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(Front cover) Leonora Carrington, *La Joie de patinage* (1941), oil on canvas, 17 15/16" x 24 3/8". Collection Pierre Noel Matisse.

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As always, *WAJ* brings together an engaging mix of subjects in these pages. For two of the artists under discussion, Suzanne Duchamp (1889–1963) and Leonora Carrington (1917–2011), the two World Wars that so affected Europe were a defining influence.

On our cover is a work that Leonora Carrington painted during her brief sojourn in New York City, following her escape from war-torn Europe. Salomon Grimberg's fascinating study of this all but unknown chapter in Carrington's life offers new insights into this artist's remarkable career. As Grimberg observes, "When Leonora Carrington arrived in New York in July of 1941, she was unknown; by the time she left, eighteen months later, she was unforgettable." Based on a decades-long personal association with this Surrealist artist and a deep knowledge of her work, Grimberg introduces some little-known paintings and drawings as well as details of her experiences in New York. He writes eloquently of Carrington's escape from France; her eventual departure from Portugal as the new wife of Renato Leduc, a Mexican diplomat; and her reconnection with other Surrealist expatriates in New York. This article fills in gaps between Carrington's well-known love affair with Max Ernst and their life together in France before the War and her permanent settlement in Mexico in December 1942, including Carrington's experiences in Spain—her confinement in a psychiatric hospital in Santander in 1941, and then reconnecting with Leduc in Madrid. Grimberg includes lively descriptions of stunning Surrealist compositions produced in New York by Carrington, and speaks knowledgeably of her psychological profile, as it was revealed to him through interviews with many of her friends, associates, dealers, and others (in Europe, Mexico, and the U.S.), and his long friendship with the artist.

Suzanne Duchamp was the only woman artist in a family of artists that included her brothers Marcel Duchamp, Raymond Duchamp-Villon, and Jacques Villon. Emma Anquinet writes of Duchamp: "Throughout her career spanning five decades, she expressed her personal concerns by incorporating elements of various contemporary art styles in her work. Like many artists of her generation in France, World War I had a major impact on her life and art." Although Suzanne Duchamp's early work had fauvist tendencies, as a painter who had an especially close relationship with one brother, Marcel Duchamp, she became an adherent to the avant-garde. After his move to New York City, Marcel would mail Suzanne instructions for making her own Ready-mades. Following World War I, married to Jean Crotti, a close friend of Marcel's, Suzanne Duchamp joined Francis Picabia in the use of machine aesthetics. Among the first women artists in Paris to create machine imagery, she introduced geometrical figures, type, and ready-made objects into her assemblages. Suzanne Duchamp and Crotti established the Tabu Dada movement, to explain, writes Anquinet, "'the unknowable and invisible' of the cosmos and life, using personalized, spiritual symbolism, giving meaning to life in contrast to the nihilistic 'anti-attitude' of the Dada movement."

Moving into the twenty-first century, Joyce Beckenstein writes about Marianne Weil, whose sculptural forms hark back to ancient times. Although based in New York, Weil has sought

inspiration in places like Stonehenge, the Greek Peloponnese, and Chalcolithic sites in Andalusia for her sculptures in various materials. Beckenstein explains, "For Weil, prehistoric abstract forms, their mythic texts and archaeological contexts, serve as compelling models for her enigmatic works. Her disciplined mastery of the lost wax process continuously evolves generations of forms that coax both bronze and glass into sculpture that seamlessly transcends time."

Kirstin Ringelberg's article on "gendered devaluation of contemporary Japanese art" challenges the equation of Japanese culture with the "weakened, effeminate masculinity of *otaku* (computer nerds) or "the hyper-amateur, hysterical *kawaii* (cute) girl culture to be mocked for its alleged superficiality." Focusing on English-language criticism of contemporary Japanese art, Ringelberg develops her critique by introducing a number of women artists including Chinatsu Ban, Miwa Yanagi, and Tabaimo to support her arguments. As a case in point, she looks at the reception of the video artist Tabaimo, whose video installations, which begin with hand-drawn images, concern themes of isolation, instability, and contagion, and whose solo exhibition in the Japanese Pavilion at the 2011 Venice Biennale brought her widespread recognition. Inspired by various Japanese art forms including ukiyo-e woodcuts, anime, and manga, Tabaimo creates surreal narratives of both intimate interiors and communal spaces. "The discourse around Tabaimo maintains a lot of the discursive cues that circulate around the broader simultaneous celebration and dismissal of Japanese contemporary art in Europe and the U.S.," writes Ringelberg. "Framing her as both *kawaii/otaku* ... and traditional (read, particularly, Edo-influenced [ukiyo-e]), English-language critics have found a tidy container for understanding her work as distinctly and explicitly "Japanese," often failing to grasp its complexity or reach, precisely for that reason."

Books and exhibition catalogues featuring women artists continue to celebrate the contributions of accomplished innovators in every medium. *WAJ* book review editor Ute Tellini has brought together, as always, a contingent of distinguished reviewers to highlight some of the recent offerings on artists including Georgia O'Keeffe, Lee Miller, Eva Hesse, Alice Lex-Nerlinger, Marisa Merz, Honoré Sharrer, Lygia Pape, Yayoi Kusama, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Carmen Herrera, Rei Kawakubo, Doris Salcedo, and Kara Walker. We thank our reviewers for their thoughtful and insightful comments, observations, and recommendations.

We also thank Ian Mellanby and Guy Griffiths at Old City Publishing for their advocacy and professionalism in bringing out each issue of the journal. And we would especially like to extend our deep appreciation to Christina Pasley, the Art History Department's administrative supervisor, Dr. Jim Swenson, Dean of Humanities in the School of Arts and Sciences, and Richard Edwards, Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, for the support of Rutgers University during the past thirteen years.

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

TRAVELING TOWARD THE UNKNOWN

LEONORA CARRINGTON STOPPED IN NEW YORK

By Salomon Grimberg

For Joan Geiger

In the summer of 1941, the surrealist painter Leonora Carrington (1917–2011) (Fig. 1) had not been in New York two weeks when Stella Snead recognized her in the subway.¹ Carrington and Snead had been classmates and friends in England, and she would become the subject of one of Carrington's first paintings in New York. Snead told Carrington that Amédée Ozenfant, their teacher, also had immigrated and brought his Academy of Fine Arts to East 20th Street. She also told Carrington about other artists who had fled Europe and were in New York, in particular, the other surrealist refugees. She took Carrington to see André Breton and his wife Jacqueline Lamba at their walkup apartment in Greenwich Village; they were joyful to see her again, after having no news of her since the War began. Breton, Lamba, and Aube, their five-year old daughter, had arrived the previous June, out of Marseille via Martinique to New York, thanks to the art collector and gallerist Peggy Guggenheim, who sponsored their trip. Through them, 24-year-old Carrington soon reconnected with the community of European refugee artists.

The fateful encounter with Snead had brought Carrington a long overdue sense of family, of home, and of safety. She and Renato Leduc, her new husband—it sounded strange to refer to him as her husband, for she hardly knew him—after waiting in Portugal for several months for the arrival of her immigration papers, had sailed out of Lisbon on the SS Exeter—a ten-ton single-funnel passenger/cargo liner built by American Export Lines—on July 11, 1941, arriving in New York ten days later. Leduc recalled, “The trip to New York we made in a small boat named Exeter, and we had to travel piled up like sardines.”² Three Mexican citizens were traveling with diplomatic passports: Leduc, Carrington, and Loyola, a co-worker of Leduc's. Leduc and Loyola's profession appears on the list of passengers as “government.” Oddly, Carrington's is listed as “none.” It is likely she had had nothing to do with getting tickets for the trip because 46-year-old Suzanne Menard, another English woman on-board, apparently had no issue listing “artist” as her profession. Upon arrival, Leduc reported to the New York branch of Mexico's Secretaría de Hacienda, the same where he had worked in France, and



Fig. 1. Renato Leduc, Photograph of Leonora Carrington (c.1942). Private collection.

resumed his old job in the technical department of the tax office (Leonora would never quite understand what he did). Settled in an apartment at 306 West 73rd Street, her growing sense of reality—and relief—began to sink in: she had left behind not only the horrors of the War in Europe but the

unrelenting clutches of her parents, who had resisted letting her go. But Carrington's relief was short lived, as five months later, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, the United States entered the War and a familiar sense of uneasiness returned.

While living in Paris, Carrington had met the Mexican Renato Leduc once, without ever considering how significant that fateful meeting would one day be, radically altering the course her life. Leduc was a colorful man, a self-proclaimed "prudent anarchist"³ who, in his younger days, had been a telegraphist for Pancho Villa and had withdrawn from law school "because I did not like that besides being boring, it's bureaucratic and corrupt, since lawyers defend equally good and bad things."⁴ He joined the diplomatic service to be able to travel, eventually leaving that career behind to become a journalist and poet. In France, Leduc had befriended some of the surrealists, including André Breton, Benjamin Perét and his love interest Remedios Varo, Leonor Fini, and others. One evening, Fini told Leduc, "I'm having dinner at the home of Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst; Picasso will be there, would you like to meet him?"⁵ When they arrived, Picasso had brought a wineskin for the hosts. Leduc and Picasso, who shared a common passion for bullfighting and a mutual friend in Diego Rivera, got along famously and talked together the entire evening.⁶ Leduc was intelligent, well read, and knew no strangers, but when he spoke, his words, peppered with obscenities, belied his fine character and education. Carrington immediately liked Leduc, for whom there were no hidden agendas. What you saw was what you got.

Two years had passed since Leduc's visit to Carrington and Ernst's apartment on rue Jacob 12 when they ran into each other at an elegant restaurant in Madrid. He was sitting with a friend who first noticed a woman staring at them. Across the room sat Carrington accompanied by two men. When Leduc raised his hand to greet her, she approached. They spoke about her recent stay at a hospital in Santander and about some of the surrealists who had escaped to Spain and Andorra. When they parted, he assumed he'd never see her again. The next day, however, Carrington called on him at his hotel. She wanted to travel to America. Could he help her? Leduc was on his way to Lisbon, where he would be staying several months, and told her to get herself there and to call on him at the Mexican Consulate. When she arrived unannounced at the Consulate, she promptly asked for Leduc and tried to secure a visa for traveling to Mexico. As Lisbon was then a nest of Gestapo spies, and no one could vouch for her, her request was denied. Informed that Leduc was not there, she waited.⁷

When Carrington ran into Ernst unexpectedly at a market in Lisbon one day, each was stunned to see the other. It had been more than a year since either had had any information about the other. Ernst, still absorbed in his longing during their forced separation, had neither given up on finding her nor contemplated how—if he did find her—the dynamics of their relationship might have changed. He had missed her desperately and tried to reignite their passion and was shocked to discover that Carrington was no longer in love with him. For her, the meaning of their affair had fallen into

place: a necessary stage in her life, vital at one point, it now belonged to the past. Also, unexpectedly, she had found herself attracted to 42-year old Leduc. She still liked Ernst, the person, and admired the artist, but she was uninterested in the lover. He told her he was marrying Peggy Guggenheim only to escape Europe, hoping to change her mind, and even believed that when they were both in New York, she would come around. But Carrington held steadfast. No meant no.⁸

Leduc did try—unsuccessfully—to get Carrington a visa to enter Mexico. Finally, like his friend Leopoldo Urrea, who had married a Spanish Republican to save her from prison, he was convinced to take the same step. "One morning," he recalled, "I went with Leonora to the English consulate where she had a friend named Darling, who married us without difficulties."⁹

Born in England into privilege, Leonora Carrington was educated in convent schools, from which she was (proudly) expelled, and later ran away (again, proudly) from private schools where she had been sent "to be finished." Carrington was an exquisite beauty, tall, slender, with perfect rose petal skin, raven-black hair and piercing dark eyes. "One of the most beautiful women I had ever seen," said Jimmy Ernst, who recalled their initial meeting: "Her name was Leonora Carrington, and her dark glowing beauty so affected me that I found it difficult to talk to her coherently."¹⁰

In 1936, Carrington had entered purist Amédée Ozenfant's Academy of Fine Arts in London, becoming his first student. Among her classmates was Ursula Blackwell. Besides enormous wealth, the two had much in common and became instant friends. By nature, since childhood, both had been rebellious, an attitude that included contempt toward British snobbery. Both despised fishing, hunting, and shooting—killing animals—and loved riding. When Max Ernst—a friend of Blackwell's husband, Erno Goldfinger, was in town for the vernissage of his exhibition at the Mayor Gallery, she invited Carrington to join them for dinner. The two friends planned to play a practical joke on Ernst, who had a reputation for becoming infatuated with women young enough to be his daughters. "Ernst likes the young girls," Blackwell told her with a knowing smile, "we can be silly and flirt with him."¹¹ But the unexpected happened: Carrington and Ernst both were smitten. Without a second thought, it seemed natural for her to take Ernst to meet her parents and to inform them she had decided—once again—not to finish school and to leave for Paris, to live with Ernst. "Yes, without marrying him," she replied truthfully.¹²

Max was at that moment the man that every woman waits for; there it was, the man that I had always imagined, it was a marvelous union. I was 19 [she had actually turned 20 two months earlier] and he 46. We decided to live in Paris. That is how I went to communicate it to my parents who, when learning that I would not marry, the only answer my father expressed was: "Never will my door be darkened by your shadow." In Paris, Max taught me a new way to live, of coming into my own; he made my ideas develop, the

visions that had lived in me since childhood; he drew me to him, to Surrealism. He gave me all his support, his love: in our home there were always friends, they arrived continually, Paul Eluard, André Breton, Louis Aragon, Marcel Duchamp, and Yves Tanguy who were from the group. We held formidable reunions, we wrote, we painted, we created poetry; we communicated ideas, feelings....¹³

Carrington's avatar was the horse, and she drew them obsessively; in childhood, she believed she could shape-shift into one at will. She was also brilliant, and despite her young age when she arrived in Paris with Ernst—was admired by the older surrealists for her intuitive intelligence and her ability to articulate it. Carrington's appearance in the group was sudden, and her acceptance immediate. Enthralled by her wraithlike persona, the surrealists soon came to admire her kindred spirit as one who lived and created under the belief that invisible forces influenced the world of appearances. Breton made Carrington one of his chosen few; only from her did he accept what he would have interpreted from others as insubordination. She held the key to the door that opened to the other side.

By August of 1938 the pair had left Paris, arrived in Saint-Martin d'Ardèche in southeastern France, and on the 17th of that month, "Leonora Mary Carrington" signed the title, as sole owner of their house, a dilapidated seventeenth-century farmhouse, which they repaired themselves.¹⁴ Life seemed perfect, but the War brought their peaceful idyll to an end. A German citizen, Ernst was considered an enemy alien in France, at the same time Nazi Germany had labeled him a degenerate artist. Once caught by the Gestapo, his numbered days would end in a concentration camp. Twice he was interned in a holding camp, but only the first time was Carrington able to get him released. Thereafter, alone, hopeless, and with an overwhelming sense of alienation, she began to grow paranoid. The progressive distortion of Carrington's internal reality gradually gave way to her misreading external events. The initial (prodromal) period of Carrington's psychotic decompensation was relatively short—barely a few weeks—a synergism of events accelerated the experience that unleashed psychotic thinking. Each day, the War brought new and unexpected events confirming that one was less and less in charge of one's life. Although with Ernst she had never questioned her safety, suddenly he was gone because of an irrational accusation: a deaf mute had turned him in for communicating with the enemy by sending light signals. Furthermore, the people in the small town of Saint-Martin had never been quite trusting of the foreign couple. What were they to make of Ernst's internment and Carrington's despair? They had their own troubles.

Becoming progressively more alienated, overwhelmed by loss of security and the fear of aloneness, Carrington stopped eating and drank only alcohol so the physical pain would distract her from her helplessness. When soldiers stormed into the house, accusing her of being a spy, what could she say or do to convince them otherwise? Nothing. She had given up.

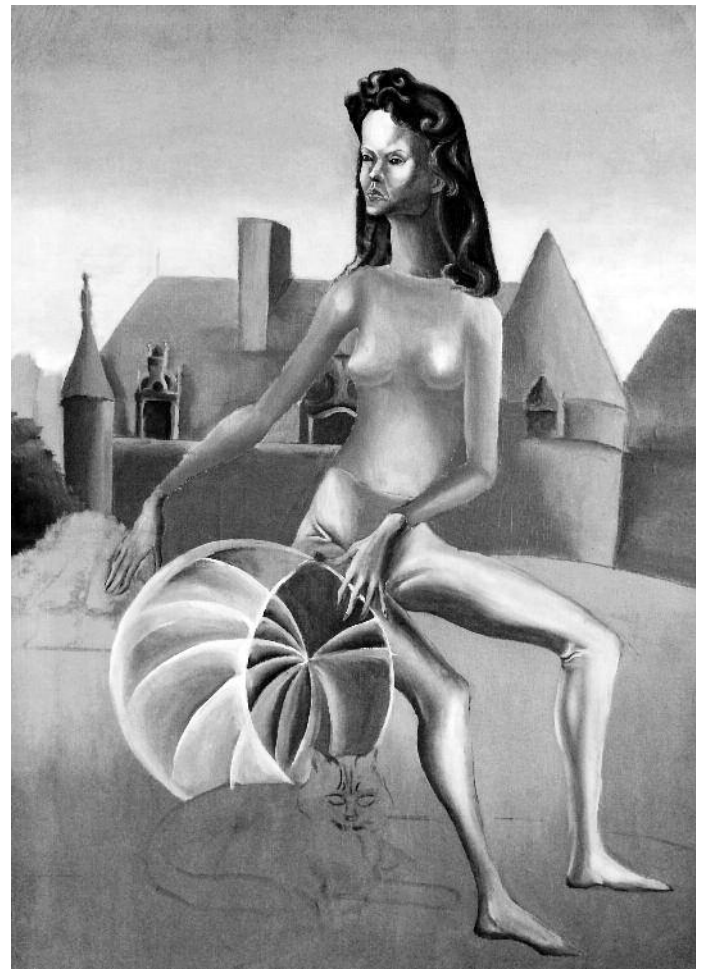


Fig. 2. Leonora Carrington, *Stella Snead and her Cat* (1941), oil on canvas, 24" x 17 7/8". Private collection.

Had it not been for the sudden arrival of Max's friends Catherine Yarrow and Michel Lukacs, who knows what worse trouble she might have gotten into. Each moment added fuel to the fire. By the time they had helped her to escape to Madrid, she had developed a full-blown psychotic break and was unable to function. Her parents stepped in and interned Leonora against her will in a psychiatric hospital in Santander.¹⁵

While they were students in London, Stella Snead's first painting had been *A Woman with Cats*. In New York, the memory sparked Carrington to paint a strange portrait of Stella with her cat (1941; Fig. 2), sitting outside a manor, on an invisible chair. Stella's face is turned to her right and her black hair falls in waves touching her shoulders. She has a severe look, and her puckered lips make her look prune-faced and put out, which is odd, because Stella was beautiful, a charming woman, easy to get along with, and quick to smile. Her right arm reaches out toward the sphere beside her but does not quite touch it. She does, however, with her left hand, touch the edge of the opening where lines originate at a point to form a swirling vertical that spirals to the right, increasing to infinity. Below the sphere is the outline of a cat. Unfinished, it looks



Fig. 3. Leonora Carrington, *Garden Bedroom* (1941), oil on canvas, 18" x 24". Whereabouts unknown.

transparent. Stella's blouse and pants fit snugly against her thin figure, momentarily looking more painted on than made of fabric. Her tight koi-red blouse delineates her breasts and navel; and her long sleeves reach perhaps two inches from her wrists. Like stockings, her taupe leggings cover her bare feet. Although Carrington left the work unfinished, in some way the image suggests the beneficial effect that meeting Snead had had on her, by helping her shift out the dark state of mind that fueled *Garden Bedroom* (Fig. 3, Pl. 1), the first work she painted in New York, dated October 1941.

One month later, by November 25, with the same quiet mood evident in Stella Snead's portrait, Carrington finished *Theater People* (Pl. 2), a poetic representation of two otherworldly personages in costume standing in an empty landscape. The man wears a striped navy and black hunting hat and a dark green frock coat that spreads at the waist and opens in the front. His dark brown pants fit snugly inside shiny black high-heeled boots. His head turns to the left, focusing on the beyond. The woman is wrapped in a gray-fringed, koi-red shawl, which she holds protectively against her body with her left arm; she wears white stockings but walks shoeless. Suspended over her head and shoulders—although never touching her—is a helmet shaped as the upper part of a white-spotted, gray horse, that, through an opening in front, exposes her pale face. Floating behind them, the irregular shaped skin of a body-less horned bull forms a backdrop that frames the couple. Both *Stella Snead and Her Cat* and *Theater People* were painted on the same size canvases and with the same soft color palette. In fact, had Snead's portrait not been identified as such, placed side by side with *Theater People*, the two might have passed as companions.

Carrington blended immediately into the surrealist community in New York, as she had in Paris. She moved freely among old friends—and made new ones—participated in

meetings, attended shows and parties, befriending Americans eager to come face to face with these émigrés who had made a difference with their daring vision. Surrealism was a complex art movement, which integrated the literary, the political, as well as the visual. Art historian Martica Sawin has recorded that "[w]hat they learned from the refugees was far more complex.... One might consider what took place during those years was a form of empowerment." She goes on to quote art historian Meyer Schapiro: "It wasn't automatism that the Americans learned from the surrealists, but how to be heroic."¹⁶

During her eighteen-month exile in New York, Carrington's creativity was imbued with the force of her previous psychiatric internment, and her eccentricities were a source of fascination. Artist Hedda Sterne recalled Leonora vividly: "She was simply the most beautiful creature, she went around in jodhpurs and boots—nobody was doing that. I remember a show, a surrealist show ... and at the opening,

again Leonora Carrington, when people didn't do that, came in a dress from a thrift shop, a high necked lace dress. She looked absolutely beautiful."¹⁷ Others, more observant, could see the person through the personage and perceived something was not quite right. Dealer Julien Levy, who had introduced surrealism into the United States and became a lifelong friend of Leonora's, recalled her unique sense of humor but also her vulnerability: "Carrington was too wacky; she had an impossible temperament, impetuous, tempestuous, you never knew when you were going to hurt her feelings. She was oversensitive."¹⁸ But most did not consider that her unusual demeanor, rather than evidencing personal freedom, or even "surrealist" demeanor, carried residual symptoms from the psychological injuries she had recently experienced, and a lingering evidence of her recent incursion into psychosis, from which one does not emerge overnight. In his memoirs, Luis Buñuel recalled a disturbing memory of Leonora at a party; but before mentioning the anecdote, he prefaced it by saying that she had recently left a sanitarium in Santander. "One day, arriving at the home of a so called Mr. [Bernard] Reiss, she entered the bathroom and showered completely dressed. Afterward dripping, she took a seat in the salon and stared at me fixedly. Moments later, she took me by the arm and told me in Spanish: 'You are handsome, you remind me of my caretaker.'"¹⁹

By day the surrealists worked hard and at night they attended reunions or parties, often at Peggy Guggenheim's, where it was certain one always found interesting people. On occasion, these were masquerade parties where Lamba and Carrington stood out. Ethel Baziotes recalled how Lamba had discovered that, for a pittance, she could rent eye-catching costumes from theatrical establishments and dress up as historical personages, a favored one being Marie de Fontanges, the young mistress of Louis XIV, with her hair carefully coiffed



Fig. 4. Leonora Carrington, in collaboration with Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp, and Roberto Matta, *Summer* (1941), oil on cotton bedsheet, 7' x 12'. Signed and dated Leonora Carrington 6 Nov. 1941 (lower right). Collection Tel Aviv Museum of Art. Gift of Marya Rubinstein Bernard-Adir, through the America-Israel Cultural Foundation, New York, 1968.

to look disarranged as she had made it fashionable in court.²⁰ But Carrington's inventiveness went beyond what anyone might imagine: One evening she walked into a party wearing a dress she had made out of old velvet curtains acquired in a junk shop and sewn throughout with small bells. As she entered the room, the sound of the bells drew the silent attention of those present to her stunning looks. Standing motionless for a moment, with a single movement of her hand, she let the dress slide off her shoulders to expose her naked body.²¹

Carrington and Lamba continued as best friends and co-conspirators. Lamba and Breton had been having problems for some time. She had had enough of his authoritarian ways, but with a daughter between them, she felt trapped in the marriage; also, she was living in a foreign country thanks to the protective umbrella of Breton's reputation.²² When *VVV*, the surrealist publication edited by David Hare, with editorial advice from Breton, Ernst, and Marcel Duchamp, was in its beginnings, and Hare, who only spoke English, and Breton, who only spoke French, were unable to communicate with each other, it was Lamba who translated for both. She and Hare fell in love, and before their affair was exposed, Carrington covered for her friend so she could meet her lover. She also babysat Aube, who, Carrington recalled, threw awful tantrums like her father, and also like him was an admixture of endearing and tyrannical traits. Yet, Carrington and Aube had fun together, playing the candle game and hide-and-seek, and inventing and playing out stories with character dolls Carrington made out of sanitary napkins.²³

Despite the genuine affection Carrington felt toward Breton, she empathized with Lamba's predicament and sided with her: reflecting back, she referred to him as a "machista," for seeing men as superior and women as subservient. Julien

Levy recalled Carrington undermining Breton's infantile tyranny and self-importance among a group of artists chatting at a café. "Breton raised his fist and pounded the table. 'This will be a serious meeting,' he said, 'we will conduct it in perfect parliamentary fashion. When you wish to speak, you will raise your hand, and I will acknowledge your signal with the words *La parole est à tel-et-tel, la parole est à vous*, (So and so has the word, the word is yours).'"²⁴ Leonora burst into laughter, which she had tried in vain to smother. Breton rapped sternly again for order.²⁴ But Leonora's mocking intervention had turned the meeting into a joke.

As soon as she settled in New York, Carrington began painting; she had done little during her *travaux* in Santander and none in Portugal. Painting was how she paid closest attention to herself. In Santander, she had lacked basic materials, other than pencil and notebook paper the hospital provided her for the drawings she made each day, encouraged by Dr. Luis Morales, to help organize her thinking and explain herself to him.²⁵ Finally, while at the sanatorium, overcoming her fear one day she wrote a letter to her father—it was the first time she communicated with her family since they had forcibly hospitalized her—asking him to authorize the hospital to provide her with artist's supplies.²⁶ Although she received no direct acknowledgment of her letter, she knew he had received it when painting materials arrived. Despite their being of lesser quality than she would have preferred, she was grateful and began painting. In the hospital, she produced *Villa Pilar*, of three mythical beasts—one a horned horse—which she dedicated "*A Dr. Luis Morales, Janvier 1, 1941*," and gifted it to him as she was leaving.²⁷ A second, *En Bas* (*Down Below*), where a number of inmates in fancy dress—she and her avatar white horse among them—pose for a group portrait,

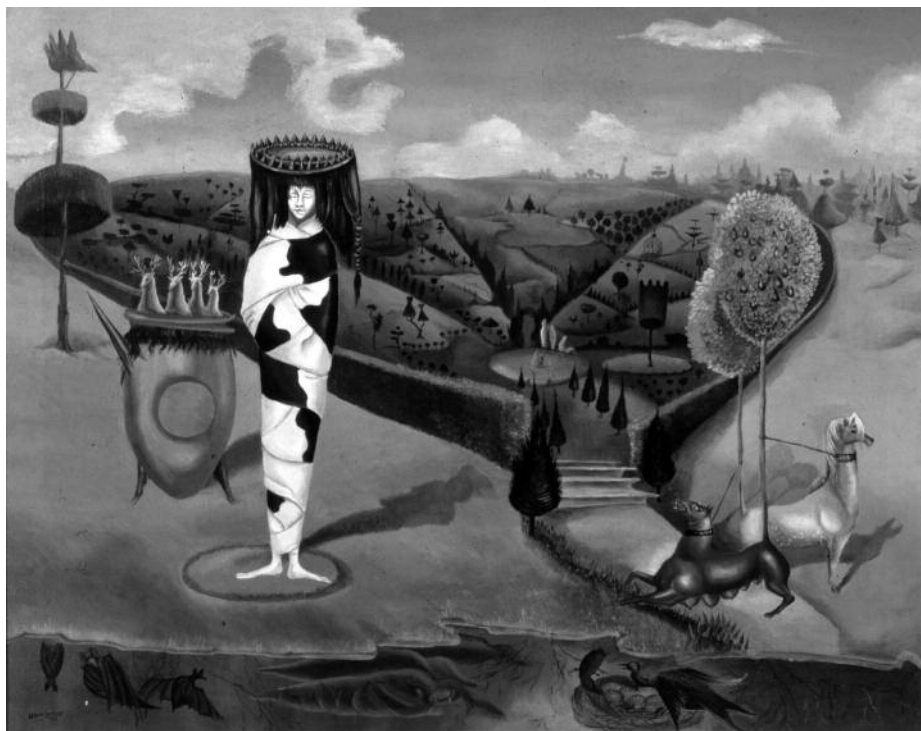


Fig. 5. Leonora Carrington, *Green Tea* (1942), oil on canvas, 24" x 30". Private collection.

she gifted to Leduc in New York. On the verso, she signed, dated, and inscribed: "*Santander, Pour toi Renato, au nom du magie, le vert qui est mon couleur* (Santander, For you Renato, in the name of magic, green, which is my color) 28 Jan. 1942."

As events of the War turned more chaotic, Carrington became acutely aware how, at every moment, indefinable forces have an effect on a person's life, and how totally alone she was and always had been. That she had not been in charge of her life became all too clear by the time she was discharged from the hospital. In retrospect, her hospitalization confirmed that, depending completely, as she had done, on her parents and then Ernst, was akin to being captive. Freedom would not be hers unless she seized it; and self-reliance was the only way. Yet, she remained fearful.²⁸

Carrington worked steadily in New York, and a significant part of the writing and painting she produced during this eighteen-month period reflects the disquiet she lived with from the War. Noteworthy are the autobiographical text "Down Below," and the self-portrait *Garden Bedroom*, both about her hospitalization in Santander. These painful recollections, crystallized here as art, had remained very much alive in a dark recess of her mind. "Down Below," written with razor-blade precision, recalled her recent incursion into madness, dictated during a three-day period, August 23–26, 1943, three years to the day after her involuntary commitment. "I was interned in Dr Morales' sanatorium in Santander Spain," she recalls, and pronounced "incurably insane."²⁹ In the text, she describes the unspeakable treatment she received in hospital, and other events and interactions with fellow inmates and caretakers:

I returned to Amacho in a state of great sexual excitement. It seemed natural to me to find don Luis in my room, busy examining Elizabeth's dummy. I sat down next to him, he caressed my face and introduced his fingers in my mouth. This actually induced an orgasm. Then he took my notebook and wrote down on one page, "O Corte o Cortijo" ("Palace or Cottage") whereupon I took to wanting him terribly and to writing him every day.³⁰

In *Garden Bedroom* (Fig. 3 and Pl. 1), a ghoulish Leonora rocks madly on a spotted rocking horse resembling the one Ernst had bought for her in 1938. The once beautiful Carrington is unrecognizable: she looks disheveled, wearing an old red shirt torn at the cuffs, tight black pants open at the waist, and yellow striped socks, like the ones she has Ernst wear in the portrait she made of him walking shoeless on the icy landscape. Behind her, a nude woman-tree observes the scene, as stunned and startled as the black-beaked red parrot that pulls upward in mid-flight to face her. Oblivious to the horrible event is a doll-like personage (Elizabeth's dummy?) sitting on the ground, face concealed behind a white mask wearing a fixed smile and an inward look, and two rabbits in front. On the far back right corner, nude caryatids hold up the canopy of an undisturbed bed.

Working at the *Secretaría de Hacienda*, Leduc had a good salary, and Carrington lacked for nothing, yet, selling *Garden Bedroom* was important to her for it satiated momentarily her hunger for autonomy. *Garden Bedroom*, the first painting she sold in New York, went to Rudi Blesh, a friend of Jimmy Ernst's. Blesh, a prolific art and respected music critic, authored groundbreaking books on jazz, Ragtime, De Kooning, Stuart Davis, Buster Keaton, and more. He also acquired two works by Lamba.

There was never any question about Carrington and Leduc's marriage as one of convenience, so attitudes and behaviors of a traditional marriage were not expected to interfere with the arrangement. Even so, Carrington's infatuation with Leduc, in whom she discovered "a good person," grew.³¹ He was generous, non-judgmental, respected her space, and made no demands. Upon learning that she had run away to Lisbon without luggage, he took the initiative and took her to buy a dress. Even Peggy Guggenheim took notice that he was protective of Carrington in a paternal way.³² Although their worlds were diametrically apart, and each led a separate life, they shared compatibility. However, over time, it became clear that he preferred spending time with friends to having a serious romantic relationship. When he finally settled

down, he admitted never having married for love, that his current wife was a good friend who kept their home admirably.³³ Not what Carrington would have liked, but the relationship would take its course—and by then, they were living in Mexico.

By the Fall of 1941, Carrington's precarious state of mind had mostly dissipated. So when the famous Rubinstein sisters, Helena and the younger Manka, visited her studio, she was painting at her best. Before leaving, Helena acquired a painting of five black dogs beneath a tree on which a white animal is perched,³⁴ and Manka commissioned a work. When Helena learned that Carrington might be traveling to Mexico, she had many stories to tell about the artistic community she would be encountering there—Helena had been there the previous summer and had visited several artists' studios and acquired their work. Unable to decide which watercolors by Diego Rivera's to buy, in the end, she did not buy any, but she did acquire a still life by Frida Kahlo. She bought many naïve nineteenth-century portraits of children, but also was interested in Mexico's post-revolutionary work and brought back paintings by Olga Costa and Miguel Covarrubias, and had her portrait painted by Roberto Montenegro. The narrative of Mexico and its artists still meant nothing to Carrington, for she had no points of reference, but the sisters' warmth toward her left an indelible imprint on her and a lifelong "absolute devotion" toward them.³⁵ Manka had remained silent while her sister spoke but then commissioned Carrington to paint a mural; she could pick the subject herself.³⁶ They agreed on a price of \$200. Carrington's problem would be how to pay for a mural-size canvas; she could barely afford small canvases, and none of her friends had money to lend her. She approached Chagall, as it was common knowledge that he was the only one of the exiled artists selling his work. After looking at her paintings, he shook his head, deciding against the loan, and patronizingly said, "Keep painting my little one, keep painting."³⁷ At the eleventh hour, Breton rescued the day by giving her one of his bed sheets, and she was able to paint the mural, with Ernst, Duchamp, and Roberto Matta as assistants. Ernst momentarily shifted out of the assistant mode and painted his signature bird in the upper left corner to complement the work. Carrington titled it *Summer* (Fig. 4). Manka loved it.³⁸

The scene in the horizontal landscape, takes place in an open field, at high noon, under a bright yellow sky. The eye is drawn toward the middle right foreground and rests on a haloed red compass suspended in midair. Leopard heads at the end of each cardinal point stare out at the viewer, and on each side, a long-haired amphibian mermaid stands on blood-red ground. Their thick bodies turn away from each other, although the one on the right with white hair turns her head toward her companion. Near her, a circular shape rests on a triangle balanced on the ground; white spots sprout out of its center, and on the area bathed by the spots Carrington writes, again in mirror writing:

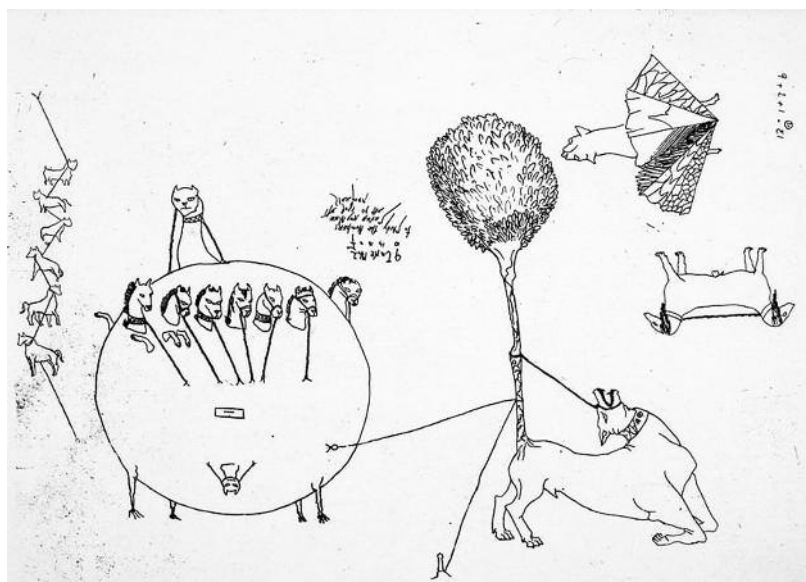


Fig. 6. Leonora Carrington, *Dogs of the Sleeper* (1942), etching on paper, 12 1/2 " x 13". Private collection.

*Guimmon Guimm
The Yaks of With
Mandragon
Guimmon Guimmon Let me Sleep
And when we are The Secrets
of*

You are [she draws a circle with wings] + I am [she draws a circle with arms, a neck, and a sun for a head].

There she signed the painting on the lower left, also in mirror writing, "Leonora Carrington 6 Nov 1941." On the left, under a balance, stand two bulls, a black male Maremanna with half moon shaped horns, and a red long-horned female Afrikaner. Under the black bull, in mirror writing, she wrote in black letters:

*And Skinless Little Horse Don your
Yak skin. Guimmon's cloak
The Bird of Belief is Cracking the
Cold of the Night in his beak*

Behind them, on the dark green mountainous middle ground, four brown bulls with large spreading horns walk in line toward the right. Farther behind, on the left, a man hangs from a gallows. On the right middle ground, swaddled in yellow, red, and black, respectively, three half-deer half-humans hang aligned on a perch, pierced through the heart. In the background center floats a circular garden with a single pine growing in the middle. Aligned in the faraway is an endless view of white medieval tents flooded by sunlight. Max Ernst's larger-than-life bird stands on its two legs, wings spread, witness to the event unfolding before him.

