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(Front cover) Janet Culbertson, *The Abyss* (2018), oil and collage on canvas, 34" x 48". © Janet Culbertson.

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Woman's Art Journal

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Old City Publishing and our extended circle of staff members, board members, and contributors past and present offer profound thanks and wish the utmost happiness to Margaret Barlow, co-founder of *Woman's Art Journal* with Elsa Honig Fine, upon her retirement after forty-two years as innovator and copy editor. With her tireless dedication, high standards of scholarship, and calm, good-humored disposition, Peggy has enabled the journal to thrive in the difficult terrain of feminist art publications, a space where we have sustained our presence and position since 1980.

With Margaret retiring, we are very pleased to announce that Aliza Edelman, who joined the journal as book reviews editor in 2019 (upon the retirement of Ute Tellini), has become the co-editor of *WAJ* with Joan Marter. Aliza specializes in global feminisms and the transnational histories of abstraction in modern and contemporary art. Alison Poe, a specialist in the reception of Greek and Roman antiquity within a variety of gendered historical and pop-cultural contexts, is the new book reviews editor.

Contributing to the growing scholarly field on climate crisis and the Anthropocene, our first feature article treats Janet Culbertson's forty-year commitment to ecological issues through her extraordinary corpus of paintings, drawings, and prints. "In today's struggle to get justice for our natural environment," author Margaret Bridget Betz asserts, "fighting those powers that turn our wilderness to a toxic wasteland can be a joyless effort, and while there are scenes of horror in Culbertson's subjects, the painting surfaces often sparkle."

The essay by Laura Elizabeth Shea offers a comprehensive study of Magnum photographer Inge Morath. Analyzing the photographer's 1960 *Road to Reno* series through the dynamic act of positioning, Shea observes, "Morath's photographs offer a new story for American mid-century and automobile travel, problematizing and making complex the experiences some Americans had on and off the road during the postwar years." Shea notes a consistent obfuscation of clear viewpoints in these photographs, an uncertainty framing Morath's penetrating vision of the American landscape that forces us, as viewers, to question how we look.

Shinoda Tōkō (who died in 2021 at age 107) forms the subjects of our contribution by emerging scholar Kimihiko Nakamura, who provides an extended biography and many important examples of the artist's work and process. Shinoda was trained in East Asian calligraphy, the author explains, and yet her resulting abstract ink paintings disengage from lexical constraints and traditions in order to resist calligraphy's "long-standing gendered division of styles"; likewise, they express a nuanced visual affinity with the bold black brushstrokes of mid-century Abstract Expressionism and Textual Abstraction. Shinoda exhibited with Betty Parsons Gallery and Bertha Schaefer Gallery in New York City in the 1950s.

Our articles travel backward through time to the early twentieth century. We conclude with Gwen John, a Welsh-born artist eminently deserving of attention for her paintings of the New Woman. Colleen Denney's discerning essay on the artist's self-portraiture argues for her performative agency and cultivated self-fashioning: "John's embodiment of the professional woman artist … challenges the status quo for women at the turn of the twentieth century, and determines portraiture as a site of resistance for modern women's identity formation." John's "confident stance" also brings new meaning to the concept of solitude for both the artist's interior scenes and her individual choice of lifestyle.

Alison Poe has expertly shaped a suite of book reviews, many authored by new *WAJ* contributors. Two reviews make important contributions to the scholarship on Black women artists in America. Tiffany E. Barber masterfully considers a monograph on Loïs Mailou Jones, whose multifaceted aesthetic response to Blackness and womanhood is examined through the concept of "*middleness*—across different identities and locales, and within modernism itself." Adrienne L. Childs probes an exhibition catalogue dedicated to Kara Walker's personal archive of images that "lay bare the artist's singular vision of the all-consuming dark gravitational forces of American racism."

Analyzing an edited volume on feminist visual activism and the global body, Catherine Dormor applies the metaphor of dance and the ellipse to explore the authors' dialogues "across time, space, bodies, and encounters as a form of choreography," a schema that acts as a "collective activism." Julia Skelly's analysis of a new volume dedicated to transnational feminisms poses tactful questions about the author's proposal to show how the arts, through coalition-building across feminist networks, "produce social change for marginalized and vulnerable individuals, including women of color, white women, and migrant women." Christine Filippone draws upon a wide breadth of knowledge in science and art to tackle the interdisciplinary study reappraising the generative influences for contemporary artists of D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's *On Growth and Form* (1917, 2nd ed., 1942), foregrounding a processual view of evolution and anticipating more recent material feminisms.

Ellen Landau argues how the "new historical models" presented in a career-spanning exhibition catalogue on Joan Mitchell rightly claim the Abstract Expressionist painter's greatness. Salomon Grimberg, an expert on Frida Kahlo, reviews three recent publications on the artist, including a new catalogue raisonné and the autobiography by Hayden Herrera, considered by this reviewer as the most welcome addition to the Kahlo literature. Two major retrospective catalogues are presented on artists whose body of work escapes strict categorization and the limitations of gender: Gabrielle Rose-Curti expounds the "staggering diversity and interdependency" of Sophie Taeuber-Arp's abstractions; Barbara Stehle illuminates how Meret Oppenheim's art goes beyond her iconic fur-covered *Object* (1936). Reviewing a catalogue dedicated to Louise Bourgeois's psychoanalytic writings, Nathalie Hager evaluates the perspectives on the artist and her work that arise from her "voyage to self-discovery." Catherine Scallen appraises an interdisciplinary collection of essays on Mary of Hungary, the sixteenth-century art patron and leader whose innovative patronage and collecting in the visual arts and music, together with her "multiple identities" as Habsburg princess, queen, and long-governing regent warrant this greater attention in Anglophone scholarship.

We thank Old City Publishing for their continuing support of *Woman's Art Journal* through the many months when communications were difficult. Guy Griffiths and Ian Mellanby deftly managed the production of the issues for 2020 and 2021.

Joan Marter and Aliza Edelman
Editors, *Woman's Art Journal*

Icons in the Present Tense

Janet Culbertson's Moral Imagination

By Margaret Bridget Betz

In Pennsylvania I often drove with my family to a relative's farm—a farm with rich volcanic soil, situated on rolling hills surrounded by dense forests. On the way we passed miles of smoldering slag heaps—strip mines. They remain fixed in my mind as an image of hell. Why does "development" of the land have to mean its destruction? As a child, I felt outraged and helpless. I still feel outraged. Today the destruction is so widespread that most people have at least some consciousness of it. Yet few people do anything about ecological problems until something happens in their neighborhood.

—Janet Culbertson, from her essay, "Ecotage!" in *Heresies*, 1981[1]

Climate change: "A code red for humanity." The United Nations Secretary General issued a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on August 9, 2021. This report has lit a fire under many creative individuals, but one artist has made it her life's mission to bring awareness to this issue and has stood firm for nearly sixty years: Janet Culbertson. Her painting, *The Abyss*, is featured on the cover of this issue. This is not a sunflower, but an ovoid of silver shards (painted with iridescent pigments) exuding hellish, faintly hissing gasses, inspired by Culbertson's impression of the fumeroles atop the craters on the Galapagos Island she visited. *The Abyss*'s gas is suggestive of the radiation from a nuclear reactor melting down. Is the faint color in the lower part an orange and ochre sludge? The color feels lurid, radioactive, as though we have been trapped in the reactor's core. These last few centuries have so changed our planet that a new name for it, the Anthropocene, has come into use, and Janet Culbertson has found of late that the scholarship of Elizabeth Kolbert on this topic jibes with her own preoccupations.[2] George Orwell's *1984* has also figured into her artwork, such as her *2084 (Message to the Future)* (1985; Pl. 1), and more recently, in 2020, she recalls the painting made for him, complete with photo, memorabilia, and artificial flowers, titled *Orwell Memorial (Descansos)* (Pl. 2).

In her fifty-five years of professional art exhibits, Culbertson created a body of work that keeps pointing to a future that is tense: indeed, in fact it is now here. Nearly coinciding with the timing of her first solo exhibition in New York, *Elegy to Nature* in 1967, American news outlets suddenly were featuring photos of a river on fire. From this time, our society at large first began to care about industry's free market destruction of the environment. Drawing freely from these images of the burning river, Culbertson used this as a key incident and a site to recall how this event helped generate the political will to create governmental agencies and policies friendlier to preservation of wilderness and toxic cleanup.

Her very recent oil on panel, *World on Fire* (2021; Pl. 3), has a small kangaroo leaping out of a raging fire. At the top we find darkness, dripping down like a contagion. The texture on the kangaroo looks like charring. How can anyone forget the cringeworthy videos from Australia's recent wildfires, which destroyed much of human structures and, even more poignantly, much of the natural home of such iconic creatures? Culbertson has a heart like a biblical "burning bush," and I was brought up short when I got the latest issue of *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, with its cover image of a steam locomotive in a smoking landscape (a sort of London fog), where all the homes belch carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses. In this photo there is limited color (dull red, green) on the engine, but all else is shades of silver and charcoal. Janet Culbertson's passion matches that of her *World on Fire*, and the last lines of John Valentine's poem on page 16 of the poetry journal, "Speaking in Tongues, North Georgia," fits with both artist and painting:

> The rant, the voice
> of all whirlwinds, vowel of all vowels,
> every nerve of the ghost on fire.
> The searing word, raw, primeval,
> the burning bush of your heart.[3]



Fig. 1. Janet Culbertson, *Along the LIE* (2021), digital image with *Toxic Garden* (2001) on the billboard.

An implacable baboon appears in earlier images, and Culbertson recalls the creature to serve in an imagined "virtual billboard," sitting now within a photograph of a multi-level, Long Island Expressway interchange. Here, in the digital image *Along the LIE* of 2021 (Fig. 1), she presents this baboon staring into a viewer's soul, a primal animal in the latest "evolution" of the billboard blight. An irregular colored shape, as of a mountain, is where the primate appears. This seems to imply that this part of the nuclear haze obscures a once lovely mountain view. All remaining colors are dingy, and the highways are fully monochrome. From this terrain, our very smart "species cousin" sits in front of a "park" of nuclear stacks, and seems to call for an answer: Is nuclear energy any cleaner than other extractive fuels? Surely, the devastating meltdown of the Chernobyl Power Plant in Ukraine remains a lesson to be heeded. It brought down an entire Soviet government, after revealing the corruption of its system, as Culbertson warns us in *Chernobyl* of 2000 (Fig. 2).

In today's struggle to get justice for our natural environment, fighting the powers that turn our wilderness to a toxic wasteland can be a joyless effort, and while there are scenes of horror in Culbertson's subjects, the painting surfaces often sparkle. With iridescent paint (possibly suggestions of celebration) on some of her scenes of devastation, she both attracts the eye and points to the sheen on the surface of a pond invaded by oil pollution. In fact, while walking in Culbertson's favorite nature reserve on Shelter Island years ago, she photographed a small pond with just that rainbow effect on the water's surface, tainted by an oil slick; it was an unforgettable moment for this writer. In 2002, Culbertson wrote:

> For the nineteenth-century Romantic painters, Nature seemed sublime, even eternal. What we today think of as our 'landscape' may disappear before very long. Nature has become theater, and we are audience to its disappearance and transfiguration into a Disneyland set. Does the artist adapt and paint urban blight, garbage, pollution? Can we pretend we don't hear the cries of the earth? In the end, we do the best we can to be effective, driven out of need and by our conscience.[4]

Culbertson stands out in her generation for her foresight in linking feminism and ecology, through art that succeeded in



Fig. 2. Janet Culbertson, *Chernobyl* (2000), oil, iridescent pigment on rag paper, 29" x 41".

the public world of galleries; it was noticed in many reviews. The work rose in the context of a growing awareness of how chemicals carelessly destroyed birdlife while combatting mosquito-borne illnesses in humans. Industries like DuPont flogged the media with ads that claimed, "better living through chemistry." Culbertson saw through this when Rachel Carson's controversial book about pesticides disrupting our ecosystem, *Silent Spring*, appeared in 1962.[5] DuPont fought back, but eventually yielded. At a certain point its slogan left out "chemistry." Carson's book led to responsive laws passed in the 1970s, the setting of a dedicated Earth Day, and the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency. Joyce Beckenstein contextualized Culbertson's work within these larger movements in her 2011 essay on "The Toxic Landscape" carried in the *Woman's Art Journal*.[6] Culbertson's prescience in seeing all this coincided with her rejecting, in the late 1940s, the prevailing fate open to women in her generation, the happy housewife and mother. She saw the chains hidden under the starched apron, found how the burgeoning environmental movement matched, on a panoramic scale, the concerns for individual and collective opportunities for women in postwar America, the second wave of feminism, the era of *Ms*. magazine and the *Woman's Art Journal*. Culbertson's life and art form a consistent theme, a prophetic warning, and an example of a healthy—and essential—way of life with all cylinders firing, physical, spiritual, social, and economic. In our era of #Resistance and #MeToo, she sees the power of sisterhood give women's voices and art renewed strength. Culbertson's early *Mythmaker* series of ink and pastel drawings from 1973–74 validated her desire to explore a Joseph Campbell-type hero as a female on her own quest for a meaningful life.[7] The National Museum of Women in the Arts acquired *Inbound*, and the entire series' twenty drawings, to represent this key shift in feminist iconography.[8] Culbertson's artist book, *The Mythmaker*, based on this series, has just appeared, edited by Vanessa King and printed by Bedwick and Jones.

Raised just east of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Culbertson remembers her childhood sadness at seeing the industrial encroachment on wilderness scenes of swamps and forests. There are few forces more potent than a child's sense of justice, as anyone can attest who has had to mediate the cry of "That's not fair!" This artist never lost this virtue, and it only grew stronger as she matured. The young Janet recorded discordant details of her environment, the weird colors running out of strip mines and through the rivers where her family canoed:

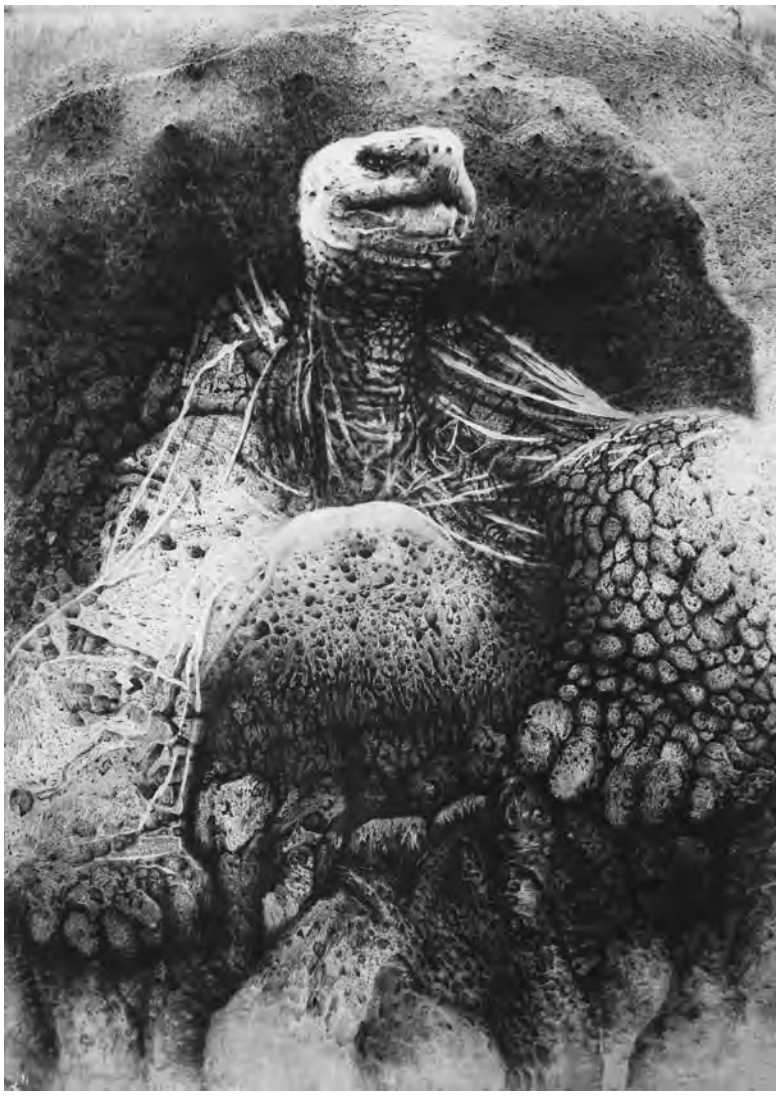


Fig. 3. Janet Culbertson, *Galapagos Tortoise* (1976), ink and pastel on rag paper, 120" x 72".

"As a child I felt outraged and helpless. I still feel outraged."[9] When her father carried home from the annual hunt a deer, Janet was sickened. Several autobiographical sketches maintain the centrality of these experiences, and her worldview appeared early. Today, we can follow Culbertson on social media and get a broad overview with many stimulating deep dives into her work and thought.[10] Her intellectual approach includes a gentle irony about the misuse of language, in particular the Orwellian euphemisms created to cloak the true effects of industrial pollution: "industrial parks" and "tank farms" with oil storage tanks instead of food crops, "creating open space" where logging firms clear-cut forests. Linguistic subterfuge pollutes the mind; really, it is propaganda, and as such, was called out by Thomas Merton before the mid-1960s, among other writers and social activists.[11] Culbertson calls renewed attention to it in her interviews to this day. Notable among these, I recommend her 2019 talk, "Dystopian Visions," a Pecha Kucha at the Parrish Museum in Watermill, New York.[12]

Indomitable spirits like hers built the Environmental Era in our nation.[13] Approaching ninety years of age, she continues in health to create, to challenge with her visual elegies, to spread her hope for the future. Her regular travels to the wilderness, daily walks in a nearby nature preserve, and gardening in her lovely home keep her brain healthy and her spirit linked to the local and reacting to the wider world, an eco-friendly lifestyle. She tempers her dire images with a consistent gimlet-eyed hopefulness that her work means something important for our collective future.

How can it be, then, that sixty years after jeers like "tree-hugger" first drew the line between those who support the health of our planet and those who advocate untrammeled licentiousness for industry, that international work to reverse our disastrous course has such paltry results in governmental policy among the most industrialized nations? Culbertson's mid-1970s trip to the Galapagos Islands provided a totemic figure that first brought her work to my attention, the tortoise. The pride and rectitude of this ancient animal still calls to me. First spotted in Lerner-Heller Gallery in New York City in 1976, this ten-foot, colossal *Galapagos Tortoise* (Fig. 3) confronted me, and I could not look away. His physicality, his primal "being," melted my preconceptions. I had been committed to postwar Abstract Expressionism, and this was the first realistic image that proved for me the validity and even urgency of recognizable images. My knees wobbled like they had in front of a 1913 Kandinsky, my breath shortened, my heart seemed to stop. How could I even stand? To this day I am challenged and changed by the event.

Reviewing Culbertson's 1989 exhibition *New Narrative* at the Guild Hall in East Hampton, *New York Times* critic Phyllis Braff called the works "gripping images" with a "haunting impact."[14] She was thrilled to see one of Culbertson's *Billboard* series, in which a polluted landscape is interrupted by a ghost of its older self, pristine then and uninhabitable now. Billboards are "the icons of our age" for Culbertson, and this enduring series—exemplified by the painting *The First Billboard* (1987), inspired by her drive through Elizabeth, New Jersey—has now entered the Guild Hall's collection, and contrasts strikingly with her images such as the *Galapagos Tortoise* and other species facing extinction, like the ostrich and the elephant in *Tusks* (1986; Fig. 4). *Tusks*, from the mid-1980s, speaks to the poaching of mature elephants in Africa, which has, in the last few decades, caused these majestic mammals to come to the verge of extinction. This image features a background of protruding mangled tusks behind a rampaging young elephant. One can comprehend her rage. The composition is set on a strong diagonal from lower left to upper right, and this invokes such tension as to convey the outrage. Often used to show how we humans ignore danger by putting our head in the sand, Culbertson's bird in *Ostrich* (1976) is alert and almost accusatory. The dark background of her drawing sets off the



Fig. 4. Janet Culbertson, *Tusks* (1986), ink and pastel on rag paper, 72" x 92".

animal and makes it a sort of conscience for Nature as a whole. Once again, the artist cuts to the heart of her worldview in a simple, dramatic "icon."

For Culbertson, there is a long-standing interest in photography and positive and negative space on a two-dimensional surface. Culbertson's silverpoint drawings from the late 1960s and early 1970s, based on her family album photos (she counts Rachel Carson among her "family"), demonstrate her interest in many values that have remained consistent through her fifty-five years of professional accomplishment. Mary Vaughan in *Arts Magazine* wrote: "By fusing the positive-negative elements of a photograph, she developed a balance between spatial tension and emotional tension…. Another link of the silverpoints to the recent paintings is in their similar use of light. In the old photos light faded into blankness, almost an implied brilliance too bright to see, yet unifying in its shape."[15] Another factor at work this early is history, which keeps intervening in Culbertson's works, even when they seem to be predictions and not reportage. Disasters of modern industry keep severing the tortoise's Jurassic era from our own geological epoch, the Anthropocene, and its attendant brutal ravages of the environment—all due to human activity.[16] The parallels between Culbertson's imagery and actual events continue to prove her value. In a 2018 interview with Rachel Bosworth for her exhibition *The Seventh Circle*, Culbertson recalled: "Man's impact on the environment has all too often been one of greed. We develop and discard without awareness for the future environment or other species. I often paint these eco and social disasters—juicy and horrific—oil spills, nuclear disasters, the killing of our own citizens, and violent climate changes…. Our exhibit deals with issues of mankind's aggressions on our planet and ourselves." Bosworth further summarized: "Culbertson expresses her views on these issues through paint, stimulating a necessary awareness. Art still has to be exciting, tactile, compelling, ugly and beautiful, she says, to warrant appreciation and to inspire. Outside of art she does her part as well, recycling, reusing, limiting her consumption, and encouraging others to embrace a consciousness of how our actions impact the earth."[17]

Several international shipping incidents, for instance, recall the warning to Julius Caesar by a soothsayer, "Beware the ides of March." Off the coast of England in March 1967, the supertanker *Torrey Canyon* ran aground and spilled its crude oil, the most disastrous event of this kind to date, and a harbinger of the growing climate catastrophe. *BBC News* called it "the day the sea turned black."[18] Culbertson's *Canoeing Through Black Gold*, painted in 1969 (Pl. 4) and diminutive at 22 x 28 inches, may just be one of the gentlest ironies ever hung on a gallery wall. Referencing such world-changing disasters



Fig. 5. Janet Culbertson, *The First Billboard* (1970), oil on linen canvas, 34"x 48". Collection of Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, New York.

in beautifully rendered oil paintings, Culbertson has consistently brought contemporary and recent history into the esoteric world of art. Not to mention connecting these historical events to each voter's choices in social and political policy: the SS *Torrey Canyon* event led to fundamental changes in the laws of the sea. Culbertson's painting presents a pair of women canoeing on an unnaturally smooth liquid surface—oil, of course—toward a huge billboard with a swamp scene floodlit with a rare touch of color. Behind the canoe rises a haze of swirling pastel strokes, like a toxic cloud above the oiled water. The contrasting textures, like the pink and gold touches in an otherwise monochrome image, carry such a wealth of information; her professional training shows here, and her deliberative choice of recognizable images allows some commentators to see a bit of Magritte's surrealism. The "black gold" here is treacherous, fool's gold, like King Midas's Golden Touch. Folk wisdom has taught the unreliability of this item of seemingly immortal value. Those today depending on fossil fuels know this resource poisons our Planet Earth, the blue marble floating in the black sea of space.

In *The First Billboard* (1970; Fig. 5), a blue-grey wetland appears on the signage within a ruined, grey landscape. Here the textures of a barren moonscape seem still more forbidding because of the industrial waste of hard, dull metallic shapes poking up "closest" to the viewer. What has been lost (the "blue yonder," perhaps) attracts our imagination and our memory of a better time, a gentler planet no longer available to us. A similar longing shows up as the ethereal blue predominating in Culbertson's recent *Another Last Billboard (Blue)* of 2020 (Pl. 5), which floats unsupported against a backdrop of spare verticals, as though mankind has paved over even the heavens. The billboard's imagery is a set of dripping splotches of red, white, and blue paint, in an Abstract Expressionist vein, a style from Culbertson's academic training that she rejected along with its well-known "toxic masculinity."

In yet another springtime disaster, in late March 2021, the Suez Canal was obstructed for six days by the *Ever Given*, a 1300-foot cargo ship buffeted by winds that wedged and grounded it across Europe's most vital link to Asian industrial products. Markets were stunned, and the stock market reacted to this delay in importing the vast amounts of consumer goods that answer to our voracious neediness. Culbertson's iconic *Tanker in the Grand Canyon* (Fig. 6) came immediately to mind. The canyon's texture recalls that of her tortoise, and Culbertson's inventive, even joyous, burst-ink technique



Fig. 6. Janet Culbertson, *Tanker in the Grand Canyon* (1972), acrylic and pastel on rag paper, 96" x 120".

