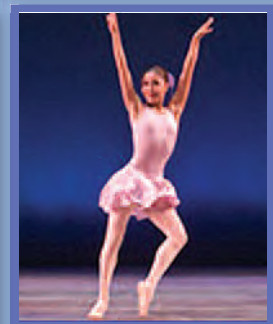
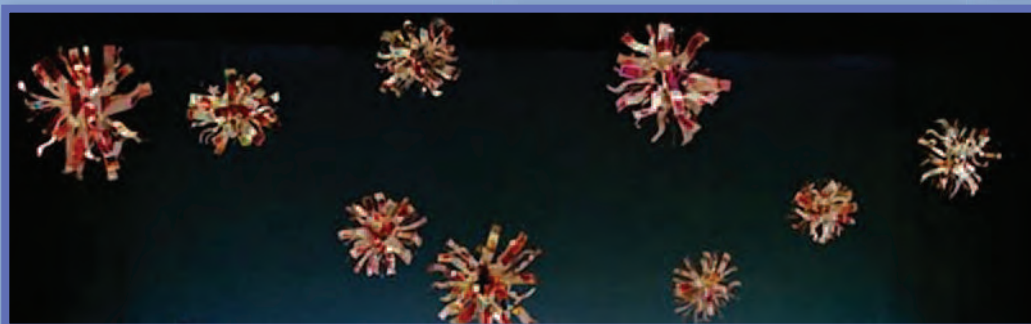
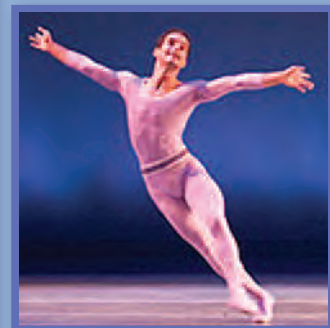


WOMAN'S ART JOURNAL

SPRING / SUMMER 2016 VOLUME 37, NUMBER 1 \$15.00



WOMEN OF ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

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JUNE 12–SEPTEMBER 25, 2016

“This groundbreaking and long-overdue survey of women Abstract Expressionist artists reveals the intellectual richness of their careers and their profound impact on American art of the 20th century.”

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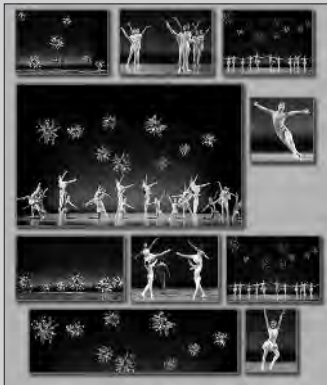
Edited by Joan Marter

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(Front cover) Dorothy Gillespie, *Summerscape* (1982), set design for Cleveland Ballet, nine sculptures, 4'-7' diam., enamel on aluminum. They rose at the start of the performance, and set a light, playful tone for the costume design and choreography.

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WOMAN'S ART JOURNAL

SPRING / SUMMER 2016 VOLUME 37, NUMBER 1

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In this issue, we focus attention on the history of the women's art movement with accounts of events during the early years of feminist art on the east and West coasts of the U.S. Carey Lovelace documents a range of feminist groups active in New York in the early 1970s, with information on activist protests by women as a response to the neglect of women in art institutions such as the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art, feminist groups organized shows and formed co-op galleries. Still significant today, "A.I.R. was the first true women's co-op, opening in September 1972 in an old machine shop," writes Lovelace. "The goal was not so much to create a feminist alternative, but ... to demonstrate that women did work worthy of inclusion in any mainstream gallery."

Ruth Iskin was on the scene in Los Angeles, where a strong women's movement also emerged. The museums and art galleries were similarly dismissive of women artists and their work. Iskin chronicles some of the little-known feminist activism of the Los Angeles Council of Women Artists that led to the monumental 1976 exhibition, *Women Artists: 1550–1950*. In their report documenting the Los Angeles County Museum's "longstanding record of discrimination," La CWA counted works on the walls and in exhibition catalogues. They found that while women made up more than half the population, representation of women artists in La CWA's group shows in the previous decade amounted to four percent. Iskin also offers details about *Womanspace*, an early project that attracted thousands of members. Besides providing gallery space for exhibitions, *Womanspace* sponsored a diverse array of programs. Iskin also updates the history of exhibitions on women artists. These two articles are welcome contributions to the literature on the evolution of the feminist movement on both coasts.

Dorothy Gillespie (1920–2012) arrived in New York City in the 1940s to become a working artist and became closely involved with feminists during the 1970s, particularly with the Women's Interart Center. Steve Rbury's retrospective view of Gillespie's artistic development focuses on her public art. From an early age she had wanted to work on a large scale, and it was in these works that she found great satisfaction. Her exuberant style lent itself to a variety of venues. Our cover, for example, is a photomontage of *Summerscape*, Gillespie's 1982 set design for the Cleveland Ballet—evidence of the winning interaction of dancers with dynamic and colorful sculptures that complemented their performance. Gillespie's public projects include permanent installations and some temporary projects of great interest. In 2003, for example, Gillespie created what she considered her "crowning achievement" for Rockefeller Center in Manhattan: "a kaleidoscopic winter garden of 185 colorful forms placed high and low along the entrance walkway between Fifth Avenue and the famous plaza."

Renowned scholar Anna Chave writes about Helen Frankenthaler in a presentation that was originally included in a symposium on the artist at New York University. Chave argues that Frankenthaler's special circumstances and comfortable lifestyle preordained success. Despite being hailed by the influential critic Clement Greenberg as a "founding mother" of color-field painting following the success of her

Mountains and Sea in 1952, Frankenthaler "began to look somewhat marginal within this milieu," even though, in Chave's estimation, "she produced during the 1960s the best work of her career..."

The abstract painter Joan Thorne is discussed by Vittorio Colazzi, who details the history of abstraction in the post-minimalist period. By including comparative examples of both female and male artists exploring abstraction, he offers a strong assessment of Thorne's signature style. "Rather than shaping, cutting, and connecting a charged pictorial space, Thorne's contorted linear trails pile upon one another, thus making intentionality ... the subject of their pictorial action." According to Colazzi, "Thorne plays intention upon non-intention by picturing a seemingly un-willed disarray."

As usual, our Book Review editor, Ute Tellini, has assembled an excellent team of reviewers for a list of books spanning a broad range of times and places. Marjorie Och reviews a volume that examines especially the later work of Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1653), placing her accomplishments within the literary and cultural milieus of Rome and Naples, where she lived and worked, and for the Spanish court, where she found important patrons. Catherine Puglisi reviews a book on Gentileschi's Bolognese near-contemporary, the painter Elisabetta Sirani (1638–65), which includes a catalogue raisonné collecting the 150 or so paintings she completed in her short lifetime.

Some exhibition catalogues present new takes on well-known artists such as Frida Kahlo—her and Diego Rivera's consequential period spent in Detroit, and the garden at her Blue House in Coyoacán, Mexico, reviewed by Ellen G. Landau. A catalogue of works by Sophie Taeuber-Arp shows the many sides of this multi-disciplinary artist—besides the textiles for which she is well-known, she had an architectural practice, made innovations in modern dance, and more, as reviewed by Anja Baumhoff. Lauren Jimerson discusses catalogue essays on the Fauve-like nudes of the French painter Emilie Cerny. Colombian artist Doris Salcedo's installations responding to acts of political violence are featured in a catalogue of the artist's first U.S. retrospective exhibition, reviewed here by Liza Delman.

Other not-to-be-missed books reviewed are the remarkable volume of Linda Nochlin's collected essays on women artists; a beautifully illustrated study of the Moroccan-born Lalla Essaydi's photographic works; two books on "artistic meditations" on the contemporary home; an examination of the significance of the distinctive geometric patterns on mud cloth made by the Bamana women of Mali; a beautiful catalogue raisonné of works by the British sculptor Elisabeth Frink; and a fascinating study of women and public space in visual culture over the nineteenth century in Europe and beyond.

As always, we thank Rutgers University and Old City publishing for their ongoing support. We also extend our appreciation to our excellent authors and reviewers for their valued contributions as *WAJ* enters its thirty-seventh year of publishing on women artists and feminist topics.

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

OPTIMISM AND RAGE

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN ART IN NEW YORK, 1969–1975

By Carey Lovelace

Often lost in descriptions of the early days of New York's Women's Movement in art is how dynamic and euphoric the atmosphere was, how charismatic and compelling the personalities. Feminism exploded in the art world there around 1970, with a whirlwind of activism, protests, women-run galleries, journals, and fledgling styles.

There were the organizations, too. Among them, the Ad Hoc Committee of the Art Workers Coalition, Women in the Arts, Where We At, the Women's Interart Center, and Redstockings artists. By April 1972, a report given at the Corcoran Gallery's Conference for Women in the Visual Arts in Washington, D.C., estimated that there were some 1,500 members in various New York groups. In her essay in this journal (see pages 12–20), Ruth Iskin points out that the contributions of the Los Angeles Council of Women Artists (which among other achievements, brought issues of gender inequity in art onto the front page of *The Los Angeles Times*¹) have not been sufficiently memorialized.

Sadly, such amnesia is not unusual, arguably part of the "Great Silence" that writers have quoted Adrienne Rich as referring to regarding women's role in history. It is something the artist Judy Chicago in particular ingeniously fought against, documenting from the very beginning the feminist programs that she launched at Fresno State University and California Institute of the Arts, as well as the *Dinner Party* installation she created. Others around her learned by her example.

Yet, Iskin's remarks notwithstanding, the West Coast has been more effective at enshrining its history. Indeed, many East Coast groups that played critical roles during the first six years of the Women's Movement in art have virtually vanished from historical accounts, except in the most cursory descriptions. For complex reasons, New York's renegade coalitions lacked devoted chroniclers to take notes or preserve photos. Perhaps survival in the city was, as it is now, so challenging that there was little extra time for niceties like documentation. Perhaps there was also a lack of appreciation



Fig. 1. Jan Van Raay, Women Artists in Revolution (WAR) meeting (April 13, 1970), 729 Broadway, New York. Photo: © Jan Van Raay.

of how pivotal these events would be for future generations.

Yet, it was in Manhattan that what was known as Women's Liberation (and now known as second-generation feminism) really took root.² Although they were not art groups per se, New York Radical Women (1967–69) and Redstockings (1969–ca.1975) developed the technique known as consciousness raising, which was to impact art-making everywhere.³ In CR, as it was nicknamed, women spoke round-robin without interruption on a particular subject (body image, housework, sex, money, children). At the time, this resulted often in the startling realization that feelings (some shameful) experienced in isolation were shared by others—and were, in fact, the result of being a "class" of women. (Most had faked orgasms, been cheated on, hated their bodies, had a hard time asking for a raise, were afraid to express anger.) This was not simply a therapeutic or political exercise: new realms of experience and reality came to the surface.

New York Radical Women organized the 1968 Miss America protest, with its "bra burning," that apocryphal one-liner that helped dramatize women's issues for the first time for a

baffled American public; the cabal grew so much in size, it fractured into breakaway groups.⁴ The most famous, Redstockings (named after “bluestockings,” the nineteenth-century term for intellectual women), propagated texts such as “Sisterhood Is Powerful,” “The Politics of Housework,” and “Resistance to Consciousness.”⁵ It, too, quickly grew in number, as women taught others the CR techniques it refined, who taught others in turn.

Many of the early adherents were in the art community (including art historian Eunice Lipton, artist Nancy Azara, and curators Marcia Tucker and Elke Solomon). Joan Jonas was in a CR group and has attributed discussions about whether there was a female sensibility for the development of her 1970 *Mirror Check*, in which, standing nude in front of a live audience situated thirty feet away, she examined, with a small round mirror, details of her body in a way that she could see but they couldn’t.⁶ Another group launched in September 1970 used CR as a structuring format to critique each other’s art; its collective discussions motivated members to develop female-oriented content—significantly before the advent of Feminist Art.⁷ For example, in a world that favored hefty, large-scale sculpture, Patsy Norvell, who had been making Robert Morris-inspired Minimalist “stacking” pieces of mirrors and metal, started using a sewing machine, creating wall-works of pleated vinyl, in tribute to forgotten women; Harmony Hammond, a hard-edge abstract painter, began making Bags, consisting of fabric given to her by female friends, which was then attached to shoulder purses, treated with paint, and rubberized. Soon, Louise Fishman began her series of small “angry” paintings, words scribbled feverishly like rapid finger-paintings, dedicated to each member of the group (“Angry Harmony,” “Angry Sarah”)—the bottled-up rage that CR began to identify and unleash.⁸

In 1969, slightly later than in university departments or the field of politics or literature, ideas set loose by Women’s Lib began tiptoeing into the art world (admittedly haltingly) via the antiwar counterculture, in the form of groups such as WSABAL (Women, Students and Artists for Black Artists Liberation) and Women Artists in Revolution (WAR).⁹ “Contrary to the popular image as the wild-eyed radical,” critic Lucy Lippard once observed, “artists are usually slow to sense and slower to respond to social currents.”¹⁰ It is fairly certain that, founded in early 1969, WAR (Fig. 1) was the world’s first feminist artist organization—an offshoot of the legendary antiwar Art Workers Coalition headquartered near SoHo. It was so early that one of the founders, Juliet Mitchell, admits that she had never before heard the term “feminist.” At the time, women were accustomed to being told that things were “not that bad” for them. It occurred to WAR members to canvas high-profile galleries—only to find that “things were much worse than we thought”: one artist in twenty was female. Statistics-gathering, predictably, was to become a staple activity of feminist and other groups (including, two years later, the Los Angeles Council of Women Artists). WAR urged antiwar protest organizations they were part of to include “sexism” as part of their mission. They met with the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of



Fig. 2. Faith Ringgold, *Women’s Liberation Talking Mask: Witch Series #1* (1973), mixed media, beads, raffia, cloth, and gourds, H. 42”.

American Art to demand matching the population’s ratio of females, 50 percent, to their representation in exhibitions—an idea so radical the group was barely taken seriously.

In a status-conscious avant-garde, one of the challenges faced by WAR was that female artists, and women in general, occupied the lower rungs of the ladder of prestige. Finally, frustrated with the complete absence of opportunities, a few members banded together with others to themselves stage, in early 1970, the first consciously “feminist” art exhibit, *X12*. (“X is crossed out; their manifesto read, “disposed of as we have been for centuries.”) It received condescending reviews.¹¹

Critic Lucy Lippard, however, had made a name for herself since the late 1960s with her essays and exhibitions defining Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, and Conceptual Art. She and young avant-garde artists Brenda Miller and Poppy Johnson, along with African American activist artist Faith Ringgold—whose works like *Women’s Liberation Talking Mask: Witch Series #1* (1973; Fig. 2) directly reflected CR—had worked together in early antiwar and anti-museum efforts and had been visible members of the Art Workers Coalition. Often, women came to feminism through a kind of “conversion” experience, what *Ms. Magazine* called the “click.” After having hers while working on a novel on the coast of Spain the summer of 1970, Lippard joined with others that September to initiate an Ad Hoc Committee of the Art Workers Coalition,



Fig. 3. Lucy Lippard protesting at Whitney Museum of American Art demanding 50 percent representation of women and non-white artists in the Whitney Annual (Sept. 1970). Photo: Ann Arien.

targeting the Whitney Museum, protesting the low number of women (eight percent in 1969) in their prestigious survey Annuals (Figs. 3 and 4). The group quickly attracted other alienated, isolated women. Employing colorful tactics such as secreting eggs and Tampax plungers marked “50%” around the museum, besieging the museum with telegrams from well-placed supporters, and issuing fake press releases, the group claimed credit for the fact that when the Annual opened December 8, 1970, representation jumped to 20 percent). (Including two African Americans, Betye Saar and Barbara Chase-Riboud, it was the first time women of color had been showcased in a major art museum).¹²

The demonstration attracted international press, and Ad Hoc, as it was known, became a meeting point for women artists, many of whom, unknown at the time, would go on to have substantial careers, in no small part because of the support and skill-sharing they found there.¹³ They adopted a kind of free-form discussion, not exactly consciousness raising, but a forum to vent and share experiences. That meetings rotated between artists’ lofts provided a chance to visit studios and see the often quite powerful art on view, helping dispel widely held assumptions about the imitative nature of women’s art. The group developed a Slide Registry, collecting examples of women’s work from around the country.¹⁴ Galleries, museums, lecturers, and Women’s Studies classes could draw from this resource, gaining access to art that, in a pre-internet age, otherwise would remain unseen. Ad Hoc



Fig. 4. Women Now, Whitney Annual protest by Ad Hoc Women Artists’ Committee (Winter 1970–71). Photo: Amy Stromsten.

undertook other campaigns, for example, pressuring schools to hire female faculty members, and *The Rip-Off Files*, which gathered tales of discrimination from around the country.¹⁵

“We just can’t find women of quality,” was the reason often given by museums about the lack of women represented. As women shared work and experiences in a supportive atmosphere, a new aesthetics began to be generated. For the first time, it was proposed that there might be an ideological factor in such assessments of “quality.” Moreover, Lippard herself noticed, in group round-robin sharing, that when she would exercise her formalist background and dismiss a particular work, another might exclaim, “I wonder how she does that!” “What is good, what is bad?” she began to ask herself. Also she began to realize that, in contrast to the large-scale art-world-approved abstract forms in vogue, a large number of women preferred more intimate forms of art, often involving collage. Much of this speculation found form in the essays that Lippard began to write about women’s art, many of which were engendered by her experiences with Ad Hoc. Along with Linda Nochlin’s 1971 essay, “Why Are There No Great Women Artists?,”¹⁶ which examined the mythologizing mechanism in art that excluded women, it began questioning the Modernist canon, which would lead to Post-Modernism.

An experienced curator by this time, Lippard knew that to legitimize any new art phenomenon, a museum-quality exhibition was in order. The goal of “Twenty-Six Contemporary Women Artists,” which opened April 26, 1971, at the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Connecticut (Fig. 5), was to showcase the accomplished styles she was witnessing. Unusual as a curatorial approach at the time in the gathering Lippard put together was its range of expression, its pluralism, featuring everything from Adrian Piper’s live performance in which she hypnotized herself, to Susan Hall’s satirical drawings, to Alice Aycock’s installation featuring a huge bed of cracked red earth surrounded by maps tracing piping and water systems, to works by Jackie Winsor, and lyrical abstractions by Dona Nelson. (Once again, many for whom this was a significant first exposure went on to have significant international careers).¹⁷

Other coalitions arose. Ad Hoc was criticized by some for adhering too closely to Lippard's Post-Minimal aesthetics. (They were mostly sculptors, Joyce Kozloff observed, who worked with the grid and no color.¹⁸) Painter Ce Roser, after attending an Ad Hoc meeting, realized that, yes, it was difficult for female artists, but even more so for those over a certain age, and started phoning abstract and realist painters she knew in their forties, fifties, even seventies (Pat Passlof, Buffie Johnson, Alice Neel, Fay Lansner, Elaine de Kooning)—as well as writers and poets, inviting them to come to her apartment and talk about their concerns. Twenty women attended the first April 1971 meeting. “We all got excited, and then very angry,” recalls Roser. “We decided we were going to free ourselves, get divorces, and just work on our own work.”¹⁹ Women in the Arts soon had a membership numbering 500, publishing a monthly newsletter featuring short articles about the panels, conferences, readings that were mushrooming everywhere. They demonstrated in front of New York City galleries against low prices for women's work, and in front of Sotheby Parke Bernet protesting that only one female artist, Lee Bontecou, was included in the October 1973 Robert C. Scull auction.

And they organized “Women Choose Women” (Fig. 6) featuring 108 artists, nominated by the membership, instead of by “experts.”²⁰ Originally conceived as a massive citywide gathering of women's work modeled after the 1913 Armory Show, when the six major museums they solicited all declined to participate, it was scaled down to a single exhibition at the New York Cultural Center in Columbus Circle, opening January 12, 1973. Still, it was the largest such show in history. Visible already were certain tendencies, such as a predilection for fabric and textiles and realist paintings on domestic themes.

Prejudice against women's art was often subtle. To an almost comical extent, reviews nearly universally used the word “intuitive,” even when describing the most aggressive work. Brenda Miller famously wrote a letter to the editor of *ArtForum* protesting the reviewer's comparison of her Post-Minimal wallwork *Subtrahend*, involving mathematically determined lengths of sisal strands, to “crafts more than art,” which was the domestic domain to which women were regularly assigned.²¹ Less oblique was the occasion that Carol Haerer recalls, when a colleague, Jack Beal, brought dealer Allan Frumkin to her studio. After viewing the canvases she brought out, he departed without response. She could hear the gallerist mutter as they walked downstairs. “I don't want women in the gallery. Women cry.”²²

Confronted with what was a typical brick wall when seeking a permanent gallery, it occurred to Barbara Zucker and her studio mate Susan Williams, both accomplished avant-



Fig. 5. “26 Contemporary Women Artists” (1971), installation view, includes work (front) by Jackie Winsor, Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, CT.

garde sculptors, to found a co-op. However, artist-run galleries, exuding a slight air of desperation, were not held in high regard. Zucker thought that “the only thing worse would be a *women's* co-op. A double negative. It was thrilling.”²³ So they did it. Drawing from the Ad Hoc Slide Registry, they put together a search committee that included Mary Grigoriadis and Dottie Attie and visited fifty-five studios.

Although there had been briefly a Tenth Street women's gallery in the late 1950s, A.I.R. was the first true women's co-op, opening in September 1972 in an old machine shop on Wooster Street renovated by the twenty founding members themselves.²⁴ By this time, work with feminist themes was beginning to emerge. Judith Bernstein was represented by her monumental-sized “screw” drawings, of actual, very phallic-looking screws. Nancy Spero's *Torture in Chile* (1975) addressed violence against women. Patsy Norvell displayed a diaphanous quilt composed of the hair of members of her CR group. Yet the

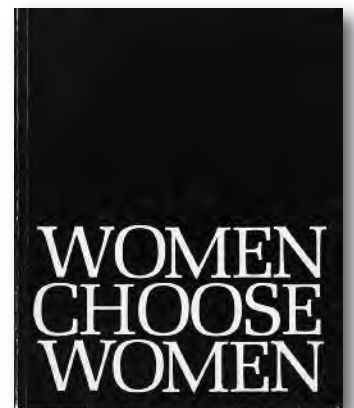


Fig. 6. “Women Choose Women” catalogue cover (1973).



Fig. 7. Sylvia Sleigh, *A.I.R. Group Portrait* (1977–78), oil on canvas 76" x 82". L to R; Back Row: Daria Dorosh, Nancy Spero, Dottie Attie, Mary Grigoriadis, Blythe Bohnen, Loretta Dunkelman, Howardena Pindell, Sylvia Sleigh, Patsy Norvell. 2nd Row: Sari Dienes, Anne Fealy, Agnes Denes, Laurace James, Rachel Bas-Cohain, Louise Kramer. 3rd Row: Pat Lasch, Maude Boltz, Clover Vail, Kazuko. Front Row: Mary Beth Edelson, Donna Byers. Courtesy Estate of Sylvia Sleigh and Freymond-Guth Gallery.

majority, such as Conceptual Artist Agnes Denes, or Howardena Pindell, who was at the time making Post-Minimal wall pieces, worked in "neutral" styles. The goal was not so much to create a feminist alternative, but, once again, to demonstrate that women did work worthy of inclusion in any mainstream gallery.

A.I.R., whose members are memorialized in Sylvia Sleigh's group portrait (1977–78; Fig. 7), was also the site of a Monday evening lecture series that brought together intellectuals and artists (male and female) to address issues in criticism, about the marketplace, and quickly changing art trends of the day. It attained a surprising degree of glamor on the gallery scene and became a petri dish for women's culture in New York. At the opening, one man admitted, "Okay, you did it. You found twenty good artists. But that's it."

Within a few years, thanks to constant pressure by the groups cited above, gallery representation began to increase. Statistically, it was small, from, say, 5 percent to 10 to 20 percent. But proportionally, it was huge, and the upward trend seemed rapid. Art magazines were changing from including no articles at all on women to one or two per month. The greatest beneficiaries of this opening were veterans such as Louise Bourgeois, Alice Neel, and Agnes Martin, as well as younger artists working in Post-Minimalism. Robert Pincus-Witten noted in his eponymously titled book that although the hybrid style was mostly widely associated with male artists such as Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, and Richard Serra, Post-Minimalism's "relationship to the Women's Movement cannot be overly stressed," crediting a female artist, Eva



Fig. 8. Mary Miss, *Stake Fence* (1970). Photo: Mary Miss.

Hesse, with originating the approaches at its foundation in the mid-1960s.²⁵ With its predilection for "soft" materials and its emphasis on process, Pincus-Witten pointed out, "many of its formal attitudes and properties, not to mention its exemplars, derive from methods and substances that hitherto had been sexistically tagged as female or feminine, whether or not the work had been made by women."²⁶ Many female Post-Minimalists separated their activism from their art, although a few acknowledged a stratum of feminist content in their work. For example, Mary Miss has stated that her Land Art (1970; Fig. 8) as opposed to that by artists such as Robert Smithson or Michael Heizer, who cut into or intervened dramatically in the earth, adopted an intentionally anti-monumental stance.²⁷

Painter Joan Semmel, who organized "Contemporary Women: Consciousness and Content," a companion exhibition to "Women Artists: 1550-1950" when it appeared at the Brooklyn Museum, after its Los Angeles premiere, would write, "The price for entrance into the cathedral of 'high art' has been conformity to male modes."²⁸ Yet, by 1973, a number of New York artists had started dealing with concepts emerging via the Women's Movement. In Semmel's own case, for example: "I was convinced that the repression of women began in the sexual arena and this needed to be addressed at the source."²⁹ She switched from quasi-expressionist abstractions to attempting to forge an eroticism more sympathetic to the woman's point of view, making the female subject rather than object.



Fig. 9. Anita Steckel, *Giant Woman (Empire State)* (1973), black-and-white photo collage and pencil on paper, 37" x 49" x 1". ©The Estate of Anita Steckel. Courtesy The Suzanne Geiss Company.

It would be a while before anyone could identify a feminist art overall, but Semmel, for one, identified four thematic ideas that "occur with uncommon frequency in women's art: sexual imagery, both abstract and figurative; autobiography and self-image; the celebration of devalued subject matter and media which have been traditionally relegated to women; and anthropomorphic or nature forms...." She noted: "The constant recurrence of self-images and autobiographical references in women's art has paralleled feminist preoccupation with the connections between the personal and the public."³⁰

Not surprisingly, artists exploring ideas coming out of feminism in their art were, with a few exceptions, ignored or marginalized by the downtown avant-garde art world; their figuration, intimacy, and exploration of the decorative ran transgressively and decidedly against the art world's preoccupation with scale and with the purist tenets of formalism. Those who explored sexuality, like Semmel, and in particular, mounted any critique or reversal of gender roles, met with outright hostility. In February 1972, Anita Steckel

mounted "The Feminist Art of Sexual Politics" at Rockland Community College in Suffern, Long Island, with her Daumier-like satires including her *Giant Woman* series of photo-collages (1973; Fig. 9) featuring a monumental female nude (Steckel's own face superimposed) overpowering various urban settings. But it was the drawings of erect penises perching jauntily atop Manhattan skyscrapers, critiquing what she saw as a male-dominated cityscape, that caused a local legislator to demand the one-woman show close. However, Steckel pointed out that it wasn't nudity that was objected to: "It was okay to show nude women [at the college]," she observed. More specifically, "There was still a prohibition against the 'eroticized display of male bodies.'"³¹

Similarly, Sylvia Sleight, for one, who did parodies of classical paintings, for example Ingres's *The Turkish Bath*, featuring male nudes instead of female, often found herself facing "angry" reactions. In 1973, Steckel formed Fight Censorship, including Sleight, Semmel, Bernstein, and Hannah Wilke, among others. At an October 1973 presentation at the

New School, Semmel brought in one of her gigantic paintings, and Bourgeois sat with *Fillette*, an enormous phallus-sized plaster-and-latex sculpture across her lap.

The Feminist Art Journal, a bimonthly tabloid founded in 1972, reported on such subversive goings-on, covering the women's-art-oriented exhibitions and scruffy institutions that began to open around the city in addition to profiling overlooked historical figures.³² The paper chronicled the Women's Interart Center, created when WAR merged with Feminists in the Arts, which in July 1971 opened in a fire station on the Lower East Side, the next year transferring to a sixth-floor building in Hell's Kitchen. Directed by Jacqueline Skiles, it offered exhibitions to any woman asking for one, and provided workshops in silkscreen, life-drawing, writing, poetry, and dance therapy, at \$5 per month, "if you can afford it."³³ Other co-ops opened, such as SOHO20 Gallery in 1973, which, like A.I.R., showcased a range of styles. And there were exhibitions. "Where We At," at the Greenwich Village Acts of Art Gallery, June and July 1971, became the "first Black women's art show in known history," as well as the name of an exhibiting coalition focusing on family and community issues—and eventually an art-based social service organization dealing with race, going into disadvantaged neighborhoods.³⁴

In the autumn of 1971, Ad Hoc habitué and Expressionist painter Joan Snyder, had the idea of organizing a series at Rutgers University of solo exhibitions by women. The university's all-male senior faculty at the time objected to using the university gallery for such a purpose. But the university library's director, Daisy Brightenback Shenholm, responded enthusiastically and appointed the Women Artists Series' first coordinator, Lynn F. Miller.³⁵ Also slightly outside New York City, at the Suffolk Museum at Stony Brook in October 1972, "Unmanly Art," curated by June Blum, was the first in-house museum-curated exhibition of female artists, fifty-six in all.

Nevertheless, by 1975, the progress toward more equitable representation that at first seemed promisingly rapid began to stall, puzzling the many women who had worked so hard for change. This led to the next chapter, during the second half of the 1970s, when groups such as the Heresies Collective, a kind of feminist "think tank," attempted to examine societal forces on a deeper level. And while equal representation would remain elusive, and intra-feminist disputes begin to rage, an ever increasing amount of art dealing with themes and ideas coming out of Feminism came to the fore, preserved still today thanks to much better documentation than was exercised in those crucial earliest years, with all their fervent optimism and euphoric rage. •

Carey Lovelace, a New York-based art critic, currently is writing a book on the women's art movement.

NOTES

1. Dorothy Townsend, "Threaten Civil Rights Suit: Women Artists Say Museum Discriminates," *Los Angeles Times* (June 16, 1971).
2. Women's Liberation began the summer of 1967, with the Chicago Westside Group.
3. Early feminist pioneers included many artists and art historians: Shulamith Firestone, who trained at the Chicago Art Institute; painter Irene Peslikis; painter and later art historian Pat Mainardi; Kate Millett, at the time a sculptor affiliated with the Fluxus Group, among others.
4. In fact, protestors threw girdles, steno pads, dishtowels, etc., into a Freedom Trash Can.
5. These essays are available in *Redstockings: First Literature List and A Sampling of Its Materials* (New York: Redstockings, 1969).
6. Joan Jonas, interview by author, May 5, 2014, Jonas interview, transcript.
7. Included were artists Sarah Draney, Louise Fishman, Harmony Hammond, Patsy Norvell, and Jenny Snider, and anthropologist Elizabeth Weatherford.
8. The group staged "A Woman's Show," a 1974 collective exhibition at the Nancy Hoffman Gallery. There were no wall labels bearing artists' names, the point being to show the interrelationship among the works, although the intent was not widely understood.
9. WSABAL was a guerilla unit consisting primarily of artist Faith Ringgold and her daughter Michele Wallace, a writer.
10. Lucy Lippard, *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984), 160.
11. Emily Genauer, in the *New York Post*, scoffed: Why, she wrote, did they have to point out they were women? Finding a gallery is hard for any young artist. The exhibition was held at Museum, the Noho (North of Houston Street) artists' coop that housed the Art Workers Coalition and featured artists Iris Crump, Lois di Cosola, Mary Ann Gillies, Silvianna Goldsmith, Helene Gross, Doloris Holmes, Arline Lederman, Inverna Lockpez, Carolyn Mazzello, Vernita Nemec, Doris O'Kane, and Alida Walsh. For a full description, see Vernita N'Cognita, "My Feminist Art History," accessed Feb. 4, 2016, http://ncognita.com/my_feminist_art_history.htm.
12. See for example, *Dictionary of Women Artists*, ed. Delia Gaze, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1997), 119.
13. Active early Ad Hoc members included Faith Ringgold, Michele Wallace, Michelle Stuart, Jackie Ferrara, Mary Miss, Jackie Winsor, Paula Tavins, Camille Billops, Sylvia Stone, Laurie Anderson, Joan Semmel, Joyce Kozloff, Nancy Spero, Agnes Denes, and Louise Bourgeois.
14. Members of the Slide Registry Committee were Michelle Stuart, Mary Miss, Jackie Ferrara, and Sandy Gellis.
15. The committee putting the tabloid-format paper together consisted of Maude Boltz, Loretta Dunkelman, Joan Snyder, Nancy Spero, May Stevens, and Joyce Kozloff.
16. Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," *Art News* (Jan. 1971). This essay has been reprinted numerous times.
17. Artists in the exhibition were Cecile Abish, Alice Aycock, Cynthia Carlson, Sue Ann Childress, Glorianna Danvenport, Susan Hall, Mary Heilmann, Audrey Hemenway, Laurace James, Mablen Jones, Carol Kinne, Christine Kozlov, Sylvia Mangold, Brenda Miller, Mary Miss, Dona Nelson, Louise Parks, Shirley Pettibone, Howardena Pindell, Adrian Piper, Reeve Potoff, Paula Tavins, Merrill Wagner, Grace Bakst Wapner, Jacqueline Winsor, and Barbara Zucker.
18. Joyce Kozloff, interview by the author, Sept. 15, 1995.
19. Beryl Smith, Joan Arbeiter and Sally Shearer Swenson, *Lives and Works: Talks with Women Artists*, vol. 2 (Lanham, MD and London: Scarecrow Press, 1966), 124.
20. The judges panel consisted of Pat Passloff, Ce Roser, Sylvia Sleight from WIA, Linda Nochlin (Vassar), Elizabeth C Baker (*Art News*), and Mario Amaya and Laura Adler (New York Cultural Center).

