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Joan Semmel,
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oil on canvas,
48" x 53". Courtesy
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Occasionally our selection of articles affords the opportunity to explore a particular aspect of the praxis of women artists. In this issue a remarkable pairing has happened, with the subject of the nude female image by two artists four centuries apart: Lavinia Fontana, an Italian painter of the late sixteenth century, and the contemporary artist Joan Semmel.

Fontana, as described by author Liana de Girolami Cheney, “excelled in composing a new theme for female painters of her time to follow, that is, the depiction of mythological subjects, in particular the portrayal of nude female figures, as seen in her nude Minervas and Venuses.” As mythological or allegorical subjects, they included identifying attributes, but however pure or “prudent” these images may have been meant to appear, the provocative poses of the figures, the use of mirrors, transparent garments, and playful cupids suggest a sensual valence for all of the paintings. Fontana was a highly successful and prolific artist, who counted among her patrons several popes and members of the Papal Court. Without knowing who were the models for these nudes, in this case, the “gaze” of a renowned woman artist centers on a delectable female subject. (We learn that a cardinal was the likely patron for at least one of these sexually charged images.) Feminists have long been interested in claiming the nude female image for themselves. While countless male artists through the ages have depicted female nudes in various poses, “Fontana’s new genre,” writes Cheney, “paved the way for Artemisia Gentileschi’s depictions of female nudes in the seventeenth century” and was a precedent for women artists who followed. Cheney’s in-depth article details the many attributes and sources that Lavinia Fontana drew upon in developing her remarkable paintings.

Since the 1970s, Joan Semmel has been expanding the subject of the nude female by concentrating on the self-image. Included in Joyce Beckenstein’s article on the artist, there are only a few references to the presence of mirrors, as in *Masque* (1991), but like Fontana’s *Allegory of Prudence* (1590), Semmel has often used mirrors to show front and back views of a single figure. Here, reflecting on the exercise craze of the 1980s, Semmel “tapped the divide between the typical female body as seen ... in the dressing room, and the one those women strove to own—



Lavinia Fontana, *Allegory of Prudence* (1590s).



Joan Semmel, *Masque* (1991).

the modern idealized Venus of ancient myth reinvented in [Jane] Fontana form,” writes Beckenstein. Semmel has been painting images of her own naked body for decades, continuing into her eighties. And just as Fontana, in 1612, depicted transparent clothing in *Minerva Dressing*, Semmel reveals her aging self beneath translucent drapes in *Unveiling* (2011). We discover that women have claimed this subject much longer than feminists have assumed, and have taken delight in showing the female body in various guises.

Also in this issue ... Brenda Miller, who, like Semmel, was a dedicated activist in the early years of the women’s movement in New York, is the subject of a celebratory article about her many successful projects of the 1970s and 1980s. Cynthia Fowler positions Miller as an innovator among the post-Minimalists who expanded the use of materials to include fiber and string. Her large-scale installations “had a commanding presence that demanded recognition,” writes Fowler. “Their impressive size connects them to feminist efforts to ensure gallery space for women artists” at a time when “the battle to claim space was at the forefront of the feminist movement.”

Janet Sobel was a self-taught painter in the age of surrealism and abstract expressionism. Known and hailed as a “primitive painter,” Sobel’s work did not fit easily into any of the categories of the burgeoning 1940s New York art world,” writes Sandra Zalman in her

examination of Sobel’s critical reception by Clement Greenberg and other art world tastemakers of the day.

Our sincere thanks to Old City Publishing and Rutgers University for their ongoing support of *Woman’s Art Journal* over the past ten years, and to the scholars around the world who write the articles and reviews in these pages. We look forward to continuing our mission to publish a broad range of articles on women artists and feminist topics.

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

JOAN SEMMEL

NAKED CAME THE NUDE

By Joyce Beckenstein

Joan Semmel wields her brush with the energy of a thirty-year-old and the wisdom of an octogenarian. One of feminism's staunchest advocates, and one of this era's most prolific artists, she has unflaggingly stayed as true to herself as she has to her cause, never allowing sexual politics to loosen her grip on the artist within. Semmel is a risk-taker. She abandoned abstraction for figuration at a time when minimalism held sway. She appropriated elements of pornography to militate against commercial porn's objectification of women. Most daring, she used her nude body, unidealized, to tackle subjects few others would touch; first unromanticized female sexuality, then the reality and vulnerability of the aging woman. Despite the inevitable commercial compromises, Semmel never lost her moral compass.

Her formidable body of work transcends her use of her body as subject matter. As she chronicles the passage of time through five decades of self-imagery, Semmel captures the many incarnations of feminism as she experienced them, both as a maturing woman and as an evolving artist. Sometimes the lessons were clear, strident, and blatant, like her early sex paintings. Other insights congealed through a blurry lens. Those called for a different handling of paint. Semmel's gifts lie in her remarkable ability to tap that space where intellect meets intuition and where flesh meets spirit in a visual world that hovers between figuration and psychic abstraction.

Born in 1932, Semmel straddled two worlds, coming of age in the post-war 1950s, then taking a giant leap into 1970s feminism. As a young art student at Cooper Union she listened to teachers directing her towards abstraction, and succumbed to the prevailing wisdom favoring early marriage and childbearing. In 1952 she married a civil engineer and had her first child at twenty-three. A subsequent battle with tuberculosis kept her confined and isolated from her family for months, but with time to reflect on what was already an unhappy marriage. She nevertheless stayed, moving to Spain in 1963, where her husband had a job. They separated soon after the birth of their second child. Semmel remained abroad pursuing her career as an expatriate in a country granting women few rights. Even so, Semmel successfully exhibited her



Fig. 1. Joan Semmel, *Green Heart* (1971), oil on canvas, 48" x 58". Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, N.Y. ©2015 Joan Semmel / Artists Rights Society (ARS), N.Y.

work, something she ironically found much more difficult when she returned to the United States, where she encountered gallery doors shut to most women artists. It was a twist of fate, one that saw her shift from abstraction towards figuration as she became an increasingly more strident feminist.

Perfil Infinito (1966; Pl. 1) and *Green Heart* (1971; Fig. 1) document her change in style. *Perfil Infinito*, an expressionist abstract work, consists of broad blocks of vibrant reds, greens, golds and plum purples serving as backgrounds for an energy field of smaller amorphous shapes, lines, and scribbles. *Green Heart*, semi-abstract, retains the figure-ground relationships of her earlier abstractions, but now the language becomes provocative, literal, and unapologetically charged in its portrayal of a woman's electric-pink and flesh-tone legs wrapped around the vibrant green buttocks of her partner. As in similar works, such as *Flip-Flop Diptych* (1971), a study of woman supine, then man supine, Semmel created visual excitement through abstraction: the implied movement of attenuated and foreshortened limbs; hotly hued, viscerally textured surfaces, all clinging to the picture plane, close to the



Fig. 2. Joan Semmel, *Intimacy/Autonomy* (1974), oil on canvas, 50" x 98". Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, N.Y. ©2015 Joan Semmel / Artists Rights Society (ARS), N.Y.

viewer. These works, which Semmel made in the 1970s and exhibited abroad, constituted her early Sex series. She featured them for her thesis exhibition at Pratt, where she earned an MFA that enabled her to teach art in order to support her family.

It is not surprising that Semmel's shift from non-objective art to sexually blunt figuration occurred almost as soon as she returned from Spain. Accustomed to censorship, she was shocked when she arrived in New York to find the first wave of feminist art colliding with the golden age of porn. In 1968 the publisher Al Goldstein debuted *Screw*, a sexually explicit magazine, off the charts in offensiveness. (Goldstein's 2004 *New York Times* obituary quoted the deceased's attorney, Alan M. Dershowitz, as saying, "Hefner did it with taste ... Goldstein's contribution is to be utterly tasteless."¹) The early 1970s also heralded the national distribution of explicit sex in films, including *Mona the Virgin Nymph* (1970), *Deep Throat* (1972) and *The Devil in Miss Jones* (1973), all funny fodder for Johnny Carson on his legendary Tonight Show. Even with the proliferation of sexually explicit visual material, much of it readily available, dealers, museums, and most galleries deemed Semmel's early sex paintings off limits.

Acceptance of her art was but one of the predicaments facing Semmel when she became a political activist fighting for women's rights, a battle fought on two major fronts, in California and in New York. Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro spearheaded the California movement, in 1972 organizing *Womanhouse*, "an exhibition emanating from the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of Arts. Their art curriculum created a safe haven for women to explore their

artistic voices removed from what Helène Cixous later referred to as the 'system of censorship that bears down on every attempt to speak in the feminine.'"² That same year, New York artists including Nancy Spero, Louise Bourgeois, and Howardena Pindell, led by art critic Lucy Lippard, spearheaded A.I.R., a co-op gallery of women artists that opened its doors in a SoHo storefront. "It was a scary and precarious time," writes Semmel. "I began attending political meetings at the Art Workers Coalition, The Ad Hoc Women Artists Committee and various other groups ... it was exciting ... for women who ... confronted the status quo with demonstrations and picket lines."³ When, in 1976, the groundbreaking exhibition "Women Artists: 1550–1950," organized by Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris, opened at the Brooklyn Museum, it was billed as "the first large-scale museum exhibition in the U.S. dedicated exclusively to women artists from a historical perspective."⁴ At the same time Semmel curated for the museum a related show, "Consciousness and Content,"⁵ exhibiting art by contemporary women. What Semmel and these other early feminist artists did for painting, sculpture, performance, and installation art would reshape the landscape of women's sensibilities in everything from art criticism to mass advertising, as it did feminist dialogues taking place across the country.

For Semmel that conversation insisted on leveling the sexual playing field, with paintings that made the case for woman's role as an equal sexual partner. Believing that the dismayed reactions to her pornography-inspired images had less to do with the imagery itself than with the reversal of male-dominant attitudes portrayed in her work emboldened her further. She

seized the camera and proceeded to photograph couples engaged in sex. *Erotic Yellow* (1973) depicts an entangled couple; he painted a bronzed green, she a hot pink, her hand firmly pressed against his genitals. Semmel explains:

I appropriated the modeled form and smooth surface of the closely cropped photograph onto my paintings, which tended to push the image from the picture plane into the viewer's space and retained abstract color as a primary element of the work. This served as a distancing device, defining the object as art and separating it from the realm of pornography.⁶

She made such paintings at a time when feminist art was at its most strident pitch, when many women artists ironically subverted pornography to make a point. Who can forget Lynda Benglis posing nude with an outsized dildo in an *Artforum* advertisement for her 1974 exhibition at Paula Cooper Gallery? And The New Museum's 2013 press release for an exhibition of works by Judith Bernstein read:

These monumental pieces provocatively appropriate the image of the screw as a phallic symbol of oppression—as in the expression 'being screwed' ... and evoke ominous power ... *HORIZONTAL* (1973) was censored ... in 1974 ... at the Museum of the Philadelphia Civic Center for "lacking redeeming social value," phraseology commonly applied to pornography.⁷

Like these provocative artists, Semmel walked a fine line. As the feminists militated against sexist imagery as pornography, so did they engage sexual imagery in their art at a time when the country was embroiled in a national fight against pornography. What separated female porn from its male counterpart? What made female appropriations of what they most loathed about the male objectification of women appropriate for their own use? Semmel faced the repercussions of this conundrum when an article by Gregory Battcock, "Purient Primer of Erotic Art: Up Your Arthole," appeared in the May 1974 issue of *Screw*, with an image of *Erotic Yellow* reproduced without her permission. All this took place as the Supreme Court, in *Miller v. California*, was redefining pornography, including rewriting its first amendment right's language from "redeeming social value" to that which lacks "serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value."⁸

As women artists pushed to new limits the kind of imagery the Supreme Court tried to sort through, they developed their own explicit language, albeit with different dialects accenting different points of view. Semmel in the 1970s joined ranks with those who had earlier begun to use their own bodies in photography, performance, installation art, and film. Her painted portrayals of the woman as an active sexual partner who receives pleasure and gives it without becoming submissive or objectified sought to strip away emotional and romantic narratives. The emotive content in her work is formally embedded in her art; her narration speaks to mutual passion, and refuses to belittle the role of a male partner. This nonjudgmental approach to sexuality combined with the work's inherent sensuality

resonates with the writings and works of Carolee Schneemann, who used her body in performances such as *Meat Joy* (1964), and in *Fuses* (1965), an abstract experimental film incorporating lovemaking sequences with her husband, James Tenney. Schneemann wrote: "When I said LOVE I meant EROTIC love; deep transforming bounty one imparts to another reciprocally; it assumes ... all! To celebrate, illuminate respect, tenderness, trust, passion and regard...to joyfully put all we are into one another's hands ... all contact, touch, expression possible desired."⁹

If you follow Schneemann's free-associative thinking, the issue of pornography as good, evil, or with inherent redeeming value becomes a non sequitur. It is instead a matter of the cultural context in which it is seen, used, and so often abused that matters, and that it seems was the reasoning behind the court's shift in wording. So when the 1970s porn dust finally settled, it was clear that the erotica emanating from this first wave of feminism claimed its social value in its proclamation of womankind's right to realize her sexual self. As Semmel put it,

I wanted to make imagery that would respond to female feelings. My paintings deal with communication, how a hand touches a body rather than male or female domination. Women are conditioned to play a masochistic role. But I want to show sensuality with the power factor eliminated. The images are handled in a cool way.... But there is feeling in the gestures, passion in the color. I'm using sex to hang my art on.¹⁰

Her insistence that the work be about the art gives it its aesthetic muscle. She demonstrates what that means in works such as *Intimacy/Autonomy* (1974; Fig. 2), a painting made in the mid-seventies when Semmel began to use her nude self as a model. The painting depicts an exaggerated foreshortened view of a nude couple lying side by side in what appears to be a post-coital interlude. The figures are cropped as if an observer photographed them from the shoulders down. Their torsos, realistically rendered in a strange bluish tint, traverse a stretch of beach—an interesting play of bodies cooled down and spent. Languishing against a warm expanse of sand, their contours become one with a landscape that abruptly ends with a band of deep blue sky. This denial of linear perspective and surreal body tonalities complement Semmel's collisions of abstraction and figuration with their intersecting triangular forms—bent leg and breasts, and soft mounds of female anatomy suggesting undulating hills countering the tauter expanse of male flesh. Because she keeps the viewer ricocheting between genres, the mind's eye relentlessly oscillates between the title's visual and psychological double entendres. In this case *Intimacy* and *Autonomy* refer to the lovers' relaxation into their own bodies and states of mind following sex. It also embraces the role of the viewer whose observation post outside the work weirdly connects his/her own head and shoulders to the outstretched figures, in effect completing the human forms. Thus are the observed and the observer both distanced and linked as are the subjects within Semmel's painting.



Fig. 3. Joan Semmel, *Sidepull* (1979), oil on canvas, 78" x 108". Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, N.Y. ©2015 Joan Semmel / Artists Rights Society (ARS), N.Y.

Intimacy/Autonomy in title and form is a transition work bridging Semmel's heterosexual paintings with the autoerotic works she made between 1974 and 1979. These pieces represent another key moment in the history of feminism, when consciousness raising—a phenomenon begun in the late 1960s—became a vehicle for both personal and political empowerment. Carol Hanisch, a founding member of New York Radical Women, explained:

Consciousness-raising was birthed as a mass-organizing tool for the liberation of women in 1968 when the country and the world were seething with freedom movements. The women who started the Women's Liberation Movement, several of whom had experienced the Southern Civil Rights Movement firsthand, were convinced it would take a similar mass movement that went beyond lobbying for legal reforms (as NOW and some other groups were doing) to get to the roots of male supremacy and end women's oppression.¹¹

Meeting in groups, women organized consciousness-raising sessions to explore the nature of female oppression and to discuss what exactly could be done about it. Without males present, they spoke of their marriages, personal relationships,

workplaces, and their greater marginalization within society. This talk spilled into conversations about their self-images, their sexuality, and health issues rarely mentioned outside the home, if at all. As most women living through that time remember, "women's problems"—menstruation, pregnancy, contraception, gynecological disease, a lump in the breast—were rarely discussed publicly. Then, in 1973, came a groundbreaking book, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.¹² Conceived, written and edited by a collective of women in their twenties and thirties, it directed women's attention to their biological workings and encouraged them to act as their own advocates. Activist artists followed suit:

Artists such as Carolee Schneemann, Hannah Wilke and Mary Beth Edelson explored varieties of female pleasure, posing naked as goddess figures or sex kittens and taking back the female nude for their own ends. Judy Chicago enlisted the efforts of many artists to create a monumental work, *The Dinner Party*, a dinner table laid with ceramic plates, featuring imagery supposedly derived from butterflies and symbolic of a "vaginal core," presented on beautifully embroidered runners, all dedicated to great women of myth and history.¹³

Semmel's response was to redirect the male gaze, first in her early sex paintings portraying intimacy from *her* point of view, then in another series of cropped nude images derived from photographs she'd taken of herself. Gone are her unexpurgated colors and artificial perspectives. These paintings are curious explorations of the self as seen from difficult angles, then rendered from tight perspectives using natural body tones. They reveal the phenomena of movement, pigmentation, flexibility, and sensuality, all coaxed into fascinating abstract compositions. In *On the Grass*, (1978; Pl. 2) peaked breasts and pendulous belly contrast with scruffy pubic hair, its texture echoed in a tangle of grass beneath the figure. A wrinkled heel pressed into the triangle of an opposing bent leg looms as a foreboding omen to otherwise youthful skin. In *Secret Spaces*, as a breast intersects with the crook of an arm, an undulating roll of belly with a thigh, the body becomes a shifting landscape, its creases, shallows and shadows forming anew as the body moves. The surface kiss of warm sun courts the throbbing life within as skin tones brushed with golden pinks yield to veiny blues and greens. In *Sidepull* (1979; Fig. 3) Semmel re-introduces arbitrary color and form by overlaying an abstraction of the photographed torso over the naturalistic one, rendering the visual "echo" in unnatural greens and purples. These stylistic variations occur repeatedly, and will become important in understanding Semmel's later works, such as *Fade-in* (2008; Fig. 4), a painting that strips the vibrant sexuality of youth down to the naked realities of advancing age.

Consciousness-raising also led to "self-improvement" in the form of women across America exercising—in gyms and in their living rooms, where throughout the 1980s a generation of leotard and leg-warmer-clad moms tuned into Jane Fonda's morning TV workouts. "Feel the burn!," she chanted as she led them through multiple sets of leg hydrants and belly crunches. Their abs ached for Fonda's nipped waistline, enviable firm limbs, and tight symmetrical buttocks. Setting her camera's eye now on women at the gym, Semmel's resulting paintings tapped the divide between the typical female body, as seen and photographed in the dressing room, and the one those women strove to own—the modern idealized Venus of ancient myth reinvented in Fonda-form. *Masque* (1991; Pl. 3) provides an interesting play between these two extremes, with Semmel effectively using the mirror image to reflect on the subject physically and psychologically. She depicts a young naked woman facing a mirror, applying her lipstick, her back to the viewer. Semmel's image reflects her photographing the scene—an observer sitting on a stool wearing only a pair of panties, her belly protruding, breasts sagging, and a camera obscuring her face. The seam of the mirror creates a center panel suggesting a triptych. Each figure partially leaning into this otherwise empty space underscores the notion of the masquerade; as Joan Marter summed it up: "Semmel aims a camera into the ubiquitous

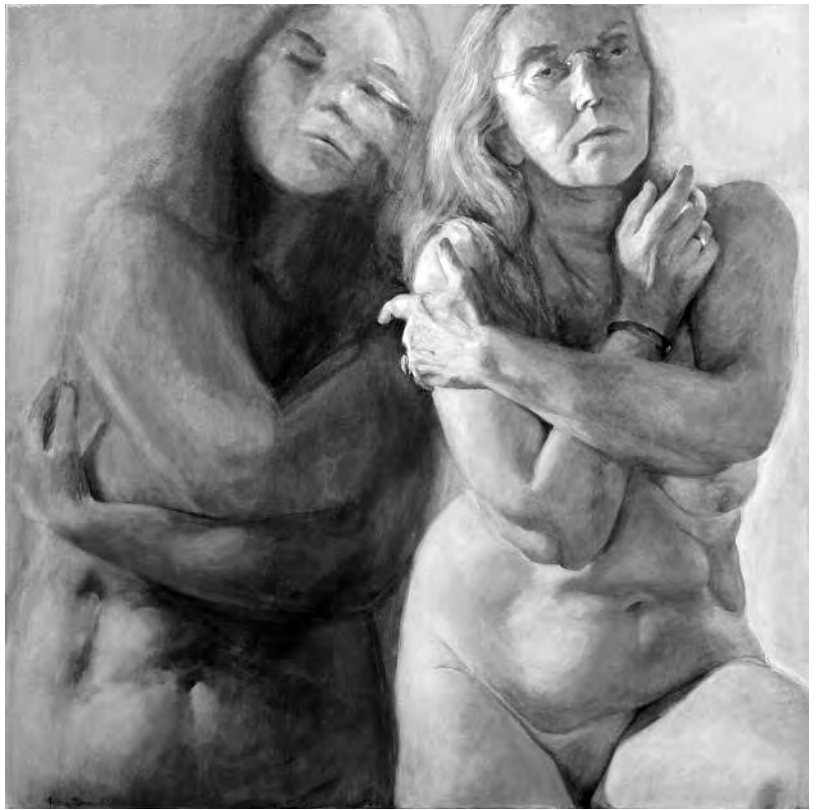


Fig. 4. Joan Semmel, *Fade-in* (2008), oil on canvas, 36" x 36". Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, N.Y. ©2015 Joan Semmel / Artists Rights Society (ARS), N.Y.

mirrors of the locker room and records the activity of the masquerade—women preparing to re-enter the realm of the male gaze.... Semmel contrasts her own aging body with others ... still occupied with the artificiality of the masquerade ... her image more spectator than spectacle."¹⁴

Semmel's decision to pursue this subject through painting was a bold one. Dealers and art critics had warned her that painting was dead, feminism over. These works also arose from the conversation about female sexuality having widened to embrace identity and gender issues as well as an acceptance of one's self in as-is condition. Her subsequent *Mannequin* series (1996–2001) pushes the masquerade metaphor further, with haunting images that make one wonder what cruel force of nature impels women to dance in this macabre ritual. *Rack* (1998; Fig. 5) depicts store mannequins hanging on rack hooks like flayed meat, their armless torsos amputated at hip level. They gaze in different directions, some through suffocating plastic bags. Palpably more lifelike in this enervated state than they were made-up and posed in storefront windows, they are the visual epilogue to the quest for idealized perfection, a fantasy fated by time and circumstance. *Centered* (2002; front cover) is a stunning visual summation of the masquerade and the possibility of moving beyond it to reclaim oneself. This work is from the artist's *With Camera* series in which she often appears naked, facing the viewer, the camera obscuring some part of her face or anatomy. Here Semmel takes her own



Fig. 5. Joan Semmel, *Rack* (1998), oil on canvas, 54" x 72". Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, N.Y. ©2015 Joan Semmel / Artists Rights Society (ARS), N.Y

photograph as she is seated before a mirror, the camera hiding her face. A mannequin sits on a pedestal behind her. Obliquely referencing this double image of womanhood is a double image that runs along the top of the painting as if the camera shifted in the taking of the photograph, though all is, in fact, deliberate and painted. The fragile mannequin in the background summons the classical ideal that became today's anorexic-looking runway model. It contrasts with Semmel's dominating presence, her strong limbs commanding the space as she performs her role as observer behind the camera. Instead of becoming the object of the male gaze, she reverses roles. Semmel explains the rationale for this *With Camera* series: "It about me looking at the viewer, not the viewer looking at me. ... It's an aggressive act." For its 2015 mini-retrospective of Semmel's work, Alexander Gray Associates hung *Centered* at the far end of its long gallery, symbolically placing the artist viewing both her own oeuvre and those viewing her exhibit. As visitors meandered past Semmel's episodic forays through figuration and abstraction, so did

they absorb the evolution of feminism's shifts in focus as that movement evolved within this artist's lifetime.

In two recent series, *Shifting Image* (2006–12) and *Transparencies* (2011–14), the artist faces head on the psychological and physical realities of advancing age. Though the subject matter is difficult, often painful, they are among Semmel's most moving works. In *Fade-in* (2008), a double portrait, a youthful likeness of the artist, her facial features blurred, stands behind an older, clear-eyed Semmel, more comfortable in her skin than her younger memory. In *Redressing* (2008), the age shift portrays the younger figure clothed, the older nude, with features in a haze, almost beyond recognition, in a series of multiple images that appear to turn in space and move through time. Blending color and texture with an incredibly soft touch, Semmel suggests a mist or fog, thin then dense, where forms appear only to take leave in ill-defined space. This blurring, taking its cues from multiple-exposed photographs, presents palpable impressions of one's passage from youth to old age.



Fig. 6. Joan Semmel, *Triple Play* (2011), oil on canvas, 60" x 48". Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, N.Y. ©2015 Joan Semmel / Artists Rights Society (ARS), N.Y.



Fig. 7. Joan Semmel, *Disappearing* (2006), oil on canvas, 54" x 46". Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, N.Y. ©2015 Joan Semmel / Artists Rights Society (ARS), N.Y.

Throughout the history of Western art images of youth and old age—popularized in seventeenth century Dutch genre painting—were meant as metaphors for the transience of life, often humorously subtexted with a narrative warning about the ravages of time. Gerrit Van Honthorst's *Procuress* (1625), for example, portrays a brothel scene in which a buxom young woman accepts a proposition from an admirer. The procuress, shown as an old crone, all skin, bones and wrinkles, looks on, eager for her commission. It's a lesson in vanity, a teasing reminder that youth is fleeting; that the carefree young woman is destined to become the old hag. Semmel's nonjudgmental portrayals of youth and old age are by contrast far more terrifying, for there are no witticisms to mitigate sagging skin and lagging memory. Aloneness becomes time's trump card. Semmel conveys it through her transparencies, another incarnation of her double imagery. In *Triple Play* (2011; Fig. 6) she overlaps three images of herself bending and rising from a kneeling position. The work is a tour de force of movement and light, the bodies rendered simultaneously as volumetric figures with their transparent, ghostlike echoes, one behind the other. With colors likewise modulating from warm and supple flesh tones to unnatural greens, all set against a bright yellow to yellow-green ground, Semmel integrates actual and ethereal space as she melds past and present with infinite time. Her use of unnatural hues recalls the early sex works where vivid saturated color kept the figurative work abstract. The



Fig. 8. Joan Semmel, *The Unseen* (2014), oil on canvas, 72" x 48". Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, N.Y. ©2015 Joan Semmel / Artists Rights Society (ARS), N.Y.

transparent images, now rendered with a softer, modulated palette, recall earlier juxtapositions of abstract and figurative forms that likewise maintain the tension between recognizable life and intuitive art.

These late works come to grips with inevitable mortality. In *Unveiling* (2011; Pl. 4), a double image of Semmel is viewed through a transparent veil. The title suggests the Jewish ritual of unveiling the stone marker on a grave to acknowledge a mortal's passing. *Disappearing* (2006; Fig. 7) makes yet a stronger statement about transience, with multiple exposures of the figure fading into a soft beige background, as the camera, the artist's tool and sight line, dissolves along with her disintegrating form.

Semmel continues to process the complexities of sexuality. In a startling image, *The Unseen* (2014; Fig. 8), she deals with them as universal issues that evolve, shift and change through our awareness of non-Western cultural traditions. This painting depicts a nude figure wearing a transparent burka, one that covers the entire face leaving just a circular fabric

grille about the eyes. This openwork allowing the wearer to see also suggests a camera, another incarnation of the artist viewing the viewer, as it simultaneously implies the wearer looking out from her own psychic world. Semmel chose to depict the older female body within a garment worn by women in the Middle East because, she says, "in America, women are also covered up; age becomes a kind of shroud." This image conveys universal fears of aging and dying. Once again, Semmel tackles primal urgencies through the lens of what is contemporary and current. In doing so she perseveres as the fearless artist she has always been, one who seamlessly merges the carnality of paint with the palpability of flesh, opacity with transparency, and most of all, one who probes psychic space between self-knowledge and truths we only dimly know. •

Joyce Beckenstein is an arts writer living in New York.

Notes

1. Andy Newman, "Al Goldstein, a Publisher Who Took the Romance Out of Sex, Dies at 77," obituary in *The New York Times*, Dec. 19, 2013.
2. Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7 (Autumn 1981): 50-51; in *Global Feminisms, New Directions in Contemporary Art*, Maura Reilly, Linda Nochlin, eds. (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 2007), 24.
3. Joan Semmel, catalogue essay, "A Necessary Elaboration," *Joan Semmel: Across Five Decades*, (New York: Alexander Gray Associates, 2015), 4.
4. Robert Hughes, "Rediscovered—Women Painters," *Time*, (Jan. 10, 1977), reprinted in Reilly & Nochlin, eds., "Global Feminisms, New Directions in Contemporary Art," 25.
5. The two exhibitions, "Women Artists: 1550-1950" and "Consciousness and Content" ran simultaneously at the Brooklyn Museum from Oct. 1–Nov. 27, 1977.
6. All direct quotes by Joan Semmel are from a taped interview that took place in the artist's studio on May 10, 2015.
7. "Judith Bernstein: Hard, Times" (Oct. 10, 2013–Jan. 20, 2014); see www.newmuseum.org, for synopsis for the exhibition.
8. United States Supreme Court, *Miller v. California* (1973), No. 70-73, Argued: Nov. 7, 1972, Decided: June 21, 1973. For complete ruling, see: caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/413/15.html
9. Carolee Schneemann, "More Than Meat Joy" (Kingston, NY: McPherson & Co., 1979), 57.
10. Sieberling, Dorothy, "The Female View of Erotica," *The New York Magazine*, Feb. 2011, 55.
11. Carol Hanisch, "The Feminist Mind," *On The Issues Magazine* (Spring 2010); http://ontheissuesmagazine.com/2010spring_Hanisch.php.
12. Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves; a book by and for women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).
13. Eleanor Heartney, Helaine Posner, Nancy Princenthal, Sue Scott, Introduction, *After the Revolution, Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art*, (New York: Prestel, 2013), 16
14. Joan Marter, "Joan Semmel's Nudes: The Erotic Self and the Masquerade," *WAJ*, vol. 16, no. 2, (Fall/Winter 1995): 24–28.

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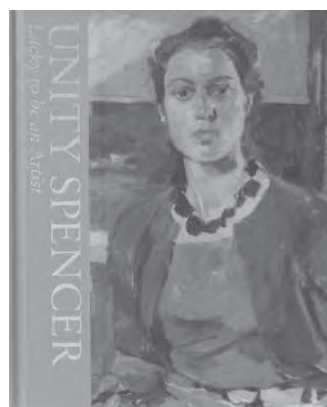
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BRENDA MILLER AND POST-MINIMALIST ART

By Cynthia Fowler

Brenda Miller (b. 1941) was among the women artists working in New York to make a prolonged contribution to Post-Minimalism. During the 1970s and early 1980s, she created key works that engaged Post-Minimalist interests and concerns. Quick to recognize that an artist's legacy is largely contingent upon success in the art market, Miller recently reflected on the status of women artists like herself: "What we needed was to have our work bought and sold."¹ Miller's career as an artist documents this reality; because she had no sustained relationship with major art galleries or collectors, her legacy has been obscured. Even so, her persistence as an artist and her outspokenness as a feminist have maintained her visibility with enough certitude to allow a reconsideration.

Born to an immigrant Jewish family in the Bronx, Miller graduated from Parsons School of Design before leaving New York. She received a BFA from the University of New Mexico, and then completed an MFA in painting at Tulane University in 1967. Back in New York, Miller quickly moved away from painting. She started making rugs, which facilitated her progression from painting to sculptural works and installations. Experimenting with new materials and installation art, Miller became active among the circle of Minimalist and Post-Minimalist artists that emerged in New York in the 1970s.² A close friend of Carl Andre, Miller shared his interest in the geometry of the grid.³ Although influenced by Minimalism, like her contemporary Eva Hesse, Miller turned away from the use of rigid industrial materials and challenged the modernist grid.⁴ Her work also compares with some of the sculptural pieces created by her friend Jackie Winsor, a Post-Minimalist artist who described "a clear idea of my invisibility" that resulted from her experience as a woman artist establishing her art career in late 1960s New York.⁵

In the early 1970s, Miller began to work with sisal, an organic material she found readily available, inexpensive, and with an appealing softness and uniformity of color so that any color shifts in her work could be planned. She used sisal throughout that decade to create large-scale installations such as *Ceiling Piece* (1970; Fig. 1), exhibited at her first show at 112 Greene Street. As described by Miller, five rows of six-foot long sisal hung from the ceiling of the gallery; the rows were separated at five-foot intervals, and the strands were one inch apart.⁶ Hanging in a room with 16-foot ceilings,⁷ her work



Fig. 1. Brenda Miller, *Ceiling Piece* (1970), sisal, nails, 240" x 72" x 120". Temporary installation. Photo: Courtesy the artist.

would have hovered more than four feet above the average viewer's head. For her second installation at 112 Greene Street, *Entryway to Stairwell* (1970), five rows of sisal extended from the ceiling and were attached to the floor at one-inch intervals across the width of the stairs to the basement.⁸ Her interest in creating site-specific works is reflected in the titles of both installations, which identify them in relation to their specific locations in the gallery. While *Ceiling Piece* required the viewer to look up, it did not disrupt access to the space; however, *Entryway to Stairwell* was a more aggressive occupation of space in the way that it denied access to the stairwell.

Louise Sørensen has described 112 Greene Street as an alternative space "synonymous with a remarkably concentrated period in the New York art world where creativity and idealism went hand in hand—a product, no doubt, of the 1960s counter-culture."⁹ During the 1960s and 1970s, New York artists developed a number of such alternative spaces, which as Melissa Rachleff summarizes, "provided a kind of forum for the diverse cultural communities that sought edgy innovation and rejected market-driven concerns."¹⁰ As a political activist involved in Civil Rights and anti-war movements and a committed feminist, Miller shared the values of this counterculture. So it is not surprising that she was connected to 112 Greene Street and other alternative spaces. In 1970, her work was also on

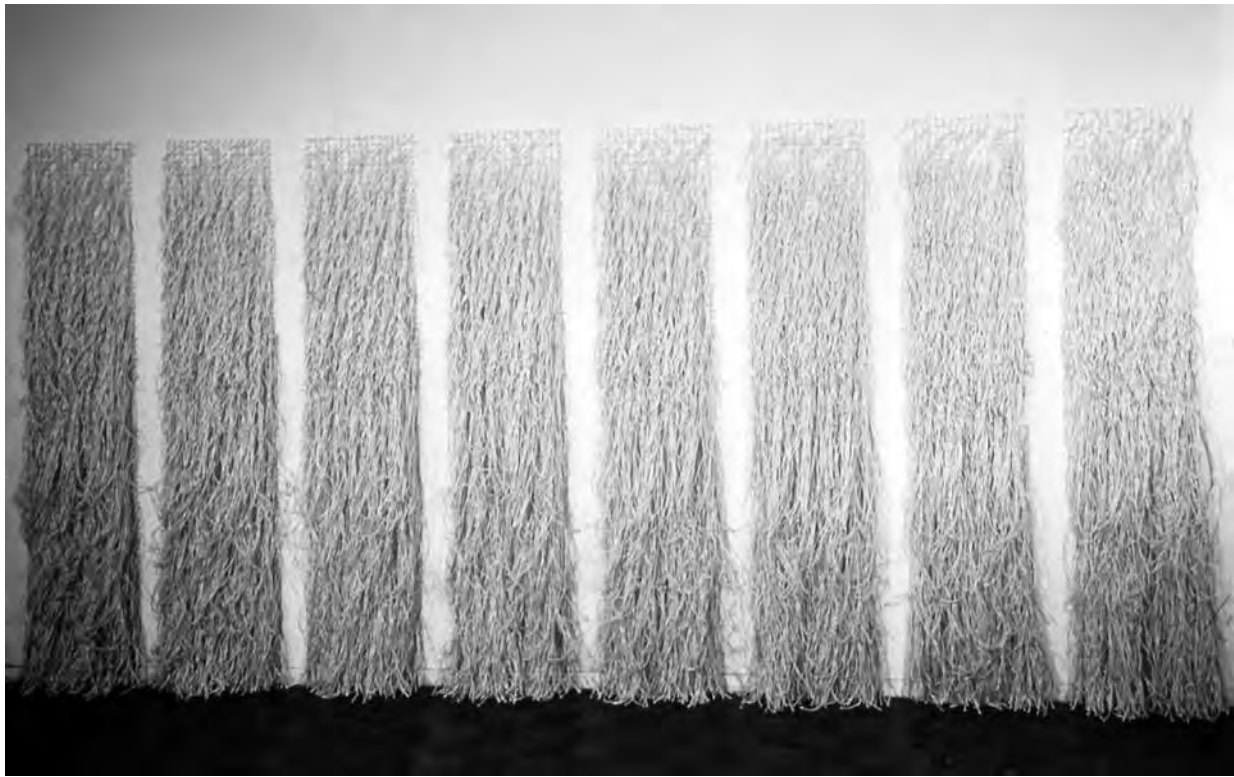


Fig. 2. Brenda Miller, *Entasis* (1971), sisal, nails, blue pencil, 80" x 184" x 1-3". Temporary installation. Photo: Courtesy the artist.

view at Apple, an alternative space run by Pop-turned-conceptual-artist Billy Apple.