Carrington produced two paintings during December 1941, one referring to the world she left behind and the other to the one where she had arrived. *La Joie de patinage* (The Joy of Skating) (front cover), finished on December 11, harkens back

emotionally to a time when the peaceful life in Europe was suddenly shattered. In a winter landscape, the mountains and ground are covered in snow, and the water on which two personages are skating is iced over. The first skater, a satyress—female head, bare breasted torso loosely covered with a green fabric, and the dark furred hind legs of a goat—is skating on her left hoof and lifting her right to keep her balance. The second skater, a bald, three-headed female, wears a long and ample red and blue striped dress to keep herself protected from the cold along with the warmth of animal skins. The fur of a lynx covers her left shoulder; and two live foxes circle around her neck: one is biting the tail of another that has turned around to look at it. Snuggled up, a black soay ram rides on her back as she slides with her right bare foot on the ice, balancing herself with her left leg upraised. Oblivious to their surroundings, both are skating peacefully, when an iridescent blue sphere comes crashing down into the ice, barely missing them. On the other side of the river is the place where horses live. One stands below the arched entry of the building that houses them, where, on its highest point, a horse weather vane points toward the wind direction. Outside the building an Icelandic horse is covered with a blanket, a brown stallion is mounting a grey mare, and a fourth horse is galloping toward the entrance. In the distance, another iridescent sphere in the sky forewarns of what is to come.

As the year was coming to an end, on December 27, Carrington finished *Caballos* (Pl. 3). The scene is a desert landscape split by a body of water. On the far side is the landscape representing Europe, which rages, and where volcanoes belching smoke darken the sky. On the near side, where harmony reigns, is America, solely inhabited by horses that roam freely at their leisure. To the left, two rest in a private enclosure. In the distance, a ruinous structure once inhabited by humans, now shelters horses of various breeds. A young black stallion stares aroused at an American Paint mare playing opposite, on the rooftop. And below the archway a black Andalusian horse observes a stallion covering a mare.

By the time Leonora Carrington's interlude in New York came to an end, she had produced during 1941 eight documented canvases—*Garden Bedroom*, *Stella Snead and Her Cat*, *Theater People*, *Untitled* (a painting of five dogs beneath a tree on which an animal is perched), *Summer* (a mural); *La Joie de patinage*, and *Caballos*. She also completed a ninth canvas, begun in 1937, an untitled work later given the title *Fear* (Pl. 4). It is a painting she began when she first arrived in Paris at the end of 1937, one that Ernst took with him, among other works by her that he rescued, when he escaped from Saint-Martin d'Ardeche to Lisbon (where they ran into each other). The painting has elements from other works from 1937, including the girl-horse and the feminine boudoir chair (included in the self-portrait). The emotional content is very revealing. A young girl-horse, fear in her eyes and gestures, is out of place, trapped in an empty human context. Outside the window is emptiness. She is torn between two choices: to stay trapped in an enclosure where she does not fit in or to take a chance outside, at the unknown. It is a telling image of how Carrington grew up (and lived her whole life) living a

conundrum for which she never ever found an answer, looking human but not fitting among humans with whom she had to live; not being an animal but feeling at home with them, specifically identifying with horses, believing in childhood she could transform into one.³⁹

The following year, 1942, she completed *La Chasse* and *Green Tea*, plus *Dogs of the Sleeper* (an etching) and several drawings. Her earlier, undated self-portrait, *A l'Auberge du Cheval d'Aube* (*At The Inn of the Dawn Horse*, 1940), was used to illustrate André Breton's interview in *View* magazine.⁴⁰ Also, in *View*, during 1941–42, she published two stories, "The Sisters" and "White Rabbits," and her *Portrait of Max Ernst* (1940) illustrated her text titled "Max Ernst The Bird Superior." In *VVV*, the surrealist magazine, she collaborated in every issue between 1942 and 1944, contributing her three narratives—"Waiting," "The Seventh Horse," and "Down Below"—and four illustrations—*Green Tea* (the painting that Breton titled after Carrington's story by the same name, *La Dame Ovale*) and three drawings.⁴¹ Also in 1942, following Carrington's departure to Mexico, Peggy Guggenheim published a book, *Art of This Century Collection*, illustrating Leonora's second version of *The Horses of Lord Candlestick* (1938), introduced by a brief biography and reproducing four lines from Carrington's short story "La Debutante."⁴²

Green Tea (Fig. 5 and Pl. 5), signed and dated July 1942, is Leonora's visual recollection of her stay in Santander. Although Carrington spoke little about the work, she said enough for it to be understood what she endured. In the forefront of the painting, a larger than life Carrington towers over the grounds of the hospital. She is ghostly pale, semi-unconscious, swaddled, still sleeping off the effects of the anesthesia given to her prior to receiving shock therapy. A white circle around her is a boundary to enclose and protect her. She stands on the left of the landscape, away from the carefully manicured garden to the right. Separated by lined trees, four wedges of green land grow out and expand out of a central, circular fountain where two swaddled bodies stand by another that sits on the edge of the fountain, and a road branches away from the property. In the foreground, underground, Carrington painted chthonic life, inhabitants of the underworld: bats, swaddled human corpses, and a mother bird approaching her nestlings. The garden itself is enclosed within a circular fence of thick shrubbery, whose sides come to a stop as they meet the sides of the road, where a horse and a dog grow trees—one full of figs ready to be plucked—instead of tails, and each one's collar is tethered to the other's tail. They also represent hospital inmates.

Carrington's first surrealist print, *Dogs of The Sleeper* (1946; Fig. 6), complementary to *Green Tea*, is a most brutal depiction of her experience in hospital; it is painful to look at. Perhaps what makes the image so disturbing is how the event, drawn onto the plate with such absolute certainty, is hard lined in black and white. Aligned on the left edge stand a group of chained dogs, and toward the center each dog of a second group of seven is collared and chained within a circular disc. As in *Green Tea*, one dog chained to a tree is pulling at the chain, desperate to escape. The etching was part of a portfolio

Fig. 7. Leonora Carrington, *Dr. Morales* (1940), pencil on paper, measurements unknown. Whereabouts unknown.

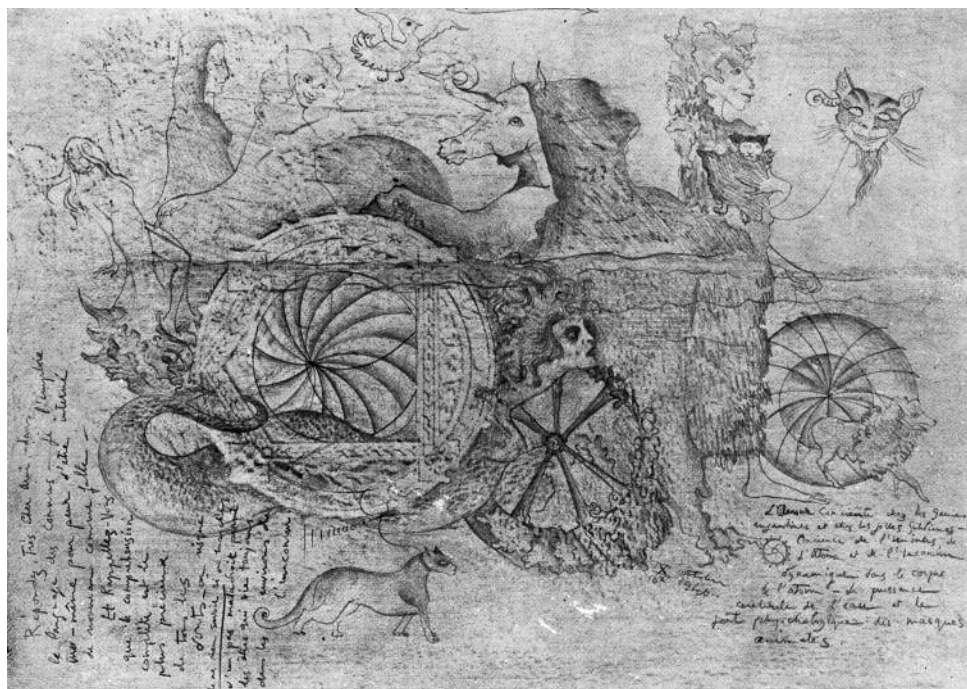


Fig. 8. Leonora Carrington, *Vers l'inconnu* (Toward the unknown) (1940), pencil on paper, measurements unknown. Whereabouts unknown.

of original works published by VVV, created in the studio of engraver Stanley William Hayter. An edition of fifty was planned, to raise funds to continue the magazine, but they did not sell well and just twenty were printed. Other artists planned to be included were Breton, Chagall, Hare, Matta, Alexander Calder, Andre Masson, Robert Motherwell, Kurt Seligmann, and Yves Tanguy.⁴³

By February 1944, when the fourth and final issue of VVV appeared, Carrington was no longer in New York. The publication would make history, as it brought together the creative efforts from many of the surrealists who had come to New York, exiled from the War in Europe, and others who had influenced them or shared the group's mindset. Their effect on American artists struggling to establish a personal iconography would be pivotal. Abstract expressionism could not have developed as it did without the arrival of surrealism. But also, as the surrealists settled into their new home—despite their desire to avoid assimilation—they began to integrate into the fabric of their surroundings, as many ties that bound them together loosened, and following their instinctual nature they sought to explore the world around them.

Among the texts published in the last issue of VVV was Carrington's "Down Below," the scorching effect of every word making the text nearly an unbearable read. Patrick Waldberg, chronicler of surrealism, then living in New York, in awe, summed up the reaction of many: "The ripping tale by Leonora is one of the most moving documents I have read in a long time. I read it in one breath, as if fascinated. It's true, Leonora, the person, inspires in me extremely troubling feelings, and it is difficult for me to be objective about them."⁴⁴

Dr. Pierre Mabilie, another escapee from war-torn France to New York, had suggested to Carrington that she get the

Santander experience out of her system by writing about it. It would help her, he said, attain freedom from the angst caused by the memory—and peace of mind—as she gained understanding of the experience. When Carrington attempted to put it down on paper, she stumbled. It was too raw, too fresh in her mind; she needed some distance from it. Mabilie persisted: if she could not write it, perhaps she would dictate it, as if speaking to him, which she did—to Jeanne Mégren, Mabilie's wife. The text was translated from French to English by Victor Llona Gastañeta for publication in VVV.⁴⁵ Carrington illustrated it with three complementary drawings. One is a portrait of Dr. Luis Morales (1940; Fig. 7), her psychiatrist, and the second a detailed map of the *Sanatorio para enfermos del aparato digestivo, nutrición y nerviosos*, on which she carefully labeled and numbered each landmark to match the outlined list (except for the injured horse lying on its side, near the apple tree, which is neither named, nor numbered, nor included on the list). In the third drawing (1940; Fig. 8), Carrington places a unicorn at the wheel of a partially submerged amphibian vehicle. In front, a floating mermaid carries on her back a mandala, in whose center is a sphere that spirals to the right (as does the one at Stella Snead's feet). In back of the vehicle, to stabilize it, is a spiked wheel. Various personages stand or sit on the car; a bird flies above, and behind, a woman holds an infant to her chest with her left arm, while her right hand holds the leash of a female dog that has recently given birth. Behind the woman and child, Carrington recreates a sphere that spirals to the right. Written sideways in French, on the left edge of the drawing:

Reply, my very dear friend in a known language— I implore you, I myself – fear of being interned again as mad. And remember that complete understanding is the most precious of all rights. One risks



Fig. 9. Leonora Carrington, *La Chasse (The hunt)* (1942), oil on canvas, 19 1/8" x 37". Whereabouts unknown. "First Papers of Surrealism" exhibition catalogue (1942), p. 35.

*knowing nothing if one walks with a clumsy step among beings who still live near the unknown. On the lower right corner she adds: Love conscious in homes of infant genies, homes of sublime mad women. Awareness of the universe, [of] the atom, and [of] the unknown: dynamics in the body of the atom – the cerebral power of water, and the psychology of animal masks.*⁴⁶

She titled the drawing *Vers l'inconnu* (Toward the unknown), and signed and dated it "October, 1940." She had made the drawing while interned in the madhouse at Santander.

As he expected, and as she hoped, following Mabilles' suggestion was a freeing choice. By thoughtfully organizing and articulating the experience, dictating "Down Below" helped Carrington observe how her instinctual choices and their external expression had shaped her life during her breakdown. Mabilles was greatly respected, not only as a physician (he had delivered Aube Breton), but also as an anthropologist. His advice was sought after by the surrealists, for his knowledge of psychoanalytic theory, Kabbalah, Voodoo, religious ecstasy (he authored a study of Saint Thérèse de Lisieux), and other esoteric subjects. It was Mabilles who introduced her to psychoanalytic thought, to Kabbalah, and to his 1940 book, *Le Miroir du merveilleux* (*Mirror of the Marvelous: The Classic Surrealist Work on Myth*), which became a surrealist classic. This last work provided for Carrington the only understanding she accepted as explanation of her recent incursion into madness—and of her life: a journey of marvelous interactions between dream and wakefulness, the interconnectedness between internal and external reality, of nature and the constant unfolding of oneself, internally and socially. By understanding this process, one's history would no longer come across like a series of random events but as a struggle to conquer sequential experiences in order to reach a spiritual promised land.

The "First Papers of Surrealism" exhibition, held October 14 to November 7, 1942, at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion in midtown Manhattan, was the last surrealist event Carrington attended and participated in installing before leaving for

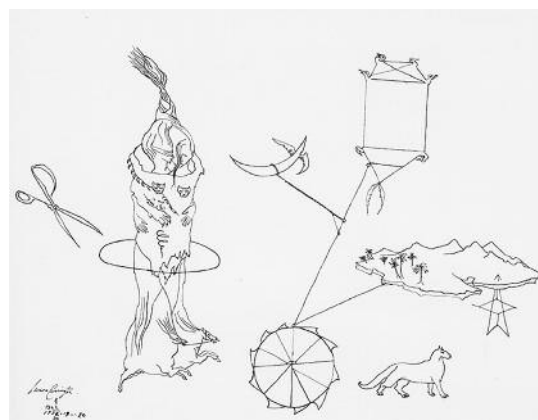


Fig. 10. Leonora Carrington, *Brothers and sisters have I none* (1942), ink on paper, 14" x 18". Mary-Anne Martin | Fine Art, New York. "First Papers of Surrealism" exhibition catalogue (1942), p. 26.

Mexico.⁴⁷ *Newsweek* advertised the show as the "biggest all-surrealist show ever in the United States,"⁴⁸ which was an exaggeration, but it made for good press. Regardless, the fact was that the show really was a serious affair deriving its title from the struggles the refugees had gone through to escape Europe by the skin of their teeth—including obtaining exit visas from their countries and immigration papers from the United States. To bring immediate attention to the seriousness of their predicament, the cover of the catalogue reproduced a photo of a wall pockmarked with bullet holes actually poked in the paper. But what drew the public to the exhibition, and turned it into an unforgettable affair, was less the art than its presentation. Breton hung the exhibition of works by some thirty artists,⁴⁹ and Duchamp took hundreds of feet of twine and, with the assistance of Carrington, Lamba, and Susi Hare wove a criss-cross web throughout the exhibition space.⁵⁰ This installation had a double intent: to interfere with easy access to the works by visitors as well having them go to extra lengths to reach them. Critics, journalists, and visitors offered endless interpretations of the symbolism of the twine web. But Duchamp, the only one who knew its meaning—if there was one—didn't care, or bother to tell. Duchamp also had the ingenious idea to replace photographs in the catalogue of several of the artists represented with "compensatory portraits" of other personages. For example, Matta's portrait would be a child in a sailor suit; Duchamp's a distressed woman; Breton's a film noir character, etc. For Leonora's image, he used the well-known portrait of Allie Mae Burroughs by Walker Evans, considered a symbol of the Great Depression. As if all this was not enough, Duchamp still came up with another idea to befuddle visitors on opening night: to have a group of boys and girls play ball and hopscotch, respectively, as visitors attempted to study the works exhibited. If these "added attractions" were meant to cause a *succès de scandale*, the goal was accomplished. As if it was not enough, a photograph of the "webbed" show, as it looked upon entering, was intentionally reproduced upside down in *VVV!* Thus spoke surrealism. The two works exhibited by



Fig. 11. Photograph of Peggy Guggenheim sitting by Leonora Carrington's *The Horses of Lord Candlestick* in her Art Of This Century gallery, c. 1942. Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.



Fig. 12. Leonora Carrington, *The Horses of Lord Candlestick* (1938), oil on canvas, 23 1/2" x 35". Private Collection, New York.

Carrington in the show were reproduced in the catalogue. Matta lent *La Chasse* (The hunt) (Fig. 9), which he had acquired fresh off the easel. Its quiet silence speaks of the aftermath of the hunt. Snow covers the mountainous landscape, including the abodes and birds sitting atop the mountains. Two flying structures are invisibly hung from the subtle green sky. In the upper left, five personages stand together and one female lounges on her side. Hanging from the structure are swaddled catch. On the upper right, three determined horses travel in a straight line, pulling forward a floating island. On the lower right corner is the trapped animal, the hunted and caught dark brown horse lying flat on its side atop a circular net, similar horse to the one Carrington drew in the map for "Down Below." Her drawing *Brothers and sisters have I none* (Fig. 10) was reproduced below a drawing by "O.W.," *L'ame soeur* (L'Androgyne), below a quote from Balzac's *La Comedie Humaine*, "Séraphita-Séraphitus," the perfect androgyne having transcended their humanity.⁵¹ The intention was to establish a parallel between both drawings of the alchemical androgyne, the twin male and female souls that parted and reunited as one being. In Carrington's drawing, open scissors, held by an invisible hand, threaten to cut the protective circle around it. The title is the first line of a riddle: *Brothers and sisters have I none, but this man's father is my father's son. Who am I looking at?*

Answer: He is looking at himself. In the drawing, Carrington is foretelling her forthcoming aloneness, the effect of her impending separation from her surrealist family. On the coat worn by the androgyne, Carrington partly inscribed in mirror writing, "TIME WAS TIME IS TIME IS PAST."⁵² Carrington gifted the drawing to André Breton before leaving for Mexico.

In Peggy Guggenheim's museum-gallery, Art of This Century, architect Friederick J. Kiesler had mounted Carrington's *The Horses of Lord Candlestick* on an adjustable projecting arm, opposite a sitting area where it could be easily studied at eye level (Figs. 11 and 12). The painting had entered an excellent home, where it hung in good company among twentieth-century masters like Brancusi, Braque, Brauner, Chagall, De Chirico, Delvaux, Ernst, Kandinsky, Matta, Miro, Picasso, and Tanguy. *The Horses of Lord Candlestick* was the first canvas Carrington sold; Guggenheim had acquired it directly from her in France, for eighty dollars, in 1938, before Carrington and Ernst moved to Saint-Martin d'Ardèche. This was before Guggenheim began her wild shopping spree to artists' studios, when she was determined to buy one painting a day from uneasy artists eager to sell for dollars as the threat of war loomed on the horizon. A comparison of this painting with the first version of the subject Carrington had produced earlier that same year reveals how her masterful self-assured craft developed by leaps and bounds in a brief period of a few months. The former appears as the work of a talented but struggling Leonora. The latter is the work of a mature Carrington, one that brings together the characteristic magic of her spontaneous freedom and the fine artistry of her mature work. It was also the first work by a woman that entered Peggy Guggenheim's collection.

Leonora Carrington was in Mexico when, between December 9, 1942 and January 24, 1943, her self-portrait *A l'Auberge du Cheval d'Aube*, and the portrait she painted of Max Ernst were prominently included in the New York Museum of Modern Art exhibition, "20th Century Portraits."⁵³ Her two works were still being exhibited there when, during January 5–31, 1943 (extended to February 6), Peggy Guggenheim

presented the historic “Exhibition by 31 Women,” in which only four of the thirty-one artists were represented with two paintings; Leonora was among them. Guggenheim lent *The Horses of Lord Candlestick*, and Pierre Matisse *La Joie de Patinage* (erroneously dated 1942 in the brochure). Marcel Duchamp had proposed the show, and he and Guggenheim selected works with advice from Jimmy Ernst, Max Ernst, Howard Putzel, James Thrall Soby, and James Johnson Sweeney. Two years later, Carrington was included in “The Women,” Guggenheim’s second exhibition of art by women.

When Leonora Carrington arrived in New York in July of 1941, she was unknown; by the time she left, eighteen months later, she was unforgettable.

Leaving came suddenly and was not planned. Leduc wanted to stay in New York. He had gotten used to living well in France and returning to Mexico’s low salaries was not a welcome thought. In New York, he and Leonora lived frugally but well, and he was able to put aside a reserve. One day, he received a visitor, Eduardo Villaseñor, then General Director of the Banco de México. They discussed Leduc’s hesitancy about returning to Mexico, where he feared not being able to make a living for two. At Villaseñor’s urging, he went to Mexico to explore work opportunities, but came back disappointed, without prospects. However, Villaseñor persisted, wiring him \$800 dollars, a significant sum in those days, to encourage and plan his return.⁵⁴

Feeling closer to her husband than to anyone else in New York, Carrington chose to leave with Leduc. For little money, he bought an old banger and off they went. On the road, Leonora discovered a country that had nothing to do with New York, which explained Leduc’s insatiable resentment of the United States. She saw rampant racism that she could not have imagined in offensive signs outside restaurants that read “No Colored Allowed,” and further south, “No Mexicans or Dogs Allowed.” Once, she had to go into a restaurant to buy food and bring it back to the automobile, for Renato was not allowed entrance. It was a good idea to leave the United States, she thought. Crossing into Mexico, she saw people riding horses on unpaved streets, and she felt a comfortable familiarity. But when they drove into Mexico City, and she noticed a trolley with a sign that read “Misterios,” she knew she had arrived at the right place.⁵⁵ •

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Notes

I am indebted to several persons for countless generosity. In Mexico, at the Galería de Arte Mexicano, Directors Mariana Pérez Amor and Alejandra Reygadas Yturbe; Patricia Torres and Rafael Yturbe; and Enrique Guerrero, Director of the Galería Enrique Guerrero. In New York: Mary-Anne Martin, Director of Mary-Anne Martin/Fine Art; Stella Snead; Manka Rubinstein and Ephraim Adir. In Paris, at the Galerie 1900-2000, Directors Marcel Fleiss and David Fleiss. In Madrid, I thank Josefina Alix, and Dr. Luis Morales in Santander; and in Venice, Silvio

Veronese, Librarian and Archivist at The Peggy Guggenheim Collection. Lastly, my greatest debt goes to Leonora Carrington, who walks with me every step of the way.

Several segments in this essay appeared in my 2008 essay, *Leonora Carrington, What She Might Be*, published by the Dallas Museum of Art. Since then, other authors have published the information without providing proper credit. Mexico celebrates the centennial of Leonora Carrington’s birth next year with an exhibition at Mexico City’s Museo de Arte Moderno.

1. Stella Snead, interview with the author, 1999.
2. José Ramón Garambella, *Renato Por Leduc Apuntes de Una Vida Singular* 3rd ed. (México, D.F.: Ediciones Océano, 1983), 143. Author’s translation. Henceforth, *Leduc*.
3. *Ibid.*, 108.
4. *Ibid.*, 114.
5. *Ibid.*, 124.
6. *Ibid.*, 124–26.
7. *Ibid.*, 138–42.
8. While in Portugal and the United States, Ernst, relentless about reestablishing the relationship with Carrington, spoke nonstop to Peggy Guggenheim about it. Meanwhile, Peggy was in love with him, and despite feeling torn about his cruel indifference toward her feelings, she remained determined to rescue him from Europe. Not once did Ernst express gratitude or consideration—not then, not afterward—an issue that did not go unnoticed by Leonora, which only added further distance between them. In the fall of 1942, after Ernst met Dorothea Tanning, and Carrington and Leduc left for Mexico, Ernst’s obsessiveness finally abated. Ernst never spoke publicly about Carrington. Carrington was also discreet; but her admiration for the artist Ernst remained steadfast, as well as her gratitude for the person he had been with her; she had no regrets. They never communicated again. Leonora Carrington, personal communication. I had a long friendship with the artist, beginning in 1966, until weeks before her death, with many opportunities for personal communications.
9. Garambella, *Leduc*, 142.
10. Jimmy Ernst, *A Not So Still Life* (New York: St. Martin’s/Marek, 1984), 87.
11. For the description of how Carrington and Ernst met, see my essay in *Leonora Carrington, What She Might Be*, (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 2008), 51.
12. When Leonora took Ernst to meet her parents, she was genuinely surprised when her father told her that if she planned to live with a married man, he never wanted to see her again. Ernst returned to London to wait for Carrington, who had stayed to speak further with her horrified parents, and when nothing was accomplished to pack, telling them she was going to Paris to attend a party at Christian Bérard’s, although they knew better. Before leaving, in anger, she picked up a decorative object, a metal animal, and threw it across the room. Leonora Carrington, personal communication.
13. Manuel Avila Camacho, interview with Leonora Carrington Part I, “Max Ernst me Enseña Nueva Forma de Vivir,” *Excelsior*, Feb. 10, 1974, B-2. Author’s translation.
14. For a comprehensive narrative of the events leading to Carrington and Ernst’s move from Paris, their stay in Saint-Martin, and what transpired following their separation and with the house since their departure, see Silvana Schmidt, *Loplops Geheimnis Max Ernst und Leonora Carrington in Südfankreich* (Köln: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1996), 59. Author’s translation.
15. As she was leaving France to cross into Spain, Carrington was simultaneously crossing to the other side of sanity, and whatever information presented itself to her thereafter, she could only misread. Only hospitalization in a place where her life could be organized and simplified would help.

16. Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), ix.
17. Hedda Sterne quoted in Jacqueline Bograd Weld, *Peggy, The Wayward Guggenheim* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1986), 227.
18. Julien Levy quoted in *ibid.*, 227.
19. Luis Buñuel, *Mi ultimo suspiro (memorias)* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janes, S. A., 1982), 177. Author's translation.
20. Ethel Bazotes, communication with the author, Oct. 4, 2000.
21. Hedia Xavier, communication with the author, 1966.
22. Jacqueline Lamba, personal communication with the author, August 1987.
23. Leonora Carrington, communication with the author.
24. Julien Levy, *Memoir of an Art Gallery* (New York: Putnam, 1977), 279.
25. Dr. Luis Morales, interview with the author, August 10, 1995.
26. Leonora Carrington, communication with the author.
27. I thank Dr. Luis Morales for providing me a photo of Carrington's painting *Villa Pilar* and many other generositys.
28. Leonora Carrington, communication with the author.
29. Leonora Carrington, "Down Below," *VVV*, David Hare, ed., no. 4, (Feb. 1944), 70.
30. *Ibid.*, 84. Elizabeth's dummy is a life-size doll made available in psychiatric units for patients' use as a form of psychodrama, to hit violently whenever they feel angry, or hug when feeling needy.
31. Susana Corcuera, communication with the author, 1989.
32. Reflecting on Leduc's attitude toward Carrington when she first escaped to Lisbon, "Peggy observed with some satisfaction, 'He [Renato] was like a father to her.'" Quoted in Anton Gill, *Art Lover, A Biography of Peggy Guggenheim* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 256.
33. Garambella, *Leduc*, 275–76.
34. This painting is lost. The only documentation of its existence appears in Helena Rubinstein's estate sale: Parke Bernet Galleries Inc, N.Y., *The Collection of Helena Rubinstein [Princess Gourielli], Modern Paintings and Sculpture*, part two, April 27, 1966, lot 654 (not illustrated).
35. Leonora Carrington, communication with the author.
36. Personal communication with the author, 1987. I thank Manka Rubinstein for sharing her memories of Leonora Carrington and for her generous hospitality.
37. Leonora Carrington, communication with the author.
38. *Ibid.*
39. The work is among those discovered by Teresa Feibelman, including *Theater People* and *Bedroom Garden*. Although the painting has been known as *Untitled*, I titled it *Fear*, with Carrington's blessing, because of its emotional content.
40. *View*, Nicolas Callas, ed., vol. I, nos. 7–8 (Oct.–Nov., 1941).
41. The second issue of *VVV* was double, including issues 2 and 3.
42. Peggy Guggenheim, ed. *Art of This Century* (New York: Art Aid Corporation, 1942), 132.
43. Personal communication with the author, 1987. I thank Ephraim Adir for showing me the complete album, his hospitality, and other generositys.
44. Michel Waldborg, ed., *Patrick Waldborg and Isabelle Waldborg, Un Amour Acéphale, Correspondance 1940–1949* (Paris: ELA La Différence, 1992), 215. Author's translation.
45. Dating "Down Below" is somewhat of a conundrum. Marina Warner follows its trajectory from the beginning. Carrington wrote an early version of the original text in English, in 1942, while living in New York, and showed it to an uninterested Janet Flanner. That text was lost. When Carrington explained to Mabile that she was having trouble writing it, he suggested she dictate it to his wife, which Carrington did, in French, while, Warner tells us, "Mabile and other refugees were camping in the abandoned Russian Embassy in Mexico City." At the time, Carrington and Leduc were living on Artes 110, before divorcing. The text first appears in print, translated into English, in 1944, after Carrington had been living in Mexico over a year. One needs also to consider that after she dictated it in French, it was sent to Victor Llona, the translator who, in the early 1940s was living in Lima. We do not know whether the English translation was passed by Carrington to confirm it was in her voice before it was printed in *VVV*; but it's unlikely. Its first French publication by FONTAINE, as "EN BAS," was in 1945, as she dictated it to Jeanne Mégren. The text had been reprinted again and again in Llona's translation until Paul De Angelis and Marina Warner brought it to Carrington for her reading and commentaries before re-publishing it. See Marina Warner's *Introduction* in *Leonora Carrington, The House of Fear: Notes From Down Below* (New York: Dutton, 1988), 1.
46. Author's translation.
47. A comprehensive study of *First Papers of Surrealism* is Lewis Kachur's, *Displaying the Marvelous* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), 164–214. The exhibition was sponsored by the Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies, Inc., which published the catalogue, which may be seen at <https://archive.org/details/firstpaperssur00bret> (accessed Aug. 2, 2017).
48. "Agonized Humor," *Newsweek*, (Oct. 26, 1942), 76.
49. There was no checklist in the catalogue or one printed separately. Facing the foreword by Sidney Janis, within the drawing of a keyhole, is a haphazard list that includes fragmented names of foreign artists, Frida Kahlo, Meret Oppenheim, Hedda Sterne, and Remedios Varo. But from other sources, one learns that work by these artists, except for some collages by Hedda Sterne, were not exhibited. Breton wrote to Péret, who was living in Mexico, asking to borrow two paintings by Varo and one she owned by Brauner; but these were never lent. Only works by two women appear illustrated in the catalogue, a painting and a drawing by Leonora Carrington and a painting by Kay Sage.
50. Interview with Susanna Perkins Coggeshall (formerly Susi Hare), in 2002. Carrington, Duchamp, Lamba, André Breton, and Susi Hare "strung" the show. Susi recalled for me how the exhibition was mounted and how, later that night, David told her he was leaving her for Lamba, with whom he'd been having an affair.
51. *Séraphîta* refers to Honoré de Balzac's novel about an androgyn who, by being both male and female, embodies the perfect human.
52. The line *Time was—Time is—Time is past*, is from a comedy by Robert Greene, a playwright from the Elizabethan era. Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, both of whom are magicians, work together to create a brass head, animated under the devil's influence. The head speaks three times, saying *Time was—Time is—Time is past*, and then falls to the floor and shatters. Afterwards, Friar Bacon's careless use of magic causes two innocent young men to kill each other. Contrite, he gives up magic and devotes himself to a life of repentance. Carrington repeats the quote two lines from the bottom in the text, she wrote in 1945 to accompany the portrait of Saint Anthony she submitted to a contest in search of the saint's portrait to appear in the film *Bel Ami*.
53. During 1943, the exhibition travelled to the Baltimore Museum of Art, Feb. 12 – March 7; Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Mass., March 21 – April 18; Arts Club of Chicago, May 1 –31; and California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco: June 14 –July 12.
54. Garambella, *Leduc*, 306.
55. Leonora Carrington, communication with the author.

SUZANNE DUCHAMP

ART REFLECTING ON A MODERN LIFE

By Emma Anquinet

Suzanne Duchamp (1889–1963), like three of her brothers, took an active role as an avant-garde artist. Throughout a career spanning five decades she expressed her personal concerns by incorporating elements of various contemporary art styles in her work. Like many artists of her generation in France, the First World War (1914–18) had a major impact on her life and work (Fig. 1).

The fourth of six children, Suzanne was one of the four artists in the family Duchamp-Nicolle. Her three older brothers were Jacques Villon (1875–1963), Raymond Duchamp-Villon (1876–1918) and Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968). Marcel and Suzanne, who were closest in age and temperament, maintained a close lifetime bond.

Beginning her education as a painter in 1905 at the École des Beaux-Arts in Rouen, near the family's home, Duchamp was introduced to contemporary avant-garde artists and movements through her brothers as well as through membership in artists' groups, including the Société Normande de Peinture Moderne and the Section d'Or. The Société Normande merged with offshoots of the Cubist movement to become the Section d'Or, whose first exhibition, in 1912 at the Galerie La Boétie in Paris, was promoted by Duchamp's three brothers. Suzanne's style was influenced by Cubism as well as by Fauvism and Post-impressionism,¹ as seen in *Jeune fille au chien/Magdeleine* (Young Woman with Dog/ Magdeleine, 1912; Fig. 2), one of two paintings she showed in the Section d'Or exhibition—though neither her name nor her paintings were listed in the exhibition catalogue. Other artists exhibiting at this event included Alexander Archipenko, Fernand Léger, Albert Gleizes, and Marie Laurencin (1883–1956), with whom she would exhibit regularly in the future.² Also in 1912, Suzanne Duchamp had her first exhibition at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris, again showing *Jeune fille au chien/Magdeleine* and *Intimité* (1911).

In 1911, Suzanne had married Charles Victor René Demares, a pharmacist in Rouen, and started working at his pharmacy. Although he was not present at the marriage, Marcel gave his sister his painting *Jeune Homme et Jeune Fille dans le Printemps* (Young Man and Young Girl in Spring, 1911) as a wedding gift. The numerous readings of the painting caused a lot of consternation among art historians: the Italian scholar Arturo Schwarz, for example, interpreted this wedding present, based on extensive readings of, among others, Freud



Fig. 1. Suzanne Duchamp working as a nurse during the First World War (1914–15), Hôtel des Invalides, Paris.

and Jung, as an indication of Marcel's unconscious, incestuous affection for his younger sister.³ On the other hand, the American scholar Francis M. Naumann has argued that, rather than seeing Suzanne's marriage as a betrayal, Marcel celebrated it in the painting, placing his sister and future brother-in-law in the positions of Adam and Eve, the world's first lovers, in the Garden of Eden.⁴

Nevertheless, the marriage was short-lived, and in 1914, as war broke out, Duchamp divorced her husband and moved to Paris, staying at Marcel's apartment in rue la Condamine. (Marcel was discharged from military service for medical reasons and moved to New York in June 1915.⁵) By August of 1914, the face of Paris—known for its modern, metropolitan identity—had changed: there was less social and public activity as traffic was restricted and civilians were fleeing abroad out of fear of the German occupiers. With lights turned off or blacked out to avoid aerial bombardments, the "city of

light" was turned into a city of darkness. As some 880,000 Parisian men were mobilized and sent to war, public life became more feminized: women replaced men in factories and public workplaces, and many young women, including Duchamp, volunteered in military hospitals all over Europe. Suzanne Duchamp remained in Paris, serving at the Hôtel des Invalides, one of the largest French military hospitals. Her experience at her former husband's pharmacy, especially her knowledge of the composition of medications, proved advantageous in her work. Yet nothing could have prepared her for the calamities and horrors of the War with which she would have to cope. Nurses were often the first persons to have contact with the soldiers coming in from the front, covered in mud and blood, many severely wounded, both physically—paralysis, amputated limbs, facial disfigurement,) and mentally—shell shock, hysteria, delirium, and more.⁶

Duchamp's elder brother Raymond died during the War from an infection of typhus. As a young man, in 1898, suffering from rheumatism, Raymond Duchamp-Villon had abandoned his medical studies, and during his recovery he began sculpting small figurines, discovering his vocation as an artist, which he would pursue successfully in the following years. When the War broke out, he was working on what would be one of his masterpieces, *Le Cheval*, for the Salon d'Automne in Paris. Despite his fragile health, Raymond volunteered as a doctor's assistant, and in late November 1916, he became infected with typhus while caring for sick patients at a station at the front in Champagne. He died two years later, in October 1918, at a military hospital in Cannes and was buried in the family tomb in Rouen.⁷

Besides her work at the military hospital, Suzanne Duchamp continued making art, building her reputation in the Parisian quarter of Montparnasse. She kept close contact with Marcel, who informed her on the most recent developments in the New York art world. In 1916, she met the Swiss painter Jean Crotti (1878–1958), who shared a studio with Marcel in the Lincoln Arcade Building in New York. There was an instant *coup de foudre* between Suzanne and Crotti, who carried letters back and forth between the brother and sister. Crotti's close connection with Marcel Duchamp is reflected in the Dada wire portrait with glass eyes he made of Marcel in 1915 (Fig. 3). Crotti divorced his wife, Yvonne Chastel, and after the War, he and Suzanne were married, on April 14, 1919.

It was soon after that Suzanne Duchamp became involved in Dada, making the works for which she is best known. Although Paris was a center for avant-garde art and artists before the War, the Dada movement came late to that city. Dada originated around 1916 in Zurich, Switzerland—a neutral country during the First World War that had become a refuge for many modern artists—by a group of anti-war artists, including Hugo Ball, one of the owners of the Cabaret Voltaire, Emmy Hennings (1885–1948), one of its stars,⁸ Tristan Tzara, Hans Arp, and the German pacifist poet Richard Huelsenbeck. The movement was propagated later on in other cities, in Berlin around 1918 and not until 1920 in Paris.

"Dada" was intended as a repudiation of the traditional world of reason and logic underlying the atrocities of the War.