(partly viewable on a video posted on her website) produces a stolid, callused surface of enduring strength, above which floats the large but ghostly ship—which the canyon will never let through. Has a drought lowered the water level, like the Colorado River in our day? Or do the veins of red-orange in the walls suggest lava flows, the anger of the Earth gods in ancient lore? Yet there is a quietude here as well, a sense that so-called civilization will never defeat nature, its romance and mystery, its strength and implacability. Culbertson calls her technique "imploded ink," finding a dark parallel with what she "felt was happening to the landscape." Like her love for the Galapagos Islands, this calm arises from the art's sense of a "poetic anthropomorphism … satisfying and serene."[19] Her tortoise of 1975 is still a favorite image, as evident in its illustration for the 2019–2020 exhibition, *Artists Choose Artists*, discussed in the *Brooklyn Rail*.[20]

A huge drawing of *Javelinas (Wild Pigs)* from 1981 (Fig. 7) manages to convey the vitality of nature through the burst-ink texture along with the spikiness of their fur. They race along parallel to the picture plane, heedless of the viewer and, at six-feet high, it is a compelling image of joy, even though rendered with simple monochrome black and grey. Unemotional energy refuses to give any heed to the concerns of our species; they simply have somewhere to go. Mural-sized as this is, *Wild Pigs* embodies the artist's sense of the need for timeless images that convey understandable emotions.

In her 1981 contribution "Ecotage!" to the feminism and ecology issue of *Heresies*, Culbertson notes the crucial work of an activist known as "The Fox," who combined the words ecology and sabotage and advocated for radical actions to save an environment through nonviolent collective action.[21] Culbertson and Lucy Lippard proposed this topic for *Heresies* and worked to bring it to fruition. This Ecotage movement drew in a sizable number of women, among them pregnant women concerned with how contemporary industries ignored the many childhood illnesses, the stillbirths, and malformed infants among populations in polluted areas. This factor stood alongside the burning river and other polluted sites and helped generate the political will to create governmental agencies and policies friendlier to preservation and toxic cleanup. The health of humanity and our environment seemed joined, unquestionably, at this time. Periodic reminders have been needed, however, and in the Summer 1992 "Art and Ecology" issue of *Art Journal*, Suzi Gablik's piece, "The Ecological Imperative," pointed to the evolving movement



Fig. 7. Janet Culbertson, *Javelinas (Wild Pigs)* (1981), ink and charcoal on rag paper, 60" x 84".

among artists like Culbertson "as the need for restoring awareness of our symbiotic relationship with nature"—the single most urgent cause of our time. We humans belong "to something precious and worthy of protection."[22]

Unfashionable as landscape painting was in the time of Abstract Expressionism, for Culbertson it carried her early prognosis for capitalism, its rapaciousness in particular. To stress the importance of the subject, Culbertson kept the mural scale of many of her works. Her exhibitions always sparked conversations for the intellectual strata just awakening to environmental concerns in the 1960s, and her reviews in art periodicals and newspapers demonstrated the impressiveness of her technical inventiveness. Named *faktura* in earlier art movements, Culbertson's surface qualities involve archaeological sensations that can be prickly in a literal sense, though one never touches the paintings in reality. Many of the images in this article carry strong sensory information through *faktura*.

In *Seeking a New Planet* (2020; Pl. 6), a greyed billboard, caught in a web of barbed wire with a sketchy image of a highly paved-over exurban area, floats in a haze of almost moldy twilight tints of yellow and grey with a single horizontal streak of rose. Aside from the forbidding wire, nothing seems solid at all, but reminders of "how it came to this" are everywhere evident. These rings within rings of wire are the inverse of the solid impasto of earlier images from the *Industrial Park* series. In discussing that series, Culbertson stresses how the imagery is dissolving, decomposing; things fall apart, the center no longer holds (as W.B. Yeats phrased it in his famous poem, "The Second Coming"). Rose Slivka noted the heavily worked images that were "a combination of gorgeous and gross … strangely beautiful, yet sinister."[23] The hazy, twilight colors in this later image of the floating billboard are applied to the surface—as is the wire—with the lightest of touches. It all rises up, as if in the final conflagration, long since over.

For her show at the Islip Art Museum on Long Island curated by Janet Goleas in 2010, the latter part of its title, *Insights: Janet Culbertson, Future Tense*, is a telling phrase, given how the future is rushing toward us and the tense stand-off delaying the urgent action needed to preserve a livable environment on Planet Earth.[24] While earlier archaeologists carved up the ages into chunks like Jurassic and Pleistocene, they now advocate for the Anthropocene to name our own age, where careless human activity (like Alice's Tea Party, we mess up one place and move to the next, as if we can establish colonies on other planets) has so degraded the planet's ecology. Mother Nature is not an inert locale for our greedy extractive industries. She is not passive but has shown why we humans must reverse our consumerist priorities. Just witness the wildfires, floods, droughts, and tornados devasting wide swaths of nations. Like these events, Culbertson's images are

awe-inspiring combinations of beauty and tragedy, her message consistently stressing what is happening. Culbertson represents a ninety-year-life of eco-activism through art, consistent and life-giving, an enduring warning for us to work for change in the spirit of passionate hope. Will we finally heed this call, or let greed continue to wreck our only home? •

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Notes

The Mythmaker by Janet Culbertson was published by Tortoise Shell Press in New York in 2022. Culbertson was recently awarded a grant from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation.

1. Janet Culbertson, "Ecotage!," *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* 13, no. 1 (Jan. 1981): 47.
2. Elizabeth Kolbert, *Under a White Sky: The Nature of the Future* (New York: Crown, 2021). The *New Yorker* featured a discussion by filmmaker Adam McKay in which he puts his newest film project in the context of the U.N.'s IPCC, *New Yorker*, accessed December 22, 2021, podcast, www.newyorker.com/new-yorker-live/adam-mckay-dont-look-up.
3. John Valentine, "Speaking in Tongues, North Georgia," *The Orchards Poetry Journal* (Winter 2021): 16, https://orchardspoetrycom.files.wordpress.com/2021/12/orchards-winter-2021-for-digital.pdf
4. Janet Culbertson, "Losing Paradise," *Terra Nova* 3, no. 2 (April 1998): 45.
5. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962).
6. Joyce Beckenstein, "Janet Culbertson: The Toxic Wilderness," *Woman's Art Journal*, vol. 32, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2011): 22–29.
7. On this series, see Jenni L. Schlossman, "Janet Culbertson: Political Landscapes," *Woman's Art Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 1993): 27–31.
8. The twenty drawings comprising the *Mythmaker* series was exhibited at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C., in October 2004 through January 2005.
9. Janet Culbertson, "Ecotage!," *Heresies*, 47.
10. Culberston's website is https://www.janetculbertson.com.
11. See William H. Shannon et al., eds., "Language and Propaganda," *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002): 242–44.
12. Janet Culbertson, "PechaKucha: Dystopian Visions," filmed June 14, 2019, Parrish Art Museum, video, https://www.pechakucha.com/presentations/dystopian-visions, accessed December 1, 2021.
13. On the Environmental era, see Samuel P. Hays and Barbara D. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
14. Phyllis Braff, "8 East End Artists Saluted," *New York Times*, August 27, 1989, 16.
15. Mary Vaughan, "Janet Culbertson," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 51, no. 8 (April 1977): 4.
16. Kolbert writes, "So pervasive is man's impact, it is said that we live in a new geological epoch—the Anthropocene. In the age of man, there is nowhere to go, and this includes the deepest trenches of the oceans and the middle of the Antarctic ice sheet, that does not already bear our Friday-like footprints." Kolbert, *Under a White Sky: The Nature of the Future*, 7.
17. Rachel Bosworth, "The Seventh Circle of Earth's Destruction [East End Arts Council and Southampton Cultural Center]," *Sag Harbor Express*, April 10, 2018, https://sagharborexpress.com/seventh-circle-earths-destruction/ (accessed March 11, 2022).
18. Bethan Bell and Mario Cacciottolo, "Torrey Canyon oil spill: The day the sea turned black," *BBC News*, March 17, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-39223308 (accessed March 11, 2022).
19. Ernest Heller, introduction to *Islands*, Janet Culbertson exhibition (New York: Lerner-Heller Gallery, 1973), np.
20. Joyce Beckenstein, "Artists Choose Artists," *Brooklyn Rail*, Dec. 2019–Jan. 2020, https://brooklynrail.org/2019/12/artseen/Artists-Choose-Artists (accessed March 11, 2022).
21. Janet Culbertson, "Ecotage!," *Heresies*, 47.
22. Suzi Gablik, "The Ecological Imperative," *Art Journal*, vol. 51, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 49, 50.
23. Rose Slivka, "Janet Culbertson," in *Janet Culbertson*, exh. cat. (Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences, 1998).
24. Janet Culbertson, *Islip Museum Collection Insights: Janet Culbertson, Future Tense*, exh. cat. (East Islip, NY: Islip Art Museum, 2010).



Hannah Wilke: *Art for Life's Sake*

Edited by Tamara Schenkenberg and Donna Wingate

A richly illustrated exploration of Hannah Wilke's provocative art and trailblazing feminism

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"I Cannot Penetrate the Spirit"

Inge Morath's Road to Reno (1960)

By Laura Elizabeth Shea

In Inge Morath's (1923–2002) photograph of a tour group, *Oconaluftee Village, Cherokee, North Carolina* (Fig. 1) of 1960, four men stand behind a line of four women and a school-age boy. Woven baskets of various sizes, displayed on a bench in the foreground, separate the tourists from the action they intently observe, likely some kind of demonstration. The tourists themselves are not depicted in full, as two of them have their faces blocked or partially blocked by a hanging basket, and a third tourist's body is cut off at the right edge of the photograph. Viewers of the photograph, however, witness the spectacle of tourism in a small, but representative moment where tourism itself, and the types of gazing it entails, is the subject. As viewers, we have access to the people in the photograph, but not exactly passage to what they gaze upon. We are confronted by an image that seems to value the act of looking yet simultaneously denies full visual permission to connect to the photographic subjects. Photographs like *Oconaluftee Village*, from Inge Morath's 1960 series, *Road to Reno*, relish the act of positioning and encountering such gazes and aversions among subjects that are looked at by viewers, but never fully seen. The images, taken during Morath's eighteen-day road trip with Henri Cartier-Bresson from New York to Reno, Nevada, feature a number of popular roadside attractions. And yet the more one looks at the photographs, the less they seem to show. Morath's images rarely present a full view, or what was thought to be notable about these places.

Morath's *Road to Reno* photographs draw upon the familiarities of mid-century road travel but ultimately refuse to visualize the celebratory tropes associated with this overwhelmingly white, middle-class experience. Instead, her images are of stifling interiors, confusing optical reflections, and diminutive landscapes. Her consistent obfuscation of clear viewpoints is, I argue, a strategy to complicate photography's overly easy associations with documentary formats and truth-telling;



Fig.1. Inge Morath, *Oconaluftee Village, Cherokee, North Carolina* (1960), photograph. © Inge Morath/Magnum Photos.

instead, Morath considers how vision is uniquely influenced and circumscribed by the experiences drawn from the road.

A central question guiding my study is why Morath traveled so far to photograph the American landscape only to make these sites difficult to comprehend in their entirety? Morath is not just blocking visual access to these places, which often have political or historical associations, but rather visualizing the complex, contradictory, and embodied experience of the famed American road trip. Morath foregrounds uncertainty in her photographs as a strategy to draw viewers in and get us to look closer. The argument that uncertainty provides a productive starting point to analyze photography builds upon the ideas presented by scholar Kate Palmer Albers in her book, *Uncertain Histories* (2015). Albers argues that when photographs foreground what is unknown rather than known about the subject, then uncertainty "leads back around to a new kind of knowledge production" where "the uncertainty is not a dead end, but a generative space for the viewer's own productive engagement with the construction of history."[1] When viewers are not sure what they are looking at, Albers claims, they begin to examine how meaning is constructed. Like the photographers Albers analyzes in her text, Morath, too, presents photography as "a fundamentally ambiguous medium that can be at once deeply evocative of the historical past while at the same time deeply limited in the stories it conveys."[2]

Most telling is the quotation from Morath's diary from 1960 that serves as the title for this article, "I cannot penetrate the spirit." After spending several days in the South, driving through Knoxville, Nashville, and Memphis, Tennessee, and Little Rock, Arkansas, Morath was perplexed by the country's contradictions, such as its great displays of wealth and poverty, friendliness and racism, and strange recreations and natural beauty. On the typewriter brought along with her, she set down the sentence, "I cannot penetrate the spirit. It is not for outsiders."[3] Trying to show things in full view and in their entirety would not be true to the physically draining experiences of road travel. "I am terribly tired. My eyes are red from driving," Morath wrote in another diary entry.[4] Nor would it be a true reflective commentary on her encounters with American life and history.

The thesis of uncertainty actually reveals Morath's insight into the American cultural context, especially as an international woman photographer encountering the country with an outsider's penetrating "eye." After fleeing Berlin during World War II, Morath, who spoke German, French, and some English, applied to work for the United States Information Services in Austria in 1945, and was hired to translate American press agency texts for the Austrian press. At the Information Services, she became familiar with both the content and style of popular American reportage. Her next position was as an editor at *Heute*, a bi-monthly magazine, from which Paris Magnum, a photography collective, recruited her in 1949 to work as a writer, researcher, and editor. Between 1953 and 1955, Morath primarily worked at Magnum Photos as a researcher and assistant to Cartier-Bresson, a co-founder in 1947 of the renowned cooperative photography agency, editing his contact sheets and accompanying him on reportage trips. As a full member of Magnum since 1955, Morath was no longer the mentee when she drove to Nevada with Cartier-Bresson but an active and respected member of the cooperative. Although she could not "penetrate the spirit" of American culture, Morath, the European multilingual photographer, could clearly penetrate the surface.

When Morath and Henri Cartier-Bresson planned their road trip from Manhattan to Reno in 1960, they chose the Southern route, a drive nearly six hundred miles longer and hotter in the July summer, and more crowded with tourists than the one they could have taken through the Midwest. The two photographers planned their American road trip on their way to photograph the set and production of *The Misfits* (1961), a Hollywood film drama written by Arthur Miller and directed by John Huston. Starring Marilyn Monroe and Clark Gable, the film is a western about social misfits determined to live "free" amidst changing times. Magnum had obtained exclusive rights over the film's images that documented its production, sending teams of two photographers every fifteen days to shoot on location in Nevada.[5] However, the photographs taken by Morath on her eighteen-day road trip to Reno were not part of the official assignment, but for herself.[6]

I suggest that Morath and Cartier-Bresson chose to drive to Nevada through the South because they wanted to see places where America's postwar ideals about freedom and equality were distorted and unfulfilled, a framework viewed through the lens of what the American road trip meant to white Americans during the 1950s and early 1960s. The crux of my argument not only hinges on how Morath's *Road to Reno* photographs engage with period tropes surrounding road travel and related types of mediated gazes, but also present viewers with something that intentionally complicates and denies full visual access to the sites themselves. Through the analysis of two types of photographs from this trip, the destination film set in Nevada will be connected to the themes of her project as a whole.

Opened in 1926, U.S. Highway 66 was neither the longest nor the first long-distance highway, but it uniquely came to represent, as Peter Dedek has described it, the "power and freedom of the private automobile."[7] After World War II, historian Susan Session Rugh points out, "the family vacation became democratized by the road trip."[8] The country's growing prosperity, standardized two-week vacations, rising rates of car ownership and cheap gasoline, all contributed to the road trip boom. With the Interstate Highway Act of 1956, five new interstates were built and Route 66's prominence and use gradually declined.[9] By 1960, when Morath and Cartier-Bresson traveled, they took the new Interstate 40 most of the way. Despite this, Route 66 established the standard version of how mid-century Americans understood ideal highway travel: as a touristic experience in which they could express their independence and as an opportunity to view iconic sites to bolster their sense of civic pride. Route 66 was promoted as a way for families to have a safe, smooth itinerary to see the

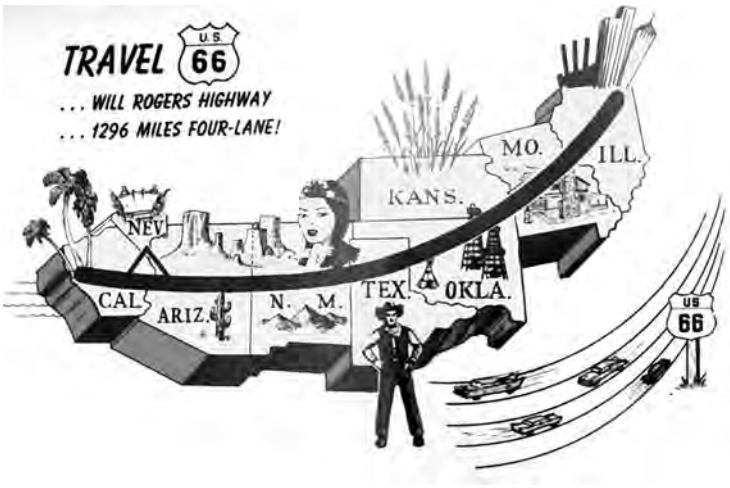


Fig. 2. Postcard of U.S. 66 National Highway Association, 1950s.



Fig. 3. Cover of *Green Book*, featuring "What to See in Chicago" from *The Negro Motorist Green Book* (1956). Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library Digital Collection (b14504472).

country from the comfort of their own car (Fig. 2). However, this comfort was limited and marketed to white travelers.

The inequalities present in everyday life were reinforced on the road, evidenced by the need for travel guides, such as the *Green Book* (Fig. 3) and *Travelguide* published to keep African Americans safe while traveling.[10] Black travelers did participate in the postwar automobile, travel, and leisure boom, but they had to consider many additional factors before departing in order to try to avoid violence. The popular *Green Book,* published from 1936–67, and *Travelguide*, from 1947–57, described accommodations for sleeping, eating, restrooms, shopping and any other needs Black travelers might have while away from home. Virtually all advertisements in the mainstream press—for cars, maps, routes, accommodations, and restaurants—during the 1950s and 1960s were geared toward white audiences. Arguably, one crucial way that the construction of whiteness was cultivated during this era was through the family car and the prospect for automobile travel. Comparably, Dianne Harris's book, *Little White Houses*, examines the construction of white identities in terms of postwar housing. Home ownership was often not afforded to African Americans and other minorities who faced



Fig. 4. Lincoln advertisement in *House and Garden*, August–September (1952).

discriminatory housing laws, redlining, and hostile homeowners' associations. Harris argues, "Postwar domestic environments became poignant ciphers for whiteness, affluence, belonging, and a sense of permanent stability."[11] The family car can be analyzed as an extension of those domestic environments. For example, in a 1952 Lincoln advertisement, the automobile pictured is described as "the most dramatic fabrics and fittings on wheels," visible through a family's dining room window where one couple hosts another in a stylish, modern interior (Fig. 4). The postwar road trip was a mobile iteration of the home to explore and express notions of belonging across the American landscape as the home similarly accomplished for the neighborly residents. Sara Ahmed has described how whiteness "orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space."[12] Both homes and cars acted as mobile units or places where white Americans could and did take up space, comfortably. The experiences gained from looking at and making photographs of historical roadside stops and natural wonders on road trips solidified a white, middle-class, American identity. The ability to take time off of work to travel, prompted by such advertisements, indicated a privileged economic situation most often afforded to those who achieved the dream of homeownership. Middle-class whites understood it as their right and even duty to travel by automobile to any place in their home-on-wheels.

Photographers Morath and Cartier-Bresson had the advantage of appearing like a typical, white American couple traveling the country—not unlike the couples in the mid-century car advertisements enjoying the relative liberties and ease of travel that came with not having to consider their whiteness explicitly. But as Europeans who had directly experienced the hardships of World War II, they also carried with them a resolute suspicion of all things nationalistic and were quite curious and cynical of American culture (especially the food).[13] As a pair, Morath, an Austrian, and Cartier-Bresson, a Frenchman, continued a long lineage of European writers, photographers, and intellectuals who traveled the



Fig. 5. Robert Frank, *Trolley—New Orleans* (1955) gelatin silver print, 8 5/8" x 13 1/16". © Robert Frank from *The Americans* (1958); courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York.

American road and embraced an adventurous spirit harking back to the nineteenth-century French sociologist and theorist Alexis de Tocqueville.[14] American women also had long traveled on the road despite the cultural barriers of doing so. In 1909 Alice Huyler Ramsey became the first woman to take an automobile trip across the United States, from New York City to San Francisco, followed by Blanche Stuary Scott in 1910, and Anita King in 1915. Suffragists drove to reach voters; single women drove wounded soldiers during World War I; and women were the primary organizers of the family road trips taken after World War II.[15] However, the exemplar par excellence of mid-century American road trip photography is the Swiss-born photographer Robert Frank, whose travels from 1955 to 1957 are chronicled in his renowned photo book, *The Americans*.[16] Morath is indebted to Frank in the ways she gravitates toward the unidealized parts of American life and culture, as in his iconic *Trolley—New Orleans* of 1955 (Fig. 5). Yet where Frank's images are sordid, dirty, fast, and punctuated, Morath's are quiet and thoughtful. Frank also pictured the ambiguity and strangeness of American race relations, but did not prioritize recognizably famous sites or landmarks on his travels. In contrast, Morath desired to experience and picture famed roadside tourist attractions.



Fig. 6. Inge Morath, Notes for road trip. Inge Morath Photographs and Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.



Fig. 7. Inge Morath, *A photograph of John Brown exhibited at Harpers Ferry Museum, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia* (1960), photograph. © Inge Morath/Magnum Photos.

With an exciting movie-set assignment from Magnum ahead of her, a Southern route, and an experienced driving partner, Morath was set to hit the road with her camera.[17] For as much as the road trip evokes connotations of freedom in the popular imagination, Morath and Cartier-Bresson had planned a tightly regimented excursion. On a piece of paper (Fig. 6), Morath carefully planned out days eight through eighteen: She noted the cities and towns they would visit, the number of hours it would take to get from one destination to the next, and how many nights they could stay in each place in order to arrive in Reno on time. Although a chronological accounting of Morath's photographs provides a more accurate sense of direction and visual pacing of their trip—collected in the posthumously published *Road to Reno* book (2006)—this analysis considers her work broadly through historical landmarks, natural wonders, and landscapes.[18]

Morath's photographs are often taken at sites of American landmarks where she simultaneously draws the viewer's attention both to the construction of vision and



Fig. 8. Inge Morath, *This is the place where the legend of John Brown lives, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia* (1960), photograph. © Inge Morath/Magnum Photos.

history. In West Virginia, Morath took two photographs at historical sites related to Harpers Ferry, a popular junction known for America's founding fathers and abolitionists. The photographs show the contents of an informational glass display case for visitors. The first, *A photograph of John Brown exhibited at Harpers Ferry Museum, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia* (Fig. 7), contains a formal portrait of the white abolitionist, John Brown, who led an ultimately unsuccessful slave uprising in 1859. The second, *This is the place where the legend of John Brown lives, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia* (Fig. 8), includes the text label "Harpers Ferry National Monument," and objects mounted for viewing, such as weapons and shackles related to the uprising. In both images, the surrounding landscape is reflected on to the display glass, placing it on the same visual plane as the image of John Brown and the objects. The effect is an overlap or fusion of present time with historical memory into singular, distorted images. In the photograph of Brown, the reflection allows viewers to see not only a stoically bearded figure but also a view of a river, telephone pole, roads, and, on the far left, a car, all symbols of communication and mobility. In the other, the historical weapons, including a gun, and perhaps knives, are angled in such a way that they actually go right through the bodies of the four contemporary visitors whose reflections are visible in the glass.

Through the use of reflection, which complicates any kind of resolved national unity or idealized freedom, Morath's photographs formally weave the weight of historical racial violence with the present landscape. For the viewers of these photographs, she forces the past and present to interact, a gesture of equivalence through time, place, and space, alluding to the continued segregation, inequality, and violence still occurring in the United States. She does not see the commemorative site as merely historical, but visualizes the weight of the past abutting the present day. By optically using the reflective qualities of the glass to her advantage, Morath denies a clear view of either the historical displays or

the contemporary landscape, obfuscating both in order to force us to see them as necessarily reflecting and acting upon each other in a reciprocal manner. She thus imagines American history as a tangled web, not just through didactic presentations of reductive narratives, but unfolding all around us.