Miller's large-scale works had a commanding presence that demanded recognition. Their impressive size connects them to feminist efforts to ensure gallery space for women artists. At a time when women artists were largely ignored by art galleries and museums, the battle to claim space was at the forefront of the feminist movement.¹¹ This is evidenced by the formation of spaces exclusively for women artists, such as the A.I.R. Gallery in New York, established in 1972.¹² Miller, an active member of the Art Workers Coalition (AWC) and a co-founder of its Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee, participated in demonstrations to protest the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art's inadequate representation of women artists.¹³ The Ad Hoc group organized four months of protest against the Whitney and helped form the Women's Art Registry to collect and preserve information on women artists.¹⁴ Any woman artist seeking even a modicum of success in the art world was necessarily part of the struggle to gain professional recognition through the exhibition of her work in galleries and museums; and those making large-scale works such as Miller found it especially difficult.

Along with her installations, Miller also made wall pieces. *Entasis* (1971; Fig. 2 and Pl. 5) is an early example. The title refers to the slight convex curvature in the center of classical columns, a correcting effect on columns so they are perceived from a distance as straight rather than concave.¹⁵ In the case of Miller's work, a different corrective is at play. The work is composed of eight columns, each over six feet and constructed from a two-piece grid drawn directly onto the wall in blue

pencil. Each grid is separated by eight inches, although this construction is not obvious to the viewer's eye. In a labor-intensive action reminiscent of the threading of vinyl tubing seen in Hesse's *Accession II* (1967) and the thousands of nails hammered into planks in Winsor's *Nail Piece* (1970), Miller nailed individual strands of sisal to the wall, their length and position predetermined on a grid. In the first row of the top grid, the sisal is one inch in length, with each strand becoming progressively longer, up to 36 inches in the last row. The lengths are reversed for the bottom grid.¹⁶ Miller's use of a precise formula to arrange the sisal can be compared to the Greek interest in mathematical proportions. Her use of a blue pencil indexes blueprints used for architectural renderings. But rather than upholding the ideal of perfect mathematical proportions, *Entasis* disrupts this ideal. The sisal curves in a multitude of directions to create the effect of randomness rather than order that negates the grid as its originating source. Lippard described these works as "shaggy, aggressive and mysterious thrusts out of their neatly gridded and numbered origins."¹⁷ Miller herself described them as "a bit unfriendly." Furthermore, Lippard has connected them to feminist art interests, observing that Miller's sisal work "exemplifies the female/feminist alterations of the minimal grid, its transformation into a sensuous organic form."¹⁸ Miller was not alone in this interest. Art historian Anna Chave has observed that during the sixties and seventies, "numerous women ventured to explore the geometric schema of the grid, revisiting this modernist, Minimalist emblem with a vengeance."¹⁹ For example, Howardena Pindell's *Untitled* (1970–71; Fig. 3) represents an effort to deconstruct the grid.

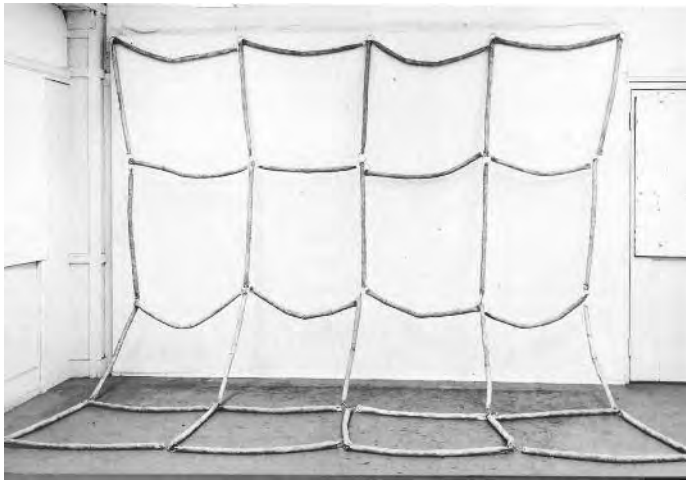


Fig. 3. Howardena Pindell, *Untitled* (1970-71), synthetic polymer, polyurethane, canvas, enamel grommets, rings, 139" x 152" x 3". Collection of the artist.

For this work, Pindell constructed a large grid out of synthetic polymer, polyurethane, and canvas that hung flaccidly from the wall and collapsed onto the floor. Similarly, in *Bound Grid* (1971-72; Fig. 4), Winsor's choice of tree branches necessarily resulted in an irregularly shaped grid based on the natural formations of the branches, while the irregularity of the hemp wrapping adds to this humanizing effect.²⁰

While *Entasis* clearly challenges the modernist grid, it also rejects the insistence on straight lines and unbending geometry that characterize Minimalist works. Chave has argued that the unyielding rigidity of Minimalism had political implications that were grounded in oppression, writing, "By manufacturing objects with common industrial and commercial materials in a restricted vocabulary of geometric shapes, [Donald] Judd and the other Minimalist artists availed themselves of the cultural authority of the markers of industry and technology."²¹ According to Chave, this "cultural authority" operates to silence viewers. Furthermore, she describes the "domineering, sometimes brutal rhetoric" used by Minimalists themselves to describe their work.²² Post-Minimalist works like Miller's imagined the possibility of escape from these rigid systems through the use of soft materials that suggested organic growth rather than industrial conformity. Chave has also recognized strong similarities between Minimalism and classical architecture in the "repetition of simple geometric forms," and because "both are distinguished by the use of plain, lucid forms that tend to reveal themselves in their entirety from any viewpoint."²³ With *Entasis*, Miller challenges all three traditions: the sisal overrides the classical columnar shape, the modernist grid as its foundation, and the rigid forms of Minimalism.

Chave provides a context to understand the work of Miller—and Hesse—as critiques of Minimalism's limitations, although both artists maintained an uncritical engagement with Minimalism as well. Art historian Anne Wagner has observed that Hesse was "at home with the ways and concepts of Pop and Minimalism; she seems to possess them effortlessly and reconfigure them immediately."²⁴ Similarly, art historian

Yve-Alain Bois observed Hesse's "unwitting involvement with the logic of the part-object [which] allowed her to adopt the Minimalist decentered and nonhierarchical a-compositionality without having to adhere to the dogma of the 'single image.'"²⁵ Like Hesse, Miller reconfigured Minimalism to explore the ideas that interested her. Indeed, each artist associated with the movement approached his or her work in significantly different ways.

Miller's 1980 installation at P.S.1, *Collapsed Grid* (Fig. 5), came closest to revealing the underlying impotence of the grid. Here again she began by constructing a grid that set the preliminary parameters, but after the sisal was installed on the ceiling in a grid formation, Miller literally destroyed the grid by pulling at the strings until it collapsed. Traces of the ordered structure remained on the ceiling and walls, while some resistance to this collapse is seen on the grid that remained on the floor. In another engagement with the grid, *Separate But Equal* (1981; Pl 6), the space defined by the grid acted like a prison. Miller's title is an obvious reference to the policy of racial segregation in America that continued in spite of being overturned by the Supreme Court in 1954. When installed at the David Bellman Gallery in Toronto, viewers were allowed to enter the installation, but their movement was constricted by the grid form. Both *Collapsed Grid* and *Separate But Equal* represent a shift away from Miller's earlier, more open-ended perspective on the grid.

Miller contributed to other art trends of the seventies and eighties in New York. One significant example is her work with text—interested in letters as expressive gestural marks, she initially thought she might develop her own alphabet. In 1975, the Whitney Museum of American Art presented a one-woman exhibition, "Diagonal Alphabets," dedicated exclusively to Miller's text-inspired works, comprising eight wall installations with accompanying drawings and diagrams. Each installation in the series was made by stamping letters

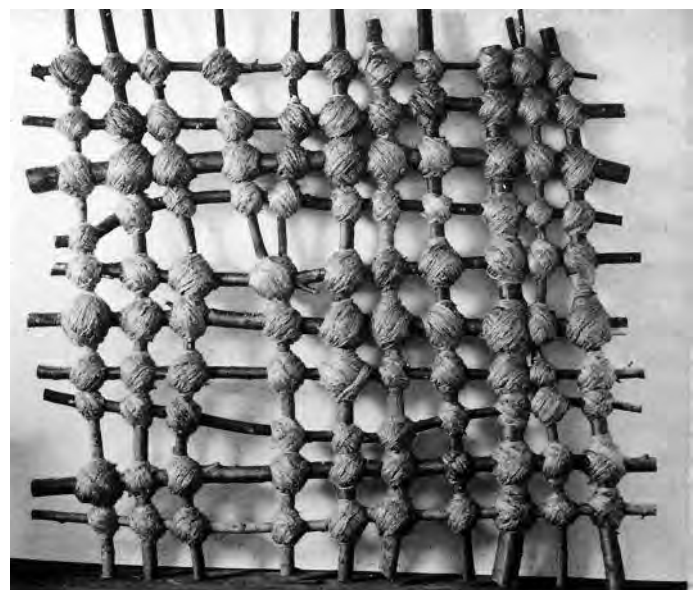


Fig. 4. Jackie Winsor, *Bound Grid* (1971-72), wood and hemp, 84" x 84" x 8". Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris.

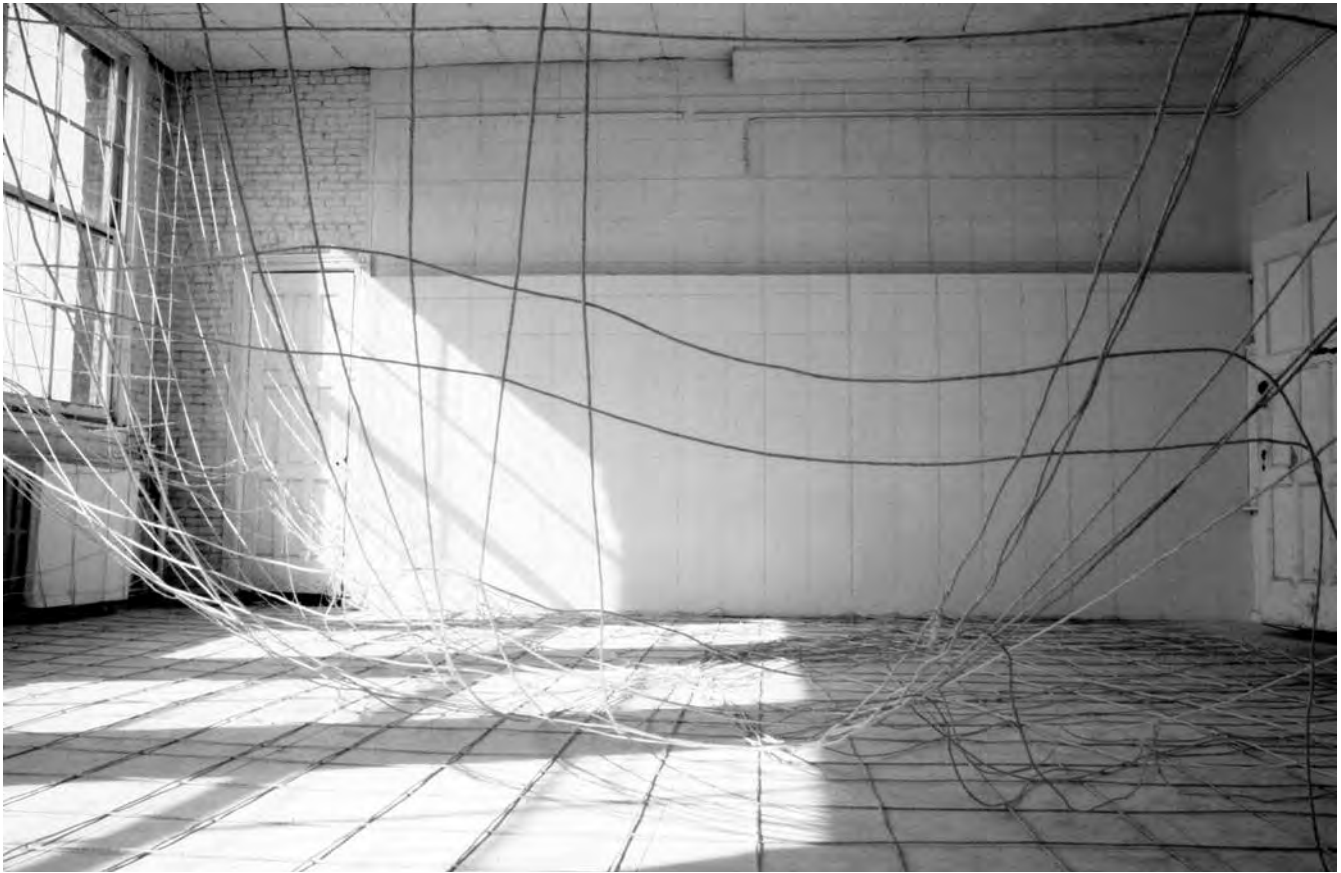


Fig. 5. Brenda Miller, *Collapsed Grid* (1980), sisal, dimensions unknown. Temporary installation. Photo: Courtesy the artist.

from the alphabet directly onto the wall of the gallery. The geometric patterns that resulted were created by varying both the number of times Miller applied a stamp to a single location and the direction of the letters. She considered these wall installations a form of sculpture, based on their perceived three-dimensionality. She explained, “[T]he impressions [created by stamping] cause density. You can see the density.”²⁶ In one example (1975; Fig. 6), the apexes of four triangles converge in the center of the work; other installations in the series created by using the same technique resulted in diamond, x-marks and other forms. As ordered as these geometric shapes might appear on first glance, however, the smudged letters allude to a loss of meaning. Lippard wrote about this series:

What interests me far more in Miller’s work than the cool, handsome images these systems generate is the process of contradiction underlying their creation. She deals with making, with change, with time, with impermanence. The time is a double one, including the amount of time it takes to make the same gesture over and over, which negates flat surface by sheer intensity and physical persistence, and the time the piece will, or can last.²⁷

Miller continued her use of text during the next decades, exploring both its visual potential as well as its potential to obscure meaning.

Another interest of Miller’s was outdoor works that directly relate to Earth Art. For *Strata* (1986; Pl. 7), created for the “Site Projects” exhibition at the Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art at Snug Harbor, Staten Island, she used topsoil and sod to construct architectural-like elements that disrupted the flat grassy area in which it was located. Viewers were invited to engage the work by walking through passageways that ran through it. That such outdoor works eventually eroded over time reflects Miller’s longtime interest in “creating works that were impermanent” and thus “resisted the commodification of the art object.”

Miller’s *Subtrahend* (1972; Pl. 8) raised an interesting question about the implications of Post-Minimalist work being viewed as fiber art or craft. For this work, she nailed 6400 strands of sisal directly to the wall using an 80-inch grid as her guide. The obsessive action of nailing up thousands of individual strands is characteristic of works from this time.²⁸ Here again, her blue numbers written on the wall defined the length of each strand of sisal, from one to forty inches, and a diagram on display with the work informed the viewer of the mathematical arrangement. In *Subtrahend*, unlike *Entasis*, the sisal moved away from the wall and directly into the space of the viewer, sharing similarities with Hesse’s *Untitled* (1970; Fig. 7). While in Hesse’s work, a single strand emerges from each painting referent on the wall and into the space of the viewer, Miller’s work is more assertive: the multiple strands of

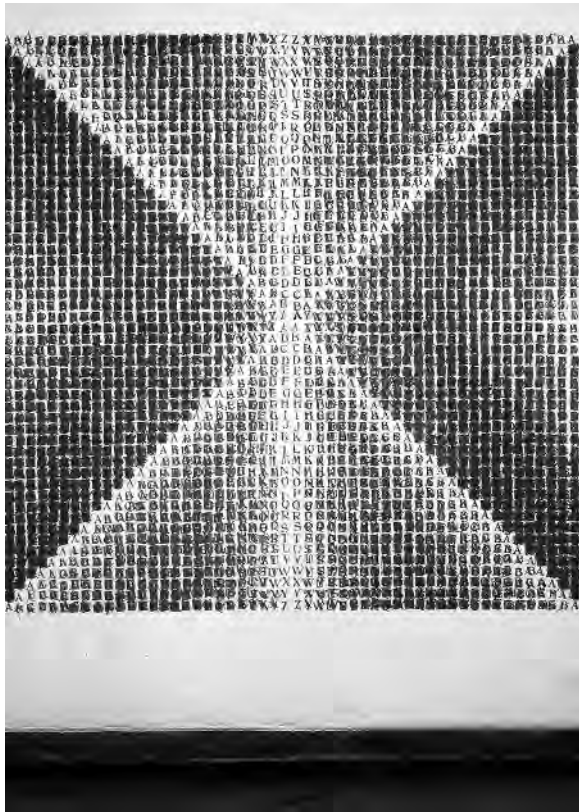


Fig. 6. *Diagonal Alphabets* (1975), rubber stamped ink and pencil on wall, 52" x 52". Temporary installation. Photo: Courtesy the artist.

sisal fall into the gallery space in a movement reminiscent of a waterfall tumbling to a river basin below.

Subtrahend was exhibited in a group show at the John Weber Gallery, along with works by Andre, Nancy Holt, Hans Haacke, and Mary Obering.²⁹ In his review of the exhibition for *Artforum*, painter and art critic Bruce Boice described *Subtrahend* as having "the general appearance of ... a white shag rug of some sort fixed to the wall, suggesting crafts more than art."³⁰ Such a connection of Miller's work to the craft tradition directly engaged questions being asked in the 1970s about the categorization of women's artistic production.

Miller responded with a scathing "letter to the editor," objecting to her work being called "craft," and arguing that Boice's use of this label marginalized her as a woman artist. She pointed out that Claes Oldenburg, too, used cloth, but his work had not been labeled craft.³¹ "For some time women have been questioned whether a work of art made by a woman is treated like a work of art, or as an artifact made by a woman instead of an artist."³² In her support, Carl Andre wrote to Miller addressing the implications of her work being described as a rug, and his letter was published right after Miller's in the same issue of *Artforum*.³³ Since Rozsika Parker's seminal book, *The Subversive Stitch*, art historians have been considering the implications of gendering women's artistic production as craft.³⁴ The denigration of so-called women's crafts—like rug making and embroidery—has long prevented their inclusion in the "fine art" tradition, and by allowing her work to be consigned to this category, Miller would have been taking a

serious professional risk. As has been previously pointed out in this essay, Miller did in fact make rugs in the early part of her career. But she ended her experiments with rug making once she transitioned from painting to sculpture.³⁵

At the moment when Boice's review was published, the fiber arts movement was emerging in full force and raising questions about the relationship between so-called fine art and craft. Miller's use of sisal certainly begs a comparison of her work to that of fiber artists such as Sheila Hicks, who also created large-scale installations with knotted rope-like materials (Fig. 8).³⁶ Long associated with the craft tradition and women's artistic production, fiber art was marginalized in the art world, and 1970s fiber artists were valiantly arguing for their works to be viewed as art.³⁷ Hicks and others stood on common ground with Post-Minimalists such as Miller and Robert Morris that used fiber to create conceptual (rather than functional) works. Although Miller clearly identified as a sculptor,³⁸ her sisal installations, like Morris's felt pieces, established a dialogue between Post-Minimalist works and those associated with the fiber art movement.³⁹ Hesse's work also became part of this dialogue in that she utilized techniques associated with the feminine, such as sewing and lacing. Ultimately, the differences between fiber artists and Post-Minimalists using fiber are a matter of semantics, but those semantics had serious repercussions regarding the status of the artists concerned.⁴⁰ Not until the 1990s were postmodern artists unapologetically engaging craft; for example, one historian used the term "abject craft" to describe the appropriation of craft by artists like Mike Kelley and Tracy Emin.⁴¹ Miller's work provides a fascinating example of craft experimentation as a springboard from Minimalism to Post-Minimalism, where rug making informed her transition from painting to her later sculptural works.

Despite reservations about being pigeonholed as a woman artist, Miller showed her work in several exhibitions exclusively for women. In 1971, she was included in *26 Contemporary Women Artists*, organized by Lucy Lippard for the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, with works by

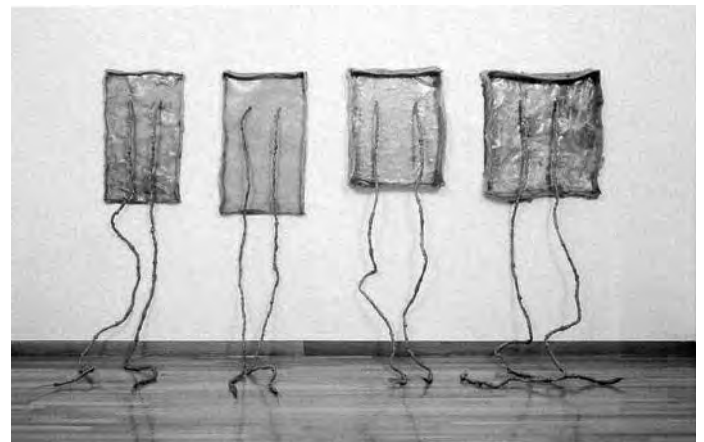


Fig. 7. Eva Hesse, *Untitled* (1970), 4 units, fiberglass on wire, mesh and latex and cloth on wire, 90 7/8" x 147 5/8" x 42 1/2". Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa.

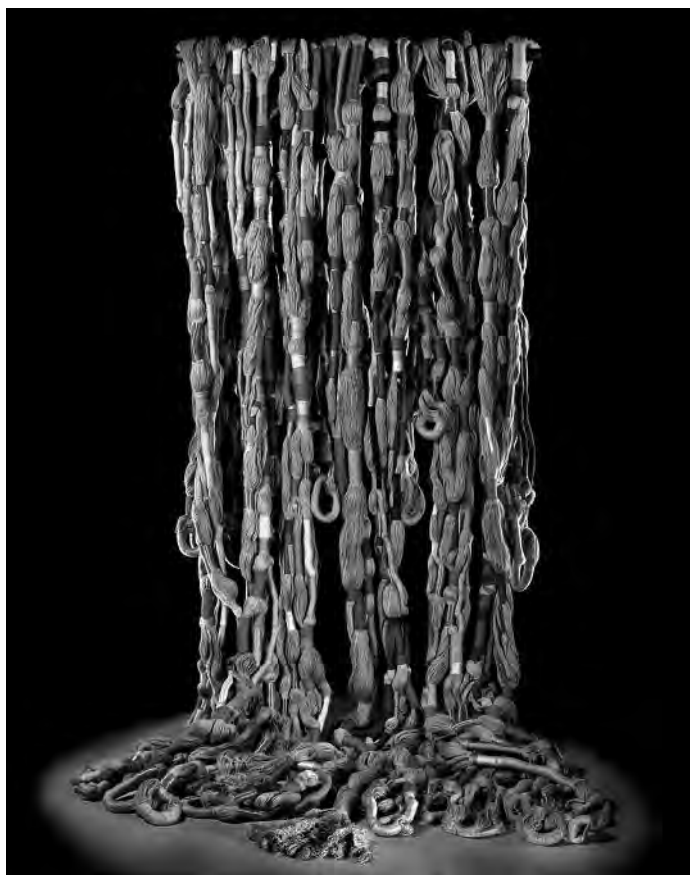


Fig. 8. Sheila Hicks, *The Principal Wife Goes On* (1969), linen, silk, wool, synthetic fiber, 185 1/4" x 19" x 4". Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



Fig. 9. *Verjoning* (1973), sisal, 80" x 80" x 40". Temporary installation. Photo: Courtesy the artist.

Alice Aycock, Mary Miss, Howardena Pindell, Adrian Piper, and Jackie Winsor, among others. Lippard wrote in the catalog introduction: "I took on this show because I knew there were many women artists whose work was as good or better than that currently being shown, but who, because of the prevailing discriminatory policies of most galleries and museums, can rarely get anyone to visit their studios or take them as seriously as their male counterparts."⁴² Miller exhibited *Homage to Constance-Marie Charpentier* (1971), honoring the eighteenth-century French Neoclassical painter. It consisted of strands of sisal attached from the ceiling in one-inch increments and hanging to the floor over a staircase; after installation, the sisal was then cut at the 6'8" mark from the bottom to create two separate pieces, with the bottom piece allowed to follow gravity. When gallery owner Larry Aldrich, without consulting the artist, pulled out and removed the entire bottom portion of the work to create easier access to the staircase, Miller responded by tearing down the rest of the piece at the exhibition's opening.⁴³ The following year Lippard organized *Ten Artists (Who Also Happen to be Women)* at the Kenan Center in Lockport, New York, again including Miller's work.

During the seventies and eighties Miller was able to overcome some of the barriers for women artists through a number of one-woman shows and inclusion in exhibitions at

major museums. *Entasis* was installed in the Member's Penthouse of the Museum of Modern Art in 1972, and an installation was included in the Whitney Museum's 1973 annual. After a bold move on Miller's part in which she asked a Whitney Museum curator to exhibit her work, she was given the 1975 "Diagonal Alphabets" exhibition.⁴⁴ The brochure featured an interview with Miller by Barbara Haskell, who had recently joined the museum staff.⁴⁵ When asked if the women's movement had influenced her work, Miller replied, "In a sense I think that it did. I believe that it allowed me to be more courageous about what I wanted to do. I realized that I had nothing to lose."⁴⁶ Her participation in protests of the New York museums' limited representation of women artists helped bring about her own and a few other one-woman exhibitions.⁴⁷

Also during those decades Miller received a number of honors. In 1978 she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, and also exhibited at the Hurlbutt Gallery in Greenwich, Connecticut, with Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Richard Long and Michael Singer. She received National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships in 1976, 1979, and 1987. By the 1990s, however, interest in exhibiting her work had waned.

Miller's drawings are in the Wadsworth Athenaeum, Smith College Art Museum, the Whitney Museum, the Museum for Modern Contemporary Art at Bolzano, Italy, and the

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague; however, *Verjonging* (1973; Fig. 9), in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, is the only large work acquired by a major art museum. In the 1970s, museums were hesitant at best to devote large spaces in their galleries to works by women artists, and even Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* (1974-79) was without a home until 2002, when it was finally housed at the Brooklyn Museum. Having been told numerous times that her work was "too difficult to store or collect," Miller responded by "recycling" the sisal from her installations, boiling it and using the remains to make paper for a handmade book.

Anna Chave has observed that, "for a generation of women who came of age in the 1960s, it took a measure of denial and some slyness to imagine that they might have any future as artists."⁴⁸ Brenda Miller emerged as an artist under these unfavorable historical conditions, nevertheless producing an impressive body of work and exhibition record. To recount Miller's story is to describe the experiences of many women artists who never gained celebrity status in the art world but lived their lives as artists and contributed to now seminal movements. When Miller's work is considered among the celebrated works created in New York during the late 1960s and 70s, Minimalism and Post-Minimalism become more nuanced as art movements. Her engagement with the grid is most noteworthy, particularly in the diverse ways she approached its meaning, both historically and politically. Her choice of sisal for her installations and wall pieces resulted in some of the most innovative sculptural works from the 1970s, works that raised questions about the boundary between art and craft. When asked by Barbara Haskell about her identification as a sculptor, noting the alignment of her wall works with two-dimensional art, Miller replied, "It's unfortunate that we have to be one or the other."⁴⁹ Indeed, Miller's work, through its exploration of the potential of sisal, the appropriation of text, and its diverse conceptual foundations, straddles many categories of art from the last quarter of the twentieth century. Her use of sisal brings Post-Minimalism in dialogue with fiber art; her environmental pieces connect Post-Minimalism and Earth Art. Fundamentally, Miller's work demonstrates that these categories are too restrictive in that artists moved between these so-called movements throughout their careers. Indeed, Brenda Miller exemplifies a spirit of experimentation that operated across movements. And as a feminist, she has been dedicated to ensuring that there is a place for women artists in all of them. •

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Notes

1. Brenda Miller, interview with author, digital audio, Greenport, Long Island, Oct. 15, 2014. All undocumented quotes are from this interview.
2. Miller was personally connected to the New York art scene through

her many friendships, including Jackie Winsor, Michelle Stuart, Mary Miss, Poppy Johnson, Carl Andre, Keith Sonnier, and Sol LeWitt, also Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt, and Nancy Spero and Leon Golub. When Westbeth Artists Housing opened in 1970, Miller was one of its first residents, along with Andre, Nina Yankowitz, Hannah Wilke, Howardena Pindell and Hans Haacke. From Westbeth, she moved to a loft on 26th Street, where she remained for 30 years until moving to her current home on Long Island. These living spaces, she said, were vibrant creative communities. Miller's friendship with Andre connects her to the controversy surrounding Ana Mendieta's death. See, for example, Anna Chave, "Grave Matters: Positioning Carl Andre at Career's End," *Art Journal* 73, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 5-21. So as not to dilute the focus of this essay on Miller's work, I have chosen not to engage the controversy here.

3. Andre's interest in the grid is evident, for example, in his floor-based works such as *144 Lead Square* (1969).
4. For a discussion of Hesse's work, see for example, Helen Cooper et al, *Eva Hesse: A Retrospective* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1992); Elizabeth Sussman et al, *Eva Hesse: Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2006); and Griselda Pollock and Vanessa Corby, *Encountering Eva Hesse* (Munich: Prestel, 2006).
5. Quoted in Robert Pincus-Witten, "Winsor Knots: The Sculpture of Jackie Winsor," *Arts Magazine* (June 1977), 130.
6. Brenda Miller, quoted in *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street: History, Artists & Artworks*, Robyn Brentano with Mark Savitt, eds. (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1981), 6.
7. Louise Sørensen, "Introduction," *112 Greene Street, The Early Years 1970-1974* (Santa Fe: Radius Books, 2012), 10.
8. Miller, quoted in Brentano and Savitt, eds., *112 Workshop*, 17.
9. Sørensen, *112 Greene Street*, 9. Regrettably, in this book, Miller is only referred to offhandedly by artist Bill Beckley as "an artist who shall remain nameless" as he recounts the death of a rooster he used in one of his installations from toxic chemicals covering the sisal used by Miller for her installation. See Beckley, quoted in *112 Greene Street*, 39; and <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2013/04/artseen/112-greene-streetspaces-interior-and-exterior>. Accessed October 18, 2014. Miller recalled that this was the first time she had worked with sisal, and she was unaware that the orange color came from its having been steeped in chemicals, which apparently killed the rooster. Brenda Miller, interview with author, Greenport, Long Island, July 22, 2013.
10. Melissa Rachleff, "Do It Yourself: Histories of Alternatives," in *Alternative Histories: New York Art Spaces 1960 to 2010*, Lauren Rosati and Mary Anne Staniszewski, eds. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 23.
11. See Maura Reilly, "Introduction: Toward Transnational Feminisms," in Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin, eds. *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art* (New York: Merrell, 2007).
12. See Barbara Zucker, "Making A.I.R." *Heresies* 2 (Spring 1979): 80-82; Marcia Tucker, "Bypassing the Gallery System," *Ms. Magazine* 1 (February 1973), 33-35; and *A.I.R. Gallery: The History Show* (New York: Tracey/Barry Gallery, New York Univ. and A.I.R. Gallery, 2008).
13. Along with Faith Ringgold, Poppy Johnson and Lucy Lippard, she co-founded the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee specifically to protest against the Whitney's low representation of women in their annuals (now biennials). See Lucy Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art* (New York: New Press, 1995), 6, 33.
14. The registry has been recognized as "a model for other resource initiatives." See Julie Ault, "A Chronology of Selected Alternative Structures, Spaces, Artists' Groups, and Organizations in New York City, 1965-85," in *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985*, Julie Ault, ed. (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2002).

15. Miller credits Carl Andre with naming the work.
16. Susan Tower describes its construction in detail in "The Object Perceived/The Object Apprehended," *Artforum* 11, no. 5 (Jan. 1974): 40.
17. Lucy Lippard, "Brenda Miller: Woven, Stamped," *Art in America* (May/June 1976), 97.
18. Lucy Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan*, 6.
19. Anna Chave, "Outlaws: Women, Abstraction, and Painting in New York, 1967-1975," in *High Times Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975*, Kathy Siegel, ed. (New York: Independent Curators International, 2006), 123.
20. For the most comprehensive discussion of Winsor's work, see Dean Sobel, *Jackie Winsor* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Museum, 1992).
21. Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine* (January 1990), 44.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 53.
24. Anne Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1996), 258.
25. Yve-Alain Bois, "Dumb," in Sussman et al, *Eva Hesse Sculpture*, 19.
26. Brenda Miller, quoted in *Diagonal Alphabets* (exh. brochure) (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1975), n.p.
27. Lippard, "Brenda Miller, Women Stamped," 96.
28. See Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986).
29. It was the second show of works by this group (except for Haacke) at the gallery. Andre organized both shows and was intent on including women artists. Miller said Weber never showed any of these women again, although he did continue to show Haacke. Brenda Miller, email to author, October 22, 2014.
30. Bruce Boice, "Group Show, John Weber Gallery," *Artforum* 11, no. 5 (January 1973), 85.
31. Miller also draws a connection between her work and that of Sol LeWitt in her letter. As she recalls, LeWitt was angry with her for mentioning him and considered it "disrespectful" of her to do so. In this regard, Andre should be recognized for his willingness to "go public" in his support of Miller.
32. Brenda Miller, "Letter to the Editor," *Artforum* 11, no. 8 (April 1973), 9.
33. Carl Andre, letter to Brenda Miller, printed in *Artforum* 11, no. 8 (April 1973), 9. In his letter, Andre asks why the term craft has been applied to Miller's work but not to his, since Andre himself recognizes the connection between his works and craft. But Andre is very specific about which crafts he wants his work aligned with, saying that his works "derive from the working class crafts of bricklaying, tile setting, and stonemasonry." Andre, too, rejects the description of his floor-based works as like "rugs," although critics had described them as such. Thus, both Miller and Andre reject the "feminine craft" of rug making as an appropriate lens through which to view their work.
34. Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*. (1984; reprint, London: Women's Press, Ltd., 1996).
35. In the late 1960s, the rugs she made were a vehicle for her to explore the possibilities of soft surfaces that she found impossible to achieve in paint. Miller created her rugs using a punch needle, which requires the same repetitive action that she would later apply to her grid pieces. The grid-like foundation of rugs also connects these to her later works. There is now significant scholarship that documents the craft experimentation that informed the works of modern artists such as Sonia Delaunay, Wassily Kandinsky and Gabrielle Münter, and Sophie Tauber and Hans Arp. American modernists like Marguerite Zorach engaged in the same type of experimentation with craft. See for example, See 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*, Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, eds. (New York: Harper and Row, 1982); Bibiana Obler, "Taeuber, Arp, and the Politics of Cross-Stitch," *The Art Bulletin* 91, no. 2 (June 2009): 207-29 and *Intimate Collaborations: Kandinsky and Münter, Arp and Taeuber* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2014); Sherry Buckberrough, *Sonia Delaunay: A Retrospective* (Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1980); Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*; and Cynthia Fowler, *Early American Modernism and Craft Production: The Embroideries of Marguerite Zorach* (Ph.D. diss, Univ. of Delaware, 2002).
36. For a discussion of Hicks's 1970s works, see Cynthia Fowler, "A Sign of the Times: Sheila Hicks, the Fiber Arts Movement, and the Language of Liberation," *The Journal of Modern Craft* 7, no. 1 (March 2014): 33-52.
37. Elissa Auther, *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2010), xx.
38. *Diagonal Alphabets*, n.p.
39. A drawing by Miller that was included in the 1980 exhibition *American Fiber Art: A New Definition*, held at the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Gallery at the University of Houston, suggests recognition at the time of crossover between her Post-Minimalist and fiber works of art.
40. In her seminal book *String, Felt, Thread*, Auther argues that "the use of fiber by artists across the art world in the 1960s and 1970s was a significant locus" for the "sorting out" of the "artistically legitimate from the illegitimate." As described by Auther, this act of sorting out had little to do with differences between works by Post-Minimalists and fiber artists. Instead, it provides "an illuminating example of power and authority at work in the art world." As a woman artist, Miller was justified in her fear that a connection between her work and the craft tradition would cast her out of the Post-Minimalist group, which was the group deemed "artistically legitimate" by critics and art historians. Miller's protestations in her *Artforum* letter reveal her anxiety about being aligned with a tradition that would dilute her relationship to Post-Minimalism. See Auther, *String, Felt, Thread*, xx.
41. Glenn Adamson, *Thinking through craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).
42. Lucy Lippard, "Introduction," *26 Contemporary Artists* (Ridgefield, CT: Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, 1971), n.p.
43. Miller told the author that friends encouraged her to put up another piece that was acceptable to Aldrich in its place, which she did, but that to this day she regrets this act of capitulation.
44. Miller recalls encouraging Mary Miss to take a similarly bold action, as Miss had encouraged her, which resulted in Miss's 1976 show at the Museum of Modern Art. Ibid.
45. Haskell may have been the curator that Miller approached. (She could not recall.)
46. *Diagonal Alphabets*, n.p.
47. Winsor would have a one-woman show at MoMA four years later. See *Jackie Winsor* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1979). Winsor has attributed some of her success in exhibiting her work to the protests of feminists against New York museums. See Sobel, *Jackie Winsor*, 26.
48. Anna Chave, "Outlaws," 115.
49. *Diagonal Alphabets*, n.p.

JANET SOBEL

PRIMITIVE MODERN AND THE ORIGINS OF ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

By Sandra Zalman

When the critic Clement Greenberg set about compiling the collection of his writings that would be published as *Art and Culture* (1961), it is well known that he made several strategic edits. Among these revisions were a few additional lines about an amateur artist named Janet Sobel (1894–1968) in “American Type Painting,” Greenberg’s major essay on the New York School. Originally published in 1955, when the essay appeared again in 1961, the enhanced paragraph read:

Back in 1944, however, he [Jackson Pollock] had noticed one or two curious paintings shown at Peggy Guggenheim’s by a “primitive” painter, Janet Sobel (who was, and still is, a housewife living in Brooklyn). Pollock (and I myself) admired these pictures rather furtively: they showed schematic little drawings of faces almost lost in a dense tracery of thin black lines lying over and under a mottled field of predominantly warm and translucent color. The effect—and it was the first really “all-over” one that I had ever seen, since Tobey’s show came months later—was strangely pleasing. Later on, Pollock admitted that these pictures had made an impression on him.¹

As an authority on avant-garde painting, Greenberg’s admiration of Sobel’s work was notable in itself. But even more so, by positioning Sobel as a forerunner of Abstract Expressionism in general and of Pollock in particular, Greenberg was actively rewriting the recent history of American art.

