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(front cover) Julie (Yaminga) Dowling, *Mary* (2001) oil on linen, 59" x 47 1/4". State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia. Purchased through the Contemporary Art Group, Art Gallery of Western Australia Foundation, 2002. © Julie (Yaminga) Dowling, 2001.

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With great excitement we prepared this new issue of *WAJ* that strongly reflects its growing international scope. Beginning with an article about the Australian painter of our remarkable cover image, Julie Dowling, we are pleased to include five articles prepared on five continents. As in other recent issues, the authors present artists tackling universal issues such as gender and feminism from different perspectives and with distinctive viewpoints.

An Australian scholar Amy Jackett recounts how Julie Dowling came to paint her iconographic portraits of her female Aboriginal forbears. As the artist continues a lifelong search for a Aboriginal family members who were separated and placed in institutions, identity issues are at the core of her art as she works to restore a Aboriginal traditions. "Her vibrant paintings combine ... western portraiture, Central Australian dot painting, Catholic iconography and social realism," writes Jackett, and her art "conveys important messages, especially regarding the imperative role of a Aboriginal women in guarding and sharing oral history and the importance of matrilineal ties to country." We are very pleased to introduce Dowling and her exceptional work to *WAJ* readers.

For more than two decades the South Korean-born artist Sooja Kim has received international acclaim for her mixed media works and installations. Joo-eun Lee, of Konkuk University in Seoul, discusses the artist's early sewn and wrapped cloth works, which "carry specifically Korean themes and reflect the lives of Korean women." Although they incorporate both "western and Korean modernism as well as western and Korean feminism," inherent in them is that nationalism—not feminism—was the predominant concern among Korean women. The author writes that through these works Sooja Kim has attempted to "raise cloth works from the domestic realm to the level of modernist art."

Brenda Schmahmann, a professor at the University of Johannesburg, takes readers on the complicated path through the emergence of feminist art in South Africa during apartheid. As in Korea, feminism was a secondary concern of women artists in South Africa, where it was trumped by issues raised by apartheid. Art activists' primary concern was to open educational facilities to artists of all races. Feminist art did emerge, however, in the early 1980s, as Schmahmann writes, "against a backdrop of profound political turmoil." She goes on to explain how works created by Kim Siebert, Penny Siopis, Sue Williamson, and others document the varied reactions of these women to feminism in their divided country.

By M. Lluïsa Faxedas, of the University of Girona, Spain, is an article on the women artists of Cercle et Carré. This international group of men and women committed to abstract art joined forces in Paris for a brief moment in the early 1930s. They published several issues of a journal to promote their ideas and held a single exhibition before disbanding. Most of the women had achieved some success before joining the group and continued to produce and show their paintings, photographs, and prints in the years that followed. They "fought fiercely against the stereotypes of femininity, demanding more virility [in the work] from both men and women," although, as Faxedas argues, "[t]he universalism inherent to the theory of abstraction necessarily implied a rejection of gender-specificity, especially feminine."

From our continent is an article on the unique sculptural installations of New York-based multimedia artist Petah Coyne.

Known internationally for her inclusion of taxidermied creatures in her remarkable sculptures, Coyne takes ecology and feminist agency in new directions. According to author Heather Cammarata-Seale, Coyne's use of taxidermy is best understood from a feminist perspective, associating the female body with the animal body at the same time it exemplifies an "ecological sensibility by forging a union between natural and cultural worlds." Cammarata-Seale also explores the spiritual aspect of Coyne's work, "incorporating taxidermied birds, in particular the peacock, into her work" as "a way to cope with death, mourn the loss of loved ones, and offer them a peaceful passage to the afterlife."

Several of the dozen books under review that round out this expanded issue should make interesting summer reading. Susan Landauer reviews a book examining the seven-decade career of sculptor Claire Falkenstein, whom she calls "one of America's most audaciously innovative mid-twentieth century artists." A volume on the very interesting life of performance artist Charlotte Moorman, known as the "Topless Cellist," is reviewed here by Korean scholar Gyoung Eun Oh.

Also reviewed here, by Midori Yamamura, is a retrospective catalogue on the art of Hung Liu, the California-based artist whose "provocative paintings" combine old and recent photo images to tell stories relating to her Chinese homeland. Reviewer Betsy Fahlman calls a monograph on modernist painter Jaune Quick-to-See Smith "a model of literate, insightful scholarship," and Rachel Marie-Crane Williams reviews a book on sculptor Nancy Graves that she notes is as beautiful as it is revealing of the artist's process, experience, and influences.

Deborah Frizzell provides a penetrating review of the catalogue chronicling the interactive, participatory, experiential work of Brazilian artist Lygia Clark, whose "practices and approaches propelled her abandonment of modernism and its tenets." Roberta Tarbell's review of a new book on the 1970s-era "Sister Chapel" describes the author's efforts to reunite this multi-part early feminist project.

A recent volume on Gertrude Stein presents "a multifaceted portrait ... painted and written" of this "enigmatic woman who lived by her intuition, instincts, whims, and personal passions," writes reviewer Joyce Beckenstein. Patricia Briggs reviews a catalogue on Eva Hesse that concentrates on 1965, the year she returned from a residency in Germany as a sculptor, having left New York the previous year as a painter, while a Liza Edelman reviews a volume that gets to the heart of the well-known friendship between Hesse and Sol LeWitt and the important artistic "engagement with Minimalism" that resulted. Finally, two other books detail artistic collaborations, one reviewed by Nancy Mowll Mathews on the legendary couples, Gabrielle Münter and Wassily Kandinsky, and Sophie Taeuber and Hans Arp; the other a study, reviewed here by Kimberly Chrisman Campbell, on Degas and Mary Cassatt, that examines how influence between them flowed both ways.

For their gracious, ongoing support of *WAJ*, we give special thanks to Old City Publishing, particularly Guy Giffiths and Ian Mellanby, and to Dean James Swenson and Cathy Pizzi of the Art History Department at Rutgers.

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

JULIE DOWLING'S CELEBRATION OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN THROUGH PORTRAITURE

By Amy Jackett

The Australian Aboriginal artist Julie Dowling (b. 1969) was introduced to portraiture at a young age in a rather unusual way—her mother gave her a spiral-bound sketchbook and instructed her to draw people on trains and buses. They were complete strangers but they could have been family. Like many Australian Aboriginal families, Dowling's family is incomplete, with some Aboriginal members missing because they were separated from their relatives and placed into institutions run by white Australians. The quest to find missing family members is urgent for Dowling and her family. Dowling remembers her mother trying to look into the faces of fair-skinned and darker-skinned Aboriginal people "to try and find family, to see if there was a gesture or a way that they walked that meant they were part of our family."¹ As Dowling sketched people her mother suspected of being related to them, her twin sister Carol would interview each person and transcribe their answers. In an interview with oral historian John Bannister, Dowling excitedly exclaimed, "We've actually met some of our relatives that way!"²

Dowling's passion for portraiture continues. Nowadays she uses the genre to record the appearance of family members such as her grandmother (Fig. 1) and others; to create self-portraits expressing her own identity as in her 2006 *Self Portrait: Djeran*³ (Fig. 2), and also to imagine the appearance of her ancestors and historical figures she admires—especially women who have overcome adversities. Dowling has Badimaya/Noongar⁴ Aboriginal heritage, as well as Irish, Scottish and Jewish heritage. As such, she sees herself as a "litmus test" for race relations in



Fig. 1. Julie Dowling, *Everlasting Mollie* (1998) acrylic, red ochre, gold and plastic on canvas, 37 3/8" x 30 1/2". Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, Perth, Western Australia. © Julie Dowling.

Australia.⁵ She explores both sides of her heritage by drawing on western and Aboriginal art traditions. According to anthropologist Deborah Reed-Danahay, this kind of hybridity is a defining characteristic of autoethnographers: they are boundary crossers who have dual identities.⁶ Dowling's autoethnographic paintings aim to convey Aboriginal cultural traditions to younger generations—a method she learned from Aboriginal artist Robert Campbell Junior, who painted to teach his family Aboriginal customs. Importantly, they are sensitively made from the perspective of being a member of the culture rather than an outside observer.

Dowling was born in Subiaco, Perth, Western Australia. She spent her childhood in the outer suburb of Redcliffe when it was on the fringes on the bush before it was engulfed by the expanding city of Perth. Dowling was a compulsive painter in high school, which led her to study art at the Claremont School of Art in Perth where she graduated with a Diploma of Fine Art in 1989. In 1992 she gained her Bachelor of Fine Art from Curtin University in Perth. Since holding her first solo art exhibition at the Freemantle Arts Centre in Perth, she has exhibited widely across Australia, and in 2006 she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Literature from Murdoch University in recognition of her dedication to visually expressing her own Aboriginal identity and stories concerning the lives of Aboriginal Australians.

Her vibrant paintings combine a diverse range of styles, including western portraiture, Central Australian dot painting, Catholic iconography and social realism. Dowling's mixed aesthetic style is comparable with other contemporary Australian Aboriginal artists, including Lin Onus, Trevor Nickolls, Robert Campbell Junior, and Ron Hurley, although Dowling's unique style at times incorporates glitter and ochre. One of the most distinguishing features of her practice is her emphasis on women. Although she is one of Australia's "most collectable" artists,⁷ her art is not just aesthetically appealing; it conveys important messages, especially regarding the imperative role of Aboriginal women in guarding and sharing oral history and the importance of matrilineal ties to country.

Australian Aboriginal women have been subjected to many waves of cultural oppression and exploitation. Conscious of this treatment, Dowling explains: "I feel sometimes that I'm privileged only by the difference in time. My grandmother's and mother's generations were forced into lives as domestic servants. I not only see it as my responsibility to ensure that those injustices never occur again, but that my abilities to read, paint and talk about the things they couldn't is a constant reminder of how lucky I am."⁸

Aboriginal women are rarely mentioned as custodians of country in literature, or even as decision-making individuals; they are seen as wives and mothers whereby their connection to country is mediated by another.⁹ In Western Australia, the term 'Noongar' means 'man,' which may reflect that Aboriginal men are more visible than the women.¹⁰ In spite of this, the notion that Noongar women are strong and talented is evident in Noongar cultural representation.¹¹ The vast majority of Dowling's familial portraits are of matriarchs, such as her grandmother, Mollie, her great grandmother, Mary, and her

great-great grandmother, Melbin. Drawing on western portrait traditions, Dowling encourages viewers to see her female ancestors as strong and proud women. This essay traces important aspects of Dowling's life story which have shaped her practice and argues that her paintings have a feminine sensibility.

Dowling and her sister Carol were the first of their family to be included in the first Australian census that recognized Aboriginal Australians—in 1971. Like other Aboriginal families, hers bore the brunt of detrimental government policies for several generations. One of the most damaging government interventions was assimilation. The Australian government's assimilation policy, which was enforced from the 1930s to the 1970s, "sought to transform mixed-blood Aboriginal Australians into white Australians."¹² Assimilation was ambiguous because the term was applied to two different kinds of integration: biological absorption, referring to the removal of Aboriginal physical characteristics, and social integration, involving the phasing out of Aboriginal cultural practices.¹³ In both senses, assimilation had devastating consequences.

Photographs of Aboriginal people often were used as propaganda for assimilation.¹⁴ Dowling's grandmother, Mollie Dowling, was considered "the poster child for Catholic assimilation," and, as such, had her photograph taken every few months "as proof of what an Aboriginal woman could become."¹⁵ At the age of six, Mollie's white father placed her in the Catherine McAuley Family Centre (St. Joseph's Orphanage), where she eventually embraced the Catholic Church and tried to disassociate herself from her Aboriginal family. Her story reflects the complex emotions of those children who were removed from their Aboriginal families and became known as the Stolen Generations. As historian Peter Read emphasizes in his book, *A Rape of the Soul So Profound: The Return of the Stolen Generations*, the Aboriginal children who were removed from their parents and raised in institutions often felt "a genuine sense of love and gratitude for the white people who raised them."¹⁶ Mollie was such a devout Catholic that she wanted to become a nun, even though she was told Aboriginal people could not become nuns.

In her painted portrait, *Everlasting Mollie* (Fig. 1), Dowling portrays her grandmother in the traditional western half-figure pose, with expressive hands. Mollie's image is placed in the center and images of her life unfurl around her, from her birth in a field of everlasting daisies to her time in the orphanage to her life in the city of Perth. White crosses emanate from this life-story border. Her head and shoulders are depicted in a naturalistic style; while in the lower half of the painting her cardigan is filled with Aboriginal iconography. Framing her figure are spiritual elements of her life, both Catholic and Aboriginal. Her eyes look out toward the viewer in a soft, elegiac manner. One of her hands reaches into her cardigan towards her heart, while the other hand appears clenched to indicate her strength and determination. With this portrait, Dowling shares aspects of her grandmother's life, which, although personal, resonate with many other Aboriginal families.

In 1993 Mollie had a stroke, and Dowling, as an unmarried

female relative, was required to look after her. During the two years she spent caring for her grandmother, she absorbed stories from visiting elders. Even though she was not painting at this time, she was thinking about the importance of oral history and the complexities of race relations in Australia—themes which would dominate her work when she returned to painting.

Dowling's mother, Veronica, too, was raised by the Catholic Church to become a domestic servant and to marry a white.¹⁷ She has described religion as "a very dominant force" throughout her childhood.¹⁸ Veronica also learned Aboriginal bushcraft and how to find bush tucker (Aboriginal food), such as kangaroo, emu and swan eggs, from her grandmother, Mary Oliver. Mary also wanted to teach her granddaughter their native tongue; however, Mollie did not allow this as the nuns had taught her that the Aboriginal language was not acceptable.¹⁹ Veronica Dowling recalls that Mollie "wanted us to be white," evidently feeling that assimilation was the right path for her children.²⁰

For Julie Dowling, assimilation meant learning to hide Aboriginality. When she was growing up, "the pressure to assimilate into Wudjula [white] society was intense," she recalled.²¹ The Aboriginal ways she learned had to be kept secret because they were not accepted in mainstream Australian society.²² She grew up with "two sets of enlightenment": one from the Catholic Church and one from her Aboriginal heritage. It was not easy, and she explains, "Ever since I left high school, I have sought out those aspects of my own indigenous enlightenment—an enlightenment that was severely damaged by my family's dispossession and assimilation."²³ According to Carol Dowling, "Julie and I were the first people in our family to ask questions and to push against such assimilationist ideology. We are now proud Badimaya women working to decolonise our family and to strengthen our language and culture for future generations to come."²⁴

To ensure the continuation of their culture, the sisters became founding members of a program called *Kootamiara Quob* (Healing together strong).²⁵ The program brings together members of local Aboriginal communities to practice traditional cultural activities and share stories. For instance, each year as part of the Kootamiara Quob program, Dowling and her sister make kangaroo skin cloaks, known as *boogkas*, using traditional techniques which had not been practiced for over 170 years.²⁶ The *boogka*, says Dowling, was "one of the only significant personal possessions by a Noongar person. It had your life's journey and Dreamings etched onto its tanned skin. It was wrapped around you when you were buried into the sacred earth."²⁷ One portrait of Melbin, *Warridah Melburra Ngupi* (2004; Pl. 1.), depicts her great-great grandmother wearing a *boogka* with visible but imagined gray life journey



Fig. 2. Julie Dowling, *Self Portrait: Djeran* (2006), oil on canvas, 23 3/4" x 36 1/4". Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, CCWA 851, The University of Western Australia. © Julie Dowling.

lines. In this way, Dowling has visually recorded the appearance of a *boogka* for future generations in an autoethnographic manner.

As well as reinforcing and continuing Aboriginal traditions, the Kootamiara Quob program also aims to help participants deal with "child sexual abuse, domestic violence, substance abuse, and cultural oppression,"²⁸ atrocities which Dowling and her sister experienced firsthand; after their white father abandoned them at birth, their uncle Robert sexually abused them. Dowling likens Robert to a "dark cloud" who "represented all the frustration our menfolk had in our family."²⁹

Some scholars have argued that Aboriginal men in Australia have been more severely affected by colonization than the women.³⁰ Men were seen to be emasculated by colonization, as their authority was undermined by white officials and their connections to their country were severed. Aboriginal people were seen homogenously as 'the Aborigines,' even though, as historian Bain Attwood explains, "Their world was premised upon small groups and narrow divisions rather than upon broad unity, and they defined themselves in terms of their specific relationships with the land and other Aborigines."³¹ Different Aboriginal communities have different gendered structures of power and authority.³² For example, in Dowling's family tradition, Aboriginal men and women were equal but lived separately and performed different ceremonies, a practice that led to Western patriarchal assumptions that Aboriginal men owned land and had more authority than women. This initial failure on the part of white anthropologists to understand the complexities of Aboriginal cultures meant that when land rights entered mainstream Australian politics in the 1960s, the focus was on Aboriginal men's rights to land. It was not until 1979–80 that Aboriginal women's rights and matrilineal lines were recognized.³³ In many cases, the women hold more



Fig. 3. Julie Dowling, *Authentic Self-Portrait* (2001), synthetic polymer paint and red ochre on canvas, 47" x 39 3/8". Collection of the Artist. © Julie Dowling.

genealogical knowledge than the men—knowledge that is essential to claim native titles.³⁴

Anthropologist Pat Baines explains, "In giving birth to children Nyungar³⁵ women are linked with the very identity of the land."³⁶ *Budjarri Maroubra* (2005; Pl. 2) conveys this connection. The painting depicts Dowling's great grandmother in the bush surrounding Maroubra station near Lake Moore and Mount Gibson after having just given birth. Her great grandmother is presented as a small figure in a vast landscape, resting under a Gascoyne tea tree, her baby cradled in her arms. Her skin is the same colour as the earth, conveying that Aboriginal people "are truly of the place of origin; are of the land ... [their] skin is synonymous with the Earth's covering."³⁷ The clear sky appears calm and nurturing. Since Lake Moore is famous for its pink coloring, the colors of the land specifically evoke this region. Dowling keeps some ochre from Lake Moore in a plastic container in her studio, which she uses to embed physical traces of the country in her paintings.³⁸ *Budjarri Maroubra* shares a personal family story. It recreates the scene of her great grandmother giving birth as Dowling learned it through oral history. Every depicted detail

is important, as the painting "shows what [my great grandmother] took with her when giving birth: rifle, knife, dogs, blanket, and a Coolamon (wooden dish to carry the baby back in)."³⁹ The two Kangaroo dogs (Australian hunting dogs), sleeping amongst the flowers, provide protection from snakes and dingos. In the background a tall plume of smoke indicates where her husband is waiting for her return.⁴⁰

Budjarri Maroubra is a warm and loving portrait. I would argue that it possesses the qualities American artist Joan Snyder attributes to women's art: "a kind of softness, layering, a certain colour sensibility."⁴¹ The pastel carpet of flowers surrounding Dowling's great grandmother and her newborn soften the scene, giving it a dreamlike aura. The subject of birth is also particularly feminine. *Budjarri Maroubra* depicts a tender and precious moment while also emphasizing the autonomy of a woman birthing comfortably alone. It has a sense of caring, a quality Lucy Lippard sees in much women's art.⁴² In the statement for this work, Dowling speaks lovingly about the scene: "My Nana still brags about being born in a field of everlasting flowers as if it has some influence upon her living a long life."⁴³ Personal details such as this enliven and narrate the painting, making it autobiographical—another feature which Snyder sees as characterizing women's art.⁴⁴ The feminine sensibility of *Budjarri Maroubra* conveys Dowling's maternal love for her ancestors; it is a poignant portrait with a strong sense of narrative.

Budjarri means pregnant or birth in Noongar language; *Maroubra* refers to Maroubra station in the Gascoyne region of Western Australia. Dowling often titles her paintings in Noongar as a strategy of decolonization to undermine the imperial power of English. Using Noongar is also her way of maintaining its continuation, as she is acutely aware that many Aboriginal languages are disappearing because, like her grandmother, older generations were not allowed to speak these languages under assimilation policies and did not pass them on. According to Australian cultural theorists Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, "The intense attachment of Aboriginal communities to their traditional languages is an antilanguage strategy, excluding outsiders (White Australians, and even other Aboriginal groups) and bonding the community."⁴⁵ Hence, Dowling's use of Noongar titles cements her ties to Noongar culture.

The representation of the land in *Budjarri Maroubra* reflects some degree of influence from the well-known Australian Aboriginal artist Albert Namatjira in its realistic depiction and color palette. Dowling admires Namatjira's adoption of colonial artistic methods to represent his country.⁴⁶ While sometimes viewed as evidence of successful assimilation, Namatjira's art has also been seen in terms of its potential to bridge cultures.⁴⁷ Generally speaking, Aborigines see his art as a political forebear of the Aboriginal art movement.⁴⁸ In

Western Australia, the public and commercial success of Namatjira's paintings inspired the Carrolup mission to teach children to paint in the style of Namatjira. The Carrolup tradition, as it became known, continues to influence many contemporary Noongar artists.⁴⁹ Dowling directly associates Namatjira's work and its influence on her own work with the Carrolup tradition.⁵⁰

Adopting this realistic style as one of "the fair-skinned mob, urban and dispossessed," Dowling has had to face the authenticity debate.⁵¹ Aboriginal people living in cities are often confronted with issues of authenticity. For decades only "the most traditional" Aboriginal art was accepted in the Australian art world, even though the context of that authenticity could not be measured by the white audience at whom it was directed.⁵² The Australian art world's insistence on authenticity has locked Aboriginal art into a particular mode of production which, in fact, limits self-expression. It is sustained by the illusion that Aboriginal art emerges from a vacuum, isolated from other art and experiences, yet this is clearly not the case.⁵³ As with all art, Aboriginal art is responsive to surrounding influences. Insisting on alleged authenticity fossilizes Aboriginal culture. Conversely, being dynamically open to different influences maintains cultural vibrancy.⁵⁴

Dowling's *Authentic Self-portrait* (2000; Fig. 3) visually articulates the difficulties of being an urban-dwelling, fair-skinned Aboriginal woman. On the left-hand side of the painting, two white people question Dowling's Aboriginality: one stares accusingly while the other cups her gold-watch-adorned wrist over her lips to gossip. Words such as 'does not look Aboriginal' clearly indicate the stance of the two white onlookers. On the right-hand side, two Aboriginal people appear angry, with furrowed brows: one raises his hand while both appear to be shouting. Words such as 'fake' and 'thief' indicate their position. Dowling is caught in the middle between abuses from both sides. The composition is inspired by Hieronymus Bosch's *Christ Mocked* (c.1490–1500) whereby four disbelievers surround and torture the central figure of Jesus. However, unlike the solitary Christ, within Dowling's body are female relatives who give her strength; they are part of her and it is her duty to honor their memory. She can withstand and overcome the torments because she has her family to support her. Dowling declares, "I believe that I am the sum total of my ancestors and that they walk with me daily."⁵⁵

As a woman and an artist, Dowling feels a responsibility to honor, as accurately as possible, the voices of her ancestors.⁵⁶ Her need to protect their stories means they become as much her own as her ancestors'. She proclaims, "I talk about my grandmother and my mother's story as if it's mine as well."⁵⁷ One such story, which Dowling holds close to her heart and is only known through oral history, traces the life of her great-great grandmother, Melbin.

Melbin was the first Aboriginal person in Dowling's family to have contact with white people. She was taken by a white man because she could find the precious resource of water in the hot Western Australian desert using star patterns in the night sky.⁵⁸ The white man who took her, Edward Oliver, named her Melbin, after his favorite Australian city,



Fig. 4. Julie Dowling, *Melbin* (1999), acrylic, red ochre & plastic on canvas, 39 3/8" x 48". Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, CCWA 666, The University of Western Australia. © Julie Dowling.

Melbourne. Her Aboriginal name remains unknown to Dowling's family. It seems that Edward saw Melbin as an exotic charm he could profit from when he took his new wife to England to be paraded as a Savage Queen dressed in Western clothing, as shown in Figure 4 (1999). In this painting Dowling presents Melbin on her voyage to England, classified as an item of cargo with a tag around her left arm stating her name, destination and prescribed identification number. Melbin clutches onto some gumleaves as a fragrant reminder of home. European ships and chains encircle her head in an Aboriginal dot-style aureole which also contains bare footprints, stars, waterholes, European objects and small groups of people linked together. Beyond this pale halo, the background is filled with the faces of other Aboriginal people which directly confront the viewer. Melbin appears grave; yet she is not alone and she will not forget her country. When she returned to Australia, she must have grown frustrated with being treated like an object as she eventually made the painful decision to leave Edward, even though it meant leaving her daughter, Mary, behind. While Melbin rejoined her Aboriginal community, Mary became a domestic servant and nursemaid to Edward's new white family.

Dowling apotheosizes both Mary and Melbin in her portraits, *Mary* (2001; front cover), and *Warridah Melburra Ngupi*. In both large portraits, the women stand alone in the landscape, dominating the center of the paintings. With its

western associations with representations of elite rulers and saints,⁵⁹ the full-length standing pose connotes power and commands respect.

In *Mary*, Dowling's great grandmother stands comfortably alone in the land with a dingo standing loyally by her side. The dingo would have helped her hunt, as Mary was a kangaroo hunter.⁶⁰ Her bare feet blend into the land. She is dressed in European clothing, a white dress, suggesting virtue and purity, with a belt fastened around her waist. She is portrayed as an innocent yet independent young woman who is touched, but not impaired, by European culture. The bush tucker she holds firmly in one hand, a goanna (lizard), confirms that she maintains Aboriginal cultural knowledge; she is a woman of both worlds. Her expression is calm and reflective with her eyes directed towards a realm beyond the viewer. This portrait has a soft, nostalgic tone. Unlike most colonial portraits of Aborigines which used a similar style to present Aboriginal people in a romantic, doomed light,⁶¹ Mary appears brave and independent standing alone in the fiery desert. In this respect, it echoes the proud stance of men and women depicted in Dowling's portraits of freedom fighters, such as Walyer, an Aboriginal resistance fighter.⁶²

Mary's story is not uncommon; many children who were born to Aboriginal mothers and white fathers were deemed 'half-caste' and forced into servitude.⁶³ In Dowling's *Biddy, the Midwife* (2003), for example, an Aboriginal woman wearing a white pleated dress is depicted standing with her arms wrapped around her waist amongst a garden of frangipanis. Behind her head is a pale halo painted in an Aboriginal dot-style. As in *Everlasting Mollie*, Dowling often incorporates halos into her portraits of her ancestors and members of the Stolen Generations. The allusion to Catholic imagery promotes the deification of the depicted subject. In this way, it is comparable to Aboriginal artist Ron Hurley's fusion of Renaissance oil portraiture, European religious paintings and symbols from Aboriginal culture.⁶⁴ Hurley declared that colonialism in Australia "only creates martyrs of the people it sets out to destroy."⁶⁵ His saintlike portraits, like those of Dowling's, convey this sentiment.

The stories of the women Dowling paints are an important part of Australian history, and in sharing their stories, Dowling exposes aspects of Australian history that are often suppressed. Similarly, the African-American activist bell hooks has argued, "It is the telling of our history that enables political self-recovery."⁶⁶ Even when her subjects' stories tell of oppression, Dowling resurrects these subjects as survivors. Her lifelike portraits draw viewers into a close, emotionally invested relationship with her subjects. This connection enables viewers to see them as Dowling does: "Stories of our survival against oppression and the experiences of displacement from our lands are all embedded in the personal and social memories of Aboriginal communities in Australia and are within reach of the imagination of all."⁶⁷ With her strong, striking portraits, Julie Dowling celebrates Aboriginal women whilst continuing Aboriginal culture and cementing her own matrilineal ties to country. •

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Notes

1. Julie Dowling in John Bannister, *Interview with Julie Dowling* (Perth: J. S. Battye Library of West Australian History and National Library of Australia, 2005), sound recording, Interview conducted in association with the J.S. Battye Library of West Australian History. Recorded in Perth, W.A. 5 digital audio tapes (ca. 260 min.).
2. Ibid.
3. Dowling made this self-portrait in the Djeran season (April to May) of the Aboriginal Noongar calendar of the southwest of Australia. The Noongar seasonal calendar includes six different seasons in a yearly cycle. The Djeran season is known as the "ant season." It is when the temperatures finally begin to drop and the nights begin to cool. For more information see: Bureau of Meteorology, <http://www.bom.gov.au/iwk/nyoongar/djeran.shtml>
4. Note that there are many different ways of spelling Australian Aboriginal words in English as Aboriginal languages are oral languages. Noongar, for example, may also appear in writing as Nyungar, Nyoongar, Noongah. I have used the spelling 'Noongar' throughout this article for consistency and to match how Dowling herself spells it.
5. Julie Dowling in Kerrie Jean Ross, "Interview with Julie Dowling," ABC Radio National, 2007.
6. Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Auto/ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1997), 3.
7. Julie Dowling was named Australia's most collectable artist in 2002. See Judith McGrath, "Julie Dowling: A Different way to the Future," *Australian Art Collector*, 19 (2002): 38–40.
8. Julie Dowling, *The Doug Moran National Portrait Prize 2000/2001*, (Artist Statement) (Sydney: State Library of New South Wales, 2001), 22–23.
9. Diane Bell, *Daughters of the Dreaming* (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2002), 50.
10. Pat Baines, "Seeking Justice: Traditions of Social Action Among Indigenous Women in the Southwest of Western Australia," in *Words and Silences: Aboriginal Women, Politics and Land*, ed. Peggy Brock (Crows Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2001), 58.
11. Ibid., 85.
12. Defined by the anthropologist A. P. Elkin in Donna Leslie, *Aboriginal Art: Creativity and Assimilation* (Melbourne: Macmillan Art Publishing, 2008), 11.
13. John Chesterman and Heather Douglas, "'Their ultimate absorption': Assimilation in 1930s Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies* 28, 81 (2004): 47–58, 48.
14. Brenda L. Croft, "Laying Ghosts to Rest," in *Portraits of Oceania*, ed. Judy Annear (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1997), 21.
15. Dowling in Ross, "Interview with Julie Dowling."
16. Peter Read, *A Rape of the Soul So Profound: The Return of the Stolen Generations* (St Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 149.
17. Julie Dowling in Gabriella Coslovich, "Truth, in Black and White," in *The Age* (July 31, 2007), 11.
18. Mary Anne Jebb, *Oral History Interview Ms Veronica (Ronnie) Dowling* (Gosnells Knowledge Centre: City of Gosnells Aboriginal Oral History project).
19. Jebb, *Oral History Interview Ms Veronica (Ronnie) Dowling*.
20. Ibid.
21. Julie Dowling, *Occasional Address: Ms Julie Dowling*, Murdoch University Graduation Ceremony, Perth, Western Australia, March 27, 2006.

22. Lavinia S. Ryan, "Grandmother's Mob and the Stories [Interview with Julie Dowling]," *Artlink* 18, 1 (1998): 45–47.
23. Dowling, *Occasional Address*.
24. Carol Dowling, *Oottheroongoo (Your Country)*, Julie Dowling (Perth: Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2008).
25. Kootamiara Quob is run by the Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation. Kootamiara Quob in Noongar language means 'healing together strong.'
26. Dowling, *Occasional Address*.
27. Ibid.
28. Rachel Maza, "Julie Dowling," *Message Stick*, ABC Television, 2006, accessed September 7, 2011, <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/messagestick/stories/s1590834.htm>.
29. Ibid.
30. S. Flynn. "Issues for Aboriginal Men," In *Linking Men's Services*, (Adelaide: Noarlunga Health Services, 1986), 38–40.
31. Bain Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), 149.
32. Peggy Brock, ed., *Words and Silences: Aboriginal Women, Politics and Land* (Crow's Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2001), 9.
33. Ibid.
34. Brock, *Words and Silences*, 12.
35. Also spelt Noongar, as Dowling spells it.
36. Baines, "Seeking Justice," 73.
37. Jean Houston in Leah King-Smith, *Patterns of Connection: An Exhibition of Photo-Compositions with an Environmental Soundscape by Duncan King-Smith* (Northcote: Victorian Centre for Photography, 1992).
38. McGrath, "Julie Dowling: A Different way to the Future," 36.
39. Julie Dowling, *Winyarn Budjarri (Sorry Birth): Birth's End* (Artist Statement) (Perth: Artplace, 2005), accessed July 30, 2012, www.artplace.com.au/storytexts/winyarn.pdf.
40. Dowling, *Winyarn Budjarri*.
41. Joan Snyder in Lucy Lippard, "What is Female Imagery?" in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: Dutton, 1976), 86.
42. Lippard, "What is Female Imagery?" 89.
43. Dowling, *Winyarn Budjarri*.
44. Snyder in Lippard, "What is Female Imagery?" 86.
45. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind* (North Sydney, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1991), 206.
46. McGrath, "Julie Dowling: A Different way to the Future."
47. Ian McLean, *White Aborigines: Identity Politics in Australian Art* (Melbourne: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 98. See also, Ian McLean (ed.) *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art: Writings on Aboriginal Contemporary Art* (Sydney: Institute of Modern Art and Power Publications, 2011), 19–20.
48. McLean, *White Aborigines*, 98.
49. In the 1940s the Carrolup mission arranged for the children's paintings to be taken to England to be exhibited, although the children were never paid for their work. Many contemporary Noongar artists continue to be inspired by the Carrolup tradition. See Philippa O'Brien, "History and memory," *Artlink*, 19, 1 (2011), 56–59.
50. Bannister, *Interview with Julie Dowling*.
51. Julie Dowling in R. Ian Lloyd, John McDonald and Dean Hastie, "Julie Dowling," in *Studio: Australian Painters on the Nature of Creativity* (Singapore: R. Ian Lloyd Productions, 2007), 66.
52. Anne Marie Willis and Tony Fry, "Art as Ethnocide: The Case of Australia" in *The Third Text Reader on Art, Culture and Theory*, eds. Rasheed Araeen, Sean Cubitt and Ziauddin Sardar (London: Continuum, 2002), 124.
53. Judith Ryan, *Indigenous Australian Art: In the National Gallery of Victoria* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2002).
54. Hodge & Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream*, 114.
55. Dowling, *The Doug Moran National Portrait Prize*, 23.
56. Dowling, *Occasional Address*.
57. Mary Anne Jebb, *Oral History Interview Ms Julie Dowling* (Gosnells Knowledge Centre: City of Gosnells Aboriginal Oral History project).
58. Bannister, *Interview with Julie Dowling*.
59. See Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Cambridge: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), 73.
60. Dowling in Ross, "Interview with Julie Dowling."
61. Painted when theories of social evolution were dominant, colonial painters, such as Thomas Bock, Tom Roberts, Benjamin Duterrau and Robert Dowling (of no known relation to Julie Dowling), often drew on traditions of upper-class European portraiture to imbue the allegedly doomed Aboriginal people with a sense of dignity. See Margaret Maynard, "Projections of Melancholy," in Ian Donaldson & Tamsin Donaldson, eds., *Seeing the First Australians* (North Sydney: George Allen & Unwin), 92–109.
62. Dowling has created several portraits of Aboriginal freedom fighters. For example, she has portrayed Sambo (Saturday), Pemulwuy, Windradyne and Tunnerminnerwait—all of which were included in her exhibition *Widi Boornoo (Wild Message)* (2006). These portraits extend what Yorta Yorta artist Lin Onus began with his celebrated 'Musquito' series (1979–82). Ron Hurley similarly painted the Aboriginal freedom fighter Pemulwuy (2001).
63. Baines, "Seeking Justice," 53.
64. For example, see Hurley's portrait of portrait of Gooreng Gooreng man, George Everett Johnson (1989) with gold leaf.
65. Quoted in Bruce Mclean, *Nurreegoo: the art and life of Ron Hurley 1946–2002* (Brisbane: Gallery of Modern Art, 2009), 9.
66. bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (Hoboken: Routledge, 2008), 103.
67. Dowling, *Occasional Address*.

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PETAH COYNE

TAXIDERMY AND ECOFEMINISM

By Heather Cammarata-Seale

Known for her elegantly composed, physically substantial, and metaphorically elusive installations, Petah Coyne creates sculptures that are tenuous despite their stability. They are at once vulnerable and forceful, beautiful and bizarre, life-affirming and morbid. By inviting dichotomies into her work, Coyne not only acknowledges but embraces the fact that contradictions permeate all aspects of modern existence. Furthermore, due to her attraction to the decadent and morose, Coyne allows Romantic and Victorian undercurrents to infiltrate her art and influence her material choices. Particularly, Coyne features taxidermy, a product associated with antiquated mentalities of the nineteenth-century, in many of her sculptures. In *Untitled #1336 (Scalapino Nu Shu)* (2009–10; Pl. 3), for example, twenty-seven stuffed birds—ten roosting peacocks and seventeen hanging pheasants—fill the blackened branches of a Japanese apple tree, while *Untitled #1242 (Black Snowflake)* (2007–12; Fig. 1) features a single peacock.

Petah Coyne was born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in 1953. Her mother had a Master's Degree in Ikebana (the art of Japanese flower arranging) and her father was in the military, which led the family to move approximately fifteen times over the course of twelve years before settling in Dayton, Ohio. This itinerant lifestyle exposed Coyne to a variety of cultures, landscapes, and attitudes toward nature.¹ While living in tropical environments (the family spent several years in Hawaii), Coyne engaged with nature on a very personal level. Her family tended to a Japanese garden that was always filled with exotic birdlife, and she once helped save a beached whale.² Coupled with fond memories of visits to natural history museums, these formative experiences inspired Coyne's lifelong interest in nature, fostered a deep regard for all of its inhabitants, and were foundational for her artistic endeavors.