21. Brenda Miller, "Letters," *ArtForum* (April 1973): 9. See also Cynthia Fowler, "Brenda Miller and Post-Minimalist Art," *WAJ* 36, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2015), 16.
22. Carol Haerer, interview by the author, Sept. 16, 1999.
23. Barbara Zucker, interview by the author, Sept. 15, 1997.
24. A.I.R. founding members were Dotty Attie, Rachel Bas-Cohain, Judith Bernstein, Blythe Bohnen, Maude Boltz, Agnes Denes, Daria Dorosh, Loretta Dunkelman, Mary Grigoriadis, Harmony Hammond, Laurace James, Nancy Kitchell, Louise Kramer, Anne Healy, Rosemarie Mayer, Patsy Norvell, Howardena Pindell, Nancy Spero, Susan Williams, and Barbara Zucker.
25. Robert Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism* (New York: Out of London Press, 1977).
26. *Ibid.*, 16.
27. Mary Miss, interview by the author, March 20, 2014.
28. "Contemporary Women: Consciousness and Content" opened at the Brooklyn Museum Oct. 1–27, 1977. From press release, Sept. 20, 1977. Brooklyn Museum Archives. Records of the Department of Public Information, Press releases, 1971–1988. 1977, 022-23.
29. Joan Semmel, *Joan Semmel: Across Five Decades* (New York: Alexander Gray Associates, 2015).
30. *Ibid.* 29.
31. Richard Meyer, "Hard Targets: Male Bodies, Feminist Art, and the Force of Censorship in the 1970s," In *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Lisa Gabrielle Mark (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007): 362–83.
32. Cindy Nemser, Patricia Mainardi, and Irene Moss were editors.
33. "New York: Activities by, for and about Women in the Arts," *Women's Caucus for Art Newsletter* (April 1976), 6.
34. Early members of Where We At were Carol Blank, Kay Brown, Vivian Browne, Carole Byard, Gylbert Coker, Jerri Crooks, Iris Crump, Pat Davis, Linda Hiwot, Doris Kane, Mai Mai Leabua, Dindga McCannon, Onnie Millar, Charlotte Richardson, Faith Ringgold, Ann Tanksley, Modu Tanzania, and Jean Taylor. Other artists who would hold membership during the group's evolution included Brenda Branch, Janette Burrows, Linda Cousins, Asiba Danso, Dimitra, Jeanne Downer, Miriam Francis, Rafala Green, Deidre Harris, Claudia Hutchinson, Crystal McKenzie, Mari Morris, Madeline Nelson, Millie Pilgrim, Hurtha Robinson, Akweke Singho, Saeeda Stanley, Gail Steele, Joan Stevens, Priscilla Taylor, and Ann Wallace.
35. The first year, it featured one-person shows by Mary Heilmann, Lorraine Forte, Mae Rockland, Nancy Azara, Audrey Hemenway, Roberta Richman, Pat Steir, and Joan Snyder. It later was renamed the Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series.

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FEMINISM, EXHIBITIONS AND MUSEUMS IN LOS ANGELES, THEN AND NOW

By Ruth E. Iskin

After almost half a century of feminist art history, we are now in a position to observe that momentous changes have taken place in the realm of museum exhibitions of women artists. The 1970s feminist art movement is in the process of becoming history, as museums as well as university galleries are exhibiting—and in some cases collecting—feminist art made from the late 1960s onwards. The story of the feminist art movement of the 1970s in Los Angeles, as generally told, has focused primarily on individual artists, notable works such as *Womanhouse* (1972) and *The Dinner Party* (1974-79), and one feminist institution, the Woman's Building, but has not dwelled much on exhibitions. While later feminist art exhibitions have been covered more broadly,¹ the literature does not examine the long-range trajectory of feminism and museums and alternative exhibitions. The goal of this article is twofold: to propose an historical trajectory of feminist art exhibitions and compare today's developments to the 1970s, and to deepen understanding of the history of the feminist art movement in Los Angeles in the 1970s by focusing on exhibitions.

The vibrant and provocative beginnings of this movement crossed paths with my personal history in Los Angeles, where I arrived in September 1972, and proceeded to become intensively involved in early art-related feminist activism. Exhibitions of art by women, and especially feminist art, were still a very new phenomenon limited to a few alternative independent feminist art spaces. For those of us engaged in organizing the exhibitions, we did not think of it as "curating"; rather, the activity was part of feminist art activism and the day-to-day running of feminist art spaces.

During the 1970s, exhibitions played a central role in the feminist art movement, which was an integral part of the larger feminist movement but outside the established art institutions. From the beginning feminists pursued a two-pronged strategy: founding independent feminist art spaces for exhibitions and performances, and mounting protests of exclusion by museums. The opening shot of the feminist art movement in Los Angeles was the groundbreaking 1972 exhibition of *Womanhouse*. Twenty-one students of Cal Arts' Feminist Art Program, led by Miriam Schapiro and Judy



Fig. 1. Members of Womanspace transform front of laundry into a gallery space (Fall 1972). Photo: Rachel Rosenthal. Author's collection.

Chicago, made the first collective feminist artwork by transforming a dilapidated mansion in mid-town Los Angeles. The site was a significant distance both from Los Angeles's La Cienega Boulevard art gallery district and from Valencia, where the Feminist Art Program was located. Being on both



Fig. 2. Opening exhibition, Womanspace (Venice Blvd.). Included 60 artists, among them: Martha Alf, Eleanor Antin, Bruria Finkel, Karen Carson, Carole Caroompas, Judy Chicago, Candy Lee, Lili Lakich, Linda Levi, Rachel Rosenthal, Miriam Schapiro, Faith Wilding, Rita Yokoi, Connie Zehr. Photo: Rachel Rosenthal. Author's collection.



Fig. 3. Dance performance by Katja Biesanz and a colleague (1973), Womanspace (Venice Blvd.); Open Wall display visible at back. Photo: Rachel Rosenthal. Author's collection.

geographical and institutional margins was crucial to *Womanhouse*. The site functioned initially as the place where the art was made, and then as the exhibition and performance space for its month-long run.² The students transformed a mansion that was soon to be destroyed, located in a rundown area in midtown Los Angeles, into an innovative temporary art installation. Their work explored the motto, "The personal is political," by delving into personal experiences through consciousness-raising as a tool for uncovering oppression and developing critical insights. Integrating emotional and political expression, they made art that focused on the material base of the middle-class home to draw attention to the oppressive mystification of white feminine domestic labor. Performances held at the *Womanhouse* site addressed these and other feminist issues, including the topic of rape. Even though working on the margins of the art world and its institutions was wholly necessary for developing this pioneering feminist exhibition, so innovative and radical for its time, it attracted an impressive several thousand visitors during the single month it was open to the public, and drew the attention of the national press, including *Time* magazine.³

Having been designed as a temporary exhibition and space, *Womanhouse* disappeared. Soon after, however, a community of women artists, art historians, and art professionals in Los Angeles organized to found the city's first alternative, independently run art gallery for women artists, which opened on January 27, 1973. Naming it Womanspace indicated its public function and eliminated the association of "house" and "home" that had dominated *Womanhouse*. Unlike A.I.R., the co-op gallery founded in 1972 in New York City, which was supported by a small group of artists who exhibited there, Womanspace attracted a large membership in the community, reaching 3000 at its height. A pioneering phenomenon for the time, it became the subject of an article in *Art News*.⁴ Womanspace opened at 11011 Venice Boulevard in Culver City (again, miles from the La Cienega galleries). Previously a



Fig. 4. Panel discussion, "The Economics of Women and Art," at Womanspace (Venice Blvd.) (July 11, 1973). Front to back: Claire Spark Loeb, KPFK Radio producer; Barbara Haskell, Curator, Pasadena Museum of Art; Josine Ianco Starrels, Gallery Director, California State Univ., L.A.; artist Candy Lee, moderator; Open Wall display visible at back. Photo: Rachel Rosenthal. Author's collection.

laundry, the space was transformed (Fig. 1) by many of its founding members into an art gallery, with pristine white walls in the front room for exhibitions (Fig. 2) and a larger back room for performances (Fig. 3) and community meetings (Fig. 4) featuring an Open Wall for hanging art on a first-come, first-served basis—a memorable display was Suzanne Lacy's hanging of beef kidneys (Fig. 5)—with a small office space in between. Having recently arrived from the East Coast (where I had studied art history at Johns Hopkins University), I was invited to serve as co-director along with Gretchen Glicksman, and soon founded (and edited) *Womanspace Journal* to document its exhibitions and events and to serve as an early platform for writing on women's art.⁵ The covers and journal were designed by Womanspace member Deborah Sussman, who became a renowned graphic designer (Figs. 6 and 7).⁶



Fig. 5. Suzanne Lacy, *Untitled* (1972), kidney/string installation, Open Wall, Womanspace (Venice Blvd.). Photo: Courtesy Suzanne Lacy.

Womanspace has received short shrift in the established narrative of the women's art movement in L.A. More attention has been focused on the larger and longer-lasting Woman's Building, which opened in November 1973, in a building at 743 S. Grandview Street that formerly housed the Chouinard Art Institute, near McArthur Park.⁷ After one year at the Venice Boulevard site, Womanspace moved to the Woman's Building, which also housed co-op and commercial galleries, a feminist bookstore, and the Feminist Studio Workshop (FSW), an experimental feminist art school.⁸

During its brief heyday, Womanspace held some groundbreaking group exhibitions.⁹ In Spring of 1973, Betye Saar, a founding member, curated "Black Mirror," featuring five African American artists—Gloria Bohannon, Marie Johnson, Suzanne Jackson, Samella Lewis, and herself (Fig. 8).¹⁰ Saar's aim was that the exhibit and events "form our own mirror image" and "will interpret the black woman's reflections of herself, the way she lives, the thoughts she thinks, the way she looks, loves, and creates.... We live in the throes of discovery."¹¹ She later acknowledged, however, that, while she had "enjoyed the professional exposure" at Womanspace and formed friendships there with other women artists, since "mainly black women and men ... turned out for the activities" organized to accompany the "Black Mirror" exhibit, "it was as if we were invisible again."¹² The exhibition included what became Saar's iconic work, *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972), which was prominently featured in *Womanspace Journal* along with her brief write-up on the exhibit.¹³

An exhibition devoted to lesbian art was also held at Womanspace. During a week in February, there was a small exhibition and a rich program of related events, including films, slide presentations, theatre, dance, a poetry reading, and discussions. The participants aimed "to affirm an identity and cultural vision which had been merely an underground expression until that time."¹⁴ Participating artist Christina Schlesinger, whose work "aimed to destroy stereotypes of lesbians," wrote on the issue and on her work for *Womanspace Journal*.¹⁵ The fact that art by African American and lesbian artists were the subjects of exhibitions at Womanspace, demonstrates that the early movement was more attentive to lesbians and women of color than critics later charged.

Another groundbreaking exhibition, "The Female Sexuality/Female Identity Exhibition," was described by performance artist Barbara Smith as an attempt at a new kind of "self definition" in art in the face of the hegemonic definition of "women" by a tradition of art that universalized a masculine point of view.¹⁶ "What I see is a group of women who are groping to accept and affirm themselves as individuals in a culture that makes this a very difficult endeavor," wrote Smith at the time, in concluding her article on the exhibition.¹⁷

In addition to establishing alternative gallery spaces to show contemporary art, feminists targeted the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) to protest its exclusion of art by women. In fact, it was the activism of women artists in Los Angeles that directly paved the way for the first major museum survey show of four hundred years of art by women.¹⁸ Curated by art historians Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, the 1976 exhibition, "Women Artists: 1550–1950," was largely the result of the now forgotten feminist activism of the Los Angeles Council of Women Artists (LACWA). This group of women artists, filmmakers, and graphic designers formed in the Spring of 1971 in response to the blatant (if typical) discrimination in Maurice Tuchman's *Art and Technology* exhibit, which included not a single woman artist (nor, for that matter, any African American, Chicano, or Asian artists).¹⁹ Although sixty-seven women had submitted (unsolicited) proposals, not one was accepted.²⁰ The all-white, all-male cast was featured in the sixty-four photographic portraits of the artists on the cover of the show's thick catalogue.

LACWA members wrote a comprehensive, critical report documenting LACMA's discriminatory practices, and on June 15, 1971, organized a protest and spoke out in the media to publicize their findings and present their demands. The report included a thoroughly researched critique of the museum's longstanding record of discrimination.²¹ LACWA's members had counted all the works displayed on the walls and scrutinized the exhibition catalogues in the museum library. Their detailed findings constituted an important precedent for the Guerilla Girls, who later on incorporated similar statistics in a punchy communication style on posters designed for public view. Among its findings, LACWA reported that, while women represent 53 percent of the population, group shows at LACMA between 1961 and 1971 had included just 4 percent,

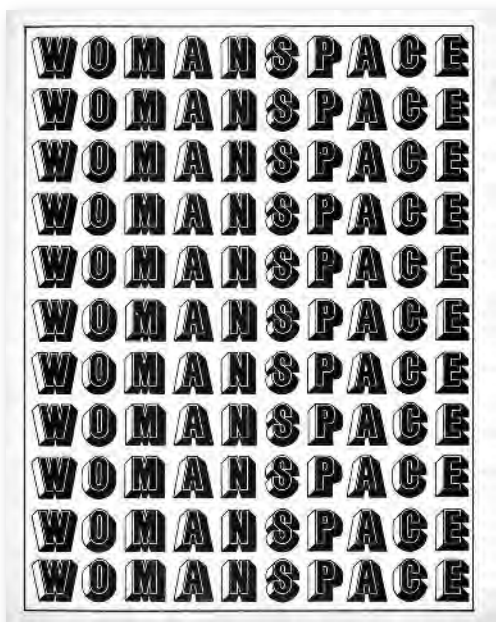


Fig. 6. Deborah Sussman, cover design for *Womanspace Journal*, no. 1 (Feb./March 1973). Photo: Woman's Building Archives, Otis College of Art and Design.



Fig. 7. Karen Carson, drawing from *Bed Series* (ca. 1971–72). *Womanspace Journal*, no. 3 (Summer 1973). Photo: Woman's Building Archives, Otis College of Art and Design.

(29 of the 713 artists shown). Moreover, of the 53 one-artist shows at the museum during the same period, only one was devoted to a woman, the photographer Dorothea Lange.

The report also articulated twelve far-reaching, concrete demands, including that half of all contemporary art shown at the museum be the work of women artists, and that half of all solo shows and museum acquisitions of contemporary art be of work by women. They also demanded that the museum acquire works by women artists from earlier periods, and that half of the trustees be women, including one working artist. LACWA proclaimed, "We hope to negotiate first with the Los Angeles County Museum concerning the program, however, if necessary, we are prepared to persuade them through the legal means of the Civil Rights Commission via a lawsuit."²²

The museum initially rejected the group's attempts to discuss these demands, capitulating only after LACWA engaged ACLU (women) lawyers, threatened to file a civil rights suit, and sent a letter to the California Senate in Sacramento, which was read aloud on the Senate floor.²³ Four LACWA members—artists Bruria Finkel and Gilah Hirsch, filmmaker Judy Reidel, and designer Vicky Hodges—eventually met with LACMA representatives, including museum trustees, curators, and administrators. The meeting broke up after Anna H. Bing, a trustee (whose bequest continues to this day to provide LACMA with major funding), questioned whether it was really time for women to be shown in the museum, to which Finkel responded by asking whether Bing thought that the Blacks in the South also needed to wait to vote.²⁴ When the meeting ended, LACMA Director Kenneth Donahue spoke with LACWA members, revealing that he loved Artemisia Gentileschi's work and promising to pursue an exhibition of her art.²⁵ However, his idea for a project fit the

traditional approach of singling out one particular artist as a "master," a rejection of LACWA's more radical proposals.

Although the women of LACWA deserve credit for the unprecedented turn-around that LACMA's 1976 survey exhibition of art by women represents, the group's efforts were never acknowledged. The exhibition catalogue contained no mention of LACWA, whose protest, demands, legal threats, and negotiation had directly prompted the reluctant museum to commission the exhibition. Also conspicuously absent from the catalogue was the customary foreword from the museum's director. Only the two guest curators contributed introductory texts. Apparently, museum officials had taken a decision to distance their institution from the exhibition because of

their deep ambivalence about it, and this was reflected in the catalogue of the first major museum survey exhibition of women's art.

Ann Sutherland Harris, in her Acknowledgments, briefly alluded to "women artists" who came to LACMA with demands, but made no mention of LACWA or the group's organized efforts. By contrast, she described in some detail the events that led Donahue (an art historian also specializing in Italian Baroque art) to invite her to curate the exhibition:

The idea for the exhibition emerged during the course of some informal after-dinner speeches following the symposium organized in connection with another exhibition, *Caravaggio and His Followers*, held at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1971. Kenneth Donahue told the story of women artists who came to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art demanding gallery space and exhibition time for women equal to that being given to male artists.²⁶

Harris went on to say that Donahue claimed that the women had suggested a Gentileschi exhibition, which he "greeted with enthusiasm," even though—as recalled by Finkel—this was in fact his own idea in response to LACWA's more far-reaching demands. Donahue finally agreed to a survey show of women artists when Harris, a respected art historian in his own field, made the case "that there were many other neglected women artists worthy of exhibitions.... Mr. Donahue came over immediately to ask me if I would be interested in being a Guest Curator for such a show ... and in the course of our conversation the idea of a historical survey of major women artists emerged."²⁷ Thus, the idea of the exhibition having "emerged"



Fig. 8. "Black Mirror" exhibition, Womanspace (Venice Blvd.) (Spring 1973). Photo: Rachel Rosenthal. Author's collection.

over an informal conversation among colleagues supplanted the fact of LACWA's activism, which was reduced to a vague mention of the efforts of some nameless "women artists."

Harris later urged the museum to invite Nochlin to co-curate the exhibition, which included eighty-three artists from twelve countries and some 150 European and American paintings, supplemented by prints and drawings (Fig. 9). The opening night, December 23, 1976, was a grand celebration, marked by a sense of triumph, collective pride, and a general elation. Timed to be on view during the College Art Association's (CAA) annual conference, to be held in Los Angeles the following February, the exhibition was seen by a national audience of artists, art historians and museum professionals before traveling to three other venues.²⁸

To extend the visibility of contemporary art by women, the Woman's Building opened two exhibitions of contemporary art also timed to coincide with the CAA conference: an exhibition of works on paper by over 140 women artists from thirty states, curated by Judith K. Brodsky (sponsored by the Women's Caucus for Art), and "What is Feminist Art?" conceived by New York art critic Lucy Lippard, Los Angeles art historian and critic Arlene Raven, and myself. The phenomenon of feminist art was so new that the term was still rarely used. To address the question in the exhibition title, the Center for Feminist Art Historical Studies sent out to a long list of artists (mostly in the U.S. and some overseas) a pink postcard with the following request: "If you consider yourself a feminist, would you respond by using one 8 1/2" x 11" page to share your ideas on what feminist art is or could be." Artists were asked to use the page however they chose and to send it back unfolded. Among the 200 artists who replied were Ana Mendieta, Ulrike Rosenbach, Rachel Rosenthal, Martha Rosler, Joan Snyder, June Wayne, Faith Wilding, and Hannah Wilke. All responses were displayed, either on the walls or in a folder

that viewers could leaf through. Visitors were invited to add their own responses as well. The organizers did not think of feminist art as a style, but rather as art produced by feminists, made with feminist goals, or more generally inspired by feminism. Our goal was to stimulate thought about the topic, trusting that artists would produce many different answers, which of course they did.

The variety of responses went far beyond the reductive idea of "essentialism" (the belief that gender "has innate or universal validity rather than being a social, ideological or intellectual construct"), which was attributed to 1970s feminists a decade later (and has since been widely critiqued).²⁹ For example, Martha Rosler (then based in Southern California) addressed several issues in her response, among them the much-discussed idea at the time that feminist art is "art that allows for the expression of a

specifically 'female consciousness.'" Arguing that any such consciousness was socially constructed, she stated: "I think that all we can know of female consciousness is that it is a product of one's time & place & particular position in the socioeconomically defined world."³⁰ As this view demonstrates, what in the 1980s would be termed the social construction of gender was already being recognized in the 1970s.

While discriminatory practices in the art world persist, in recent years, a number of exhibitions organized by feminist curators have been shown in large and smaller museums. The year 2007 was especially significant in the U.S. on both East and West Coasts, with "WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution," curated by Cornelia Butler, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (MOCA LA), and "Global Feminisms," curated by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin at the Brooklyn Museum.

Nowadays the introduction of feminist art and art made by women into major museums is facilitated in ways that were not possible four decades ago. First, women, including feminist curators, now hold significant positions within museums, in stark contrast to the 1970s, when the survey of art by women at LACMA was curated by feminist art historians from outside of the museum.³¹ Women curators at major museums are no longer a rarity, and in some institutions, women are in the majority, as for example at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), where in 2010, twenty-four of its thirty-five curators were women.³² In addition, some independent feminist curators make a point of maintaining their autonomy.³³

A second important difference is that, while women have long been patrons and served on boards of trustees, in recent years some have donated money specifically to fund large projects aimed at increasing the visibility of women artists.



Fig. 9. "Women Artists: 1550–1950," installation photo, Los Angeles Country Museum of Art (Dec. 1976 – March 1977) Photo: © Museum Associates/L.A.C.M.A.

Elizabeth A. Sackler, who founded and provided the funding for the Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, is currently Chair of the museum's Board of Trustees. Sarah Peter founded the Modern Women's Fund at MoMA in 2004, after which the museum's female curators met and developed the fund's first project, a collaborative effort in which "each curatorial department went through its holdings and digitized images of women's art starting in the 19th century."³⁴ Supported by the Modern Women's Fund, MoMA published *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*.³⁵ The fund also supported a panel, on "Art Institutions and Feminist Politics Now," in May 2010, following up on MoMA's earlier symposium on "The Feminist Future: Theory in Practice in the Visual Arts."³⁶

A third major factor that distinguishes the current conditions from those of the 1970s is the broad cultural impact of feminism. The mindset—of audiences, critics, artists, and the curators themselves—has changed, influenced by a generation of women and men who came of age when the impact of feminism on the culture at large was a given. Today, most of the museum exhibitions of art by women and feminist art are curated by a generation of women who had access to the body of knowledge initially developed by artists, art historians, and curators of an earlier generation. Nonetheless, as players in a system that remains ambivalent about feminism, feminist curators today often find themselves playing a balancing game between the desire to break new

curatorial ground and the need to secure approval and funding for every exhibit.³⁷

The early protests against museum exclusions did have some lasting effects. Connie Butler, for example, said that the idea for "WACK!," an international survey featuring 118 artists and 300 works made between 1965 and 1980, "was hatched as far back as the early 1990s," partly under the influence of feminist protests.³⁸ Butler also cited as a source of inspiration the newly formed Women's Action Coalition's 1992 targeting of "the downtown annex of the Guggenheim Museum . . . which had opened that year with very few women artists represented."³⁹ Camille Morineau, who curated the landmark 2009 exhibition in Paris, "*elles@centrepompidou: Women Artists in the Collection of the National Museum of Modern Art*," conceived of that exhibition to a large extent as a result of her encounter with women's studies twenty years earlier as a student in the U.S., at Williams College in Massachusetts. After returning home, as she tried to implement feminist ideas, she encountered little interest or support:

When I came back to France, I kept waiting for the subject to pop up at a museum or university... It just didn't. I taught at l'École du Louvre for 10 years and tried to create a gender studies program. Impossible. When I started working here [at The Pompidou], six years ago, I started talking about doing something, but it took a while to shape an exhibition.⁴⁰

She described having to overcome considerable resistance from male colleagues and superiors because “the word feminism is still completely taboo in France,” and acknowledged that “a certain amount of deception about the goals of the exhibition had to be built into its planning... In fact, it had to be a feminist gesture that could absolutely not appear that way.”⁴¹ The result, “elles@centrepompidou,” was the most ambitious survey exhibition to date, featuring some 500 works in a wide range of media by 200 artists.⁴² It differed from other exhibitions also in being presented as a re-hanging of the museum’s permanent collection, which required the unprecedented move of putting into storage many of the regularly displayed works by male art stars. Notably, approximately 40 percent of the art in “elles@centrepompidou” had been acquired during the five years leading up to the exhibit, reflecting a concerted effort to build up the collection and enable the exhibit’s wide scope.⁴³ By the time the show opened, art by women comprised about 18 to 25 percent of the contemporary art in the museum’s collection.

The importance of landmark feminist exhibitions notwithstanding, long-term change requires that museums both include greater numbers of women in thematic and solo exhibitions and incorporate art made by women into their permanent installations as a significant part of the stories they tell about modern and contemporary art. Otherwise, such singular events, which have a crucial function as a kind of manifesto, may appear to be ghettoizing art by women, although such an effect is less the result of exhibitions of women’s art than the general lack of adequate representation of women in museum exhibitions. Regrettably, it does not appear that we are headed toward an enduring, significant change just yet. After “elles@centrepompidou” closed, the permanent collection of modern art on display returned to including about 10 percent of work by women artists, which may have precipitated the abrupt departure of Morineau,⁴⁴ who has continued as an independent (feminist) curator.⁴⁵

The integration of art by women, like that of any marginalized art, is attended by the risk of institutionalization and “museumification” of that which is newly embraced. For example, when the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., mounted an exhibit in 2014, tracing an artistic dialogue between Mary Cassatt and Edgar Degas through a selection of seventy works, both paintings and works on paper, the catalogue essays deliberately avoided an analysis of gender.⁴⁶ Such de-politicizing discourse distances itself from the issues of social and feminist art history.

The risk of institutionalization is often raised in the context of exhibiting contemporary feminist art in major museums. Like other types of art motivated by urgent political momentum that for decades was on the margins before entering major museums, feminist art is fated to be transformed by its institutional acceptance. It is with this in mind that Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry recently asked: “Has feminism’s preservation in the museum also neutralized its politics? There is a perceived contradiction between the subversion of power relations promised by feminism and the

regulation of the subversive performed by the art institution.”⁴⁷ Further, Griselda Pollock warns that by exhibiting previously excluded feminist works “we might gain this work for art, but miss its significance in transforming art.... we assimilate and domesticate the feminist rupture into a deadened, museal category of ‘feminist art.’”⁴⁸ Since the feminist agenda remains highly relevant, feminist curators are actively searching for strategies to highlight the political context of the art when it enters major museums, and discussing what it means to curate as a feminist.⁴⁹ If the only alternative to “institutionalization” were keeping feminist art outside of museums, doomed to be forgotten like the art of women throughout the centuries, most feminists would not endorse this path. Not only is it contrary to the basic goals of the 1970s activists, but still today, the fight goes on to end discrimination against women artists, artists of color, and other underrepresented groups.

Although the statistics regarding the relative representation of female and male artists vary from one institution to another, the big-picture remains, indisputably, one of continuing vast inequality. Revisiting LACMA, for example, the lack of progress is astounding: between 2000 and 2005, of its twenty solo exhibitions, only one featured a woman (Diane Arbus).⁵⁰ More recent figures for 2007 through 2014 at LACMA show slight progress, with just under 20 percent of solo exhibitions of women, still the weakest record compared with MoMA, the Whitney, the Guggenheim, and MOCA LA.⁵¹ Thus, while the newer issues of institutionalization and museumification are important to consider, underrepresentation remains a pressing concern. In addition, there is a growing awareness of the underrepresentation of women artists worldwide, especially those outside North America and Europe. In the long run, however, the impact of exhibitions that focus exclusively on art by women will be limited if it is not coupled with a fundamental change in the status quo, to be achieved through the telling of new histories of art that fully acknowledge the value of art made by women and artists from other marginalized groups. •

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Notes

1. See for example, Katy Deepwell, “Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s,” in *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*, ed. Janet Marstine (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 64–84, and Hilary Robinson, “Feminism Meets the Big Exhibition: Museum Survey Shows Since 2005,” *Anglo Saxonica*, Ser. III, no. 6 (2013): 129–49.
2. Womanhouse was open to the public from Jan. 27 to Feb. 28, 1972. For an analysis that discusses the significance of its location as an antidote to Los Angeles’s modernist urban space, see Cécile Whiting, *Pop L.A.: Art and the City in the 1960s* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2006), 188–201, esp. 192. See also, for example, Paula Harper, “The First Feminist Art Program: A View from the

- 1980s," *Signs*, 10, no. 4 (Summer 1985): 762–81, and Arlene Raven, "Womanhouse," in *The Power of Feminist Art*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 161–72.
3. "Bad-Dream House," *Time*, (March 20, 1972), 77.
4. Nancy Marmer, "Womanspace: A Creative Battle for Equality in the Art World," *Art News* (Summer, 1973): 38–39.
5. The publication was discontinued after its third issue due to a lack of funds.
6. David Colker, "Deborah Sussman dies at 83; L.A. designer known for bold use of color," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 21, 2014, <http://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-deborah-sussman-20140822-story.html>.
7. See for example a long bibliography that includes numerous references to the Woman's Building, the feminist art programs, and *Womanhouse* but none to *Womanspace* at: <http://www.otis.edu/ben-maltz-gallery/womans-building-suggested-readings>. Although Michael Fallon, in *Creating the Future, Art and Los Angeles of the 1970s* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2014), has a chapter devoted to "The Rise of Women Artists," he mentions *Womanspace* only in passing, as the site where Rachel Rosenthal taught performance.
8. On the Woman's Building, see Lucy Lippard, "The L.A. Woman's Building," in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: Dutton, 1976), 96–100; Sondra Hale and Terry Wolverton, eds., *From Site to Vision, The Woman's Building in Contemporary Culture* (Los Angeles: Otis College of Art and Design, 2011); Meg Linton and Sue Maberry, eds., *Doin'it in Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building*, exh. cat. Los Angeles, Otis Ben Maltz Gallery (Los Angeles: Otis College of Art and Design, 2011).
9. For a documentation of exhibitions at *Womanspace*, see *Womanspace Journal* (1973). On groups and exhibitions in the early 1970s, see Judith K. Brodsky, "Exhibitions, Galleries, and Alternative Spaces," in Broude & Garrard, *The Power of Feminist Art*, 104–19; "Selected Chronology of All-Women Exhibitions, 1943–83," compiled by Jenni Sorkin and Linda Theung, in *WACK!*, 473–99.
10. The exhibition was on view from Mar. 31 to April 22, 1973, at the Venice Blvd. location. The *WACK!* catalogue erroneously states that "Black Mirrors" was held in the Woman's Building. Sorkin Theung, "Selected Chronology," *WACK!*, 478.
11. Betye Saar, "Black Mirror," *Womanspace Journal*, no. 2: 22.
12. Betye Saar, interviewed by Ruth Askey, in "A Baker's Dozen: Oral Histories of Women Artists," (MA thesis, Goddard College, 1998), cited by Yolanda M. Lopez and Moira Roth, "Social Protest: Racism and Sexism," in Broude & Garrard, eds. *The Power of Feminist Art*, 140–57, at 152.
13. *Womanspace Journal*, no. 2 (April/May, 1973): 22.
14. Norma New York, "Lesbian Week," *Womanspace Journal*, no. 2: 20. Thanks to Sue Maberry, Director of the Library of the Otis College of Art and Design and Derek McMullen for extending scans of *Womanspace Journal*.
15. Christina Schlesinger, "The Image of the Lesbian in Contemporary Society," *Womanspace Journal*, no. 2: 21.
16. Barbara Smith, "The Female Sexuality/Female Identity Exhibition," *Womanspace Journal*, no. 2: 23–27, 34.
17. *Ibid.*, 34.
18. "Los Angeles Council of Women Artists Report," June 15, 1971, at The Getty Research Institute, 2003.M.46. Fallon, *Creating the Future* discusses LACWA, 16–17, 34–63, 42–43, 351. A small museum exhibition curated by Ann Gabhart and Elizabeth Broun preceded the LACMA show: "Old Mistresses: Women Artists of the Past," at the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore (April 17–June 18, 1972).
19. Maurice Tuchman, *A Report on the Art and Technology Program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967–71* (Los Angeles: LACMA, 1971).
20. *Ibid.*, 81. One very brief proposal by a female artist, Channa Davis, was published in the catalogue but was not accepted for exhibition.
21. "Los Angeles Council of Women Artists Report," June 15, 1971, at The Getty Research Institute, 2003.M.46: <http://blogs.getty.edu/pacificstandardtime/explore-the-era/archives/i143/>
22. *Ibid.*
23. Bruria Finkel, communication with the author, Jan. 17, 2015.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. Ann Sutherland Harris, in *Women Artists: 1550–1950*, eds. Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin (New York: Alfred A. Knopf/Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1976), 8.
27. *Ibid.*
28. "Women Artists: 1550–1950" traveled to The Brooklyn Museum, the University of Texas at Austin, and the Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh.
29. Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/essentialism>. For critical discussions of essentialism, see Amelia Jones, *Sexual Politics, Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (Los Angeles: UCLA at the Hammer Art Museum and Cultural Center, 1996), 20–45, 82–125; Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, in *Introducing Feminist Art History*, Amazon e-book, 2014. For a thorough reading of *Womanhouse* as a work that critiques rather than reiterates essentialist notions of women, see Temma Balducci, "'Womanhouse': Welcome to the (Deconstructed) 'Dollhouse,'" *WAJ* 27, no. 2 (Fall-Winter, 2006) 17–23.
30. Martha Rosler, response to "What is Feminist Art?" 1976–77. American Archives of Art, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/items/detail/what-feminist-art-or-might-be-12901>.
31. For an account of the exclusion and discriminatory treatment of women curators during the 1970s, see Marcia Tucker, *A Short Life of Trouble: Forty Years in the New York Art World*, ed. and Afterword by Liza Lou (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2010).
32. As noted by MoMA's Associate Director, Kathy Halbreich, on a panel in the MoMA Symposium "Art Institutions and Feminist Politics Now," May 23, 2010, quoted in Mira Schor, "A Year of Positive Thinking," <http://ayearofpositivethinking.com/2010/05/23/moma-panel-art-institutions-and-feminist-politics-now/>
33. Discussed by Rosa Martinez in Katy Deepwell, "Curatorial Strategies and Feminist Politics: An Interview with Rosa Martinez," *N. Paradoxa* 18 (2006): 5–9.
34. Deborah Wye, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Chief Curator of Prints and Illustrated Books at MoMA, cited in Phoebe Hoban, "We're Finally Infiltrating," *ARTnews*, February, 2007, http://www.artnews.com/issues/article.asp?art_id=2215
35. *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*, eds., Cornelia H. Butler and Alexandra Schwartz (New York: MoMA, 2010).
36. "Art Institutions and Feminist Politics Now," May 23, 2010; "The Feminist Future: Theory in Practice in the Visual Arts, January 26–27, 2007. For list of speakers of the two-day conference, see: <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/the-feminist-future-theory-and-practice-in-the-visual-arts/>. For a review of the conference, see Holland Cotter, "Feminist Art Finally Takes Center Stage," *New York Times*, Jan. 29, 2007.
37. In some museums, as documented in the case of MoMA, significant progress has occurred in the degree of self-censorship applied by curators. After Kathy Halbreich, MoMA's Associate Director,