Fig. 2. Suzanne Duchamp, *Jeune fille au chien / Magdeleine* (1912), oil on canvas, 36 1/4" x 28 3/4". Centre national d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, Paris. © Suzanne Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris/ARS, New York 2017.

The Dada movement defined itself as an amoral, anti-dogmatic art movement and life form, which radically contrasted with the past—in the words of Francis Picabia: "our brain should be nothing but a blackboard."⁹ Dada-artists questioned traditional notions of beauty and conformism in the art world by using provocation and humor. On the other hand, they provided art with a broader, social role as an attempt to subvert various contemporary institutions, such as industrialism, the bourgeoisie, and the official politics of the academies.

Since 1915 in New York, Marcel Duchamp, Picabia, Man Ray (Emmanuel Radnitzky) and Crotti were drastically transforming the art world with their Dadaistic ideas. Marcel shocked his contemporaries with the development of his ready-mades. He proposed that the modern artist should rediscover the importance of the concept—the mental activity of the artistic creation—rather than exclusively focusing on the physical object. According to Marcel Duchamp, the artwork only exists in relation to the outside world, to the spectator and the context in which the work is perceived.¹⁰ By introducing his ready-mades, he questioned the absurdity of the functioning of a museum and its traditional interest in the physical object and its beauty. The artistic act is not producing the object, but choosing an object from the daily, industrial context of modern



Fig. 3. Jean Crotti, *Portrait de Marcel Duchamp* (Sculpture made to measure) (1915), lead, wire and glass, original work lost.

life and then isolating it in an artistic context that causes the object to be transformed into a piece of art whose concept is more important than its physical form.¹¹

Suzanne Duchamp was acquainted with this concept early, since Marcel kept her informed about his vision and the development of his ready-mades in their regular correspondence. In mid-January 1916 he wrote asking her to preserve the bicycle wheel and bottle rack that he had left behind in his studio on rue la Condamine. He would use these items as “ready mades” and explained his artistic process to Suzanne—that he would sign these objects and give them an English inscription, thereby changing an everyday artifact into a work of art. More specifically, he proposed that Suzanne make a ready-made “from a distance” and he gave her the instructions to compose a phrase and write it at the base on the inside of the bottom ring of the bottle rack. Afterwards, she was to sign it with the inscription “[after] Marcel Duchamp.” Marcel gave his sister several examples of this new art form and told her that she shouldn’t understand his inscriptions in a “Romantic, Impressionist or Cubist sense.”¹² Unfortunately, Suzanne was cleaning out Marcel’s apartment and settling his affairs in Paris at that time, and before the letter arrived she had already thrown away these objects. The following year, on the day after the opening of the exhibition of the Society of

Independent Artists in New York (in April 1917), Marcel wrote to his sister about the rejection of a revolutionary artwork, *Fountain* (1917), a urinal, which a female friend of his had entered in the exhibition under the pseudonym ‘Richard Mutt.’ He did not reveal his authorship of this work even to his sister at that time.¹³

Dada was introduced in Paris early in 1920—on the 23rd of January 1920, to be exact, at the Vendredi de Littérature—by, among others, Tzara, Picabia, and Jean Cocteau, inspiring Paris to expand as a center of Dadaistic absurdity, spectacle, and provocation. Suzanne Duchamp became one of the prominent members of this Parisian Dada movement. She signed Picabia’s *Manifeste du Mouvement Dada* (1920) and was actively involved in many events. In the Dada exhibition and soirée at the Salon des Indépendants at the Grand Palais in February 1920, she exhibited the ‘mechano-dada’ assemblages *Un et une menacés* (One and one menaced, 1916; Pl. 6) and *Radiation de deux seuls éloignés* (Radiation between two separated, 1916–20) as well as the painting *Multiplikation brisée et rétablie* (Broken and Restored Multiplication, 1918–19; Pl. 7).

In April 1921, Duchamp and Crotti organized a retrospective exhibition of their Dada work at the Galerie Montaigne in Paris. The Dadaistic nature of this exhibition is illustrated by the invitation: “*Pour comprendre l’incompris: soir et matin, marcher 30 minutes sur la tête. Aller vêtu seulement de quelques toutes petites roses: 2 devant et 1 derrière*” (To understand the misunderstood: evening and morning, walk 30 minutes on your head. Go dressed only in a few tiny roses: 2 in front and 1 behind).¹⁴ The same location was used for the Salon Dada in June 1921, one of the most important Dada events in Paris (although Duchamp and Crotti did not participate). That year, Suzanne became a member of the Salon d’Automne, where she exhibited *Chef d’Oeuvre: accordéon* (Masterpiece: accordion, 1921; Fig. 4), assembling oil paint with gouache and tinfoil. The Salon d’Automne, founded in 1903 by Henri Matisse, André Derain, and others, like the earlier Salon des Indépendants, was formed in reaction to the conservative politics of the official salons. The goal was to exhibit progressive (originally fauvist) art, and with no jury these exhibitions were more accessible to artists. The Salon d’Automne did not, however, show much interest in mechanomorphism, and an article in *Comoedia* notes that the mechanomorphic works of Suzanne Duchamp, Jean Crotti and Francis Picabia were hidden in a corner, so that the public would not notice them.¹⁵

Although, as far as is known, Duchamp gave no explanations about her Dada work, it reflects her ambiguous postwar attitude towards modern industry and its developments. She identified herself as a modern woman, fascinated by contemporary ideas and innovations. She liked, for example, going to the cinema and making automobile trips along the Côte d’Azur with Crotti and their friends, Picabia and Germaine Everling. A fascination with technology in her imagery incorporates elements of mechanomorphism, as developed by Picabia. This art style provided a metaphor for the optimistic belief in modern industrial developments and human behavior in the ‘machine age’ as representing and/or

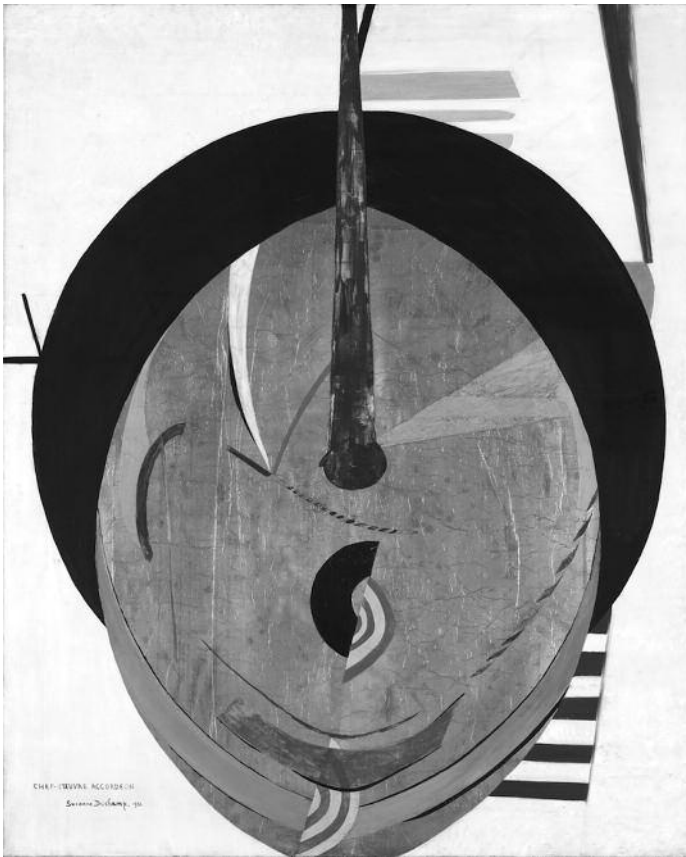


Fig. 4. Suzanne Duchamp, *Chef d'Oeuvre: accordéon* (1921), oil, gouache and tin foil on canvas, 39 5/16" x 31 7/8". © Suzanne Duchamp. Yale Univ. Art Gallery.

represented by (dysfunctional) mechanical objects. This new idiom flourished in the Dada movement, influenced by the theory of Paul B. Haviland about the new age in which men created the industrial machine and then tried to overcome its superiority by making human life itself mechanomorphic.¹⁶

Another important influence was the New York Armory Show of 1913, in which Marcel had debuted *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912). Also that year he created *Bicycle Wheel on a Stool*, a kinetic work reflecting on modern 'machine esthetics.' Picabia was convinced that industry was the genius of the modern age and that a painting was the way to express modern life correctly because it communicates universal, metaphysical ideas by representing a particular reality. By integrating the machine in artistic imagery, Picabia would thus be able to provide the most suitable expression of his reality.¹⁷

Suzanne Duchamp was one of the first women artists in Paris to use machine-esthetics, incorporating numbers and geometrical figures, cryptic titles, and ready-made objects such as metal gears, string, and a plumb bob in her 'mechano-dada' assemblages, *Un et une menacés*, *Fabrique de joie* (Joy factory, 1920) and *Usine de mes pensées* (Factory of my thoughts, 1920; Fig. 5).¹⁸ Her brothers were a primary influence: Raymond Duchamp-Villon had experimented with functional and visual relationships between animals and machines in his sculptures; Jacques Villon used reproductions of machines from journals

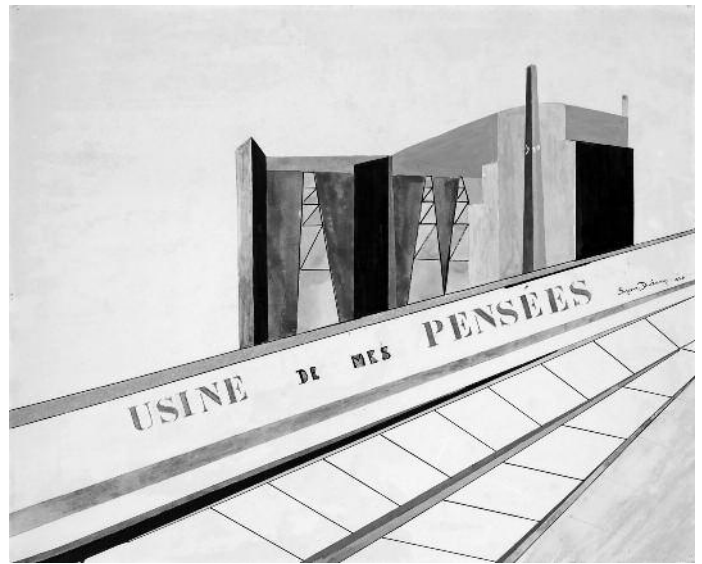


Fig. 5. Suzanne Duchamp, *Usine de mes pensées* (1920), watercolor, gouache and ink on paper, 17 3/4" x 21 1/4". Private Collection. © Suzanne Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris/ARS, New York 2017.

and newspapers in his collages; and Marcel Duchamp was becoming an icon with his introduction of ready-mades. Eventually, she did collaborate in one of his ready-made projects: as a wedding gift, Marcel sent Suzanne and Crotti instructions for its creation. Suzanne was to hang a schoolbook on geometry on the balcony of her apartment, extracting the object from its conventional habitat and transforming it into a physical manifestation of the changing "irrational" weather conditions. She was to record the results of this process by a photograph and a painting. Titled *Le Ready-Made Malheureux de Marcel* (The Unhappy Ready-Made of Marcel, 1920; Fig. 6) she turned the photograph—and with it the rational laws of physics and traditional representation—upside down.¹⁹

Although fascinated by new technologies, Suzanne Duchamp was also skeptical and cautious about the consequences of these developments, partially as a result of the deep impressions left by the War and her experiences as a nurse. The disharmonic, bright-colored elements of *Multiplication brisée et rétablie* (Pl. 7) refer to the great disruptions that affected every aspect of life. A catalogue text from a 2015 exhibition titled "Shatter/Rupture/Break" at the Art Institute of Chicago, which owns the work, focuses on the words as well as the images.

Indeed, many works suggest the fracturing of language along with pictorial conventions, as words and images no longer seemed to have stable meanings. Suzanne Duchamp's *Broken and Restored Multiplication* epitomizes this sense of linguistic rupture and disorder. Around a central image of the Eiffel Tour turned upside-down, the artist inscribed phrases redolent of the fracturing of modern society: "The mirror would shatter, the scaffolding would totter, the balloons would fly away, the stars would dim, etc..."²⁰

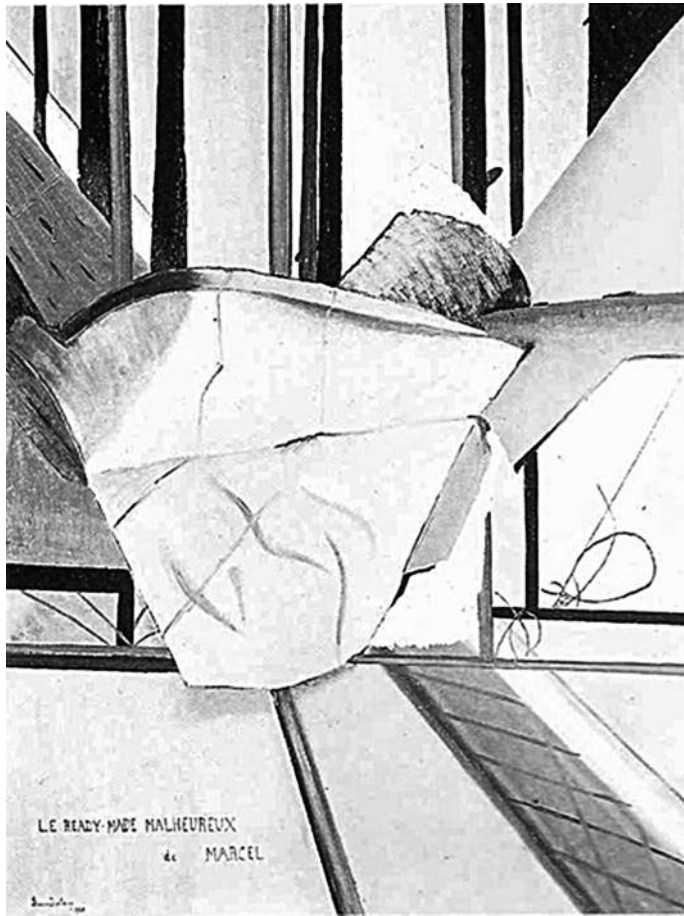


Fig. 6. Suzanne Duchamp, *Le Ready-Made Malheureux de Marcel* (1920), oil on canvas, 31 7/8" x 23 3/8". Private Collection. © Suzanne Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris/ARS, New York 2017.

It is clearly an expression of the artist's personal experience of the chaotic atmosphere in Paris at the end of the War. In many ways, Duchamp's own world had "broken": the divorce from her first husband, the death of her brother Raymond, and the calamities she witnessed at the military hospital. However, the end of the War also brought a restoration in her social and artistic activities in Paris—the very center of modern life.²¹

Through many self-portraits she made throughout her life, Duchamp expressed her position as a modern artist. In *Give me the right Right to life* (1919; Fig. 7), for example, the head of the artist appears captured by a chaotic net of objects that refer to the dichotomy between the human body and nature (clothing, twigs, a moth), and industry and war (lantern, clock, machine gun). Here she encapsulates the dangerous effects of the latter on the former, drawn from her own experiences as a modern woman and an artist.²² The cryptic title of this watercolor can also be linked to the contemporary debate on the social status of women and indicates a claim for women's rights. *Portrait de l'artiste* (1919) has similar imagery, with one eye visible and the same short hairstyle. Duchamp does not state that she takes or has this right, but that she wants to

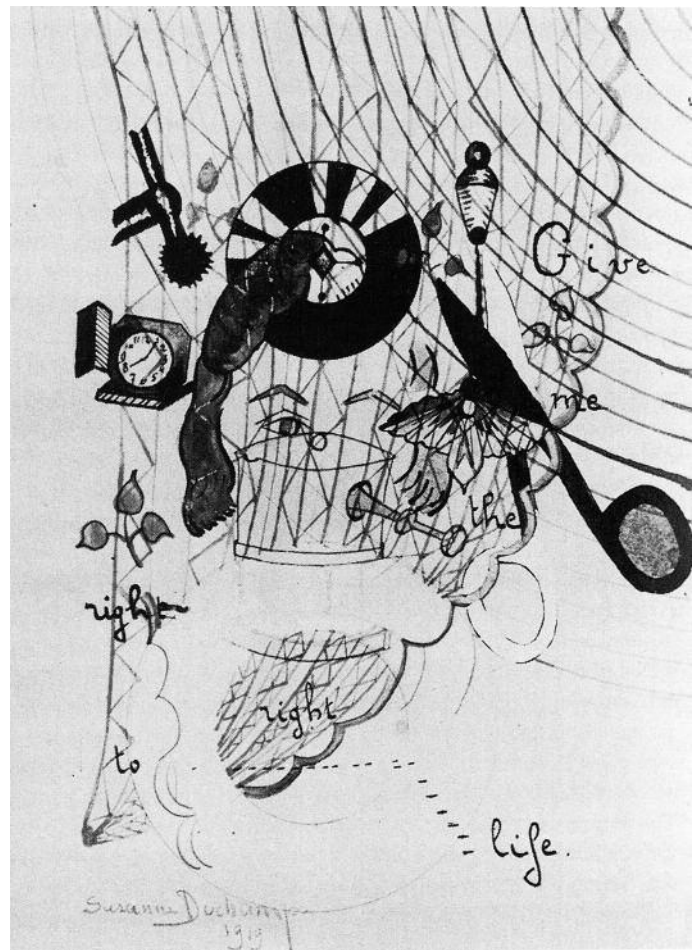


Fig. 7. Suzanne Duchamp, *Give me the right Right to life* (1919), watercolor, ink and pencil on paper, 9 3/8" x 7 1/8". Private Collection. © Suzanne Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris/ARS, New York 2017.

receive it ("give me"). Implicitly, the artist thus evokes an unequal (power) relationship, in which the woman takes an inferior, dependent role. This struggle was ongoing, as despite the many suffragette actions and feminist movements, French women did not get the 'right to life'—the right to vote—until 1944, toward the end of World War II.

These reflections on the consequences of modern technology and on women's status are important themes in Duchamp's work during the interbellum period. Throughout her oeuvre she incorporated various elements of contemporary art styles to convey her personal opinions and concerns on these subjects. After rejecting Dada, in 1921 Duchamp and Crotti created their own movement, "Tabu Dada."²³ As explained by them, Tabu Dada was a philosophical, amoral "religion" that communicated the mystery, "the unknowable and invisible" of the cosmos and of life, by using personalized, spiritual symbolism, giving meaning to life in contrast to the nihilistic "anti-attitude" of the Dada movement. Duchamp was convinced that the human spirit was capable of almost everything, and that art was the most suitable instrument to obtain absolute freedom of inspiration and of the mind.²⁴

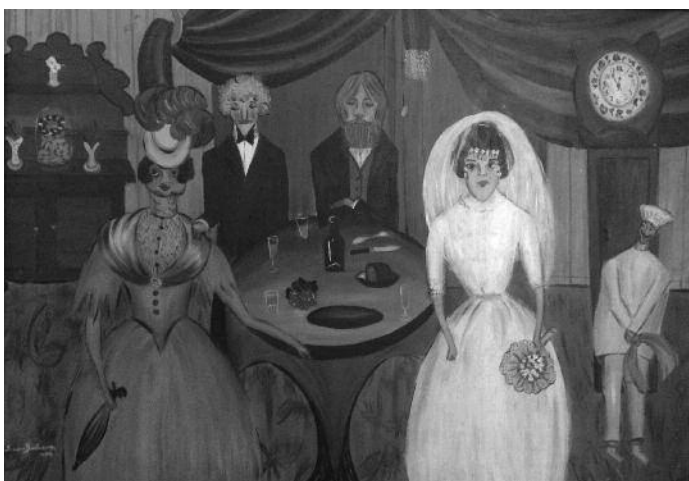


Fig. 8. Suzanne Duchamp, *La Noce* (1924), oil on canvas, 26" x 36 1/4". © Suzanne Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris/ARS, New York 2017.

ARieTte d'oubli de la chapelle étourdie (*ARieTte of Oblivion in the thoughtless chapel*, 1920; Pl. 8) exemplifies Suzanne Duchamp's Tabu Dada imagery. This complex assemblage combines cosmic elements with measurement instruments as a reference to industrial precision. In the center is a wood/multimedia profile portrait of Crotti with a glass eye—a ready-made element that refers to his 1915 wire portrait of Marcel Duchamp. With its symmetrical composition, complex symbolism, and enigmatic title, *ARieTte d'oubli de la chapelle étourdie* can be interpreted in different ways. The title itself is ambiguous. While the art historian William Camfield has pointed out that the capital letters in the title form the word "ART,"²⁵ Ruth Hemus explains that "ariette" is the French word for a short aria. She interprets the work as a visualization of a short music piece, where the different fonts of the letters could indicate how the words should be pronounced in a musical way.²⁶ This conforms with a typical Dadaistic feature: the rejection of traditional boundaries between visual arts, poetry, and music.²⁷ Either interpretation suggests that Duchamp used her art—whether or not specifically music—as an instrument to escape what Camfield calls the "dazzling chapel" of life, including social institutions like the church, science, and the state.²⁸ If the "chapelle" in the title refers to a connection between art and religion, "étourdie" alludes to the irrational aspects of both art and religion. For Duchamp, this possibly illustrates her notion of the mystical nature of artistic creation as an intellectual process to achieve a higher notion of truth and to liberate the inspiration of the cosmic soul that is menaced by the rational logic of modern science and industry.

As the 1920s progressed, Suzanne Duchamp's idiom became more figurative, characterized by an interest in what was being popularized as "primitivism." This "return to order" following the War can also be seen in the work of other modern artists like Léger and Derain, and in the neoclassicist paintings of Pablo Picasso.²⁹ Characterized by a fluent, graphic line, bright colors, and a seemingly unskillful use of perspective and spatial proportions, Duchamp's naïve style artworks may reflect her personal vision on daily life and



Fig. 9. Suzanne Duchamp, *Les petites Tarentin* (ca. 1923), oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. © Suzanne Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris/ARS, New York 2017.

social norms in a subtle way and are comparable with the work of her contemporary, Marie Laurencin, an artist she knew very well. The somber facial expressions and the gloomy colors in Duchamp's *La Noce* (The Wedding Night, 1924; Fig. 8) suggest an uncanny atmosphere. The subject appears more like a funeral than a marriage (*noce*) of two lovers. The women in front look straight at the spectator, while the men at the back—complacent or unhappy—look down at their feet. The only cheerful character is the cook in the background. This image causes a tension between the tragic and the comic in the painting, which is also visible in her portrait painting *Les petites Tarentin* (ca. 1923; Fig. 9).³⁰ Here again the artist suggests a cheerless atmosphere by depicting sad children under a pitiful tree.³¹ By absencing 'the smile' in these paintings, Duchamp highlights in a satirical way the absurdity of the traditional codes in the art world (the portrait) and in society (marriage).

Works such as *Give me the right Right to life* signal that Duchamp herself had become part of another important postwar development: considering the social status of women, in particular women artists. When the male population of France went off to fight, the women were left to serve on the home front, working in factories, on farms, and, like



Fig. 10. Hannah Höch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* (1919), photomontage with collage and watercolor, 44 7/8" x 35 7/16". Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie.

Duchamp, in hospitals. In France, as elsewhere, this led to a growing movement for women's rights, as more young women took steps toward pursuing careers outside the home. Most political and social institutions continued, however, to repress women, maintaining their inferior, "speechless" positions and traditional roles as wife and/or mother. Modern, independent women like Duchamp were considered destroyers of 'womanly virtue' and the family for choosing a professional career over their 'natural' disposition for procreation.³²

Another work with this theme is *Force et grâce (Sédution)* (1920; Pl. 9), in which Duchamp examines the impact and possibilities of the contemporary technological developments on social relationships. In analyzing its abstract, geometrical forms Ruth Hemus has claimed that there is a distinction between feminine and masculine elements in this watercolor. The dark, vertical volume on the left can be interpreted as a phallus, referring to masculinity; while the half circle on the right could refer to the traditional notion of female 'curves' and thus fertility. The title seems to confirm this interpretation. The word *force*—traditionally interpreted as a male trait—is written in capitals over the first half of the word *sédution*, while *grâce* (written in a more elegant font) covers the second part of *sédution*. Hemus suggests that Suzanne Duchamp reflects in this composition on the reciprocal relation between femininity and masculinity by using words as independent, visual elements with a context relating to traditional social conventions.³³

In Berlin, Hannah Höch (1889–1978), associated with the Dada movement there, was incorporating imagery and themes on the emancipation of women in works such as *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser Dada durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands* (Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany, 1919; Fig. 10). In this photomontage Höch deconstructs conventional images and words from the contemporary media by putting them in a new relation to one another, suggesting an alternative perception of the contemporary political, social and cultural reality. The first part of the title of this work, "Cut with the Kitchen Knife," hints on one hand to the process of cutting out the images necessary in the photomontage technique. On the other hand, it refers to the 'traditional,' domestic position of women—in the kitchen. Like Suzanne Duchamp, Höch thus reflects on her social role and personal identity as a modern, emancipated woman by referring to daily modern life, and criticizes the social-political role and patriarchal representation of women in postwar Berlin media. And like Marcel Duchamp's 'cross-dressing' as Rose Sélavy, Höch subverts the conventional gender roles by placing an image of the head of the artist George Grosz on the body of a ballerina in tutu. The head, so prominent in *Give me the right Right to life* as Duchamp's self-identification, is rather a symbol for the traditional representation of male intellect in Höch's montage. In conventional popular imagery, even today, women are reduced to a body. By combining male and female in one surreal figure in Höch's photomontage, or by placing the head of a woman—Duchamp herself—in the center of *Give me the right Right to life*, both artists deconstruct the conventional gender boundaries and offer an alternative perception of modern women, and women artists in particular.³⁴

Suzanne Duchamp took part in various associations and exhibitions in Paris for women artists. She participated in the 1926 "Femmes Peintres Françaises" exhibition at Galerie Barbazanges, organized by women artists striving to claim recognition in the official art world. Other women who showed works included Laurencin, Emilie Charny (1878–1974), Marguerite Crissay (1874–1945), and Hélène Perdriat (1889–1969).³⁵ In 1937 Duchamp exhibited, along with Laurencin, Vanessa Bell (1879–1961), Natalia Goncharova (1881–1962) and Suzanne Valadon (1865–1938) in "Les Femmes Artistes d'Europe," at the Musée du Jeu de Paume, one of the biggest official exhibitions with a similar goal.³⁶

During World War II, when the German army occupied France in June 1940, many artists fled abroad or to the south of France, which (until 1943) was a relatively neutral area.³⁷ Duchamp and Crotti were in the United States at the time, visiting Crotti's elder brother, a professor at the Ohio State University and an internationally known surgeon. (André Crotti was the head surgeon at Walter Reed General Hospital, a U.S. military hospital, during World War I.³⁸)

The German Occupation had drastic consequences for the French art world. During the Vichy regime of Marshal Pétain, the Nazi-backed "Aryan art" was the only acceptable standard; modern art was considered degenerate, and the salons were



Fig. 11. Suzanne Duchamp, *Untitled (Flowers on a table, ca. 1942)*, crayon, watercolor and pencil on paper, 16 1/2" x 25". © Suzanne Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris /ARS, New York 2017.

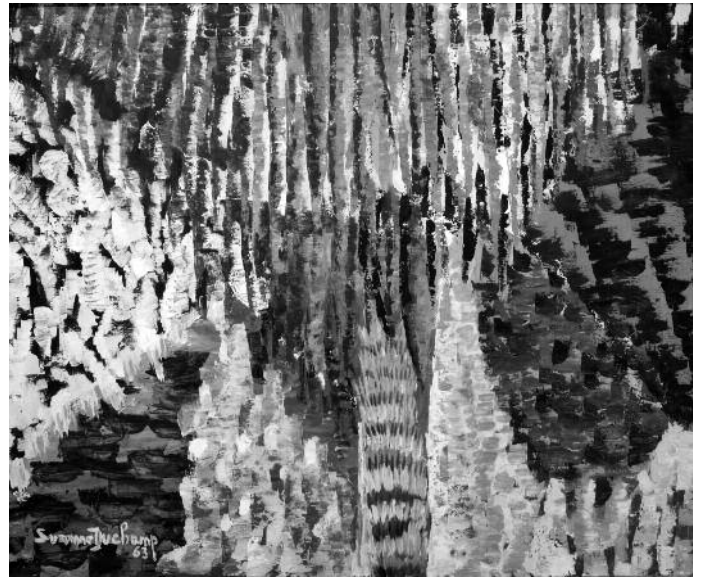


Fig. 12. Suzanne Duchamp, *Le sous-sol mystérieux* (1963), oil on canvas, 39 1/2" x 32". Private Collection. © Suzanne Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris /ARS, New York 2017.

censored. Many modern artists who fled or were deported felt compelled to express the suffering and misery of the War in their work. Some did this in a very direct way, such as the photographer Germaine Krull (1897–1985), who explicitly photographed daily life during the War, while others, such as Picasso reflected political resistance movements in their work. (During 1925–30, Duchamp and Crotti had shared a cottage with Picasso and his first wife, Olga Khokhlova, near Juan-les-Pins, and afterwards they remained lifelong friends with the artist.) Suzanne Duchamp expressed her opposition indirectly by using hidden symbolism.³⁹

In 1941, Duchamp and Crotti moved from German-occupied Paris to Arcachon, on the southwest coast, near Bordeaux. It was an unhappy time for Duchamp. In 1943, while Crotti was working in Cauterets, near the Spanish border, he tried to comfort his wife in his letters, encouraging her to paint to help alleviate her anxiety and agitation. Her work, he told her, would outlive her and was thus the only thing that mattered. Most of her letters to Crotti are lost, but it seems that she took his advice to heart, and made numerous drawings and watercolors of landscapes, flower still-lives and portraits, often reflecting her patriotism. *Bouquet de Marianne* (1942) refers to Marianne as the symbol of the French republic, and in an untitled watercolor of flowers on a table (ca. 1942; Fig. 11), a *Paysage Rouge* (1943), and *Paysage de la France* (1944), the predominant colors are the blue, white, and red of the national flag of France. For two 1945 watercolors of the same landscape at Lac St. Ferrol she used realistic colors for one and patriotic hues for the second. With this strong, symbolic anti-war statement, Suzanne Duchamp thus made known her feelings about the Second World War.⁴⁰

Despite the German occupation, Duchamp affirmed her sympathy to the resistance by sending artworks to Paris and participating at exhibitions in France and elsewhere. The Salon d'Automne of 1941, where she participated, identified itself after the War as "the salon of the liberation" for exhibiting anti-war art. She also exhibited at the *Exposition au profit de l'Art et*

des Artistes (Galerie Malesherbes, Paris, 1939), the *Salon d'Automne* (1940), the *Salon des Tuileries* (1944) and the *Salon des Femmes peintres et sculpteurs* (Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, January-February 1945). Along with other contemporary artists with a strong anti-war attitude, she exhibited and sold work to support war victims at the 1945 "Vente au profit des Prisonniers, Résistants et Déportés" at Galerie Drouant-David in Paris.⁴¹ After the War, she became a member of the Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs and regularly exhibited landscapes, portraits and flower still-lives at its salons.⁴²

Some explorations in abstraction by Duchamp, clearly influenced by the abstract expressionists, intensified following Crotti's death in 1958. Using vivid colors, her expressive lines and seemingly chaotic compositions evolve into independent elements, so that the figurative depictions seem to disappear. In *Le sous-sol mystérieux* (The mysterious basement, 1963; Fig. 12), the expressive and dynamic composition of color and lines likely mirrors her personal struggles around the time she was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Even in this painting, her last work, the artist continued to incorporate elements of contemporary styles. Suzanne Duchamp died at her apartment in Neuilly-sur-Seine on the 11th of September 1963, within a month of the diagnosis.

Throughout her life as an artist, Suzanne Duchamp's work reflected her concerns about modern society, the effects of war, and her role as a modern woman and artist. These themes were expressed in various styles—by appropriating technology and contemporary objects in her Dada and mechanomorphic assemblages, in her revealing self-portraits, and through her use of color symbolism. In a personal way that was influenced by her time and the art world she came to know, Suzanne Duchamp assembled a complex, heterogeneous oeuvre and made a unique contribution to modern art.⁴³ ●

Emma Anquinet works at the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage, Brussels. She authored the catalogue of a solo-exhibition on Suzanne Duchamp's work at the Francis M. Naumann Fine Art Gallery (New York, 2015).

Notes

1. Seymour Howard, "Hidden Naos: Duchamp Labyrinths," *Artibus et Historiae* 15, no. 29 (1994), 176; Ruth Hemus, *Dada's Women* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2009), 141–42; Laurent Le Bon, ed., *Dada* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2005), 390; Leon Krempel et al., *Family Affairs: broers en zusters in de kunst* (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2006), 124; Emma Anquinet, *Suzanne Duchamp: Works on paper* (New York: Francis M. Naumann Fine Art, LLC, 2014), 2.
2. See for example, Léa Vergine & Mireille Zanuttini, *L'autre moitié de l'avant-garde: 1910–1940; Femmes peintres et femmes sculpteurs dans les mouvements d'avant-garde historique* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1982), 176; Franz W. Kaiser et al., *Parijs, stad van de moderne kunst. 1900–1960* (Amsterdam: Ludion, 2012), 47; Nane Bettex-Cailler, "Biographie de Suzanne Duchamp," *Les Cahiers d'Art-Documents. Encyclopédie générale des Beaux-Arts aux XIXe et XXe siècles. Peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, architectes, décorateurs*. vol. 2, no. 56 (1957), 13; André Warnod, "Les Femmes peintres françaises," *Comoedia* (Dec. 6, 1925), x. Duchamp and Laurencin also exhibited, for example, in "Femmes Peintres Françaises" at Galerie Barbazanges in Paris (1926); together with Mary Cassatt, they participated in the Salon des Tuileries in Paris in 1929, where Laurencin exhibited her *La femme au chien* (Woman with dog, 1921, also known as *The Bride*); and at the "Vente au profit des Prisonniers, Résistants et Déportés" at Galerie Drouant-David in Paris (1945).
3. Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1969), 90.
4. Francis M. Naumann, *The Recurrent, Haunting Ghost. Essays on the Art, Life and Legacy of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Readmade Press, 2012), 299–301, 343–45.
5. Maurice Raynal, *Anthologie de la peinture en France – de 1906 à nos jours* (Paris: Editions Montaigne, 1927), 32.
6. Emmanuelle Cronier, "The street," in Jay M. Winter & Jean-Louis Robert, *Capital cities at war: Paris, London, Berlin, 1914–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997 [2007]), 58–61; Jay Winter, "Hospitals," in Winter & Robert, *Capital cities at war*, 358, 367–68, 378–79; Anne Powell, *Women in the war zone: hospital service in the First World War* (Gloucestershire, UK: History Press, 2013), 70–73.
7. Le Bon, *Dada*, 390; Anquinet, *Suzanne Duchamp*, 3; Krempel et al., *Family Affairs*, 123; "Association Duchamp Villon Crotti," <http://www.duchamp-villon-crotti.com/fr/raymond-duchamp-villon/>, accessed Jan. 23, 2016.
8. See, for example, Thomas F. Rugh, "Emmy Hennings and the Emergence of Zurich Dada," *WAJ*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1981): 1–6.
9. Francis Picabia, "Thank you, Francis!" originally published in *Littérature*, new series no. 8 (Paris, Jan. 1923) as 'Francis Merci!'
10. Lucy R. Lippard, ed., *Dadas on art* (New York: Dover, 2007), 171; Georges Hugnet & Tristan Tzara, *L'aventure Dada. 1916–1922* (Paris: Galerie de l'Institut, 1957), 79; Marcel Duchamp, "Statements and Documents," *Daedalus. Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 89, no. 1 (Winter 1960), 112.
11. Lippard, *Dadas on art*, 171; Hugnet and Tzara, *L'aventure Dada*, 79; Duchamp, "Statements and Documents," 112.
12. Naumann, *The Recurrent, Haunting Ghost*, 270. This letter was published for the first time in English translation by Francis M. Naumann, "Affectueusement, Marcel: Ten Letters from Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp and Jean Crotti," *Archives of American Art Journal* 22, no. 4 (1982): 2–19.
13. Camfield, "Suzanne Duchamp and Dada in Paris," 85, Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, ed., *Women in Dada: essays on sex, gender, and identity* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998); Jean Crotti papers, 1913–1973, bulk 1913–1961. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (Washington, D.C.): Box 1, Folder 18: *Correspondence: Letter from Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp*, 15th of January 1916; Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp, April 11 1917, *Jean Crotti Papers*, Archives of American Art, published in Francis M. Naumann, "Affectueusement, Marcel: Ten Letters from Marcel Duchamp to Jean Crotti and Suzanne Duchamp," 2–19. For more information on this process and the interpretation of Marcel Duchamp's letter, see: Naumann, *The Recurrent Haunting Ghost: Essays on the Art, Life and Legacy of Marcel Duchamp*, 112–18.
14. Suzanne Duchamp possibly refers to these 'three roses' in an undated watercolor, *Trois roses*. André Gybal, "Les expositions: Suzanne Duchamp et Jean Crotti," *Comoedia* (8 April 1921), x.
15. Gioia Smid, *Dames in DADA: het aandeel van vrouwen in de DADA-beweging* (Amsterdam: Stichting Amazone, 1989), 17; Jay Winter, "The practices of metropolitan life in wartime," Winter & Robert, *Capital cities at war*, 17; Hugnet & Tzara, *L'aventure Dada*, 75; Michel Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 2005), 279; Anquinet, *Suzanne Duchamp*, 4; André Gybal, "Les expositions: Suzanne Duchamp et Jean Crotti," *Comoedia* (8 April 1921), x.
16. William A. Camfield, "The Machinist Style of Francis Picabia," *Art Bulletin* 48, no. 4 (December 1966): 314; Paul B. Haviland, "We are living in the age of the machine," 291, no. 7 (Sept. 1915), title page.
17. Camfield, "The Machinist Style of Francis Picabia," 309; Francis Picabia, untitled, 291, no. 12 (February 1916), 3.
18. Smid, *Dames in DADA*, 25; Le Bon, *Dada*, 390; Hemus, *Dada's Women*, 133.
19. Camfield "The Machinist Style of Francis Picabia," 311; Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in context: science and technology in the Large Glass and related works* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1998), 115; Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Holt, 1996), 214; Anne Collins Goodyear, ed., *Inventing Marcel Duchamp: The dynamics of portraiture* (Boston: The MIT Press, 2009), 83; Duchamp & Naumann, "Affectueusement, Marcel: Ten Letters from Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp and Jean Crotti," 13; Hemus, *Dada's Women*, 131.
20. Sarah Kelly Oehler and Elizabeth Siegel, *Shatter, Rupture, Break* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2015), online interactive catalogue, 102. The French text is: "Et la glace se biserait, L'échoudage croulerait, Les ballons s'envollevaient, Les astres s'étendraient, etc."
21. The two stars in white and red could be interpreted as symbolic representations of explosions, referring to the First World War and the modern war industry. William A. Camfield & Jean-Hubert Martin, *Tabu-Dada: Jean Crotti and Suzanne Duchamp, 1915–1922* (Bern: Die Kunsthalle, 1984), 18; Therese M. Southgate, "Suzanne Duchamp," in *Journal of the American Medical Association*, no. 286 (2001), 274.
22. Camfield, "Suzanne Duchamp and Dada in Paris," 9; Le Bon, *Dada*, 356; Hemus, *Dada's Women*, 147.
23. The meaning of the name of this art movement is difficult to determine. The term "Tabu" could be a variation of "tabou", i.e., to see through the indefinable, mysterious and unattainable essence of existence. Sigmund Freud's publication "Totem und Tabu" (1913), on the continuous tension between desire and the forbidden as taboo, could as well have been an influence on the name of this intellectual art vision. There is no proof that Suzanne Duchamp and Jean Crotti had a direct connection with the theories of Sigmund Freud.