Coyne enrolled at Kent State University in 1972, later transferring to the Art Academy of Cincinnati, where she earned her degree in 1977. After graduation, she moved to



Fig. 1. Petah Coyne, *Untitled #1242 (Black Snowflake)* (2007–12), steel, chicken-wire, wire, cable, cable nuts, specially-formulated black wax, candles, handblown glass bulbs, taxidermy Black Shoulder peacock, tassels, velvet, plastic, sash weight, shackles, jaw-to-jaw swivel, 3/8" grade 30 proof coil chain, paper, 71" x 75" x 50". Private Collection. Photo: Christopher Burke Studio. © Petah Coyne. Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York.

New York City. Being sensitive to her environment, Coyne sought inspiration in her immediate surroundings. No longer surrounded by crystal-clear oceans, uninterrupted blue skies, and exotic wildlife, she trolled the streets around her Soho

neighborhood and elsewhere in the city. Most interesting to her were Chinatown, where she was taken by the many vendors selling produce and seafood, and Brooklyn, where she found in trash bins discarded taxidermied specimens (presumably discarded by museums and private collectors). Appalled that beautiful animal bodies were either being sold to passersby or buried in the trash, Coyne sought to remedy the situation. She purchased the dead fish and exhumed the stuffed animals from their dumpster graves and placed them in her artwork, giving them a proper burial and a new life. Coyne had found the material—both intellectual and physical—from which to create.

During an interview with the author, Coyne reminisced about how she was always taught that “you’re supposed to take what is thrown away and make something good from it, to make something beautiful.”³ Encountering rejected animal bodies deeply upset her. Not only did she feel as though these creatures had received “a terrible send-off,” she “felt so bad that [their previous owners] thought they were of no value.” Coyne decided that she “was going to make them valuable.” The inclination to bestow worth on pounds of dead fish and numerous pieces of unwanted taxidermy was fed not only by environmentalist inclinations but feminist ideologies. According to Coyne, the disregard she saw for these animals mirrored her generation’s sentiments toward women.

While attending the Art Academy of Cincinnati in the late 1970s, Coyne experienced this prejudice firsthand. She felt her male colleagues did not respect her as an artist or believe she could succeed in the profession because of her gender. She was determined to prove them wrong. Now, as then, as a female artist, Coyne strives to give value to that which has been deemed valueless, specifically women and animals. She accomplishes her goal by “tying things together and making strong bonds between all of us,” emphasizing the intrinsic worth of all living things.

For some feminist artists, a woman’s body is a battlefield on which political and religious wars about contraception, abortion, and power are waged.⁴ For others, the female figure is a place where Cartesian dualism can be challenged: where the spiritual and corporeal, the emotional and rational, or the natural and cultural meet, mingle, and merge. Taxidermy, comprising both animal and artificial materials, symbolically functions like the female body because it is also a site of such collision.

Deriving from the Greek words *taxis* (to arrange) and *derma* (skin), the term taxidermy refers to the act of re-arranging the skin of a deceased animal over a premade form in an attempt to make it look alive once again. Extensive knowledge of animal physiology and expert sculpting skills are needed to fashion a successful piece of taxidermy. First, the dead body of an animal must be broken down, skinned, cleaned, and chemically preserved. Next, its internal structure must be replicated. Metal armatures, wire, and steel rods replace the skeleton; clay, plaster, fiberglass, and plastic become muscle; glass beads serve as eyes, and varnish mimics saliva. The animal skin, however, retains its original form. An animal exterior now holds a human-made interior. What was once fully animal now only

appears so. Through taxidermy, the animal becomes a representation of itself, an object that merges artificial and natural materials. Taxidermy is therefore simultaneously scientific and artistic, a means of understanding the animal body and a conduit for admiring its beauty.

During the Victorian era taxidermy was a popular activity for the domestic woman. The *Ladies’ Manual of Art, for Profit and Pastime*, published in 1887, dedicates 91 pages to the art of taxidermy. This home journal urged educated and refined women to see art and all of its incarnations as a “source of profit as well as pleasure,” a means by which they could “earn a good livelihood and famous name” while “disseminating beauties everywhere.”⁵

Although this branch of taxidermy can be easily categorized as ‘decorative’ or described as a passive activity with aesthetic rather than intellectual applications, it also should be understood as a means for women to transgress culturally imposed boundaries. Publications such as *Women and Things, 1750-1950: Gendered Material Strategies*, and Richard Sennett’s *The Craftsman* aim to understand “the overlooked and often despised categories of women’s decorative arts and homecraft activities as sites of important cultural and social work,” demonstrating that these activities are actually forms of knowledge production because “making is thinking.”⁶

In the Victorian era, the emerging discipline of natural history was a male-dominated sphere. However, practicing taxidermy gave women the opportunity to break free from social borders and engage in the natural sciences. Studying, fashioning, and writing about taxidermy allowed the Victorian woman to step “outside the boundaries of domestic womanhood” and invade “the masculine world of specimen hunters and professional taxidermy.”⁷ Coyne, by making taxidermy a vital element in her sculpture, associates herself with both the (female) Victorian housewife and the (male) Victorian naturalist. The use of taxidermy enables Coyne to break free from prescriptions of feminine propriety, investigate the dualities of modern life, and conduct patriarchal interventions.

Coyne’s interest in the subversive aligns with the politics of ecofeminism. In the 1960s, feminist philosophies were extrapolated to encompass issues related to animals, which, like women, have historically been valued for their physical attributes.⁸ Ecofeminist Karen Warren claims that there are undeniable correlations between the cultural treatment of women, animals, and nature. She asserts that as ‘othered’ minorities, they are systematically controlled and oppressed by male-biased authorities. Ecofeminism “theorizes the interrelations among self, societies, and nature,” striving to integrate dualisms in order to produce a holistic society built on mutual respect.⁹

Coyne began filling her SoHo apartment with the taxidermy she recovered and the carcasses of dead fish purchased in Chinatown.¹⁰ After preserving the fish by dipping them in resin (Fig. 2), she strung them up throughout her living quarters and on the roof of her apartment. When neighbors started to complain about the stench, she was urged



Fig. 2. Petah Coyne, *Untitled #9-11* (1982), dead fish, squid, octopus, baby barracuda, hemp, clothespins, resin, 77" x 360" x 58". Temporary installation Photo: Petah Coyne. © Petah Coyne. Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York.

to tackle new projects in which she could honor and preserve animal bodies.¹¹ Encouraged to expand her material repertoire, it was at this point that her artwork began to evolve. She used wax to combine her findings—besides taxidermied animals, chicken wire, horsehair, silk flowers, ribbons, and old car parts are only a sampling of the found objects that Coyne shrouded in wax.

Untitled #850 (Three Peacocks) (1996; Fig. 3), features animal figurines, a lavish mass of curled satin ribbons, manipulated wire, and iridescent bows that have all been dipped in candlewax, shaped around a steel understructure, and hung from the ceiling. Perched on top of this chandelier-like object are three fabricated miniature peacocks, their feathers deceptively dripping with hardened wax. Fashioned in black and white, from both delicate and strong objects, *Three Peacocks* acknowledges that opposing binaries—such as the masculine and the feminine, the sturdy and the fragile—can come together to make a harmonious whole.

In the early 1990s, Coyne began to free her sculptures from their wax tombs, allowing them to directly engage with the world around them. A wax-less bobcat peers from behind a dark mass of flowers in *Untitled #1205 (Virgil)* (1997–2008; Pl. 4). In *Untitled #1180 (Beatrice)* (2003–08; Fig. 4), a flock of ducks tumble in and out of a conical cloud-like pile of black velvet and purple silk flowers while stuffed squirrels burrow down into its driftwood core. Fragments of some animal bodies are concealed by dark matter while others are revealed; meaning is simultaneously hidden and exposed; reality and fantasy become indistinguishable.

The parenthetical titles of these pieces refer to Dante Alighieri's fourteenth-century masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*, in which the characters of Virgil and Beatrice act as two of the author's guides through Purgatory, Heaven, and Hell, while he searches for Paradise.¹² Instead of portraying Virgil as a human, Coyne envisions him as a stuffed bobcat. While Beatrice is represented here as a piece of cast-wax statuary, which inconspicuously peers out from the apex of *Beatrice*, several



Fig. 3. Petah Coyne, *Untitled #825 (Three Peacocks)* (1996), specially formulated wax, pigment, steel birdcage, artificial peacocks, cable, ribbon, wire, 3/8" Grade 30 proof coil chain, paper towels, satin sleeves, Velcro, quick-link shackles, jaw-to-jaw swivel, 92" x 50" x 50". Installation view: High Museum of Art. Private Collection. Photo: Peter Harnoldt. © Petah Coyne. Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York.

taxidermied creatures attempt to navigate through the darkness that surrounds them. Furthermore, Coyne associates certain birds with particular people. In pieces dedicated to specific individuals, she allows taxidermied avian bodies to stand in for loved ones. The peacocks of *Scalapino Nu Shu* and *Untitled #1375 (No Reason Except Love)* (2011–12; Fig. 5) carry the memory of Coyne's cherished confidant, the late poet Leslie Scalapino. The peacock reappears in *Black Snowflake* (Fig. 1) to commemorate the life of Coyne's deceased father. Mallard ducks stand-in for Coyne and her older brother in *Untitled #927 (BZ+CD+Putt-Put)* (1997–98; Fig. 6).

By unabashedly associating an individual with an animal in these works, Coyne repackages ecologically minded Romantic ideals. Artists active in the early nineteenth century prided themselves on being social outsiders with a disdain for the ordinary.¹³ They opposed Enlightenment thinking by highlighting "the symbolic unity of the universe, in spite of all its apparent diversity."¹⁴ By reconnecting with nature, Romantics constructed a distinctive identity for themselves by discovering the animal within. Ultimately, their desire to interact with animals and re-establish links with nature



Fig. 4. Petah Coyne, *Untitled #1180 (Beatrice)* (2003–08), cast-wax statuary, taxidermy animals, taxidermy birds, silk flowers, silk/rayon velvet, specially formulated wax, felt, tree branches, tree bark, driftwood, cable, cable nuts, acrylic paint, black spray paint, chicken-wire fencing, metal hardware, pearl-headed hat pins, pigment, thread, wire, plywood, wood, vinyl, 136" x 109" x 121". Photo: Wit McKay. © Petah Coyne. Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York.

provided them with a means to assert their difference from dominant social norms.¹⁵ Coyne exemplifies this 'ecological sensibility' by forging a union between natural and cultural worlds. In many of her large-scale installations, the human figure is absent while the animal body is fully present. In the aforementioned *Virgil*, for example, Coyne allows a stuffed feline to embody a human alter ego. Therefore, by identifying with Romantic sensibilities and alluding to the history of feminist Victorian taxidermy, the use of taxidermy aids her in undoing distinctions that separate the human from the animal, while her tendency to associate individuals with animal counterparts brings awareness to the animal otherness within humans.

Although Romantic and Victorian allusions abound in her work, Coyne's use of taxidermy is best understood when looked at from a feminist perspective. Feminist artists—including Kiki Smith, Carolee Schneemann, and Ana Mendieta—have artistically associated the female body with the animal body. Smith's *Lilith* (1994), alluding to medieval Jewish folklore, depicts Adam's first wife as an animalistic woman. Brutally rendered in bronze, Smith perches Lilith



Fig. 5. Petah Coyne, *Untitled #1375 (No Reason Except Love)* (2011–12), taxidermy birds, taxidermy White Peacocks, taxidermy squirrel, chandelier, chicken-wire, silk flowers, specially formulated wax, black spray paint, pearl-headed hat pins, wire, quick-link shackles, cable, cable nuts, 3/8" Grade 30 Proof Coil Chain, jaw-to-jaw swivel, silk/rayon velvet, thread, ribbon, plastic, Velcro, silk/rayon ribbon, black sand from pig iron casting, resin, candles, 81" x 71" x 66 1/2". Private Collection. Photo: Christopher Burke Studio. © Petah Coyne. Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York.

upside down on the wall in an active crouching position. Looking as if ready to pounce, Lilith's stiff left arm morphs into a horse's hoof. Schneemann intimately interacts with her cat in the photographic series *Infinity Kisses* (1981–88), where the artist documents mornings spent embracing her beloved pet. In *Untitled (Silueta Series, Mexico, L02836)* (1974), Mendieta fills an impression of her silhouette that she has dug into the earth with animal blood purchased from the butcher, connecting herself to nature in multiple ways.

In the 1960s and 1970s, women artists began incorporating the body—especially their own—into their work. Body art, writes Laura Cottingham, is largely seen as a "form of self-assertion that doesn't end with the corporeal body, but actually begins there. Many of the artistic processes that have incorporated the artist's body are really about transcending it, getting outside of the corporeal limitations of the human frame."¹⁶ One way to accomplish this task is to extend the concept of the female to that of the animal.

Carolyn Merchant wrote in *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* that women have been associated with nature for centuries. This association is argued to be one of the many reasons why the subordination of women is accepted in Western patriarchal societies. In multiple mythologies and origin stories, the earth is portrayed as a caring mother and "bride whose primary function was to



Fig. 6. Petah Coyne, *Untitled #927 (BZ + CD + Put-Put)* (1997–98), horse hair, hair dye, taxidermy birds, wire, picture hangers, wire brads, tacks, 138" x 186" x 8". Private Collection. Photo: Wit McKay. © Petah Coyne. Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York.

comfort, nurture, and provide for the well-being of the male," while her non-human inhabitants are regarded as commodities.¹⁷ In the 1960s, a renewed interest in conservation and animal rights simultaneously emerged with the birth of the modern women's liberation movement.¹⁸ Merchant notes that "the conjunction of conservation and ecology movements with women's rights and liberation has moved in the direction of reversing both the subjugation of nature and women."¹⁹ In this context, taxidermy serves as an interesting medium for the female artist for it offers a way to transcend the physical borders of the human body, enter the realm of the animal, and comment on contemporary ecological and political issues.

Ecofeminist discourse aims to destabilize male-dominated hierarchies while asserting the value of subjugated minorities. As argued by Robert McKay, postmodern feminist interest in the body transfers to the animal, because both parties have been deemed valueless when compared to their white male or human counterparts.²⁰ This notion serves as the cornerstone of the ecofeminist argument that women and animals are bound together by a shared history of patriarchal oppression. Moreover, understandings of 'the female' and 'the animal' are biologically and socially constructed, causing both to serve as a place of passage where nature confronts culture.²¹ Both malleable constructs, 'the female' and 'the animal,' are, as Donna Haraway would say, "bonded by significant otherness" and able to define difference in postmodern society.²²

The art historian Steve Baker has noted that "many postmodern or poststructuralist artists and writers seem, on one level or another, to adopt or identify with the animal as metaphor for, or as image of, their own creativity. Whether it connotes a sense of alienation from the human or a sense of

bodily freedom and unboundedness, this willing taking-on of animal form casts the fixity of identity as an inhibition of creativity."²³ Taxidermy, as an artistic medium, aids artists in asserting their identity. Taxidermy signifies an individual's desire to be seen as distanced from typical notions of humankind—an 'othered' yet empowered individual.

In *Scalapino Nu Shu*, a gnarled and fruitless Japanese apple tree, whose trunk has been artificially blackened with colored sand, tries to root itself in the surrounding wooden floorboards but is only met with opposition. Seventeen stuffed melanistic pheasants limply hang upside down from the spindly lower branches. Their wings are fully spread, caught in motionless flight, as gravity causes them to descend toward the ground. The weakened tree also supports ten taxidermied peacocks, which delicately sit atop its branches. With furled tails cascading behind them, the birds gracefully gaze downward at their unfortunate brethren. Their iridescent jewel-toned plumage shines brightly in contrast to their somber surroundings. The external fragility of the peacocks is balanced by their sturdy interiors. Because their delicate

appearance is contradicted by their internal strength, these taxidermied birds exemplify Coyne's characterization of the way in which women are perceived by contemporary society. The respectful repurposing of the dead animal body as seen in Coyne's practice gives worth to that which has been deemed worthless. Through the materiality of taxidermy, Coyne not only fashions something beautiful from cultural detritus but uses the medium to transgress established patriarchal opinion.

Patriarchy, or the systematic institutional domination of women by men, has long served as an oppressive conceptual framework in society, producing a widespread male-biased mentality.²⁴ Historically, the Catholic Church is understood as a misogynist edifice.²⁵ A religious institution that adheres to strict masculine-driven hierarchies, Catholicism embraces an "archaic attitude toward women."²⁶ By defining Mary, the mother of Christ and the Queen of Heaven, as an eternal virgin, Catholic mythology denies her a sexual identity. As argued by art historian Eleanor Heartney, there is widespread belief that this perspective gives the Catholic Church "doctrinal justification for its refusal to deal honestly with female equality and human sexuality."²⁷ Through her art, Coyne—who is a lapsed Catholic—aims to destabilize the patriarchal beliefs Catholicism promotes by tapping into the Catholic Imagination and appropriating its imagery to subversive ends. More specifically, Coyne aims to empower women—and by association, animals—by challenging long-held Catholic opinions.

Heartney describes the Catholic Imagination as "an imagination that is not simply a matter of official church doctrine...but brings together the pomp and beauty of Catholic ritual and the seductiveness of traditional Catholic

art” while encouraging one to re-connect with the supernatural world of Early Christianity through representations of the physical body.²⁸ Notions of the body and images of the Madonna have fed Coyne’s conception of feminine perfection. As a young Catholic school girl, Coyne was taught that the Virgin Mary is the epitome of beauty and womanhood. Coyne grew up believing that all women should grow into this ideal. As she aged, however, she was only met with disappointment because she was never able to equal the Virgin’s faultlessness.

Heartney acknowledges that Coyne’s appropriation of the Madonna figure, as seen in pieces such as *Untitled #1093 (Buddha Boy)* (2001-03; Pl. 5), rebels against perfectionism.²⁹ In this piece, a statue of the Virgin Mary is encrusted with bows, ribbons, feathers, and silk flowers. More are strewn about the surrounding floor. The virgin’s arms serve as candlestick holders. Beads are meticulously draped over her now undistinguishable form. The statue, as well as these frivolous markers of femininity, is encased in white wax. All of these disparate objects are unified under a protective casing. *Buddha Boy* simultaneously embraces purity and extravagance. Coyne’s version of the Virgin Mary, who is both sterile and fecund,³⁰ criticizes Catholic perceptions of femininity by insinuating that the religion’s tenets force women to be burdened—or weighed down—by their sexuality. While Heartney fully investigates how Coyne challenges Catholic perceptions of female perfection, she does not wholly consider how Coyne’s respect for the body also feeds her attraction to taxidermy.

A number of stories concerning the body are integral to the Christian faith. Heartney writes that “Christ’s Incarnation in human form, his physical death and his bodily Resurrection, the Immaculate Conception and the Transubstantiation of the Eucharist in the Mass” are all central to the “drama of Christian history,” which “hinges on the moment when ‘the Word was made Flesh,’ and God became man in order to assume mankind’s guilt and absolve its sins.”³¹ Additionally, Catholicism (a sect of Christianity) holds an intrinsic morbidity—a predilection for fetishizing dead body parts and fixating on the body at the time of death—for it considers death the ultimate border, the moment of one’s passing and rebirth.³² Taxidermy, which is made from the corpse of a once living animal, allows Coyne to investigate Catholicism’s obsession with death, the body, and resurrection while asserting the importance of animals in the drama of Christian history.

The need to preserve is embodied by the practice of taxidermy. Anxiety surrounding losing something fragile to decay drives some to protect it from imminent deterioration. Being taxidermied, the stuffed animals in Coyne’s work embody paradox: they “beautifully capture the tension...between our fear and fascination with death” by revering the corporeal and metaphorically straddling the border between the living and the dead.³³ Historically, the preservation of bodies is “frequently associated with religious ceremonies and mystical rites.”³⁴ Various cultures believe that bodies which are carefully preserved after death provide the deceased with a means for peaceful passage into the afterlife.³⁵

Furthermore, Catholic churches have traditionally collected, preserved, and displayed bodily fragments of divine leaders, believing that the worship of these corporeal relics could “alleviate suffering” within their beholder and “transport worshippers to a higher spiritual plane.”³⁶

Although there is no evidence suggesting that animal bodies were revered as Catholic relics, Laura Hobgood-Oster, a professor of religion, argues that animals were once highly regarded in Christianity. Although many Biblical stories present animals as subordinate to man, such as Genesis 1:26: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth,”³⁷ Hobgood-Oster asserts that many early Christian parables place much importance on animals while celebrating them as agents of Christian divinity, not simply its objects.³⁸ “As the history of Christianity became intertwined with that of patriarchal and imperialistic Mediterranean and European powers,” in the Middle Ages, however, “the dominant forms of Christianity became increasingly anthropocentric.”³⁹ Animal-centric tales were left untold, and the integral role of animals in the religion was diminished.

Hobgood-Oster argues that animals were once portrayed as martyrs, spiritual guides, and exemplars of piety in alternative liturgies such as visual art, legends, and hagiographies.⁴⁰ For instance, Saint Francis of Assisi not only recognized the ability of animals to worship the almighty but acknowledged the special talent of birds to preach the word of God. Paul the Hermit, who lived in a cave for sixty years, was befriended by a plethora of animals that did God’s bidding by providing him with food, safety, and camaraderie. Saint Jerome’s best companion was a great lion, and the Holy Ghost, or the spirit of God, took bodily shape as a dove at the baptism of Jesus Christ. As a young girl in Catholic school, Coyne was influenced by stories such as these because she was taught that birds are intercessors, or agents of God, that possess the power to pass between the realms of the living and the dead as they usher souls to the afterlife.

Despite Christian theology promoting the divine capabilities of animals, the religion was deeply impacted by theories of Cartesian dualism during the Enlightenment and again during the Second Vatican Council (which took place in the early 1960s). During these critical moments in the Church’s history, Catholic leadership suppressed the religion’s sacramentality, or the belief that God is present in all creation.⁴¹ Ultimately, Christianity, “a religion centered on the idea of God becoming a male human being,” not only disempowered women but “played a great role in strengthening the idea that humans are not only unique but superior to other animals.”⁴² Coyne’s artwork, however, encourages us to look at animals from an early Christian perspective.

While on sojourn in Italy to visit a friend, Coyne spent one “weekend visiting dozens of churches and lighting candles,” spurring her friend to gift her a box of candles to honor her ritual weekend.⁴³ The wax from these candles gradually worked its way into Coyne’s art. Among other things, she used



Fig. 7. *Untitled #810 (Filipino Hat)*, (1995), specially formulated wax, pigment, artificial birds, chicken-wire, tassels, steel armature, cable, cable nuts, wire, artificial branches, quick-link shackles, 3/8" Grade 30 proof coil chain, paper towels, satin sleeves, Velcro, jaw-to-jaw swivel, 72" x 69" x 69". Private Collection. Photo: Dennis Cowey. © Petah Coyne. Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York.

it to encase "fragile birds in wax prisons," turning them into passive decorative elements, as seen in works such as *Three Peacocks* and *Untitled #810 (Filipino Hat)* (1995; Fig. 7).⁴⁴ In later works, such as the previously described *Scalapino Nu Shu*, Coyne's birds are no longer entombed in wax. Instead, her taxidermied peacocks are released from wax mausoleums and allowed to act as divine chaperones that can lead us toward the afterlife. Thus, by featuring pristine animals in her work, Coyne feeds off of a Catholic fondness for death and the body while asserting animal sacramentality. She makes visible animal presences which Catholicism once revered but has since deemed trivial.

Moreover, incorporating taxidermied birds, in particular the peacock, into her work has provided Coyne with a way to cope with death, mourn the loss of loved ones, and offer them a peaceful passage to the afterlife. The aforementioned birds of *Scalapino Nu Shu*, *No Reason Except Love*, *Black Snowflake*, and *BZ+CD+Put-Put* not only honor those lost but attempt to

provide them with a means to enter the hereafter. *BZ+CD+Put-Put*, featuring stuffed mallard ducks, commemorates the beautiful, chaotic, and too-short life of the artist's older brother. Coyne made this piece immediately after he lost his long battle with cancer. "It was the only thing to give me solace," says the artist. Mounted to the wall, multiple birds attempt to spread their wings as they try to free themselves from a synaptic tangle of black horsehair. Thick braids and delicate tendrils intertwine loosely at the work's core and tighten up as they near the entrapped avian bodies. Creating a lace-like neurological map from which the birds cannot free themselves, this seemingly diseased "two-dimensional mind projection" symbolically hovers between heaven and earth, offering either the deceased a plan by which to reach the afterlife or the living a path by which to reconnect with the departed.⁴⁵ These plans are not easily followed; the proposed routes are intricate and difficult, mirroring the emotional and physical turmoil Coyne and her brother experienced during his illness. Although the serpentine braids suggest a hopeful destination, they promise a threatening journey. No matter how hard they try, the taxidermied birds will always be stuck in a liminal state of being, between life and death, never able to reunite.

Stuffed birds also abound in *Untitled #1388 (The Unconsoled)* (2013–14; Pl. 6), where a silver pied peacock, a pair of snow geese, and a sulphur-crested cockatoo swoop in and out of a lush garden filled with red and white silk chrysanthemums. These blooms, reminiscent of those used in funerary arrangements, are suspended in four large gray freestanding frames. The full, sinuous arrangements of the silk flowers are ominously punctuated by

lightning-like silver branches. The flowers conceal what is behind them, while negative space surrounding the branches provides a glimpse behind the installation. One of the large frames is disconnected from the other three, creating a doorway into the mysterious unknown. The white peacock sits upon the corner of this break, beckoning visitors to enter, to discover the dark fantasy behind *The Unconsoled's* beautiful exterior.

These works allude to Coyne's conflicted emotions regarding the afterlife as well as conjure associations with contemporary literature. *The Unconsoled* is inspired by the work of Japanese authors Kazuo Ishiguro, Haruki Murakami, and Kōbō Abe. All three writers weave narratives that investigate dark spaces—both emotional and physical—one can enter but not easily escape, dark spaces that both console and confound their inhabitants.⁴⁶

The peacock is also indicative of Coyne's interest in the writings of Flannery O'Connor, who was a devout Catholic

and a peacock lover. In her short stories, mostly set in her native South, O'Connor finds beauty in the grotesque. She conceives of characters that are bigoted and deeply flawed but otherwise serve as prophets and "agents of grace."⁴⁷ She frequently employs the peacock, which sheds its tail feathers in summer and regrows them in the New Year, as a symbol of conflict and resurrection. O'Connor raised peacocks, pheasants, Muscovy ducks, and Chinese geese on her Georgia farm but had particular affection for her peacocks because they are simultaneously attractive and repulsive. With alluring plumage, threatening talons, and a repelling call, the peacock embodies contradiction, making it an appealing figure through which O'Connor—as well as Coyne—can challenge patriarchal dogma. Furthermore, by featuring taxidermied examples of the bird in her installations, Coyne enhances the peacock's paradoxical powers.

Although taxidermy is largely understood as morbid, Coyne sees it as hopeful. No longer using vintage taxidermy in her work, Coyne now purchases mounted birds that are ethically harvested from government-supported pen-raised programs. As described by the artist, these programs, which are run by humanitarians and hunters, rehabilitate injured birds that were wounded in the wild. If their injuries fully heal, they are released back into the wild to replenish depleted ecosystems. If they do not make a full recovery, they are left to live the rest of their days on protected grounds. (The administrators of these programs are given permission to use 1 percent of their birds as a source of food or income, making taxidermy a viable revenue stream.) These programs demonstrate respect for animals, providing them with a second chance at life, and "feed wildlife systems in America," Coyne says. "And I think that's a beautiful thing."

In Coyne's work, taxidermy serves as a site of passage, paradox, and healing. It provides the artist with a means to honor deceased humans and animals once their souls have departed. She can metaphorically mend rifts between life and death, love and loss, as well as man and animal with its material presence. In ecofeminist terms, taxidermy "help[s] heal the wounds of patriarchy where cognitive and behavioral strategies alone are not enough" by challenging binarism and "re-find[ing] cohesion in a shattered world."⁴⁸ By featuring taxidermy in her art, Coyne puts forth a new conception of social cohesion. She couples the abject and the beautiful while merging the human and the animal, all while respecting individual difference. By intervening in patriarchal belief systems, she encourages "movement toward healthy, life-enhancing, nourishing, and restorative values, beliefs, practices, and systems."⁴⁹ She creates an ecofeminist reality by undoing histories of oppression and finding holism in a world rife with multiplicity. •

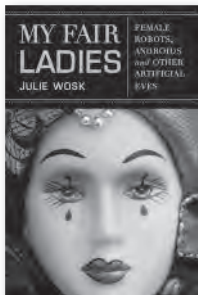
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WOMEN AND ART



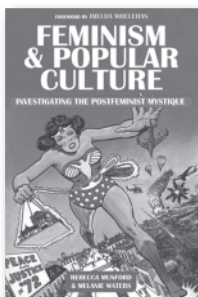
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SOOJA KIM'S WRAPPING CLOTH

THE AESTHETICS OF PARADOX

By Joo-eun Lee

The widely renowned South Korean artist Sooja Kim has been active on the international stage and drawn constant attention from the art scene since the 1990s. Born in Daegu in 1957, she did not leave Korea until finishing graduate school in Seoul in 1984. Since 1998 she has resided in New York, while working also in Seoul and Paris. This article on her early fabric pieces of the 1980s and 1990s focuses on their motifs, which stemmed from within Korean society of the 1970s to the 1990s, setting them apart from her recent works, which concern international issues. Western critics view these early works as dealing with the lives of Korean women,¹ including their attempt to break free from lives imposed on them by a patriarchal social system (Fig. 1), while reviews from the 2000s point out that later works address a worldwide insurgence of economic despair and migration.² The focus of this article is on her early works, which carry specifically Korean themes and reflect the lives of Korean women in the political, economic, and social context of Korea.

Sooja Kim spent her twenties in the 1980s immersed in the debate of political ideologies surrounding dictatorship and democracy in Korea. Instead of pursuing classical art forms such as painting or sculpture, she chose the internationally popular installation art. The unique characteristic of installation art is that the artwork is not complete when leaving the artist's studio, but rather adopts new meaning depending on its display environment and context.

Thus the cloth works and cloth bundles of Sooja Kim, such as *Mind and World* (1991; Pl. 7) could be interpreted in a certain way when placed 'here' and in another way when placed 'there.' In the sense that her sewn cloth works contain a uniquely feminine lyric and tactile sensitivity, they are understood in the same vein as many Western feminist works. On the other hand, her cloth bundles should be interpreted as representing the destiny of Koreans who must carry the past of their people wrapped inside them wherever they go, or in the



Fig. 1. Sooja Kim, *Cities on the Move-2727 km Bottari Truck 11 days Performance in South Korea* (1997), film still (single channel video). Collection of the artist.

context of nomadism, in the sense that the artworks do not settle in one place but wander around.

Kim clarifies that she is neither a nationalist nor a feminist, but rather started her work from a personal motivation.³ She says that the cloth material fit her sentiments well, touching on her dim memories, and while working with cloth she became immersed in its formative possibilities:

One day while sewing a bedcover with my mother, I had a surprising experience in which my thought, sensibility, and action at that moment all seemed to converge. And I discovered new possibilities for conveying buried memories and pain, as well as life's quiet passions. I was fascinated by the fundamental orthogonal structure of the bedclothes, the needle and thread moving through the flat surface, the emotive and evocative power of colorful traditional bedclothes.⁴

However, when her works are displayed in public they are not limited to the formative dimension. If we compare the artist to a mother who gave birth to her artworks, Kim's artworks have already left their mother's arms and started their own journey. Koreans view her works as 'ours' in the sense that they inhabit the Korean tradition, while to foreigners they sufficiently satisfy what they expect of Korean artwork. In short, Sooja Kim's works are viewed as a representation of Korea.

It is not surprising that an artist like Sooja Kim with a formal fine art education would actively respond to the global art world. Also, through her experiences of living and exhibiting in the cradles of Western art such as New York or Paris, she learned what foreigners liked to see from her works and which aspects they paid attention to. Therefore we cannot read her works only in the context of Korean art just because she uses traditional Korean cloth. Her artworks can fully express their meaning only when we consider both the local aspects of Korea and the ideas of the time in which she was working. Based on this premise, this paper attempts to explain Sooja Kim's works as intersecting with Western and Korean modernism as well as Western and Korean feminism.

The biggest single characteristic of twentieth-century Western modernism was the thriving of abstract art. Early abstract artists declared severance from past traditions and tried to suggest a vision for a better life through the new art form. However, by the end of the century, abstract art had lost its avant-garde status and even had become a target of criticism; for example, Shirley Kaneda, a feminist artist, criticized abstract art as stale academism.⁵ Modernist abstract art stressed purity and intellectuality while trying to separate art from external elements to achieve value neutrality. However, seeking purity in itself could not be neutral, because it segregates what can be accepted from what cannot be. On the contrary, its predominant valuing of what is pure, clear, and progressive led to the creation and categorization of what was substandard, ambiguous, and ignorant.⁶ For example, the early abstract artists Wassily Kandinsky, Kasimir Malevich, and Piet Mondrian all sought a universal truth that did not change in the ideological world of spirituality. For Kandinsky, abstract art was mental activity of the supreme caliber. Malevich removed himself to a state of zero and finally reached the level of absolute white on white canvas. Mondrian displayed the opposition and balance of duality through compositions of horizontality and verticality, universality and individuality, objectivity and subjectivity, male and female principles, etc.; however, Mondrian's dualism assigned a dominant role to universality, objectivity and male principles.⁷

Korean abstract painting took the form of monochrome paintings.⁸ Despite the chaotic social changes taking place in the 1970s, this main trend of Korean paintings pursued a pure spirituality. It excluded colors or shapes as much as possible, most valuing reaching oneness in the artwork, the artist's spirit, and the universe, in a meditative state. The reason behind this was the belief that the colors or shapes stimulated emotions and stirred up images, which prevented reaching one pure, unified world.

Seobo Park is representative of 1970s era Korean monochrome painters in Korea.⁹ He stated that the purpose of his work "does not lie in the repetition of lines itself, but rather the rhythm and movement involved when creating the piece. When only my breathing and movements are left, and the movements are naturally and instinctively automatic to a degree, it is at that point where I truly connect with my work."¹⁰ As expressed by Park, the goal of monochrome painting is to suppress the explosion of emotions, returning to nature by a repetition of simplicity on the canvas, breaking free from the body and reaching a pure state of mind, free from all ideas. This form of abstraction might have succeeded in the recovery of pure spirit, but in the end it stripped art of personality, freedom, and voices of diverse classes and genders.

It was during the administration of former president Jeonghee Park (1961–80) that Korea overcame the scars of the Korean War and truly moved toward modernization. Plans for western-influenced industrialization and urbanization began to exert pressure and conflict on the established societal relationships of Korea's traditionally planned towns. To successfully accomplish the plans for modernization despite such challenges, the Park administration called for a mentality that would unite the people by establishing a strong national identity of being 'Korean.' This became a crucial driving force behind economic development, and it was this sense of unity and identity that aided in managing the struggles arising from the shift to westernized modernization.¹¹

The emphasis on being Korean was expressed politically through a strong anti-communistic attitude that repelled North Korea, while economically it was portrayed through the will to overcome poverty. People sang a workers' song that said, "Let's live to the fullest"; their pledge of allegiance swore them to serve the nation and its people; the Charter of National Education found its purpose in the restoration of the people; their reliable Korean soldiers would defeat the red soldiers of North Korea and, if necessary, die to defend their beautiful Korean land. In this era of modernization where each and every citizen was unified by the thread of national identity, it is no coincidence that paintings portraying one unified color on the canvas earned great popularity.

Even among monochrome tones, white earned the most interest. This can be related to the purity representing the symbolic white clothes of the Korean people, the moderation stemming from Confucius's ideals, and the abstinence that accompanies a mindset to overcome poverty. Such symbolic ideals were imbedded within the art of the era, and were in fact heading towards the same direction as proposed by the modernization projects.¹² While universalism is the foundation of Western modernism, you might say the corresponding value of Korean modernism is nationalism. In the process of accepting Western modernist art, Korean modernist art internalized nationalism, creating a Korean style of modernism.

In 1980, the assassination of President Jeonghee Park and the advocacy of democracy revealed the shaky balance of the movement toward modernization. The rapid growth of industry had not been accompanied by a parallel development



Fig. 2. Sooja Kim, *Thread Routes-Chapter 1* (2010), film still (16mm film, transferred to HD format). Courtesy of Kukje Gallery and Kimssooja Studio.

in freedom of thought for citizens but rather by the suppression of personal freedom. The art world was similarly affected, so that the artists of the 1980s whose work was called *minjoong* art (art of the people) criticized the monochrome painters, stating that they pursued the 'Korean Spirit' in the realm of art only. They believed that abstract art was too caught up in the art form itself and ignored the realities of the time.

Minjoong art was critical of the industrialization and capitalism that had turned the nation of Korea upside down. These works generally portrayed positive images of the past, representing traditional values and images of the countryside. It can be inferred that the prevalence of traditional houses, farmlands, and people in *hanbok* (traditional dress) in paintings of the 1980s was an attempt to find the unscathed roots of the Korean people in a modern day safe from foreign powers. Different from the *minjoong* artists, who tried to find a collective identity, Sooja Kim adopted Korean traditional fabrics in an attempt to find the sense of individuality that was lost in their group mentality.