- brought the pervasive problem of curators' self-censorship to the attention of the Director, Glenn D. Lowry he gave his explicit permission to pursue exhibitions more freely. See Schor, "A Year of Positive Thinking," <http://ayearofpositivethinking.com/2010/05/23/moma-panel-art-institutions-and-feminist-politics-now/>
38. "Amelia Jones talks to Connie Butler about the upcoming exhibition 'WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution,'" *Frieze*, 105 (March 2007), http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/history_makers/
 39. Ibid.
 40. Morineau, quoted in Suzanne Muchnic, "At Paris' Pompidou Center, the Year of the Women," *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 2009, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-ca-elles24-2009may24-story.html>.
 41. Morineau, comments made on the MoMA panel "Art Institutions and Feminist Politics Now," reported by Schor in "A Year of Positive Thinking."
 42. Morineau, in *elles@centrepompidou: Women Artists in the Collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne*, eds. Morineau and Annalisa Rimmaudo (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2009), 15–16.
 43. Syma Tariq, "Stealing the Show," *The Guardian*, July 10, 2009. <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/jul/10/elles-pompidou-paris>
 44. Maura Reilly, "Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating," Keynote Lecture at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney College of the Arts, Univ. of Sydney, Australia, Oct. 24, 2014: <https://vimeo.com/113864836>.
 45. For example, in Fall of 2014, Morineau curated the landmark exhibition of Niki de Saint Phalle, at the Grand Palais, Paris.
 46. Kimberly Jones, ed., *Degas, Cassatt*, exh. cat. (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2014). For an approach that foregrounds gender issues in a comparative study of Degas and Cassatt, see Iskin, "The Collecting Practices of Degas and Cassatt: Gender and the Construction of Value in Art History" in *Perspectives on Degas*, ed. Kathryn Brown (forthcoming, Ashgate, c. 2016).
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 48. Griselda Pollock, "Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space, and the Archive," in eds. Malin Hedlin Hayden and Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe, *Feminisms is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 105–39, cited in Robinson, "Feminism Meets the Big Exhibition: Museum Survey Shows Since 2005," 147.
 49. See "Curatorial Strategies," special issue of *N. Paradoxa*: international feminist art journal, 18 (2006); Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry, "Constant Redistribution: A Roundtable on Feminism, Art and the Curatorial Field," *Journal of Curatorial Studies* II, 2 (2103): 219–41; Helen Molesworth, "How to Install Art as a Feminist," in eds., Butler and Schwartz, *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*, 499–513.
 50. Maura Reilly, "Introduction: Towards Global Feminisms," in *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art*, eds Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin (New York: Brooklyn Museum & London: Merrell, 2007), 44 n. 21.
 51. Maura Reilly, "Taking the Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures, and Fixes," *ArtNews* (June, 2015), <http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/taking-the-measure-of-sexism-facts-figures-and-fixes/>



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DOROTHY GILLESPIE

REFLECTIONS OF A JOYFUL ADVENTURE

By Steve Arbury

Dorothy Gillespie (1920–2012) was a prolific and successful artist, widely exhibiting her art in solo exhibitions from the late 1940s well into the twenty-first century.¹ Known for her output of colorful, joyful sculptural art, like *Earth Series, Time Zone VI* (1981; Fig. 1), she was among those who helped blaze a path for women artists during the feminist art movement in the 1970s.² She mastered many mediums, including painting, paper, sculpture, printmaking, environments and happenings, ceramics, jewelry, and set design, and her works are included in numerous public and private collections.³

From a young age, Dorothy Gillespie wanted to be an artist; but in the 1920s and early 1930s in Roanoke, Virginia, there were no galleries or museums, and no opportunities to study art. The first female artist to inspire her was the French painter, Rosa Bonheur (1822–99). As a child, Gillespie saw a black-and-white photograph of Bonheur's *The Horse Fair* (1853) in an encyclopedia. Although the reproduction was small, the caption gave the dimensions, so she knew it was large, and she knew that she also wanted to make *big* art.⁴ Despite her parents' wish that she become a teacher, Gillespie was determined to attend art school, and in 1938, after finishing high school and then working for a year, she enrolled at the Maryland Institute of Art, graduating in 1941.⁵

On June 5th, 1943, Gillespie moved to New York City, and after receiving five job offers within a week, she settled on Assistant Ad Designer for the B. Altman department store. She also continued her art education. At the Art Students League she studied with Sydney Edward Dickinson, who taught life drawing, painting, and composition; his direct and candid teaching method suited Gillespie.⁶ She also took sculpture classes at the Clay Club, and studied etching at Stanley William Hayter's printmaking studio, Atelier 17. With its philosophy and "ethos of never quite completing, always experimenting in the matter of making art," Atelier 17 was a formative influence.⁷

In 1946 Gillespie married Bernard Israel; their daughter Dorien was born in 1947, son Gary in 1949, and Richard in

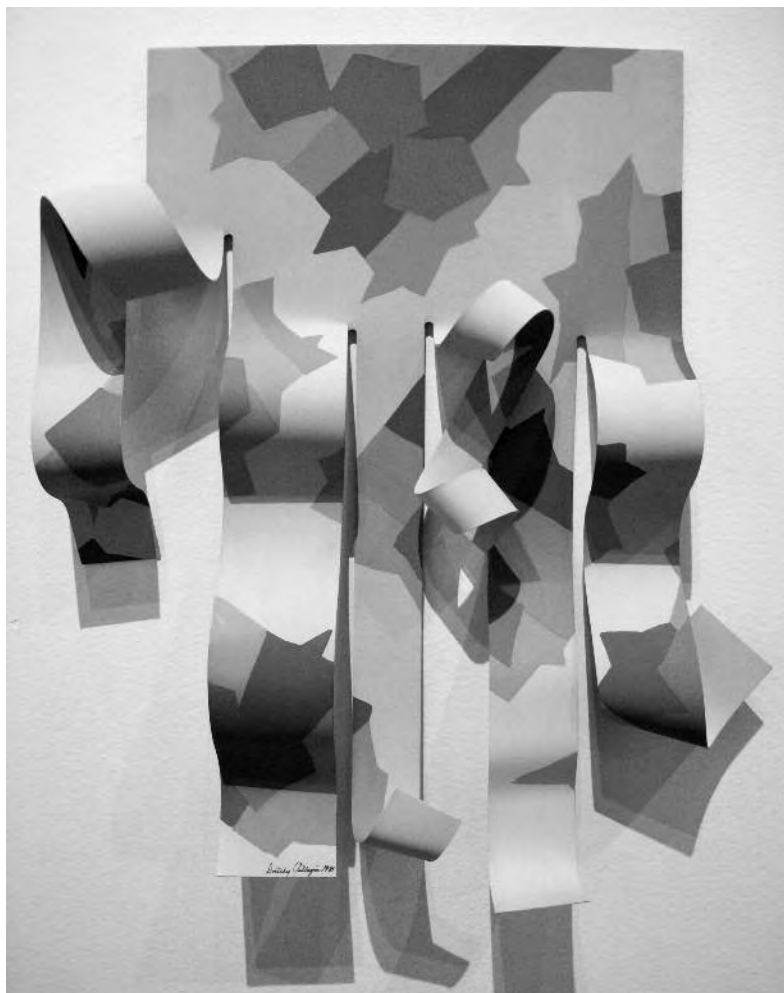


Fig. 1. Dorothy Gillespie, *Earth Series: Time Zone VI* (1981), acrylic on aluminum, 20" x 17" x 4".

1956.⁸ The family spent a few years in the early 1950s living in Peru before moving to Miami, Florida, for eight years beginning in the mid-1950s. In Lima, Gillespie frequented the National Museum of Archaeology and participated in a local archaeological dig in addition to making her own art.⁹ In 1963 the family returned to New York City, where she lived until her later years and maintained a working studio.

When she first arrived in New York City, Gillespie was painting in a loose realist style typical of many artists at the



Fig. 2. Dorothy Gillespie, *Winged Flight* (1957), oil on Masonite, 39" x 21".

time. But seeing abstract works in the galleries dramatically changed her outlook. She wanted to paint abstractly but soon realized this was easier desired than done. As Gillespie later said, "Changes in style do not occur overnight; they occur in little increments."¹⁰ *Dancers*, from 1944 (Pl. 1), hints at the transformation of her style. One can still clearly distinguish the human figure in this simplified quasi-Cubist painting, but it is a radical change from her earlier figurative work. Art historian George S. Bolge said of this and other works of that period that they affirmed "an intense psychological moment, a religious or mystical experience, a deeply subjective reaction to a person, place, or occasion."¹¹

Still, her truly abstract paintings were more than a decade away. Gillespie furthered her research into abstraction during the 1950s, in works such as *Winged Flight* (1957; Fig. 2), an energetic tour de force of brushwork. By 1960, in works like in *Encircled Path* (Fig. 3), her abstract style was fully formed.

Gillespie continued expanding her horizons both artistically and critically with a series of multimedia installations in New York, including *American Way of Death* (1964), *Made in the USA* (1965), *Light and Motion* (1965), and *Flag Show* (1966).¹² *Made in the USA*, which dealt with American consumerism, was described as an extraordinary experience that assaulted all five senses, with:

blinking lights, peep holes, mirrors, revolving figures, three-dimensional shadow boxes which utilized theatrical gauze, plastic and aluminum to depict the stereotypes of the American scene. Colored lights rotating continually created a startling psychedelic effect heightened by stereo tape recordings of street sounds, music, news, speeches and sirens—all combining to give

the viewer, who was also a participant, a feeling of unreality while seeing, hearing, touching smelling and tasting the familiar.¹³

The enormous shadow boxes revealed American fads, such as dieting, via life-size silhouettes, pictures, and words. The boundaries between reality and make-believe blurred, causing people to think the real dollar bills on the floor were fake.

In *Flag Show* (also referred to as *U.S.*) Gillespie again was experimenting with new materials, in this case Mylar, which she had first seen at the DuPont Pavilion at the 1964 World's Fair.¹⁴ Conceived also as an environment to involve all five senses, *Flag Show* traversed three rooms with Mylar-covered walls that reflected the light from red, white, and blue bulbs. A loudspeaker in the corridor blared John Philip Sousa's *The Stars and Stripes Forever*, and the main room displayed some two dozen images—paintings, collages, rotating sculptures—representing various aspects of the American flag (Fig. 4). The *New York Times* review quoted Gillespie describing how she had created some 3,500 stars out of Mylar, plastic and other materials.¹⁵ Another room draped in black cloth housed two rear-view projectors that ran color films showing typical American scenes, such as Little Leaguers playing baseball, Sunday picnics, and historic monuments, while a radio broadcast gave ongoing news updates. The purpose of the installation was, Gillespie said, to encourage people to think about what we have in the United States, noting that "we are living in the most wonderful time in the world and I think most of us take too much of it for granted."¹⁶ For Gillespie, "the audience was the show,"¹⁷ and she had indeed created an artistic situation that promoted viewer response.

Paper as a medium proved crucial to Gillespie's artistic development. In *Rituals '71*, a three-hour "happening" at New York University, Gillespie employed mammoth sheets of painted paper. This was followed by two "Paper Works"



Fig. 3. Dorothy Gillespie, *Encircled Path* (1960), oil on linen, 44" x 47".

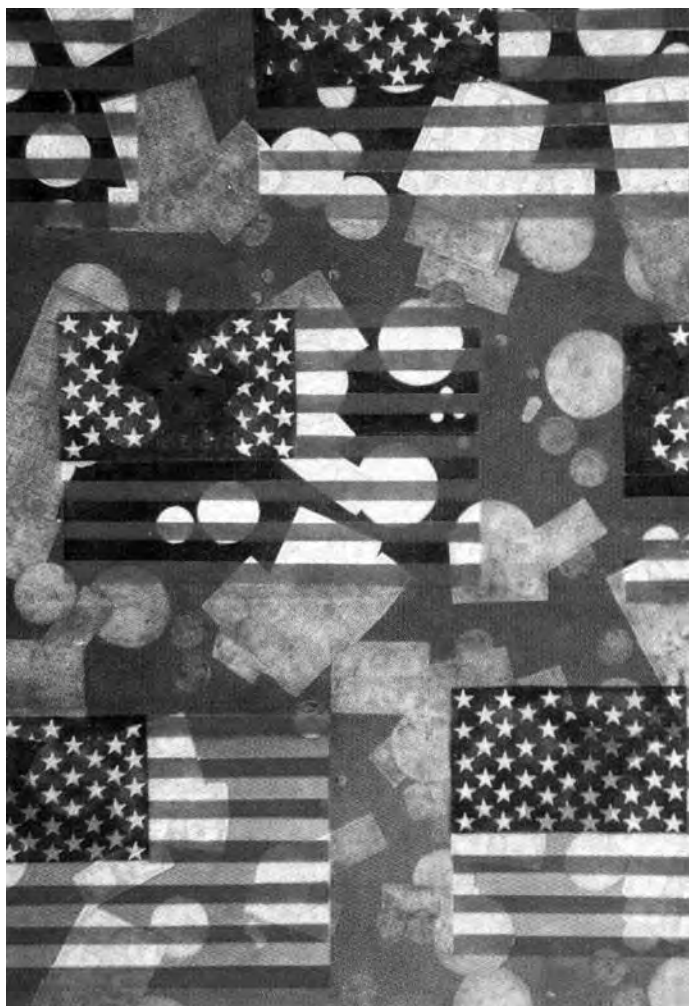


Fig. 4. Dorothy Gillespie, *Flag Show Collage* (1966), paper, aluminum, paint.

exhibitions on an even more massive scale at New York University (1976) and the Jersey City Museum (1977). In these installations large rolls of paper cascaded off the walls or were placed on the floor partially unrolled to reveal Gillespie's bold designs. The Jersey City exhibition (Fig. 5) contained four paper pieces 150 feet long that draped a large staircase and were largely suspended in the air. Paper allowed Gillespie not only to move her art off the wall but to work large, and she often said that without paper, she would not have realized the potential of metal sculpture.

Gillespie's paper works are closely associated with her devotion to the women's movement in the late 1960s and 1970s—paper is readily available and inexpensive, and exhibitions of paper works were relatively easy to pack and install and light enough to ship to venues around the country. As the women's art movement unfolded in New York, Gillespie was there. In 1970 she joined in picketing at the Whitney and was instrumental in founding the Women's Interart Center, where she participated in various events. She helped establish its Women Artists Historical Archives and organized, with painter Alice Baber (1928–82), the first women's art show at the Center—from then on she maintained



Fig. 5. Dorothy Gillespie, *Paper Works* (1977), Jersey City Museum.

her studio in the same building on West 52nd Street. She and Baber also developed and taught a course at the New School for Social Research titled "Functioning in the Art World," focusing particularly on professionalism for women artists.¹⁸

Her personal consciousness-raising moment occurred in 1975. She had designed a large wall painting for the side of a building in New York, but city regulations required that professional wall painters—not the actual artist—paint the wall. While standing below on the ground giving directions to the painters on the scaffold, a man walked up and asked whose painting it was. Gillespie replied that it was hers. The man told her that he thought only men painted walls. That day, she decided to change the way she signed her works. Instead of signing "Gillespie" or "D. Gillespie," she wrote her full name.

Transferring the concept of rolls of flowing paper to her paintings on canvas, in the 1970s Gillespie created works such as *Passage to the Hidden Valley* (1978; Fig. 6), a long scroll of painted canvas that rolled up at the bottom away from the wall. She sought ways to maintain the free flowing form paper allowed with greater body and durability so that works could also be three-dimensional. She spent a summer with her studio assistant, Tom Hicks, developing a technique to stiffen paper, but it made the paper too cement-like. Laminating painted canvas to steel that she had shaped into the desired form yielded works like *Series 4: Arrangement XXX* (1977; Pl. 2), shown paired with a two-dimensional painting of a similar



Fig. 6. Dorothy Gillespie, *Passage to the Hidden Valley* (1978), acrylic on canvas, 99" x 27".

the edges back an inch or two to give the panels some depth. (This also served to create a lip so that they could be hung on the wall.) She created works using a single sheet of aluminum; first she painted the overall design, and then using metal shears, she cut it into strips, which she then shaped. Gillespie painted on the metal using enamel-based paint and a variety of brushes, including foam, small rollers, and hairbrushes. The final phase might be an application of polyurethane, especially for outdoor pieces. Large, complex works, like *Colorfall Series: Garden*, require assembly. This work consists of twenty-two pieces—eighteen "ribbon" sections and four rectangular panels installed side by side. Tabs on the back of the ribbon sections are inserted into slots on the flat panels, and the result is a colorful, luxurious whole that extends off the wall and into the spectator's space.

Having established what would become her trademark technique, Gillespie experimented with shapes and arrangements to create new forms. Many of her works were designed to be displayed in different configurations, for example, *Tiered Arrangement III* (1992–95; Fig. 7) could be installed as shown, or with the smaller loops hung between (instead of above) the larger loops to create a shorter, wider

design. While laminating the canvas to shaped metal achieved the desired results, it was a tedious process. The solution came when she discovered that she could paint directly on the metal.

Gillespie chose anodized aluminum because it is lightweight, allows coloring, is relatively easy to shape, and resists corrosion.¹⁹ This choice profoundly affected the rest of her career, as it became the basis for her unique mature style and technique of painting on aluminum. While some works remained flat, such as *Through the Looking Glass: Celebration I* (1993; Pl. 3), most were more three-dimensional with billowing ribbons of painted aluminum, such as *Colorfall Series: Garden* (1993; Pl. 4).

The techniques Gillespie used to achieve her signature style varied. Even with works like *Through the Looking Glass: Celebration I*, where she painted her abstract designs on flat aluminum sheets, she bent

piece. Other works, such as *Through the Looking Glass*, can be hung either horizontally or vertically. She often incorporated two ways to hang a work not only for variety's sake, but also for practical reasons, to allow curators leeway in installing works to best suit their space (thus two sets of dimensions are listed for some pieces). Freestanding painted sculptures like *Ribboned Presence* (1993; Fig. 8) were set on pedestals to be seen from multiple points of view. Another variation was her use of unpainted, highly reflective silver aluminum, which caused a work like *Changing Reflections* (2001; Fig. 9) to acquire its "color" from the distorted reflections seen on its curved surfaces.

Gillespie frequently employed gallery assistants but did much of the work herself, even with large pieces, teaching herself how to use heavy equipment to shape the metal.²⁰ She also worked with students at Radford University, where she was a visiting professor for many years, to repair some works. Among other projects she did with the help of art students, she repainted worn areas of *Sky Castles*, a large work composed of four tall towers, that was originally displayed at Walt Disney World's Epcot Center, Orlando.

Always fascinated with new materials, Gillespie continued to experiment and incorporate them into her work. For



Fig. 7. Dorothy Gillespie, *Tiered Arrangement III* (1992–95), 74" x 56" x 22" (or 50" x 104" x 22") (10 pieces), enamel on aluminum.



Fig. 8. Dorothy Gillespie, *Ribbioned Presence* (1993), enamel on aluminum, 32" x 14" x 14".

Anniversary Series: To the Voice of Birds (1997; Fig. 10), she uploaded her design to a computer and used a large printer to replicate the design on huge sheets of vinyl. (This involved so many processes from conception to final product that she labeled these works as "very mixed media on vinyl.")

She also applied her unique geometrical designs to ceramic pieces with glazes just as she did to metal with enamel—mostly large pieces, in keeping with her ongoing desire to "work big." But she could also work on a small scale, using her metalworking skills and love of artist-designed jewelry, which she called "wearable sculpture," to make pieces of her own, experimenting with new materials such as gold clay.

The desire to work large drove Gillespie to seek major commissions. Beginning with her 1975 wall mural in New York, she continued making large outdoor works, including murals such as the one she painted in her hometown of Roanoke (1979; Fig. 11), as well as numerous privately and publicly commissioned metal sculptures.

In 1982, Gillespie was commissioned to design the set for the Cleveland Ballet's production of *Summerscape* (Front cover), a ballet created by its artistic director, Dennis Nahat. After he told her he imagined bursts of suns all over the stage,



Fig. 9. Dorothy Gillespie, *Changing Reflections* (2001), bright silver aluminum, 53" x 24" x 9".

she created nine spherical sculptures of varying diameters (up to seven feet) that were suspended over the stage. The sculptures rose up at the beginning of the performance and then moved with the air currents throughout the performance. The slowly rotating starbursts provided the basis for the color scheme of the dancers' costumes, designed by David Guthrie. The twenty-four dancers wore white leotards and tights with purple, blue, and yellow accents that mirrored the colors of the sculptures suspended above. The choreography also was inspired by the sculptures, as the dancers' movements were in part defined by their placement and shifting motion.²¹

Magic Carpet Slides (1986; Pl. 5), installed on an exterior wall of the Museum of Art in Fort Lauderdale, Florida (where she maintained a second home for many years), combines attached and

floating painted metal sheets. Five aluminum sheets suspended by cables seem to "float" out from the wall and move with the sea breezes, while four smaller sheets in between are secured flat to the wall. The title implies a series of playful slides that descend into the museum's sculpture garden, but one could also see them as rippling paths ascending skyward.

Another large commission, *Colors and Forms in Flight*, installed inside the escalator well in the Delta terminal at the Fort Lauderdale/ Hollywood International Airport in 1989, is composed of forty colorful aluminum panels, painted using more than 130 different hues, tints, and shades. Spanning more than 22 feet across, it is meant to evoke the feeling of flight for passengers ascending or descending toward their destination in this large, sunny airport.

One of Gillespie's largest and most challenging installations, *Encircled Path to The Enchanted Kingdom*, was made for a public parking garage in Orlando (1998; Pl. 6). The six-story column comprised ninety-six 10- by 4-foot aluminum panels, painted on both sides (both sides were visible), and required 10,000 rivets. The panels were hooked together to form the column and stabilized with 250,000 yards of post-tension cable. Although Gillespie's usual brilliant color palette was on display, a specific accented color marked each level and was coordinated with matching color-keyed railings and markers at



Fig. 10. Dorothy Gillespie, *Anniversary Series: To the Voice of Birds* (1997), very mixed media on vinyl, 121" x 70" (or 70" x 121").

each level. Despite its enormous size, attention to detail was essential because the central column was barely a few yards from drivers and passengers moving along the spiraling ramp. As described in the *Orlando Sentinel*,

A column of yellow, flecked with what looks like multicolored ribbons, rises through the center of a corkscrew, spiral ramp.

Driving up the ramp, locked into a continuous left-hand turn, you can see that the column is like a tree trunk, 20 feet in diameter and rising to the roof of the six-floor garage. The color changes from yellow to orange as you rise to the second floor. Each hue matches to the next parking level. The colors on the sculpture blend into red and then purple. Closer to the top and the roof level that opens to the sky, the artwork's color deepens to blue and then green.²²



Fig. 11. Dorothy Gillespie, Court House Square mural (1979), 50' x 50'. Roanoke, VA.

Because the ramping was a double helix design, the views varied depending whether you were driving up or down. This thoughtful and well-orchestrated public work incorporated art on a dramatic scale with sophisticated engineering.²³ Unfortunately, after it was badly damaged by Hurricane Charlie in 2004, the work had to be dismantled.

The city of Orlando quickly commissioned Gillespie to create another piece for the same space. Entirely different in conception, *Celestial Joy* (2006; Pl. 7), was designed to have less surface area to catch violent winds. Thirty-six cables support 720 starburst spheres made up of ribbons of bright colors that flow up and down through the entire height of the garage. Like its predecessor, this work not only beautifies a practical and normally mundane structure, it also helps calm traffic. Of her thousands of works, *Celestial Joy* was her favorite, she said: "It's very daring, and gets to me to somewhere where nothing got me before.... It's ethereal."²⁴ The metallic starburst form became signature for Gillespie and she used it in many other installations, especially those with a high, deep space.

What Gillespie considered her crowning achievement came in early 2003 (at age 83), when she was invited to create a massive outdoor installation at New York's Rockefeller Center (Fig. 12 and Pl. 8). Given free rein by the administrators of the complex, she even was allowed to affix metal panels to the walls of the buildings.²⁵ In keeping with the surrounding architecture, she designed *Color, Light and Motion* to complement the pure Art Deco style of Rockefeller Center, with the result being a kaleidoscopic winter garden of 185 colorful forms placed high and low along the entrance walkway between Fifth Avenue and the famous sunken plaza in front of 30 Rockefeller Center.

Gillespie attached aluminum panels to the walls between the store windows; some of the panels remained flat with paint only, others had ribbon strips or starburst forms attached. The garden beds nearest Fifth Avenue contained low towers of wide undulating ribbons of anodized gold aluminum,

colorfully painted, while those nearer the plaza held four-sided towers with variously shaped ribbons. Suspended above were Gillespie's trademark starburst forms. This installation was a climactic work for Gillespie, her most diverse in terms of the contrasting elements of the site and the variety of colors, forms, and materials employed.²⁶

In her late eighties, when she could no longer handle creating large works in metal, Gillespie returned to paper, making colorful works using marker pens. These small paper abstracts, often with a black background, still displayed the bold colors and dynamic forms of her signature style.

At a time when women artists struggled to come into their own, Dorothy Gillespie forged a career that was independent, innovative, and individual. From the early days of the women's art movement, and throughout her life, she used her energy and generosity to support and promote other women artists, to help them gain the respect and dignity their efforts deserved. Part of Gillespie's secret to an innovative and productive career was her open-minded child-like curiosity,²⁷ her delight in ordinary things, her love of adventure,²⁸ and above all, her sense of joy. These qualities infused her art and attracted people to her work (and to herself). Always willing to experiment with new materials and explore new ideas, Gillespie's art continued to evolve over seven decades.

Dorothy Gillespie gave generously of her time to numerous art causes and advised countless art students. In 1983, four decades after her own graduation from the Maryland Institute of Art, she spoke to the graduating class, summing up her philosophy of the artist's life:

The dedication of a life to producing works which have no practical purpose, which may or may not be preserved, which may or may not be sold, which may or may not be exhibited, and which may or may not be worth the original cost of materials, is a curious phenomenon that has existed in all civilizations. The creative artist is truly the great adventurer of all times.²⁹ ●

Steve Arbury is a professor at Radford University and Director of the Radford University Art Museum. He worked closely with Dorothy Gillespie on traveling exhibitions of her art from the Radford University holdings and her personal collection.

Notes

1. Much of the personal information comes from conversations with Dorothy Gillespie over many years, especially during her numerous visits to Radford University.
2. Gillespie often mentored college students at the many institutions she visited during her career. As Distinguished Professor of Art at Radford University, she made extended visits to campus where she worked closely with students.



Fig. 12. Dorothy Gillespie, *Color, Light and Motion* (2003). Installation at Rockefeller Center, New York City.

3. These include (among many others) the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, Yale University Art Gallery, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, the Meadows Museum, Asheville Art Museum, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Delaware Museum, North Carolina Museum of Art, the National Museum for Women in the Arts, Radford University Art Museum, the Frankfurt Museum (Germany), Kessel Museum (Germany), the Institute of Contemporary Arts (Peru), the Helena Rubenstein Pavilion (Israel), and the United Nations, New York.
4. Dorothy Gillespie interviewed in *First of May* (documentary film), by Gerry McCarthy (Blue Ridge Public TV, 1984). The painting is at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.
5. The BFA degree did not exist in 1941, and Gillespie was awarded an honorary BFA degree by her alma mater in 1996. She maintained ties with her alma mater, for example, addressing the graduating class of 1983.
6. Alexandra de Lallier, "Dorothy Gillespie: The Shape of Festivity," *WAJ* vol. 3, no. 2, (Fall/Winter 1982–83), 50, 54. Sidney Edward Dickinson was known for his painted portraits, including members of the Rockefeller family, New York City mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia, and fellow artists such as painters Mary Gray and Raphael Soyer, and sculptor Georg Lober. Gillespie painted numerous portraits during her career in a loose style similar to Dickinson's.
7. Richard Martin, in *Dorothy Gillespie* (Radford, VA: Radford Univ. Foundation Press, 1998), 10.
8. Bernard Israel ran a nightclub and restaurant in Greenwich Village. He died in 1992. Son Gary Israel now heads the Dorothy M. Gillespie Foundation, 549 West 52nd Street, New York City.
9. Gillespie maintained a life-long interest in archaeology and past cultures. She was an inveterate traveler and later participated in a dig at Exeter Cathedral in England uncovering Roman ruins, and visited ancient sites in Greece and Egypt, among many. See also de Lallier, "Dorothy Gillespie: The Shape of Festivity," 49–50.
10. Dorothy Gillespie, interviewed in *Color, Form and Space* (documentary film), by Gerry McCarthy (Smartview Productions, 1999).
11. George S. Bolge, "Paintings," in *Dorothy Gillespie*, 127.

12. *American Way of Death, Light and Motion*, and *Made in the USA* were shown at the Champagne Gallery at 135 MacDougal Street. *Flag Show* was held at the Gertrude Stein Gallery at 24 East 81st Street. *American Way of Death*, a collaboration with Sam Goodwin, was a gaudy treatment of the American funeral industry (which she had recently encountered following the death of her father), intended to expose its exploitative scams. Goodwin was a founding member of the avant-garde anti-art movement NO!Art, which targeted the "hypocritical intelligentsia, capitalist culture manipulation and consumerism." (See www.no-art.info/_statements/en.html)
13. Marcia Corbino, "Environments," in *Dorothy Gillespie*, 133.
14. In the DuPont Pavilion at the 1964 New York World's Fair, three young men dressed in white, like scientists, each carried a piece of Mylar as they danced and sang, while a voice-over told visitors how strong the new material was. Gillespie was fascinated with the reflective qualities of this thin and flexible yet sturdy material, and she knew immediately that she wanted to use it in her environments. Dorothy Gillespie, interview in *First of May*.
15. Alfred E. Clark, "Flag is Subject of an Art Show," *New York Times*, October 2, 1966: 85. Clark began his review by referring to Dorothy Gillespie as a modern-day Betsy Ross.
16. Ibid. For a more detailed discussion of Gillespie's environments, see Marcia Corbino, "Environments," in *Dorothy Gillespie*, 133–36. For more on the *Flag Show* (U.S.), see Richard Martin, "Foreword," in *Dorothy Gillespie*, 8.
17. Richard Martin, "Foreword," in *Dorothy Gillespie*, 8.
18. See Eleanor Dickinson, "Report on the History of the Women's Caucus for Art" (2007); <http://www.nationalwca.org/wcadocs/TheHistory%20of%20the%20WCA.pdf>
19. Anodized aluminum has a protective oxide layer created by an electrolytic process and is non-conductive.
20. Aluminum is fairly lightweight, which made it manageable; however, for very large commissions, such as the parking garage in Orlando or the block-long installation at Rockefeller Center, Gillespie employed assistants, including her two long-time New York studio assistants, Tom Hicks and Dale Carmen.
21. Danced to Dimitri Shostakovich's *Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Major*, *Summerscape* is a free-flowing abstract dance both humorous and romantic that celebrates love.
22. Tom Burton, "Moving Art," *The Orlando Sentinel* (May 31, 1998).
23. "Downtown Parking, Uptown Solution," *Florida/Caribbean Architect* (Summer, 1998), 20–21, with credit to Architects Spillis, Candela & Partners, Inc., also featured on magazine cover. In the Orlando Public Archives, this work is referred to as "Stairway to the Enchanted Castle" (www.publicartarchive.org/work/celestial-joy).
24. Gary Israel, email dated July 17, 2015.
25. Gillespie was so impressed with the officials at Rockefeller Center and the freedom and support they gave her that she said it was almost like working for the Medici.
26. Pieces from the Rockefeller installation were repurposed two years later in an exhibition at the Cameron Art Museum in Wilmington, Delaware, also titled "Color, Light and Motion."
27. Gillespie herself said in documented interviews that the energy and motion in her work derives from her childhood memories of colorful bouncing balls, spinning tops, flying kites, and yo-yos. Interviews in *First of May* and *Dorothy Gillespie: Creating Magic with Color*.
28. Gillespie loved to travel and visited many countries around the world, some of them more than once. Although visually stimulated by the many exotic things she saw during her travels, she rarely used a camera. She felt that taking pictures was too distracting; instead she preferred to absorb and enjoy what she saw with all its movement.
29. From Dorothy Gillespie's speech to the graduating class of the Maryland Institute, College of Art in Baltimore, Maryland, 1983.

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FRANKENTHALER'S FORTUNES

ON CLASS PRIVILEGE AND THE ARTIST'S RECEPTION

By Anna C. Chave

In 1969, a forty-year-old painter so successful as to be enjoying already a second New York museum retrospective (Fig. 1) got cast in an odd but telling role by a mass-market magazine headline: that of the “heiress” (Fig. 2).¹ Ostensibly, *Time* was framing Helen Frankenthaler, as she got framed throughout her career, as the heiress to the New York School—above all to Jackson Pollock, who inspired her to pour paint over horizontally positioned canvas. But *Time*’s characterization had some snarky overtones besides. Stereotypically, an heiress is a socially extraneous figure without incentive to work. And Frankenthaler’s way of realizing painting that looked, as she said, “as if it all happened or was made in one stroke,”² tended to resonate with old-time suspicions concerning avant-garde artists’ endemic laziness, as Suzanne Hudson recently noted.³ Moreover, what got described as Frankenthaler’s “impulsive” or “impetuous” technique⁴ disallowed extensive re-working of her canvases, which meant that she had to be prepared to waste plenty of art supplies, as indeed she was.⁵ That such extravagance did not unduly tax her bank account was made effectively explicit also by *Time*, which identified Frankenthaler as in a more literal sense an heiress to a “sizeable estate” left by her father, a former New York State Supreme Court justice.⁶ In contrast to the enduring trope of the struggling or bohemian artist whose life and art stand as a rebuke to bourgeois values, Frankenthaler would all along embrace her class privilege—a choice that affected her art’s reception, or so I will argue here.

Not fortunate in all ways, Frankenthaler lost her father in 1940, while still a child. At his funeral, the honorary pallbearers reportedly included New York’s governor and the mayor as well as a United States Supreme Court Justice.⁷ Alfred Frankenthaler had gained not only great professional stature but financial success, and the family lived on Park Avenue, on Manhattan’s wealthy upper east side. Helen’s family



Fig. 1. Helen Frankenthaler posing before *Blue North* (1968), clipping from *New York* (Feb. 17, 1969). Photo: Morris Warman. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation Archives, N.Y.

considered it “a great coup” when she gained admission to the Brearley school, whose Jewish quota she mentioned in a 1968 interview with her friend Barbara Rose.⁸ But such on-the-record acknowledgement of a price attaching to her



Fig. 2. "Heiress to a New Tradition," clipping from *Time* (March 28, 1969). Photo: Henry Grossman. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation Archives, NY.

Jewishness was a rarity for Frankenthaler, whose generation was not prone to foreground identity issues. She was loath also, for that matter, to address the topic of her gender, which writers, regardless, endlessly broached with her.

