswoman; the artistic grows out of this as a matter of course." Vally Wieselthier "Zu meinen Keramischen Arbeiten," *DKD* 50, no. 7 (July 1922), 238.
36. Touring six eastern and Midwestern cities (Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Cleveland, Baltimore, Detroit, Newark and Pittsburgh), the International Exhibition of Ceramic Art was largely didactic in intent, aiming to introduce American audiences to the latest trends in European ceramics. For more on the exhibition, see Elaine Levin, *The History of American Ceramics* (New York: Abrams, 1988), 136-37.
37. *Catalogue of the International Exhibition of Ceramic Art* (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1928), n.p.
38. "Doing Many Different Things, She Says, Is More Fun Than Specializing in One," *New York Post* Feb. 19, 1931, n.p. [Metropolitan Museum of Art Artist Files].
39. Wieselthier, *Autobiography*, 7. It is highly likely, though undocumented, that Wieselthier's work was influenced by the stylized modern mannequins that figured prominently in the Parisian Exposition. See Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting the City in 1920s Paris*, 101-07.
40. See Melissa Hyde, *Making Up the Rococo: Boucher and His Critics* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2006).
41. Ruth Canfield, "The Pottery of Vally Wieselthier," *Design* 31, no. 5 (Nov. 1929), 104.
42. On modernism's suppression of the decorative, see Jenny Anger, "Forgotten Ties: The Suppression of the Decorative in German Art and Theory, 1900-1915," in *The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996), and Paul Klee and *the Decorative in Modern Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005). Similar issues on the difference between 'significant' abstraction and 'mere' decoration are also raised in Norma Broude's "Miriam Schapiro and 'Femmeage': Reflections on the Conflict between Decoration and Abstraction in Twentieth-Century Art" and Patricia Mainardi's "Quilts: The Great American Art," both in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (New York: Westview, 1982), 315-40 and 331-45.
43. Wieselthier showed regularly at the Ceramic Nationals: in 1933, 1938, 1939, 1940, 1941, and posthumously in 1946, when she won first prize with "Taming the Unicorn." For more on Wieselthier's influence on American Ceramic Art, see Ross Anderson and Barbara Perry, *The Diversions of Keramos: American Clay Sculpture 1925-50* (Syracuse: Everson Museum, 1983); Elaine Levin, *The History of American Ceramics* 131-60; Janet Koplos, *Makers: A History of American Studio Craft* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2010), 153-58; and Thelma Frazier Winter *The Art and Craft of Ceramic Sculpture* (London: Applied Science Publ., 1973).
44. See, for instance, the following reviews commenting on the supposed 'frivolity' of the New Viennese Ceramics: Royal Cortissoz, "International Show at the Metropolitan," and Helen Appleton Read, "Metropolitan Museum Opens Current Art Season with Fine Display of Ceramics" both in *Critical Comments on the International Exhibition of Ceramic Art* (New York: repr. courtesy of New York Times, New York Herald-Tribune, Brooklyn Daily Eagle for The American Federation of Arts, 1928), 13-16; 17-20.
45. Here, I take issue with her biographer Marianne Hörmann's arguments that, in her new 'serious' style, Wieselthier's works achieve full sculptural value. See Hörmann, *Vally Wieselthier*, 39.
46. American Works of Vally Wieselthier, Orrefors Galleries, New York, September 1944. *Salome* was also shown at the Wieselthier retrospective at the Galerie St. Etienne, New York, in January 1948.
47. Karl Maria Grimme, "Keramiken von Gudrun Baudisch," *DKD* 64 (1929), 175.
48. In marking a return to a purist vessel aesthetic, the postwar ceramic world marginalized the figural work of Wieselthier and other ceramic sculptors. When, against the grain of the new academicism of the purist vessel aesthetic, the idea of an 'expressionist' approach to clay was revived in the mid-1950s by Peter Voulkos at the Los Angeles County Art Institute, it was in a creative atmosphere of rough-and-tumble masculinity and male camaraderie not unlike that of the New York School of Action Painters. Ironically, even as works like *Modern Youth* anticipated the technique of Voulkos's massive ceramic assemblages—vessels that also denied their status as pots—Wieselthier's figural feminine style was hardly an appropriate lineage for a potter like Voulkos. See Barbara Perry, "The Figure Emerges: American Clay Sculpture 1925-1950" *The Ceramic Art Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1984): 34-40.

LUCIA MOHOLY'S BAUHAUS PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE ISSUE OF THE HIDDEN JEW

By Rose-Carol Washton Long

Many of the photographs Lucia Moholy (1894–1989) took of Bauhaus products and of the first director Walter Gropius's architectural work for the school (1926 and 1924; Figs. 1 and 2) have become as recognized as the work of her more famous husband László Moholy-Nagy. In the 1920s Lucia Moholy's name was usually not listed when her photos were published in Bauhaus publicity brochures, and she was seldom given credit for her work in illustrated articles about Gropius's architectural achievements. She began to publicly claim recognition for her contribution to László's work in the 1970s¹; but it was not until Rolf Sachsse published a monograph on Lucia in 1985 and a catalogue of her Bauhaus photos in 1995 that her authorship of many of the iconic photographs of the Bauhaus began to be acknowledged.²

How did this happen? Did she like other women married to Bauhaus artists subordinate her career to her husband as Bauhaus specialists such as Magdalena Droste and Anna Baumhoff, among others, have argued?³ Did personal insecurities and awe of patriarchic figures contribute to this situation? What role did her utopian concerns for collaboration over innovation play? Did her emigration to England after the National Socialists took over Germany add to her delayed recognition? While there are many possible answers to these questions, I will place the issue of Jewish identity into this mix and ask if Lucia Moholy's reaction to her own and her husband's assimilated Jewish background, compounded with problematic conditions for Jews at the Bauhaus, exacerbated her marginalization. If so, what impact could this have had on her own work?

Lucia remained remarkably vague about both her and László's Jewish origins. In a 1971 letter to her lawyer, she claimed that "no one in our circle was interested" in religious identification and maintained ignorance of László's Jewish background, adding: "Should I ever want to know, who would be able to answer?"⁴ Yet, during that year, she not only paid for the burial of her brother, who had moved to Los Angeles in 1934, but arranged for his interment in an orthodox Jewish cemetery in Switzerland, where she was living at the time.⁵ Despite her private insistence on the need for Hebrew lettering on her brother's tombstone, her public denial of interest in



Fig. 1. Lucia Moholy, Bauhaus building, Dessau, from Northwest (1926). Collection Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin. Estate Lucia Moholy.



Fig. 2. Lucia Moholy, Tea Service by Marianne Brandt (1924). Collection Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

questions of Jewish identity was not uncommon among numerous émigrés from Hitler's Germany. Sander Gilman has used the phrase "the hidden Jew" to describe how many European Jews distanced themselves from their traditional religious origin but left traces of their background in their



Fig. 3. Lucia Moholy, Portrait of Julia Feininger, from *Malerei, Photographie, Film* (Painting, Photography, Film) (1927), p. 94

artistic works nonetheless as they embraced the universalism of international modernism.⁶ Could some aspect of Lucia's Jewish origins in Prague, where she had grown up, in addition to nationalistic attacks on the Bauhaus as overrun by Jews provide clues as to why this talented woman became the unpaid laborer for both László and the Bauhaus?

László for his part did not totally ignore Lucia's photographic work during the Bauhaus years. In the second 1927 edition of his major theoretical treatise *Painting, Photography Film* (*Malerei, Photographie, Film*), he included one of her photos of Julia Feininger (Fig. 3), the wife of another faculty member. More importantly, he called Lucia's work an objective approach to photography, explaining that it was not pictorial or overcome with emotional expressiveness but reflected the approach he termed "the New Seeing or the New Vision," intended to stimulate an enhanced consciousness of the new modern world.⁷ Even after they separated in 1929, László included Lucia's work, such as photos of Bauhaus faculty and students, in the 1929 Film and Photograph exhibition in Stuttgart. Nonetheless, essays such as the 1922 "Production-Reproduction," which she later claimed to have co-authored, and the Bauhaus book *Painting, Photography, Film* (Fig. 4), which she insisted was planned together with László, bore only his name, not hers. Although László acknowledged her assistance in the preface to his 1929 book, *From Material to Architecture*, writing that his wife had enriched and clarified his thoughts through her careful editing, by 1930 he omitted those generous words in the English edition.⁸

While the break-up of their marriage may have affected his change of wording, László may not have been the obvious villain in the delayed acknowledgement of Lucia's photographic talent. Robin Schuldenfrei, in a 2013 essay, points to Walter Gropius's use of Lucia's negatives without crediting her as the author, for years after the Bauhaus ceased to exist, as a primary factor in Lucia's late recognition.⁹ Gropius's stubborn



Fig. 4. László Moholy-Nagy, Book jacket for *Malerei, Photographie, Film* (Painting, Photography, Film) (1927).

reaction to Lucia's claims reflects a view (dominant for much of the twentieth century) of women as amateurs, whatever their expertise. Even the photos that László and Lucia took of each other during their five years at the Bauhaus, from 1923 to 1928, reinforce a common view of Lucia as the passive feminine counterpoint to László's active masculinity. Two portrait works (c. 1926; Figs. 5 and 6) are often cited as clear signs of their emotional and intellectual differences. Her loose hair, bare shoulders, the contrasts of light and dark turning her face into an abstract pattern are usually interpreted as examples of László's vision of her sensuality and passivity. Her photo of him, set against a white partition, clearly presents a person in worker-like coveralls whose unobstructed, determined gaze and solid stance could be construed as the epitome of the active but thoughtful workman.

This commonly held attitude of the active man and the passive woman was reinforced even in the strong patriarchal tradition of assimilated Jewish families. Both Lucia and László were from relatively secular Jewish families, living in countries carved out of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire: she from the newly established Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic), he from Hungary. By the time they met in Berlin, László, like many assimilated Hungarian Jews, had converted to Calvinism (in 1918, before he left Budapest). Although converts were often ridiculed by both Christian and Jewish communities, Lucia's offhand denial of their Jewish origins perpetuated a long-standing myth that neither of them had any connection to Judaism.¹⁰ Even László's daughter, Hattula, did not learn of her father's Jewish background until long after his death.¹¹ This lack of identification with Judaism was not unusual, particularly among many secular German and Central European Jews working in the Weimar Republic, who envisioned their art works as bringing forth a new internationalism, a golden age in which the divisions of religion, race, and nationalism would be vanquished. Rather than identifying with a particular religion, nation, or creed, both believed they could be freed from the limitations of past traditions associated with unscientific and superstitious notions by opting for universalist world views.



Fig. 5. László Moholy-Nagy, Untitled (Lucia Moholy) (c. 1926).



Fig. 6. Lucia Moholy, Portrait of László Moholy-Nagy (1926). Collection Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

When László and Lucia set out to produce a new way of seeing for the modern world, the possibilities seemed infinite. The Nazis ended that utopian dream as we know. But even after the Holocaust, Lucia's reaction was similar to that of a number of Central-Europeans such as the parents of former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who denied any connections to their Jewish origins. Albright described in her autobiography how the determination to survive and the knowledge of the horrors of the camps left many with the conviction that "the past was to be deaf and dumb . . . it was to be neither heard, nor spoken."¹² Well-known artist émigrés to the United States such as Hans Richter, to name just one, have insisted upon a lack of connection with their Jewish background.¹³ Among numerous scholars discussing the tension and anxiety created by anti-Semitism, Gilman has described how these fears of betrayal and annihilation led many Jews trying to assimilate to develop a "hidden side" which could not be exposed to the world.

During their time at the Bauhaus, Lucia left no accounts of either László's or her responses to anti-Semitism. But, as we know from contemporary newspaper essays, the Bauhaus had more than its share of anti-Semitic attacks, many of which exaggerated the number of Jewish students, and often conflated Jews with communists as the threat from the East.¹⁴ Even within that liberated and multi-national school, some Bauhausers reflected these negative attitudes. Anni Albers (1899–1994), for example, told her biographer that although her family had converted to Protestantism and she had married a Bauhaus instructor, she felt uneasy at the school due to her recognition as a Jew.¹⁵ The Bauhaus chronicler Oskar Schlemmer, in a moment of anger, used a common stereotype of the period when he described László as arrogant, labeling

that trait a "typical Jewish manner."¹⁶ Gropius was not only known for his paternalistic views of women but also to have made occasional unflattering comments about Jews. During World War I, he had uncharacteristically referred to Jews as "poison," equating them with "social democracy, materialism, capitalism, profiteering."¹⁷ And in 1920 Gropius exasperatedly referred to the Jewish student supporters of faculty member Johannes Itten as having too much influence over him. Since Itten's followers at the school included Theosophists, vegetarians, pacifists, as well as those exploring alternate religions, why emphasize a Jewish group, and then write: "Itten students against the Germans"?¹⁸ While Gropius did not continue to perpetuate this type of negativism, he was authoritative—by today's standards—patriarchal, and his primary concern at that moment in Weimar was the preservation of the Bauhaus against nationalistic attacks of an inflammatory nature. Even in the more socialistically oriented city of Dessau, to which the Bauhaus moved in 1925, the school was accused of foreign interference and cosmopolitanism, often a code name for both Jews and Communists. These types of attacks would have contributed to a sense of unease and intensified the desire of secular Jews to distance themselves from their origins.

Lucia's adolescent diaries (Fig. 7), written from the time she was 13 to 21, offer significant evidence of her attitudes toward the religion into which she was born.¹⁹ Although she made no



Fig. 7. Lucia Moholy, diary. Collection Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

overt references to anti-Semitism, her comments reflect her familiarity with common negative clichés toward both Jews and women. For example, she wrote about her admiration for the poetic drama *The Jewess of Toledo*, by the Austrian-Jewish novelist Franz Grillparzer. This drama perpetuated the anti-Semitic myth, then dominant, about Jewish men as avaricious money-grubbers and Jewish women as both mysteriously sensuous and anarchic or as obediently subservient.²⁰ These “orientalist” stereotypes could not offer Lucia any feminine or even masculine Jewish models for personal or public advancement.

Her diaries, written in German, the language used by assimilated middle-class Jews from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, contain a number of reflections on her Jewish upbringing. During the first year away from her family and her native Prague, she wrote in April of 1915 that she wanted to do “something for Judaism.”²¹ A surprising comment not only due to her later assumed ignorance of Judaism but also because her earlier comments, written when she was 13 and 14, gave no indication of religious fervor and practice in her secular urban family. Instead, her comments were limited to casual statements about having a very short Seder on Passover or going to school on the day of her grandmother’s funeral,

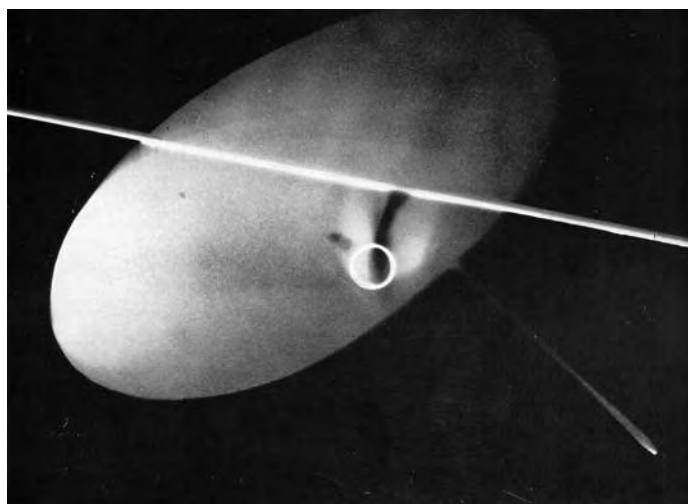


Fig. 9. László Moholy-Nagy, Cameraless Photo (before 1925), from *Malerei, Photographie, Film* (Painting, Photography, Film) (1927), p. 72.