While in college, Sooja Kim's works were mainly flat compositions with all-over painting techniques. Cloth first appeared in Kim's works in 1983, the year in which the artist herself considers that her art activity began full scale. She had been searching for some mundane elements to express through her canvases, and one day, while she was sewing a blanket with her mother, she recognized the new artistic possibility of cloth.¹³

At first, she created flat works, sewing primary-color square cloth pieces together. From our own clothes to bedclothes, cloth cannot be separated from human life and is the most mundane and the most private material. Clothes are an especially important visual clue to what kind of person is

wearing them and are therefore related to the person's identity. When we relate clothes to identity, the identity is not understood as something internal and fixed but rather is dependent on an outer image that is endlessly changing. In *Portrait of Yourself* (1985) colorful pieces of cloth from clothing were sewn together and intended to bring up memories mixed together to compose 'you.'

By the 1990s, Sooja Kim discontinued her sewing technique in favor of using only unsewn cloth. While the works of the 1980s mainly used leftover quilting pieces, the works of the early 1990s featured the crumpled attributes of the cloth. In *Mind and World*, for example, crumpled lumps of cloth pieces are pasted together on an oval base. Considering that the artist named other similar works *Heart Flower* (1991) and *Towards the Flower* (1992), the

artist may have created these works with flowers in mind. Not only does each clump of cloth resemble a flower, but the whole shape of the work reflects a large flower form.

Unlike the monochrome paintings, which tried to combine mind and the world as one, Sooja Kim's *Mind and World* comprises diverse shapes and colors. Its circular base seems to symbolize both the world and an all-encompassing mind, as in the title. This is not a world advocating a Utopia of a single color, because nobody living in this world is identical to anyone else, and no memory can be treated the same as others.



Fig. 3. Sooja Kim, *Thread Routes-Chapter 1* (2010), film still (16mm film, transferred to HD format). Courtesy of Kukje Gallery and Kimssooja Studio.

Feminist artists in the United States, such as Miriam Schapiro in the 1970s, worked with cloth premised on the fact that women are more familiar, or perhaps even intimate, with this material. Calling her work "femmage,"¹⁴ Schapiro stripped the practical uses from the cloth completely, then pasted it onto a canvas, arranging it in geometric abstractions.

This she did on a huge scale, like a modernist work. Through these works she attempted to get rid of the prejudice in which cloth is deemed an insignificant material used in cottage industries, and ultimately to raise cloth works from the domestic realm to the level of modernist art.

Sooja Kim's flat cloth works also demonstrate a modernist abstraction—considered a masculine language—in their forms.¹⁵ However, many viewers are still reminded of the unique femininity of cloth. In his review of Kim's 1991 exhibit, art critic Kwangsu Oh sees Kim's works as reflecting women's internal history that has been handed down from generation to generation through the medium of cloth:

When we stand in front of Sooja Kim's works, we are filled with the same emotions as we feel when we are looking at the recurrence of the existence that is connected to our mother and her mother. We witness not simply the material of cloth but the private history of women's lives that are mediated through the cloth.¹⁶

In 2010, Sooja Kim worked on a film called *Thread Routes*. For this project, she travelled around the world following people's stories related to cloth and recorded weavers working in various locations. Figure 2 shows women in Peru spinning in a traditional way, and Figure 3 shows Peruvian women dancing during a festival, whose shadows reflected under the sun resemble a spool of thread, symbolic in that thread is directly connected to women's lives.

Why is it that cloth and thread bind women? Above all, perhaps, is the action of touching cloth and thread as has always been done in women's labor: making cloth by weaving warp threads and cross threads, sewing a blanket, decorating a cushion, making clothes. All these tasks were domestic labor that fell naturally into the hands of women, who mostly stayed home to look after children. The division of labor as domains of outside work and inside work also divided the sexes into spatial concepts and was fixed to different gender roles where men took charge of work in the public sphere, and women in the private sphere.¹⁷

This strict division of the public and private spheres was the way of the Victorian era in the nineteenth century, when women had status only at home. Griselda Pollock has discussed how female images in modern paintings have been associated predominantly with private areas or domestic spaces.¹⁸ In today's multilayered society, the boundary between the public and private spheres is far more ambiguous. Despite this fact, unconsciously pairing cloth with femininity implies that people continue to think of the private sphere as feminine, well into this century. Making the private non-private is an act of rejecting the private = feminine equation, and the reason Sooja Kim's works are associated within a feminist context originated from the nonprivatizing of her works by displaying textiles blankets in public places.

An example of this is the blankets she spread out in the Oksan Lecture Hall valley in Kyungju in 1994. As the title *Lying on Nature* (Pl. 8) indicates, the colorful blankets are placed as if they are reclining humans in a natural background.

Unlike the internationalized city of Seoul, the background of this work is a lecture hall built to honor the early-sixteenth-century Confucian scholar Eonjeok Lee, from the middle period of the Joseon Dynasty.¹⁹ This place symbolically reflects extremely conservative and paternalistic Confucian ethics. In such a place proudly displaying blankets that belong in the cupboard of a woman's room suggests feminism. The blankets belong to the private sphere, related to nighttime, sleep, and sexuality, and symbolize a woman's quarters and her trousseau. *Lying on Nature* reflects the frustration and suppressed desire of women of the Joseon Dynasty, who were confined to the home. They suffered extreme control over their behaviors, and the artwork shows them bursting out of their roles through the spread-out blankets under the clear, open air.

It was not only in the Confucian society of the Joseon Dynasty that women's public activities were controlled. In his modernizing project for Korea, President Jeonghee Park imposed, as the role model for modern woman, a traditional Joseon woman, Saimdang Shin.²⁰ It would seem contradictory to choose such a woman—who embodied the ideal woman following the three Confucian duties of women, wise wife, wise mother, and dutiful daughter-in-law, as well as royal wife—as the model for the modern Korean woman, because this doctrine runs counter to progressive modernization. However, in a society where one vast patriarchal family is the ideal of the modern nation-state, Saimdang Shin—who can indoctrinate such a patriarchal value—was the perfect person to personify this ideal. In order to make a man a strong soldier who devotes himself to defending the nation and developing the economy, a woman who devotes herself to being a wise mother and a good wife was more in demand than a woman who competes with men.

While Western feminism was moving on a richer paradigm, discussing an identity of nature and culture, gender and the gender gap, in Korean feminism, discovering one's female identity was not the most important issue. Rather, it was discussed as a secondary issue mixed with the question of the people and nationalism.²¹

A work by another woman artist, Jungyeob Jung's *Housewife 1* (1991; Fig. 4), is emblematic of this ideal. In this work, a housewife is shown as a poor job-seeker who watches the advertisement board. In fact, this painting is not just about the life of an individual woman. This housewife is a collective person coded to represent the face of a tired and impoverished people, class issues of labor exploitation, and an unequal social structure. She is not a particular woman but rather a being beyond a gender concept who represents a home-protector called 'mother' or 'wife,' a refuge, and a tenacious national link in the fence of life.

Here national identity coming before gender identity suggests that the private sphere belongs to the public sphere, uniqueness belongs to generality, and the individual belongs to the nation.²² In *Housewife 1* the voice of national identity is so strong that the voice of a female sub-identity can hardly be heard. Sooja Kim's works in the 1990s exposed a female identity that had so far been kept silent under such an air of national discourse.

In *Lying on Nature* Kim selected a place with an air of Confucianism, namely the Oksan Lecture Hall, in order to bring out the memory of our great-grandmothers and their grandmothers in the Joseon Dynasty, living confined to their homes. Starting from this memory Kim's installation raises a question of patriarchal traditions that have continued in today's middle-aged women who grew up in the Korean modernization era, learning the national norm through such figures as Saimdang Shin. The blankets that lie in the wide-open land and look as if they are yearning for freedom are the face of female identity wanting to be liberated from oppression.

The work was not always understood as a woman's attempt to be liberated from the Confucian tradition, but instead as conveying the experience of a human becoming one with nature through the traditional medium of cloth. The art critic Jaegil Yu wrote, "*Lying on Nature* shows the colorful man-made cloth object d'art becoming one with nature, and is the expression of life transcending time and space."²³ However, the person who can feel oneness with nature beyond time and space in the traditional Confucian story is a male subject, not a female one.

A still image from Sooja Kim's 1997 film *Cities on the Move* (Fig. 1) shows the artist's back; after collecting all the blanket covers and putting them in cloth wrappers, she is sitting on the bundles. This scene, in which the artist herself becomes one of the bundles intimates that she is leaving for someplace.²⁴ Her features face away from the viewer, as if she does not want to leave any attachment to what has passed. This cloth wrapper expresses metaphorically the sentiment of escaping from the home that confines women.

By leaving home, this woman shows that she is not continuing her social roles as a wife and mother as imposed upon her under the old patriarchal family system. She is starting on her journey to become a new subject of her own life, deserting the life of a person who could find identity only at home and in relation to a man. But here, leaving also symbolizes wandering. The figure absent-mindedly squatting on the bundles also implies that the woman who has left home does not have a place to go. Since settling down in a new place means being restrained by another framework, the released female self is destined to endlessly wander.²⁵

The art critic Sungwon Kang wrote that the sewing in Sooja Kim's works symbolizes weaving foreign things together, and that the willpower to unify those foreign things at one level comes from a universalism whereupon modernism is founded.²⁶ In 1987, Sooja Kim made a work called *Black*, for which she painted all but a few sections of multi-colored cloth black, causing one to wonder if the artist had turned to monochrome. However, the crucial clue to reading this picture is the small portion that is not painted black, but left as it is. This small part is left to testify that the black portion is not originally black but painted black. The black paint hides all the individual colors of the original cloth pieces and unifies them as a single indistinguishable color. It is a situation where one domineering value is covering other individual values. *Black* seems to say that the monochrome paintings in Korea from the



Fig. 4. Jungyeob Jung, *Housewife 1* (1991), oil on canvas, 45 1/2" x 35 3/4". Collection of the artist.

1970s to 1980s are not purely a single color but a single color as an oppressed state where many colors are not being expressed.

Since 1993 Sooja Kim has often used the word 'deductive' in the title of her works. The word, as applied in philosophy, means a process of reasoning deduced from a general concept to reach a specific concept. The artist said that she referred to her cloth as a 'deductive object' in the sense that decorating objects with cloth confirmed the structure of the objects but did not change the original frame.²⁷ This means that an object with general meaning assumes a special meaning depending on the context, without losing its own characteristics.

Deductive Object of 1993 (Fig. 5) is a wall project that the artist worked on for the P.S.1 Gallery program while she was staying in New York that year. She put cloth pieces in all the cracks of one entire white wall, but while the cloth pieces are actually squeezed into the cracks, it appears as if they were being squeezed out. It appears that diverse values with their own colors are springing forth from the cracks as if voicing their own sounds. Or it may be that the white background is being disguised as not being seen or not having color, and concealing all the other colors behind the wall.

Considering that this work was created and exhibited in New York, one might interpret that the hard surface of the white wall is the white male sphere, the mainstream group of Western society. In that sense this work reflects a reality in the



Fig. 5. Sooja Kim, *Deductive Object* (detail) (1993), installation view. Courtesy of the artist and P.S.1 Gallery.

United States wherein the Western white male is the mainstream, and the female artist of color is the stranger who cannot be absorbed into the mainstream. The only places she can occupy are in the cracks of mainstream society.

In 1997 Sooja Kim participated in the Istanbul Biennale and displayed the same wall artwork. Historically, Istanbul has been a city which acted as both a gate and a bridge, where the Eastern and Western cultures met in a culturally mixed area. It was also home to the Greek Orthodox Church, which over time was replaced by Islamic culture. Utilizing such characteristics of the city, the 1997 Biennale was centered on the concept of the coming together of the East and the West.²⁸ *Deductive Object* suggested to the viewers at this exhibit that the meeting of the West and the East might not be equal from the start.²⁹ It threw out to the viewers such metaphorical questions as: Was the meeting of East and West similar to the squeezing of cloth pieces into the cracks of the huge white wall?

Perhaps we are witnessing here the 'in-between space' described by Homi Bhabha. The phrase defies the expectation that a certain culture could be pure. It not only is an encounter

of domestic and foreign objects, but also an activity center for complex and ambiguous exchanges such as collision, merging, borrowing, and adaptation.³⁰ An in-between space is the state of a culture with mixed identities while being an acculturation zone. All cultures from all ages are the result of mixture, of course, but when a culture is exposed to foreign influences due to its inferior position, acculturation is more easily achieved. By such definition, modern Korean society is a model of acculturation.

Sooja Kim also used the title *Deductive Object* for a work in which she spread out a bedcover on a café table as if it were a tablecloth. In 1995 she installed the work in both the Boymans Von-Beuningen Gallery café in Rotterdam, and Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh. The people in both cities actually enjoyed meals and tea on this exotic and unique "tablecloth," not realizing that what they were seeing atop the table was in fact 'used' bedclothes.³¹ Had they known, they may have been embarrassed; this can be compared to a situation where people are drinking water from Duchamp's readymade *Fountain* (1917), a urinal.

Foreign viewers strived to view only the unique and different aspects of Korean art that they could not find in Western works to label as being 'local.' To express local Korean characteristics is sometimes a burden to Korean artists, as there exists no specific ideal that one can label as being in itself 'Korean.' To Koreans, something 'Korean' could be recognized only when Western civilization became the dominant paradigm of the land. In other words, Korean

characteristics could only truly be distinguished when compared or juxtaposed with factors that are not Korean.³²

Ultimately, what foreigners consider Korean and what Koreans consider their own are one and the same. If Sooja Kim's blankets were seen as something Korean, the reason might be because blankets were signified as a sign of otherness. Anyone who cannot read the paradoxical message from Sooja Kim's blanket works and sees them only with Korean characteristics, even if she or he is Korean, is someone who has internalized the "Orientalist" view.

When we pay attention to the colors used in Kim's works, we can see that juxtaposition and contrast are the main expressive methods she applies. Strong color contrast, such as blankets quilted with complementary colors of red and green, and yellow and purple, is Sooja Kim's aesthetic language. Primary-colored cloth and cloth wrappers of pink, red, and green sparsely placed between gray buildings in a gray city look like primary-colored paints imprinted on black-and-white pictures, creating a clear and refreshing contrasting effect. It is as if she is accusing the cities of being painted in a single achromatic color during the Korean modernization

period, and implying that the era of resurrecting individual colors has approached.

The ideology of homogeneity for modernization projects has always had the element of invisible, achromatic colors. The way the ideology works can never be featured as primary colors, which are too obviously visible. That is why primary colors are a purer state than black and white, and so is the mixture of colors a more pure state than a single color. Through colorful cloth wrappers Sooja Kim is showing an ideal world view where diverse values co-exist.

Sooja Kim's works have been interpreted as being based on Asian women's sentiments from the viewpoint of nomadism. This paper is rather flexible in attempting to understand Kim's works from such a stereotyped viewpoint. Understanding of her works can vary widely, depending on how the works are situated and on the interpreter's viewpoint or intention. This paper looks at Sooja Kim's works of the 1980s and 1990s only, from the context of Korean culture. As Western modernism dreamed of a Utopia of a general and unchanging purity, Korean modernism idealized a collective homogeneity called 'nation.' Such homogeneity not only contains masculine rhetoric based on patriarchal Confucianism, but is founded on an order that silences the private sphere and does not respect elements of pluralistic differences. This paper focused on the way Sooja Kim's works respond to such orders in a paradoxical way.

These works of Sooja Kim are feminist because her material, cloth, is associated with femininity. However, they advocate feminism not because they are cloth projects but because of the way she uses this material. Also, since cloth wrappers are uniquely Korean, Sooja Kim appears to employ an inherited Korean women's tradition. She is a modern artist, though, whose cloth wrappers are not in the context of inheriting tradition, but rather parody tradition by being disguised as a traditional work.

Depending on which context the work is placed in, Sooja Kim's work is critical: of traditional Korean Confucianism by disguising itself as tradition, or of the Western viewpoint that looks upon her works as having an Eastern appearance. •

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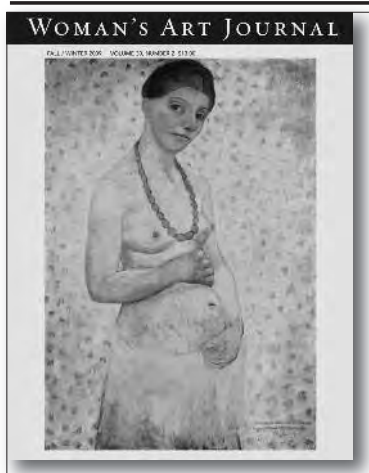
Notes

1. Clive Adams, "Sooja Kim: Wrapping the Bundle," *Contemporary Art* 3 (Spring 1996): 41.
2. Paul Ardenne, "Kim Sooja: Stitched into Our Time," *Art Press* 286 (January 2003), 30.
3. In the opening statement for her website project, she has written: "A one-word name (Kimsooja) refuses gender identity, marital status, socio-political or cultural and geographical identity by not separating the family name and the first name." Sooja Kim, "Action One: One-Word Name Is an Anarchist's Name," July 14, 2003, New York. <http://www.kimsooja.com/action1.html>, referenced June 2014.
4. In 1983 Sooja Kim rediscovered the new artistic possibility of cloth. Sooja Kim, "Artist's Note," in *Kim Sooja*, exh. cat. (Seoul: Gallery Hyundai, 1988), 9.

5. Shirley Kanada, "Painting and Its Others: In the Realm of the Feminine," *Arts Magazine* 65 (Summer 1991), 58–64.
6. For example, Alfred Barr used the word 'purity' for abstract art, but 'adulteration' for other paintings. He justified exclusive discourses on abstract art in the name of pure form. Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (1936), *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1966), 11–13. On the politics of abstract art, see also Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism; Other Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1997).
7. Piet Mondrian, "Nature and Spirit as Male and Female Elements," Hans L. C. Jaffe, *De Stijl* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1971), 88–89.
8. Jun Lee, "The Artistic Characteristics of Korean Abstract Paintings," in *The Spirit of Korean Abstract Paintings*, exh. cat. (Seoul: Ho-am Gallery, 1996), 11–18.
9. Among those artists known for monochrome abstract paintings are Youngwoo Gwon, Seobo Park, Seungwon Seo, Hongseok Kim, Dongyup Lee, Hwang Huh, Namshin Gwak, Myungroh Yoon, and Oksun Jin. Kwangsu Oh, *Modern Korean Art History: From the Introduction and Settlement to the 1990s* (Seoul: Yeolhwadang, 2000), 231.
10. Jun Lee, ed., *The Spirit of Korean Abstract Painting*, 104.
11. Eun-sil Kim, "The Cultural Logic and Pros and Cons of the Korean Modernization Project," in Ji-hyun Lim et al., *Fascism Within Us* (Seoul: Sahm-in, 2000), 113–15.
12. Kwangsu Oh, *Modern Korean Art History*, 231.
13. Sooja Kim, "Artist's Note," in *Kim Sooja*, exhibition catalogue (Seoul: Gallery Hyundai, 1988), 9.
14. The term "femmage," coined by Miriam Schapiro referring to the cutting and sewing of cloth, applies to the collage art form to characterize cloth work mainly done by women. Norma Broude, "The Pattern and Decoration Movement," in *The Power of Feminist Art*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 216.
15. In recent years, there has been a lot of research towards uncovering gender discrimination inherent in the modernist abstract art that advocated pure formalism. Such research revealed that abstract art did not escape from the context of reconfirming and enhancing dichotomous thinking in general, such as logic vs. intuition, reason vs. emotion, material vs. spirit, culture vs. nature, subject vs. object, West vs. East, male vs. female, etc., by the artists who created abstract art or the critics who added historical meaning to it. What is pure, exact and universal—as modernism promotes—is in reality one of the discourses that reflects androcentric prejudice, and was accomplished through the process of oppressing and excluding feminine sensitivity. Based on this understanding, abstract art, especially geometric abstraction, became the representative male discourse that excluded intuition, emotion, and subjectivity from art in favor of logic, science and objectivity. See for example, Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1997).
16. Kwangsu Oh, "Sooja Kim's Latest Work: Returning to the Archetype," in *Sooja Kim's Private Exhibition Catalogue* (Seoul: Gallery Hyundai, 1991), n.p.
17. Michelle Rosaldo, a social, linguistic, and psychological anthropologist famous for her studies of the Ilongot people in the Philippines and for her pioneering role in women's studies and the anthropology of gender, has suggested that sexual asymmetry should be understood not by the biological difference between a man and a woman but in relation to the fact that, in most traditional societies, a woman spends most of her adult life in giving birth and raising children. These biological responsibilities make women less participatory in public life, and this fundamental element divides women and men into the private and public spheres. See this discussion in Eun-sil Kim, "Issuing Feminist Anthropology in the

Private and Public Sphere: Cross-cultural Argument," *Women's Studies Review* (Seoul), no. 13 (December, 1996), 379–83, 398–99.

18. According to Griselda Pollock, the spaces of femininity operate not only at the level of what is represented, the drawing-room or sewing-room. The spaces of femininity are those from which femininity is lived as a position in discourse and social practice. They are the product of a lived sense of social location, mobility and visibility, in the social relations of seeing and being seen. Femininity is not the natural condition of female persons. It is both the condition and the effect. See Griselda Pollock (1988), "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1994), 50–90.
19. The Joseon Dynasty lasted over 500 years. Historians divide it into four parts: the Early Period, from 1392 to the end of the 15th century, the Middle Period refers to the 16th and 17th centuries Joseon; the Mature Period implies the 18th century Joseon; and the Late Period is from the early 19th century up to the beginning of the 20th century.
20. Korean female middle and high school students in the 1970s and 1980s were taught about Saimdang Shin's female virtue as a guideline of women's education. Jihyun Park, "From Painter to Mother: A History of Discourse on ShinSaimdang," *Dongyang Studies in Korean Classics*, vol. 25 (2007): 47.
21. Korean feminist art emerged from the foundation of the people's art in the mid-1980s. See for example, Jinkyung Oh, "Feministic Study on Korean Women's Art of the 1980s," in *Journal of History of Modern Art*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2000).
22. The public/private dichotomy is related to Jürgen Habermas's two-level social theory. In the 1990s feminists criticized the public/private dichotomy and tried to suggest an alternative. Nancy Fraser criticized Habermas for dividing economy and family, public and private sphere, materialistic and symbolic reproduction, and the systematic and the living world. He justified male control over society and female subordination. In response to this, Iris Young and Anne Phillips pointed out that the division of the public and private spheres is not itself the problem, but hierarchical dichotomy and social separation between the public/private, rational/emotional, masculine/feminine and general/specific is the issue. Mikyung Jang, "Feminist Modernists: Dismantling Public/Private Dichotomy and Feminism Citizenship," *The Trend of Modern Criticism Social Theory*, compiled by Hogi Kim (Seoul: Hanul, 2001), 72–94.
23. Sooja Kim, *Art Vivant Korean Modern Artist Series*, (Seoul: Sigongsa, 1994), n.p.
24. "The human body is the most complicated cloth wrapper," says the artist. "Soo-ja Kim, Wrapping the bundle," in *Contemporary Art*, vol. 3 (Spring, 1996): 40.
25. In the fall of 1994, Sooja Kim performed by loading numerous cloth wrapped bundles in a truck and driving across Korea for 11 days. In 1999 she participated in the Venice Biennale with her truck loaded with cloth wrapped bundles, and in the same year she participated in *Cities on the Move*, Louisiana-Copenhagen-London travelling exhibits. Sooja Kim's cloth wrapper truck drew the attention of Westerners for its nomadistic identity. Yeongchul Lee, "Resurrection of Venice through Nomadism," *Monthly Art* (Seoul) (July, 1999), 65–73.
26. Sungwon Kang, "Everyone Has His Own Truth-Installation Expression, Subjectivity and Culture," *The Space* (June, 1996), n.p.
27. Youngtaik Park, Interview with Sooja Kim, "From Flat surface to Three Dimensional Bottari," in *Space* (June, 1996), 115.
28. Sinui Park, "The Post-centric Scene where the East and the West Cross—the 5th Istanbul Biennale," *Monthly Art* (Seoul) (December, 1997): 109.
29. The meeting of East and West occurred full scale as a result of Western imperialism. British colonization opened both the meeting of East and West and simultaneously the West's colonizing of the East. See for example, Edward W. Said, trans. by Hongkyu Park, *Orientalism* (Seoul: Kyobo, 2011).
30. Homi Bhabha (1988), "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences," *The Post-Colonial Studies Readers*, eds., Bill Ashcroft et al. (London: Routledge, 1995), 208.
31. It was stated to be a 'used bedcover' in the exhibit brochure.
32. Youngjune Lee, "The Axiom and Paradox of Korean Aesthetics," *Photography, Strange Art* (Seoul: Nunbit, 1999), 226.



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SHADES OF DISCRIMINATION

THE EMERGENCE OF FEMINIST ART IN APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

By Brenda Schmahmann



Fig. 1. Kim Siebert, *What did your mother ever tell you about the Hard Edge School?* (1986), photo collage on board with painted frame. Iziko SANG Collection.

Like other South African women artists, Kim Siebert has coupled her focus “on personal history, cultural heritage and context” with “what it means to be perceived and to perceive the world as a woman artist in Africa.”¹ These concerns also play out in works such as *What did your mother ever tell you about the Hard Edge School?* (1986; Fig. 1), an early work by Siebert (b. 1958), who currently lives in Taiwan. One of a number of collages from the 1980s in which she represented middle-class white women (constituted from cut-outs from magazines from the 1950s) in museums or domestic settings

confronting “masterpieces” by males from the West, the work makes reference to the male gaze through the phallic binoculars that are in turn reiterated in pillars, the larger of which one female embraces seductively. A motif which might be read as a parody of the fetishistic objectification of female bodies commonplace in popular magazines and films,² it also implies a link between hard-edge painting and the realms of the phallogentric.

Related to collages Siebert made for a Master in Fine Art degree at the University of Cape Town in the early 1980s, *What did your mother ever tell you about the Hard Edge School?* formed



Fig. 2. Nina Romm, untitled (mid 1970s), photograph of performance. Collection of the artist.

part of a group of works in which she engaged with ways in which the tropes and mechanisms in modernism had marginalized and objectified women. In a discussion in her thesis of one of her collages which depicts females confronting a painting by Picasso in a museum, Siebert observed a “disjuncture between the potential realizations of these women and their essential, though not necessarily inherent creativity,” while noting also that traditions of fine art have “often tended to preclude the heritage of many creative female contributions in the field of crafts.”³ *What did your mother ever tell you about the Hard Edge School?*, likewise, emphasizes the way in which female creativity tends to be associated with embellishment of the home.

In addition to drawing attention to the uneasy and pejorative distinction that tends to be drawn between the concepts of “abstraction” and “decoration” in western discourses, Siebert makes reference to manifestations of the “decorative” amongst disenfranchised and economically disadvantaged groups in South Africa. The triangular designs featuring on the frame of *What did your mother ever tell you about the Hard Edge School?* and the depicted screen or doorway on the left of the image refer to beadwork and basketry by isiXhosa and isiZulu speakers as well as to items such as embellished mat-racks made by the latter. The collage thus suggests that creative work made by not only westernized middle-class white women but also black working-class communities tends—through prejudice—to be afforded reduced status.

Although Siebert’s collages were made more than a decade after women students enrolled in a program with Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro at the California Institute of the Arts had produced the installations constituting *Womanhouse* (1972), for example, they are in fact early examples of feminist art in South Africa—a locale where the women’s movement took more time to have impact than it did in the United States. There are only very occasional instances of South African women artists producing works in the 1970s which are underpinned by a consciousness of gender. This is true, for instance, of Nina Romm (b. 1949), who would later, with Constance Khoza, constitute a Women’s Rights Peace Party during the First Democratic Election in 1994. While studying for a Master of Fine Art degree at the University of Cape Town between 1972 and 1975, Romm was aware of contemporary feminist art in the U.S.,⁴ and her Dada-inspired performances (Fig. 2) and textual works had feminist underpinnings. But it was only in the 1980s that feminism began exerting any significant influence in the cultural domain.

Reasons for this lateness are to do with the orientation as well as agendas of left-wing groups in South Africa. Although the National Party (which came to power in 1948 and introduced apartheid legislation) coupled racism with gender discrimination,⁵ activists and political organizations engaged in resistance against the state—notably, the African National Congress (ANC)—tended not to encompass feminism within their focus. Pointing out reasons for feminism’s uneasy status within the national liberation movement, Shireen Hassim observes that it was, on the one hand, “seen as an ideology primarily articulated by white (academic) Western women” and its “perceived intellectual roots in the North were seen to limit its applicability to the experiences of black women in the highly exceptional circumstances of apartheid.”⁶ On the other, it was construed as divisive and, more crucially, “the association of feminism with demands for greater organizational autonomy, for more decentralized and democratic mechanisms for agenda setting and strategic positioning, and a more nuanced view of how power relations were established and maintained” was problematical to the male-dominated leadership of the national liberation movement.⁷ Given such misgivings, it is unsurprising that feminist activities in the domain of art were slow to emerge.

Marion Arnold’s art historical work has been groundbreaking in bringing to light some feminist practices in South Africa during the 1980s,⁸ and she has mapped out many of the circumstances that marginalized females, also observing how the women’s movement was slow to gain credibility in South Africa.⁹ There is, however, an issue which her writings do not confront directly. One might assume that the 1980s, when feminist art practices became increasingly widespread, would have also seen a focus on gender in the visual arts becoming gradually recognized as compatible with aims to challenge racial discrimination. But this was not the case. What becomes evident on investigation is that, while feminist ideas became increasingly influential in universities, including their art departments, there was ongoing ambivalence about the value of the feminist project amongst many of a left-wing

persuasion operating outside academia.¹⁰ In fact, it was only following the inclusion of feminism in the national agenda in the run-up to the first democratic election in 1994 that this contention tended to dissipate.

Accounting for the introduction of a focus on gender to the visual arts, Arnold observes perceptively that, by the 1980s, “postmodernism offered South African art ways of theorizing complexity, contradiction and ambiguity, of utilizing intertextuality and re-reading history.”¹¹ I reveal in this article that such devices allowed local artists to explore ideas and concepts raised by feminists in the West in relation to the cultural and political particularities of a South African milieu. I would suggest, in fact, that the works resulting from such processes could be interpreted as arguments for the relevance of feminism in a context where its value was in dispute.

Feminist art emerged against a backdrop of profound political turmoil. The 1980s were characterized by not only brutal and authoritarian political oppression but also increased mass resistance. Violent suppression of opposition to the state was in particular evidence on June 16, 1976, when police opened fire on black secondary-school pupils protesting the use of Afrikaans as a language of instruction, and it would be in evidence a year later when Black Consciousness Movement leader, Steve Biko, was murdered in police custody. While popular resistance had tended to dissipate by the end of the 1970s, it was renewed in 1983. That year, the apartheid government attempted to invest its system of governance with the appearance of legitimacy through its introduction of a Tricameral Parliament, which gave Colored and Indian groups some representation but excluded black Africans. Rather than fending off criticism, mass protests increased, leading eventually to the formation of the United Democratic Front, an alliance of progressive organizations. A State of Emergency declared on July 25, 1985, and ending on March 7, 1986, was followed by a second State of Emergency, announced on June 12, 1986, which lasted four years, until June 8, 1990. With the state allowed to prohibit meetings and the police to detain people indefinitely without disclosing their names or sites of internment, the State of Emergency periods saw an increase in deaths in detention as well as in numbers of activists going into exile. Also during these times, there was an increase in operations on the part of Umkhonto weSizwe, the armed wing of the banned ANC, from various bases outside the country.

Two organized public events are considered key in terms of imbuing South African art with an activist direction. The earlier of these, “The State of Art in South Africa” conference, was organized by the University of Cape Town in 1979. But, as Arnold observes, while the delegates made two important resolutions—to demand “that educational facilities be open to artists of all races” and to “boycott all state-sponsored exhibitions until the first requirement was met”—“any direct



Fig. 3. Penny Siopis, *Embellishments* (detail) (1982), oil and plastic ballerinas on canvas, 59" x 79 1/2". Photo: Paul Mills. Wits Art Museum Collection, Johannesburg.

reference to gender discrimination” was absent from the debates.¹² Three years later, in July 1982, the Medu Ensemble, a collective of creative practitioners based in Gaborone in Botswana, organized a Culture and Resistance Festival.¹³ While important in fostering commitment and energy for deploying art to express resistance against apartheid, feminism as an ideology and the difficulties experienced by women, specifically, were once again not given any focus. Despite this, some works with feminist underpinnings made in the early 1980s began to achieve exposure or to exert some influence.

Amongst the best known of these was a series of paintings by Penny Siopis (b. 1953), which represented various forms of confectionary set out on tables or pedestals and which created analogies between sweetmeats and the female body. *Embellishments* (Fig. 3), an example from 1982, includes little plastic ballerinas—the kind that are often used as decorations on cakes for young girls—embedded in its pigment. As I have noted previously, *Embellishments* evokes transgressive and ironic reference to a popular rhyme: “Sugar and spice; And all that is nice. That’s what little girls are made of.” The vaginal cakes are rendered through “fleshy” pink and coffee hues which, “melded with allusions to white lace, suggest stained underwear, as if they were infused with the fluids of a seeping body rather than being palpable flesh.” Tendrils of icing, which entrap some of the figurines, “allude uncomfortably to flayed flesh, ripped lace as well as a snare.”¹⁴ By incorporating old dried paint from her palette into new wet surfaces, Siopis also conveyed a sense of deterioration and decay and thus alluded to bodily decrepitude.¹⁵

Following her completion of her Master of Fine Art degree at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, Siopis had spent a year in England—beginning in September 1978—studying for a postgraduate diploma at the Portsmouth Polytechnic. Although she was back in South Africa (teaching at the former Natal Technikon in Durban) when she started making these cake paintings, they develop ideas to which Siopis had been



Fig. 4. Sue Williamson, *A Few South Africans: Winnie Mandela* (1983), photo etching/screenprint, 27 1/2" x 25". Photo: Courtesy Goodman Gallery, Cape Town.



Fig. 5. Sue Williamson, *A Few South Africans: Amina Cachalia* (1984), photo etching/screenprint collage, 27 1/2" x 25". Photo: Courtesy Goodman Gallery, Cape Town.



Fig. 6. Sue Williamson, *A Few South Africans: Helen Joseph* (1983), photo etching/screenprint, 27 1/2" x 25". Photo: Courtesy Goodman Gallery, Cape Town.

exposed in the United Kingdom and do not make specific reference to a local context. This orientation would, however, shift in her works from the mid-1980s.

In contrast, the early feminist works of Sue Williamson (b. 1941) were immediately related to a South African political arena. *A Few South Africans*, her series of sixteen iconic images of women involved in the struggle against apartheid, was first exhibited in 1984. Williamson, who had studied at the Art Students League of New York and returned to South Africa in 1969, began the series in 1982, when enrolled for an Advanced Diploma in Fine Art at the University of Cape Town. Each portrait photograph (Figs. 4, 5, 6 and Pl. 9) is set within a patterned border which includes motifs making reference to some aspect of the subject's life and interests; the artist compiled accompanying information sheets on the women as well. Williamson also produced postcards from the works, which enabled the images to be distributed widely.

Such a strategy was important in a context where, as Nicholas Dawes writes: "Images of women like Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Helen Joseph, banned and placed under house arrest, hardly ever appeared in the media, and indeed were proscribed in many instances."¹⁶ But it simultaneously drew attention to females who tended to enjoy less prominence in the liberation struggle than did their male colleagues. Williamson chose a visual language of the iconic. "By placing women centrally in the frame, I gave them the status of heroines," she observed.¹⁷ Furthermore, by incorporating framing devices, which, while alluding to African textile designs, seem in shape to invoke the idea of a devotional altarpiece, she created an implicit reference to female saints within Christian iconography. Thus the work, Dawes remarked, "had the dual effect of consolidating the mythic status of these women and confirming their real existence."¹⁸

Williamson was chair of a grassroots women's organization, the Women's Movement for Peace in Cape Town, and this political involvement had an immediate impact on the work. The visual discourse in *A Few South Africans* would seem to have enabled Williamson to make reference to the kinds of décor she witnessed in Crossroads, the informal housing settlement where she was doing much of her work. A high-density area that was the site of political violence, it was nevertheless also a space in which residents asserted their sense of "home" through the display of reproductions they liked as well as personal items such as photographs.

By inserting allusions to the aesthetic choices of people marginalized and oppressed through apartheid, and then reproducing her works in the form of postcards, Williamson was on one level insisting on the idea of art referring to the tastes of, as well as being available to, people normally excluded from the domain of fine art in South Africa. On another level, her references to home décor in Crossroads facilitated critical engagement with feminist concepts of decoration. As Norma Broude revealed in her essay on the American feminist artist Miriam Schapiro, being mistaken for a "decorator" has been viewed as a potential pitfall for artists working in modernist frameworks.¹⁹ For example, in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Wassily Kandinsky included the following well-known statement: "If we begin at once to break the bonds which bind us to nature, and devote ourselves purely to combination of pure color and abstract form, we shall produce works which are mere decoration, which are suited to neckties and carpets."²⁰ But is it in fact the retention of "the bonds which bind us to nature" that secures a stylized motif the definition of an "abstraction," allowing it to be distinguished from designs "suited to neckties and carpets"? It would seem that associations of work with male rather than

female producers, and with galleries, museums, and other public spaces rather than domestic contexts, is what ultimately affords an image status—an idea which Williamson's images implicitly set up for critique.