Within the ambit of the New York School—the diving board from which she launched, as she envisioned it⁹ (with the troping to the fluid that ran deep with her)—Frankenthaler's being Jewish may have counted, if anything, as a plus. Some of the school's founding figures were Jewish—such as Mark Rothko, with whose work Frankenthaler's manifested at times a real affinity; and there was, too, what Max Kozloff termed that "old time Jewish sect called American art criticism."¹⁰

Being a woman was quite another matter, however. For a wealthy female born in 1928 who wished to make a mark, the available roles remained predominantly of a supporting kind: the networking role of the hostess, for instance. In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, published in 1925, as the title character readies for a party she dwells on the perception that her motive is "to have famous people about her; great names"; and indeed the prime minister will attend her grand affair. But, muffling any social ambition, Clarissa Dalloway preferred to view her parties as an "offering"; and "She did think it mattered, her party," for "it was possible to say things" on such an occasion that "you couldn't say anyhow else."¹¹

As for Frankenthaler, her renown as a hostess was legendary. Her *New York Times* obituary, no less, relayed an account by the British sculptor Anthony Caro of being welcomed to New York in 1959 by a dinner party for "some 100 guests," at which he got "seated between David Smith and the actress Hedy Lamarr."¹² The painter's most consequential party, however, was a 1950 gallery opening for a show of Bennington College graduates' artwork that she, a recent alumna, got tapped to organize. Seeking publicity, she cold-called a leading *New York Times* critic as well as Clement Greenberg to ask them to the opening. Greenberg accepted,

providing alcohol was served, and she recalled promising him "a lot of liquor," including "martinis and manhattans." Though a savvy enough twenty-one-year-old to know of Greenberg's stature, Frankenthaler did not pretend to have read his work. Neither did Greenberg pretend, once the event transpired, to have the least esteem for her painting.¹³ But she was then a "delicious young morsel," as the painter Friedel Dzubas reminisced,¹⁴ and—notwithstanding that Greenberg was bald and nearly twice her age, with a messy personal life and a short fuse—the two began a liaison that lasted five years.¹⁵ Whatever genuine personal chemistry existed between them, gaining close proximity to an influential man then represented the most time-tested strategy for attaining visibility in the world for a straight woman of any class.

Among the unappealing attributes that can attach to the condition of being privileged is obliviousness to the full dimensions of the benefits that privilege entails. (Consider that old jibe that so-and-so 'was born on third base and thought he'd hit a triple.')

So it was with Frankenthaler as regards the remarkable perquisites that followed from her tie to Greenberg. In her interview with Rose, the painter called it a point of honor that neither of them would ever use the other in the service of their careers. Yet, from one reply after the next to Rose's questions, it becomes blatantly clear that Frankenthaler's career must have taken another shape entirely were it not for the entree Greenberg supplied.¹⁶ Not only did he introduce his new protégée to Pollock, taking her to his important 1950 Betty Parsons Gallery show and, afterward, repeatedly to his home and studio—a life-altering experience for her by all accounts¹⁷—but the couple regularly visited other galleries together besides. Frankenthaler followed Greenberg also, briefly, to the legendary Black Mountain College, which she found, however, too "dreary," because there was "no water" except a "swimming hole," and "Most of the people were dingy. The barracks were unspeakable." More successfully, he steered her to Hans Hofmann's Provincetown academy for some indoctrination into the verities of painting as both men perceived them. Soon thereafter a small painting by Frankenthaler that Greenberg displayed in his home caught the eye of Adolph Gottlieb, who selected her for a 'new talent' show. Other introductions to players of all kinds in the art world—including John Meyers when he was on the verge of opening the Tibor de Nagy gallery, which promptly took her into its stable—were made over regular dinner or drink dates and trips to The Club.¹⁸

Then there was the fabled trip through Nova Scotia, where Frankenthaler and Greenberg painted watercolor landscapes side by side, which led afterwards in her New York studio to the realization of the loosely Marin-esque *Mountains and Sea* (1952; Fig. 3). That a novice twenty-three-year-old painter could have the leading critical voice of the day come at once to her studio to assure her that her latest experiment was "terrific" and that she was "red hot," as Frankenthaler recalled it,¹⁹ was strictly the stuff of pipe dreams, of course. And though the 1952 painting soon showed at Tibor to no acclaim, its breakthrough status got secured once Greenberg brought Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis—up-and-comers whom he had been nurturing—for a five-hour visit to Frankenthaler's



Fig. 3. Helen Frankenthaler, *Mountains and Sea* (1952), oil and charcoal on canvas, 86 3/8" x 117 1/4". Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, N.Y., on extended loan to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

studio (in her absence).²⁰ Afterward, she accompanied Greenberg to their Washington, D.C. studios to discuss what was being made of her so-called soak-stain method, whereby dilute paint got deployed on unprimed canvas. And so "color-field" painting emerged and entered high-profile collections, framed by Greenberg as the due successor to the New York School. Further, Frankenthaler got positioned in historical narratives, unprecedentedly, as a founding *mother* for an avant-garde movement. But that coup came at a price; for her legacy would remain constrained (at least until recently²¹) by a defunct critical paradigm, no matter that she ultimately figured in Greenberg's writings just parenthetically, as a special case²²—a mere "bridge between Pollock and what was possible," as Louis himself once indelibly put it, pointing toward the work of Noland and himself.²³ By the time Greenberg had occasion to publish on these figures, his relationship with Frankenthaler had deteriorated. He even assaulted her at a party, class privilege affording no warrant against domestic violence.²⁴

Despite Greenberg's initial success at promoting color-field painting, in the course of the 1960s critical discourse in the United States turned increasingly toward artwork perceived as somehow more readily endued than painting with critical or political valences—especially art modalities that violated what

Greenberg had decreed as the necessary separation amongst media, such as the "specific objects" endorsed by Donald Judd, who was Frankenthaler's exact contemporary.²⁵ She began to look somewhat marginal within this milieu, regardless that she produced during the 1960s the best work of her career, in my estimation, as she adopted the acrylic paint that ideally suited her process; folded her drawing into her shape-making; and conjured an at times Matissean élan—as for example in the blithe *Interior Landscape* or *Small's Paradise* (Pl. 9), both of 1964. Not these works, however, but *Mountains and Sea* got enshrined as the vital instant of Frankenthaler's career. Art historians typically isolate a given interval or so within any artist's oeuvre as key, but in her case that interval could finally amount to but a single painting. Thus, Alison Rowley adjudges starkly that, "Art historically, Helen Frankenthaler's practice never has had much of a life after *Mountains and Sea*"²⁶; and, regarding the artist's image as a bridge figure, Hudson quips that it "turned out to be a bridge to nowhere."²⁷

That Frankenthaler got trapped beneath a Greenbergian bell jar (to switch up metaphors) was partly a factor of her emergence having been "co-extensive with the Greenberg effect," as Caroline Jones frames it,²⁸ but was no less a matter of her reluctance to leave. Late in her career she could



Fig. 4. Interior of Frankenthaler and Motherwell's Manhattan townhouse. Clipping from *House and Garden* (July 1969). Photo: Tom Yee. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation Archives, N.Y.

unabashedly affirm to Rowley, for instance, such an anachronistically Greenbergian tenet as: "The end of painting was with Noland's final chevrons."²⁹ Close in age to Frankenthaler, the erstwhile émigré Yayoi Kusama, by contrast, likewise made captivating extrapolations from Abstract Expressionist painting during the 1950s, absent Greenberg's support. But though from a wealthy family herself, Kusama had scant independent income, and she was impelled to scavenge some as she ventured alongside or ahead of a network of peers who were assaying performance, assemblage, Pop and other new strategies. Meantime, Frankenthaler began to question the counter-orthodox tactics deployed by such avant-gardists, while disdaining to confer membership in a "real" avant-garde to anyone following her own peer group. She began to complain, too, about a paucity of worthwhile art writing, advising her Yale University art students in 1970, for instance, to read especially those authors who favored her, and to abjure the art magazines.³⁰

By her own account, Frankenthaler had been a favored child: used to being waited on, to having her way, and to extravagant praise; used, in short, to being center stage.³¹ Faced as an adult with a critical climate increasingly indifferent, if not adverse to her, she would often endeavor to stage-manage

a more flattering reception. More so than is typical with artists generally, those who devoted catalogues or monographs to her—such as Frank O'Hara, Rose, and Eugene Goossen—were friendly admirers, or were handpicked by her, such as John Elderfield.³² But the critics or journalists assigned to cover her were less predictably sympathetic. And, whether avowed allies or not, writers did tend to subject her to (overtly or tacitly) sexist treatment, as Lisa Saltzman and others have discussed.³³ In general, Frankenthaler attempted either to woo those assigned to write about her, or to spar with them, or both. Thus, for instance, in 1966 she evidently extracted major revisions to a review by B.H. Friedman, initially by appealing directly to him—for he was a friend, whom she and her first husband Robert Motherwell had earlier driven in their Bentley to a pheasant dinner at a swank Greenwich restaurant—but finally by going over his head to *Art News's* lead editor.³⁴ Frankenthaler's fully staffed Upper East Side townhouse intermittently received journalists of varying stripes (such as from *Women's Wear Daily*, which dubbed it "a curiously snob mixture of Victorian, modern and country"³⁵) (Fig. 4). At her studio, the "arched double portal...big enough to let in a coronation carriage," plus the splits of French champagne awaiting favored visitors impressed author Eleanor Munro.³⁶ And at the Connecticut house run "like a grand hotel" that Frankenthaler owned with her investment-banker second husband,³⁷ *New York Times* feature writer Deborah Solomon stayed in 1989 in a "pretty guest room overlooking Long Island Sound and equipped with little niceties" and partook of a lobster supper (*female* lobster, for the roe).³⁸ Years earlier, Dore Ashton had made out better still, having received an artwork from Frankenthaler upon issuing a favorable review.³⁹

Frankenthaler did of course receive a quotient of admiring press. Some style-page writers fawned over her coif by Kenneth, her Chanel handbags, and her designer outfits. But numerous other writers upbraided the artist for her high-handed attempts at controlling their encounters. Thus, the acerbic *Women's Wear Daily* reporter described in 1969 how she had demanded to direct every photograph taken (full-face only; never profile); questioned every question she got posed; and required that "every sentence be read back, rephrased, rewritten."⁴⁰ Decades later, *People Weekly's* reporter described undergoing a "Monty-Pythesque satire of an interview" involving pre-typed questions and answers read mechanically aloud.⁴¹ Whether adulatory or not, the prevailing account of Frankenthaler that emerged in the general press was of a born and bred socialite—a patrician, at times imperious woman concerned with protocol and appearances; with home decor and entertaining; and with enjoying the finer things in life, as her wealthy peers defined them. Yet this particular socialite was the only *soignée* woman at, say, the 1969 gala opening of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's ambitious "New York Painting and Sculpture" show to actually have work displayed therein, and would attain in 1989 the utmost honor—then nearly unheard of for a woman—of a full Museum of Modern Art retrospective.

The text of Frankenthaler's 1989 retrospective catalogue (produced not by MoMA, but by the show's originating

institution, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth) was throughout underpinned, or constrained, by her own dictates on her work. But curator E.A. Carmean gainsaid at the outset any presumption that the literature on her must be “largely... Greenbergian.”⁴² Departures from Greenbergian orthodoxy included ongoing attention to poetic suggestions of imagery in her art—suggestions at times encouraged, at times deflected by the artist. Frankenthaler was long intrigued by the specter of hidden imagery in Pollock’s work, and she enjoyed the child’s-game-like aspect of this type of diversion: find the swan (in her own *Swan Lake I* of 1961, for instance), or the fox, or what have you. (She titled some paintings for juvenile pastimes, too, and her earlier works, such as *Eden* of 1956, can betray child-art-like formulae—all of which may betoken the cherished view she held of her early childhood.) A Greenbergian emphasis on painting’s necessary flatness would remain throughout ingrained in accounts of Frankenthaler’s tactics, however—though she herself could complicate the notion, in part through a Greenbergian resort to the exemplar of Cubist space.⁴³ What tends to follow from the banishment of illusionistic space, in this episteme, is a bid to recover space through a lateral extension of the picture plane. As she saw it, Frankenthaler’s best work was big work⁴⁴ that required a lot of real estate to execute and to show. Whether in museums or collectors’ homes, such real estate came at a premium, as did (and do) the outsize paintings in question. Some apartments had initially to be altered to accommodate large canvases, as Lane Relyea recently noted while tracing the efforts of ‘shelter magazines’ to pitch the new look of an expansive canvas in an expansive interior.⁴⁵ Frankenthaler’s clipping files contain images, for instance from *House and Garden*, of her work installed in various stylish homes (Fig. 5).

Frankenthaler’s paintings have at times been derided as, for example, “boardroom” art.⁴⁶ But when Relyea alleges that her work’s “goal” was “precisely to go well with the couch,” he means instead to boldly redeem her legacy by invoking present-day interests in reclaiming the decorative—as evinced, say, by Jorge Pardo or Andrea Zittel. ‘Second-wave’ feminists importantly anticipated that revaluation, however, with Lynda Benglis, for one, devoting a productive career to the interrogation and re-imagining of the decorative, as in her outlandish, poured pigmented latex *Odalisque* of 1969, subtitled *Hey, Hey, Frankenthaler*—a salute the latter disdained to return. In Frankenthaler’s lexicon as in Greenberg’s before her, the term “decorative” was primarily a slur.⁴⁷ Her own account of her goals turned almost invariably on the concept of the beautiful, which she often linked (in the Keats-ian way) to truth. When deployed by female artists, aspirations for beauty came of course heavily freighted or pre-depreciated, as it were. “Art must be beautiful; artist must be beautiful,” chanted a vamping Marina Abramovic in a 1975 video by that name. But in view of Frankenthaler’s conventionally glamorous persona—which she could willingly commercialize, once touting that pricey status symbol, the Rolex watch, for instance (Fig. 6)—her professed quest for beauty became the more susceptible to mundane or belittling responses. “Her paintings, as much as the woman who created



Fig. 5. Photo of Yann Weymouth’s New York living room. Magazine clipping from *House and Garden* (Jan. 1970). Helen Frankenthaler Foundation Archives. N.Y.

them, seem intent on providing worldly pleasure,” observed Solomon in 1989, adding, “Her lesser paintings...fit in a bit too comfortably with the décor.”⁴⁸ A few years later, *New York Times* critic Holland Cotter commented that, “Because Ms. Frankenthaler works on a heroic scale, the work has tended to look ‘important,’ though in fact it got by largely on elegance and seemingly effortless charm.”⁴⁹

As I see it, Frankenthaler’s art shows scant engrossment with the idioms of the decorative. Her lesser work is neither merely, nor too, decorative or beautiful, as her detractors would often have it: Call it instead formulaic, or facile, or uninspired. (For that matter, Frankenthaler herself once acknowledged there being aspects of her practice where she ran the risk of proving “facile” and “seducible by my own talent.”⁵⁰) And her successful work—say the luminous, poetic, playful *The Bay* of 1963 (Pl. 10)—is outright beautiful, just as she claimed. She “chanced beauty in the simplest and most forthright way,” declared poet James Schuyler in 1960.⁵¹ A few years later, however, Donald Judd invoked Bonnard in characterizing what he called Frankenthaler’s “softness,” while adding that her work would be “more profound if it were also hard.”⁵² And while such gender-loaded terms might be expected of Judd, Frankenthaler did persistently get “pegged as...a purveyor of prettiness on a



Fig. 6. Rolex advertisement. Clipping from *New Yorker* (1989, n.d.).
Helen Frankenthaler Foundation Archives, N.Y.

grand scale, a sort of Park Avenue Boucher," as Barry Schwabsky summarized it late in her career.⁵³

Over the course of Frankenthaler's professional lifetime, critics came increasingly to view the pleasing of viewers through a pursuit of beauty as, of itself, an unduly limited aesthetic undertaking, and one perhaps tantamount to marketplace pandering; a comparison to Boucher could not, in this climate, be mistaken for a compliment. "The role of pleasure in modern art has itself been a contested subject...—exactly whose pleasure does art represent, and for what audience?" observes Kenneth Silver, while invoking "the question of whether pleasure of any kind is commensurate with art's sterner demands." Adds Silver: "One way to cope with the pleasure problem is to deny it, a venerable tactic in art criticism."⁵⁴ Thus, for instance, Matisse's early twentieth century ambition—to create "art which could be ... for the business-man as well as the man of letters, for example, a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair"—came to be reflexively rebutted by his would-be defenders.⁵⁵ Viewers continued to luxuriate in those 'armchairs,' of course, regardless that only successful businessmen, or those of like class (including for a time the Motherwells), could acquire them.⁵⁶ Pleasure, in its infinite variety, has remained inextricable to art. And while Benjamin Buchloh, for one, can freely deride artists who produce "objects of desire for speculation with [the] surplus capital" of "card-carrying members of the international art-world party,"⁵⁷ the paintings of his own favorite, Gerhard Richter, may answer also to that description: They circulate through a marketplace continuous with, if more globalized, crass, and cynical than the one where

Frankenthaler's art took hold. 'High' art mostly remains affordable only to the present-day equivalent of Boucher's aristocracy—to the 'one-percent,' in today's vernacular. Art institutions and the art historical field remain accordingly, in so many ways, class and race-bound. What separated Frankenthaler from most other artists who succeed in the marketplace was that she all along owned as her birthright her membership in the collector class: "My life is square and bourgeois," she affirmed in 1989—though *haute bourgeois* is more like it. And when she described what constituted successful art of any era, she could casually speak in marketplace terms of a desire, "if I have the cash" to "buy and hang [it] up."⁵⁸

Critics nowadays (myself included) mostly continue to privilege work that is somehow endowed with political 'teeth,' which were never evident in Frankenthaler's art. She passed her youth during the Great Depression and World War II—including, as someone of German-Jewish heritage, through revelations of the Holocaust; and her earlier adulthood coincided with the Cold War and the activist 1960s. But due in part, perhaps, to the insulation afforded by her wealth (as some suggest), Frankenthaler seems never to have assumed a public political identity, unless we may count, say, her unapologetic attendance at a Reagan White House party.⁵⁹ In her mind, moreover, as she plainly put it, "art always implies elitism."⁶⁰ The beautiful was "something moving to someone who really knows," she declared in 1961, adding, "there are relatively few people like this," people who "have seen enough and know enough.... And you become a snob about it," she admitted. "Or you try to be very polite about it."⁶¹

Frankenthaler saw the pursuit of beauty as apart from politics: so she told Hilton Kramer in 1992. But then she mustered a more complex idea than usual when affirming a self-evident (to her) artistic aim. "When art is really beautiful and moving, it brings with it not only growing pleasure but also a sense of truth. This truth, this reality—something so spiritual and unnameable, unprovable—is and has always been a political force in itself."⁶² Such a claim may elicit a cynical reaction, as it did from Rowley: "Insulated by wealth and privilege... Frankenthaler was free to pursue the 'unnameable, unprovable' truths of painting undisturbed."⁶³ But I admit to being more moved by her avowal. I recall Jacques Rancière's reminder that what Greenberg had, at bottom, sought was "a way of separating art radically from politics in order to preserve its political potential."⁶⁴ "Aesthetics entails a politics of its own," Rancière argues further; and "The political act of art is to save the heterogeneous sensible that is the heart of the autonomy of art and its power of emancipation."⁶⁵ Key among art's many roles, in short, is that of bringing a public to its senses, a role it may perform—pace Frankenthaler—not only for an elite. •

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Notes

This paper is a slightly revised version of a talk delivered at a Frankenthaler symposium organized by Rob Slifken and Pepe Karmel at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, October 23, 2015.

1. "Heiress to a New Tradition," *Time*, March 28, 1969, 64.
2. Frankenthaler, cited in Emile de Antonio and Mitch Tuchman, *Painters Painting: A Candid History of the Modern Art Scene, 1940-1970* (New York: Abbeville, 1984), 85. This book, and the eponymous film by de Antonio that preceded it, incorporates interviews with various artists (including Frankenthaler) said to have been conducted in 1970; *ibid.*, 9.
3. Suzanne Hudson, "A Comma in the Place Where a Period Might Have Gone," in Katy Siegel, ed., *"The heroine Paint": After Frankenthaler* (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2015), 232-33.
4. The term "impulsive" may be found in Irving Sandler, *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 67. For the term "impetuous," see Jean Lipman and Cleve Gray, "The Amazing Inventiveness of Women Painters," *Cosmopolitan*, Oct. 1961, 66 (reproduced in Siegel, ed., *"The heroine Paint,"* 83).
5. "I throw out I can't tell you how many paintings a year. I mean for every one that I show there are many, many in shreds in garbage cans"; oral history interview with Helen Frankenthaler, 1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Hereafter, Oral history interview, AAA.
6. "Heiress to a New Tradition," 64.
7. Roberta Brandes Gratz, "Woman in the News: Helen Frankenthaler," *New York Post*, Feb. 22, 1969.
8. Oral history interview, AAA. Although she attended Brearley for a time, Frankenthaler ultimately graduated instead from the more liberal Dalton school.
9. When Rose asked Frankenthaler how she initially responded to Pollock's paintings, she recalled that she "knew that this was my message, that this was a, what do you call it? What do you dive off from?" Rose suggested, "A diving board?" and Frankenthaler answered, "Yes." Oral history interview, AAA.
10. This phrase, which Kozloff coined in an April 1976 *Artforum* essay ("Jewish Art and the Modernist Jeopardy"), was recouped by Mark Godfrey as the title for his own essay in Norman L. Kleeblatt, ed., *Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976* (New York: Jewish Museum, and Yale Univ. Press, 2008), 247ff.
11. Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 1925 (repr. San Diego: Harcourt, ca. 1981), 121, 122, 168, 171.
12. Grace Glueck, "Helen Frankenthaler, Abstract Painter Who Shaped a Movement, Dies at 83," *New York Times*, Dec. 27, 2011. When made the subject of a documentary—Perry Miller Adato's 1978 "Frankenthaler—Toward A New Climate"—the artist seemed to relish performing the hostess role for the camera, while a liveried maid tended the guests around her table.
13. Oral history interview, AAA.
14. In Adato, "Frankenthaler." Dzubas and Frankenthaler shared a studio for a time in the early 1950s; see "Chronology," in E.A. Carmean, *Helen Frankenthaler: A Paintings Retrospective* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, with Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 1989), 96.
15. For details, see Florence Rubenfeld, *Clement Greenberg: A Life* (New York: Scribner, 1997).
16. Oral history interview, AAA.
17. See for instance Larry Rivers's vivid account of Pollock's impact on Frankenthaler and himself at this early juncture, cited in B.H. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 221.

18. Oral history interview, AAA.
19. de Antonio and Tuchman, *Painters Painting*, 78.
20. Rubenfeld, *Clement Greenberg*, 181.
21. The boldest attempt to date to reposition Frankenthaler is that made by Siegel, ed., *"The heroine Paint."*
22. Frankenthaler and Paul Jenkins were mentioned in parentheses, paired as "special cases," in a 1960 essay on "Louis and Noland," repr. in John O'Brian, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, vol. 4 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), 95.
23. Louis, cited originally in James M. Truitt, "Art-Arid D.C. Harbors touted 'New' Painters," *Washington Post*, Dec. 21, 1961.
24. Two instances of Greenberg's violent treatment of Frankenthaler are narrated in Rubenfeld, *Clement Greenberg*, 198.
25. See Judd's canonical 1965 "Specific Objects" essay, repr. in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), 181-89.
26. Alison Rowley, *Helen Frankenthaler: Painting History, Writing Painting* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 129.
27. "...or at least to nowhere beyond itself," Hudson, "A Comma in the Place Where a Period Might Have Gone," 226.
28. Caroline A. Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), 306.
29. Rowley, *Helen Frankenthaler*, cites the artist from an interview Rowley conducted in 1998, 75.
30. Transcript of lecture at Yale Univ., Jan. 20, 1970, Helen Frankenthaler Foundation. The Foundation has stipulated that the immediate context for the word cited here must be provided, as follows: "And what struck me—and this is another thing; I'm glad you brought it up—what strikes me more and more is how damn good everybody's getting. In other words, umpteen people can make umpteen gorgeous, hangable, salable, beautiful avant-garde pictures. And I'm putting that all in quotes, meaning they don't come off at all. They're all pastiche. They're hideously beautiful. And it's gotten so knowing that the whole real avant-garde is threatened or has jumped out the window."
31. Frankenthaler told numerous interviewers how her "parents...thought I was the most wonderful, gifted, complicated, hopeful creature in the world. I mean my father would walk behind me with my mother and say to her sometimes audibly to me, but she would tell me about this years later: 'Watch that child. She is fantastic.' And I think in a way I was fantastic," Oral history interview, AAA. "If you have a gift, it is your halo and your cross [...] I was a special child, and I felt myself to be. [...] I had the genes...intelligence... talent... the 'gift'"; cited in Eleanor Munro, *Originals: American Women Artists* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 210-11 (unbracketed ellipses as in original).
32. Regarding her inviting Elderfield to write a monograph about her, to be published by Harry N. Abrams, see Amei Wallach, "Living Color at MoMA: Frankenthaler in Retrospect," *New York Newsday*, June 5, 1989.
33. Lisa Saltzman, "Reconsidering the Stain: On Gender and the Body in Helen Frankenthaler's Painting," in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2005), 372-83.
34. B.H. Friedman, "Art World Details: Journal Excerpts," *Grand Street* 51 New York (Winter 1995). See excerpts of diary entries from Feb. 19, 1961 (146) and June 8, 1966 (149), where Friedman described himself as "shocked" by the "changes in content" that Frankenthaler secured: "I understood that Helen had chosen careerism over friendship."

35. Angel Cuccio, "The Fashions: Frankenthaler," *Women's Wear Daily*, March 28, 1969.
36. Munro, *Originals*, 207, 210.
37. "Ms. Frankenthaler and Mr. Motherwell were divorced in 1971. In 1994 she married Stephen M. DuBrul Jr., an investment banker who had headed the Export-Import Bank during the Ford administration," reported Glueck, "Helen Frankenthaler, Abstract Painter."
38. Deborah Solomon, "Artful Survivor," *New York Times Magazine*, May 14, 1989.
39. Rubinfeld, *Clement Greenberg*, 274.
40. Cuccio, "The Fashions." Remarkably, the impulse to discipline or micro-manage those writing on Frankenthaler seems not to have died with the artist. In seeking permission to publish some unpublished statements by her, I submitted a few brief excerpts from the present text to the Frankenthaler Foundation, whose director, Elizabeth Smith, responded in part by re-drafting some of my prose and asking me to substitute her versions, whereby, for instance, a (more saintly) Frankenthaler would not have "complained," but would instead have "voiced her opinion"; email communication to the author, Jan. 8, 2016.
41. Susan Reed, "Arts," *People Weekly Magazine*, Dec. 4, 1989, 117.
42. Carmean, *Helen Frankenthaler*, 7.
43. Frankenthaler discussed the importance to her of Cubist space in, for instance, de Antonio and Tuchman, *Painters Painting*, 75.
44. "I feel my best pictures generally are big pictures," transcript of Frankenthaler lecture at Skidmore College, August 1973, Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.
45. Lane Relyea, "The Apollonian Domestic," in Siegel, ed., *The heroine Paint*, 122.
46. "The *New Yorker* has dismissed her work as 'boardroom' art, then groused about her 'high-priestess airs," reported Reed, "Arts," 117.
47. For instance: "'Color doesn't work unless it works in space,' she [Frankenthaler] says, launching one of her favorite subjects. 'Color alone is just decoration—you might as well be making a shower curtain'"; cited in Solomon, "Artful Survivor."
48. Ibid.
49. Holland Cotter, "Art in Review," *New York Times*, Nov. 27, 1992.
50. See "Helen Frankenthaler: Interview with Henry Geldzahler (1965)," repr. in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, eds., *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1996), 31.
51. Cited in Sandler, *The New York School*, 67.
52. Judd, "In the Galleries," *Arts*, April 1963, repr. in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings*, 83.
53. Barry Schwabsky, "Art Review: Deeper, Not Sadder: A Painter Looks Inward," *New York Times*, Feb. 14, 1999.
54. Kenneth E. Silver, *Making Paradise: Art, Modernity, and the Myth of the French Riviera* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 17, 18.
55. Henri Matisse, "Notes of a Painter," 1908, repr. in Jack D. Flam, *Matisse on Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978), 38. Flam's express concern about this passage may be taken as typical, or symptomatic: "Unfortunately the phrase 'something like a good armchair', which has been quoted so often, tends to give the impression that Matisse desired from painting merely a means of relaxation or of entertainment—in short that his ideals were somewhat superficial. Matisse, however, does not advocate an art of superficial decoration or entertainment, but states his belief in art as a medium for the elevation of the spirit..."; in *ibid.*, 34.
56. A cut paper work and a drawing by Matisse appear in photos of the Motherwells' townhouse published in *House and Garden*, July 1969.
57. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Venice 2015: Biennale on the Brink," *Artforum* 54, no.1 (Sept. 2015), 309.
58. Transcript of lecture at Yale Univ., Jan. 20, 1970, Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, 21. The Foundation has stipulated that the immediate context for the words cited here must be provided, as follows: "But I can also feel, if I hit WQXR and Verdi or Mozart or Hayden, oh, God, that's divine! Listen to it. You know. Well, I still have the same feelings. It's still the same piece of music, played angelically, in the same way that I can see a great Quattrocento picture in the Fogg or the National Gallery, or an Impressionist or a Pollock or a Morris Louis. In other words, it's the experience and the feeling and the beauty of it still, for me, that I want to be surrounded by. Or if I have the cash, would buy and hang up. Now, I don't want to hang up that rather ugly lamp, no matter who's signed it or what group made it. Now, is that my problem? Or is there a dimension that is involved in something totally different? ...But if I buy a work of art, I still think I want a beautiful picture. And certainly, if I'm making something, I want to make a beautiful picture, I myself." (N.B. In context, it emerges that the reference to the "ugly lamp" is to work by artists such as Dan Flavin.)
59. "The kitchen of her town house is filled with photographs that show her socializing with people ranging from old artist-buddies like the late David Smith to Princess Diana and President Reagan. ('Some of my friends criticized me for going to the White House, but it was a great party,' she says"); in Solomon, "Artful Survivor."
60. Transcript of Frankenthaler lecture at Bard College, 1977, Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, 12. The Foundation required that a fuller version of the statement cited here be provided, as follows: "Well, unfortunately, art always implies elitism... By elitism, I mean that there aren't many good ones [i.e., works of art or artists]. And elitism probably involves people who say, I choose this and I think it's good and I think it's right... But you have to be right for you. Otherwise, you are everything to everyone, and very often, nothing to yourself. Which doesn't mean that we all shouldn't... be charitable, or encourage anybody to try anything. I mean, that's giving and social and democratic, and hurray. But I'm very bad at political science."
61. Dec. 1961 interview with Frankenthaler (edited in part by her), in David Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2001), 105. In mentioning people who "have seen enough and know enough," Frankenthaler may be implying in part people privileged, as she herself was, to tour extensively through European art collections, including in an era when the cost of such travel remained prohibitive for most.
62. Hilton Kramer, "An Interview with Helen Frankenthaler," *Partisan Review* 61, no. 2 (1994), 241. (The interview in question is said to have taken place at the New York Public Library on Dec. 8, 1992.) "[P]olitical movements during the sixties did not impinge in any way on my concerns as an artist when I was working in my studio... When I leave my studio of course these might be my concerns," hedged Frankenthaler, adding that she wanted her message to emerge "in aesthetic not political terms... Recently, that view seems to be most unpopular"; in *ibid.*, 243.
63. Rowley, *Helen Frankenthaler*, 111.
64. Jacques Rancière, cited in Peter Hallward, "Politics and Aesthetics: An Interview," trans. Forbes Morlock, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 8, no. 2 (August 2003), 206.
65. Jacques Rancière, "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics," 2009, repr. in Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung, eds., *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, 2nd ed. (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 76, 78. "What could be the ultimate paradox of the politics of aesthetics is that perhaps by inventing new forms of aesthetic distance or indifference, art today can help frame... new political communities of sense"; in *ibid.*, 86.

JOAN THORNE

ANALYTIC ECSTASY

By Vittorio Colaizzi

Although the work of Joan Thorne (b. 1943) has varied considerably since she began exhibiting in the early 1970s, her favored formal devices, visible for example in *Squazemo* (1984; Fig. 1 and Pl. 11) include elaborate polygons rolling in shallow space, linear adornments that are willfully disconnected from any grounding structure, recurring wavy or saw-toothed contours, and constantly inward-turning arrangements that articulate pictorial enclosure rather than literal surface and its attendant objecthood. These are the very devices that younger painters such as Josh Smith and Ida Ekblad deploy tongue-in-cheek.

Benjamin H.D. Buchloh has listed the “fallacies” of abstraction as “endless repetition, infinite refinement ... [and a] boundless range of pictorial mechanisms,” all apparent in the “empty gestural painting that came at the tail end of Abstract Expressionism....”¹ Such abundance acts as a negative example that is either strenuously avoided, as in the mechanistically determined imagery of Wade Guyton, or else ironically pursued, as in the entropic production of Smith and Ekblad, and before them Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke. Two notable painters working today, Amy Sillman and Joanne Greenbaum, remain cautious if not outright cynical with regard to painterly invention. The former’s gestures are praised for embodying anxiety and trepidation,² while the latter problematizes part-to-whole relationships through sprawling compositions made up of miniscule and detached line work.

Within this scenario, Thorne’s paintings are vexing because she seems to earnestly embrace that which her contemporaries handle only circumspectly; Smith’s *Untitled* (2007; Fig. 2) features curlicues, dots, and zigzags that conjure a sardonically generalized memory of modernism, and paintings such as Ekblad’s *Untitled* (2011; Fig. 3) incited Roberta Smith to compare her work to what she calls Thorne’s “generic writhing forms.”³ This “generic” quality, seen in late 1970s works such as *Kabba* (1982; Fig. 4 and Pl. 12), is key to Thorne’s critical position. Despite Douglas Manson’s appreciative claim that she “consistently takes the risk of embracing pure expression,”⁴ she is not an nth-generation New York School stalwart, quixotically rehearsing ideals that were academic by the time she



Fig. 1. Joan Thorne, *Squazemo* (1984), oil on canvas, 80" x 83". Photo: Courtesy the artist.



Fig. 2. Josh Smith, *Untitled* (2007), oil on canvas, 60" x 48". Photo: © Josh Smith. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.



Fig. 3. Ida Ekblad, *Untitled* (2011), oil on linen, 78 3/4" x 63" x 1 3/8". Photo: John Berens. Courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali, New York.



Fig. 4. Joan Thorne, *Kabba* (1982), oil on canvas, 102" x 85". Photo: Courtesy the artist.

was a teenager. Nor does Ken Johnson's equally well-intentioned assessment that her canvases "fit right in with the permissive pluralism of painting today"⁵ fully explain her relevance. It is not pluralism, nor the newly minted "atemporality"⁶ that makes Thorne's work fit in as if by default, but more pointedly her career-long engagement with the problems of mark, composition, and pictorial space. While Johnson muses that Thorne's "raucously sensual abstraction" was superseded in the 1980s by "cerebral trends" and her "hot career cooled,"⁷ part of Thorne's accomplishment is to stir up the distinctions between hot and cool, between sensual and cerebral. It is not that Thorne needs to be re-positioned from one side to the other of a divide that pits expression against analysis; instead, her paintings demonstrate that the interrogative qualities associated with recent, critically respected abstract painting also appear in painting that is committed to "enigma" and "ecstasy."⁸ Her paintings embody the conflict between the valorization of subjective experience inherited from midcentury abstraction and the literalized conditions of process, materiality, and context privileged by subsequent generations.