- Nonetheless, this Tabu Dada movement can be related to Freud's theories by the context of Vienna in the mystical experience of Crotti and the importance of Freud's discoveries in psychoanalysis for various avant-garde art styles. Besides this, Francis Picabia published in 1920 "Le Pilhaou-Thibaou" in his journal 391, and the term "thibaou" could have been an inspiration for the name. Tabu Dada was introduced publicly by a manifesto at an exhibition on the 1st of November 1921 in the Salon d'Automne, yet Duchamp and Crotti remained the only two members of this very intellectual art movement. See Camfield & Martin, *Tabu-Dada*, 71; Francis Picabia, "Le Pilhaou-Thibaou," in 391, no. 15 (July 1920), 1; Vergine & Zanuttini, *L'autre moitié de l'avant-garde*, 176.
24. Lippard, *Dadas on art*, 158–60; Jean Caro Bertoli, Francis M. Naumann & Marine De Weck, *Jean Crotti: l'oeuvre peint (1900–1958)* (Milan: 5 Continents Editions, 2007), 13, 57; Camfield & Martin, *Tabu-Dada*, 69, 74.
 25. Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in dada: essays on sex, gender, and identity* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 2005), 82–102.
 26. Hemus *Dada's Women*, 158. In "Over the River" by Arthur Moss in *Paris Times* (Nov. 27, 1924), Duchamp explains that she 'sings' while she is painting and that her colors form the song. This possibly illustrates the 'musical sensitivity' in her artworks.
 27. Judi Freeman & John C. Welchma, *Das Wort-Bild in Dada und Surrealismus* (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 1990), 15.
 28. Camfield, "Suzanne Duchamp and Dada in Paris," 94.
 29. Hugh Honour and John Fleming, *A World History of Art* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2009), 798–800.
 30. Greer, *The Obstacle Race*, 124; Camfield and Martin, *Tabu-Dada*, 132; Le Bon, *Dada*, 390; Anquinet, *Suzanne Duchamp*, 10; Florence Gilliam, "Paris Women in the Arts," *Charm* (March 1925): 12.
 31. L.L. Martin, "Salon d'Automne," *Paris-Soir* (1 November 1924): x.
 32. For example, as the fashions of Coco Chanel (Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel, 1883–1971) permitted women to move in a more liberated and comfortable way, so they literally perceived themselves as having more freedom as well. Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot, *Histoire des femmes en occident 5: le XXe siècle* (Paris: Plon, 1992), 31; Yannick Ripa, *Les femmes, actrices de l'histoire de France, de 1789 à nos jours* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010), 86; Catherine Gonnard & Elisabeth Lebovici, *Femmes artistes / artistes femmes: Paris, de 1880 à nos jours* (Paris: Editions Hazan), 40.
 33. Hemus, *Dada's Women*, 141–42.
 34. Gonnard & Lebovici, *Femmes artistes / artistes femmes*, 40, 99; Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank : Paris, 1900–1940* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1986), 4; Ripa, *Les femmes, actrices de l'histoire de France*, 97, 101–03; Hemus, *Dada's women*, 97, 106; Le Bon, ed., *Dada*, 484; Mark A. Pegrum, *Challenging modernity: Dada between modern and postmodern* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 135, 139; Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993).
 35. Anon., "Women Painters and Women who Paint," *American Women* (Feb. 1936), x; André Warnod, "Les Femmes peintres françaises," *Comoedia* (6 December 1925), x.
 36. The exhibition took place during "L'exposition internationale des arts et des techniques dans la vie moderne," and it was an initiative of La Fédération internationale de l'union féminine des carrières libérales et commerciales. Later on, this exhibition was organized in Prague (1937–38).
 37. Laurence Bertrand Dorléac and Jacqueline Munck, *L'Art en Guerre. France 1938–1947* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2012), 20.
 38. See Naumann, *The Recurrent, Haunting Ghost. Essays on the Art, Life and Legacy of Marcel Duchamp*, 146.
 39. Artworks of Suzanne Duchamp with a similar theme and imagery from 1940–1945: *Paysage Rouge* (1943), *Paysage de la France* (1944) and *Paysage Bleu* (1945). Dorléac and Munck, *L'Art en Guerre*, 5, 21, 28, 315, 321, 416–417; Gybal, "Suzanne Duchamp ou la réussite de la liberté," 5; Gonnard & Lebovici, *Femmes artistes / artistes femmes*, 226.
 40. Bertoli, Naumann & De Weck, *Jean Crotti: l'oeuvre peint*, 314; *Jean Crotti Papers*, 1913–1973, box 1, folder 13: Correspondence: Letters from Jean Crotti to Suzanne Duchamp, 1943; Dorléac & Munck, *L'Art en Guerre*, 321.
 41. Gonnard & Lebovici, *Femmes artistes / artistes femmes*, 232; Bettex-Caillier, "Biographie de Suzanne Duchamp," 13; Digitalized collections of the National Institute for Art History, Paris: <http://bibliotheque-numerique.inha.fr/collection/item/24885-vente-de-tableaux-modernes-au-profit-des-prisonniers-resistants-et-deportes-du-m-n-p-g-d-vente-du-23-mai-1945?offset=1>. Other artists participating at this sale were, among others, Mary Cassatt, Henri Matisse, Constantin Terechkovitch, and Marie Laurencin.
 42. Pierre Sanchez and Chantal Beauvalot, *Dictionnaire de l'Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs (1882–1965): répertoire des artistes et liste de leurs oeuvres* (Dijon: Echelle de Jacob, 2010), 525. This association was founded in 1881 by the French sculptor Mme Léon Bertaux (Joséphine Charlotte Hélène Pilate, 1827–1909), and strived for the professionalization and recognition of women artists.
 43. Letter from Marcel Duchamp to Monique Fong, March 3, 1964, private collection. I would like to thank Francis M. Naumann for making this letter available for this article.

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MARIANNE WEIL

BRONZE AND GLASS MYTHOLOGIES

By Joyce Beckenstein

Marianne Weil spends much of her time going back in time. Her elegant, haunting bronze sculptures, sired by the intense fires of a 7,000-year-old lost wax process, are contemporary kin to archaic ruins stretching from Stonehenge in England to the ruins in Argos, along the Greek Peloponnese. Weil travels extensively to such sites, drawn to their history and archeology and to the mythology embedded in prehistory's unsolved mysteries, a time when the god was a goddess. During that time, humanity felt a shared proximity to nature and coveted the goddess's life-giving powers, intuiting her spirit within swelling sturdy tree trunks, bulbous underground caves, and undulating mountains and hills. They wrote to her—embedding and incising snaky spirals, gouged out vulva-shaped wells, and lozenges and symbolic chevrons on temples, tombs, and ritual objects. Weil's art absorbs the mythic and spiritual soul of that era.

But mostly, it is the challenge of contemporary art that drives Weil. As Helen Harrison noted: "Weil is not interested in trying to re-imagine or replicate such prototypes. Instead, she uses them as springboards for her imagination, extrapolating from them the way an improvisational musician takes a theme and expands upon it until it becomes his or her own creation."¹ For Weil, prehistoric abstract forms, their mythic texts and archeological contexts serve as compelling models for her enigmatic works. Her disciplined mastery of the lost wax process continuously evolves generations of forms that coax both bronze and glass into sculpture that seamlessly transcends time.

Born in Mt. Kisco, New York, in 1952, Weil traces her interest in archeology and art to her childhood. "My brothers and I always built tunnels and caves," she recalled, "and I visited Stonehenge at age sixteen. I originally thought about studying

government and attended American University, but then found my way back to Goddard College in Vermont, where I learned about bronze casting. By nineteen I knew I wanted to be an artist."² Between 1974 and 1991 Weil travelled routinely from New York to Italy for apprenticeships and independent studies. During those years of intense training—learning to carve marble and to forge bronze sculpture—she also received

her MFA from the School of Visual Arts, NY in 1986. These residencies, studies, and travels inspired her mature works, dating from the 1990s. Subsequent travels to ancient sites in Spain, Northern Portugal, Italy, and Greece continue to evolve new stages in her art, most of it produced in her studio/home, a converted barn located at the far reaches of Long Island's East End. She commutes to City University of New York, College of Staten Island, where she is a tenured Associate Professor of Sculpture.

Weil came of age during the 1970s, a particularly rambunctious period in U. S. history. Feminism was in full swing: Gloria Steinem and Letty Cottin Pogrebin published *Ms. magazine*, the Supreme Court decid-

ed the landmark abortion rights case, *Roe v. Wade*, and men and women across the country marched and voted in an effort (unsuccessful) to have Congress pass the Equal Rights Amendment. Lucy Lippard referenced the relationship of feminism to parallel groundbreaking movements in art during that time:

The origins of time and of counting seem in turn to lie somewhere between the cycles of the earth and the moon (with the human body as medium) and the lines of a journey, a life toward change. If these were the preoccupations of ancient peoples, they periodically



Fig. 1. Marianne Weil, *Quoyness III* (2005), cast bronze, 6" x 6" x 2"

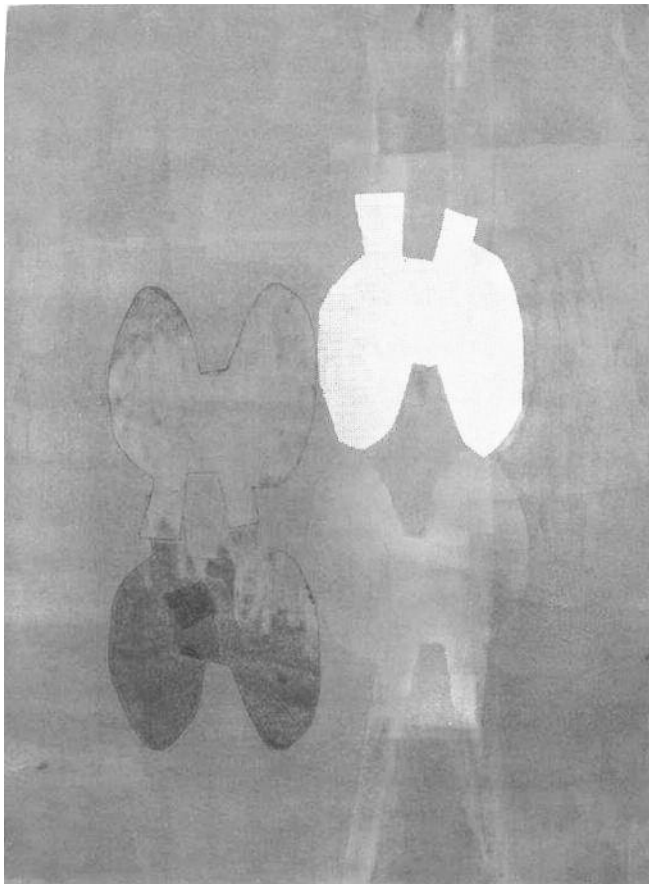


Fig. 2. Marianne Weil, *Los Millares III* (2007), monotype, oil on Arches, 22" x 30".

resurfaced in the history of art—most recently in the work of the Minimalists and Conceptualists of the 1960s and '70s ... [their] obsessions with basic geometry ... laid the ground for "primitivizing" artists to explore more complex areas of myth and history.³

Weil is neither a minimalist nor a conceptualist, though elements of those genres are undeniably embedded within her abstractions. Feminism, however, fueled her courage to venture into male-dominated realms: forging metal, carving in stone, and traveling as a twenty-year old to Italy and Spain where, at the time, women were seldom seen working in foundries or stone quarries. *Quoyness III* (2005; Fig. 1) a small bowl-like form, with an irregularly shaped rim, in keeping with Lippard's reference to artists absorbing mythic content into their work, recalls the kinds of daily ceramic objects once placed in tombs, filled, perhaps, with food for the afterlife. The surface is typical of the rich, multi-hued patinas Weil favors—amber to deep bronze, green and earthy coppery tones that catch and absorb light. The outer surface, punctuated with irregularly shaped openings, carries the eye through and beyond the form's exterior, merging interior and exterior space. For Weil, this interior space is as important as the outer surface because the scratches, marks, indentations, and openings she creates often suggest a conceptually gestating womb concealing a hidden form, idea, or inscribed message.



Fig. 3. Marianne Weil, *Los Millares*, ed. 6 (2007), cast bronze, 32" x 13" x 6".

In 2007 Weil spent research time at Los Millares, a Chalcolithic site⁴ in Andalusia, Spain, dating from the fourth through the second millennium B.C. A community of approximately a thousand people, this ancient farming enclave is known for its concentric protective walls, and necropolis of *tholos* (mound) tombs. It is also believed to be one of the earliest metallurgy production sites for the manufacture of copper tools and artifacts. Weil's Los Millares series consists of monotypes, wall reliefs, and freestanding sculptures derived from her studies at this site. In the monotypes, Weil plays with different iterations of double-breasted or lung-shaped objects that in fact derive from an aerial view of the architectural substructure outlining the entrance to the Los Millares citadel. For *Los Millares III* (2007; Fig. 2) she inverts and then connects these forms, arranging them to alternatively suggest positive and



Fig. 4. Marianne Weil, *Panóias Espiral* (2010), cast bronze, 8" x 8" x 6".

negative space by virtue of their varied colors: white, grey orange, and deep red hues set against a background wash of variegated reds. They appear to court each another, like embryos performing a mating dance. In *Los Millares* (2007; Fig. 3), an edition of six freestanding sculptures, the conjoined couple evolves as a single anthropomorphic female figure with ample breasts, indented waist, and curved hips. A central opening suggesting a vulva and the rounded entrances to the *tholos* tombs, simultaneously functions as negative space drawing the viewer towards, in, and around the sculpture. Here the washes of vivid reds used in the monotype yield to striated patinas of golds, umbers, and dark greens. These sensuous, earthy surfaces echo the round protruding surfaces of moss-covered cave interiors where the goddess herself was thought to reside. Weil gives her shape and form as a muscular torso capable of catching and holding light that millennia ago seeped through her yawning underground passageway. *Los Millares 0* (2008; Pl. 10), a third iteration of what began as an architectural imprint, again changes character completely when, with its mottled patina of shiny gold, it rests as a formal arrangement of shape, texture, open and closed space against the wall's neutral surface.

In 2008 Weil visited Panóias, a Roman sanctuary in northern Portugal. Resting on a remote hillside facing the Douro River, this huge outcropping of granite provided the ancient Romans with enormous slabs of stone into which they dug deep rectangular pits, holding tanks for sacrificial animals. Unlike the rounded, biomorphic forms of her *Los Millares* series, the works emanating from this Roman ruin, *The Panóias Cycle* and *The Dig*, echo the geometries she discovered there.

The Dig (2010; Pl. 11) consists of twenty squarish bronze plaques patinaed to a vibrant turquoise. Each plaque holds a collage of various textures replicating the designs on ancient ceramics: water waves, spirals, fish netting, lozenges. But like



Fig. 5. Marianne Weil, *Mindful* (2011), blown glass and cast bronze, 11" x 7" x 3".

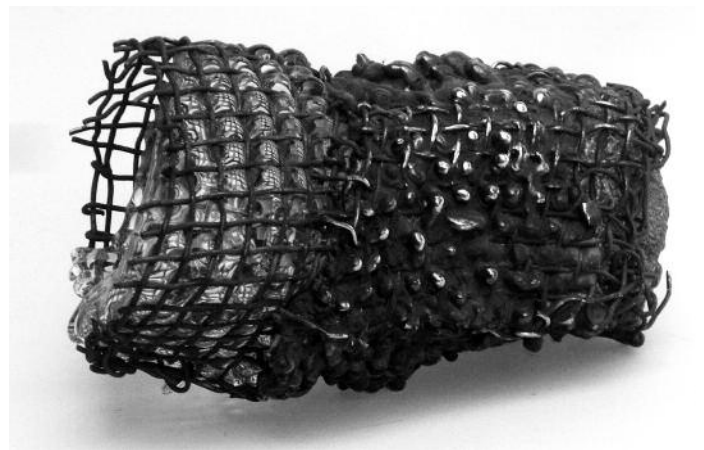


Fig. 6. Marianne Weil, *Fragment* (2014), cast glass and cast bronze, 5" x 3" x 3". Collection Sally Gelling.

her choice of turquoise background—a “manufactured” color compared to the earthy tones of her earlier work—the collage of patterns attached to these plaques are culled from kitchenware: soda caps, Teflon pans, waffle irons, and grid designs pressed from potholders and loosely woven fabrics into wax. It is interesting to note here the persistence of primal forms: the way the ubiquitous designs carved and etched into prehistoric objects prevail through time and turn up in everyday objects. According to Lippard: “Certain forms have survived the intervening millennia as the vehicles for such vital expression. The concentric circle, the spiral, the meander, the zigzag, the lozenge or diamond shape.... the passage and the labyrinth ... are still meaningful to us even if we cannot cite their sources and symbolic intricacies.”⁵ Thus, millennia from now, the bottom of today’s Teflon frying pan may well be imbued with the same mythic mystery we read into the spiral forms writ large five thousand years ago on giant stones surrounding the ritual chamber at New Grange in Northern Ireland, another site Weil has visited.

Content, form and process are inseparable in Weil’s art. The textural qualities of her bronze works derive their palpable essences from wax models that rely as much on her touch as they do on her sculpting tools. Pressing fingers into soft, warm



Fig. 7. Marianne Weil, *Argos Revisited* (2017), cast bronze with copper mesh, 17" x 12" x 8".

wax, having it creep beneath her nails, feeling it peel in strips thin and thick—it is sensuous work that settles with permanent ease within her molten surfaces. Consider the compact box-like form, *Panóias Espiral* (2010; Fig. 4). Its contrasting smooth and grooved mottled surfaces, bathed in warm washes of coppery light, begs to be touched; it asks the hand to trace its contours as the artist did when she formed it. A circular opening recalling the oculus of a *tholos* tomb sits off center, its edges opening like flower petals to reveal deep within a dark womb of interior space, a coiled spiral, symbol of the goddess's regenerative powers. Once again, interior space is as important as what first catches the mind's eye. For Weil this discovery, this mystery, operates as the kind of driving force Marija Gimbutas describes: "The main theme of Goddess symbolism is the mystery of birth and death and the renewal of life, not only human but all life on earth and indeed the whole cosmos.... This symbolic system represents cyclical, not linear, mythical time. In art it is manifested by the signs of dynamic motion...."⁶

And so it is with the evolution of Marianne Weil's art, whose current works combine bronze sculpture with blown or cast glass. It is a courageous combination, full of chance, rife with ruinous accident and splendid surprise. Weil first thought of combining glass and bronze in the 1970s during a residency in Italy, and still has her first attempt—a bronze frame edged with



Fig. 8. Marianne Weil, *Argos Revisited* (2017), detail, cast bronze with copper mesh, 17" x 12" x 8".

broken glass to prove it. She inserted glass within the frame, wrapped it in wax, and secured it with wire before covering it with the firing investment—a plaster shell surrounding the sculptural mold. The glass shattered, ruining the investment material for future recycling. The foundry workers had a fit, and Weil says, "I gave up the idea. But that was thirty-five years ago. Part of the

discipline of making art is not to abandon the idea. I was haunted by the glass and bronze work I was doing in 1979."

She renewed those efforts in 2010, and her subsequent explorations and experiments with these materials have (like her travels) taken her to places she has not yet visited. Each of her new works continues to wed biomorphic imagery, bursting with life, to inorganic material. For *Bullseye* (2010; Pl. 12) she first created a spiral metal sculpture and surrounded it with golden-colored blown glass—the resulting work resembles an ancient fossil preserved in amber. For other works, such as *Mindful* (2011; Fig. 5), she blew glass into a chevron-patterned bronze cone shape: it suggests a gelatinous life form emerging from a cocoon. By 2013 she switched her process from blown to cast glass. *Rim* (2013; Pl. 13) for example, exists primarily as stand-alone sculpture, a mass of cobalt blue glass muted, softened, and texturally enhanced with soft orange applications of sand and powder. *Fragment* (2014; Fig. 6), another variation, consists of an openwork container of wire mesh into which Weil poured molten glass: it blurs the lines between interior and exterior space as it "bubbles," seeping through openings, creating yet another world of animated texture.

But as is usually the case with Weil, the best is yet to come with the next phase of her process. That now involves new pieces inspired by her recent study of archaic Greek architecture in Argos, with its crumbling walls and remarkable amphitheater, and her recent guest residency at the Emily Harvey Foundation in Venice. In these works Weil again plays with contrasts, this time reversing the inherent fragility of glass and the expected indestructibility of bronze. Now, instead of pressing textures into wax, she presses the wax

through a variety of openwork forms, such as wire mesh, and then later adds new shapes to the wax armature. When combined with solid molten glass, the resulting beadlike wire and bronze netting seems as ephemeral as delicate gauze, the glass a solid mass binding fragile form. Densely packed, the forged wire and bronze forms replicate the irregular texture of crumbling architecture with its time-gouged spaces; when loosely knit, the results resemble delicate chain-like fabric, reminiscent of medieval armor. The possibilities seem limitless, as indicated by two of her most recent works, *After C. Sabbadino 1557* (2017; Pl. 14) and *Argos Revisited* (2017; Figs. 7 and 8).

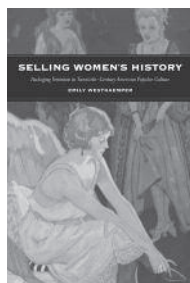
While in Venice she was invited to do a work based on the cartography of the Venetian lagoon. She discovered a sixteenth-century map by Cristoforo Sabbadino that, surprisingly, appeared as an aerial configuration of the lagoon. As she similarly based her earlier Millares works on an aerial outline of the Spanish citadel, so did she use this unusual example of Renaissance cartography as a model for *After C. Sabbadino 1557*, a luscious emerald green “sea” of glass. Patches of bronze netting suspended within the glass form suggest disintegrating masses of land preserved forever within the depths of this molten “lagoon.” For *Argos Revisited* Weil created a flowing and delicate shawl-like spray of metal and copper netting oozing sparkles of coagulated and encrusted bronze.

Other unfinished works made from metal grids similarly are punctuated by openings—accidental to the casting process or incidental to her creative process (the two intersect)—that recall the incrustations and decay of ancient walls. They await a decision: whether to evolve them as new hybrid glass and bronze forms, or leave them, like *Argos Revisited*, as bronze freestanding sculpture, the place where Weil began. Has she come full circle? If so, it will only likely last until her next excursion. •

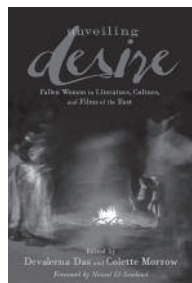
Joyce Beckenstein is an arts writer living in New York.

Notes

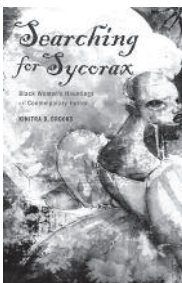
1. Helen Harrison, catalogue essay, “Marianne Weil, Los Millares: Recent Bronzes and Monotypes,” (New York: Kouros Gallery, 2015), 4.
2. All direct quotes attributed to Marianne Weil are from my interview with the artist in her studio in Orient, New York, August 7, 2017.
3. Lucy R. Lippard, *Overlay, Contemporary Art and The Art of Prehistory*, (New York: The New Press, 1983), 77.
4. Chalcolithic derives from the Greek word meaning “copper age” and refers to the early agricultural period between the copper and bronze ages.
5. Lippard, *Overlay* 10–11.
6. Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess: Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilization*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), introduction, xix.



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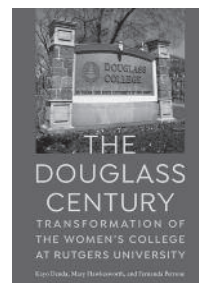
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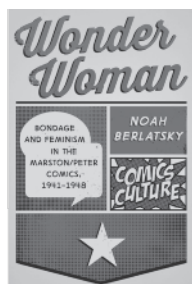
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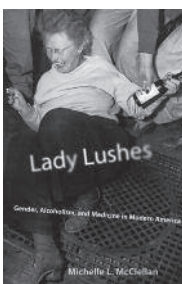
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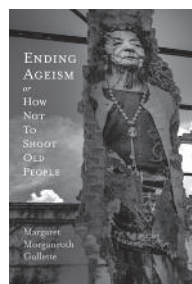
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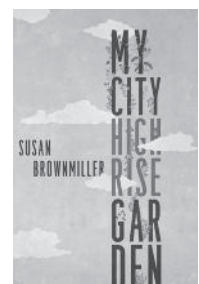
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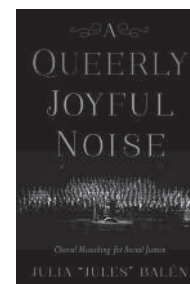
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LITTLE SISTER, BIG GIRL

TABAIMO AND THE GENDERED DEVALUATION OF CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE ART

By Kirstin Ringelberg

English-language discussions of contemporary art display an ongoing “Orientalism” that often manifests itself in analyses that equate Japanese culture with the weakened, effeminate masculinity of *otaku* (computer nerds).¹ Supposedly made so by animania and too many video games, *otaku* are countered only by a *kawaii* (cute) “girl” culture to be mocked for its alleged superficiality. Running across the grain of these English-language devaluations of Japanese art, although sometimes caught up in it, is the work of Tabaimo (Ayako Tabata, b. 1975), perhaps now best known among Western art critics for her solo exhibition in the Japanese Pavilion at the 2011 Venice Biennale, featuring the work *teleco-soup* (2011; Fig. 1 and Pl. 15), and the PBS *ART21* spot that followed it. I will argue that Tabaimo’s work fits both the now-dismissed *kawaii/otaku* aesthetic promoted in the 2000s, often exemplified by Takashi Murakami, as well as its “opposite,” the more traditional yet socially critical path promoted now, often exemplified by controversial painter and installation artist Makoto Aida. Not only can Tabaimo’s work fit in the worlds of both Takashi Murakami and Makoto Aida or—better—perhaps serve as a bridge across them, but it shows how Japanese contemporary art cannot be shoved into such binaristic boxes.²

Tabaimo’s video installations generally begin from hand-drawn images she then animates in a computer, adding original sound effects she produces herself. The multi-media product is then projected into the gallery space, often on multiple planes with an immersive effect. Her style has varied over time, but her first decade of work often included formal references to traditional Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodcuts and contemporary manga and anime. Thematically, her works tend to express isolation and instability with imagery including sea creatures, birds, insects, and disembodied anatomical parts of humans intended to cause discomfort as she challenges her viewers to experience the spaces she creates and understand their meaning.

Ayako Tabata invented her professional name, “Tabaimo,” by combining Tabata with the Japanese word for little sister,



Fig. 1. Tabaimo, *teleco-soup* (2011), video installation, 54th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, dimensions variable. James Cohan Gallery.

imōto. While still a student at the Kyoto University of Art and Design, Tabaimo gained attention for her first video installation, *Japanese Kitchen*. Following her first solo show at Kirin Plaza in Osaka in 2000, the artist was subsequently included in numerous international exhibitions, including the Yokohama Triennale (2001) and Sao Paulo Biennale (2002), and later represented Japan in 2011 at the 54th International Art Exhibition, the Venice Biennale.

The discourse around Tabaimo maintains a lot of the discursive cues that circulate around the broader simultaneous celebration and dismissal of Japanese contemporary art in Europe and the U.S. Framing her as both *kawaii/otaku* (located in the cuteness of anime and consumer culture and/or nerdy video-game and online culture, respectively) and traditional (read, particularly, Edo-influenced), English-language critics have found a tidy container for understanding her work as distinctly and explicitly “Japanese,” often failing to grasp its complexity or reach, precisely for that reason. In what follows, I will first discuss the framing of contemporary Japanese art in Western criticism before moving to a consideration of how that framing shapes the reception of the work of Tabaimo and other artists.

Two exhibitions, both at the Japan Society in New York, marked the binary poles which contemporary Japanese art has been framed by and the lenses through which English-language viewers tend to view it. The 2005 “Little Boy” exhibition inaugurated a general excitement in Cool Japan and all things Murakami that strongly affected American culture in particular in the early 2000s. But that embrace was deemed both foolish and “over” by the 2011 “Bye Bye Kitty!!!” exhibition, whose title made overt its rejection of *kawaii/otaku* interests (in the form of Hello Kitty). The 2011 exhibition touted a more “serious” new art from Japan—art that was actually not new at all, as its foremost producers, especially Aida, had been in the Japanese market for decades. A perfect example of the condescending tone European and American writers used in discussing this shift can be found in Peter Schjeldahl’s *The New Yorker* review of the 2011 exhibition: “‘Bye Bye Kitty!!!’ signals a collective will to grow up, *if just a bit*, with a general revival of traditional forms and techniques, and some acute social criticism” [emphasis added].³ Schjeldahl’s statement contains in one short sentence the assumption that Japanese artists need to grow up, are finally ready to do so—but “just a bit”—and that the path to their maturity must be taken through traditional aesthetics and social criticism. The focus on traditional aesthetics as a way to show maturity is particularly interesting. Surely we would not assume the same developmental maturity if a group of British artists shifted from making video and performance art to painting like early nineteenth-century Romantics; but the implication that social criticism is not present in *kawaii* works is one I will dispense with here.

The Western expectation for a stereotypically Japanese “trendy” art was constructed quite actively by European and American curators and patrons but also by artists like Takashi Murakami and Yoshitomo Nara, who had a lot to gain from this process. Adrian Favell has elucidated the very careful construction of a scene in which “[w]hen there are shows of new Japanese contemporary art in the West, the only theme curators know to use is something reflecting Japanese pop culture as it [is] imagined in the West, that is, framed in terms of *manga*, *anime*, *kawaii*, or *moé* (*otaku* expression for ‘adorable’), the themes made famous by Murakami’s curated shows.”⁴ The desire to fit new art into existing paradigms and tropes, even (or perhaps especially) when they eventually serve to denigrate the very art being framed, is a familiar tactic to achieve some success within the structures that created those tropes. But in many ways these shows faced a dual challenge of overcoming both the lack of



Fig. 2. Takashi Murakami, *Miss ko2* (*Project ko2*) (1997), oil, acrylic, fiberglass, and iron, 100" x 46" x 36".

interest from Western audiences in nontraditional Japanese art (which they achieved) and the expectation from certain contemporary art critics that good art should not be also cute.

The division between kitsch and high art is often associated with Western modernist critics like Clement Greenberg, whose 1939 essay “Avant-garde and Kitsch” is commonly cited as a germinal text in the discussion. However, some concern about the notion of art that is in any way either commercial or broad in its appeal is longstanding in aesthetic theory.⁵ Some of the contemporary suspicion about art that is kitschy or cute seems justified; certainly the works of Jeff Koons seem to reinforce the worst fears of audiences all too ready to dismiss art in general as superficial and useless. Thus we might assume the same might be the case for more recent cute visual art and culture coming from Japan. *Kawaii*/anime/manga works meant for adults express their childlikeness in a way that makes them seem out of place in the typical anti-aesthetic mode of the bulk of critical contemporary art favored in Western venues—if “good” contemporary art is deliberately unappealing visually so as to avoid the traps of catharsis or beauty associated with support of the status quo,

what is to be made of work that leads with charm?⁶ In fact the most famous treatment of such material in a Western avant-garde art context by non-Japanese artists, Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno’s “No Ghost Just A Shell” traveling group exhibition (2002–03), notably voided any cuteness that might have obtained in their manga/anime source material, replacing it with a weighty conceptual and theoretical framework.⁷ In looking at contemporary Japanese art that reveals or even revels in its appeal to a broad audience, however, in many cases these aesthetic approaches, used in a more critical way, are actually a means to bridge the gap between the criticality of anti-aesthetic art and the desire for pleasure in viewing. And here we come to the tension created by the recent work of many contemporary Japanese artists whose eagerness to use imagery that seems approachable suggests a commercial and public appeal that renders them suspect as critical avant-gardists; they stake a claim *as* avant-garde through their use of *kawaii* and *otaku* aesthetics as a critical gesture.⁸

However, the ability to see *kawaii* as critique requires thinking about Japanese art that is not Eurocentric. It doesn’t help that the most visible advocate of cuteness in Japanese contemporary art is Takashi Murakami, who might well seem like another Jeff Koons both in his factory production of works and his overt embrace of commercial marketing that emphasizes his own superficiality. Works like Murakami’s

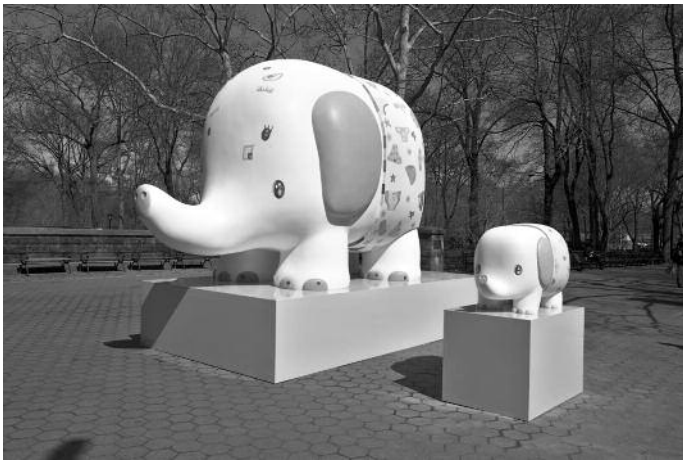


Fig. 3. Chinatsu Ban, *V W X Yellow Elephant Underwear and H I J Kiddy Elephant Underwear* (2005), fiber-reinforced plastic, steel, acrylic paint, urethane, 170" x 95 3/4" x 108 1/4" and 48 3/4" x 28" x 28 3/4". Public Art Fund and Japan Society, Marianne Boesky Gallery.



Fig. 4. Chinatsu Ban, *The 10:45PM Creature (It Was Probably A Raccoon!)* (2005), acrylic on linen, 51 1/2" by 76 1/2".

sculptural figure *Miss ko2 (Project ko2)* (1997; Fig. 2), far more popular than his earlier more traditional or more conceptually oriented works, also shared with Koons a linking of commercially cute imagery with overt misogyny. But it is inappropriate to see Murakami as both "uniquely Japanese" in his love of cartoon influences *and* operating in precisely the same context as Koons, much less to use him or the proliferation of Sanrio products in the last twenty years as a sign of what General Douglas MacArthur infamously called in the 1950s a nation of twelve-year-olds.⁹ Perhaps Westerners comfort themselves at the tremendous development of Japan as an economic and industrial power since the 1970s by seeing the love of *kawaii* and *otaku* as the foolish diversions of a superficial, kitschy culture—not to be taken seriously.

This very perception of *kawaii* as superficial because it is precious, cute, or "puerile," as Nicholas Bornoff argued, seems to me to be painfully inadequate, even intellectually lazy.¹⁰ Yuko Hasegawa offers an important alternative when she reminds us that *kawaii* is understood in Japan not just as cuteness, preciousness, and innocence but also as indeterminacy or potential transformation. Hasegawa writes that *kawaii* "has the potential to perform a political function of undermining current ideologies of gender and power. It could also be interpreted as a deliberately oppositional image, which juxtaposes the idea of a complete identity (a Western sense of identity) with an incomplete or hollow identity, one in which hollowness or emptiness is a natural state, never to be filled."¹¹ Citing the internationally popular *Ghost in the Shell* manga and anime series, Hasegawa notes that a Japanese notion of self is often mutable and less about physical and ontological wholeness than that normally posited by Western belief. As such, a desire for things that are cute, for an identity that emphasizes an innocent state before the more strictly enforced responsibilities and delimited identities of adulthood, offers more opportunities to see oneself as unfinished and unfixed. Looking at childlikeness as lacking in intelligence, sophistication, or criticality is a view that is imposed on this

impulse from outside the constructs of indeterminacy that Hasegawa sees in a Japanese sense of the term.