A coupling of feminist interests with reference to local creative practices was at play in Marion Arnold's art work as well. Having moved in 1979 from Zimbabwe to South Africa, where she took up a position in what was then the Department of History of Art and Fine Art at the University of South Africa, Arnold (b. 1947) played a significant role in introducing feminist concerns within the curriculum during the early 1980s. As in works by Williamson and Siebert, her watercolor painting entitled *Insight* (1985; Fig. 7), a depiction of a hippo looking into a mirror, includes references to the creative practices of those marginalized by the mainstream fine art world, in this instance financially impoverished Shona-speaking women who depended on informal markets to sell their works. The hippo is a clay object made by a Zimbabwean female potter, and further allusions to "feminine" forms of domestic embellishment are invoked through the crochet work at the base of the mirror (another type of creative work commonly sold by Shona-speaking women in markets), molded ceramic flowers around its border, and the decorative cloth on which the ceramic animal is placed. By representing these details in the form of a still life, Arnold alludes simultaneously to a western genre that tends to be denigrated in gendered terms. A work by her from three years later, *Divinely Appointed the Property of Ladies*, which includes related imagery, makes ironic reference to words in which a nineteenth-century male critic had characterized still life, primarily practiced by women, according it a low status within the hierarchy of genres.

The motif of the hippo looking into a mirror had dual significance. The mirror reflection draws attention to the idea of illusionism, and thus emphasizes Arnold's conscious avoidance of single-point perspective in the work—that is, a mode of representation enabling a masterful and controlling gaze on the part of the artist/viewer. It also alludes to self-examination and the search for identity. As Arnold observed in a commentary published in 1988:

Only the mirror permitted woman to gaze upon herself, woman seeing woman. And all the time man thought this habit was vanity. No. It was painful introspection, the only way woman had of determining what she really was. And yet the mirror was not a friend; it was mute and answered none of the questions woman posed to it. Between the silent truth of the mirror and the verbal lies of man, where was woman to find herself?²¹

South African works with a feminist consciousness from the early 1980s were, almost without exception, made by white women. While this is partly to do with the uneasy status of

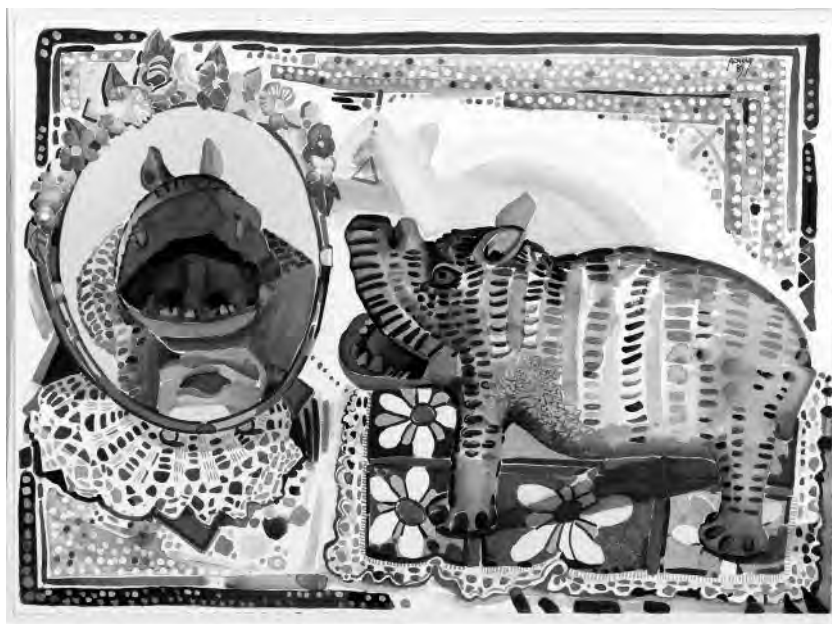


Fig. 7. Marion Arnold, *Insight* (1985), watercolor, 21 1/2" x 30 1/4". Standard Bank Collection, Johannesburg.

feminism within the liberation struggle, an important additional factor was the minimal number of black women artists. Through the Extension of University Education Act of 1959, the apartheid government prohibited black South Africans from enrolling at its various established universities without special permission and instead designated five university colleges for people of color. Only two of these—Fort Hare, intended for isiXhosa-speakers, and Durban-Westville, intended for students of Indian origins—offered fine art qualifications. Community arts organizations were the spaces in which the majority of black artists received training in the 1970s and 1980s.

In a paper delivered in 1990, Lize van Robbroeck observed that community arts projects tended to include considerably fewer women than men.²² Further, she suggested, community arts organizations sometimes absorbed hierarchies in which so-called "fine art" activities such as painting and printmaking were structured as more important and more financially remunerative than so-called "craft" activities such as weaving and ceramics, and that women tended not to participate in the former but to be dominant within the latter.²³ Van Robbroeck also noted: "It is furthermore a distressing fact, and one worth investigating, that black women who complete Fine Art courses often do not continue pursuing a career as artists."²⁴

Bongi Dhlomo (b. 1956), who was enrolled at the Evangelical Lutheran Art and Craft Centre at Rorke's Drift in Natal during 1978–79, is the significant exception to the rule in the sense that she studied printmaking rather than tapestry or ceramics and also sustained a career as an artist. Commenting how "at that time a black girl going out on a tangent and going to art school was unheard of,"²⁵ she noted that nursing, teaching, and secretarial work tended to be the chosen occupations for women in her community. Only five of twenty students enrolled in Rorke's Drift programs at the time were female, she recalled.



Fig. 8. Bongi Dhloomo, *Removals III: Resettlement* (1982), linocut, 7 1/2" x 9 1/2". Wits Art Museum Collection, Johannesburg.

Acknowledging that it was challenging to operate in a terrain where "all the artists that were spoken about were male,"²⁶ Dhloomo does not, however, seem to have considered feminist ideas in her work but rather often used biblical themes when at Rorke's Drift. In the early 1980s, when employed by the African Art Centre in Durban, run by the Institute of Race Relations, she began engaging with social issues such as forced removals (Figs. 8 and 9).²⁷ Even when appearing within a feminist context,²⁸ her works tended to show the hardships faced by black communities through the laws and actions of the apartheid state rather than being oriented to raise concerns about gender inequality specifically.

Dhloomo moved to Johannesburg in 1984, securing an administrative position in the Fuba Gallery and, in 1986, was invited to run the Alexandra Arts Centre. It seems that her family accepted her operating in art domains, despite this being unusual in her home community, not because they viewed her as mapping out new opportunities for women but rather because they "were able to see where my career fitted in the liberation struggle"²⁹ while also enabling "my financial upkeep and possibilities for bringing up my children and putting them through school."³⁰

In 1983, an art journal published by the University of South Africa, *De Arte*, ran a "Women in Arts" edition. Its editorial, written by a male academic, Ivor Powell, was to some extent informed by the predominant thinking in activist circles that focusing on gender inequities was to compromise the unity of anti-apartheid resistance. But while arguing that, "given the political situation in this country, there is an element of false consciousness in asserting female unity over racial solidarity,"³¹ Powell did nevertheless acknowledge unequal relations of power between men and women in both black and white communities. He also suggested that there was an overriding paradox in South Africa. Observing that the visual arts in South Africa were not in fact characterized by the absence of women but, on the contrary, that white females

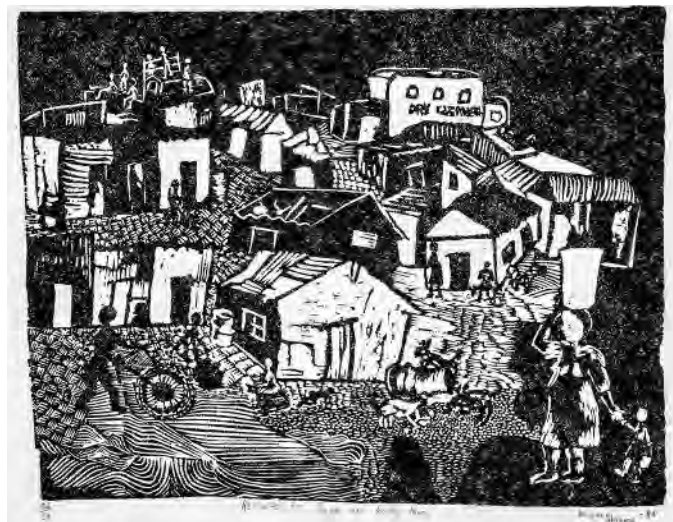


Fig. 9. Bongi Dhloomo, *Removals VII: People are Living There* (1983), linocut, 8" x 10 3/4". Wits Art Museum Collection, Johannesburg.

were "a ubiquitous presence" in the history of its art as well as in art-world structures, he suggested that this indicated "not so much a recognition of female capabilities as a scorn for the arts in general."³² This argument obfuscated some very real power imbalances. In the early 1980s, male professors predominated in art schools even though their students were predominantly female, and those judging prestigious national art competitions were almost invariably men.

Two years later, in 1985, the complexity of focusing on issues of gender in art in the framework of apartheid was also apparent when a Women's Festival of Arts comprising eleven exhibitions was organized at various venues in Johannesburg. In contrast to "Women Artists in South Africa," an historical survey of women artists held at the South African National Gallery in Cape Town, also in 1985, where works included were selected by the curatorial staff,³³ the organizers of the Women's Festival of Arts sought to enable diversity by rejecting any formal selection process. Their efforts to arrange the event according to wholly egalitarian processes were met with multiple challenges. Lize van Robbroeck, one of the organizers, recalls wryly that: "a call would go out to meet, fifteen or so women would pitch, take a decision, then the next meeting would be called, fifteen different women would pitch and overturn the previous decision."³⁴ Despite these attempts at inclusivity, relatively few black women were in fact available to participate and, as the catalogue cover (Fig. 10) makes clear, the organizers were all white.

More successful in enabling diversity was an exhibition of work by South African women that Janet Goldner, a member of the New York based Women's Caucus for Art, initiated in about 1988. "South African Mail, Messages from Inside: Women Artists in Resistance" included about 400 postcard-sized works by participants from different backgrounds and circumstances. It was shown early in 1990 at the Joseph Stone Auditorium in Cape Town, the Johannesburg Art Foundation, and in New York at the SOHO 20 Gallery and as part of the Women's Caucus for Art conference entitled "Shifting Power."

As with the Women's Festival of the Arts, all submissions were exhibited. Siopis, who was one of its organizers, observed that, although the word "art" appeared in the title of the envisaged show, it was avoided in the information sheets and advertisements calling for participation. These were widely disseminated and included, for example, trade unions and newspapers with a predominantly black readership such as the *New Nation*.³⁵ This avoidance of a high-art association was important in generating support, as was its involvement of organizations in South Africa with left-wing credentials, as well as its arrangement "within the terms of the (selective) cultural boycott" and thus its backing by the United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid.³⁶

In the same way that focusing on fine art in a conventional sense tended to limit possibilities for black female participation, so too did conferences on art. Differential access to education on the basis of race was exacerbated by gendered norms, and, as noted above, very limited numbers of black women receiving any formal training in the visual arts, let alone at universities. Thus when the Transvaal Branch of the South African Association of Art Historians was seeking papers for a "Women and the Visual Arts" conference to be held in March 1990, at the University of the Witwatersrand, it was unsurprising that nobody black—let alone anybody black and female—considered offering one. The organizers sought to use two accompanying exhibitions to enable inclusivity lacking in the main program. As with "South African Mail" from two months earlier, an exhibition titled "Women Choose Women," to be mounted at the Gertrude Posel Gallery at the University of the Witwatersrand, was devised in such a way that participants would themselves select others to be included on the show.³⁷ The exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, entitled "Maidens, Mothers and Madams" and which included works on paper from that museum's collection, took an essentially didactic approach by explaining feminist understandings of representation to non-specialist audiences through accompanying wall texts. But unfortunately, as Elizabeth Delmont and Michelle Jersky reflected in the proceedings, the conference ultimately "fell between two stools, neither locating issues thoroughly enough within a theoretical context, nor addressing more broadly based popular concerns."³⁸

When a year later, in early 1991, the Gender Research Group at the University of Natal organized a conference on "Women and Gender in Southern Africa," there was once again conflict between what were argued to be dichotomous activist and academic interests. But this time there was also fallout in regard to what was deemed by a few delegates to be a racist insensitivity on the part of the largely white presenters and organizing committee. In her scathing attack, Desiree Lewis suggested that the conference "became a self-glorifying monologue in which 'black woman' merely bolstered the ruling elite's sense of authority—blatantly manifested in the logo on delegates' folders: a tiny-headed, naked and burdened Other, 'present' only as object for scrutiny by the self-defining, theorising subject" (Fig. 11).³⁹ But the logo in question—in which Durban artist Dina Comick depicted a San woman with her gathering stick and bag, and which she based on a San rock

painting—was actually intended to be read in a way that was antithetical to how Lewis was interpreting it. Hassim, a member of the organizing panel, observes: "We were pleased with the energy that she captured and with the San reference as we felt that seemed right in a conference taking place in the then-Natal, that it suggested women's agency as deeply historical in Africa and not something dreamt up by 'western feminism.'"⁴⁰

Despite the fact that the context of apartheid made it very difficult for black and white women to find common cause, resulting in the kinds of implosions that happened at the "Women and Gender in Southern Africa" conference, feminism had become increasingly influential in academia during the second half of the 1980s. When, in 1976, Cherryl Walker began research towards her book *Women and Resistance*, "there was almost total indifference to the idea of women's studies within the academic community, and virtually no body of scholarship on women's roles historically or on theories of gender on which to draw."⁴¹ Although, paradoxically, such developments coincided with increased marginalization of women's concerns within the overall goals of the national liberation movement,⁴² a decade later feminism had entered the curricula of many university programs, including art history and fine art courses.

Employed by the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg from 1984 until she relocated to Cape Town in 2010, Penny Siopis provided impetus and encouragement for a generation of female students at that institution to explore feminist ideas through their work. Unsurprisingly, her influence can often be discerned in the art of the postgraduates she supervised. For example, while the works of Leora Farber (b. 1964) from the 1990s onwards are distinctive and deploy tropes and media very different from those of Siopis, discourses and ideas in paintings she made in the late 1980s, when a postgraduate student, relate to those at play in the works of her supervisor. This is clear, for example, if one compares Farber's *Delusions of Grandeur* (1987; Fig. 12) with Siopis's now iconic *Melancholia* (1986; Pl. 10).

Melancholia includes various foodstuffs and collectibles which are parodic. For example, as I have observed previously, the constituents of "Franz Snyders' *Still Life with Meat Basket* (c. 1640) appear on the round table immediately behind the main table, while the work as a whole, with its overripe edibles, egg timer, shells and other elements invested with *vanitas* symbolism, invokes generic reference to Baroque still-life paintings."⁴³ A large sculpture towards the left of the front table, which is visually parallel to the image of Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* on the far right, is of a woman with her stomach stripped open to reveal a fetus—a motif that Siopis based on a seventeenth-century medical illustration. Siopis's painting, importantly, "is deliberately theatrical, with a swooped-up curtain conveying a sense that the staged spectacle, replete with various simulations of 'masterful' art, is being ceremoniously unveiled for the viewer."⁴⁴ Farber's *Delusions of Grandeur*, like Siopis's painting, represents a luxurious interior in glaringly hot hues which seems to be suggestive of death and decay. It also includes allusions to abject bodies: the pattern of the two sofas transmutes into suggestions of veins and flesh and, in the case



Fig. 10. Front cover, catalogue for Women's Festival of the Arts (1985), Johannesburg.

of the example on the left, slices of meat, while the rug between these two seats invokes reference to entrails, mucous and other bodily matter. And Farber, like Siopis, deploys the theatrical device of the swooped-up curtains but in such a way that these swags of cloth might potentially be read simultaneously as suspended carcasses in a butchery.

Alert to the way in which pictorial devices such as single-point perspective and painterly illusionism had a long history of structuring the viewer/artist as a masterful "I," *Melancholia* has an exaggerated perspective. Orthogonal lines which are excessively rapid in their recession seem to pull the eye into a tunnel-like space, but a lack of atmospheric perspective nevertheless keeps the eye to the surface of the work. Representing herself via a mirror on the right of the work but in such a way that it becomes difficult to read her image as a reflection, Siopis seems to refuse the domain of the optical or the gaze in favor of an insistence on tactility. Picking up on the disturbances to linear perspective and their association with a masculine controlling gaze, Farber's *Delusions of Grandeur* also shares with Siopis an avoidance of atmospheric perspective. As in *Melancholia* where, Colin Richards suggested, Siopis favors "a tactile, rhapsodic threading and weaving of matter" which compels the viewer "to relinquish a safe viewing

distance and move up to and about the surface,"⁴⁵ in *Delusions of Grandeur* Farber invites a form of looking which concentrates on detail across the surface of the work.⁴⁶

Crucially, the works of both artists have implications to do with a wider political context—far more so than did Siopis's first feminist works from the early 1980s. In referring to vanitas imagery and to Baroque excess, their paintings seem to allude to a decaying and corrupt white regime straining under the weight of its acquisitions. Indeed, Griselda Pollock's suggestion that *Melancholia* "reads as an allegory of South Africa—appearing to the white population as a place of plenty but always based on a violence which underpins and undermines it,"⁴⁷ could equally apply to *Delusions of Grandeur*, which couples an allusion to a luxurious interior with reference to meat, entrails, and flayed flesh.

Significant also in the late 1980s was the work of Helen Mmakgabo Sebidi (b. 1943). Although her earlier idyllic scenes of rural life offer little in the way of social commentary, from 1986 onwards she began representing her experiences of the urban environment and showing what she described as "the conflict between women and men, the past and the present"⁴⁸ in such an arena. Albeit that she has never termed herself "feminist," Sebidi represents women as sources of strength and agency. For example, she explained the content of her *The child's mother holds the sharp side of the knife* (1988–89; Pl. 11) to Arnold as follows: "I see a woman chained, pulling her tradition. In our language they always say—yours is yours. You've got to handle it, you've got to be, don't let go ... In African tradition they say it is the woman who holds the sharp side of the knife in this way and is saying—this is what I have to do, and it's my way."⁴⁹ The shift in approach followed her enrollment for classes at the Johannesburg Art Foundation, where she studied under not only Bill Ainslie but also, perhaps more crucially, Ilona Anderson, whose own work was (and continues to be) informed by feminist understandings.⁵⁰

But it was only really in the 1990s, with the overthrow of apartheid, that circumstances were created for an art world that included black women, including those engaging with a politics of gender, in any significant numbers. The transition period between the unbanning of the ANC in 1990 and the first democratic election in 1994 was, additionally, crucial to feminism. Rather than seeing an ongoing marginalization of women within the politics of the liberation struggle, these years saw women's rights becoming central to the political agenda amongst those negotiating and developing the South African Constitution. Within her exploration of the many complex reasons for this shift, Shireen Hassim suggests that a move away from discourses of nationalism to those of citizenship on the part of the African National Congress, and, concomitantly, from the community "as an undifferentiated entity" to "the individual-in-community," worked in favor of enabling focus on the need to ensure female agency, autonomy and rights.⁵¹ For the ANC, she observed, "women came to occupy a peculiar status as the proving ground for the extent to which the new order would be inclusive, participatory, and permeable to socially excluded groupings."⁵² The upshot of such agendas, along with pressure from women activists, was

Fig. 11. Dina Comick, logo for "Women and Gender in Southern Africa" conference (1991), organized by Gender Research Group, University of Natal.



Fig. 12. Leora Farber, *Delusions of Grandeur* (1987), oil on canvas, 48" x 63". Location unknown.

a Constitution which commits to ensuring gender equality. More particularly, there was a shift in which feminism, rather than being perceived as the province of privileged white women, achieved broader credibility.

An emphasis on "the individual-in-community" may also have played an important role in developing a feminist art specifically. Rather than seeing art only as a weapon of the struggle, attitudes that were encouraged in the 1979 "The State of Art in South Africa" conference, and the "Culture and Resistance Festival" of 1982, the 1990s saw artists of a left-wing persuasion feeling able to reflect on their own individual circumstances (including the ways in which their histories and experiences were shaped by gendered norms) without being in danger of inviting accusations of self-indulgence. One might argue that the idea that the personal is political, the underpinning of much feminist work, acquired credibility in South African art of the 1990s that it had not really enjoyed in the 1980s.

The increasing number of artists in South Africa who have worked with issues of gender since 1994 have developed areas of interest that diverge from those of the 1980s: clearly, not only social changes but also, for example, the development of digital technologies and forces of globalization have had an impact on contemporary feminist art practices. But those operating in this area today nevertheless owe a debt to a generation of women artists who, while having to negotiate a context in which the relevance and viability of feminism was frequently contested, established the groundwork for current explorations of gender. •

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Notes

1. Kim Siebert, "An Investigation into the Interrelationship Between the Formal Means of Collage and Assemblage and the Painted Surface," (MFA thesis, Univ. of Cape Town, 1984), 12.

2. The inclusion of this motif suggests that she was familiar with feminist considerations of psychoanalytic theories about looking—notably, the arguments Laura Mulvey had made in her widely read essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6–18.
3. Siebert, "An Investigation," 178.
4. Interview with Nina Romm, Oct. 22, 2013, Johannesburg.
5. Discrimination on the grounds of gender was complicated by a politics of race, as indicated by Nazir Carrim, "Human Rights and the Construction of Identities in South African Education," (PhD diss., Univ. of the Witwatersrand, 2006), 121. White women "did not have access to all jobs that men had access to, were not paid the same salaries as men, could not own property without the consent of men and were treated legally as 'minors', dependent on the income, authority and consent of a 'white' male presence." Black women had still more limited rights in the sense that they "were not regarded as 'citizens', did not have political rights, were invisibilised through the body politic and marginalised in their exploitation within the economy."
6. Shireen Hassim, *Women's Organisations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 29.
7. Ibid.
8. See Marion Arnold, *Women and Art in South Africa* (Cape Town & Johannesburg: David Philip, 1996).
9. See Arnold, "Visual Culture in Context: The Implications of Union and Liberation," in *Between Union and Liberation: Women Artists in South Africa, 1910–1994*, eds. Marion Arnold and Brenda Schmahmann (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 1–32.
10. Ibid., 19. Arnold writes that "in some quarters" there was hostility to feminism, and she remarks that "black men were particularly hostile to feminism and vocal about 'our culture', by which they meant black culture." But these comments do not make clear that hostility to feminism was within the national liberation movement.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 18–19.
13. For an overview of the Medu Ensemble and the significance of the festival, see John Pepper, *Art and the End of Apartheid* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2009), 73–98.
14. Brenda Schmahmann, "Representing Regulation – Rendering Resistance: Female Bodies in the Art of Penny Siopis," in *Between*

- Union and Liberation: Women Artists in South Africa, 1910–1994*, eds. Arnold and Schmähmann, 200.
15. See Elizabeth Rankin, *The Baby and the Bathwater: Motif, Medium and Meaning in the Work of Penny Siopis* (Johannesburg: Imprimatic, 1992, n.p.
 16. Nicholas Dawes, "Sue Williamson and the Trauma of History," in *Sue Williamson: Selected Work*, ed. Sue Williamson (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2003), 6.
 17. Quoted in Lila Komnick, "A tribute to powerful women in Parliament's art collection," from July 2013 publication of *In Session*, 29. <http://www.parliament.gov.za/Multimedia/InSession/2013/july-august/files/assets/basic-html/page29.html>
 18. Dawes, "Sue Williamson," 6.
 19. Norma Broude, "Miriam Schapiro and 'Femmage': Reflections on the Conflict between Decoration and Abstraction in Twentieth-Century Art," in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 314–29.
 20. Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. M.T.H. Sadler (New York: Dover, 1977), 47. (*Über das Geistige in der Kunst* was first published in 1911.)
 21. Marion Arnold, "Extracts from Diary Entries for Connections," in the *Connections* exhibition catalogue, 1988. Quoted by Leora Farber, "Opticality and Tactility in Selected South African Still-Life Painting," (MFA thesis, Univ. of the Witwatersrand, 1992), 63.
 22. Lize van Robbroeck, "Women and Community Arts" (paper presented at the Woman and the Visual Arts conference organized by the Transvaal branch of the South African Association of Art and Architectural Historians, Univ. of the Witwatersrand, March 23–24, 1990), 24–28.
 23. Ibid.
 24. Ibid., 26–27.
 25. Interview with Bongi Dhlomo on Dec. 12, 2011, Constitutional Court Oral History Project, Historical Papers Research Archive, Johannesburg, 3. http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/inventories/inv_pdf/AG3368/AG3368-D19-001-jpeg.pdf
 26. Ibid., 4.
 27. The apartheid government implemented forced removals between 1960 and 1983 to bring about segregation of races. Destroying multiracial communities, they often relocated people many miles from their places of work.
 28. For example, Dhlomo's works were reproduced in a collection of feminist texts entitled *LIP* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983) and included in the Women's Festival of Arts (1985) in Johannesburg.
 29. Dhlomo observes that her position in Alexandra "offered me a number of trips overseas for fundraising but also to continue to work in the liberation struggle" (Interview with Bongi Dhlomo, 7).
 30. Ibid.
 31. Ivor Powell, "Editorial" of special issue on Women in Art, *De Arte* 29 (Sept. 1983): 3.
 32. Ibid., 2, 3.
 33. Raymond van Niekerk, Director at the time, wrote in the exhibition catalogue about difficulties in deciding on inclusions, noting that these: "have to do with quality, historical importance or medium of expression and questions regarding the period to be covered and the very validity of the theme agreed upon." He speaks also "of many often heated meetings in which the curatorial staff of the gallery pulled and teased and winnowed until this show resulted." See *Women Artists in South Africa*, exh. cat. (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 3). The exhibition was held May 16–June 30, 1985.
 34. Informal conversation with Lize van Robbroeck on a social media site, Sept. 2013.
 35. Penny Siopis, "Some Thoughts on Women Representing Women," (paper presented at the Woman and the Visual Arts conference, March 23–24, 1990), 45.
 36. Ibid., 45, 46. Siopis records that Goldner first contacted Sue Williamson, who put her in touch with the Visual Arts Group of the Cultural Workers Congress, and they in turn contacted the Artists Alliance, based in the Transvaal province.
 37. An initial exhibitor (e.g., Siopis) chose a second exhibitor who in turn chose a third, and so on, until an optimum number of participants were included.
 38. Elizabeth Delmont and Michelle Jersky, "The South African Association of Art Historians: Between Two Stools?" (paper presented at the Woman and the Visual Arts conference, March 23–24, 1990), 1.
 39. Desiree Lewis, "The Politics of Feminism in South Africa," *Staffrider* 10, no. 3 (1992): 16.
 40. Shireen Hassim, e-mail communication with the author, Nov. 14, 2014.
 41. Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991), xi. First published in 1982 by Onyx Press Ltd, London.
 42. From 1983, progressive women's organizations fell under the umbrella of the National Democratic Front. Hassim points out: "Within two years of joining the alliance with the United Democratic Front, women's organizations shifted from being able to define goals and strategies in relation to their primary constituency of women to being auxiliaries of the United Democratic Front with the responsibility of mobilizing a 'sector' of the masses into the larger organization." See Hassim, *Women's Organisations and Democracy*, 13.
 43. Brenda Schmähmann, "Representing Regulation – Rendering Resistance: Female Bodies in the Art of Penny Siopis" in *Between Union and Liberation: Women Artists in South Africa 1910 – 1994*, eds. Arnold and Schmähmann, 204.
 44. Ibid.
 45. Colin Richards, "Excess as transgression: reducing surface to depth in the still-life paintings of Penny Siopis" (paper presented at the Second Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians, 1986).
 46. Farber, "Opticality and Tactility," acknowledges commonalities between her works and those of Siopis, including *Melancholia*.
 47. Griselda Pollock, "Painting, difference and desire in history: the work of Penelope Siopis 1985–1994, unpublished transcript of essay supplied to me by the artist.
 48. Jacqueline Nolte, "Narratives of Migration in the Works of Noria Mabasa and Mmakgabo Sebidi" in *Between Union and Liberation: Women Artists in South Africa, 1910–1994*, eds. Arnold and Schmähmann, 182–85.
 49. Arnold, *Women and Art*, 140.
 50. Ilona Anderson (b. 1948) taught Sebidi prior to travelling to the United States on a Fulbright Scholarship in 1988. Anderson, who has an MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts and Tufts, and who has lived in Boston for many years, was originally a painter and subsequently began working in embroidery and installation.
 51. Hassim, *Women's Organisations and Democracy*, 161.
 52. Ibid., 161–62.

WOMEN ARTISTS OF CERCLE ET CARRÉ

ABSTRACTION, GENDER AND MODERNITY

By M. Lluïsa Faxedas



Fig. 1. Opening of the exhibition of *Cercle et carré* (April 18, 1930). Left to right: Unknown, Franciska Clausen, unknown, Pere Daura, Marcelle Cahn, Wanda Chodasiewicz-Grabowska, Florence Henri, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Joaquín Torres-García, Piet Mondrian, Ingibjoerg Bjarnason, Michel Seuphor, Jean Gorin, Luigi Russolo, Wanda Wolska, Stefan Moszczynski, Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart, Germán Cueto; (back row) Georges Vantongerloo, Vera Idelson, Manolita Piña.

On July 1, 1926, gallery owner Léonce Rosenberg wrote to his friend, the painter Fernand Léger, “Women, in freeing themselves, are enriching humanity with additional and surprising values. The exhibition in your academy is new evidence of this. Indeed, the two most interesting artists, in my humble opinion, are two women: Mademoiselle Clausen and Mademoiselle Cahn.”¹ Franciska Clausen (1899–1986) and Marcelle Cahn (1895–1981) were part of a group of female artists who, in late 1920s Paris, were involved with the abstract art movement; however, little has been written about the role these women played in the development of abstraction in this period.² By examining their participation in the group *Cercle et carré*, we can shed light on the contradictions these women experienced. Although *Cercle et carré* appears to have been democratic and egalitarian, its

ideological basis—as reflected in its periodical—left little room for genuine participation by the women or for inclusion of their work.

Cercle et carré (Circle and square) was born of a chance meeting in the spring of 1929 in Paris between the Uruguayan painter Joaquín Torres-García and Belgian poet Michel Seuphor.³ This was a particularly difficult moment for abstract artists working in the French capital.⁴ The artistic environment was clearly hostile: art critics were still deliberating on the acceptance of what could be called post-Cubism (with figures such as Braque, Léger and especially Picasso among the most admired) and—as important publications such as *Cahiers d’art* would point out—abstraction, stigmatized as cold, cerebral and decorative, seemed to many to be a road leading to nowhere.⁵ The very fact that many of the leading abstract



Fig. 2. Florence Henri, *Composition no. 10* (c. 1928), gelatin silver print, 10 1/2" x 14 3/4". Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, Reproduktion Markus Hawlik. Florence Henri@Galleria Martini & Ronchetti, Genova, Italy.

artists were foreigners awakened chauvinism in some critics,⁶ and with certain exceptions,⁷ most of the gallerists and collectors were also unreceptive. Furthermore, the artistic atmosphere of the avant-garde was saturated with Surrealism, a movement towards which many of the abstract artists felt their own sincere hostility.⁸

Nevertheless, by the end of the 1920s Paris had become the capital of the European avant-garde and attracted many important abstract artists. In this context, the meeting between Torres-García, a mature painter who was just discovering abstraction, and Seuphor, an abstract art enthusiast and a friend of Mondrian, would be the point of departure for their organization that would gather together artists who were attracted to abstraction and offer them some visibility.⁹ *Cercle et carré* was short-lived, its public output consisting of three issues of a journal and a collective exhibition in April 1930 (Fig. 1).¹⁰ By October 1930, Seuphor's illness and Torres-García's progressive marginalization led to the group's dissolution.

In his memoirs, Seuphor says little about the women artists of *Cercle et carré*, while Torres-García does not mention them at all.¹¹ From Seuphor's account, we know that some women participated in the first meetings, in Spring 1929, in his studio: Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889–1943) attended with Hans Arp, Alexandra Exter (1884–1949), Florence Henri (1893–1982), and Adya van Rees (1876–1959) with her husband, Otto¹²; we can assume that Ingibjoerg Bjarnason (1907–77) was also there. By October 1929, the meetings had moved to the Café Voltaire, where Seuphor notes the presence of Marcelle Cahn.¹³

As for the women's contributions to the journal *Cercle et carré*, the first issue included a short statement by Adya van

Rees, a brief text by painter and stage designer Vera Idelson (1893–1977) and a scene design for a ballet by Alexandra Exter. The second issue included a longer text by Idelson, "Problems of Modern Theater," and one of her costume designs. It also reproduced a photograph by Henri (Fig. 2), a work by Taeuber-Arp, and the catalogue of the group's April exhibition. Up to ten women participated in the exhibition: Bjarnason, Cahn, Exter, Idelson, Taeuber-Arp, Van Rees, Clausen, Nadia Chodasiewicz-Grabowska (later Nadia Léger) (1904–82), Nechama Szmuszkowicz (1895–1977), and Wanda Wolska (1902–33).¹⁴ Most of these women can be seen in the well-known photographs that document the opening and closing of the show. The third and final issue, dedicated to architecture and abstract film, included a reproduction of Taeuber-Arp's work at the bar of the Café Aubette.¹⁵

All these artists knew either Seuphor or Torres-García. Bjarnason, an Icelandic painter and Seuphor's partner at that time, had a one-woman show at Povolutzky's

gallery in the autumn of 1929.¹⁶ Taeuber-Arp, already a prominent figure in many avant-garde activities, had met van Rees in 1915 in Zurich's Dadaist circle.¹⁷ Van Rees and her husband had a close relationship with Torres-García at the time of *Cercle et carré*, and she remained in touch with the avant-garde, although to a lesser extent.¹⁸ Works by both women were included in the 1929 *Exposición de arte moderno nacional y extranjero* organized by Torres-García at the Galerías Dalmau, Barcelona.

Most of the female members of *Cercle et carré* were associated with the Académie Moderne, with Fernand Léger and Amedée Ozenfant¹⁹; and Szmuszkowicz and Idelson had attended the stage design lessons given there by Exter. In 1925, Cahn, Clausen, Henri and Exter had participated in "L'Art d'aujourd'hui," an important show featuring the latest trends in contemporary art, especially abstraction.²⁰ Clausen and Cahn were selected by Katherine Dreier and Marcel Duchamp for inclusion in the 1926 international Société Anonyme exhibition in New York.²¹ Cahn also showed in the 1929 "Exposition Select d'Art Contemporain," Amsterdam, arranged by Nelly van Doesburg; and Clausen and Taeuber took part in a 1930 Stockholm show curated by Carlsund. Chodasiewicz showed with her first husband, Stanislas Grabowski, at the Galerie d'Art Contemporain (1926, 1927), and took part in Art Polonais Moderne (1929) in the Galerie Bonaparte. Wolska participated in exhibitions at the Galerie Sacré du Printemps (1927, 1928), and at the Salon des Surindépendants (1930). Exter already had an important career in the Russian and French avant-garde, and Idelson had worked as a stage designer in a number of futurist theatrical productions.²² Bjarnason, Clausen, Cahn, Henri, Szmuszkowicz, and Exter exhibited their work at the



Fig. 3. Marcelle Cahn, *Le globe (Le mappemonde or Tête et globe)* (1927), oil on canvas, 28 3/4" x 39 3/8". Location unknown.

Salon des Indépendants during the late 1920s.²³ Several of the women were also included in important art publications of the time.²⁴ The fact that they were all part of a wider circle of artistic and personal relationships made the invitation to join *Cercle et carré* quite a natural step for all of them.

As far as is known, none of the women played a decisive role in establishing the group, nor were they involved in defining its aesthetic principles. Years later, Clausen recalled that she had attended the group meetings but never took part in the discussions.²⁵ Although Cahn remembered that she and Mondrian understood each other well,²⁶ the *Cercle et carré* was, according to Clausen, ruled by "some latent misogyny: women were not taken seriously."²⁷

The journal *Cercle et carré* was intended by Seuphor to be more than a photo album of members' work, but rather to present theoretical content.²⁸ Considering its low quality reproductions and lengthy articles, one may readily conclude that he succeeded. In this context, there emerges one of the most telling differences between the activities of the men and women of *Cercle et carré*: while male artists accompanied their artistic works with plenty of theoretical writings, such statements from the women were scarce. This lack of a

theoretical discourse by female artists, and the fact of their minimal participation in the debates on abstraction taking place in many forums,²⁹ places them at odds with the abstract artistic practices of the time; we do not know their perspective on the issues under discussion, and their role within the group was likely undervalued. For the time, this situation was not unusual; Prat, for instance, describes Clausen as "a pretty woman painter, not too concerned with theory."³⁰

The most important goal of their discussions was to define a common concept of abstraction. Among members of *Cercle et carré* were representatives of all the abstract trends of the time, ranging from the most radical option practiced by the *De Stijl* artists such as Mondrian, to purists such as Léger or Ozenfant; and from painters who did not completely reject figuration like Torres-García, to artists who felt an affinity with Surrealism such as Arp or Kurt Schwitters. While this openness made it possible to welcome many artists, it also generated intense debate between advocates of a radical abstraction and those who sought a synthesis between abstraction and figuration.³¹ Furthermore, this ambiguity provoked strong criticism from outside.³² Only because all members were highly interested in developing a joint project



Fig. 4. Exhibition *Cercle et carré* (April 1930). On back wall (L – R): Franciska Clausen, *Komposition* (1929) (top); *Abstrakt komposition* (1929) (bottom); *Baren* (1927). On right wall (L – R): two works by Vera Idelson; one work by Amédée Ozenfant and four works by Joaquín Torres-García.

did they finally agree on a common basis from which Seuphor would summarize the concepts of structure and abstraction, expressed as “structure and architecture.”³³ This debate was reflected in the difficulty of choosing a name for the group; after much discussion, Seuphor’s suggestion, *Cercle et carré*, was accepted. For Seuphor, these geometric figures—circle and square—reflected the dualism implicit in the debate between abstraction and figuration, but also alluded to the idealism upon which contemporary theories of abstraction were built.³⁴ In this essentialist tradition, based on a dualist understanding of the universe, Seuphor’s discourse and that of other abstract artists of the time would clearly favor the spiritual, mental, and intellectual dimensions of existence (corresponding to the masculine), in detriment to the material, natural, or sensual dimensions (that is, the feminine), reflecting the contemporary understanding of the male/female dichotomy.