In synthesizing these two modes and refusing to accept their growing polarization in the wake of minimalism, Thorne reveals an independence that had been encouraged from her childhood. Her parents sent her to the famously progressive Little Red Schoolhouse near their home in Greenwich Village,

where Thorne recalls folk singer Pete Seeger performing regularly. The teachers there hung her paintings in the halls and, she recalls, "talked to me about them in a serious way." Years later, while pursuing her MFA at Hunter College (after undergraduate studies at NYU), Thorne felt similarly legitimized by her advisor Tony Smith, who "From the beginning, ... treated [her] like a professional painter."⁹

Even before these experiences, however, Thorne cites her father's work materials as a partial inspiration for her paintings' intricate layering: "[M]y father was a hand surgeon. And when I was a very young child, just beginning to walk, I would turn the pages of these huge anatomy atlases that were on the floor, full of all these colored photographs and drawings of the inside of the body." In 1985, Barry Schwabsky likened the "distinctive stratification" of Thorne's pictorial space to "intellectually oriented abstract painters" such as Jonathan Lasker.¹⁰ With this somewhat surprising comparison that the artist herself hesitates to endorse, Schwabsky sees what is sometimes obscured by the exuberance of Thorne's pictorial elements: the deliberation and severity with which they are painted. This is true in her scrupulously separated snaking lines of 1978–82, in the three-part layering of stroke, volume, and background of the mid-to-late eighties, and in the translucent, near-repetitive units that structure the ambiguous space of her work since 2010. In all cases, the gesture, what Saul Ostrow, writing on Lasker, called "the most privileged signifier of modernism's pictorial paradigm,"¹¹ is not enacted as a trace of bodily immediacy, but rendered and recited with an almost classical poise.

It makes sense that Thorne should address the gesture with such deliberation when it is, after all, an adopted language. Her first exhibited works, shown at the Whitney Annual in 1972 and the Corcoran Gallery in 1973, consisted of faint washes of color against a white ground, set within hard-edged frames of unpainted canvas, as in *Untitled* (1972; Fig. 5) As she described them,

I was painting with very little pigment, mostly water, on twenty foot canvases, and when you looked at them it looked like there was just a hint of a stain of a color. But they were mostly the format of windows. I mean abstract but that kind of format, with two rectangles, one on the top and one on the bottom, or in the case of the long ones they were lined up.

According to Thorne, life events precipitated the abandonment of this approach:

I think the most drastic jump I ever made in my work was back in 1972–73.... I took a trip to Mexico, and looked at the Mayan temples and the trip to me was [such] a very mystical trip that, when I came back I changed almost everything in my life, including my art. So I went from those very faint paintings ... to very thick paint, very expressive thick paint.



Fig. 5. Joan Thorne, *Untitled* (1972), pigment and glue on canvas, 78" x 168". Photo: Courtesy the artist.

This origin myth of sorts, a change in practice brought on by personal experience, is structurally similar to futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's "rebirth" from a ditch after a car crash. For Rosalind Krauss, this personal myth was indicative of modernism's obsession with origins.¹² But while Krauss identifies the grid as the recurrent and fervently sought figure of origin, Thorne, at the other end of the century, moved from the grid to the gesture, from a statement of painting's ontological wholeness to a performance of its contingent variety. Her next cohesive group of paintings, dating from 1976 and 1977, embody this turn from the attempt at an anonymous and universally valid statement to the imposition of a particular pictorial will. In *Kopt* (1976; Pl. 13), shapes and angles elbow into an otherwise unified and centralized burst of streaks and smears. These marks, made with a palette knife, stop short of the canvas edge all the way around, in a move that Thorne has called "protecting the painting," adding, "I wanted to also be very aware of the edge at that time."¹³ What she remained "aware" of, what she needed to "protect," was the literal quality of the painting-as-object and as conglomeration of applied matter, underscored by the repeated radial expansion, and yet complicated by the aggressive interior shapes. In this way, wholeness is declared and then revoked, and composition infects non-composition.

Non- or anti-composition, or the use of readymade systems or processes rather than subjective invention to determine pictorial structure, dates back to the early twentieth century,

but enjoyed wider manifestations in the wake of abstract expressionism and in the general orbit of minimalism.¹⁴ The systemic image accommodates Frank Stella's complaint that "relational" balancing in painting—"You do something in one corner and you balance it with something in the other corner"—results in "a terrible kind of fussiness," lacking a much-desired feeling of force or wholeness.¹⁵ Daniel Buren's stripes, Simon Hantaï's knotted grids, and Wade Guyton's black slabs all posit concrete and reliable forms that gain critical legitimacy by sidestepping the creative ego. However, the widespread employment and academic canonization of non-composition make it just as authoritative as previous generations' painterly virtuosity. Writing in *Artforum*, curator Mark Godfrey pointed out that it has been "the privilege of white male artists to do away with their subjectivity. . . ."¹⁶ In this he echoes Mira Schor's observation that, "It is a familiar irony in the history of feminism that the goals feminists fight to achieve are declared insignificant or in error just as the goals are at last met."¹⁷ In other words, the assertion of female subjectivity remains politically subversive even though, or perhaps because, it is supposedly artistically rear-guard. Although the photographic and conceptual strategies adopted by women artists have effectively countered the phallic hegemony of the paintbrush, artists such as Lee Lozano, Jo Baer, and Mary Heilmann, found that through painting, they could, to again quote Godfrey, "foreground the self in all its ineluctably political specificity."¹⁸

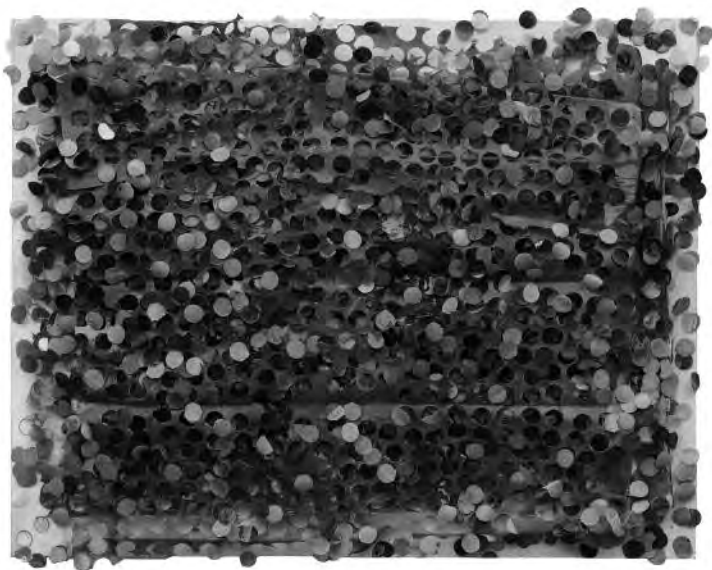


Fig. 6. Howardena Pindell, *Untitled # 73* (1975), watercolor, gouache, crayon, ink, punched papers, spray adhesive, and thread on board, 7 1/2" x 9 1/2". Photo: Courtesy the artist and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York.

Thorne does not speak in terms of non-composition or the self's political specificity, but she eagerly points out that she was one of the few women in the 1973 Whitney Annual and 1981 Biennial. She must be counted among those artists who practice feminism upon the field of abstract painting, working within but never resolving its conundrums. Helen Molesworth has shown how abstract painting can be an effective feminist tool against power structures inherent in aesthetic hierarchies. According to Molesworth, the aforementioned Heilmann, as well as Howardena Pindell and Joan Snyder, all "perform[ed], in the space of the canvas, the dilemma of whether or not something is a 'good painting.'" Since "quality" was the province of male critics, "their paintings stage the problem of how to ascertain it."¹⁹ For Molesworth, the painters in question undermine orthodoxies of quality through "putrid or acidic" color, "off-kilter compositions" or, in the case of Pindell, "self-destroyed drawings"²⁰ (Fig. 6), but her larger point is that the mechanism of exclusion can apply to any artistic strategy and therefore shut it out of serious critical consideration. So by the end of the 1970s, paintings such as *Naust* (1978; Pl. 14), with its ropes of paint interwoven with thickly outlined shard-like shapes, epitomized the indulgence in gesture and space that Douglas Crimp saw as "hackneyed recapitulations of late modernist abstraction."²¹ He made this call in his epochal essay "The End of Painting," which was largely occasioned by "American Painting: The Eighties," an exhibition curated by Barbara Rose that included Thorne's work.²²

In a long review of this show, Hal Foster briefly focuses on Thorne, complaining, "Her line, it is true, is not descriptive of any representational image, but neither is it definitive as line." He also reflects, "Thorne responds 'content' to the question of the critical issue in painting today; however in her work nothing contains it. No rhetorical form enunciates her 'image,' no intentionality, as it were, guides her intention."²³ As is often the case, what a critic sees as a shortcoming is particularly

helpful in determining an artist's achievement. In Thorne's turn of the decade paintings such as *Naust*, *Mazu* (1980; Pl. 15), or *Wa Kort* (1981; Fig. 7) it is as if she took Willem de Kooning's softened bristles, sensitized to each turn of the wrist, and hardened them into a consistently thick and sustained smear of the palette knife. Likewise, she isolated the alternately jagged and voluptuous marks that for de Kooning were informed by study of the model into meandering curves, pointed enclosures, or tumbling lighting-bolts. Just as Stella averred that artists no longer had to contend with Picasso after Jackson Pollock,²⁴ Thorne seems to negate the figurative tradition that stood behind de Kooning, mutating his legacy with decidedly inert yet shrill constituents reminiscent of the clarity, if not the austerity, of minimalism. In 1980, *Village Voice* critic Kay Larson saw something similar, as she credited Thorne with "a bright overallness that synthesiz[es] Pollock's arm with postconceptual brashness and an iconoclast's attention to her forbears."²⁵ Thorne would undoubtedly disagree with Larson's reading as well as my own for over-emphasizing calculation at the expense of the "magic"²⁶ with which she hopes to infuse each image, but the magic lies precisely in her historically based heresies, because they violate specific though tacit prohibitions. Rather than shaping, cutting, and connecting a charged pictorial space, Thorne's contorted linear trails pile upon one another, thus making intentionality—to return to Foster's complaint—the subject of their pictorial action. Thorne plays intention against non-intention by picturing a seemingly un-willed disarray. It is as if she is faking or even lampooning the ostensible moral forthrightness of non-composition through a flagrant display of its opposite.²⁷

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, at the same time that Thorne was committing these offenses, Lasker was also building a strategy out of the appearance of extravagantly flaunted aimlessness. His paintings at the time featured wild abstract figures, crisply layered upon sensual but rote gestural patterns. Hilton Kramer's characterization of Thorne's work as "suitably animated" but "terribly well mannered,"²⁸ could just as easily have been applied to Lasker, who has been celebrated for his construction of a vocabulary or "syntax" with which to "mix oil and water (the spontaneous and the contrived)."²⁹ With Lasker there remains a quest for truth, to discern the intellectual and cultural situation of painting, which he finds in an analysis of its constituents and the process of its construal, even if that truth turns out to be the constant interchangeability of signs. Thorne, like the painters Molesworth discusses, eschews the responsibility to be right and paints a conflicted condition. Nevertheless, like Lasker, she grapples with the problem of how to avoid the threat of mannered repetition. The path that she and others have taken is the isolation and recombination of abstraction's components. In one of Lasker's 1978 paintings, Ostrow finds a "field of [Jack] Tworlov-like crosshatching,"³⁰ an apt comparison, as Tworlov's miniaturized repetition of the gesture came after years of action painting. Thorne befriended Tworlov late in his life, and although she denies an outright influence, they share a re-shaping of painterly abstraction into something more deliberate.



Fig. 7. Joan Thorne, *Wa Kort* (1981), oil on canvas, diptych, 102" x 180". Photo: Courtesy the artist.

Aahee (1984; Pl 16) is typical of the changes Thorne introduced in the early to mid 1980s. Pictorial space dramatically expands as existing elements pull away from one another and attain distinct identities. The polygons gain dimension and undergo almost muscular torsion, while the tangles disperse and become actual brushstrokes, sometimes breaking into smaller flickering accents, and sometimes tracing meandering pathways across the surface. In a few cases, Thorne reiterates these pathways with another color, so that improvisation and recitation go hand-in-hand. Behind this drama are backdrops of two or three large zones of color whose ambiguous figure-ground relationships underpin the more conspicuous activity up front. The figures in space possess a violent or perhaps amorous energy, but are scrupulously segregated; they overlap now and then, but seem always to push in different directions. The result is a dynamic pressure that Thorne sandwiches between the two-color background and the transparent but inviolable screen of strokes on the picture plane. Like Lasker (and these are the paintings that instigated Schwabsky's comparison), she announces the conventionality of pictorial construction, but instead of Lasker's rundown of eccentric shapes in a sequence

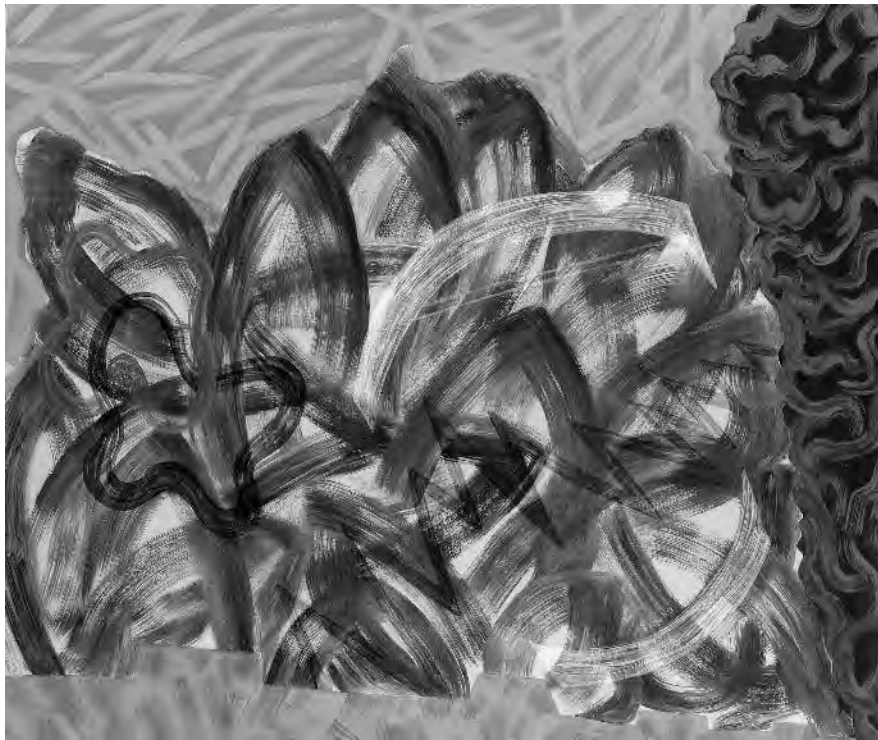


Fig. 8. Joan Thorne, *Hampi*, (2010), oil on canvas, 66" x 56". Photo: Courtesy the artist.

of idioms (solids, bars, squiggles), Thorne relies on the painted elements' potential to move the viewer through vicarious kinesthetic action. In other words, each picture asserts a



Fig. 9. Joan Thorne, *Aphrodite* (2001), oil on canvas, 59" x 50". Photo: Courtesy the artist.

distinctive identity, almost a narrative; the picture's self-consciousness is less important than what happens within it.

In reference to this period, Thorne noted, "These were kind of a contradiction, because you have these more dimensional images and this space with kind of two-dimensional lines. So you have opposing forces."³¹ These opposing forces are none other than the historical forces at work in painting after Pollock; not only flatness versus depth, but what Achim Hochdörfer has summarized as literalism versus transcendence.³² For Pollock and his peers, the concrete reality of their materials coexisted with abstract optical space and concomitant suggestions of sublimity. Michael Fried famously critiqued minimalist object-makers for overemphasizing Pollock's concreteness at the expense of the ambiguous space that his layered drips suggested, a space that, according to Fried, painters such as Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitski preserved and highlighted with their washes and sprays of color. For Fried, literalism led to "theatricality," or the interdependence between viewer, object, and context, which made art into a situation.³³ Of course, it is along the lines that Fried warned against that the investigative inheritance of modernism has been carried out. In refusing or downplaying what is not verifiably present, literalism has manifested as the examinations of art's avenues, customs, and modalities, examinations often carried out under the banner of conceptual art.

In 2009, David Joselit posited painting's most fertile task as "transitivity," i.e., the declaration of the medium's dependence on and mobility within economic and social networks, achieved largely through tactics of installation, such as Jutta Koether's pink disco-lights and Guyton's black plywood floors.³⁴ Although the networked condition of painting is indisputable (they are shown, purchased, transported, and argued over), the strategy of transitivity, which entails a migration of interest to the painting's exterior, from image to contextualized object, is predicated on an impatience for pictorial activity, or what Scott Rothkopf has called, perhaps with some detached bemusement, "formal noodling."³⁵ Accordingly, Joselit cites Martin Kippenberger's verdict that "simply to put a painting on the wall and say that it's art is dreadful."³⁶ Already in 1989, Mira Schor had taken note of this dread:

The history of avant-garde painting has been oriented toward a demystification of Figure ... and an emphasis and amplification of ground: the flatness of the picture plane, the gallery space as ground, finally the gallery space as Figure, a subject in itself. The history of modern painting—with the possible exception of Surrealism and its progeny—is the privileging of Ground.... The privileging of ground is consistent with the utopian ideal often expressed by modernist pioneers that painting, liberated from representation and reduced to its formal elements, will transcend its end and evaporate into architecture.³⁷

Although one would be hard pressed to call Mary Heilmann and Amy Sillman "utopian," they engage in the environmental/contextual impulse Schor describes. Heilmann's colorful rolling chairs and tantalizingly sensual ceramics add a hip domesticity to her exhibitions-turned-hangouts, and Sillman positions her large abstractions as one aspect in a continuum of activities that also includes cartoons, zines, animations, and portrait drawings. Thorne stands in stark contrast to this shifted key, staking her works' identity on decisions made upon the plane. Robert C. Morgan called this an "audacity to be what they are," adding that Thorne was never "tempted to transform her work into 'installation art.'"³⁸ With this seemingly strange comment, given the legions of other painters similarly untempted, Morgan reacts to a predilection to find mere image-making dreadfully insufficient, and also shows his sensitivity to the physically expansive qualities of Thorne's work. Although with recent works such as *Hampi* (2010; Fig. 8) she has corralled the insistent and sometimes inches-thick tactility of the 1970s into thin translucence, so that the self-evident layering of brushstrokes opens an interstitial space that is more felt than seen; and while she has dialed back her frequent grand scale, there remains a certain insistence and singularity of surface treatment through near-repetition of painterly units. Thorne's

surface acts as a site of resistance to the literal by maintaining a dialectical split: they are both surface and depth, and in terms of pictorial content, both uniform and differentiated, both “all-over” and replete with incident.

This is a continuation of the conflict that Thorne noted in mid-1980s between dimensional forms and surface-adhering strokes. Each stroke is a thing, a figure or element, yet they read together as a field—the simultaneous identity is never resolved. This dichotomy is further complicated by additional elements whose seemingly inconsequential scale belies their critical significance. In the 1990s and early 2000s, congregations of floating bits of architecture, striated Hellenistic drapery, or fanciful protozoa formed the major pictorial drama, as in *Aphrodite* (2001; Fig. 9). More recently, as a repertoire of interpenetrating brushstrokes build complicated zones of space, fleeting objects such as the white zigzag in the upper right and nearly circular blue undulation in the lower right of *Ananda* (2013; Fig. 10) interrupt the gathering uniformity of surface, and with it the historical force of the all-over.

Thorne explains about these small interruptions: “I mean the courage to put this, here, I mean maybe most people don’t realize it but it takes a lot of courage to put it where it is.” Only someone sensitized to historical anxieties regarding subjective composition would make this claim. Instead of Stella’s strategy of constructing a procedural and stylistic fail-safe in the form of the one-shot image, Thorne makes the image dwell in this uncertainty, referring to but refusing the solution of a perfected image that excludes the arbitrary. By playing out loose patterns that imitate natural growth, Thorne depicts the yearning for an objective and literal image of the kind that Stella, Richter, and Guyton achieved by privileging process over judgment.

When Thorne says, “I don’t believe that the canvas is flat,” she not only distances herself from the central tenet of Clement Greenberg’s theory of modernist painting (practically a default position), she also resists the foregrounding of idiom over image. While few painters today take their historically mandated task to be the emphasis of painting’s flatness, fewer still would not concede that a canvas is, after all, flat; it’s just not the most important thing about it. But among painters to whom considerable critical attention has gone in the last few decades, flatness has been, not an abiding truth to uncover, but a grounding characteristic upon which to enumerate the inherited and conventional conditions of painting’s languages, more in keeping with Leo Steinberg’s notion of the “flatbed picture plane,” which acts as a receptor for all manner of quotations from visual culture.³⁹

In his 1979 essay “Pictures,” Douglas Crimp described how art’s theatrical operations, theretofore manifested in the spatial environment, became “quite unexpectedly, reinvested into the pictorial image.”⁴⁰ For example, the images of Sherrie Levine and Cindy Sherman call for imaginary reconstructions of their



Fig. 10. Joan Thorne, *Ananda* (2013), oil on canvas, 66" x 56". Photo: Courtesy the artist.

suggested contexts and narratives. This mode of pictorial theatricality is also in effect in abstract painting. While Lasker and Richter would balk at the idea that they compose with quotations, the historical resonance of each visual phoneme is palpable, and their constant referentiality is amplified by an internal dissociation and alienation between pictorial elements. Rather than being woven into a homogenous, if manically active space in the manner of de Kooning’s cubist-derived scenarios, Lasker cobbles his pieces together as if temporarily, explaining, “I often think of these biomorphic shapes that are laid down on top of the grounds of my paintings as being picture puzzle elements that I can grab and lift off the canvas and hang on the wall for a second. Just let them sit there on a coat hanger totally separate from what’s happening on the painting ground.”⁴¹ To deny the requisite flatness of this approach as Thorne does is to locate the most germane task of painting to be the building of space (something that Stella also insisted upon in *Working Space*, a text worth revisiting in relation to contemporary abstraction⁴²). And yet, Thorne’s paintings are also stridently, insistently literal. The flatness of the surface constantly conditions, supports, and deflects the mark. In her late 1970s tangles, the plane-bound adornments of her 1980s paintings, and in the semi-transparent loops, zigzags, and striations of her recent work, Thorne keeps flatness in operation, as something to be

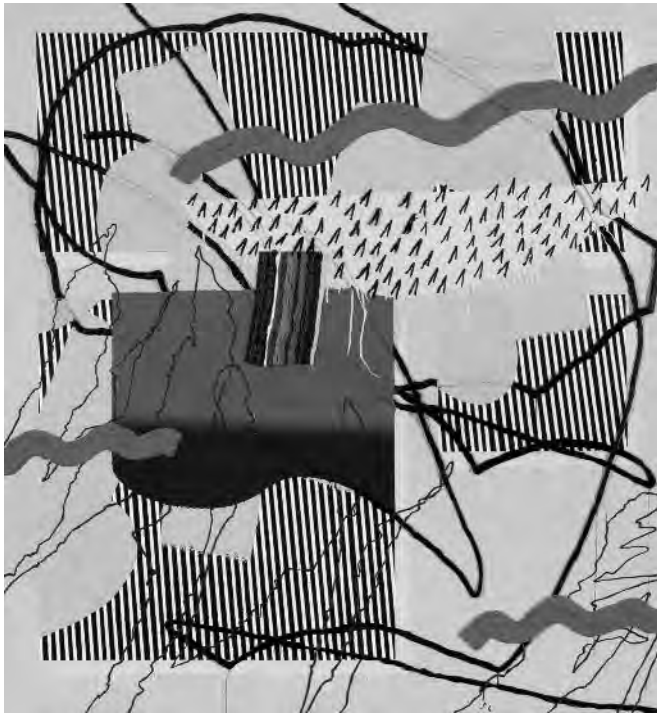


Fig. 11. Trudy Benson, *For RL* (2013), acrylic, spray paint, and oil on canvas, 63" x 68". Photo: Courtesy the artist and Lisa Cooley gallery.

pushed through, not defeated, but opened out within the self-conscious fiction of picture-making. This is what she means when she describes an impossible desire to "paint the other side" of the canvas, to "go through to the other side of the painting."⁴³

Thorne's resolute in-between-ness, poised between the picturing of things and an all-over treatment of the plane, is shared by a number of younger abstract painters, such as the aforementioned Joanne Greenbaum, as well as Trudy Benson and Brooke Moyses. Benson's additive and carefully disjunctive compositions, such as *For R.L.* (2013; Fig. 11), achieved through a variety of tools that include brushes, rollers, spray guns, and paint squeezed from the tube, seem at odds with Thorne's more integrated worlds, but both employ an unmoored linearity, whose apparent anarchic flourishes are actually controlled and almost courtly. Benson keeps the ground in view as a concrete receptor for deposited figures, while Thorne dissolves her surface into a distant but recognizable offspring of the Albertian window. After Stella, perhaps after Pollock, this is a trenchantly oppositional stance, because it effectively de-literalizes painting's materials, questioning the ethics that underscore much minimal and post-minimal art, an ethics that remains in Benson's collage-like accumulations. However, it may be a matter of degree rather than a paradigmatic gulf that separates Benson from Thorne, for the elements in Thorne's recent paintings remain distinct from one another, even as they seem to strive for an organic unity.

A less-than—or more-than—literal surface is evident in Moyses's paintings, which, beyond their obvious ebullience, share with Thorne a recognizability of forms; in Moyses's *Birl* (2013; Fig. 12) one can discern a circle here, a wavy line there,



Fig. 12. Brooke Moyses, *Birl* (2013), acrylic on canvas, 42" x 30". Photo: Courtesy the artist.

behind them a loose checkerboard, and over it all concentric rings. Although the two large yellow patches are less identifiable, they are equally distinct parts that nevertheless form an ensemble rather than an inventory. Both Thorne and Moyses put these forms to work, creating the pictorial happenings that Thorne calls "enigma" and Moyses terms "gateways to another world."⁴⁴ Whether or not Thorne, Benson, and Moyses, in taking composition and intentionality as their subjects, are able to create visual meaning that is not cripplingly circumscribed is up to the viewer. They base their efforts precisely on the specificity of each image, and in this way resist the totalization of the surface-as-object, a totality that has become the avatar for historical compulsion itself, the inexorable closing of doors that so many artists today actively oppose.

To connect Thorne's work with minimalism, non-composition, or postmodern meta-abstractness may seem like an ill-advised project of shoe-horning a distinctive voice into a discourse from which she displays admirable independence. She was unimpressed by the painting in the 2014 Whitney Biennial and preferred to ignore Christopher Wool's Guggenheim retrospective in favor of the nearby Kandinskys. But however passionate and fruitful her commitment to what current vernacular would call old-school modernism's spiritual ambitions, the paintings themselves, in their structures and imagery, betray an astute and thoroughly

interiorized comprehension of the challenges abstract painting has faced from midcentury to the present. •

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Notes

1. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Pandora's Painting: From Abstract Fallacies to Heroic Travesties," *Gerhard Richter: Documenta IX, 1992; Marian Goodman Gallery, 1993* (New York: Marian Goodman, 1993): 48.
2. Mark Godfrey, "Statements of Intent," *Artforum* vol. 52, no. 9 (May 2014): 297-98.
3. Roberta Smith, "Ida Ekblad," *New York Times* (October 7, 2011): 26.
4. Douglas Manson, "Joan Thorne: Sideshow," *Art in America* 99 no. 4 (April 2011): 127.
5. Ken Johnson, "Joan Thorne: Recent Paintings," *New York Times* (Nov. 26, 2010): C36.
6. See Laura Hoptman, *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014).
7. Johnson, "Joan Thorne Recent Paintings." This "cooling" is despite numerous supportive critics. See, for example, John Yau, "Joan Thorne's Visionary Universe," *Arts Magazine* 58, no. 1 (Sept. 1983): 118-19, and Stephen Westfall, "Dance Electric," *Art in America* 73, no. 12 (Dec. 1985): 98-101.
8. Joan Thorne in conversation with the author, Feb. 20, 2014. All uncited quotes in the text are from this conversation.
9. Thorne's statements and the information in this paragraph come from Peter Hastings Falk, "The Ghost Picked Me: The Life and Art of Joan Thorne," in *Joan Thorne: Recent Paintings* (New York: Sideshow Gallery, 2010), 3. Here Thorne also reports that her mentor Smith told her: "You're very fortunate. Women are closer to the source. They're not afraid to use their intuition." Asked about this troublingly essentialist, even primitivizing claim, Thorne reasoned that the oppression of women grows from fear of an inherent power.
10. Barry Schwabsky, "Joan Thorne," *Arts Magazine* 60, no. 2 (Oct. 1985): 140.
11. Saul Ostrow, "Jonathan Lasker: A Pre-Fab View," in *Jonathan Lasker: Paintings from 1978 to 1982* (New York: Bravin Post Lee, 1994), 7.
12. Rosalind Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde: A Postmodernist Repetition," *October* 18 (Autumn, 1981): 53. Marinetti's account appears in "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism," in Herschell B. Chipp, ed., *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1970), 285.
13. Joan Thorne, lecture, New York Studio School, November 1983. I am grateful to the artist and David Randall for providing a recording of this lecture.
14. See, for example, Yve-Alain Bois's contribution to "Abstraction, 1910-1925: Eight Statements," in *October* 143 (Winter 2013): 7-17; and Howard Singerman, "Noncompositional Effects, or the Process of Painting in 1970," *Oxford Art Journal* 26, no. 1 (2003): 127-50.
15. Stella in Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, and Frank Stella, "New Nihilism or New Art?" Interview with Bruce Glaser, in James Meyer, ed., *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 197.
16. Godfrey, "Statements of Intent," 298.
17. Mira Schor, "From Liberation to Lack," *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* (Durham and London: Duke Univ. Press, 1997), 51.
18. Godfrey, "Statements of Intent," 298.
19. Helen Molesworth, "Painting with Ambivalence," in Cornelia Butler, et al., *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art and Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 434.
20. Ibid.
21. Douglas Crimp, "The End of Painting," *October* 16 (Spring 1981): 73.
22. See Barbara Rose, et al., *American Painting: The Eighties* (New York: Vista, 1979).
23. Hal Foster, "A Tournament of Rose's," *Artforum* vol. 18, no. 3 (Nov. 1979): 67.
24. Frank Stella in *Painters Painting*, VHS. Directed by Emile de Antonio, 1973. New York: Mystic Fire Video, 1989.
25. Kay Larson, "Seven Young Americans" *The Village Voice* (April 28, 1980), 81.
26. Thorne, telephone conversation with the author, summer 2014.
27. Godfrey characterizes the "faked" gestures of Sillman, Humphries, von Heyl and Owens as distinct from both "authenticity" and parody. 237-38.
28. Hilton Kramer, "Neo-Modernists—A Sense of Deja Vu," *New York Times* (Sept. 23, 1979), D31.
29. Barry Schwabsky uses the term "syntax" in "Toward the Subject of Painting," in *Jonathan Lasker: Coloured Scribbles* (London: Timothy Taylor Gallery, 2004), 5-11, and Ostrow applies the metaphor of "oil and water" in "Jonathan Lasker: A Pre-Fab View," 9.
30. Ostrow, "Jonathan Lasker: A Pre-Fab View," 7.
31. Joan Thorne, lecture, Univ. of Arizona, Oct. 1991. I am grateful to the artist for supplying a DVD of this event.
32. Achim Hochdörfer, "A Hidden Reserve," *Artforum* 47, no. 6 (Feb. 2009): 152-59.
33. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967): 12-23.
34. David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself," *October* 130 (Fall 2009): 125-34.
35. Scott Rothkopf in Johanna Burton, Jeffrey Deitch, James Meyer, and Scott Rothkopf, "The Painting Factory: A Roundtable Discussion," in Deitch et al., *The Painting Factory: Abstraction After Warhol* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, and New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2012), 19.
36. "One Has to Be Able to Take It!" excerpts from an interview with Martin Kippenberger by Jutta Koether, Nov. 1990 – May 1991, in *Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective*, ed., Ann Goldstein, (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art: Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 316, quoted in Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself," 125.
37. Schor, "Figure/Ground," *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* 6 (Nov. 1989), 19.
38. Robert C. Morgan, "Joan Thorne: Mythical Journeys, Power, and Flight," *Joan Thorne*, exh. brochure, (New York: Andre Zarre Gallery, 2001), n.p.
39. See Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria," in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), 77-91.
40. Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 77.
41. Lasker, interview with Shirley Kaneda, *Bomb* 30 (Winter 1989/1990): 17-18.
42. See Frank Stella, *Working Space* (Cambridge and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986).
43. Thorne, Arizona lecture, 1991.
44. Brooke Moyses in conversation with the author, Nov. 14, 2014.

Doris Salcedo

Edited by Julie Rodrigues Widholm
and Madeleine Grynsztejn
The University of Chicago Press/
Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, 2015

Reviewed by Aliza Edelman

For an artist who concentrates around the themes of death and mourning, Doris Salcedo (b. 1958) is indefatigably present in her artwork and functions no less than a living interlocutor to her subjects' narratives mercilessly abandoned or silenced over time and through history. Bravely positioned in this interrelated role as both artist and memoirist, Salcedo's sculptures, site-specific installations and public interventions painstakingly recount and embody the repressed and unspoken acts of violence and terrorism perpetrated against countless victims in a devastating history of civil conflicts and military regimes in Latin America and Colombia, her country of origin, or what she calls "the country of unburied dead" in reference to the murderous disappearance of vast numbers of its citizens or *los desaparecidos* (217). Yet her projects also resonate transnationally, far beyond the geographic specificity of Salcedo's own political background and artistic education in Bogotá. Often, she turns to the all-seeing eyes of philosophers and poets, particularly Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Paul Celan, to clarify her own aesthetic vision and her investment in the "poetics" and "topology" of mourning. Reiterating Derrida, Salcedo says that the singular events and epic histories conveyed in her practice are all at once "what is no longer and what is not yet." At the same time she insists that her artworks are not "experiences taken from life" even as they rigorously document and "inscribe" pathological images on our conscious drawn from the twentieth and twenty-first century (215).¹

Doris Salcedo is the catalogue for the artist's first comprehensive retrospective in the United States, organized by Julie Rodrigues Widholm and Madeleine Grynsztejn and initiated at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. In the



Fig. 1 Doris Salcedo, *Plegaria Muda* (2008–10), wood, concrete, earth, and grass, 166 parts, each: 64 5/8" x 84 1/2" x 24" (overall dimensions variable). Installation view, CAM-Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon, 2011, Inhotim Collection, Brazil Photo: Patrizia Tocci.

catalogue introduction, Grynsztejn underscores the global topicality of Salcedo's social- and political-based art and its appeal to our sense of "public responsibility" in the face of pervasive gun violence, racial inequalities, and disreputable immigration policies for refugees worldwide (14). Grynsztejn further emphasizes the complexities of assembling, in a rational museum setting, Salcedo's larger body of work that "visually recapitulates the unresolved nature" of tragedy oriented towards an "aesthetics held in suspension" (13). It is precisely due to this miraculous act of suspension between two worlds—one living and the other dead—that Salcedo conceptualizes her projects as intertextual sites and potential encounters for ritualistic mourning, variably collective and solitary, spiritual and vernacular, with the immanent purpose to affirm life through an evocation of silence.²

The curators also produced a short documentary video to accompany the exhibition in order to convey the complexities involved in producing Salcedo's site-specific projects (beautifully illustrated in the catalogue), as well as the fundamental importance of the artist's impressively large studio in Bogotá. In one of her boldest and complicated interventions, called *Shibboleth* (2007), at the renovated Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, London, Salcedo's studio gouged out a 548-foot

crevice stabilized with steel mesh along the hall's polished concrete floor. The monumental sculptural presence of *Shibboleth* was determined by an encounter with negation, a viewing relationship directed by the surface's laceration through the building. This scar, or threshold, was intended to counter the museum's embodiment of grand modernist architecture and Western values, the latter understood as exclusionary and racist in line with the roots of the word 'shibboleth.' As in her earlier ephemeral public interventions, sculptural presence is displaced onto the architecture's skin or densely compressed within. *Noviembre 6 y 7* (2002) commemorates the anniversary of the brutal siege and massacre at the Palace of Justice, Bogotá, by lowering over a fifty-three-hour period simple wooden chairs to mark individual deaths and therein buttress the government building's exterior. Another commission for the 8th International Istanbul Biennial squeezes 1,550 wooden chairs into a vacant lot between two buildings, extinguishing space by inversely stuffing it with a grotesquely disfigured pile of objects (2003).