Fig. 8. Constructivist and Dadaist Conference in Weimar, Sept. 1912, photograph. Back row – Lucia Moholy, Alfred Kemeny, László Moholy-Nagy, El Lissitzky with pipe, Theo van Doesburg in white suit with De Stijl cover as hat.

which was a reflection of her family’s lack of interest in following Jewish ritual.²²

In another entry of 1915,²³ she noted a discussion about Zionism with a prospective employer and indicated mixed feelings about the movement. Only a very small percentage of Central European Jews were involved with Zionism, as the cultural and international aspirations of its many factions had led Jews to be accused of dual loyalties—to their native country and to a possible new homeland.²⁴ It may be worth noting that another Prague Jew, the writer Franz Kafka, at about the same period also expressed mixed feelings about Zionism, praising the cultural aspects of the movement for its vigorous and affirmative commitment to Judaism but expressing concern about its nationalistic aspect. While he viewed his interest in Zionism as an act of rebellion against his assimilated bourgeois family, he strongly blamed the Christian majority for “threatening [Jews] with danger” as the basis for the insecurity of Jews and the desire of many to emigrate.²⁵

Lucia’s interest in the issue of Zionism went hand in hand with a growing disdain for her overly controlling father. Entries from 1915 describe how she found her home situation limiting and confining. Trained as a fluent linguist in German, Czech, and English, she was unable to find employment in Prague and wrote in her diary that she could not stand “to be supported by him.” But it wasn’t until she left Prague, ironically through her father’s assistance in obtaining a paid position in a Wiesbaden publishing company, that she could actually write about “despising” the man she had a few years earlier revered.²⁶

The most oppositional act against her family was Lucia’s sudden development of an interest in a career as a photographer when she began working as a secretary in Germany. In an entry of February 1915 that she called her “first leap into the world,” she wrote about her fascination with photography—a less secure and less bourgeois option—and



Fig. 10. Lucia Moholy, Table lamp by Carl J. Jucker and W. Wagenfeld (c.1924–25). Collection Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

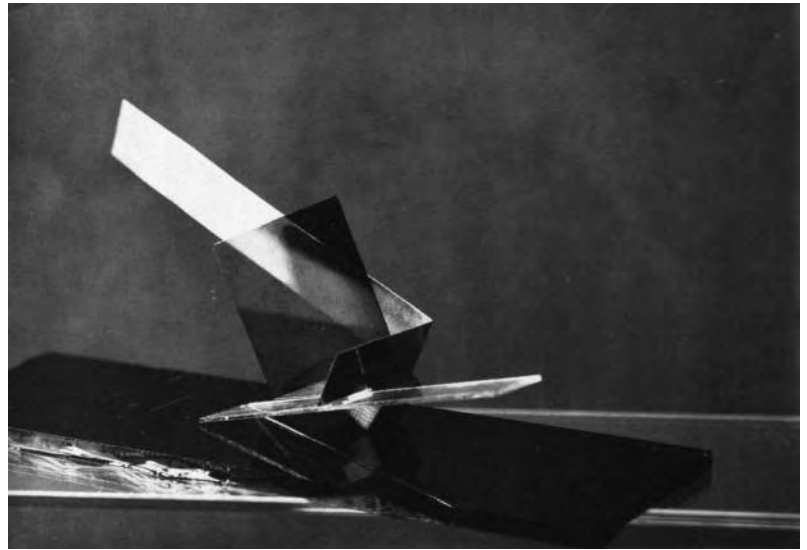


Fig. 11. Lucia Moholy, Balance study by Anni Wildberg from Moholy-Nagy preliminary course (1924). Collection Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

her desire to learn all about the practice. She laid out a plan for an apprenticeship, during which she would support herself with her secretarial work. But at the same time, she described herself as “a passive artist,” writing in a crisp, analytical but undermining tone: “I am not creative, not productive within myself, but have a very fine ability to take something in, to be receptive.”²⁷ This is a sentiment both euphoric and also horrifying, as her words became prophetic of both her limitations and achievements.

By the time she met László in 1920, she had transferred her earlier expression of interest in Judaism and Zionism into a direct involvement with anarchism, mysticism, and pacifism, concepts then prominent among the artistic left in Germany. Living during the summers in the Worpsswede anarcho-communist commune of the painter Heinrich Vogeler, she had become more politically engaged, nursing victims of the German revolutionary movement and contributing essays to the commune newsletter, using the masculine pseudonym of Ulrich Steffens to hide her radical activities.²⁸ Through contacts from the commune she met László, who had left Hungary in 1919. László had studied Hebrew as a child,²⁹ and like Lucia, he was also involved with radical politics, having left Budapest due to the failure of the Soviet revolution there. However, Hungarian anti-Semitism could not diminish his confident nature and his desire to be innovative in the visual arts.³⁰

Lucia and László were married on January 18, 1921, and she supported him with her work for the Berlin publisher Ernst Rowohlt, while he continued his experiments in painting and photography. Both were present for the famous Dada-Constructivist Congress in Weimar in the fall of 1922 (Fig. 8; they are in the back row, separated by a Hungarian friend). László’s participation in the Congress, as well as El Lissitzky’s promising reviews of his exhibition at the Berlin Sturm Gallery a few months earlier, prompted an invitation to teach at the Bauhaus.³¹ The approval of Lissitzky, the Soviet cultural emissary (in the black cap, just below Lucia), encouraged Gropius to believe that

László could bring the Soviet constructivist aesthetic to the production of objects for mass consumption to the Bauhaus.³²

Supported now by László, both moved to Weimar in the spring of 1923. By this point, the essay “Production-Reproduction,” explaining how an ordinary reproduction—of placing an object on a light sensitive surface—could become a creative production, had been published.³³ While this essay as well as the resulting visual works established László’s reputation as an innovator in the new medium of photography, especially cameraless photography (before 1925; Fig. 9), Lucia was insistent in her memoirs of 1970 about how they had worked together during that summer of 1922, explaining that the results were due to “the symbiotic alliance of two diverging temperaments.” In recalling how László was “bold” and “passionate” and she more restrained, she emphasized how their working together by “mutual consent” was of benefit to both of them.³⁴

A number of art historians such as Lucia scholar Rolf Sachsse and the László scholar Eleanor Hight have expressed the opinion that the essay and even the early cameraless works, or photograms, the term used by both Lucia and László, represent a genuine collaboration, as Lucia had more practical experience with the technical side of photography.³⁵ Some have even commented that László was at that point enthusiastically undisciplined, and how much Lucia may have helped with the organization of his thoughts. But even those László scholars who do not believe Lucia had much impact upon László’s work admit that she developed and printed all their negatives while they were together at the Bauhaus. Gropius’s wife, Ise, in her still unpublished journals, described László’s outgoing nature, charm, and energy, but she also mentioned that his thick Hungarian accent caused some of his students to disdainfully ignore his directions.³⁶ Eventually, however, he was considered second in command, “Gropius’ prime minister” as Schlemmer described him during the Dessau years.³⁷ But Lucia, who acted in many ways as a public



Fig. 12. Lucia Moholy, Master's House, House of Walter Gropius from the north (street) side (1926). Collection Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin. Estate Lucia Moholy.

relations advisor for the school, did not get the same kind of adulation.

Considered the only practicing photographer at the school, Lucia took photos for faculty and student identity cards (see Fig. 3), and seemed eager to embrace the Bauhaus's communal aims by photographing student assignments as well as objects produced for public consumption (c.1924–25; Figs. 10 and 11), which Sachsse has labeled her “product photography.”³⁸ By the time, the school moved to Dessau in 1925, she was recording the final stages of the construction of Gropius's main Bauhaus building, as well as the designs for his own house, and for the multi-family faculty dwellings (1926–28; Figs. 12 and 13). Gropius's public efforts to insure that the Bauhaus could become financially independent resulted in the need for brochures, posters, and magazine articles to promote the school as the new, modern way of living. While a paid photographer was occasionally hired, and a few students (such as Erich Consemüller) also contributed, Lucia's photos helped more than any others to construct the canonical image of the school that continues today.³⁹ On most occasions she received no credit, as these two photos (Fig. 14) from an article about the new Bauhaus building in the 1927 issue of *Das Kunstblatt* makes very clear.⁴⁰ The demand for photos was so great that Ise Gropius noted in her journal that Lucia was working “day and night.”⁴¹ Basically, she had two unpaid roles: that of the wife of a master faculty member who was expected to entertain and to highlight the new modern designs—she and László lived in one of the master's houses; and that of an unpaid public relations advisor, who was to promote and publicize the school's products as well as its architectural achievements. In addition, she also managed to produce some experimental photography of her own.

All these demands had a negative effect, and in 1927, her notes indicate that she felt suicidal, writing about losing all joy of life and thinking often about death.⁴² She lamented that she did not possess her husband's vitality and liveliness, and complained about the crowds of visitors swarming over the Bauhaus, who brought “nothing but their organs that want to be filled up.” Feeling that she could recharge in Berlin, she



Fig. 13. Lucia Moholy, Living room of Lucia Moholy and László Moholy-Nagy Master's House, Dessau (1927–28). Collection Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin. Estate Lucia Moholy.

reiterated to László that her goal was “not to leave you but to rediscover you.”⁴³

Lucia's photographs from her time at the Bauhaus reveal none of the struggles discussed in this paper, neither the public condemnation of the Bauhaus as Jewish and Bolshevik, nor her own private struggles with both László and Gropius. Instead, most of her works reveal a clarity and harmony which belie the tension beneath the surface. Examining several of these publicity or “product photos” (see Figs. 10–13), one notices that, whether it is of an object or a building, Lucia often centered her composition, at times using dominant verticals and horizontals or precise angles, and minimized background distractions to create a focus on the image. One might argue that images had to be clear in publicity or product photographs intended to sell. But comparing Lucia's horizontal placement of glass tea cups (1924; Fig. 15) against the neutral background that brings out the simplicity and regularity of the products, to Bayer's/Consemüller's diagonal placement of Breuer's famous Wassily chair (c. 1927; Fig. 16), the surface calmness of Lucia's work is apparent. Our attention is focused on the objects, not on compositional diagonals or the dazzling experimental design. Comparing Lucia's own experimental photos of Bauhaus balconies with László's (1926, 1927; Figs. 17 and 18), although both have

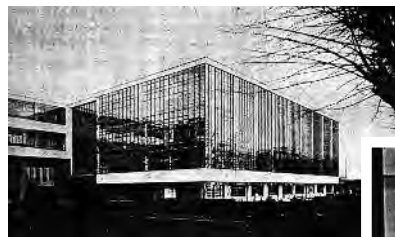


Fig. 14. Grohmann essay in *Das Kunstblatt* (1927), with unattributed photos by Lucia Moholy.





Fig. 15. Lucia Moholy, Tea glass holders by Max Krajewski (1924). Collection Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

dramatic angles, her photo has much greater solidity than his. Finally, when comparing Lucia's well known portrait of the Bauhaus student Florence Henri (1927; Fig. 19) to László's more dynamic and tension filled portraits of her (see Fig. 5) or other women, one can see how Lucia's centering of the cropped image stabilizes her photo.

László's photographic achievements triumphed over the resentment of what some called behind his back "his Jewish arrogance," so why couldn't Lucia have the same success? The subservient position of women at that time, even at the Bauhaus, undoubtedly contributed. Both Irene Bayer and Anni Albers, also from Jewish backgrounds and married to Bauhaus faculty, did not achieve the same kind of recognition for their visual work as did their husbands. After Irene and Herbert Bayer divorced in 1928, her photographic work was ignored until recent years. Anni Albers, who had wanted to study

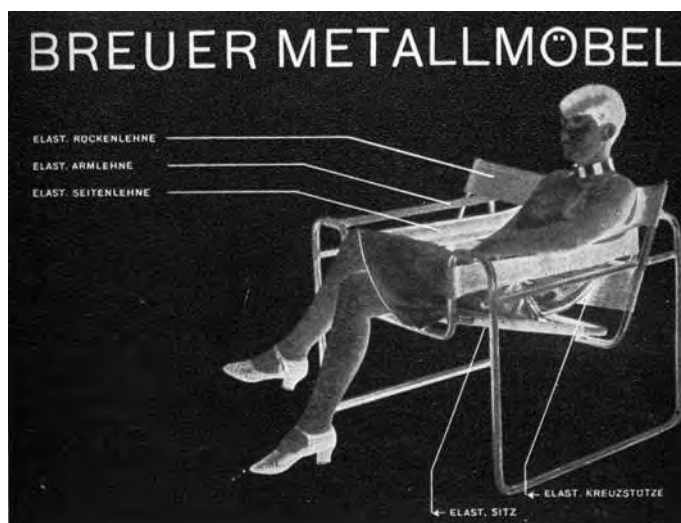


Fig. 16. Herbert Bayer design, based on photo by Erich Consemüller, Cover for a sales catalogue of Marcel Breuer's Metal Furniture (c. 1927).

painting but enrolled in the weaving workshop, did not receive a significant commission for her textile design until Hannes Meyer became director of the Bauhaus in 1928. Unlike Lucia, Albers was able to leave Germany with her husband Joseph in 1933, and was included in the Gropius and Bayer 1938 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.⁴⁴

Although Albers's father did not approve of her Bauhaus studies,⁴⁵ Lucia's father was far more controlling. As a result, Lucia had to distance herself from her family much more than



Fig. 17. Lucia Moholy, Balcony of studio house, Bauhaus building, Dessau [cut from larger image] (1926). Collection Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.



Fig. 18. László Moholy-Nagy, *Balconies*, from *Malerei, Photographie, Film* (Painting, Photography, Film) (1927), p.58.



Fig. 19. Lucia Moholy, *Portrait Florence Henri* (1927). Collection Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.



Fig. 20. Lucia Moholy, *Self-portrait* (1930). Collection Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin. Estate Lucia Moholy.

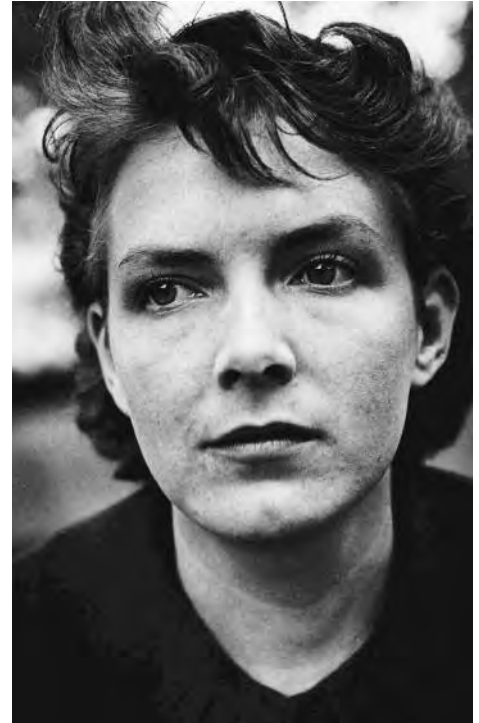


Fig. 21. Lucia Moholy, *Portrait Inez Spender* (1936).

Albers, and she found in the Vogeler anarchist commune a substitute family even before she was involved with the Bauhaus. We may not wish to accept Lucia's replacement of her father's authority with that of László, but we should recognize that László's abandonment of his Jewish origins not only supported her own disengagement with her middle-class Jewish family but also encouraged her interest and experiments within the sphere of the visual artist. Her rebellion against assimilated middle-class conventions that led her to study photography, to experience a utopian communal lifestyle in Worswede, and then to embrace the communal emphasis of the Bauhaus, would have strengthened her desire to merge her identity with that of her husband. Only much later could she insist that they "had kept quiet about the extent and manner of [their] collaboration."⁴⁶ During their Bauhaus years, her faith in their joint promotion of the new utopian vision could not allow possessiveness to be part of her thoughts or personal conflict to permeate her work. At this point, it may become possible to understand that until 1927 Lucia felt she was helping both of them by clarifying and editing his manuscripts, by developing his photos, and by minimizing her own experiments in photography. As she wrote, they had a "symbiotic relationship." But repression of conflict—whether about her Jewish past, her identity as a woman, or as an independent artist—in her case led to absence of tension in her public work. And this absence of tension marked her photography during those years when she and László participated in Bauhaus activity. Later she could admit: "How then should friends and colleagues have realized the exact circumstances? Any attempt to sort out ... the share

owing to the one or the other of the participants or to the two together would be utterly futile."⁴⁷ Nonetheless, as she had prophesized when she began "her leap into the world" in 1915, her output was uncannily receptive to the promotion of her husband and the Bauhaus rather than her own self.