For another artist, Greenberg’s appraisal might have launched a career. Yet Greenberg made sure to assert Pollock’s status as legitimate author by qualifying Sobel through labels like “primitive” and “housewife.”² Moreover, in his very next sentence, Greenberg mitigates Sobel’s significance, writing that Pollock “anticipated his own ‘all-overness’ in a mural he did for Peggy Guggenheim at the beginning of 1944.... Moreover when, at the end of 1946, he began working consistently with skeins and blotches of enamel paint, the very first results he got had a boldness and breadth unparalleled by anything seen in Sobel or Tobey.”³ Even as he selects Sobel as Pollock’s predecessor, Greenberg asserts that Pollock had already surpassed her. For the few scholars who have mentioned Sobel’s role in Abstract Expressionism’s history,

Greenberg’s comment is taken at face value as a (qualified) recognition of Sobel’s accomplishment.⁴ Gail Levin does probe this issue in the only academic article (prior to this one) devoted to Sobel; the present essay expands on her important work.⁵ The rationale behind Greenberg’s revised lineage becomes even stranger when we consider that Sobel’s career has only retroactively been linked to Pollock, Greenberg, or the developing ideals of Abstract Expressionism. In the three years that she was active in the New York gallery system, Greenberg never acknowledged her work. So it is curious that more than a decade after her brief artistic career, Greenberg invoked Sobel as he set about framing his definitive assessment of Pollock and the New York School.

Despite strong critical reception of her art at prestigious New York galleries, Sobel’s work did not fit easily into any of the categories of the burgeoning 1940s New York art world, or alternately, it slid into too many of those categories. Sobel was part folk artist, Surrealist, and Abstract Expressionist, but critics found it easiest to call her a “primitive.” Greenberg’s endorsement functions ambivalently—it lends credence to Sobel’s aesthetic accomplishments, but safely sequesters her work. Still, as a “primitive,” Sobel not only participated in the art world but, for a brief moment, flourished. Her work, and its reception, are important for the ways they complicate the terrain of the primitive, a category that enabled her acceptance by the art world but restricted her artistic development. Sobel’s status is even more problematic when we consider how she has been historicized, ultimately at arm’s length from both the European and American avant-gardes. In this article, I argue that Sobel’s primitivism is emblematic of both the opportunities and limitations of the American art world at mid-century, as critics, curators, and artists grappled with the influences of modern European art as they attempted to establish a uniquely American modernism.

Sobel’s embrace by the American art world was made possible by modern artists’ interest in the “primitive,” a term that could refer to non-Western work or self-taught artists. While contemporary scholars have problematized the term for its stereotypical designations of the “other,” referring both to the term’s racial and gendered associations, the use of the word primitive to refer to self-taught artists has received less critical attention.⁶ In the U.S., many early supporters of modern art were also interested in self-taught artists. Sidney Janis, the collector and later dealer, was a fervent advocate for

"naïve" artists, and his influence at the Museum of Modern Art lent institutional support to his endeavors. Janis was appointed to MoMA's advisory committee in 1934, based mainly on the strength of a collection that included his recent purchase of Henri Rousseau's *The Dream* (1910).⁷ After his purchase of the Rousseau, Janis was obsessed with uncovering untrained talent. According to a 1960 *New Yorker* profile, "Janis was soon clocking thirty-five thousand miles a year in his quest for primitive artists. 'Having picked up the scent of talent, he was like a terrier at a badger hole,' Alfred Barr says."⁸

In 1938, Alfred Barr, the founding director of MoMA, credited Rousseau with giving credence to the category of folk art in the large exhibition "Masters of Popular Painting," which showcased untrained artists from Europe and the United States.⁹ The following year, MoMA's Advisory Committee (likely at Janis's urging) organized "Contemporary Unknown American Painters," including eight paintings owned by Janis in the show. As an extension of that exhibition, Janis published *They Taught Themselves: American Primitive Painters of the 20th Century*.¹⁰ In the foreword to Janis's book, Barr acknowledged that, while the broad historical category of the "primitive" stretched back centuries, serious attention to self-taught artists was a modern phenomenon.¹¹

But the framework of the primitive was double-edged at best. Many critics were quite taken with it because it implied an unimpeachable originality through ignorance of academic traditions. As American artists were struggling to find an identity independent of European practices during and just after World War II, untrained artists offered a model for self-reliance. Still, there were hierarchies. Despite having given untrained artists major museum exhibitions, Barr seemed wary of evaluating the self-taught alongside trained artists: "Perhaps it is imprudent to try to evaluate the importance of the self-taught artists in comparison with other schools or kinds of living artists. Some of the painters in this book seem to me so obviously superior to others that I wish Mr. Janis had not been quite so generously inclusive."¹² The limits of primitive painting also concerned Greenberg, and his 1942 article on the subject in *Art and Culture*, reveals his disdain:

As a rule, "primitive" painters strive for realism... and it is by its bungled realism that their work most unmistakably declares itself to be "primitive." ... one would expect them to learn the tricks of realistic drawing and shading sooner or later. That most of them never do seems, under the circumstances, more attributable to mental than to social or cultural handicaps....¹³



Fig. 1. Janet Sobel, *Untitled (JSP188)* (1945), oil on masonite, 18" x 14". © Estate of Janet Sobel. Courtesy Gary Snyder Fine Art.

This attitude embodies the resentment that self-taught artists could be subject to. Indeed, Barr's support of untrained artists at MoMA was a factor in his dismissal from the directorship at the museum. When Janis convinced Barr to host an exhibition of the primitive painter Morris Hirshfield in 1943, the show was so ill-received that Barr was removed from his position soon after.¹⁴

It is no coincidence that it was Janis who first put Sobel's work on public display in the 1943 group show "American Primitive Painting of Four Centuries," which he organized at the Arts Club of Chicago.¹⁵ Janis showed Sobel's *Summer Festival* (1943) alongside two Hirshfields and two paintings by "Mother" Moses, among others. When Sobel had her first "one-man show"¹⁶ at Puma Gallery in 1944, the reviews were quite positive. Henry McBride, critic for the *New York Sun*, wrote: "Mrs. Sobel's colors are unfailingly good, her imagination absolutely unrestricted, and her compositions hang together into well-knit and decorative units on the wall. Of all the so-called primitives to come to light recently, she is the gayest."¹⁷ Emily Genauer's review also distinguished Sobel



Fig. 2. Janet Sobel, *Three Vases* (1943), enamel on canvas, 24" x 36". © Estate of Janet Sobel. Courtesy Gary Snyder Fine Art.

from other self-taught artists: "Mrs. Sobel is a middle aged woman who only recently took up her brushes. The results are rather extraordinary. This is not conventional primitivism in any sense of the word."¹⁸ Reviewing a group show that included Sobel's work at the Norlyst Gallery later that year, Genauer repeated her assessment of the "newly discovered 'primitive' Janet Sobel, a housewife in Brooklyn who really does have a delightful decorative flair for pattern and color. Very few of the other things need occupy you long."¹⁹ Critic Carlyle Burrows mentioned that "there is a touch of sophisticated 'white writing' here, but one is inclined to believe from the evidence at hand that the artist has never had a lesson in her life, nor been influenced in any conspicuous way. That is what makes her the painter she is!"²⁰ Even though Burrows found elements in Sobel's paintings that were in dialogue with the "white writing" of a professional artist like Mark Tobey, he retreated from the comparison. Sobel's work was seen positively, but it was always through the mediating lens of the primitive.

It was true that Sobel's work fit into the category of primitive as it was conceived in the 1940s. She rarely relinquished representation, a hallmark of self-taught painters. In her figurative works, we can see the complexity of Sobel's motifs. If modernism is located in the urban experience, Sobel's figures appear to be from a mythic era—in some

works, like *Untitled* (JSP188) (1945; Pl. 9 and Fig. 1), they hover like specters over an abstract ground; in others the figure becomes the landscape or is consumed by it, as in *Burning Bush* (1944; Pl. 10), seen at the Puma show. Yet many works, especially in the Puma show, also demonstrate Sobel's attachment to more conventional ideas of figure and landscape. *Three Vases* (1943; Fig. 2) shows two or possibly three women whose bodies are composed of tightly tangled lines that are legible as patterned clothing. One woman's face is seen in both frontal and profile views, that, when coupled with the warm sepia tones of the painting, recalls Cubist experimentation in shorthand. The third form remains ambiguous—another woman or simply a vase? Primitivism was a convenient category because it could absorb Sobel's attachment to the figure while putting her in conversation with modernism. Yet it did not offer full acknowledgment of Sobel's affinities with avant-garde movements like Surrealism or the emerging New York School.

Sobel started painting in 1937, a year that began with MoMA's massive "Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism" exhibition organized by Barr. The exhibition showcased 700 objects covering five centuries, including sections of commercial art, children's art, work by self-taught artists, and, controversially, drawings by the mentally ill. Barr's massive exhibition demonstrated how the Surrealists' interests

dovetailed with the premise of the primitive as intuitive, free of technique, and staunchly anti-rational. Sobel later told an interviewer that she was not able to get to museums much, given her responsibilities as a wife and mother, but she did have access to catalogues and books.²¹ One of her ink drawings fills the copyright page of MoMA's 1941 Salvador Dali exhibition catalogue (Fig. 3).

When the Surrealist artists immigrated to New York as refugees during World War II, they were welcomed by Janis and other collectors. Janis recalled a conversation with Max Ernst around this time, in which Ernst asserted, "'You know that this [*They Taught Themselves: American Primitive Painters*] is the best American art.' He was probably right because up to 1942 the [American] avant-gardists had not done anything."²² The Surrealists admired intuitive ways of creating images unencumbered by academic strictures. As Janis described it, "We had the artists over very frequently, you know, for cocktails and for dinner. [André] Breton was very much interested in the work that I was doing with the auto-didacts."²³ The Surrealists in exile recognized Sobel's talents (called to their attention by Sobel's son, Sol, who had written to Max Ernst, as well as by Janis).²⁴ Breton and Ernst visited with Sobel, who hosted them for dinners in her home. In turn, Ernst introduced Sobel's work to his wife, Peggy Guggenheim, who later included Sobel in a juried group show and gave her a solo show in 1946 at her Art of This Century gallery. Sobel's unaffected approach to image-making, which led her to both figuration and abstraction, fit well with the Surrealists' interest in psychological exploration and spontaneous working methods that need not conform to a particular style.

But Surrealism's stylistic diversity—in particular its figurative dimension—was also problematic in the 1940s New York art world, where abstraction and figuration were increasingly set against each other by influential critics like Greenberg, as he and others strove to characterize the new American art.²⁵ Peggy Guggenheim had blithely played along with these divisions when she and Frederick Kiesler designed the Art of This Century gallery to include separate rooms for abstract and Surrealist art, even though she famously declared her neutrality in the division by wearing mismatching earrings at the opening of her gallery in 1942. One earring, designed by Yves Tanguy, represented her interest in Surrealism and figuration; the other, by Alexander Calder, demonstrated her affinity for the new avant-garde's abstraction.

Like Guggenheim, Janis also participated in articulating the contemporary art scene in New York as comprising coexisting Surrealist and abstract tendencies. In 1944, he published *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*, one of the first books to attempt to characterize the new American avant-garde. (An exhibition with the same title was shown in San Francisco, Cincinnati, Denver, Seattle, Santa Barbara, and New York.) Janis included a color plate of Sobel's painting *Music* (1944; Fig. 4) in the Surrealist section, alongside works by William Baziotes, Joseph Cornell, Mark Rothko, Mark Tobey, Adolf Gottlieb, Arshile Gorky, and Jackson Pollock. This section of Janis's book attested to the diversity of the new American avant-garde, for also included in this capacious category were



Fig. 3. Janet Sobel, drawing on Dali catalogue (JSP-094) (1941), pen and ink on paper, 10" x 7 1/2". © Estate of Janet Sobel. Courtesy Gary Snyder Fine Art.

Morris Hirshfield, O. Louis Guglielmi, and Walter Quirt. For Janis, Surrealism was a framework that offered American artists a place to experiment with style and could readily absorb the art of the self-taught.

Even as he tried to abide by his categories, Janis's selections made it clear that the divisions between abstraction and Surrealism were porous. As reported in *Art Digest*, "Identities are becoming lost...I would be surprised if many an artist in the show wasn't bewildered to find himself catalogued as he is."²⁶ Greenberg panned *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*, calling it a "compost of exalted prattle...and irresponsible pronouncement..."²⁷ Yet, Janis's book was unique in bringing together American and European artists as well as attempting to articulate trends in contemporary art. Greenberg later recanted his initial opinion, acknowledging Janis's book as "one of the very first books that so much as noticed the 'movement' which...a few painters in New York were beginning to constitute."²⁸ Even if Janis's categories were permeable, the inclusion of so many of the painters who would later constitute the New York School demonstrated his knowledge of the state of contemporary art in the U.S.

When Sobel received a solo show at Art of this Century in 1946, Janis, who wrote the catalogue's foreword, asserted,

"Mrs. Sobel's work is no longer primitive and has taken another direction.... Today her paintings are filled with unconscious surrealist phantasy."²⁹ Critics seemed to agree, and Sobel's show garnered several reviews that specifically commented on Sobel's advancement beyond the primitive. *Art News* contrasted Sobel's primitive work with her "highly sophisticated abstractions."³⁰ And the local paper, the *Brooklyn Eagle*, balanced these competing categories in its headline declaring, "Critics Acclaim Boro Grandmother as Top Flight Surrealist Painter,"³¹ referencing Sobel's age and gender alongside her status as a member of the avant-garde. The *New Yorker* gallery listings summed things up succinctly "Paintings by Janet Sobel, a primitive gone modern."³²

As critics increasingly treated Sobel's works seriously, they also began to question her initial primitiveness. Edward Alden Jewell wrote in the *New York Times*: "Janet Sobel...began as a 'primitive' and is now an abstractionist. Whether her primitivism was ever genuinely such or from the start sophisticatedly 'pseudo,' may be debated."³³ Jewell's unwillingness to accept development in Sobel's practice demonstrates just how constraining the category of primitive really was. A month earlier, when Bill Leonard, host of the WCBS radio show "This is New York," had interviewed Sobel, he offered a reason for critics' attraction to self-taught painters: "Critics find the pictures refreshing because they're simple and uncomplicated and galleries vie with each other to show the work of these primitives, as they're called. It's as if everybody had suddenly reached the saturation point of sophistication... a point, I might add, that I don't find it hard to reach at all."³⁴ The implied unsophistication of untrained painters reflects the rejection of European artistic standards. Yet Leonard concludes that Sobel's works are hardly primitive: "By no stretch of the term could her paintings be called primitives. They're about as primitive as a B-29."³⁵ Leonard allows that "Mrs. Sobel isn't the least bit confused. 'I'm a surrealist,' she says. 'I paint what I feel within me.'"³⁶ But Sobel's own convictions about the ideas informing her art were not enough to gain her admission to the avant-garde.

Sobel's 1947 move to Plainfield, New Jersey, distanced her physically from the art world, and her allergy to paints limited her production in that medium, though she continued to produce work.³⁷ In 1948, Janis opened his own gallery, but it seems he did not show Sobel's work.³⁸ Instead he quickly became known as a successful dealer of Abstract Expressionism, giving Pollock several solo shows in the years before his death. It was also at Janis's gallery that the young art historian William Rubin first met Pollock, and it was Janis who facilitated the use of his collection to provide the funds for MoMA's purchase of Pollock's *One: Number 31, 1950* (1950).

Janet Sobel's entrance into art history came with the publication of Greenberg's edited compilation *Art and Culture*. In 1966, Rubin decided to follow up on Greenberg's proposal that Sobel had influenced Pollock. Rubin was in the process of planning a major MoMA exhibition entitled "Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage," which positioned Pollock as a lynchpin between European anti-modernism (Dada and Surrealism) and the triumphal American avant-garde. In some ways,



Fig. 4. Janet Sobel, *Music* (1944). © Estate of Janet Sobel. Reprinted from Sidney Janis, *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*, 1944.

Rubin was walking in the footsteps of Janis, who had been the first to frame the burgeoning New York School as a tension between abstraction and Surrealism. On the other hand, like Greenberg, Rubin was interested in Sobel at least in part because her status as a primitive made her a more compelling muse for Pollock than what Greenberg and Rubin saw as the alternative—that fellow Abstract Expressionist Mark Tobey had influenced Pollock's all-over painting.

When Rubin wrote to Peggy Guggenheim, trying to track down Sobel's paintings from the 1940s, he summarized Greenberg's account without questioning it:

... All other efforts I have made to track her [Sobel] down have been fruitless. Her connection with Pollock is as follows: in 1943-44 she did a series of abstract pictures with 'all-over' patterns vaguely resembling superimposed marble veining. Clem Greenberg and Pollock saw these pictures—which anticipated Pollock's own all-over patterning to some extent—at Art of This Century in 1944. According to Clem, Pollock was very impressed by them. (Pollock did not see until much later—after he went into his own all-over style—comparable patterning in Tobey's white writing pictures although these were also shown in New York at Marion Willard in 1944).³⁹

Though there were several factual errors (including the location of Sobel's 1944 show), Rubin elaborated on Greenberg's proposed line of influence in the third installment of his major series of articles on Pollock, "Jackson Pollock and the Modernist Tradition," published in *Artforum* in 1967.

Part of Rubin's goal was to fortify and flesh out Greenberg's claims that Pollock was deeply influenced by Cubism (more so than Surrealism). After anointing Greenberg the "pioneer critic of the New American Painting,"⁴⁰ Rubin eventually turns to "all-overness" and Mark Tobey, whose work, Rubin re-affirms, Pollock did not see at the Willard Gallery in 1944.⁴¹ In making his case against Tobey's influence on Pollock, Rubin—as Greenberg had before him—diverts attention to Sobel, proclaiming, "Mrs. Sobel had gone beyond her conventionally 'primitive' images to a highly abstract and decidedly all-over kind of painting."⁴² Rubin recalled the furtive admiration Greenberg and Pollock shared for Sobel's work, illustrating Sobel's painting *Music* (1944), a high-contrast painting of energetic exploding lines, alongside Pollock's *Shimmering Substance* (1946). "*Music* is much closer to Pollock than is Tobey's painting," Rubin wrote, "in part because of the substantial corporeality of the pigment."⁴³ These paragraphs were the first to elaborate on Sobel's importance for Abstract Expressionism.

While Rubin allows that "Mrs. Sobel" has exceeded her primitivism, like Greenberg he too used Sobel to deflect attention from Tobey (whose work had been the focus of Greenberg's original paragraph in 1955). Greenberg had selected Sobel from obscurity in 1958—the year of his revision of "American-Type Painting"—and it seems more than coincidence that that year Tobey was especially prominent. In 1958, Tobey won the top prize at the Venice Biennale, becoming the first American painter since Whistler to receive the honor. As Jeffrey Weschler has noted, when William Seitz organized Tobey's solo show at MoMA in 1962, Seitz included a two-page footnote documenting the shift in Greenberg's critical appraisal of Tobey between 1944, when Greenberg perceived Tobey's white writing as "one of the few original contributions to contemporary American painting," and 1947, when Greenberg thought Tobey's work "turned out to be so narrow as to cease even being interesting."⁴⁴ It may not be coincidence that 1947 marked the beginning of Pollock's drip period and thus, his move toward Tobey's style.

Scholars have stressed how important ideas of originality were for the burgeoning New York School in the 1940s. Indeed, many artists and critics felt that it was only by rejecting European models that American art could come into its own in the postwar art world. But influence by other New York School painters may have been just as threatening. Being influenced by Sobel wouldn't count against Pollock in the same way, because Sobel could be fitted into the same critical space as the Native American sand painters who also influenced Pollock. Primitivism promised originality but it was simultaneously a condoned site for appropriation by the avant-garde. Sobel surely did influence Pollock, but in retroactively attributing influence to Sobel, Greenberg likely recognized that the untrained, unknown Sobel was less



Fig. 5. Janet Sobel and John Dewey (c. 1946). © Estate of Janet Sobel. Courtesy Gary Snyder Fine Art.

threatening—and made a more compelling narrative—than ascribing influence to fellow Abstract Expressionist Tobey.⁴⁵

Indeed, Sobel and Tobey have quite a bit in common. While several recent authors have taken Greenberg's comment about Tobey at face value,⁴⁶ art historian Judith Kays's research has revealed Greenberg's recollection to be flawed, if not entirely false.⁴⁷ Tobey showed before Sobel in 1944, and despite Greenberg's denial of it, Pollock almost definitely saw that show at the Willard Gallery. Moreover, Tobey exhibited in two group shows with Pollock, including Janis's "Abstract and Surrealist Art in America," in which they were both classified—along with Sobel—as Surrealist painters. In his 1990 exhibition, "Abstract Expressionism: Other Dimensions," curator Jeffrey Weschler was the first to critically investigate Sobel's relationship to American modernism. Weschler makes the case for a broader understanding of Abstract Expressionism, especially in terms of one of its signature characteristics—its large scale. Weschler points out the discrepancy between Tobey's strong exhibition record in New York and his dismissal as a West Coast mystic.⁴⁸ The fact that both Sobel and Tobey consistently painted small was another form of discrimination—stylistic, but with its own gendered associations.

Though Greenberg stated that Pollock had first seen Sobel's work in 1944 at Peggy Guggenheim's gallery, in actuality, the first time Sobel was shown at Art of This Century was in the all-female group exhibition, "The Women," which ran from June 12 through July 7, 1945.⁴⁹ Sobel's work received unmitigated praise from *Art Digest*: "Janet Sobel is responsible for one of the most joyous chromatic expressions seen this season."⁵⁰ The *New York Times* critic and the *New York Herald Tribune* writer both distinguished Sobel's work from the other female artists on view.⁵¹ According to Guggenheim, the idea for the show came from Duchamp, and the thirty-one painters were selected by an all-male jury consisting of Duchamp, Breton, Max Ernst, James Johnson Sweeney, James Thrall Soby, Howard Putzel



Fig. 6. Janet Sobel at work (c. 1946). © Estate of Janet Sobel. Courtesy Gary Snyder Fine Art.

and Jimmy Ernst.⁵² In a letter the previous year, Guggenheim called Sobel “the best woman painter by far in America.”⁵³

In some ways, Sobel and Tobey were both part of marginalized communities. Tobey was gay and lived on the West Coast. Sobel was female, a mother and grandmother, and Jewish. Many of the New York School artists shared this religious background with her—including Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Adolf Gottlieb, and Lee Krasner. But Sobel’s Jewishness was foregrounded in critical accounts of her work. Bill Leonard’s interview is telling, for it combines both gender and cultural biases: “The grandmother in Mrs. Sobel is just as strong as the artist. When John Dewey, world famous American philosopher, called on her in Brighton Beach, he came to admire and talk about her paintings. But he stayed to consume her gefilte fish”⁵⁴ (1946: Fig. 5). Critic Maude Riley emphasized Sobel’s domestic life, believing that Sobel’s paintings “made at home in Brighton with the kids all around [were] the most charming.”⁵⁵ Riley was distinguishing her from her male colleagues whose children, if they had any, were largely irrelevant to their professional practice.

A photograph of Sobel at work (c. 1946; Fig. 6), taken for a

magazine story that never appeared, attests to the gendered lens through which Sobel was seen. Lying on her stomach, Sobel casually holds a paintbrush in one hand. She props her head with her other hand, and the pose is reminiscent of a child lounging in a bedroom, underscored by the rumpled blanket beneath her. Her horizontality is extended through to the flatness of the painting lying on the floor. It could not be more different from Hans Namuth’s famous image of Jackson Pollock at work—flinging paint, attacking the canvas, confidently acting in its arena (Fig. 7). In contrast, Sobel’s practice is domestic and her painting attire—skirt, stockings and heels—seems appropriate.

Yet at one point Sobel’s reach seemed like it would stretch beyond her Brighton Beach living room. In Ad Reinhardt’s 1946 illustration of “How to Look at Modern Art in America” (Fig. 8), Sobel has a designated leaf next to Tobey’s. Tobey’s leaf nearly grazes Pollock’s (misspelled as Pollack), which sprouts from an adjacent branch. All three are positioned on the healthy side of the tree, unencumbered by the weight of “Subject Matter” and other evils that Reinhardt asserts bear too heavily on American artists. However, there were other



Fig. 7. Hans Namuth, Jackson Pollock (1950), gelatin silver print on paper, 14 3/4" x 13 3/4". © Hans Namuth Estate. Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution / Art Resource, NY.

factors besides subject matter that limited Sobel's success. As painter Hedda Sterne said of her appearance as the only woman in *Life* magazine's iconic photograph of "the Irascibles," "In terms of career, it's probably the worst thing that happened to me." She continued, "They all were very furious that I was in it because they all were sufficiently macho to think that the presence of a woman took away from the seriousness of it all. Do you understand?"⁵⁶ Painter Lee Krasner also recalled sexism in the art world in a 1979 interview: "When I see those big labels, 'American,' I know someone is selling something. I get very uncomfortable with any kind of chauvinism—male, French or American."⁵⁷ Krasner implies that, with the ascension of American modernism as a marketable movement, female painters were increasingly left by the wayside.

Sobel's place in the history of art was bounded by the very limitations that enabled her moment of success. In the 1940s, her work was assessed on its merits, but as a woman, and as a primitive, she occupied a circumscribed space where she was at once in dialogue with the avant-garde but could not become part of it. Her inclusion in accounts of Pollock's development marshals her aesthetic innovations in order to advance the career of a more well-known male artist. Thanks to Rubin, Sobel was able to enjoy some credit for her aesthetic accomplishments before her death in 1968. Though her paintings were located too late to be included in "Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage," Rubin arranged for one of Sobel's all-over drip paintings *Milky Way* (1945; Pl. 11) to enter MoMA's collection (donated by the family); he acquired another for himself as a future bequest (Pl. 12).⁵⁸ Looking at

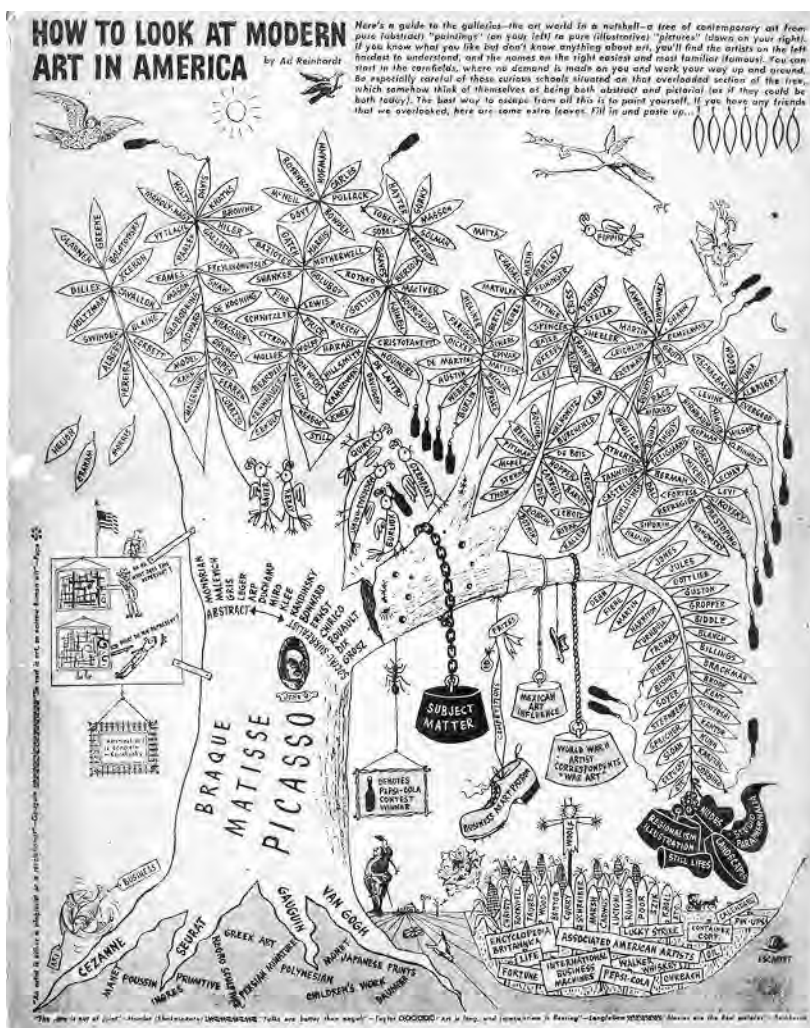


Fig. 8. Ad Reinhardt, "How to Look at Modern Art in America," *PM Magazine* (June 6, 1946).

Milky Way, it is easy to see why Rubin wanted the painting for MoMA. A delicate tracery of blown and flicked skeins of cream, pink and yellow paint circulate across a surface of smudgier blues, purples and greens that, in light of the title, recall the night sky. Sobel balances intricate surface incident with spontaneity to imply a universal expanse.

When Sobel's paintings were displayed in MoMA's 1970 exhibition "Recent Acquisitions of Painting and Sculpture," a press release identified Sobel's *Milky Way* as being part of Sobel's "one-man show at Art of this Century, the gallery run by Peggy Guggenheim where Jackson Pollock had his first one-man show in 1943."⁵⁹ According to the *New Yorker*, "For years, a drip painting by Sobel hung kitty-corner from Jackson Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm* [sic] at MoMA."⁶⁰ Linked retrospectively to Pollock, Janet Sobel, and her supporting role in art history, is an example of the contradictions of Americans' search for a home-grown modernism. As artists, critics, collectors, and curators forged the ideals of a new avant-garde, there was no longer room in that catchall category of the primitive for a Jewish grandmother from Brooklyn, even if — especially if — that primitive had become modern. •

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Notes

1. Clement Greenberg, "American-Type Painting," *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 218.
2. Anna Chave makes this important point as a side note at the end of her powerful article on the gendered dynamics between Pollock and Krasner, though she does so without questioning the accuracy of Greenberg's motives (or the accuracy of his statement). See Anna Chave, "Pollock and Krasner: Script and Postscript," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* (Autumn 1993): 110.
3. Clement Greenberg, "American-Type Painting," 218.
4. In addition to Chave, mentioned above, see also Jeffrey Wechsler, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Dimensions* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1989) and Ann Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1997).
5. See Gail Levin, "Janet Sobel: Primitivist, Surrealist, and Abstract Expressionist," *Woman's Art Journal*, v. 26, n. 1 (Spring/Summer 2005): 8–14. Levin also provides a useful historiography of art historical interest in Sobel's work, as well as key biographical details, including much of the biographical information included here.
6. In Robert Goldwater's classic book on primitivism in modern art, originally published in 1938, Goldwater attempts to account for Picasso's simultaneous interest in African sculpture and Henri Rousseau. Goldwater argues that the term 'primitive' is used for both non-Western work as well as untrained Western painters to signify the supposed psychological connection they shared. See Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986, orig. publ. 1938), 157.
7. Alfred Barr, the founding director of MoMA, particularly admired the Rousseau for MoMA's collection. William Rubin, *A Curator's Quest: Building the Collection of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, 1967-1988* (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2011), 43. It was sold to Nelson Rockefeller for the purposes of donation to MoMA in 1954 (John Brooks, "Why Fight it? [Profile of Sidney Janis]," *The New Yorker*, Nov. 12, 1960, 75).
8. Brooks, "Why Fight it? [Profile of Sidney Janis]," 76.
9. In the introduction to the American section of the exhibition catalogue, Holger Cahill described the importance of popular primitive art in parallel to the interest in ethnic primitive art, both of which were framed as a redemptive antidote to a hyper-rationalized modernism. Holger Cahill, quoted in MoMA's press release for "Masters of Popular Painting," April 27, 1938.
10. Sidney Janis, *They Taught Themselves* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, reissue 1965, orig. publ. 1942), n.p.
11. Alfred Barr, "Foreword," in Sidney Janis, *They Taught Themselves*, n.p.
12. Ibid.
13. Clement Greenberg, "'Primitive' Painting," *Art and Culture*, 131.
14. A confluence of factors contributed to Barr's demotion in 1943, among them, the Hirshfield show, and other exhibitions that the trustees felt were not in keeping with the standards of the museum.
15. Sobel Gallery talk in Gary Snyder documents. Janis had made the first sale of Sobel's work in 1942, writing her a letter of congratulations along with the check (Sidney Janis, letter to Janet Sobel, Oct. 26, 1942, Gary Snyder archives).
16. "Goings on About Town," *The New Yorker*, April 29, 1944, 6.
17. Henry McBride, [review of Puma Gallery Show], *New York Sun*, (n.d.) 1944 (clipping in Gary Snyder archives).
18. Emily Genauer, *New York World Telegram*, April 29, 1944.
19. Emily Genauer, "Gasparo Has a Surprise or Two," *New York World-Telegram*, Sept. 23, 1944.
20. Carlyle Burrows, "Art of the Week: Janet Sobel," *New York Herald Tribune*, April 21, 1944.
21. Emily Cheney, "Only Human," *Daily Mirror*, May 10, 1944. Sobel is quoted as saying: "No, I never went to museums much. I didn't have time and...I didn't understand these things. But I always read books..."
22. Sidney Janis, interview with Paul Cummings, Tape 2: April 11, 1972, Archives of American Art.
23. Ibid.
24. Levin, "Janet Sobel: Primitivist, Surrealist, and Abstract Expressionist," 10-11.
25. In 1944, Greenberg unequivocally stated that the most ambitious and effective art was abstract (Clement Greenberg, "Abstract Art," *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism* v. 1, ed. John O'Brian [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1986], 204, orig. in *The Nation*, April 15, 1944). And when it came time to historicize the New York School, William Seitz introduced his 1955 dissertation—the first written on modern art in the U.S.—by positing the new American avant-garde as one that overcame its figurative tendencies.
26. M.R., "Whither Goes Abstract and Surrealist Art?" *Art Digest* (Dec. 1, 1944), 8.
27. Greenberg, quoted in Brooks, "Why Fight it? [Profile of Sidney Janis]," 80.
28. Clement Greenberg, quoted in ibid., 100. The essay was written on the occasion of the Hetzel Union Gallery of Pennsylvania State University's show "An Exhibition in Tribute to Sidney Janis," (Feb. 1958), but apparently arrived too late to be included in the show's catalogue.
29. Sidney Janis, *Paintings by Janet Sobel*, exh. cat., Art of This Century, Jan. 1946.
30. "Janet Sobel," *Art News* 44 (Jan. 1946), 22.
31. *Brooklyn Eagle*, Nov. 10, 1946
32. "Goings on About Town," *New Yorker*, Jan. 12, 1946.
33. Edward Alden Jewell, *New York Times*, Jan. 6, 1946.
34. Bill Leonard, "This is New York," (Dec. 16, 1946), transcript from Gary Snyder archives.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Levin, "Janet Sobel: Primitivist, Surrealist, and Abstract Expressionist," 13. Sobel did not receive another solo show in New York City until 2002 at Gary Snyder Fine Art Gallery (See Roberta Smith, "Art in Review: Janet Sobel," *New York Times* (Feb. 15, 2002).
38. Despite the earlier debacle of the Hirshfield show at MoMA, which he admitted was "one of the most hated shows the Museum of Modern Art had ever put on," Janis gave Hirshfield a retrospective at his gallery in 1965 (Janis, quoted in John Brooks, "Why Fight it? [Profile of Sidney Janis]," 78.)
39. William Rubin, letter to Peggy Guggenheim, Oct. 31, 1966, *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage*, exh. files, MoMA Archives.
40. William Rubin, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition, Part III," *Artforum* (April 1967), 18.
41. Ibid., 27.
42. Ibid., 29. By and large, when Rubin refers to Sobel, he calls her Mrs. Sobel.