In its first installation in the United States, *Plegaria Muda* (Silent prayer) (2008–10; Fig. 1) fills the gallery space as a breathing cemetery with over one hundred wooden tables, each structure an inversely stacked pair and symbolic

grave, coffin or garden, depending on one's view of the dark mixture of earthy soil on each table from which delicate blades of green grass silently emerge for the exhibition's duration. In her essay, Widholm approaches Salcedo's "psychogeography" of war and grief through the conceptual lens of Jean-Luc Nancy's application of the word *image*, or *imago*, reliant on absence; this is further explored by Widholm in conjunction with the paradoxical and oscillatory relationships between insufficiency and meaning, victim and perpetrator, and chaos and order (19, 20, 24).³ *Plegaria Muda* has a dual reference to Colombian mothers desperately searching for their young sons murdered and buried in the countryside by the military who falsely claimed them as guerrilla fighters. The work was also informed by the experiences of mothers in the United States who lost family members to gun violence. Salcedo is continually researching the notion of the "social death" or "death-in-life," a profound recognition of those who are not "afforded the same rights as others" (23). Identifying her role in art as the "critical eye" for society and her practice as one of recuperation not "activism," a point reinforced by Widholm, Salcedo maintains a strict abidance to her victims' testimonies, having earned the trust of the primary mourners and witnesses.

Many of Salcedo's untitled sculptures created between 1989 and 2000 occupy space in a physiological and psychological sense. Her reconfigurations of household furniture and quotidian objects—beds, armoires, dressers, chairs, cradles, and garments—become phenomenological points of entry into a "disrupted domestic sphere" that can never be fully accessed by the viewer (18). Salcedo further dislocates concepts of shelter, childhood, and memory through these aggressively constructed juxtapositions, which subjugate, handle and graft objects with concrete, animal fibers, bone, hair, and surgical thread. Her language of pathos explores a displaced existence violently inscribed on the bodily surfaces of Salcedo's unorthodox fabrications. This is captured in the series *La Casa Viuda* (The widowed

house) (1992–95), as well as the three sculptures from the *Unland* series (1995–98), a combination of modest wooden tables sewn together with raw silk, human hair, and thread, relating to the concept of "homelessness" proffered by the Romanian-born poet Paul Celan.

As Katherine Brinson suggests in her essay on Salcedo's elegiac aspects of mourning, *A Flor de Piel* (Under the skin) (2014) is perhaps one of the artist's grandest gestures towards a "reclamation of the dead body" in her tribute to a Colombian nurse tortured to death (210). The sutured and stitched quilt of preserved red rose petals blankets the gallery floor as a "domestic mending" of skin and flesh (211). Drawing on Elaine Scarry's seminal text, *The Body in Pain*, the installation *A Flor de Piel* is akin to "the intense pain that destroys a person's self and world, a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire universe."⁴ With a similar emphasis on the corporeal as an inscriptive and abstracted surface for both pain and pleasure, Salcedo's series *Disremembered* (2014) conjures a loosely woven and ethereal tunic seemingly occupied by an absent body. Upon further inspection the garment's meticulous weave of burnt needles and raw silk is intended to exert extreme suffering on its "wearer" and to remind one to mourn and grieve. Again, Salcedo desired that her sculptures exist in a state "suspended between the animate and the inanimate" (216).

Taking into account the early influences of Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Beuys on Salcedo, Helen Molesworth's essay interestingly positions the latter's authorial choice of "domestic artifacts" as a critical feminist reworking of the readymade sculpture tradition. Molesworth puts value on reshaping this tradition through an examination of the history of gendered spaces, including Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro's *Womanhouse* (1972) and Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1976). Importantly, it is within an expansive political realm of contemporary practice that contributing author

Elizabeth Adan further engages Salcedo's art, understood alongside artists working in the late 1980s and early 1990s such as Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Mona Hatoum, and Rachel Whiteread. Adan's essay, "Seeing Things," addresses the ethical and philosophical dimensions of what is "representable" in contemporary practice when artistic subjects are responses to the social "experiences of exclusion ... in their violence and trauma," and arguably deemed "unrepresentable" or "unspeakable" with respect to historic acts of torture and genocide, such as the Holocaust (31). Even so, the exhibition catalogue maintains a steady monographic focus on Salcedo herself without much comparative discussion of contemporary artists. This firmly reflects Salcedo's strategic inscription on her artwork and on the lives and memories of her subjects and viewers as both a "confrontation" and an "embrace" situated "precisely at the threshold where ... absence makes itself present" (216). •

Aliza Edelman is a regular contributor to *W&J*. Her essay, "Departing the Plane: Charmion von Wiegand's Otherworldly Abstractions of the 1950s," was published in *American Women Artists, 1935-1970—Gender, Culture, and Politics*, edited by Helen Langa and Paula Wisotzki (Ashgate, 2016).

Notes

1. See Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 2006), 30.
2. Doris Salcedo, artist talk, "Doris Salcedo: A Symposium," Guggenheim Museum, New York, Oct. 2, 2015.
3. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2005), 67–68.
4. See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), 35.

Lalla Essaydi: Crossing Boundaries, Bridging Cultures

Edited by Dina Nasser-Khadivi and
Ahmed-Chaouki Rafif, with
contributions by Mitra Abbaspour, *et al.*
ACR Édition Internationale and
Edwynn Houk Gallery, 2015

Reviewed by Carol Solomon

This lavishly illustrated, luxury slip-case edition is the most comprehensive study to date of the large-format photographs of the Moroccan-born, New York- and Marrakesh-based artist, Lalla Essaydi (b. 1956). Yet another manifestation of the renewed interest in Orientalist art, the book celebrates Essaydi's rise in the last ten years to a position of international recognition.

Orientalist fantasies of the lascivious Arab woman persist in the Western imaginary, and the imprint of Edward Said's influential discourse, *Orientalism* (1978), positioning a superior West over the East, is still in evidence. But new paradigms of Orientalism informed by the rhetoric of globalization are taking hold as old ones are challenged and revised. The image of the "exotic Arab in need of civilizing rule" has been displaced by a vision of the Arab as "an integral member of the global economy of cultural production" (53). Major collectors and collections of Orientalist art are now concentrated in North Africa and the Middle East. No longer constrained by a dominating Western perspective, the Orient is being returned to the Orientals.¹ In contemporary art, a tradition of counter-Orientalist representation has emerged. Artists with ties to the Arab and Islamic world have engaged with the legacy of Orientalism by appropriating and deconstructing the Orientalist lexicon in order to dispel myths, transform hardened associations, and critique existing realities and assumptions. Lalla Essaydi is one such artist.

Essaydi produces elaborately staged photographs in series using the Orientalist tropes of the veil, the odalisque, and the harem. Engaged in a

critical exploration of female Arab identity, the artist makes use of the thematic language of European Orientalist art to contest established myths and reveal "Orientalism as a projection of the sexual fantasies of Western male artists—in other words as a voyeuristic tradition" (12). Essaydi adopts the use of calligraphy, an art form historically associated with male practice and sacred Islamic art, as a female mode of expression. Using henna, the quintessential means of Arab female adornment, she applies an intentionally indecipherable calligraphic script to the skin of the women, their clothing, the drapery. A protective veil concealing the woman's body, the calligraphy becomes an instrument of empowerment and agency, metaphorically giving voice to the artist and her female subjects.

The collective aim of *Lalla Essaydi: Crossing Boundaries, Bridging Cultures* is to provide a more nuanced understanding of her art by presenting it in multiple contexts. Most illuminating is the identification of the many influential ties, formal and otherwise, to the artist's cultural roots in Morocco and to Islamic traditions in architecture, art, and design. The title of the book alludes to the artist's liminal perspective, the product of her transnational, transcultural personal history as an Arab woman raised in Morocco, educated briefly in Paris, and resident for many years in Saudi Arabia before moving to the United States, where most of her training as an artist took place and where her art was first shown.

Consisting of several essays and copious illustrations, the monograph begins with an introductory statement by the artist and a brief biography by Kinsey Katchka, curator of the artist's mid-career retrospective *Lalla Essaydi: Revisions* (2012) at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution. Five essays follow: four by specialists in different areas, and a fifth, more personal, reflective contribution by Egyptian feminist writer and Arabo-Islamic women's rights activist, Nawal El Saadawi.

The artist's statement highlights key elements of her personal history—her Moroccan heritage and the transforma-

tion of her critical perspective as a result of her lived experience in the West. Essaydi discusses the significance of architectural space, "actual and metaphorical, remembered and constructed," (10) at the core of her practice, explaining the historical association of gender and space in traditional Muslim society: men are identified with public space, women with the private, domestic space. In Morocco today, these spatial boundaries persist although they are less rigidly enforced. In the Morocco of Essaydi's youth, access for women beyond the prescribed boundaries was much less permissible. She comments on the misrepresentation of Arab women and culture in Orientalist art and in the West as she elaborates on the definitions of her basic topoi—the veil, the odalisque, and the harem. She assigns political significance to the participation of her Moroccan models in the creation of her works. All family acquaintances, these women eagerly participate in her project despite the painstakingly slow process of applying henna, which can take as long as nine hours. "They feel they are contributing to the greater emancipation of Arab women," says Essaydi, "and at the same time conveying to a Western audience a very rich tradition often misunderstood in the West" (11).

The first essay, by Stéphane Guégan, a specialist in nineteenth-century European Orientalist art, begins with a brief theoretical justification of the revisionist approach to the study of Orientalist art. He dismisses Edward Said's *Orientalism*, as a "manifesto," which has lost its "essential credibility" in the years since its publication in 1978. However, his repudiation of Said's work is misplaced in the case of Essaydi's art because the artist has identified him as one of the major influences in her work.² Guégan does concede that Said's writings were valuable insofar as they reminded us that Orientalism "cannot be approached with an innocent eye, lazily or carelessly forgetting the geopolitical conditions and anthropological conditioning in which writers and artists operated" (22). According to Guégan, Said's "identity-monism is no longer possible, much less operational in the geographical and mental spaces of postmodern mobility" (22).

Under the influence of more recent theorists, such as Homi Bhabha, new perspectives in the dialogue of difference have now opened up, making way for the discovery of “a much more subtle dialogue” (22).

Bypassing the most frequently discussed French nineteenth-century Orientalists, Guégan considers Essaydi's works in relation to depictions of the harem by Henriette Browne and John Frederick Lewis. Theirs is not the clichéd and sexualized portrayal of the sultan's “oppressive and macho harem” (31) but a space of protective confinement, which echoes historical reality. For the women inhabiting this space, it is a world of their own control, of comfort, serenity—a space of female and familial camaraderie. Essaydi's art embraces this wholesome apprehension of the harem as it quietly speaks to the emancipation of Arabic women and the undoing of one-dimensional Orientalist stereotypes. And yet, Essaydi's work invites us to step inside a world where women are hardly immune from male control and oppression.

One of the attributes of the book is that it provides a fuller and more accurate understanding of the concept of a harem and its multiple associations. A class-based institution, not historically distant as one might expect, the harem was part of Essaydi's childhood experience.

Mitra Abbaspour also avoids the standard clichés of nineteenth-century European Orientalist art and looks to non-Western sources in her essay, which explores historical precedents for Essaydi's representation of the harem. A photography curator, Abbaspour locates the early history of photographing women in the harem in the late nineteenth-century Persian court of Nâsir al-Dîn Shah. An enthusiast of the medium, Nâsir al-Dîn Shah took pictures of his wives, thus creating authentic photographs of harem women. Abbaspour introduces other examples of non-Western harem-related imagery from previous centuries to consider in dialogue with Essaydi's themes.

Characteristic elements of Moroccan design in *zellige* tilework, textiles, and architectural ornamentation (including elaborate overall patterns carved in

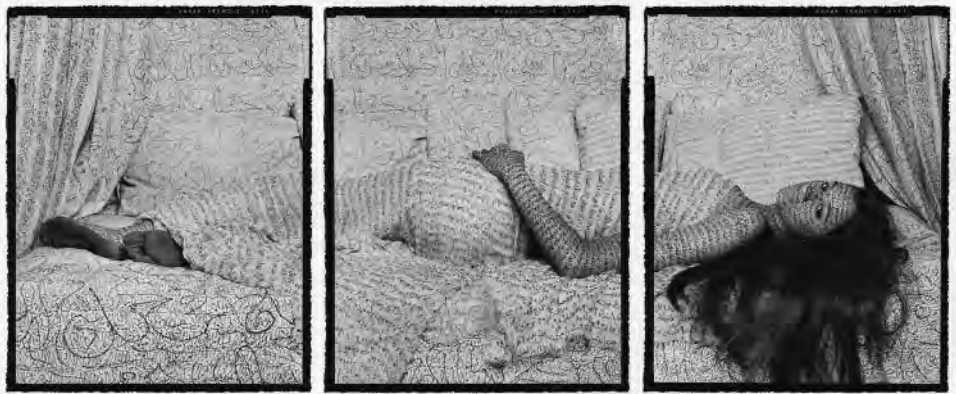


Fig. 1. Lalla Essaydi, *Les Femmes du Maroc: Harem Beauty #1* (2008), chromogenic prints mounted on aluminum.

plaster and wood in intricate geometric detail) are identified as sources of inspiration for Essaydi's aesthetic language. As explained in the essay by Maryam Ekhtiar, a curator of Islamic Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the artist's apparent “joy of filling spaces,” otherwise known as the phenomenon of *horror vacui*, is a common trait of Islamic art (67). Essaydi's propensity towards overall geometric pattern and her use of calligraphy and vibrantly colored fabrics are also attributed in a generalized way to sources in Moroccan and Islamic manuscript illumination and textiles. Several examples are discussed by Ekhtiar, who seeks further affirmation of the artist's indebtedness to her Moroccan and Islamic heritage. Not mentioned among non-Western influences on Essaydi's art are works of contemporary artists, such as the photography of Shirin Neshat, an important predecessor in the use of text over female bodies.

The essay by Nawar El Saadawi focuses on Essaydi's use of henna and calligraphic text and the liberating power of the written word. This Egyptian advocate of Arab women's rights (herself imprisoned for her controversial writings) explores Essaydi's ability to reverse “the silence of submissive femininity” in her expressive campaign for women's rights and justice (80). The “creative ambiguity” of Essaydi's art succeeds in El Saadawi's view because, rather than “obscuring meaning,” it “clarifies and opens the mind to new universes” (80).

The final essay, “A Delicate Balance,”

by Kinsey Katchka provides an overview of Essaydi's development as an artist through a close analysis of each of her photographic series produced between 2002 and 2013. Katchka examines how in each successive series Essaydi deconstructs the essential elements of the Orientalist idiom. However, for some viewers, as Katchka acknowledges, Essaydi's counter-narrative challenge to tradition and convention “goes unrecognized” (87, 105, 106). One must ask if the message is too subtle, the stereotypes too deeply embedded, the reclining models so beautiful they actually enhance the Orientalist fantasy as in *Les Femmes du Maroc: Harem Beauty #1* (2008; Fig 1). Or has the idiom simply not been transformed enough? Some critics claim that Essaydi's art actually reinforces the Orientalist stereotypes it seeks to contest.³ The strength of Essaydi's art, Katchka contends, is attributed to its “deliberate subtlety” and multilayered complexity, making it rich in “paradox and ambiguity” and leaving it open to varied interpretation (106).

The remaining, largely illustrative part of the book (pages 108–367) contains more than two hundred high-quality plates. Each series, with the exception of *The Three Silences*, is briefly introduced and represented by a selection of full- or double-page color illustrations. Several fold-out plates are interspersed with commentary and brief quotes by the artist and other sources. The book concludes with a list of publications comprising mainly exhibition reviews. Sources listed here

lack page references as do several of those cited in the notes for the individual essays. A list of suggested readings consists mainly of titles devoted to Orientalist painting. Also included are an exhibition history and a list of collections housing works by the artist. The book omits dimensions and the number of photographs in each series. The text would be improved by including a discussion of the evolution of women's rights in Morocco during the artist's lifetime, especially the influence of Mohammed VI's reforms of 2003 on the legal status of women. This is concisely reviewed in relation to Essaydi's art in Cynthia Becker's provocative 2009 article "Art, self-censorship, and public discourse: contemporary Moroccan artists at the crossroads," which sheds light on the

comparatively soft revolution waged on behalf of Moroccan women in Lalla Essaydi's art.⁴ The reader of this beautiful book comes away with an appreciation of the varied richness of Essaydi's works in both form and content, and benefits from exposure to critical approaches now current in the analysis of and reassessment of Orientalist art. •

Carol Solomon, an art historian and curator, is a 2015–16 recipient of a Fulbright Senior Scholar Grant to Morocco for research on contemporary art in North Africa. She teaches at Haverford College.

Notes

1. Jean-Claude Vatin, "After Orientalism: Returning the Orient to the Orientals," in

After Orientalism: Critical Perspectives on Western Agency and Eastern Re-appropriations, eds. François Pouillon and Jean-Claude Vatin (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015).

2. Lalla Essaydi identifies Said, along with Linda Nochlin, Fatima Mernissi, and Nawar El Saadawi as her major influences in a 2012 *PBS Newshour* interview, "Q&A: Lalla Essaydi Challenges Muslim, Gender Stereotypes at Museum of African Art," www.pbs.org/newshour/art/blog/2012/05/revisions.
3. Benjamin Genocchio, "Reviving the Exotic to Critique Exoticism," *New York Times*, March 5, 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/03/07/nyregion/07artsnj/.
4. Cynthia Becker, "Art, self-censorship, and public discourse: contemporary Moroccan artists at the crossroads," *Contemporary Islam: Dynamics of Muslim Life* 3 (2009): 143–66. (reference not included in Essaydi text).

Playing at Home: The House in Contemporary Art

By Gill Perry
Reaktion Books, 2013

Art and The Home: Comfort, Alienation and the Everyday

By Imogen Racz
I.B.Tauris, 2015

Reviewed by Anne Swartz

The home in contemporary art has been a subject for many artists as a material image. It also is a gathering point for artistic meditations on how the dwelling encompasses the social situation. In recent years, the home has been examined in the art historical and visual culture literature in edited collections of essays and as a study of a few artists. British curator Colin Painter's *Contemporary Art and the Home* (2002) and Anglo-Australian cultural historian Sara Ahmed's *Uprootings/regroundings: questions of home and migration* (2003) are essay collections, while art historian Jennifer Johnung's *Replacing Home: From*

Primordial Hut to Digital Network in Contemporary Art (2012) focuses on case studies, emphasizing art that offers alternatives to the fixity of the home.

Perry's and Racz's monographs are welcome additions to the literature and will become essential references. Both consider the literal structure of the home and house and functions like domesticity, and have organized their text into themes, with each chapter functioning independently.

In *Playing at Home: The House in Contemporary Art*, Perry frames artists exhibiting in Britain, Europe, and America and their explorations of the representational form of the house or home as an image and a subject in installation art. She interrogates the house and home as either a spatial configuration or representation, utilizing theoretical models ranging from phenomenology to feminism. Although her study centers primarily on American and British artists, she also includes several artists of other nationalities.

Playing at Home is divided into seven chapters, with numerous subheadings to organize the analysis. Perry has brought together artworks in each chapter where she can highlight a theme, such as "Family Traces," in the first chapter. She then immediately

begins surveying a limited number of works by an artist. Usually she considers only one complex piece with numerous components, such as Chinese artist Song Dong's *Waste Not* (2012) comprising more than 10,000 objects. In select instances, she will discuss more. In Chapter 3 on "Broken Homes," she discusses one to three works by seven artists and then extends her appraisal to five works by Korean artist Do-Ho Suh, who has made numerous important works about the home. Chapters open with a consideration of the art and have neither a framing introduction nor a summary conclusion. Nevertheless, with 45 color plates and 75 halftone illustrations, it is an excellent resource for anyone interested in a detailed overview of selected themes about the house and home in contemporary art.

The title phrase "Playing at Home" establishes the general scope of the book, which examines human engagement with houses, including a remarkable variety, from dollhouses to dream houses, even haunted houses. Perry recognizes the enormity of what a house and home can represent in the artistic imagination: "Our relationships with 'home' and its material correlate, the house, can reveal complex cultural geographies in which established

categories of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, class, and social status can overlap and interact" (Perry, 10).

Perry explores film and installation art, relying on a specific reading of the latter: "In its three-dimensional forms, installation art has a special potential to stimulate ideas and memories through the embodied experience of material objects" (Perry, 14-15). Such a definition leaves out the non-material and the conceptual but keeps the narrative on track because of this clarity. Chapter headings indicate her attention to types of homes or their forms, for example, Chapter 2, "Scaled Down," has subsections titled "Size Matters," "Cottages," "Toys and Doll's House," and "Furnished or Unfurnished."

For Perry, a professor of art history at the The Open University (UK), this book represents her ongoing interests in gender and visibility, and specifically in play and domesticity. She acknowledges the reach of house and home as interdisciplinary composite themes, incorporating "cultural geography, anthropology, literature, philosophy, architectural history and film studies (among other disciplines)" (Perry, 254). The volume draws upon many areas of inquiry in an accessible manner. As an example, after discussing Anglo-Asian Sutapa Biswas's film *Birdsong* (2004; Fig. 1), Perry remarks upon the oft-complicated subject of the home. Biswas's unusual work, which is a fantastical image of a young boy in an English home interior imagining he has a real horse living in his home (with one of the dual projections on a slight delay to add to the disorienting or hallucinatory quality of this image). The child looks Southeast Asian (he is Biswas's son who inspired this work saying he wished he had a horse living in his home). The idea of home being a place rife with fantasy and disassociating at the same time mirrors the conventional immigrant experience of dislocation in the new home country. Following the discussion of Biswas's complex work, Perry sums up her perspective on her subject, writing that "'Home' emerges as an elusive, multivalent concept, enriched by re-imaginings, autobiography and performative play" (Perry, 169). Biswas's work is redolent with these elements and



Fig. 1. Sutapa Biswas, *Birdsong* (2004), (frame), 16mm film transferred onto 2 DVDs. Double screen installation, 7 min. 8 sec. Color, no sound. Made possible with the generous support of Iniva (London), Film and Video Umbrella and Arts Council England.

Perry's concluding sentence helps give the reader access to the film's broad issues relative to the subject of home.

In *Art and The Home: Comfort, Alienation and the Everyday*, Imogen Racz spotlights American and British artists or artists of various nationalities who have exhibited in either the United States or Canada. (Her bibliography does not cite Perry's book, though she does list an article by Perry on another topic.) While she looks at similar theoretical models as Perry did, including phenomenology and feminism, Racz weights the issues differently and broadens the topics. (As the subtitle indicates, she includes comfort, alienation, and the everyday.) Racz intersperses issues and examples from the distant and recent past; while she principally discusses recent art, she also looks at the origins in early Modernism (or earlier) for the concepts she reviews. Each chapter begins with a history of ideas and art related to the subject at hand, but as with Perry, offers little in the way of a conclusion.

A Senior Lecturer in Art History at Coventry University, Racz has studied contemporary craft and sculpture, and gender, one of her persistent interests, is a theme in this book. She

argues for her primary focus on American and British artists because of the existing overlaps in the "real social and cultural understanding of the ideals underpinning the home and family," and emphasizes the "ways that disturb, challenge and enrich the normal understanding of this phenomenon" (Racz, 4, 5). She centers her inquiry on "sculptural practice," which is an expanded definition of sculpture, encompassing both objects and their presentation. She explains:

Sculptural practice is of the world, and is experienced spatially, materially and in time. Sculpture is measured against the scale of the body, and the audience needs to move around it to engage with its material reality. Its physicality can act as a metaphor and stand in for other states. Found and manipulated objects hold echoes of their previous existence both in function and material. This does not mean that sculpture, objects and installations are 'reality'; their staging is also crucial (Racz, 1).

Her inquiry is expansive, including discrete objects (such as a found sculpture by British artist Tony Cragg) and wallpaper. This conceptualization

supports her idea that “[t]he home both contains us and is within us” (Racz, 2). Artistic representations of the home, according to Racz, rely on literalism and prompt a kind of autonomic response in the body as the viewer recalls the real and the subjective contact one has with the house, the home, and the domestic.

In contrast to Perry’s book, *Art and the Home* probes more specifically into the duality of public and private in houses and homes. Some of the themes Racz discusses are specific to the role of objects and structures in our physical experiences and psychic lives or “the gap between the material and imaginative worlds” (Racz, 93). Her chapter headings belie the elision of this pairing: “Enclosure,” “Doors and Windows,” “Female Space,” “Alienation,” “The Unmade House,” “Withdrawal,” “Objects,” “Sentiment and Memory.”

Both books offer an opportunity for the reader to learn more about Anglo-American artistic interests in the home

and house. There is some overlap—for example, both include considerations of similar works by British artist Rachel Whiteread. However, this topic is vast and many artists have used the house and home or their corollaries as subject. Both mention Do-It-Yourself (DIY) trends related to the home, discuss crafts, and feminist spaces that have appeared in contemporary art, and pay some attention to the pejorative reality of the home in many artworks. (Perry has a chapter on “Broken Homes,” and Racz has one titled “Ruins.”) However, the negative home is an incidental topic for both authors, and closer scrutiny of artistic works about domestic violence, dysfunctional homes, the home in exile, and similar houses in transitional or degraded circumstances would be useful. Both include some discussions of women artists. Perry mentions *Womanhouse*, the 1972 massive temporary installation in Los Angeles, organized by American artists Judy Chicago and Miriam

Schapiro and their students at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) Feminist Art Project, and Racz has a chapter on it; otherwise, there is limited attention given to feminist space. Perry and Racz both excavate the house and home as a significant microcosm of contemporary culture and fill existing gaps.

Although *Playing at Home* is better illustrated, with just 18 halftone illustrations, *Art and the Home* is scholarly but accessible. Both are optimal books for an undergraduate course on the home in contemporary art or for the reader attentive to domesticity in contemporary art. •

Anne Swartz is a Professor of Art History at the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD). Her latest project is developing a book on the home in contemporary feminist art.

The Silence of the Women: Bamana Mud Cloths

By Sarah C. Brett-Smith
5 Continents Editions, 2014

Reviewed by Kate Ezra

Mud cloth, or *bògòlanfini*, is a type of dyed cotton textile with distinctive linear and geometric patterns contrasting deep brown with either white or ochre tones. It was originally made by women, and some men, among the Bamana people of Mali, West Africa. In the form of adapted, modernized, and often mass-produced versions that have become popular as markers of Malian and pan-African identity since the 1970s, mud cloth is now just as likely to be seen in Paris and New York as it is in a rural Malian village. In *The Silence of the Women*, Sarah Brett-Smith provides an in-depth examination of Bamana mud cloth as it was made and used before these changes in production took place. Fortunately, other authors have documented the recent renaissance in mud cloth, showing

it to be a vibrant, dynamic art form that is able to respond to contemporary conditions and absorb new meanings.¹ Since the earlier mud cloths, for example Figure 1 (before 1964), were made primarily by women to use as wrapped garments for everyday and ritual use, this book contributes to our knowledge of African women’s artistry and how their art reflects women’s concerns and experiences.

The book’s title, *The Silence of the Women*, encapsulates both Brett-Smith’s thesis and the challenges she experienced in her field research, which began in 1976 and continued, off and on, until 1998. She found most Bamana women who made and used the cloths to be reluctant to speak to her about them, disavowing all but the most superficial knowledge of their designs and meaning. According to Brett-Smith, the patriarchal nature of Bamana society forces women to be silent and to hide behind a façade of ignorance, since overtly expressing their ideas would incite the jealousy, resentment, and ill will of others, both male and female, and make them potential targets of

poisoning and other occult practices. The designs on mud cloth are similarly “mute”—ambiguous and cryptic—meant to camouflage the ideas they encode. In Brett-Smith’s decoding, these patterns relate primarily to marriage and childbearing, and reveal a woman’s vulnerability in the Bamana marriage system, in which a wife lives far from her own family and surrounded by in-laws, co-wives, and co-wives’ children, all of whom may want to do her harm. Although some of the patterns, such as “Guanjo’s Time” (154), suggest positive ways that women achieve success and well-being in marriage, Brett-Smith is especially interested in those such as “Lizard’s Head” (170–76), that allude to the invisible forces women must muster to protect themselves from harm or to hurt those who threaten them.

Sorcery, occult knowledge, and the power to manipulate supernatural forces are deeply engrained in Bamana society, but so are values such as respect, cooperation, mutual support, and obligations to family and society. The Bamana have terms for these opposing tendencies, *fadenya* or “father-childness”

for the forces that compel individuals to act for their own power and benefit, and *badenya* or “mother-childness” for the forces that promote harmony and unity.² Ideally the two tendencies are balanced, but in *The Silence of the Women* Bamana life is dominated by poison, murder, infanticide, and constant fear. An ominous, paranoid tone pervades Brett-Smith’s writing, seen in phrases like “the greatest obscurity is that which walks abroad in the sun at high noon and ... the most innocuous-looking, elderly woman in the Kolokani market may be the most vengeful sorcerer” (95). Countless such dark pronouncements create a bleak and distorted portrayal of Bamana people and culture.

The Silence of the Women is divided into three parts. The first three chapters address the materials, techniques, aesthetics, and conventions of mud cloth. It is made by first immersing the cloth in an herbal dye made from specific types of leaves. This solution acts as a mordant or chemical fixative when the cloth is then painted with fermented mud. Bamana women categorize the cloths as either “white” (*kanjida*) or “red” (*basi* or *bileman*). Those used for everyday wear are called “white” because the areas not painted with mud have been bleached to remove the colored stain of the initial leaf dye. For spiritually charged “red” mud cloths, the ochre tones of the leaf dye are intentionally retained after the mud designs have been painted on.

In chapters four through six, Brett-Smith explores several constellations of motifs found on the “white” mud cloths, related to women’s experience in marriage. She carefully parses the name, cultural references, and sometimes the form of each motif; students of textiles, women’s studies, and Bamana culture will find much of interest here.

The final chapters examine “red” mud cloths, which signal that the wearer should abstain from sex, whether for ritual purposes or for occasions when blood is shed, thus releasing a potent spiritual force (*nyámà*). The author discusses patterns and colors on “red” mud cloths worn by Bamana hunters which proclaim the men’s ability to confront the *nyámà* of

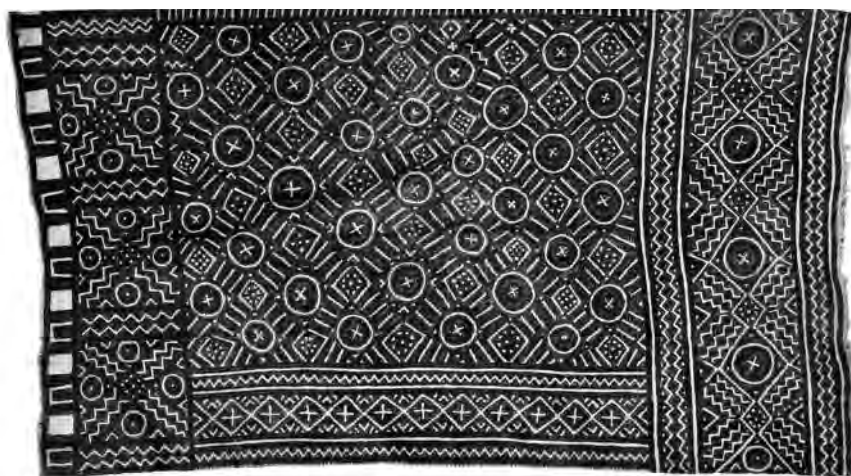


Fig. 1. Unknown Bamana artist, *Woman’s Mud Cloth* (before 1964), cotton cloth dyed with vegetable dye and mud, 31 3/4” x 58 1/4”. Paris, Musee du Quai Branly, inv. no 71.1964.0.2 X Af.

animals and the bush. Prior to the 1960s and 1970s, a woman wore the “red” cloths on the occasions of first menstruation, excision, loss of virginity in marriage, and childbirth. These cloths become filled with *nyámà* by absorbing her blood and sweat and by contact with her genitals, thus becoming powerful ritual objects that can be used in occult practices. The two patterns found on women’s “red” mud cloth, *N’Gale* and *Basiae*, are shown to incorporate references to moral behavior, fertility, marriage, childbirth, and supernatural protection.

Brett-Smith’s analysis of mud cloth is rooted in her deep and far-ranging understanding of Bamana language and culture, gained through her countless interviews with both women and men. She makes clear that the interpretations she presents are her own syntheses and hypotheses (128–30). Nevertheless, it is troubling to read, over and over, that the women who made and wore the cloths may not have been aware of the meanings Brett-Smith attributes to them. Although her goal is to compensate for their silence, many of the interpretations she proposes go beyond the evidence she provides. In one example, she interprets the horizontal stripes that characterize the *N’Gale* pattern as abstract representations of female genitals, based upon the information provided by a single informant, a woman from the Mianka ethnic group, not the Bamana (230–32). In another example, Brett-Smith

describes the practice, used in the early twentieth century, of leaving a slight space between each stroke of dark mud, calling it a “shadow.” She then explores the many meanings associated with the Bamana word for shadow (*ja*), including one aspect of a person’s spiritual essence, and connects this practice with the occult (91–95). Since the word “shadow” was not suggested by her Bamana informants, its use as the basis for further interpretation seems unjustified.