That Lucia's photos obfuscated her repressed anxieties and conflicts ought not to diminish their effectiveness and power. Indeed, her "product photographs," as well as her portraits, should be given more attention not only because they enable us to see the construction of the Bauhaus myth of untroubled modernism but also because they underscore both the benefit and the cost of Lucia's and László's collaboration.

In 1929, after her separation from László, Lucia moved into her own apartment in Berlin, not too far from his. She photographed László's designs for the theater and obtained work as a photography instructor in the Berlin art school run by another former Bauhaus faculty member, Johannes Itten. Soon she was sharing her apartment with Theodor Neubauer, a Communist member of the Reichstag, and photographing him and his colleagues such as the Socialist Clara Zetkin, as she had done with László's Bauhaus friends. A photograph that she took of herself in 1930 (Fig. 20), reveals a woman who seems willing to engage with the world. She does not look away as she did in portraits taken by László, but her symmetrical placement of hands and the centralized position of head may represent an effort to separate herself from László's experimentalism. Although she kept the last name of Moholy, she began to sign her works Lucia Moholy Neubauer,⁴⁸ a tribute to her new love, as well as a reflection of a "need" to merge her identity with another.

This direct documentary style, traceable to her Bauhaus experience of reproducing portraits of people as well as their products, served her well in England, where she landed in 1934, after leaving Germany the day after National Socialists came to arrest Neubauer in 1933. Quakers who had been involved with the Worpswede commune helped ease her path in England and introduced her to a number of literary and other intellectuals who commissioned portraits (Fig. 21). She took on numerous projects connected with photography and succeeded in having a book, *One Hundred Years of Photography*, published in 1939. She also became involved with scientific documentation, primarily microfilming documents for UNESCO. She was able to support herself and to sustain her life, but after the Second World War she no longer engaged with photography as a medium. The two men she loved died at nearly the same time. László died in Chicago from leukemia in 1944, and Neubauer, despite her efforts to have him released from prison, was shot by the Nazis shortly before the War ended. Who knows what she might have achieved if the National Socialists had not forced Lucia to experience the psychic and economic losses perpetuated by permanent exile. In 1959, she moved from England to Switzerland, where she concentrated her energies during her remaining years to reclaim the identity she believed she had once achieved.

Although László propagandized for the recognition of photography as a powerful visual art form, a photographic department was not established at the Bauhaus until after he, Lucia, and Gropius left the school in 1928. Given that the photographic medium was not accepted in all its guises as a visually powerful form, equivalent to painting, until the late 1980s and 1990s, it may not be so surprising that Lucia delayed her claim to the historical and economic rewards of authorship. Her subtitle *Documentary Absurdities for Marginal Notes* calls attention to the many reprints of both László's and Lucia's work and her own attempt to establish which of their photographic prints were vintage. While her allegiance to László and their communal beliefs that had supplanted her earlier ties to her Jewish family lay hidden for over forty years, her commitment to the record of history finally overcame the negation of self that had allowed her to believe during the Bauhaus years that both she and László were one. •

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Notes

Portions of this essay were presented at two conferences, *Seminar on Art and Psychoanalysis*, The American Psychoanalytic Association, Dec. 17, 2000; and *From Lesser to Tanya Ury: German-Jewish Artists, 1890-2010*, College Art Association, February 16, 2013.

I would like to thank Prof. Magdalena Droste, formerly Curator, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin and Sabine Hartmann, Photo Archivist, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin for their very gracious assistance with the research for this essay.

1. Lucia Moholy, *Marginalien zu Moholy-Nagy: Dokumentarische Ungereinheiten/ Moholy-Nagy, Marginal Notes; Documentary Absurdities* (Krefeld: Scherpe Verlag, 1972).

2. Rolf Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy* (Dusseldorf: Edition Marzana, 1985; and *Lucia Moholy, Bauhaus-Fotografin* (Berlin: Museumpädagogischer Dienst Berlin and Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, 1995).
3. Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus, 1919-1913* (Berlin: Bauhaus-Archiv Museum für Gestaltung, 1990), 38-39, 72-74, 150-51, 184, and Anja Baumhoff, *The Gendered World of the Bauhaus: The Politics of Power at the Weimar Republic's Premier Art Institute, 1919-1932* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001), esp. 53-71 and 76-115. See also Mercedes Valdivieso, "Eine 'symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft': Lucia und László Moholy-Nagy" in *Liebe Macht Kunst. Künstlerpaare in 20 Jahrhundert*, ed. Renate Berges (Cologne: Bohlau Verlag, 2000):65-85; and Ulrike Müller with Ingrid Radewaldt and Sandra Kemker, *Bauhaus Women* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009).
4. Letter of December 14, 1971, from Lucia Moholy to Dr. F (Friedrich) Karsten, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.
5. Franz Schulze, who used the alias of Francis George Spencer, was buried in the Jewish Cemetery of Pambio Noranco, near Lugano, according to letters of Lucia Moholy from Oct. 19, 1972, and July 11, 1973, in the Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin. Although their correspondence seems restrained, he did try to help her emigrate to the U.S., as did Moholy-Nagy. But she was denied entry and eventually she moved in 1959 from England to Switzerland, where she remained until her death in 1989; see also letter to Franz of March 30, 1940.
6. Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred, Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1986), esp. 309ff.
7. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography Film*, trans. Janet Seligman (1925; repr. from the 1926 ed., Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 96; also see RCW Long, "From Metaphysics to Material Culture: Painting and Photography at the Bauhaus," in *Bauhaus Culture: From Weimar to the Cold War*, ed. Kathleen James-Chakraborty (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2006), esp. 49-53; and Eleanor M. Hight, *Picturing Modernism: Moholy-Nagy and Photography in Weimar Germany* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), esp. 3-5.
8. Moholy-Nagy, "Vorwort," *Von Material zu Architektur* (1929; repr., Mainz and Berlin: Florian Kupferberg, 1968), 7; see also the "Foreword" in the English edition, titled, *The New Vision, from Material to Architecture*, trans. Daphne M. Hoffmann (New York: Brewer, Warren & Putnam, 1930).
9. Robin Schuldenfrei, "Images in Exile: Lucia Moholy's Bauhaus Negatives and the construction of the Bauhaus Legacy," *History of Photography*, 37 no. 2 (May 2013): 182-203. In the introduction to a 2009 anthology, Schuldenfrei and her co-editor Jeffrey Saletnik mention Gropius's position that the negatives were the property of the Bauhaus and provide extracts from letters illustrating the bitter dispute over ownership between the two. For extracts of the exchange of letters between Lucia Moholy and Walter Gropius, see Saletnik and Schuldenfrei, "Introduction," in *Bauhaus Construct: Fashioning Identity, Discourse and Modernism*, J. Saletnik and R. Schuldenfrei, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 6-7.
10. The Moholy-Nagy scholar Oliver Botar has pointed out that even after the fall of Communism, many Central and Eastern European Jews, still extremely fearful of anti-Semitism, did not publicly refer to their Jewish origins or even denied them.
11. Lloyd C. Englebrecht, *Moholy-Nagy: Mentor to Modernism*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati: Flying Trapeze Press, 2009), 54.
12. Madeleine Albright, *Prague Winter: A Personal Story of Remembrance and War, 1937-1948* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), esp. 327-30.
13. See for example, Milly Heyd, "Hans Richter: Universalism vis-à-vis Particularism," *Arts Judaica* 7 (2011): 105-22.
14. [Anon], "The State Bauhaus in Weimar," supplement to the *Thüringer Tageszeitung* (1920), in *German Expressionism:*

- Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism*, ed. RCW Long (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, paperback ed. 1995), 252–54.
15. Nicholas Fox Weber, *The Bauhaus Group: Six Masters of Modernism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 359–60.
 16. Oskar Schlemmer to Otto Meyer, June 29, 1930 (unpublished typescript, Bauhaus-Archiv-Berlin). Schlemmer later crossed out this phrase, explaining that he could not “help himself” at the time. The published edition of his letters and essays does not contain this reference.
 17. Walter Gropius letter to his mother, undated (c. Jan.–Feb. 1918), quoted in Reginald R. Isaacs, *Walter Gropius: das Mensch und sein Werk* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1983), 176. While Gropius’s attitude reflects mainstream German upper-middle class attitudes toward Jews during the War, his outcry may have intensified due to conflicts with Alma Mahler, and what he considered her “destructive” Jewish tendencies.
 18. Walter Gropius letter to Lily Hildebrandt, April 14, 1920; Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.
 19. The diaries are part of the collection that she donated to the Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.
 20. Lucia Moholy, diary entry, April 7, 1915, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin; see Franz Grillparzer, *The Jewess of Toledo*, trans. Arthur Burkhard (Yarmouth Port, MA: Register Press, 1953).
 21. Lucia Moholy, diary entry, April 2, 1915, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.
 22. See Lucia Moholy, diary entries, March, 18, 19, 20, 29, 1907; Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin..
 23. Lucia Moholy, diary entry, June 29, 1915; Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.
 24. For a good survey of the different concepts of Zionism as well as the problematic questions about loyalty to two nations, see the section on Zionism in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), 529–89.
 25. See letter to Felice of Sept. 12, 1916, in *Franz Kafka Letters to Felice [Bauer]*, ed. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born, trans. James Stern and Elisabeth Duckworth (New York: Schocken, 1973), 499–501; also see *Franz Kafka Letters to Milena*, ed. Willi Haas; trans. Tania and James Stern (New York: Schocken, and Farrar, Straus & Young, 1953), 50. In others letters to Milena written during 1921–22, Kafka wrote about the “heroism” of staying in a place where “one is hated so much,” see esp. 213.
 26. Lucia Moholy, diary entry, Feb. 3, 1915.
 27. Ibid.
 28. Oliver A. I. Botar, *The Technical Detours, The Early Moholy-Nagy Reconsidered* (New York: Art Gallery of the Graduate Center, City Univ. of New York, 2006); “An Activist-Expressionist in Exile: László Moholy-Nagy 1919-1920,” in *László Moholy-Nagy: From Budapest to Berlin, 1914-1923* (Newark, DE: Univ. Gallery, Univ. of Delaware, 1995), 78–79; and “Prolegomena to the Study of Biomorphs: Modernism: Biocentrism, László Moholy-Nagy’s ‘New Vision’ and Erno Kallai’s Bioromantik.” PhD diss., Univ. of Toronto, 1997, esp. 355–59.
 29. According to Lloyd C. Engelbrecht, László went to a Jewish public elementary school; at the age of 10, he began attending a gymnasium, where he was assigned to a Jewish section of religious studies all students were required to take. Engelbrecht also clarifies the origins of László’s last name, taken from his mother’s brother Gusztav Stern who had changed his name to Nagy and lived in Mohol; *Moholy-Nagy: Mentor to Modernism*, 6–7, 11. Also see Botar, *The Technical Detours*, 29. Other scholars such as Magdalena Droste and Krisztina Passuth have briefly mentioned his Jewish background.
 30. Engelbrecht discusses the fact that Jews were more willing to accept “magyarization” than other minorities in the Hungarian portion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and, as a result, had greater opportunity to participate in Hungary’s modernization, see *Ibid.*, 8–11. Botar in *The Technical Detours* emphasizes that László’s desire to be viewed as more Hungarian was also a factor in his conversion to the Hungarian Reformed Church or Calvinism, 29.
 31. El Lisickij [Lissitzky], “Exhibitions in Berlin,” (May 1922) as reprinted in *Vesc’ Objet Gegenstand* (repr. ed. Baden, SWI: Verlag Lars Müller, 1994), 122.
 32. See Long, “From Metaphysics to Material Culture: Painting and Photography at the Bauhaus” in *Bauhaus Culture: From Weimar to the Cold War*, 49; for additional discussion of reactions to Moholy-Nagy’s work in Germany see Magdalena Droste, “László Moholy-Nagy – Zur Rezeption seiner Kunst in der Weimarer Republik,” *Über Moholy-Nagy: Ergebnisse aus dem Internationalen László Moholy-Nagy Symposium, Bielefeld 1991, zum 100. Geburtstag des Künstlers und Bauhauslehrers*, eds. Gottfried Jäger and Gudrun Wessing (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 1997), 23–36.
 33. László Moholy-Nagy [and Lucia Moholy], “Production-Reproduction” (*De Stijl*, 1922); repr. in Kriszina Passuth, *Moholy-Nagy* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985).
 34. Lucia Moholy, *Marginal Notes*, p. 55.
 35. Sachsse, “Die Frau an seiner Seite” in *Fotografieren hiess teilnehmen: Fotografinnen der Weimarer Republic*, ed. Ute Eskildsen (Essen/Düsseldorf: Museum Folkwang/Richter Verlag, 1994), 67–75 and Hight, *Picturing Modernism: Moholy-Nagy and Photography in Weimar Germany*, 46–47.
 36. See Ise Gropius journal entry of Nov. 16, 1926, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin; also see Engelbrecht’s discussion of László’s German, *Moholy-Nagy: Mentor to Modernism*, 220–21.
 37. Oskar Schlemmer to Otto Meyer, Dessau, mid-Dec. 1925, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, ed. Tut Schlemmer, trans. Krishna Winston (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1972), 184.
 38. Sachsse, “Architectural and Product Photography” in *Photography at the Bauhaus*, ed. Jeannine Fiedler for the Bauhaus-Archiv (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1990), 184–203.
 39. See also Claire Zimmerman, “Lucia Moholy,” lecture, Museum of Modern Art, January 6, 2010, <http://www.moma.org>.
 40. Will Grohmann, “Das neue Bauhaus in Dessau,” *Das Kunstblatt* (January 1927), 18–22.
 41. See Ise Gropius, journal entry, Nov. 26, 1926, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.
 42. Lucia Moholy, journal entry, April 13, 1927, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.
 43. Lucia Moholy, Note to Laci, May 24, 1927, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin. Lucia often referred to László as Laci. At this moment, he was most likely having an affair with Gropius’s wife’s sister, Ellen Frank, but Lucia may also have had another love interest. They moved to Berlin in 1928, shortly after Gropius resigned as director.
 44. See *Bauhaus, 1919-1928*, eds. Herbert Bayer, Walter Gropius, Ise Gropius (1938; repr. Boston: Charles T. Branford, 1959); also see Karen Koehler, “The Bauhaus, 1919-1928, Gropius in Exile and the Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., 1938” in *Art, Culture, and Media under the Third Reich*, ed. Richard A. Etlin (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002), 287–15.
 45. Weber, *The Bauhaus Group: Six Masters of Modernism*, esp. 393.
 46. Moholy, *Marginal Notes*, 55.
 47. *Ibid.*, 55–56.
 48. Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy, Bauhaus-Fotografin*, 23.

Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey

by Trevor Schoonmaker, Kristine Stiles,
and Greg Tate
Nasher Museum of Art at Duke
University, 2013

Reviewed by Vittorio Colaizzi

The exhibition for which this book is the catalogue opened at the Nasher Museum at Duke University before travelling to Brooklyn, Miami, and Evanston, Illinois. The show and book feature Wangechi Mutu's (b. 1972) signature collages, in which she places imagery from fashion, porn, mechanics, and "ethnography" alongside drawn and painted elements in order to deconstruct colonialist fantasies of the black female body as a site of exotic sexuality. By juxtaposing accepted signs for nature versus technology (tall grass and motorcycle parts, for example) and performing in her videos the ritualized actions of eating, cleaning, and destruction (most notably in the gripping and poignant *Eat Cake* of 2012), Mutu is able, according to art historian Kristine Stiles, to "expose the ideological social function of images" (55), and to "dismantle visual regimes that contribute to repression" (53). Stiles's thesis is that Mutu's is an activist art, because if representation is a form of control, its hijacking and mutation offers liberation. Examining Mutu in light of postcolonial theory, Stiles finds that her fragmented narratives and totems accomplish "intersubjectivity," or the simultaneous validation of and empathy for various perspectives (51–52).

The full scope of her practice is also on view, including installation, video, and sketchbook drawings in pen and watercolor (2011–12; Fig. 1), many with collaged accents. Early in his essay, curator Trevor Schoonmaker announces that the drawings are on view for the first time. Accordingly, they are given pride of place in the catalogue, where full page reproductions act as prelude, coda, and punctuation for the text. Julie Klugman Braude's book design communicates the diversity of Mutu's work, particularly through a generous set of installation

shots that are faithful to the sense of the exhibition as a "fantastic journey" through the artist's freewheeling and sharply critical imagination. Stiles, Schoonmaker, and Greg Tate make apt connections to post-colonial theory, music, surrealism, science fiction, and sci-fi's ancillary, Afro-Futurism, an amorphous term applied to black artists, musicians, and writers such as Sun Ra and Samuel R. Delaney who infuse their work with fantasy and social commentary.

Given Mutu's sensitivity to the politics of images, it is curious to find a couple of carefully orchestrated photos of the artist amid furs, fruits, and other exotica, projecting the very tropes of celebrity that her work problematizes. Although she is quoted as rejecting "clear-cut binaries" (51), it seems a tall order to undercut the glamour machine simply by inhabiting it.

Such multiplicity and indefinability, however, are key to Mutu's aesthetic activism, as she not only "wrest[s] control from representations that threaten to obliterate one's sense of self" (63), writes Stiles, but also, through her drawings, wrests control from the regimes of art history and criticism. Traditionally, collage interrupts what had been a naturalized and authoritative pictorial order. Its cuts target the gesture, severing the controlling hand of subjectivity. But Mutu shows that no technique is bound to a position. The individualism of modernism, whose universalist ambitions conceal white male hegemony, is not the individualism that Mutu claims with her pen and brush, an individualism that takes its stand against the stereotypes that she finds and re-configures. Schoonmaker, Stiles, and Tate argue passionately and astutely for Mutu's artistic actions on behalf of selfhood, but do not tie this aspect explicitly to these newly visible drawings' disruption of established strategies. This is a minor complaint, and it is only due to the artist and authors'

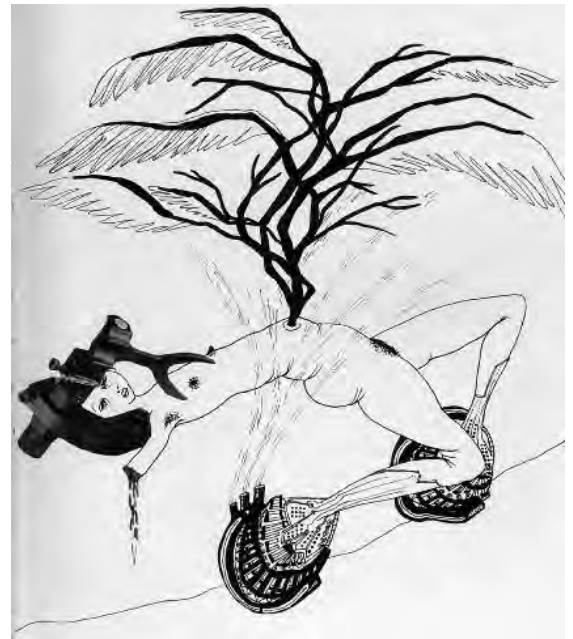


Fig. 1. Wangechi Mutu, *Sketchbook Drawing* (2011–12), pen, ink, and collage on paper, 11" x 8 1/2".

complexity that it is raised. The images, texts, and lengthy interview will surely make this book a vital resource. •

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.

FRONTIERS
A JOURNAL OF WOMEN STUDIES

Edited by Guisela Latorre and Judy Tzu-Chun Wu

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Louise Lawler: Adjusted

Edited by Philipp Kaiser, with essays by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *et al.*
Prestel, 2013

Reviewed by Robin Rice

The title of Louise Lawler's 2013 retrospective exhibition, "Adjusted," in part refers to the way Lawler changed the proportions of her photographs to fit specific exhibition spaces, in the Museum Ludwig, Cologne, and even to fit the pages of this exhibition catalogue. Not for the first time, she literally "stretches" the way art is seen and understood. For this, Lawler's first large survey in Germany, Museum Ludwig Director and exhibition curator Philipp Kaiser invited Lawler to use any part of the museum building. Among around eighty works in the show were ten new large tracings. The catalogue incorporates essays by Hal Foster, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Sven Lütticken, and Kaiser, himself. The relationship of Lawler's oeuvre to the catalogue essays or, indeed, to any writing about it is challenging because Lawler's practice across nearly four decades has consistently used language and images to comment on and contribute to our thinking about art. As Foster says, "[W]hat she reveals is usually hidden in plain sight (or plain in hidden sight).... If her pictures have the structure of a collage, they also have the logic of a joke" (109). At its best Lawler's work in all its permutations transcends appreciation by one sense, and the coincidence of our perceptions coalesces into an ineffable moment of understanding—a perceptual destabilization and restabilization—that inevitably loses force and charm when dismantled by analysis. This is not to suggest, however, that discussion is a waste of time.

As exhibition organizer, Kaiser in his introduction looks back to Lawler's early achievements, and in a more extended essay, the last in the catalogue, "In the Beginning was the Cow: Re-presentation in the Work of Louise Lawler," he tackles the topic of representation. "The dialectic between a self-assertive, wall-occupying gesture and contextual humility is

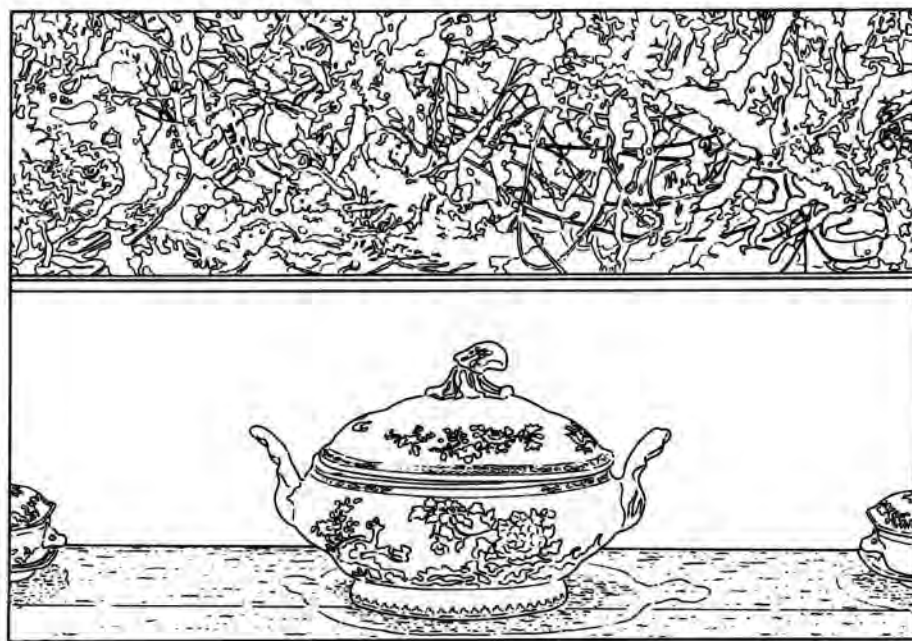


Fig. 1. Louise Lawler, *Pollock and Tureen (traced)* (1984/2013), photograph, variable dimensions.

demonstrated" in part through the historic strategy of anamorphosis (163–64). Regarding Lawler's *tracings* of her own photographs, by a hired hand, some, such as *Pollock and Tureen (traced)* (1984/2013; Fig. 1), included in this retrospective, he notes that she, like Warhol, is interested in "disembodying the line" (165). "Louise Lawler demonstrates empirically the further steps that can be taken to explore the extreme ends and corners of pictures and their contexts" (167).

In "Memory Images of Art Under Spectacle," Buchloh links Douglas Huebler's famous 1969 renunciation of making new art objects that begins, "The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add anymore," with Lawler's photographic project (73). He asks "[W]hat kind of photography is it that results from the activities of this artist [Lawler] and what kind of art results from the activities of this photographer?" (74). Her work over time has become an "archive of the art world" and "has acquired all the dimensions of the documentation of a historical project after all" (86). However, "almost all the spaces and constellations that Lawler has recorded remind us of the deficiencies of all gratifications, most certainly of those offered by private property and ownership...and acquire

an undercurrent of destabilization, lack, and absence...." (87).

"The actors, extras, objects, and other agents that are part of what we tend to call 'Louise Lawler's work' may take it in directions that are not necessarily foreseen by the artist-author," offers Lütticken. "As privileged as her agency is in some respects, the real work may very well happen in the chance encounter between a student and a matchbook" (143). "Not Stone": Acting in and with Louise Lawler's Pictures." makes a convincing case to consider Lawler's work in terms of performance.

"In a sense ... Lawler moved from work to text as well as from work to frame" (106), says Foster, in "The Exterminating Angel." "A recourse to language, however, gets us only so far with Lawler" (111). Foster also significantly mentions her consistent presentation of straightforward political statements, and in a footnote reveals that she originally wanted to call the Museum Ludwig show "No Drones" (142, fn).

The catalogue reproductions do a good job of conveying the character of Lawler's work, from self-contained images to objects like matchbooks to wall-filling photographs and tracings. However, as we may notice in examples like *Marie + 90*, *Marie + 180*, and *Marie + 270*, three full page images in different

color formats of the tattered tulle skirt of Degas' *La Petite Danseuse de Quatorze Ans*, the subtlety of color in books falls a little short of the perfection of a unique photographic print. The appendix includes a comprehensive list of solo exhibitions since 1984, a bibliography,

and information about every image. This is an engaging record of a show that did not travel and a significant resource for anyone interested in Lawler. •

Robin Rice is a much-published art writer, educator, and curator. Her recent

curatorial projects include solo shows for sculptor Susan Hagen (2013) and David Stephens (2014) and "GLASS!" (2014) for the Huntingdon Museum in Clinton, NJ. She is currently organizing a Braille-based garden project with Aaron Levy for Slough Foundation.

Patricia Johanson and the Re-Invention of Public Environmental Art, 1958-2010

By Xin Wu
Ashgate, 2013

Reviewed by Erin Devine

The title of the volume states clearly that Patricia Johanson (b. 1940) creates public environmental art, although other terminology by which to frame the artist's output circulates throughout (including garden art, garden design, landscape architecture) as well as outside the text (eco-art, earth art). And yet Johanson is not a name that consistently surfaces among the well-known voices of the Land Art movement of the 1970s. An American artist who showed promise quite early in her career within the New York Minimalist circle of the 1960s, Johanson's "breakthrough" moment, as it is often referred to by the author, came in 1969, when she was commissioned by the editor of *House & Garden* magazine to introduce new garden design concepts for its readership. It seems the editor was most interested in what Johanson, as a minimalist painter and sculptor, could produce in terms of a radically unique design that would fuse contemporary visual art practice with the outdoor experience. While some of Johanson's Minimalist contemporaries—some of whom she knew, such as Robert Smithson—moved away from the constraints of the white cube to the natural environment, she moved in a similar and yet entirely different direction, creating designs for quite functional spaces as opposed to visual and visceral interruptions of an open, unpopulated landscape.



Fig. 1. Patricia Johanson, *Sagittaria Platyphylla* (detail), gunite. 235' x 175' x 12'. From *Fair Park Lagoon* (1982–86), Dallas, TX. Photo: © Xin Wu.

This would be of appropriate interest to Xin Wu, whose scholarship is primarily invested in landscape architecture, garden design, and representations of nature in Chinese art. Through Johanson, Wu transitions into the realm of environmental design within a U.S.-based, contemporary context (her previous book is *Patricia Johanson's House & Garden Commission: Reconstruction of Modernity* [2008]). In this new volume, Wu offers that the original 1969 commission of 150 unrealized garden design proposals was the continuing catalyst to and inspiration for much of Johanson's later realized work. Wu further contends that they are important for understanding her creative evolution from painting and sculpting to landscape and environmental design (Johanson returned to school to take a degree in architecture in the late 1970s).

Wu uses much of the first half of the book to recount that evolution, to trace Johanson's later finished works back to the *House & Garden* commission, and to lay theoretical groundwork that contextualizes Johanson within both

garden design and modernist debates on visual and structural form among her contemporaries. Wu treats Johanson's garden drawings and models as works of art in themselves, and they do in fact account for a considerable amount of the artist's oeuvre. For Johanson, as perhaps for many artists working to such scale, many of her proposals are left unrealized. However, Wu does not give sufficient attention to the public projects Johanson was able to bring to fruition after the 1980s, the most well-known of which are *Fair Park Lagoon* (1981–86; Fig. 1), Dallas; *Endangered Garden* (1987–89), San Francisco; and *Petaluma Wetlands Park* (1998–2009), Sonoma County, CA. cursory summaries in the fifth chapter on functionality and the public space fail to lend each project its due recognition as a complex work that goes beyond garden design to engage site-specificity, the changing landscape, the rigors of large-scale urban project planning, and the use of art and design in ecological and environmental support functions.

This monograph offers artists, scholars, and urban planners a sound

basis for the study of Johanson's work. Although the bibliography is far from exhaustive, leaving out seminal authors on contemporary site-specific art such as Miwon Kwon, there are many rich illustrations (over 100 total) to which Wu lends careful analysis. However, much is left unaddressed. Rather than expand upon her previous research on the *House & Garden* commission (a text that included two volumes), Wu would have better served the artist with fuller analyses of her completed commissions, which are also surprising proto-examples of repurposed spaces as well as conceptually astounding fusions of

landscape, art, and architecture. Wu's focus on the artist's creative evolution is admirable, though laborious, but perhaps more impressive was Johanson's prescient attunement to the relationship between art and environment. Upon completion of her 1975 sculpture commission, *Nostoc II*, for the Storm King Art Center in New York, Johanson wrote in a letter to the landscape architect: "I want it to be left exactly as it is: no trees taken out or planted; no landscaping of any kind; no paths, no benches, no signs, no other sculpture.... If the site is tampered with I will no longer consider it my work" (87). Johanson's early

understanding of and dedication to site-specificity and environmental art—a decade before the controversy of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*—are emblematic of the need to unravel her overall exclusion from that canon. •

Erin Devine is an artist and independent scholar in Washington, DC. She curated "Positive ID: Bodies & Subjectivities in Photography," for the Gallery at Northern Virginia Community College, Aug. 26 – Sept. 26, 2014, and is curating "Reference" for the Workhouse Arts Center, Spring 2015.

Barbara Chase-Riboud: The Malcolm X Steles

Edited by Carlos Basualdo, with essays by Barbara Chase-Riboud, Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, and Ellen Handler Spitz
Philadelphia Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2013

Reviewed by Jennifer Wingate

In her essay for this catalogue that accompanied an exhibition of works by Barbara Chase-Riboud (b. 1939), Ellen Handler Spitz calls the artist "pro-tean," an apt characterization of the multi-talented expatriate novelist, poet, and sculptor. The term is equally appropriate when used to describe the art world's framing of Chase-Riboud's visual work. The inconsistencies in the literature highlight problems with the discipline of art history, and how certain label-defying artists slip through the cracks of its tidy narratives. This catalogue does not untangle those contradictions, though the essays make some fresh insights into a productive career and a striking body of work, the *Malcolm X steles*, which spans almost four decades (1969–2008). It also considers, and lavishly illustrates, examples of Chase-Riboud's drawings, to shed light on the artist's creative process, reconsider the relationship between figuration and abstraction in the *Malcolm X* series, and help tease out overarching themes of personal and public memory.