43. Rubin, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition, Part III," 29. Rubin continued, "These painters render every element, every part of the canvas equivalent; and they likewise weave the work of art into a tight mesh whose principle of formal unity is contained and recapitulated in each thread..."
44. Greenberg (*The Nation*, April 22, 1944; *Horizon*, October 1947) quoted in Seitz, *Mark Tobey* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1962), 86-87, also quoted in Weschler, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Dimensions*, 160. Seitz also noted that Tobey was still "more highly regarded abroad than he is at home." Seitz, *Mark Tobey*, 7. Seitz reports that New York's art magazines were not interested in Tobey's international honors, even though mainstream publications like *Life* and the *New York Times* ran feature stories. Quoted in Weschler, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Dimensions*, 161.
45. See Judith S. Kays, "Jackson Pollock and Mark Tobey: Setting the Record Straight," in *Mark Tobey* (Madrid: Reina Sofia, 1997), 91-114.
46. See Caroline Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), 277; Kirsten Hoving, "Jackson Pollock's 'Galaxy': Outer Space and Artist's Space in Pollock's Cosmic Paintings," *American Art* 16, n. 1 (Spring 2002), 91.
47. See Judith Kays, "Mark Tobey and Jackson Pollock: Setting the Record Straight," in *Mark Tobey*, 91-114. Irving Sandler said: "Clement Greenberg says Pollock never saw the work of Tobey before doing his drip paintings. I do not believe that. They both showed in group shows in New York. So unless Pollock didn't go to his own show...." (Irving Sandler, interview with Jeffrey Weschler, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Dimensions*, 77).
48. Geographical remove is not the only issue with Tobey's work; as Weschler points out, Clyfford Still's reputation did not suffer from his West Coast residencies (he only lived in New York during 1945-46). But Still painted big, and Tobey did not (Weschler, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Dimensions*, 86-87). Size was also cited as an issue by art historian Anna Chave, who noted the dismissive accounts of Sobel as a housewife, but acknowledged that "what separates Pollock's work definitively from Sobel's is the heroic scale his pictures sometimes assumed and the relatively free flow of his paint" (Anna Chave, "Pollock and Krasner: Script and Postscript," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*: 109). Weschler records the numbers as 146 out of 290 having the dimensions of about 36 by 36 inches or less (Weschler, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Dimensions*, 104). Only 66 paintings have a height or width over 72 inches.
49. Indeed it was her strong work in this show that seems to have convinced Guggenheim to grant her the solo show. In 1945, Sobel was also included in a group show at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia.
50. Ben Wolf, "Bless Them," *Art Digest* (July 1, 1945).
51. See Carlyle Burrows, "Art of the Week," *New York Herald Tribune*, and Edward Alden Jewell, "Chiefly Modern in Idiom," *New York Times*, both June 17, 1945.
52. Peggy Guggenheim, *Out of this Century: Confessions of an Art Addict*, 279. Jimmy Ernst apparently left in the middle of the selection process because he did not want to be responsible for rejecting his girlfriend's submission. Sobel's work was exhibited alongside Louise Bourgeois, Kay Sage, and Leonora Carrington.
53. Peggy Guggenheim to David Porter, Nov. 17, c. 1944, David Porter Papers, Archives of American Art, noted in Jasper Sharp, "Seeing the Future: The Exhibitions at Art of This Century 1942-1947," in *Peggy Guggenheim and Frederick Kiesler: The Story of Art of This Century* (Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2004), 329.
54. Bill Leonard, "This is New York," (Dec. 16, 1946), transcript from Gary Snyder archives.
55. Margaret Breuning and Maude Riley, quoted in Sharp, "Seeing the Future: The Exhibitions at Art of This Century 1942-1947," 329.
56. Hedda Stern, Oral history interview with Hedda Sterne, December 17, 1981, Archives of American Art. Despite her long career as a painter, Stern was interviewed for the Archives of American Art's Mark Rothko and His Times oral history project. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-hedda-sterne-13262>
57. Lee Krasner, quoted in Gail Levin, *Lee Krasner: A Biography* (New York: William Morrow, 2011), 391. Levin also quotes Krasner from a 1981 interview: "I had absolutely no consciousness of being discriminated against until abstract expressionism came into blossom" (p. 69).
58. Walter Bareiss, letter to Sol Sobel, Nov. 6, 1968.
59. "Recent Acquisitions of Painting and Sculpture on View," July 31, 1970, MoMA Press Release. In 1970, Sobel's son Sol corresponded with Rubin at the time of the MoMA exhibition, reporting later that Rubin's suggestion that he try to secure a show for his mother's work had so far been fruitless, since Janis had not returned his calls. Sol Sobel, letter to William Rubin, Oct. 19, 1970, Gary Snyder Archives.
60. "Goings on About Town," *New Yorker*, March 4, 2002. MoMA does not own "Autumn Rhythm," but it is safe to assume the author is referring to one of Pollock's other large drip paintings that MoMA does own, *No. 1, 1948* or *One: Number 31, 1950*.

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LAVINIA FONTANA'S NUDE MINERVAS

By Liana De Girolami Cheney

Lavinia Fontana (1552 Bologna–1614 Rome) was a Bolognese *nobil donna*, an educated and accomplished female artist as well as a loving mother.¹ Her fruitful creativity led her to create 135 paintings, including representations of single and group portraits,² religious paintings for church altarpieces or private chapels,³ and historical paintings,⁴ as well as self-portraits.⁵ However, she further excelled in composing a new theme for female painters of her time to follow, that is, the depiction of mythological subjects, in particular the portrayal of nude female figures, as seen in her nude Minervas and Venuses. Fontana's new genre paved the way for Artemisia Gentileschi's depictions of female nudes in the seventeenth century.⁶

Fontana's artistic recognition documents her prolific and brilliant career as a painter and manifests her commitment to excel as a person. She trained as a painter in Bologna, with her father, Prospero Fontana, and Ludovico Carracci. She worked in Rome under the patronage of several popes, including Gregory XIII, Clement VII, and Paul V. During her lifetime she received significant appointments, including the Portrait Ordinary at the Vatican by Pope Gregory XIII. Fontana was the first female to be accepted at Rome's old and prestigious Accademia di San Luca.⁷ Thus Fontana's good fortune was to have been raised and educated in Bologna, home of one of the oldest universities in Europe, to have been trained as a painter by her successful father, Prospero, and to have received an honorific appointment to the papal court in Rome. Within this framework, Fontana moved in a patronage circle of sophisticated, well-connected nobles, Church officials, politicians, scholars, bankers, and other powerful and affluent men and women in Bologna and Rome.

In 1577, she wed the Count of Imola, Giovan Paolo Zappi, who trained in her father's studio. The marriage was arranged by her father and Severo Zappi, father of the future spouse. Giovan Paolo Zappi collaborated with Fontana in painting compositional backgrounds and details such as drapery. He also assisted in caring for and educating their eleven children. Fontana died in Rome and was buried in the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva.

Sixteenth-century literature applauded this cultivated female and noted the implications of the social limitations for her artistic success. Baldassare Castiglione suggested in *The Courtier* that the system of education and patronage during this time, particularly in Italy, precluded females from developing a full range of themes in art and, therefore, from

achieving recognized excellence.⁸ That is, women were limited to painting acceptable "female topics" such as religious paintings and portraits, in particular self-portraits.

The focus of this essay, however, is Lavinia Fontana's emblematic or mythological paintings, and in particular, her two nude Minervas: *Minerva Dressing* (*Minerva in the Act of Dressing*) (1612–13; Figs. 1, 2, and Pls. 13, 14).⁹

It was highly unusual for a woman painter of her time, but during her artistic career, Fontana depicted several mythological paintings with nude figures on the subject of Venus and Cupid, such as *Venus and Cupid* (1585; at the Hermitage Museum, Leningrad), *Venus and Cupid* (1585; Pl. 15), *Venus Kissing Cupid* (1600; private collection, Bologna), an attributed painting after Fontana, *Venus and Cupid* (1600; private collection), *Portrait of Isabella Ruini as Venus* (1592; Fig. 3), and *Venus Receiving Gifts from Two Cupids* (1590s; Pl. 16).¹⁰

Fontana also composed allegorical paintings with nude figures, such as the *Allegory of Prudence* (1590s; Pl. 17), based on Achille Bocchi's *Symbolicae quaestiones* of 1555 (reprinted in 1574) in Bologna.¹¹ It should come as no surprise that she would draw upon this work, as both she and her father were commissioned to create drawings for the engravings in Bocchi's emblematic volume. Bocchi (1488–1562), a close friend of Fontana, was a Bolognese humanist and teacher at the University of Bologna.¹² He composed this moralistic volume under the influence of his friends Pierio Valeriano, a classicist and emblemist who wrote *Hieroglyphica* (Venice, 1556),¹³ and Francesco Colonna, a Dominican poet who composed the mysterious allegorical tome, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Venice, 1499). In turn, both of these humanists were influenced by Horapollon's *Hieroglyphica*, a fifth-century Neoplatonic treatise on ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. In Bologna, in particular, familiarity with Horapollon's writings was due to a grammarian, Filippo Beroaldo the Elder (1453–1505), who translated, annotated, and compiled some of Horapollon's hieroglyphs into a vocabulary of grammar for Bolognese students.¹⁴

Another significant emblematic source for Fontana's mythological paintings is the jurist and philosopher Andrea Alciato's (1492–1550) ethical book on the *Emblemata* (1531, with subsequent editions of 1542, 1546, and 1550 published in Paris, Lyon, and Venice). During the Lombardy war between Milan and Pavia, Alciato moved his legal studio to Bologna in 1538.¹⁵ Even though his residence in Bologna lasted only for a few years (1538–41), Alciato's presence and writings had a great



Fig. 1. Lavinia Fontana, *Minerva Dressing* (1613), oil on canvas, 102 3/8" x 35 3/8". Galleria Borghese, Rome. Photo: Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività culturali / Art Resource, NY (ART303430). (Hereafter, Borghese *Minerva Dressing*).



Fig. 2. Lavinia Fontana, *Minerva Dressing* (1612), oil on canvas, 95" x 35 3/8". Private Collection, Rome (Hereafter, Roman *Minerva Dressing*).

impact on the art of his friend Giorgio Vasari (1511–74),¹⁶ who was decorating the Monteolivetan Refectory of San Michele in Bosco in Bologna at the time, and on Bocchi's emblematic writings, which were also published in Bologna. Both Vasari and Bocchi were friends of Prospero Fontana.

Bocchi was also the leader of the Accademia Bocciana, which was sponsored by two avid collectors and patrons of the arts, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese (1520–89), the nephew of the Farnese Pope Paul III, and Cardinal Scipione Caffarelli Borghese (1577–1633). It should come as no surprise, therefore, that both cardinals patronized Fontana's art while she resided in Rome and even made her trip to the eternal city possible. Thus, Lavinia Fontana's emblematic inspiration and iconographic depictions in her mythological paintings can be derived from her Bolognese cultural milieu.

Fontana's two versions of *Minerva Dressing* have a most intriguing cultural history. In the space that follows, I shall consider three points: 1) the origin of the commissions, 2) the stylistic sources for the imagery, and 3) the symbolic signification of the imagery.

Fontana's connections with the Borghese family solidified in 1604, when she moved her family to Rome to work for Pope

Paul V, former Cardinal Camillo Borghese (1552–1621). During his papal legate in Bologna (1588–93), Camillo Borghese became Fontana's patron as well as her friend, becoming godfather to her son Severo in 1592.¹⁷

The 1613 Borghese *Minerva Dressing* (Fig. 1/Pl. 13) is Fontana's last completed painting before her death.¹⁸ According to the Archivio Borghese Vaticano of 1613–14, Cardinal Scipione Borghese commissioned the work.¹⁹ The archival documents include records on the commission for the frame and the painting as well as information on the restoration. These records confirm that Fontana painted this work for Cardinal Borghese in 1613 and dated "...FACIEBAT MDCXIII" below Cupid's foot. At this same time, Andrea Durante, a painter and decorator residing in the Borghese household, was commissioned to frame Fontana's painting.²⁰ In 1779, Domenico de Angelis cleaned and restored the painting in Rome, but no documentation exists on the nature of the restoration. During the Napoleonic era, as part of a marriage dowry in 1808, the painting traveled to Paris along with the furniture and personal belongings of Cardinal Borghese. In 1816, these objects and paintings were returned to Rome as part of Pauline Bonaparte Borghese's patrimony. In 1902, the Italian government acquired the Borghese estate. In 1954, the painting was again cleaned and restored. The



Fig. 3. Lavinia Fontana, *Portrait of Isabella Ruini as Venus* (1592), oil on canvas, 29 1/2" x 23 5/8". Photo: Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen.

conservator, Alvaro Esposito, recorded removing the yellow varnish, revealing the date of 1613 below Cupid's foot, and attesting to the previous notations found in the earlier Borghese archive of 1613–14.²¹

Fontana's Borghese *Minerva Dressing* depicts an original iconography of Minerva (Roman goddess Pallas Athena), the goddess of War, Peace, Wisdom, and the Arts. Her imagery deviates from the more common classical and Renaissance visual conventions of the deity as seen, for example, in a Roman statue of Minerva from the second century CE (Fig. 4) and Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving of *Pallas Athena* of 1510–15 (in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris). Fontana's Borghese *Minerva Dressing* contains the traditional attributes associated with the clothed goddess—including an olive branch or tree, an owl, and military attire with a cuirass or coat of mail, a gorget, a helmet, a shield, and a lance. Unusually and significantly, however, Fontana depicted the goddess in the nude, with her military attributes at her feet. With this depiction of the figure of Minerva, Fontana may have been the first female artist of the sixteenth century to study from life the female body and to paint nude female figures.²²

The Borghese *Minerva's Dressing* of 1613 comprises both an interior and an exterior setting. The open area, with its blue and pink colorations, suggests a sunset scene, while the elegant interior decoration reveals a regal room. The painting is designed with three vertical rectangles. The first rectangle on the left contains a dramatic green and gold curtain and a



Fig. 4. Roman statue of Minerva (2nd century CE), marble, 126 3/8". Capitoline Museum, Rome. Photo: Liana Cheney.

dressing table that holds an elaborate royal garment. Two gilded military instruments, a shield and a gilded gorget, rest adjacent to the furniture.

The second rectangle presents a nude female crowned with a coiffure of several strings of pearls. Her ambiguous gesture suggests that she is holding, placing, or lifting from the dresser her regal attire. At her feet lies another military instrument: a gilded cuirass.

In the third rectangle a cupid seated on a loggia step plays with a plumed helmet. Above him, on the pome of the loggia's balustrade, an alert owl (*Athene noctua*) guards the premises. Framing the owl is a large olive tree whose branches are displayed in the shape of a peacock's fantail. Through the branches, a Roman domical edifice is seen, perhaps the Roman Pantheon of 100 CE or, even more suggestively, the Temple of Minerva Medica of the fourth century.²³ A lance decorated with cardinal-red fringes or tassels rests on the balustrade in front of the owl and points to the olive branches. The diagonal placement of the lance visually connects the interior and exterior spaces.

Fontana displayed her talent in the Mannerist treatment of the vertical space of the overall composition, including depicting reflective light effects, which appear in the skyscape, in the metal armors, and in the velvet curtain. A refined décor milieu with stage-setting ornaments and a colorful

embroidered garment enhance the decoration of the room.²⁴ Moreover, Fontana also infused the painting with Mannerist and moral conceits.

Most scholars have commented on the imagery of the nude Minerva as “an allegorical, moralizing desire completely divested of erotic notions” (*una volontà allegorica moraleggiante completamente priva di intenti erotici*).²⁵ In 1994, in the catalogue entry on *Minerva in atto di abbigliarsi* (*Minerva in the Act of Dressing* or *Minerva Dressing* at the Galleria Borghese), Silvia Urbini discussed the connection between the sixteenth-century emblematic tradition and Fontana’s painting by making three points.²⁶ First she mentioned Minerva’s invention of the art of weaving, which is noted in Vincenzo Cartari’s *Imagini degli Dei Antichi*.²⁷ Fontana was clearly familiar with this mythical tradition, as she depicted Minerva holding her woven peplos (outer robe). The second point related to Minerva’s offering a gift from the land—the olive tree and its fruit—to the Athenians during the contest with Neptune, which is represented in Bocchi’s *Symbolicae quaestiones*, Emblem LXV, *Inanis est infractuaosa gloria* (Vain is glory that does not produce fruits). Fontana depicts this in her painting with an olive branch and an owl. And the third point is that Fontana alluded to Alciato’s chastity notion—without specific reference to any emblem—in her depictions of the nude Borghese *Minerva Dressing* and *Venus and Cupid* (Pl. 15).

In her analysis of Fontana’s Borghese *Minerva Dressing*, Maria Teresa Cantaro did not provide new iconographical interpretation. She merely reiterated Paola della Pergola’s documentation and observations and emphasized stylistic connections in terms of gesticulation seen in Fontana’s imagery from previous paintings such as *Cleopatra* (1585), in the Palazzo Spada in Rome, and the *Holy Family with Saint John* (1589), at the Monastery of El Escorial in Madrid.²⁸ Vera Fortunati viewed Fontana’s use of Minerva’s imagery as self-referential and as a theatre of memory, as the painter longing for her past: “Through the goddess’s subtle sensuality, Fontana seems to nostalgically project the memory of her long-lost youth-fullness.”²⁹

In view of these interpretations, I propose some stylistic and symbolic connections not considered by these scholars, provoking further analysis of Fontana’s mythological paintings.

Although the visual imagery of a nude female and the overall décor, light, color, and textures are sensual, the subject matter emphasized instead a different allusion, which is a moral message of peace and love. Fontana’s Borghese *Minerva* differs from the traditional portrayals of clothed Minerva. Although her nonsexual nude Minerva symbolizes pudicity, or modesty, at the same time it recalls the nude Mannerist sculpture of Benvenuto Cellini’s *Minerva* (1565; Fig. 5), a bronze statuette located in a niche of the base for *Perseus with the Head of the Medusa*, in the Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence.³⁰

Fontana was likely familiar with her fellow Bolognese artist Marcantonio Raimondi’s engravings of *Reconciliation of Minerva with Cupid* (1510–15; Fig. 6) after Raphael,³¹ where a winged Cupid takes an olive branch from the tree next to him and offers it to the beautiful disarmed goddess Minerva. In the engraving, Minerva’s steady stance, a *figura serpentinata*,

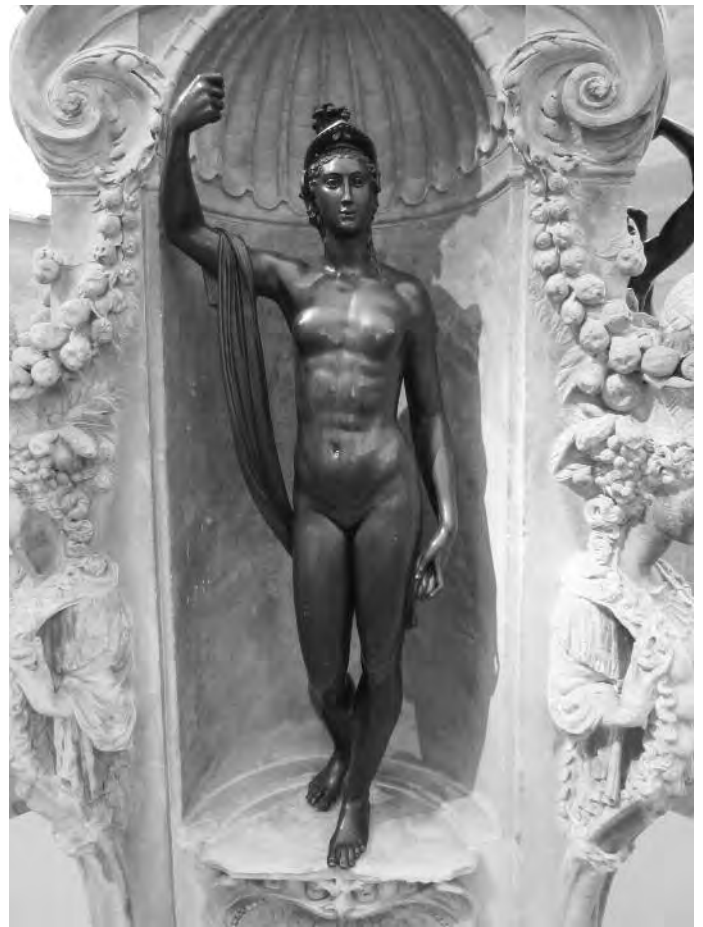


Fig. 5. Benvenuto Cellini, *Minerva* (1565), bronze, 35". Bargello, Florence (in a niche orig. the base for *Perseus with the Head of the Medusa*, Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence). Photo: Liana Cheney.

contrasts with Cupid’s apprehensive action. In a classical tunic, a wet drapery motif, Minerva conceals and reveals her sensual and statuesque body. Her wind-blown veil reveals her long tresses and her breast line. Her modest gesture of pointing to and partially covering her breast with her hand recalls Raimondi’s classical source of Venus’s chaste act, the Roman statue of the Capitoline Venus of 100 CE (Museo Nuovo, Capitoline Musei, Rome). While shaking hands with Cupid, Minerva exchanges his gift of peace, an olive branch, with her offering of love, as she caresses and points to her bare breast, a symbol of *Caritas* (Charity). The owl on a tree, Minerva’s symbol of prophecy, wisdom, and virtue,³² is witness to the exchange of gifts. Her presence as a sign of virtue and wisdom is similar to a seal on a peace treaty. Further testimony to this event is a poem inscribed in Raimondi’s engravings printed in 1550 for Lorenzo Musis. The poem reads:

From virtuous Pallas:

The child holds a beautiful olive branch of chaste Minerva
To show that those who pride themselves on having

Minerva as friend

and really follow the path of virtue, enjoy internal peace.³³



Fig. 6. Marcantonio Raimondi, *Reconciliation of Minerva with Cupid* (1505–10), (engraving after Raphael), reprinted in 1550 for Lorenzo Musis.

In addition to Raimondi's engraving, for Fontana, another artistic source as witness to a gift of peace or reconciliation would have been Andrea Alciato's emblems of Prudence and Concordia. The emblem of Prudence features an owl on a tree with the motto *Prudens magis quàm loquax* (Wise head, closed mouth), which alludes to wise counsel imparted by a sage Minerva (Fig. 7).³⁴ In a drawing for Bocchi's emblematic book, Fontana also included an owl in the image of clothed Minerva (Fig. 8). Moreover, in Alciato's *Emblemata*, the shaking of hands is illustrated in the emblem of *Concordia*, alluding to peace or reconciliation in time of conflict.³⁵

Some interesting *paragoni* are observed when comparing Fontana's depiction of Minerva's owl with her artistic and cultural milieu, including the Roman sculpture of *Minerva Holding an Owl* of the second century CE (Archeological



Fig. 7. Andrea Alciato, *Prudens magis quàm loquax* (1550), engraving from his *Emblemata* (Lyon: Macé Bonhomme for Guillaume Rouille, 1550).



Fig. 8. Lavinia Fontana, *Minerva* (1574), drawing for Achille Bocchi, *Symbolicae quaestiones* (Bologna: Giulio Bonasone, 1574).

Museum, Naples), Raimondi's engraving of the *Reconciliation of Minerva with Cupid*, and the emblems of Alciato and Valeriano, alluding to Prudence and Concord, for example. Fontana depicted Minerva resting her martial weapons and



Fig. 9. *Disarmed Venus*, (2nd century, restored 16th century). Louvre Museum, Paris. Photo: Liana Cheney.

pointing the lance toward the owl, a symbol not only of wisdom but also of prudence, while the olive branches allude to peace.³⁶ These attributes of prudence and peace differ from the instruments of war. Hence, disarmed Minerva now personifies reconciliation with the virtues of concord, love, and peace through wisdom and prudence.³⁷

The tassel, from the Latin *tassu* (clasp),³⁸ not only decorates the lance but also reveals other significations. When associated to Minerva as the Goddess of Weaving, the tassel may allude to her mastery in weaving, also revealed in the beautiful and colorful woven peplos that Minerva holds. Or it may allude to an honorific recognition. From its origin, the tassel had a religious connotation. According to the Bible, Moses urged the Israelites to make tassels (*tzitzit*) at the end of their clothes in order to remember God's commandments.³⁹ The Christian Church continued the Jewish tradition, with some variance, by adding tassels to religious garments as an ecclesiastical sign of distinction. Hence Fontana, in decorating the lance with a tassel of cardinal-red color, emphasized the importance of her distinguished patron, Scipione Borghese, as a prominent cardinal in the Roman curia of the Catholic Church. The red tassel on the lance is both decorative and a status symbol. In placing the lance with the red tassel pointing to the owl and the olive branches, Fontana alluded to her patron's virtues of wisdom and



Fig. 10. Marco Zoppo, *Disarmed Venus or Venus Vicitrix* (1470), drawing. Photo: The Trustees of the British Museum, London (Inv. 1920,0214.1.25; AN489614001).

prudence.⁴⁰ Fontana's lance also directs attention toward a domical edifice seen through the foliage, alluding to Christian and pagan religious buildings, e.g., Saint Peter's, Cardinal Borghese's church, and the Roman temple of Minerva Medica. Both of these edifices were reputed to have divine healing powers.

Furthermore, Fontana removed a helmet from Minerva's head (Figs. 1, 2, & Pls.13, 14) replacing it with an elaborate coiffure of pearls, emulating Venus, the Goddess of Love and disarmer of Mars. Meanwhile, mischievous Cupid discards his wooden instruments, the bow and arrows, in order to play with the metal helmet, admiring the beautiful plumes, glittering design, and his reflection on the instrument of war—a narcissistic motif. Both disarmed and nude, Minerva and Cupid transcend from realms of war and erotic actions to metaphysical realms of Platonic love and peace.



Fig. 11. Gilles Corrozet, *Chasteté vaincq Cupido*, Emblem 14 (1540), engraving from his *Hecatomgraphie* (Paris: Denis Laton, 1540).

Minerva's actions of disrobing and placing her war instruments (helmet, cuirass, gorget, and shield) on the floor recall similar successful actions of another deity, Venus, the Goddess of Love, who astutely disarmed Mars, the God of War, allowing Cupid and his companions to play with Mars's martial arms, as seen in the Roman marble copy of *Disarmed Venus* of the second century but restored in the sixteenth century (Fig. 9). Fontana was probably familiar with the works of her fellow Bolognese artists, such as Marco Zoppo's drawing of *Disarmed Venus* or *Venus Victrix* (Victorious Venus) (1470s; Fig. 10),⁴¹ where Venus proudly holds a helmet with her left hand and a lance in her right hand, while daring cupids play with martial attire and weapons.

The theme of *Disarmed Venus* or *Venus Victrix*⁴² achieved great popularity in Renaissance art and literature, e.g., Botticelli's *Mars and Venus* (1490s; National Gallery, London) and Angelo Poliziano's love poem *La Giostra* (*The Joust*).⁴³ Lucian of Samosata's *Dialogues of the Gods*, a satire in which Lucian composed a dialogue between Venus and her son Cupid, in which Venus wonders why "his [Cupid's] quiver has no arrows, his torch no fire, and his right hand no cunning" against Athena (Minerva). Cupid explains to his mother that he fears Minerva's bellicose actions. In order to reconcile his anxious state, he prefers peace with the Goddess of War, offering her an olive branch, not arrows of love.⁴⁴ While Gilles Corrozet's emblem (Fig. 11)⁴⁵ and Raimondi's engravings capture Lucian's irony, Bocchi's emblem, *Rivalitas Cupidinis Durissima* (*Passionate Rivalry Hardest*, Fig. 12), reversed the scene, illustrating Minerva attacking Cupid with his bow and arrow, leaving him in a state of submission. Hence chaste Minerva restrains Cupid's passion.

With a similar thought, Fontana's Cupid relinquishes his erotic ardor in order to play with the plumes of Minerva's helmet, a discarded instrument of war. Paralleling the same sentiment, Fontana depicted a different type of Pallas Athena, not the Goddess of War but a *Minerva Pacifica*, a Minerva of Peace and Prudence, as well as a *Minerva Pudica* or a Modest Minerva. In putting aside the instruments of war and her military attire, as well as disrobing and revealing her nude body, chaste Minerva reveals and confirms her moral attitude



Fig. 12. Achille Bocchi, *Rivalitas Cupidinis Durissima* (1574), Fontana's drawing for the engraving in Bocchi's *Symbolicae quaestiones* (Bologna: Giulio Bonasone, 1574).

toward virtue, peace, and love, hence moralizing or controlling the eroticism in Cupid and, indirectly, Cupid's mother Venus, the Goddess of Love and Lust. Minerva's act is one of prudence in reconciling or transforming the erotic love of Cupid with Platonic love, achieving a peaceful balance between natural and metaphysical love, thus teaching Cupid and the viewer a moral lesson. Reason or prudence (Minerva) triumphs over passion (Eros).

Only a few observations will be considered here regarding Fontana's 1612 Roman *Minerva Dressing* (Fig. 2 & Pl. 14), keeping in mind the similar artistic and cultural ambience of the 1613 Borghese version. Perhaps these two paintings of *Minerva Dressing* were completed in the same year and for the same patron, Cardinal Borghese, as pendant, companion pieces. There are some suggestions of a correlation between Minerva and Venus. Fontana depicted an interior space, a private room, where only a small window gives access to an early sunset. Through the window, in the distance, a temple and hills can be seen, perhaps alluding to Mount Parnassus, where Minerva and the Muses resided, or to Esquiline Hill in Rome, where the Temple of Minerva Medica was dedicated to Minerva as Goddess of Wisdom, Medicine, and the Arts. At

the edge of the window, Fontana depicted a large laurel tree (*Laurus nobilis*), connecting the symbolism of medicinal and healing properties of the herbal plant with Minerva's role as a healer.⁴⁶ The Vestal Virgins consecrated the laurel, an evergreen plant, to Minerva as a symbol of their enduring chastity, erecting a Palladium, a statue of Roman Minerva, in her honor in their Temple of Vesta, in the eighth century BCE, in Rome.⁴⁷ The perennial nature of the laurel also signifies immortality, hence eternally honoring Minerva's regal and victorious status, or that of the unknown patron.⁴⁸ A semi-nude female poses for the viewer, displaying a traditional Renaissance lady's garment while surrounded by the instruments of war. As mentioned earlier, Fontana was inspired by Cellini's bronze sculpture for the depiction of Minerva in the nude (compare Figs. 1 and 2, with Fig. 5). Minerva's coiffure here, however, in contrast to the Borghese 1613 version, is decorated not with pearls but with an elaborate plumed helmet. Her elegant, embroidered attire alludes moreover to Minerva as the goddess of domesticity and inventor of textile arts, such as sewing, weaving, and spinning. In *The Imagini delle Dei degl' Antichi*, the mythographer and humanist Vincenzo Cartari explained the signification of Minerva's various roles, including her invention of the textile arts.⁴⁹

But what is most interesting in Fontana's 1612 Roman *Minerva Dressing* is the goddess's veiled attire, which wraps around her body, at once concealing and revealing her sensual female form. In previous paintings on the theme of Venus, Fontana employed the same transparent golden lamé veil to cover the body of the goddess of Love, e.g., *Venus and Cupid* (Pl. 15) and *Portrait of Isabella Ruini as Venus* (Fig. 3). What is unusual, however, is the lamé veil that wraps around Minerva's body, decorated with three red silk-bows that hold the vestment in place.

Fontana was fond of red bows, having depicted them previously as love knots in her *Self-Portrait* of 1577 (Accademia di San Luca), a betrothal painting dedicated to her husband-to-be.⁵⁰ These bows are love knots, tokens, and symbols of love, as seen in emblem books⁵¹ and other marriage paintings.⁵² Since information on the patronage of the Roman *Minerva Dressing* is lacking, one might wonder if the painting was commissioned for a betrothal or some other private commission.⁵³

Both paintings allude to a *Minerva Victrix*, as seen in Bocchi's title page (Fig. 13). The image represented there is of a victorious Minerva, dressed in her military regalia, plumed helmet, breastplate, and warrior's boots. She is holding a cornucopia, symbol of abundance and wealth, with her right hand—a substitution for the Aegis shield—and a traditional banner of victory with her left hand. Minerva's imagery here again replaces instruments of war with instruments of peace; the spear of war now is the banner of victory; hence she is a *Minerva Victrix*. The Roman goddess is depicted residing on the Aventine Hill, represented by the terrain where she stands. Her sacred tree, the olive tree, a symbol of peace, is at her side. At her feet are books, one of which is inscribed *Bocciana Docet*, referring to the teachings of the Accademia Bocciana. Bocchi, as founder of the academy, understood the attributions of Minerva as the Goddess of War transformed into a Goddess of



Fig. 13. Achille Bocchi, Title Page (1574), engraving in his *Symbolicarum quaestionum* (Bologna: Giulio Bonasone, 1574).

Learning, Teaching, and Wisdom and thus reflecting the aims of his academy. (The name Minerva in Latin originally meant "thought.") Ovid called her the "Goddess of a Thousand Works."⁵⁴ Minerva was a multi-talented goddess: of Wisdom, Poetry, Music, Medicine, Arts and Crafts (especially wool), Science, Commerce, and War. More generally, she was considered the patroness of intellect and learning, especially academics. In Roman times, she was celebrated as the Patroness of Artisans during the *Quinquatrus*, the artisans' holiday, from March 19 to 23. Her temple on the Aventine Hill is considered to have been a center for craft guilds.⁵⁵

The 1613 Borghese painting depicts a prudent Minerva, a transformation of a bellicose Minerva into a peaceful goddess, hence a *Minerva Pacifica*. In the Roman 1612 version, Fontana's bellicose Minerva transforms into a loving Minerva or a *Venus Pudica*, or a lustful Venus becomes a *Minerva Pudica*. The harmony between Minerva and Venus and vice versa is illustrated in Bocchi's emblem, "True Pleasure Harmonizes with General Virtue," which was designed by the Fontanas. In view of these observations, perhaps the titles of these paintings should be modified as *Minerva Pacifica* (Borghese 1613) and *Minerva Pudica* (Roman 1612), respectively. After all, the Borghese archival records refer to the painting as "Minerva" (Pallas), not as *Minerva Dressing* or *Minerva Undressing*.

Fontana's paintings were completed during the Counter-Reformation period, where the moral tone militated against lascivious paintings, as instructed by one of the most important advocates of the Counter-Reformation at the Council of Trent, the Cardinal and Archbishop of Bologna, Gabriele Paleotti (1522–97). Paradoxically, in his *De sacris et profanis imaginibus* (*Discorso sulle imagine sacre e profane*, or Discourse on sacred and profane images) of 1582, published in Bologna, Paleotti conceded that mythological or pagan images of gods and goddesses for scholarly purposes might be created and displayed in private villas.⁵⁶ At least one of these paintings of Fontana's is recorded for a private patron, Cardinal Borghese. Her paintings evoke the sentiment and concur with the moralistic attitude of the Counter-Reformation, as she depicted a nude Minerva, a virgin goddess, who, aware of her beauty as it is displayed for the viewer, prefers to remain pure and chaste. Fontana's prudent Minerva reconciles lust and war with love and peace, and her triumph is to harmonize over the passion and treachery of Cupid and Venus.