Morath and Cartier-Bresson also travelled to places with beautiful views and unique geological features. However, Morath's photographs serve as temporary stop-gaps from what many want to see—clear, open, majestic and inspiring views—and what is typically experienced, that is, parking lots and gift shops. Her photographs bring us right up to the edge of the sublime, but refuse it for an alternative view. *Natural Bridge, near Lexington, Virginia* (Pl. 7) depicts a huge parking lot full of big American automobiles. The vehicles closest to the camera, one bright red and the other mint green with sleek chrome finishes and white tops, face a tightly-packed parking lot with only a few figures visible amongst the mass of metal. A large sign, "Entrance. Natural Bridge. One of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World," refers to the Natural Bridge of Virginia, a giant rock formation in the shape of a lowercase "n," open on the bottom with a bridged upper ridge. The natural bridge has long been a major tourist attraction with an illustrious history in American folklore: first mapped out by George Washington when he was a surveyor, it was then purchased by Thomas Jefferson in 1774. Jefferson subsequently built a log cabin with a room for visitors, which was eventually replaced by the Natural Bridge Hotel designed to cater to tourists on U.S. 11.[19] With even more to offer, the large sign also advertises a "Drama of Creation Nightly," a performance begun in 1939 that continues today consisting of symphonic music and singing along with colored lights, during which a voice from high above tells the Biblical story of creation.[20]

In *Natural Bridge*, Morath depicts the spectacle of travel consumerism. Not pictured here, or anywhere else in the published *Road to Reno* photo book, is the natural bridge itself. There is a suggestion of the picturesque surroundings in the background, with a hint of bluish mountains, although those are mostly blocked by the large entrance sign. Morath's photograph focuses on the power of a tourist attraction, "some kind of touristic Lourdes," she wrote in her diary, referring to the French pilgrimage site famous for the apparition of the Virgin Mary.[21] The thrill supposedly is getting there while the rest is banal: finding a parking spot, the obedient following of directive signs, and the need to find nourishment to sustain all of this. Seeing the site itself is often only a short part of the experience. *Natural Bridge* demonstrates particularly well how Morath draws upon the road trip experience without ever really fulfilling it visually: she evokes the trouble tourists go through to see the site, and then photographs everything but it. Morath situates viewers to look more closely at the values and desires surrounding the American road trip experience.



Fig. 9. Inge Morath, *The Grand Canyon, Arizona* (1960), photograph. © Inge Morath/Magnum Photos.

Similarly, Morath's *The Grand Canyon, Arizona* (Fig. 9) does not satisfy viewers with sweeping, wide-open views of the canyon's natural wonders but instead shows the backs and sides of a couple looking out into it, their faces obscured from view, while a lone, young boy in a cowboy hat sits on the ledge nearby but looks away from the geological attraction. Even as she evidently faced the site in order to photograph it, Morath cuts off a clear view of the canyon for the viewer, negating what could be seen as a kind of American patriotic reverence and rejecting a clear view or sense of awe in favor of angles that deny a kind of patriotism often associated with Western landscapes. The landscapes avert sweeping vistas in favor of banal, desolate, or diminutive subjects, or rather are not pictured at all. Instead of showing Americans what to see, she shows them *how* to see what they are seeing.

Further West, Morath photographed *Highway entertainment at an 'Indian Trading Post,' before arriving at Albuquerque, New Mexico* (Pl. 8). It shows three Native Americans on a stage dressed in colorful headdresses and moccasins, wearing jewelry and other ritual adornments, one holding a drum. Morath has positioned herself behind the makeshift stage, with crudely painted designs of American Indians on horses around the bottom, next to a poorly re-constructed cowboy town of the Wild West explicitly designed for tourists, visible on the other side of the stage and watching the performance.

The construction of "Indianness" as a commodity to be sold to white travelers is on full display in this photograph. The Black feminist scholar bell hooks has described imperialist nostalgia as one that "expresses itself as yearning on the part of the colonizer for the ways of life they have destroyed or altered," which, she argues, largely informs contemporary thinking about American Indians in the United States.[22] Further, historian Philip Deloria writes, "Primitivism, technological incompetence, physical distance and cultural distance—these have been the ways many Americans have



Fig. 10. Inge Morath, *Heads of slot machines looking over a truck, Reno, Nevada* (1960), photograph. © Inge Morath/Magnum Photos.

imagined Indians."[23] Morath shows how performers equally play a role and take monetary advantage of the tourist's problematic nostalgia and perception of American Indians' belatedness to American culture that Deloria describes. Morath continually photographed popular sites in a way that highlights the ambiguous, violent, and difficult histories that are often suppressed or simplified in touristic experiences of the road.

Throughout her trip, but especially in Reno, Morath frequently employed windows as framing devices that shape not only the driver's and passenger's vision of the road and sites, but also the viewer's. In an image simply titled *Reno, Nevada* (Pl. 9), a woman is viewed through Morath's driver's side window. She drives a bubble-gum pink car with a cream-colored top, but the view of her is limited, mediated through frames of multiple car windows. Again, in the black-and-white image, *Heads of slot machines looking over a truck, Reno, Nevada* (Fig. 10), Morath depicts through a rear car window two cowboy-themed slot machines, whose realistic, grinning, immobile heads welcome motorists to the Palace Club behind them. Such an abundance of windows and windshields allude to the cinematic, televisual ways of seeing that Anne Friedberg has identified as the visual paradigm of the twentieth century, replacing Leon Battista Alberti's Renaissance architectural window and perspectival frame; as Friedberg explains, seeing a moving-image as in the cinema relies on "the immobility of its spectators and the aperture of a fixed frame. This newly wrought combination of mobile and virtual visualities provided a virtual mobility for immobile spectators who witnessed movement confined to a frame."[24] In *Reno, Nevada* and *Heads of Slot Machines*, both the photographer and the subjects are immobile—the woman in the photograph, sitting at what is presumably a stoplight, and the cowboys, forever stuck to their slot bases. Throughout this series, in the Harpers Ferry photographs and elsewhere, Morath employs windows or glass as framing devices to shape not only the vision of the road and sites for the drivers and passengers, but also for the photographic viewer. Through her photography Morath shows us what viewers may know but do not stop to look at and really see in everyday life. Instead, through visual obfuscation, her photographs lead us to ask more questions about American culture and society. And lest we forget, Morath was on her way to photograph a film, that is, to take stills for a motion picture. These stills would be filtered through several types of screens—and frames—to reach their final destination, fixed in pages of magazines and newspapers, but always representative of movement.

John Huston's motion picture, *The Misfits*, captured throughout the summer of 1960 by Morath, Cartier-Bresson, and several Magnum photographers, was deemed by David Campany as "the most celebrated case of independent photographers working on set."[25] The extensive operation and agreement between *The Misfits* and Magnum also became an infamous one: it was both Clark Gable's and Marilyn Monroe's last completed film. Gable suffered a heart attack the day after shooting was complete and died from a second attack less than two weeks later; Monroe died almost two years later in August 1962, while filming *Something's Got to Give*.[26]

From the very beginning of *The Misfits*, the Western landscape, the automobile, and views framed through windows are recurring themes: text advertising 'Jack's Reno Garage,' on the back of a mechanic's truck, is the first image to appear across the screen of the film. The mechanic, Guido (Eli Wallach), is on his way to fix Roslyn's (Monroe's) car, arriving just as she is getting ready to leave to court for her divorce, and smitten, he drives her to in Reno. Morath's photograph of the scene (Pl. 10) shows a confident Monroe outside of the courthouse in a black dress and heels with a svelte up-do, the scene watched by flocking, curious fans. After the divorce case is finalized, Roslyn and her new friend, Isabelle (Thelma Ritter), get a celebratory drink in Harrah's casino, where they see Guido again. This time, Guido is with his friend, Gay (Clark Gable). The two women take the men up on their spontaneous offer to see the "real country," as they called it, at Guido's unfinished house. Once they arrive, Roslyn immediately dashes to the picture window to admire the view. But, as it is dirty and streaky, she runs outside to look instead, and dreamily declares, "Gee, it goes on forever."[27]

The photography scholar Deborah Bright has argued that "appreciating the scene was itself an homage, a ritualized expression of what it meant to be an American citizen," and by



Fig. 11. Inge Morath, *Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller in their suite in Reno's Mapes Hotel after a day's shooting, Set of* The Misfits (1960), photograph. © Inge Morath/Magnum Photos.

doing so in this scene, Roslyn self-initiates into her imagined new life as an unattached, western woman.[28] Her rejection of viewing the landscape through the picture window in favor of going outside is also representative of her rejection of traditional domesticity and domestic values. In many of Morath's production photographs, she stresses Monroe's motion through her body and hair—she is constantly dancing, jumping, and running in the film, often in flowing sheets and robes. This freedom from conventional behavior, inducing a sense of bodily autonomy, is a marked contrast to Gable's rooted and grounded poses, indicating, perhaps, that it is Monroe's divorced and jobless character who is actually freer than her staunch, drunken, and disillusioned cowboy counterpart, who is desperately clinging to his own sense of freedom. The film ends with a shot through a windshield of Roslyn and Gay embracing and driving off in the car, which, rather than the land, is the only real site of agency depicted for the film's cast of misfit western characters.

Morath had access beyond the set to Monroe and Miller, who were unhappily married at the time. In *Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller in their suite in Reno's Mapes Hotel after a day's shooting* (Fig. 11), Miller stands at the edge of the frame, cigarette dangling from his mouth, hands in pocket, gazing at Monroe, with her signature platinum blonde hair, who wears a low-back dress and looks out the window. As star and writer, they are separated by a huge lamp: Monroe in the light, Miller in the shadow looking at her looking outside of a window, the two never quite able to come together. Morath later recalled how everyone had been trying to get photographs of Monroe and Miller, but as the couple barely spoke, this photograph of them together in their hotel room was nearly one-of-a-kind.[29] Once again, Morath photographs the act of looking; the window's direct, unmediated vision is at work here, symbolically and compositionally. Here Friedberg's comparison of the window to a screen is also apt in terms of Monroe's work as a film actress. Morath obfuscates the mise-en-scène as we cannot see a full view of the star's coveted face, further suspending judgment when faced with individuals whom she met professionally.

Morath's photograph of the crumbling couple in the intimate space of their hotel room would, only two years later, be replaced by a photograph of herself next to Miller, marking their 1962 wedding. In the photograph, labeled "Inge and Arthur, Wedding Day, February 1962 Roxbury" (not permitted to be reproduced), Morath wears a two-piece white suit topped with a long, animal print coat, and Miller dons a suit.[30]

Morath would settle down with Miller at their Roxbury property, working out of a grain silo, using a large, wooden Spanish table to lay her prints.[31] Morath and Miller were married for forty years, working collaboratively on photo books based on their travels all over the world until her death in 2002.

Although aspects of Morath's personal life end nicely after meeting Miller, even today her images from the journey continue to destablilize what we think we know about the American road trip. Morath's photographs offer a new story for American mid-century automobile travel, problematizing and making complex the experiences some Americans had on and off the road during the postwar years. Morath's *Road to Reno* photographs work to unsettle the fixity of histories and sites she encounters, visualizing a story of the transiency inherent in travel and vision. Her project sustains tensions between seeing and not seeing, and knowing and not knowing. Morath's photographs are valuable in their incompleteness because they stay true to the complex, embodied, and limited experiences on the peculiar space and history of the American road trip. Morath foregrounds uncertainty to get us to look more closely at our own ways of seeing. •

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Notes

1. Kate Palmer Albers, *Uncertain Histories: Accumulation, Inaccessibility, and Doubt in Contemporary Photography* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 4.
2. Ibid., 3.
3. Inge Morath, Road to Reno Diary, July 9, 1960. Inge Morath Photographs and Papers, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.
4. Morath, Road to Reno Diary, July 8, 1960. Inge Morath Photographs and Papers.
5. George Kouvaros, "*The Misfits*: What Happened Around the Camera," *Film Quarterly* 55.4 (Summer 2002): 29.
6. Inge Morath, *The Road to Reno*, ed. John P. Jacob (Gottingen, Germany: Steidl, 2006), 10.
7. Peter Dedek, *Hip to the Trip: A Cultural History of Route 66* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 2–3.
8. Susan Sessions Rugh, *Family Vacation* (Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2009), 7.
9. Dedek, *Hip to the Trip*, 64, 66.
10. The *Travelguide*'s slogan, "Vacation and Recreation Without Humiliation," is both alarming and comforting, stressing the real need for such resources.
11. Dianne Harris, *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 1.
12. Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8 (2007): 150.
13. Morath wrote how she and Cartier-Bresson got so tired of shakes and burgers on the first few days of the trip, that they resorted to having apples and tea for dinner during the rest of it. Morath, Road to Reno Diary, July 9, 1960. Inge Morath Photographs and Papers.
14. For example, German photographer E.O. Hoppé took a road trip in the 1920s, and Russians Ilya Ilf and Eugeny Petrov in the 1930s.
15. Sidonie Smith, *Moving Lives: Twentieth-Century Women's Travel Writing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 172.
16. See Sarah Greenough, *Robert Frank: Moving Out* (Washington, D.C.: The National Gallery of Art, 1994), and David Campany, *The Open Road: Photography and the American Road Trip* (New York: Aperture, 2014).
17. In 1947, Henri Cartier-Bresson went on a seventy-seven-day American road trip with American writer John Malcolm Brinnin, from Washington, D.C. to San Francisco and back to New York, the goal being a book project, never published. Some of Cartier-Bresson's road trip photographs were later published in *America in Passing* (1991). Brinnin wrote about the experience in his memoir, *Sextet* (1981). For more on their trip, see Agnes Sire, *Henri Cartier-Bresson and Walker Evans: Photographing America 1929–47* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2009).
18. See Inge Morath, *The Road to Reno*.
19. Tim Hollis, *Dixie before Disney: 100 Years of Roadside Fun* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi 1999), 136.
20. "Fun Things to do in Natural Bridge, VA," Natural Bridge Historic Hotel and Conference Center, accessed January 14, 2022, https://naturalbridgeva.com/things-to-do-natural-bridge-va/. See also Hollis, *Dixie before Disney*, 136–137.
21. Morath, *The Road to Reno*, 124.
22. bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 189.
23. Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 4.
24. Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 5.
25. David Campany, *Photography and Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 124.
26. Serge Toubiana and Arthur Miller, *The Misfits: Story of a Shoot* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 96.
27. *The Misfits*, directed by John Huston (1961; Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment, 2001), DVD.
28. Deborah Bright, "Victory Gardens: The Public Landscape of Postwar America," *VIEWS* (Winter-Spring 1990): 2–3.
29. Morath, cited in Toubiana and Miller, *The Misfits*, 81.
30. "Inge and Arthur, Wedding Day, February 1962 Roxbury," Inge Morath Photographs and Papers, folder 3, box 528.
31. Matthew Mason, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library Archivist, conversation with author, 15 April 2015, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

Shinoda Tōkō

Ink, Abstraction, and Radical Individualism

By Kimihiko Nakamura

It is true that I am unreal—what I think and what I create. But, as a work of art, it exists in reality. It does exist.

—Shinoda Tōkō[1]

A pioneer of abstract ink painting and one of the most successful female artists born in early twentieth-century Japan, Shinoda Tōkō (1913–2021) passed away on March 1, 2021 after nearly eight decades of an international career.[2] Her works, often exhibited at the prominent Betty Parsons Gallery in New York, made Shinoda one of the few commercially successful Asian artists associated with Abstract Expressionism.[3] At the age of 107, Shinoda was presumably one of the oldest practicing artists in the recorded history of art. While Shinoda's oeuvre was predominantly executed using the traditional means and media of East Asian calligraphy, her resulting abstract ink paintings disengaged from lexical constraints and showed a greater visual affinity with the bold black brushstrokes of mid-century Abstract Expressionism, Art Informel, and what recently has been called "Textual Abstraction."[4]

Nonetheless, Shinoda's artistic journey was believed to be a personal quest for freedom, and her achievement has been only minimally included in art historical discussions. In her extensive literary output over many decades, the artist herself stressed her individualistic stance and rejected association with any particular movement, group, or school. In her best-selling memoir from 2015, Shinoda claimed:

> I am an artist, but I never thought to become an artist…. I feel like I became an artist while trying to live a life in freedom…. For example, the character for river [川, *kawa*] has a rule of drawing three vertical lines. However, I have come to want to describe the river not with three lines, but with countless lines. Or I want to describe it with a single long line. I have come to want to be free from the constraints of characters, and to create new forms, and so I opened up a new field of abstract ink expression, where I could express my heart as I felt…. My heart's yearning for freedom has created my own path. Everything I have done has been because my heart asked for it, and that is why I am who I am today.[5]

The influential critic Sawaragi Noi summarized her career in a relevant manner: "Shinoda Tōkō is none other than Shinoda Tōkō"; "her works were called abstract or avant-garde because there was no other way to describe them, but in reality, she was a solitary figure who was distinct from these movements."[6] While Shinoda's achievement has been recognized by the public, most of the existing literature on her has served as biographical appreciations of her centenary, life and career, providing only limited insight into the art historical significance of her works and their socio-political context. As suggested in Alicia Volk's study of Shinoda's contemporaries, Katsura Yuki (1913–1991) and Migishi Setsuko (1905–1999), or Izumi Nakajima's recent feminist scholarship on abstract painters in postwar Japan, many ambitious female artists often adapted an individualistic stance to maintain autonomy within the patriarchal Japanese art world; however, in order to construct a critical discourse, their artistic legacies cannot be easily disconnected from the master narrative.[7] While recognizing Shinoda's independent achievements, this article closely examines how she responded to the "mainstream" art movements of her time, and situates her practice in its historical and socio-political context.

Shinoda was born in 1913 into a wealthy family in Dalian, Manchuria, then part of Imperial Japan's leased territory in the period between 1905 and 1945. Her given name was Masuko (literally "child of Manchuria") but later she received the artistic pseudonym Tōkō, meaning "red peach flower." In 1914, when her family moved to Tokyo, where Shinoda was raised, it was an era known as the "Taishō Democracy," marked by great social, political, and economic reforms. During the Taishō period, secondary education and professional skills training for women made rapid progress, and the number of women's higher schools (*kōtō jogakkō*) significantly expanded across the country.[8] Furthermore, an increasing number of young women entered the workplace,



Fig. 1. Shinoda Tōkō, *Shika* (Flower Poem) (1948), ink on paper, 23 5/8" x 32 43/64". Gifu Collection of Modern Arts, Seki, Gifu.

and the term "professional working woman" (*shokugyō fujin*) came into popular usage. However, in interwar Japan, marriage and motherhood were still considered the primary duty of women, and the cornerstone of women's education at that time was to train them for their future role as a "good wife, wise mother" (*ryōsai kenbo*).[9] While Shinoda was encouraged to engage in intellectual and creative activities from quite a young age, they were still considered part of her feminine accomplishments, and she was not expected to become a professional artist. Shinoda's career eventually broke from the yoke of this pervasive patriarchal dogma that narrowly defined who she was and what she could be.

Shinoda's father, Raijirō, was a highly cultured intellectual from an old family in Akutami-mura, Gifu. He taught Shinoda various forms of classical poetry and provided her with her first calligraphy instruction at five years old. In 1925, she entered a women's higher school, where she received calligraphy instruction from a tutor named Shimono Setsudō and studied the principles and techniques of calligraphy in the most common method called *rinsho* (copying the calligraphy of classical masters). Although the tutor recognized her pupil's great talent, Shinoda soon questioned the traditional pedagogy:

> It has been my personality since I was little. I could imitate the models, but it was not really enjoyable. It is, after all, fake-making. My teacher praised me for making fakes. If it looked exactly like the model, she praised it. I felt that was very strange, even as a child.[10]

Shinoda's assertion of creative freedom was derived, in part, from such discomforting experiences of calligraphic practices that prevented her from obtaining a free and individualist expression. Still, for about two years after graduation, Shinoda continued to be tutored by Shimono. It was also during this period that she learned to compose short poems (*tanka*) with Nakahara Ayako (1898–1969). Nakahara was an active poet under the tutelage of the pioneering feminist poet Yosano Akiko (1878–1942), and several of Shinoda's short poems were published in the literary magazine *Izukashi* (Sacred Oak), which Nakahara edited. In 1936, at age twenty-three, Shinoda ran away from home and began to earn a living by teaching calligraphy. While her mother Jō, who married Raijirō at age fifteen, was supportive of her daughter's decision to live on her own and to not rely on a male provider, Raijirō was adamantly against it. Even in his last will, Raijirō wrote, "[Tōkō] must marry."[11] Shinoda later recalled, with some self-deprecating humor, that she "ended up being like a perfect example of an unfilial daughter."[12]

In 1940, Shinoda realized her first solo show at the Ginza retail store Kyūkyodō. She exhibited calligraphy of her original short poems written in *kana* (Japanese syllabary), but they were harshly criticized by the calligraphy establishment (*shodan*) as "rootless" or lacking a respectable classical foundation. While these works have not survived, the calligraphy establishment's reaction was hardly surprising given its particular position as a bastion of traditionalist conservatism and, more generally, calligraphy's long-standing gendered division of styles. Although a number of female



Fig. 2. Shinoda Tōkō at work (1956). Photographed by Hans Namuth. Courtesy Shinoda family and Gifu Collection of Modern Arts, Seki, Gifu.



Fig. 3. Shinoda Tōkō at work (1956). Photographed by Hans Namuth. Courtesy Shinoda family and Gifu Collection of Modern Arts, Seki, Gifu.

calligraphers had attained fame since the prewar period, they predominantly practiced in *kana* calligraphy, which traditionalists considered to be a native and demure "feminine" mode of writing vis-à-vis the foreign and rugged "masculine" *mana* (Chinese characters) writing.[13] What was expected in *kana* calligraphy was a "feminine delicacy" grounded in the study of the *kana* diaries and poems produced by the Heian court women in the late tenth and eleventh centuries. Shinoda's unorthodox calligraphy, which neglected such established norms, coupled with the presentation of her own original poems, irritated the calligraphy establishment.

In the same period, the promulgation of the National Mobilization Law (*Kokka sōdōin hō*) in 1938, and the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941, forced calligraphers into a situation where they could only exhibit work that glorified the war effort. In addition, in 1941 the Cabinet endorsed an Outline for Establishing a Population Growth Policy (*Jinkō seisaku kakuritsu yōkō*), with the national slogan "bear more children and multiply" (*umeyo fuyaseyo*). As a result, young women were encouraged to produce more children who could then become soldiers and part of the labor force. In this climate, it became extremely difficult for Shinoda, an unmarried woman in her twenties, to exhibit her works freely, so that Shinoda evacuated to Aizu, Fukushima, in 1941, and her career was temporarily suspended until she recovered from tuberculosis in 1947.[14]

In the wake of Imperial Japan's defeat and surrender, Shinoda quickly developed her signature abstract style. In her memoir, the artist noted: "The air of freedom after the war suddenly nurtured the seeds of a desire within me to express the shape of my heart visually. I was suddenly emancipated from the oppressions of my twenties, and my brush moved like an outpour. Like a spur, [this new feeling] pushed me outside the constraints of characters, and it became my exciting job with limitless scope."[15] In one of her earliest surviving works, *Shika* (Flower Poem) (1948; Fig. 1), Shinoda transformed characters into almost illegible ideographs, a profundity discerned by blurring the calligraphic lines with diluted ink, a common technique in East Asian ink wash painting. Still, a graphic linearity persists and the script components can be read: *ichi* (弌, one) on the right, *kusa* (艸, grass) in the middle, and *hana* (華 flower) on the left.[16] Nonetheless, rather than expressing each character's semantic meaning, Shinoda's swift and sonorous yet restrained lines convey rhythm and the artist's motion. In *Isshun* (A Moment) (1950–1955; Pl. 11), Shinoda further adopted a painterly approach in which the blank space (*yohaku*) was pushed to the uttermost edge, evoking a poignant tension between ink and the unpainted ground. Moreover, she applied a wax-resist dyeing technique to calligraphy, an approach that fired the young Shinoda's passion for experimenting with new methods

and creating unique forms. Notwithstanding the vertical direction of the large scroll of paper suspended from the wall, the drawing *Seisō* (Elapse) (1954; Pl. 12) prevents the viewer from reading the surface from the top to bottom. Instead, Shinoda's upwardly gushing ink powerfully moves beyond orthography and gravity. These early works clearly demonstrate that Shinoda had already established her abstract style through the use of brushstrokes and ink splashes that employed a variety of expressions, even before she moved to New York.