The catalogue includes four essays: by the editor Carlos Basualdo (the Keith L. and Katherine Sachs Curator of Contemporary Art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art [PMA]), the art historian Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, Chase-Riboud herself (a reprint of a lecture given at the PMA), and Ellen Handler Spitz (a philosopher who writes on topics ranging from aesthetics to psychology). In addition to 42 color plates and 32 supporting illustrations, there is an illustrated chronology and checklist of the thirteen sculptures in the series (compiled by John Vick). Chase-Riboud's *Malcolm X* sculptures, most over six feet tall, have a formidable presence, and the amply sized plates do them justice by capturing their subtle textural and tonal variations.

Shaw's is the most accessible and readable of the three interpretive essays in the catalogue. She acknowledges the art historical pitfalls raised by Chase-Riboud's art and sets out to consider why her body of work has been "so challenging for scholars" (22). She notes that Chase-Riboud "has rarely been examined in the context of larger artistic movements in America" (22), though art historian Kellie Jones has elucidated the sculptor's career in the milieu of black abstraction in the United States (and Basualdo importantly speaks here of the postwar European context).¹ Shaw observes that critics and art historians instead have focused on Chase-Riboud's interest in art through the ages and from

around the world. Jones, too, has stressed that the sculptor herself is "adamant about the fully global inspirations for her work"²—and not just its connections with African art, though these were especially easy to see in the 2014 Brooklyn Museum exhibition, "Witness: Art and Civil Rights of the Sixties," installed in galleries adjacent to Brooklyn's African ones. In her essay for that show, Jones highlights African masquerade arts as an influence for *Malcolm X #2* (1969; Fig. 1).³ It is true that the sculpture's black patina makes its folded bronze forms look like supple leather or malleable wood, something light enough to be carried. The cords and ropes that form a skirt around the bronze also show potential for movement, and transform the work into "no longer a piece of sculpture, but a personage, an object of ritual and magic."⁴

As for the American art with which *Malcolm X #2* shared space in the Brooklyn exhibition, however, Chase-Riboud never expressed much affinity: "I had a violent allergy and negative reaction to Pop Art, Protest Art, and hyper-realism."⁵ Her "focus on the aesthetic and the beautiful," in her bronze, silk, and wool pieces, Jones explains, "can be seen as diametrically opposed" to those non-aesthetic objects.⁶ It is useful nonetheless to acknowledge the influence of the fiber art movement, if only to convey the

fuller significance of the sculptor's friendship with Yale classmate and fiber artist Sheila Hicks (b. 1934). Because Chase-Riboud has lived abroad for over forty years, though, some critics question the relevance of considering her alongside American art at all. "[T]he relationship between me and America is one of confrontation," Chase-Riboud said in 2006, "I tend to, as anybody would... go where I'm loved... which is not the United States in particular."⁷

Instead of arguing for or against American contextualization of the sculptor's work, or rehashing territory covered by Jones, Shaw considers Chase-Riboud's sculpture "on its own terms and engages with the objects on the merits of their thingness and their phenomenological impact on the viewers who stand before them" (22). This decision reveals a commitment to avoid the missteps of a previous generation of critics who pigeonholed African American artists as makers of socially conscious or "primitive" art. The political implications of the series' dedication to the assassinated Civil Rights leader confused earlier writers. They had difficulty reconciling the sculptures' titles with the artist's formalist agenda. In a review of her 1970 exhibition at the Bertha Schaefer Gallery, *New York Times* critic Hilton Kramer went so far as to say that the elegance of Chase-Riboud's four "Monuments to Malcolm X" (as they were called in this exhibit), "unfortunately suggest the ambiance of high fashion rather more than they suggest the theme of heroic suffering and social conflict."⁸ Chase-Riboud objected to Kramer's misinterpretation. By dedicating the sculptures to Malcolm X, she said, she was "trying to express the ideas of a man who, more than any single individual, has affected the way Black people think of themselves."⁹ Oddly, this catalogue, though specifically focused on the Malcolm X series, fails to mention any of the abstract works by other artists that were dedicated to Malcolm X, including sculptor Melvin Edwards's *The Lifted X* (1965).¹⁰ Some discussion of these might help dispel lingering confusion over the naming of the series.

All of the essayists address what

PMA Director Timothy Rubb calls the "presence of memory" and the "elegiac" mood (8) of Chase-Riboud's work, and they all see in the Malcolm X pieces formal evocations of commemorative or funereal qualities (that the sculptures have been variously called monuments and steles invites these associations). Shaw interprets the simultaneous fragility and durability of the bronze as that which "pushes the element of mortality to the fore" (25). The direct lost wax casting method that Chase-Riboud has used since the sixties results in sculptures that cannot be recast (because she forms the models directly out of manipulated wax sheets). Upon close examination, Shaw notices traces of that process in markings on the surfaces, and also areas of oxidization in the sculptures' unpolished crevices, both of which reveal the material's "slow organic life" (24). The dualities in Chase-Riboud's Malcolm X sculptures cannot be denied, but I do not see mortality—the "testimonies of death, anxiety, and disappearance" that Basualdo identifies (18), or the eviscerated slaughterhouse animals that Shaw sees (24)—to quite the same degree. These evocative sculptures will conjure different associations for different viewers. The important thing, these essays suggest, is to look at them carefully as Shaw has, to experience their presence as Spitz has (99), and also to acknowledge the artist's intent. As Chase-Riboud has said in response to a question about why she uses silk cords for some of the sculptures in the series and wool for others: "I don't think it's about politics. It is what the viewer brings to the piece and his interpretation that makes the difference...."¹¹ And in response to her naming them in tribute to and celebration of Malcolm X:

Some people have read the sculptures as an embodiment of [Malcolm X] himself, perhaps because of the raw power these sculptures emulate, but, for me, they were an expression of remembrance not embodiment and then they just grew in power and significance.¹²



Fig. 1. Barbara Chase-Riboud, *Malcolm X #2* (1969), black bronze and wool, 92" x 42 1/2" x 24". Collection of the Newark Museum, New Jersey.

Basualdo locates the historic tension between the sculptures' dedication to Malcolm X and their nonrepresentational quality to the "the problematic relation that exists between modern art and memorials." "How do we speak in tongues," he asks, "while pronouncing that which must be remembered?" (19). Although artists like Claes Oldenburg had begun to experiment with pared-down anti-monuments in the sixties, acceptance of minimalist monuments such as Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans' Memorial* (1982) did not come until over a decade later. Isamu Noguchi's abstract proposal for a Hiroshima memorial had been rejected, in part, for not being accessible enough (27, 86). Fully aware of the discrepancy between public monuments and private tributes, Chase-Riboud intentionally included a figurative element in her African Burial Ground Memorial (*Africa Rising*, 1995) in the Ted Weiss Federal Building in Lower Manhattan (86). Her Malcolm X series may reflect loss or celebration or pride, or elicit those feelings in the view-

er, but they are not monuments in the public sense.¹³ According to the artist, the primary function of all of her art, whether a tribute to or remembrance of a historic figure, is to “produce beautiful objects that amaze, enchant, and induce strong emotions.”¹⁴ As Shaw concludes,

Without the visceral reaction produced by the viewer’s presence in the space of her work, without the viewer’s receptiveness to examining the form, there is nothing. No story. No emotion. No easy take-away with which to placate the busy art critic (31).

Fifteen years after her first Malcolm X sculptures were exhibited, Chase-Riboud created four more works for the series, and in 2007, she began five final Malcolm X sculptures. Has the current culture of public commemoration or “memorial mania,” in forms ranging from figurative to abstract to ephemeral, created a more hospitable environment for the series in the twenty-first century?¹⁵ Do the sculptures serve as a personal leitmotif, connecting the artist with her native country? Or do they signal the artist’s enduring sadness and cynicism with regard to the civil rights Malcolm X fought for “because it’s

obvious we haven’t gone anywhere, that we’re back in the 1950s”?¹⁶ This catalogue does a good job celebrating Chase-Riboud’s remarkable oeuvre, and acknowledging her individualistic and “transglobal” vision (27). Despite the admiration for the artist that it inspires, though, readers still may desire a bit more context to anchor the major ebbs and flows of her Malcolm X series to the tides of art history. •

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Notes

1. Kellie Jones, “To the Max: Energy and Experimentation,” in *Energy/Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction, 1964 to 1980* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2006): 14–34.
2. *Ibid.*, 20.
3. Kellie Jones, “Civil/Rights/Act,” in Teresa Carbone and Kellie Jones, *Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties* (New York: Brooklyn Museum and Monacelli Press, 2014), 22.
4. Francois Nora-Cachin, “Dialogue: Another Country,” in *Chase-Riboud* (Paris, 1973) cited in Patton, *African-American Art* (NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 208.
5. Suzette A. Spencer, “On Her Own Terms: An Interview with Barbara Chase-Riboud,” *Callaloo* 32, no. 3 (2009): 754. The interview took place in 2006 in Paris with follow-ups conducted via email.
6. Jones, “To the Max: Energy and Experimentation,” 30.
7. Spencer, “On Her Own Terms,” 739.
8. Hilton Kramer, “Black Experience and Modernist Art,” *New York Times*, Feb. 14, 1970, 23.
9. “People—Barbara Chase-Riboud,” *Essence* 1, no. 2 (June 1970): 62, 71; Cited in Jones, “To the Max: Energy and Experimentation,” 30.
10. Jones, “To the Max: Energy and Experimentation,” 24, 29.
11. Spencer, “On her Own Terms,” 747.
12. *Ibid.*, 748.
13. I prefer Sharon Patton’s description of the Malcolm X sculptures as “votive works of art,” rather than either “monuments” or “steles.” Patton, *African-American Art*, 209. Even though Lin’s memorial proved the success of a minimalist commemorative formal vocabulary, there’s an important distinction between a hypothetical Malcolm X memorial, for example, and sculptures dedicated to his memory.
14. Spencer, “On Her Own Terms,” 757.
15. Erika Doss discusses the ubiquity of memorials today in *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010).
16. Spencer, “On Her Own Terms,” 749.

Marisol: Sculptures and Works on Paper

Edited by Marina Pacini
Yale University Press, 2014

Reviewed by Evelyn Kain

Nine years in the making, the catalogue to the exhibition “Marisol: Sculptures and Works on Paper” at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art¹ is an exhaustive labor of love by Marina Pacini, chief curator of American, Modern and Contemporary art, who worked with the generous cooperation of the artist herself. Six insightful, well-illustrated essays, including two by Pacini, emphasize under-appreciated complexities of

Marisol’s art and life over a forty-five-year period.

The catalogue starts off with Pacini’s extensive biographical sketch and overview of Marisol’s work: her international background and variety of influences, media, themes and approaches, all far more diverse than usually associated with the artist. Pacini’s second essay focuses on the theme of family. When Marisol was eleven, her mother committed suicide, a trauma which caused her to stop speaking for years. Decades later, she created *Mi Mama Y Yo* in steel and aluminum. Both dressed in pink, the mother smiles broadly, while the child Marisol makes a petulant face. What the artist may have been thinking remains ambiguous. Similarly, Marisol’s other families, whether famous like the

Kennedys or anonymous like the fatherless Dustbowl family, are left open to interpretation.

Deborah Cullen, director and chief curator of the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery at Columbia University, illuminates the multi-faceted Latin American aspects of Marisol’s art, from pre-Columbian through Afro-Caribbean, Spanish Colonial, and popular Catholic imagery down to socially critical Latin American modernism. She cites examples such as early Venezuelan ceramic figures, the wood *santos de palo* of Puerto Rico, and Argentine Otra Figuración painting of the early 1960s.

Douglas Dreishpoon, chief curator at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, explores the “Marisol Mystique.” The “Latin Garbo” had a habit of disappearing at



Fig. 1. Marisol, *Andy* (1962-63), graphite, oil, and plaster on wood with Andy Warhol's shoes 56 1/2" x 17 1/4" x 22 1/2". Photo: Courtesy of Acquavella Galleries.

inopportune moments in her career and traveling around the world for years at a time. Like her friend Andy Warhol, she created a persona characterized by long, awkward silences. Marisol's sculpture of Andy (1962-63; Fig. 1) switches back and forth between two and three dimensions, between illusion and reality, between art and life—incorporating a pair of Warhol's own shoes—in ways that are hallmarks of her signature style. The wooden knots in the white shirt eerily presage the gun wounds that Warhol would suffer five years later at the hands of Valerie Solanas. Dreishpoon discusses the dark side of Marisol's mystique using her little known, disturbing colored pencil drawings and lithographs.

Bill Anthes, associate professor of art history at Pitzer College, goes into depth about another lesser known aspect of Marisol's work: her representations of Native Americans, mainly sculpted portraits based on historical photographs. Anthes combines a discussion of Marisol's stereotyping together with the tendency to categorize the artist herself as a "primitive," "naive" or "folksy whittler" (149).

Dore Ashton, professor of art history at the Cooper Union, who first wrote reviews of Marisol's work in the 1950s, notes the "lingering aroma of Surrealism" in Marisol's "scavenger art," but with a lack of irony that made her "the odd woman out" (164). Ashton agrees with Carter Ratcliff's characterization of Marisol as "an artist of ellipsis," one who knew "what to leave out" (166). Marisol's complexity is "never obvious, and always capable of piquing and challenging the keepers of the flame" (170).

This mid-sized (9 x 11 1/2"), hard-cover catalog is a beautiful publication with a user-friendly chronology and index. Almost 200 pages long and with nearly as many high-quality illustrations, it succeeds well in presenting Marisol's work in unfamiliar complexity and from engaging points of view. •

Evelyn Kain is Professor of Art History Emeritus, Ripon College, and a writer-at-large, mainly fiction, art, and travel.

Notes

1. The exhibition dates were June 14 – Sept. 7, 2014.

Reconciling Art and Mothering

Edited by Rachel Epp Buller
Ashgate, 2013

Reviewed by Niku Kashef

I can think of no more relevant way of beginning a review on *Reconciling Art and Mothering* than from the personal perspective. My young daughter slumbers peacefully in front of me as I write this introduction; she is immune to her mother's months of lost sleep and struggle with how to balance her art practice and mothering, "a creative but anxious encounter with one of the central conflicts of womanhood"¹ *Reconciling Art and Mothering*, an anthology of twenty-four illustrated essays, brings together contemporary voices about mothering as a complex topic for artistic practice. The term

"mothering" is used to separate the discourse from that of the dominant historic representations of the mother and the institution of motherhood, which have often been made by male artists. "Histories are not the same as herstories, feminist mothering departs radically from the patriarchal institution of motherhood," writes Buller (10). This volume clearly differentiates the narrative of "patriarchal motherhood" from that of "mothering."

Rachel Epp Buller is both the editor of the anthology and a contributor. Her dual practice as a studio artist and art historian creates a rich introduction for readers unfamiliar with work focused on mothering or its critical underpinnings. In *Reconciling Art and Mothering*, Buller brings together an impressive array of both widely known and emerging historians and artists including Andrea Liss (authored *Feminist Art and the Maternal*, 2009), Myrel Chernick (co-

edited with Jennie Klein *The M Word: Real Mothers in Contemporary Art*, 2011) and Sandra Matthews (co-authored with Laura Wexler *Pregnant Pictures*, 2000). The contributions are grouped into two sections: the first from art historians, and the second from "artist-mothers," practicing artists making work about mothering. Each of the contributors "make[s] room for the complexities and diversities of feminist mothering experiences" (5). Buller notes that while these voices have often been kept separate, many of today's practicing artists are also scholars, curators, and cultural producers, and many of today's art historians come from a background in studio art. She acknowledges the fluidity of these two areas and their common critical foundation by including both. Although a considerable amount of the book is North American, global representations and experiences of maternity are given



Fig. 1. Nané Jordan, *Field Notes: Cat and Strawberry II* (2007), black and white photograph, 11"x14".

voice with contributions from South America, Australia, South Africa, Southeast Asia, and Europe.