The association of the Japanese love of *kawaii* with negative perceptions of its juvenility is also a sexist enterprise because that love is always presented in negatively gendered terms. First, as most careful cultural observers have noted, the trend is as popular with men as women, whereas in American and some European cultures most gender-conforming men eschew Hello Kitty watches, Pokémon backpacks, and the like as too "girly" or silly. Japanese males from the teens to the mid-30s openly sport such *kawaii* items. It has also become a Western trope (as well as a conservative Japanese one) that the manga-loving *otaku* are all male-identified and perverts, watching and reading *hentai*, pornographic examples of cuteness. But the original use of the term *kawaii* does in fact come from associations with the feminine—a type of writing originating among schoolgirls in which romanized, left-to-right horizontal characters intermingled with images of hearts, stickers, exclamation points, and English words. Sharon Kinsella's research into *kawaii* has been invaluable in understanding it as a phenomenon that empowers its younger fans by its rejection of more formal and traditional aspects of Japanese culture.¹² According to Kinsella's findings, the majority of the young people she interviewed in Japan described both their society and adulthood in deeply negative terms, and thus an extension of childhood was seen as a way of prolonging a sense of freedom and individuality. If females cherished *kawaii* more ardently than males, it was precisely because of the even greater restrictions social values imposed on (especially married) women. To quote Kinsella,

[F]or women the urge to prolong youth and its appearances took on the form of a profound struggle. These young women thus savoured their brief years of freedom as unattached urban socialites through decadent consumption, and also expressed their fear of losing that freedom and youth through the cute aesthetic. Shimamura notes that, as young women get



Fig. 5. Miwa Yanagi, *My Grandmothers – Yuka* (2000), chromogenic print on Plexiglas on aluminum, 63" x 63". (from series shown in the "Bye Bye Kitty!!!" exhibition).

older and particularly in the period immediately prior to marriage, their fascination with and immersion in cute culture becomes still more acute.¹³

Lise Skov and Brian Moeran, in their introduction to the anthology *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*, argued that studies of Japanese women tended almost universally to see them as peripheral to the main dynamics of Japanese society or as passive dupe consumers.¹⁴ By viewing *kawaii* as merely the mindless fun of silly teenage girls (and anime as the mindless fun of effeminate teenage boys), we reify this sexist vision of Japanese culture.

Instead, we must take these engagements more seriously for what they teach us about culture—not as an easy way to dismiss adherents as superficial or interested in aesthetics at the denial of a critical function. Certainly the desire for *kawaii* objects has been used to market goods and thus exploit the desire commercially. But the desire itself is not necessarily, and did not originate from, a commercial enterprise but rather an intimate, relational, and slightly subversive one. And even the commercialism we must again view from a less Eurocentric view where support of commercialism is support of the status quo and the mainstream. Young people in Japan during the rise of *kawaii*, Kinsella argues, saw engagement in consumer culture as another rebellion, like cute-mania, against a more conservative mainstream mentality. "[P]ersonal consumption," she writes, "is portrayed as something rather anti-social and immoral in mainstream Japanese society, and cute youth culture went against the grain of older social values by sanctioning consumption."¹⁵ Granted, *kawaii* and anime are often used in Japan to make unpleasant things more pleasant, as characters adorn police stations and toilets. This shift has caused some interpreters to read it, as Brian J. McVeigh has,

"to soften up the vertical society, to soften power relations and present authority without being threatening."¹⁶ This creates an intriguing tension which I believe many of the contemporary Japanese artists using *kawaii* and anime imagery activate deliberately.

One such artist is Chinatsu Ban. Her giant elephant-in-underwear sculptures *V W X Yellow Elephant Underwear* and *H I J Kiddy Elephant Underwear* (2005; Fig. 3) graced the entry to Central Park in New York during the "Little Boy" exhibition. These pieces might have reminded many of Koons's flower puppy sculpture; certainly they are adorable, fun, and colorful. And although the bulk of Ban's work is two-dimensional, it was these three-dimensional pieces that simultaneously became most recognizable and were treated to critical scorn. Tom Eccles, director of the Public Art Fund and the commissioner of the piece, encouraged the negative linking of these works to commercialism and childishness when he stated that he had them placed where he did to suggest the physical connection to the children's toy store, FAO Schwartz, just across the intersection, as if the sculptures had come alive and issued from the store.¹⁷ The bulk of reviews of Ban's work from this and other U.S. shows constantly reiterate a kind of near disgust with the cuteness of the elephants, entirely ignoring Ban's own oft-repeated discussion of them as talismanic figures that help her survive and withstand the terrors of contemporary existence.¹⁸ Ban has also talked about her work in terms of its obvious sexuality and its perhaps less-obvious versions of natural selection, yet these topics are generally avoided by English-language critics.¹⁹ As Ban's works have become less overtly *kawaii* and manga in their style, some observers have grown more comfortable describing them in terms that seem more high-art appropriate and less repulsed. From the Modern Museum of Art in Fort Worth, for example, regarding paintings on exhibition there including *The 10:45Pm Creature (It Was Probably A Raccoon!)* (2005, Fig. 4): "The paintings represent a new phase of Ban's imagery in which significant stylistic and conceptual changes begin to take place: the elephant is more abstracted, and the landscape is increasingly more mythical and epic. In these works, metaphor is derived from nature rather than from culturally produced objects."²⁰ You can almost hear the ironic sigh of relief that the artist whose work became famous in the United States precisely because of its Japanese-y cuteness has eventually grown "serious" (or perhaps Western?) enough to begin making more abstracted, mythical, and epic work.

Yoshitomo Nara more obviously presents the tension of the comforting *kawaii* gesture in a world of alienation. His childlike figures often act out, and they are often presented in the realm of the artist's studio and thus associated with himself as an adult. Nara's use of a cute aesthetic is clearly fraught with the tensions mentioned by Kinsella in her analysis of *kawaii*. We literally see Nara struggling with his identity, his role as an artist, his place in a contemporary culture dominated by consumption and alienation.²¹ Speaking of a series of photographs of Afghanistan that he projected in a hut viewers could not enter but only look into, Nara said something applicable to most of his work: "I saw it as a

metaphor for an outsider unable to casually access another community."²² His earliest works, images of children in various (usually bad) moods, developed from time Nara spent in Germany, where "his lack of linguistic ability left him as helpless as a child; his solitary work at his studio prompted him to search for what was real and authentic inside himself."²³ Nara's children, like real children, are not merely cute but often troublesome and troubled; as he has pointed out, we don't know if the threat comes from them or if they are reacting to a threat from us. Like a Japanese artist in Germany, an office lady in Tokyo, or a viewer in an art exhibition, these are strangers in strange lands, looking at the world around them from a subjective and not necessarily consistent position.

The association of the ideas of *kawaii* and *otaku* subcultures with Japanese contemporary art became a tool to dismiss this art as irrelevant and superficial, often on explicitly gendered terms, where the *otaku* are rendered as insufficiently masculine and *kawaii* fans as mindless teen girls lacking in any critical faculties. While Murakami et al certainly play on notions of superficiality, it is dangerous territory to dismiss any cultural phenomenon as merely superficial and unworthy of our interest. Likewise, it is problematic to dismiss female artists working in (for?) Murakami's studio KaiKai Kiki like Chinatsu Ban and Chiho Aoshima as mere "unknown girls."²⁴ Like Andy Warhol's Factory denizens, these women have their own brains, their own abilities, and deserve to be treated no differently than their more frequently named male counterparts. The academic agenda seems to be to further marginalize young women and computer geeks whose tastes may not match those of the cultural elite but who nonetheless represent a large and growing contingent of global culture. Although no one can deny the popularity of this phase of Japanese art in the West, the backlash was quick and perhaps a little too aggressive.

This can be seen in the Japan Society's own calendar booklet advertising their revisionist 2011 exhibition:

"Bye Bye Kitty!!!" is a radical departure from recent Japanese art exhibitions. Moving *far* beyond the stereotypes of *kawaii* and *otaku* culture, Japan Society's show features 16 emerging and mid-career artists whose paintings, objects, photographs, videos and installations meld traditional styles with challenging visions of Japan's troubled present and uncertain future. Each of the three sections, *Critical Memory*, *Threatened Nature* and *Unquiet Dream*, not only offers a feast for the senses but also *demolishes our preconceptions* about contemporary Japan and its art [emphasis added].²⁵

Emphasizing a nearly violent return to traditional visual approaches with a heavy dose of newer critical perspective, the argument that the nail was in the coffin, at least at the Japan Society, would be a little easier to buy if the previous page's advertisement for a day-long festival event that claimed to move "above and beyond Japan's *kawaii* culture" weren't accompanied by a picture of a group of Harajuku girls wearing

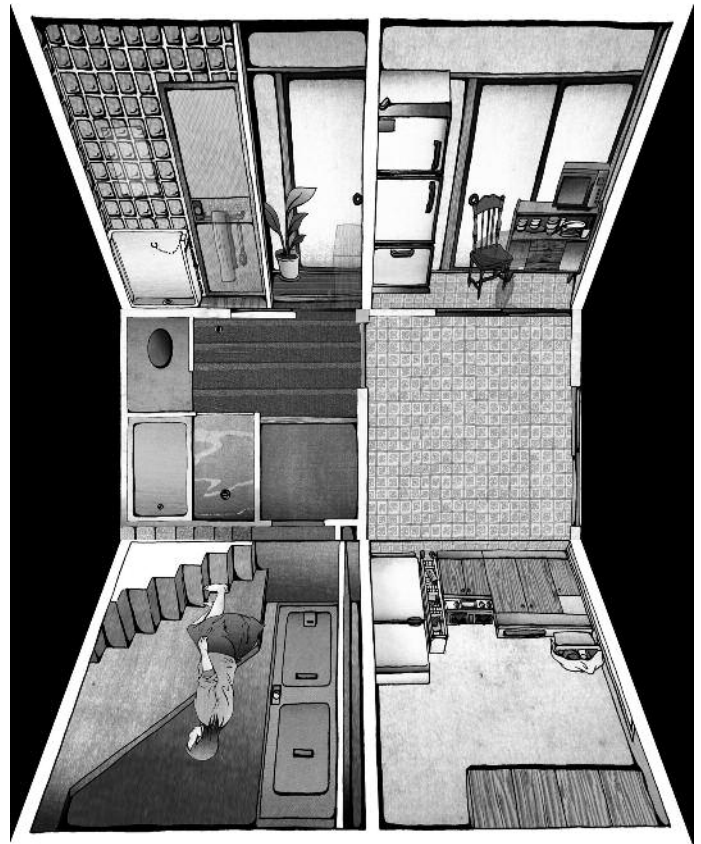


Fig. 6. Tabaimo, danDAN (2009), video installation, dimensions variable, 4'31" loop. James Cohan Gallery.

pinafores. It would also be easier to stomach if it were not, once again, couched in disparagingly gendered terms. In both Holland Cotter's *New York Times* review and Favell's *Art in America* review, they pointed out that David Elliott's curation was more equal in numbers, being made up of half male and half female artists (something Cotter described as "feminism"), and Favell also pointed to a seeming parity between the show's biggest names, Makoto Aida and Miwa Yanagi respectively. But note what else Favell sees. Of Aida: "In works like the vividly graphic *Harakiri Schoolgirls* (2002)," he writes, "Aida can sometimes seem misogynistic, so Elliott takes care to balance male and female artists in the show."²⁶ Of Yanagi, writes Favell, "Elliott couples Yanagi with Aida as the main entry point to the show. ... Elliott wanted the bizarre and gargantuan 'Windswept Women'... which bombed at the Venice Biennale in 2009. No one was sure where to place them in current curatorial trends; they also sit uneasily with theoretical feminism. So instead, with space a problem, Elliott chose a few safer options...."²⁷ The safer option was photographs from Yanagi's joyous and less intimidating *My Grandmothers* series, including *My Grandmothers – Yuka* (2000; Fig. 5), in which subjects posed as they wished to imagine themselves as older women. Thus, regardless of sexed identities, the two featured artists are both at least a little suspect in their presentations of gender identity in their work and how that aspect of their work is negotiated in "Bye Bye Kitty!!!" The featuring of more female artists does not

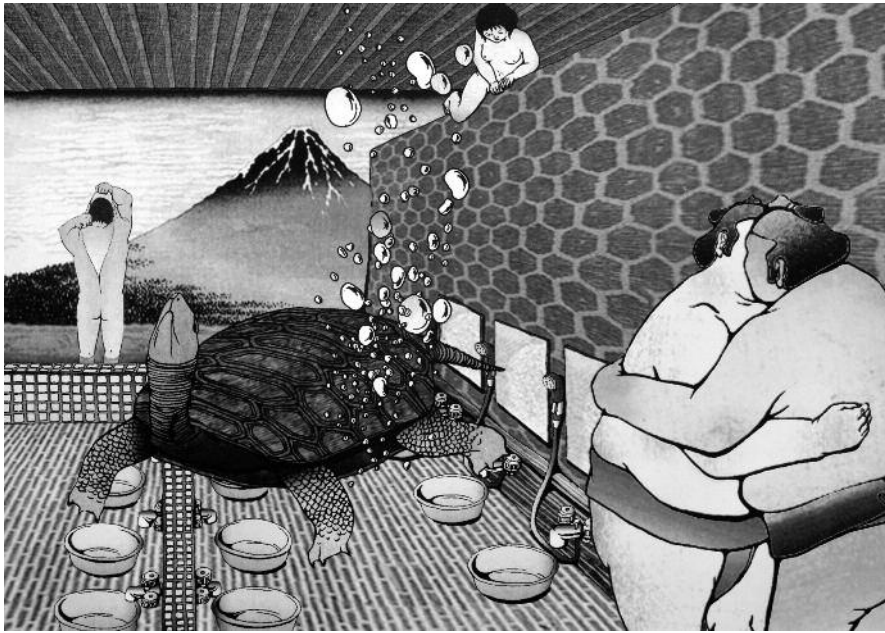


Fig. 7. Tabaimo, *Japanese Bathhouse—Men's Bath (Nihon no yuya: otoko yu)* (2000), still image, video installation, 177" x 377" x 205". James Cohan Gallery.

necessarily assuage what seems to be a general interest in framing these shows from a masculinist perspective. Noting the absence of Tabaimo, Favell states:

Whatever the story, there's a hole, since her work illustrates so well many of the themes Elliott advances. Tabaimo and Odani are archetypal artists of the "floating generation," as Tokyo cultural commentator Tetsuya Ozaki calls it in his essay for the catalogue. These artists turned to an esthetic very different from that of the pop- and sub-culture obsessed '60s generation of Aida, Murakami and Nara, who grew up surrounded by consumer toys and imaginative possibilities. Anyone who left college in the early '90s or after, in contrast, came of age in a world where opportunities and hope had been dashed.²⁸

I agree that Tabaimo's absence from the 2011 Japan Society exhibition was a problematic omission—both because her work bridges the gap between the "Little Boy" and "Bye Bye Kitty!!!" exhibitions, and because her selection to represent Japan at the 2011 Venice Biennale had already been made public. According to Japan Society Gallery Director Joe Earle, they had hoped to include her, but exhibition space constraints made it impossible.²⁹ (Having previously encountered Tabaimo's work by surprise and without any established framing discourse perhaps allowed me to see her work differently than did "Bye Bye Kitty!!!" curator Elliot, as I would have found the space and made it work.) Tabaimo sits at the intersection of *karwaii/otaku*, critique, and historiography that is the heart of my challenge to the binarism of English-language art criticism. I was fortunate to see a nearly complete body of her work to that date at the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo in the summer of 2006, and a

slightly smaller show at the Fondation Cartier in Paris in early 2007. In both places, I was absorbed in the work but occasionally caught the comments of the equally absorbed viewers around me. Interestingly, these comments tended to conflate Tabaimo's hand-drawn animations with Japanese commercial manga and anime (described by two Westerners I overheard as "cartoons") as well as with ukiyo-e woodblock prints. This conflation is not inaccurate, given that some contemporary manga and anime share stylistic approaches common to some Japanese prints from the Edo period. But I wasn't hearing the audiences at Tabaimo's exhibitions talk about a trajectory from ukiyo-e to contemporary manga and anime to contemporary digital art per Murakami in the materials he surrounded his "Super Flat" and "Little Boy" exhibitions with.³⁰ I was hearing them note that Tabaimo seemed to be drawing on both traditional

arts they were accustomed to seeing as Japanese (ukiyo-e) and new forms of image-making they didn't consider art: cartoons. I'm not mocking these viewers for their ignorance of the history of Japanese art or of Murakami's overdetermined genealogy. Rather, I think they point out something that art historians might be tempted to overlook by focusing instead on how clearly Tabaimo weaves together and expands upon that history. She's making anime. But she's also making art. Most of the viewers I overheard struggled with this combination. How can "cartoons" be art? And yet, in Tabaimo's work, they so clearly are—and were, even for these lay viewers. And her use of ukiyo-e references, which were familiar to most of the audience on some level, however accurately, helped even those without art historical knowledge recognize this conflation, which was not subtle, even to the untrained eye.

As such, Tabaimo's work starts to fit the box of English-language criticism, sometimes literally. Her 2009 video installation *danDAN* (Fig. 6 and Pl. 16), for example, was constructed by scanning ukiyo-e prints into her computer, adding original elements, and then animating them. Some of her earliest work included relatively unaltered references to well-known ukiyo-e prints, as in *Japanese Bathhouse—Men's Bath* (*Nihon no yuya: otoko yu*) (2000; Fig. 7 and Pl. 17) where Katsushika Hokusai's *Clear Day with a Southern Breeze* (*Gaifu kaisei*) from his print series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* (*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*, 1831) can be clearly identified in whole in the background of a scene.³¹ Tabaimo's methods bring us back around to another way Japanese art has always been fitted strangely into Western art history. Ukiyo-e, while now thoroughly entrenched in the canon of even Eurocentric "fine art" history, was originally not particularly high-brow. It was often advertising, and almost always focused on popular culture and popular experience. Its history is explicitly commercial, associated with a new Japan,

one restructured by the Tokugawa Shogunate that then shifted into Meiji global capitalism and Westernization. Yet in the West, both in the nineteenth century and today, ukiyo-e is seen as uniquely Japanese fine art, and its absorption into Western notions of high art de-emphasizes its historically commercial and popular connotations in Japan. Thus a false genealogy is created, whereby the Japanese once made fine art, but now contemporary artists like Ban, Nara, and Murakami are lulled by an over-commercialized twenty-first century into creating cute commodities. The result is the occurrence of a new Orientalism, which I believe Tabaimo's work defuses and reuses to a more complex end.

The artists themselves seem to have shifted along with this shift in thinking: initially, as most clearly seen in Murakami's manifestos on Superflat, the hope seemed to be that Japanese contemporary artists could escape the association of Japan with a traditionalist past, both artistically and more generally, through embrace of the commercial and cute.³² This attitude changed pretty quickly, even among those in Murakami's circle, to a concern that this embrace might have accidentally created a new type of Orientalism re-emphasizing a perceived Japanese immaturity. In the words of Yoshiko Shimada:

[W]hen Murakami appropriates historical elements, it is always this Western-approved, stereotypical cliché of Japanese culture. One cannot help feeling this as a renewed, collaborative Orientalism. "Superflat" gives Western art audiences a kind of futuristic Oriental spectacle that they can enjoy without feeling any sense of relationship to it, and likewise its approval by the West gives the Japanese a sense of self-importance and pride of being "uniquely Japanese."³³

Works like Nara's started to wear the implied alienation of cute rebellion on their sleeve, perhaps to avoid these connotations.³⁴ Tabaimo takes us into a third phase by utilizing commercially associated styles to more subtly critique the false notion of Japanese homogeneity. In Tabaimo's work, ukiyo-e can be seen as both traditional and new, both commercial and beautiful; it can be connected to anime, which also can now be seen as both traditional and new, both commercial and beautiful. And as the language of a world both uniquely Japanese and widely varied in its characterizations of that world, it denies the false distinction between art and commerce and between beauty and critique.³⁵ Not so cute, but



Fig. 8. Tabaimo, *Japanese Commuter Train* (*Nihon no tsūkin kaisoku* (2001), video installation, dimensions variable, 8'03" loop. James Cohan Gallery.

absolutely critical, her "cartoons" pave the way for an improved way of thinking about contemporary Japanese art.

Visiting the Hara Museum in 2006, I had the much more widely represented (mostly male) artists Yasumasa Morimura and Yoshitomo Nara in my sights. For them, I had ample background noise in my head, as well as expectations that were more than met. But my visit coincided with the exhibition "Yoroyoron," my first Tabaimo experience. Naturally, I saw the influence of ukiyo-e in color and design, the use of digital means to animate the work, and the references to standard tropes of contemporary Japan—sushi, salarymen, cell phone dangles, teen suicides, and more, as in *Japanese Commuter Train* (*Nihon no tsūkin kaisoku*) (2001, Fig. 8) where even in this single still from the animation we can spot most of those figures (and where, later, a human nigiri will be made). Despite these familiar elements and their ties to more superficial stereotypes, there was a compelling ambiguity in their presentation. Since then, as the conversation around Tabaimo's work has developed, however, the basic binarism of East/West and feminine/masculine used to talk about Japanese contemporary art has remained.

The first two things that are said about Tabaimo, always the same, are that she is influenced by ukiyo-e and digital popular culture. This starting point invokes tropes that make it easier to lump Tabaimo in with "all" Japanese artists, who apparently cannot think too far beyond manga and anime (itself a short-sighted criticism, given the global popularity of these forms). Yet Tabaimo's work does not look like that of the Murakami crowd, and the constant reiteration of these themes is one way of reducing Tabaimo's work to the trend notion of contemporary Japanese art, and thus its inevitable fall from interest when replaced with another trend. Attempting to



Fig. 9. Tabaimo, *Public conVENience* (公衆便女/ *Kōshū ben-onna*) (2006) video installation, dimensions variable, 6'5" loop. James Cohan Gallery.

avoid this equation were supporters of Tabaimo like Ziba Ardalan de Weck, who pointed out in the exhibition catalogue for a Tabaimo exhibition at Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art in London in 2010 that “the manga-derived images in Tabaimo’s work differ from the often cute and seemingly extrovert images in the work of other Japanese artists, such as Takashi Murakami and Mr.”³⁶ Tabaimo’s only hope in surviving the trend is to be contrasted sharply with her male *otaku* colleagues.

Similar comments can be found in a 2011 exhibition review by Carol Kino in the *New York Times*: “One thing is certain about the artist known as Tabaimo: her animated videos have never followed the fashion for *kawaii*, or cuteness, that has ruled Japanese contemporary art for years. Instead, they focus on the anxieties bubbling beneath the surface of everyday life.”³⁷ Kino’s visual description of the artist added to the sense that this is one Japanese artist who can’t be tossed in with the superficial, super-girly Japanese stereotype: “A demure woman dressed in a denim workman’s jumpsuit, she was initially hard to tell apart from the rest of the team installing her show.” Kino also emphasized the hand-drawing aspect of Tabaimo’s work, which is employed inconsistently by reviewers—in this case it served Kino’s goal of decoupling Tabaimo from the stereotypes of animaniac mass-producer in the Murakami vein. Kino then enlisted the words of two curators to strengthen her point, but this took her in the direction of the other standard discourse: Japanese artist as

most appropriate and appealing when traditionalist. First she quotes Shelly Langdale, curator of prints and drawings at the Philadelphia Museum of Art: “‘There is an anime look to her work,’ Ms. Langdale said, ‘but she is also calling on traditional Japanese visual culture to allude to this constant tension in Japanese society between old customs and increasing globalism.’” Then quoting Yuka Uematsu, curator at the National Museum of Art in Osaka and organizer of Tabaimo’s Venice show, Kino adds, “‘She was focusing on typical Japanese society’”—a realism Ms. Uematsu had not seen in Japanese art before—‘but critically, in her own way.’” In other words, rest assured that Tabaimo isn’t a trendy *kawaii* artist—no, she’s a critical artist working in the tension between Edo and Cool. Again, I don’t completely disagree with these analyses, but I wish rather to point out how there is a recurring theme of binaries—as a contemporary Japanese artist, one is either superficially hip or sensitively aware of tradition. Kino’s article began to allow for some alternatives—she allowed that Tabaimo’s work was critical and individual. But even Kino felt compelled to refer to what her Western audience expects in this analysis—mention of qualities many find childish as well as the traditionalism expected of Japan since Westerners first encountered it.

Better perhaps is J.J. Charlesworth’s essay for the Parasol unit show, where he stated that “[w]hat makes Tabaimo’s approach unusual is the complex interplay between forms of psychological symbolism embedded in sexual, gendered and

bodily experience, with a narrative content that points us to the public and social realities of everyday life in Japan.”³⁸ Noting Tabaimo’s representations of bodies in flux, rather than strictly determined and divided, Charlesworth compared her positively—but again in binary contrast—to the newly heroized Makoto Aida: “But if the vaguely obscene and ironic misogyny of Aida’s images tends towards a blunt social satire of Japanese (masculine) erotic mores, Tabaimo’s approach is more subtle—not least for the fact that her protagonists are often women, or are involved in situations in which social and gender divisions are pertinent.”³⁹ This is particularly clear in *Public conVENiENCE* (公衆便女 / *Kōshū ben-onna*) (2006; Fig. 9 and Pl. 18), an installation that brings the viewer into an animated women’s bathroom wherein moths act like voyeuristic drones, snapping photographs of women in various states of dress, feeling sick, giving birth (through their noses), washing up, and ... pearl diving. Unfortunately, like many of his published compatriots, Charlesworth hoped his ideal Tabaimo was not a feminist: “It would be too easy to impute a particular ‘agenda’ to such images, which might easily support a feminist agenda. [...] But perhaps the reality is more subtle.”⁴⁰ We certainly wouldn’t want to locate something so unsubtle as a feminist social agenda in the work of a contemporary female artist; perhaps most importantly, that might detract from our attempts to locate the Orientalist “Japanese” signs we expect.⁴¹ As the artist suggested in interviews during her exhibition “*Danmen no Sedai*,” (roughly translatable as Cross-Section Generation) by framing her own generation as a cross-section or cross-cut generation, one marked by unease, instability, and doubt, Tabaimo also presents an alternative—work that doesn’t fit easy binaries of gender, method, or influence; work by a Japanese artist that is simultaneously about Japan and legible in a more global environment without being reduced to stereotypes.⁴²

We European and American art historians and critics clearly need an increasing awareness of our role in perpetuating the Westernizing field of contemporary art by ignoring the local specificities of Japanese contemporary art, which will not fit into what David Clarke calls “pre-existing western frames of understanding.”⁴³ To merely include Japanese art in our purview is not sufficient, as we know, but we also must be wary of our tendency to shift back to old tropes in looking at unfamiliar (or falsely familiar) images. To quote Eric C. Shiner, “Today it is no longer possible to speak about Japanese contemporary art as a purely *Japanese* phenomenon.”⁴⁴ Happily, an increasing number of Japanese women are making art that is succeeding in the global contemporary scene. What we need to be more aware of is our discourse in addressing this phenomenon. Although speaking of a different group, female expatriates, I find Karen Kelsky’s words productive here:

Japanese women’s efforts to include themselves in the class of transnational technocrats through a painstakingly acquired decontextualized cultural knowledge are not entirely successful; they are continually being put

back in “their place” by continuing racial and gender hierarchies that serve to marginalize them even (or especially) in the internationalist venues they idealize.... Japanese women rejecting Japan according to a logic of internationalist progress are often welcomed in the United States and other Western countries as ideal embodiments of an already feminized Japan, evidence of the universal desirability of the West over the Orient, legitimators of Western female feminism and Western male “sensitivity.”⁴⁵

Critics of contemporary art history are trained in anti-essentializing approaches that should, but somehow don’t, make the leap when faced with art from Japan. We need new stories, new relationships, in which to see and speak about art that is both specific and individual while still retaining an awareness of its cultural grounds. We won’t get there on an ideological equation of animation + ukiyo-e = feminized and superficial yet traditional Japan (or on one of *nihonga* + sexism = remasculinized Japan). I might say about art in general what Tabaimo says about hers in specific: “It’s not the existence of the object that is important but rather, I think, the fact that everyone is able to recognize their own perspective in relation to their situation: how was the object perceived and from what viewpoint?”⁴⁶ Whether one sees in Tabaimo’s works the traces of Edo-period art, contemporary animation and consumer culture, “Japan,” a young artist communicating in a theoretically global but realistically still Orientalist art market, or the mingling of these and other features of course depends on the viewer’s perspective. At present, the discourse on such artists and their work remains predominantly binary in its nationalistic and gendered terms and expectations, showing how far we have yet to go in creating a more inclusive context for contemporary art. •

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Notes

1. I use the term “Orientalism” not in the binary, essentializing manner now being foregrounded in critiques of the work of Edward Said (see for example David Zarnett’s book review of two such critiques in “Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said’s Orientalism” in the Spring 2008 *Dissent*) but as one of many approaches taken by some English-language art critics and scholars to simultaneously exoticize and diminish the cultural productions of artists from Asia and the Middle East. Here I attempt, rather, to “provincialize Europe” in the mode encouraged by Dipesh Chakrabarty (*Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton Univ Press, 2007) by pointing out the ongoing limitations of U.S.- and Eurocentric discourses that construct Asian artists in exclusively Othering ways. Feminist readers might be particularly interested in the way that Orientalism is inherently

gendered (the East as feminized Other is a core component); what the patriarchy has done to women including women artists is fundamentally aligned with what our Orientalizing art historical discourse does to Asian artists in general, and Asian women artists in particular. For more on the gendered nature of Orientalism, see Maryam Khalid, "'Gendering Orientalism': Gender, sexuality and race in post-9/11 global politics," in *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies* 10, no. 1 (2014), 1–18.

2. "Japanese contemporary art" is itself a dubious category, but my argument here is driven in no small part by the attempts others make to lend that category meaning through over-generalization.
3. Peter Schjeldahl, "Fearing the Worst: Angst in new Japanese art," in *The New Yorker* (March 28, 2011), 112. Holland Cotter's review "Anxiety on the Fault Line" for *The New York Times* (March 17, 2011) is far less snarky but makes some of the same gestures. Both Schjeldahl and Cotter view the exhibition as an improvement in seriousness or political drift, but Cotter recognizes *kawaii* as having serious origins in "cultural malaise" and "chronic uncertainty." Cotter unfortunately takes the exhibition's bait that the show represents "a new art generation," even while himself noting not only the broad age differences among the artists but the well-established style and career of Makoto Aida, for example. For more on the exhibition from the point of view of its curators, see the exhibition catalogue *Bye Bye Kitty!!!: Between Heaven and Hell in Contemporary Japanese Art* (New York: Japan Society, 2011).
4. Adrian Favell, "Tokyo to LA Story: How Southern California became the Gateway for a Japanese Global Pop Art Phenomenon," in *Kontur: Tidsskrift for kulturstudier* 20 (2010): 64. Favell also points out how gendered, and often sexist, this process was, although that is never his main point.
5. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-garde and Kitsch," in *Partisan Review* 6:5 (1939): 34–49.
6. A good argument in this direction is made by Gunhild Borggreen in "Cute and Cool in Contemporary Japanese Visual Arts," in *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 29:1 (2011): 39–60.
7. Named from the *Ghost in the Shell* manga and anime empire (1989–present) created by Masamune Shirow, a collection of works by Huyghe, Parreno, and others based on the purchase from Japanese company K Works of copyright for a character named Annlee, which Huyghe and Parreno then reduced to a simplified figure in a digital file. Each of the 15-plus artists used the character in different media and to different ends, and varied combinations of the works were exhibited at institutions including Kunsthalle Zürich (2002), San Francisco MoMA (2003), and Tate Modern (2000).
8. Perhaps a clear sign of the imbalanced view contemporary art historians might be taking of the Japanese *kawaii* works is how accepting they are of comic imagery used by canonical Western avant-garde artists like Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. Jack Halberstam has used cuteness broadly to critical ends, albeit differently in terms of content and method (not addressing *kawaii* specifically, for example). See *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2011).
9. It must be said that Murakami began the more successful part of his art career in precisely this ambivalent state between the demands of his traditional training as a *nihonga* painter and his understanding of the Western definition of contemporary art as both critical and unappealing to a broad populace. Attempting to bridge all these gaps, Murakami ended up embracing what is sometimes considered New Pop, a commercialized yet still historiographically aware form: "I think much more than Marcel Duchamp is Walt Disney concept piece, really hardcore. Because he can get what people desire." For a discussion of Murakami's tussle with appeal versus critique, see Katy Siegel, "In the Air," in Takashi Murakami, *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2005), 269–87.
- MacArthur's xenophobic comment, made to the U.S. Senate following his dismissal from his command, was, "Measured by the standards of modern civilization, [Japan] would be like a boy of twelve as compared with [the Anglo-Saxon] development of 45 years."
10. "Sex and Consumerism: The Japanese State of the Arts," in Fran Lloyd, ed., *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art* (London: Reaktion, 2002), 41–68.
11. Yuko Hasegawa, "Post-Identity *Kawaii*: Commerce, Gender and Contemporary Japanese Art," in Lloyd, ed., *Consuming Bodies*, 140.
12. Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," in Lise Skov and Brian Moeran, eds., *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan* (Surrey, UK: Curzon, 1995).
13. Ibid., 245. The quote references an interview Kinsella conducted with Mari Shimamura, an editor of the magazine *Cutie for Independent Girls*.
14. Skov & Moeran, "Introduction: Hiding in the Light: From Oshin to Yoshimoto Banana," in Skov and Moeran, eds., *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*, 1–73.
15. Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," 246.
16. Natalie Angier, "The Cute Factor," in *The New York Times*, Jan. 3, 2006.
17. Carol Vogel, "The Murakami Influence," in *The New York Times*, April 6, 2005.
18. Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. website, <http://english.kaikaikiki.co.jp/artists/list/C8/>, accessed April 20, 2017.
19. Ivan Vartanian, "Chinatsu Ban," in *drop dead cute: the new generation of women artists in Japan* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 2005), 102–04. The statements these artists have made are available in English translation, so although the language biases of European and American critics might limit their access to a fuller understanding of Japanese artists (itself a concern), in the case of artists of this stature there is plenty of translated material available.
20. "Focus: Chinatsu Ban, Dec. 3, 2006–Jan. 28, 2007," <http://themodern.org/exhibition/past/focus-chinatsu-ban-1707>, accessed April 20, 2017.
21. Sianne Ngai goes into further detail on Nara's invocation of *kawaii* imagery in her essay "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde," in *Critical Theory* 31, no. 4 (Summer 2005), 811–47, as well as her excellent book *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2012). Her focus, however, is more on the interrelation of cuteness with horror, aggression, and violence in Nara and Murakami's work as a stepping stone to discussing literary cuteness, where she is more varied in her interpretations. Ngai makes good use of Kanako Shiokawa's "Cute But Deadly: Women and Violence in Japanese Comics," in *Themes and Issues in Asian Cartooning: Cute, Cheap, Mad, and Sexy*, ed. John A. Lent (Bowling Green, OH: Popular Press, 1999), 93–125; and Noi Sawaragi's "Dangerously Cute: Noi Sawaragi and Fumio Nanjo Discuss Contemporary Japanese Culture," in *Flash Art* 163 (March–April 1992), 75–77. But while I agree with her reading, via Teodor Adorno, of cuteness as a way for art to challenge bourgeois functionalization, I am far more interested in the way that cuteness is seen to remain on the level of the childish and/or negatively gendered when located Eurocentrically.
22. Yukie Kamiya, "Yoshitomo Nara and Graf: Happy Together," in *Art AsiaPacific* 53 (March–April 2007): n.p.
23. Murakami, *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, 61.
24. Adrian Favell, "Bye Bye Little Boy," in *Art in America* (April 2011), 89.
25. Japan Society, March–April 2011 pamphlet, "Exhibitions," 6.
26. Favell, "Bye Bye Little Boy," 90.