While postwar Japan was undergoing an unprecedented transition from the military-led totalitarian regime to an American-style democracy, Shinoda was not the only calligrapher who celebrated the creative freedom and liberating sense of selfhood through calligraphy. Scholars have widely interpreted the flourishing of modernist calligraphy in postwar Japan as a movement initiated by predominantly male students and by Hidai Nankoku, the son of the calligraphy master Hidai Tenrai, who is often referred to as "the father of modern Japanese calligraphy."[17] As early as 1945, Nankoku had produced the highly abstract work, *Den–Variation of the Lightning*, which received both praise and censure. The Calligraphic Art Institute (*Shodō geijutsu-in*) was formed in 1947 and in its manifesto it declared, "We are standing up to scream for artistic freedom."[18] Many vanguard calligraphers, including Tenrai's students, Ueda Sōkyū and Ōsawa Gakyū, and Ueda's student, Morita Shiryū, joined this association as part of the founding committee or jury.[19] While Nankoku, Ueda, and Ōsawa pioneered an avant-garde calligraphy (*zen'ei sho*) that radically asserted creative freedom and edged toward abstraction, other students of Tenrai, such as Teshima Yūkei and Kaneko Ōtei, established a calligraphy of few characters (*shōjisū sho*) and a calligraphy of modern poetry (*kindai shibun sho*), respectively. In 1952, five calligraphers who had previously worked in Ueda's *Keiseikai* (Group of the Megrez Star)—Morita, Inoue Yūichi, Eguchi Sōgen, Nakamura Bokushi, and Sekiya Yoshimichi—formed a new avant-garde calligraphy group called *Bokujinkai* (People of the Ink). "In order to live freely as individuals, in order to make unrestricted and personal art, we need to liberate ourselves from bonds and contortions," the five young calligraphers wrote.[20] "[W]e announce our independence from any existing association."[21] In *Bokujinkai*, they claimed that "All of us are equal," rejecting conservative master-student hierarchies such as "authoritarianism."[22] "The calligraphic community is full of followers who blindly believe their 'masters,'" they suggested, "whereas truly free 'individuals' often remain unnoticed and forgotten."[23] This brief history tells us that while *kana* calligraphy had offered opportunities for women to become professionals, the innovative, modernist terrain of postwar Japanese calligraphy was in fact not open to them, framed as belonging to the leading male calligraphers who were the legitimate heirs of the master Tenrai. In that sense, Ōsawa's advice to Shinoda was not entirely off the mark: "As long as you remain in the calligraphic world, you could one day become a leading *kana* expert."[24]

Shinoda, who did not have a master to follow or reject, needed to develop a strategy to overcome her marginalized position within the calligraphic community without losing her artistic and personal independence. She was a member of the Calligraphic Art Institute from 1950 until 1956, and participated in the fifth *Mainichi Calligraphy Exhibition* (*Mainichi shodō-ten*) in 1953. These associations provided Shinoda with opportunities to exhibit her work regularly with leading male calligraphers, and gradually she garnered acclaim and financial security. Nevertheless, she was increasingly frustrated with the calligraphic associations' hierarchical structures, their prize systems, and the responsibility of mentoring students. Shinoda maintained a certain distance from this bureaucracy and refused full integration in their activities. In 1954, Shinoda had a critically successful solo show at the Ginza Matsuzakaya department store, displaying her abstract ink paintings in a space specially designed by Tange Kenzō, one of postwar Japan's foremost architects. Further, Shinoda was also commissioned to create large-scale ink murals, including for the Japan Pavilion designed by Tange at the four-hundredth anniversary of São Paulo in 1954, and the Japan Pavilion designed by Kenmochi Isamu at the Washington State Fourth International Trade Fair in 1955, among other venues. From the mid-1950s onward, Shinoda endeavored to expand the definition of calligraphy by collaborating with modernist architects. As her work was shown overseas, she was gradually known beyond the Japanese calligraphic community. In 1954, along with several leading male calligraphers, Shinoda was selected for a group show entitled *Japanese Calligraphy* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The following year, the Brussels-born CoBrA painter Pierre Alechinsky visited Japan and captured Shinoda, Ōsawa, Morita and Eguchi in his art film, *Calligraphie Japonaise*.[25] Importantly, Shinoda was not just a passive beneficiary of postwar internationalism and popular interest in Japanese culture in the Euro-American sphere. In fact, she actively engaged with the international art scene to expand her exhibition opportunities and audiences beyond Japan.

Shinoda's ambition is evident in her letter dated June 1956 to Arthur Drexler, the curator of the Museum of Modern Art, New York:

> I wish to have opportunities to exhibit some of my works at New York and other cities in America. In this connection, if you would kindly help me in any way, I should be greatly obliged. I will attach to this letter a copy of my personal history. For these ten years I have been recognized as a unique person in the calligraphy circle of Japan. Nobody except me has ever shown internationally the combined work of calligraphy and modern architecture [sic].[26]

In September 1956, with an invitation from the Swetzoff Gallery in Boston to hold a one-person exhibition, the 43-year-old Shinoda embarked on a solo journey to the US, even though, in the post-Occupation period, traveling abroad, especially for Japanese women, was still more fantasy than reality. The Boston show was positively reviewed by a local paper:

> In recent years, American artists, particularly on the West Coast, have turned to [East Asian calligraphy] for inspiration in their modern, abstract paintings, filling their canvases with hundreds of flowing lines to be enjoyed for themselves alone.... These paintings are usually painstaking in detail, the lines tightly interwoven and very fine.... Not so with Miss Shinoda, who, instead of closing in, expands. Great, broad, smooth-flowing brush strokes in off black are entwined with lovely, lighter than air brush strokes of slowly undulating or pronounced rhythm. Sometimes just three or four brush strokes comprise one panel.[27]

Although Shinoda only had a two-month visitor's visa, it was through the assistance of Okada Kenzō, a popular painter at the Betty Parsons Gallery, that she secured her first New York solo show at the Bertha Schaefer Gallery in January 1957. Shinoda continued to have solo exhibitions in major American and European cities—New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, Paris and Brussels. One newspaper writer reported: "Miss Shinoda, whose art is now on display here, is as Japanese as the flowered kimono she wears.... [Her] pictures ... suggest the strength within their tiny, charming creator."[28]

Given that Western audiences at the time held an Orientalist interest in the idea of the Asian woman artist herself, Shinoda's decision to continue wearing kimonos after moving to the US may be interpreted as a performative strategy.[29] In a series of photographs from 1956 by Hans Namuth, we can observe the dual image embraced by the artist in the US. Namuth presented Shinoda wearing a kimono, posing against her newly finished work and smiling modestly (Fig. 2), a portrait that was strikingly distinct from his images of Jackson Pollock and other white male American icons, often



Fig. 4. Shinoda Tōkō, *Discovery* (1962), ink and white paint on paper, 84 41/64" x 58 21/32". Photo: Courtesy The Tolman Collection.



Fig. 5. Shinoda Tōkō , *Minu katachi 9* (Unseen Form 9) (1961), ink on paper, 27 23/64" x 52 41/64". Gifu Collection of Modern Arts, Seki, Gifu.



Fig. 6 (left). Shinoda Tōkō, *Kizuku* (Building) (1962). Nichinan Cultural Center, Nichinan, Miyagi. Photograph reproduced in *Shinoda Tōkō ten* (Shinoda Tōkō Exhibition), ed. Seibu Museum of Art (Tokyo: Seibu Museum of Art, 1989), 70.

Fig. 7 (below). Shinoda Tōkō, *Musubu* (Tying) (1962). Nichinan Cultural Center, Nichinan, Miyagi. Photograph reproduced in *Shinoda Tōkō ten* (Shinoda Tōkō Exhibition), ed. Seibu Museum of Art (Tokyo: Seibu Museum of Art, 1989), 70.



presented brashly, with cigarette in hand or between the lips staring at the camera with furrowed brow.[30] Comparatively, Namuth captured Shinoda's bodily movements executing an abstract ink painting on paper: this time she directly confronts the paper on the wall, her mouth slightly open, the brush in her right hand blurred by its swift dexterity (Fig. 3). The photograph conveys the intensity of Shinoda's stylistic expressionism, comparable to Namuth's canonical pictures of Pollock at work in the 1950s. However, Shinoda presented herself dressed in a kimono as a quintessentially "traditional" Japanese figure, a play on *neo-Japonisme* that quickly garnered admiration from her international viewers and arguably facilitated her entrée into the New York art scene. Moreover, Shinoda purposefully situated her practice in a direct relationship with American gestural abstraction and sought a modern ink process that was emancipated from the shackles of limiting traditions and established calligraphic norms.

Shinoda returned to Japan in May 1958 and remained in the country, increasingly frustrated with the dry climate in the US, as it was not conducive for producing ink paintings. Upon returning home, the lexical constraints of calligraphy became even less pronounced for some works, whereas the gestural splashes of ink and *gofun* (white pigment made from seashells) continue to show formal and material resonances in dialogue with the New York School (Fig. 4). She had experimented with gestural abstraction even before traveling to the US, but more importantly, in Japan Shinoda establish her mature style, as evident in her ink on paper *Minu katachi 9* (Unseen Form 9) (1961; Fig. 5), for which wide, bold lines—such as blurs, hazes, and subtle but rich variations of tone within a black field—dominate the picture surface and express more clearly the nature of ink. At first glance, her stylistic affinity with American abstraction was eclipsed by a shift in the crystallization of ink expression: This transition could be understood through a socio-political lens as part of the so-called "reverse course" (*gyaku kōsu*) position, a reactionary and conservative return in Japanese politics that followed US containment policy. The reassertion of "traditional" Japanese values in both popular culture and school curricula became prominent. Eugenia Bogdanova-Kummer explains: "Losing their existential anxiety made avant-garde calligraphers, including the Bokujinkai artists, more risk-averse in their international ventures. From the late 1950s onwards, the People of the Ink were only interested in international events that would promote their art without challenging it or comparing it to abstract painting. In this way, the Bokujinkai gradually moved from reforming the art of calligraphy to

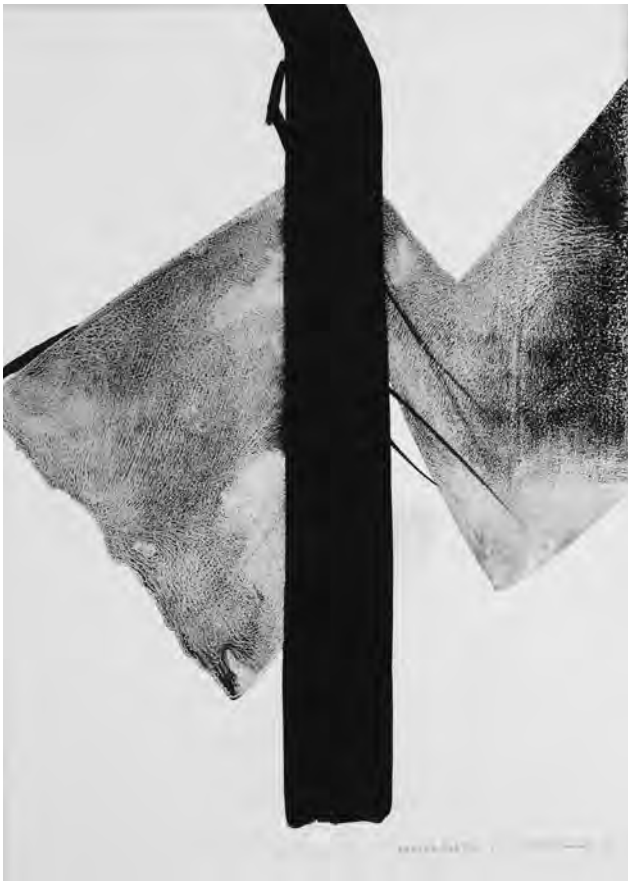


Fig. 8. Shinoda Tōkō, *Unseen Forms* (1968), lithograph on paper (edition 9/100), 14 1/4" x 20 1/2". Lehigh University Art Galleries, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

preserving and protecting its cultural uniqueness."[31] Shinoda's stylistic shift, however, does not necessarily need to be regarded as a reactionary turn. Instead, Shinoda's move toward simplified pure abstraction supports the artist's consistent intention to create new ink lines and forms. This ambition can be sensed most clearly in the monumental grand drape (Fig. 6) and the porcelain wall relief (Fig. 7), which were commissioned for the Tange-designed Nichinan Cultural Center in Miyagi in 1962. From 1960 onwards, Shinoda produced more than 1000 lithographs (ink applied on lithographic stone plates), while actively dismantling the established categories of art (Fig. 8).

In the art monthly *Bijutsu techō* (Art Notebook), published in April 1959, a critic noted that Shinoda is a "slender, tall beauty" but, despite appearances, she is a courageous, "unfeminine" (*onna datera*) woman.[32] Although "she may think she has a commitment to her art," her recent works as a result "have exuded coquettish pretensions and a feminine body odor to a much greater degree."[33] This kind of unfounded derogatory remark against women was not uncommon in Japan at the time, and many female artists eventually withdrew from the art world due to such patriarchal power structures. For Shinoda, crude misogynist comments hardly undermined her success because her work continued to be shown overseas. Shinoda consciously maintained her distance

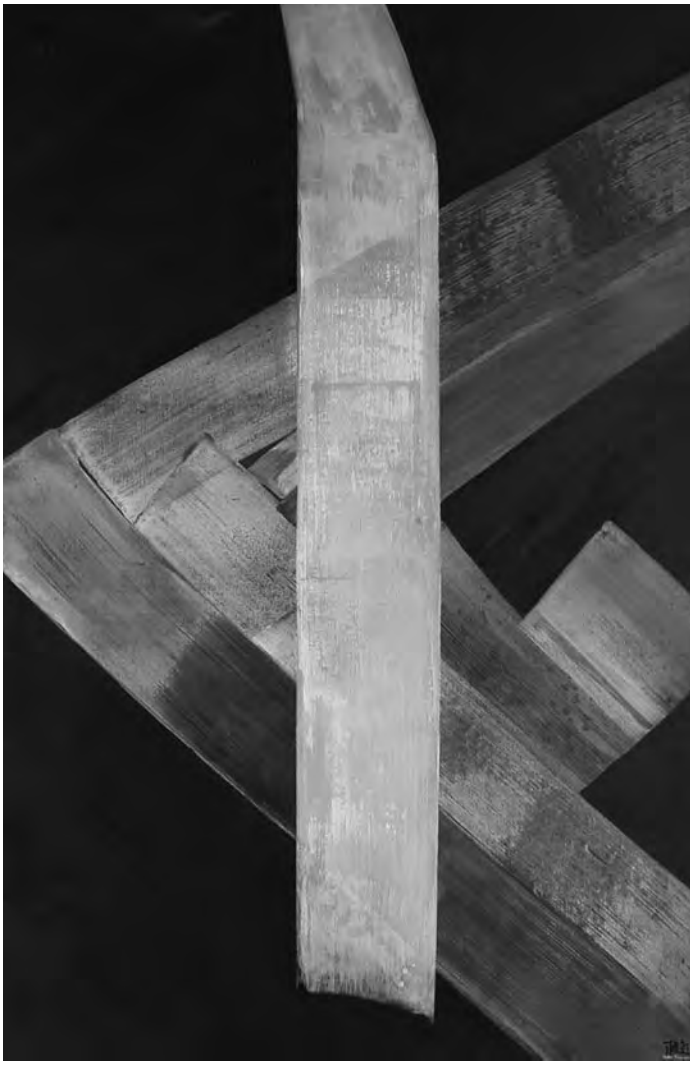


Fig. 9. Shinoda Tōkō, *Tōtsu yo* (In the Far Past) (c. 1964), ink and silver paint on paper, 107 7/8" x 71 17/64". The Museum of Fine Arts, Gifu City, Gifu.

from the patriarchal and hierarchical Japanese art world and, with her critical success outside her homeland, established herself as an acclaimed international artist.[34]

In 1971, John Canaday, the influential critic of the *New York Times*, visited Shinoda's show at the Betty Parsons Gallery and wrote:

> The first response of American eyes to Miss Shinoda's abstractions is always that here must be an exceptionally refined follower of the late Franz Kline, whose broad swathes of black paint are similarly cut across white fields. The resemblance is there but it is superficial and indirect, going back to shared ancestry—natural to Miss Shinoda, as a Japanese and adopted by Kline and other recent Americans who discovered that the principles of Oriental calligraphy could be revamped to serve the ends of modern abstract expression.... The great difference between Miss Shinoda's abstraction and that of such artists as Franz Kline is her absolute control of

her medium at different levels of intensity. Where the modern Americans put a premium upon immediacy to the point of semi-automatic improvisation and the cultivation of accident, Miss Shinoda works with a precision that would seem to be denied, but is rather invigorated, by the freshness with which each stroke of ink is applied. Her art identifies finesse with directness, delicacy with strength.[35]

Canaday's positive yet gendered accolades of "delicacy with strength" was noteworthy in itself, particularly because the comparison between Franz Kline and the Japanese avant-garde calligrapher underscores a highly politicized topic in the developing discourse on Abstract Expressionism.[36] Notoriously, while American art was gaining growing international stature and attention, critics such as Clement Greenberg and Frank O'Hara sought to clarify the originality and superiority of this new American cultural asset and dismissed Eastern influences on Abstract Expressionism, often with arrogance and condescension directed at Asian artists.[37] These dogmatic critics maintained an active silence on successful Asian artists shown at the Betty Parsons Gallery, including Shinoda and Okada. Canaday, on the other hand, acknowledged the influence of "Oriental" calligraphy on Abstract Expressionism and praised the "freshness," "directness," and "strength"—qualities that were often associated with American gestural painting—in Shinoda's abstract ink painting. Still, by foregrounding Shinoda's "precision" rooted in her calligraphic background, Canaday distinguished Shinoda's work from American painting, highlighting technique over original process, and left Kline's canonical status intact.

While Shinoda's monochrome ink abstractions particularly attracted attention on the international art scene, the artist was also seeking a new mode of expression. For example, in *Tōtsu yo* (In the Far Past) (c. 1964; Fig. 9), displayed at her first Betty Parsons Gallery show in 1965, ink completely forms the background and the effective use of silver paint—which changes easily over time, potentially making this piece more luminous at the time of its unveiling—brings a dramatic contrast of light and shade on the picture surface. From the mid-1960s, Shinoda's work gradually began to include a brighter palette including silver, gold, and vermilion (cinnabar), and through the late 1980s and 1990s, she pursued large-scale pieces with backgrounds of silver, gold, or platinum leaf (Pl. 13). In 2012, the 99-year-old (*hakuju* or "white age") Shinoda unveiled a work titled *Hyaku* (A Hundred) (Pl. 14). Over a gold-leaf background, her quietly powerful, nearly countless lines of white and silver paint shine upward like rays of light. As *Hyaku* clearly attests, Shinoda consistently endeavored until her death to create a significantly unique approach to her art.

Even though Shinoda did not have a "master" and was subsequently marginalized in the calligraphy community, she consistently strove to find ways to assert her originality. Shinoda came in contact with many leading male artists in Japan and the US, but she was not really interested in the historical destiny of Japanese calligraphy or the masculine nationalist struggles—or what Bert Winther-Tamaki has called an "artistic nationalism"—into which Okada, *Bokujinkai*, and many male artists lapsed.[38] Shinoda was a radical individualist who insisted on creating her own unique forms with ink that masterfully transcended the framework of calligraphy, ranging materially and spatially in abstract inks, architecture, lithography, and luminous large-scale paintings. Although she never cared about her position in art history, her oeuvre made a remarkable contribution to the development of postwar calligraphy and abstraction, even as it was an artistic journey guided by her own convictions. At the same time, her journey reflected the social situation faced by Japanese women through the twentieth century, from the Taishō period to the present, and what it meant for women to assert their originality and gain artistic and personal independence in the midst of a conservative social climate. The artist reminisced:

I am avoiding reality. I never had children, never became a mother, and never became a wife. I have avoided that way of life, and that is who I am. So, what I create is also unrealistic.… It is like something floating in the world.… It is true that I am unreal—what I think and what I create. But, as a work of art, it exists in reality. It does exist.[39]

With the minimal help of assistants and relatives, Shinoda remained single and lived independently her entire life. Her radical individualism was "unrealistic" at a time when it was considered a woman's duty to bear children and support a husband as well as the nation. Nonetheless, many successful Japanese female artists, like Shinoda, adopted a similar stance that individualism was, in fact, one of the artistic prerequisites that women could fulfill in order to survive as professionals in wartime and early postwar Japan. By radically distancing themselves from the hierarchal and patriarchal art establishment, particularly its value judgments (Shinoda refused to receive any prestigious prizes and honors), the family system, and even homeland, Shinoda and other Japanese women artists, such as Katsura, Migishi, and Kusama Yayoi (b. 1929), forged a new yet still critically masculine artistic persona—a serious, fiercely independent (and often deemed unfortunate) woman who sacrificed companionship and everything—to withstand comparison to the historical "genius" or "giants" predominantly associated with autonomous elite male artists.[40] The reinterpretation of Shinoda's art and career offers a counter-narrative to the male-dominated discourse and, at the same time, suggests that there are still many female (and non-binary) artists who await reexamination.[41] It is imperative for historians, curators, collectors, and students to reinterpret the artwork and stories of these women, who were segregated from "mainstream" Japanese art history and were still, as Shinoda put it, "floating in the world."[42] ●

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doctoral dissertation explores a transpacific artistic exchange between Japan and the US in the postwar period, focusing on three Japanese artists: Shinoda Tōkō, Okada Kenzō and Kawabata Minoru.

Notes

1. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Shinoda Tōkō, *ETV tokushū: sumi ni michibikare sumi ni madowasare–bijutsuka Shinoda Tōkō 102-sai* (ETV Special: Guided by Ink, Confounded by Ink–Artist Shinoda Tōkō at 102), aired May 30, 2015, on NHK Educational, Tokyo.
2. For female artists in postwar Japan, see Kokatsu Reiko, "Postwar 'Avant-Garde' Art Movements and Women Artists, 1950s–60s," trans. Nina Horisaki-Christens, Bunka-cho Art Platform Japan, https://artplatform.go.jp/resources/readings/202003, accessed January 5, 2022. First published in Kokatsu Reiko, "Sengo no 'zen'ei' geijitsu undō to josei ātisuto 1950–60 nendai," in *Zen'ei no josei 1950–1975* (Japanese Women Artists in Avant-Garde Movements, 1950–1975) (Utsunomiya: Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, 2005), 9–17.
3. Ann Gibson has argued that the Betty Parsons Gallery represented many women and LGBTQ+ artists, and that Parsons refused to champion only a narrowly defined version of Abstract Expressionism. Gibson, however, does not include Asian names, with the exception of Alfonso Ossorio (who was born in the Philippines and immigrated to the United States at a young age) despite the fact that artists such as Shinoda, Okada Kenzō, and Kawabata Minoru were important members of Parsons's artistic community for decades. Ann Gibson, "Lesbian Identity and the Politics of Representation in Betty Parsons's Gallery," in *Gay and Lesbian Studies in Art History*, ed. Whitney Davis (New York: Haworth Press, 1994), 245–270.
4. *Textual Abstraction Within Transnational Modernism*, online symposium organized by Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational and The Courtauld Institute of Art, November 6 and 13, 2020.
5. Shinoda Tōkō, *103-sai ni natte wakatta koto: jinsei wa hitori demo omoshiroi* (Things That I Figured Out About Life by 103: Life Is Fun Even When You Are Alone) (Tokyo: Gentōsha, 2015), 96–98.
6. Sawaragi Noi, "Ureteru hon: kore de oshimai Shinoda Tōkō (cho): togisumasareta kyokuhoku no kotoba" (Best-Selling Books: This is the End, Shinoda Tōkō [Author]: Sharpened Ultimate Words), *Asahi shinbun*, June 26, 2021.
7. Alicia Volk, "Katsura Yuki and the Japanese Avant-Garde," *Woman's Art Journal* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2003/Winter 2004): 3–9; Volk, "Art and Women's Liberation in a Newly Democratic Japan, with a Focus on Migishi Setsuko and Akamatsu Toshiko," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 57 (2020): 21–56; and Nakajima Izumi, *Anchi akushon: nihon sengo kaiga to josei gaka* (Anti-Action: Postwar Japanese Art and Women Artists) (Tokyo: Brücke, 2019). See also Hiroko Ikegami, review of *Anti-Action*, by Najajima, *caa.reviews*, http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/3775#.YdyvVS2ZNE7, accessed July 14, 2021.
8. In Taishō Japan, "after completing the six years of compulsory schooling, girls wishing to continue their education had two options. One was to enter a higher elementary school (*kōtō shogakkō*). These provided an additional two or three years of study and rendered the young women graduates eligible for admission to 'normal' schools (*shihan gakkō*), which offered a five-year teacher-training program. The other choice was enrollment in the more prestigious women's higher schools (*kōtō jogakkō*), where the period of study was between four and five years." See Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 25.
9. For *ryōsai kenbo*, see Shizuko Koyama, *Ryōsai Kenbo: The Educational Ideal of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' in Modern Japan*, trans. Stephen Filler (Boston: Brill, 2013).
10. Shinoda Tōkō, interview by Hashimoto Daijirō, *Waido! sukuranburu* (Wide! Scramble), aired October 14, 2015, TV Asahi, Tokyo.
11. Shinoda Tōkō, *Sono hi no sumi* (Ink of the Day) (Tokyo: Tōjusha, 1983), 39.
12. Ibid.
13. For gendered norms of writing in Japanese, see Tomiko Yoda, *Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the Constructions of Japanese Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
14. Shinoda contracted tuberculosis in spring 1946.
15. Shinoda, *Sono hi no sumi*, 26.
16. Over her career, Shinoda created several works titled *Issō ikka* (弌艸一華, meaning "One Grass, One Flower"). For example, a folding screen, *Issō ikka* (1955), is housed at the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University.
17. See Eugenia Bogdanova-Kummer, *Bokujinkai: Japanese Calligraphy and the Postwar Avant-Garde* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020); and Kurimoto Takayuki, *Bokkon: sho geijutsu ni okeru modanizumu no taidō* (Ink Writing: First Signs of Modernism in the Art of Calligraphy) (Tokyo: Shinwa-sha, 2016).
18. See the Calligraphic Art Institute's official website: http://lincs.co.jp/shogei/02_enkaku.php, accessed July 14, 2021.
19. Onchi Shun'yō, "Sho no hiroba: sōritsu kara hakone kaidan made–shoki no shodō geijutsu-in" (Calligraphy Plaza: From the Foundation to the Hakone Conference–Calligraphic Art Institute in the Early Days), *Shodō geijutsu* (Calligraphic Art) 550 (February 2007): 3.
20. Quoted and translated in Bogdanova-Kummer, *Bokujinkai*, 45.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 46.
23. Ibid., 45.
24. Quoted in Haryū Ichirō, "Sho no genkai wo koete sho no genten e" (Beyond the Limits of Calligraphy to the Roots of Calligraphy), in *Shinoda Tōkō: toki no katachi* (Shinoda Tōkō: Shape of Time), ed. Museum of Fine Arts, Gifu (Gifu: Museum of Fine Arts, 1992), 14.
25. For Alechinsky's film, see Eugenia Bogdanova-Kummer, "Ink Splashes on Camera: Calligraphy, Action Painting, and Mass Media in Postwar Japan," *Modernism/modernity* 27, no. 2 (April 2020): 299–321.
26. Quoted in *Toko*, ed. Miyazaki Kaori (Seki: Gifu Collection of Modern Arts Foundation, 2019), 54. Although Shinoda was among the first calligraphers to be involved in major architectural projects realized abroad, she was not the only calligrapher who explored three-dimensionality. In fact, many calligraphers developed interdisciplinary interests in postwar Japan. See Kenji Kajiya, "Modernized Differently: Avant-Garde Calligraphy and Art in Postwar Japan," paper, *M+ Matters: Postwar Abstraction in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan*, Hong Kong Arts Centre, June 28, 2014.
27. Edgar J. Driscoll Jr., "Japanese Artist's Show Is Strikingly Different," *Boston Sunday Globe*, October 14, 1956.
28. William D. Cole, "Top Japanese Painter Visits United States for First Time," *Santa Maria Times*, December 11, 1957.
29. Shinoda spent most of her life wearing a kimono. For Shinoda, "A kimono is something that covers and drapes a person's body. Western clothes are not meant to cover a person, but to contain a person.… I prefer to wear a kimono where the person is the master. Western clothes, in which the person has to enter into a certain form, are arrogant." Shinoda Tōkō, *105-sai, shinenai no mo komaru no yo* (It Is Also Troubling that I Cannot Die at 105) (Tokyo: Gentōsha bunko, 2019), 163–164.