In her two introductions (the first encompassing the content of the entire book, and the second written for the artists' section as an additional survey of artists who were not directly included in the book), Buller raises important ideas in existing scholarship about historic patriarchal constructions of motherhood as well as of the feminist art movement of the 1970s, and why the artistic envisioning of maternal experiences has not been considered serious art making (1–2). Buller references influential feminist texts, and the handful of feminist artists and organizations in the 1970s that championed representations of mothering. She finds common ground in a group of critical writings that are frequently referenced, including Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79), and Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1986). Kelly offers a documentation of her relationship with her young son, and Rich questions the experience of motherhood in the imposed patriarchal culture that creates a maternal ambivalence and rage. She also considers Sara Ruddick's 1995 book *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*, which suggests the act of

mothering as creating distinctive ways of "maternal thinking" (5) to be a key text along with several others.

The nine essays by art historians in the first part of the book, "On Representing the Maternal Body: Critical and Theoretical Reflections," examine work of artists that address mothering across a wide span of years and geographies. Heather Benlap Jensen writes about the early-nineteenth-century French painter Marguerite Gérard, whose imagery places the "modern mother" as functioning within a community of other women including companions, female maids, and social acquaintances (16–17). Gérard's images illustrate the space for other surrogate mothering experiences within the community. Additionally, Andrea Liss considers Renée Cox's *Yo Mama* series (1992–95) of powerful nude maternal self-portraits that echo back to the powerless clothed maternal representations in early-nineteenth-century slave-child portraits (73–75).

Cecily Cheo examines the work of contemporary Southeast-Asian artists: Amanda Heng, who works collaboratively with her mother, and Shia Yih Yiing, who uses participatory strategies with her children (95–107). Additional writings consider personal, ethnic, religious, economic, and cultural contexts of mothering as well as queer mothering

and other maternal experiences, which allows for a broad dialogue to emerge. Art historian Jessica Dallow explores the artistic matrilineage of the Saar family in her essay, "Departures and Returns: Figuring the Mother's Body in the Art of Betye and Alison Saar." Citing the installation of Alison Saar's *Fertile Ground* (1993), Dallow posits that the work is not just symbolically about the mother's body as a "source of creativity—an arena of play or exploration—but also a material, professional model," removing the division between home and work (62). Erin Barnett later considers how Catherine Opie's "lesbian family photo album" (85) of "non-apologetic" portraits (and self-portraits) exposes Opie's own complex identity and that of the non-stereotypically heteronormative family and motherhood.

The fifteen essays in the second part of the book, "Contemporary Artist-Mothers: Statements and Negotiations," are written by artists making work that directly relates to their own diverse mothering experiences. Buller begins this section with an overview of artists who visualize mothering in contemporary art and themes including the maternal body, the maternal gaze, and maternal ambivalence. In Buller's own essay, she writes about *The Food Landscape*, a print series that records the introduction of solid foods to her youngest child—the end of breastfeeding. She likens her art making process to ritual, much like those rituals of feeding-sleeping-diapering-crying with young children (204). Her depiction of transitional experiences of breastfeeding and weaning calls our attention to mother-child collaborations that at times can also be seen as critical commentaries on mothering (206). For many artists, this critique often involves self-inflicted questioning. Gail Rebhan's essay tells of making photographs that document individual objects over the course of time in her son's room:

Part of me feels that this work portrays me as a neglectful mother. Am I terrible for allowing my son to keep a messy room or for allowing him to drink alcohol and eat unhealthy food? Would I be a better mother if I made my

son clean up? Do I allow this behavior because I can use it to make art? Should I be too ashamed or embarrassed to exhibit this work? (173)

While superimposed ideals of the “mother” and the institution of motherhood can create a division between private and public life,² they also create an ambivalence that extends to how we feel about our role as artist-mother. Myrel Chernick describes maternal ambivalence as “the emotion that characterizes the process of separation from the mother and need for independence and autonomy for the child that begins at birth” (256), and writes of her decision to deal with it in her art making after the birth of her twins:

When I decided to have children, I did not anticipate the conflicts that would arise between my need to make art and be part of an artistic community, and my family life. So I decided to make art that helped me validate my decision, a decision that was questioned in the art world I knew, that I had questioned myself (258).

Her essay traces the objections she encountered to her own artwork and the exhibition “Maternal Metaphors,” and considers maternal ambivalence in both its art-world and societal implications.

Essays by Joan Linder, Nané Ariadne Jordan, and Elizabeth MacKenzie reference the challenges faced in combining the roles of artist and mother—preparing for a “much-hyped “balancing act”” (227), given limited time, changes in practice, and discrimination towards exhibiting and

making mothering-specific work. After having her child, Linder began a series of installations of laboriously hand-copied artist-parents’ resumes to understand what role gender plays in career and parenting. She asserts that art making is more about questions than answers, and while some peers with children were more focused on their practice, others stopped making altogether. In *Field Notes: Cat and Strawberry II* (2007; Fig. 1), Jordan uses her kitchen table as a staging ground and site of a living inquiry. She makes photographs as she “performs” the everyday tasks of mothering. While creating anonymity for the personal through the wearing of masks, she and her children are able to reveal patterns in their relationships through play (233–36). MacKenzie embraces the tension between her roles as artist and mother, creating large-scale drawing installations that emerge in response to these circumstances. In her essay, she writes:

My development as an artist has not happened in spite of being a mother; it has happened *because* I am a mother. My maternal identity is deeply integrated with my identity as an artist (247).

The ideas discussed in the essays in *Reconciling Art and Mothering* are about universal and personal experiences. Mothering is both: “All human life on the planet is born of woman.”³ Artist Sandra Matthews depicts this simple truth by making combined portraits of women photographed within twenty-year increments representing multiple generations. Through the comingling of time periods, she creates an ambiguity and commonality: the shared photographic frame and a shared frame of reference (motherhood) (165).

By including such variety—and contexts—of artist-mothering experiences *Reconciling Art and Mothering* broadens the existing scholarship and fortifies the argument that there is no one singular Mother or practice of Motherhood. This hardcover volume is illustrated throughout with black and white images and a series of beautifully printed color plates. It contains a section of contributors’ biographies, an index, and bibliography. Most essays include historical references, a formal analysis of the work including consideration of the medium as part of the message, conceptual interpretations, as well as personal implications of making work about mothering. *Reconciling Art and Mothering* offers readers new voices and a range of experiences about the role of feminist mothering as a rich source in contemporary art practice, and offers up insights into the way artists and scholars redefine an imposed narrative with new perspectives. •

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Notes

1. Tamar Garb, *Sisters of the Brush: Women’s Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-century Paris* (New Haven, CT; Yale Univ. Press, 1994) viii.
2. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York; W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), 13.
3. *Ibid.*, 11.



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Fig. 1. Gego working on *Reticulárea*.
Photo: Juan Santana.



Untangling the Web: Gego's *Reticulárea*— An Anthology of Critical Response

By María Elena Huizi and Ester Crespín
and edited by Mari Carmen Ramírez
and Melina Kervandjian
Yale University Press, The Museum of
Fine Arts, Houston, Fundación Gego,
2014

Reviewed by Dina Comisarenco Mirkin

The German-born Venezuelan artist Gertrud Goldschmidt (1912–1994), better known as Gego (the first letters of her first and last names), is one of Latin America's most noteworthy women sculptors of the

twentieth century since her innovative sculptures of the 1960s and 1970s created an original new direction in modern art (Fig. 1). According to the specialist Mari Carmen Ramírez, curator of Latin American Art of the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston,

[T]he recasting of Gego as a postmodern, contemporary artist coincided with the reassessment of Minimalism by the artistic generation of the 1990s both inside and outside Latin America. As a result, the impact of Gego's work, most particularly her "reticulárea practice," was immediately felt among a young generation of artists looking for novel ways of expression. Indeed,

a number of authors (Pérez Oramas, Cristofori, González, to name a few) credit Gego with ushering in a contemporary, experimental form of expression—as evident in the work of, among others, Brazilian Ernesto Neto and Venezuelans Magdalena Fernández, and Elías Crespín—that deeply resonated with current artistic practices in the region and beyond. Undoubtedly in this sense, *Reticulárea* represented a transformative paradigm shift in both Venezuelan and Latin American contemporary art (28–29).

This book was conceived to mark the centennial of her birth. The poet and essayist María Elena Huizi coordinated the anthology, while the curator Ester Crespín executed the documentary research and authored the *Reticulárea* timeline. Together, they compiled this amazing selection of essays, interviews, press clippings, letters, and poems. Ramírez and art historian Melina Kervandjian oversaw the very careful editing of the anthology.

As indicated by the title, the volume is centered primarily on *Reticulárea* (Fig. 2), the site-specific installation created by Gego in 1969, originally displayed in the Museo de Bellas Artes of Caracas; on subsequent versions that became part of the *Reticulárea* project—each piece was adapted to the particular space in which it was displayed (all over the world); and on its many related "paperless drawings," hanging sculptures made out of wire, or other linear objects. In 1969, the art critic Pedro Briceño described the project:

Gego—with an admirable sense of space [that is perhaps natural for an] artist who is also an architect—suspends structures entitled *Reticulárea* to envelop viewers with a calculated magic. [...] using small wire units, Gego constructs a marvelous network of triangles—and subsequently hexagons—which break the surface of inevitable walls, achieving an agile effect of visual

texture. Blank spaces intervene as intervals breaking the continuum, while the lines—their value increased by varying thicknesses in the material—affect the almost musical and serial conception of the structure. In *Reticulárea*, Gego has attained her most personal expression and has achieved quite a difficult goal; here the boundaries of what is structural and what is subjective, what involves well-thought out ideas and unbridled emotion, are all admirably united (37).

Reticulárea is not only a paradigmatic work in itself, but it constitutes the epitome of the “reticulárea practice.” This creative method inaugurated by the original installation cuts across Gego’s entire production and provides us with many elements to interpret it as a whole, including series such *Streams* (1970), *Trunks* (1974) and *Spheres* (1976).

Even though Gego herself was an articulate writer who frequently expressed her vast knowledge and philosophical world-vision, she did not write any specific text about *Reticulárea*. As time went by, however, critics and scholars generated an extensive array of critical texts, which, thanks to this publication, now sets the stage for new studies and perspectives on Gego’s works. Considering the amount of criticism collected in the book, this last statement might sound paradoxical; however, it is clear, in the case of Gego as with many other artists, that the art historical discipline sometimes works at a timid and dependent pace, not straying far from the key critical works published at the time of the creation of the work being analyzed. With the remarkable expressive power of Gego’s works and their avant-garde relationships not only to drawing and architecture but also to technology and science, it is possible to imagine new in-depth studies, in and beyond Latin America, to unveil their complementary local and universal meanings.

Past writings have created a substantial basis for studying Gego’s work. One of the first calls to attention regarding the unjustifiable neglect



Fig. 2. Gego, *Reticulárea* (1969), installation at Museo de Bellas Artes (sala 8), Caracas. Photo: Paolo Gasparini.

surrounding Gego’s artistic production appeared in *Mirar en Caracas* (1974), an anthology of newspaper articles on the work of various twentieth century artists.¹ The art critic Marta Traba recognized Gego’s pioneering role, compared with her Venezuelan colleagues, in the kinetic movement, and her originality in the creation of “lyrical webs” that let spectators take off into a new spatial dimension.

Almost two decades later, *Gego, Obra completa (1955–1990)*, was published to accompany a comprehensive show that took place in the Museum of Fine Arts of Caracas.² This thorough documentation of the artist’s production included high quality photographs of her most paradigmatic drawings, engravings, sculptures, and installations. With texts by specialists such as Iris Peruga, Glenn Lowry, Josefina Núñez, and Luis Enrique Pérez Oramas, the book introduced readers to Gego’s personal history, her conceptual proposals, and her creative processes in a panoramic way.

Sabidurías y otros textos de Gego (2005), published posthumously, was the first compilation of the artist’s significant

writings.³ Edited by Huizi and Josefina Manrique, this anthology is a trilingual edition in Spanish, English, and German, the artist’s three languages.

The last of a series of publications to accompany important art shows devoted to the artist during the last decade was *Gego: Between Transparency and the Invisible* (2006, also Museum of Fine Arts, Houston). In addition to fine illustrations and a timeline of the artist’s production, the book’s original essays by young guest scholars such as Bruno Bosteels, Juan Ledesma, Kaira Marie Cabañas and Luis Enrique Pérez Oramas added significantly to the literature on Gego.

Now, *Untangling the Web: Gego’s Reticulárea* is an important contribution, for many reasons. Chief among them is the fact that it compiles criticism and other writings published since *Reticulárea* was first exhibited, allowing readers access to this valuable material, as if they had the unusual opportunity of visiting the artist’s personal archive.

The study of a well-defined, small unit of research proposed by the book—in this case the criticism and literature

written on the paradigmatic *Reticulárea* and related pieces—puts us in touch with the original sources, with exceptional comprehensiveness and depth. Included here are not only new texts but the primary sources, often difficult to access—such as Marta Traba's groundbreaking texts—on which these scholars based their works.

Additionally, the wide range of primary sources reunited in this volume emphasizes the importance not only of the critical response to a work of art, but also to its development over time. This demonstrates that an artistic piece, as any other art historical subject of study, continually evolves when analyzed from different perspectives, at different times, and according to different cultural contexts. Mari Carmen Ramírez notes, for example, “that Gego's environmental installation emerges from these contemporary interpretations as a paradigm to address a wide range of artistic and nonartistic phenomena associated with both modern and contemporary art” (29). This book, thus, sets the table for carrying out a profound historiographical reflection, not only for the study of Gego's work but for the discipline of art history as such, since it demonstrates openly the forms in which art historical knowledge is constructed and deconstructed over time.

Finally, the texts by Huizi and Kervandjian that introduce each chapter allow readers to connect the micro-history that is documented to larger questions, which, suggested by the titles themselves, allow us to interpret the visual language and the deep symbolism of the works in context, for example: “Casting and Recasting the Web”; “Other *Reticuláreas*”; “*Reticulárea's* Space(s): Structure, Transparency, and the Viewer; Nature, Poetry, and Music: *Reticulárea* as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*”; and “Experiment or Paradigm? A Space for *Reticulárea* in Modern and Contemporary Art.” In this last chapter, for example, the authors explain that the anthology concludes with:

...a group of texts that consider Gego's relationships to modern art and key national and international movements and

artists.... In trying to position *Reticulárea* 1969 (and its variants with respect to the broader story of twentieth-century art, writers have specifically identified Kurt Schwitters's *Merzbau* (c.1923-33), Marcel Duchamp's *Mile of String* (1942), and American architect Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome completed for the universal exposition held in Montreal in 1967 as important precursors. Scholars, critics, and curators also have examined in broader terms *Reticulárea's* connections (and disconnections) to the work and/or theories of a number of Latin American, North American, and European artists—including Paul Klee, Alexander Calder, Naum Gabo, Isamu Noguchi, Richard Lippold, Jesús Rafael Soto, Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Pape, Mira Schender, Lygia Clark, and Ernesto Neto (141).