Although Fontana's paintings depicted female nudes turning their heads toward the viewer, possibly suggesting a flirtation or sensual allusion, these figures do not gaze at the viewer. Today's viewers maybe tantalized by the nudity of the figures, but it is important to bear in mind sixteenth-century Italian culture. Artistically, Fontana was an established artist, but a female painter. By painting nude figures, perhaps she wanted to demonstrate that she was as capable a painter as her male counterparts.⁵⁷ Culturally, Fontana operated in the ambit of the Roman papal court when she created these paintings. The commission for at least of one of these paintings was for a Roman cardinal. The moral content of images for such patrons was scrutinized by the Inquisition and the Counter-Reformation, as a consequence of previous moral and political abuses by churchmen.⁵⁸ Historically, Fontana depicted a traditional Roman goddess, in particular the virgin goddess Minerva, who, like her godly companions Diana and Vesta, vowed chastity.⁵⁹

In depicting a nude or semi-nude Minerva, Fontana visualized a Mannerist conceit: 1) symbolically, integrating Andrea Alciato, Vincenzo Cartari, Pierio Valeriano, and Achille Bocchi's imaginative and emblematic inventiveness; 2) stylistically, revealing Giorgio Vasari's concept of *bella maniera* (beauty) conceived in an aesthetically beautiful body; and 3) morally, creating a beautiful figure that would educate the senses on the superiority of prudence. Hence this was Fontana's intention in depicting Minerva, whether dressing or undressing, concealing or revealing her body, or impersonating the goddess's multiple roles of Wisdom, Peace, Love, and Prudence. •

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Notes

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1. See Liana De Girolami Cheney, et al., *Self-Portraits by Women Painters* (London: Ashgate, 2000, rev. 2009, Washington, DC: New Academy), 56–64.
2. For example, *Portrait of Scholar* (1581), and *Portrait of the Gozzadini Family* (1584), both at the Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna. See Carolyn Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2003), Figs. 66 and 100, respectively.
3. For example, *The Stigmatization of Saint Francis* (1579), at the Seminario Diocesano, Villa Revedin, Bologna, and *The Assumption of the Virgin* (1593), in the Collegiata di Santa Maria Maggiore, in the Pieve di Cento. See Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, Figs. 51 and 76, respectively.
4. For example, *The Visit of the Queen of Sheba* (1600), at the National Gallery, Dublin, and *Cleopatra* (1604), at the Galleria Spada, Rome. See Maria Teresa Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana Bolognese: Pittora singolare: 1552–1614* (Rome: Jandi, 1989), 188, Fig. 4a.85, and 210, Fig. 4a.98, respectively.
5. For example, the *Self-Portrait at the Spinet* (1577), at the Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, Rome, along with a replica (1577) at the Uffizi, is oil on canvas, signed and inscribed: "Lavinia Virgo Prosperi Fonatane/Filia Ex Speculo Imaginem/Oris Suis Expresit Anno/MDLXXVII." See Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana*, 72–74, Figs. 4a.12, for illustration of both portraits, and Cheney, et al., *Self-Portraits by Women Painters*, 57–60, Figs. IV.10, IV.12, IV.14, and X, on Lavinia Fontana's *Self-Portraits*.
6. See Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989), 172, 188, 191–92.
7. See Carlo Pietrangeli, ed., *L'Accademia Nazionale di San Luca* (Rome: De Luca Editore, 1974), 204, 206.
8. Baldassare Castiglione, *Il Cortegiano* (1528). *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. C.S. Singleton (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), 206–09, 211, 214–15. In Book Three, Castiglione presented a discussion for and against female inferiority. See Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil, Jr., eds. *Her Immaculate Hand: Selected Works by and about The Women Humanists of Quattrocento Italy* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992), for a study on Renaissance women defending the stigma of "inferiority."
9. For clarity, I will refer to Fontana's versions in this manner: the 1613 painting as *Borghese Minerva Dressing* and the 1612 painting as *Roman Minerva Dressing*. This study benefits from the scholarship of Maria Teresa Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana Bolognese: Pittora singolare: 1552–1614*; Carolyn Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*; Vera Fortunati, *Lavinia Fontana: 1552–1614* (Rome: Electa, 1994 and 1998); and Rudolf Wittkower, *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977 and 1987), Chap. 9.
10. See Daniela Benati, *Amor è vivo: due dipinti erotici di Lavinia Fontana* (Milan: Marco Riccomini, 2002), 20–21, illus., 19 (Plate II). This recently discovered painting is in oil on copper.
11. Achille Bocchi, *Symbolicae quaestiones* (Bologna: Giulio Bonasone, 1574). The engravings were composed after the drawings of Prospero Fontana, assisted by his daughter, Lavinia Fontana. See Silvia Urbini, "Lavinia Fontana," Exhibition catalogue entry 74, Fortunati, *Lavinia Fontana*, 207. See also Alessandro Zacchi and T. Zennaro "Allegory," in *La Pittura Eloquente*, exh. cat. (Monte Carlo: Maison d'Art, 2010), Entry 3, 23–27- illus., 25, for the attribution of the painting to Fontana.
12. See Urbini, "Lavinia Fontana," Exhibition catalogue entry 74, in Fortunati, *Lavinia Fontana*, 207; and Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 16,

- 18, 52, and 54, for the association of Bocchi with Prospero and Lavinia Fontana.
13. Pierio Valeriano, a humanist scholar from Belluno, visited Rome in 1509 with an introduction to Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici, and later became the classical tutor for the Medici family. In 1530, Valeriano returned to his native town and completed the *Hieroglyphica*. The text is dedicated to several scholars, including Achille Bocchi, Paolo Giovio, and Giorgio Valla. The tome consists of 60 books appropriating and elaborating on the symbols and hieroglyphs of Horapollon's *Hieroglyphica*. In 1422, Cristoforo Buondelmonti, a Florentine geographer and monk, while visiting Andros, a Greek Island, obtained a copy of Horapollon's *Hieroglyphica* (today in the Biblioteca Laurenziana, Plut. 69,27). This precious manuscript became an important original source for Florentine humanists such as Aldus Manutius and Giorgio Valla. In the Renaissance, Horapollon's text was only known as a reference in *Suda*, a Byzantine encyclopedia of the tenth century. In 1505, Manutius published Valla's Greek translation of Horapollon's *Hieroglyphica*.
 14. See Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance: The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007), *passim*.
 15. See Emilio Costa, *Andrea allo studio di Bologna* (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1903), 21–23.
 16. On Vasari's friendship and art, see [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/andrea-alciano_\(Dizionario_Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/andrea-alciano_(Dizionario_Biografico)/); and Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Vasari and Naples: The Monteoliveto Order," in *Parthenope's Splendor: Art of the Golden Age in Naples*, ed. Jeanne Chenault Porter and Susan Scott Munshower (Philadelphia: Papers in Art History, Pennsylvania State Univ., 1994), 5: 48–126.
 17. See R. Galli, *Lavinia Fontana Pittrice* (Imola: P. Galeati, 1940), 31, 118; Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana*, 314, 318; and Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 91, 171. All cite documents relating to Fontana's friendship with the Borghese family.
 18. In 1614, a year after completing *Minerva Dressing*, Fontana was buried in the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva. However, the tomb has since disappeared. Fortunately, a registered entry from the Vatican Archivio Segreto, Libro dei Mortuari della Parrocchia di S. Nicola in Arcione, records her death and burial site: "11 agosto 1614 ... Morse la Sig. Lavinia Fontana moglie del Signor Gio: Paolo Zappi da Imola con tutti li SS. Sacri fu sepolta alla Minerva" (On 11 August 1614, ... Died Mrs. Lavinia Fontana, wife of Mr. Gio: Paolo Zappi from Imola with all holy sacraments [she] was buried in [the church of Santa Maria sopra] Minerva). See Galli, *Lavinia Fontana Pittrice*, 35.
 19. See Paola della Pergola, "Contributi per la Galleria Borghese. *Minerva in atto di abbigliarsi*," in *Bollettino d'Arte* 39 (1954) 2:134–35; The Archivio Borghese Vaticano, Busta (Envelop) 470, depositato, inv. n. 7; Paola della Pergola, *Galleria Borghese. I Dipinti*, 2 vols. (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1955), 1:35.n. 44; and Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana*, 222, for a complete discussion of the history of the commission.
 20. See della Pergola, "Contributi per la Galleria Borghese. *Minerva in atto di abbigliarsi*," 2:134–35, citing from the Archivio Borghese Vaticano, Busta (Envelop) 470, Durante's statement: "Una cornice fatta nello stesso modo quale serve per la Pallade della Signora Lavinia Fontana" (a frame done in the same style, which is used for the Minerva of Mrs. Lavinia Fontana).
 21. See Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana*, 222, for a discussion on the painting's restorations.
 22. See Carolyn Murphy, "Lavinia Fontana and Female Life Cycle Experience in Late Sixteenth-Century Bologna," in *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 111.
 23. The Roman temple contained a nymphaeum and a splendid villa. The dome was covered with a medicinal plant, decagon (*althaea officinalis*), a cough suppressant but also used by the Romans as an "esculent vegetable." The roof was destroyed in 1828. In the sixteenth century, several statues were found during the excavations, among them Asclepius, Hygieia, and Minerva with serpents. See <http://www.botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/m/mallow07.html>, n.p.
 24. Cantaro suggested that the attire held by the nude figure is in the style of Quattrocento princely clothes. See Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana*, 222.
 25. See Urbini, "Lavinia Fontana," Exhibition catalogue entry 74, in Fortunati, *Lavinia Fontana*, 207; and Anna Maria Fioravanti Baraldi, "Lavinia Fontana," Exhibition catalogue entry 30, Fortunati, *Lavinia Fontana of Bologna: 1552–1614* (Milan/Washington, DC: Electa/National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1998), 108.
 26. See Urbini, "Lavinia Fontana," Exhibition catalogue entry 74, in Fortunati, *Lavinia Fontana*, 207.
 27. See Vincenzo Cartari, *Imagini degli Dei Antichi (Imagines Deorum, qui ab antiquis colebantur)* (Lyon: Stephanum Michaellem, 1581), 269.
 28. See Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana*, 222.
 29. See Fortunati, *Lavinia Fontana of Bologna: 1552–1614*, 36.
 30. See Yael Even, "The Public's Familiarization with Images of 'Heroic Rape' in Medicean Florence," *International Journal of the Arts in Society* 1.4 (2007): 103–09.
 31. Now at the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, and the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University.
 32. See J.C. Cooper, *Symbolic and Mythological Animals* (London: Aquarian Press, 1992), 172; Guy de Tervarent, *Attributs et Symboles dans l'Art Profane* (Geneva: Droz, 1997), 124; and Pierio Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica* (Basel: Palma Ising, 1575, princeps 1556), Book XX, Owl, *Noctua Sapienza*, for the owl as symbol of Minerva's moral virtue and spirit of knowledge.
 33. A copy of Raimondi's engraving for Lorenzo de' Medici in 1550 contains the inscribed poem. See Adam von Bartsch, *Illustrated Engravings* (Leipzig: R. Weigel 1843, repr. NY: Abaris Books, 1982–97), XIV, 297, n. 393 G.
 34. See Andrea Alciato, *Emblemata* (Lyon: Macé Bonhomme for Guillaume Rouille, 1550), trans., ed., and annotated by Betty I. Knott and with an introduction by John Manning (London: Scholar Press, 1996), 25, the owl a sacred bird of Minerva; and Alciato Andrea, *Les emblems* (Paris: Jean Richer, 1584). The text (subscription) on the emblem explains how the owl is a symbol for Athens, Cecrops's city, for among the birds the owl is known for wise counsel. Deservedly was it dedicated to the service of weapon-bearing Minerva, in the place vacated by the chattering crow. See also, for the image, <http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciato/emblem.php?id=A46a076>.
 35. See Alciato, *Emblemata*, trans., ed., and annotated by Knott and Manning, 45. On the emblem page, the text (subscription) explains the *pictura* and motto:
In bellum civile duces cum Roma pararet,
Viribus & caderet Martia terra suis:
Mos fuit in partes turmis coeuntibus easdem,
Coniunctas dextras mutua dona dare.
Foederis haec species: id habet Concordia signum,
Ut quos iungit amor, lungat & ipsa manus.
(When Rome was marshaling her generals to fight in civil war and that martial land was being destroyed by her own might, it was the custom for squadrons coming together on the same side to exchange joined right hands as gifts. This is a token of alliance; concord has this for a sign - those whom affection joins the hand joins also).
 36. Another observation on this painting: since it was Fontana's last painting before her death, perhaps Lavinia, as her name indicates—"She knows"—had a premonition about her own death, a prophetic

- explanation about her health. In Roman mythology, the owl is considered a nocturnal animal that may reveal its secret in dreams or sleep. Since a nocturnal animal is also a symbol or a death omen, is this why Fontana depicted the sunset scene, the owl resting on the balustrade, and a nude Minerva?
37. See Vincenzo Cartari, *Imagini delli Dei degl'Antichi* (Venice: Francesco Marcolini 1556/1557, 1571, and 1647), repr. and ed. by Marco Bussagli (Genoa: Nuova Stile Regina Editrici, 1987), 194. See also the English translation by John Mulryan, *Vincenzo Cartari's Images of the Gods of the Ancients: The First Mythography* (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2012).
 38. The composition of the tassel was to create a decorative object by forming a knot where bands of silk filaments were vertically interwoven, forming an internal lacing. See Martin Pegler, *The Dictionary of Interior Design* (London/New York: Fairchild, 1983 and 2006), see entry on Tassels.
 39. See James Kugel, *The Bible as it Was* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997), Numbers 15:37–40.
 40. See Anthony Majanlahti, *The Families Who Made Rome* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2004), 180.
 41. See British Museum, London, MN 1920-0214.1.25; and for a discussion on how Zoppo's drawings were known in the Emilia-Romagna area, see *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings*, exhib. cat., ed. Hugo Chapman and M. Faietti. (London: British Museum, 2010; Florence: Galleria degli Uffizi, 2011), "Hugo Chapman has shown that Zoppo's compositions must have been known by artists later in the century, as one of his figurative compositions is copied by Cesare Cesariano in the 1490s in a fresco in San Giovanni Battista, Reggio Emilia," cited in the catalogue from London, 2010, 146–49 and Figs. 4–5, no. 25 by Hugo Chapman. I am grateful to Prof. Lilian Armstrong of Wellesley College (emerita) for this citation.
 42. During the time of Julius Caesar and after, Roman coins contained the label of *Venus Victrix*, alluding not only to Venus's victory but also to Venus as a symbol of *Minerva Pacifica*. See Wittkower, *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols*, Chap. 9, 138–39.
 43. See *ibid.*, citing Politian's *Stanze, L'Orfeo e le Rime*, ed. Giosuè Carducci (Florence: G. Barbèra, 1863), 1: 381.
 44. See H.W. Fowler, ed., *The Works of Lucian of Samosata* (Lucian's *Dialogues of the Gods*) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), Dialogue 19 (23), Aphrodite and Eros, n.p. See <http://www.theoi.com/Text/LucianDialoguesGods1.html>.
 45. The image of Corrozet derives from the woodcuts of Petrarch's *Trionfi*, commentary by Bernardo Lapini da Siena (Venice: Bernardino Rizus, Novariensis, 1488). See Gilles Corrozet, *Hecatomgraphie* (Paris: Denis Laton, 1540), Emblem 14, Chasteté vaincq Cupido. Subscript comments: "Contre Pallas Cupido son dard lance, / Mais au devant elle met son escu, / Et fait si bien qu'elle le rend vaincu, / Tout desnüé d'armes & de puissance." See emblematic reference and image in <http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/emblem.php?id=FCGa014>. See also Emblem 10, Contre la foiblesse des amoureux. Subscript comments: "Si Cupido me vient lancer ses flesches, / Ses grans flambeaux, & ses ardentes mesches, / Lors que je dors & suis ensommeillée, / Que fera il quand seray resveillée?" And see also Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1939), 95–128, on the iconography of Cupid.
 46. See Hans Biedermann, *Dictionary of Symbols: Cultural Icons and The Meaning Behind Them*, trans. James Hulbert (New York: Meridian, Penguin, 1994), 202, and Grant Heiken, Renato Funciello and Donatella de Rita, *The Seven Hills of Rome: A Geological Tour of the Eternal City* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007), The Esquiline Hill.
 47. See Cartari, *Imagini delli Dei degl'Antichi*, 190.
 48. See J. C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 96.
 49. See Cartari, *Imagini delli Dei degl'Antichi*, 193; and Urbini, "Lavinia Fontana," exhib. cat., entry 74, in Fortunati, *Lavinia Fontana*, 207.
 50. See Cheney, et al., *Self-Portraits by Women Painters*, 59–60, on Lavinia Fontana's *Self-Portraits*.
 51. See Jacobus Boschius, *Symbolographia, sive, De arte symbolica: sermones septem* (Augsburg; Dillingen: Bencard, 1701/2), III, 138, on the love knot.
 52. See Alessandro Moretto, *Portrait of a Woman in a Wedding Dress* (1540), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.
 53. Likely the painting was cut at the bottom, since part of Minerva's cuirass and feet are missing.
 54. See Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. and ed. James G. Frazer (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard Univ. Press, 1931), Book 3.
 55. See Robert E. Bell, *Women of Classical Mythology: A Biographical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), 308–09.
 56. See Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagine sacre e profane* (Bologna: Alessandro Benacci, 1582), repr. in Paola Barocchi, ed., *Trattati d'arte fra manierismo e contrariforma* (Bari: Laetrice, 1960–62), 117–509 (esp. 289–93); and Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 102. For further discussion on Fontana and Paleotti, see Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 8–12 and 184–85.
 57. For example, when comparing Michelangelo's *Risen Christ* (1514–19), in the church of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva in Rome (<http://pictify.com/233563/michelangelo-the-risen-christ>), with Fontana's *Venus and Cupid* (1585), in a private collection in Venice (Fig. 3), several similarities are noted in the composition, contrapposto stance, and treatment of the figure. When flipping the image of Michelangelo's *Risen Christ*, the comparison is remarkable. In her *Venus's* actions, Fontana appropriated the gestures of Christ in Michelangelo's statue, e.g., Christ holding a rope with his left hand is paralleled by Venus holding a Cupid's bow with her left hand, while Christ's right hand resting on a tree trunk is equated with Venus's right hand caressing Cupid. There are two possibilities regarding Fontana's knowledge of Michelangelo's statue: 1) familiarity with the sculpture in Rome while she was working for the Roman papal curia (see William E. Wallace, "Michelangelo's *Risen Christ*," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28:4 [Winter 1997]: 1251–80); or 2) awareness, through the Bolognese humanist circle of Ulisse Aldrovandi, with the history of the statue's duplication—due to a flaw in the marble (see Irene Baldriga, "The First Version of Michelangelo's *Christ for S. Maria Sopra Minerva*," *The Burlington Magazine* 142, no. 1173 [December 2000], 740–45, 740).
- Another coincidental observation: the goddess's name, Minerva, and her attribution of holiness reveal that in depicting mythological paintings on Minerva, Fontana was aware of the strong veneration for the virgin goddess during Roman times: numerous temples were dedicated to her, including the sacred edifice where Michelangelo's *Risen Christ* was displayed. Also, the foundation of the church Santa Maria sopra Minerva rested on what was believed to be an ancient temple dedicated in 50 BCE to the Roman goddess.
58. See Christopher Black, *The Italian Inquisition* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2009), passim; Marcia B. Hall and Tracy E. Cooper, *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013), passim; and Virginia Cox, *The Prodigious Muse: Women's Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2011), passim.
 59. See Bell, *Women of Classical Mythology*, 308.

Elaine de Kooning Portraits

Essays by Brandon Brame Fortune, Ann Eden Gibson and Simona Cupic
DelMonico Books-Prestel for the Smithsonian Institution National Portrait Gallery, 2015

Elaine de Kooning Portrayed

Essay by Phyllis Braff
Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, 2015

Reviewed by Ellen G. Landau

Elaine Marie Catherine Fried was born in 1918 (not 1920 as she often claimed)—a full decade after “pioneer” Lee Krasner, and between four and ten years earlier than Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell and Helen Frankenthaler, the canonical triumvirate of “second-generation” Abstract Expressionist women. For most of the quarter century since her death from lung cancer at the age of 71, Elaine de Kooning’s standing in the New York School has remained equivocal, despite her active career as a painter, art critic¹ and noted arts educator. Of course, Elaine’s famous married name and notoriously ambivalent relationship with her husband, the Dutch-born modernist Willem de Kooning, has played a central role in obscuring her status as a creative individual, a situation not unlike that of Krasner in regard to Jackson Pollock. Elaine and Bill (who was fourteen years her senior) met in 1937, and she proceeded to study art with him for the next several years. They wed in 1943, but then separated in the late 1950s. In view of his increasingly debilitating alcoholism and mounting mental problems—and despite his having a daughter with another woman—the couple would more or less reconcile some twenty years later. By the time Elaine de Kooning died in East Hampton in February 1989, her husband’s Alzheimer’s had advanced considerably.

Compared to the mostly better studied women artists named above, prior to two interconnected events in

2015—“Elaine de Kooning Portraits,” the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery’s major exhibition of her portrait-based paintings and drawings, and the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center’s complementary summer show, “Elaine de Kooning Portrayed,” featuring depictions of the artist by herself and others—a somewhat less incisive focus has been trained on Elaine de Kooning’s oeuvre. Unusual for Abstract Expressionism, “portraits” constitute a substantive percentage. Sketches and oil studies made in conjunction with her most famous sitter, President John F. Kennedy, commissioned for the Truman Library, were shown soon after JFK’s assassination, and Elaine was given portrait exhibitions at the Montclair Art Museum in 1973 and at Illinois Wesleyan in 1975. Some of her portrait drawings were placed on view at East Hampton’s Guild Hall the year she died, with canvases in this vein seen at Brooklyn College two years later. These smaller shows were followed

by a traveling career retrospective organized at the University of Georgia (where Elaine taught in the mid-1970s) and a portrait exhibit with catalogue at a New York art gallery in the late 1990s. Among authors weighing in on Elaine de Kooning’s hybrid abstract/realist portrait style, most notable are artist/writer Fairfield Porter, critic Lawrence Campbell, poet Bill Berkson, curator Helen Harrison, and art historian Celia Stahr. In the wake of two particular sources, Ann Eden Gibson’s revisionist arguments in *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (1997), where Elaine (interviewed by Gibson) was a key player in the author’s endeavor to enlarge the movement by including more women, gay practitioners and racial “others” working in New York in the 1940s and 1950s, and Stahr’s 2003 *Genders* article based on her dissertation, “Elaine de Kooning, Portraiture and the Politics of Sexuality,” analyzing the provocative nature of her signature presentation of men in a spread-legged pose, Elaine has



Fig. 1. Elaine de Kooning, *Willem de Kooning* (c. 1952), oil on panel, 38 5/8" x 25 1/2". National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

become the sole subject or an extended case study in at least three additional doctoral theses by younger women scholars in more recent years.² She will be one of twelve artists featured in 2016 in a traveling exhibition centered on women Abstract Expressionists organized by the Denver Art Museum.

Elaine de Kooning’s incipiently burgeoning reputation is likely to accelerate as a result of the handsome catalogue produced by the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery to accompany its 2015 show—rather remarkably, the artist’s first in a premier venue. This exhibition was organized in part to showcase the NPG’s ownership of more portraits by her than any other institution, thirteen in total. Both new information and nuance to known facts are provided in three complementary texts, by curator Brandon Brame Fortune and two authors chosen to illuminate particular aspects of Elaine’s portrait career: Gibson, now a professor emerita of art history, and Simona Cupic, an associate professor at the University of Belgrade

specializing in American art and culture. Fortune's essay, "Likeness as a Glimpse: Elaine de Kooning's Portraits," presents an overview of the artist's admitted "addiction" to this theme, mentioning a majority of works on view in Washington and quoting varied commentary by previous scholars and critics, especially from articles and reviews contemporary with the paintings. Fortune is interested in explicating Elaine's Boldini-like revision of the spontaneous energy of Action Painting to adumbrate quickly executed summaries of her subjects' recognizable gestures, in this way amalgamating traditional likeness with Abstract Expressionism's demonstration of the process of becoming. In view of Elaine's deliberate co-option of the Ab Ex macho pose for herself both personally and artistically, her cited quip, "Bill always thought that portraits were pictures that *girls* made" (NPG 29), appears laced with implicit irony.

As Phyllis Braff points out in her short essay for the Pollock-Krasner House's smaller publication, *Elaine de Kooning Portrayed*, both her portraits of a number of artist friends and the reciprocal images of her made by them express, on a subjective level, "an echo of the aura surrounding Elaine's persona." They also illustrate how she shared with her husband a "more expansive view of the avant-garde," one that recognized both the centrality of the individual and the necessity for newer formal innovation (PKH 7). Ann Gibson, in "Elaine de Kooning's *Joop* Series: Visualizing the Modern Subject in Portraiture," goes further and postulates a mid-century-based theoretical framework, mentioning key thinkers such as Roland Barthes and Ortega y Gasset whose ideas she believes to be useful for understanding the artist's unusual concentration. In particular these appear valuable to Gibson for explaining Elaine's choice to downplay her sitters' visages to an extreme where facial features are frequently smeared or non-existent. (Although not discussed, this practice was first utilized by Willem de Kooning much earlier in his development.)

As a route to understanding how that direction—one useful for subverting the male objectifying gaze—became crucial for Elaine, Gibson examines her extended series of portraits of the artist Joop Sanders made from 1944 through 1946. A 1945 portrait of Elaine by Sanders is included in the East Hampton exhibition, and the comparisons are enlightening. In 1989 Ann Gibson was given unprecedented access by the artist to slides of her numerous drawings and paintings of Joop, and all but one of these known depictions are illustrated in her NPG essay, together for the first time. In them, Gibson now proposes, Elaine de Kooning began to establish parameters that would be more fully worked out in her better known "faceless" or "gyroscope" men. Sitters for these included her husband (1952; Fig. 1) and Fairfield Porter among others, as well as the critics Thomas Hess and Harold Rosenberg, with whom Elaine was also particularly close. In such works, male sexuality and an investigation of the fluidity of personal identity combine in an alternate paradigm that distinguishes her purposely ambiguous vision from the critically acclaimed (and apparently misogynistic) early 1950s Women series that garnered Willem de Kooning's reputation. No attention is given to whether Elaine was the model for Bill's ferocious and malevolent female type, a topic often raised in discussions of her work, as well as his. Gibson argues instead for the "intersubjectivity" between artist, sitter (and viewer) that Elaine de Kooning's disjunctive "attitude" toward portraiture manages to project, a concept that Braff's essay and the full-page plates of each work in *Elaine de Kooning Portrayed* further illuminate. It should also be noted that some of the works on view in East Hampton were made in homage to Elaine de Kooning after her death, by such admirers as Paul Harris and Ray Johnson.

Likely, the best-known series of portraits Elaine painted in her prime are those done in preparation for portrayal of a sitter with unquestioned prominence on the current world stage. Simona Cupic's NPG essay, "JFK by

EdeK: 'A Woman Paints One Man,'" positions the non-traditional choice of Elaine de Kooning to create an official presidential portrait of John F. Kennedy as based on an apprehension that her singular brand of "creative invention, innovation and imagination" obviously "belonged to the new frontier in art" (NPG 113–14). Indeed, her style and approach seemed to present a ready-made artistic correlative to the youthful vision and Camelot spirit of the Kennedy administration. Interestingly, one of Elaine's most frequently quoted statements from Gibson's 1987 interview, "Men always paint the opposite sex. I wanted to paint men as sex objects" (NPG 29) can help to explain her success in capturing Kennedy's visage and character. Cupic quotes Elaine's first impression of the President upon meeting him in December 1962 at the Palm Beach Winter White House: "He was incandescent, golden. And bigger than life" (NPG 109). In this special case, Cupic explains, informed by her admiration for him in every aspect—mental and physical—Elaine was enabled to transform reality into a more subjective statement. Perhaps paradoxically, as the NPG catalogue ably demonstrates, it was the inversion of traditional gender constructs governing her approach to portraiture that helped Elaine de Kooning to communicate the essence of even her most prestigious subject as a model of contemporaneity. •

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Notes

1. See Elaine de Kooning, *The Spirit of Abstract Expressionism: Selected Writings* (NY: George Braziller, 1994).
2. Dissertations: Celia S. Stahr (University of Iowa, 1997), Aliza Edelman (Rutgers, 2004), Jill R. Chancey (University of Kansas, 2006), Lisa Beth Strahl (Temple University, 2009).

Yoko Ono: One Woman Show, 1960-1971

Edited by Klaus Biesenbach, Christophe Cherix. Texts by Julia Bryan-Wilson, Yoko Ono, Midori Yoshimoto, *et al.* Museum of Modern Art, NY, 2015

Reviewed by Midori Yamamura

In 1971, Yoko Ono (b. 1933) staged an unsanctioned exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) entitled “One Woman Show,” an imaginary show advertised in two newspapers. “More than forty years later,” writes Glenn D. Lowry, the Museum’s Director, “we are proud to have worked closely with the artist to present “Yoko Ono: One Woman Show, 1960-1971” (6). The present volume is the catalogue to her official one-woman exhibition at the very establishment she critiqued long ago. Her goal for the original show, entitled “Museum Of Modern (F)art,” was to transform people’s fundamental way of thinking, based on her experience of being a woman in a patriarchal society. The challenge for the catalogue, as I see it, was how to make Ono’s singular vision accessible to the public.

Comprising three thematic essays—on Ono’s persona, her early works in New York, and her 1971 MoMA intervention, respectively—and five texts detailing her activities in New York, Tokyo, and London, the catalogue focuses on the period from 1960 to 1971, when Ono broke artistic ground by amalgamating music, conceptual art, painting, sculptures, and performance—what today is known as “intermedia.” Toward the seventies, as the Vietnam War intensified, she invented a political art from her unique place, foreshadowing the feminist art of the 1970s. The volume’s 126 illustrations include a variety of previously inaccessible archival materials: the original typescript for Ono’s earliest stage performance, *A Grapefruit in the World of Park* (1955/c.1961; Fig. 1); two programs from her earliest contribution to the New York scene, the Chambers Street Loft Series (1960-61); selected press clippings; and photo documentation. These records are helpful when

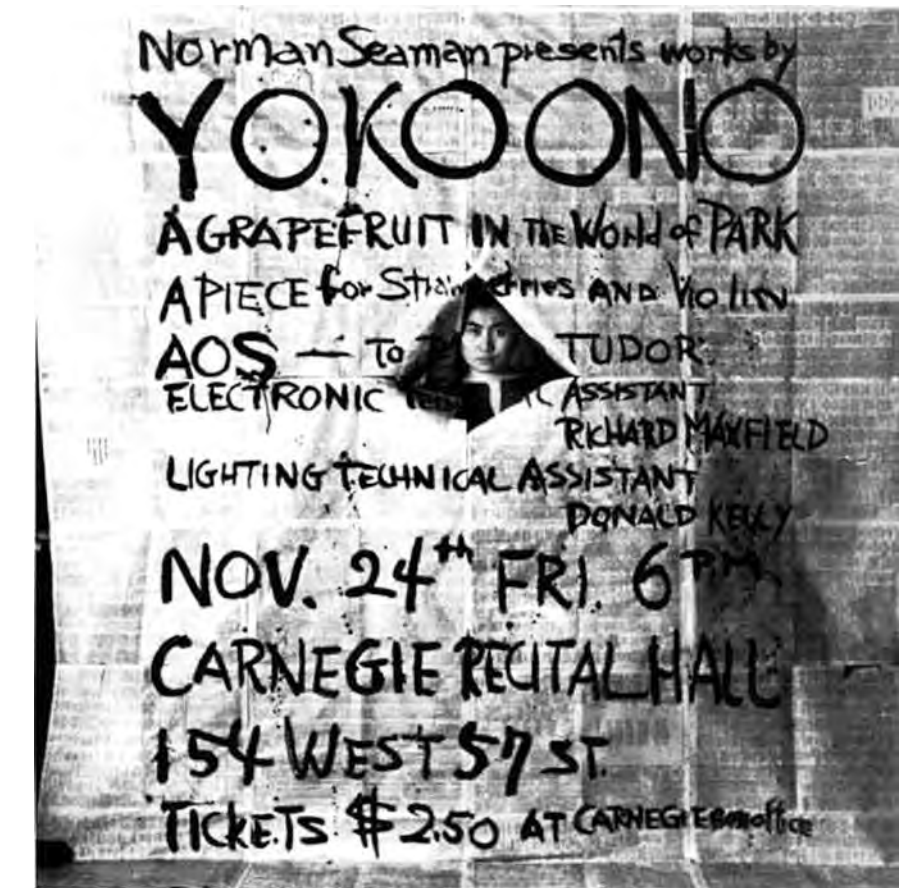


Fig. 1. Yoko Ono, photograph conceived as poster for *Works by Yoko Ono* at Carnegie Recital Hall, New York (1961), gelatin silver print, 9 15/16" x 7 15/16". Photo: George Maciunas.

reconstructing Ono’s ephemeral art. They also make us aware that, with the exception of one instance in Japan, most reviews were sympathetic to her work. Both *The New York Times* and *The Village Voice*, for example, paid serious attention to her first solo recital (1961). The brochures for her concerts further reveal such impressive array of avant-garde artists as John Cage, David Tudor, La Monte Young (13), George Brecht, and Yvonne Rainer (69) in the United States, and in Japan Genpei Akasegawa, Toshi Ichianagi, Tatsumi Hijikata, and Yasunao Tone (85), who participated in Ono’s three early concerts, evidencing how seriously Ono was received by the vanguard communities in the international art scenes. Her impeccable records make us wonder why the MoMA is only now giving a solo exhibition to such a respected woman artist.

The reason for this long delay can be surmised from “Absence and Presence in Yoko Ono’s Work,” an essay by Klaus

Biesenbach, the exhibition’s co-curator. Biesenbach observes that Ono is not always present at her performances. Her instruction pieces—codes of musical compositions that proposed mental and/or physical actions to be carried out by the reader/performer—for example, did not require the artist’s presence. At the same time, Ono consciously employed the media to build her public persona (35), so that she could deliver political messages; the persona functioned like her “mask” (33), which Biesenbach saw as an alternate form of “presence.” Her access to the media was enhanced by her marriage to John Lennon in 1969, and today, Ono is the most publicly visible experimental artist from the 1960s (she has 4.72 million Twitter followers). It may have been her popularity that caused the MoMA not to take her works seriously.

She was also not alone in “working within arenas of Conceptualism that sought to move art beyond the walls of

the institution by turning to advertising, fake or inaccessible exhibitions, and signage worn on the body" (24), writes Julia Bryan-Wilson in her essay, "For Posterity: Yoko Ono," in which she informatively places Ono's "Museum Of Modern (F)art" within the context of its time. "Far from merely iterating her own ethos" (24), Ono's work employed strategies similar to those that emerged in works by Dan Graham, Adrian Piper, Robert Barry, and Daniel Buren—some even earlier than 1971. Others such as Henry Flynt and Jack Smith had even picketed the MoMA, critiquing the "institution's policies and ideologies" (24). Ono's interest in low bodily functions during this time—such as flatulence—can equally be linked to George Maciunas's scatological design and "feminist practices of around the same time" (25). Citing Joan Kee's writing, one thing Bryan-Wilson avoids in her essay is "the emphasis on the individual," as purportedly, such emphasis "for women artists from Asia who exhibited in the US and Europe" would result "in the subordination of the work to a host of other concerns" (29).

And this is where, as a feminist, my question arises. Since the 1990s, such feminist scholars as Griselda Pollock have been struggling to find the significance of "difference" in women's art practice.¹ And in 1966, Ono had already dissociated herself from the history of Conceptualism by describing her instruction pieces as "Con Art."² Her art, most importantly, "asks us to reorientate ourselves physically and mentally," was how the curator Joan Rothfuss observed Ono's work in 2000.³ This is because Ono matured as an artist when attitudes toward gender and race were radically changing in the post-WWII world, and she wanted to shift people's perception of the world as *she* saw it differently.

Born in 1933 in Tokyo, Ono was part of the first generation of women admitted to Japanese universities after the New Constitution took effect in 1947. She moved to New York in 1953, when underrepresented women and émigré artists were converging on downtown Manhattan and launching their careers from artist-run cooperative

galleries. Galvanized by the democratic spirit, at a time when "nobody is going to really give me a concert, no producer is never [going to] give me a show or a gallery show," Ono thought of renting a loft at 112 Chambers Street.⁴ This became the historic Chambers Street Loft Series. Still, the sources excluded from this catalogue attest to the fact that Ono was marginalized even at her own loft, due to her gender and ethnicity.⁵ Being unable to perform a program of her own, Ono imaginatively began using the loft walls.⁶ These became her "Instruction Paintings." Indeed, her *Add Color Painting* (1961) is captured in the background of an unidentified loft performance photograph (50), which the show's co-curator, Christophe Cherix, compared with Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* (1951).

In "Yoko Ono's Lightning Years," Cherix saw that both Ono's and Rauschenberg's works required the "process of interaction and change triggered by their display" (17). But Ono might have felt herself more aligned with the Gutai artist Yoshihara Jiro's *Please Draw Freely* (1956), which stimulated the participants' creativity, since Ono was against chance operation. Based on Ono's letter to Jon Hendricks, documented in this volume, her classical text, "Words of a Fabricator" (1962), was really a critique of John Cage's chance operation. She instead advocated, "sounds by intention" (116). Ono's support for intention from this period is representative of post-WWII artists who dreaded being reincorporated into a totalitarian society. After the war, even Surrealists sought for "intentions" in Japan.⁷ But Cherix, like Bryan-Wilson, considers Ono's early works in New York without paying attention to Ono's Japanese upbringing.

Among the writings in this catalogue, only Midori Yoshimoto's text on Ono's activities in Japan (1962-64) brings in Japanese context and discusses Ono's frictions with Japan's patriarchal society (80). Aside from Yoshimoto, the catalogue tries to align Ono with other artists of significant achievement.⁸ However, if we are truly in the post-feminist phase, rather than judging Ono in relation to established history, doesn't the MoMA need to develop a different

set of values to represent her? A hint of that can be found in Ono's own feminist statement, "The Feminization Of Our Society" (1971). In it, she wrote: "the ultimate goal of female liberation is" to liberate ourselves from "paternal influence in this society." For that, women should not be "apologetic for being real ... for farting ... for making love and smelling like a human being" (217).

If the current volume accepted more of her pains, struggles, and excitements as a person, then we probably no longer need "to play" what Ono describes as "the same game that men have played for centuries" (218). Still, the catalogue is a good starting point for discussions regarding that change. •

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Notes

1. See for example, Griselda Pollock, "Inscriptions in the Feminine," in M. Catherine deZegher, ed., *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art: In, Of, and From the Feminine* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 67–76.
2. Midori Yamamura, "Imagine the World Differently: Yoko Ono's Early Instruction Pieces," a brochure from *Grapefruit: Yoko Ono in 1964* (New York: Ise Cultural Foundation, 2004), 1.
3. Joan Rothfuss, "Somewhere for the Dust to Cling: Yoko Ono's Paintings and Early Objects," in Alexandra Munroe with Jon Hendricks, eds., *Yes Yoko Ono* (New York: Japan Society, 2000), 93.
4. Yoko Ono, "The Yoko Ono Interview" (1971), Audio C72, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Library.
5. In one instance, Ono remembered that La Monte Young (although she merely addressed him as a person who lived on Bank Street) once introduced her to the reporters as a "chick who owns this loft" that "I was not seriously taken as an artist because I was a woman." Ono, "The Yoko Ono Interview" (1970), cited in Midori Yoshimoto, *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 86. Young considered himself as Director of the Series. See La Monte Young, "La Monte Young Experience," in *La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela* (New York: self-published, c. 1972), n.p.

6. Bruce Altshuler, "Instructions for a World of Stickiness: The Early Conceptual Work of Yoko Ono," in Munroe, *Yes: Yoko Ono*, 65. Altshuler cites an e-mail to him from Ono, November 3, 1999.
7. For more on the anti-conformist tendency

in post-WWII Japan, see Midori Yamamura, *Yayoi Kusama: Inventing the Singular* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 9–44.

8. Aside from her informative text, Yoshimoto translated two important

articles in the volume: Donald Richie, "Stumbling Front Line: Yoko Ono's Avant-Garde Show," and Toshi Ichiyanagi, "Voice of the Most Avant-Garde: Objection to Donald Richie" (122–25).

Sonia Delaunay

Edited by Anne Montfort, with contributions by Jean-Claude Marcadé *et al.*
Paris Musées & Tate Enterprises, 2014

Reviewed by Jan Garden Castro

The Tate Modern catalogue and exhibition is a visual tour de force, with over 250 mostly full-color illustrations that highlight Sonia Delaunay's artistic range working in diverse media, materials, and processes as well as her leadership and participation in new arts movements, including Orphism, Simultané, Abstraction-Création, and Nouvelles Réalités. Its scope is larger than the 2011 fabric and fashion-oriented *Sonia Delaunay: Color Moves* catalogue and exhibition at the Smithsonian, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum. The Tate Modern catalogue, a collaboration with Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris (where the exhibition originated),¹ offers fourteen short essays by leading and younger Delaunay scholars, primarily from France, with one from England and two from the United States.² An excellent chronology for each decade is interspersed between the essays to present the timeline of Sonia Delaunay's life (1885 Ukraine – 1979 Paris) and main artistic achievements. Instead of a grounded narrative overview and analysis of Delaunay's body of work in relation to her century (and our own), the chronology, images, and essays spotlight key artistic achievements.