30. Namuth's portrait of Shinoda is consistent with Gordon Parks's portraits of women Abstract Expressionists in submissive poses illustrated in "Women Artists in Ascendance: Young Group Reflects Lively Virtues of U.S. Painting," *Life* 42, no. 19 (May 13, 1957): 74–77.

31. Bogdanova-Kummer, *Bokujinkai*, 129.

32. "Jinbutsu tenbyō: Shinoda Tōkō" (Pointillism of Figures: Shinoda Tōkō), *Bijutsu techō* (Art Notebook) 156 (April 1959): 120.

33. Ibid.

34. For similar examples, see Midori Yoshimoto, *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

35. John Canaday, "Toko Shinoda Displays Precision in Sumi Paintings," *New York Times*, May 7, 1971.

36. See Bert Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 56–62; Eugenia Bogdanova-Kummer, "Contested Comparisons: Franz Kline and Japanese Calligraphy," in *In Focus: Meryon 1960–1 by Franz Kline*, ed. AnnMarie Perl (Tate Research Publication, 2017), https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/in-focus/meryon/japanese-calligraphy, accessed July 14, 2021.

37. In his essay "'American-Type' Painting," revised in 1958, Greenberg stressed that "not one of the original 'abstract expressionists'—least of all Kline—has felt more than a cursory interest in Oriental art. The sources of their art lie entirely in the West; what resemblances to Oriental modes may be found in it are an effect of convergence at the most, and of accident at the least." However, in its original 1955 version, Greenberg wrote: "Kline's unmistakable allusions to Chinese and Japanese calligraphy encouraged the cant, already started by [Mark] Tobey's example, about a general Oriental influence on American abstract painting. Yet none of the leading abstract expressionists except Kline has shown more than a cursory interest in Oriental art." In 1964, O'Hara defended Kline by disdaining Japanese artists: "Unlike Tobey, Kline did not find a deep spiritual affinity in Japanese art.... His influence on Japanese painters themselves has usually led them directly *away from* their own calligraphic tradition, and we know that one of their leading painters, the late Saburo Hasegawa, admired Kline precisely because his work seemed so uniquely American." For O'Hara, there was no doubt that Japanese artists could only be passively influenced by or derivative of Kline, although Kline and Japanese calligraphers had reciprocal influences. See Clement Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 220; Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," *Partisan Review* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1955): 188; Frank O'Hara, "Introduction and Interview," in *Franz Kline: A Retrospective Exhibition* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1964), 10. See also calligraphic drawings produced by Shinoda and Kline reproduced in *Chicago Review* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1958): 31–32, 65, 73.

38. Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations*, 5–9. For artistic nationalism and women artists in Japan, see Nakajima, *Anchi akushon*, 131–133.

39. Shinoda Tōkō, *ETV tokushū: sumi ni michibikare sumi ni madowasare–bijutsuka Shinoda Tōkō 102-sai* (ETV Special: Guided by Ink, Confounded by Ink–Artist Shinoda Tōkō at 102), aired May 30, 2015, on NHK Educational, Tokyo.

40. The art of Kusama, for example, is often exaggeratedly linked to her psychiatric disorders. See Izumi Nakajima, "Yayoi Kusama between Abstraction and Pathology," in *Psychoanalysis and the Image: Transdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Griselda Pollock (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 127–160.

41. For instance, another successful female calligrapher from the postwar period is Kagawa Shunran (1897–1985), a founding member of the Calligraphic Art Institute and the leader of *Keikōkai* , or "Group of Fragrant Scent." Shinoda and Kagawa had two-person shows at the Ginza Mitsukoshi department store in 1950, the Chūō kōron-sha gallery in 1954, and both were selected for the 1954 MoMA show.

42. Shinoda's use of the expression "floating in the world" (*uiteru yōna, konoyo ni*) can be interpreted in various ways. It suggests her freedom and independence in the art world. But, as the term "floating world" (*ukiyo*) has such connotations as a transitory or ephemeral reality, Shinoda's words also imply her dignity in being uninterested in the vicissitudes and vagaries of artistic trends and her fame in society.



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"A View of the Open Sky"

Gwen John's Early Modern Portraits and Interiors

By Colleen Denney

The Welsh-born artist Gwendolen John (1876–1939) spent the majority of her career in Paris in the early twentieth century after attending London's Slade School between 1895–98, alongside her brother, Augustus John, and colleagues who were equally intrigued as she was with interior scenes. Her first foray in Paris followed in 1898–99, when she enrolled with two of her women artist friends from the Slade, Gwen Salmond (1877–1958) and Ida Nettleship (1877–1907), at the Académie Carmen, under the tutelage of the American expatriate, James McNeill Whistler. They lived in Montparnasse, the artistic center of Paris at the turn of the twentieth century. John then returned to London from 1899–1903, living alone in various small lodgings. In 1903–04, with her friend Dorelia McNeill (1881–1969), she took an artist's sojourn on foot in France. Thereafter, she settled permanently as an independent artist in various rented Parisian rooms between 1904 and 1911; from 1911 onward, she retained her Parisian address for her art studio while living on the city's outskirts in the village of Meudon, where she eventually bought a permanent home with a studio. She would live there until the end of her life in 1939.

John is famous for creating portrayals of women. While her early work, on which this study focuses, centered on self-portraits, interiors, and depictions of women both nude and clothed, her work shifted around 1911 to a more subtle and subdued stylistic approach and subject; she created paintings of single women whom she observed up close, in muted tones, as if viewing them through a thin, opaque scrim. This mature body of work was partly based on her exposure to Whistler, who was more concerned with the formal possibilities of tonal treatment than he was with a British artistic narrative. In 1913 John converted to Roman Catholicism and took comfort in the company of the Dominican Sisters of Charity at Meudon, many of whom became subjects for her portraits. Coupled with her deep religiosity, John gained the artistic patronage and financial support of John Quinn, an American lawyer and collector, who purchased her artwork and created exposure for it in America between 1910 and his death in 1924. She was hence a well-known artist by the time of Quinn's death, having



Fig. 1. Gwen John. *Dorelia in a Black Dress* (c. 1903–04), oil on canvas, 28 3/4" x 19 1/4". Tate Gallery, London. Presented by the Trustees of the Duveen Paintings Fund 1949. Photo © Tate. N05910. CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported): https://www.tate.org.uk/art/arrtworks/john-dorelia-in-a-black-dress-n05910.



Fig. 2. Gwen John, *Self-Portrait* (1899-1900), oil on canvas, 24" x 14 7/8". © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Fig. 3. Gwen John, *Self-Portrait in a Red Blouse* (c. 1900–02), oil on canvas, 17 5/8" x 13 3/4". Tate Gallery, London. Purchased 1942. Photo © Tate. N05366. CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported): https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/john-self-portrait-n05366.

shown her work in both America and in Europe, including her interior view from his collection titled *Girl Reading at the Window* (1911) at the controversial Armory Show in 1913 in New York.[1] Her first solo exhibition in 1926 at London's New Chenil Gallery sealed her reputation as a successful and sought-after artist.

I became intrigued by John's story when I encountered her portrait of *Dorelia in a Black Dress* (c. 1903–04; Fig. 1) at the Tate Gallery, London, during my year-long travel fellowship in 2013–14.[2] John made this portrait of her friend, Dorelia McNeill, during their excursion to France, where she furthered her art practice. Sleeping rough, John and McNeill earned money by singing in the streets, and John also sketched portraits in exchange for meals. They were determined to get to Rome, but instead ended their travels in lodgings in Toulouse before moving to Paris in 1904, where John began to support her art career by becoming an artist's model. Such an undertaking seems bold, risky, and exciting, even today. Yet, traditionally, John scholars have treated her as an outsider and a recluse who did not engage in the world around her but rather retreated from it. This reading of her art career centers on these biographical details: John's supposed dependence on her brother, Augustus, and the ongoing affair she had during 1904–17 with the most prominent French artist of the time, Auguste Rodin.[3] This study argues that, to the contrary, John was a daring young woman whose independent spirit shines through in her early self-portraits that themselves echo the voice in her letters wherein she rejoices in the freedom of sea bathing naked, sleeping in the Luxembourg Gardens, and, just as pointed, in the great pleasure she takes in keeping her rooms in order.[4]

Some John scholars have read her interior views of her rooms in Paris, as well as her life as a single woman artist, as evidence of her loneliness. But there is a vast difference between being lonely and being alone. John *chose* to live alone. Sue Roe remarks, in this regard, that some John scholars have found it difficult "to imagine the life-style and frame of mind of a woman living alone."[5] Yet as John's friend, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, explained, an artist or writer must have "solitude" in order to work[6]: A time to rest from the constant need for negotiation that made up the modern existence, one John embraced between the time of her painting the two early self-portraits that open this essay, and soon after, when she



Fig. 4. Marie-Louise Catherine Breslau, *Portrait des amis* (Portrait of Friends) (1881), oil on canvas, 33 1/3" x 63". © MAH Musée d'art et d'histoire, Ville de Genève, Achat avec l'aide de la Fondation Diday, 1883. Inv. no 1883-0002; Photo: Bettina Jacot-Descombes.

joined with McNeill and headed for Rome on foot. It is this confident stance, argued here, that John created in the two early self-portraits that she would later maintain in her quiet interior scenes.

In the two early painted self-portraits, *Self-Portrait* (c. 1899–1900; Fig. 2 and Pl. 15) and *Self-Portrait in a Red Blouse* (c. 1900–02; Fig. 3 and Pl. 16), John finds herself on a precipice, leaving the late Victorian world behind to embrace a modern one.[7] These self-portraits and her early Parisian chamber interiors in rented garret apartments represent John's embodiment of the professional woman artist. Further, in these works, John challenges the status quo for women at the turn of the twentieth century, and determines portraiture as a site of resistance for women's modern identity formation. Her interiors reflect a cultural shift for women artists who—as revealed, for example in Virginia Woolf's essay, "A Room of One's Own"—began to have their own spaces in which to work. Woolf was able to achieve economic independence through a legacy from an aunt that offered her a limitless "view of the open sky," an expression and concept I use here to indicate the bottomless freedoms similarly open to John as a young artist in Paris.[8]

Hilary Taylor, in a study of women artists at the Slade during John's time there, wrote that "in the latter part of the 1890s, God distributed the fierceness and arrogance mainly amongst the men. A feminine temperament could not be compatible with an artistic one."[9] Arguably, this stance is contrary to the one that John presents in these two self-portraits: John embraces her own "temperament" while striding forward with her "artistic" self. For all her resistance, however, John was part of an artistic dialogue about the modern interior setting and home, which oftentimes underscored the instabilities that were the consequence of cultural change.[10] What role did John's early paintings play within such cultural change? By examining these early self-portraits and interiors and how they relate to her ability to have a room of her own, contrary to the Victorian womanhood construction of the "angel in the house," this essay offers a unique art historical investigation of the gendered dynamics at the core of her modern interiors. It is through John's early self-portraits that she creates the persona to resist the scandals associated with a woman who supported her art by working as a nude model and defied conventional attitudes toward a single woman living alone.

John was a professional woman navigating the options for an independent life in the metropolis at the turn of the twentieth century.[11] She consciously created a defiant, public persona during her early career, from 1899–1911, as a response to hegemonic, patriarchal structures. Her 1899–1900 *Self-Portrait* shows her as confident with brash posturing, hand on hip, and a leveling gaze. She portrays herself in the up-to-date clothing of the New Woman, with cinched waist, mutton sleeves and an added touch of panache in the large black bow at her throat. While harking back to the swagger portrait tradition of her predecessors, such as John Singer Sargent,[12] in her self-conscious presentation, she creates a unique image of herself as a woman who would also create works of art as markers of a modern urban identity.

Elsewhere I have argued for a "separate spheres imaginary" in response to the binary of the separate spheres dialogue that creates the "angel in the house," since the

modern woman walks the city rather than remain secluded in the domestic realm; she is always present in urban culture, if not totally free of danger.[13] To counter the work of some previous John scholars who criticize John for acting outside of the conventional woman's box through her free movement about the city, perceiving her early works as representative of her resulting loneliness,[14] it is more advantageous to continue a dialogue on the bored woman in nineteenth-century European interiors, which argues for the unraveling of the separate spheres in images of women at the window. The "angel in the house" of Victorian womanhood ideology, or *la femme au foyer* equivalent in France, began to disappear in the second half of the nineteenth century. Women started breaking free of their binds, with the benefit of laws that helped to protect their personal safety and economic independence, laws that gave rise to the New Woman, the very one, Alicia Foster argues, that John pictures herself to be in her early self-portraits.[15]

John created the *Self-Portrait* in London after she spent 1898–99 in Paris, where she, Nettleship, and Salmond had worked with Whistler at his Académie Carmen. Foster argues aptly that this *Self-Portrait* represents John's conscious effort to counter the portraits of male geniuses in her Slade circle with a woman artist's bold response. Instead, she followed the example Whistler set by using an intimate, small-scale format and employing tonal harmonies, subdued colors, and a plain background.[16] But John goes further: an indication of the collective, newfound freedom these young women artists found in Paris is also present in John's *Interior with Figures* (1898–99; Pl. 17), which pictures her two roommates looking at French fashion plates in a light-filled Parisian interior. Foster argues that while the young women were very in tune with Parisian fashions, they worked against them by creating a kind of artistic dress that mirrored their own practices. In their rooms they produced self-portraits, used each other as models for other works, and turned their living area into a combined domestic/studio space.[17] John's picture thus creates a new kind of interior that celebrates modern women's companionship and camaraderie, defiant and resistant to male presence. This Parisian moment is just one example of women finding a room of their own in which to work.

Virginia Woolf wrote her essay in 1928, decades after John and other women were already leading independent lives, which they literally clothed differently. They were part of a modern movement of women artists working in the urban capitals of Europe, including women from every continent who came to Paris to study art at newly independent ateliers, a phenomenon recorded in the 1879 guide for women artists working in London, Paris, and Rome written by Abigail May Alcott (sister of the author Louisa May Alcott).[18] John's interiors, like those in some other interiors by French women beginning in the 1880s, show a shift away from the separate spheres dialogue, which attest instead to women's sense of purpose and agency, as in Marie-Louise-Catherine Breslau's *Portrait des amis* (Portrait of Friends) (1881; Fig. 4). Breslau depicts herself painting roommates seated at a table, the central companion taking notes in a bound book and turning to share information with the other two. The scene is made into a comfortable domestic/studio setting by their comradely, engaged presence over cups of tea and by a little white dog who sits on the same table, suggestive of their household indulgences. John's work with Whistler and her deepening friendships in Paris inform our reading of her *Self-Portrait*, completed upon her return to England in 1899–1900, when she was living alone in London flats. Exhibited as her first public showing at the New English Art Club in 1900, it represents her particular vision of the young woman artist launching into the art world who, like Breslau, set herself up in independent quarters, free of family influence.

John likely completed *Self-Portrait in a Red Blouse* while visiting Ida Nettleship, newly married to her brother Augustus and living in Liverpool, where he had a teaching stint; while there she often acted as nursemaid to their first child, David. She created this second self-portrait while ensconced in a traditional domestic realm. It is, then, as a more experienced individual that John did the second self-portrait. Contemplating a journey out after living as an independent woman in urbane London, we sense a more mature self in the later portrait, not quite so brash as in the first. Instead, she faces us head on, confident, independent, controlled, with an intense gaze. Her choice of the red blouse announces her determination to set out on her own, thoughts of the impending travel perhaps evident in her set expression, her head somewhat tilted as if expecting us to challenge her. With both self-portraits she presented herself publicly, declaring her artistic self. She does not duplicate the popular stereotype of the New Woman as an avid cyclist or sportswoman wearing the new bloomer fashion that declared a woman to be eager to demonstrate her power and gain freedom. Rather, we meet a bold young woman showing herself in control of her own modern identity formation. Her brother called her "passionate, independent, and strong-willed," and said that "her apparent timidity and evasiveness disguised a lofty pride and an implacable will."[19] We sense she has unmasked herself here, the "disguise" as her true self—her "lofty pride" and strong-willed being shining through in these paintings. As a woman positioning herself as modern and professional, she found a middle ground, neither overly dressed and frivolous, nor frazzled and harassed. In this second self-portrait she balances her unflinching engagement with the viewer against her prim, buttoned up, and cameoed neckline, presenting herself as impeccable, impenetrable, and formidable. She submitted *Self-Portrait with Red Blouse* to an exhibit organized for the former students of the Slade School, and it was proclaimed by Augustus "a wonderful masterpiece."[20] Her former Slade professor, Frederick Brown, certainly agreed by purchasing the painting from the exhibit, attesting to his professorial pride in his student's success.[21] Perhaps on the strength of its triumph, John and Dorelia McNeill made their trip to France, where John remained and established herself in Paris by 1904. McNeill eventually returned to England to live with Augustus and Ida in an intimate *ménage à trois* that defied public morality.

A woman's independence and burgeoning economic power were revealed in John's solo living arrangements. John herself was no restless captive of the separate spheres ideology—that gender roles for men and women are innately determined.[22] Instead, her depictions of her Parisian rented rooms exist within the artistic dialogue she shared with her former peers at the Slade, whose works in the 1890s and after "represented an immediate response to everyday life, an attempt to isolate and capture some of the intensity of passing moments...."[23] The artists were "responding to rooms which re-enforced notions of identity, class, culture and taste."[24] John's two turn-of-the-century self-portraits and *Interior with Figures* attest to her already-formed individual voice well before she settled in Paris in 1904, one inflected by her pursuits of these "notions" alongside her fellow Slade peers.

Like the fictional Lorimer sisters, who set up a professional photography studio in their home in 1880s London in Amy Levy's 1888 novella, *The Romance of a Shop*, John not only had to be aware of current art trends, but also to traverse the modern city to do so. In Paris, from 1904 to 1911, she lived on the Left Bank in the Montparnasse neighborhood.[25] She navigated the city, purchasing art supplies and frames; obtaining employment with artists and visiting artists' studios, both as a colleague and life model; attending art openings; traveling to the suburbs to sketch; and submitting her work to exhibitions. Hence, we would be hard-pressed to position John's mood and intent in her early interiors, with their views out into a secluded courtyard or a building opposite, as comparable to that of the youngest Lorimer sister, Phyllis, who laments, after looking out the window at evening time, "It is a little dull, ain't it Gerty, to look at life from a top floor window?"[26] Gerty has a secret ocular pleasure about that view that asserts her own female gaze. She confesses to the reader a delightful love "for the gas-lit street, for the sight of the hurrying people, the lamps, the hansom cabs, flickering in and out of the yellow haze, like so many fire-flies...."[27]



Fig. 5. William Orpen, *Window in London Street* (1901), oil on canvas, 20 1/2" x 34 1/4". Photo: © National Gallery of Ireland. Presented, 1970. NGI.1978.

Phyllis's position at the window presages that of the woman in *Window in London Street* (1901; Fig. 5) by John's Slade colleague, the Irish-born artist William Orpen. The woman's "consciousness of the world outside" (mirroring that of Phyllis and her sister) is evident in how she presses her hand on the windowsill, anticipatory of the world beyond the interior space.[28] Such imagery, like that of John's self-portraits and early interiors, suggests a significant leap forward from Phyllis's mentality, however; and Orpen's woman is not bored, not "dull" like Phyllis, but rather expectant as in Gerty's own reverie of the promise of a city sight, and has moved from the state of inertia that Phyllis embodies to one of longing for action. As the title suggests, the focus has transferred from the interior to the street itself, and the commanding presence of the window and the vast space it occupies suggest the myriad possibilities now open to this woman of the Edwardian age, alongside her "artist-sister," John. In this regard, John's occupied interiors, *La Chambre sur la Cour* (1907-08; Pl. 18), *The Artist in her Room in Paris* (1908; Fig. 6), as well as *Woman Dressing* (1907; Fig. 7), avoid Susan David Bernstein's observation of Levy's scene about the potential for "dangerously reciprocal" gazing in such modern city structures.[29] Temma Balducci argues of Baron Haussmann's project of modernizing Paris, that by the 1870s it resulted in windows and balconies "affecting the dynamics of viewing and people watching."[30] Thus, the notions of privacy disappear in the modern city, because people are living on top of and opposite each other, on the close streets of Paris, along its large boulevards, or, as was often the case in John's apartments, across interior courtyards as in *La Chambre sur la Cour*. In this painting we see an open window into another—albeit empty—apartment opposite. While a young woman occupies John's interior, there is no one opposite for "reciprocal gazing"; rather, the young woman is focused instead on her sewing, her sole companion being the cat on the wicker chair opposite her. The only movement in the room is

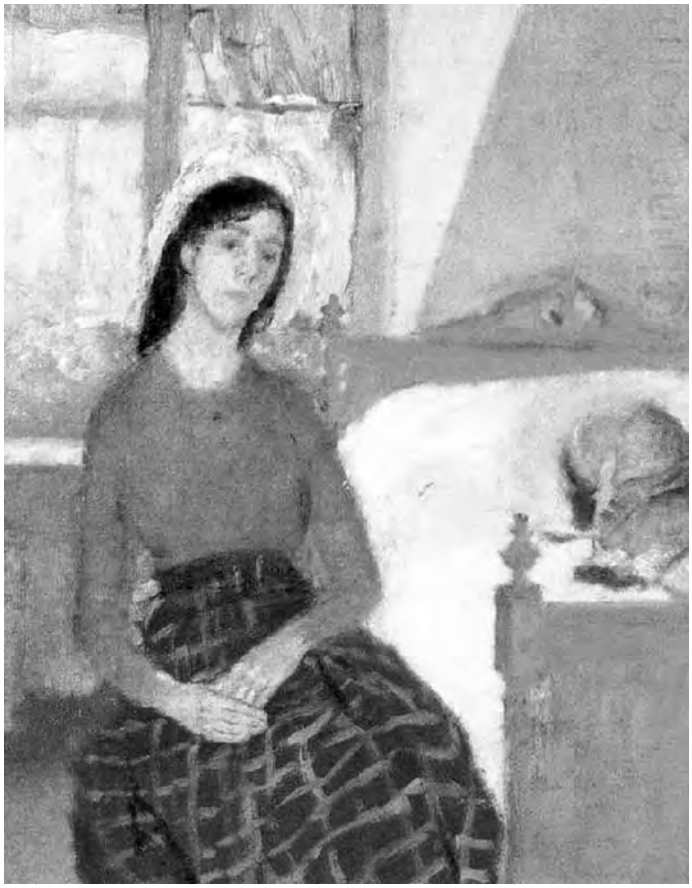


Fig. 6. Gwen John, *The Artist in Her Room in Paris* (c. 1908), oil on canvas, 10 3/4" x 9". Private Collection.



Fig. 7. Gwen John, *Woman Dressing* (c. 1907), gray wash and chinese white on medium, slightly textured, brown wove paper, 10 7/8" x 9 1/8". Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1993.30.94

through the suggestion of a slight breeze in the diaphanous white drapery that billows out slightly toward the wicker chair.