Extraordinary photographs complete this well-rounded publication; scattered throughout and concentrated in the sections entitled “Installations I” and “Installations II,” they dialogue with and complement the texts, constituting significant documents in themselves. “*Reticulárea: A Time Line*,” compiled by Crespín is a well-constructed reference tool, followed by the translation of the texts into Spanish, an important editorial decision which greatly expands the potential readership among Latin American audiences. An Appendix lists the documents reviewed and consulted for the book, with references to the ICAA digital archive where they can be consulted in their original language. Many of the documents could have been included in more than one chapter because they are connected, as in a web, perhaps a telling metaphor for the web-like creative process used by Gego in creating her transgressive works.

The thorough recuperation of the local and the international reception of *Reticulárea* will undoubtedly contribute to a fuller appreciation of Gego's work. It also may open new avenues of investigation in regard to important issues

such as the inclusion and exclusion of Latin American artists in general, and female artists in particular; the contextualization of contemporary Venezuelan art in relation to international art movements; and the status of the spectator who interacts with the work of art, the so-called “expanded field,” and the production of a social space—a preoccupation of many artists.

Untangling the Web: Gego's Reticulárea, An Anthology of Critical Response not only will help to reassess Gego's place in the history of modern art, but will also demonstrate the importance of the critical analysis of contemporary criticism and historiography in contemporary art historical studies. The book brings to the fore both the aesthetic and the historical value of a very creative artist who was able to produce a new visual language and a new notion of space, abstract, personal and expressive at the same time. Scholars, students and anyone interested in contemporary art will find this to be intellectually enjoyable and an editorial jewel. •

Dina Comisarenco Mirkin is an Art History Professor at the Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City, and a member of the Mexican National System of Research (SNI). She has published widely on 20th-century Mexican art and design, and the interconnections of gender, culture and society.

Notes

1. Marta Traba, *Mirar en Caracas* (Caracas: Monte Ávila Editores, 1974).
2. Iris Peruga, Josefina Núñez, et. al., *Gego. Obra completa, 1955–1990* (Caracas: Fundación Cisneros, 2003). The exhibition took place from Nov. 2000 to April 2001. Fundación Cisneros is devoted to the promotion and support of Latin American art.
3. María Elena Huizi and Josefina Manrique, eds., *Sabidurías y otros textos de Gego*, (Houston: International Center for the Arts of the Americas [ICAA], Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and Caracas: Fundación Gego, 2005).

Theresa Bernstein: A Century in Art

Edited by Gail Levin
University of Nebraska Press, 2013

Reviewed by Aliza Edelman

With the recent output of anthologies and books challenging historical definitions of the modern woman in the twentieth century, Gail Levin's *Theresa Bernstein: A Century in Art* claims a strong place and purpose. A monographic study accompanying an exhibition, Levin's approach to Bernstein's long career and life (1890–2002) proposes difficult questions on why and how some women artists from this early generation of American modernists are neglected from canonical records and art markets—including Marguerite Thompson Zorach (1887–1968) or Peggy Bacon (1895–1987), for example—in contrast to the enduring renown and success of such contemporaries as Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986) or Louise Nevelson (1899–1988), Bernstein's student. Levin sets out to redress many of the distorted representations, dates, and relationships in Bernstein's career, to uncover the artist's earlier writings, and to throw light on the complex issues of women's representation in this nation's incipient gallery systems. Clarifying that Bernstein was neither a student of Robert Henri nor a member of the Ashcan School, a long-held misconception, further underscores the extent to which an artist's critical trajectory is framed by the significance of her position or affiliation, at times understood as both a privilege and an anomaly. In so doing, Levin repositions Bernstein as a female artist in the context of the struggles of the development of modernism, not just American Realism, and as an artist married to another painter and printmaker, William Meyerowitz (1887–1981). Highlighting the challenges experienced by artist couples to establish careers and identify collectors and patrons—particularly interesting in a marriage as supportive as theirs—the Baltimore Museum of Art, in 1930, held simultaneous individual exhibitions on Bernstein and Meyerowitz. Levin's ardent examination guides this



Fig. 1. Theresa Bernstein, *Lilies of the Field* (1915), 35" x 55". Endicott College Collection, Walter J. Manninen Trust.

book beyond yet another reclamation project, however, offering comprehensive insights on topical issues of gender, womanhood, Jewishness, and longstanding critical success in American art.

Theresa Bernstein: A Century in Art is the culmination of many years of archival research, and includes thematic essays, documentary photographs, large color reproductions, and an exhaustive chronology and exhibition history. Levin undoubtedly brings personal reflections to the artist's biography, wryly noting that Bernstein had in fact "counted on my writing about her work" (11). Bernstein's engaging life was often cited for its steadfast presence and intimate recollections in lieu of her considerable accomplishments. Born in Cracow and raised in Philadelphia, Bernstein's Jewish roots and then Zionist inclinations play indelible roles in her varied painterly narratives and urban interests, from music and opera, to immigration laws, parades, and the burgeoning suffrage movement. The compressed spaces of *Suffrage Meeting* (1914) and *Suffrage Parade* (1915) mark her presence on the political stage, as a witness to famous activist campaigns for the right to vote. Sarah Archino's essay on World War I distinguishes the artist's "human scale"

portrayal of the patriotic citizen caught up in the daily progression of reports and demonstrations—evidenced in Bernstein's *Reading the War News* (1915) or *National Holiday* (1917)—set against George Bellows's political bent, for example, or the broad spectacle of Childe Hassam's flags (113–14).

Bernstein's formative studies at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women, now the Moore College of Art, and lectures at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts inevitably led her to New York City, where she studied briefly in 1911 with William Merritt Chase at the Art Students League before renting her own studio space at the Holbein Studio. Soon thereafter, she attended the trendsetting 1913 Armory Show. In her early adherence to figuration over abstract tendencies, Bernstein set on a path parallel to her many contemporary urban Realists on the New York scene—primarily those associated with "the Eight" or the Ashcan School, including Robert Henri, John Sloan, William Glackens, George Luks, and Everett Shinn, as well as other early modernists such as Edward Hopper and her close friend, Stuart Davis. Yet many of Bernstein's female colleagues, Levin exhorts, remain

unrecognized if not lost today, relegated to shows and venues organized by women's associations, leagues or clubs. Then again, most emerging American modernists were concerned with limited exhibition opportunities—including Bernstein's Dadaist contemporaries, shown in the inaugural 1917 Society of Independent Artists. Archino offers how the trappings of juried and annual shows, prizes and memberships became raw material for artist parodies and satirical periodicals such as *The Blind Man* or *The Paint Rag*, and notes earlier connections to the leftist politics associated with *The Masses*, where John Sloan became art editor in 1912.

Elsie Heung's essay problematizes Bernstein's alliance to the vital immediacy and arguably "masculine" dynamics critically formulated in the history of the Ashcan painters. Seeking a broader analysis of Bernstein's urban visions beyond formal characteristics of composition and color, Heung considers the artist's traditional training in Philadelphia in contrast to the illustrative and journalistic background innate to the identity of the Ashcan group. Bernstein's subjects, however, pointedly reflected the economic and social boundaries of an educated New Woman in the metropolis—milliners, churches, libraries, portraits, and mothers and children. Her treatment of public and private spaces is equally significant for our broader understanding of the historical dimensions of American womanhood, and equally viable in the cultural matrix as the lascivious bars and otherwise insolvent stations occupied in Ashcan paintings. Directing her attention toward women engaged in more disreputable professions in *Woman with a Parrot* (ca. 1917) or *Lilies of the Field* (Fig. 1; 1915), an uprightness of character, subtle bodily gestures, and dignified attention to clothing and costuming typically associated with prostitutes strategically frame the notoriety on view. In *The Milliners* (1918), another dynamic and circular grouping of immigrant women—modeled on female family members and her parents' housekeeper, Katie—supplies for hat making are copiously distributed around a central

table, harmonizing the internal gaze of the garment workers. *Girlhood* (1921), in the Phillips Collection, was the first painting by Bernstein purchased for an art museum.

When Bernstein's work was successfully reviewed in the company of male contemporaries such as Sloan, for example, her style was cautiously noted for its "unrestraint" (39), or she was critically admired as "a woman painter who paints like a man" (44). One critic wrote: "Theresa Bernstein's attitude toward her work seems to be circuitous rather than direct. This is, in itself, a baffling feminine quality, but dependable..." (53). Gendered connotations of critical terms are ubiquitous, and the "feminine" phrases are depreciative, even when intended as critical appraisal.

As Michele Cohen argues in her absorbing essay, Bernstein actualized "multiple identities as an artist, woman, and partner" through the receptive artistic community and social opportunities during her annual summer residences on the New England coast of Cape Ann in Gloucester, Massachusetts (94). From Fitz Henry Lane to Marsden Hartley, the topographical scale and atmosphere of Gloucester's bustling harbor, majestic schooners and local fishermen, sweeping beaches and hidden coves, sea captain's homes and widow's walks have long inspired artists. Bernstein chose instead to portray the "unseen" elements in women's lives (100). She was welcomed into prominent artist circles around East Gloucester's Rocky Neck Art Colony and Folly Cove, establishing relationships with Cecilia Beaux (1855–1942) and Ellen Day Hale (1855–1940), who made available printmaking facilities. Her participation in the short-lived but important Gallery-on-the-Moors in 1916 (a forerunner to the North Shore Arts Association) exemplified, according to Cohen, the creative possibilities for the New Woman (99).

Levin's exhibition seminar at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York played a seminal role in this project, and doctoral students contributed essays to this catalogue and developed an excellent website as an

additional resource for Bernstein's career. The inaugural exhibition occurred in two locations simultaneously and offered the enthusiastic visitor a unique opportunity to view Martin and Edith Stein's dedicated collection at Baruch College's Sidney Mishkin Gallery, along with an extensive selection of paintings, drawings, early notebooks and clippings, photographs, and letters assembled from additional private and museum collections at the James Gallery at the Graduate Center, CUNY. Observing the trajectory of Bernstein's career, one truly comprehends the far-reaching thread that weaves together her art and life through the century. Bernstein's precocious self-portraits and still lifes composed of both intimate and historically based objects—what the artist called "Symbolic Documentaries"—merit attention and are purposely explored in the catalogue by Patricia M. Burnham.¹ Together with Bernstein's unfailing marriage and primary role as Meyerowitz's champion, examined further in Gillian Pistell's study of the artist's still life-cum-portrait *Documentary Still* (1972), to her aesthetic relationship to printmaking, an important and popular art form in the early twentieth century and also her husband's domain, as Stephanie Hackett offers, we have a range of incisive research material. Yet it is a particular yearning determined in her figural relationships of women, mobilized in all phases of life, where we may find potential avenues for new scholarship on the modern woman, following Bernstein's own words that to paint is "to see a picture in embryo." •

Aliza Edelman published "Grace Hartigan's *Grand Street Brides: The Modern Bride as Mannequin*" in *WAJ* (2013), and organized the exhibition and catalogue for "Judith Lauand: Brazilian Modernist, 1950s–2000," at Driscoll-Babcock Galleries, New York, Oct. 23–Dec. 8, 2014.

Notes

1. See also Patricia M. Burnham, "Theresa Bernstein," *WAJ* 9, no. 1 (Fall 1988–Winter 1989): 22–27.

Hannah Höch

Edited by Dawn Ades, Emily Butler,
and Daniel F. Herrmann
Whitechapel Gallery and Prestel, 2014

Reviewed by Elizabeth Otto

Hannah Höch, best known as the most important female artist of the Berlin Dada movement, created a vast oeuvre of photomontages that are edgy, jarring, disturbing, and beautiful, each in its own, strange, way. Learning about Höch in the early 1990s was pivotal for me as a budding art historian, and her work was probably the strongest influence in my decision to focus my doctoral dissertation research on issues of gender, photomontage, and the rise of a complex visual language of bodily fragmentation in Germany's Weimar Republic. The primary medium for my discovery of Höch was a book that I still love, Maud Lavin's groundbreaking *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch*.¹ As I began to teach, I frequently used parts or all of Lavin's book with students to explore the complex issues that she so skillfully draws out of Höch's work: the interwar visual context in which art was in constant dialogue with the mass media, gendered viewing and art-making practices, allegorical and psychoanalytical modes of interpretation; the list of rich topics goes on. Time after time I saw that Höch could engage students like almost no other artist, and Lavin's book was always there to help them unpack these rich and complex works. When *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* went out of print around 2006, I wrote to the press to request that they reprint it—something that I have never done with any book before or since—but they declined. Maria Makela and Peter Boswell's 1996 *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, which lent a great deal more analysis and documentary evidence to our understanding of this artist, is likewise unavailable.² German scholars have produced a much more constant stream of publications on Höch's work, but these have generally not been translated into English.³

What a joy then that a terrific new, well-illustrated book on Höch is now

available. *Hannah Höch* was published as the catalogue to an exhibition held earlier this year at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. This first-ever U.K. retrospective of Höch's work was curated by veteran Dada scholar Dawn Ades, Whitechapel Curator Daniel F. Herrmann, and Assistant Curator Emily Butler, and this same team edited the *Hannah Höch* volume. Herrmann's "The Rebellious Collages of Hannah Höch" provides a smart and breezy overview of Höch's life and work that is framed through the book's chronology and primary documents. Herrmann argues that the leitmotif of Höch's work is her rebellion that was fueled by a "resolute artistic curiosity and a determination to break down intellectual boundaries" (9). Thus, for him, Höch's unconventional life and her turn to the destructive-productive and "alienating" (11) media of collage and montage dovetail to create art which "had a mission. It bore the potential of change" (15). "Hannah Höch, Dada, and the 'New Woman,'" Dawn Ades's essay, examines specific aspects of Höch's radicality: her feminism, her representation of themes of gender and sexuality, and the iconography of the New Woman that is a near constant feature of her interwar work.

Other essays further explore particular aspects of Höch's rebellious and highly original work—their "singularity" in the words of one contributor. For example, we mostly do not associate Höch with performance art, but Deborah Lewer's short "Hannah Höch, Performance, and the *Anti-Revue*" allows us the surprise of learning that we should. Lewer describes Höch's one night as a Dada performer and links it to more substantive themes of the performative in her photomontages and her 1925 collaboration with Kurt Schwitters on their *Anti-Revue* theater production. "Glued, Not Cut: On the Singularity of Hannah Höch's Scrapbook," Berlinische Galerie Curator Ralf Burmeister's essay, argues that Höch's little-known yet extraordinary 1934 *Album*, a 114-page scrapbook, is actually a radical experiment in a new kind of additive montage. Unlike the often violently fragmented bodies and



Fig. 1. Hannah Höch, *Aus der Sammlung: Aus einem ethnographischen Museum* (From the Collection: From an Ethnographic Museum) (1929), photomontage and gouache on paper, 10 1/4" x 6 7/8". Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.

bits that make up most of Höch's montages, *Album* intuitively unites groups of whole pictures to evoke themes and moods but—like the photomontages—no specific messages.

Brett M. Van Hoesen's "Performing the Culture of Weimar Postcolonialism: Hannah Höch's *From an Ethnographic Museum* and Its Legacy" probes the troubling and persistent imagery of the non-Western Other in Höch's work. These images (such as Fig. 1 from 1929), as Van Hoesen reveals, were culled from a mass-media press catering to a public in shock from Germany's loss of its colonies at the close of World War I. This is also the one essay in this volume that identifies Höch's influence on contemporary artists, particularly Wangechi Mutu.

Lavin's *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* is clearly beloved by many, and almost no publication on women artists, or Dada, or on Höch herself seems to be complete without an essay by her—the present volume included. These are always reproductions or reworkings of chapters from the original *Cut with the Kitchen*

Knife book.⁴ The essay included here, "The Mess of History, or the Unclean Hannah Höch," is a heavily reworked version of the book's fifth chapter that was first published in 1996.⁵ For the Whitechapel volume, however, its first paragraphs have been rewritten again in order to remove some unproductive vitriol against other scholars and to provocatively argue that our current understanding of Höch is misguidedly reductive:

This new, sanitized view of Höch goes something like this: despite media claims to the contrary, as seen in glorified photographs of the New Woman, women's lives in Weimar Germany were terrible and Höch as an artist recognized this. Her montages (good) are a condemnation of these dishonest, slap-happy media images of the New Woman (evil). The fact that Höch fragmented women's bodies, goes the simplistic aesthetic argument, means that she wanted to show that women were unhappy" (89).