Brett-Smith’s underlying goal of reconstructing a “pure” version of mud cloth untainted by modernity is also problematic. Given that major changes were ongoing for more than a century in the way it was made, marketed, and imbued with meaning, one might question whether such an ideal reconstruction is even possible. To do so would require a much more thorough and careful use of historical documents than is presented here. She could have looked more closely at mud cloths in museum collections and made better use of information in the early literature about the Bamana. Her historical reconstructions beg for stronger proof. One of the book’s major claims is that the underlying gridlike structure of many mud cloths stems from Islamic sources, but the visual and documentary evidence offered is not convincing (102–12). Elsewhere she states that *Basiae* designs go back at least to the mid-nineteenth century, but provides no evidence at all (239).

The Silence of the Women contributes to the literature on Bamana art and culture, especially in its examination of the use and meaning of the spiritually charged “red” cloths worn by men and women, and in the connections it draws between mud cloth designs and the experience of Bamana women in marriage. However, because of its often negative views of Bamana culture and many questionably supported interpretations, it should not be the sole source of information on either mud cloth or Bamana women’s lives. •

Kate Ezra is the author of *A Human Ideal in African Art: Bamana Figurative Sculpture* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of African Art and Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986) and several articles on Bamana art.

Notes

1. Tavy D. Aherne, *Nakunte Diarra: Bògòlanfini Artist of the Beledougou* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Art Museum, 1992); Pauline Duponchel, *Textiles Bògòlan du Mali* (Neuchâtel: Musée d’Ethnographie, 2004); Pascal James Imperato, *African Mud Cloth: The*

Bogolanfini Art Tradition of Gnèli Traoré (Tenafly, NJ: The African Art Museum of the S.M.A. Fathers and Manhassat, NY: Kilima House Publishers, 2006); Victoria L. Rovine, *Bogolan: Shaping Culture Through Cloth in Contemporary Mali* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 2008).

2. Charles S. Bird and Martha B. Kendall, “The Mande Hero—Text and Context,” in *Explorations in African Systems of Thought*, eds. Charles S. Bird and Ivan Karp (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1980), 13–26.



Fig. 1. Elisabeth Frink, *Riace Warriors* (1986–89), bronze, H 83”–99”.

Elisabeth Frink: Catalogue Raisonné of Sculpture 1947–93

Edited by Annette Ratuszniak, with contributions by Leo A. Daly, Arie Hartog, Michael Morpurgo and Julian Spalding
Lund Humphries, 2013

Reviewed by Julie L’Enfant

Henry James famously said that the work of the novelist was to create the sense of “felt life.” In this catalogue raisonné, essays by Julian Spalding, former curator of the Glasgow

Museums, and Arie Hartog, director of the Gerhard-Marcks-Haus in Bremen, argue that it is the “living presence” of Frink’s sculpture—a consciousness embodied in bronze very like James’s “felt life”—that made her both popular with the public and, at the same time, largely irrelevant to the art establishment in her native Britain.

Elisabeth Frink (1930–94) was a figural sculptor who came of age in the 1950s, becoming as well known for her generous personality and her life as the doyenne of Woolland, a country house and studio in rural Dorset, as for her accessible sculpture, drawings, and

prints. She began her career in London at the Chelsea School of Art, where she studied with Bernard Meadows, under whose influence she began to work in plaster for casting in bronze. It was not an academic approach, with preparatory drawings and clay models; nor did she use the “direct carving” of earlier twentieth-century modernists. Rather she piled wet plaster on an armature, building it up, then scaling it back with an array of chisels, hammers, and other tools. The resulting twisted, tortured forms (mainly birds and sinister bird-men) echoed Surrealist forms and reflected the existentialism of postwar Paris. (In early photographs Frink looks appropriately sullen.) For a time she was grouped with Meadows, Kenneth Armitage, Lynn Chadwick, and Reginald Butler, the successors to Henry Moore.

Yet she would never be an insider. After early attention from the British Council and the Tate, she was sidelined by the London art world as it converted to new ideas from America, namely Clement Greenberg’s theory of abstraction as historical imperative. But Frink persisted with the figure. Not that she was alone: Arie Hartog’s essay, “Towards a Modern Art History of the Figure: Observations on Elisabeth Frink,” places her in a significant contemporary figural tradition that includes Alberto Giacometti, Germaine Richier, Marino Marini, Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, and numerous other postwar European artists. But Frink was unique in being a female sculptor who focused almost exclusively on figures of males.

Her work had its roots in World War II. She was nine when it started. Her much adored father was a soldier and often absent. Living in rural Surrey, she had direct experience of bombing raids and other horrors of war. At fifteen, she saw the first newsreels about the opening of the concentration camps. Some particular experiences left her with horrible anxiety, but her work, she said, discharged it. One is reminded of Louise Bourgeois, although (unlike Bourgeois) Frink never revealed her secret traumas to the public.

Frink's *First Man* (1954), a direct response to Rodin's *Age of Bronze* (ca. 1876), shows her absorption of his influence. Her version, however, is ambiguous and anti-heroic. Whereas Rodin's seminal figure of manhood is posed to hoist a spear with one hand and cradle his head with the other (probably to protect a wound)—and thus to display his beautiful form—Frink's first man, with his barrel chest and spindly calves, seems inchoate, homely; he scratches his head in puzzlement. Yet he's also filled with wonderment, his chest swelling with breath. The nude male figure, as Julius Spalding remarks in his catalogue essay, "Frink: Catching the Nature of Life," would become "the essence of her sculptural statement" (14). Frink had nothing against the female figure, she often explained: it simply did not give her the material for what she wanted to say.

Frink was so out of step in London by 1967 that she moved to the Cévennes forest in the south of France, where she lived until 1974. There she did her first truly personal work, the Goggle Heads (1969), a series of four larger-than-life heads whose eyes are obscured by sunglasses. Inspired by photographs of the notorious General Mohammed Oufkir of Morocco, the Goggle Heads were taken by critics as a cartoonlike depiction of brutality. Herein is seen an ongoing problem for Frink: critics tended to find her figures mere stereotypes, whereas her intention was to use stereotypes in a way that exposed their simple-mindedness. The Goggle Heads are brutal, but also strangely vulnerable. A series allowed her to create four individuals, each with subtle

differences in features and expression, to subvert the very notion of a stereotype. The carefully nuanced surfaces (always done herself, without assistants) also brought a sense of inner life.

A consummate country-woman, Frink also sculpted animals, particularly horses and dogs. The *Horse and Rider* (1974), for example, to be seen in front of Trafalgar House, London, is a thought-provoking contrast to traditional equestrian sculptures that show man as master of beast. (Seeing Verrochio's late fifteenth-century *Bartolommeo Colleoni* in Venice was one of the catalysts in Frink's process of becoming an artist.) Humans need animals, according to Frink, who was deeply involved in humanitarian causes, including a charity called Farms for City Children. *Horse and Rider* exists as a unit, each head turned slightly (one of her techniques for embodying being rather than acting).

Frink made her strongest humanist statements with her walking, running, or sitting men. As Spalding points out, there is an emotional trajectory in her work from brutality and woundedness to wholeness. Her later figures seem elemental but also evoke the primitive and the classical past. Although her Riace Warriors (1986–89; Fig. 1) were inspired by the fifth-century B.C. Riace Bronzes discovered off the coast of Italy in 1972, hers are thoroughly modern, and her own. Their faces are painted white, like masks. (Late in her career Frink started to use color in her sculptures.) They are fully charged, on the alert, and they seem to advance across the land. As is typical with Frink's series, they are superficially alike, yet each is himself. They have large eyes, broad shoulders, and graceful mesomorphic bodies. It was often remarked that these mature sculptures looked like Frink herself, who was vigorous (she swam forty laps every morning). Although it is not always evident in photographs, the beauty in her strong features, long chin, and thick aureole of hair was often remarked upon. Given this resemblance to her male figures, Frink was obliged to insist that she was not androgynous, but it is tempting to think that her men are

not so much "male" as "men" in the old sense of humanity as a whole. They radiate her deeply felt sense of the power that resides in the here and now of physical life. Her earliest figures were *l'informe*, in the mode of Jean Fautrier or Jean Dubuffet; the later figures are fully present beings.

There is a spiritual dimension to Frink's work. Raised a Catholic, she became disillusioned with the Church but never faltered in her belief in the spirit. A number of commissions were for churches. With symbolism befitting a novel, Frink's last work, as she was dying of esophageal cancer attributed to smoking and the use of toxic materials, was a monumental *Risen Christ* (1992) for Liverpool Cathedral, characteristically firm-bodied, with large, intense eyes attesting to the reality of eternal life.

This catalogue raisonné is a fine monument to Frink's work as a sculptor. Edited by Annette Ratuszniak, curator of the Frink Estate and author of several books on British sculpture, it fully documents Frink's work, drawing on new information from the estate's collections and archives as well as the previous publications on Frink, including two earlier catalogues raisonnés (1984 and 1994). This volume has photographs of all 402 of Frink's sculptural works, many in color and some from more than one point of view. Entries for each work include collections, exhibitions, and literature. Exhaustive lists of exhibitions, public collections, and major commissions show how Frink, who served as her own business manager, succeeded in getting her work seen and bought, not only in Britain but also, to a lesser extent, abroad.

The volume includes a short story dramatizing Frink's uplifting effect on young people by her long-time friend Michael Morpurgo, the well-known children's book writer. (He is the author of *The War Horse*, the basis for the recent play and film, also the subject of Frink's penultimate work of sculpture). Another old friend, Leo A. Daly III, contributed an essay on the pleasures of creating a private garden of her work.

Also the subject of a number of books, including an invaluable collection of

interviews edited by Edward Lucie-Smith (1994), and an official biography by Stephen Gardiner (1998), Elisabeth Frink is a powerful figure, inspiring not only for her meaningful work but also for her independence, refusal to see herself as a victim, and dignified reticence about what was at times a

turbulent personal life. She is not as well known outside of Britain as she should be. Sadly, this volume, priced at \$200 in the United States, is not likely to advance her reputation here. Much more remains to be written about this artist who succeeded so well in bringing sculpture to life. •

Julie L'Enfant, formerly professor of art history at the College of Visual Arts in St. Paul, is the author of *Pioneer Modernists: Early Women Artists in Minnesota* (Afton Press, 2011), among other books.

Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo in Detroit

Essays by Mark Rosenthal, *et al.*
Detroit Institute of Arts and
Yale University Press, 2015

Frida Kahlo's Garden

Edited by Adriana Zavala, Mia D'Avanza and Joanna L. Groarke
Delmonico Books/Prestel for The New York Botanical Garden, 2015

Reviewed by Ellen G. Landau

The number of books published about Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (1907–54) is extensive, to say the least. So, what new information or nuance can possibly be added at this point? Could there be anything meaningful to say that hasn't already been touched upon innumerable times? Two recent publications, each associated with a 2015 exhibition, have made an admirable attempt to add to our knowledge of Kahlo's inexorably intertwined art and life, trying either to broaden or deepen interpretation of aspects we think we already understand.

The ambitious project undertaken by the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA)—locale of *Detroit Industry*, arguably Diego Rivera's best in situ mural, as well as one of the direst episodes in Kahlo's often-calamitous personal life—takes a specific look at events and art created throughout the period that the couple spent in that city. During this time (April 21, 1932 to March 14, 1933) the avowedly Communist muralist completed a paid commission for the archetypical capitalist Henry Ford. A number of essays in the catalogue are devoted to in-depth investigation of Rivera's iconography in *Detroit Industry* with the aid of new, more intensive

examination of his full-scale cartoons, also owned by the DIA. John Dean describes the role of Edsel Ford, Henry's son, in making this mural happen, and Linda Downs sheds light on the impact of Rivera's relationship with DIA director, William R. Valentiner.

As previous authors have described, Kahlo was much less enthusiastic than her husband about the United States. Juan Rafael Coronel Rivera, Diego's grandson, writes in the DIA catalogue that she had already experienced New York City in a negative way, so a city like Detroit, focused as it was on the lucrative automobile business, only confirmed her distaste for the American way of life, exacerbating her homesickness (*Detroit*, 138). Moreover, Kahlo was at this time particularly fragile, both physically and emotionally; two months expectant upon arrival, she was in a troubled psychological state over whether to continue her pregnancy. Kahlo's previous inability to carry a baby to term as a result of her childhood polio, congenital scoliosis, and the now-famous trolley accident where a pole impaled her vagina, had led to an abortion in Mexico.

The lead author of *Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo in Detroit*, curator Mark Rosenthal, and essayist Salomon Grimberg, a psychoanalyst and well-known Kahlo specialist, each highlight the critical importance for her work at that time (as well as for the direction of her subsequent career) of what is typically characterized as the miscarriage Kahlo suffered at Detroit's Henry Ford Hospital on July 4th, 1932. Kahlo often described this experience in ways suggesting that's what had happened, both verbally and in a well-known surrealist painting depicting herself lying in a hospital bed tethered to anatomical models and her fetus,

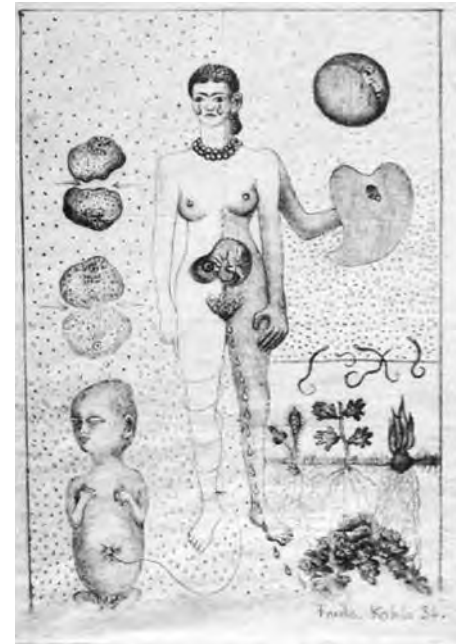


Fig. 1. Frida Kahlo, *Frida and the Abortion* (1932), lithograph, 12 3/8" x 9 1/2". Private collection.

among other related symbolic objects. Included in a recently released set of letters Kahlo wrote to Dr. Leo Eloesser, her physician in San Francisco (the Riveras had been on the road for much of their two and a half year marriage), is one that clearly discloses the loss of this male child in Detroit as the result of another abortion. Her Detroit termination was induced with quinine and mineral oil prescribed by a local obstetrician at Kahlo's own request.¹ This particular letter, however, was apparently previously obtained by biographer Hayden Herrera, who published it in 1983.² Nonetheless, most authors including Mia D'Avanza in *Frida Kahlo's Garden* (*Garden*, 66) continue to refer to a print Kahlo also made in response to this experience as *Frida and the Miscarriage*. In this lithograph (1932; Fig. 1), based on

anatomy illustrations she asked to study during her hospital convalescence, Frida depicted her standing pregnant self in tears, with blood or vaginal fluid dripping from her pubic area inseminating the earth to her left. Another much larger fetus, preparatory to the one in *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932), is attached to the right side of her body via an umbilical string coiled around her leg, and a supplemental left arm terminates in a palette displayed in a third hand. Rosenthal (*Detroit*, 18) and Grimberg (*Detroit*, 148) are adamant that *Frida and the Abortion* is a more accurate title for this work, the iconography of which is so clearly prescient of Kahlo's immediate and future artistic developments.

The articulated premise of the DIA exhibition and catalogue involves demonstrating that—for both Rivera and Kahlo—the varying aspects of their respective Detroit experiences constituted a critical turning point for each. Although there, and throughout their reciprocal careers, his fame was gained as an epic historical muralist while she produced, by contrast, mostly intimate self-reflections, as Rosenthal points out, these dual tracks were experienced in Detroit as simultaneous (*Detroit*, 7). While Diego was enabled to incubate new subjects on the walls of the DIA (one of which, seen in the mural section's *Infant in the Bulb of a Plant* and *Vaccination*, was surely based on his unborn son), Frida, focusing on her physical pain and ambivalence about motherhood, began to formulate the parameters of a very different (and now considered even more wildly successful) artistic career. Her demonstrated contempt for the American scene contributed to the binary approach seen in such works of the Detroit period as *Frida and the Abortion* (fetus vs. palette/mother vs. artist) or, in the more politically inflected yet still very personal *Self-Portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States*. In this small but powerful 1932 composition Kahlo juxtaposes Mexican myth against modern progressive machine aesthetics for a dissimilar, seemingly much less utopian purpose than is seen in her husband's Detroit iconography. While Diego was

the more obvious social engineer, as Rosenthal explains, Frida's obsessive representation of her own bodily pain does double duty as a metonym for Mexico seen in light of colonialism's legacy.

Extensive use of contemporary interviews, letters in a variety of private collections (including the Archivo Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo, Banco de Mexico), and the Linda Downs Research Materials in the DIA Research Library and Archives enabled the various authors included in *Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo in Detroit* to provide a more comprehensive look at an identifiable, and it turns out, important interlude for both its protagonists. Helping to round out this very useful examination are many interesting photographs of the artists taken during the Detroit period, mostly from Kahlo's collection of over 6000 images.

Such photographs are also used to S excellent effect, likewise providing a richer visual context, in *Frida Kahlo's Garden*. In this handsome catalogue from the New York Botanical Garden exhibition, curator Adriana Zavala, an Associate Professor of Latin American art history at Tufts University, trains a particular lens on how Frida and Diego fashioned the diverse garden at their home in the Mexico City suburb of Coyoacán. Setting tropical and desert plants alongside pre-Hispanic sculpture, folk art, and a menagerie of pets, they produced “a unique and intense way of expressing their Mexican identity” (*Garden*, 13). Casa Azul, originally purchased by Guillermo Kahlo, Frida's father, and her primary residence from 1939 to 1954, has been highlighted in previous publications, including (in English) *The Blue House: The World of Frida Kahlo*, edited by Erika Billeter for a 1993 exhibition co-organized by the Museum of Fine Arts Houston. But Zavala and her co-authors direct a fresh spotlight on how the Casa Azul gardens,³ as well as Kahlo's many related paintings featuring plants, flowers, and fruit, served to update the complex allegorical (frequently sexual and nationalistic) connotations of this genre, interpreted originally by the seventeenth to nineteenth century

Spanish and Mexican artists Kahlo admired. Given her own emotional and medical history, her quoted comment, “I paint flowers so that they will not die,” seems to take on an extra level of personal meaning.⁴

A particularly stunning inclusion in *Frida Kahlo's Garden* is a set of 1939 photographs of Frida posing amidst her outdoor plants created using a three-color carbro process by Nickolas Muray, one of her important lovers. These further clarify how replanting her garden became another, interconnected way—in addition to her Tehuana clothing—to express the concept of *Méxicanidad*, so foundational for her art and Diego's.⁵ As Coronel Rivera points out in another essay here, signifying an expressive political break with the Porfirian era, the Riveras hypothesized a mestizo park at Casa Azul mixing Spanish and indigenous traditions to create “A Nahuatl Garden of Delights” (*Garden*, 49). Such a landscape style, Coronel Rivera explains, was more attuned to the modernist aesthetic promoted by the post-revolutionary government (*Garden*, 52). At the same time, especially after the 1941 construction of a garden pyramid that foreshadows Anahuacalli, Rivera's later museum structure built to display his vast collection of Pre-Columbian artifacts, the couple's deeply felt connection to ancient Mexican mythology is also demonstrably present.

The garden at Casa Azul, Robert Bye and Edelmira Linares maintain, surely offered Kahlo “a pleasant distraction” (*Garden*, 108) during times of emotional and bodily pain as well as a crucial source for her emblematic and expressive still life paintings. At the same time, seen especially in the backgrounds of her many disconcerting self-portraits (*Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* of 1940 is in the show), the conversion of her father's European-style courtyard into an eclectic jungle of Mexican plants, animals, and cultural artifacts reflects “the interdependence of [Frida Kahlo's] physical condition, creativity and spiritual essence with nature's cruelty and beauty—an intimate connection that continues to intrigue us today” (*Garden*, 105).

Ellen G. Landau is Andrew W. Mellon Professor Emerita in the Humanities, Case Western Reserve University. She is the author of *Jackson Pollock* (1989); *Lee Krasner: A Catalogue Raisonné* (1995); *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique* (2005); and *Mexico and American Modernism* (2013). •

Notes

1. See Javier Espinoza, "Frida Kahlo's Last Secret Revealed," *The Guardian*, August

11, 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/aug/12/artnews.art>

2. Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (NY: Harper & Row, 1983), 138.
3. Joanna Groarke documents the evolution of the Casa Azul in a photographic essay and Kathryn O'Rourke provides additional context through comparison with the gardens and landscapes of Frida Kahlo's Mexico City. Karen Daubmann explains how Frida's garden was reconstructed in New York.

4. Quoted by Zavala, 22, from Salomon Grimberg, *Frida Kahlo: The Still Lifes* (London: Merrell, 2008), 11.
5. See Ellen G. Landau, "Performing the Self and the Other: Portraits and Self-Portraits by Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo," *Crónicas: El Muralismo, Producto de la Revolución Mexicana, en América* (March 2002/Feb. 2003) 15-34; <http://www.revistas.unam.mx/index.php/cronicas/articulo/view/17266>.

Sophie Taeuber-Arp— Today Is Tomorrow

Edited by Thomas Schmutz and
Friedrich Meschede
Scheidegger & Spiess Publications, 2015

Reviewed by Anja Baumhoff

The multi-disciplinary artist Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889–1943) was recently honored with an exhibition that took place in Aargau, Switzerland, before it moved to Germany, where it was shown in Bielefeld.¹ The curators, Thomas Schmutz and Rahel Beyerle, put three hundred works on display. On the German side, the Bielefeld museum contrasted some of her works with those of Sonia Delaunay (1885–1979), her friend and contemporary, although the catalogue does not document that. Madeleine Schuppli, Director of the Kunsthau Aargau, and Friedrich Meschede, Director of the Kunsthalle Bielefeld, in their joint preface, mention that although "Textile Designs were first seen as independent artworks through the achievements of the Bauhaus" (9), the historical Bauhaus never intended to raise the stature of textile design to match that of fine arts. Textiles had the lowest status of all the Bauhaus workshops, and the school hardly promoted this department, so that today few people associate the Bauhaus with textiles but rather with architecture and product design.

Thomas Schmutz explains in his introduction that the aim of the exhibition was to show Taeuber-Arp's aesthetic position and the techniques connected to it (13). Clearly, her trans-

disciplinary work in the realms of arts and crafts, fine art, architecture, and sculpture as well as modern dance has lost none of its fascination. Yet, as Rudolf Suter explains, we still see Taeuber-Arp through the eyes of her congenial partner and husband, Hans Arp, who liked to describe her as a dreamer and as a woman who worked mostly from intuition (255). Contrary to this, Suter observes that Taeuber-Arp constructed her art carefully and purposefully. Many of her works are based on a calculated conception, he claims, consisting of many different layers that may not be visible at first glance. He rightly criticizes that her husband "eulogized his deceased wife as an angelic being" and a fairy-tale creature (255), and, Suter argues, too many art historians have taken Hans Arp as a reliable source instead of critically evaluating his pronouncements (257). The translation of Suter's text entails a strange twist. Hinting at possible rifts in the story of this idealized marriage, Suter argues in the German version of the catalogue that Arp was afraid of his wife's critical judgment of his own work. But this in turn gets translated as "Arp's anxiety about the critical perception of Sophie Taeuber-Arp," which is an entirely different thing. In the end both interpretations might be true, but it is interesting that Suter questions the all too glorious image Hans Arp gave about themselves as a couple, and the translation smoothed it over, just as art historians have done for many years (256). Progress, it seems, is sometimes hard to achieve.

The collaborative essay by art historians Sigrid Schade, Medea Hoch,

and Walburga Krupp deals with an interesting research project at the Institute for Cultural Studies in the Arts, at Zurich University of the Arts. The library purchased 445 of Sophie Taeuber-Arp's letters, dating from around 1905 to 1942, which are scheduled to appear in print later this year. Mostly letters to her sister or husband, they read like fragments of an autobiography (259). This project could potentially challenge further Arp's all too bright interpretation of their marriage.

The authors may be jumping to conclusions too quickly when they state that:

What is interesting in this context is that in artists' own legitimization of abstract pictorial design, references to arts-and-crafts and applied arts played a central role, but the consequences of this were different for women and male artists. Men were celebrated as avant-garde and pioneers of abstraction in the high arts, while the women were ascribed a supporting role and their occupation with arts-and-crafts was presented as traditionally "feminine" production (259).

Generally, this is true. However, the authors' examples, Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, illustrate that men were not that easily "celebrated as avant-garde and pioneers of abstraction" but were sharing the danger of being marginalized should they dare to venture into arts and crafts. During their years in Munich, both

artists were criticized for being feminine and too craft oriented. Kandinsky's glass paintings and Klee's small formats were mocked as "decorative." For both male and female artists, the territory of arts and crafts was a dangerous one, as this sphere seemed to be mutually exclusive with that of fine art. This makes Sophie Taeuber-Arp's work all the more courageous. She was not impressed by these demarcations and ventured freely between the disciplines, focusing mainly on her work and little on the reviews she might get. She was an independent spirit as proved by her artwork, which seems timeless and has lost nothing of its attraction.

In "The Line in Focus," Rahel Beyerle analyzes Taeuber-Arp's work in the context of some contemporary colleagues, including Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg (252). Her essay culminates by stating that Taeuber-Arp

presented neither free, spontaneous lines, nor purely calculated ones. Taeuber-Arp positions the viewer between the poles of abstraction and empathy, synthesizes the logical-rational and instinctive-irrational, without having to explain it (254).

Maïke Steinkamp's essay discusses the magazine *plastique*, which first appeared in spring of 1937, with Taeuber-Arp as its main editor. "As an international forum for abstract-concrete art, it was meant to contribute to better networking among the movement's proponents" (233). While she and Hans knew many of the people who were involved in this project (237) the frame of the periodical was much broader. "The magazine not only brought together art scenes in New York and Paris, but also simultaneously offered a forum for those artists in Europe persecuted by national socialism and fascism" (238). On a more personal level, Taeuber-Arp used it to gain publicity for her ideas and her art. The journal ended in 1939, after only five editions, when the couple was forced to flee to southern France. Taeuber-Arp hoped to continue the journal together with Max Bill in Switzerland, but her

tragic death (from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning) made this impossible.

The architect Brigitte Maier looks differently at Taeuber-Arp, focusing not only on the artist but also on the designer and architect. In her essay, "In the Bedlam of the Avant-garde," she points out that 1929 was a decisive year for Taeuber-Arp, as she decided to leave her teaching job in Zurich and go freelance. Between 1926 and 1935 Taeuber-Arp worked as an architect, not only at the famous Aubette in Strasbourg, where she contributed to the interior design of the café, but at several other projects in Paris, Basel, and Berlin (240). More information about these projects would have been welcome. But the essay is mainly about her social relations and her influence on exhibitions, like the 1937 Constructivist exhibit in Basel, where she displayed more works than Moholy-Nagy, Mondrian, van Doesburg, or Georges Vantongerloo. Maier explains some of the difficulties in researching what exactly was on display, and these remarks are insightful. Taeuber-Arp sold well during this exhibit even though she was still seen as a craftswoman and hardly counted as a fine artist (245). Critics at the time thought it impossible that she would venture from arts and crafts, where she was well known. Also, while women were widely accepted in that field, it was not expected that a woman could succeed in the fine arts (245).

Sarah Burkhalter writes about dance in the art of Sophie Taeuber-Arp, and it seems that the impact of modern dance (Fig. 1) on her work has not received enough attention. After 1916 Taeuber-Arp explored the possibilities Rudolf Laban offered and also worked with Mary Wigman, two of the pioneers of German modern dance. Her dances excited the Zurich Dadaists, among them Hugo Ball, who especially liked "the connection of a clear choreographic structure with an engaged interpretation" (229). Burkhalter concludes that, "in the light of the terminology of [the art historian] Aby Warburg to define the relicts of the 'pathosformel' in European art, the

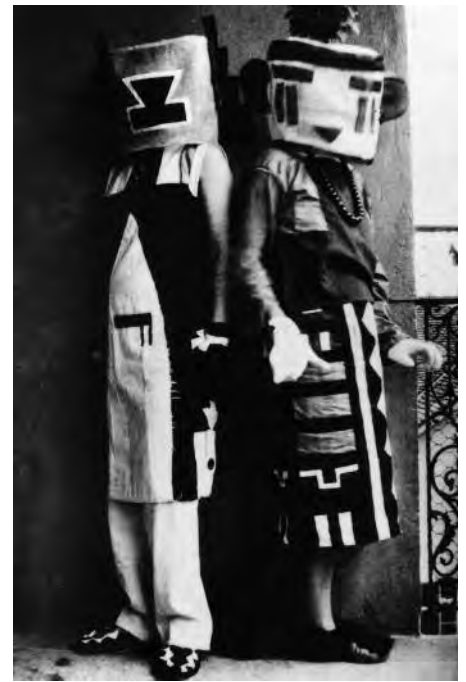


Fig. 1. Erika and Sophie Taeuber-Arp in costumes "Hopi-Indian" designed by Sophie Taeuber-Arp (ca. 1922).

experienced movement can be viewed as an actuality that runs through Taeuber-Arp's entire work like a dynamogram" (231).

Walburga Krupp portrays Taeuber-Arp as a pioneer of abstract art, placing her next to Mondrian and Kazimir Malevich (217). (This again is based on a 1955 statement made by Hans Arp.) Later, Krupp compares her to Johannes Itten and Paul Klee (218) and concludes by stating that Taeuber-Arp focused on the "elementary, regardless of whether the application follows as abstracted figuration in the applied arts or abstraction in the fine arts" (225).

Medea Hoch, writing here about the interdisciplinary quality in the work of Taeuber-Arp, explains some of the intricacies connected to her estate and its later reception. Her textile works were marginalized, she argues, because her husband feared they might diminish her status as an artist. Hoch depicts her as a "pioneer of constructivist art. It appears that due to her arts-and-crafts practice, she developed new abstract forms in a more self-evident and radical way than most of her artist colleagues" (215). And Hoch concludes: "Locating

Sophie Taeuber-Arp's genre crossing pioneer work within the cataloging of art history shows that even to the present day, it is hardly obvious that 'technical and medial developments have offered the decisive impulses to abstraction'" (216). Here Hoch relies on a reference that is twenty years old. Already Walter Benjamin mentioned the impact photography had on the fine arts and one might wonder if a broad statement like this holds true.

The catalogue has a spacious layout with many high-quality reproductions. It includes a short biography of Sophie Taeuber-Arp and a list of her exhibitions with their respective publications. The bibliography further entails her own

writings, monographs of her work, as well as the available secondary literature. The catalogue can be recommended without hesitation.

This catalogue demonstrates the breadth of Sophie Taeuber-Arp's oeuvre, which is exceptional and needs to be recognized more widely. It includes not only architecture but also interior design. Other artifacts could come directly from the Bauhaus but were designed a few years later (1922–25) while in France, where she lived most of the time after the mid-1920s.

The idea of the Kunsthalle Bielefeld to show works by Taeuber-Arp together with some of Sonia Delaunay's demonstrates how close these women were in

parts of their work, and although this material was not included in the catalogue, it would be fascinating to carry this further for a more detailed and broad comparison of their respective art. •

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Notes

1. The exhibition was presented at Kunsthau Aaragu, Aug. 23 – Nov. 16, 2014, and at Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Dec. 12, 2014 – Mar. 15, 2015.

Émilie Charmy

Edited by Matthew Affron, essays by Sarah Betzer and Rita Felski
The Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia, 2013

Reviewed by Lauren Jimerson

With a loaded brush and vivid palette, the French artist Émilie Charmy (1878–1974) painted striking landscapes, still lifes, portraits, and nudes during the first seven decades of the twentieth century. From provincial origins, Charmy launched her career in Paris, became aligned with the Fauves before the First World War, and gained considerable renown during the interwar period. Critics acclaimed her work, noting, in particular, the sensual quality of her nudes. Her bold and subversive depictions of the body are still impactful today. In 1926 Charmy was awarded Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, then promoted to officer twelve years later. She was a member of FAM (Femmes Artistes Modernes), the woman's exhibiting society in France.

Charmy's first United States retrospective, at the Fralin Museum at the University of Virginia (UVA) and the Arts Club of Chicago, is documented in this excellent catalogue. (Her work was last seen in the U.S. in the legendary

Armory Show, a century ago.) On view were Charmy's most notable works, many of which were on loan from private collections. Well-researched, eloquent catalogue essays by three scholars from diverse fields highlight different aspects of Charmy's art.

Matthew Affron, a modernist (formerly at UVA), provides in-depth contextual analysis of Charmy's life and art. Tracing her career from its

beginnings in Lyon under the mentorship of the artist Jacques Martin, he documents Charmy's move to Paris in 1903, relationship with the gallerist Berthe Weill, growing prominence during the interwar period, and later years as she continued painting into her nineties. Affron covers her exhibition history and critical reception, threading this with lucid analyses of her work.

Charmy employed models but also



Fig. 1. Émilie Charmy, *Nude on Red Sofa* (ca. 1925), oil on canvas, 25 5/8" x 31 1/2". Collection of Pamela K. and William A. Royall, Jr

did nude self-portraits, and early on, her daring approach to the body was evident. *The Salon* (1900), for example, depicts nine nude females, some wearing stockings, in an interior that could be either a bourgeois living room or a brothel. “[T]hat Charmy, as a young female artist working in a provincial city, would have chosen to make a major statement using the image of the prostitute is remarkable,” writes Affron (18). She continued to push the boundaries of propriety during the 1910s and 1920s. Erotic works like *Nude on Red Sofa* (ca. 1925; Fig. 1) have not lost their capacity to shock. Painted in a sensual and provocative manner, using luscious brushwork and striking applications of color, these paintings are both visual and tactile representations of the body. Affron aptly describes the haptic nature of her work, saying, “Charmy’s overarching concern in painting the nude is the bond between seeing and feeling” (28). In discussing the predominant role that gender played in Charmy’s career and critical reception, he notes that “the language of gender would be used repeatedly to define the qualities of Charmy’s work and to situate it in a system of aesthetic values” (30). Charmy approached the

body without reserve, and critics viewed this as masculine. Like other critics of the time, Roland Dorgèles was struck by the daring boldness of her work—deemed uncharacteristic for a female painter—writing, “Charmy, it appears, sees like a woman and paints like a man” (31).¹

Sarah Betzer, an art historian at UVA specializing in eighteenth and nineteenth century art, offers a close analysis of *The Salon* in her essay, situating the painting between the tradition of the rococo interior, as seen in works by Boucher and Fragonard, and the realm of the modern nude, such as Manet’s *Olympia* (1863). Charmy would have seen Manet’s nudes at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1900. Like him, she created *The Salon* as a picture of ambition that disrupts convention; hers defies categorization by genre. Betzer describes *The Salon* as “an extraordinary picture, less for the obvious fact that it was painted by a woman than for the remarkable combinations wrought by Charmy, who here brings into contact the domestic interior, the artist’s studio, and an army of naked women suggestive of a brothel” (53).