In his “manifesto” for the first issue of the journal, “In Defense of an Architecture,” Seuphor argues his position, stressing the differences between the polarities:

Two generalized notions make up the whole of nature: the beautiful and the true. The beautiful is nature itself as it appears to our senses; the true is the law that regulates nature, the principle. [...] Every man is equally attracted to these two notions of the world: on the one hand, the principle, the deliberate, the vertical, and on the other hand, the natural, the feminine, the horizontal. Our judgment thus consists of two opposing poles that influence it equally. Natural beauty takes us gently by

the hand and leads us to the heart of matter, whereas the attraction of the true incites us to thought and lifts us to abstraction. [...] Art will be true or it will not be art.³⁵

Seuphor’s point of view was shared—indeed, to a large degree, inspired—by the most respected figure in the *Cercle et carré* group, Mondrian, who, in the second issue of the journal published an article on realistic and superrealistic art, writing:

The desire for equilibrium and the desire for disequilibrium continually oppose each other within us. This tragic is simply a culture-toward-equilibrium that moves forward as we feel the oppression of the tragic—oppression caused by the two polarities of life and the desire to free ourselves from it. [...] But it [the tragic] is still a false beauty: an illusion. Hence, it will be abolished in the super-reality of the future.³⁶

In previous writings Mondrian had clearly identified the tragic element with the nature-body-female concept, that is, with everything that should be purified and suppressed in a superior artistic conscience.³⁷ This vision, broadly held by many contributors to the journal, led Seuphor and Mondrian to support pure abstraction, which strongly defined the theoretical trend of the journal.³⁸ Significantly, even if other participants arrived at different conclusions, they shared the same principles. For Torres-García, for example, the most important idea was that of synthesis, which in his artistic vocabulary was translated as *construction*. In his programmatic

text for the first issue of *Cercle et carré*, Torres-García wrote, "Whether there is emotion or reasoning at the root of construction must not matter to us. Our only goal is to construct. [...] that is the spirit of synthesis."³⁹ His position regarding the presence of figuration was not as radical as that of Seuphor or Mondrian, but he shared the same dualistic starting point.

Considering the negative criticism of 'the feminine' that was implicit in the essentialist discourse of the journal, the theoretical positions held by the female artists in the group should be of great interest. In the few examples available, the women's opinions echo the same elements and vocabulary as their male counterparts. Adya van Rees refers to Torres's "construction" when she writes: "In art, one must, above all, dedicate oneself to this truth, that the construction is as necessary (visible or sensed) as the foot is to the human body,"⁴⁰ and her work, like Torres's, synthesizes abstraction and figuration.

Vera Idelson, in the first issue, points in another, more complex direction, writing: "Through the control of a strict spiritual discipline, the establishment of the primacy of the mind over the influence of the senses and sensations [sic]. Above human miseries, Art = perfection, clarity, purity, order, stability = harmony."⁴¹ These words can be read in light of the ideas of Seuphor and Mondrian: her vision of spirit prevailing over matter and her defense of an art which is the equivalent of purity and perfection is clearly intellectualist, and belongs to the essentialist tradition mentioned earlier. For the second issue, Idelson wrote on "Problems of the modern theatre," based on her experience as a stage and costume designer for *L'angoisse des machines* (The Anguish of Machines), written by her partner, the futurist poet and playwright Ruggero Vasari and first performed in Paris in 1927. Idelson advocates a theatre where plays are performed using only marionettes (an approach that had been widely explored by avant-garde artists during the 1920s), saying that in contrast to naturalistic human movement, the marionette allows "pure, abstract movement; movement in itself."⁴² Idelson's dualistic approach to art is again reinforced: "Ideologically, human drama is juxtaposed with cosmic drama [...]. The new drama, the drama of the antinomy between the human and the cosmic, a kind of modern Greek tragedy, is yet to be born."⁴³ Her text is illustrated with one of her costume designs for the play.

L'angoisse des machines is set on an almost completely mechanized planet from which women have been banished. Tonchir, the wise man responsible for the main machine that provides energy to this world, retains some of his humanity, whereas his assistants, Singar and Bacal, like most of the population, have become almost completely machine-like. When the women return to the planet, their queen, Lipa, is imprisoned but convinces Tonchir to preserve what remains of his humanity and destroy the world of machines.⁴⁴ Idelson's



Fig. 5. Exhibition *Cercle et carré* (April 1930). L – R: one work by Wanda Wolska, two works by Ingibjoerg Bjarnason and two works by Willi Baumeister.

organic-style costumes for Lipa and Tonchir accentuated their bodies, while the costumes for Bacal, Singar, and the other "machine-damned" were geometric and abstract.⁴⁵ Her designs helped develop the play's implicit dualism with a more radical aesthetic than even Vasari had envisaged. Here the machine and the geometric are associated with perfection, whilst the human body, traditionally associated with the female element, is considered "grotesque, comic and farcical."⁴⁶

Essentialist theories which supported abstraction implied a negative vision of the feminine element, but Idelson's work proves that this did not prevent some women from endorsing such views. Cahn, who had studied philosophy in Strasbourg and Zurich, declared a desire to "intellectualize" her work.⁴⁷ These women may not have associated the concept of "feminine" with their art, as the characterization of art as masculine or feminine did not always match the gender of the creator.⁴⁸ Some women fought fiercely against the stereotypes of femininity, demanding more virility from both men and women.⁴⁹ The universalism inherent to the theory of abstraction necessarily implied a rejection of gender-specificity, especially feminine.⁵⁰ But it is difficult to overlook the fact that many theoreticians believed that women lacked the creativity needed to become serious practitioners of art. Mondrian himself wrote that "woman is against art, against abstraction ... in her innermost being ... [a woman] is never completely an artist."⁵¹ Although this negative view of women's creative possibilities was not limited to the circles of geometric abstraction,⁵² the "latent misogyny" felt by Clausen in *Cercle et carré* and which emerges in some of the journal texts was connected with this ideological context.

The Cercle et carré exhibition took place at Galerie 23 during April 18–30, 1930; among the forty-six participants were some of the most important names in abstract art.⁵³ The artworks (between one and five for each artist) were displayed in four rooms and a basement.⁵⁴ Although the theoretical program of the group promoted radical abstraction, the exhibition as a whole was much more ambiguous.⁵⁵ The catalogue, published in the second issue of the journal, reveals a broad artistic field ranging from abstraction to figuration, from purism to what can be called the neoplastic / constructivist tendency.

The women artists' works on exhibit reflected this fairly broad range of styles and was quite egalitarian.⁵⁶ Cahn's four pieces were purist-influenced, figurative paintings, all made in 1927: *Le globe* (The globe) (Fig. 3), *Femme à la raquette* (Woman with a racket) (Pl. 12), *La Rame* (The oar) (Pl. 13) and *L'allumette* (The match).⁵⁷ Clausen's three works can be identified thanks to a photograph of the exhibition (Fig. 4), as *Baren* (Bar) (1927), *Komposition* (1929; Pl. 14), both oils, and *Abstrakt komposition* (1929).⁵⁸ Exter showed two maquettes, one for a ballet (possibly the work reproduced in the first issue of the journal), and one for a stage lighting project. Bjarnason showed three paintings (Fig. 5), and Chodasiewicz three unidentified *Compositions*. Idelson showed two maquettes for *L'angoisse des machines* and two temperas, *Boucherie* (Butcher's shop) and *Les Halles* (The market) (shown in Fig. 4). Nechama Szmuszkowicz showed two landscapes.⁵⁹ Taeuber exhibited a "composition" and two paintings, *Personnages* (reproduced in the second issue of the journal) (Pl. 15), and *Café* (Pl. 16), both 1928. Adya van Rees exhibited two abstract compositions and a landscape, and Wanda Wolska presented three paintings, one of which appears on the left in Figure 5.

Although we cannot identify all the paintings that were exhibited, it is clear that for the women (as for the men in the group), their style reflects their individual artistic development. That said, all of the artists represented wished to move away from the imitative conception of art—rather than a wholesale rejection of figuration, this involved their choosing from among the new artistic languages—Cubism, purism, Constructivism, and even Neoplasticism. Cahn's works, for example, indicate her proximity to Léger's simplification of objects and to Ozenfant's purism.⁶⁰ Clausen's evolution shows an opposite trend; the personal development of some former Académie students led them through a process of progressive abstraction that took them further from their teachers toward more radical movements such as Neoplasticism. Clausen created her first abstract compositions in 1922. After a purist-influenced period—represented in the exhibition by *Baren*—in 1929 she again created some abstractions, including a series of geometric Neoplastic compositions: black grids that create rectangles filled with primary colors to which she added soft tones of green and violet. In 1930, she began to work with circles and squares (Pl. 17) in what became a more personal approach to geometric abstraction; the circle and the curved line were banned from the neoplastic universe, and in this sense her work points to an attempt to explore new possibilities with the restricted vocabulary of geometry.

Sophie Taeuber-Arp also experimented with the circle in her most abstract works; however, the paintings she showed at the Cercle et carré exhibition were emblematic of her work of the late 1920s, in which a radical geometrization of form and the two-dimensional pictorial plane do not completely hide lingering figurative reminiscences, especially in her series of *Personnages*. On the other hand, Chodasiewicz's work during the 1920s, and before her association with Léger, was closer to the work of three male contemporaries who shared her interests: Ozenfant, in chromatism and textural research; Albert Gleizes, in rotation and translation; and Hans Arp, in biometric forms, as shown by her *Kompozycja planimetryczna—Waza* (Planimetric composition—vase) (1926; Pl. 18). It is possible that Chodasiewicz's and Clausen's experiences with abstraction prior to studying at the Académie Moderne influenced their development.⁶¹

The exhibition was a key moment for artists in the abstract art circles in early 1930s Paris, and while the opening and closing events were crowded social occasions that boosted the morale of members of the group, the exhibition itself was a commercial failure. No work was sold, overall attendance was light, and the critical reception was poor and mostly negative.⁶² The women's contributions received no special attention.⁶³ The group broke up soon after.

In 1931, some of the artists who had participated in Cercle et carré and Art concret created another association, Abstraction-Création.⁶⁴ This group published an annual journal (*abstraction création*) and organized some exhibitions, involving about one hundred artists. Although Abstraction-Création is often mentioned as the successor to Cercle et carré, just fifteen of its artists participated in the new group, and Taeuber-Arp was the only female member of Cercle et carré to join.⁶⁵

In fact, most of the women of Cercle et carré encountered various difficulties in furthering their careers in the field of abstract art. Cahn declined an invitation to publish some of her paintings in *abstraction création*,⁶⁶ and began exhibiting figurative works. Clausen moved back to Denmark, but after the poor reception of a 1932 one-woman show in Copenhagen, she began experimenting with Surrealism and did not return to abstraction until the 1950s. During the 1930s Exter created some scenography and costume designs, but focused chiefly on book illustrations and decorative panels. Adya van Rees is not connected with any abstract groups (her husband participated in Abstraction-Création). Chodasiewicz focused on her work at the Atelier Léger (which she later managed) and moved away completely from abstract painting for many years. Bjarnason left Paris in the mid-1930s for Germany and Iceland, where she focused on non-artistic issues. Idelson continued to exhibit at the Parisian Salon d'Automne and elsewhere during the 1930s, and worked as stage and costume designer for at least two more plays⁶⁷; and Nechama Szmuszkowicz had a one-woman show in April 1931, at the Galerie Bonaparte.⁶⁸ Finally, Florence Henri focused on photography, becoming more successful than she had been as a painter.⁶⁹

Ultimately, these women's participation in Cercle et carré had little positive impact on their careers. Before Cercle et carré, all had been intensely active within the Parisian avant-

garde scene, and several had attracted some attention to their work. Instead of being a milestone on a coherent path of artistic development, enabling them to make a name for themselves in the avant-garde artistic scene of the 1930s, Cercle et carré proved quite the reverse.⁷⁰ It is true that throughout the 1930s, difficulties arose for all abstract artists. In addition to the general negative outlook described here, the economic crisis following the 1929 economic crash affected the commercial reception of avant-garde art in Europe, and particularly of abstract art⁷¹; the political situation also grew more hostile to abstract experimentation. Even so, generally speaking, male artists in the show found greater success and are better documented than their female colleagues.⁷²

Having analyzed the female artists' participation in the Cercle et carré, we could conclude that there were no specific differences between their contributions and those of their male counterparts in terms of the kinds of works they exhibited.⁷³ In this sense, Cercle et carré may appear to have been a favorable space for women's incorporation into modern artistic practice, even when compared with the role they played in other avant-garde movements, such as Surrealism. Nevertheless, their subsequent careers suggest that this incorporation was far from exemplary. The women's minimal participation in the theoretical discourse that framed the activities of the group suggests that their presence was easier to accept in the artistic domain, which was characterized by significant creative diversity, than in the theoretical domain, which was dominated by a dogmatic essentialism. It would seem, therefore, that their activity generated a contradiction: on the one hand their contributions to abstraction place them at the center of the artistic practices that were constitutive of modernity; on the other, modernity, as it was being framed and defined, made it difficult to assume with any degree of normality the presence and work of women artists, and the implicit difference this presence involved.⁷⁴

Arthur Danto, writing about Clement Greenberg's critical work, stated that there always exists some kind of relationship between a specific approach to an artistic issue and the vocabulary one uses—including its translation into real life attitudes. "The history of modernism," he states, "is the history of purgation, of generic cleansing, of ridding the art of whatever was inessential to it."⁷⁵ The "inessential" components which were to be purged from modern art included, as we have seen, the feminine element. These women probably did not identify themselves with what this concept of the "feminine" alluded to, and indeed, many of them eschewed it in their work. But the fact that the discourse which framed their artistic activities—produced by their male counterparts—did identify such a connection, undoubtedly affected how the work of these women was received and how their contribution to abstract art was judged. Despite their active role in some of the most radical artistic manifestations of the time, abstraction, as Cercle et carré understood it, was for them a largely inhospitable arena. •

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Notes

1. "Les femmes en se libérant enrichissent l'humanité de valeurs supplémentaires et inattendues. L'exposition de votre académie en est la preuve nouvelle. En effet, les deux artistes les plus intéressants, à mon humble avis, sont deux femmes: Mademoiselle Clausen et Mademoiselle Cahn." See Christian Derouet, ed., *Correspondance Fernand Léger – Léonce Rosenberg, 1917-1937* (Paris: MNAM, 1996), 215. Rosenberg is referring to the exhibition by students of the Académie Moderne, which was held in the Galerie d'Art Contemporain (June 30–July 13, 1926).
2. Two major exceptions to this are Sonia Delaunay and Sophie Taeuber-Arp. See Catherine Gonnard and Elisabeth Lebovici, *Femmes artistes/artistas femmes, Paris, de 1880 à nos jours* (Women artists/artist women, Paris, from 1880 to today) (Paris: Hazan, 2007); and Beat Wismer, ed., *Karo-Dame. Konstruktive, Konkrete Constructive, und Radikale Kunst von Frauen von 1914 bis heute* (Concrete and Radical art by women, from 1914 to today), (Aarau: Aargauer Kunsthau, and Baden: Verlag Lars Müller, 1995).
3. Both men have given accounts of the group's history: Joaquín Torres-García, *Historia de mi vida* (Story of my life) (Barcelona: Paidós, 1990 [1939]), 203–06; Michel Seuphor, *Le style et le cri* (The style and the scream) (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1965), 108–23, and *Cercle et carré* (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1971), 7–28. For the most complete account, see M. Aline Prat, *Peinture et avant-garde au seuil des années 30* (Painting and avant-garde at the threshold of the 30s) (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1984), also the recent exhibition catalogue *Cercle et Carré and the International Spirit of Abstract Art* (Athens, GA: Georgia Museum of Art, 2013).
4. See for example, M. Aline Prat, *L'abstraction en France, 1919-1939* (Paris: CNDP, 1992), 13.
5. Nevertheless, in 1931, the journal, citing its desire to uphold its own strict code of impartiality, gave a chance to some of the major figures of abstraction (Mondrian, Léger, Baumeister, Kandinsky, Arp and Alexander Dorner) to "defend this accused art," *Cahiers d'art* 1 (1931): 41.
6. Gladys Fabre underlines this point in *París 1930: arte abstracto, arte concreto, Cercle et Carré* (Valencia: IVAM, 1990), 13–22. Of the women in *Cercle et carré*, only Marcelle Cahn was French.
7. For example Léonce Rosenberg, who supported De Stijl, and Jeanne Boucher, whose gallery organized, in 1928, Mondrian's first ever one-man show. Some Polish gallerists who had settled in Paris, such as Povolotzky himself, Sliwinsky (director of the gallery Sacré du printemps) and Eugène Zak and Jadwiga Kon, from Gallery Zak, were also supporters of abstraction. Fabre, *París 1930*, 15–16.
8. Seuphor wrote about how all the artistic activity in Paris was focused on Surrealism, which had a very strong public presence. Seuphor, *Cercle et carré*, 11.
9. Torres-García had already talked about the need to create some kind of group with Theo Van Doesburg, whom he had met in 1928, but the project didn't go forward. In 1930 Van Doesburg founded *Art concret*, which was limited to the publication of a booklet of the same name in April of that year; Van Doesburg's group was joined by Tutundjan, Hélion, Carlsund and Wantz. For more on the relationship between Torres-García and Van Doesburg, see *The Antagonistic Link. Joaquín Torres-García / Theo van Doesburg* (Amsterdam: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1991).
10. The three issues of the journal *Cercle et carré* were published on March 15, April 15 and June 30, 1930; a fourth issue set for October was never published. The group's exhibition was open April 18–30, 1930, at Galerie 23, in Rue de la Boétie.
11. Based on the catalogue of the exhibition *Cercle et carré*, we could list the members of the group as follows: Arp, Baumeister, Bjarnason, Buchheister, Cahn, Clausen, Colson, Cueto, Charchounne, Daura, Exter, Fillia, Foltyn, Gorin, Chodasiewicz-

- Grabowska, Hoste, Huszár, Idelson, Kandinsky, Lafnet, Le Corbusier, Léger, Luethy, Mondrian, Seuphor, Moszczynsky, Olson, Ozenfant, Pevsner, Prampolini, Russolo, Sartoris, Schwitters, Stazewski, Szmuszkowicz, Stella, Suschyn, Taeuber-Arp, Torres-García, Vordemberge-Gildewart, Adya Van Rees, Otto van Rees, Vantongerloo, Welty, Werkman and Wolska; Freundlich participated too, although he is not listed in the journal. There were also a number of contributors of text or images to the journal who did not exhibit their work at the show: Domela, Hoyack, Brzekowski, Olombel, Rattner, Dalcroze, Freundlich, Céron, Bufano, Meyer, Linze, Behne, Gropius, Behrendt, Richter, Hausmann, Deslaw, Henri, the Luckhardt brothers and Moholy Nagy. *Cercle et carré* 3 (1930).
12. Michel Seuphor, *Le style et le cri*, 113; *Cercle et carré*, 11; "Le Jeu du je" (The game of me) in Herbert Henkels (ed.), *Seuphor* (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 1976), 320.
 13. Seuphor, *Le style et le cri*, 114.
 14. Florence Henri did not participate in the exhibition, but had a one-woman show of her photographs in the same gallery later in the year.
 15. See Gabriele Mahn, "La contribution de Sophie Taeuber-Arp et de Hans Arp à l'Aubette," in Emmanuel Guignon (dir.), *L'Aubette ou la couleur dans l'architecture: une oeuvre de Hans Arp, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Theo Van Doesburg* (Strasbourg: Les Musées d'Strasbourg and Association Theo van Doesburg, 2006), 141.
 16. She even signed some letters as Ingibjoerg Seuphor (see a letter to Torres-García, published in *The Antagonistic Link*, 164). Seuphor talks about her in "Le jeu du je," 317–22; their relationship appears to have begun in the spring of 1928 and lasted about two years, according to him. Little is known about her artistic output; see Caroline Cason Barratt, "Artists' biographies," in *Cercle et Carré and the International Spirit of Abstract Art*, 307.
 17. Adya Van Rees participated, together with her husband and Hans Arp, in an exhibition that took place in November of 1915 at the gallery Tanner, in Zurich. It was at the vernissage of this show that Arp and Sophie Taeuber met for the first time.
 18. Torres-García, *Historia de mi vida*, 208, 220–21. Six letters from Adya to Torres-García's family have been published in *The Antagonistic Link*, 162–63.
 19. For more information about this school, see Gladys Fabre, "L'Esprit Moderne et le problème de l'abstraction chez Léger, ses amis et ses élèves de l'Académie Moderne," in *Léger et l'esprit moderne. Une alternative d'avant-garde à l'art non-objectif (1918-1931)* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1982), 355–406; and "L'Atelier de Léger et l'Académie Moderne," in *L'œil* 320 (1982): 32–39. Cahn studied there during 1925–26; Clausen, 1924–26; Chodasiewicz, 1925–26; Wolska, 1926–28; Szmuszkowicz, 1926–31; Henri, 1925–26. Clausen was Léger's assistant for a time, working on some of his pictures (for example, *Composition with profile: knife and figure*, 1926). Chodasiewicz was Léger's assistant from 1932, later ran the atelier, and married him in 1952. Clausen, Henri, Idelson and Cahn had studied previously in Germany, and Chodasiewicz had attended the Smolensk Art School and the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. Clausen took part in the 1924 Atelier Fernand Léger exhibition at the Maison Watteau. Clausen, Henri, Cahn and Chodasiewicz took part in exhibitions at the Galerie d'Art Contemporain (1926) and Galerie Aubier (1927), respectively. In 1928, Galerie Aubier held two consecutive exhibitions, with works by Szmuszkowicz in the first, and then Clausen's. A review of the 1926 exhibition in *Cahiers d'art* (1926, 6) reproduced paintings by Clausen, Cahn and Henri.
 20. At the end of the show Clausen sold *Komposition* to the Vicomte de Noailles.
 21. Dreier did not retain their works for the Societé's collection, which would later include a sculpture by Sophie Taeuber. See Robert Herbert, Eleanor Apter and Elise Kenney (eds.), *The Societé Anonyme and the Dreier Bequest at Yale University. A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1984).
 22. In 1927, at the gallery Der Sturm in Berlin, and the following year at Magdeburg, Exter exhibited 66 works for the stage, in collaboration with Szmuszkowicz. In 1929, the Galerie des Quatre Chemins (Paris) showed Exter's théâtre maquettes, décors, and costumes. Idelson had studied with Exter from 1924, when she had settled in Paris and opened a school in her own atelier.
 23. Jean Monneret, *Catalogue raisonné du Salon des Indépendants. Les Indépendants dans l'histoire de l'art, 1884-2000* (Paris: Salon des Indépendants, 2000).
 24. Cahn, Clausen and Exter were mentioned in the book *Die Frau als Künstlerin* (Women as artists) published by Hans Hildebrandt in Berlin in 1928; Taeuber was included in *Kunstismen* (The Isms of Art) edited by Hans Arp and El Lissitzky (1925); Henri and Cahn were mentioned in *Kubismus* (Cubism) (1928) by Albert Gleizes. Cahn's work also appeared in the magazines *Bulletin de l'effort moderne* (1926) and *Der Sturm* (1930). Chodasiewicz-Grabowska was co-editor, with Polish poet Jan Brzekowski, of *L'art contemporain* (1929–30), a Parisian avant-garde journal that published works by Henri and Wolska, as well as Chodasiewicz's own work.
 25. Generally speaking, the debates were monopolized by Vantongerloo and Torres-García; Seuphor, *Cercle et carré*, 14–15.
 26. She wrote that, even though they got on well with each other, they did not stay in touch after *Cercle et carré*. Marcelle Cahn, "Biographie," in *Marcelle Cahn*, (Paris: Archives d'art contemporain, 1972), 60.
 27. This quotation, "une certaine misogynie latente: les femmes n'étaient pas prises au sérieux," comes from Prat's 1978 interview with Clausen, in Prat, *Peinture et avant-garde*, 72, quote 33.
 28. The artists were more interested in exhibiting, while Seuphor believed the journal was their essential means of expression; as editor-in-chief, he played a crucial role in the definition of its aesthetic project.
 29. Taeuber had previously published, in 1922 and 1927, essays on the teaching of applied arts, *Sophie Taeuber: rythmes plastiques, réalités architecturales* (Clamart: Fondation Arp, 2007), 103–13. Exter had published two reviews of exhibitions and three brief articles on her work as a stage designer in various Russian journals.
 30. "Une jolie femme peintre, pas trop soucieuse de théorie" in Prat, *Peinture et avant-garde*, 56, nota 20. In this sense, I disagree with something that Lynn Boland writes in his otherwise excellent essay on the group: "The first issue of the group's eponymous journal includes twenty-four individual statements [...] and its democratic nature, internationalism, and, at least relative to the time, egalitarianism and gender equality are evident in all three issues."; "Inscribing a circle," in *Cercle et Carré and the International Spirit of Abstract Art*, 13–55; 14.
 31. Seuphor, *Le style et le cri*, 112–14.
 32. In the editorial of the second issue of *Cercle et carré*, Seuphor discusses and responds to a very critical letter by Van Doesburg: "Your journal is truly appalling.... as poor in content as in form, without any basis, without documentation, even without direction," in "Editorial," *Cercle et carré* 2 (1930); English translation, *Cercle et Carré and the International Spirit of Abstract Art*, 101.
 33. Seuphor, *Le style et le cri*, 115, and Prat, *Peinture et avant-garde*, 64–66.
 34. See Seuphor, *Le style et le cri*, 113.
 35. Michel Seuphor, "Pour la défense d'une architecture," in *Cercle et carré* 1 (1930); English transl. from *Cercle et Carré and the International Spirit of Abstract Art*, 73–78. Many years later Seuphor would write about his dissatisfaction with this text, which was defined as too simple and dense. Seuphor, *Cercle et carré*, 27.

36. Piet Mondrian, "L'art réaliste et l'art superréaliste," in *Cercle et carré 2* (1930); English translation, *Cercle et Carré and the International Spirit of Abstract Art*, 88–92.
37. "The feminine and the material rule life and society and shackle spiritual expression as a function of the masculine. A Futurist manifesto proclaiming hatred of woman (the feminine) is entirely justified. The woman in man is the direct cause of the domination of the tragic in art." Piet Mondrian, "Neo-plasticism: the general principle of plastic equivalence" (1920) in Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, eds. and transl., *The New Art – The New Life, The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 137. On Mondrian's views on this issue, see Mark A. Cheetham, "Purity or Danger. Mondrian's Exclusion of the Feminine and the Gender of Abstract Painting," in Elizabeth D. Harvey and Kathleen Okruhlick, eds., *Women and Reason* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1992), 187–200.
38. See, for instance, the articles by Léger, M. Olombel, Vantongerloo, Fillia, Rattner or Gorin. See also Laura Valeri, "Seuphor as Editor: The Pursuit of a Unified Philosophy in Cercle et Carré's Journals," in *Cercle et Carré and the International Spirit of Abstract Art*, 56–71.
39. Joaquín Torres-García, "Vouloir construire" (A Will to Construct), *Cercle et carré 1* (1930); English translation from *Cercle et Carré and the International Spirit of Abstract Art*, 78–80. Seuphor removed some of the more controversial passages from Torres-García's original text; see *Cercle et Carré and the International Spirit of Abstract Art*, 60–63.
40. *Cercle et carré 1* (1930); English transl. from *ibid.*, 80.
41. *Cercle et carré 1* (1930); English transl. from *ibid.*, 82.
42. *Cercle et carré 2* (1930); English transl. from *ibid.*, 93.
43. *Cercle et carré 2* (1930); English transl. from *ibid.*, 93–94.
44. For more information about the play and its staging, see Giovanni Lista, "'L'angoisse des machines' de Ruggero Vasari," in Denis Bablet, ed., *Les voies de la création théâtrale. Mises en scène, années 20 et 30* (Ways of theatrical creation. Staging in the 1920s and 30s) (Paris: Eds. du CNRS, 1979), 277–305.
45. Bacal's costume was based on a circle form, and Singar's on a square.
46. *Cercle et carré 2* (1930); English transl. from *Cercle et Carré and the International Spirit of Abstract Art*, 93.
47. Marcelle Cahn, "Biographie," *Marcelle Cahn*, 55.
48. For example, some works by Rosa Bonheur and Camille Claudel have been reviewed in a positive light as virile, while paintings by artists such as Renoir or Klee have been dismissed as "feminine"; see Anne Higonnet, "Writing the Gender of the Image: Art Criticism in Late Nineteenth-Century France" in *Genders 6* (1989): 61–73, and Jenny Anger, *Paul Klee and the Decorative in Modern Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004).
49. See Valentine de Saint-Point, *Manifeste de la femme futuriste: suivi de Manifeste futuriste de la luxure, Le théâtre de la femme, La métachorie* (Manifesto of Futurist Woman: followed by Manifesto of Lust, Theater of the Woman) (Paris: Séguier, 1996). The Manifesto was published in 1912 in Paris.
50. Griselda Pollock wrote, "in pursuit of universal truths, absolute values and aesthetic purity, gender and all other forms of social positioning were deemed irrelevant [...] to gain access to more of their humanity, [they] would be permitted none of their femininity." "Inscriptions in the feminine," in Catherine de Zegher, ed., *Inside the visible: an elliptical traverse of 20th century art. In, of and from the feminine* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1996), 69.
51. Robert P. Welsh and Joop M. Joosten, eds., *Two Mondrian Sketchbooks, 1912–1914* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff International, 1969), 19, 34. Symbolism, the intellectual precedent for many abstract artists, had already addressed the issue of women's lack of artistic talent; see Patricia Mathews, *Passionate discontent: Creativity, Gender and French Symbolist Art* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999).
52. In 1928, art critic Louis Vauxcelles wrote of the painters Emily Charny and Odette Garet: "But these delicious peintresses – two of the most talented of the day—are they capable of competing with Bonnard, Vuillard, Utrillo in 1911, or Friesz in his best days, or Segonzac, Dufrene, Lotiron?... Are they artists in the profound sense of the word? Is there, to the contrary, an aspect of assimilation in their seductive words?" Quoted in Paula Birnbaum, *Women artists in Interwar France. Framing femininities* (Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 15.
53. The catalogue includes up to 46 names; Otto Freundlich participated but is not listed, and Prampolini is listed but did not participate. For the complete list, see note 11 above.
54. In the first room, visitors found examples of the artistic diversity that coexisted in the group, from the stylized figuration by Wolska or Bjarnason (Fig. 5) to the geometric abstraction of Gorin or Daura. In the second room were paintings by Mondrian, Vantongerloo, and Taeuber's abstracts; the third room, called "purist," presented paintings by Cahn, Idelson, Taeuber, Léger, and Ozenfant. In the last room were works by Clausen and Adya Van Rees (Fig. 4), and in the basement maquettes by Exter and Idelson. Some controversy arose over the hanging of Clausen's works, which Vantongerloo moved to another room rather with Mondrian's paintings, as planned. See photographs of the exhibition in Prat, *Peinture et avant-garde*, 76–77, and Boland, "Inscribing a circle," 43.
55. Even Seuphor, who had always defined the group and the exhibition as a movement that existed to defend and promote abstract art, admitted some years later that some paintings, as those by Torres-García or Ozenfant, were barely abstract. Michel Seuphor, *Dictionnaire de la peinture abstraite* (Paris: F. Hazan, 1957), 49.
56. "[...] the installation further demonstrated the group's democratic ideals (in many ways more than the journal), its internationalism, and its members' desire to work under the common banner of 'structure and construction.'" Boland, "Inscribing a circle," 43.
57. The artist herself destroyed this work, see Cahn, *Marcelle Cahn*, 60.
58. See the catalogue of her works in Sidsel Maria Sondergaard (ed.), *Absolut Avantgarde. Franciska Clausen 1921–1931* (Hellerup: Oregaard Museum, 2011). In her memoir Clausen wrote that she had shown *De la Rue Delambre* (1925), *Composition* (1929) (Pl. 14), and *Circle and Square* (Pl. 17), but only *Composition* can be seen in the exhibition photographs; *Karo-Dame*, 186.
59. These works may have appeared in her one-woman show in Spring 1931, at the Galerie Bonaparte, where Szmuszkowicz showed two landscapes and *Deux femmes*.
60. Years later, Cahn would write about her relation with Léger and Ozenfant. She loved Léger's work, which she thought had some greatness; and she felt that Ozenfant's purism had strongly influenced her abstract work," Cahn, *Marcelle Cahn*, 57.
61. While studying in Smolensk, Chodasiewicz had encountered the work of Malevich and Sztreminsky, though perhaps superficially; she took to Paris a sketchbook with some suprematist pencil sketches that she later developed into a series of oil paintings; see Christophe Czwiklitzer, ed., *Suprematisme de Nadia Khodossievitch – Léger* (Paris: Editions Art – C. C. 1972). Clausen had studied in Berlin with Archipenko and Moholy-Nagy.
62. Seuphor wrote about this critical failure in the last issue of the group's journal and in his later publications; for a summary of the published criticism, see Prat, *Peinture et avant-garde*, 78–80.
63. Except for a review published in the magazine *La Pologne*, whose critic focused on the contributions of the five Polish artists in the show, three of whom were women (although Chodasiewicz was

- Russian, she was married to a Polish artist and was considered a member of the Polish community in Paris). This critic says of Wolska's work that it was "the product of a sensibility filled with incoherent artifices," and considered Szmuszkowicz (who he mistakenly believes to be a man) "the most damnable case", because he sees this artist as a deserter from abstraction. He much prefers the works by Nadia, who he believes is "in progress." Edouard Woroniecki, "L'art polonais a Paris," *La Pologne* (1930), 861-62.
64. The group was mainly promoted by Vantongerloo, Héliou, and Herbin, with the collaboration of Van Doesburg. The most important reference we have of the group, besides the journal itself, remains the catalogue *Abstraction création 1931-1936* (Paris and Münster: Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte Münster / Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1978).
 65. Tauber-Arp remained in the group until 1934. The other women whose work appears in the journal *abstraction création* and in some of that group's exhibitions are: Jeanne Kosnick-Kloss, Sonia Delaunay, Laure Garcin, Marlow Moss, Evie Hone, Mainie Jellett, Alexandra Povorina, Barbara Hepworth, Paule Vézelay, Katherine Dreier and Katarina Kobro.
 66. On her refusal to join Abstraction-Création, see Cahn, *Marcelle Cahn*, 60. Cahn does not mention a particular reason for this retreat, beyond wanting to focus on her work (ibid.). However, in the interview upon which this text is based, Cahn hints at a more personal issue; see the transcript in Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre de documentation et de recherche du MNAM/Cci, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. It has been suggested that her Jewish origins may have been a factor in this retreat from the artistic front row; see Marie Louise Syring, "Du purisme à l'abstraction puriste," in *Marcelle Cahn* (Paris: Lahumière, 1997).
 67. For Idelson's biography, see Lea Vergine, *L'altra metà dell'avanguardia, 1910-1940. Pittrici e scultrici nei movimenti delle avanguardie storiche* (The other half of the Avant-garde, 1910-1940. Women painters and sculptors in the historic avant-garde movements.) (Milan: Comune di Milano and Mazzotta ed., 1980) 143-45. Exter, Van Rees, Henri, Cahn, and Clausen are also included in this catalogue.
 68. She exhibited both figurative and more abstract compositions; in the text he wrote for the catalogue, the critic Raymond Cogniat categorizes her work as Purism, although he concedes that she has gone much further in the process of abstraction than Ozenfant himself.
 69. See *Florence Henri. Parcours dans la Modernité – Peinture / Photographie 1918 – 1979* (Course in Modernity – Painting / Photography 1918-1979) (Toulon: Hôtel des Arts, 2010).
 70. Sophie Taeuber is again the exception, since she was already a highly regarded artist before Cercle et carré.
 71. See Fabre, *Paris 1930*, 13-22; and *L'art dans les années 30 en France* (Saint-Etienne: Musée d'art et industrie de Saint-Etienne, 1979).
 72. "On the whole, far less has been written about the female participants than the male, and work by the women in Cercle et Carré is represented far less in public collections. There are exceptions [...] but even there, scholarship is greatly lagging in comparison to canonical male artists." Boland, "Inscribing a circle," 53.
 73. Although women represented only about one fifth of the participants at the exhibition, this was not an inconsiderable quantity; Seuphor himself would point to the significant number of women who became interested in abstraction during the 1920s. Seuphor, *Dictionnaire*, 69.
 74. Amongst many authors that have addressed this question, see for example, Carol Duncan, "The MOMA's Hot Mamas" in *Art Journal* 48, 2 (1989): 171-78; Andreas Huyssens, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass-culture, Post-modernism (Theories of Representation and Difference)* (Basingstoke, Engl.: MacMillan Press, 1986); and Griselda Pollock, "Inscriptions in the feminine," in de Zegher, ed., *Inside the visible: an elliptical traverse of 20th century art. In, of and from the feminine*, 67-87.
 75. "The history of modernism is the history of purgation, of generic cleansing, of ridding the art of whatever was inessential to it. It is difficult not to hear the political echoes of these notions of purity and purgation, whatever Greenberg's own politics actually were. [...] You cannot use the idiom of purity, purgation and contamination and at the same time take easily to the postures of acceptance and toleration." Arthur C. Danto, *After the end of art: Contemporary art and the pale of history* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995), 68.