27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 90–91.
29. Author's conversation during a visit to the exhibition. In response, I suggested she be given a solo show at the Japan Society entitled "Little Sister, Big Girl" to contrast the "Little Boy" exhibition and as a play on her chosen name, Tabaimo, a nom de plume meaning "Tabata's little sister." Tabaimo's first one-person show in the U.S. was held instead at the San Jose Museum of Art, Feb. 6 – Aug. 21, 2016.
30. See Takashi Murakami, *Super Flat* (Tokyo: Madara Shuppan, 2000), and *Little Boy: the Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*.
31. About which she said: "At the center of it all, I didn't use the ukiyo-e aesthetic to show off a Japanese tradition, but rather to engage the surprise I felt when they are placed alongside animation." "A Walkthrough with Tabaimo," Sept. 15 2011, transcribed and revised by Ali Van from an interview of Tabaimo by Jane DeBevoise, <http://www.aaa-a.org/2012/06/15/a-walkthrough-with-tabaimo/>, accessed April 20, 2017.
32. An example of support of this hope in English art writing is curator Michael Darling's "Plumbing the Depths of Superflatness," in *Art Journal* 60, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 76–89; a bit startling is the way Darling's work reads as an extended press release for the *Superflat* show, which he helped curate—and which was still on view at the time of publication. Nonetheless he raises key points in line with seeing especially otaku culture more meaningfully.
33. Yoshiko Shimada, "Afterword: Japanese Pop Culture and the Eradication of History," in Lloyd, ed., *Consuming Bodies*, 188.
34. This is closer to the tack taken by Midori Matsui in her essay "Beyond the Pleasure Room To a Chaotic Street: Transformations of Cute Subculture in the Art of the Japanese Nineties," in Murakami, *Little Boy: the Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture* (209–39). Matsui's excellent discussion parallels mine in seeing potential for meaning in the *kawaii* aesthetic, but diverges significantly in both her grounding (Eiji Otsuka's essays on the link between *shojo* culture and consumerism, which my use of Kinsella clearly rejects), and in her formulation of Murakami's *Superflat* and *kawaii* activities as postcolonial recontextualizations within the frames of the colonizer. To see Japanese contemporary *kawaii* works as childish is first of all to agree to an interpretation I feel is inaccurate; secondly, to see the use of *kawaii* as relating as much or more to the West than to Japan's own desires is, I feel, more colonialist than postcolonialist. What I most like about Matsui's reading is her revelation of the way many of the women artists deconstruct and critique sexist otaku representations of gender, as well as her reminder (needed still) that viewers should not conflate commercial anime with contemporary art making in that regard.
35. Tabaimo has argued that the pervasiveness of anime and manga in Japanese culture issues from and creates a uniquely Japanese situation, in which denizens fail to distinguish between the real and the unreal, thereby opening up a space between or among the two poles. Bringing together a seemingly flat affect with horrific but real news stories, she feels "the animations that I have created are meant for Japanese viewers," presumably because Western viewers don't have the same perspective. See "Tabaimo," in *drop dead cute*, 144–46.
36. Ziba Ardan de Weck, "Tempest in a Virtual Paradise," in Ziba Ardan de Weck, ed, *Tabaimo: Boundary Layer* (London: Parasol/Koenig, 2010), 58.
37. Carol Kino, "Cutting Through Cute To The Real Japan," in *The New York Times*, Oct. 16, 2011, 19. Subsequent quotes in this paragraph also are from this review.
38. J.J. Charlesworth, "Tabaimo: Reality Bleeds Through," in de Weck, *Tabaimo: Boundary Layer*, 68.
39. Ibid., 70.
40. Ibid.
41. It is a common Western misapprehension that there is neither a long history of feminism nor feminist theorizing in Japan. One of many examples can be found in Sandra Buckley's *Broken Silence: Voices of Japanese Feminism*, which includes interviews of 11 major Japanese feminist theorists followed by a 35-page chronology of important historical events relating to gender from 1868–1991 and a 15-page list of feminist organizations in Japan. The book's genesis came from Buckley's frustration at her Western colleagues' doubts even in the face of evidence—and that frustration is echoed by many of her subjects, who rush to point out the diversity of feminisms they themselves represent as well as both the contextual differences that might make Japanese feminism unique in comparison to Western feminism (for example, the very different religious elements in daily life that might make abortion rights central to an Irish feminist but not to a Japanese feminist, as Saitō Chiyo points out) as well as the many similarities (shifts in emphasis over time) that can be articulated similarly to the "waves"; Kazuko Tanaka says it shifted from consciousness-raising to issues-oriented specificity from the 1970s to the 1990s, and claims a similar diffusion to that decried by Western feminists in the 1990s; see "The New Feminist Movement in Japan, 1970–1990" in Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow and Atsuko Kameda, eds., *Japanese Women: New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Feminist Press, 1995). Michiko Kasahara leads with this precise frustration about Western misunderstandings of Japanese feminism (more pointedly the assumption that Japanese feminism is borrowed from the West, also discussed in Buckley's book) in "Contemporary Japanese Women's Self-Awareness" in Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin, eds, *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art* (New York: Merrell, 2007). The situation was, in the past, partly attributable to what was available in translation (hence Buckley's book) but given all the unheard correctives, it is ongoing due to Orientalism in our own feminist and other academic circles, where Japan has to represent some sort of pre-Meiji era traditional culture instead of being, much like the U.S., an industrial advanced nation where binaristic and male-dominated structures of social and political power may dominate but feminist scholarly and social justice work are nonetheless present. That said, the word "feminism" is less likely to be used in Japan than either "*ūman ribu*" ("women's lib"—usually referring specifically to the 1970s movement) or the more commonly used "*jendā*" (gender).
42. Tabaimo's Yokohama exhibition title "*Danmen no Sedai*" plays on the term *dankai no sedai* used to describe the previous baby boomer generation. That generation was identified as having attributes of solidarity, whereas the cross-section wording Tabaimo employs suggests her generation as more individualized. See for example Ashley Rawlings, "All that Creeps Below the Surface: Tabaimo," in *ArtAsiaPacific* 71 (Nov.–Dec. 2010): 100; see also Shuichi Yoshida, "A Duet Discussion of Generations—Why the *Danmen no Sedai*?" interview recorded in Tokyo on Sept. 9, 2009, pdf available on the James Cohan Gallery website at <http://i1.exhibit-e.com/jamescohan/53bcc2e5.pdf>, accessed April 20, 2017.
43. David Clarke, "Contemporary Asian Art and the West," in Jonathan Harris, ed., *Globalization and Contemporary Art* (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 247.
44. Eric C. Shiner, "Making a Home for Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York: A Curatorial Walk-Through," in *Making a Home: Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2007), 21.
45. Karen Kelsky, *Women on the Verge: Japanese Women, Western Dreams* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2001), 18.
46. *Tabaimo*, exh. cat., Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2006), 18.

Georgia O'Keeffe Living Modern

By Wanda M. Corn
Delmonico Books Prestel for the
Brooklyn Museum, 2016

Reviewed by Ellen G. Landau

Like Frida Kahlo, her counterpart in Mexico, it would seem that Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986) has been written about so exhaustively that one might be tempted to conclude that there is not much really new to say or any fresh angle from which to analyze her contribution to the twentieth century. Again similar to Kahlo, O'Keeffe's fame—for both, it is now more like celebrity—is not solely based on the intersection of their gender with an urge to draw and paint, but also rests to a not inconsiderable degree on a perhaps more contested traditional status, that of artist's muse. In O'Keeffe's case she played this role to the pioneering American photographer Alfred Stieglitz, to whom she was married for a number of critical decades. Theirs was an artistic and personal relationship superficially comparable to Kahlo's with her husband, the painter Diego Rivera, although the many hundreds of intimate photos of O'Keeffe that Stieglitz took and exhibited widely overwhelmingly dwarfs the number of times (and ways) Rivera chose to depict his wife.

Especially interesting for feminist studies, in the case of both, their choice of clothing and living surroundings were remarkably important components of O'Keeffe and Kahlo's overall artistic personae; far more popular and scholarly attention has however been paid to the *mexicanidad* of Kahlo's Tehuantepec outfits and the indigenous way she decorated Casa Azul, her home near Mexico City,¹ than to the corresponding apparel and home designs adopted by O'Keeffe. Wanda Corn, in a 2016 traveling exhibition sponsored by the Brooklyn Museum, and with much greater specificity in the show's over-300 page catalogue, sets out to definitively redress that lacuna in

O'Keeffe studies, and she succeeds admirably. Her handsomely designed book, whose subtitle “Living Modern” is readable in several important ways, presents much heretofore unknown or under-analyzed detail about how O'Keeffe chose to present herself, and how, in tandem, she constructed her immediate environments during different periods of an unusually lengthy career. Corn provides many new insights into O'Keeffe's self-fashioning that, taken as a whole, suggest greater agency underpinning her lifestyle and artistic decisions—including what, ever more clearly, presents as her willing collaboration with those (especially Stieglitz) who wished to depict her face and body—and the multitude of ways in which varying aspects of her life were so often closely intertwined.

According to Corn, privileging examination of the clothing O'Keeffe wore as well as the personally orchestrated spaces in which she lived, primarily New York (with Stieglitz) and for a much longer period near Santa Fe (without him), adds a material culture dimension critical to understanding more fully the value of O'Keeffe's intentionally “integrated aesthetic” (11). (Most of the clothing she apparently designed and sewed herself, and many of these pieces are illustrated here in beautiful color plates.) This material aspect both deepens and helps to alter the received story of her willful transformation away from the notoriety surrounding her image as a highly sexualized urban “New Woman” of the flapper era (Stieglitz's nude photos of O'Keeffe and the eroticized interpretations of her flower paintings that he encouraged induced parallels to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*) into the nun-like “St. Georgia of the Desert.” This very different appellation, Corn explains, was given to the ascetic persona O'Keeffe chose to embody in her post-New York phase and especially in how severely she dressed and posed in portraits by the many photographers subsequent to Stieglitz. Such luminaries as Arnold Newman and Yousuf Karsh, among others, created memorable images of O'Keeffe at her homes in Abiquiú, New Mexico, and nearby Ghost Ranch, mid-life and during



Fig. 1: Arnold Newman, *Georgia O'Keeffe, Ghost Ranch* (1968). Arnold Newman/Getty Images.

her extended old age (1968; Fig. 1). Indeed, Corn describes O'Keeffe as “the most photographed American artist of her century,” citing her depiction by over forty photographers. She deems dressing and modeling for photographers O'Keeffe's “second profession in the arts” (13) and in *Georgia O'Keeffe Living Modern* Corn illustrates many previously unpublished portraits (especially early pictures), allowing for comparison over a period of almost an entire century.

In redefining O'Keeffe's identity formation process Wanda Corn (as she had done more succinctly in a previous book for O'Keeffe and other members of the modernist Stieglitz and Arensberg Circles)² features a great deal of fascinating background information on aspects of culture crucial to understanding the specific points she is trying to make. Here, this includes, for example, comparative discussion of the ideas of feminist author, publisher, and social theorist Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose little magazine *The Forerunner* O'Keeffe read, and in Corn's opinion internalized, especially Gilman's arguments about the need to “reform clothing” for women with emphasis on the functional rather than the decorative

(42). Corn considers O’Keeffe’s lifelong choice of monochromatic black (with touches of white), rejection of corseting, and emphasis on unbroken lines with little to no ornamentation, in the context of Gilman’s principles as well as the stylistic innovations of Coco Chanel, more O’Keeffe’s contemporary. Photographs of the latter two, separated by the Atlantic but wearing similarly streamlined and understated outfits at the same time, provide another interesting counterpoint (45). Corn also discusses the New York skyscraper aesthetic; O’Keeffe and Stieglitz, who had an apartment on an upper floor of the Shelton Hotel, were among the first Americans to live in a skyscraper, and both depicted the novel experience of seeing the city from high above. Summer attire at Lake George, the upstate New York Stieglitz family vacation home, provided another foundational aspect of O’Keeffe’s self-fashioning. Native Southwest architectural style and the stock elements of western apparel that go along with this (blue jeans, cowboy hats, chunky turquoise jewelry) play an even larger role in Corn’s narrative building toward the definition of a new typology for O’Keeffe’s final identity. Corn defines this personality as “Spiritual Woman,” austere and timeless, one that turned O’Keeffe into a kind of priestess ever more, as artist Marsden Hartley had earlier put it, “Sphinxian” in her deceptively simple complexity (102).

O’Keeffe’s character trajectory, according to Corn, began with “Sexual Woman,” moved on to “Artist Woman,” “Nature Woman,” and “Modern Woman” before arriving at this final Zen-like state (95). Beginning with her discussion of O’Keeffe and Stieglitz’s torrid love affair, most chapters of the book include a section entitled “In Front of the Camera” where Corn provides nuanced close readings of the ways in which O’Keeffe self-presented and/or was constructed by a variety of photographers as embodying these successive tropes. Corn maintains throughout the text her assessment of a symbiotic relationship between O’Keeffe’s dress, body, and paintings, although the latter are not her primary focus. At the outset she defines O’Keeffe as comparable to Kahlo in two critical ways; both were “regional” (not international) modernists as well as “brilliant models for men’s cameras” that benefited equally from assenting to this process (17).

In the book’s final section, Corn relates how, by the 1970s, younger artists like Andy Warhol and Marisol, and especially first-wave feminists such as Mary Beth Edelson and Judy Chicago, began paying homage to O’Keeffe as “an American original” and “living legend.” More recently, Corn avers, prominent global fashion designers including Yoji Yamamoto, Michael Kors, and Prabal Gurung, have begun to reference in their work O’Keeffe’s signature minimalist

style. Even O’Keeffe’s homes in the southwest, featured over the years in popular magazines, have become touchstones for fashion and also gender studies. A prominent example presented is Bruce Weber’s photograph of Calvin Klein’s orgasmic rapture when posing in juxtaposition with a fireplace and bleached cow skull in 1984 in her Abiquiu living room (277). Georgia O’Keeffe, Corn posits at the book’s conclusion, “justly belongs in more than one kind of history; her breadth of interests and her excellence in all of them are what make her such an unusual artist.” That her distinctive career path challenges “the very idea that a modernist’s creativity need solely be vested in the production of ‘fine art’” (283), is powerfully demonstrated by Wanda Corn in this important study. •

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Notes

1. See, for example, Erica Billeter, ed., *The World of Frida Kahlo: The Blue House* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1994).
2. Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1999).

Lee Miller: Photography, Surrealism, and Beyond

By Patricia Allmer
Manchester University Press, 2016

Reviewed by Caitlin Davis

In the first chapter of *Lee Miller: Photography Surrealism and Beyond*, author Patricia Allmer correctly avers that “the reception history of Miller’s biography represents it repeatedly as a largely fixed and complete narrative, continuously re-asserting a key set of events, encounters,

and sequences, and rarely questioning them” (1). This groundbreaking book is a welcome, indeed crucial, addition to Lee Miller scholarship. Allmer’s analyses reframe and enhance our comprehension of Miller’s artistic oeuvre, gracefully complementing, rather than completely upending, the established canon. The narrative is pleasingly plotted, and Allmer’s conclusions crisply and satisfyingly come together.

To illustrate her arguments, Allmer provides thorough dissections of both famous photographs and little-known works, including collage, a medium not

commonly associated with Miller. Rejecting the tendency to compartmentalize Miller’s artistic output into discrete periods, Allmer instead discovers overlap and interactions throughout Miller’s career—a span of time that is significant: Contrary to the perception that Miller’s artistic production ceased abruptly and traumatically at the conclusion of World War II, Allmer believes Miller remained vital and fruitful throughout her postwar life.

After the thoroughly readable first chapter, Allmer plunges in Chapter II into an impressive, nuanced, and excellently researched examination of



Fig. 1. Lee Miller, *Advertisements I* (1945), gelatin silver print, © Lee Miller Archives, England, 2017. All rights reserved. www.leemiller.co.uk

Miller's rarely-considered yet important pendant photographs *Severed Breast from Radical Surgery in a Place Setting 1* and *2* (c. 1930), contextualizing these pieces by exploring them within the contexts of Surrealism and feminist art. In addition to an excellent formal analysis, Allmer properly positions the pendants within Miller's oeuvre, skillfully linking the pair to the artist's contemporary output in Paris, as well as with later works, especially those from the Second World War. "Miller's subsequent artistic and creative developments can be located in and traced out of this early work,... [which] is arguably one of the first radical feminist artworks and a forerunner of and influence on women surrealists' reconceptualisations and appropriations of still life" (55).

Allmer hops in Chapter IV to the mythic summer of 1937 in Mougins, France, when Miller shared a richly collaborative vacation with a gathering of the avant-garde, including among others, her lover (and later husband), the British Surrealist Roland Penrose, and Pablo Picasso. She explores Miller's *Untitled, Collage, including Eileen Agar*

and *Dora Maar* (1937), "only superficially a significant oddity in Miller's largely photographic oeuvre" (92), which is "a complex and deliberate" (92) work and "a meditation on the situation of the woman artist in relation to modernist avant-garde traditions" (93). The work reflects Miller's concern with the representation of women in active, constructive roles, and exists as her personal response to the art of Picasso and Penrose. Using a medium not commonly discussed in relation to Miller as a tool towards understanding her artistic impulses and ideals is refreshing, and also deliberate; we learn in the book's final chapter that Miller returned to collage after the war, when she composed an entire collage section for the significant 1953 exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, "Wonder and Horror of the Human Head: An Anthology."

Miller's years in Egypt (1934–39), are treated in great depth. Allmer writes that this was an important time artistically, "in which a series of transitions are achieved, a threshold series of works around which the rest of her photography takes new forms and assumes new kinds of significance" (122). Examining Miller's famous *Portrait of Space*, Allmer rejects previous readings of the photograph as an expression of Miller's interior lassitude, and convincingly puts it forth as a critique of the colonial and patriarchal society of Miller's adopted country, one that presents the viewer "with a visual experience of being at the brink, at the nodal point between civilization and its dissolution" (128). Allmer identifies a continuing trope in Miller's art, namely, a "deployment within the image of a multiplicity of framing devices" (132), which serves to play up the "tension between permanence and mutability" (133) and provides "an alternate perspective, proposing that reality can be perceived not from the 'window' of tradition, but from a spreading anti-structure: a nomadic migration of form and containment into a set of mobile co-ordinates which is unstable and consequently resists the very framing that the image seems to emphasize" (134). *Portrait of Space* (1937) is a

representation of Miller's exploration of changing, fluid identities and mobile boundaries, an idea revisited during World War II when she photographed the unsettled European front.

Shifting perspectives set the stage for Miller's war. She was living with Penrose in London while he worked for the Industrial Camouflage Research Unit, taking inspiration from Cubist forms to conceal objects from the enemy. Allmer argues that Miller began to consider and incorporate the visual questions of camouflage into her contemporaneous images. I do not wholly agree with the totality of Allmer's arguments regarding Miller's strategic usage of maps as props within her war imagery, but this is a mere quibble, and still useful as a fresh analysis to consider. Allmer is absolutely correct in noting the connective strands tying together Miller's images documenting the war, her previous work in fashion and advertising, and her surrealist pieces. Miller's background as a model, a commercial fashion photographer, and a contributing member of the Surrealist avant-garde served to make her an extraordinary and unique documentarian of war. Here Allmer identifies the ways in which Miller's images from the front were unlike any others by using a suite of pictures of suicided Nazi figures in Leipzig to carefully and fully tie her arguments together.

The second of two chapters on Miller's war output presents a fascinating study of the artist's images taken in a defeated Germany immediately following the cessation of hostilities. Once again, Allmer has located little-known images by Miller, and here links them with the artist's ultimate negation of the Nazis' romantic preoccupation with architectural ruins. Her research continues to impress. The study of Miller's photographs of advertising boards and pillars (1945; Fig. 1) is particularly absorbing, weaving together the artist's interest in and knowledge of collage, advertising and visual culture, ethnography, and even her personal reaction to the infamous *Entartete Kunst* exhibition held under the auspices of the Nazi regime from 1937 to 1940.

There is so much more to this densely written, meticulously researched, and well-thought-out volume. An entire chapter devoted to Miller's portraits of the cast of *Four Saints in Three Acts*, taken in 1933 in New York, clearly demonstrates how these (once again, little-known or -understood) photographs complement the themes of the revolutionary Virgil Thomson opera with libret-

to by Gertrude Stein. It is heartening and satisfying to read Allmer's evidence, laid out in the concluding chapter, countering the perception of Miller's moribund postwar career. *Lee Miller: Photography, Surrealism, and Beyond* should be savored, as it ably demonstrates the edifying and elucidating results of an agile mind applying fresh eyes to the lifetime output of a known

artist. The canon regarding Miller is undeniably altered and enhanced with the publication of this book. •

Caitlin Davis, an independent scholar, received her Ph.D. in Modern Art from Rutgers University, and wrote her doctoral thesis on Lee Miller's war photography.

Liminalities of Gender and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Iranian Photography: Desirous Bodies

By Staci Gem Scheiwiller
Routledge, 2017

Reviewed by Donna Stein

This new scholarly volume provides a framework for interpreting photographic representations of the body in portraits, ethnographic studies, and erotica by studying the onset of photography and its antecedents in the second half of the nineteenth century during the Qajar Dynasty of Iran (1785–1925). The book is the latest volume in this publisher's History of Photography Series. Staci Scheiwiller's reflections on visibility and agency are not an easy read, but the subject is fascinating and the book is rewarding.

The various chapters of *Desirous Bodies* address decoding locations of desire in Qajar photography. They variously trace how women have been depicted in Iranian art, before and after photography's arrival in the early 1840s; discuss photography of harem women at the royal court based on the collection of Nasir-al-din Shah; assess the erotica industry and courtesan culture, especially in Tehran and Tabriz; define the liminalities, the state between in relation to rites of passage in society—not wholly heterosexual or homosexual, not wholly Iranian or European; distinguish expressions of homoeroticism and masculinity in Iran; and explore the position of black African slaves, present in Iran since antiquity.

This is mainly a feminist tract, for in Qajar Iran, photography was really the story of women and their corporeal representation. Scheiwiller asks, "Why were women in Qajar Iran photographed so much? Why did women adopt the medium? What was it about photography that transformed women into viewers, sitters and photographers in ways that no other artistic medium in Iran had done before in its history?" (200).

Contemporary portraits of women were rare in Iranian art before the arrival of photography but were commonly pictured as legendary figures and tropes. While Qajar photography depicted existing gendered roles and stereotypes, as seen in Figure 1, it also portrayed new and unprecedented modes of representation, a position between reality and performative construction that revealed the connection between politics, gender, and power.

Photography was primarily done by men and for men, exhibiting their sex, power, and machismo, etc. Scheiwiller considers the Shah, courtiers, homosocial male groups such as the palavan strongmen (knights, warriors, gymnasts) of the zurkhaneh (house of these strongmen, e.g., "gym"). Public women (slaves, prostitutes or courtesans, performers) also were posing for men.



Fig. 1. Catalogue sheet of photographs of women, late nineteenth-century to early twentieth century, Courtesy of the Qajar Image Archive of Donna Stein, Los Angeles.

In contrast, photographs of harem women, who were usually posing for their private inner circles (other harem women or male relatives), exhibited strategies of empowerment, domination, expression, and being seen. As Scheiwiller rightly comments, a legacy of strong-willed authoritative women in Iran existed before the nineteenth century, but the modern period provided different ways for them to express

themselves as viable political beings (207). Events and technology in the nineteenth century empowered women to action, as the harem became the locus of power in running the Qajar state. Among the various new approaches were women cross-dressing as men; nudes with depilated vulvas, an ideal propagated by religion, literature, and visual culture; European furniture as a sign of power; and veiling and unveiling.

Scheiwiller's language is academic and dense and shows she is well versed

in critical theory. Each chapter has its own voluminous footnotes and targeted bibliography. This generously illustrated book provides a visual context for her ideas, even though the captivating images are small and sometimes blurry, which can make it difficult to identify the elements described by the author. Nevertheless, her careful and detailed descriptions of the illustrations and the copious and thoroughly documented captions admirably place the examples within the history of Iranian stylistic

developments, political history, religion, and literature. •

Donna Stein was advisor on modern and contemporary art to the Shahbanou of Iran, 1975–77, and has published articles on early photography in Iran and contemporary Iranian art. Most recently, she was deputy director of the Wende Museum of the Cold War, Culver City, CA.

Diaries

By Eva Hesse, edited by Barry Rosen, with the assistance of Tamara Bloomberg, Hauser & Wirth and Yale University Press, 2016

Reviewed by Aliza Edelman

Eva Hesse (1936–70) is one of the most celebrated American artists of the twentieth century, and her rightful place in the art historical canon of postwar sculptors has been claimed since her untimely death at age thirty-four. Adding to the numerous and significant scholarly books, monographs, and exhibition catalogues on Hesse is *Diaries*, a revelatory and compact volume of the artist's journals, beginning in 1955 during her early student years as a painter and then at Yale University to her final days of tragic illness and decline; her tumultuous marriage and formative artistic friendships and acquaintances on the New York scene in the mid-1960s cover a wide terrain. An ambitious compilation edited under the careful guidance of expert Barry Rosen, with the assistance of Tamara Bloomberg, *Diaries* dutifully transcribes the artist's journals in addition to some pertinent loose sheets and notes (Fig. 1). Hesse's beautiful sketches and quirky doodles that often accompany her writings are omitted, however. There is no introduction, simply a brief note to the reader about the transcription process, taking into account the sometimes difficult process of both deciphering and dating material, whereby accession numbers and years are systematically

applied. Helen Hesse Charash, Eva's sister, bequeathed the original volumes (excluding one) to the archives of the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio, where digital scans are now also available.

Hesse was an avid diary keeper throughout her life. So it comes as no surprise that her writings capture in one fell swoop the artist's soulful literary tone, gentle self-reprimands, stultifying self-doubts, and forceful projections alongside quotidian jots. Eva's entry for her very first page, on New Year's Eve, 1955, strikes a prophetic and buoyant pitch: "I open my new book. What will you tell for the next year. To bring forth a new chapter of wisdom, hopes, joys fears. I shall be honest with myself; and therewith SUCCEED" (17). For any reader or young scholar already familiar with the artist's career, moreover, the diaries seamlessly advance the complicated yet arguably integral relationship between Hesse's biography and her formal aesthetic practice. At her most succinct, Hesse lists titles of artworks alongside dates. More persuasively, the diaries unveil the underlying importance of private writing and psychotherapy to assuage Hesse's anxieties and frustrations, a form of "free association" to "approach solutions" whereby she may, in her darkest moments, view herself through a slightly detached lens under her own moniker, "Eva" (454). In

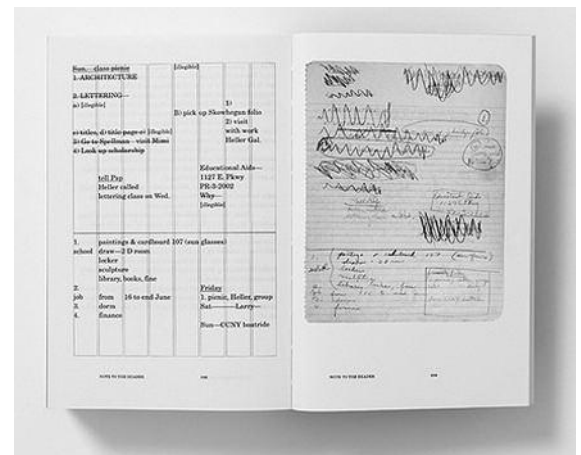


Fig. 1. Eva Hesse, pages 898–99, from *Diaries* with transcription. © The Eva Hesse Estate, courtesy Hauser & Wirth.

1970, nearing her death and post-operation, Hesse evokes in her desperately challenged final entries a dream state fugue on the circle of life: "If I could go back to the beginning where it all began" (883). For our purposes, moreover, how do we best utilize this vast wealth of personal material collected and revealed in its pages, not unlike a carefully inscribed tome, to conjure new and as of yet unspoken connections about the nature of creativity and the artistic self? *Diaries* is another key to unlock Hesse's remarkable life and to understand her limitless endeavor to be an artist. •

Aliza Edelman's most recent article in *W&J* is "The Particle and the Wave: Sandra Lerner's Metaphysical Landscapes, Taoism, and the Calligraphic Impulse" (Fall/Winter 2016).

Marisa Merz: The Sky Is a Great Space

Edited by Connie Butler
Prestel, 2017

Reviewed by Joyce Beckenstein

The art critic Holland Cotter recently wrote that “Things may be changing as the reality of modernism as an international phenomenon becomes more widely known...confirming the reality that work by women, feminists or not, was the major inventive force propelling and shaping late-20th-century art.”¹ The catalogue accompanying the Met Breuer’s 2017 exhibit, “Marisa Merz: The Sky Is a Great Space,” underscores Cotter’s analysis with its own comprehensive survey of this enigmatic artist’s life and art.

Organized by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles,² the exhibition, curated by Connie Butler and Ian Alteveer, also includes an impressive catalogue that recognizes Marisa Merz (b. 1926) as the only woman member of Italy’s *Arte Povera* movement (the literal translation is poor art). This 1960s reaction to post-modern abstraction rejected the celebration of synthetic, industrial materials, choosing instead to honor as media the humble, “poor” detritus of pre-industrial-age everyday life—even dirt, twigs, and rocks. Merz’s contributions to *Arte Povera*, and beyond that to contemporary art, have until recently crouched in the shadow of the movement’s better known male artists, especially that of her late husband, Mario Merz.

The essays in this volume dispel the art-historical misogynist myth that portrays Merz as a female artist-muse happily devoted to encouraging her husband’s career and keeping house for her family. Those who believe that the current millennial art world no longer diminishes women’s achievements should Google the “Art Story, Modern Art Insight.” Its list of *Arte Povera*’s four “key” proponents includes Mario Merz, not Marisa³—this despite her emergence today as, arguably, the most inventive and insightful member of the twelve-member *Arte Povera* group.



Fig. 1. Marisa Merz, *Living Sculptures* (c. 1966), strips of aluminum, no dimensions given. Met Breuer installation, 2017.

Merz believes that less is more—in her art, and in the information she shares about it. She divulges little about her early life and avoids titling, signing, or dating her work. “According to the earliest extant works and anecdote, she emerged in 1966, at age forty as a fully mature artist,” writes Butler (21). Such gaps create a curatorial headache because they inject guesswork into the otherwise scholarly pursuit of knowledge about an artist’s evolutionary process. It is why, one surmises, this book lavishes much more attention to Merz’s better documented early series, *Untitled (Living Sculpture)*, than to her less-known but daunting output of paintings, abstract sculptures, crocheted copper, nylon forms, and wall installations. That said, the book’s contributing essayists find alternatives to traditional chronologies that offer new ways to encounter Merz’s nearly seven-decade-long career. Its more than 300 pages, filled with beautiful images of her work, also contain a section of Merz’s own writings and poems and an annotated chronology/exhibition history. All together, these comprise an impressive analysis of an artist too long sidelined by the contemporary art world.

Merz’s family and creative lives were inseparable. Her kitchen was her studio, a quirky accommodation of hearth and

atelier, where she fabricated the many iterations of her art, including her aptly titled *Living Sculpture*. These signature works—enormous, bloated organic forms, hand-made from twisted, bent, and layered aluminum strips (1966; Fig. 1)—hang from the ceiling in her Turin apartment like macabre industrial carcasses. Catalogue photographs of her home reveal their alien rapacious tentacles squeezing tables and a TV console within claustrophobic spaces but without disturbing the trappings of everyday life—pots, pans, bowls, typewriters, clocks, and toys.

This merging of living and studio habitats early on taught Merz about the unique relationship between space and sculpture—how one element translates and transforms the other. Her *Living Sculpture*, for example, assumed a very different character when it was *displayed* at the trendy Pluri Club in Turin in 1967 from how it appeared in her apartment, or when it was cast by filmmakers Tonino De Bernardi and Paolo Menzio as the entrails of *Il mostro verde* (The green monster) in their 1967 movie. As Ian Alteveer’s essay explains, Merz recycles her art: “Works made decades before reappear and are reactivated as they move through different installations and tableaux” (270). Merz was, in this respect, well ahead of her

peers at a time when much of the international art world struggled to find non-traditional venues for their experimental art forms.

Butler draws analogies between *Arte Povera* objects made of industrial cast-offs and the social-political world of post-Fascist Italy, comparing them to the Argentine designer Emilio Ambasz's ideas for achieving social transformation through design. But Merz's mash of commonplace materials did not dwell within this world of architectural sophisticates. She instead devised her own brand of postmodern aesthetics—a way of making art in her cramped apartment that resonated with the feminist wave washing ashore Italy's gender landscape, beginning in the early 1970s with new divorce laws.

Lucia Re's extensive essay considers Merz's art within feminist trends as they emerged in post-World War II Italy (37–75). She cites publications such as Anna Banti's 1947 novel *Artemisia*, the translation into Italian of Virginia Woolf's *A Writer's Diary* (1959), and Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* (1963), that exerted running influences on a generation of Italian women struggling to overcome Fascism's sexist attitudes. Re's article cites a book's worth of references to feminist critics and advocacy organizations that nevertheless sadly find Merz marginalized—unmentioned, for example, by Germano Celant's 1967 manifesto, "Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerilla War."

Merz's recourse—her ambient public/private persona—allowed her the freedom to be in full possession of herself as she worked through the conundrums of being a twentieth-century woman artist. Though she didn't consider herself to be a feminist, she could, within the sanctity of her domestic world, be fearless about making art from household objects and processes such as sewing, cutting, and knitting—delicate slippers and bowls from copper wire, shiny jewel-like squares reminiscent of pot holders or scouring sponges. The art-as-life-as-art world she created for herself also kept her close to her husband and to her young daughter, Bea, whose identity finds expression in many works, such as

the name *Bea*, spelled out with wire, tacks, and knitting needles.

But as Teresa Kittler's essay suggests, Merz's work had less to do with feminism and more to do with how unorthodox art gets made and then finds itself out in the world (231). The book's remaining essays offer brief insights into that process. Leslie Cozzi finds relationships between archaic art and the artist's amorphous clay heads, and points to both Renaissance masters and nineteenth-century Pre-Raphaelites as influences on Merz's religious-themed paintings (247–59). Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev urges the reader to consider Merz's art as one would music and poetry, as a spiritual meander through time and space (273–79).

Connections are also made between the expansive organic growth characterizing Merz's art works, and the way they relate to the Fibonacci series that likewise intrigued her husband (228). A photograph of the Merz kitchen catches a string of the beginning numbers of the Fibonacci series—1,1,2,3,5—tacked to a wooden molding above the stove. Fascinating stuff ... but there is little text to explain how and why this arithmetic progression informs Merz's art beyond, say, her affinity for Fibonacci-related spirals that appear in one illustration as a small roughly wound metal armature for a copper wire nest, and in another as a curved sweep of woven forms unwinding upon a wall. It is in this respect that each of this volume's short chapters leaves the reader wanting to know more.

So it comes as an unexpected and delightful surprise when one suddenly grasps the genius of Merz's silences. The dearth of documentation that tradition-

ally informs the reader rallies the intuitive side of the brain. It encourages the mind's eye to journey through real and imagined time, as Merz likely does to create her work. Thus are readers leafing through these pages apt to conjure associations all their own: a fetus-like clay head, its features yet unformed, may connect with a graphite drawing gestating faint facial outlines, all densely smudged and afloat on a subtly gridded surface. Almost magically, that grid emerges pages later in an installation, as a series of knitted metal squares dispersed on a lined surface that suggests a musical score. Then, another knitted thought: a great circle of nylon left on the beach to merge its lacy self with the foamy sea. Eventually the eye settles on one of Merz's poems, hinting at the muses to whom she listened:

Speak to me of Antonello da Messina
Speak to me of Gentile Fabriano
Speak to me of the mystic lamb
Speak to me for the sky is a great space...

Marisa Merz. •

Joyce Beckenstein is an arts writer living in New York.

Notes

1. Holland Cotter, "At MoMA, Women Play in the Fields of Abstraction," *Art and Design* section review, *New York Times*, April 13, 2017.
2. The exhibition opened at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Jan. 24–May 7, 2017, and traveled to the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, June 4–Aug. 20, 2017.
3. See www.theartstory.org/movement-arte-povera.htm; accessed July 5, 2017.

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Alice Lex-Nerlinger: Fotomonteurin und Malerin

Edited by Marion Beckers,
essay by Rachel Epp Buller
Das Verborgene Museum, in cooperation
with the Akademie der Künste,
Berlin, 2016

Reviewed by Jay A. Clarke

The first monograph on this photomontage artist and painter, *Alice Lex-Nerlinger: Fotomonteurin und Malerin*, is a thoroughly researched and beautifully illustrated publication. Far from being another book about a forgotten woman artist, it investigates Lex-Nerlinger's (1893–1975) life and work through a strong methodological lens. In so doing it uncovers a complex period of German history and politics from the 1920s to the 1960s from the perspective of a woman devoted to the worker both personally and visually. The book was published under the auspices of Das Verborgene Museum (The Hidden Museum) in collaboration with the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, where the accompanying exhibition was held in 2016. The main body of the book is by Rachel Epp Buller, with a foreword by Elisabeth Moortgat, an afterword by Eckhart J. Gillen, and the full text of Lex-Nerlinger's 1956 memoirs. The three essays appear in German, with English translations included at the back of the book; the 29-page memoir is in German only.

Buller's text, which sprang from research for her dissertation "Fractured Identities: Women and Photomontage in the Weimar Republic" (2004), covers the artist's entire career, not just her better-known work in photography and photomontage from the 1920s and 1930s. Born Alice Pfeffer, the artist took her artist husband Otto Nerlinger's last name after their marriage in 1918, but in the early 1920s, perhaps as a way to differentiate her production from Otto's, she began to use the artist name Lex. Although early on she named her professor the graphic artist Emil Orlik as a mentor, as Buller details, Lex's true "teacher" was the tumultuous socio-political world around her. As Lex



Fig. 1. Alice Lex-Nerlinger, *Näherin* (Seamstress) (1930), gelatin silver print, 6.2/3" x 4.2/3". The Art Institute of Chicago, Julien Levy Collection, Gift of Jean Levy and the Estate of Julien Levy

commented in her memoir of her decisive turn in 1928: "Now I began an exceptionally productive time and the path lay clear before me: I photographed, experimented, made photograms and spray-paintings and drawings, and all of the work was concerned with the idea of bettering the lives of people. Nothing seemed more senseless to me than painting abstract pictures for snobs at a time when the masses were suffering more than ever" (151).

Lex's body of work incorporated various media in her use of art as a means by which to comment on and potentially impact class struggle. She began by focusing on prints and drawings under Orlik's tutelage. In the 1920s, she turned to collage and photomontage in the private production of her so-called *Picture Book* series of 1928. In the early 1930s, she created moving photographs of workers—seamstresses (c. 1930; Fig. 1) and factory workers—and, perhaps the most

arresting and original works of her career, photograms that similarly featured themes of labor and images to support the battle against Paragraph 218, which deemed abortion a crime. Once the National Socialists came to power, Lex was subject to house searches and had to create politically innocuous imagery. A fascinating section of Buller's essay considers the post-war and GDR periods when Lex grappled with issues of urban desolation and starvation in her drawings and that of form and content in what would soon be known as Socialist Realism. She came down on the side of a return to realism and what she

called an "understandable visual language" (164) in her large-scale portrait drawings of workers.

The text is well-argued and presents a straightforward monographic, socio-political, and chronological approach. This reader would have appreciated a more nuanced feminist interpretation of the artist. It may be that her feminism manifested itself via Communism and the depiction, most often, of the female worker, but, given the stress in Lex's memoirs on politics, more room could be made for a discussion of gender. Another shortcoming of the book is a very confusing numbering system for the images. The reader needs to flip back

and forth throughout the book to find a given figure. The illustrations are not in numerical order, and, on many occasions, were difficult to find. Despite these two quibbles, the book serves as a superb addition to the literature on both Weimar art and a valuable example of the still scant literature in English on "non-Degenerate" artists working during the Nazi era and the ways they managed to produce art perceived as inoffensive to the National Socialists. •

Jay A. Clarke is Manton Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs, The Clark Art Institute.