The quietness of this John interior is matched by that in *The Artist in her Room in Paris* in which John herself faces the viewer, her back to the window behind her. As in her earlier self-portraits, she is self-contained, her hands resting easily in her lap, her gaze expressing the same burrowing intensity. The window behind her is closed, but outside there is brilliant daylight. John sits in an attic room whose slanting wall hovers over her bed behind her; the view outside is of other Parisian rooftops. This painting expresses a rich cheerfulness through John's use of blonde coloring; it is the brightest room she would ever paint. It speaks not of poverty, loneliness or retreat, but rather of delight in the sun that fills her room and illuminates her singular, focused presence.

Similarly intimate and revealing of her rooms as positive, personal spaces is her wash drawing, *Woman Dressing*. The half-nude model turns away from the viewer, standing before a partially-lifted window shade that flaps slightly in the breeze from the open window panes that lean inward toward her. The light from the exterior is somewhat muted since the apartment looks out onto an inner courtyard with a shady tree.[31] Inspirational precedents to John's vision come perhaps from the women Impressionists, such as Berthe Morisot's *Woman at her Toilette* (1875-80; Fig. 8), in which the young woman similarly faces away from the viewer. However, in Morisot's work the woman sits and looks in a mirror, indicating her own vanity in perusing her elaborate dress and up-do, whereas John's woman is in the act of putting on a modest dress of muted colors, the light from the open window allowing her to see her way into her unassuming attire. While Morisot's work emulates flamboyant, eighteenth-century traditional tropes of a woman's vanity by placing her at the toilette, as in François Boucher's *Pompadour at Her Toilette* (1750: Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum), John's strikes a new chord in its simplicity and intimacy, devoid of such conceit. The contrast is further reflected in each artist's choice of medium and application: Morisot's luxuriously colorful, opulent surfaces, and rapid brushstrokes in her oil painting reinforce the woman's attention to her beauty, whereas the exquisite plainness of John's smaller wash drawing on textured brown paper augments the model's straightforward approach, devoid of the vain pleasures of looking. Further, John's interior contrasts with Gustave Caillebotte's *Interior, Woman at the Window* (1880) where we witness the "reciprocal gazing" of this woman with the woman looking out of her window across the boulevard. She engages with this other woman whose cosseted, protected bourgeois lifestyle mirrors her own. In many nineteenth-century paintings of interiors we find women isolated from each other, a notion marked in the Caillebotte by the rigid framing of the woman at the window



Fig. 8. Berthe Morisot, *Woman at her Toilette* (1875–80), oil on canvas, 23 3/4" x 31 5/8". Art Institute of Chicago, Stickney Fund, 1924.127.

through the formal elements of a balcony on the exterior and through the surrounding gauze curtains on the interior. A similarly unsettled attitude toward the bourgeois woman of leisure exists in Morisot's *The Artist's Sister at a Window (Portrait of Mme Pontillon* or *Young Woman at the Window)* (1869; Fig. 9). While conventionally depicting Morisot's elder sister, Edmé (Morisot) Pontillon (1839–1921), who was an artist before her marriage in 1869, sitting idly before a view of her new seaside home of Lorient, with nothing to occupy her but her fan, it anticipates the shift to independence that John achieves in *Woman Dressing*. As Anne Higonnet suggests, "Behind Morisot's women's reserve we sense a life all the more intense because it is withheld."[32] Morisot herself lived in a larger sphere than that she creates for her sister in this painting, one which her sister envied when she wrote in her letters of Berthe's lively and connected social world.[33]

John's interiors, like those of Breslau, Orpen, Morisot and Caillebotte, attest to her awareness of a painting tradition devoted to women's limited domestic spheres. She seeks, instead, "a view of the open sky" in tune with the possibilities of the New Woman's enlarged realm. She embodies Norma Broude and Mary Garrard's call to recognize "a steady and ongoing participation of women in culture, as active agents at every level ... and as a conceptual force that *threatened a fragile and sometimes desperate masculine hegemony*" [italics mine].[34] Hence, John defies what Julie Johnson sees as an abstruseness in her interiors that reflect her own uncertainty about the modern world. Johnson argues that the "curious and elusive nature of John's early images of interiors are connected to the complex ways in which she traversed professional and urban life as a woman artist in *fin-de-siècle* Paris, especially the trials



Fig. 9. Berthe Morisot, *The Artist's Sister at a Window (Portrait of Mme Pontillon* or *Young Woman at the Window)* (1869), oil on canvas, 21 9/16" x 19 1/4". National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection. 1970.17.47.



Fig. 10. Gwen John, *A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris (with Open Window)* (1907–09), oil on canvas on board, 12 1/4" x 9 3/4". National Museums and Galleries of Wales. 1995; Purchase; with assistance of Derek Williams Trust / Estate of Mrs J. Green, NMWA3397.

and ambiguities of this journey."[35] Lauren Elkin also seeks to deny John her independent, unvarying stance when she asserts that John calls "on the motif of the window as both demarcation and threshold, a transparent barrier which turns simultaneously outward and inwards, and, in so doing, in Emily Dalgarno's terms, 'represents the limits of the visible world.'"[36] However, John's *La Chambre sur la Cour*, while only including one figure, suggests the pleasures of a domestic space, similar to Breslau's, rather than its limits, in its inclusion of her cat. Her image proposes a cozy, self-determining existence, rather than the oppressive and tense interior both Johnson and Elkin suggest, one that Janet Wolff also seems to determine is the case for John as a young woman artist in Paris when she says "there was little room for maneuver in the face of a gender-divided culture."[37] John, like Breslau and Morisot, found ways around the system, ones which do not exist, however, for the woman in Caillebotte's painting who is turned away from her husband. While he is close to her physically, he remains transported to the world beyond the window through his perusal of the newspaper. As Susan Sidlauskas has argued, many interiors by male artists stage such anxieties and alienation between their painted subjects,[38] a mood not at all present in John's quiet, meditative, and calming inner spaces, inhabited only by a single woman model, her women friends, or herself.

In *The Artist in her Room in Paris*, John reveals her room as both living space and studio, as with the Breslau, a situation that did not change for John until 1911, when she moved to Meudon, while maintaining her Paris apartment at 6 rue de l'Ouest as her studio. The painting expresses Tamar Garb's observation about women artists' shift to professionalism, one John establishes in the two early self-portraits: "Women's traditional role, as objects to be adorned, surfaces to be painted and embellished, [as] a construction of femininity was incompatible with the image of forthright professionals taking the brush into their own hands."[39]

Nonetheless, like Orpen's woman, John participates in this vision of modernity: she is a participant in, rather than a recipient of, the gaze. As Balducci asserts, "everyone was looking."[40] John's interiors are not repressive spaces suggestive of a woman's longing for something to happen, as the Caillebotte interior suggests, but rather indicative of her own freedom as a modern woman to make her own way, a stance she takes with great cognizance in her two early self-portraits. In general, John's interiors, like the early self-portraits, are ripe with promise, quiet spaces above the modern city's bustle, places apart, to think and paint. This observation certainly applies to John's two very similar interiors, *A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris* (1907–09; Pl. 19), and *A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris (with Open Window)* (1907–09; Fig. 10), which reveal a soft, early morning light. Both contain evidence of the artist's presence, such as the coat resting on the wicker chair near the window in *A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris*, which also suggests a recent trip beyond the frame of her window. In the *Open Window* version a soft summer light illuminates a building opposite, while in the interior with the closed window, a gauzy, transparent white curtain somewhat obscures the view out. John's use of light grey tones to indicate a rainy day beyond the window is verified by the coat and umbrella resting on the wicker chair. While representing the same interior, she offers differing moods, the one with open window inviting, the other somewhat closed off. Both are as revelatory as the self-portraits, through the intimacy of this space and what it tells us of John herself: a city wanderer, a modern woman, taking charge of her destiny. The interior with open window suggests her engagement with the modern city, the open window still evoking the Romantic idea of a longing for nature,[41] while the interior with closed window suggests her room as an escape. She tells us that her room can be both, that she is a confident woman, celebrating her own space and embracing its privacy as well as the access to public spaces it can offer. Despite the lack of a figurative presence, these two interiors are not empty, sad spaces. Inhabited or not, John creates both a literal and figurative celebration of a "view of the open sky." Similarly, in *The Artist in her Room in Paris*, the interior is suffused with bright, early morning light, a light full of joy.

In her study of John's interiors, Alicia Foster argues that they are in sympathy with the works of some of her former Slade colleagues who formed the Camden Town group. Walter Sickert, for example, painted "simple, often drab, domestic interiors,"[42] although his *Ennui* (Boredom) of 1917–18 (Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford), as just one example of many, has a strong anxious edge that is missing from John's interiors. Sickert's female subject appears bored, as reflected both in the title and in her slumped body, as she leans against a chest of drawers in the background while a man in the foreground sits at a table, ignoring her while smoking a cigar. It is astonishingly like Caillebotte's *Interior, Woman at the Window*, only more stifling, with no view out. It is also more explicit, since the woman stands next to a large glass cloche that encases a collection of stuffed birds. The caged bird trope, redolent of the entrapped Victorian woman, is still relevant to Sickert's woman, while John has freed both herself and her women subjects of such oppressive symbolism.

While such comparisons establish John in dialogue with her contemporaries and predecessors, she takes a unique approach: her scenes reflect her independence and her celebration of it, as with Breslau, rather than the tensions of married life portrayed in the interiors by Caillebotte, Morisot, and Sickert. John's interiors are understated, creating a space for a modern, professional woman to pursue her engagement with the urban world as a single woman, alone but not lonely. While my original encounter with John's portrait, *Dorelia in a Black Dress* (see Fig. 1), suggested that the artist was a risk-taker, it is John's interiors that reveal the modern, resistant self introduced in the early self-portraits, despite Wolff's conclusion for John, mentioned earlier, that "there was little room for maneuver in the face of a gender-divided culture."[43] Her actions were a purposeful retreat of an artist whose goal was to be quiet and safe in her own space so that she could work, undisturbed. Neither of the early self-portraits suggests a woman who is a social butterfly despite the brio swagger of the first one and the effort she makes with her neat blouse and shawl in the second one; both assert a woman artist who meets the world on her own terms. It is therefore fitting that her *Self-*

Portrait now resides in London's National Portrait Gallery. As Joanne Woodall attests, for such personages "the right to representation remained exclusive in that responsibility for change was attributed to the inspired ideas of exceptional individuals…."[44] John's early self-portraits established what became for her a lifelong path of independence, one only possible because of her resistance to convention. ●

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Notes

1. John's *Girl Reading at the Window* (1911), now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, was no. 58 at The Armory Show of the Sixty-Ninth Regiment.
2. I wish to thank the College of Arts and Sciences, University of Wyoming, for granting me the Seibold Fellowship, 2013-14, which made this travel possible.
3. See Deborah Cherry and Jane Beckett's essay, "Gwendolen Mary John (1876–1939)," *Art History* 11 (September 1988): 453-63; they are the first feminist scholars to question this narrow view of John by reviewing the work of previous scholars who have created this rather limited identity. See, for example, Mary Taubman, *Gwen John* (London: Scolar Press, 1985); and Cecily Langdale and David Fraser Jenkins, *Gwen John: An Interior Life* (London: Phaidon and Barbican Art Gallery, 1988). For John's correspondence with Rodin between 1904 and 1916, housed at the Musée Rodin, see Susan Chitty, *Gwen John* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1987).
4. See Letter to Michel Salaman, spring 1899, NLW MS 14930C, ff. 20-1; Letter to Ursula Tyrwhitt, NLA MS 21468D, ff. 13-14; and Letter to Charles McEvoy, NLW MS 23874C, ff. 89-90; in *Gwen John: Letters and Notebooks: Selected from the Gwen John papers at the National Library of Wales*, ed. Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan (London: Tate Publishing in association with The National Library of Wales, 2004).
5. Sue Roe, *Gwen John: A Painter's Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), xix.
6. Discussed in Janet Wolff, "The Artist and the *Flâneur:* Rodin, Rilke and Gwen John in Paris," in *Resident Alien: Feminist Cultural Criticism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995).
7. See Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *From Victorian to Modern: Innovation and Tradition in the Work of Gwen John, Vanessa Bell and Laura Knight* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2006).
8. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929; repr. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957).
9. Hilary Taylor, "'If a Young Painter Be Not Fierce and Arrogant God … Help Him': Some Women Art Students at the Slade, c. 1895-9," *Art History* 9 (June 1986): 243.
10. Susan Sidlauskas, "Psyche and Sympathy: Staging Interiority in the Early Modern Home," in *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, ed. Christopher Reed (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 65, 80.
11. Cherry and Beckett, "Gwendolen Mary John," 456; and Wolff, "The Artist and the *Flâneur*," 88–114.
12. See Alicia Foster, "Gwen John's *Self-Portrait*: art, identity and women students at the Slade School," in *English Art 1860–1914: Modern Artists and Identity*, ed. David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 168–79.
13. See Colleen Denney, *The Suffrage Photography of Lena Connell: Creating a Cult of Great Women Leaders in Britain, 1908–1914* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press, 2021).
14. For a summary of this scholarship see Cherry and Beckett, "Gwendolen Mary John."
15. The rise of the New Woman was aided by agitation for women's rights in three arenas: access to higher education, the professions, and the vote. In England, married women, as of 1882, could keep their own earnings and property through the Married Women's Property Act; divorce, while still expensive by the 1880s, became more prevalent since women could hold their own property and earnings through the 1882 Act, giving them considerable autonomy. The situation was not as advanced in France, however; the French establishment viewed the New Woman as an unwelcome import from England and America. See Colleen Denney, "*Les Femmes Ennuyées*: Bored Women in European Culture; Presaging a Call to Action," in *The Visual Culture of Women's Activism in London, Paris and Beyond* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2018), 17–63. See also Alicia Foster, *Gwen John* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; London: Tate Gallery, 1999), 16; and Foster, "Gwen John's *Self-Portrait*."
16. Foster, "Gwen John's *Self-Portrait*," 177, 179.
17. Alicia Foster, "She Shopped at the *Bon Marché*," *Women's Art Magazine* 65 (July-August 1995): 14.
18. Abigail May Alcott, Mrs. Nieriker, *Studying Art Abroad, and How to Do It* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1879; repr. London: Forgotten Books, 2012). Of the independent ateliers, the Académie Julian was most popular with women. See *Overcoming All Obstacles: The Women of the Académie Julian*, ed. Gabriel P. Weisberg and Jane R. Becker (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999); and Laurence Madeline et al., *Women Artists in Paris, 1850-1900* (New York: American Federation of Arts; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017).
19. Augustus John, *Chiaroscuro: Fragment of Autobiography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1954), n.p.
20. See Jennifer Higgie, *The Mirror and the Palette: Rebellion, Revolution, Resilience; Five Hundred Years of Women's Self Portraits* (London: Pegasus Books, 2021), 162.
21. Brown later included John's self-portrait in the background of his own *Self-Portrait* of 1920 (Ferens Art Gallery, Hull, England). John's *Self-Portrait in Red Blouse* was also shown in the New English Art Club Retrospective Exhibition, January-February 1925.
22. See Denney, "Bored Women."
23. Taylor, "If a Young Painter Be Not Fierce and Arrogant," 238.
24. Kenneth McConkey, "New English *Intimisme*: The Painting of the Edwardian Interior," in *The Edwardians: Secrets and Desires,* ed. Anne Gray (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 90.
25. In 1904 she lived at 19 Blvd Edgar Quinet; in 1906 at 7 rue Saint-Placide; by 1907 at 87 rue du Cherche-Midi; and by 1909 at 6 rue de l'Ouest, keeping it as her Paris studio when she moved her residence to Meudon in 1911.
26. Amy Levy, *The Romance of a Shop* (1888), ed. Susan David Bernstein (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2006), 106.
27. Ibid., 105.
28. McConkey, "New English *Intimisme*, 93.
29. Susan David Bernstein, ed., "Introduction," to Levy, *The Romance of a Shop*, 38–39.

30. Temma Balducci, *Gender, Space, and the Gaze in Post-Haussmann Visual Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 10.
31. Roe, *Gwen John*, 85.
32. Anne Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot's Images of Women* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 116.
33. See Kathleen Adler and Tamar Garb, introduction to *Berthe Morisot: The Correspondence with her family and her friends: Manet, Puvis de Chavannes, Degas, Monet, Renoir and Mallarmé*, ed. Denis Rouart, trans. Betty W. Hubbard (New York: Moyer Bell, 1987), 9.
34. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, introduction to *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Postmodernism*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 22.
35. Julie Johnson, "A Contested City: Gwen John, Suzanne Valadon, and Women Artists in *Fin-de-Siécle* Paris," in *City Limits: Perspectives on the Historical European City*, ed. Glen Clark, Judith Owens, and Greg T. Smith (McGill: Queen's University Press, 2010), 236.
36. Lauren Elkin, "The Room and the Street: Gwen John's and Jean Rhys's Insider/Outsider Modernism," *Women: A Cultural Review* 27 (2016): 249; Emily Delgardo, *Virginia Woolf and the Visible World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 84.
37. Janet Wolff, "The Artist and the *Flâneur*," 108.
38. Sidlauskas, "Psyche and Sympathy."
39. Tamar Garb, "Portraiture and the New Woman," in *The Body in Time* (Seattle: Spencer Museum of Art and University of Washington Press, 2008), 66.
40. Balducci, *Gender, Space and the Gaze,* 10.
41. See Lorenz Eitner, "The Open Window and the Storm-Tossed Boat: An Essay in the Iconography of Romanticism," *Art Bulletin* 37 (Dec. 1955): 281–90.
42. Foster, *Gwen John*, 45.
43. Wolff, "The Artist and the *Flâneur*," 108.
44. Joanne Woodall, "Introduction: facing the subject," in *Portraiture*, ed. Woodall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 5.



JUNCTURES IN WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP: THE ARTS
Judith K. Brodsky and Ferris Olin



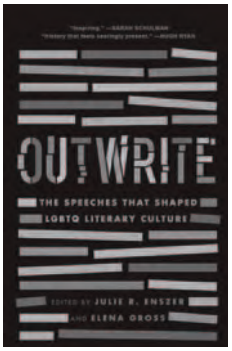
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D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's Generative Influences in Art, Design, and Architecture: From Forces to Forms

Edited by Ellen K. Levy and Charissa N. Terranova
Bloomsbury, 2021

Reviewed by Christine Filippone

"D'Arcy Thompson is an essential influence," declared artist Carolee Schneemann (1939–2019) in a 2002 interview.[1] The influence of Scottish zoologist D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's text *On Growth and Form* (1917, 2nd ed. 1942) on art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is the premise of the magisterial new book *D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's Generative Influences in Art, Design, and Architecture,* co-edited by artist Ellen K. Levy and art historian Charissa N. Terranova, both expert scholars in the intersection of art and biology. Thompson believed that dynamic physical and chemical processes give rise to the morphology (form and structure) of organic and inorganic matter. Thompson's work developed in reaction against a simplistic view of evolution which, he felt, underemphasized the role of physics and mechanics as determinants of the morphology of living organisms. He believed his thesis to be in opposition to the evolutionary model, holding instead that physical forces are inescapable and unchanging over time. Contrary to Darwin, who believed that the morphology of organisms results from heritable, biological traits that are selected for over time, Thompson believed that the process was more complex, that "evolution involved physical forces acting on form" (2). The principles put forth in *On Growth and Form*, this volume shows, have inspired myriad artists, including Schneemann, who in the tradition of her Surrealist and Abstract Expressionist forebears sought correspondences of abstract pattern and form found in the collective unconscious. Schneemann's early 1960s MFA thesis, for example, traced the morphology of serpentine and circular patterns in the traditions of prior cultures, "an early unconscious approach to formal and mythic systems that would continue to encode my work," she explained in 1993.[2]

Thompson argued that morphogenesis was the result of physical forces, not genetics. The field of genetics was still somewhat nascent in 1917, but even by 1942, when his second edition was published, Thompson still believed that genes and their behaviors were themselves subject to physical forces. Therefore, while Thompson did not directly address the role of genetics in his tome, his interdisciplinary approach, Levy and Terranova argue, had far-ranging effects on the contemporary scientific understanding of the relationship between genetics and culture in the formation of living organisms. In validation of the interdisciplinary nature of Thompson's text, the editors convincingly argue in favor of "a gene-culture feedback loop: that culture and genes reciprocally influence each other to varying degrees." Seeking to characterize the complexity of Thompson's appeal for artists, the editors refer to the German idealism of Goethe: "This rhythm of form and flow, form and flow, is aesthetic for artist and scientist alike" (9). Schneemann, like Thompson, held a relational view of self and nature, whereby the self is shaped by the physical forces of nature, a concept central to her "kinetic theater" performances. Schneemann contributed an essay to this volume, which must have been written shortly before her death.

In their preface, Levy and Terranova present Thompson's thesis that living organisms take form from dynamic physical forces and create complex systems, which themselves remain in flux. They explain that Thompson's processual view is in part a rebuttal of Darwin's theory of natural selection, which the zoologist saw as reductive, even mechanistic, because it unduly eliminates the role of the organism in the evolutionary process—it robs the living being of its agency. Testament to Thompson's view, though it largely escaped his notice, is the set of processes known as epigenetics, whereby behavior and environment affect genetic expression. By foregrounding the way physical processes act on organic bodies, the editors argue, Thompson presciently anticipated more recent philosophical materialism, including the material feminisms of, for example, Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, and Karen Barad, who maintain that consciousness is formed from and through the body. The editors note that Thompson was also forward-thinking in his treatment of women, supporting women scientists like Dorothy Wrinch, who would go on to develop crystallography into a science of structure. Later in the volume, mathematician Marjorie Seneschal explores the friendship between Thompson and Wrinch.

Levy and Terranova ably situate Thompson within hybrid practices of art, science, and design by twentieth- and twenty-first-century artists, intentionally framing this approach as "a counterforce to the anti-science movement" (xxii). By "anti-science," the editors mean in part the line of thinking within the humanities, and particularly in feminist theory, that identifies and critiques inherited science as a product of patriarchy. This strikes me as an overly broad definition of the many nuanced early feminist critiques of science, including that of pioneering physicist and philosopher Evelyn Fox Keller, one of the book's distinguished authors. I appreciate the editors' efforts to distinguish a carte-blanche dismissal of hereditary biology (and its eugenic offspring) by early feminists, but I fear we do a disservice to the work of feminist forebears by, in the name of greater complexity, throwing the baby—important, paradigm-altering feminist theory—out with the bathwater—the critiques of inherited science as a product of patriarchy writ large. Contributors to the volume are impressively interdisciplinary. They include scientists, historians of art and architecture, and historians and philosophers of science and technology, among them Fox Keller; complex systems researcher Stephen Wolfram; art historians Brandon Taylor and Matthew Jarron; architectural historian Hadas A.



Fig. 1. Carolee Schneemann, photo collage from *Fresh Blood—A Dream Morphology* performances (1981–86), 12" x 10". Carolee Schneemann Foundation.

Steiner; and architects Philip Beesley, Caroline O'Donnell, and Sarah Bonnemaison. The final chapter contains brief explorations of Thompson's work by a range of artists, architects, and hybrid art-science practitioners, including Meredith Tromble, Todd Siler, and Levy herself, as well as former *Nature* editor Philip Ball, historian of science and design Henry Petroski, and scientists Justine Kupferman and Bart Kahr. Most of the book's fifteen color plates feature artists' works that respond to Thompson, such as Schneemann's *Fresh Blood—A Dream Morphology* (1981–86, Fig. 1); *Noosphere* (2018), by Philip Beesley's Living Architecture Systems; Janet Echelman's *1.8* (2016); and Todd Siler's *Metaphorming Four Building Blocks of the NanoWorld* (2011–12).

Among the heirs to Thompson's legacy in the fine arts, the editors explain, have been artists and architects addressing complex systems through generative art, bioart, and bioarchitecture, the last defined as habitable space made from living components (6). These artists, including many from the Weimar Bauhaus, engaged in or currently practice formmaking, which "entails a process in which the ways works are made and what they are made of count as much as what they represent" (4). For example, Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes embody "tensional integrity" or "tensegrity," terms Fuller coined to convey the structural principle whereby isolated components under compression determine the form that they also support. The Brutalist architecture of Louis Kahn, with its textural surfaces and sometimes pulsing volumes, was informed by readings of *On Growth and Form*, a mainstay for the architecture program at the University of Pennsylvania, where Kahn taught, and in other architectural schools.

Further testament to the interdisciplinarity of *Thompson's Generative Influences* is its thorough and capacious timeline condensing "the long history of evolutionary theory" (6) and situating Thompson within the history of science and culture. The timeline joins philosophical with biological theories and approaches, from idealism, positivism, rationalism, phenomenology, cybernetics, systems theory, second-order cybernetics, and New Feminist materialisms to Gregor Mendel, Francis Galton, Darwin, neo-Lamarckism, and epigenetics, as well as art movements and styles: Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Surrealism, Bauhaus, Bioart, Biodesign, and New Media. Surprisingly, Ludwig von Bertalanffy's early twentieth-century systems biology is absent from the timeline, although his highly influential *General System Theory* (1968) is included.