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The Art of Hung Liu: Summoning Ghosts

Edited by Amy Teschner,
essays by Wu Hung, Karen Smith, et al.
University of California Press, 2013

Reviewed by Midori Yamamura

Hung Liu is known for her provocative paintings based on Chinese archival and recent photographs, with subjects ranging from prostitutes and exploited laborers to children of the Revolution and intimate family snapshots. *The Art of Hung Liu: Summoning Ghosts* is the catalogue for the artist's much-anticipated second major U.S. retrospective at the Oakland Museum of California. "By turning old photographs into new paintings, Liu brings her subjects out of the shadows of history into contemporary consciousness" (199), is how Jeff Kelley, Liu's husband and collaborator for the past thirty years, explains her practice in the book's chronology. In the spirit of the literati tradition, Liu references images from the past, of suffering, hardship, and chaotic turmoil, while commenting on the "universal themes of repression and gender based power."¹ Given how her artworks made after her immigration to the United States in 1984 could be perceived as controversial by the Chinese Communist government, the chronology reveals her surprisingly illustrious career in her native country.

Hung Liu was born in 1948 in Changchun, China, to a family that sided with the Kuomintang, the Chinese Nationalist Party. Still, in 1961, Liu was accepted into the government's special boarding school for girls in Beijing, where she maintained top grades until the Cultural Revolution erupted in 1966. As a student of an elite school, Liu was forced to undergo "re-education," which, based on Liu's photographs and paintings from the period (61–64, 78–79), did not seem to have impacted her. After completing her "re-education," she enrolled at the Beijing Teacher's College, and became an art teacher at the Jingshan School, an elite Beijing school modeled after the Russian system. The government also assigned her to teach a

children's art program on national television, and as a result, she became a TV personality. In the meantime, Deng Xiaoping had taken over the reins of government on the death of Mao Zedong and instituted more moderate economic and social policies. Liu entered the graduate program at Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts—the apex of the Chinese art world—and was retained as a faculty member there to teach mural painting.

What the book does not make clear is that, despite her family's background (her father, Xia Peng, a captain in the Kuomintang army, was sent to a labor camp by the Communist government the year Liu was born, and her mother, Liu Zong Guang, was forced to divorce him), Liu's family was relatively untouched by the anti-bourgeois purge during the Cultural Revolution. This was likely due to Liu's impeccable academic performance. Nevertheless, her fear of authoritarianism was quite deep, and only after she emigrated to the United States and after she located her father and had him released in 1995 did she fully realize how the Chinese government had programmed her like a puppet.² The repercussions of this event led Liu to paint a series of happy-looking children from Mao Zedong's propaganda photographs of the 1950s and early 1960s, triggered by her memories of growing up under the Communist government.³ This group of artworks is largely absent from the current catalogue. Moreover, despite Liu's unique background, noticeably absent from the book is a biography (excepting Kelley's chronology), nor is there an interview that might give readers added insight into her thinking. Instead, such features are oddly replaced by the novelist Yiyun Li's memoir of growing up under Communist China, which reduces Liu's unique experience to a universal type. As Gayatri Spivak insightfully points out in her 1988 subaltern study, not all subjects of the Other are the same.⁴ Although Liu's work is more conceptual than biographical, learning about her unique worldview derived from her sin-



Fig. 1. Hung Liu, *Western Pass* (1990), oil on canvas, silver leaf on wood, ceramics, 60" x 60" x 10". Collection of Hung Liu and Jeff Kelley.

gular socio-cultural experience in her own words would deepen our understanding of her work.

Nevertheless, this is a handsomely illustrated book, with 140 photographs, and editor Amy Teschner has assembled several informative texts. Among them, Wu Hung's essay, "Four Moments in Hung Liu's Art," is especially helpful in contextualizing Liu's work. The foremost authority on Chinese contemporary art, Wu focuses on four critical works and projects in Liu's career, marked by social events. The first section explains how Liu's largest and most important government-commissioned mural painting, *Music for the Great Earth* (1980–81), inspired by the Warring States bells called *bianzhong*, was her response to the Cultural Revolution and an attempt to restore human sensibility to those bereft of all hope. The second section focuses on Liu's new artistic identity after graduating from the University of California, San Diego, in 1986. Reflecting the 1980s multicultural environment of the Bay Area, three interconnected changes occurred that could be observed in Liu's threshold exhibition, entitled "Resident Alien" (1988), as part of the artist-in-residence program at the Capp Street Project. These changes were: the emergence of the immigrant as a central theme; Liu's interest in modern and contemporary

Chinese politics; and the use of old photographs and other historical artifacts. Concerning the latter, she was interested in images relating to Chinese people, particularly those who were excluded from the mainstream history. Rather than assimilating into U.S. culture, Liu explained that she wanted to contribute to her “new home” by expressing her “Chineseness” (24).

It was during this period that she began conducting social surveys and archival research into modern and contemporary history that became pivotal to her practice. It was also during this time that Liu’s “paintings and installations began to show historical traces in an increasingly complex manner; different temporalities negotiated, interwove, and collided in ever more puzzling ways” (24). Central to this exhibition were three 5’ x 7’6” *Green Card* paintings, representing three immigrant generations of the Wong family of San Francisco. Other works in the show were paintings of prostitutes of old Chinatown and of Chinese laborers in the West who built the transcontinental railroad. Such subjects would reappear in her later works. Overall, this exhibition connected her experience in the United States with that of other Chinese immigrants within a changing historical context.⁵

The third section of Wu’s text focuses on *Trauma*, Liu’s response to the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989. Two sections in this work render a map of Beijing centered on Tiananmen Square (left) and a furious officer from the People’s Liberation Army (right). The officer’s pistol is aimed at Liu’s self-portrait painted directly below. Like many other Chinese expatriate artists, the June Fourth incident reconnected Liu with China, spurring her use of Chinese archival photographs—evoking memories of herself and her native country. The first of this series, *Western Pass* (1990; Fig. 1), is based on the British plant collector E. H. Wilson’s gruesome images of criminals waiting for execution, taken between 1899 and 1910. To a faithful depiction of two such tortured criminals, Liu added two three-dimensional wooden square pedestals, placing a porcelain bowl on each, and

added lines of poetry. Wu notes that, “Many of the visual elements in *Western Pass*,” such as the juxtaposition of two- and three-dimensional images and the past and present, would “continued to be extended in Liu’s later works” (32).

More changes occurred in Liu’s technique, especially, during the mid-1990s. She added “ink splash” (*po mo*) to her images and symbolically blurred them, as if to signify a process of memory permeating her art. Bill Berkson’s essay, originally written for Liu’s 1998 Rena Bransten Gallery exhibition catalogue, elaborates on her new drip technique as creating an anticlimactic disillusion, marking Liu’s shift away from the rigid social realism that she studied in China.

The last section of Wu’s essay focuses on Liu’s first solo exhibition in China, which coincided with the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Situated in the Nanxincang granary, the imperial storehouse erected in Beijing during the Ming dynasty, the show included Liu’s installation made especially for this venue, titled *The Great Granary*. The work consists of thirty-four old-style grain measures from the thirty-four provincial administrative divisions in China, filled with grains, cereals, and beans and placed directly on the floor in a pattern roughly resembling an outline of China. Surrounding *The Great Granary* were new studies based on *Music for the Great Earth*, her earliest mural painting.

Having started her career as a muralist, spatial formation, or installation, was an important yet lesser-known aspect of Liu’s oeuvre that she began creating in 1985, a year after her arrival in the United States. Stephanie Hanor’s essay chronologically discusses Liu’s site-specific works, such as *Jin Jin Shan* (Old Gold Mountain) (1994) and *Going Away, Coming Home* (2006). Senior Curator of Oakland Museum René De Guzman’s essay, “Snapshot,” which captures moments of Liu’s life that she knew personally, as Liu’s studio assistant, is a little diffused and argumentatively thin. However, De Guzman’s images, especially those of Liu’s oil paintings and of photographs from the time of the Cultural Revolution, with their idyllic and idealized representation, suggest how Liu complied with the government,

giving readers an interesting and important point of comparison with her later works.

Curiously, the book contains no discussion of Liu’s feminism. According to the chronology, however, she spoke at the 2011 feminist conference in China, the International Conference on Chinese Women and Visual Representation. The subjects of Liu’s paintings range from the powerful Dowager Empress Cixi, to orphaned girls, prostitutes, and Korean comfort women, and such scholars as Elaine Kim and Norman Bryson have eloquently written on the uniqueness of Liu’s feminism.⁶ In the present catalogue, the Beijing-based art historian Karen Smith touches on some of Liu’s female subjects. She also refers to a 2011 interview in which Liu discussed wanting to “restore dignity” to “the women who have completely lost their freedom, family, and identity” by returning “the male gaze in the more aggressive, strong, dignified way” (99). Missing, though, from Smith’s essay, was a discussion how Liu’s female subjects returned the male gaze.

The Art of Hung Liu: Summoning Ghosts has much to recommend it, and the essays are important contributions to scholarship on this artist. However, given the lack of a feminist lens, a biography, and a personal interview, the present volume would be best complemented by reading *Hung Liu: A Ten-Year Survey 1988–1998*, which includes Kathleen McManus Zurko’s extensive interview with Liu, and Trinkett Clark’s essay for *Hung Liu: Parameters* (1996), which discusses Liu’s work in relation to her biography. •

Midori Yamamura is a lecturer at Fordham University. She is a specialist in modern and contemporary Asian art with a global and transnational focus, and has written extensively on Japanese post-World War II art. Her first book, *Yayoi Kusama: Inventing the Singular*, will be published by MIT Press this year.

Notes

1. Roslyn Bernstein, “Scholar-Artist: Hung Liu,” in *Hung Liu: The Year of the Dog, 1994*, exh. cat. (New York: Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, 1994), 6. Liu was not aware of literati until she came to the United

States due to the Cultural Revolution; Trinkett Clark, *Hung Liu: Parameters*, exh. brochure (Norfolk, VA: The Chrysler Museum of Art, and Oakland, CA: Mills College Art Gallery, 1996), n.p.

2. Clark, *Hung Liu: Parameters*, n.p.

3. Ibid.

4. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in Patrick Williams and

Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994), 66–111.

5. For more on these images, see for example, Allison Arieff, "Cultural Collisions: Identity and History in the Work of Hung Liu," *WAJ* 17, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1996): 35–40.

6. Elaine H. Kim, "Bad Women: Asian

American Visual Artists Hanh Thi Pham, Hung Liu, and Yong Soon Min," *Feminist Studies* 22 (1996): 507–603; Norman Bryson, "Hung Liu's Goddess," in *Hung Liu: A Ten-Year Survey, 1988–1998*, ed., Kathleen McManus Zurko, exh. cat. (Wooster, OH: College of Wooster Art Museum, 1998), 17–26.

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: An American Modernist

By Carolyn Kastner

University of New Mexico Press, 2013

Reviewed by Betsy Fahlman

Carolyn Kastner's *Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: An American Modernist* is a concise monograph on an important artist, curator, and political activist. Kastner's beautifully written and richly textured analysis is a model of literate, insightful scholarship. Five thematic chapters each focus on a specific body of work. Acknowledging Smith's particular vantage on the "racialized discourse of American history" (1), Kastner places the artist's oeuvre and practice within a broad historical, social, and contemporary context, demonstrating how her use of "dense sign systems" (2) enables the artist to deliver "complex messages" (3) referencing her identity as a Native American modernist.

In her first chapter, "Born in the USA," Kastner considers Smith's multiple inspirations, discussing how the artist has drawn on a broad range of influences to "enrich, resist, or confound" meaning (3). By deriving "imagery and color from the natural world and diverse cultures of North America" (7), Smith's experience is grounded in a "fragmented and complex" hybridity as a result of "being female, indigenous, urban, and a resident of the United States" (9). Born in Montana in 1940, and based in New Mexico since 1976, she has been inspired by nature: "My life's work involves examining contemporary life in America and interpreting it through Native ideology" (15).

For the artist, color and subject matter are directly connected, a topic Kastner explores in her second chapter, "Seeing Red: Indigenous Identity and Artistic Strategy." In addition to it being a primary color and thus deeply grounded in the history of painting, red also references racial identity, blood, and anger. Kastner deftly deconstructs *The Red Mean: Self-Portrait* (1992; Fig. 1), explicating how Smith's use of red signals "affirmation and resistance" (23).

"American Modernism and the Politics of Landscape," chapter three, locates Smith's work within the broad history of American painting, revealing her "personal sense of place and connection to the land of North America" (27). The artist's sources are imaginatively diverse and include Thomas Cole, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Willem de Kooning, although, writes Kastner, she recasts "the American landscape as a site of cultural conflict," visualizing "an indigenous viewpoint about land" (27). The works discussed here are vigorous and painterly, informed by a breathtaking and densely expressive abstraction richly resonant with "multiple and colliding cultural signs" (31) that Smith uses to "denounce the damage to the place and the people who hold the site sacred" (29).

In "Chief Seattle: Visualizing Environmental Disaster," the fourth chapter, Kastner explores how Smith "adapted the gritty urban styles of American pop and graffiti art to invoke the threat of environmental ruin in a

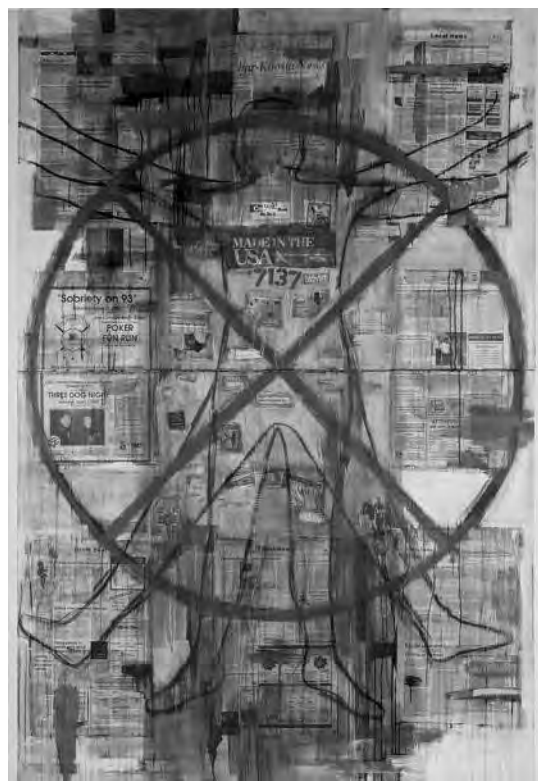


Fig. 1. Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *The Red Mean: Self-Portrait* (1992), acrylic, newspaper collage, shellac, and mixed media on canvas, 90" x 60". Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts.

series of explicitly political art works" which have intriguing parallels to Robert Rauschenberg and Jean-Michel Basquiat (4). Passionately political, and referencing oil spills, acid rain, and drought, these intense works "resist the idyllic, yet resonate with poetic metaphor" (42). Each piece contains words from Chief Seattle's 1854 speech when "he surrendered his people and land" to federal control (41).

In her last chapter, "The Discourse of Modern Art in a Post-Columbian World," Kastner discusses the thirteen watercolors of paper dolls Smith created during the 1992 Columbian quincentennial in

which she substituted post-Columbian for post-colonial to present counter-narratives combining “pop art traditions and Native American humor” (5). She shows how our indigenous cultures were impoverished by colonial conquest, domination, and assimilation” (51). Her trickster figures of Barbie and Ken Plenty Horses are rooted in Native American dislocation, the result of being reservationized. Most bitter are the matching

smallpox suites; one size fits all of the paper dolls. Smith’s trenchant critique is ultimately grounded in “hope and humor” (59).

Thirty-one plates in excellent color illuminate Kastner’s splendid text, which is accompanied by thorough notes and a well-chosen bibliography. Kastner’s *Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: An American Modernist* is a thoughtful and intelligent volume that represents a

brilliant meditation on one of our most important contemporary artists. At a concise eighty-four pages, Kastner’s tightly argued text is a welcome contribution to the literature. •

Betsy Fahlman is professor of Art History at Arizona State University, and serves on the Editorial Board of *WAJ*.

Lygia Clark: The Abandonment of Art, 1948–1988

Edited by Cornelia H. Butler and
Luis Pérez-Oramas
The Museum of Modern Art, 2014

Reviewed by Deborah Frizzell

The Brazilian artist Lygia Clark (1920–88) was a pioneer, an innovator of experiential art projects, participatory performances, and therapeutic art practices. After studying art and architecture in Rio de Janeiro and Paris from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, by the late 1950s she was a leading abstractionist at the forefront of the Neo-Concretist movement in Brazil, introducing the interactivity of audiences through her work and setting precedents for contemporary participatory art. From the mid-1960s through the 1970s, she created a series of unconventional art projects informed by the contexts of psychoanalytic therapy and phenomenological philosophy, leading to her therapeutic *propositions*, which were grounded in the dynamics of her art practice. These practices and approaches propelled her abandonment of modernism and its tenets.

Due to the radical nature of Clark’s most significant experiential art projects, such as *Baba antropofágica* (*Anthropophagic slobber*, 1973), the challenge for curators has been how to convey the power and passion of work that is essentially invisible, work solely produced within the sensory-based experience of individual viewers within a communal framework. Only traces of these events remain

through photographic or cinematic documentation. The everyday objects deployed in these events were merely ephemeral components, “relational objects,” as Clark called them: mediating devices removed from the realm of aesthetics. By 1965, Clark had jettisoned the artist’s authorship of discrete objects to transform her role into that of an interlocutor of psychological and sensorial healing, prefiguring “relational aesthetics” as outlined more recently by Nicolas Bourriaud.¹ Curators may assemble remnants—elastics, shells, stones, industrial rubber, gauze, fabric masks and thread—from her dialogic projects such her *propositions*, reifying these elements into relics or reconstructed fetishized objects, but Clark’s activities evade recapitulation in the art museum. The artist’s therapeutic workshops in Paris and Rio, or from the Venice Biennale as in her *House of the Body* (1968), were expansive and emancipatory projects, hybrid in nature, and informed by psychoanalysis, phenomenology and countercultural politics as well as Brazilian politics. Clark’s investigations into “relational objects” and immersive participation by audiences were developed over a period of twenty-six years, representing two-thirds of her artistic production, whereas the artist’s abstract works account for just the first thirteen years of her career.

The Museum of Modern Art’s retrospective of Clark’s work offered an exceptionally detailed map of her early years as a formal abstractionist, comprising the bulk of the exhibition and the catalogue illustrations. While the MoMA brought together over 300 of the artist’s works and published her writings

for an English-speaking audience, there remained a missed opportunity in the exhibition installation to emphasize and elaborate on Clark’s many and varied participatory projects, her most significant achievement; “relational objects” were confined to a single gallery at the end of exhibition.²

The monograph accompanying Clark’s exhibition, *The Abandonment of Art*, analyzes and contextualizes the artist’s participatory projects and charts the intensity of her drive and her passionate study and intellectual grounding in psychoanalysis and philosophy. The handsomely produced volume includes essays on specific aspects of the artist’s oeuvre by the curators and invited scholars alongside nearly 300 images of the artist’s work and archival photographs. Most important, a range of Clark’s own writings are translated and chronologically interspersed throughout, revealing her deep engagement with fellow artists and the artistic, cultural, and political issues of the period. Her writings reveal a lyricism combined with deep thought and emotion, her struggles to unify everyday life with her artistic experiments and the realization of her therapeutic projects and practice. While archival photographs illuminate Clark’s participatory performances, the illustrations of her abstract paintings tend to read as flat graphic works. Clark’s paintings are object-like in their presence, often painterly in their pigment application, layered and intuitive in their process-oriented construction. A Chronology primarily focused on Clark’s exhibition record presents little biographical information

to flesh out a sense of the artist's life, and there is no Index to guide readers through the multitude of contextual materials.

Co-Curator Cornelia Butler's essay, "A Space Open to Time," examines the cultural and artistic contexts of Clark's years in Rio de Janeiro and exile in Paris (1968–76) as well as the impact of her ideas and strategies on contemporary Brazilian artists and the broader international art discourse, including artists such as Carlito Carvalhosa, Ernesto Neto, and Emily Roysdon, founder of queer activist collective LTTR (26–27). While the artistic contexts are well researched and subtly woven together, Butler outlines a strictly linear developmental track in positioning Clark's production unambiguously in a trajectory toward "The Abandonment of Art." Left out of the analysis is a discussion of Brazil's wretched political realities and the brutal military dictatorship which emerged by 1967 and held power for two decades, torturing and murdering thousands of its citizens. As Ana María León argues in an earlier essay, "Lygia Clark: Between Spectator and Participant," the political and socio-economic conditions in Brazil and neighboring Latin American countries impacted the artist's work before and after her departure for Paris in 1968, the year that culminated in international student protests and upheavals. Clark's *Diálogo: óculos* (*Dialogue: Goggles*, 1968; Fig. 1), for example, consists of a pair of connected goggles for two people, with reflective surfaces causing an altered sense of surroundings and an uneasy, forced connection: not an indifferent object unrelated to politics. León argues that *Goggles* was a reaction to a stifling political moment, an eerie, contorted instrument of surveillance related to Clark's helmets that look like gas masks.³

Exhibition co-curator Luis Pérez-Oramas examines Clark's formal and psychological transition from paintings to interactive objects: from *Casulos* (*Cocoons*, 1958–65) to *Bichos* (*Critters*, 1960–64) to *Caminhando* (*Walking*, 1964). *Cocoon, Version 01* (1959) consists of intersecting triangular planes and looks



Fig. 1. Lygia Clark, *Óculos* (1968), industrial rubber, metal, glass. 11 7/16" x 7 1/16" x 2 15/16". © Courtesy of World of Lygia Clark Cultural Association. Photo: © 2014 Eduardo Clark.

like a nexus of painting and sculpture in the exploration of movement and concepts of shelter. Clark's best known works, *Bichos*, consist of geometric planes of stainless steel and aluminum, connected by hinges, meant to be played with, reshaped and reoriented by viewers (MoMA's visitors could handle only two examples). *Caminhando* is a Möbius strip made of paper that each participant cuts lengthwise to create a continuous pathway of thinner and thinner width. This action invites each person to experience her own sensorial body agency by opening up a process of discovery imminent to the performance of action. Clark knew Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical theory and his topological demonstrations such as cutting a Möbius strip lengthwise, along a line midway through its width, to demonstrate that the subject is nothing more than a cut that creates the distinction between inside and outside, cutting apart the subject.⁴ Pérez-Oramas weaves these ideas into his art historical discussion of Pliny's famous legend of the origin of painting and sculpture from *Natural History*, embarking on a philosophical mode of address: the Corinthian maid Dibutade traces the silhouette of her beloved on a wall by

candlelight when she learns he will be departing, perhaps for good. The legend, he writes,

...hides a moral and existential question, one that modern readers of Pliny tend to forget: it is ultimately because of the imminence of a separation, an absence, a loss, that painting is "invented," when the line of the contour of the shadow of the face of a girl's lover is traced an instant before the two part. It is the imminence of the lover's absence, as much as his isolate presence, that creates the possibility of this infra-light shadow, this infra-thin corporeal exhalation, and with it the desire from the line that encloses it, as if embracing it, as if caressing it, as if enclosing the shadow might allow the girl to touch the body that absents itself, that separates itself and departs ... (43).

Pompidou Centre curator Christine Macel enters the path cleared by Pérez-Oramas and intersects it with the psychoanalytical in her essay, "Lygia Clark: At the Border of Art." Brazilian

culture and its obsession with the body peaked in the 1950s, when radical art critic Mário Pedrosa, a founder of the Workers Party which rules Brazil today, introduced Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as well as Carl Jung's theories of the archetypes of the collective unconscious to Clark and her compatriots in the Neo-Concretist group, including Hélio Oiticica, her sometime collaborator. For Clark-via-Merleau-Ponty, embodiment as it interacts with social and cultural variables is central to identity formation: an embodied *self* embedded within dynamic environments (254). Clark's relational work becomes the formation of embodied subjectivity as constitutive of notions of self, and the persistent interrogation analyzing biological, social, and cultural embodiment. Phenomenology employed useful methodologies to uncover hidden presuppositions which underlie taken-for-granted notions of human experience, with the aim of offering more comprehensive descriptions of experience. Merleau-Ponty jettisoned the "either/or" straitjacket of Descartes's dualistic ontology, the mind/body "split," analyzing instead the ways in which human experience is a matrix of shifting situations integrating multiple variables.⁵ The core phenomenological accounts of embodiment, as our mode of being-in-the-world in which it is impossible to disentangle so-called "natural" and "social" elements, are key to understanding how the materiality of the body enters into our sense of self as affect, emotion and desire.⁶ Clark surpassed the subject/object dialectic, the autonomous object, aiming to put the body back at the center of an art experiment as part of therapeutic treatment aimed to structure a whole resonant self. The artist was in therapy herself (with the psychoanalyst Pierre Fédida, a student of Gilles Deleuze who was influenced by Lacan), and the *propositions* she developed, according to Macel, explored the frontier between art, therapy, and life, positioning her projects between art and psychoanalysis, creating a hybrid (256).

Brazilian writer Eleonora Fabião's essay is a mesmerizing account of her

own experience of Clark's legendary *Baba antropofágica*, a collaborative and cathartic event. Clark's reference for this participatory performance was the discourse involving cannibalistic tropes of incorporation, first articulated by the Brazilian writer Oswald de Andrade's 1928 "*Manifesto antropófago*," suggesting a concept of cultural cannibalism as a mode of resistance to the cultural dominance of Europe. Clark's metaphoric and symbolic *Baba antropofágica* involved actual bodily fluids and the communal unraveling of spools of thread to create a body net which was then destroyed: A person would lie on the ground surrounded by participants kneeling around her with spools of thread of different colors in their mouths; each person unwound the thread and pulled it out slowly until all the spools were empty and the central prone body was covered in saliva-infused threads, like a sticky cocoon or chrysalis. Then participants opened their eyes as the dense spider web of thread was carefully lifted off and arduously untangled and broken up. A discussion of each person's sensory experiences followed the event, which took many hours to complete and whose reverberations were embedded in memory. Fabião discusses the psychoanalytically informed notions of oral fixation and primordial cannibalism that permeated the "destruction" of the spidery mesh, completed with alternating feelings of aggression, euphoria, and pain in breaking apart the threads that bound the participants. Fabião's recollection suggests an experience of totality and bodily resonance, a heightened perception integrating all the textures of the sensible body, while, paradoxically, subject and object seemed to dissolve (297-98).

The Museum of Modern Art's monograph on this artist is an invaluable resource for scholars and the

general reader interested in art and its contemporary forms. With a range of approaches for analyzing Lygia Clark's oeuvre and its historical contexts, the essays offer in-depth current research and inspired interpretations of her many forms of art-making, through her final break with object-making and authorial intention. The catalogue points to many areas of further analysis within Clark's participatory projects, which inform so much performance and participatory art today. •

Deborah Frizzell is Adjunct Assistant Professor of Art History at William Paterson University, where she teaches modern and contemporary art history and theory. She has curated a number of exhibitions, including, most recently, *The Body Is Present: Women at Work*, at Berrie Center for the Arts, Ramapo College, Mahwah, NJ (2013).

Notes

1. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle* (Dijon, FR: Les Presse Du Reel, 1998).
2. Lygia Clark, "1968: Are We Domesticated?," *October* 69 (Summer 1994): 85-109. Clark's key writings were published in this issue of the journal, along with an introduction by Yve-Alain Bois.
3. Anna Maria Leon, "Lygia Clark: Between Spectator and Participant," *MIT Architecture* 39 (2011): 50. https://www.academia.edu/5360701/Lygia_Clark_Between_Spectator_and_Participant
4. Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," 1953, *The Rome Discourse, Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 105.
5. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Humanities Press, 1962).
6. Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 9.

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Nancy Graves Project & Special Guests

Edited by Bridgette Franzen and
Annette Lagler
Hatje Cantz, 2013

Reviewed by Rachel Marie-Crane
Williams

Nancy Graves (1939–95) was a versatile artist who was never restricted by material limits or the strict disciplinary boundaries of visual art. Like many artists of her generation she crossed in and out of visual art into other fields like dance and film. She was deeply influenced and inspired by the natural world and the ways that scientists and anthropologists found meaning and purpose within that world through observation, creation, imagery, and research. Graves enchanted the art world with the debut of her camel sculptures at The Whitney Museum of American Art in 1969. Ironically, thirty-nine years after the female sculptor Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney founded the museum, Graves was the first woman to receive a solo exhibition at museum.

The Ludwig Forum fuer Internationale Kunst in Aachen, Germany, in cooperation with the Nancy Graves Foundation of New York, staged an exhibition of Graves's most important works made between 1969 and 1979.¹ This unusual catalogue, *Nancy Graves Project & Special Guests*, accompanied this retrospective exhibition. Editors Bridgette Franzen, the Distinguished Director of the Ludwig Forum fuer Internationale Kunst, and Annette Lagler, its Deputy Director and Head of Collection, have assembled one of the most comprehensive documents available on the artist. The catalogue provides a multifaceted look at Graves's work, inspirations, and motivations through the voices of scholars, curators, restorers, dancers, and fellow artists. The book features interviews with Chuck Close and Yvonne Rainer, as well as texts by Benjamin Dodenhoff, Walter Grasskamp, Christina Hunter, Lindal Kohneim Kramer, Petra Lange-Berndt,

Josephine Mengdoht, Susan Rosenberg, and Joan Simon.

The book itself, with a few curious features including holes drilled close to the spine so that it resembles a file to be archived after reading, was included in a list of the 100 most beautiful German books of 2014. Each essay, presented in German and English, is printed on mint green paper; the images appear as small black and white photographs at the top of each page. The essays are separated by lovely color reproductions of Graves's work printed on white paper. Graves's connection to Germany and to the Ludwig Forum fuer Internationale Kunst began when her work was collected and toured around the globe by Peter and Irene Ludwig.

Although Graves is perhaps best known for her camels, her aim was never to reproduce a camel that was anatomically correct but rather ones which corresponded to our perceptions of bits and pieces of the concept of "camel," a beast that is strange and familiar at the same time. The sculptures themselves match the western images of camels that most of us (who are not in regular contact with camels) hold in our mind's eye. They have one foot in the world of conceptual art and another in the world of new realism. Her camels also appeal to not only our visual pleasure but also our tactile desires. The sculptures are easily "read" as camels, but for most viewers, as they draw closer, it is impossible not to isolate parts of the sculptures and focus on particular details, such as the eyes, pelt, or knees. Annette Lagler's essay, "Mind and Moving Eye," refers to Graves's interest in "de-differentiation," in combining the empirical/scientific with the intuitive/imagined bits of pieces of her subject. The viewer's perception is thus fragmented, making it difficult to perceive the whole as a unified work. She was inspired by the writings of Anton Ehrenzweig, a well-known art theorist who died in 1966.

An impressive creative researcher, Graves kept copious notes, visited numerous authorities, and spent hours



Fig. 1. Nancy Graves, *Pleistocene Camelus* (1971), gouache on paper, 28 3/4" x 20".

observing and even filming her subjects (camels) in their natural environment. In the early 1970s, after a number of years working on assemblages and large sculptures, Graves returned to her first mode of image making: painting. Like the pioneering English photographer Eadweard Muybridge, she was also interested in motion and time, which inspired her to make films and drawings based on photographs of slithering snakes, jumping frogs, fish in motion, pacing camels, and flying birds. She thought about the bones, hair, skin, camouflage, gait, and environment of beasts, and her research fueled her as a maker and added new knowledge to her conceptual work about time and form. Her drawings on graph paper from her time in Morocco and her study of the forms of camels (Fig.1) are as beautiful as the resulting films and sculptures.

Graves's work in the liminal space of whole to part and real to imagined continued in her later works, which included paintings, drawings, and prints, many of which resemble scientific studies, biology textbook illustrations, or painterly abstractions of animals, moonscapes, and the topography of other planets. The

ongoing space race, along with television and the visual permeation of lunar images within western culture piqued her imagination. She began creating images based on satellite photographs and conceptual mapping. Within these images she used the geography of real places to alert viewers to the possibilities for abstraction. Composed of dots of color, when perceived from a distance, her images create regions and give the viewer the impression of a section of topography. Upon closer inspection, each dot of paint is actually a world in itself. Her images are inspired by mediated topography. She first draws inspiration for these works from images that have been visually mediated by our use of technology. She further removes our visual references to these texts from their original source through the addition of her hand. Graves explored the possibilities of cartography, but chose places that were only known through photography, not actual exploration. Christina Hunter's essay, "Mapping Space and Time," discusses the ways in which maps are abstracted flat representations of three-dimensional places, why artists like Graves have been attracted to maps, and the use of maps by artists who are Graves's contemporaries.

Like many artists in the late 1960s, Graves pushed the boundaries of materiality and experimented with nontraditional art-making materials like fiber and construction materials. While the result was the creation of a considerable body of work, some of these pieces have been difficult to preserve. Her fascination with materials

that were outside the mainstream continued during her lifetime, although in the 1980s she began to make cast bronze sculptures and eventually moved to other metals as well. She cast found objects and made sculptural assemblages that were graceful and open like her drawings. Using her skills as a painter she infused some pieces with bits of color and expressive line. She returned to the tension presented by combining the idea of the meaning of the whole and the individual narratives of recognizable parts.

Graves moved easily as a respected figure between the worlds of makers like Chuck Close and Paul Thek and artists who worked with the ethereal and ephemeral quality of performance like Yvonne Rainer, Tricia Brown, Joanne Aklatis, and Philip Glass. The interviews with Rainer and Close offer insights into the friendships Graves cultivated with other artists. In "The Name of the Game: Tricia Brown, Nancy Graves and *Lateral Pass*," Susan Rosenberg writes about the process of the collaboration between Graves and Brown. Each artist deeply influenced the other, and Graves's work is clearly recognizable on the stage with Brown's dancers, where her hand, as an artist, is recognizable in the lines and configurations, even the illusion to cartographic imagery.

This catalogue, though intended to accompany a retrospective that featured a single decade of the artist's work, fortunately pushes past 1979 and into the later years of her short life: The last color plate depicts a sculpture Graves completed in 1995, the year of her death. The text addresses the life of Graves and

her history of curiosity with form, culture, nature, and materials. Revealed is a biographical and conceptual portrait of Graves as an artist. As her work is explored by critics, scholars, friends, and colleagues from the world of art and museums, readers gain a sense of how Graves found ideas, explored them, translated them, and used them as a springboard for new projects. Graves was making art at a time and in the midst of a group of strong women including Eva Hesse, Hannah Wilke, and Ana Mendieta, who rejected formalism and turned our attention to culture, history, and anthropology through abstraction and materiality. While the essays touch on her relationships with other famous artists like Hesse and Richard Serra, the focus is clearly on her work and process as an artist rather than her personal life or politics. While she is quoted at times, much of what is present are the critical impressions of others. We are privy to her sketches and the experiences that influenced her work. Overall, the editors have created an interesting and aesthetically pleasing reading experience that offers an in-depth look into the world and work of a remarkable artist. •

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Notes

1. The Nancy Graves Project was exhibited October 13, 2013 – February 16, 2014, at Ludwig Forum fuer Internationale Kunst Aachen, Germany.



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The Art of the Sister Chapel, Exemplary Women

By Andrew Hottle
Ashgate, 2014

Reviewed by Roberta K. Tarbell

Andrew Hottle has rescued from oblivion *The Sister Chapel*, a temporary installation created collaboratively by thirteen women artists between 1974 and 1978 and exhibited in four venues between January 1978 and April 1980.¹ Indignant over the disrespect and neglect shown toward this pioneering work, the author set out to locate, save, and document the abstract ceiling canvas and the eleven standing portraits, each of a heroic woman of the individual artist's choice. Hottle not only found eleven of the twelve surviving paintings, he also facilitated the creation of an Art Gallery at Rowan University, Glassboro, New Jersey, which then acquired nine of the paintings as well as the panel that Sharon Wybrants repainted in 2010 after her original was presumed lost. (Panels by May Stevens and Betty Holliday remain in private collections.) He interviewed the six artists who still were active thirty-five years after the opening of the completed installation and the families of the others for his project. He declared that the project is "more than a passing historical moment. One only has to stand among the towering figures of *The Sister Chapel* to understand why contemporary critics lauded this accomplishment and to see why such an evocative testament to women is still relevant" (48).