Céline Chicha-Castex and Brigitte Leal open by summarizing the huge, important donations of art and documents by Sonia and Charles Delaunay, her son, to the National Museums of France in 1963 and 1977. The primary written materials include masses of letters, and over thirty years of Sonia's journal entries, most stored at the Bibliothèque nationale. One sign of

Delaunay's international stature are these primary materials along with others at institutions in France, Germany, United States, Russia, Portugal, and Spain.

The first essays, "In St. Petersburg" by Jean-Claude Marcadé and "Being Russian in Paris" by Sherry Buckberrough, touch on Sergei Diaghilev's *Mir Iskusstva* (*World of Art*) magazine as an important part of the young artist's formative influences, and on the Ukrainian and Russian needlework and craft traditions that it re-popularized. Neither mentions that the artist's family had its own seamstress, and that costume parties were part of her youth. Importantly, the Hermitage Museum, near her home, offered an optimal view of great international art.³ Marcadé discusses that few documents survive in relation to Sara Stern Terk's Ukrainian birth heritage and the Jewish intelligentsia culture in which she was raised in St. Petersburg, after age five, by her aunt and uncle Terk. Marcadé notes that after she moved to Paris, the artist did not frequent Jewish circles, considered herself a 'Russian Ukrainian,' and celebrated the Orthodox Christian Easter "culturally rather than religiously" (19). Buckberrough's essay argues that Delaunay was consciously androgynous because she may have met with Valentine de St-Point in Paris in 1914, because Natalia Goncharova painted hieroglyphs on her bare breasts in Moscow the same year, and because she "wears a man's working jacket ... personalized by her patchwork" in one 1914 photo (47–48). In my opinion, Buckberrough neither defines androgyny nor provides sufficient evidence that it applies here. Delaunay was not consciously choosing to adopt a male/female persona, and the word androgynous is being retro-imposed. She was functioning simultaneously as a wife, mother, artist, and income-produc-

er just as many of my (baby boomer) generation experienced this same requirement without necessarily self-identifying as androgynous.⁴

Brigitte Leal discusses the important 'Fauve' works the artist created after her studies with Ludwig Schmid-Reutte in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 1904, her studies with Rudolf Grossmann in Paris in 1907, and her introduction to the art of Braque, Picasso, Derain, Dufy, Metzinger, Pascin, and her future husband, Robert Delaunay (they married in 1910). First, though, in 1908, Sonia married German gallerist Wilhelm Uhde (a marriage of convenience to an openly gay friend) rather than return to St. Petersburg as her relatives urged. Leal's short essay centers on the post-Cézanne context for *Nu jaune* (*Yellow nude*, 1908), "in which colour prevails over form, and narrative over iconicity," and which, along with work by (Czech painter) Frantisek Kupka,

marked the simultaneous arrival in the work of both the Czech and the Russian artist of an art of colour which would dominate the century in all its dimensions—expressive, psychological, physiological and musical—and of which they shared equal status as the undisputed pioneers (40).⁵

To a remarkable degree, Delaunay's inventions were ahead of her time. Pascal Rousseau's essay, "Voyelles: Sonia Delaunay and the universal language of colour hearing," first quotes Apollinaire's close-up view as the guest of Sonia and Robert, "As they wake up, the Delaunays speak painting" (71). Rousseau emphasizes that the artist's pioneering use of color had an international impact, in part, because Sonia grew up with German, English, and French governesses, and she, Apollinaire, Blaise Cendrars, and others in her circle were polyglots, fluent in



Fig. 1. Sonia Delaunay, *Autoportrait* (1916), cover of the catalogue for the Stockholm exhibition, pochoir, 13 3/8" x 17 7/8". Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. Gift of the artist, 1977.

several languages. Rousseau concludes that Sonia "was to find in colour an authentic substitute for the expressive deficiencies of language" (72). He argues that artists and thinkers of the period posited correspondences among vowels, colors, and *sounds* and that "this helps to explain Sonia Delaunay's very 'physiological' taste for coloured vowels, in particular during her pre-war 'simultanist' period, which led both her and Robert towards 'pure painting'" (75). Nearby, dozens of color illustrations related to this essay demonstrate Rousseau's points that the emotional resonances of Delaunay's contrasting juxtaposed colored shapes communicate vividly, as he suggests, more akin to music than to verbal language.

Each essay contributes another layer, color, and point. Sophie Goetzmann's essay supports Rousseau's view of Delaunay's international language of painting as it explores the stir caused by her art *objects* with "pure tones and humble materials" (90) (rather than oil paintings) at Herwarth Walden's important 1913 *Der Sturm* salon in Berlin. Sonia Delaunay introduced five paintings along with painted boxes, cups, a curtain and cushions with

abstract titles such as *Coussin Astral* (*Astral Cushion*). The art objects were a shocking departure from painting and made a huge impact on the fifty avant-garde artists exhibiting at *Der Sturm*. These decorative objects stirred a hearty debate about "what is art?" Because Sonia was fluent in German, she and Robert Delaunay navigated the Berlin scene so well that Lyonel Feininger called the couple "almost scientific, an optical corporation" (90).

In "On time: Sonia Delaunay's sequential Simultanism," Juliet Bellow addresses how some of Delaunay's art was both created and performed in relation to time, including performances for which Sonia created costumes that would literally be moving in time with their wearers. She mentions the Delaunay family's six-year 'vacation' in Portugal and Spain during and just after World War I. This period was artistically rich beyond the scope of Bellow's fine essay. Sonia learned to support her family by designing fashions for their friends, including members of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. She opened Casa Sonia, a fashion boutique.

Cécile Barques next discusses Sonia's relationships with Romanian Dada

founder Tristan Tzara, Russian Futurist Iliazd, and others after the Delaunays returned to Paris in 1921. Some old friends were bitter that the Delaunays had decamped during the War. Sonia became friends with Tzara, who had brought the Dada movement to Paris in 1919. In 1923, she designed cardboard costumes (which were not easy to wear) for *Le Couer à Gas* (*The Gas-Powered Heart*), a Dada romp that caused the surrealists in the audience to riot and storm the stage. André Breton broke one actor's arm with his cane. Lush drawings of the period follow: dress poems, photos of sets and costumes for René Le Somptier's film *Le P'tit Parigot* (*The little Parisian*), the Delaunay's living room, Sonia's fashions and fabrics.

During the 1920s, Sonia invented coordinated designs for hats, scarves, coats, shoes, swimsuits, beach coats and umbrellas, purses, and even a matching Citroën B 12 sports car. Cécile Godefroy, overall Curator of this exhibition, contributes a short essay, "The métier of Simultanism," discussing Sonia Delaunay's polymorphic output. She participated in the 1924 Salon d'Automne and the 1925 Exposition of Industrial and Decorative Arts. She also produced an album of pochoir prints that advanced the field of printed reproductions. Robert Delaunay had patented the Simultané brand in 1925. After the stock market crash of 1929, Sonia's main market became fabric designs for Metz & Co, a boutique department store based in Amsterdam. Matteo de Leeuw-de Monti, the grandson of its founder, Joseph de Leeuw, picks up the story in "Sonia Delaunay – the designs for Metz & Co." After Joseph de Leeuw met Sonia at the 1925 Paris Expo and placed his first order, their business collaboration and friendship prospered. Sonia's friends during this period included the American photographer Florence Henri and artists Mondrian, Chagall, Gabo, Gleizes, Kandinsky, Léger, Pevsner, and Vantongerloo. The author, Matteo de Leeuw-de Monti, first met Sonia Delaunay much later—in 1956 when he was four years old; in addition to his own career, he has devoted part of his life to researching and preserving Delaunay's art and legacy.

During the 1930s, Sonia became involved with the Abstraction-Création artists led by Auguste Herbin and Georges Vantongerloo and with plans for the 1937 Paris International Exposition. She was part of the *Réalités Nouvelles* group of abstract artists that formed in 1939. Even though she was born Jewish and France was occupied by Nazis, during the war she managed to care for her husband Robert (who died in Montpellier in 1941), to preserve their and their friends' art, and to remain in France—she lived with the Magnellis and the Arps in Grasse. Sonia also created new art, including a work for the International Red Cross. Guitemie Maldonado discusses the circular rhythms of Delaunay's art of the 1930s, and does a good job summarizing this important period and her abstract murals and oil paintings of 1938 and 1939. I wish she could have further emphasized the genius of painting airplane propellers, dashboards, and engines for the 1937 Paris International Exposition and have further answered her own question about how and why Delaunay moved from abstract representations of travel to pure large abstract paintings and murals in the late 1930s.

"Confused origins" by Laurence Bertrand Dorléac reviews what biographer Dominique Desanti has written about Sonia Delaunay's Jewish origins, roots, and early education in relation to the aftermath of World War II. Because her Civil Status Record from 1910 marking her legal presence in France suggested, but did not list, her Jewish heritage, she was lumped into the 'métèque' (foreigner) status with other Russian emigrants after World War II. Dorléac quotes from the artist's 1941 diary at the Bibliothèque nationale and other sources and concludes that she identified as Russian but not Jewish during a difficult period. By January 1945, Delaunay had returned to Paris and was busy exhibiting as well as starting a "friends of Robert Delaunay" young artists group. Their son, Charles Delaunay (1911–88), who became a jazz critic and joined the Resistance during the War, started a journal *Le Jazz Hot*.

Griselda Pollock, in "Art criticism and the problem of the non-modern

story of modern art," critiques the ways in which critics of various stripes—from French to traditional to feminist—slant their views of Sonia Delaunay's accomplishments. She quotes Michel Seuphor's 1950 book on the origins of abstraction in which Seuphor suggests that sometimes Sonia appeared to be "ahead" of Robert in her art-making, and that she was best of show in 1948 when she turned from decorative arts back to painting (220).⁶ Pollock says Sonia was more supportive of her husband's art than he may have been of hers. She does not mention that Sonia both restored Robert's art and worked to secure his place in the French pantheon, nor that Robert was the son of French Countess Berthe de la Rose, who had 'discovered' Henri Rousseau. Delaunay was modest about her achievements until later in life. Her role as a pioneer of chromatic abstraction was overlooked or downplayed because she had left the Russian art scene, was not French, and was a woman in an art world dominated by men. Pollock suggests that traditional art historians including Guy Weelen did not give Sonia equal stature with her husband in 1960, and that feminist Cindy Nemser's later conversation with Delaunay "is full of a feminist discourse of discrimination and difficulty" that misread her historic role. Pollock concludes: "Sonia Delaunay lived a life of partnership, generosity, necessity and sustained research into the field in which she must now be understood as historically an innovator, a creator, a first" (222).

The title of Domitille d'Orgeval's essay, "Conquering the Paris art scene in the 1950s and 1960s," refers readers to the last chapter of Cécile Godefroy's doctoral thesis on Delaunay. In the post-WWII years, Paris artists both rallied around those who had died during the War (including Robert Delaunay), and also held salons presenting abstraction as *Réalités Nouvelles*. Given Sonia Delaunay's friendships, by now, with curators who had risen to become directors in the French museum system, and her innovative prints and paintings shown by the Denise René Gallery, she "achieved in stages the different objectives she had set for herself at the

end of the war" (247). The culmination came in 1967, with a Sonia Delaunay retrospective at the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.

From her 1963 meeting with Jacques Damase, who published a range of her art books and prints until her death in 1979, Delaunay continued to receive major exhibitions, prizes, and recognitions. Juliet Bingham, Curator of the Tate Modern exhibition, returns readers to Delaunay's historically important early achievements in the context of modern art. Ann Montfort, Curator of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris exhibition, closes the essays with "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui," which is translated as a Mallarmé poem's title "The Virgin, Vivacious and Beautiful Today."⁷ Montfort's essay moves in many directions; at one point, she proposes that a 1967 painting in three parts, *Le serpent noir*, draws its inspiration from Delaunay's art works from three different periods. She discusses the freedom Delaunay found, in 1973, by returning to making art in relation to favorite poetry, such as nine of Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, and quotes the artist's 1968 view: "Just as, in written poetry, it is not the way the words are put together that counts, but the mystery of creation that gives, or does not give, an emotion ... so with colours, it is poetry and the mystery of an inner life that emerges, radiates and communicates" (274).

This major exhibition and catalogue from Paris and London boldly asserts that earlier critics were biased, and these critics collectively hail Sonia Delaunay (and Kupka) as *the pioneers* of modernist color. The essays on her fashions, mixed media, and decorative arts stop short of making the same claims in these media, even though the evidence is just as strong or stronger. The prints, drawings, paintings, and pochoir deserve further discussion as the 250 images and the essays propel Sonia Delaunay's body of work into the forefront of early modern art. Another major achievement, thanks to Griselda Pollock's and Brigitte Leal's strong views, is new ways to view early twentieth century achievements and new ways to dissect and reflect on early modern art history.

Jean-Claude Marcadé, Sherry Buckberrough, and others quote from the 1978 autobiography *Nous irons jusqu'au soleil* (*We Will Go Right Up to the Sun*), which Delaunay dictated in the year before her death; however, this seems to me to be a less reliable source than earlier primary documents and accounts. Buckberrough hints but does not directly state that the name Sonia is Russian for sun, making the artist's identification with the sun personal as well as symbolic in her art—as seen in her important Self-Portrait series of 1916 (Fig. 1), in which her circular abstract 'head' consists of nests of multi-hued half-circles. One critic mentions another early innovation—breaking electric light into circular patterns of prismatic diffracted colors related to light and sun. Juliet Bellow and a few others mention the artist's 1913 abstract art/text collaboration with Blaise Cendrars, *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France* (*The Tale of the Trans-Siberian Express and Little Jeanne of France*), a vertical scroll two meters tall. Although it is amply illustrated in the catalogue, this historically significant work would benefit from a fuller analysis.

I will elaborate on one small quibble because it's at the core of modern art history. Belgian artist and writer Michel Seuphor, born Fernand Berckeaers in 1901, played an important role in featuring Delaunay's earliest art, including the interior for a bookstore, in his periodical *Het Overzicht* in Antwerp in the early 1920s. He told me, in 1991, about his frequent visits to the Delaunays' salons, starting in 1925, after he had moved to Paris. In the following decades, he was instrumental in developing abstraction as a concept. With Joaquín Torres-García, he co-founded the 1929 Cercle et Carré group to which Robert and Sonia belonged (a footnote on p.188). Seuphor is pictured with Mondrian, Sonia Delaunay, and others in the Abstraction-Création group, 1931 (on p. 191). After World War II, the main focus of many of his books became to establish *abstract painting* as a concept. Nevertheless, in his book *l'art abstrait 1. 1910/1918* (Paris: Maeght, 1971), in his chapter 'Les premiers maîtres de l'art abstrait' (*Masters of Abstract Art*),

Seuphor lists Sonia second after Kandinsky—three places above Robert Delaunay—in a field of two women and thirteen men. Even though Seuphor suggests Sonia should have stuck to painting (p. 29, same quote Pollock uses), Seuphor includes images of her early collages, prints, fashions, and paintings. In the same book, Seuphor's chapter 'Les origines de l'art abstrait,' includes only painting and one woman in the group of fourteen. Seuphor's championing of Sonia's design work in the 1920s and its inclusion, despite his seeming preference for painting, in his 1971 book exemplifies one way that one quote may not fully represent a critic's valuation of an artist's work.

Finally, most of the illustrations are not discussed. The evolution of Sonia Delaunay's art is clearly outlined, yet there is no hint that the essayists have observed the embedded signs and symbols present throughout her work—from the image in the 1911 cradle cover for her son Charles to the late prints and paintings. •

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Notes

1. The exhibition opened at Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (Oct. 17, 2014–Feb. 22, 2015) and traveled to the Tate Modern, London (April 15–Aug. 9, 2015).
2. The contributors to the catalogue and their credentials, as listed in the catalogue, are as follows: Juliet Bellow: Assistant Professor of Art History, American University, Washington, D.C.; Juliet Bingham: Curator International Art and curator of Tate exhibition; Sherry Buckberrough, Chair of Art History, University of Hartford, CT; Chris Dercon, Director, Tate Modern; Domitille d'Orgeval, Art Historian; Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, Art Historian, Professor at Sciences-Po, Paris; Cécile Godefroy, Curator of the exhibition, art historian; Fabrice Hergott: Director, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Matteo de Leeuw-de Monti;

Sophie Goetzmann, doctoral student, Université Paris IV – Sorbonne; Brigitte Leal, Deputy Director, Musée National d'Art Moderne/ Centre Pompidou; Jean-Claude Marcadé; Guitemie Maldonado, Professor, History of Art, École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris; Anne Montfort, Curator of exhibition at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Griselda Pollock, Professor of Social and Critical Histories of Art, University of Leeds; Juliette Rizzi, Assistant Curator, Tate; Pascal Rousseau: Art History Professor at Université Paris I- Panthéon-Sorbonne.

3. See Mikhail Piotrovsky, *My Hermitage How the Hermitage Survived Tsars, Wars, and Revolutions to Become the Greatest Museum in the World* (New York: Rizzoli, 2015). Sonia, in St. Petersburg between 1890—around 1905, visited its international collection. She experienced how increasing anti-Semitism affected even circles of wealthy assimilated Jewish people, and this probably affected her decision to not identify as Jewish. She was in Paris during the 1905 workers demonstration in front of the Winter Palace, and she identified with this movement, even though it affected her family and eventually ended her income from them. This book documents the Hermitage's grand collection and how it was preserved during evacuations in 1812, 1917, and 1941.
4. Bernard Dorival, in his excellent biography *Sonia Delaunay Sa vie, son oeuvre* (Paris: Damase editions, 1980) mentions that Sonia Delaunay was more 'masculine' than her husband Robert: "C'est elle qui fut virile et, lui, féminin" (p. 84). In this, he seems to refer to the fact that Sonia was organized, calm, and supported the family while Robert could be temperamental and never earned his own living. Dorival was using French cultural and generational norms. Sonia, Coco Chanel and many women of their generation were, either from necessity or choice, financially responsible for themselves and others. It seems to me that considering this (and some other traits) "masculine" often refers to cultural biases of a period/country rather than gender-exclusive traits/ behavior.
5. Note: all quotes use the British spelling colour, and I use the American spelling color.
6. Quote on p. 220 from Michel Seuphor, 'Robert Delaunay,' *L'Art abstrait, ses origines, ses premiers maîtres*, Maeght, Paris, 1950, pp. 41-47. For more on this quote from Seuphor, see second to last paragraph of this essay.
7. C. F. MacIntyre translates this as "The lively, lovely, and virginal today": *Stéphane Mallarmé Poems* (Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1971), 83.

Joy Laville: The First Fifty Years

Essays by Salomon Grimberg,
Silvia Cherem, Isabella Rowe
McKinney Avenue Contemporary,
Dallas, 2015

Reviewed by Carol Damian

Little known outside of Mexico, the country that has claimed the British-born (Isle of Wight, 1923) artist, Joy Laville is now in her nineties and still painting. This exhibition in Dallas should contribute to recognition for her work beyond the Mexican borders. It is not as if Laville has not had a stellar international career, been included in important Latin American auctions and exhibitions, and been sought after by museums and galleries. She has lived and worked in many places in the world, the last four decades in Mexico, where she had her first exhibition in 1964, and has received every award Mexico can bestow, including the Medalla de Bellas Artes and prestigious Premio Nacional, the nation's highest honor for an artist.

Laville was never political—difficult in Mexico where artists formed their own “sides” in the art scene that was defined in 1966 by “Confrontation 66,” an exhibition that marked a turning point for the traditional vs. the avant-garde, and where, despite her independence, she won the coveted Bellas Artes Acquisition Prize for a group of pastels. Even within Mexico, where her career has thrived, her quiet and introspective painting defies the characteristic Mexican stylistic categories. Her work does not look like Frida Kahlo or Maria Izquierdo or Leonora Carrington (also a British expat). It is not surreal, although it is mysterious. Even at its most elusive and abstract, Laville's approach to abstraction is different from that of her contemporaries, the recognized modernists Gunther Gerzso and Francisco Toledo.

Exhibition curator Salomon Grimberg transforms the life and career of Joy Laville into a romance, with writing as expressive as her art, that enables the reader to look both at and beneath the painted surfaces and understand their

very personal significance. The catalog opens with an introduction by renowned Mexican journalist Silvia Cherem, titled “The Lilac Woman,” which focuses on Laville's biography, and sets the tone for the artist's palette of soft pastels. Cherem introduces the artist as an adventurous, often brave, woman whose life was a constant journey, intellectually stimulating but indelibly marked by a great tragedy: her beloved husband, renowned Mexican author Jorge Ibargüengoitia, met an untimely death in a plane crash in 1983, en route from Paris to Bogotá to attend a conference of writers. Such life experiences cannot help but affect the creative process and chosen subjects (despite such denial by some artists). The catalog also includes touching personal reminiscences by Laville's granddaughter, Isabella Rowe, that place the artist at home with her treasures, traditions, and memories, all meaningful and relatively untouched to this day.

Grimberg's essay opens with a conversation that sums up the staying power of Laville's work, like Figure 1, which appears on the cover.

Two friends of Joy Laville's, both artists, are discussing her work. Gunther Gerzso is drawn by her faultless composition, which he compares to Matisse's: “Her work is put together so carefully you can't move anything because the whole work falls apart,” adding, “People like her painting because it makes them feel good.” Although Leonora Carrington does not disagree, her interest in Laville's painting lies elsewhere; its mystery is what draws her to it. “It's like a fingerprint,” she observes: unique, unmistakable, and difficult to puzzle out, although, on the surface, it is accessible and easy to read. Each opinion is correct (31).

Memory and reflection play a key role in the creation of Laville's imagery, and knowing her story only adds depth to their meaning, even to an outsider who may at first be simply attracted to their lovely colors and unusual



Fig. 1. Joy Laville, *Girl standing wearing a green dress* (2008).

abstractions. It is this personalization of the artist's story that makes the catalog (and the exhibition) more than just ordinary documents of time and place served up in chronological order according to accepted art historical methodologies. Grimberg not only describes the work and its formal elements, he offers insights into Laville's life as an artist so that the reader can interpret the rest and arrive at the realization that her work, as soft and ethereal as it may at first appear, has depth and substance. The characters and subjects that repeat throughout her paintings are more than just the basis for the application of her fluid strokes of blues and greens, pinks and lilacs. They reflect her life, as related to all three contributors to the catalog by the artist, who is always careful not to reveal too much but enough to indicate that, for her, painting is not only a visual practice but an emotional one as well. Grimberg writes, “Joy's memory is as clear as one of her paintings, not only visually but also emotionally” (60).

Laville's distinctive color may be the first thing that defines and describes her work, making it clearly recognizable over the years, but it is not applied for the sake of color alone, or even for its symbolic associations. For the artist, color is as much an abstract subject as the singular figures, flowers, land- or seascapes it

defines. Each canvas is built up with color, and color is allowed the privilege of the moment. As she travelled and lived in different parts of the world, her experiences affected the choice of color as “subject and technique converged” (60). The landscapes, as varied as those in different parts of Mexico, Greece, Paris, London, Canada and Spain, combined with her creative visions, resulted in what Grimberg calls “a different form of self-portrait, not the artist’s outward appearance but the spiritual state within

perfectly suspended between harmony and balance” (64).

“I am excited by space,” says Laville, “it’s possible ... [that] a painting is sparked by something that has sparked in me, that is why it’s suspended in one moment—time suspended—nothing ever moves” (65). It is true. Time does stand as still as the subjects in her fields of color, lost in the simplicity of her spatial constructs.

While color marks a first impression when seeing a Joy Laville work, “her

iconography has evolved in usual ways,” writes Grimberg. “What is on the surface may look familiar, but the work is mostly invented, and more often than not, only she can tell us what was on her mind while creating it” (85). •

Carol Damian is Professor of Art History at Florida International University in Miami. Her areas of specialization include Latin America and the Caribbean and women artists.

Women Photographers: From Julia Margaret Cameron to Cindy Sherman

By Boris Friedenwald
Prestel, 2014

Reviewed by Robin Rice

A generous and handsomely presented array of photographs is the primary attraction of art historian Boris Friedenwald’s coffee table book, *Women Photographers: From Julia Margaret Cameron to Cindy Sherman*. Fifty five photographers are introduced alphabetically, each with a large single page biographical sketch, a small portrait of the artist, and several examples of work accompanied by detailed captions. Although she is mentioned in the title, Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–79) is neither the earliest nor the first alphabetically. The earliest historically, biologist Anna Atkins (1799–1871), worked with cyanotype, “photogenic drawings,” with which she became acquainted through Henry Fox Talbot. Also an acquaintance of Sir John Herschel, another early scientific photographer, Atkins made the first book of photographs. It consisted of “cyanotype impressions” of algae (16).

Friedenwald’s introduction raises often-discussed issues of the meaning or gaze of a “woman” photographer, explaining that to some of the artists he writes about the designation is limiting. A least one, Bettina Rheims, sought to envision photographs as if taken by an

amateur male photo-grapher (182), and to many, the gender of the artist is simply beside the point. Similarly, Friedenwald raises the art/craft dichotomy, a division that might be more profound in the field of photography than any other discipline, though he does not align himself with an opinion or position. Throughout the book he succinctly describes the particular experiences and affinities that have led individual women to take up photography.

Specific entries typically narrate important events in the artists’ lives. In writing about the earlier ones, such as Madame d’Ora (Dora Kallmus), who photographed celebrities in 1920s and 1930s Paris (Fig. 1) and Vienna, Friedenwald is engaging but predictable. His entries on living ones are more lively, possibly reflecting personal interviews. The biography of Sally Mann begins, “Her childhood was in many ways different from that of other children: Sally Munger and her two brothers were the only children to spend the Bible study class in the hallway, waiting for it to end.” Near the conclusion of this essay, he writes, “[F]or Sally Mann, the creation and the beauty of life, its laws and phenomena in all its facets including transience and death, are all connected on one another through love” (142). He notes controversies associated with individual photographers, such as the persistent critiques of Mann’s

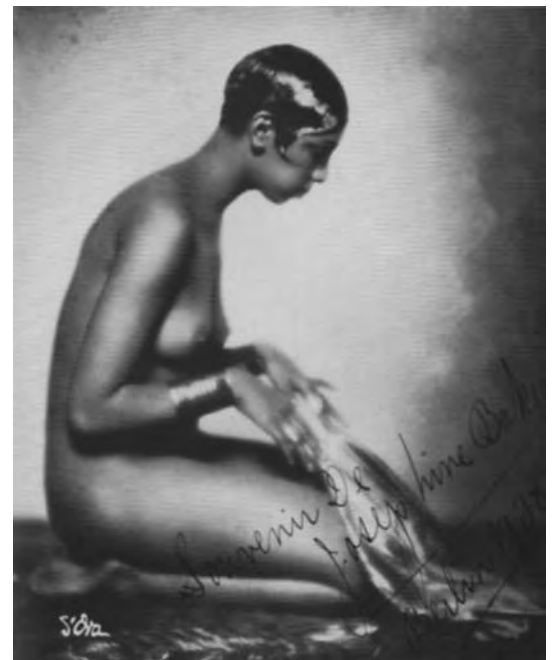


Fig. 1. Madame d’Ora (Dora Kallmus), *The Revue Dancer Josephine Baker* (1928).

photographs of her naked children. Friedenwald also describes the cameras and technical approaches preferred by individual artists.

The volume is lightly sprinkled with provocative quotations set in an eye-catching font. “In reality, all we photographers photograph is ourselves in the other ... all the time,” Evelyn Hofer is quoted (91). “I did *not* admire Mrs. Cameron’s large heads, taken out of focus. The best of the life ones were Lady Hawarden’s,” says Lewis Carroll, comparing two of the featured artists (79). Unfortunately, no citations are given for these interesting tidbits and

other quotations and information in the text. There is a simplified bibliography, but an index would have added an important component.

It is a pleasure to page through this non-academic but well-informed introduction to photographers. The images are well presented and the ones in color are true to the type of film used. The group is international with a slant toward

Europe and America. The omission of some significant artists is perhaps inevitable. These include Diane Arbus, Lorna Simpson, Annie Leibovitz, and Sabine Weiss, who was honored internationally with exhibitions surrounding her ninetieth birthday last year. The fact that the striking cover image of Margaret Bourke-White was taken by a man (Oscar Graubner) could spark a conversation or

two, and perhaps that's a good thing. •

Robin Rice is an educator, and curator. Author and co-author of books, catalog essays and articles, her recent curatorial projects include solo shows for David Stephens (2014) at the Center for Art in Wood, Philadelphia, PA and "GLASS!" (2014) for the Huntingdon Museum in Clinton, NJ.

Home Truths: Photography and Motherhood

Edited by Susan Bright
Art Books Publishing Ltd and The Photographers' Gallery, 2013

Reviewed by Rachel Epp Buller

Highlighting the complexities and contradictions of shifting maternal identities, Susan Bright's recent publication focuses on photographic works that "sit within the ever-expanding and increasingly nebulous genre of documentary" (17). The artists included draw on wide-ranging sources, from painting and iconography to fashion and performance, ensuring that motherhood is not portrayed as a monolithic truth or singular experience. At the same time, as Bright argues, the examined works are not just about motherhood but also about current issues in photography, such as the ubiquity of images that surround us in twenty-first-century life.

Home Truths accompanied an exhibition of the same name (first shown at the Photographers' Gallery in London, with adapted displays later shown in Chicago and Belfast), though the volume functions somewhat differently than a standard exhibition catalogue. The essays contained therein do not address the exhibited works; rather, each author engages with a theme that is found also in some of the works on display. Bright's format, interspersing the topical essays between sections on related artists, encourages readers to make conceptual connections between the two, but no explicit parallels are ever articulated.

Home Truths offers a diverse array of entry points into motherhood. Katie Murray's *Gazelle*, a video performance of the artist carrying her children while atop an exercise machine, gives voice to the physical and emotional absurdity, as well as the endurance and determination, which can narrate life with small children. In an expansive series of photographs, Ana Casas Broda, too, engages with the extreme physicality of motherhood, and with the blurring of maternal-child identities that can occur in the early childhood years. Leigh Ledare's photographs offer a glimpse of mothers who defy conventional roles, viewed as particularly risky or inappropriate when crossing sexual boundaries. Several artists address themes of mourning, whether of maternal loss (Miyako Isiuchi and Tierney Gearon), child loss (Fred Hüning), or unfulfilled maternal desire (Elina Brotherus). In a thoughtful interpretation, Bright suggests that these latter artists simultaneously invoke ideas of abundance or excess by photographing their situations "repeatedly, almost obsessively, and with both fervor and rigour" (20).

Two of the essays offer historical perspectives, which readers may find surprising in this contemporary volume. Simon Watney's essay on "Madonnas and Mothers" at first struggles to establish a connection with the photographs, tracing the rise and evolution of Marian imagery in art history as either a figure of consolation or a symbol of fertility. While the first half of the essay appears to be tangential, if interesting, Watney eventually uses the information as groundwork for how British and other photographers adopted conventions of



Fig. 1. Janine Antoni, *Inhabit* (2009), digital C-print, 116 1/2" x 72". Courtesy the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

Marian portraiture in nineteenth-century secular photographic portraits. Although he asserts that the Madonna and Child representation "has left a deep cultural impact" (57), a stronger tie to the contemporary works would have been welcome. Stephanie Chapman's essay on the absent mothers in photographs from the Foundling Hospital similarly offers an historical vantage point—and a lovely meditation on absence—but the connection to the contemporary works becomes much clearer in the immediately following images by Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, who works with historical

photographs of mothers, and by Ann Fessler, whose narrative pieces address adoption and separation.

Nick Johnstone's personal reflection on "Mothering Fathers" offers a nuanced understanding of mothering, arguing that the caregiving role he occupies in his own family is inevitably pictured in the history of photography as a maternal one. His writing provides a companion to the exhibited photographs of Fred Hüning, whose central involvement in the family is nevertheless absent from the photos because of his place behind the camera. Johnstone eventually posits a combined parental caregiving role for both mothers and fathers as a new form of genderless motherhood, a provocative point that he saves for the end of the essay (99).

Viewing the *Home Truths* exhibition in addition to reading the book, one becomes much more aware of, and affected by, size and scale. Janine

Antoni's *Inhabit* (2009; Fig. 1) towers above the viewer, her over-life-size maternal figure suspended and trapped within her domestic situation. Casas Broda's large-scale photographic installation, *Kinderwunsch*, surrounds the viewer completely, reinforcing the utter absorption of the early childhood years. Small-format photographs and books by Brotherus and Hüning draw in the viewer in an altogether different manner, their small seriality underscoring the ongoing nature of the discourse between grief and acceptance.

Bright's book is a fine contribution to the growing body of literature on maternity and contemporary art.¹ Differentiating her work by looking specifically at recent photographic history, Bright builds on Sandra Mathews and Laura Wexler's *Pregnant Pictures* (2000), which examined both art historical and vernacular photography. While much of the writing published so far has been comprehensive in scope,

such an increasingly firm foundation of maternal scholarship will open the door to studies and exhibitions that delve more deeply into specific maternal themes and individual media. •

Rachel Epp Buller is Associate Professor of Visual Arts and Design at Bethel College and a regular reviewer for *WAJ*. Her recent books include *Reconciling Art and Mothering* (2012) and *Mothering Mennonite* (2013). Forthcoming in 2016 are a book and exhibition, "The Art of Alice Lex: Women and Work / Frauen und Arbeit," in Berlin.

Notes

1. See, for example, Andrea Liss, *Feminist Art and the Maternal* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2009); *The M Word: Real Mothers in Contemporary Art*, Myrel Chernick and Jennie Klein, eds., (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2011); and *Reconciling Art and Mothering*, Rachel Epp Buller, ed., (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2012).

Restless Ambition: Grace Hartigan, Painter

By Cathy Curtis
Oxford University Press, 2015

Reviewed by Aliza Edelman

In this first-ever biography on the Abstract Expressionist painter Grace Hartigan (1922–2008), author Cathy Curtis recounts an easily overlooked but prescient anecdote: In the fall of 1954, the up-and-coming and brassy Hartigan was invited to address the all-female student body at Vassar College, whose art gallery held a survey of her paintings, including her epic *Grand Street Brides*, *Bride and Owl*, and *Masquerade*. The exhibition catalogue introduced her as Grace George Hartigan, a gendered reference to the artist's masculine moniker, "George." She chatted sociably to the youthful art majors and the then little-known instructor, Linda Nochlin, about the struggles of "developing a personal style," the prosaic routines of artists and writers confided in Virginia Woolf's

recently published *A Writer's Diary*, and the challenges of being a woman artist in a male-dominated environment (134). No doubt that Hartigan's downtown, urban bravura and tone, peppered with cusses, impressed her admiring audience, some of whom were later interviewed by Curtis. On her own, however, the artist's private journals, kept annually from 1951–55, expressed deeply unsettled, at times paralyzing self-doubts and incongruities as one would expect from a newly recognized artist. Her journal entry from November 10, 1954 posed the urgent yet far-sighted question: "Who am I?"¹

Seventeen years later, in 1971, Professor Linda Nochlin posed her own related question in her seminal feminist article, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Hartigan, who never outwardly identified as a feminist, was always determined and at times heedless in her undeniable pursuit of success, never succumbing to New York's gendered hierarchies while candidly enjoying her battles. Hartigan's critical triumphs arrived swiftly, unlike the older or "first

generation" of women artists on New York's Abstract Expressionist scene, such as Lee Krasner or Elaine de Kooning. By January 1951, she received her first solo exhibition at the new and avant-garde Tibor de Nagy Gallery (individual shows, 1951–57, 1959), co-owned by the mercurial John Bernard Myers. In 1953, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. acquired *The Persian Jacket* (1952; Fig. 1) for The Museum of Modern Art, followed by *River Bathers* (1953), ceremoniously installed alongside canvases by Franz Kline, Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, and William Baziotes (133). Both paintings were included in the museum's 1956 exhibition "12 Americans," curated by Dorothy Miller—Hartigan was the only female participant—from which Nelson Rockefeller, soon New York's governor, purchased *City Life* (1956), but only after it was featured in *Mademoiselle*. Again, in 1958, she was the only woman (and the youngest artist) showcased in MoMA's European touring exhibition, "The New American Painting," and the previous year's IV Bienal de São Paulo, Museu de Arte Moderna, Brazil (165,

167). In rapid succession she was launched in the public eye, photographed by Gordon Parks for *Life* magazine's 1957 article "Woman Artists in Ascendance," and featured in *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Art News*, *Look*, and *Cosmopolitan*.

Biographer and journalist Cathy Curtis, who first met Hartigan in 1988, was therefore equally compelled to offer her own question on the first page of the book: "Why did [Hartigan] fall so abruptly off the art map?" *Restless Ambition* is a nuanced character study that attempts to address and elucidate the above proposition. Rather than debunking the male mythologies of Abstract Expressionism, Curtis painstakingly crafts Hartigan's childhood frustrations, financial sacrifices, and prodigious artistic accomplishments to portray a fuller picture of the artist's own world of reference. On her quest, Curtis charts the artist's male and female friendships, husbands and lovers, and collaborators; indexes her professional ties and picayune squabbles with dealers, galleries, and art critics, alongside the investigative research of provenance histories and collections; and maps her studios, local hangouts, and foreign and domestic travels.

While the biography is chronologically presented in five parts—with 30 color reproductions and numerous photographs—nearly half the text focuses on the late 1940s through the 1950s. In addition to available oral histories and interviews with family members, Curtis relies heavily on Hartigan's journals, a potential hazard in the construction of an artist's life, yet an invaluable resource published in 2009 through the auspices of the Syracuse University Library, Special Collections Research Center, which also holds the Grace Hartigan Papers. Curtis also conducts important interviews with Hartigan's former students and colleagues at the Hoffberger School of Painting, Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), Baltimore, where she was a renowned professor and mentor, and served as director from its inception in 1965.