Of course, as Lavin goes on to explain, there is a lot more complexity to be teased out of these photomontages. Höch is "no hero"; rather she is interested in the profound ambiguities reflected in Weimar culture's particular admixture of radical change, traditionalist backlash, and great uncertainty.

The book's final essay, Emily Butler's "Hannah Höch's Later Collages: An Endless Process of Renewal," exposes another way in which Höch is usually pigeonholed: as a Dadaist and interwar

artist. In fact, Höch continued to make art for forty-five years after the end of the Weimar Republic. At times she returned to forms and themes she had explored in her earliest and Dada years. But increasingly she also created lyrical and abstract photomontages that, as Butler argues, resonated with the Cold War and Western European turn away from representation. Yet Höch's abstractions still have one foot in reality; in them action painting meets Surrealist dreamscape.

Hannah Höch also offers translations of a number of important primary documents, including writings by and interviews with Höch and early reviews of her work. The book's 116 gorgeous full page and full color illustrations are arranged in rough chronological sections and include rarely seen works from as early as 1912. These help to chart Höch's early experiments in Expressionist painting, design, and collage. However, figure numbers for the images are not provided, so that it is often difficult to find particular works of art referenced in the texts. This seems to work against the rest of the book project, which clearly seeks to make Höch's work accessible to a broader audience.

Overall, *Hannah Höch* is a supreme achievement that is required reading for anyone with even a passing interest in this artist. In it, her spectacular photomontages come alive for a whole new generation of viewers. Further, it adds new perspectives to the scholarly dialogue that has developed around Höch's complicated works whose meaning is, as this book shows, never fixed and ever unfolding. •

Elizabeth Otto is Associate Professor of modern art and visual studies at the State University of New York at Buffalo, and Executive Director of the Humanities Institute. Her publications include *Tempo, Tempo! The Bauhaus Photomontages of Marianne Brandt* (2005).

Notes

1. Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993).
2. Maria Makela and Peter Boswell, eds., *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, exh. cat., (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1996).
3. A small selection of the German-language scholarship on Höch includes: Cornelia Thater-Shulz and Berlinische Galerie, ed., *Hannah Höch: eine Lebenscollage*, v. 1. Berlin: Argon, 1989; and Ralf Burmeister, ed. *Hannah Höch: Aller Anfang ist DADA!*, exh. cat., (Berlin: Berlinische Galerie, and Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2007).
4. For example, Lavin's "From an Ethnographic Museum" chapter was reproduced in its entirety in *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity*, Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998); another portion of the book was reproduced as "The New Woman in Hannah Höch's Photomontages: Issues of Androgyny, Bisexuality, and Oscillation" in *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Postmodernism*, Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2005).
5. Maud Lavin, "The Mess of History or the Unclean Hannah Höch," *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine*, Catherine de Zegher, ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 117–23.



Violence & Virtue: Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes*

By Eve Straussman-Pflanzer,
Yale University Press, 2013

Reviewed by Marjorie Och

This slim catalogue (40 pages total) accompanied a small exhibit at the Art Institute of Chicago—"Violence & Virtue: Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes*"—whose significance was anything but slight.¹ The catalogue, which includes a checklist of works shown as well as an interpretative essay, is an excellent record of this compelling and beautiful exhibit.

Eve Straussman-Pflanzer begins her essay with a punch, writing,

Judith savagely slices through Holofernes's neck in Artemisia Gentileschi's defining work, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*. Abra, Judith's maidservant, holds down the struggling Holofernes, allowing her mistress maximum leverage. Blood sprays from Holofernes's neck and saturates the white sheet under his body in pooled rivulets (11).

This powerful initial description of the work reads like the setting of a play, highlighting the theatrical quality of Baroque painting. It also asserts the primacy of Gentileschi's painting in the essay, a primacy paralleled in the gallery because, in spite of the fact that other objects in the exhibit were on display in the room, the seeming reality depicted by Gentileschi dominated the viewer's attention.

Artemisia Gentileschi's oeuvre has not always been familiar to scholars or appreciated as her own production. Now considered a significant figure in the history of art, thanks to the work of Mary D. Garrard, R. Ward Bissell, and others, Artemisia was little known well into the twentieth century, with many of her paintings attributed to her father, Orazio Gentileschi, or to Caravaggio.² Garrard, in particular, suggested a way of understanding Artemisia's



Fig. 1. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (ca. 1620), 78 3/8" x 63 3/4". Uffizi, Florence.

paintings—even sorting through problems of attribution—in part through autobiography. These studies have revealed the artist to be not only a consummate technician but also a master storyteller. It was as storyteller that feminist art historians identified Artemisia Gentileschi as a proto-feminist whose representations of Biblical heroines, such as Susanna and Judith, reveal a woman's perspective as never before, and made the same narratives by male artists appear as fantasy.

Knowing the earlier scholarship on Gentileschi certainly adds context to the exhibit and catalogue, but it isn't required. Straussman-Pflanzer briefly

reviews Artemisia's youth in Rome—her tutelage under her father, the influence of Caravaggio on father and daughter, Orazio's collaboration with the painter Agostino Tassi, Artemisia's rape by Tassi and the legal suit Orazio brought against his colleague, and her marriage shortly after the conclusion of the trial to Pierantonio Stiatessi. All of this is background to Straussman-Pflanzer's focus, and that is this painting's centrality to Gentileschi's life and career in Florence after the close of the trial late in 1612. For the next eight years, Gentileschi's life followed the pattern oft repeated in the seventeenth century—the artist attempting to win court patronage. *Judith Slaying*

Holofernes is here treated as Artemisia's ultimate statement of her own particular courtly style; however, the violence expressed through a refined realism found little support in Florence.

It made sense for Artemisia and her husband to go to Florence in 1612, because her father's family was Tuscan, and Orazio had written on behalf of his daughter to Christine of Lorraine, the Medici Grand Duchess. Florence was intellectually stimulating for Gentileschi; she became a member of the Accademia del Disegno and was friends with artists and writers, including Galileo. Professionally, however, Gentileschi did not prosper, and Straussman-Pflanzer suggests this was the result of the artist's reputation after the trial, her affair with Francesco Maringhi, a Florentine nobleman, and the slow pace of her work (due in part to the birth of four children in Florence, only one of whom lived to adulthood). The artist left Florence in 1620 and returned to Rome, one imagines, with both a sense of relief and anxiety. Gentileschi's work in Florence, however, demonstrates her talent and determination to succeed.

The art favored by the Medici grand dukes was richly ornamented, even lavish. As an example, Straussman-Pflanzer cites Cristofano Allori's *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (Palazzo Pitti, Florence) of ca. 1616, a work Gentileschi likely knew. In Allori's painting (unfortunately not in the exhibit), Judith's sword, yellow damask robe, and velvety blue and red cloak highlight the refined elements of Florentine art at this time. In her *Judith Slaying Holofernes* of ca. 1620, Gentileschi marries the Caravaggesque realism of her Roman style to the elegance preferred at the Florentine court. Understanding something of Florentine painting at the turn of the seventeenth century contextualizes Gentileschi's *Judith*. Gentileschi places her figures on and above the shimmering silvery-white bed fabric, clothes her Judith in a rich yellow damask, and embellishes Judith's wardrobe with an exquisite bracelet that highlights Florentine craftsmanship as well as the artist's name—the figures on the bracelet may depict Diana/Artemis. But each of these elements distinguishes

Gentileschi's painting from Allori's while at the same time connecting it to her Caravaggesque beginnings. For example, while Allori includes the hilt of Judith's sword at the far right edge of the painting, the blade is not visible. In Gentileschi's work, Judith's sword is just as ornate, but the sharp reflective blade is now visible: it not only cuts through the neck of Holofernes, it also marks the vertical center of the composition and serves as the fulcrum for the fan of bodies (Holofernes's legs and torso, Abra the maidservant, and Judith) pressing down upon Holofernes's head. The contrast between the violence of Judith's action and the visual appeal of the beautiful objects speaks to Gentileschi's skillful blending of her Caravaggesque training with the luxury she knew appealed to her Florentine public.

The patron of this *Judith Slaying Holofernes* is not known, although the "exceptional quality" leads Straussman-Pflanzer to suggest that "Cosimo II remains the most likely patron or intended recipient of the work." But, she adds, "Artemisia's brash depiction of Judith could not be stomached on Florentine soil" (28). The painting was not placed among the Medici's most celebrated works, and early written references to Gentileschi's Florentine paintings do not clearly connect the artist to this particular work. It is not surprising that this painting was eventually hidden and all but forgotten; nor is it surprising that it was not always attributed to Gentileschi (23). As Straussman-Pflanzer points out, Gentileschi's depiction of Judith is "savagely violent" (29).

Like the exhibit, the catalogue demonstrates the importance of focusing on a single work. The reader is

encouraged to contemplate what is evident in the painting—Artemisia's technique and the narrative she depicts—as well as how the work might have been understood by her contemporaries. We cannot see the work as did Cosimo II or members of his family and court in Florence, but this brief monographic study places it in that world. The paperback catalogue is, itself, a beautiful object. Across the front cover and partially on the back is a detail of Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* dramatically reproduced in red and black with the text boldly printed in white. In the catalogue, as in the exhibit, Artemisia Gentileschi is again confirmed as one of the most perceptive followers of Caravaggio as well as one of the most compelling of seventeenth-century painters. •

Marjorie Och is Professor of Art History at the University of Mary Washington. She has published on Vittoria Colonna, Properzia de' Rossi, and Giorgio Vasari, and currently is working on Vasari's accounts of cities in his *Lives of the Artists*.

Notes

1. The exhibition was on view at the Art Institute of Chicago from Oct. 17, 2013, to Jan. 9, 2014.
2. Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989); R. Ward Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art: Critical Reading and Catalogue Raisonné* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1999); Keith Christiansen and Judith W. Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2001); see also the bibliography in the catalogue under review for more recent publications.



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Pl. 1. April Gornik, *Ekstasis* (1992), oil on linen, 80" x 91".



Pl. 2. April Gornik, *Light After the Storm* (2012), oil on linen, 74" x 104".



Pl. 3 (left). April Gornik,
Reflected Trees (2002),
oil on linen, 84" x 63".



Pl. 4 (below). April Gornik,
Two Fires (1983),
oil on canvas, 74" x 96".



Pl. 5. April Gornik,
The Speed of Light (1997),
oil on linen, 74" x 81 1/2".



Pl. 6. April Gornik,
Moonrise (1991),
oil on linen, 92" x 74".



Pl. 7 (left). Gülsün Karamustafa,
Mystic Transport (1992),
mixed media, 20 pieces,
each 23 5/8" x 17 3/4" x 35 1/2".
Third International Istanbul Biennial,
Feshane, Istanbul.

Pl. 8 (right).
Gülsün Karamustafa,
Genealogy (1994),
mixed media, 120 pieces,
each 7 3/4" x 3 7/8".
Siyah Beyaz Art Gallery,
Ankara.



Pl. 9 (left). Gülsün Karamustafa, *Fragmenting/Fragments* (1999),
laser printing, 42 pieces, each 5 7/8" x 7 3/4". Stills, Cuts, and
Fragments Exhibition, IFA Gallery, Stuttgart.



Pl. 10 (above). Gülsün Karamustafa, *The Notebook* (1993), mixed
media installation. Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi
(Women's Library and Information Center Foundation), Istanbul.



Pl. 11.
Gülsün Karamustafa,
New orientation (1995),
mixed media installation,
h 157 1/2".
4th International Istanbul
Biennial, Antrepo, Istanbul.

Pl. 13 . Anna Maria Maiolino,
Glu, Glu, Glu... (1966),
acrylic and fabric on wood,
c. 43 5/16" x 23 1/4" 4 15/16".
Courtesy of the artist.



Pl. 12. Lygia Pape, *Divisor (Divider)* (1990), performed at Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro.
©Project Lygia Pape. Photo: Paula Pape.



Pl. 14. Vally Wieselthier, *Fruit Dish* (1927), glazed earthenware, 4 1/2" x 9 1/8" x 8 1/2". Photo: Courtesy MarkBassett.com.

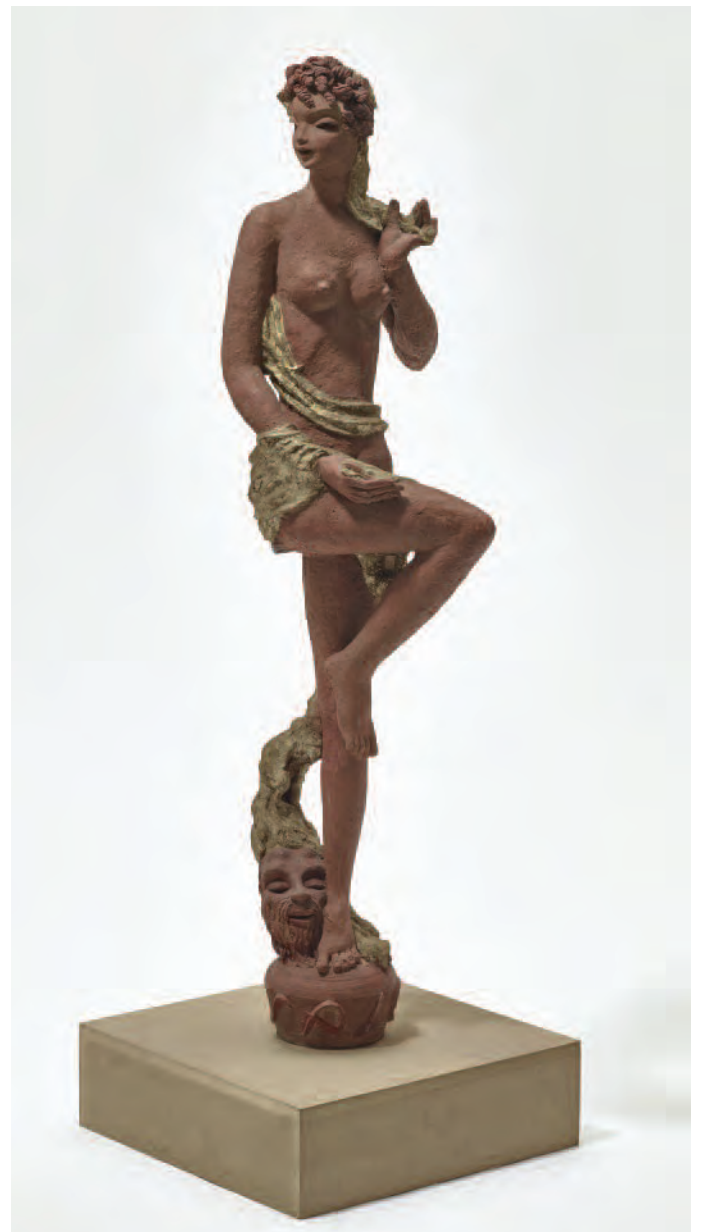


Pl. 15 (right).

Vally Wieselthier, *Frauenkopf* (1928), glazed red earthenware, 14 1/2" x 7 1/2". Photo: Courtesy Galerie bei der Albertina Zetter.



Pl. 16. Vally Wieselthier, *Flora* (1928), red earthenware, white slip, colored glaze. 24 3/8" MAK–Austrian Museum of Applied Arts/Contemporary Art. Photo: MAK/Georg Mayer.



Pl. 17 (right).

Vally Wieselthier, *Salome* (1938), unglazed brown terracotta, 53". MAK–Austrian Museum of Applied Arts/ Contemporary Art. Photo: MAK/Mika K. Wisskirchen.