Ilise Greenstein (1928–85) painted the *Ceiling of the Sister Chapel*, a large acrylic work on canvas measuring 18' x 17 1/4'. Her abstract circular painting with a mirror in the center was intended to include the viewer in the chapel. Maureen Conner's *Maquette for Sister Chapel Pavilion*, made with nylon, velvet, and plastic with miniatures of the paintings, is no longer extant. The remaining eleven artists created 9' x 5' panel paintings depicting notable women. Elsa M. Goldsmith's (1920–2005) panel depicted *Joan of Arc*; Alice Neel's (1900–84), *Bella Abzug—the*



Fig. 1. Installation photograph of *The Sister Chapel* at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Stony Brook (November 1978). Photo © Maurice Blum. Clockwise from left: Elsa M. Goldsmith, *Joan of Arc*; Alice Neel, *Bella Abzug—the Candidate*; Judith Blum, *Betty Friedan as the Prophet*; Diana Kurz, *Durga*; and Shirley Gorelick, *Frida Kahlo*.

Candidate; May Stevens's (b. 1924), *Artemisia Gentileschi*; Sylvia Sleight's (1916–2010), *Lilith*; Shirley Gorelick's (1924–2000), *Frida Kahlo*; Judith Blum's (b. 1929), *Betty Friedan as the Prophet*; Cynthia Mailman's (b. 1942), *God*; Betty Holliday's (1925–2011), *Marianne Moore*; Martha Edelheit's (b. 1931), *Womanhero*; Diana Kurz's (b. 1936), *Durga*; and Sharon Wybrants's (b. 1943), *Self-Portrait as Superwoman: Woman as Culture Hero*.

Hottle's brief introduction reviews archival sources and historiography.² His first chapter, "From Genesis to Revelation: The Origins, Development, and Realization of *The Sister Chapel*" is a dry, chronological, methodical account detailing its original conception through the last exhibition in 1980. In January 1974, Ilise Greenstein prepared her proposal for the project for the "Works in Progress" exhibition at the Women's Interart Center in New York (founded in 1971 and still vibrant today), which revealed that her intent was to retell the myth of creation from a woman's point of view.³ For the rest of the year Greenstein developed ideas with Elsa Goldsmith and invited colleagues from Women in the Arts and Central Hall Gallery, two new women's cooperatives and alternative spaces, to join the endeavor.⁴ The first group meeting took place on January 20, 1976, and Sylvia Sleight completed the first portrait, *Lilith*,

two days later. The *Sister Chapel* was secular, representing a new spiritual union among women artists but not the artists' own religious views, which included Judaic, Catholic, Protestant and Atheist beliefs. The artists' intention was to create images denying "socially constructed stereotypes ... associating masculinity and creativity."⁵

Hottle organized Chapters Two through Seven around "individual studies of the constituent works ... within the larger context of the creator's oeuvre," with two or three of the artists per chapter "paired or grouped according to professional, historical, or personal associations," although he never explains what those associations are (3). The chapters contain artists' names as subheads but include no introductions or conclusions. The best parts of these chapters are the in-depth analyses of the twelve paintings. In the last, very short "Epilogue: The Resurrection of *The Sister Chapel*," the author documents the remarkable rediscovery and recovery of all but one of the paintings. The hope is that soon he will be able to reconstitute and exhibit the chapel.

This well-researched book contains over 1100 endnotes, a twenty-five page bibliography, 156 black-and-white illustrations, and sixteen color plates. Some of the 1970s photographs, such as Figure

1, are the only records of unique aspects of the project. Hottle mined the voluminous scholarship on these women artists, adding original monographic studies on the lesser-known collaborators along with cogent summaries of those better known. His use of interviews and writings by the various artists offers remarkable insights into their lives and aesthetic decisions. For example, the reader can follow Alice Neel from determined young artist to vivacious septuagenarian portraitist.

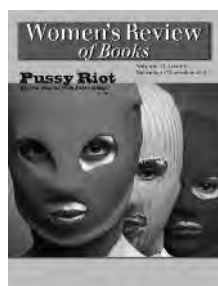
Hottle's story comes to life in the context of the matrix of national and local women's organizations of the late 1960s and 1970s (2). The author details the participation of some of the thirteen artists in such pioneering feminist organizations as the National Organization of Women and National Association of Women Artists, and in New York—Women in the Arts, Women's Interart Center, Central Hall Artists Gallery, and SOHO Gallery 20. Like other endeavors of the time, *The Sister Chapel* not only forged connections among women artists but also their identification with heroic women underrepresented in literature and the public consciousness. *The Sister Chapel* is not as well known as *The Dinner Party* (1974–79), the contemporaneous collaborative installation conceived by Judy Chicago. Both included historic, mythic, and contemporary heroines. *The Sister Chapel* was intended to be a feminist parody of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, while *The Dinner Party* paralleled the iconic Last Supper of Christ and his twelve disciples. *The Sister Chapel* artists were autonomous, choosing their own subjects and style, unlike Chicago's project, where she was the lead designer and the collaborating artists executed her vision. *The Sister Chapel* was disassembled after the final exhibit in 1980, as by this time the artists apparently were ready to move on and did not act collectively to enshrine their circle of painted pillars and ceiling.

Hottle significantly expands our understanding of the inextricable interweaving of feminist issues and broader social politics with the creation of artworks, which is the hallmark of these collaborative projects of the 1970s.

They involved both shared creativity and the initiative to exhibit them without waiting for selection by or invitations from a male-dominated hierarchy. One of the catalysts was "Old Mistresses: Women Artists of the Past," a 1972 exhibition at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, curated by Ann Gabhart and Elizabeth Broun, both of whom became influential museum directors, thus fulfilling a goal of the women's movement that women become leaders of arts institutions. Although by the 1970s, women had gained access to the best art schools, they were woefully marginalized in mainstream gallery exhibitions as well as in group exhibitions sponsored by major museums and arts organizations.

Hottle reports, that the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., missed an opportunity in 1993, when a curatorial staff member offered to reconstruct *The Sister Chapel* at NMWA but never followed through, and again in 2001, when the NMWA curatorial staff refused Cynthia Mailman's offer to donate *God* (2; 262). Even so, Hottle emphasizes that the paintings were meant to be seen together (6) and both his book and his aggressive efforts to collect the paintings at Rowan University, where he is an Associate Professor of Art History, are steps toward making this a reality. While acknowledging that it "might have been preferable to find a more visible venue for a collaboration of such magnitude," no major institution has stepped forward (263). •

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Notes

1. The four venues were P. S. 1 (Institute for Art and Urban Resources), Long Island City, NY, Jan. 1978; Art Gallery, Fine Arts Center, State University of New York at Stony Brook, Nov. 1978; and without Greenspan's ceiling, Conner's model or Wybrant's panel at the Art Gallery, Cayuga County Community College, Auburn, NY, Nov. 1979, and nearby at the Associated Artists Gallery, Fayetteville, NY, March–April 1980. The artists intentionally organized the portraits in the circle of panels in a different order at each location.
2. As two of the best resources on *The Sister Chapel*, Hottle credits Gloria Feman Orenstein, "The Sister Chapel: A Traveling Homage to Heroines," *Womanart* 1, no. 3 (Winter/Spring 1977):12–21, and Judith E. Stein, "Collaboration," in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 226–45.
3. Ilise Greenstein, "Sister Chapel," artist's statement on obverse of poster announcing the Sister Chapel exhibition at P. S. 1, New York, 1978, collection of the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.
4. Works by Greenstein, Gorelick, Neel, Sleigh, and Stevens were among the 199 works on view in the exhibition "Women Choose Women," organized by Women in the Arts held at the New York Cultural Center, Jan. 12 – Feb. 18, 1973 and juried by Sleigh, Pat Pasloff, Ce Roser, Linda Nochlin, Elizabeth Baker, Laura Adler, and Mario Amaya, Director of the Cultural Center from 1972 until its closing in 1975. Greenstein had been one of the founders of WIA in 1971 and Goldsmith was on the board (77). At Central Hall Gallery, Port Washington, NY [moved to Soho as Central Hall Artists in 1981], Greenstein's colleagues included Blum, Gorelick, Holliday, and Alice Landes (who was invited to contribute to *The Sister Chapel* but chose not to participate).
5. Marsha Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Scarlet Press, 1996), 55.

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Topless Cellist: The Improbable Life of Charlotte Moorman

By Joan Rothfuss
MIT Press, 2014

Reviewed by Gyung Eun Oh

A provocative cellist of New Music in the 1960s New York art scene, Charlotte Moorman (1933–91) performed music written by her contemporary luminaries, such as John Cage, Joseph Beuys, Yoko Ono, Jim McWilliams, and most notably, Nam June Paik. Moorman gained notoriety almost instantly after a performance of Nam June Paik's *Opera Sextronique* at the Filmmakers' Cinémathèque in New York City on February 9, 1967. In this performance, Moorman played the cello movements in various states of nudity, which led to her arrest and consequent nationwide media exposure as the "topless cellist."

Topless Cellist: The Improbable Life of Charlotte Moorman is the first extensive biography that reveals Moorman as an avant-garde artist in her own right. Joan Rothfuss, an expert on Fluxus art and New York's avant-garde circle of the 1950s and 60s, chronicles Moorman's life from her childhood in Little Rock, Arkansas, through her short yet prolific career until her death from cancer at age 58. The author draws from a wealth of materials excavated from archives, libraries, and her own interviews with people who shared memories of the artist.

In contrast with the prevailing scholarship that often dismisses Moorman as a passive participant, *Topless Cellist* addresses her active role in New York's 1960s avant-garde art scene. The book is composed of three parts that reveal the artist's life story with a stress on her dashing approach to New Music. Part One, about Moorman's youth, sets the artist's character as a small-town girl who was a devoted classical musician, a beauty pageant participant who willingly showcased her beauty for viewers' consumption, and an audacious, uninhibited young artist. In this section, the author provides details she discovered about

Moorman's first (and short-lived) marriage to a young double bassist named Thomas Coleman. As early as 1961, Moorman already showed exceptional independence, choosing her career over marriage; Coleman demanded more of her presence in their marriage while she sought an orchestra position in New York City. Rothfuss writes:

Tommy would have provided Charlotte with everything a woman was supposed to want and need in 1961: a husband with prospects, a nice home, children, financial security, social status. But Charlotte sensed that such a life was not for her, even though she could not say precisely why (34).

The author concludes that Moorman must have been dissatisfied with a life designated as the traditional role for a woman, relating it to what Betty Friedan describes in her 1963 bestseller, *The Feminine Mystique*, as "the problem that has no name," which certain educated, married women of their generation encountered. Apparently, the marriage fell apart almost simultaneously as Moorman was introduced to avant-garde music, when, in 1960, she made the acquaintance of concert promoter Norman Seaman, who supported New Music as well as avant-garde artists such as Kenji Kobayashi, Toshi Ichianagi, Yoko Ono, David Tudot, La Monte Young, Jacob Glick, and Simone Morris. Meeting with them drew her into unorthodox, experimental music alongside her classical music career. She gradually became more enthusiastic about the former as her involvement in the New York Avant-Garde art scene deepened.

Part Two focuses on Moorman's involvement in that art world, not just as a collaborator/ interpreter for musical composers but also as a founder



Fig. 1. Charlotte Moorman's 1964 production of *Originals* by Karlheinz Stockhausen for Festival of the Avant Garde, New York City. Clockwise from top center: Moorman, Allan Kaprow, Allen Ginsberg, Max Neuhaus, Robert Breer, Jackson MacLow, David Berman, Olga Adorno Kluver, Nam June Paik, Gloria Graves, Robert Belford Brown. Photo: Dan McCoy/Rainbow.

of the Annual Avant Garde Festival of New York. This event pulled together artists from a wide spectrum and working in various media: experimental music of Fluxus artists and Happenings that included sound, action music, performance, kinetic art, television, and video art installations. Part Two begins in 1962, when Moorman actively sought to perform composer Karlheinz Stockhausen's groundbreaking experimental music. In a note written to him in 1963, she asked,

I want to know if you've written anything for cello or if you would possibly consider writing something for [solo] cello, cello with another instrument, or, preferably, cello with electronic tape. I am criticized by some of my colleagues for playing "kooky," "far

out,” or “weird” music, and since I will be the first cellist to play experimental music in a New York City Town Hall debut, I might as well be criticized for playing the best avant-garde music possible (59).

Not only was Moorman partaking in New Music, she clearly had an active voice as to what she wished to include in her performance. That year she founded the Annual Avant Garde Festival of New York, and went on to organize fifteen festivals over the period from 1963 to 1980. The Festival was an extraordinary event where young and progressive artists from various backgrounds performed together to display their often-misunderstood or undermined art to the largest audience possible, in the belief that art should be non-elite and easily accessible. Before Rothfuss’s biography, few published works emphasized that at the core of that festival were Charlotte Moorman’s ambitions, perseverance, and efforts to realize the avant-garde philosophy.

Over multiple chapters Rothfuss describes Moorman’s collaboration with Nam June Paik, which obviously was one of her most important career moves. Yet, in effect, such concentration on this partnership may have slightly diminished Moorman’s independence as an aspiring (and inspiring) artist in her own right. She first met Paik when she was mounting Stockhausen’s performative music piece *Originals* (1964; Fig. 1) in her second festival. The two musicians instantly recognized each other’s talent. When Moorman asked Paik to take part in *Originals*, he agreed right away, on condition that they become partners for his future compositions. Moorman’s response was:

Why do I need him for a partner?” ... He was telling me [about] all these pieces he’d always wanted to do. He’d always wanted a beautiful girl to striptease, and he wanted me to play cello and take my clothes off.... There was something about him. He was so strong, so serious, that I listened.

We became partners. And now everything in the world has happened to us as a result (82).

In fact, the collaboration of Paik and Moorman has been discussed often in the context of a sexist male artist using a female body as an object at his will. Another of Paik’s female collaborators, Alison Knowles, especially expressed dismay at what she interpreted as an objectification of women. However, for Paik, incorporating a female nude body in his musical compositions was a way for him to transcend the boundaries of traditional music, as it suggested sexuality, which had been taboo in music, unlike other artistic genres such as literature and visual art. Paik thought of Moorman as a colleague with a mutual understanding of the ideas beneath the surface, although this understanding was not as clearly stated in this book. Rothfuss mentions numerous times that Moorman was uninterested in feminism, but also leaves much room for feminist interpretations of the artist.

Does Moorman’s apathy about feminism mean that her work cannot be discussed in a feminist context? Perhaps not. Art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau has written: “Whether a woman artist personally describes herself as a feminist is now somewhat beside the point. What is far more important is what the work is doing, how it operates, whether it exceeds, disturbs, destabilizes, puts in question its commodity status as trophy, decoration, or fetish.” Moorman’s performative work certainly accomplished some or all of these things (296).

As Rothfuss aptly suggests, Moorman’s work has fibers that resist simple sexist notions. Rothfuss relates an interesting anecdote which reveals that Moorman’s nude performance was realized upon the suggestion of artist Carolee Schneemann before Paik’s input in their 1964 performance of *Originals*. In another chapter, the author discusses the case of *Human Cello* as evidence of how

Paik was on an eye-to-eye level with Moorman, as Paik acknowledges her as a conspirator in a clever performance and not merely female imagery to be exploited. To counter Man Ray’s *Le violon d’Ingres* (1924), a photograph showing the nude back of a sensuous woman with two drawn-in f-holes, illustrating the female body as an instrument to be played, Paik wrote *Human Cello* for Moorman to play his body as a cello as he yelled out, “Imperialist Americans should hit yellow man.” This case shows how Paik empathized with the metaphoric woman’s position in society, taken by Moorman, as he was an Asian male marginalized in the Western art world. In this sense, Moorman was Paik’s alter ego, and Paik was a colleague for Moorman who provoked the audience to new thoughts, as she did with her festivals.

Part Three chronicles Moorman’s last years. Rothfuss portrays her battle with breast cancer as an extension of her performance, illustrating how Moorman truly blended her life with her art in accordance with the 1960’s Avant-Garde artistic philosophy.

Detailed and thoroughly researched and featuring photographs of the impactful visuals that comprised Moorman’s performances, *Topless Cellist* is unprecedented in its achievement as a biography of this unique artist. This publication serves as a valuable reference as well as invites further examination of Charlotte Moorman as an active creator of avant-garde art. •

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Eva Hesse 1965

Edited by Barry Rosen

Foreword by Susan Fisher Sterling

Essays by Todd Alden, Jo Applin,

Kirsten Swenson

Yale University Press, 2013

Reviewed by Patricia Briggs

A painter when she left New York City for a residency in Kettwig an der Ruhr, Germany, in June 1964, Eva Hesse was a sculptor when she returned in September 1965. The fifteen months Hesse spent in Germany have long been considered important, but *Eva Hesse 1965*, published on the occasion of an exhibition presented by Hauser and Wirth, London, the gallery that handles Hesse's estate, presents the artist's work of this period as never before, in nearly one hundred large color plates. The foreword by Susan Fisher Sterling and three short essays, by Todd Alden, Jo Applin, and Kirsten Swenson, serve as a solid, up-to-date introduction to the most current art historical and theoretical contexts for examining Hesse's work. Its excellent illustrations clearly document Hesse's formative period.

The first wave of scholarship on Hesse viewed her work in largely formalist terms and hailed it as a feminine counterpoint to the dominant sculptural trends of the time. Over the past decade or so, a new brand of Hesse scholarship has slowly emerged. Kleinian object-relations theory and Gilles Deleuze's concept of the "body without organs" have been adopted as theoretical models for understanding Hesse's work, which is in this literature contextualized within the art historical tradition of Dada and Surrealism. Key texts for the recent wave of Hesse scholarship include Mignon Nixon's *Eva Hesse (October Files)* (2002), which reprints Rosalind Krauss's 1993 Deleuzian essay "Hesse's Desiring Machines"; and two exhibition catalogues, Sabine Folie's *Eva Hesse: Transformations—The Sojourn in Germany 1964/65 and Datebooks 1964/65* (2004), and Helen Molesworth's *Part Object Part Sculpture* (2005).¹¹ The short scholarly essays included in *Eva Hesse: 1965* do a

fine job of shaking off the received formalist and autobiographical narratives about Hesse's oeuvre and acclimate readers to contemporary critical perspectives which hinge upon the artist's relief sculptures and drawings of 1964 and 1965.

In 1964, Hesse was an art-world unknown married to the older, more established artist Thomas Doyle. It was Doyle who attracted the attention of the German collector and industrialist Friedrich Arnhard Scheidt, who offered the couple studio space in one of his unused textile mills in Kettwig an der Ruhr. Interested in purchasing a sculpture by Doyle, Scheidt surmised that it would be less expensive to set up the artist and his wife in a studio in Germany for six months (a period which grew to more than a year) than to purchase one of Doyle's monumental metal works in New York and ship it back to Europe.

In time, however, Hesse's reputation came to overshadow Doyle's. Perhaps because scholarly interest in Hesse took shape during the rise of the feminist movement, after the artist's untimely death in 1970, there has been little discussion of artistic cross-pollination between the two artists. This lacuna is called into question by Todd Alden in "Transformation Event Context: Eva Hesse 1965." Alden writes that the dominant narratives of "Hesse as wound" have left too many lines of analysis ignored or "under-registered" (19). According to Alden, Hesse's life and art have too often been conflated:

Legions of black ink have been spilled about what could be called Eva Hesse's traumatography: escape from Nazi Germany in 1938 via *Kindertransport* to Holland (age two); the murder of many family members by the Nazis; her parents' divorce in 1944; her mother's suicide in 1945; her husband's noted drinking and philandering; Hesse's protracted illness culminating in death from a brain tumor (age 34)[...](18).

Alden goes on to say that "Doyle's actual role in nurturing [Hesse's] early art and experimentation—and dare I say

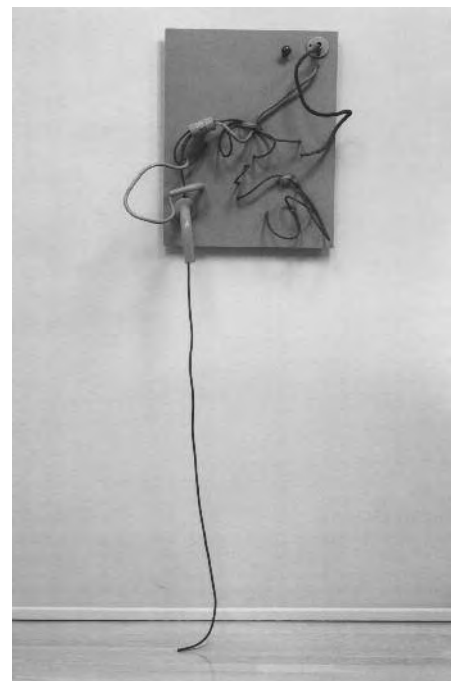


Fig. 1. Eva Hesse, *Top Spot* (1965), tempera, enamel, cord, found objects, particle board, wood 82" x 21 1/4" x 12 3/4". Private Collection.

this out loud?—Doyle's early influence—not to mention his role as a foil or artistic counter-type for Hesse—remains, critically speaking, an unweeded garden" (19). Alden's point is well taken and rings true; yet, unfortunately, he offers no insight on the matter.

Alden does a good job of sketching in the European context for Hesse's residency, which has been until relatively recently "mostly unearthed, unknown, or under accounted-for by her current audience" (19). In fact, Hesse's exposure to European contemporary art rivals that of most other American artists of her generation. Aside from Scheidt's offer of studio space, Doyle had attracted the attention of important European curators, including Harald Szeemann, Director of the Kunsthalle Bern, and Arnold Rudlinger, curator of the Kunstmuseum Basel. Through such powerful friends, "Hesse and Doyle had extraordinary access to a vast network of particularly northern European contacts"(19). Using Hesse's datebooks, Alden tracks her encounters with various curators and artists and chronicles her visits to exhibitions in Brussels, Amsterdam, Cologne, Paris, Basel, Dusseldorf,

Berlin, and Bern. She traveled with Sigmar Polke to Colmar to see the *Isenheim Altarpiece* and visited with Linda and Hans Haacke. She saw the CoBrA group artists Asger Jorn and Pierre Alechinsky at the Documenta 3, accompanying Rudlinger and Franz Meyer, the director of the Kunstmuseum Basel (20–21).

Hesse's relationship with Szeemann, who later included her work in the important 1969 exhibition "When Attitudes Become Form" at the Kunsthalle Bern, is particularly important. In 1962 Szeemann had completed a catalogue of Francoise Picabia's work, and in 1965 he presented the first major retrospective of Duchamp's readymades. Hesse was able to see a version of "Duchamp's bachelor machine and other mechanical-erotic contraptions firsthand" (20). The dozens of drawings Hesse made of abstract mechanical forms obliquely suggesting the body indicate that she shared Szeemann's interest in Duchamp's and Picabia's mechanical metaphors for the human body.

Molesworth, Nixon, Folie, and Krauss, in their works mentioned earlier, have illuminated the significance of Dada's erotically charged mechanical body metaphors for Hesse's drawings. In this volume, essays by Swenson and Applin pick up this line of analysis, offering close readings of artworks that are so well illustrated that readers are able to follow the subtle critical twists and turns of their analyses. In "C-Clamp Blues: The Relief Works of Eva Hesse," Applin walks readers through Hesse's "delightfully deviant" abstract wall reliefs made of paper mache, plaster, or cloth on Masonite (48). She shows how the reliefs, such as Top Spot (Fig. 1) grew

out of the physical context of a makeshift industrial workshop littered with wooden spindles, wire, plastic tubing, and bolts—"the industrial detritus of the workshop floor" (47). Applin sees Hesse avoiding the norms of familiar aesthetic formulas and argues that she endeavored to follow the advice of her friend Sol LeWitt, who wrote in a letter of April 1965: "try to do some BAD work, the worst you can think of and see what happens" (43). Celebrating the oddness—or BADness—of Hesse's reliefs, Applin tracks how they "misbehave" in ways that parallel Donald Judd's theory of "specific objects." Like Judd's "specific objects," Hesse's eccentric reliefs occupy an "in-between" space that is Judd calls "neither painting nor sculpture" (45). Showing how Hesse weaves the world of rational tools and screws together in "weird humor[ous]" ways with glue and "kitschy colors," Applin sees in both Hesse's drawings and reliefs the "mechanical-erotic play" of Duchamp's mechanical figures, which "reveals the logic of the body as a series of abstract part-objects that awkwardly straddle the infantile and the erotic" (43–47).

Swenson's "Impossible Machines: Drawing into Sculpture" nicely documents the transformation in Hesse's drawing style from the sketchy expressionist abstraction she developed in Yale's graduate program to the very different mechanical line drawing style she developed in Germany. Swenson ties this stylistic transition to the artist's understanding of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, which she was reading at the time. Swenson traces "Beauvoir's notions of immanence and transcendence" as concepts Hesse "enacted through her

art" (89). The highly abstract visual vocabulary of the mechanical drawings represented "transcendence," understood by Hesse "as 'forgetfulness' of oneself—the ability to focus on abstractions or 'another space,' life beyond the everyday self-consciousness, insecurity, and frustration" that, according to Swenson, "Hesse linked to the politics of gender within her marriage and her identity as an artist" (89–90). Swenson walks readers through Hesse's de-construction of her own drawings by cutting them up and reusing the pieces as collage elements in new works where her hard-edged style took shape. She goes on to show how Hesse began in this period to use pieces of irregularly cut paper to break out of the two-dimensional, flat rectangle, in works that point toward three-dimensional sculptural relief. Also, significantly, although Swenson traces the connections of Hesse's drawings to "Dadaist female-and male-sexed *dessins mécaniques*," she shows how "Hesse's drawings emerged ... through a consideration of socially determined gender roles and the contemporary problem of female identity," thus turning inside out the parodies of gender roles created by Dadaists Picabia and Duchamp (88–89). ●

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Notes

1. Mignon Nixon, ed., *Eva Hesse (October Files)* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002); Sabine Folie, ed., *Eva Hesse: Transformations—The Sojourn in Germany 1964/65 and Datebooks 1964/65* (Koln: Walther König, 2004); and Helen Molesworth, ed., *Part Object Part Sculpture* (University Park: Penn State Univ. Press, 2005).

Converging Lines: Eva Hesse and Sol LeWitt

Edited by Veronica Roberts
Yale University Press, in association
with Blanton Museum of Art, The
University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Reviewed by Aliza Edelman

Artistic relationships are complicated, timeworn subjects in art history, whether or not the artists in question are coupled or partnered, husband and wife, collaborators, or merely studio-mates. An equal challenge, arguably, is to identify meaningful artistic encounters and reciprocal influences and to frame them successfully in an exhibition. Curator and art his-

torian Veronica Roberts has mined the deeper meaning of artistic friendship in her exhibition at the Blanton Museum of Art and the accompanying catalogue with essays by Lucy R. Lippard and Kirsten Swenson. In *Converging Lines: Eva Hesse and Sol LeWitt*, Roberts bridges two extensively researched artistic practices, that of Eva Hesse (1936–70) and Sol LeWitt (1928–2007), through the

archival matter at the core of each artist's blossoming devotion to each other, as revealed in the form of letters and postcard correspondence, private confidences and interviews, maps of lower to upper Manhattan, and extensive chronologies. Richly reproduced in the catalogue are five LeWitt wall drawings and over fifty objects (many gifted between the artists) included in the exhibition. Through Roberts's focused examination on what might appear altogether as intimate and biographical narratives between two supportive friends, the archetypal categories of postwar Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, and Conceptualism are subtly revealed and newly aligned. That LeWitt's career continued for an additional thirty years after Hesse's premature death at age thirty-four from a brain tumor is a wrinkle in their storyline, and perhaps that is the point of friendship's unyielding cord.

Roberts magnifies a pivotal moment in their storyline centered on the vital impact of Hesse's early experimental sculptures and "engagement with Minimalism" in the mid-1960s on LeWitt's formal development of wall drawing (20). LeWitt and Mel Bochner had unsuccessfully assisted Hesse in the complicated installation of her sculpture *Metronomic Irregularity II* for Lucy Lippard's 1966 exhibition "Eccentric Abstraction" at Fischbach Gallery. LeWitt observed the process by which Hesse reshaped the work as she laboriously rethreaded the wall relief, composed of three separate grey painted-wood panels connected by cotton-covered wires and sculpmetal. Later, LeWitt recalled how this instance of proto-installation art (he reconstructed *Metronomic Irregularity II* twice after her death) was a critical moment in his "liberation," for its introduction of "variability" and "unpredictability" as primary components of the work itself (22). LeWitt produced his first wall drawing at Paula Cooper Gallery two years later, in 1968. For Roberts, Hesse's preternatural imprint for aberration and mutability, the handmade and the corporeal, surfaces in LeWitt's playful reframing of the relationship between rigorous logic and unfettered line.

As catalyst for *Converging Lines*,

LeWitt's *Wall Drawing #46: Vertical lines, not straight, not touching, uniformly dispersed with maximum density covering the entire surface of the wall* (1970) manifests a decisive juncture in the artist's utilization of the "not straight" pathway. (Lippard recalled that in fact around the same time LeWitt executed his first "wiggly" line drawing in her own Prince Street apartment.) LeWitt was informed of Hesse's death while abroad preparing for international exhibitions, and as homage to his friend he installed *Wall Drawing #46* at Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris, and dedicated to her his solo exhibition at the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, The Hague. To this day *Wall Drawing #46* inspires the potential for aesthetic syncretism and rapprochement that for LeWitt encompassed both his work and Hesse's, thus expanding even after her death his grammar and "personal lexicon" of meticulous instructions designed for potential drafters (58).

Both artists of Jewish descent, Hesse and LeWitt met at some point between 1955 and 1959 in New York City. Further biographical similarities abound. During the 1960s, they shared friends and terrain (neatly inventoried in the catalogue maps designed for the catalogue and exhibition): they frequented each other's studios on or near the Bowery; participated in group shows at the same galleries, including Graham Gallery and John Gibson; and occasionally appeared together in museum exhibitions, such as "American Abstract Artists, 1936–1966" at the Riverside Museum (1966) where Hesse's *Ennead* was displayed in proximity to LeWitt's *Wall Structure, Black* (both 1966); the "Annual Exhibition, Contemporary American Sculpture," Whitney Museum of American Art (1968); and "Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form. Works-Concepts-Processes-Situations-Information," curated by Harald Szeemann at the Kunsthalle Bern (1969). Moreover, they assembled an extensive mutual network of artists and writers, among them Dan Flavin, Robert Ryman, Lucy Lippard, Robert Mangold, Sylvia Plimack Mangold, Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, and Mel Bochner. Through



Fig. 1. Eva Hesse, *Accession V* (1968), galvanized steel and rubber, 10" x 10" x 10". LeWitt Collection, Chester, CT.

Flavin's invitation, in 1964 LeWitt participated in "Eleven Artists" at Kaymar Gallery, New York, his first exhibition, and the next year he had his first solo show organized by Dan Graham at John Daniels Gallery. Likewise Smithson and Bochner addressed Hesse's work in *Art Magazine* in 1966, and Robert Morris included her in "9 at Leo Castelli" in 1968.

According to Kirsten Swenson, Hesse and LeWitt were equally positioned in their early careers to negotiate painting's "impure" and persistent problems, en route to the larger practice of sculpture or "structures" (27). Both artists duly acknowledged and responded to color's formal and "physio-psychological" elements advanced by Josef Albers, as well as Abstract Expressionism's gestural and subjective channels. For Hesse in particular, Abstract Expressionism was a determinative influence in her measures to disrupt and reorganize the picture plane. Before creating her first relief, *Ringaround Arosie* (1965), named after her friend Rosie Goldman, Hesse had worked on an untitled series that reinforced surface tension through biomorphic and erotic geometries (20). LeWitt's nascent *Run* paintings and colorful wood structures investigated sequential motion and narrative structure, a distillation of fixed moments in time and space rooted in

Eadweard Muybridge's photography.

As Roberts offers, contemporary artists readily engaged in the panoptic if not compulsive production of boxes and cubes prevalent in nationally themed exhibitions. Hesse addressed this vernacular icon in her Accession series, which for the first time utilized an outside fabricator, and in *Accession V* (1968; Fig. 1), a gift to LeWitt, the firm rubber tubes perforating the galvanized steel surface articulate a repeated geometric pattern. Hesse's boxes, in Lippard's view, "contained" more than concealed. For *Washer Table* (1967) LeWitt presented Hesse a square table painted white with the intention that she would complete it, after which she overlaid the surface with rubber washers and likewise returned it to him as a gift. Relatedly, the amusing contents of LeWitt's formative and colorful sculpture *Nine Boxes* (1963) reveal and conceal personal and popular objects associated with nine artist friends, among them Flavin, Ryman, and Marjorie Strider, and typify the broad circuitry of artistic alliances and exchanges. While LeWitt's later open cube systems and wall drawings translated the architecturally disposed nine-square grid format, Lippard, Smithson, and others had already acknowledged in their friend's art an underlying if not latent tendency

toward "intuition," the irrational, and even the absurd (46–47). As such, a lacuna exists in current analyses of LeWitt's development because many of these early works were traded among artists, are in private collections, or have been poorly reproduced.

Yet if Hesse's art overtly resists abstraction's concrete objectivity, by which altered paths does LeWitt inform her artistic practice? For Lippard, Hesse buttressed her work from this period with "a kind of discipline—tones of black, white, and gray" internalized through her peers' principle lingua franca, and observed in the works of Carl Andre, Smithson and Bochner (57). By Lippard's notion of fluid binaries, LeWittian content is forged through his own "systemic permutations" while Hesse's is materially expressed. Then there is the ineluctable subject in Hesse's critical scholarship of psychological buttressing and the connectivity between art and biography asserted through various artifacts. During Hesse's sojourn and residency in Kettwig an der Ruhr, Germany, with her husband, Tom Doyle, she received LeWitt's letter, dated April 14, 1965, reinforcing if not demanding self-possession and intrepidity in her work, as summarized in his declarative sentence, "Stop it and just DO." Similarly, the thirty-nine postcards sent to Hesse by LeWitt, on display and

reproduced in the catalogue, lend a humorous view to their relationship. Thus the ubiquitous desire to know Hesse intimately and to have personal access to her, granted here by the immediacy of her friendship with LeWitt, underlies this catalogue and exhibition.

Converging Lines raises salient questions for this period on sculptural embodiment, the anthropomorphic, and the biographical. In turn, Roberts calibrates LeWitt's current analyses with insufficient ballast, inevitably, on Hesse. At the same time it reinforces Hesse's unshakeable presence in LeWitt's life and work. Here what comes to mind is Bochner's constructive reading of Hesse's work as a "detached presence which is real," a disembodied trace and armature that duly applies to the unknowable limits of artistic friendships and individual endeavors.¹ •

Aliza Edelman recently published "Grace Hartigan's *Grand Street Brides: The Modern Bride as Mannequin*," in *W&J*, and organized the retrospective exhibition "Judith Luand: Brazilian Modernist, 1950s-2000s" at Driscoll Babcock Galleries, New York.

Notes

1. Mel Bochner, *Arts Magazine* 41 (November 1966), 58.

Claire Falkenstein

Essays by Susan M. Anderson, Michael Duncan, and Maren Henderson
The Falkenstein Foundation, 2012

Reviewed by Susan Landauer

Regardless of thematic or formal affiliation with Abstract Expressionism, artists working in the medium of sculpture have had a tough time gaining entrée into surveys of the movement. Despite some significant efforts to broaden the canon by gender and ethnicity, art historians remain fixated on "non-representational use of paint," as one recent publication defined the achievement of the New York School.¹ In 1994, the College Art

Association made a persuasive attempt to redress this bias by devoting an issue of its *Art Journal* to sculpture in postwar Europe and America. Since then, concessions to 3-D art have been made but are still scant—and the situation is particularly dire for sculptors working chiefly outside of Manhattan. Such is the case of Claire Falkenstein (1908–97), one of America's most audaciously innovative mid-twentieth century artists, who throughout the seven decades of her career consistently found new ways to challenge traditional forms and techniques of sculpture as well as blurring the boundaries of a vast array of media. In the 1940s and 1950s, Falkenstein worked principally in San Francisco and Paris, participating in the

germinal stages of Abstract Expressionism, Art autre, Art informel—and even making an early cameo appearance with the Gutai Group—thus qualifying as one of the few post-World War II artists with a truly international reach. Yet while Falkenstein was highlighted in the *Art Journal's* 1994 salvo with a fine essay by Michael Plante,² and in 2000, she was included in the Boise Art Museum's *True Grit*, a group show featuring Lee Bontecou, Louise Bourgeois, Jay DeFeo, Nancy Grossman, Louise Nevelson, and Nancy Spero, the literature on her art has been confined to a handful of slim exhibition catalogues produced by regional museums—that is, until now. With the Falkenstein Foundation's lavishly illustrated

monograph, we can finally assess the achievement of this long-neglected artist. With so many color illustrations and documentary photographs, the book might seem fit for a coffee table were it not for three informative and penetrating essays by Susan M. Anderson, Michael Duncan, and Maren Henderson.