As the narrative unfolds, Curtis unapologetically documents Hartigan's experiences that broadly conform to

those of postwar American modern women. This is especially valuable material for a period in history when uncertain social expectations, including motherhood and marriage, sexual promiscuity, abortions, and divorce, reflected real anxieties and dilemmas over definitions of femininity and womanhood. The book's prologue, however, foreshadows the imminent drama, not only by introducing the artist's fourth marriage to Dr. Winston Price, a prominent epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins University and modern art collector (whose scientific reputation was later compromised), but Hartigan's impulsive and career-defining departure from New York in 1960 to join her husband in Baltimore.

Hartigan was born in Newark in 1922 and raised variously in Bayonne and Millburn, New Jersey. The artist was single-minded in her escape from her placid and rural hometown, the backdrop for a "private world" and lifelong love of dolls, books, music, and theater (14). A precocious child, she learned to read on her own at age five while bedridden with pneumonia, and shared a special "fantasy life" with her beloved paternal Irish grandmother, Mary Agnes, who recounted old ballads and stories such as the "the Raggle-Taggle Gypsies" (8-9). Performing in high school theater productions, Hartigan "retained a lifelong fascination with the trappings of theatricality—costumes, masks, the power of gesture—precisely because of their larger-than-life dimension" (16).

Curtis duly uncovers the family's Irish genealogies and sensitively outlines the daily routines of her parents' unhappy marriage, their nominal worship at the Catholic church, and the financial hardships shared with her three younger siblings. Hartigan was devoted to her father, who worked hard as an auditor and accountant to support the home yet hardly made a lucrative living, compounded by the Great Depression. But she was gravely marked by the brittle and distant



Fig. 1. Grace Hartigan, *The Persian Jacket* (1952), oil on canvas, 57 1/2" x 48". The Museum of Modern Art, New York; gift of George Poindexter (413.1953). Digital image ©The Museum of Modern Art / © The Estate of Grace Hartigan.

relationship with her arrogant and social-climbing mother, Grace Gertrude, who, along with her membership to the Daughters of the American Republic (DAR), clearly favored her only son, Arthur. She internalized her mother's terse description of herself as always "dissatisfied—so restless" to become her singular personality trait: in Hartigan's words, restlessness was "my greatest curse and greatest potential asset, all in one" (13).

Like many women in the forties, marriage, motherhood, and World War II shaped Hartigan's future. Having turned down two potential college scholarships, one at Ryder Business College (now, Ryder University)—advanced education was a unique opportunity for women in the 1940s—she recklessly traveled cross-country with her first husband, Robert Lincoln Jachens, whom she married in 1941 (and officially divorced in 1947). Thwarted by the birth of her son, Jeffrey Arthur Jachens, on February 27, 1942, and financial difficulties coinciding with Pearl Harbor and World War II, she returned back east and excelled at manual work as a "woman draftsman"

at Wright Aeronautical factory in Newark, enrolling in night school at Newark College of Engineering (25). Concurrent with the United States's womanpower campaign, one can imagine here the popular image of Rosie the Riveter or Winnie the Welder, physically strong and patriotic wartime projections of the female worker in "masculine" guise. Lacking in formal art training, Hartigan's discipline as a master draftsman became, arguably, the true technical building blocks of her artistic education, while also providing crucial financial independence when she settled on her career as an artist in New York City in 1945.

By 1950, Hartigan's painting career had steady purpose, vitally altered by Jackson Pollock's drip paintings, on view in January 1948 at Betty Parsons Gallery. Hartigan's world was the bustling and exotic Lower East Side, where she initially shared her studio, a former sewing machine factory at 25 Essex Street, with painter and lover Alfred Leslie. She strode down the Bowery to join friends for cheap beers and endless conversation at the Cedar Tavern on 24 University Place, double-dated with Helen Frankenthaler and Clement Greenberg at Ed Winston's Tropical Gardens on 8th Street, or commanded attention from a predominantly male audience on panels at the Club, whose original charter members did not include women, alongside Elaine de Kooning or Joan Mitchell.

Moreover, Curtis prudently dissects Hartigan's self-aggrandizing desire to view herself, in the artist's words, as a "crusader, or a missionary ... with the voice that can speak to thousands," and concomitant fear to produce her most celebrated paintings from the 1950s (125). While struggling to position herself, she

anxiously explored structural tensions between figuration and abstraction. In a promising series quoting Old Masters, including *The Persian Jacket* and the *Matadors*, she embellished the use of clothing, costumes, and masks, and articulated the body through gender role-playing and masquerade. Walter Silver, another long-term partner and photographer, strikingly captured the artist-as-model and her studio environs. Curtis pointedly develops her paintings' steady solidification and resolve, visible in her subjects of brides and bathers, and most successfully in her "city life" images. In her strident embrace of market vendors, mannequins, urban showcases, and billboards, and an ever-greater exploration of popular culture's ceremonial rituals and modern goddesses, Hartigan had found her subject matter: "that which is vulgar and vital in American modern life" (147).

In these precarious years of growth (1950–55), and the pinnacle of success (1956–60), Curtis expands upon Hartigan's associations with a decidedly younger group of critics and poets gaining attention. The poet and curator Frank O'Hara and artist Larry Rivers are discussed at length for their significant reciprocal influences and collaborations (although both figures are extensively researched in previous scholarship), as well as her larger circle of poets, including John Ashbery, James Schuyler, and Barbara Guest (later, a close friend and significant collaborator). By mid-decade Hartigan was also a central figure on the Hamptons social scene, joining the coterie of artists and writers who escaped New York summering in Bridgehampton, Southampton, or The Springs.

Curtis's fascinating discussion of motherhood deserves more attention, as she broadly compares the career choices

of female contemporaries, such as Mercedes Matter, for example, whose son was born the same year as Hartigan's. *Kindergarten Chats* (1950), Hartigan's abstracted vision of her son's scattered toys, was a palpable reminder of her ruthless decision to abandon Jeffrey, a choice that haunted her life as a "shadowy presence" (71). *Months and Moons* (1950), another layered reference to the psychological fears of reproduction, suggested the conflation of lunar cycles and bodily menstruation (69).

In other respects, Curtis's cogent research on Hartigan's relatively poor success at auction in recent years presupposes the argument that even those few postwar women artists with noteworthy exhibition histories and prominent collectors rarely sustained long-term marketplace recognition, whereas male celebrities of Abstract Expressionism steadily shattered auction records. *Restless Ambition* is thus a critical book that reinforces the importance of biographical research as both academic and commercial factors in an artist's longstanding reputation and success. •

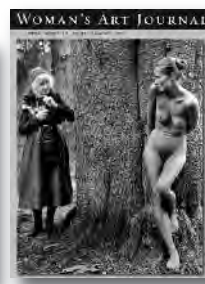
Aliza Edelman authored "Grace Hartigan's *Grand Street Brides*: The Modern Bride as Mannequin," in *WAJ* (Fall/Winter 2013), and recently organized the retrospective, *Judith Lauand: Brazilian Modernist, 1950s-2000s* at Driscoll Babcock Galleries, New York.

Notes

1. Grace Hartigan, *The Journals of Grace Hartigan 1951-1955*, William T. La Moy and Joseph P. McCaffrey, eds. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2009), 157.



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Helena Rubinstein: Beauty is Power

By Mason Klein
The Jewish Museum and Yale
University Press, 2014

Reviewed by Jennifer Zarro

Women dominated the burgeoning beauty and cosmetic industry of the early twentieth century, a period marked by increasing autonomy and creative self-expression for women. Elizabeth Arden promoted salon aesthetics and beauty products aligned with a “WASPy” elitism; her Red Door salons hinted at exclusivity. Madam C. J. Walker pioneered a line for skin and hair care in the African American market. Helena Rubinstein’s products and advertising supported individualism and democratic empowerment.

Known as “Madame,” Helena Rubinstein was a self-made woman who fashioned a unique and powerful persona for herself. She became a “beacon” of the “emboldened femininity” endorsed as her company ideal (19). All of the early, woman-run beauty empires recognized the emergent awareness about women as unique individuals who desired greater personal agency. However, it was Rubinstein who supplemented this awareness with a business model stemming from the “correspondence between modern art and cosmetics” (90). Just as modern art of the turn of the twentieth century revealed new concepts of beauty as it dramatically departed from nature, so too would “the new woman [create] herself on her own terms” (90).

Published to coincide with the 2014–15 exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York City, *Helena Rubinstein: Beauty is Power*, written by curator Mason Klein, weaves together art, design, social history, biography, beautiful period photographs and advertisements, and artworks from Rubinstein’s extensive art collection. The result is a revelatory document about the “woman who invented beauty” (90). Moreover, this book secures Rubinstein’s position as an



Fig. 1. Helena Rubinstein holding one of her masks from the Ivory Coast (1934). Photo: George Maillard Kessler. Helena Rubinstein Foundation Archives, Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY, Gladys Marcus Library, Special Collections

innovative entrepreneur and progressive marketing expert who uniquely combined art and design with beauty and cosmetics—an insight and workstyle which resulted in an international business empire.

This catalogue is not the first scholarly investigation of Rubinstein’s biography or mercantile practices, but it is the first to consider her life, her art, and her business in the context of a museum exhibition. As such, this book allows us to consider Rubinstein anew. Klein writes convincingly about how her art collection and obsession with design functioned in ways both numerous and pioneering. For example, Madame’s accumulation of portrait busts and painted portraits become more than simply objects to align into an art historical narrative. The collection allows for serious consideration of the very thing that inspired Rubinstein’s business developments: faces and identities. Her many self-portraits can be considered similarly. As singular

objects, they are part of long history of subjectivity, patronage, and artist-patron relationships. But they also reveal Rubinstein’s obsession with self-portraiture as a visual site for creative self-actualization and exploratory self-myth-making, elements vital to the allure and leadership of her business. Her collection of Gabonese, Nigerian, and Ivory Coast sculptures and masks (Fig. 1) evinces keen collecting practices for her time and also represents vastly varied concepts of beauty, ideals that were key to Rubinstein’s marketing and product development. In the context of the art museum and catalogue, then, we see how forward-looking Rubinstein was in employing art as a powerful engine to drive innovative business and marketing developments.

In her work and her life, Rubinstein demonstrated how “the modern woman could and should curate herself” (18–19). Born in a small town in Poland in 1872, she fled an arranged marriage as one of her first acts of independence. Early

travels took her to Krakow, Vienna, Melbourne, back to Europe by 1906, and soon thereafter to the United States. Early on, she educated herself about art and design and worked into the development of her beauty products ideals of independence and autonomy. Interior design, architecture, and art became models for how to live a creative life in a new, modern world. For Rubinstein, decorating the interior of a home or salon, or using cosmetics to enhance one's face or body, were acts of complete agency and provided possibilities for self-invention. A great joy of this catalogue is that we are treated to many of Madame's more dazzling design choices—a clear Lucite bed fitted with

glowing fluorescent lights, quilted and shiny cellophane walls, or a card room decorated with three large murals by Salvador Dali. Although these extravagant designs may suggest exclusively idiosyncratic choices, her overall concept about the power of design was egalitarian. Klein tells us that Rubinstein's, "kaleidoscopic variety of styles in the décor of her salons and homes ... served to level snobbish taste and democratize who and what could be considered beautiful" (20).

This catalogue effectively presents Rubinstein as a cosmetics maven with a visionary's understanding of how fine arts and style could so effectively enhance business and branding. The

book balances all the nuances required to tell this story. Klein progresses in a narrative, chronological style, drawing in biography, art and social history, beauty product development, and interior design where appropriate. Throughout are many pages of stunning images, making the reading experience one of consistent visual discovery. Ultimately, readers are able to uncover the depths and layers of this remarkable, unflagging woman whose choices now seem revolutionarily feminist for the times in which she lived and worked. •

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She's Got What It Takes: American Women Artists in Dialogue

By Deanna Sirlin
Charta, 2013

Reviewed by Jane Bickerton

Through this collection of reflective essays, Deanna Sirlin, an artist and writer, ventured on a creative journey, seeking a clearer understanding of her artistic life through dialogue with nine women artists who influenced her creative output. The artists—Joyce Kozloff (b.1942), Ursula Van Rydingsvard (b.1942), Jennifer Bartlett (b.1941), Louise Fishman (b.1939), Jane Freilicher (1924-2014), Elaine Reichek (b.1943), Joan Snyder (b.1940), Pat Steir (b.1940), and Betty Woodman (b.1930)—all were older by at least fifteen years. Sirlin shares her impressions and observations hoping to inspire young women artists.

The book examines what it is to live, work, and create as a woman artist in America today. The impetus for Sirlin to start these conversations was her wish to share her thoughts with Anne Truitt (1921-2004), who had been a dear friend and colleague, after attending a posthumous retrospective of her work at the Hirshhorn Museum in 2009.

The conversations and the writing process in this book resonate with Sirlin's

mixed media work, *Progress*, illustrated in the introduction. All demonstrate a process of layering and bricolage, integrating and sharing unique moments of gesture, emotion, and form through narrative.

The essays are organized around interviews further embroidered with additional layers from more recent conversations. These artists came of age in a male-dominated art world during the 1960s and 1970s, when the grid was often the starting point for their vision. Their voices capture individual journeys of personal growth and survival as well as their distinctive approaches to creating art over a fifty-year span.

Betty Woodman, one of Sirlin's subjects, has worked with clay for over sixty years, teaching and pushing boundaries that extend her work from creative functional pots to artistic forms. Sirlin found inspiration in

the continual inventiveness with form that has let her move beyond the wheel and into the painted world as well as the conceptual world of installation. Most ceramic artists have not pursued this kind of cross-pollination of ideas and formats.... At eighty-three, she is still taking chances and making changes (18).

Sirlin was struck by the sheer emotion of her encounter with the work

of Ursula Van Rydingsvard. Not only does the sculptor produce monumental works but she also runs a studio where multiple assistants perform a silent dance as they aid in the realization of these works. Van Rydingsvard told Sirlin that her creative output is influenced by her long time studio mate Judy Pfaff and friend Kiki Smith as well as the work of artists like Louise Bourgeois (31-32).

It was Joyce Kozloff's natural affinity for color that intrigued Sirlin:

I open the door and witness, on the walls of her bathroom, the most exquisite tile work.... It is inlaid floor to ceiling with colors ranging from red to orange to blues and purples, with floral drawing overlaid on a geometric pattern of borders within borders.... Here, Kozloff remixes her own work the way she has long mixed and juxtaposed artistic styles from multiple cultures and centuries (42).

Jane Freilicher was an artist that Sirlin admired from art college days because of her luscious use of color and paint applied in a flattened manner. Apart from landscapes drawn from her long stays in the Hamptons and Cape Cod—quiet spots where time stood still, Sirlin notes the vase as a lifelong compositional device for

Freilicher that gently played as a mantra for her paintings, repeating and speaking, whilst quietly reaching out to the soul (52).

Sirlin found Jennifer Bartlett's garden to be a natural extension of her studio.

[I]t reflects the same aesthetic as her drawings. A Douglas fir is planted beside a tree of a different species to contrast rather than to blend. A long rectangular concrete pool holds water, ready for lilies and other water plants to be cultivated. And beside it, in contrast, is a large natural rock, the right scale to sit upon (58).

Gardens also figure predominantly in Joan Snyder's work and life but with

a different feel: even as they make her happy, her works are tough.

Her paintings are just this side of sweet and nostalgic without ever actually becoming so. If anything, they are tough works with content and soul, like those of her male contemporaries like Kiefer or Rauschenberg. Her work has an uncanny physicality that is built up on the surface with paint. (76).

For Elaine Reichek, who works with text and needle, Sirlin felt that thread represents a strand of narrative, a direction for the exploration of reproduction and representation to rework the meaning of culture. Although she uses a "digitally driven production method instead of

stitching by hand," Sirlin, for example, "read Elaine's appropriation of Albers as a feminist gesture, particularly since she renders his painted images in the traditionally feminine form of embroidery" (84).

In addition to her reflections on each artist, Sirlin's references include her interviews with the individual artists in *The ArtSection: An Online Journal of Art and Cultural Commentary* <http://www.theartsection.com/> (accessed 05/22/2015). ●

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The Art Deco Murals of Hildreth Meière

By Catherine Coleman Brawer and Kathleen Murphy Skolnik
Andrea Monfried Editions, 2014

Reviewed by Mary Caroline Simpson

Since 1932, three Art Deco style roundels (each 18 feet in diameter and made of colored enamel and mixed metals) have adorned the 50th Street entrance of New York City's Radio City Music Hall, but few people can name the artist responsible for *Dance, Drama, and Song*. This first monograph devoted to Hildreth Meière (1892–1961) does much to restore her reputation, and the striking color photographs taken by her granddaughter, Hildreth Meière Dunn, which comprise much of the publication's 240 pages, are central to its success. Co-authored by the art historians Catherine Coleman Brawer and Kathleen Murphy Skolnik, the text provides a foreword by the architectural historian Richard Guy Wilson, followed by a preface, an introduction, and nine thematic sections, plus notes, a chronological list of her commissions, an index, and illustration credits.

Minnie Meière of Flushing, Queens, who had "dreamed of becoming an artist" (31), nurtured her teenage

daughter's passion for art, and following a European tour in 1911, her daughter, Hildreth, studied at the Art Students League for a year. After the family moved to San Francisco in 1913, Meière continued her studies at the California School of Fine Arts until 1916, when, at age 24, she returned to New York to complete mechanical engineering coursework at Columbia University. Desiring to do "some useful thing" (34), she briefly worked as a draftsperson for the U.S. Navy during WWI. Starting in 1919, Meière studied mural painting and the design of architectural embellishments at the New York School of Applied Design for Women. Although the more prestigious Beaux-Arts Institute of Design accepted only male students, she was able to compete in its design competitions, and her winning entries caught the notice of the architect Bertram G. Goodhue, who hired her in the 1920s to work on major projects.

The authors effectively show in section three how Meière navigated changing demands to avoid conflict with male authorities while contributing to the design program of the Nebraska State Capitol in Lincoln. For instance, Meière had researched tribal artifacts and Nebraska wildlife as she prepared designs for the Native American theme Goodhue initially proposed for the

vestibule dome, but she abandoned this work after a project advisor, the ethnologist Hartley Burr Alexander, devised a new iconographic program tying Nebraska history "to the ideals of Western civilization" (59). Although in a subordinate position during this early stage of her career, Meière's designs, which master craftsmen translated into glazed ceramic tiles, were widely admired and remain her "most important secular commission" (58).

In the subsequent sections, Brawer and Skolnik recount Meière's five-decade career. Providing abundant evidence (correspondence, working notes, sketches, and photographs) gleaned through extensive archival research, they expertly analyze the artist's development of design concepts and thoroughly describe her use of varied materials and methods of fabrication. Their overarching goal is to demonstrate that Meière was not only a talented artist but also an astute businesswoman and a consummate professional in her dealings with various clients, architects, design teams, and craftsmen. The fourth section covers Meière's mixing of Byzantine-style glass mosaic and Art Deco styling in various liturgical projects, including Missouri's Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis, described as her "labor of faith and love" (131). Spanning the period 1932, when Meière completed



Fig. 1. Hildreth Meière, *Communication of Thought by Sound and the Spoken Word and Communication of Thought by Sight and the Written Word* (1939), glass mosaic and colored cement, entrance to the auditorium of the AT&T Building, 1939 New York World's Fair.

the Radio City Music Hall medallions, and 1960, when she designed three marble mosaic panels devoted to the Hercules legend for the lobby of Prudential Plaza in Newark, New Jersey, the fifth section covers Meière's pioneering role in the development of Art Deco architectural adornment. Section six shifts attention to how dwindling corporate and liturgical commissions during the Great Depression compelled Meière to enter anonymous competitions organized by the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture, even though she felt that the contests were "impositions for known artists" (170). Her successful bids include *The Post*, a linear bronze piece depicting the Roman messenger god Mercury created for the lobby of Chicago's Logan Square Post Office. Although the authors provide little evidence of the critical and public response to her work, it is nevertheless clear that Meière's Art Deco styling was in demand. She received numerous awards and honors, lectured and published widely, and assumed leadership roles for various civic and professional organizations, most notably the directorship of the Beaux Arts Institute of Design's mural department.

The Art Deco Murals of Hildreth Meière is a meticulously researched and handsome monograph sure to appeal to architectural scholars and Art Deco enthusiasts, but its predominately technical focus may disappoint feminist historians. Tying together material from different sections would have clarified how prescribed gender behavior circumscribed Meière's choices and actions as she developed designs and negotiated contracts between 1920 and 1960. Moreover, the text lacks discussion of Meière's commitment to the education and advancement of female designers. The artist's ambivalence about feminism is revealed in a comment about a failed proposal to a federal mural competition in 1935. Meière had selected the emancipation of women from among the recommended themes, "not because I am a strong suffragist," but rather for "its pictorial possibilities" (170). Stylistically and thematically, it resembles the oil on canvas mural she painted for the National Council of Women's exhibit during Chicago's Century of Progress Fair in 1933 that illustrated how political mobilization had advanced women's educational, suffrage, and economic rights since 1833. Included in section

eight primarily to demonstrate that Meière was, "a versatile artist capable of designing a variety of historical styles" (193), the mural is visually dull and conservative in its handling of the theme. Did her ambivalence about feminism somehow account for such uninspired work? And given this ambivalence, what is to be made of her desire during the same decade to work with the theme of the female worker? Believing that the "telephone girl" possessed, "a vitality and a real interest which would be much more worthwhile than mere symbolic figures" (145), she prepared a proposal in 1931 for the lobby ceiling of Manhattan's AT&T Long Distance Building depicting a "young woman as she awoke, enjoyed her morning coffee, dressed, and left for her job" (146). After AT&T executives balked at the bedroom scene and complained that the composition resembled a comic strip, Meière revised the ceiling design because her, "first priority was to please her client" (146). However, her design program for the AT&T pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair reintroduced the "telephone girl" in a manner palatable to company leaders. Aside vermilion colored exterior doors with gold leaf figures of a female switchboard operator and a telephone lineman; she designed a colored cement and glass mosaic showing authoritative businessmen assisted by dutiful female office workers expertly using the latest communication technologies (Fig. 1). The division of labor and power is clear. Although highly accomplished, Meière was nevertheless like the "telephone girl" in that her professional survival and success often required she both meet and acquiesce to the demands of male architects and clients while somehow maintaining her own personal and professional goals and needs. •

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A Sisterhood of Sculptors: American Artists in Nineteenth-Century Rome

By Melissa Dabakis

Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014

Reviewed by Jennifer Wingate

Together with other recent publications on women sculptors in Italy, Melissa Dabakis's new book helps counter the image of a "white marmorean flock," conjured by Henry James in 1903 to describe "that strange sisterhood of American lady sculptors who at one time settled upon the seven hills [of Rome]."¹ James's phrase is still odd enough to twenty-first-century sensibilities to intrigue and perplex (like much about neoclassical sculpture itself); however, this study demystifies its subject, showing how women sculptors who negotiated the "pleasure and perils" of Rome were nothing like a uniform flock. They blazed new trails of feminine professionalism by producing sculpture and living independently in Rome between 1850 and 1876, each of them navigating the conditions of colonialism, patriarchy, and the art market in her own way. Nonetheless, though "[n]o one 'true' feminine artistic self emerged," the nineteenth-century ideology of "true womanhood" held much sway (10). Even the suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton's 1848 Declaration of Sentiments argued for women's equality by accepting their essential difference from and moral superiority over men (8). Faith in this virtuous ideal required expatriate women sculptors to carefully craft public personas and domestic lives to achieve professional goals without challenging norms of feminine decorum and male dominance (or raising the alarms of papal censors). At the same time, their privileged status as Anglo-American expatriates enabled many of the liberties that they enjoyed in colonial Italy. Like art historian Charmaine Nelson's 2009 book *The Color of Stone: Sculpting the Black Female Subject in Nineteenth-Century America*, Dabakis draws attention to the power dynamics of Anglo-American cultural tourism in Rome.²

The contradictions that these women lived make the fluidity of their sculptures' meanings and reception inevitable. By recovering these shifting meanings, *Sisterhood of Sculptors* builds on and complements recent books that Dabakis references, like Nelson's *Color of Stone*, Kirsten Pai Buick's monograph on Edmonia Lewis, Kate Culkin's cultural biography of Hosmer, and several studies of women artists by historians and art historians alike.³ All link traditional art historical examinations of biography, training, style, and technique to broader questions of place, gender, race, and colonialism.

Dabakis lives up to her promise of focusing on feminine artistic difference by covering well- and lesser-known artists together in chapters that are arranged thematically. She features Louisa Lander alongside Harriet Hosmer, for example, in Part I, "Feminine Professionalism in Boston and Rome." By choosing not to "court domesticity as a protective mantle" (65), failing to deny allegations of an illicit relationship with an Italian man, and sculpting from the nude female model for subjects like her controversial life-sized *Virginia Dare* (1859–60; Fig. 1), Lander raised the suspicions of the expatriate community, which eventually shunned her and drove her back to the United States. They perceived her behavior as reflecting poorly on her daring sculptural subjects and vice versa. Lander's story is important, not only because it reveals challenges faced by women artists, but also because it shows how they "reconfigured [neoclassicism] to give voice to feminine experience" (5). Lander's *Virginia Dare* (a memorial to the first child born in the Lost Colony on Roanoke Island who was suspected of having been captured by Indians) offered a stronger subject than other contemporary depictions of captive women. While readers may already be familiar with how Hosmer's *Zenobia* is less passive than Hiram Powers's *Greek Slave*, *Virginia Dare* is another feminist interpretation of the popular nineteenth-century captivity narrative that will be new to many.⁴

As Lander's fate illustrates, true womanhood was the social benchmark



Fig. 1. Louisa Lander, *Virginia Dare* (1859–60), marble, H. 96" (incl. pedestal). The Elizabethan Gardens, Manteo, N.C.

of middle-class and elite feminine propriety, but the ambitions and financial needs of these independent women required striving and juggling that threatened to topple them from their virtuous pedestals. Their careers necessitated studios that functioned as

public exhibition and networking spaces where financial transactions transpired. Their artistic endeavors required them to move freely about the city studying sculptures of classical nudes and working from the live model in the studio. In Part II, "Women Sculptors and the Politics of Rome," Dabakis reminds readers that women's ability "to survey their world remained highly regulated" in the nineteenth century. In Rome, though, "the power of the gaze positioned women sculptors in the superior role of cultural colonizers and thus reversed traditional power relations" (102). And even though the feminist community of sculptors, writers, and reformers in the Eternal City provided essential support of these new roles, the constant need to negotiate propriety's boundaries caused tensions. Women sculptors at times criticized each other for being too commercial, for employing Italian workmen, for working from the nude model, and for networking to win commissions.

On a more positive note, expatriate women in Rome provided an audience for one another's work and nurtured an environment in which coded feminist statements thrived. Dabakis firmly situates Hosmer's *Beatrice Cenci* (1856) within the context of Hosmer's oeuvre, which included other feminist emblems like the mythological Medusa and Daphne (both 1854), and within Italian politics. The significance of Hosmer's *Cenci* will be familiar to readers with knowledge of nineteenth-century neoclassical sculpture. In her biography of Hosmer, Culkin provides a thorough overview of Victorian fascination with *Cenci*'s story and the boldness of Hosmer's interpretation (which departed from typical femme fatale representations).³ Here, Dabakis underscores the sculptor's business acumen and her savvy timing of *Cenci*'s production and exhibition.

Sisterhood of Sculptors also tackles the stylistic possibilities and limitations particular to neoclassicism. For Hosmer, the unemotional Greek "severe style" allowed her bust of Daphne to convey "a cool and detached psychic autonomy and offer a strikingly refreshing commen-

tary upon female consciousness" (49). Dabakis notes that neoclassicism was more popular in the nineteenth century than has been acknowledged. Associated with civic virtue and patriotism, it was "an intellectual province open to American women" (6). At the same time, its "limited vocabulary" prevented Anne Whitney from modeling a satisfactory African subject for her allegorical sculpture of Ethiopia (which Whitney never translated into marble and later destroyed). Buick, Dabakis, and Nelson all have addressed the intersections of race, gender, and neoclassicism, in particular Nelson, whose book challenges the legitimacy of white marble as a medium in the portrayal of black bodies.⁶ Dabakis writes that, with *Ethiopia*, Whitney "produced a sculptural vision that mediated between the formal qualities derived from African features and those of classical (white) beauty" (165). All of these authors seem to concur that nineteenth-century neoclassical sculptors like William Wetmore Story, Lewis, and Whitney depicted racially mixed features in their black female subjects because "the light skinned woman was a veritable model of bourgeois true womanhood" at that time (165).⁷ Moreover, neoclassicism itself was inadequate for embracing a universal ideal that did not accommodate difference. Perhaps Dabakis could have included more about the difficulties Lewis faced as a black artist in Rome, but the frictions she describes, mostly regarding the sculptor's rapport with Boston patrons, nonetheless point to the distinct obstacles Lewis encountered abroad.

All three of the book's sections share new perspectives on how cultural geography and gender politics informed the production, meaning, and reception of American women's neoclassical sculptures, with some of Part III, "The Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Suffrage Debates," having appeared in a 2008 article, "Sculpting Lincoln: Vinnie Ream, Sarah Fisher Ames, and the Equal Rights Movement," and in a 2006 anthology essay "'Ain't I a Woman?': Anne Whitney, Edmonia Lewis, and the Iconography of Emancipation."⁸ For anyone who enjoyed these essays, and who uses them to teach an inter-

disciplinary art history that engages socio-political currents, this book is a long-awaited pleasure. Its generous 9 x 10 inch format gives reproductions ample space and conveys a deserved authority. Like many art history publications though, the book's heft makes it more at home on a desk than in a backpack. It remains to be seen whether academic publishers will find a way to digitize such volumes. In the meantime, professors will want to assign *Sisterhood of Sculptors* because Dabakis's writing is engaging, jargon free, and suitable for students of nineteenth-century transatlantic studies, American studies, and art history. The book is indeed very useful for "provid[ing] models for viewing and interpreting 19th-century sculpture" (3). Along with its predecessors, *Sisterhood of Sculptors* proves that neoclassicism is much more than first meets the twenty-first-century eye, and not only because atmospheric lighting made marble figurative sculpture look more sensuously flesh-like to nineteenth-century audiences than today's viewers can appreciate, but because of the socially, politically, and geographically grounded circumstances of its artistic production. This rich and engagingly conveyed history gives the stories of these sculptors and their work new life. ●

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Notes

1. Henry James, *William Wetmore Story and His Friends: From Letters, Diaries, and Recollections* (NY: Houghton, Mifflin, 1903), 1:257.
2. Charmaine Nelson, *The Color of Stone: Sculpting the Black Female Subject in Nineteenth-Century America* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2009).
3. See for example, Kirsten Pai Buick, *Child of the Fire: Mary Edmonia Lewis and the Problem of Art History's Black and Indian Subject* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2010); Kate Culkin, *Harriet Hosmer: A Cultural Biography* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2010).
4. For example, in the context of her Hosmer biography, Culkin mentions the scandal of

Lander's alleged affair to highlight Hosmer's need to patrol her reputation, but Lander's sculpture is not discussed. Culkin, *Harriet Hosmer*, 61–62.

5. Ibid, 47–50.

6. See Lisa E. Farrington's review of Charmaine Nelson, *The Color of Stone*, WAJ 30, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2009): 42–44.

7. See Buick, *Child of the Fire*, 71.

8. "Sculpting Lincoln," *American Art* 22

(Spring 2008): 78–101; Patricia Johnston, ed., *Seeing High and Low: Representing Social Conflict in American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2006), 84–102.

Fashion Victims: Dress at the Court of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette

By Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell
Yale University Press, 2015

Reviewed by Heidi A. Strobel

Rarely do my interests in art history and popular culture converge when I write a book review, but in the midst of reading Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell's *Fashion Victims: Dress at the Court of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette*, I kept thinking about Kate Middleton, the Duchess of Cambridge. When she appears in public, her outfit is instantaneously dissected and its manufacturer almost always experiences a surge in orders. This contemporary fashion scrutiny is also a cornerstone of Chrisman-Campbell's description of late eighteenth-century French fashion as a "highly visible and versatile vehicle for modern social commentary" (7). The popular Middleton (who studied art history as an undergraduate), with her careful and diplomatic nods to British designers, symbolizes the antithesis of Marie Antoinette of France, whose actions, sartorial and otherwise, comprise a significant part of *Fashion Victims*. Indeed, Chrisman-Campbell notes that today's fashion industry had its origins in Louis XVI's reign, which began in 1774. Sumptuary laws in France were increasingly ignored following the 1715 death of Louis XIV, whose *ancien régime* court was characterized by luxurious clothing. This sartorial relaxation gradually led to a modern definition of fashion that centered on novelty and disregarded custom; a famous example of this was Marie Antoinette's rejection of the *grand corps*, the unyielding corset worn only by the court elite. During Louis XVI's reign, it became increasingly difficult to identify social class by

looking at clothing. For reasons of comfort and economy, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette encouraged this democrat-ization of fashion, which contributed to the image of the king "as an ordinary mortal rather than an absolute monarch" (318). When a king loses his divinity, it becomes easier to remove him from power, a process that began in 1789. As Chrisman-Campbell explains, at least a decade before the Bastille fell and the royal family was imprisoned, the world of fashion had radically changed and embraced revolutionary qualities. By the early 1780s, the language of politics was inseparable from the world of fashion, as Thomas Crow demonstrated with the relationship between art and politics in *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (1995). As the examples of both Marie Antoinette and Kate Middleton indicate, dress remains a careful part of self-fashioning and political popularity.

Fashion Victims is divided into four parts: Court and City; New and Novel; Fashion and Fantasy; and Revolution and Recovery. The first part focuses on the three types that symbolized the radical fashion changes of the late eighteenth century: the queen, the *petite-maîtresse* (lady of fashion), and the *marchande de modes* (roughly translated as fashion merchant). Chrisman-Campbell relies on extant bills, inventories, clothing, fashion plates, and paintings for her thoughtful and thorough analysis of French fashion, one of the country's most valuable export commodities. She describes the queen as a

born fashion victim. Blessed with youth, beauty, wealth, good taste, and good intentions, she was also extravagant, immature, and highly susceptible to flattery. Her wardrobe was subject to intense public scrutiny and the rigid constraints of court etiquette (24).



Fig. 1. Adélaïde Ducreux, *Self-portrait with a harp* (1789)

Traditionally, a French consort was expected to dress richly, patriotically, and modestly, while a royal mistress (if there was one) was allowed more sartorial freedom. Chrisman-Campbell points out that while the unpopular Marie-Antoinette's spending was more modest than previous royal mistresses, her taste for *nouveau* fashion contributed to her public victimization, eventually earning her the epithet Madame Déficit. For example, her preference for imported muslins and gauzes over Lyon silk was unpatriotic and economically damaging (a fashion faux pas that Kate Middleton would never make). The queen was also expected to look to the conservative French court at Versailles for fashion cues, rather than Paris. As a young queen, Marie Antoinette disregarded these rules that had been followed for centuries and employed a provincial upstart, Marie-Jeanne "Rose" Bertin, as her chief *marchande de modes*. The queen disregarded court etiquette, allowing

Bertin intimate access to her inner circle, thus further contributing to the destabilization of social order. Bertin's Parisian success with the queen and other clients made her a celebrity, akin to Donna Karan or Alexander McQueen today.

The categories of *marchande de modes* and *petite-maitresse* were characterized by social instability, in part due to the late eighteenth-century democratization of French fashion. *Marchandes de modes* were particularly threatening, for they frequently enjoyed economic success and social mobility. Their fashion shops connoted luxurious consumption and sometimes sexuality, as *les marchandes* were criticized for seducing their clients into making purchases (62). The *petites-maitresses* were the clients of *marchandes de modes*, who often epitomized the social and sartorial instability of the 1770s and 1780s. As Chrisman-Campbell indicates, this term applied to various social classes (including the queen), for it denoted a lifestyle of constant à la mode outfit and coiffure changes; clothing had to be novel as well as new (77). The *petites-maitresses* were quite often the urban wives and/or daughters of bankers, soldiers, and statesmen, as well as actresses and courtesans; they displaced royal and aristocratic women as arbiters of taste, again threatening the social hierarchy. With their emphasis on good grooming and self-fashioning, they made fashion a key component of late eighteenth-century femininity during a period when some (often elite) women enjoyed an increase in political and economic power.

The second section of *Fashion Victims: New and Novel* begins with a brief comparison between contemporary and historical definitions of fashion. Although almanacs and fashion periodicals made it easy for eighteenth-century clotheshorses to follow various fashion trends, they reached a much narrower population than today. Unlike the wealthy elite, most people only had two changes of clothing: an everyday one and one for Sunday (74). Ready-to-wear fashion did not exist, making it quite rare for a person to get new clothing. On the other hand, there was a thriving secondhand clothing market that ensured the longevity of many

expensive garments. Even Marie Antoinette had some of her clothing refurbished so that she could wear it again (like Kate Middleton cleverly does) or passed it along to her ladies-in-waiting. In such a constricted market, truly new fashionable items, such as elaborate politically themed *poufs*, made a huge splash.