Subversion and Surrealism in the Art of Honoré Sharrer

Edited by M. Melissa Wolfe, essays by Sarah Burns, Robert Cozzolino, Michael Lobel, M. Melissa Wolfe
Yale University Press, 2017

Reviewed by Kathryn M. Floyd

The distinctive paintings reproduced in *Subversion and Surrealism in the Art of Honoré Sharrer* come as a welcome surprise. The catalogue for the exhibition at the Columbus Museum of Art and Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts¹ focuses on the work of the American artist Honoré Sharrer (1920–2009), whose artistic career seems to have unfolded backwards. She achieved early success in her twenties as a figurative painter after a peripatetic childhood with an Army officer father and artist mother, private high school in California, art training at Yale, a wartime stint as a welder and shipyard worker, and a move to New York. Like her varied background, Sharrer's works from the 1940s and early 1950s display a unique style: social realism infused with Northern Renaissance verism and a hint of the uncanny. *Workman by a Fountain* (1946) and *Tribute to the American Working People* (1946–51) reflect her self-styled "creative realism," and her beliefs about the importance of honoring the experiences of everyday Americans through meticulous

details that "enrich and explain the people and panorama" (24).

In the 1940s Sharrer was becoming an artist of note. Lincoln Kirstein championed her work. She was included in Pittsburgh's "Carnegie International" exhibition and the 1946 "Fourteen Americans" at New York's Museum of Modern Art, which acquired her *Workers and Paintings* (1943). She had a solo show at Knoedler Gallery and features in *Life*, *Time*, and *Newsweek* magazines. But in the mid-1950s, Sharrer's career swerved. An adherent of figuration, she remained independent from abstraction's dominance. Her political associations—she had joined the welder's union and contributed to the Communist journal *People's World*—and those of her husband, historian Perez Zagorin, created problems. Zagorin was blacklisted, lost his university job, and the couple spent ten years in Europe and Canada before returning to the U.S and settling in Rochester, New York, in 1965.

In the following decades, Sharrer worked and exhibited steadily, but often from the periphery of the established art world. In the catalogue introduction, Adam Zagorin remembers his mother's reticence and her quiet concentration in her home studio. Her more overt political subjects and "creative realism" became more idiosyncratic, something closer to surrealism or magical realism, although neither label quite fits.

Paintings from the 1960s on feature figurative subjects and enigmatic objects in unknowable locations. They form mysterious narratives that nevertheless demonstrate continued political engagement and a penchant for satire, albeit from a "slant view" (53). Like Dadaist Hannah Höch or the Pop artists, Sharrer developed an extensive picture archive of magazine and newspaper clippings about current events and pop culture. These found images, and her own photographs, became sources for increasingly multivalent paintings. Resulting works like *Mother Goose* (1960), *Nursery Rhyme* (1971; Fig. 1), or *Afternoon of a Satyr* (1989) are layered with sculpture-like figures, uncanny juxtapositions, pop culture references, skewed fairy tales, and droll critiques set in stage-like spaces or on tilted ground.

The history of art also served as a source; Sharrer's archive included many reproductions of artworks. Her interest no doubt began with her mother, Madeleine Sharrer, a painter who studied with George Luks. Honoré Sharrer often manipulated powerful iconography and recognizable styles from Dutch painting to modernism, sometimes appropriating the vocabularies of Fernando Botero, Balthus, René Magritte, and others. *Resurrection of the Waitress* (1984) vibrates with similarities to Max Ernst's *Wavering Woman* (1923). Drawings of a critic, curator, collector, and professor (1979) could be part of a

George Grosz portfolio of Weimar-era “art snobs.” Never derivative, however, Sharrer twisted her references until they were forged in new relationships.

The entangled constellations of elements in Sharrer’s paintings and her circuitous career provide scholars with opportunities to consider a twentieth-century American artist, not from the usual “center” or via established movements, but through the lens of someone both engaged with, but also beyond, category and canon. The exhibition organizers intended this as a “path to discovery” of Sharrer’s work and a “first critical reassessment” in almost ten years (7). Since her 2009 death, her papers have gone to the Archives of American Art, where they join her mother’s archive and interviews with her husband. *Subversion and Surrealism* reproduces previously exhibited works, but many are from the family’s private collection. The time is certainly ripe for reconsideration.

Subversion and Surrealism offers four scholarly essays following Zagorin’s personal introduction. Michael Lobel’s “From May Queen to Workers and Paintings: Honoré Sharrer’s Early Trajectory” examines Sharrer’s political images from the early 1940s catalyzed by her work as a shipyard welder in San Francisco and New York. Lobel gives an eye-opening analysis of her *People’s World* articles, reviews, and illustrations, including her wartime pieces on working women. In texts and images Sharrer described female streetcar drivers and welders from her perceptive, feminist outlook. Particularly fascinating are her contributions on issues of race and labor and her sympathetic acknowledgment of the hardships of black women. But Sharrer’s leftist activism in early adulthood, for Lobel a “transformation” of her teenage “white, upper-class femininity,” is never easily settled (16). Lobel, for example, remarks that her African American figures sometimes revealed “slightly caricatural tendencies” (31). Her attitudes about the relationships between art and labor, as in her ambiguous depictions of working class families interacting with canonical artworks in *Workers and*



Fig. 1. Honoré Sharrer, *Nursery Rhyme* (1971), oil on canvas. 49" x 89". Collection of Adam Zagorin and the late Perez Zagorin.

Paintings, are not one-dimensional. Sharrer’s reticence about her work, her commitment to aesthetic and conceptual complexity, and acknowledgment of the multifaceted nature of human experience, make her images difficult to pin down. So, too, is her oeuvre not easily demarcated or categorized. Lobel notes, for example, the fruitless temptation to separate Sharrer’s work into “distinct phases” that delineate her early social realism from her later magical realism (28). Sharrer, herself, organized her body of work not around typical chronological structures, but by canvas size and subject. Lobel concludes that early and late work merge as her early trajectory contains hints of her later surrealist vision.

Like viewers of Sharrer’s work, each author here seeks coherence and narrative connectivity within her shifting biography. Lobel glimpses the uncanny in Sharrer’s political work. In “Vicious, Tender, Meticulous: Honoré Sharrer’s “Commonist” Surrealism in the Post-War Era” M. Melissa Wolfe understands the concepts of “humanism, poeticism, and documentary,” as “consistent cornerstones as [Sharrer] negotiated the seismic political, artistic, and personal shifts through the Cold War.” Wolfe terms Sharrer’s “humanist documentary [impulse] mediated through an idiosyncratic and poetic vision” a “commonist” surrealism (51), again forging links between early and later images. Drawing

on Thomas Crow’s 2015 book *The Long March of Pop*, which redefines Pop Art as a more complex and varied “movement,” Wolfe shows how Sharrer’s work aligns with Cold War strategies of critique whereby the appropriation and recombination of media and pop culture become processes that trouble power structures. Specifically, Wolfe argues that Sharrer understood the “collusion [of mass media images] with a numbing and disempowering conformity that policed behavior in Cold War society” (60). To this end, Wolfe’s essay covers much ground, examining unsettling works like *Mother Goose* (1960), her interest in fairy tales, use of the female nude, fascination with celebrities, and connections to the folk culture movement. From the other side of Lobel’s coin, Wolfe demonstrates how Sharrer’s later surrealist work remains political, countering conformism through a humanist understanding of “the ordinary” as genuine and fully human. Wolfe shows Sharrer’s surrealism as not mere wit or weirdness, but a refusal to flatten out life’s complexities born of the artist’s integrity.

Sarah Burns and Robert Cozzolino both take up Sharrer’s critique of religion as a cohering theme. Burns’s “Plucking and Poking: Honoré Sharrer and the Art of Mockery” offers a close reading of *Reception* (1958), an extraordinary painting that depicts a lavish gathering of prominent postwar individuals beset with roosting birds.

The work includes an image of the real-life anti-Communist Cardinal Francis Spellman, and Burns explores such references to understand not just the painting itself, but Sharrer's overarching strategy of mocking satire aimed at the powerful. Like Wolfe, Burns sees Sharrer's subversion as covert and coded, describing it as "sheathed ... in velvet" (47). Cozzolino's "'Certainly not casting stones': Honoré Sharrer's Religious Imagery" examines other instances of Sharrer's engagement with Christian iconography including paintings of her parochial high school, pictures of clerics, and Crucifixion scenes, which Sharrer called "an impossible subject" that should be depicted using an obscuring "theatre trick" that lets "the audience just see a piece of it and supply its own vision" (85). Cozzolino concludes that Sharrer's appropriation of recognizable religious

imagery, like her use of other source material, could equally "border on blasphemy or simply confound interpretation," something "common to all her work" (89).

As a "rediscovery" of Sharrer, *Subversion and Surrealism* is an excellent first step that leaves one wanting more. An introductory biographical essay to map the circuitous terrain of Sharrer's career might have unburdened the authors of this task and allowed them room to extend their arguments. A concluding chronology is not enough to grasp the twists and turns of her life. Most disappointing is the lack of comprehensive bibliography and exhibition history as the essays whet the appetite for further research. Fruitful topics might include Sharrer's engagement with race, professional relationships with women like Terry Dintenfass, the critical reception of her work, and her own texts, which are

themselves beautiful and surreal. Future scholars of Sharrer's complex work and life should follow her dictum: "The multiple variations in every aspect of people's lives should be a rich source of interest..." (24). •

Kathryn M. Floyd is Associate Professor of Art History at Auburn University. She has published widely on the history of Dada and surrealism, twentieth-century German art, and the history and theory of art exhibitions. She is guest editor of a special issue of *Dada/Surrealism* (July 2017) on exhibition histories and is currently writing a book about photographs of art exhibitions.

Note

1. The exhibition opened at the Columbus Museum of Art, Feb. 10 – May 21, 2017, and traveled to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, June 29 – Sept. 3, 2017.

Lygia Pape: A Multitude of Forms

By Iria Candela, with contributions by Glória Ferreira, Sérgio B. Martins, and John Rajchman.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2017

Reviewed by Jan Garden Castro

The Lygia Pape exhibition at the Met Breuer (March 21– July 23, 2017) was a revelation. And every aspect of this catalogue demonstrates the artist's originality, her championing of Brazil's indigenous cultures and architecture—such as the impoverished seaside Favela da Maré built on stilts—and her geo-philosophical ways of making art.

Lygia Pape lived from 1927 to 2004. Her art was widely respected but not widely sold or exhibited outside of Brazil during her lifetime. Her range as a sculptor, printmaker, poet, filmmaker, and installation/performance/mixed media artist are notable. Equally important were her base as a wife and mother, her close friendships with Mario Pedrosa and Hélio Oiticica and his brothers César and Cláudio, and her

ongoing role as a teacher, including getting a Master's degree in Philosophy in 1980.

The catalogue barely goes into Brazil's tyrannical politics, including the 1964 military coup supported by the United States that deposed its elected president. Despotism continued through 1985. The artist's 1973 arrest, solitary confinement, and torture in an undisclosed location is one example of the horrors she lived through to remain with her family, friends, and students in Brazil, instead of choosing exile as many others did.

The catalogue is beautifully printed and designed, and its 278 illustrations, including many in which the smiling artist is shown participating in an art performance—popping out of a paper cube or under *Divisor*, a white tent-like form with openings for human heads—complement the main essays, two interviews, Chronology, and Bibliography. Pape's aesthetic, her major achievements, and her stance against having her art become a commercial commodity are clear. The cover image, *Livro do tempo* (*Book of Time*) (1961–63; Fig. 1), shows 365 constructions based on the square that use only bright red,

blue, yellow, and white hues in a range of geometric variations. Her series of geometric forms are only one aspect of Pape's intermedia experiments.

The artist's own words are key:

I only make a work when I deem it ready to be made. So I'm not usually disappointed. I never do work related to a particular period but rather to a specific form of knowledge that I seek to materialize. For example, I think the *Livro da criação* (*Book of Creation*, 1959–60) is as fresh today as it was the day I made it. It hasn't aged. It isn't dated. Why? Because I believe I did a really good job solving some of the problems I was setting for myself at that moment; these problems were actually conditions for the making of the work. It wouldn't have been worthwhile doing it any other way. The *Livro da criação* needed to leave the plane, move into three-dimensional space, and return to the plane. That was an extremely complicated problem and required a great effort of invention because it had to

represent fire, water, the hunter, and the stilt house, and certain elements had to have the ability to be manipulated and rotated. I obtained a maximum level of synthesis and expression there. Whereas to me the *Livro da criação* “narrates” the creation of the world, it could have another meaning for someone else, in keeping with his or her own sensibilities or experience... It is, simultaneously, a poem and an art object (20).

The *Book of Creation* is among the important works discussed and shown throughout *Lygia Pape: A Multitude of Forms*. Iria Candela, the Estrellita B. Brodsky Curator of Latin American Art in the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, calls it “a book without words” in which “the body’s interaction with the abstract work” is central (7). Contributor Sérgio B. Martins points out Pape’s *Book of Creation* uses a square as the point of departure, has a nonlinear unfolding, and its incisions fragment the plane virtually and actually (30). It exemplifies ways the Neo-concrete movement challenged figure/ground relations and subverted the picture plane. The *Book of Creation* starts with “Light,” a yellow square with a tiny square cut into its center. Another work titled *A quilha navegando no tempo* (*The Keel Navigating Through Time*) is a white square with an erect double red triangle that interacts with its base. These singular meditations about ultimate creation interact with each other and the viewer.

In her essay “The Risk of Invention,” Curator Iria Candela discusses the growth of Neo-concretism in Brazil in relation to international developments, and Pape’s roles in visually and literally articulating the new Gestalt strategy of letting figure/ground relationships engage dialectically, starting with a woodcut series called *Tecelares*. For a Neo-concrete ballet collaboration with poet Reynaldo Jardim, Pape built four white cylinders that each hid a dancer. As the lit cylinders moved to an austere score (no dancers were seen), the idea



Fig. 1. Lygia Pape, *Livro do Tempo* (Book of Time) (1961–63), installation view, magnetized space, Serpentine Gallery, London. © 2011 Jerry Hardman-Jones.

was to energize space. Some Pape works address the body, public spaces, shared identities, and culture. One graphic photograph, *lingua apunhalada*, is a *Stabbed Tongue* (1968); an “Eat Me” installation of 1976 and *Caixa das baratas* (*Box of Cockroaches*) (1967) were shown at MAM-RJ, Rio de Janeiro’s new contemporary museum. Pape discusses *Caixa das baratas*: “... the starting point is a clear concept: ... criticisms of dead art locked up in museums. I wasn’t working toward a merely discursive result; I was looking to create a situation of repugnance, of actual disgust ... I made a box with cockroaches. And it really was loathsome.” Pape and Hélio Oiticica were among the organizers for the “New Brazilian Objectivity” exhibition at MAM-RJ. Her later geometric work includes *Ttéia 1* (1976–2004), first shown at Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo, in 2012—an installation of straight, intersecting columns made of thin gold wires. This room of gold wires in intersecting geometric configurations was dramatically recreated at the Met Breuer.

In “Birds of marvelous colors” and “Outside the frame of the screen,” excerpts from 1997 and 1998 interviews, the artist discusses her art influences, her teachers, her travels, and her

nontraditional approaches to making, showing, and curating art, and the contexts for her films. Sérgio Martins’s essay, “An Anticlass in Avant-Gardism,” points out that Pape called her unorthodox classes “anticlasses.” Martins contextualizes Pape’s geo color series, the social and psychoanalytic underpinnings of her films, and Pape’s embrace of Brazil’s indigenous heritages. In “Lygia Pape’s Vital Ideas,” John Rajchman explores some literary and formal sources, including Mallarmé’s famous “Un coup de dés” poem (with its differing typefaces, spacings, and type sizes) and Ferreira Gullar’s scrambled letters pieces that showed Pape new ways to free letters and objects from their moorings.

As seen in the exhibition and this excellent catalogue, Pape’s performance and installation projects in her community, her work in a range of media, and her commitment to using art to combat authoritarian regimes make her a model for artists today. •

Jan Garden Castro is Contributing Editor at Sculpture Magazine. This review was originally published online with images at <https://blog.sculpture.org/2017/05/17/lygia-pape-a-multitude-of-forms/#more-8873>.

Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors

Edited by Mika Yoshitake
Prestel, 2017

Reviewed by Annie Dell'Aria

The hottest ticket in Washington D.C. last spring was the timed entry pass to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden's exhibition "Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors." Distributed weeks in advance online, these free passes regularly sold out immediately, prompting a predatory secondary market, extended museum hours, and even a temporary suspension of membership sales. Lucky ticket-holders endured long lines outside the museum and at each of the exhibition's five Infinity Mirror Rooms in order to spend just twenty to thirty seconds (in groups of two or three) inside each of Kusama's transformative spaces, often snapping mesmerizing selfies in the interval.

The immense popularity of Kusama's Infinity Mirror Rooms can make the actual experience of exhibitions like this one more like an amusement park than a contemplative art exhibition: long lines precede brief thrills, employees shuffle visitors efficiently through space, posted rules and regulations define the mode of engagement, and video screens entertain and educate you while you wait. The press coverage of the exhibition focused largely on the long lines and selfie culture, missing the thoughtful incorporation of paintings, sculptures, collages, and archival documentation alongside the rooms.¹ Caught up in the rush of lines and the frenzy of a blockbuster show, it would be easy to miss the refreshing and scholarly curatorial vision of Mika Yoshitake's exhibition. Thankfully, the catalogue provides the chance for sustained engagement with the Infinity Mirror Rooms beyond the fleeting half-minute allowed in the museum.

The catalogue features a wealth of illustrations, three scholarly articles, an interview, a timeline, and an annotated bibliography. Central to each of these contributions is a desire to redirect



Fig. 1. Yayoi Kusama, *Aftermath of Obliteration of Eternity* (2009), installation at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC, wood, mirror, plastic, acrylic, LED, black glass, and aluminum. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo/Singapore; Victoria Miro, London; David Zwirner, New York. © Yayoi Kusama. Photo: Cathy Carver.

interpretation of Kusama's work away from pathological readings of her biography, instead arguing for the artist's central position within the political, social, and cultural context of postwar art.² The catalogue connects the popular cultural event that the Infinity Mirror Rooms are to contemporary audiences to the artist's long-standing engagement with social liberation, desire to create transformative experiences for people, and philosophy of self-obliteration as a means of cosmic connection. While each of the three essays takes a different vantage point from which to consider the Infinity Mirror Rooms, all of them connect these installations to Kusama's production in other media, especially her rise to prominence in the avant-garde of the 1960s.

Mika Yoshitake's historical essay, "Infinity Mirrors: Doors of Perception," charts the narrative arc of the Infinity Mirror Rooms through a rich engagement with the artist's prolific production in various media in the 1950s and 1960s. The essay traces the evolution of Kusama's first room, *Infinity Mirror Room—Phalli's Field* (1965), by connecting it to the artist's investigation of themes of repetition and obliteration in painting,

sculpture, and performance in the global art world. Yoshitake adeptly situates Kusama within an international art context, discussing her work's connection to German Zero and Dutch Nul movements as well as 1960s New York. Particularly refreshing is the inclusion of Kusama's rarely seen collages. Made when the artist returned to Japan in 1973, these transitional works respond to the death of Kusama's friend Joseph Cornell and introduce strange and otherworldly spaces into her pictorial world. The "journey from superabundant physical accumulations ... to countless dematerialized receding reflections" in her Infinity Mirror Rooms is echoed not only in Kusama's artistic trajectory from painting to environments but also in the evolution of the Infinity Mirror Rooms themselves (27). Unlike the proliferation of sculptural forms in *Phalli's Field*, the darkened rooms of the 2000s more poetically evoke Kusama's themes of death and the cosmos. *Infinity Mirror Room—Aftermath of Obliteration of Eternity* (2009; Fig. 1) alludes to the Japanese floating lantern tradition of *tōrō nagashi* with its hanging LED lights housed in small plastic lanterns and reflective pool of water. Yoshitake concludes her essay with a phenomenological reading of the

experience of being within rooms like these. She argues that these rooms “allow us to reassess Kusama’s entire artistic practice by offering a new understanding of the corporeal limits of perception under conditions that define optics, tactility, and intuition of matter” (31).

Alexander Dumbazde’s briefer contribution, “Infinity and Nothingness,” similarly turns on the inherent philosophical tensions in Kusama’s oeuvre but instead focuses on the American context of her work. Opening with a discussion of the contemporary long lines outside of Kusama’s rooms discussed above, Dumbazde compares the recent Instagram frenzy around her rooms to the artist’s popularity in both the art world and popular press in the 1960s. Kusama’s happenings, often including nude performers, were deeply engaged with the counterculture. Staged as political statements and radical social experiments, these performances used the corporeal limits of the body to confront the abstract concepts of infinity and nothingness through Kusama’s notion of self-obliteration. Dumbazde argues that Kusama’s work was more political than many of her minimalist peers at the time by focusing on happenings staged in public places. The motif of the polka dot, painted on naked bodies in her happenings and recurring in sculpture, paintings, and installations throughout her career, is read not as a symptom of obsessive tendencies but rather a means to hold together the two extremes of infinity and nothingness that inform Kusama’s entire philosophy (126). In Kusama’s words, “Our earth is only one polka dot among millions of others ... We must forget ourselves with polka dots! We must lose ourselves in the ever-advancing stream of eternity” (123).

Gloria Sutton’s piece, “Between Enactment and Depiction: Yayoi Kusama’s Spatialized Image Structures,” is the most interpretively and theoretically ambitious essay in the volume. Sutton similarly opens with a discussion of the twenty-first century social media phenomenon around Kusama’s rooms, linking their replication in digital networks to the illusion of infinite replication achieved

through the mise-en-abyme of the Infinity Mirror Rooms. Connecting Kusama’s Infinity Mirror Rooms to her lesser-known Expanded Cinema projects illuminates how systems theories and cybernetics inform Kusama’s work as an artist and “affirm[s] how Kusama’s singular career presciently signaled key shifts in postwar art writ large” (140). Like the other essays in the volume, Sutton turns on close analyses of Kusama’s staged photographs within her installations. To her these photographs signal Kusama’s conceptualization of her Infinity Mirror Rooms as “machines for animation” (142), and she connects their endless repetition not to narcissism or an inward turn, but rather to radical exteriority and sociability.³ Understood within the context of Expanded Cinema artists like Stan Vanderbeek as well as the feminist manipulation of media images by Dara Birnbaum and Pipilotti Rist, Kusama’s influence and art historical significance derives less from her signature forms (dots, mirrors, pumpkins, or phalli) and more from “the recombinant nature of those very structures (economic and social) that short circuit the binary and perceived oppositions between internal and external, tangible and ephemeral” (153).

The volume concludes with Hirshhorn director Melissa Chiu’s brief interview with the artist, Miwako Tezuka’s detailed chronology, and Alex Jones’s focused annotated bibliography. The interview in many ways counters the theoretical and academic tone of the essays, allowing Kusama’s sheer exuberance for creating art for as many people as possible to speak for itself. The chronology fills many of the gaps missing in the scholarly essays, particularly by discussing Kusama’s early career in Japan and her decline and return to fame in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The annotated bibliography focuses only on Kusama’s environments, echoing the exhibition’s overall critical assessment of the rooms as a means of asserting Kusama’s place in art history.

The catalogue reinforces and expands the critical arguments in the exhibition but does not replicate its

experience of crowds, lines, and brief encounters with simulations of infinity. The illustrations of the Infinity Mirror Rooms are most often empty save for the staged photographs of the artist inside her creations. Hiding even the presence of the camera, the images of empty mirror rooms in the catalogue simultaneously immerse and remove the viewer, replicating their optical effects but denying their ephemeral and phenomenological nature. The sustained intellectual meditation the images and essays allow are an important pendant to the cultural phenomenon of the Infinity Mirror Rooms, but certainly no substitute for the raw power of experiencing them in person, however briefly. •

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Notes

1. Philip Kennicott, “I Went to Kusama and All I Got Was This Lousy Selfie,” *The Washington Post*, April 14, 2017; Emily Palmer, “Is That Yayoi Kusama Selfie Worth the Wait?,” *The New York Times*, March 14, 2017, sec. Art & Design.
2. This follows the lead from other significant recent scholarly considerations of Kusama’s work. See Mignon Nixon, “Anatomic Explosion on Wall Street,” *October* 142 (Oct. 1, 2012): 325; Midori Yamamura, *Yayoi Kusama: Inventing the Singular* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), and others cited in the catalogue’s annotated bibliography.
3. This reading of the Infinity Mirror Rooms as means of radical connection between people is fascinating considering their omission from Christina Albu’s recent study of mirroring processes and affective bonds in contemporary art. Sutton’s reading of Kusama could further connect her to broader practices by artists like Dan Graham and Joan Jonas covered in Albu’s text. Christina Albu, *Mirror Affect: Seeing Self, Observing Others in Contemporary Art* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2017).

Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Seven Work Ballets

Edited by Kari Conte
Kunstverein Publishing, Grazer
Kunstverein, Sternberg Press, 2015

Reviewed by Kathy O'Dell

Mierle Ukeles is the only artist in the world to hold an artist-in-residence position for forty years at a Department of Sanitation (in New York City). And *Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Seven Work Ballets* delivers everything an artist, student, curator, writer, or reader in general could want in a book about a single body of work by a single artist—that is, an artist for whom an extensive retrospective exhibition catalogue was published less than one year later.¹ The proximal publication dates allow the single focus of the book under review here to function as a deep dive into a particular set of works. In this case, the set consists of seven performance-based “maintenance art” events that Ukeles produced between 1983 and 2012. For these pieces, she collaborated with sanitation workers—not just in New York City but in four countries—to choreograph outdoor ballet-like, site-specific events, in which garbage collection trucks, snowplows, barges, towboats, and other vehicles involved in sanitation became the main characters in a cast of players that included the workers themselves.

Introducing the core of the book—some 200 pages of the artist’s own richly detailed accounts of the pieces, punctuated by illustrations—are a brief but informative preface and an erudite but accessible essay. The former is by artistic director Krist Gruijthuijsen of the Austrian artists’ space Grazer Kunstverein, which co-published the book, the latter by curator and writer Kari Conte, who situates the work in contexts that are both art historical and beyond visual arts per se. The volume concludes with a lively, sometimes provocative, discussion among Ukeles, Tom Finkelpearl, and Shannon Jackson, conducted in 2013. Finkelpearl was the director of the Queens Museum until 2014, when he was appointed



Fig. 1. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Rehearsal of “Dance of the Dozers: The Tragic Love Story of Romeo and Juliet,” Movement II of *Snow Workers’ Ballet* 2003, held July 21, 2003, Tokamachi, Niigata Prefecture, Japan. Photo: Shigeo Anzai.

Commissioner of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and worked with Ukeles on various projects over the span of her career. Jackson is well known for her prodigious publications on the dynamic forces at the intersection of art, public institutions, and social engagement.

Satisfying as all these parts of the book are (more on their content in a moment), the fact that Marc Hollenstein’s design of the book and its production so effectively enhances that content is particularly pleasing and notable. This form-content connection is evident even in the choice of paper, which couldn’t be less glossy or more consistent throughout. Rubbing the palm across the cover or any of the inside pages, whether they feature text or illustrations, feels the same, the slightly nubby surface providing the reader a subtle hand massage, as if bringing attention to the importance of the hand in the work being discussed. While the vast majority of the photographs, charts, and maps is in color, the book resides in memory as black and white. Or at least that’s how I

remembered it after putting the volume aside for a few weeks before writing this review. I was surprised to find, when I went back to count the illustrations (there are 130), that more than three-quarters of them are in color. Printed on matte off-white paper, the value and intensity of the colors read as muted, just as I imagine most colors of the items that sanitation workers gather—by hand, with the help of various vehicles and other mechanical apparatuses—are muted by the environmental and material conditions from which they retrieve those items. While these design and production choices may have had as much to do with economy as aesthetics, they are smart ones, advancing what the book is all about.

Indeed, there is nothing lustrous, on the face of it, about the daily enterprise of being a sanitation worker. But *putting* a face on a set of tasks, as Ukeles has done throughout her career, can make a big difference. It all began with her 1969 “Manifesto for Maintenance Art,” in which she wrote what Gruijthuijsen rightly calls “legendary words” (7). In it, she declaims: “I am an artist. I am a

woman. I am a wife. I am a mother. (Random order). I do a hell of a lot of washing, cleaning, cooking, renewing, supporting, preserving, etc. Also, (up to now separately) I 'do' Art. Now I will simply do these everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art" (7). As with any missive labeled "manifesto," the effect, if not the goal, is to assert identity, to put a face on the ideas written. The repeated use of "I" makes clear that it is Mierle Laderman Ukeles carrying out all the things listed, things that entail "care" (the manifesto was originally written as a proposal for an exhibition with that name) on a regular basis, and those activities will henceforth be considered "Art."

Ukeles extended these principles to those who deal quite literally with flushing for a living—sanitation workers. These public servants collect all those things that cannot be flushed away through domestic plumbing, but must be transported to recycling centers or sewage facilities where flushing takes place on a grand and public scale (or in the case of snow removal, which is typically under the purview of sanitation departments, moved to where it can melt). In other words, these workers get their hands dirty. To help "flush" their labor "up to consciousness ... as Art" (7), Ukeles turned to the dance form of ballet, which at first blush might seem cheeky or even patronizing, as if nobody could ever believe that such down-and-dirty labor could be thought of as Art without applying to it one of the most prim-and-proper cultural labels imaginable in hopes of getting people to suspend disbelief.

But for Ukeles, "ballet" was not just a label. In fact, her approach to these pieces seems to draw on an element in original ballet of the 1500s. Though born in the elite setting of the Renaissance court, ballet's earliest permutations entailed everyone entering into the dance after the ballerinas' official performance. As such, it was a collaborative effort. It is this element (short of audience participation) that we see Ukeles mine in her development of the *Seven Work Ballets*, at the same time

probing questions at the heart of the structure of ballet: How far can the body be pressed to act mechanically? Or more fundamentally, what is the relationship between the human body and machine? A solid art historical platform from which readers may pursue these questions as they read Ukeles's accounts of the *Seven Work Ballets* is provided in Conte's introductory discussion of Fernand Léger's avant-garde film *Ballet Mécanique* (1924), and Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet* (1922).

In Ukeles's account of each of the *Seven Work Ballets*, she methodically traces the arc of the project from inception to completion, including details about the invitation or commission, the site (two in New York City, one in the Netherlands, one in Pittsburgh, one in France, and two in Japan [2003; Fig. 1), the process of collaboration with the workers, the uniqueness of each of those series of interactions, and a summary of the movements/parts of the culminating performance. Following each essay are photographs, hand-drawn maps and charts of the works, and, finally, "credits and details." Most striking throughout is Ukeles's genuine attention to the emotional and psychological communications with her collaborators. She describes not only her own anxieties over whether the performance would materialize and her joyfulness when it did, but also the feelings of her co-performers, represented in some instances by excerpts from notes they sent to her after the fact. Also consistent is her personification of the big machines that executed the moves at the behest of the drivers at the final performances, following days of rehearsal, and her giving of credit to each and every sanitation worker who played a role, no matter how minor. In this way, Ukeles made good on her 1969 manifesto-stated desire to put a face on tasks nobody else wants to do but that are essential to the "maintenance" of everyday life—in this case, the faces (and voices) of the worker-performers.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Seven Work Ballets satisfies completely. The book represents the consistency of Ukeles's artistic mission across decades, through the examination of a single body of works, while complementing the all-encompassing quality of her retrospective exhibition catalogue. Such two-pronged publication planning stands as a model, whenever possible, for other artists. •

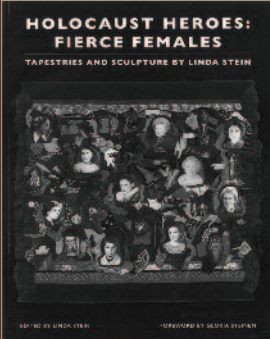
Kathy O'Dell, Associate Professor of Visual Arts at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, is author of *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970s* (1998). She is currently writing a monograph titled *Dot: A Small History of a Big Point* and co-authoring (with Kristine Stiles) a survey book titled *World Art Since 1933*.

Notes

1. Patricia C. Phillips with Tom Finkelpearl, Larissa Harris, and Lucy R. Lippard, *Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art* (Munich, London, New York: Queens Museum in association with DelMonico Books and Prestel Publishing, 2016). The exhibition, by the same name, was held at the Queens Museum, September 18, 2016 – February 19, 2017.

WHAT MAKES A
HOLOCAUST HEROES FIERCE
TAPESTRIES AND SCULPTURE BY

FULL-COLOR, 84-PAGE BOOK
 FOREWORD BY GLORIA STEIN
 ESSAYS BY INTERNATIONAL SC
 INTIMATES AND ART EDUCAT



HOLOCAUST HEROES:
 FIERCE FEMALES
 TAPESTRIES AND SCULPTURE BY LINDA STEIN



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← OR SCAN

Carmen Herrera: Lines of Sight

By Dana Miller
Yale University Press, 2016

Reviewed by Evan Senn

This large-format catalogue, published in conjunction with the retrospective exhibition “Carmen Herrera: Lines of Sight,”¹ is the first major monograph on the life and work of this Cuban-American abstract-minimalist artist. Author and exhibition curator Dana Miller has organized a thorough and critical examination of Herrera’s personal life, evolution as an artist, and seminal works in each phase of her artistic existence. Although Herrera (b. 1915) has gone largely unknown for her long professional career, she has been an active participant in many different art scenes and circles and has been creating work nearly every day since she was a child. Now, in her 102nd year, Herrera is getting some well-deserved recognition.

Her presence in the arc of art history has been well known by historians and scholars, as she has never stopped creating, communicating, and participating in the international art world. Her artwork has been associated with the likes of Ellsworth Kelly, Agnes Martin, Barnett Newman, Ad Reinhardt, and Frank Stella, to name a few (13). She has exhibited alongside Theo van Doesburg, Max Bill, and Piet Mondrian, and a younger generation of Latin American artists, including members of the Venezuelan Los Disidentes, Brazilian Concretists and the Argentinian Grupo Madi (59). She has been active in the New York art scene since her move there in 1939 (15), with brief but important breaks in Paris, where she found great inspiration, and back to Cuba to visit family and friends.

As Gerardo Mosquera explains in his essay, “Carmen Herrera: Cuba, Inside and Out,” Herrera’s persona and work both are a critique of nationalism in art. Herrera has always been divergent among the masses, by force more than by choice; she has even been quoted saying that she has never been in the



Fig. 1. Carmen Herrera, *Blanco y Verde* (1966–67), acrylic on canvas, 40" x 70". Private collection.

right place at the right time (43) and that the recognition she is receiving now is the result of her perseverance and longevity. Mosquera tracks Herrera’s progression toward abstraction and away from Cuba. He states that even though she began her abstract work in 1948, abandoning figuration forever (46), there are four major trends in her artistic trajectory that specifically led her toward her signature mature style later on in life.

Exemplified by *Shocking Pink* (1949) and an untitled work from the same year, the fourth trend is the most interesting to Mosquera. “... it presents a very early stage of the spatial searches, games between figure and background, and utilization of the edges of the painting that characterize Herrera’s mature work and establish her distinctive style. Here one can no longer trace—or construct!—a link between her work and the Cuban art scene she had known” (48). That was the same year that Herrera became a member of the Salon des Realités Nouvelles and began participating in their annual exhibitions. It is this time and this connection that most drastically changed her work and style for the rest of her career.

Although culturally reductive labels on artists may have their advantages, such as solidarity and access to specific circuits that can act as launchpads, according to Mosquera, Herrera’s work was boxed in a corner of gender- and

nationality-based discrimination. “Cuba has been an obstacle to Herrera, a mark of origin that ghettoized her work as ‘Latin American art’ for more than half a century after her return from Paris to New York,” Mosquera said. (50)

Miller’s essay, “Carmen Herrera: Sometimes I Win,” details the particulars of Herrera’s upbringing, including her changing motivations as she grew, her childhood interests, her natural feminist perspective, and even her intellectual parents’ encouragement for her to excel, sending her to Montessori schools and later to finishing school in Paris (13). Her artistic education seems to have been much influenced by the political and economic tumultuousness of Cuba, and in turn her artistic interests teetered on the edge of architecture for the majority of her life (44). Having expressed distaste for artists making overt political statements in their work, she found architecture a soothing, satisfying art form for her, where she could help the community and still make something beautiful. Her artwork still reflects her lifelong love affair with architecture, through its simplicity, lines, form, and color. She has said, “There is nothing I love more than to make a straight line. How can I explain it? It’s the beginning of all structures” (22), and has admitted on many occasions that there is a strong link between her painting and her architectural training. “I wouldn’t paint

the way I do if I hadn't gone to architecture school, Herrera said. "That's where I learned to think abstractly and to draw like an architect" (29). We can see this in such works as *Equation* (1958), *Blue with White Line* (1964), *Escorial* (1974) and many more. From 1952 onward, all of her work would push and play with bold line work and spatial color.

The Whitney Museum exhibition, only the second retrospective² of Herrera's work, gave viewers a glance at a career that evolved over seven decades, and is still going. The impeccably presented sliver included more than fifty works, focusing on the pivotal period of 1948–78—the years during which Herrera developed her signature geometric abstractions and her simplified, intensified paintings of two colors, such as all fourteen of her paintings from the Blanco y Verde series (Fig. 1), which consisted of dynamic geometric shapes and the colors green and white. The catalogue includes more Blanco y Verde works than have ever been reproduced together before. Miller writes that seeing multiple pieces from different series is critical to understanding Herrera's work: "The distinctive quality of each painting and full comprehension of her highly inventive, iterative effort is only possible when viewing multiple works from the series" (28).

The constructions of the canvases reinforce Herrera's visual design of the paintings, and often, the frontal design wraps around the structure and complements the support, as if it was all part of the artwork, not meant to be hidden or hung. "These particular Blanco y Verde paintings unfold in the same way sculpture does when circumnavigated; they only reveal themselves fully when viewed in person," writes Miller (28).