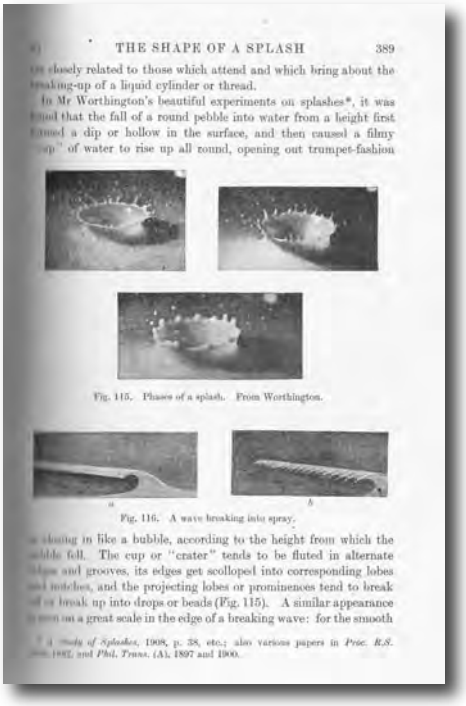
With important implications for feminism, Fox Keller asks what is at stake in a purely genetic understanding of morphology, which Thompson rejected. Acknowledging the necessary role of physical forces that act on genes in her essay "Physics in Biology—Has D'Arcy Thompson Been Vindicated?," she explains that Thompson sought the similarities between the organic and inorganic rather than focusing on the differences. She notes that despite the twenty-five-year span between the two editions of Thompson's book (1917 and 1942), during which time enormous discoveries in genetics took place, Thompson still felt compelled to leave genetics to one side. Fox Keller quotes the zoologist's warning to his reader: "To look on the hereditary or evolutionary factor as the guiding principle in morphology is to give that science a one-sided and fallacious simplicity" (37).[3] She argues that Thompson's emphasis on forces might at last be vindicated now that molecular biology has focused on the role of mechanics (physical forces) in gene expression. Feminism is implicated, I suggest, because an understanding of morphology reducible to the causal gene is concomitant with essentialism, the philosophical belief that we are exclusively the product of divine will or of nature (i.e., of the gene). As many feminist theorists have shown, essentialist beliefs have proven an incommutable restraint for women, historically considered an underclass with lesser capabilities. Tracing the historical debates throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries on whether biology or mechanics are causal in the shaping of an organism, Fox Keller concludes that the biological and mechanical models are in fact, according to molecular and mathematical biology, irrevocably intertwined.

Among the most compelling chapters in the book are those that

demonstrate Thompson's influence, and the influence of science generally, on the members of the mid-twentieth-century British Independent Group, which sought to collapse the disciplinary boundaries between art and popular culture, including artists Richard Hamilton, Nigel Henderson, and Eduardo Paolozzi. Terranova's essay "Exhibition as Extended Organism: The Evolutionary Agency of Richard Hamilton's Growth and Form" investigates Hamilton's 1951 staging of the exhibition *Growth and Form*, an homage to Thompson's book, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. Terranova notes that the architect Le Corbusier gave the introductory speech at the exhibition opening, exclaiming, "This exhibition is devoted to the description of life microbiologically, micromineralogically; where life is mathematically and cosmically ordered…" (110). Hamilton's mixed-media show included "projected moving images, microphotographs, specimen displays, and X-rays" (112). Terranova argues that Hamilton conceived of the exhibition as "an extended organism" of the human brain-body synthesis. This framing of *Growth and Form* as an organism seems a kind of preconception of cyberneticist Gregory Bateson's "ecology of mind," a notion of consciousness as an extension of the mind that encompasses the individual, society, and ecology as open, interrelated, complex systems. Terranova makes the trenchant claim that Thompson's tome suggested a kinetic process-based art to Hamilton's exhibitors. His book encouraged artists to conceive of an organic art as a series of actions unfolding over time. She intriguingly claims that Hamilton's output was the result of his simultaneous consumption of *On Growth and Form* and Duchamp's *Green Box*, yielding Bio-Dada, an inventive importation of science into the arts and perhaps the invocation of chance or accident in the evolutionary process. The installation shot provided in Terranova's essay reveals a floor-to-ceiling biomorphically shaped white lattice opening onto a gridded display case containing photographs of enlarged cellular specimens, along with plaster sculptures based on the illustrations, all situated before a mural depicting an X-ray of what appears to be a human hand and wrist (it is actually a seal flipper). Terranova explains that Hamilton divided the show into seven distinct parts: "a dimension of form; forms of cells; cell groupings; skeleton structure; related forms; form and mechanical efficiency; and the formal realization of pure mathematics" (112–13). She convincingly argues that Thompson's "open-ended empiricism" and its focus on the ways in which growth affects form made science appealing to these mid-twentieth-century artists, as did his lavishly illustrated text (109).

In her related essay, art historian Assimina Kaniari also examines the impact of Thompson's work on the Independent Group, specifically the way in which Thompson's rich illustrations, like *Phases of a Splash* (Fig. 2), suggested the idea of montage. Reproduced from physicist and photographer Arthur Worthington's 1908 photographs, the round, trumpet-like shape of displaced liquid responding to the force of a dropped pebble offered Thompson a visual morphological analogy to his drawings of medusas (jellyfish), and thus of art to nature. Kaniari argues that the camera, specifically experimental photography, allowed members of the IG to conceive of themselves as editors. She cites a 1953 quote by photographer Nigel Henderson: "Technical inventions such as the photographic enlarger, aerial photography, and the high speed flash … have given us new tools, with which to expand our field of vision beyond the limits imposed on previous generations" (100).[4] Kaniari claims that Henderson's interest in experimental photography goes back to 1951, but as the broader history of twentieth-century photography has shown, its roots lie in László Moholy-Nagy's New Vision photography and new objectivity.

In Brandon Taylor's essay, "D'Arcy Thompson's Surrealism," Taylor argues that *On Growth and Form* provided Surrealists with "images of paradox, of wonder, of nature's perverse beauty in the multiple forms in which it could appear" (94). He illustrates a striking


THE SHAPE OF A SPLASH 389

closely related to those which attend and which bring about the breaking-up of a liquid cylinder or thread.

Mr Worthington's beautiful experiments on splashes*, it was found that the fall of a round pebble into water from a height first caused a dip or hollow in the surface, and then caused a filmy "cup" of water to rise up all round, opening out trumpet-fashion

Fig. 115. Phases of a splash. From Worthington.

Fig. 116. A wave breaking into spray.

closing in like a bubble, according to the height from which the pebble fell. The cup or "crater" tends to be fluted in alternate ridges and grooves, its edges get scalloped into corresponding lobes and notches, and the projecting lobes or prominences tend to break off or break up into drops or beads (Fig. 115). A similar appearance is seen on a great scale in the edge of a breaking wave: for the smooth

* *Study of Splashes*, 1908, p. 38, etc.; also various papers in *Proc. R.S.* 1882, and *Phil. Trans.* (A), 1897 and 1900.

Fig. 2. *Phases of a Splash*, illustration in D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *On Growth and Form* (1917, 2nd ed. 1942), 389, fig. 115.

photograph of an electric discharge reproduced by André Breton in his 1934 essay "La beauté sera convulsive," which appeared in *Minotaure* above the caption "The image like that produced in automatic writing" (82, trans. Taylor), capturing for Surrealists the similarity of natural forces to the workings of the unconscious mind.

Levy's "Tracing Threads of the Living Organism" lucidly characterizes Thompson's impact on contemporary artistic practices, including the application of "complex systems, classification systems, and origins of life theories in which artists, using a wide range of media, address issues such as morphogenesis, taxonomy, and structure" (147). She discusses the work of Philippe Parreno, Oliver Laric, Christy Rupp (b. 1949), Tauba Aurebach (b. 1981), and Mark Dion. The section of her essay devoted to classification is especially illuminating, as it teases out the history of Thompson's influence on how scientists use form to create classification lineages. For Thompson, not only shapes but also the causes of shapes (the forces) must be identified. She argues that a result of Thompson's insistence on the role of physico-chemical

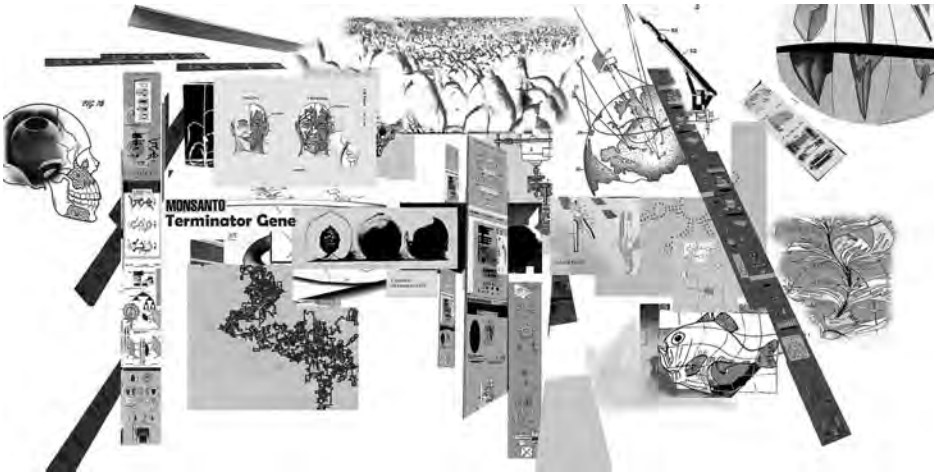


Fig. 3. Ellen K. Levy, *Evolution* (2006), acrylic over archival print, 32" x 64". Ellen K. Levy.

processes in the creation of form was the discovery of horizontal gene transfer (HGT), which undermined the Darwinian view that gene transfer occurs vertically, from parent to offspring. The HGT model controverted the diagrammatic metaphor of a tree of life connecting all living organisms to a common ancestor. The tree-of-life diagram was affirmed by Darwin in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and subsequently employed as a visual model and research tool for scientists. But the discovery of HGT upended Darwin's view that "mutation and recombination are the sole reasons for evolutionary change," Levy writes. "HGT wreaked havoc with classification systems, fundamentally challenging the reconstruction of phylogenetic systematics (the scientific study of the evolutionary relationship of organisms) and questioning the concept of species" (152). This scientific reconception has important implications for feminism, especially ecofeminism, in its rejection of a rigid top-down model and its emphasis on interconnections between and among species. The artists Levy discusses engage deeply with the science, creating atypical taxonomies to address pressing issues like the climate crisis. For example, artist Gemma Anderson (b. 1981), who has a background in scientific illustration, renders hybrid specimens with morphological similarities to one another, as seen in her copper etching of a nematode drawn from specimens at the Natural History Museum (2012). Drawing analogies between otherwise unconnected organisms like worms, ferns, and perhaps even birds and insects, Anderson's hybrid organic forms disrupt the traditional evolutionary tree of life, seeking "to blur normative animal, vegetable, and mineral boundaries" (154n30).

Levy's separate essay on the influence of *On Growth and Form* on her own work offers insight into the impetus for the current book. She reveals how she applied her interest in intellectual history (apparent throughout her contributions to the volume) and in complex systems to her patent-based projects, like her 2006 work *Evolution* (Fig. 3), a montage that combines drawings of humans, animals, and plant diagrams informed by her research of US patents. Exhibited, appropriately, at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, the work is "composed of drawings compiled from successive gene patents and digitally collaged with fragments of inventions, including Monsanto's infamous 'terminator gene' and snippets from *Scientific American* and migration and evolutionary charts" (215). The juxtaposition of diagrams of round seed pods and bisected human faces with the word "Terminator" evokes a science-fiction nightmare. Levy explains that the references in all US patents to their antecedents fostered her deep investigation into the "linkages" between inventions over a two-hundred-year span and enabled her to draw connections between biological and cultural evolution. Patents, themselves a reflection of culture, exemplify the transmission of information through time, she argues, just as evolution reflects the transfer of information through organisms.

D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's Generative Influences in Art, Design, and Architecture offers a significant contribution in its explication of the interrelationships between art, architecture, design, and biology and in situating Thompson's biological model within a broad cultural frame. The editors argue that "the field of biology, like science itself, is always embodied in rhetorical positions and shot-through with language" (8). Furthering Thomas Kuhn's suggestion that our understanding of science can never rely wholly on objectivity, since it is informed by the subjective worldviews of researchers (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 1962), the editors and authors of *Thompson's Generative Influences* seek to elucidate the individual biases and the broader cultural contexts that give rise to preconceptions and knowledge production through a union of art, science, and language. •

Christine Filippone is an associate professor of Art History at Millersville University of Pennsylvania. She was awarded a Terra Foundation for American Art Senior Fellowship by the Smithsonian Institution (SAAM) in 2021 for her current book project *Systems and Utopias of Process in Latin American Conceptual Art*. Her book *Science, Technology, and Utopias: Women Artists and Cold War America* (Routledge, 2017) was the recipient of the 2017 SECAC Award for Excellence in Scholarly Research and Publication.

Notes

1. "Interview with N.D.," in Carolee Schneemann, *Imaging Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 120.
2. "Interview with Carl Heyward," in Schneemann, *Imaging Her Erotics*, 198. Originally published in *Art Papers* 17, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1993): 9-16.
3. D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *On Growth and Form*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1942), 340.
4. Nigel Henderson in Tate Archive, Henderson Papers, 9211-5-1-2.

Transnational Feminisms, Transversal Politics and Art: Entanglements and Intersections

By Marsha Meskimmon
Routledge, 2020

Reviewed by Julia Skelly



Fig. 1. Alketa Xhafa Mripa, *Thinking of You* (2015), installation of hanging skirts and dresses, Prishtina, Kosova. Photo: Jetmir Idrizi.

Marsha Meskimmon's current slim volume is the first text in a planned trilogy dedicated to transnational feminisms and the arts. Among her many previous works of feminist scholarship, *We Weren't Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism* (1999) is a personal favorite. In that book, Meskimmon undertakes to demonstrate through extensive archival research and insightful formal analysis the extent to which the radical artwork of German female modernists in the interwar period differed from the work of such male contemporaries as Otto Dix and George Grosz, not least because the women artists depicted female subjects as human beings who worked and played and had minds as well as bodies. Meskimmon also shows how the increase in material violence towards women after the First World War occurred simultaneously with the representational violence evident in art by men, including but not limited to so-called *Lustmord* (or "sex murder") paintings. With the increase of violence towards women since the COVID-19 pandemic began, these violent paintings have often been on my mind.

In her feminist texts that focus on contemporary art, Meskimmon is still interested in establishing art's relationships with women and materiality. Put another way, she undertakes a material feminist approach to contemporary art with the ultimate objective of showing how the arts can produce social change for marginalized and vulnerable individuals, including women of color, white women, and migrant women. These concerns were also central to Meskimmon's 2011 book *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination*, another slim volume with heady, ambitious goals. *Transnational Feminisms, Transversal Politics and Art* is something of a sequel to *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination*, given that Meskimmon uses much of the same terminology—linking "responsibility" with "response-ability" in both texts, for example—and argues repeatedly and sincerely in both books that the arts can effect positive material consequences in the world.

The terms "transnational" and "transversal" recur throughout the book. Transnational feminisms, Meskimmon contends, "are capable of facilitating large-scale coalition-building *with and through* careful attention to local, concrete conditions, replacing centre-periphery hierarchies (e.g. the 'West' and the rest) with multidimensional dialogues that take place across transnational feminist networks" (4). She credits her understanding of "transversal politics" primarily to the scholarship of sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis (6), which is rooted in Yuval-Davis's work with feminist activists in Bologna in the early 1990s. Meskimmon reports that Italian feminists have been employing the term since at the least the 1970s "to describe a form of self-organization forged through dialogues that cut across conventional social divisions and hierarchies" (6).

Methodologically Meskimmon's book exemplifies how crucial the analytical tool of intersectionality has been and continues to be for feminist activism and feminist art histories. Meskimmon's approach to art is fundamentally an ethical one, concerned with our ethical responsibilities not just as feminist art historians but as human beings in the world. In her introduction she argues that "art's particular affective and imaginative potential to articulate ideas and concepts through compelling visual, material and spatial forms is pivotal to effecting transformative and lasting socio-political change" (1). The introduction lays the foundation for the rest of the book, including pointing to the importance of "the visionary politics of liberatory Black feminist thought and activism" for the project (8).

There are many moments in the volume when Meskimmon examines specific, powerful artworks that have impacted both individual people and global governmental policies. The most productive chapter for the author's objective is chapter 4, "Sexual Violence, Structural Silence and Transversal Solidarity." Here she begins with a discussion of the fabric sculpture *Untitled* (1982) by Lorna Simpson (b. 1960) and its photographic reproduction that year in issue 15 of *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics*, which was dedicated to the theme "Racism Is the Issue." The dress and slip

in Simpson's sculpture evoked the experience of a woman named Irene who was working as a maid for a family that Simpson knew. This small but affectively powerful work incorporated Irene's story, told to Simpson, about a sexual assault she had experienced. Meskimmon then turns to a very different but no less moving work, the 2015 community activist art project *Thinking of You* by Alketa Xhafa Mripa (b. 1980), which involved hanging thousands of dresses and skirts in a football stadium in Prishtina, Kosova (Fig. 1). Each article of clothing had belonged to someone who experienced sexual violence in the context of the Kosovan War (1998–99) and had been given to the artist by the victims themselves or by members of their families. This passing-over of textiles also involved storytelling, which Meskimmon discusses in terms of silence-breaking, linking this radical act with the silence-breakers of the #MeToo movement that gained momentum in 2017.[1] Even in the illustrated black-and-white photograph of the *Thinking of You* installation, the little gray blocks signifying skirts and dresses are overwhelming, pointing to the horrifying number of women who experienced sexual violence during that specific war, and thus illuminating sexual violence as a weapon of war more generally.

The final work examined in chapter 4 is also extremely powerful. American artist and activist Suzanne Lacy (b. 1945) co-organized the performance *De tu Puño y Letra (By Your Own Hand)* that took place in 2015 in an open-air theater and bullring in Quito, Ecuador. This work too was founded upon silence-breaking, in the form of letters written by Ecuadorian women who had experienced sexual violence. In the performance, men read the letters out loud, and then, in a more intimate act, went up to viewers and asked if they were willing to listen to the letters. If the viewers said yes, then they became viewer-participants and engaged in what Meskimmon describes (in reference to Mripa's project) as an "ethical call and response" (107). "Creating platforms for sharing these experiences is central to transnational feminist solidarity-building against sexual violence," Meskimmon observes, "and, importantly, this imaginative and affective work brings with it real, material change" (110). This thread of argumentation runs throughout the text, and in chapter 4 Meskimmon does point to tangible, empirical evidence to support her claim. The letters that were read in *De tu Puño y Letra* had been written as part of the project *Cartas de Mujeres*, a campaign jointly launched in Quito by the UN Conference on Women, the City of Quito, and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) four years earlier to document and combat violence against women. "Significantly," Meskimmon notes, "a GIZ document from 2013 described the campaign's successes in terms of the personal lives of survivors, the development of public policy and the possibility of transforming the future by 'breaking the cycle of violence'" (112).[2] There is no question that the letters have made an impact, at a local level if not a global one.

Meskimmon characterizes her writing of the trilogy as "a creative materialization of the mobile and multidimensional ideas and meanings that transnational feminist thought and activism engenders, and, more strongly, it is an act of feminist hope and solidarity for the future" (10). The text is certainly future-oriented, and it is indeed hopeful. Chapter 1 opens with a critical consideration of our "post-truth" world (16), an apparent riposte to Trumpian rhetoric and the harm it has caused and continues to cause. In this chapter, Meskimmon discusses a number of global artists who address feminist themes, including Nilima Sheikh (b. 1945) in India and Sue Williamson (b. 1941) in South Africa. While her analyses are insightful, however, it is not made clear how these artists' works have had a material impact beyond the effects they have had on Meskimmon herself, and even these effects are not always articulated. She concludes the chapter by posing the argument, "If we cannot *master* this work, we can *converse* with it, and each other, in and through our affinities and differences, toward responsible, located acts of knowing and imagining otherwise" (40). But what, I find myself asking, are you imagining *precisely*? Throughout the volume, Meskimmon frames imagining through dialogue as a particularly powerful tool—"the motor force of the cultural imaginary and of the shared social space of responsive and responsible solidarity" (2)—but I am sincerely interested in knowing something of what the author herself imagines for the future.

Chapter 2 is particularly concerned with the migrant experience, and Meskimmon pushes against the damaging, xenophobic belief that nationality is an "essential (*natural*) connection between blood and soil, … homeland and birth-right" (45). Meskimmon considers an interesting mix of artworks in this chapter, moving from Zoulika Bouabdellah (b. 1977) and her single-channel video work *Dansons (Let's Dance)* of 2003 to Indigenous artist Nadia Myre (b. 1974), who lives and works in Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal, and whose beaded work *Indian Act* (1999–2002)—a collaborative project carried out by more than 230 Indigenous and Canadian settler volunteers—is part of the canon of contemporary Indigenous art. Myre is hugely respected in the territory currently known as "Canada." Meskimmon compellingly argues that Indigenous artists and their feminisms are "crucial to transnational feminisms" (56).

Chapter 3, "Critical Ecofeminism and Ecological Thinking," includes a fascinating discussion of works by Australian artist Joan Brassil (1919–2005), who created mixed-media installations—such as *How Far between the Potatoes and the Planets?* (1976)—that explored the relationships among the sciences, technology, history, geography, the environment, bodies, poetry, music, and art. This chapter is founded upon the thesis that injustices related to gender, race, and class are inextricably bound up with "the exploitation and degradation of the environment" (Noël Sturgeon quoted in Meskimmon, 72).[3] The chapter also examines works by Australian artist Yhonnie Scarce (b. 1973), who belongs to the Kokatha and Nukunu peoples, thus including an important element of Indigenous art and knowledge in the discussion. The final chapter of Meskimmon's book,

"Imagining Peace: Art, Politics and Irenic Attention," begins and ends with *IMAGINE PEACE TOWER* (2007) by Yoko Ono (b. 1933) as a way to consider, and indeed demonstrate, how "peace studies" (122) can be a productive field for feminist art historians who are analyzing political contemporary art.

Transnational Feminisms, Transversal Politics and Art is a powerful text that examines a range of emotionally challenging artworks. The book offers an intersectional, ethical approach to contemporary art that is informed by a belief in the possibility that the arts can enact material change. Sympathetic readers will certainly share Meskimmon's belief, but will perhaps doubt that art effects this change as often or as dramatically as Meskimmon seems to suggest. The main issue is that she does not convincingly support this argument for many of the artworks under discussion, despite insightful analyses of works by female artists and artists of color. Meskimmon perhaps anticipates potential criticisms that this project is overly optimistic. In her chapter on migrants, for example, Meskimmon says of her definition of cosmopolitanism, "To see the commitment to exploring forms of belonging that move beyond the limits of the sovereign nation-state as hopelessly utopian and idealist, would be to misapprehend the critical materialist trajectories that inform this argument and many others" (52). As the first volume in a planned trilogy, *Transnational Feminisms, Transversal Politics and Art: Entanglements and Intersections* cannot hold all the answers. Nonetheless, it is an intensely ethical book full of hope for the future. •

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Notes

1. The #MeToo movement was initiated by Black activist Tarana Burke in 2006.
2. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, *Fighting Violence against Women in Latin America: Letters from Women*, February 2013, https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/giz2014-0311en-letters-from-women-ecuador.pdf.
3. *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 23.

Feminist Visual Activism and the Body

Edited by Basia Sliwinska
Routledge, 2021

Reviewed by Catherine Dormor

At this point in history, as we continue to live through a global pandemic, the disparities and inequalities between people and contexts have become even more urgent. This volume was conceived of before the pandemic hit and yet its agency and vitality speak loudly and clearly into this situation. The contributors are drawn from a range of different global contexts, several across borders and away from their birthplaces, making this an international dialogue of bodily and sensory experience. I am struck by how these biographies of the individual writers become intertwined with the narratives of artists, practices, theorists and concepts within this extensive volume. Basia Sliwinska has woven these together as if they were co-present in the act of writing. The volume forms a dialogue across time, space, bodies and encounters as a form of choreography rather than curation in that the reader and writers move and navigate together between the various contributions, performing patterns and arabesques of thought and visual engagement as they do so. "This plurality of effort and bodies acting in concert," introduced by Sliwinska, "manifest, coalesce and catalyse spatiality of presences, non-presences and co-presences that create networks and collaborative commons despite distance(s)" (1).

The dance as a metaphor is a useful one to describe and explore Sliwinska's volume in that its different movements and changes of tempo are allowed space and scope that might otherwise be edited into something more consistent or feel like something of a "house" style. Sliwinska has resisted this in favor of allowing each author to speak with their own voice, to explore their own understanding and explication of what visual culture might do and mean.