Finally, Rita Felski, an English professor at UVA, explores possible frameworks within feminist theory for better

understanding Charmy’s work. Insistent that Charmy’s art should not be reducible to her gender, Felski suggests other ways of seeing and analyzing her paintings, such as the “phenomenology of viewing” (63).

With high-quality color images of Charmy’s paintings, cogent art historical analysis of the work, and biographical information and photographs of the artist, this publication serves as a vital resource and invites further study of Charmy’s compelling oeuvre. Each essay tactfully negotiates issues of gender in relation to the work, while also looking beyond it. *Émilie Charmy* provides a salient example of how we might examine the work of other modern women artists of the early twentieth century. •

Lauren Jimerson, is a doctoral candidate at Rutgers University and a Fulbright Scholar in France. Her dissertation concerns women artists in early 20th-century Paris and their representations of the nude.

Notes

1. Émilie Charmy, *Toiles*, Galeries d’Oeuvres d’Art (1921), n.p. (Four authors are listed including Roland Dorgèles, so the authorship remains ambiguous.)

Women, Femininity, and Public Space in European Visual Culture, 1789-1914

Edited by Temma Balducci and Heather Belnap Jensen
Ashgate, 2014

Reviewed by Heather McPherson

This volume complements the 2011 *Interior Portraiture and Masculine Identity in France, 1789-1914*, also edited by Temma Balducci and Heather Belnap Jensen with Pamela Warner, which examined intersections of masculinity and interior spaces. Focusing on the feminine side of the ideology of separate spheres, the recent work, consisting of sixteen essays, expands the investigative field to consider European visual culture more

broadly, from the sidewalks of New York, to the late nineteenth-century illustrated press in Madrid, to the fate of women artists in fin-de-siècle Vienna. The feminine side of the binary has been re-examined over the past two decades by historians and art historians. Scholars such as Aruna D’Souza Tom McDonough, Marni Kessler, Greg Thomas, and Lynda Nead have reconsidered the question of the *flâneuse* and women’s participation in urban spaces in Paris and London (4–5). Likewise, Linda Nochlin, Griselda Pollock, and Lisa Tickner, among others, have challenged the androcentric conceptualization of modernism. The catalyst for the current volume was a session on “Women, Femininity, and Public Space” held at the 2010 CAA conference in Chicago, which helped shape the conceptual framework and

international perspective. Although a considerable body of scholarship on the depiction of women in the public sphere exists, as these essays demonstrate, the complex relationship between middle- and upper-class women and public spaces has proved stubbornly resistant to codification and offers fertile ground for revisionist investigations.

As the editors and individual authors convincingly argue, it is essential to rethink our understanding of the public sphere beyond the Habermasian model to include a broader range of liminal public spaces such as parks, cafes, museums, shops, city streets, and public transit, and to take into account the impact of commerce, the fashion discourse, and social networks (2–3). One of the volume’s strengths is its internationalism and breadth of field, encompassing art centers across Europe



Fig. 1. Jean Béraud, *Paris, rue du Havre*, (ca. 1882), oil on canvas, 13 7/8" x 10 3/4". Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Alisa Mellon Bruce Collection, Washington, D.C.

including Berlin, Vienna, Florence, Brittany, and Madrid, in addition to Paris and London, which have received far more attention in the existing literature. While the broad geographical scope makes the volume more comprehensive, it risks making it more diffuse and fragmentary due to the diversity of topics addressed. The authors also consider a wide range of non-canonical media including fashion prints, private journals, watercolors, caricatures, and architectural designs for women's housing. Together with the focus on the active participation of women in the public intellectual and cultural sphere as artists and writers shaping the art historical discourse, these materials enrich and complicate our understanding of women's agency and complex, multifaceted engagement with public spaces. Also commendable is the wide range of women artists examined, from canonical figures such as Mary Cassatt and Emily Carr to understudied figures like the Baroness Hyde de Neuville, Louise Abbéma, and Broncia Koller.

Although the essays are arranged in roughly chronological order, there are a number of recurring themes that are examined in different contexts from diverse vantage points that help unify the volume. One such subject is fashion illustration. Heather Belnap Jensen's essay considers fashion plates in relation to the maternal body in post-Revolutionary France, arguing that the domestic ideal co-existed with that of the fashionable mother. Justine De Young analyzes the cultural significance of fashion plates in mid nineteenth-century France, focusing on the development of fashion as a discourse that helped to define bourgeois ideals of femininity and attested to women's increasing independence and mobility. Another recurring theme is the urban streetscape and women's visibility and active participation in it. Laura

Auricchio's essay focuses on civic engagement through the amateur artist Baroness Hyde de Neuville's egalitarian depictions of daily life and the vernacular in New York in the early 1800s, including sympathetic images of African American workers such as her sketch of a scrubwoman (illus. plate 6). Several essays focus on the urban cityscape and depictions of women walking, highlighting their mobility and linking them with narratives of modernity. Temma Balducci's essay examines the representation of bourgeois women walking, as evidenced in Jean Béraud's late nineteenth-century cityscapes such as *Paris, rue du Havre* (ca. 1882; Fig. 1), arguing that women of all classes were omnipresent as pedestrians or riding public transit in fin-de-siècle Paris. Similarly, Vanessa Rodriguez-Galindo argues that middle-class *madrileñas* were highly visible figures in late nineteenth-century Spain; they were prominently featured in the illustrated press and played a central role in constructing modernity. Samantha Burton traces Canadian artist Emily Carr's peregrinations as an art student

in turn-of-the-century London as emblematic of modern mobility and examines the role of the boardinghouse Carr inhabited and drew as a site for social networking.

The inclusion of understudied women artists, from the copyists working at the Uffizi, to Louise Abbéma and the lesbian subculture of late nineteenth-century Paris, to the fate of Viennese artists like Broncia Koller who have been marginalized and largely erased from the historical record, is particularly welcome. The essays by Amy M. Von Lintel and Elizabeth C. Mansfield investigate the overlooked contributions of female art historians, notably Mary Margaret Heaton and Nancy Bell, who wrote for widely read popular journals, and Emilia Dilke, whose comprehensive culturally grounded studies of French art helped shape art historical discourse; these important correctives remind us of women's active participation as art historians and scholars. The concluding essay by Annalisa Zox-Weaver on Gertrude Stein's social network and multi-layered identity as a writer, collector, and active promoter of the avant-garde is a fitting coda. It brings together the strands of modern mobility, urban and sexual geographies, and female patronage and collecting, countering the tendency to underestimate the role of women in the formation of modernism and their complex negotiation between the inside and the outside and public and private spaces.

Other essays expand the purview of the volume to include topics such as salon culture, designing public housing for working women, and non-canonical source materials such as satirical journals or unpublished notes and sketches. Daniel Harkett considers how Juliette Récamier's literary salon at L'Abbaye-aux-Bois mediated between private and public spaces, serving as a platform for different political viewpoints and promoting her style and disseminating her image. Karen Leader's essay analyzes women's participation in the art world of the Second Empire and the gendered ideology of art through the lens of Salon caricatures in which women are both subjects and consumers. Julie M. Johnson's essay on the marginalization

and erasure of women artists in Vienna c. 1900 focuses on Broncia Koller's career as an example of the misreading of interiority and the ways in which separate spheres ideology has marginalized modern women artists. Erin Eckhold Sassin examines German *Ledigenheim*, the residences designed for single working women in Berlin in the early 1900s, which were home-like but also liberated women from housekeeping chores, highlighting their reformist agenda and hybrid approach to public and private spaces.

The volume is handsomely produced with twenty color plates and numerous black and white illustrations, although not all the essays are illustrated. Each essay is thoroughly documented, and there is a selected bibliography. As one would expect, the essays vary in length and approach and some are fresher and more fully developed than others. The introduction by Balducci and Jensen provides a useful overview of the shifting perspectives in feminist

scholarship, beginning with Nochlin's groundbreaking 1971 essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" The editors and the authors make a convincing case for the need to rethink the ideology of the separate spheres in order to nuance and complicate the picture of genteel women's engagement with public spaces. The individual studies address the issue from different vantage points, while reiterating the central arguments about the limitations of the public/private binary (which becomes a bit repetitive when reading through the entire volume). Both individually and collectively, the sixteen studies make a strong case for the complexities in conceptualizing the boundaries between public and private spaces in the modern era. They show the ways in which bourgeois women were challenging traditional barriers restricting their agency and participation in the public sphere by taking a closer look at their actual activities and

practices in a variety of public spaces. Although the essays focus on middle- and in a few instances upper-class women, many of these women were earning a living through their artistic or literary endeavors so they are quite broadly representative. In challenging the public/private binary the collection will undoubtedly be a catalyst for further investigation of women's engagement with the public sphere and the blurring boundaries between public and private spaces during the long nineteenth century. •

Heather McPherson is Professor of Art History at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She has published widely on nineteenth-century French art and visual culture. Her book *Art and Celebrity in the Age of Reynolds and Siddons* is forthcoming from Penn State University Press.

Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader

Edited by Maura Reilly
Thames and Hudson, 2015

Reviewed by Patricia Briggs

Perhaps the best introduction to art historical analysis on the "social construction" of the woman artist, *Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader* is also an outstanding overview of feminist art practice since the 1970s. Editor Maura Reilly opens with a substantial interview with Linda Nochlin, followed by thirty essays written by this outstanding scholar. Twenty-eight of these are culled from the hundreds of publications Nochlin has contributed to the discipline of art history over the last forty-five years, while two essays, "Ellen Altfest: A New, New Realism" and "Sophie Calle: Word, Image and the End of Ekphrasis," are published here for the first time. Precisely because Nochlin has been so prolific—she has written on subjects as varied as the art of the French Revolution, nineteenth-century Realism, Courbet, Impressionism, Post-Impres-



Fig. 1. Kiki Smith, *Lilith* (1994), silicon bronze and glass, 33" x 27 1/2" x 19". Photo: Ellen Page Wilson. Courtesy the artist and Pace Gallery.

ionism, Modernism, contemporary art, and the history of photography—this weighty 472-page volume with plentiful color illustrations is noteworthy for its concentration on the topic of women's creative expression, about which Nochlin is an acknowledged expert.

Precisely because Nochlin is such a giant in the field, it was a delight to read informal descriptions of her youth and catch glimpses of her experiences behind the scenes during the early days of the women's movement as presented in Reilly's interview, "A Dialogue with Linda Nochlin, the Maverick She." We learn that as a girl Nochlin disliked female stereotypes so much that she "poked out the eyes of Tinker Bell in an expensive illustrated edition of *Peter Pan*. [...] I hated Tinker Bell—her weakness, her sickening sweetness, her helplessness, her wispy, evanescent body—so different from my sturdy plump one" (9). Nochlin recalls that, as an undergraduate in the 1940s, her first research paper with feminist content was "about the women's magazines of the period—*Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and *The Woman's Home Companion*," where stories about Eleanor Roosevelt and Amelia Earhart suggested a leadership path for women (11).

But the fiction they offered up for female consumption told a different story: in all cases, without exception, women who pursued careers, who didn't pay full attention to husbands and children and domestic affairs, were doomed and punished (12).

About attending Vassar, which at that time was a women's college, Nochlin points out how significant it was that girls "were not pushed to the margins" but did everything from running student government, to editing the campus newspaper and building theater sets (11). She later taught the first feminist art history course at her alma mater, where she also carried out research for her first great feminist article, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists," originally published in 1970. It was sparked, she tells us, by a conversation with a prominent New York gallerist, who told

her: "'Linda, I would love to show women artists, but I can't find any good ones. Why are there no great women artists?'" (15). She also recalls, as she and Ann Sutherland Harris worked to organize the groundbreaking exhibition *Women Artists: 1550-1950* (1976), the dismissive attitudes about women's art in the period, how "[s]ome curators and directors in Europe thought we were wasting our time, as they reluctantly dragged women's works out of storage; some even laughed" (18).

Nochlin's "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," reprinted in this volume, remains an essential introduction for feminist art and art history because of its paradigm-shifting analysis of the discipline of art history and its critique of the concept of "greatness." Nochlin's strident tone—necessary at the time—is entirely absent from the essays that follow—in chronological order according to date of publication. It is a pleasure to read Nochlin's astonishingly lean prose, every line a useful advancement of an inspiring theoretical position, a bit of historical evidence supporting an argument, or an insightful observation about an image. Effortlessly turning from one historical period to the next, she offers palpable views of the past. "Women Artists After the French Revolution" (1976) presents a plethora of fascinating statistics about the exhibition records of women artists showing in the early nineteenth-century Salons, the salaries of artists, David's female pupils, and much more (95–97). One of numerous articles about the Impressionists, Nochlin's "Mary Cassatt's Modernity" (1999), draws a parallel between the modernist writer Dorothy Richardson's theory concerning woman's role as "creative director and maintainer" of the home and Cassatt's treatment of domestic subjects (201).

Nochlin finds interesting things in unexpected places. In "Florine Stettheimer: Rococo Subversive" (1980), for example, she argues that despite Stettheimer's "artificial and complex" iconography, pastel tones, and "gossamer light" style, this very private, economically privileged artist's paintings and poetry are encoded with progressive social messages about

feminine aesthetics, black culture, even the evils of capitalism (133–36).

Always engaged in the art of her own time, Nochlin's articles for *ARTnews* and *Arts Magazine* and catalogue essays about contemporary art by women make up the majority of *Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader*. Through these she shares with us her front row seat to the emergence of feminist art through the work of Lynda Benglis, Miriam Schapiro, Nancy Graves, Sylvia Sleigh, Alice Neel, Louise Bourgeois, and others during the 1970s. Never having taken her eyes off the contemporary scene, Nochlin argues "that feminist art practice has had, and continues to have, a profound influence on the shape of art since then 1970s" to the present (35). Nochlin has contributed some of the most substantial observations and theoretically informed art criticism on major figures like Cindy Sherman, Cecily Brown, Jenny Saville, Kiki Smith, Kara Walker, Paula Rego, and Janine Antoni and others. Illustrations drive home Nochlin's observations throughout the weighty volume. An excellent color illustration, for example, supports Nochlin's reading of the complicated mix of "power and victimization" characterizing Kiki Smith's *Lilith* (1994; Fig. 1), the first Eve, presented naked, crouching on a wall, staring outward through glaring glass doll's eyes (295). Today, even as women artists are recognized at the highest echelons of art world success, Nochlin argues in "Women Artists Then and Now" (2007) that we must keep our eyes on the global field where artists like Parastou Forouhar (b. Iran), Wangechi Mutu (b. Kenya), and Ghada Amer (b. Egypt) explore women's creativity at the intersection of "local traditions and national identities" (329).

Faculty teaching feminist topics at introductory and advanced levels as well as anyone interested in the perpetual question of how women's art differs from men's will find *Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader* an essential resource and a pleasure to read. •

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Artemisia Gentileschi: The Language of Painting

By Jesse M. Locker
Yale University Press, 2015

Reviewed by Marjorie Och

When we think of Artemisia Gentileschi, what paintings come to mind? Perhaps the *Susanna and the Elders* of 1610 (Schonborn Collection) or the *Judith and Holofernes* of ca. 1620 (Uffizi). One of several depictions of Judith by the painter, the Uffizi painting is an iconic representation of Gentileschi's powerful heroic women. And *Susanna and the Elders* is one of the earliest, if not the first, anatomically correct image of a woman in European art, to say nothing of its powerful depiction of a young woman's fear for her life and reputation as she faces sexual assault. Later works such as *The Annunciation* (1630; Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte) or *The Birth of St. John the Baptist* (ca. 1633; Prado) may not come to mind. *The Annunciation* presents an acquiescent Virgin Mary bowing her head before Gabriel, while *The Birth of St. John the Baptist* depicts a group of women attentive to the needs of a newborn child with the babe's obviously exhausted mother in bed. In *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Language of Painting*, Jesse Locker considers these later paintings and how Gentileschi altered her style to address the interests of patrons, and what this circle of patrons tells us about the intellectual interests of the artist over the course of her career. Locker is curious about the ways Gentileschi "was immersed in the literary culture of her day" (5). The six chapters do not present Gentileschi's work in chronological order; indeed, a reader may puzzle over the book's organization and the contribution of some chapters to the overall theme. Nonetheless, the result is a valuable, beautifully illustrated, and intriguing study that contextualizes Gentileschi's paintings in a literary world that allows us to better understand the artist's interpretations of complex narratives.

Chapter 1 focuses on Gentileschi's patronage at the Spanish court in Naples, where she received commissions



Fig. 1. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Esther Before Ahasuerus* (ca. 1627–30), oil on canvas, 82" x 107 3/4". Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY.

for paintings that entered the collection of Philip IV, King of Spain. Critical to her success there was the Duke of Alcalá, a member of the academy of Francisco Pacheco in Seville, a pedigree that places Gentileschi within the sphere of contemporary *cognoscenti*. The Duke arrived in Rome in 1625 as Spain's first ambassador extraordinary to the papal court of Urban VIII Barberini, and shortly thereafter he met Gentileschi, from whom he acquired at least three paintings. In 1629 Alcalá became Viceroy of Naples, and by 1630 Artemisia was in Naples, likely sent there by the papal court knowing the Duke's appreciation for her work. Locker presents formal analyses of paintings produced in Naples, noting that the compositional and stylistic archaisms point to Gentileschi's "turn to sixteenth-century works associated with the *maniera devota* as a guide" to her Spanish patrons' "requirements of simplicity, sweetness, pleasing coloring, and devout treatment of figures" (32). Locker concludes that Gentileschi was as much a pawn of Roman diplomats as a painter aiming to please her Spanish patrons, adding that "Artemisia and her art were instrumental to those in power—whether in Rome, Naples, Madrid, or

Venice—as her talents were utilized in an elaborate series of favors" (43).

In chapter 2, Locker examines the literary world Gentileschi encountered in Venice, and considers works dedicated to the painter by Venetian writers between her arrival in 1627 and 1653, the publication year of two infamous mock epitaphs dedicated to the artist. Locker interprets a letter from the Venetian patrician, poet, and founder of the city's leading literary academy, Gian Francesco Loredan, as indicating his high regard for Gentileschi's opinion of literary matters, although he later authored a mock epitaph berating the painter for her promiscuity. Locker explains that the Accademia degli Incogniti, founded by Loredan, welcomed some women to their gatherings and supported the careers of Barbara Strozzi and Arcangela Tarabotti. "Yet even in this relatively open environment, a vast majority of the academicians were incapable of, and hardly interested in, suppressing erotic and misogynist impulses in their writings, and the writers' literary fascination with women as erotic objects tended to eclipse attempts to take them seriously on an intellectual level" (66). Locker contextualizes Loredan's texts—and Gentileschi's work—within the

questione della donna debates of Venetian literary societies, adding that Loredan, “like the Incogniti in general famously adopted veiled, contradictory, and deliberately shocking positions on every subject...” (66).

Chapter 3 speculates on Gentileschi’s life and work in Venice during the years Loredan and other Venetian litterati were writing about female protagonists, including the subjects of Gentileschi’s paintings. While none of her Venetian paintings can be securely identified, a survey of her later work indicates that the years in Venice were crucial for Gentileschi’s turn from depictions of violence to representations of women contrasted with unexpectedly foolish men, such as *Esther Before Ahasuerus* of ca. 1627–30 (Fig. 1). This striking composition shows Queen Esther fainting into the arms of two maid-servants as she approaches the king. X-rays indicate additional figures that connect the work to Veronese’s painting of ca. 1570 of the same subject. Gentileschi’s study and subsequent rejection of Veronese’s composition indicates her lack of satisfaction with the more complex *istoria* in favor of “composing a concentrated dramatic contrapposto...” with a focus on the king and queen (76). For Locker, Gentileschi’s depiction of the king as a comic, caricaturesque figure ennobles the queen, thus locating the painting securely within contemporary Venetian debates about the nature of women, “playfully invert[ing] expectations, setting up a witty contraposition between the queen and the unusually ignoble king” (83). “To what degree might Artemisia’s presence in Venice have contributed to, or even sparked, the diffusion” of imagery concerned with clever women revealing the weaknesses of men, is a question that Locker admits cannot be answered. But the author presents a solid case for Gentileschi’s interest in notorious, clever women at a time when Venetian writers and patrons were all invested in exploring such themes.

Locker returns in chapter 4 to Naples, where the painter lived from around 1630. Although contemporary writers reported that she was successful and

influential, no Neapolitan accounts from the seventeenth century substantiate these claims of foreigners, and Locker turns to contemporary Neapolitan literature, in particular the work of Girolamo Fontanella and Francesco Antonio Cappone. Comparisons in poetry between Gentileschi and Aurora, the goddess of the dawn described by Ovid as rosy-fingered, suggest to Locker contemporary appreciation of Gentileschi’s color palette evident even in the work of her followers in Naples. Using poetry as evidence of painting, as Locker points out, is problematic. But the author contextualizes the material and makes a case for Gentileschi’s esteemed position within the Spanish court in Naples.

Chapter 5 is a consideration of Gentileschi’s self-portraits “in light of her literary, theatrical, and artistic associations” (126), particularly the *Self-Portrait as a Lute Player* painted in Florence around 1615 (Wadsworth Atheneum) and the Neapolitan-period *Self-Portrait* dated 1630–35 (Galleria Nazionale, Palazzo Barberini). Following Elizabeth Cropper’s study of Gentileschi, Locker takes the position that Gentileschi is present not only before her work, but within it, and in her costumed figures “the artist seems to, at times quite literally, embody her protagonists” (132).¹ The *Self-Portrait as a Lute Player* is a case in point. Locker identifies the work as a record of the artist’s theatrical role as a gypsy in the *Dance of the Gypsy Women* by Francesca Caccini performed for the Medici court in 1615. The Barberini *Self-Portrait*, on the other hand, shows the painter—wearing a laurel crown, richly dressed and bejeweled—at work on a portrait, likely of a patron. Gentileschi mentions her self-portraits in letters to patrons, and indicates her awareness of their intended destination, the patron’s gallery. Building on the work of Marc Fumaroli on the seventeenth-century gallery “as a place for companionship, ‘civil conversation,’ and display of wit,” Locker posits that Gentileschi created her varied self-portraits with such a gallery in mind (158–59).²

In chapter 6, Locker studies the 1792 biography of the painter by Averardo de’ Medici. Believed lost, this biography

recently was identified by Locker in a multivolume work on great men of Pisa, and is reprinted here in an appendix. Medici’s work is important for the light it sheds on the painter’s reputation as a still life painter and firsthand descriptions of several of her Neapolitan paintings. This chapter is interesting, too, as a meta-narrative about art historical research.

Locker writes in his postscript, “[s]ituating Artemisia’s artistic creations within the context of broader cultural phenomena might at first appear at odds with the feminist agenda of recognizing the artist’s singularity and particular genius, but it does in fact situate her much closer to the historical beginnings of European feminism” (182). Recognizing an “artist’s singularity and particular genius” is not a uniquely feminist approach to art history, and an examination of “broader cultural phenomena” has been a concern of every wave of feminist art history. But Locker may here be situating his own work outside of or parallel to what he sees as “feminist” studies of Gentileschi. Locker adds much to our knowledge of Gentileschi’s reputation during her lifetime and how she may have inserted herself within some of the most interesting circles of seventeenth-century luminaries. Future work on Artemisia Gentileschi will benefit from Locker’s discoveries and thoughtful interpretations. •

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Notes

1. Elizabeth Cropper, “Life on the Edge: Artemisia Gentileschi, Famous Woman Painter.” In *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, ed. Keith Christiansen and Judith W. Mann, (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2001), 263–81.
2. Marc Fumaroli, “La Galeria de Marino et la Galerie Farnèse: Epigrammes et oeuvres d’art profane vers 1600.” In *L’École du silence: Le sentiment des images au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), 37–51.

Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuosa': Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna

By Adelina Modesti
Brepols, 2014

Reviewed by Catherine R. Puglisi

In the *Felsina Pittrice* of 1678, Carlo Cesare Malvasia elevated Elisabetta Sirani (1638–65) into the top rank of Bolognese painters, closing the second volume of his magisterial historiography of Bolognese art with an extraordinary encomium to the painter. Despite the professional success and great fame she enjoyed in her own day, Sirani does not rate a mention in either Rudolf Wittkower's *Pelican History of Art and Architecture in Italy 1600-1750* (1958/rev. ed. 1999) or even in *Seventeenth-Century Art and Architecture* (2005) by Ann Sutherland Harris, who first brought modern attention to the artist in the pioneering 1976 exhibition, "Women Artists: 1550-1950" at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Adelina Modesti's monograph offers the first full-length scholarly study of Sirani and aims to reclaim the painter's historical significance.

Born in Bologna, Elisabetta Sirani was the eldest daughter of the painter Giovanni Andrea Sirani (1610-1670), a pupil of Guido Reni. As a woman, she was unable to study the male nude in local drawing academies, and her direct access to art was limited to her father's workshop where she trained, her parish church, patrons' palaces, and public exhibitions on holidays. Her formation thus relied on the study of plaster casts and prints, and consultation of her father's extensive library. All the more remarkable was her rapid development as a painter, so that when gout crippled her father, sixteen-year old Sirani directed his workshop, supervising his male apprentices and assistants. She soon outstripped her father in talent and fame and tackled an unusually wide range of subject matter and commissions for a woman painter, including large-scale public altarpieces for churches in and around Bologna.



Fig. 1. Elisabetta Sirani, *Portia Wounding Herself in the Thigh* (1664), oil on canvas, 40" x 54". Collezioni d'Arte e di Storia della Fondazione della Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna.

Her first major commission was the monumental *Baptism of Christ* (1658) for the Certosa of Bologna (cat. 19). Not yet twenty at the time, she was the youngest and only female of seven painters chosen for the church's new decorative program. Most of her work consisted, however, of easel pictures for the nobility and professional classes of Bologna, as well as for distinguished foreign collectors of Bolognese art. By her twenties, Sirani had achieved local celebrity. Her studio became an obligatory stop for visitors to the city, whom she impressed by dashing off portrait heads with nonchalance. Bolognese noblewomen, among her patrons, frequented the studio and sent their daughters to study in her painting academy for women, the first of its kind. At twenty-seven, Sirani suddenly fell ill and died after a short and painful illness. Suspicion of poisoning prompted an autopsy and her maid's arrest, but a later inquiry concluded she died of natural causes, most likely peritonitis brought on by perforated ulcers. Her untimely death provoked an outpouring of grief, expressed in a grand public funeral and many eulogies. A professor from the University of Bologna delivered the funeral oration in the church of San Domenico, which was draped in mourning and decorated with a monumental, temp-

orary catafalque presenting a life-size sculpture of Sirani in the act of painting. That she was buried in the same tomb as Guido Reni held symbolic weight, granting her the status of heir and equal to a major protagonist of the Bolognese school.

Modesti's book, comprising six chapters plus epilogue and catalogue raisonné, first appeared in Italian without the catalogue (Bologna, Editrice Compositori, 2004). Part I's three chapters closely investigate the culture of seventeenth-century Bologna based on the testimony of early sources and archival materials. Modesti explores the distinctive Bolognese tradition that promoted a high level of education and achievement for women, offering an ideal environment for Sirani's career, as it had for Lavinia Fontana almost a century earlier. Among various topics, Modesti examines the status of unmarried women during the period, arguing that Sirani chose to be single so as to devote herself to her profession, a new option for women in Bologna. The venerable University of Bologna had boasted female professors, though not in Sirani's day, and the city housed a high proportion of literate women, female writers, and female teachers who held private schools in their homes. Modesti discusses at length the patronage network of Bolognese

noblewomen who supported cultural events and philanthropic activities, reconstructing the exceptional milieu in which Sirani flourished. Special attention is paid to the private academy for women she formed from around 1660, which enrolled fourteen pupils plus her two younger sisters, Barbara and Anna Maria. Sketching the biographies of each pupil, Modesti observes that the total number represents two-thirds of the city's women artists who went on to practice professionally in the second half of the seventeenth century (68). She overstates, however, the historical significance of Sirani's academy. While the founding of such an academy is indeed a noteworthy landmark, demonstrating Sirani's status as a professional artist and teacher, its importance is belied by its limited impact; none of her pupils stands out as particularly talented or famous, and the concept of a women's painting academy died with her. Had she lived longer, the story might have turned out otherwise.

The stage set in Part I; Part II turns to Sirani's art. Following discussion of her artistic formation (chapter 4), Modesti addresses Sirani's images of women (chapter 5) and her early critical reception (chapter 6), but does not furnish any overview of the painter's artistic development. In a career spanning just over a decade, Sirani painted an impressive number of works, the best known of which are her representations of illustrious women from history, a fashionable theme in Baroque art. Like her predecessor Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1653), Sirani specialized in portraying heroic women, responding to the demand for a woman painting women. Unlike Artemisia's *femmes fortes*, Sirani portrayed these heroines as fully or mostly clothed. In the *Triumphant Judith* (1658; cat. 28), she did not depict Judith in the act of beheading Holofernes, a grisly scene first conceived by Caravaggio that Artemisia rendered even more shocking. Sirani's recondite subject of *Timoclea Throwing the Thracian Captain in the Well* (1659; cat. 36) does illustrate violent action in contrast to the static *Triumphant Judith*. The rare themes or specific episodes of these and other of her works

reflect, as Modesti shows, Sirani's familiarity with literary sources and deliberate choice of subjects displaying female fortitude and virtue. But on their overall artistic impact, the author is silent. Although ambitious in theme and their life-size scale, the pair betrays inexpert handling of human proportion, movement, and expression, and difficulty with convincingly portraying drama. The cartoonish *Timoclea* simply lacks the murderous forcefulness of Artemisia's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1612–13: Naples, Capodimonte), painted at even an earlier age than Elisabetta. But within five years of the *Triumphant Judith*, Sirani made strides in her art, unremarked by Modesti, yet evident in the accomplished composition and figural portrayal in *Portia Wounding Herself in the Thigh* (1664; Fig. 1), a striking image of female courage. Here, and in the contemporaneous *Penitent Magdalen* (1663; cat. 91), and *Venus Chastising Cupid* (1664; cat. 119), Sirani succeeded in integrating the figure into space, experimenting with lighting effects, and lending a new corporeality to the protagonists suggesting study from life of the female nude, conceivably herself. Modesti found no documentary evidence for any life drawing in Sirani's academy, but Elisabetta might well have studied her own body or used her sisters as models. The depiction of Portia's expression is also more subtle than in earlier works, Venus engages the viewer with startling immediacy, and the sensuous Magdalen is a palpable and affecting figure.

How do Sirani's paintings compare to those of the greatest seventeenth-century Bolognese artists, the Carracci, Guido Reni, Guercino, and Francesco Albani? Was her extraordinarily high reputation deserved? Modesti's book treats Sirani in isolation, missing the opportunity to assess her achievement within the Bolognese school, a defining tradition of the Baroque. Nor does Modesti make any sustained comparison between Sirani and Artemisia Gentileschi, the most famous woman painter of her generation and far eclipsing Elisabetta today. Both women were the subject of poetic tributes hailing them as marvels of nature who wielded masterful brushes like men.

The English edition of Modesti's book (in Brepols's Late Medieval and Early Modern Studies series) appends an impressive catalogue raisonné of Sirani's paintings, many identified by the author: 149 entries, arranged chronologically with data on provenance, archival references, copies, bibliography, and related drawings. Elisabetta's own register of works, begun in 1655, constitutes an important source for reconstructing the oeuvre. The photographic repertory records an uneven production, raising unaddressed questions about workshop assistance even in signed works. Regrettably no index of subjects or present locations, nor a checklist of drawings is provided. A generous number of color plates enhances the volume, predominantly reproducing Sirani's easel pictures, the rest illustrated in small black and white photographs.

Modesti's text would have greatly benefited from judicious editing for its numerous grammatical and syntactical errors, and incorrect word choices. Mistranslations or partial translations of Italian appear throughout: "rappresentative" for "representative," "castellated" for "crenellated." The text also needed tightening to avoid the frequent slowing of pace for lengthy expositions of provenance, unnecessary given its repetition in the catalogue. Furthermore, the author is prone to turgid and feminist prose: "denarratizes the discourse," "female cultural producer," "paintress," "matronage." Apart from exhausting the reader, the language has the unintended consequence of circumscribing Sirani's considerable achievements within an exclusively female world. Notwithstanding these flaws, the book will be indispensable for its comprehensive catalogue of Sirani's work, repertory of photographs, and rich history of Bolognese culture. •

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Pl. 1. Dorothy Gillespie, *Dancers* (1944), oil on canvas, 36" x 42".

Pl. 2. Dorothy Gillespie, Left: *Series 4: Arrangement XXX* (1977), acrylic on canvas laminated to steel, 84" x 6" x 9" (2 pieces); Right: *Series 5: Untitled* (1977), acrylic on canvas, 37" x 33".



Pl. 3. Dorothy Gillespie, *Through the Looking Glass: Celebration I* (1993), enamel on aluminum, 40" x 54" x 2" (54" x 40" x 2") (12 pieces, each 12" x 12").



Pl. 4. Dorothy Gillespie, *Colorfall Series: Garden* (1993), enamel on aluminum, 74" x 80" x 4" (22 pieces).



Pl. 5. Dorothy Gillespie, *Magic Carpet Slides* (1986), enamel on aluminum, 28' x 26' x 8'. Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, FL.



Pl. 6. Dorothy Gillespie, *Encircled Path to the Enchanted Kingdom* (1998), enamel on aluminum, H 63' x varying width. Administration Center Garage, Orlando, FL (dismantled after damage by 2004 hurricane).



Pl. 7. Dorothy Gillespie,
Celestial Joy (2006),
enamel on aluminum, 62'.
Administration Center Garage,
Orlando, FL.



Pl. 8. Dorothy Gillespie, *Color, Light and Motion* (2003). Installation at Rockefeller Center, New York City.



Pl. 9. Helen Frankenthaler,
Small's Paradise (1964),
acrylic on canvas,
100" x 93 5/8".
National Museum of
American Art,
Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.
Gift of George L. Erion.



Pl. 10. Helen Frankenthaler,
The Bay (1963),
acrylic on canvas,
80 3/4" x 81 3/4".
Detroit Institute of Arts.
Gift of Dr. and Mrs.
Hilbert H. DeLawter.



Pl. 11. Joan Thorne,
Squazemo (1984),
oil on canvas, 80" x 83".
Photo: Courtesy of the artist.



Pl. 12. Joan Thorne, *Kabba* (1982), oil on canvas, 102" x 85".
Photo: Courtesy of the artist.



Pl. 13. Joan Thorne, *Kopt* (1976), oil on canvas, 104" x 84".
Photo: Courtesy of the artist.



Pl. 14. Joan Thorne, *Naust* (1978), oil on canvas, 78" x 67".
Photo: Courtesy of the artist.



Pl. 16 (right). Joan Thorne, *Aahee* (1984),
oil on canvas, 69" x 65".
Photo: Courtesy of the artist.



Pl. 15 (above). Joan Thorne, *Mazu*, (1980), oil on canvas, 74" x 102". Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

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Spoon to Shell 823
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Protector 841 with Wonder Woman Shadow
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Noor Inayat Khan 813
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