The catalogue flows well; the images are gorgeous and high-resolution, with details and edges fully captured. The textual content, on the other hand, feels as if it tries too hard to prove Herrera's worth in the canon of art history. Of the four essays, Miller's essay offers the most thorough, compelling, in-depth look at Herrera's life and work. Mosquera's

analysis of Herrera's relationship to Cuba, although detailed and interesting, is mostly a repeat of Miller's account of Herrera's Cuban life. The same can be said for Serge Lemoine's essay, which focused mostly on Herrera's time in Paris and the influence of the Salon des Realites Nouvelles. Edward J. Sullivan's essay on Herrera's 'Contact Zones of Fluidity' seems overly theoretical, as though her steadfast seventy-plus years of creating geometric abstraction and her own brand of minimalist artwork was not enough to assimilate her into the arc of historic importance. His essay focuses more on other artists of similar quality and similar storyline to draw associations between important names and styles. Seemingly going against Herrera's personal affinities—the self-professed believer in the adage that "less is more" (56), all the essays except for Miller's are full of leaps in artistic comparisons and theory-driven analysis, when, according to Miller, Herrera preferred to work instinctively (22)—treating it like an equation she needed to solve. Herrera preferred simplicity and order and disdained "art speak" (27).

Sullivan writes that it is through comparisons with other Latin American artists that we may better see Herrera's work and development. "Of Herrera's Latin American contemporaries who regularly exhibited at the Salon des Realites Nouvelles in the early 1950s, the work of Venezuelan artist Jesus Rafael Soto—who would later become known for his work in Kineticism—had particularly strong parallels with Herrera's concerns from the early 1950s onward" (70). He points to Soto's *Muro optico* (Optic Wall) of 1951, where the artist began moving away from the overtly expressive qualities of his previously defining artworks, and

draws an evocative and parallel connection to Herrera's spatially dynamic *Untitled* of 1952 (70–71).

Sullivan looks at over thirty Latin American artists to help us understand Herrera's artistic innovation through similarities. He goes into detail about Herrera's obsession with color as object: "In Herrera's paintings, color cannot be separated from form. One embodies the importance of the other within a given composition" (77). Sullivan analyzes her work from the inside out, and finds the distinctive visual kinships in her contemporaries, such as Brazilian artist Lygia Clark (1920–88) to illustrate the how and why. Sullivan explains Clark's reliance on constructed form and architectural systems as equivalent to Herrera's: "In her series, *Quebra de moldura* (Breaking the Frame), begun in 1954, the penetration of real space and the possibilities set up by the tensions between lines and their projections mark these works as both objects in themselves and metaphors for the viewer's understanding of an environment. These concerns of Clark's regarding linear tension and spatial relationship serve as counterparts to Herrera's preoccupations with lines and shapes in her paintings" (76–77).

The visual documentation of Herrera's artwork in this book is exceptional. Many of Herrera's series deal with subtle shifts and details that are best viewed in person because of the angles, fine lines, oblique angles or specific presence on a wall. There has not been a previous book to compile so many of Herrera's works so well and include all angles and subtle nuances of the works both in text and in visual documentation. For people who cannot view the work in person, this is monumentally helpful. The accompanying timeline of Herrera's life and career is



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also useful, illustrated with personal snapshots of, newspaper snippets, programs, and old installation shots. This 232-page book manages to be not just an exhibition catalogue, but also a compelling and thorough historical biography of the work and life of a true artist, revealing Herrera's extraordinary resilience and perseverance and her vital contributions to art history. •

Evan Senn is a professor of Art History at Laguna College of Art and Design and California State University, Fullerton where she specializes in modern and contemporary art history. She has curated a number of exhibitions in the Southern California area, and writes for several local, national, and international art magazines and organizations.

NOTES

1. The exhibition opened in New York at the Whitney Museum of American Art Sept. 16, 2016 – Jan. 9, 2017, and traveled to the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio, Feb. 4 – April 16, 2017.
2. In July 2009 the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham (England), mounted a retrospective exhibition, which traveled to the Museum Pfalzgerie Kaiserlautern (Germany), the following year.

Rei Kawakubo: Comme des Garçons Art of the In-Between

By Andrew Bolton
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2017

Reviewed by Jan Garden Castro

Rei Kawakubo invented Comme des Garçons (like some boys) in Japan in 1973, and her Paris debut in 1981 made fashion history. Rei's art is boundary-breaking and remarkable for many reasons: Women in Japan at that time were just starting to head their own businesses. Fashion then was more tailored and traditional. The French and, to a lesser degree, Italians, had a monopoly on high fashion. Fashion was a category separate from the fine arts of painting and sculpture. Her designs relate to universal human concerns beyond the scope of fashion. Kawakubo, with Issey Miyake, revolutionized the use of new materials, shapes, and textures. She modernized ways of looking at cultural histories, as seen in her 18th-Century Punk collection. She added intuitive, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions to her fashions, and her concepts for women gave them wild possibilities. The Metropolitan Museum solo show for a living female artist is another milestone.

Kawakubo has said, "The void (mu) is important" and "I like to work with time and space (ma)." Mu and ma are part of the Buddhist philosophy that eschews the ego. Andrew Bolton, Head Curator of the Metropolitan Museum's Costume Institute, points out that mu and ma converge in her black 1982 sweater pierced with holes. Kawakubo told *The*

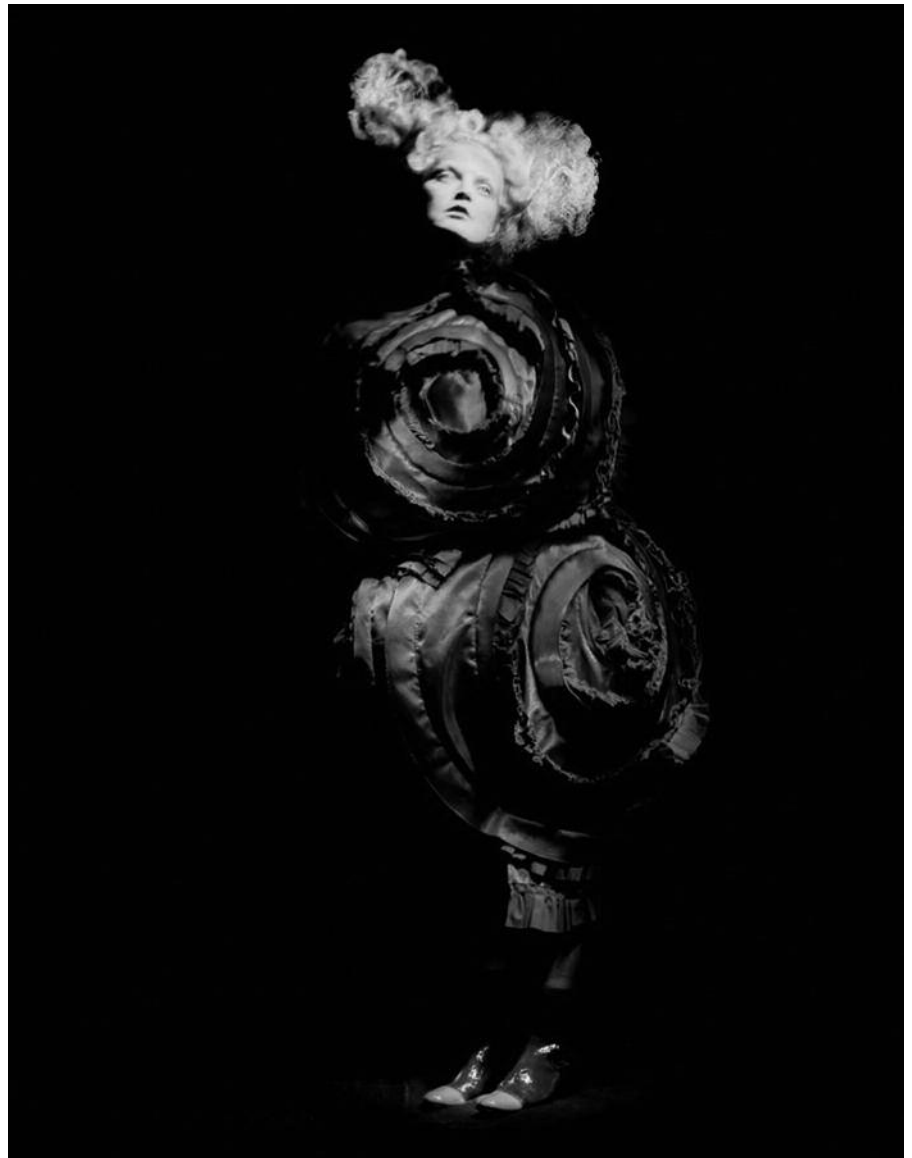


Fig. 1. Rei Kawakubo, *Blood and Roses*, spring/summer 2015; Courtesy of Comme des Garçons. Photograph by © Paolo Roversi.

Detroit Free News, "Those are tears to some, but to me ... those are openings that give the fabric another dimension.

(10, 12, 13) Her art is like a Zen koan—a philosophical riddle that defies logic. Hamish Bowles, International Editor for

Vogue, told me, “What makes it both fashion and art is: she has always thought beyond clothing and the body in conventional ways. That transforms the pieces into sculptural elements.”

On large pages with some foldouts, the exhibition catalogue begins with Bolton’s introduction and an interview with Kawakubo. They discuss their disagreements, her reluctance to have a retrospective, and her preference for the last seven collections created since 2014, starting with “Not Making Clothing” and up to “Blue Witch,” “18th-Century Punk,” and “Invisible Clothes.”

The many color images that follow are in mostly chronological order; the book ends with a full chronology and the titles of all collections. Many quotes by Kawakubo are sprinkled throughout. Altogether, this catalogue offers philosophies about life that cannot be easily summed up. Kawakubo always challenges herself to create in new ways. This includes fabrics, processes, and methods of construction, such as not using a pattern.

She also aims for transparency;

sometimes seams are on the outside or edges are not finished. The famous 1982 sweater with oddly sized and placed holes shows emptiness/mu yet, ironically, this started an ongoing trend in the opposite direction—rips and holes to expose the body’s corporeality and sensuality.

The exhibition was non-chronological and not as easy to follow. Groups of shapes, which looked like sculpture and only obliquely showed the outlines of the human body, were displayed in geometric pods—round, square, angular, and curved—with some pods above viewers’ heads. The pods paired dichotomies or opposites—for example, “Clothes/Not Clothes,” “Order/Chaos,” and “Bound/Unbound.” These titles seem generic—less exciting than Kawakubo’s clever collection titles. Also, the exhibition subtitle, “Art of the In-Between,” connotes neither here nor there and does not convey the nuances of the word “interstitial,” which Bolton also uses. Interstitial suggests an invisible connective tissue in Kawakubo’s journey of discovery—and germinating new ideas.

In my view, the beautifully produced catalogue offers much that is not in the exhibition. Each work inhabits its page like sculpture; nearby Kawakubo quotes provide contexts missing from the exhibition. Kawakubo’s “Blue Witch” series of 2016 has all kinds of shapes that dance off the page in twists and roils of color. The richly exotic “Blood and Roses” series of 2015 (Fig. 1) is a signature collection for Comme des Garçons. Kawakubo’s notes include: “... Often in history the image of the rose was more connected with blood and wars, in relation to political conflict, religious strife, and power struggles” (170). Comme des Garçons is a brand located in the most fashion-forward cities around the world. Kawakubo’s musings at the Met are high expressions of her life on this planet and also collaborations with her design team. •

Jan Garden Castro is Contributing Editor at Sculpture Magazine. A version of this review first appeared online: <https://blog.sculpture.org/2017/07/05/clothes-few-dare-to-wear#more-9037>

Doris Salcedo: The Materiality of Mourning

By Mary Schneider Enriquez
Harvard Art Museums / Yale University Press 2017

Reviewed by Alison Fraunhar

While she has maintained residence in her home country of Colombia—at times dangerous and far from global art centers, Doris Salcedo (b. 1958) has gained international renown in the past thirty years, participating in myriad biennials and international exhibitions. Salcedo is best known for her sculptural installations that strategically deploy everyday materials, usually worn or fabricated domestic items such as furniture and clothing, reconfigured to express the material and spatial uncanny resulting from ongoing violence. Her work serves as a memorial to the victims of political, domestic, and

social violence—not the more familiar monuments that bestow official recognition to politicians, public figures, soldiers, and victims of war. Precarious, ephemeral, and even deliberately awkward works, they serve as acts of remembrance of the lives of humble, unnamed citizens whose existence is marked, deformed, and truncated by violence.

It is the conflation of this specific kind of materiality with this specific kind of memorializing that provides the title and impetus for *Doris Salcedo: The Materiality of Mourning*, with text by Mary Schneider Enriquez, which accompanied the Harvard Art Museums exhibition that she curated.¹ In 2015 Salcedo was the subject of a comprehensive exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, which also generated a substantial catalogue,² and both of these documents illuminate and enhance the experience of Salcedo’s work. While the essays in the earlier catalogue approach Salcedo’s work from theoretical perspec-



Fig. 1. Doris Salcedo, *La Casa Viuda IV* (1994), detail, wood, fabric, bones, 102 5/16" x 18 1/2" x 13". Museum of Modern Art, New York.

tives, Schneider Enriquez’s monograph takes a unified approach that is a particularly useful introduction to Salcedo and

her art. Schneider Enriquez's thorough study makes Salcedo's methods, strategies, and matter available for both aficionados and newcomers.

Doris Salcedo: The Materiality of Mourning maps out the context and visual strategies that inform her practice, taking as its starting point the anti-monumental memorial. Schneider Enriquez begins by framing Salcedo's sculptural installations through a reading of the devastating history of violence in Colombia, a necessary starting point to understand the methodology that references her more internationally directed projects as well. Schneider Enriquez contextualizes Salcedo's work in its relation to that of diverse artists with whom it shares discursive components. These include the Colombian artists Beatriz Gonzalez and Juan Manuel Echevarria, whose work is less well known internationally but as rich and compelling in their deployment of materials, aesthetics and situatedness, to such influential innovators as Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Beuys. They all weave through Salcedo's practice through her absorption of their methods, incorporating ready-made objects or everyday materials and the phenomenological sense these materials bear.

The set of interlocking visual strategies that Schneider Enriquez proposes is particularly useful in analyzing Salcedo's career-spanning work: they include space, the uncanny,

surface, time, scale, and finally, disjunction and disorientation. A compelling example of materiality, mourning, and the taxonomy is *La Casa Viuda IV* (The widow's house, 1994; Fig. 1), in which an extra-long wood half-door is inlaid with bones and panels of fabric from a lacy shirt front and attached to two metal rails. Schneider Enriquez notes: "The fragments that Salcedo joins together do not fit: bones, cloth, and wood collide through sheer force, an assemblage that presents a statement of the precarious nature of that place, the impossibility of living in the space that was once home" (63). The piece renders utilitarian domestic objects useless and uncanny; the bone slivers driven into the doorframe and the fragments of lace pressed against the now absent pane of glass set into the door ask, whose bone? whose blouse? What force has hurled them, like Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, hurtling into the present, their gaze mutely fixed on the past? Salcedo encourages us to confront these questions, to experience the impact of colliding material and embodied entities.

A more recent piece included in the exhibition, *A Flor de Piel* (Literally, "Like a flower of skin," but the phrase denotes far more than thin skin: fragility, something at the breaking point, 2013), departs from the taxonomy of domestic materials and uses preserved rose petals painstakingly stitched together into a memorial

field, honoring nurses and health workers who died helping victims of Colombia's violence. The preserved petals take on an uncanny appearance of skin (the title makes reference to this) and the piece requires elaborate processes of fabrication, ongoing conservation, and conditions of storage. At the same time, these processes invoke the affective acts of mourning and memory—the preoccupation of decades of Salcedo's work—and her ongoing commitment to unpacking and exposing the consequences of violence upon its victims. •

Alison Fraunhar is Associate Professor in the Department of Art and Design at Saint Xavier University, Chicago. She is co-curator of *Crosscurrents*, an artist exchange between Havana and Chicago, and her book *Mulata Nation: Visualizing Race and Gender in Cuba* is forthcoming (2018, Univ. of Mississippi Press).

Notes

1. The exhibition opened at the Harvard Art Museums, Nov. 4, 2016 – April 9, 2017.
2. The exhibition opened Feb. 21 – May 24, 2015 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and traveled to the Guggenheim, New York, June 26 – Oct. 12, 2015. For a review of the exhibition catalogue, *Doris Salcedo*, edited by Julie Rodrigues Widholm and Madeline Grynzstein, see Aliza Edelman's review in *WAJ* 37, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2016), 46–47.

Consuming Stories: Kara Walker and the Imagining of American Race

By Rebecca Peabody
University of California Press, 2016

Reviewed by Lisa Farrington

Rebecca Peabody's lyrically written, provocative, and smart new take on Kara Walker (b. 1969) suggests that there is, in fact, much more to say about this artist who has been the subject of numerous previous studies. The author opens *Consuming Stories*:

Kara Walker and the Imagining of American Race by arguing that scholars of Walker's work have only superficially examined the artist's engagement with literary narrative, particularly with the "well-known American stories" (2) portrayed in so much of her art. Peabody also debunks the many critics and scholars who have paid so much lip service to the controversy surrounding Walker's public acclaim and vilification at the expense of a thorough review of Walker's body of work (although, to be sure, Peabody was able to skirt such a discussion precisely because it has been so well covered elsewhere). The author then proceeds, over six chapters and a

conclusion, to prove and redress her assertions with the dexterity of a seasoned scholar.

In her Introduction and in Chapter 1, for example, Peabody discusses Walker's 1995 wall installation *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* and its relationship to the Harriet Beecher Stowe 1852 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. More than merely making, as she put it "a brief reference to Stowe ... in order to identify one or two of Walker's silhouetted characters, then leave the book behind" (22), Peabody devotes the entire first chapter to identifying a dozen specific characters that appear

both in Stowe's and Walker's works. Peabody also proffers a structuralist (and, at times post-structuralist) examination of the Stowe novel as its symbolism, meaning, and impact have evolved over the 165 years since its first public reception. Peabody makes several provocative contextual observations. For example, the fact that Walker's narrative occurs in heaven after Eva's death, as its title suggests, is presented as a continuation and critique of Stowe's narrative. Peabody further notes that the human and familial dysfunction, cruelty, misery, and murder—even infanticide—described in the Stowe novel are replicated in Walker's work. As a written text, however, these horrors do not carry the same power as does the visual text—and that (the variance in art forms) makes all the difference.

Chapter 2 painstakingly engages the nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and cultural mythology associated with Saartjie Baartman (the "Hottentot Venus"), particularly the European fascination with black female sexuality. Peabody centers her discussion on Walker's 1997 collage of genitalia from *Kara Walker: The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago*. Peabody discusses writers and visual artists such as Toni Morrison, Margaret Walker, Barbara Chase-Riboud, and Renée Green, whose works, like Walker's, address black female sexuality and identity myths. A key point here is the attraction of white audiences to art that depicts black atrocities, which they reward with MacArthur grants, Pulitzer Prizes, and untold weeks on the *New York Times* best seller list. Peabody further argues that Walker's use of words surrounding photocopied nineteenth-century medical sketches of vaginas is evidence, however equivocal, of Walker's own foray into the realm of the literary.

Walker's admitted interest in romance novels is central to the next chapter. Peabody methodically explores the nature of the genre and its classic elements and tropes as these are manifested in Walker's art. After providing a brief history of the African American romance novel, in chapter 3 Peabody discusses Walker's 1995 installations, *Before the Battle* (*Chicken Dumplin'*) and *The Battle of*



Fig. 1. Kara Walker. *At the Behest of Creative Time Kara E. Walker has confected: A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant*. Domino Sugar Refinery, Brooklyn, NY (May 10–July 6, 2014), sugar, h. 35", l. 75".

Atlanta: Being the Narrative of a Negress in the Flames of Desire—A Reconstruction. According to Peabody, these works are visual incarnations of romance novels, in particular Barbara Ferry Johnson's 1980 book, *The Heirs of Love*, in which an octoroon protagonist "yearns to create a new identity for herself as the wife of a white man"—a passage cited by Walker herself (86). The narrative of self-loathing and the contradictory nature of relationships between blacks and whites, as played out in Johnson's book, is linked effectively to Walker's art using both visual evidence and the artist's own assertions.

Romance novels and certain related films are also discussed, including *The Balcony* (with Ruby Dee, 1963) and

Monster's Ball (with Halle Berry, 2001), as these share in common with Walker's portrayals characters who are shaped as much by internalized sexism and racism as they are by the events of their respective narratives. According to the artist, she consciously creates works that "function like Harlequin romance novels" (4) by representing themselves as history when, in fact, they are fantasies of female self-loathing and collusion in their own oppression. Peabody comes to three succinct and contextual conclusions in this chapter: 1) that Walker's works are visual counterparts to romance narratives; 2) that they are critiques of those self-same narratives; and 3) that they are incarnations of the convoluted nature of interracial love, power and desire.

Discussed in chapter 4 is Walker's reception (and mis-reception) in Europe and South America, where her American-based narratives are often only partially understood and sometimes openly derided. Also addressed are Walker commissions that focus on cultural histories outside of the U.S., such as the 1998 *Safety Curtain* for the Vienna State Opera in Austria, which is reviewed in terms of its references to specific European pop culture icons and images (Josephine Baker, the blackamoor, Heidi, Nazi *Entarte Kunst* posters, etc.). In these deliberations, Peabody problematizes the reception of Walker's art abroad as narratives that are viewed through myriad international veils of slavery, racism and sexism that do not jibe with those of Walker's America. Included are Spain, Brazil, Germany, and The Netherlands. In particular, Peabody examines the Dutch fairytale tradition of "Black Pete" (a black child featured in moral tales and as one of Santa's elves), which persists today in an annual celebration of black-faced white revelers in Holland. While suggesting that Walker might be familiar with the Dutch Black Pete narratives (actually, first presented in book form by a German author in 1845), the intimation is that racism and sexism in Holland has had a different trajectory than that of the U.S. and, therefore, Walker's art must prompt a different conversation in that country—one that the artist may or may not have intended.

While most of the book assays Walker's art of the previous century, the final chapter addresses the artist's more recent activity including her foray into filmmaking and video installations,

which allow for more layered, detailed, and explicit storytelling, complete with flashbacks and fantasy sequences. Especially astute is Peabody's discussion of Walker's deliberate inclusion of the puppeteer's hands in her puppet-based videos and films as symbolic of the manipulation of identity and history inherent in any culture. By reminding viewers that history (especially the traumatic history of slavery) can be and has been manipulated by the tellers of the story, according to Peabody, the horrors that Walker depicts are interrupted by a deeper awareness of reality. This chapter offers an excellent and well-edited review of the literature on Walker's New Millennium pieces such as the 2001 paper and projection installation *Darkytown Rebellion*, the 2005 digital video *8 Possible Beginnings or the Creation of African-America*, a *Moving Picture* by Kara E. Walker, and ... *calling me from the angry surface of some grey and threatening sea*, a multimedia video installation of 2007. Peabody surmises rightly that, in her film-based works, Walker employs ambiguity and heightened discomfort to prompt the viewer to look inward at their own self-determined taboos, fears, and prejudices.

Peabody dedicates her Conclusion to the monumental "Sugar Baby" sculpture (Fig. 1) that was installed in the Domino Sugar Refinery in Brooklyn, New York, in the spring and summer of 2014. A 35-foot-high, 75-foot-long white sugar-coated sphinx, the sculpture featured the head of Aunt Jemima, pendulous breasts and an exposed 10-foot-tall vagina. This last chapter deviates from Peabody's stated goal to explore relationships between

Walker's art and works of literature. Rather than examining the writings associated with mummies and Aunt Jemimas, Sphinxes, or pornography (another Walker interest) signified in this grand sculpture, Peabody instead draws the reader's attention to fiction as a socially constructed narrative that has as much, if not more, influence on culture as a great novel; and she asks (though does not fully answer) the profound question, "What happens when historical fiction becomes 'truer' than historical fact?" Unlike previous chapters, the observations made by Peabody in her concluding essay fall into the category of conventional art criticism. They are, however, no less insightful and thorough than her discussions of literature.

Peabody's book argues that "Walker tells the same story over and over again—of black women and white men who enter into sexual relationships [replete with] fantastical reallocations of power" (105). If this statement seems to suggest that everything that can be said about Walker has already been stated, such an assumption could not be further from the truth. Peabody has set the bar high. Not only does she rigorously review the copious literature on Walker, but she has taken considerable trouble to familiarize herself with Walker's own words and ideas in order to present as thorough a critique of this enigmatic artist. Brava. •

Lisa Farrington is Founding Chair Emeritus of the Department of Art and Music, John Jay College of Criminal Justice / City University of New York.



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Pl. 1. Leonora Carrington, *Garden Bedroom* (1941), oil on canvas, 18" x 24". Whereabouts unknown.



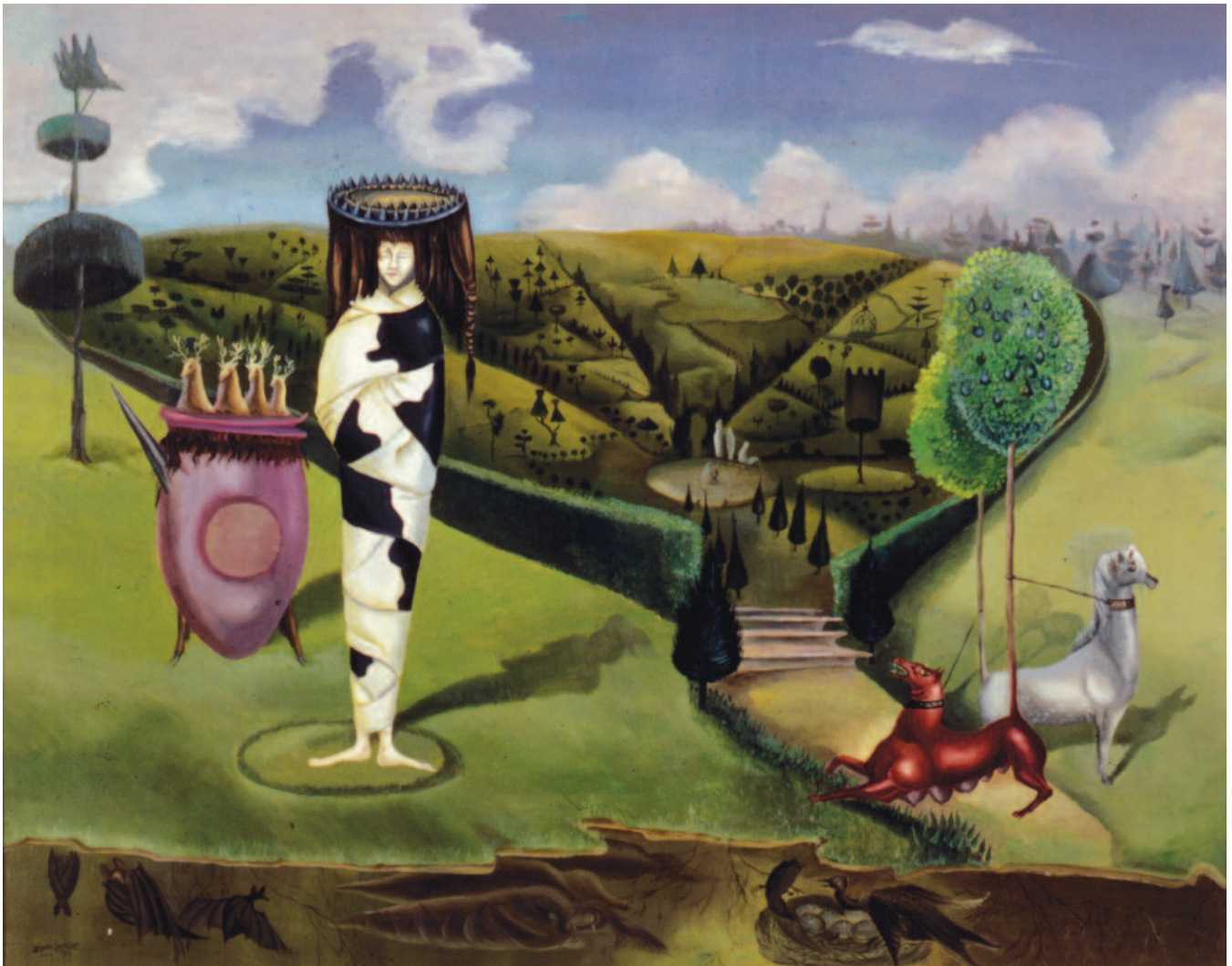
Pl. 2. Leonora Carrington, *Theater People* (1941), oil on canvas, 24" x 17 7/8". Private collection.



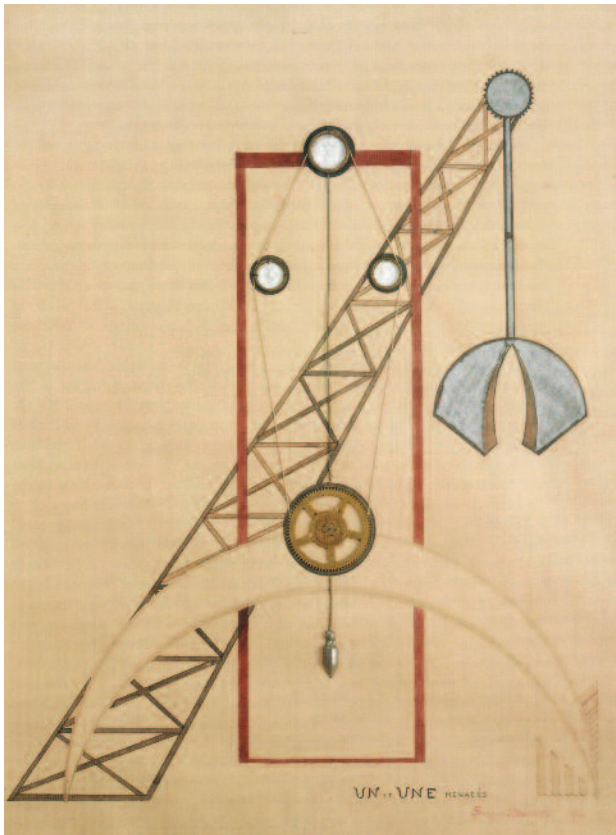
Pl. 3. Leonora Carrington, *Caballos* (1941), oil on canvas, 23 3/8" x 32". Collection Arturo Schwarz, Milan.



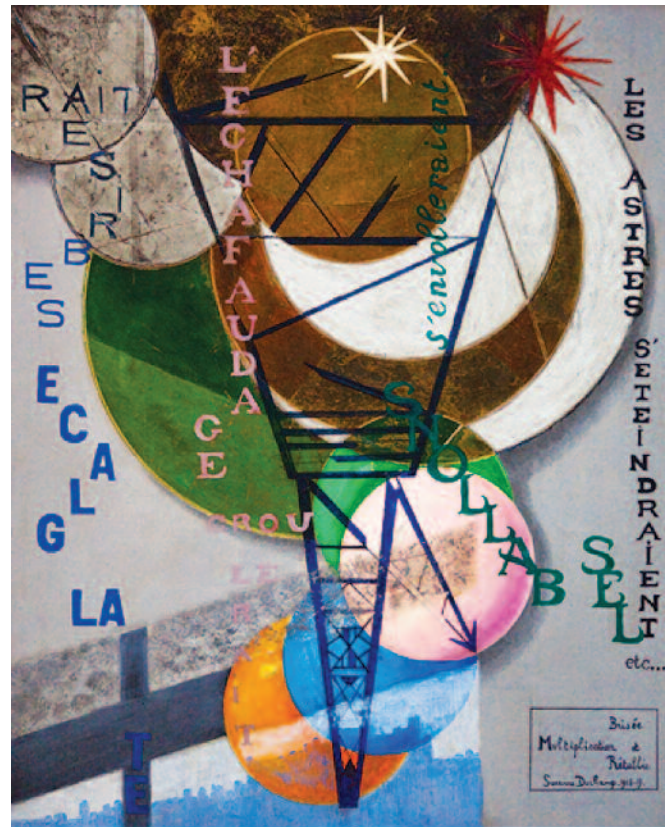
Pl. 4. Leonora Carrington, *Fear* (1937–41), oil on canvas, 13" x 19". Whereabouts unknown.



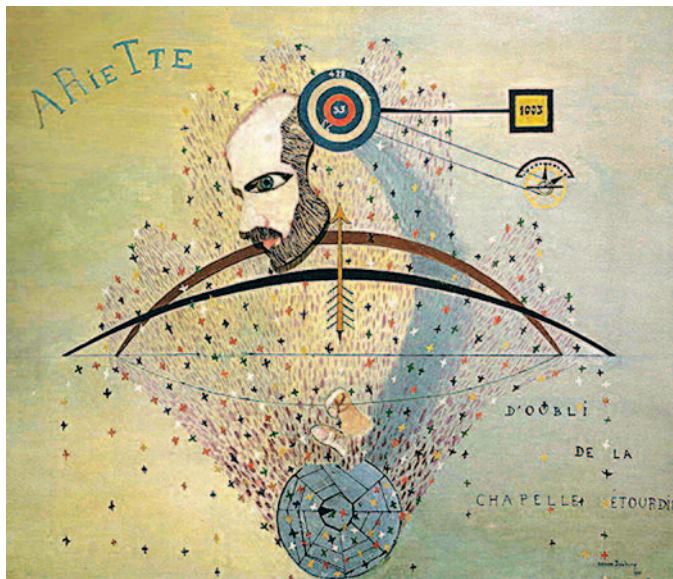
Pl. 5. Leonora Carrington, *Green Tea* (1942), oil on canvas, 24" x 30". Private collection.



Pl. 6. Suzanne Duchamp, *Un et une menacés* (1916), assemblage with watercolor, gouache, clock elements, metal rings, plumb and pencil on paper, 27 9/16" x 21 7/16". Private Collection. © Suzanne Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris/ARS, New York 2017.



Pl. 7. Suzanne Duchamp, *Multiplication brisée et rétablie* (1918-19), oil and silver paper on canvas, 24" x 19 3/8". The Art Institute, Chicago. © Suzanne Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris/ARS, New York 2017.



Pl. 8. Suzanne Duchamp, *ARieTte d'oubli de la chapelle étourdie* (1920), collage, oil, wood and glass eye on canvas, 21 3/8" x 25 1/4". Private Collection. © Suzanne Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris/ARS, New York 2017.



Pl. 9. Suzanne Duchamp, *Force et grâce (Séduction)* (1920), gouache and watercolor on paper, 21 1/4" x 17 3/4". Private Collection. © Suzanne Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris/ARS, New York 2017.



Pl. 10. Marianne Weil, *Los Millares 0* (2008), cast bronze, 10" x 5" x 1/2".



Pl. 11. Marianne Weil,
The Dig (2010),
20 panels,
cast bronze,
30" x 41" x 1/2"

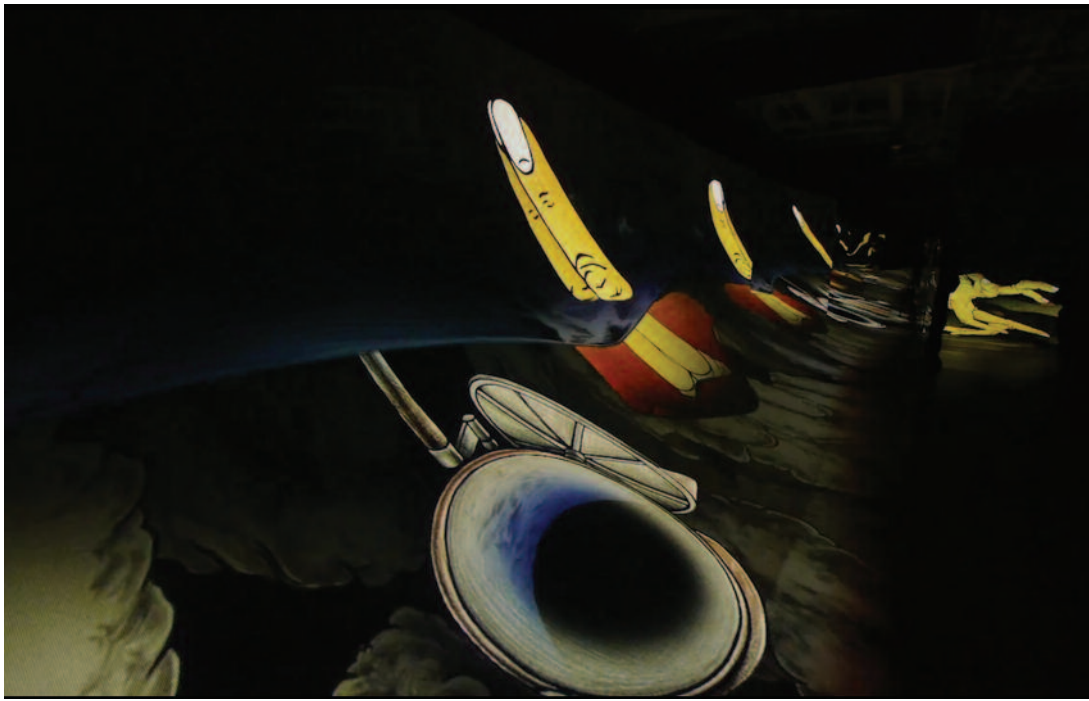
Pl. 13. Marianne Weil, *Rim* (2013), cast glass with
bronze inclusions, on steel stand, 18" x 11" x 3".



Pl. 12. Marianne Weil, *Bullseye* (2010), blown compressed glass
with copper, 11" x 6" x 4". Collection Patsy Roger & Lucille Field
Goodman.



Pl. 14. Marianne Weil, *After C. Sabbadino 1557* (2017), cast
glass with copper inclusions, on steel stand, 16" x 11" x 1".



Pl. 15. Tabaimo, *teleco-soup* (2011), video installation, 54th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, dimensions variable. James Cohan Gallery.



Pl. 16. Tabaimo, *danDAN* (2009), video installation, dimensions variable, 4'31" loop. James Cohan Gallery.



Pl. 17. Tabaimo, *Japanese Bathhouse—Men's Bath (Nihon no yuya: otoko yu)* (2000), still image, video installation, 177" x 377" x 205". James Cohan Gallery.



Pl. 18. Tabaimo, *Public convenience (公衆便女 / Kōshū ben-onna)* (2006) video installation, dimensions variable, 6'5" loop. James Cohan Gallery.

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more authentic self."
—Linda Stein

Stein - Arrow Knight 670
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