For the French elite, certain stages of life such as marriage and death, and events such as the Longchamp promenade and attending court, required new and expensive wardrobes. The latest fashion trends were often spotted at Longchamp or in wedding trousseaus, while court appearances and the early stages of mourning (*le deuil*) featured more traditional clothing. Chrisman-Campbell was trained as an art historian with specializations in fashion and textiles. As such, her volume offers extraordinarily detailed visual descriptions of the various stages of mourning, which is particularly helpful, given the lack of paintings depicting this stage of life. As she indicates, once again fashion was inextricably linked to politics, for "dutiful observance of court mourning was a highly visible way of declaring allegiance to the throne while showing off wealth and savoir-faire" (134). Then, as now, somber black was a mainstay color of mourning, whose latter stages could be enlivened by chic additions seen in fashion plates such as stripes, pierrots, fringe, muffs, embroidered fichus, and watch chains (145–46). Mourning influenced fashion, for the economical and stain-resistant black began to make itself into everyday wardrobes; its ubiquitous popularity likewise was a social leveler, making it difficult to identify one's social class by dress. For reasons of ease and economy, Louis XVI relaxed the rules of court mourning, leading to its gradual demise that weakened the social hierarchy.

In Part III, *Fashion and Fantasy*, the 1780s are described as experimental and cerebral. The *marchandes de modes* and their colleagues were often inspired by current trends and/or events, such as famous plays (Beaumarchais's *Le Mariage de Figaro*), the American Revolution, or famous visitors to Paris, such as Benjamin Franklin, the ambassadors of Tippoo-Saib, sultan of

Mysore (modern-day Karnataka, India), or Prince Nguyen Phuc Canh of Cochinchina (modern-day Vietnam). Rose Adélaïde Ducreux's *Self-portrait with a harp* (1789; Fig. 1) refers to at least three of the popular trends from this decade: Orientalism, Anglomania, and Neoclassicism. During the eighteenth-century, Orientalism was used rather freely to refer to any nonwestern culture. Ducreux wears a *robe à l'anglaise* decorated with stripes, a motif that associated with the Orient since 1686, when Siamese ambassadors arrived in France in striped clothing (243). The self-portrait celebrates Ducreux's *sensibilité*, as well as her artistic and musical talent, for she is seen checking the tuning of the harp. On a nearby table sits a neoclassical vase, as well as a music book open to a song about tender love. While this painting illustrates the fashion hybridity of the 1780s, it is important to note that such gowns offered women a freedom of movement that had been impossible earlier in the century. As the late Angela Rosenthal argued in *Angelica Kauffman: sense and sensibility* (2006), this type of clothing occasionally offered a cultural space for women free from male control.

The unfitted *chemise à la reine* provided the queen and other women with a novel and practical garment, for unlike many other gowns, it could be put on over one's head and washed (175–76). After years of purchasing luxurious garments, Marie Antoinette promoted this much simpler, loose-fitting linen chemise in several ways: she wore them during her second pregnancy in 1781 and appeared in one in the infamous 1783 portrait by Vigée-LeBrun (now in the Hessische Hausstiftung Collection). The unpopular queen was castigated for appearing in her underwear (which the chemise was not), and the painting was removed from the Salon exhibition and replaced with a more suitable regal portrait. The chemise was problematic for two other key reasons: its plainness made it hard to identify the social class of its wearer and its material (imported bleached muslin rather than Lyon silk) was unpatriotic and hurt native textile production. As Chrisman-Campbell significantly notes, this gown was a key

precursor to the more tailored neoclassical gowns of the Directoire, seen in paintings such as Jacques-Louis David's *Portrait of Madame Récamier* (1800). Most importantly, though, the queen's fashion misstep had political ramifications, particularly in the midst of the economic crises of the 1780s. Bertin and Vigée-LeBrun attempted "sartorial damage control" with the latter's 1787 portrait of Marie Antoinette (*Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon*, Versailles), which highlights the queen's maternity (260). This was a somewhat more modest and patriotic depiction of the queen, for her petticoat was trimmed with sable and native Alençon lace, but as Chrisman-Campbell indicates, it was a case of too little, too late.

The Revolution and its aftermath transformed the role of fashion in French society, as Chrisman-Campbell explains in the final section of *Fashion Victims*. Politics, social class, and fashion were entwined, as some of the early revolutionaries were labeled with clothing terms such as *sans-culottes* (270). Fashion was no longer en vogue, for it was associated with luxury, aristocracy, and nobility; these associations spelled its downfall. The revolution decimated the

fashion trade, which employed at least twenty thousand people in Paris, as simple and often disheveled clothing became and has remained the revolutionary uniform. Many of the *marchandes de modes* such as Bertin fled France along with other émigrés, and Europe lost its fashion capital. This section provides fascinating accounts of how these émigrés or *ci-devants* (former aristocrats) earned a living by manufacturing fashionable accessories such as painted fans, embroidered gowns, and straw hats (298). Not surprisingly, when Napoleon's political ascendancy began, he supported the native textile industry and the fashion trade in general. He and his chic wife Josephine encouraged the early return of formal court dress and old-fashioned symbolism as a means of reinforcing social etiquette.

Chrisman-Campbell's comprehensive volume is lavishly illustrated. Dix-huitième specialists will particularly appreciate her head-to-toe treatment of female clothing, from elaborate pouf coiffures to gorgeous tricolor mules. Like *Impressionism, Fashion, & Modernity* (ed. Gloria Groom, 2012), *Fashion Victims* is part of a long awaited conversation between fashion and art that is a rela-

tively recent addition to art historical discourse. In comparison to most volumes on Marie Antoinette, both *Fashion Victims* and Caroline Weber's *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution* (2006) also offer more nuanced and sympathetic treatments of the French queen. Chrisman-Campbell's research indicates that the arenas of fashion (and textiles) were so viciously criticized and monitored because they were dominated by women at a time when the definitions of femininity and masculinity were in flux. Her volume offers a definitive explanation of the role of French fashion in the political, economic, and social conflict that began to engulf France in the 1780s, for "this new-found freedom of dress stoked the people's desires for more meaningful freedoms" (316). •

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The Amazons: Lives and Legends of Warrior Women across the Ancient World

By Adrienne Mayor
Princeton University Press, 2014

Reviewed by Alison C. Poe

Adrienne Mayor, a Research Scholar in Classics and in the History and Philosophy of Science at Stanford, has published several long, deeply researched volumes that address some of the more piquant aspects of antiquity in an accessible and entertaining prose style.¹ Her most recent of these books, *The Amazons: Lives and Legends of Warrior Women across the Ancient World*, seeks to prove that “Amazons were Scythian women—and the Greeks understood this” (12).

Ancient Greek authors apply the name “Scythian” to all of the nomadic tribes known to them who roved the high-altitude grasslands on the far side of the Lower Danube River (e.g., Herodotus, *Histories* 4.76, probably early 420s BCE). Some modern scholars reserve this term only for the clans living north of the Black Sea, since these were the groups most familiar to the Greeks. Others, including Mayor in *The Amazons*, use “Scythian” to encompass all of the peoples of the Eurasian steppes, a vast expanse extending to the Altai Mountains at the northwest edge of China (35–41). Both current usages have merit, but to avoid confusion between them, this review will use “Scythians” only when ancient sources do, and it will refer to the tribes under discussion in *The Amazons*—the inhabitants of the entire Eurasian grassland belt—as “steppe nomads.”

Many scholars and feminists have proffered theories about who the “real” Amazons were, some even mooted steppe horsewomen (82–83, 364).² Other scholars reject the historicity of the Amazons entirely (26–30). *The Amazons* marshals by far the broadest array of evidence to consider this question. Mayor adduces Greek, Roman, and occasional Byzantine and medieval texts; Greek, Etruscan, and Roman works of art; ancient, medieval, and

more recent narratives from non-Greek cultures in the Caucasus, the Near East, Central Asia, Egypt, Libya, and China; modern steppe traditions thought to have roots in the distant past; and—crucially, given the almost total absence of indigenous written materials—archaeological remains from the ancient nomadic cultures themselves. On this basis, she argues that the Greeks viewed the Amazons of their mythology, historiography, geography, and art as female steppe warriors.

The Amazons cites a number of ancient Greek and Latin sources that explicitly link the Amazons with the nomadic peoples they call “Scythian” (44–59 and *passim*, esp. 272, 283). Key among them are Herodotus’s *Histories* (most extensively in the origin story of the Sarmatians, 4.110–17); Diodorus Siculus’s *Library of History* (c. 65–50 BCE); Strabo of Pontus’s *Geography* (completed c. 24 CE); and Justin’s epitome (second century CE?) of the lost *Philippic Histories* of Pompeius Trogus (first century BCE). Other ancient authors situate Amazons in lands identified by the Greeks as “Scythia,” while both texts and images portray Amazons engaging in activities and customs that the Greeks ascribed to steppe nomads, such as fighting on horseback with a sigma-shaped bow (41–43, 170–75, 210–17). For Mayor, Homer’s use of *Amazones*, a loanword perhaps from one of the Eurasian tribes, together with the epithet *antianeirai*, which she translates as “equal of men,” reflects an early Greek view of the Amazons as an ethnic group of women and men who enjoyed a high level of gender parity, like the steppe clans (*Iliad* 3.189, 6.186; Mayor, 21–25).

Mayor draws myriad parallels between these Greek and Roman characterizations of Amazons and the evidence found in the kurgans (burial mounds) of ancient steppe women (63–83). Some excavated female skeletons show signs of violent trauma (although attacks on non-combatants cannot automatically be ruled out); some have bowed legs from many hours on horseback; some are interred next to horses. At certain sites, more than a third are buried with arrows and/or other weaponry.³

Ancient tombs are imperfect mirrors of their occupants; they also reflect funerary traditions that can remain elusive, especially for nonliterate cultures. Weapons placed with the dead could have belonged to someone else in life. In some kurgan cemeteries, moreover, armed women constitute only a fraction of the deceased, and in none of the documented cases are all of the skeletons with weapons female. *The Amazons* mentions no armed female burials—in fact, no steppe-type graves at all—in Pontus, a region on the southeast Black Sea coast identified by many classical sources as an Amazon heartland, home to the queens Hippolyte, Antiope, Orithyia, and Penthesilea (whose stories Mayor treats at length, 249–304). Even taken all together, the known burials constitute a tiny sample, given their immense geographic and chronological span. Significantly fewer than a thousand excavated female graves must stand as representative of cultural patterns across more than four thousand miles of steppes from roughly the seventh century BCE to the fourth century CE.

All of these caveats notwithstanding, *The Amazons* does furnish a compelling preponderance of evidence that at least a minority of steppe women were fighters, and that the Greeks invested the Amazons with traits they associated with these warriors. Knowledge of real steppe horsewomen could have filtered into Greece, Mayor observes, from the Greek colonies on the Black Sea, from slaves of steppe origins in various Greek cities, and through travel and trade (19–20, 234–35, 241–42; a deeper discussion of these and other channels would have been welcome).

Relying on the classical sources and steppe materials—and, to a lesser extent, on customs of the region today and on stories about fighting women from outside the classical world (357–429)—Mayor offers a vivid portrayal of steppe women in antiquity. They did *not* cut off one breast, as Greek writers allege of the Amazons (with conflicting explanations), but they may have worn one-sided armor or breast straps to facilitate fighting and horseback riding (84–94). They had tattoos (95–116). They had sex

with partners of their choosing, sometimes for procreation, sometimes for sheer pleasure (130–41). They drank fermented mare’s milk and inhaled smoke from the seeds of hemp plants (*kannabis*, Herodotus 1.202, 4.74–75) inside teepee saunas (145–51). They were expert horsewomen (170–84). They wore trousers, which they may have invented (191–208). They shot arrows long distances and wielded battle-axes, swords, spears, and other weapons (209–33). In all of these ways and more, they were equals of men.

Of particular interest to art historians are Mayor’s explanations of several debated or formerly overlooked details in Greek images of Amazons.⁴ The author contends, for example, that a large bird accompanying a mounted Amazon and her dog in a deer hunt on a late fifth-century BCE gold ring now in Boston is a trained eagle (188). Mayor outlines an intriguing and plausible argument, published in more depth elsewhere,⁵ that the so-called “nonsense” inscriptions associated with Amazon figures on certain Greek vases are attempts at rendering the phonemes of real names from Circassian and other nomad languages (240–42). Less persuasive is her rejection of the longstanding scholarly consensus that Amazonomachy scenes after c. 460 BCE symbolize the Persian Wars (279–83). In Mayor’s view, although Amazons and Persians wear similar clothing in Greek art—soft pointed caps, boldly patterned trousers and bodysuits, animal-skin capes, other non-Greek articles—the resemblances do not equate the two.

Mayor’s reasoning relies on a too-literal interpretation of the images, such as the Amazonomachy on a large lekythos of c. 420 BCE (Fig. 1), which she describes as “crammed with lifelike ... details” (229). Just as the nudity of the Greek warriors in this scene is an abstraction connoting heroism, the garb of the Amazons characterizes these women on the broadest level as foreign Others, and thus as symbolically interchangeable with Persians.⁶

Throughout the volume, Mayor tends to efface the distinctions among what are properly three separate kinds of “warrior women”: the Amazons of classical thought, the actual women of the ancient steppes, and the female warriors of other ancient and more recent traditions. Even if the Greek concept “Amazon” depended significantly on a knowledge of nomadic culture, it unquestionably responded to, and in turn helped to shape, Greek social constructs. Mayor largely dismisses scholars’ symbolic readings of Amazon myths (26–27), but Greek notions of womanhood and manhood, of Greek and non-Greek, underlie and inform these stories of foreign fighting women. Such subjectivities dictated, for example, that the Amazons after Homer constituted an exclusively female tribe, and that they inevitably lost to Greeks in mythical battles.⁷ The narratives that circulated in non-Hellenic realms engaged with quite different cultural forces, and their heroines are consequently different. Some of these women, such as the Assyrian queen Semiramis and the legendary Chinese heroine Mulan (193,



Fig. 1. Eretria Painter, Amazonomachy, red-figure vase-painting, Attic red-figure and white-ground lekythos (c. 420 BCE), 19.5" H, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. www.metmuseum.org

364, 427–29), bear only rather indirect or tenuous connections to the steppe peoples or to the mythical Amazons. Mayor’s titular “Amazons” are a conflation of these disparate entities.

The composite figure that emerges from Mayor’s book can perhaps be seen, at least on one level, as an extremely detailed ancestor portrait of the audacious, independent, weapon-wielding



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Amazon of American popular culture, especially as embodied by the fierce, untamed Xena: Warrior Princess.⁸ Readers who uphold this type as a model of tough-girl empowerment will likely embrace *The Amazons* with great enthusiasm. Scholars of antiquity will find the wealth of textual and visual evidence and the extensive endnotes very valuable, whether or not they find themselves agreeing on all counts with the author's methodologies and interpretations. •

Alison C. Poe is an adjunct online instructor in Art History for Fairfield University. She co-edited *Receptions of Antiquity, Constructions of Gender in European Art, 1300-1600* (2015).

Notes

1. Mayor's earlier titles include *Greek Fire, Poison Arrows, and Scorpion Bombs: Biological & Chemical Warfare in the Ancient World* (New York: Overlook Press, 2008), and *The First Fossil Hunters: Dinosaurs, Mammoths, and Myth in Greek and Roman Times* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001, 2nd ed. 2011).
2. On modern scholarship as well as feminist literature about "real" Amazons, see also G. Staley, "The Amazons: Wonder Women in America," in *American Women and Classical Myths*, ed. G. Staley (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2008), 207–27, 212–13. For a humorous sampling of theories, see W. Tyrrell, *Amazons: A Study in Athenian Mythmaking* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1984), 129, n. 1.
3. The imagery of warfare in the art excavated from the kurgans would have been a fruitful topic here as well. On ancient steppe art, see E. Reeder, ed., *Scythian Gold: Treasures from Ancient Ukraine*, exh. cat. (New York: Abrams, 1999), and J. Aruz, A. Farkas, A. Alekseev, and E. Korolkova, *The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Scythian and Sarmatian Treasures from the Russian Steppes*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000).
4. For a catalogue of the known imagery, see D. von Bothmer, *Amazons in Greek Art* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957).
5. A. Mayor, J. Colarusso, and D. Saunders, "Making Sense of Nonsense Inscriptions Associated with Amazons and Scythians on Athenian Vases," *Hesperia* 83 (2014), 447–93.
6. On several symbolic functions of "Scythian" attire in Greek art, see A. Ivantchik, "'Scythian' Archers on Archaic Attic Vases," *Ancient Civilizations* 12 (2006), 197–271. Rejecting Ivantchik, but without acknowledging the nonliteral dimension of the imagery: B. Cohen, "The Non-Greek in Greek Art," *Blackwell Companion to Greek Art*, ed. T. J. Smith and D. Plantzos (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 456–80.
7. Still a good study of the "cultural data" that determined the form of the Amazon myth: Tyrrell, *Amazons* (quote xiii).
8. On this figure generally, and on Xena specifically (not explicitly an Amazon, but linked in many ways), see Staley, "The Amazons," esp. 218–21. Mayor mentions Xena—and the slightly more civilized Wonder Woman—only in passing, 93.

Louise Bourgeois, Structures of Existence: The Cells

Edited by Julianne Lorz
Prestel, 2015

Reviewed by Robert J. Belton

Published on the occasion of an exhibition by the same title at Munich's Haus der Kunst, from February 27 to August 2, 2015, *Louise Bourgeois, Structures of Existence: The Cells* is, all at the same time, a beautiful coffee table book in which to get lost, a significant contribution to the increasing volume of scholarly material on Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010), and a remarkable exhibition catalogue.

As has been documented in these pages already, Louise Bourgeois has undoubtedly become one of the more important players in late twentieth and early twenty-first century art.¹ Early publications seemed to concentrate on placing her in one stylistic pigeonhole or another, while later ones are less preoccupied with broad categories and more concerned to articulate the

theoretical specificities of the works, particularly via psychoanalytical criticism anchored to her biography.² Bourgeois's father's mistress Sadie lived under the same roof as Bourgeois and her parents, until her mother's untimely death, leading to deep feelings of conflict and rage that most writers take as interpretable determinants of her work. After all, she once said, "Everything I do was inspired by my early life."³

In contrast, Julianne Lorz's publication offers a subtle but significant variation from the latter group, for it changes the focus to the "Cells," a body of fifty-five thematically related installations that Bourgeois worked on for the last two decades of her life. While this is not the first publication to emphasize the Cells,⁴ the Munich exhibition for which this serves as catalogue is the first to collect and concentrate on such a large number of them in one place. Both the exhibition and the book—which adds eight other critical voices to the chorus—include earlier objects that foreshadow the installation works. Among the later are examples of the early *Femme-maison*



Fig. 1. Louise Bourgeois, *Passage dangereux* (detail) (1997), metal, wood, tapestry, rubber, marble, steel, glass, bronze, bones, flax, mirrors. 104" x 140" x 345". Private collection. Courtesy Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Peter Bellamy.

(woman-house) and *Personage* works, which show the artist fusing flesh and architecture, and the fabric sculptures of some forty years later. But neither the exhibition nor the book is intended to be

a retrospective: Okwui Enwezor, the director of the Haus der Kunst, writes that the intention was to take the Cells as “a single subject through which to examine Bourgeois’s complex artistic thinking” (14).

Because they are not conventional sculptures from which audiences can easily distance themselves, the Cells are like lightning rods attracting and transferring powerful psychological reactions. They typically consist of an enclosure, the most striking of which are oversized boxes or cylinders surrounded by vaguely threatening chain-link fencing, in which a variety of readymade or handmade articles—biomorphic objects, drawings, paintings, spiders, texts—are arranged in such a way as to evoke some kind of expressive reverberation, usually unpleasant in character. Bourgeois herself famously said that they “represent different types of pain: the physical, the emotional and psychological, and the mental and intellectual” (124). Indeed, Bourgeois was thinking about trauma when she first used the word “cell” to describe a series of six installations for the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh in 1991, and she took some pleasure in the word’s implication of both biology and prison (50).

In “From the Bell Jar to the Cage,” curator Lorz reveals the historical path from the *Femmes maison* of the 1940s to the works of the 1980s in which the artist created installation spaces that lead nowhere. Although these works are not part of the Cells proper, “they share the same type of enclosure, namely old architectural elements that Bourgeois reused and converted for her purposes” (29) in metaphorical allusions to “the house as refuge and simultaneous confinement” (33). Bourgeois’s themes are never far from personal anxiety, which figures in the next article, Kate Fowle’s interview with Bourgeois’s long-time assistant Jerry Gorovoy. He describes his first meeting with her as precipitated by “her anxiety about exhibiting” (37) and her later development as the “consequence of her deep-seated fear of abandonment” (44). But the curator of the aforementioned 1991 Carnegie show, Lynne

Cooke, points out that even though the Cells can be seen as descendants of Renaissance cabinets of curiosities in that they “posit private worlds ... that transform viewers into voyeurs” (47), psychological criticism is not “the only vehicle or critical tool for interpretation” (49). “Late in life,” she continues, “[Bourgeois] goes back to the materials and textiles that were a fundamental part of her childhood [when her father’s business involved the restoration of tapestries], rather than to the psychological dramas between family members that had, for decades, indelibly affected her and had provided the emotional well-springs fueling her creativity” (52). With that, Cooke signals that there is a subtle shift of emphasis away from purely personal trauma in the reception of Bourgeois’s work.

Bart de Baere’s essay “The Cell and Its Momentum” picks up this thread in a lengthy description of *Precious Liquids* (1992), a Cell first famously exhibited at Documenta IX in Kassel: “Even if the work of Louise Bourgeois makes abundant use of her personal experiences [the work is filled with references to body fluids, as if in reference to a girl experiencing a rite of passage], it always carefully transcends them into metaphors. This bed obviously is not her bed.... If any, the owner of this bed-as-a-metaphor is the body-as-a-metaphor” (60).⁵ Despite this universalizing tendency, many authors see *Red Room* (1994), a pair of Cells of which one is subtitled *Child* and the other *Parents*, as a very individual longing for security juxtaposed with curiosity about her parents’ sexuality.

In “Seeing Red, or, When Affect Becomes Form,” Griselda Pollock disagrees: “If anything is truly psychoanalytical, it is the realization that there is always something beyond the obvious, something ungraspable” (64). Artists’ search for this leads to formal innovation, to which Pollock assigns the term “formulation,” which she intends to extend beyond modernist formalism to encompass “Aby Warburg’s concept of *Pathosformel*: the formula for suffering.” The “specific traumas of the twentieth century,” she explains, did not only lead artists to express their individual suffer-

ing but “to invent new pathos formulae—formally” (68). The shift from local autobiography to universal artistic effect is accomplished when “Bourgeois forged a space for art that appears to be narrato-cinematic while remaining necessarily abstract-formal” (70).

Nancy Spector’s essay on *Passage dangereux* (dangerous passage; 1997; Fig. 1), “Resentment Demands a Story,” begins with a related thought: the artist’s formal exploration is seen as analogous to the flow of a narrative sentence. “Structurally it is laid out in a line, an elongated rectangular enclosure filled with small chambers, each harbouring a different sculptural tableau, an individual thought in a sequence of ideas” (73). This sequence of ideas does include allusions to autobiographical moments—a suspended breast alludes to the mother, while small shelves allude to the father—but it does so to generate universal associations that viewers can inhabit themselves. That is, Spector describes the work as Bourgeois meditating on her conflicted feelings about motherhood—as betrayed daughter and overworked mother herself—but it does not remain anchored solely to the artist. Instead, Spector sees it as an opportunity to explore why she (Spector) had forgotten that she had already written about *Passage dangereux* some seventeen years earlier: “I write this as my own children, who were not yet born when I first wrote about this piece, are entering adolescence. Perhaps I did not forget writing about the work after all, but rather unconsciously needed to experience it again, to share in the states of mind and states of self that Bourgeois so fearlessly rendered in sculptural form” (78).

Dionea Rocha Watt and Ulrich Wilmes round out the selection of essays with offerings that address, respectively, the artist’s preoccupation with materials and fabrics, which so informed her very early work, and the creatively salutary effects of moving to a very large studio in Brooklyn in 1980, after having had to work in a small domestic environment. The works in focus here are *Peaux de lapins, chiffons ferrailles à vendre* (rabbit skins, scrap rags for sale, 2006) and *Cell* (*The Last Climb*) (2008). While Watt’s essay explains the lingering influence of

the artist's early experiences, Wilmes's shows how Bourgeois's artistic perspective changed fundamentally at the age of 69, encouraging her to create artworks on an increasingly ambitious scale. "When I began building the 'Cells,'" wrote the artist, "I wanted to create my own architecture, and not depend on the museum space."⁶

In some ways, neither does the book depend upon the museum space, for it offers an excellent simulacrum of an exhibition-like experience. High quality color photographs alternate between general views of an entire Cell and multiple close-ups of its various components, replicating the experience of encountering an unfamiliar whole, reflecting on its details, and referring back to the whole for interpretive closure. There is a thorough catalogue of the works in the exhibition, a brief biography of Bourgeois, and a number of incidental photographs of the artist in her studio at various points in her career.

While I initially thought I did not

need another book on Bourgeois, I conclude that Lorz's edition is a valuable contribution to the scholarly reception of her work. I recommend it both for individuals and libraries.

Following its presentation in Munich's Haus der Kunst, "Louise Bourgeois, Structures of Existence: The Cells" travels to Moscow, Bilbao, and Humlebæk. •

Robert J. Belton, a former Dean of the Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies at the University of British Columbia's Okanagan Campus, is the author of *The Beribboned Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art* (1995) and "Edgar Allan Poe and the Surrealists' Image of Women," *WAJ* (Spring/Summer 1987).

Notes

1. See, for example, Julie Nicoletta, "Louise Bourgeois's *Femmes-Maisons*: Confronting Lacan," *WAJ*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Fall 1992 – Winter 1993), 21–26; Julie Nicoletta, "Louise Bourgeois by Paul Gardner; *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works*

1982–1993 by Charlotta Kotik, Terrie Sultan and Christian Leigh," *WAJ*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Fall 1996 – Winter 1997), 46–47; and Robert J. Belton, "Louise Bourgeois by Robert Storr; *Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art* by Mignon Nixon; *Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art-Writing* by Mieke Bal," *WAJ*, vol. 27, no. 1 (Spring – Summer 2006), 50–54.

2. As an example of the former, see Susi Bloch, "An Interview with Louise Bourgeois," *Art Journal*, vol. 35, no. 4 (Summer 1976), 370–73. For the latter, see Mignon Nixon, ed., special issue on Louise Bourgeois, *Oxford Art Journal* 22.2 (1999): 3–126.
3. Louise Bourgeois, "Child Abuse (Portfolio)," *Artforum* 21 (Dec. 1982), 40–47.
4. See, for example, Rainer Crone and Petrus Graf Schaesberg, *Louise Bourgeois: The Secret of the Cells* (Munich: Prestel, 2008).
5. This echoes Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota, 1998), 191.
6. Quoted in Beatriz Colomina, "The Architecture of Trauma," in *Louise Bourgeois: Memory and Architecture* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 1999), 43.

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SALUTES

DR. JOAN MARTER, PROFESSOR OF ART HISTORY

ON THE OCCASION OF HER RETIREMENT FROM RUTGERS UNIVERSITY, AND HER DISTINGUISHED SCHOLARSHIP AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE LITERATURE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND CONTEMPORARY ART HISTORY.

2015-16 ESTELLE LEBOWITZ ENDOWED VISITING ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

CHITRA GANESH

SOLO EXHIBITION

SEPTEMBER 1 - DECEMBER 10, 2015

MARY H. DANA WOMEN ARTIST SERIES GALLERIES

MABEL SMITH DOUGLASS LIBRARY

8 CHAPEL DRIVE, NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ 08901

GALLERY HOURS: M-F 9AM - 4:30PM

EVENT

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2015

RECEPTION / 5PM

PUBLIC LECTURE BY CHITRA GANESH / 5:30PM

MABEL SMITH DOUGLASS ROOM, DOUGLASS LIBRARY

INFORMATION: CWAH.RUTGERS.EDU

CONNIE TELL, DIRECTOR

NICOLE IANUZELLI, MANAGER OF PROGRAMS AND EXHIBITIONS

LEIGH-AYNA PASSAMANO, PROGRAM COORDINATOR AND WEBMISTRESS

CWAH PROGRAMS: ESTELLE LEBOWITZ ENDOWED VISITING ARTIST IN RESIDENCE, THE FEMINIST ART PROJECT, MARY H. DANA WOMEN ARTISTS SERIES, MIRIAM SCHAPIRO ARCHIVES, ON-LINE EDUCATION, WOMEN ARTISTS ARCHIVE NATIONAL DIRECTORY

CWAH IS A UNIT OF THE OFFICE OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND A CONSORTIUM MEMBER OF THE INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AT RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY.

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CWAH.RUTGERS.EDU



Pl. 1. Joan Semmel,
Perfil Infinito (1966),
oil on linen, 76 3/8" x 67 3/8".
Courtesy Alexander Gray
Associates, N.Y.
©2015 Joan Semmel/Artists
Rights Society (ARS), N.Y.



Pl. 2. Joan Semmel,
On The Grass (1978),
oil on canvas, 48" x 74".
Courtesy Alexander Gray
Associates, N.Y. ©2015
Joan Semmel/Artists
Rights Society (ARS), N.Y.



Pl. 3. Joan Semmel,
Masque (1991),
oil on canvas, 68" x 78". Courtesy
Alexander Gray Associates, N.Y.
©2015 Joan Semmel /
Artists Rights Society (ARS), N.Y.



Pl. 4. Joan Semmel,
Unveiling (2011),
oil on canvas, 48" x 48".
Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, N.Y.
©2015 Joan Semmel /
Artists Rights Society (ARS), N.Y.



Pl. 5. Brenda Miller, *Entasis* (1971), sisal, nails, blue pencil, 80" x 184" x 1-3". Temporary installation. Photo: Courtesy the artist.

Pl. 6. Brenda Miller, *Separate But Equal* (1981), sisal, dimensions unknown. Temporary installation. Photo: Courtesy the artist.

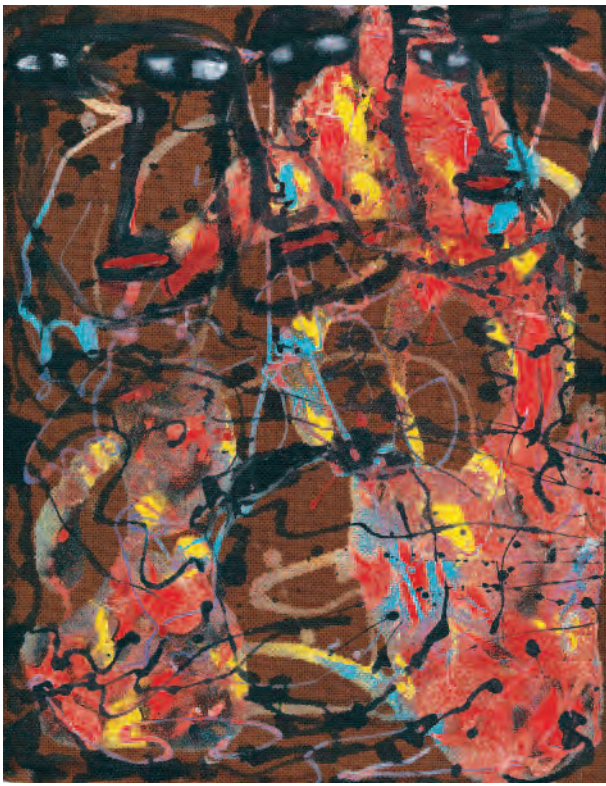


Pl. 7 (below). Brenda Miller, *Strata* (1986), layered top soil and sod, dimensions unknown. Temporary installation. Photo: Courtesy the artist.



Pl. 8 (right). Brenda Miller, *Subtrahend* (1972), sisal, nails, blue pencil, 80" x 80" x 1-24". Temporary installation. Photo: Courtesy the artist.





Pl. 9. Janet Sobel, *Untitled (JSP188)* (1945), oil on masonite, 18" x 14". © Estate of Janet Sobel. Courtesy Gary Snyder Fine Art.



Pl. 10. Janet Sobel, *Burning Bush (JSC 117)* (1944), oil on canvas, 30" x 22". © Estate of Janet Sobel. Courtesy Gary Snyder Fine Art



Pl. 11. Janet Sobel, *Milky Way* (1945), enamel on canvas, 44 7/8" x 29 7/8". Gift of the artist's family. © Estate of Janet Sobel. Photo: © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.



Pl. 12. Janet Sobel, *Untitled* (c. 1946), oil and enamel on composition board, 18" x 14". Gift of William Rubin. © Estate of Janet Sobel. Photo: © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.

Pl. 13. Lavinia Fontana,
Minerva Dressing (1613),
 oil on canvas, 102 3/8" x 35 3/8".
 Galleria Borghese, Rome.

Photo: Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività
 culturali / Art Resource, NY (ART303430).
 (Hereafter, *Borghese Minerva Dressing*).



Pl. 14. Lavinia Fontana,
Minerva Dressing (1612).
 oil on canvas, 95" x 35 3/8".
 Private Collection, Rome
 (Hereafter, *Roman Minerva Dressing*).



Pl. 15. Lavinia Fontana, *Venus and Cupid* (1585), oil on canvas, 84 5/8" x 52 3/4", signed and dated. Private collection, Venice.

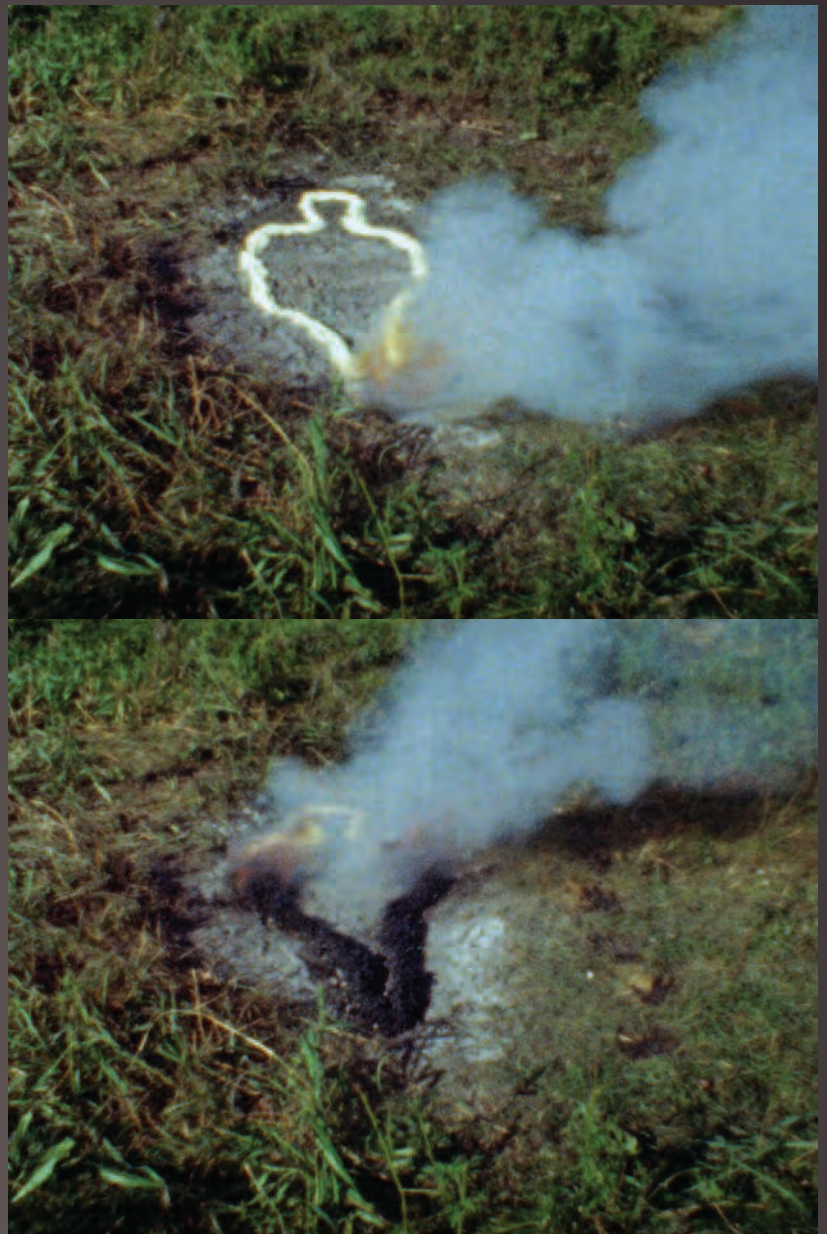


Pl. 16. Lavinia Fontana, *Venus Receiving Gifts from Two Cupids* (1590), oil on copper, 15" x 11". Private collection, Milan.



Pl. 17. Lavinia Fontana, *Allegory of Prudence* (1590s), oil on canvas, 63" x 48 3/4".
Galerie Maison d'Art, Monte Carlo, Monaco.
Photo: Galerie Maison d'Art.

Covered in Time and History The Films of Ana Mendieta



Ana Mendieta, *Untitled: Silueta Series*, 1978
Super 8 film, color, silent
© The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC.
Courtesy of Galerie Lelong, New York.

Katherine E. Nash Gallery
University of Minnesota
September 15 – December 12, 2015

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale
February 28 – July 3, 2016

University of California
Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive
November 9, 2016 – February 12, 2017

The largest collection of Ana Mendieta's filmworks ever presented as a full-scale gallery exhibition in the United States. Organized by the Katherine E. Nash Gallery. Fully illustrated exhibition catalogue available from University of California Press includes the first published complete filmography of all the artist's filmworks. Made possible in part by the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota, the National Endowment for the Arts, a gift of Agnes Gund, Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts, Kate and Stuart Nielsen, Syma Cheris Cohn, Metropolitan Picture Framing, Epson Corporation, and Tierney Brothers Corporation.