Duncan, a critic and art historian who has written extensively on California art, opens the publication with an essay provocatively titled "Claire Falkenstein: Exploding the Volume." As his title suggests, Duncan examines the ingenious ways in which Falkenstein explored "anti-form" in three dimensions, beginning in the late 1930s by creating a group of polychromed ceramic sculptures with no central core, turning them inside out by bending and folding slabs of clay in the manner of Möbius strips (her teacher at Mills College, the Russian avant-garde sculptor Alexander Archipenko, christened them "sculpto-paintings"). She followed these with a series she called Set Structures (c. 1942–46), wood sculptures cut into individual puzzle-piece-like modules with a band-saw, designed to be taken apart and reconfigured by the viewer. Falkenstein's most significant leap into dematerializing the static, monolithic nature of traditional sculpture came in the mid-1940s, with her wire and forged iron "linear drawings" such as *Game* (1944; Fig. 1), which soon led to the stove-pipe sculptures she produced after leaving San Francisco and moving to Paris in 1950. Essentially weaving these inexpensive malleable metal filaments into a wire fabric—Peggy Guggenheim referred to these pieces as her "knitting"—Falkenstein was able to create sculptures filled with space and light, metaphorically implying infinite extension. Embedding colorful bits of Murano glass melted by torch or kiln further enhanced the effect of transparency. These works, which allowed for spontaneous execution and took advantage of felicitous accident, effectively circumvent the problem so many American art historians have accepting sculpture as kindred to Abstract Expressionist painting. Michael Leja's argument, for example, that the "fixed

legibility" of volumetric abstraction precludes the "evanescence and indeterminacy" of painting does not apply to Falkenstein's sculpture.³ With the prerogative of the art critic, Duncan is dithyrambic in his praise of her ability to transcend the limits of sculpture's general intractability, and in particular the diversity of creation resulting from her restlessly inventive imagination, asserting:

Incised, textured, painted, sometimes interactive, or lit from within, Falkenstein's sculptures from the 1940s and 1950s make the work of Barbara Hepworth, Isamu Noguchi, and David Smith seem stolid and conservative. Her works from the 1960s and 1970s can stand beside those of Lee Bontecou, Anthony Caro, Robert Smithson, Eva Hesse, and Christo as representations of the deconstruction of Modernist tropes" (13).

Maren Henderson, who has spent much of her career as a scholar concentrating on the work of Falkenstein, commencing with her dissertation on the artist at UCLA in 1991, takes a somewhat more conservative approach in an essay modestly titled "Sculpture," detailing the evolution of that particular medium in Falkenstein's oeuvre, discussing in depth each phase of the artist's career, beginning with her pioneering work in clay and concluding with her series of major public commissions in Los Angeles, where she spent her last decades. Drawing from a rich fund of primary documents, Henderson interlaces tantalizing tidbits from Falkenstein's Zelig-like biography; clearly, she had a knack for being at the right place at the right time, not only meeting, but joining forces with, leading innovators wherever she went (her friends and acquaintances in the pre- and postwar years included Hans Arp, Constantin Brancusi, Sam Francis, Alberto Giacometti, Peggy Guggenheim, Stanley William Hayter, Joan Mitchell, Henry Moore, Gordon Onslow-Ford, Herbert Read, and Mark Tobey). Henderson describes Falkenstein's teaching stint in the late 1940s at the California School of Fine Arts (now the



Fig. 1. Claire Falkenstein, *Game* (1944), forged iron, wood base, 21" x 20 3/4" x 3".

San Francisco Art Institute), the hotbed for experimental art on the West Coast and the birthplace of the San Francisco School of Abstract Expressionism with a faculty that included Richard Diebenkorn, David Park, Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt, and Clyfford Still, the latter becoming a lifelong friend. The school's student body was then dominated by non-nonsense, war-toughened veterans, but as Henderson tells it, Falkenstein could hold her own as a sculpture instructor, quoting her as saying:

I had the shop! The power tools! And I had a helluva time keeping those ex-G.I.s out of there. They were big and knew how to use all that machinery, and they came in there any time they had a project. But I worked hard with my students and taught them to use the power tools not as just practical equipment but as creative tools (89).

Henderson also describes Falkenstein's involvement, after moving to Paris in 1950, with the French critic Michel Tapié, one of the most influential tastemakers in postwar Europe. She soon became Tapié's poster child for the movement he coined *Art autre*, as well as *Art informel*, with an approach to sculpture ideally suited to his notions of spontaneously created, indefinite, and non-repetitious art.

The volume concludes with Susan M. Anderson's superb essay, "The Formless Hunch," which tackles Falkenstein's prodigious, if lesser known, outpouring of paintings, drawings, collages, intaglio prints, and two-dimensional works she called her "plastics" (c. 1946–48). Composed of industrial materials such as Lucite, Bakelite, and Plexiglas, to which she applied a range of techniques including power tools, these latter works were particularly inventive and prescient for their time, anticipating Los Angeles's Finish Fetish and Light and Space movements of the 1960s and 1970s (she also used automotive lacquer for her aluminum pieces, which she hung from the ceiling). Falkenstein used "color-light" as an interactive medium, whether ambient or artificial, lighting her pieces from within or along their edge, back, top, and side, making the most of shifts in shadow, transparency, and reflection based on audience participation. Anderson's deep knowledge of West Coast Surrealism informs her discussion of Falkenstein's connection with early promoters of automatism such as Charles Howard, Hayter, and Onslow-Ford, which led her (among other San Franciscans) toward approaching the creative process without preconception, simultaneous to her coun-

terparts on the East Coast who would later be identified as members of the New York School. Anderson argues, however—along with Duncan—that Falkenstein's ideology differentiated her from her fellow Abstract Expressionists, principally because of her interest in applying principles of higher mathematics and physics to the thematics of her work. This is a rich topic for further exploration, since many artists of the San Francisco School were similarly preoccupied with creating visual metaphors of what was then popularly called the "space-time continuum."⁴ Falkenstein may not have shared the New York School's infatuation with imagery culled from Jung's Collective Unconscious—her abstraction from the start was for the most part non-objective—but she did have in common with San Francisco Abstract Expressionists a concern for expansive space as a metaphor for freedom and a universal Esperanto. •

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Notes

1. Jacket copy for Barbara Hess and Uta Grosenick, eds., *Abstract Expressionism* (Berlin: Taschen, 2009).
2. Michael Plante, "Sculpture's Autre: Falkenstein's Direct Metal Sculpture and the Art Autre Aesthetic," in Mona Hadler and Joan Marter eds., *Art Journal* 53 (Winter, 1994): 66–72. In 1980, the premier issue of WAJ included an article on Falkenstein, see Noreen Larinde, "Claire Falkenstein" WAJ 1, no. 1 (Spring - Summer, 1980): 50–55.
3. Michael Leja, quoted in Joan Marter, "Postwar Sculpture Re/visited," in Hadler and Marter eds., *Art Journal* (Winter, 1994): 20.
4. San Francisco Abstract Expressionist George Stillman recalled that in the late 1940s, while teaching at the California School of Fine Arts, Clyfford Still described the world "not as a stage but a continuum." According to Stillman, "In my opinion, as [Werner] Haftmann suggests, this notion stems from the concept of the time-space continuum that Einstein was concerned with. I discussed this at length with others and still do with regard to edge forms, etc." (Stillman, letter to the author, June 1, 1989). The "space-time continuum" in advanced physics and its application to art was prevalent in the 1940s. See, for example, Walter Isaacs, "Time and the Fourth Dimension in Painting," *College Art Journal* 2 (November, 1942).

Seeing Gertrude Stein: Five Stories

By Wanda M. Corn and
Tirza True Latimer
University of California Press, 2011

Reviewed by Joyce Beckenstein

Impressively researched, copiously illustrated, and a refreshingly "good read," this companion volume to the 2011–12 exhibition organized by the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco and the National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C., presents Stein (1874–1946) as a "cubist" paradox. A legendary patron of the arts who, with her brother Leo, helped launch the careers of modernist lions—Picasso and Matisse among them—Stein was also a consummate writer, poet and playwright. Upending tradition, she won-

dered, "...Why stories have beginnings, middles and ends" (1). This biography, however, proceeds along traditional chronologies. Corn and Latimer are not interested in analyses of Stein's artistic tomes, but in presenting a portrait of an enigmatic woman who lived by her intuition, instincts, whims, and personal passions. We meet Stein as a patriotic American who preferred Paris; a liberated woman whose lesbian relationship with Alice B. Toklas (1877–1967) conformed to traditional male-female gender roles; a Jew who befriended a Nazi sympathizer; a collector who summarily dropped her protégés; a collaborator craving top billing; an intellectual, avant-garde writer hungering for star status. Stein begs attention from many angles of vision.

This multifaceted portrait of Stein—photographic, painted, and written—unfolds as five stories, each given its

own chapter: "Picturing Gertrude," "Domestic Stein," "Art of Friendship," "Celebrity Stein" and "Legacies." The first of these story-chapters begins with portraits of Stein at age four. In one 1877 image she sits on the floor surrounded by her affluent Victorian family, all posed to boast erudition: playing a violin, reading, pensive. In an 1897 class snapshot Stein wears a "Gibson Girl" dress, the mark of a new breed of educated, more independent woman. This story emphasizes how formal portraiture became for Stein an important means of celebrating her personal status and identity. The authors insightfully connect the family's portrait tradition to Pablo Picasso's iconic *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* (1905–06), the one he painted when Stein and her brother Leo lived in Paris and held their legendary "at homes" with radical artists of the day.

Picasso seated Stein leaning forward in a wide, rounded chair that both contained and projected her dominating presence. He then finessed her ample body mass with explosive cerebral energy animating her Iberian mask-inspired eyes. Stein's Buddha-shaped torso, cloaked in mannish brown, strikes an androgynous conversation with her feminine side: her hair piled high, a soft ruffled blouse undulating towards her doughy hands. Teeming with symbolic and visual conundrums, Picasso's compelling dislocation of gender and aesthetic form resonates with his patron's bohemian and lesbian lifestyles, and with her own experimental restructuring of narrative language. Stein used this portrait to galvanize and market her public image: photographs underscore how she deliberately posed with this painting as backdrop throughout her life to assert a proprietary connection to Picasso and his groundbreaking art (Fig.1). Picasso resented this, and their bond loosened over time.

Central to the life Stein shared with Alice B. Toklas were the intellectuals and artists who rotated through the revolving door of Stein's subsequent inner circles. After WWI they included Man Ray, Cecil Beaton, Jo Davidson, Jacques Lipschitz, Ernest Hemingway, Pavel Tchelitchev and Bernard Fay. Man Ray, who didn't much care for Stein, made good money from his photographic tableaux of Stein and Toklas's shared domestic life. Cecil Beaton brought stark 1930s high fashion photography to his portrayals, contrasting Stein—sporting a cropped haircut, long vest, and mannish cap—with a more stylish, feminine Toklas. Such images fueled decades-long discourses about sexual orientation and gender roles. But as authors Corn and Latimer point out, the public depiction of a masculinized Stein dominating Toklas belies Toklas's considerable strengths. The Perle Mesta of her day, Toklas expressed her creative self through crafts, entertaining, and culinary skills—her marijuana brownies as well known as Stein's line, "A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose." So were Toklas's organizational skills essential to

the archival preservation of Stein's legacy.

Stein abruptly severed relationships she didn't favor. Ernest Hemingway discussed this, writing how Stein, courted for her patronage and influence, always expected something in return, to "advance her career." The authors aver many such friendships that waxed and waned through the years. Carl Van Vechten steered Stein's writings into the American press; Marsden Hartley had Stein's literary portrait of him reprinted in Alfred Stieglitz's *Camera Work*; Virgil Thomson composed the musical score for her *Four Saints in Three Acts*. Stein even used her partner to celebrate her own life. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, only thinly veils Stein's authorship of the book that catapulted her to fame with the help of Bernard Fay, who launched her 1934 visit home. In charismatic appearances across America, she explained her writing and its relationship to modernism. She was a smashing success.

That coast-to-coast tour raised rankling questions, as Corn and Latimer note. Why did Stein covet Fay, a French historian, scholar, and known anti-Semite, as a close confidant and friend? Why, instead of leaving Europe on the heels of WWII, did she stay, choosing to live in the countryside, protected by Fay? While serving the Vichy government during the German occupation of France, he condemned innocents to concentration camps—all the while authorizing safety for Stein and Toklas, securing their Paris art collection, and providing them extra rations. Stein later defended Fay when he was tried, then convicted, as a Nazi conspirator. He managed to escape with funds, it is said, from Toklas.

As American Jews hunkered down among locals outside Paris, Stein and Toklas were no doubt terrified. But had they no other recourse? Were friends long dismissed so offended, family so estranged since the days Stein and Toklas partnered, that they had nowhere else to turn? Or did Stein's craving for fame and validation strip her moral conscience, even as the fascist who promoted her felled so many? Was this but another, darker side of Stein's multifaceted self? The authors present these



Fig. 1. Unidentified Photographer, Gertrude Stein, 27 rue de Fleurus (ca. 1920), gelatin print, 4 11/16" x 3 7/16".

questions with candor, then move on, without passing judgment, to consider Stein's otherwise considerable legacy: her creative impact on artists from John Cage to Merce Cunningham, Nam June Paik, the Judson Dance Theater, Ed Ruscha, and Glenn Ligon, to name a few, and her impact on feminist and gender issues that continue in this millennium.

Corn and Latimer augmented this insightful study with 248 wonderful illustrations. Family photographs interspersed with those taken by professional photographers and illustrations from mass media—a 1933 *Time* Magazine cover and a 1945 *New York Times* story about Veterans, penned by Stein—present her from the many perspectives she sought. Reproductions of art works by later generations of modern artists, from Rauschenberg to Red Grooms and David Levine underscore Stein's presence as one whose impact on feminist culture has yet to be fully appreciated. Extensive references, notes, chronology, and bibliography round out this exceptional volume about a literary figure and art patron who was one of the world's most complex and all-to-human women. ●

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Intimate Collaborations: Kandinsky & Münter, Arp & Taeuber

By Bibiana K. Obler,
Yale University Press, 2014

Reviewed by Nancy Mowll Mathews

From the title, *Intimate Collaborations*, it is easy to assume that Bibiana Obler's book will bring us, if not into the bedroom, at least into the hearts of these two famous couples of early twentieth-century modernism, Wassily Kandinsky and Gabrielle Münter, and Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp. But very quickly the reader learns that "intimate" does not refer to personal relationships but artistic ones. Biography is used sparingly in favor of an examination of the complex philosophies that affected art production in the first few decades of the twentieth century and how gender issues further complicated them. She takes as her underlying organizing principle that "These artists participated in a culture that took philosophy seriously" (21), and that their love relationships and artistic collaborations can be understood through the lens of Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, Georg Simmel, Henri Bergson, and many others whose writings were well discussed in the artistic circles these couples inhabited. Twenty-first century philosophical trends, particularly the "New Materialism" of several feminist theorists are also applied to the art objects of these four artists to bring out the details of their contributions to the heady world of early modernism.

At the heart of Obler's project is the hypothesis that "the goal of both couples ... was to overcome the fragmented individualism promoted by industrial capitalism" (6). She documents their efforts to overcome isolation not by studying the conventional evidence of two people joined by personal love for each other, but by delving into their art objects, since, she asserts, they "sought to transform life by uniting it with art." The two couples worked in different aesthetic climates since Münter and Kandinsky matured as artists by the end of the first

decade of the twentieth century and Taeuber and Arp came into their own by the end of the second. In the fast-paced evolution of modernist movements, German Expressionism and Dada were worlds apart in style. Yet Obler points out that not only did Kandinsky and his cohorts (including Münter) leave a clear imprint on Dada, but the two artistic generations were linked by their desire to blur the fine and applied arts and build "new communities, ordered through anarchic freedom rather than constrained by civilization gone awry" (6).

For Kandinsky, the effort to achieve a new community through art is relatively easy to demonstrate because of his extensive writing and the universality generally ascribed to abstraction in this early phase of modernist experimentation. His *Composition II* (1910) leads the way to the verbal explanations of his series of Compositions, found in *On the Spiritual in Art* (1912) and his 1913 essay "Painting as Pure Art," as painting which overcomes the separation between people by speaking "from spirit to spirit" (84). Bringing in Bergson's *Time and Free Will* (1889, which Kandinsky owned in German translation), Obler ties the Compositions and Improvisations to Bergson's constant "becoming" of "our inner states as living things" (91).

In Münter, Obler faces a greater challenge. As Kandinsky became more abstract and more verbal, Münter claimed nature as her artistic touchstone and wrote even less about her art, partly, as Obler suggests, to distinguish herself from Kandinsky (108). The resulting paintings contrast greatly with Kandinsky's, and while they too project the "inner sound" of the Kandinsky/Bergson universality (95), they do so by keeping the separation of objects. Münter's still lifes (which Obler aptly dubs "weird"), such as the *Still Life with Saint George* (1911), are based on her collection of folk figurines and religious objects—with each object depicted with a greater or lesser degree of expressionistic brushwork. Since so much rests on the art itself, Obler makes skillful use of the illustrated works in conjunction with the text. To understand how these disparate objects relate to one another, Obler turns to feminist new materialism of the early



Fig. 1. Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Nic Aluf Studio, *Self-Portrait with Dada-Kopf (Dada Head)* (1920), gelatin silver print, 8 3/4" x 6 1/4". Collection SFMOMA, Fractional and promised gift of Carla Emil and Rich Silverstein.

twenty-first century, which proposes an underlying connection between "people, objects, and other living things" (104), but those material beings cannot always be as satisfactorily homogenized as Kandinsky proposes in his abstractions.

Obler's analysis of how Münter and Kandinsky thought about relationships and overcoming the isolation of individuals in their paintings in the early teens is intriguing and brings out very convincingly the differences (gendered and otherwise) between the two. She concludes by unexpectedly declaring both methods to be failures as, in the end, the art did not "transform life": the two artists separated as World War I engulfed them and never reconciled.

The story of Sophie Taeuber and Hans Arp is in some ways an antidote to the Münter/Kandinsky failed attempt to overcome barriers. These two artists deliberately worked together on the same art objects in the teens, married in 1922, and remained devoted to one another until Taeuber's death in 1943. Unlike the earnest attempts to communicate an artist's inner life which dominated Münter and Kandinsky's expressionistic milieu, Dada's artistic inscrutability actually allowed the men and women to blend more completely as they attempt-

ed, through Dada collaboration, to “eliminate the boundaries between them as discrete individuals” (123) (Fig. 1). The series of vertical-horizontal collages that the couple produced together in 1918 seems a perfect example of how art can transform life—achieving success where the Kandinsky/Münter experiments had failed.

But Obler frustrates this simple narrative of this Taeuber-Arp collaboration by pointing out that none of the works in this series were exhibited or otherwise made public, and that their victory must be limited to the private lives of their makers rather than an openly acknowledged statement that gendered differences in art had been decisively and permanently overcome. In public, Arp remained the masculine “fine artist,” while Taeuber remained the accomplished but secondary applied artist. Her principal income (in fact she supported them both) was from her position as professor of embroidery, an all-female department, at the School of Applied Arts in Zurich (164). In their mutual modernist interests, they “trouble the distinctions ... but they allow the categories to remain in place” (136).

In the last chapter, Obler examines their machine-produced wood work, seeking gendered interpretations in their different approaches to the “impersonality” of such objects as Taeuber’s marionettes and Arp’s wooden collages. Most intriguing is her discussion of the early twentieth century revival of marionette theater in the context of modern dance and, for some, as an alternative to cinema (166). She proposes that Taeuber’s Dada dance

practices were viewed through gender bias, as critics suggested she did not achieve Nietzsche’s union of the Apollonian and Dionysian (165). On the other hand, her marionettes for *King Stag*, which was performed in 1918, were a more successful exposition of “the tension between the organic and inorganic” (174), and “her marionettes achieved the same kind of response that a male artist could have earned—or almost the same” (177).

While these kinds of observations and interpretations are fascinating, without a strong sense of their personal and professional personalities, the four artists remain rather ghostlike. This is not so problematic for Kandinsky and Arp, who both left us a body of literature—their own writings as well as multiple contemporary critical publications. But for Münter and Taeuber, who were amazingly reticent and who received less notice in the press, a more elaborate case has to be made to substantiate the decisions Obler attributes to them. Every bit of relevant literature by and about the artists can be found in the extensive footnotes, but the reader often goes back and forth hoping for more insight into their personalities. Despite her frequent references to “undecidability,” Obler has in her own mind a strong sense of who these men and women were as artists and people. We wish she would share it.

Another lacuna in Obler’s otherwise far-reaching research is an understanding of the market reception of these artists. She is thorough in her scrutiny of the exhibition history and critical response, especially for the individual works she has chosen for interpretation. But this

extraordinary research into the public artistic environment for the two couples overlooks the related evidence to be gained from a similar examination of the market for each. All were exhibiting and selling, and they no doubt had relationships with the dealers and collectors who supported them. Why do we only hear about only one such interchange (Kandinsky and Jerome Eddy, 60–61)? The socioeconomic situation of each artist is unique, and each had more or less leeway to test the market through radical experimentation, although all obviously had found a niche among progressive collectors. Information about their relative economic positions could help us further evaluate the gender differences and the choices they made in interpreting philosophical theories in their art.

Ultimately the subtleties and complexities of the objects Obler puts under her microscope emerge in spellbinding kaleidoscope fashion, as she rigorously changes the lens from theorist to theorist. While the four artists involved stay somewhat out of focus in this process, their modernist philosophical framework takes on special meaning, and the art itself comes alive in new and unexpected ways. •

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Degas/Cassatt

By Kimberly A. Jones, *et al.*
Prestel, 2014

Reviewed by Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell

Edgar Degas’s influence on Mary Cassatt is well known—to the extent that she has erroneously been called his student, and her paintings have been misattributed to him. Cassatt’s

influence on Degas has been less thoroughly documented, until now. This handsome catalogue of the 2014 exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, consisting of an illustrated checklist and five penetrating essays by Jones, Marc Rosen, Susan Pinsky, Amanda T. Zehnder, Ann Hoenigswald, Erica Hirshler, and Elliot Bostwick Davis, assembles clues from their respective oeuvres to illuminate their unlikely and little-understood friendship.

An odd couple in terms of temperament, gender, age, and nationality, Degas

and Cassatt nevertheless shared an artistic sensibility and a thirst for experimentation. Cassatt said meeting Degas changed her life. Degas, in turn, remarked on his first encounter with Cassatt’s work, without having met her: “There is someone who feels as I do” (xiii). The older artist recognized a kindred spirit and invited Cassatt to exhibit with his band of “independent” painters, better known today as the Impressionists. She was one of three women and the only American to exhibit with the group.

The catalogue focuses on the late 1870s through the mid-1890s, the period of their greatest collaboration and innovation. The authors must rely on visual evidence, since any correspondence between the two artists has been lost. As the collector Louisine Havemeyer said of Cassatt: "It is a great pity that she did not keep his letters, nor write down her impressions of Degas; no one understood him better and she was his compeer in intelligence and art appreciation" (4). Eventually, however, they drifted apart, and that distance (and even animosity) late in their lives has obfuscated their earlier friendship.

Just as it is often said that Fred Astaire gave Ginger Rogers class and she gave him sex appeal, Degas's interest in Cassatt gave her sometimes cloying canvases an edge, while her interest in Degas made him seem like less of a boor; even male critics felt his work bordered on misogyny. Thankfully, the book does not focus on gender, which has been thoroughly explored in previous studies of both artists, but instead examines similarities in their artistic styles and practices, often revealed by detailed technical analysis (which, in Cassatt's case, has not been attempted before).

This approach reveals a shared interest in mixed media and unconventional materials, with Cassatt an equal partner in experimentation. If she does not have a reputation as a risk-taker, perhaps it is because "whereas Degas would work and rework his innovative projects, often ruining them in the process, Cassatt was quicker to recognize when an experiment could not be fully resolved (at least to her satisfaction) and to move on," Hoenigswald and Jones suggest (122). The catalogue includes a few of these failed experiments.

Without surviving correspondence, it is difficult to know if the "conspicuous compositional similarities" in their work—especially their prints—were deliberate or unconscious (8). Time and again, "the two artists demonstrated how similar poses and compositions could be crafted to create divergent meanings," writes Zehnder (17). Many of Cassatt's works can be read as sanitized versions

of Degas's, transplanting his compositional arrangements from the public, male sphere to a private, feminine, bourgeois setting. This was by necessity as much as by design; Degas could depict "areas where Cassatt would not go owing to convention, etiquette, or lack of interest" (11). Unlike Degas, Cassatt did not paint fans, perhaps wishing, as Hoenigswald and Jones speculate, "to avoid the negative connotations associated with practicing a craft typically associated with amateurs and women artists" (123). Nevertheless, fans figure prominently in her paintings, functioning as paintings within paintings—and, like Degas's fans, they are rendered in metallic paints produced for commercial decorators, not fine artists.

Although he produced only one true portrait of her, Cassatt served as a frequent model for Degas. She can be spotted trying on hats in his millinery scenes, or leaning on her umbrella in the Louvre galleries. A double outsider—not just female but American—Cassatt was also the consummate insider: an upper middle class woman, with all the privilege and refinement that implies. "He genuinely appreciated her unique character and the innate qualities that set her apart from a hired model," Jones writes (87). It is thought that Cassatt, too, included self-portraits in her own work.

Rosen and Pinsky discuss the artists' shared interest in printmaking, in which Cassatt took the lead. She was inspired to attempt printmaking by the 1890 exhibition of Japanese color woodblocks at the École des Beaux-Arts, responding with a series of color prints of the daily activities of Parisian women of her class that "was, essentially, a European reimagining of Japanese print aesthetics" using copperplates rather than woodblocks (106). These, in turn, drove Degas to reconsider printmaking, which he'd given up a decade earlier.

Hirshler and Davis argue that "Cassatt's promotion of Degas"—especially among American collectors—"can ... be seen as a highly successful strategy in



Fig. 1. Mary Cassatt, *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair* (1878), oil on canvas, 35 1/4" x 51 1/8". National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.), Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon.

promoting herself, her professional career, and her artistic legacy" (137). Cassatt readily acknowledged that Degas not only influenced her work but even painted the background of her *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair* (1878; Fig. 1), the book's cover image and likely part of Cassatt's debut exhibition with the Impressionists in 1879. Hoenigswald and Jones (the exhibition's conservator and curator, respectively) have produced thrilling new technical evidence to confirm the well-known anecdote, using infrared imaging to detect Cassatt's original composition and identify intentionally abraded brushstrokes characteristic of Degas's work. His intervention clearly altered the depth and perspective of the painting, but it was a collaboration, not an intrusion.

Cassatt once remarked that "Degas's art is for the very few" (128). The comment was intended to flatter a collector, and she added that only "painters and connoisseurs" would appreciate his work. Nevertheless, such a statement may seem laughable in light of Degas's present-day mass popularity. But though both Cassatt and Degas have been the subjects of extensive scrutiny, together and individually, the authors of *Degas/Cassatt* have managed to find new things to say about them. •

Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell is an independent scholar and the author of *Fashion Victims: Dress at the Court of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette* (Yale University Press, 2015).



Pl. 1. Julie Dowling,
Warridah Melburra Ngupi (2004),
acrylic and red ochre on canvas,
59" x 47 1/4".
Cruthers Collection of Women's Art,
CCWA 777. © Julie Dowling.



Pl. 2. Julie Dowling,
Budjarri Maroubra (2005),
acrylic and red ochre on
canvas, 39 3/8" x 47 1/4".
Private Collection.
© Julie Dowling.



Pl. 3. Petah Coyne, *Untitled # 1336 (Scalapino Nu Shu)* (2009–10), apple tree, taxidermy Black Melanistic Pheasants, taxidermy Blue India Peacocks, taxidermy Black-Shouldered Peacocks, taxidermy Spalding Peacocks, taxidermy Black Squirrel, black sand from pig-iron casting, Acrylex 234, black paint, cement, chicken-wire fencing, wood, gravel, sisal, staging rope, cotton rope, insulated foam sealant, pipe, epoxy, threaded rod, wire, screws, jaw-to-jaw swivels, 158" x 247 1/2" x 245". Collection of the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art. Photo: Elisabeth Bernstein. © Petah Coyne. Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York.



Pl. 4. Petah Coyne, *Untitled #1205 (Virgil)* (detail) (1997–2008), silk flowers, taxidermy animals, fabricated tree branches, fabricated curly willow, feathers, silk/rayon velvet, thread, specially-formulated wax, cable, cable nuts, fabricated steel, acrylic paint, black spray paint, pearl-headed hat pins, wood, plywood, vinyl, chicken-wire fencing, felt, pigment, wire, metal hardware, 68" x 97" x 115". Collection of the Nevada Museum of Art. Photo: Wit McKay. © Petah Coyne. Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York.



Pl. 5. Petah Coyne, *Untitled #1093 (Buddha Boy)* (2001–03), specially-formulated wax, cast wax statuary figure, horse hair, ribbons, pigment, chicken-wire fencing, wire, acrylic primer, silk flowers, bows, acetate, ribbons, artificial feathers, artificial pearl strands, plywood, metal hardware, pearl-headed hat pins, tassels, aluminum, 52" x 51 1/8" x 52". Photo: Jean Vong. © Petah Coyne. Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York.



Pl. 6. Petah Coyne, *Untitled #1388 (The Unconsoled)* (2013–14), silk flowers, specially formulated wax, white pigment, paint, thread, wire, floral tape, taxidermy Silver Pied peacock, taxidermy Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, taxidermy Snow Geese, steel, metal hardware, maple, birch plywood, aluminum, 120" x 288" x 24". Photo: Christopher Burke Studio. © Petah Coyne. Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York.



Pl. 7 (left). Sooja Kim, *Mind and World* (1991), installation view, the 2nd solo exhibition in Gallery Hyundai. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Hyundai.



Pl. 8 (right). Sooja Kim, *Lying on Nature* (1994), cloth, installation view, Oksan Lecture Hall Valley, Kyeongju. Courtesy of the artist.



Pl. 9. Sue Williamson, *A Few South Africans: Mamphela Ramphele* (1985), photo etching/screenprint, 27 1/2" x 25". Photo: Courtesy Goodman Gallery, Cape Town.



Pl. 10. Penny Siopis, *Melancholia* (1986), oil on canvas, 77 3/4" x 69". Johannesburg Art Gallery.



Pl. 11. Helen Mmakgabo Sebidi, *The child's mother holds the sharp side of the knife* (1988–89), pastel on paper, 73 1/2" x 110 1/4". Iziko SANG Collection.



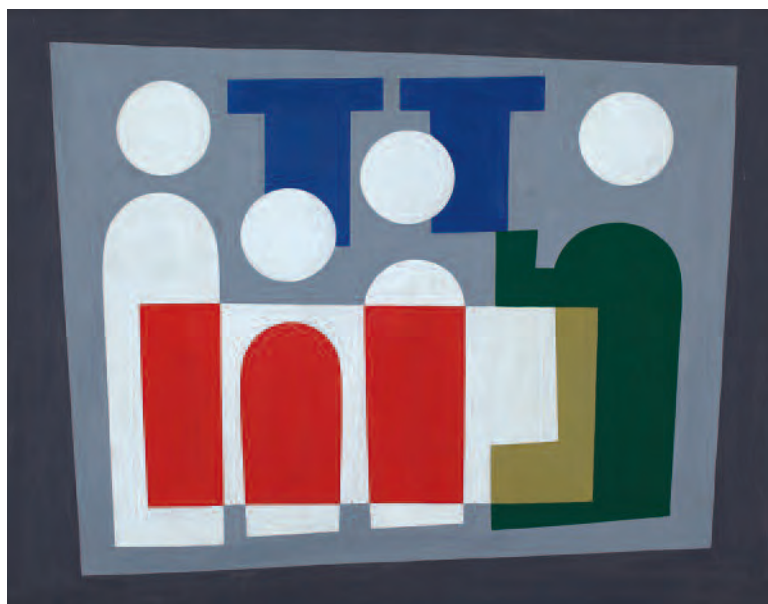
Pl. 12. Marcelle Cahn, *Femme à la raquette* (1927), oil on canvas, 28 3/4" x 20 7/8". Musée des Ursulines, Mâcon. Photo: P. Tournier, Musées de Mâcon.



Pl. 13. Marcelle Cahn, *La Rame*, no. 4 (1927), 24" x 19 3/4". Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Strasbourg. © Photo Musées de Strasbourg, M. Bertola.

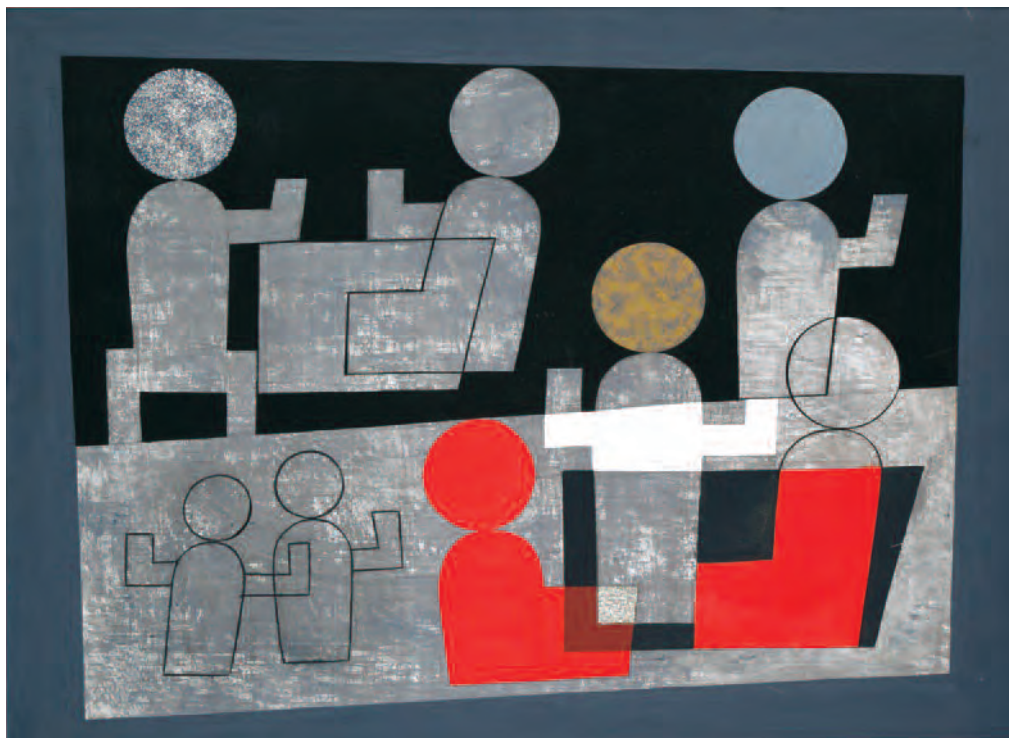


Pl. 14. Franciska Clausen, *Komposition* (1929), oil on canvas, 24 3/4" x 19 3/4". Museum Sønderjylland – Kunstmuseet Brøndlund Slot. Fonden Franciska Clausen. © Franciska Clausen, VEGAP, New Brunswick, 2014.



Pl. 15. Sophie Taeuber-Arp, *Personnages* (1928), oil on canvas, 19 3/4" x 25 1/2". Private collection, Switzerland. Photo: Peter Whinyates.

Pl. 16. Sophie Taeuber-Arp,
Café (1928),
 oil on canvas, 27" x
 34 3/8" x 2 3/8".
 Stiftung Arp e.V.,
 Berlin/Rolandswerth.
 Inv. No. 003.562.



Pl. 17. Franciska Clausen, *Cirkel og firkant* (Circle and square)
 (1930), oil on canvas, 26 1/2" x 22 5/8". National Gallery of
 Denmark, Copenhagen © SMK Photo. © Franciska Clausen,
 VEGAP, New Brunswick, 2014.



Pl. 18. Nadia Chodasiewicz-Grabowska (Nadia Léger), *Kompozycja planimetryczna-Waza* (Planimetric composition - vase) (c. 1926), oil on canvas, 11 1/4" x 8 3/8". Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź. © Nadia Chodasiewicz-Grabowska, VEGAP, New Brunswick, 2014.

HOLOCAUST HEROES: FIERCE FEMALES

TAPESTRIES AND SCULPTURE BY LINDA STEIN

An exhibition/lecture/performance
traveling to museums and
universities throughout the country
and abroad, under the umbrella of the
non-profit, Have Art: Will Travel!

This event highlights females who represent
different aspects of bravery during the time of
the Holocaust. The exhibition features: ten large
tapestries, each depicting a hero who risked
her life to save or inspire others; twenty small
sculptures from the *Spoon to Shell* series, and
one eight-foot *Protector 841*. Also included: a
film that explores the process, inspiration, and
themes for this body of work; a catalog with
scholarly essays; and a lecture in which Stein
addresses everyday and extraordinary heroism.

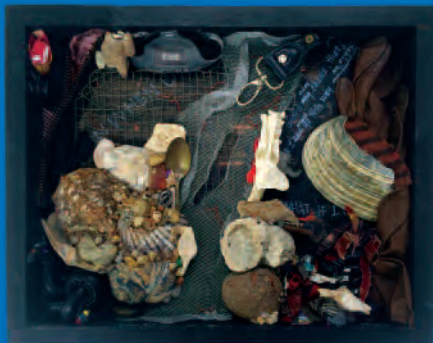
Previewing at:

Futernick Gallery, Alper JCC, Miami, FL
October 11, 2015-November 29, 2015;

Rosen Museum, Levis JCC, Boca Raton, FL
December 6, 2015-January 31, 2016



Hadassah Bimko Rosensaft 810 2014 5 ft. sq.
leather, metal, canvas, paint, fabric, mixed media



Spoon to Shell 817 2015 11" x 14" x 2"
spoon, shell, and mixed media

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Protector 841 2014 78"x 24"x 8"
leather, metal, mixed media