As I read through the chapters, obediently following the editorial progression, I was intrigued by this organization and how it moves between the intimate and global, eye and skin, self and other. In many ways this speaks into the history of Visual Activism and Visual Studies as a field, but it also speaks into and from feminist approaches to histories, narratives, and language. It is this capacity to explore the volume through or outside Sliwinska's schema that makes it all the more powerful as a collective activism itself. It is not reliant upon the singular, but revolves around dialogue and storytelling, patching and piecing the elements together to create a richer, more intriguing and more revealing whole.

I will thus start with the final essay of the volume, "Fragmented Traces ... The Tactile Feminist Un-Monuments of Sheila Levrant de Bretteville," by Caroline Wallace. In this essay Wallace and her protagonist, the American designer and public artist Sheila Levrant de Bretteville (b. 1940), rethink the concept and conceit of the monument using the ellipsis as a device. In many ways this captures the volume itself: where the ellipsis creates space and fragments, it also joins and allows for meaning to be created within that space. The ellipsis articulates fragments, or enables what de Bretteville describes as "productive tension" (237).



Fig 1. Senzeni Marasela, Untitled work from the series, *Theodorah and Gebane: Dolly Parton* (2016), photocollage and ink on paper, 11 3/4" x 16 1/2". Private collection. Courtesy Senzeni Marasela and the Toffee Gallery.

Nomusa Makhubu's chapter, "The Revolutionist: Gendered Violence, Black Radical Feminism, and the Decolonial Creative Revolution," which immediately precedes Wallace's, sets up a narrative around wxmen activists and artists in South Africa through themes of giving voice and silent protest and the politics of affect. Not only does this set up the ground for ellipsis-based thinking, but probes into the spaces and gaps, the silences and silencing. Where the ellipsis can become a spacious and generous gift to the reader, it can also enact the brutality and violence that wxmen are subjected to repeatedly and the ways in which it becomes ignorable. Makhuba calls attention to intersectional forms of struggle against the heteropatriarchal culture; she speaks into how these are not singular and how, as ellipsis, they intertwine the parts, requiring imagination and context to create meaning and, vitally, understanding.

Turning to the first four chapters of the volume allows for a reflection upon the ellipsis from another set of perspectives: Hilary Robinson's new subject positions as not white, not male, and not from New York in "Not White, Not Male, and Not New York: Race, Feminism and Artists in Pittsburgh"; Astrid N. Korporaal's disruptive bodies and sonic frequencies become tensional encounters in the contemporary works of Mona Hatoum (b. 1952) and Morehshin Allahyari (b. 1985); Sliwinska's own chapter treats corporeal solidarity and the persistence of presence in the practice of Polish multimedia artist Anna Baumgart (b. 1966); and, completing the quartet, Mario Hamad's evocative chapter focuses on absent images in Syrian activism as a strategy for power. Within and between these writers, their interlocutors and the art practices they draw out for the reader to encounter, there is a set of dialogues created that is capacious and raw; it intertwines and flows. Where Robinson presents a conjuncture of presence and what it might mean to have the right to be present in a contemporary city in the US (Pittsburgh), Hamad responds with questions about public trust and the use of mainstream media to reposition truth and to diminish the power of activists' images, thus creating a space in which the visual is rendered absent. Sliwinska and Korporaal join the debate, speaking of presence and the sonic timbre of the image, both emphasizing the role of visual activism as metranomic and persistent.

These themes and intertwining dialogues, like the river growing from the stream, gather pace as they travel, building a lexicon and syntax. Anastasia Murney's chapter gives the reader the trajectory of the Tarot and its very particular way of constructing narrative as a "therapeutic-pedagogical device" in Adelita Husni-Bey's (b. 1985) *The Reading/La Seduta* (2017), a workshop and film exhibited at the Venice Biennale. Murney proposes an ellipsis of multiplicity, articulations without solution, at a site beyond storytelling, a state she calls "sitting in the muddle" (82). "Often associated with esoterism and divination," Murney writes, "the cards are printed with terms relating to extractive capitalism: the mining of raw materials, such as oil, gas and rare metals, to be transformed into commodities and sold on the black market. The intensification of extractive capitalism and the exhaustion of natural resources marks a significant contribution to what is known as the Anthropocene…. *The Reading* situates and implicates the participants, cultivating an embodied social infrastructure in dialogue with anti-extractivist struggles" (75). Like many of the best conversations, there is no striving in the cards to find resolution, but to deploy proximity, juxtaposition, and chance encounter to formulate the direction.

The following chapters are comprised of Sera Waters's (b. 1979) settler homemaking practices and textile traditions in Australia; Paula Chambers's (b. 1966) feral chairs and the material agency of objects; Alexandra Kokoli's reflection on women's peace camps and homemaking practices; and Brenda Schmahmann's exploration of Senzeni Marasela's (b. 1977) performative self and domestic femininity. These four chapters, situated in the heart of the volume, become articulation points across its themes. They establish a form of domestic performance that is both within and outside their temporal spheres. In her short film *Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance* (2017), Chambers, herself the artist, recontextualizes a seemingly quotidian folding chair as "an intentional gesture of resistance and dissent," politicizing its presence and drawing attention to the concept and activation of feral materiality (122). This resonates with Kokoli's reading of the visual archive of the Greenham Common women's peace camps (Berkshire, UK; 1981–2000), a protest site divided by a metal fence from a nuclear military base. Where others have spoken of the ways in which this/these camps were policed and patrolled, Kokoli draws attention to the ways in which their material encounters with homemaking framed the fundamental means of resistance to removal through acts of darning and aesthetics of softness. She carries this analysis through to unpacking the more contemporary art practices of Chambers, Waters, and Małgorzata Markiewicz (b. 1979), a trio that speaks collectively of an aesthetics and agency of the domestic front.

Framing this in terms of war-like language, violence and threat alongside textile-based practices positions this collection of essays within a visual activist practice conversation that swerves and evades didactic meaning. These chapters strategically speak from the ellipses that such practices and material encounters create. Is the folding chair abandoned or actively performing itself? Are the women at Greenham creating homes or protesting against militarization? Does Sera Waters's cross-stitch act as remembrance of colonial settling and the associated depositioning of Indigenous people? In each of these chapters resistance to such simplistic readings is strong and the reader necessarily becomes implicated in the conversation through reference to the domestic, but also through the interrupted narratives. It is as if the reader is eavesdropping on someone else's conversation, but is then spotted and drawn in; there is both generosity, but also implication. The idea of implication becomes strengthened through Schmahmann's playful and deeply moving analysis of Senzeni Marasela's "Dolly Parton" series (photocollage and ink on paper) that plays out through imagery and material garments surrounding the construction of femininity within a South African context (Fig. 1). They are full of hyperbole and excess, and within the folds of the clothes and the extravagant performativity, there is offered an encounter with the self and ways in which given narratives become feral and activist practices of their own.

As all good conversations do, this volume circles around and back, developing ideas and then further enriching them in the process. Sliwinska has placed at the start of a late quartet of chapters Tal Dekel's essay exploring what it might mean to belong through the experience of Filipina women artists and migrant workers in Israel. Dekel speaks of their abject bodies within the production of the self for the citizen; she speaks of the many ways in which "stranger" is inadequate as a term as it silences the very real physical threats the stranger's body is at the mercy of (151). Here the domestic is not necessarily a site of safety or sanctuary. Dekel is followed by Evelyn Kwok, who unpacks ways in which women have become increasingly involved in the Hong Kong protest movement, making their appearance on the front line and making acts of brutality visible. They assert their right to appear in these spaces and have developed a rich and powerful syntax of visual imagery to further announce this appearance. The final two chapters, Magdalena Górska's essay on anxiety as a strategy and tactic to challenge power structures (analyzed through popular music videos) works in tandem with Karen Cordero Reiman's essay that literally abducts constructs and stereotypes of motherhood in Mexican artist Mónica Mayer's (b. 1954) personal and collective artworks. Both writers demand that women's experience of being and belonging is wrought with contingencies and conditionalities. The very language of their presence is constructed for them, creating a narrative of relative weakness and disempowerment. In these chapters, which echo to and fro with Dekel and Kwok, the acts of belonging and appearing become vital and urgent themes. They do not ask "who gives permission to appear," but rather assert their right to appear and to appear with truthfulness and clarity. They make images of themselves and other women, not as perfected images of the accepted stereotypes, but as the abject, brutalized and suppressed women the regimes they are protesting against have created.

This volume is a powerful articulation of what feminist visual activism can and does achieve as a global force. It has spaces, gaps, and occlusions. This is not a problem or a weakness; rather this is the truthfulness and care that Sliwinska and her co-producers assert for this field of research and understanding. They do not claim this as the only way to approach these themes. What they do is to open up the windows and the doors, to allow this field of vibrant, vital, and powerful practices to take in the air and for its resonances to be seen, heard, and felt broadly. The writing is cogent and readable; it is rigorous and serious, but there is space of playfulness and joy in the art practices, the bodies of practice, and the practice of bodies. The essays speak of pain, danger, violence and suppression, but also of care, tenderness and mutual support.

This volume forms a wonderful ellipsis that questions what it means to be able to appear and how that capacity and capaciousness might be declared, announced, and seized as acts of feminist visual practice. ●

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Designing a New Tradition: Loïs Mailou Jones and the Aesthetics of Blackness

By Rebecca VanDiver
Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020

Reviewed by Tiffany E. Barber

Throughout her life, Loïs Mailou Jones (1905–98) moved through various spaces categorized as "the middle" and "minority" in terms of race, class, gender, aesthetics, and geography. Jones's *middleness*—across different identities and locales, and within modernism itself—is the subject of Rebecca VanDiver's recent monograph, the first on the artist in twenty-five years. In its focus on both a figure and a genre of scholarship often marginalized within art history, *Designing a New Tradition* is a revival. This deeply researched, accessibly written, transnational study of Jones's life and work spans the majority of the twentieth century, during which the artist witnessed and participated in significant historical and cultural shifts. These movements—the Harlem Renaissance, interwar and postwar modernism, Négritude, abstraction, feminism, and identity politics—have come to define American art. Yet despite her long and prolific career and the diasporic scope of her work as an artist and educator, Jones has been relegated to the periphery. *Designing a New Tradition* remedies that neglect, placing the artist at the center of cultural and aesthetic debates of the twentieth century while deftly outlining Jones's trailblazing career.

VanDiver intermixes Jones's biography with compelling visual analysis in each section of the book to describe the artist's surroundings, the circles and collectives to which she belonged, and the ways these forces influenced her work. Born and raised in Boston, Jones and her family were part of a Black middle class that vacationed in Martha's Vineyard in the 1910s and 1920s. An understudied facet of Black life, Jones's middle-class upbringing afforded her elite opportunities. But her class status did not transcend the barriers she faced as a Black woman. On the art faculty at Howard University from 1930 to 1977, Jones found that while she was on an equal footing racially, the male chairs of the department—James V. Herring, James A. Porter, and later Jeff Donaldson—repeatedly rebuffed her requests for pay raises and promotions. Jones navigated life as a minority subject also in terms of where she lived. Aside from her General Education Board-funded sabbatical year in Paris during 1937–38, Jones resided in Washington, D.C. and Port-au-Prince, Haiti, neither of which was considered a major art center at the time. Moving between these different places and cultures, and making four trips to Africa in the 1970s, helped Jones develop her style.



Fig. 1. Loïs Mailou Jones, *Self-Portrait* (1940), casein on board, 17 1/2" x 14 1/2". Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. Courtesy Loïs Mailou Jones Pierre-Noël Trust.

To trace the chronological and geographical arc of Jones's aesthetic transformations, VanDiver explores the facets and implications of Jones's marginality. The author also discusses how the artist's Blackness and womanhood placed her in the middle of critical cultural issues, such as intraracial debates about the social responsibility of Black artists during the long civil rights era and the tenuous relationship Black women artists had with the feminist movement of the 1970s. For VanDiver, Jones's lived experience produced certain artistic responses, specifically that of a collage aesthetic, to express the multifaceted dimensions of Blackness; the artist mixed African and Afrodiasporic subject matter—West African masks, Black bodies in motion, Vodou symbols—with modernist painting techniques. In so doing, she infused an Afrocentric sensibility into Cubism, Surrealism, and other movements associated with the historical avant-garde. Each time Jones encountered Black life and culture outside of the United States, VanDiver argues, her work changed. She moved from landscapes to genre painting to collage and from the figural to the abstract as she traversed the United States Atlantic Seaboard and the Atlantic itself to Paris, Haiti, and numerous countries in Africa. The author's thick descriptions of artworks reinforce these claims, showing how lived experience, art making, and visual analysis are fertile ground for the development and application of theory.

VanDiver's reading of middleness in light of Jones's race, gender, class, and geography expands our understanding of intersectionality within both feminist discourse and African American art histories in the past and present. Through a detailed picture of Jones's expansive art and life, VanDiver argues for a Pan-African view of American art as well as for the importance of monographic studies of artists of color overlooked within art history. The author, in her words, "claims space for Loïs Mailou Jones and offers a methodology for others interested in moving twentieth-century minority artists from the margins to the middle" (194). This middleness

spans the artist's "middle-of-the-road politics, her middle-class upbringing, and her aesthetic position that straddled avant-garde experimentation and conservative academicism" (6). In Jones's 1940 *Self-Portrait* (Fig. 1), for instance, the artist situates herself between European and African artistic traditions. The painting's subject matter and the still life in the background, VanDiver argues, express the former; the African figurines standing sentry behind her shoulder illustrate the latter. VanDiver examines at length two broader themes in Jones's work also spurred by her middleness. *Moon Masque* of 1971 (Fig. 2) exemplifies both what VanDiver terms a subversive "diasporic grammar," which mixes the vocabularies and syntaxes of disparate visual languages, and what she designates "blackness in triplicate," the linking of triads of places, eras, and motifs that each bear their own relationship to Black experience and identity. Graphic patterns inspired by Ethiopian textiles frame a Congolese Kwele mask motif at the center of *Moon Masque*. The work's bold color scheme, concentric circles, and Afrocentric silhouettes recall aesthetic strategies that proliferated during the Black Arts Movement in the US at the time. "Jones's collage aesthetic, evident in her true collages of the 1950s and the majority of her paintings post-1970," VanDiver writes, "serves as a metaphor both for the diasporic condition and for her negotiation of the composite aesthetics of blackness, itself an amalgamation of peoples, cultures, geographies, and objects" (192). For VanDiver, this combinatory technique reflects the seams and fissures inherent to figuring and understanding Blackness. These convergences and ruptures engender hybrid responses, the author argues, that reflect the multidimensional rather than monolithic nature of Blackness.

Designing a New Tradition makes other forceful interventions. The book is a primer on the development of Black art as a category and political platform throughout the twentieth century, and even, I would argue, in the twenty-first. Within this trajectory, VanDiver adeptly situates Jones among other prominent Black aesthetic thought-architects and practitioners of the time with whom she corresponded and traveled, thus drawing attention to the ways in which women, not just men, shaped the cutting edges of the discourse. The bibliography and index are especially valuable resources in this regard. The volume also establishes an exhibition history of Jones's art and notes the major, groundbreaking exhibitions that she encountered during her travels, such as the Museum of Modern Art's 1935 *African Negro Art* exhibition. Additionally, VanDiver elevates the importance of Historically Black Colleges and Universities as centers for collecting, making, learning about, and theorizing art of the Black diaspora. The author illustrates that African American artist-teachers were key contributors to African American intellectual history. Lastly, VanDiver offers a nuanced account of the relationship between Haiti, the African American imagination, and the limits of Pan-Africanism. This triangulation—another example of "blackness in triplicate"—has profound implications for how scholars of every humanities discipline think about the relationship between protest, art, and foreign policy in the Black Atlantic world now.



Fig. 2. Loïs Mailou Jones, *Moon Masque* (1971), oil and collage on canvas, 41" x 30 1/8". Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. Courtesy Loïs Mailou Jones Pierre-Noël Trust.

Due to the multicultural turn in art history, moving artists of color from the margins to the center has become a well-known trope within critical writing on the subject. VanDiver's provocatively titled volume does little to trouble this tendency, begging the following questions: What new traditions of criticism and theory are possible for art history? How does Blackness disrupt how we think about and theorize the visual? In the final pages of the book, VanDiver anticipates these questions by acknowledging that her book is just one study. The density of the author's research is evident here; VanDiver packs several objects into the book's last pages, at times obscuring the objects' singular traits even while underscoring how prolific Jones was throughout her career. *Designing a New Tradition* nevertheless charts new pathways for discovering and understanding Jones's contributions to the canon, meeting the avant-garde and the naive in the middle. In this way, it is both a revival and an offering to move beyond extant methods—the margin-center model, recovering the overlooked genius—typically applied to both Black and non-Black artists. By bringing art history and Black study into direct relation, VanDiver demonstrates how interdisciplinary work can spur new knowledge and new ways of seeing the (Black) world. Not only does the author reclaim the monograph as a valid and enduring form of art-historical scholarship; she also reframes Loïs Mailou Jones as a practitioner and proponent of a modernism that is uniquely transnational and Pan-African. •

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Kara Walker: A Black Hole Is Everything a Star Longs to Be

Edited by Anita Haldemann, with essays by Kara Walker, Anita Haldemann, Maurice Berger, and Aria Dean
JRP Editions, 2020

Reviewed by Adrienne L. Childs

When Anita Haldemann, head of the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Kunstmuseum Basel, invited Kara Walker (b. 1969) to mount an exhibition of her drawings, it was Walker who proposed the opening of an archive of works that she had theretofore had no intention of exhibiting. The show and associated catalogue, *Kara Walker: A Black Hole Is Everything a Star Longs to Be*, reflect an unprecedented partnership with the artist, who provided access to a trove of her personal documents. The directors of the three exhibition venues, Josef Helfenstein of the Kunstmuseum Basel, Philipp Demandt of the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, and Martijn van Nieuwenhuyzen of the De Pont Museum in Tilburg, the Netherlands, describe this access in the volume's foreword as a greater stroke of luck than they ever expected. It is indeed a coup for these three institutions. To date there is no US venue.

In her introduction to the catalogue, Walker states that the book and exhibition's subtitle refers to the "Anti-Art Star who finds more promise in the dark gravitational forces of the Black Hole" (559). Indeed, while Walker's metaphor can bear multiple interpretations, her works in this voluminous catalogue lay bare the artist's singular vision of the all-consuming dark gravitational forces of American racism—America's black hole. In exhaustive—and perhaps also exhausting—detail, the works cumulatively chronicle the dystopian abjection of this black hole. The exhibition catalogue publishes more than 550 never-before-seen drawings, sketches, studies, and collages from Walker's personal archives. The massive com-pendium of images dates from the mid-1990s to 2020. In addition to the introduction by Walker, the catalogue includes essays by Anita Haldemann, Maurice Berger, and Aria Dean.

Walker's brief introduction frames the works exhibited as a profusion of material stored until now in folders marked "Image Sources" or in archival boxes. She states that some of the texts, and I would add the images, were "unfit for human consumption" (558), but she had the instinct to keep them secreted away and not destroy them. Walker reveals that while the show had no logic at the onset, the project became an effort to retrieve some part of her own history that was embedded in the personal and provocative documents she calls "haunts" from her archive. We get a sense of her vulnerability as she reveals herself and her process so candidly through the images. Rather than attempting to explain the often unexplainable in the works, she leaves them to speak for themselves. And they do. To illuminate and add critical assessment of this trove of new material, however, the catalogue includes three interpretive essays. Published in a mere thirty-six pages at the end of the 600-page catalogue, the essays play a minor role in a tome dominated by Walker's visual and textual phantasmagoria.

Curator Haldemann's essay "Kara Walker's Drawings: 'A Dance of Skepticism and Faith'" provides an art-historical framework for Walker's images, situating the works in the history of drawing and the processes of making. With an experienced eye, Haldemann goes into considerable detail in her deft analysis of the drawings and their formal properties, making a valiant attempt to unpack some of Walker's very complex, ever-shifting work. In *Yesterdayness in America Today* (2020), for example, a drawing created for the exhibition, Haldemann finds a reference in its guitar-strumming Elvis-Trump amalgam to Thomas Hart Benton's *The Sources of Country Music*, where a country musician echoes the pose of a Black banjo player. She thus puts Walker in sharp conversation with the tradition of American Regionalist mural painting. Haldemann sees in an untitled 2018 work an evocation of the erotic imagery of Rococo painter François Boucher's *Hercules and Omphale*, but with the addition of a Black woman holding up the white one; the erotic episode thus becomes an expression of white privilege, racism, and the entanglement of Black and white women's fates. These comparisons are valid and insightful, particularly since Walker's penchant for abjection and elusive narratives often obscures some of these sources and references. Yet Walker's shapeshifting intentions are difficult to pin down.

Maurice Berger, who contributed "The Site of Memory: Kara Walker Drawing," passed away in 2020, and the book is dedicated to him. Berger synthesizes the critical response to some of Walker's most powerful works, including *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby* (2014), as a way into grappling with the cacophony of provocative imagery that has come to light in this exhibition. He considers the drawings that live in this archive—so many of which, like Walker's monumental works, present Black bodies that are subject to violence, hypersexualization, and degradation—in terms of ideas such as shame, spectatorship, and the effectiveness of their extreme nature. He maintains that their sheer shock value does alienate the viewer but is compelling because it confirms a reality that many would rather not see. This tension between repulsion and revelation is a constant refrain in the critical response to Walker. Berger offers a beautiful description of Walker's act of drawing, noting its difference from her cutting of hard edges for her well-known silhouettes: "As the artist's fingers work their way across the page, they summon a desolate history as well as a visceral present through marks, smudges, washes, and erasures. The nuanced surfaces of her drawings resonate with unconscious, but also relatable, fears, quirks, and desires" (583). Written in memory of Toni Morrison, Berger's essay ruminates on how, writ large, Walker's drawings and iconography draw upon the engulfing, haunting qualities of Morrison's novel *Beloved*. This discussion concludes the essay and

is an evocative reminder that Walker's work is not as isolated and idiosyncratic as it might seem. Rather, it becomes part of a discourse that digs into memory, imagination, and the sordid lure of trauma to uncover and deploy the most painful remembrances and reenactments of the slave experience, thereby awakening viewers from collective amnesia about slavery's wretched toxicity—a toxicity that remains active in our present society.

The final essay is by artist, critic, and curator Aria Dean. "A Near-Ideal Black Body! On the Metaphysics and Materialist Aesthetics of One Kara E. Walker's Black Universe" casts a wide net across the Walker oeuvre, taking a philosophical assessment of her body of work rather than getting burdened by issues of representation, identity, and narrative. Just as a black hole can be a gateway into a new universe, the black hole-ness of Walker's work absorbs and destroys what Dean calls "art's continued dualistic relationship between representation and the real, the symbolic and material, reality and fiction, subject and object." Yet Walker mobilizes those very ideas "in an aesthetic program rife with representation and narrative in order to undermine and incapacitate [them]" (587). Dean contends that Walker makes images where the image does not matter, but often falls prey to the trap of figuration and the kind of thinking about representation that viewers traditionally use to reach an understanding of images. She calls it an endless conundrum. Indeed, it is one of the many quandaries that Walker's work poses. Dean calls on thinkers and philosophers from Plato and Friedrich Nietzsche to Gilles Deleuze and Tina Campt to find ways to conceptualize Walker's universe outside of the staid identity politics of representation often at the heart of Black art criticism. From Campt's method of "listening" to vernacular photographs of Black subjects, for instance, Dean formulates a model of responding to the "percepts and affects" of Walker's images, the sensations and energies activated in the viewer's body (589). While conclusions are difficult, if not impossible, to make in the critical discourse around Walker, Dean proposes provocative and expansive critical tools by which we might access Walker's alternative universe.



Fig. 1. Kara Walker, *Barack Obama Tormented Saint Anthony Putting Up With the Whole "Birther" Conspiracy* (2019), pastel, conté crayon, and charcoal on treated paper, 87 3/8″ x 72″. The Joyner/Giuffrida Collection.

While the essays cover ground needed to frame Walker's work, the 552 plates are the main attraction. Casually leafing through the book will reveal the variety of approaches Walker takes to her core subject matter—the historical trauma of Blackness in America and its contemporary legacy. As sketches, studies, doodles, and texts that inform finished work Walker is already known for, the imagery is familiar. Still, although I know what to expect with Walker, the sheer number of ghoulish stereotypes and offensive images proved to be exhausting and stressful to me. While the actual size of the objects varies greatly, as evident in the list of works and in installation photographs online,[1] the book format obscures their relative scale. Experiencing them in person will give the viewer a sense of what works were larger and emphasized. Nonetheless, the book offers page after page of nightmarish scenes and texts that *do* communicate the horror at the heart of a racist society. Of note is a series depicting Barack Obama created in 2019 for this exhibition. Works such as *Barack Obama Tormented Saint Anthony Putting Up With the Whole "Birther" Conspiracy* (Fig. 1) are evocative and timely political observations on the dynamics of the first Black United States president that don't deploy the physiological stereotypes or taboo hypersexual behaviors that often animate her larger body of work. Flipping through the pages of *Kara Walker: A Black Hole Is Everything a Star Longs to Be* is an experience in which anyone interested in this enigmatic and important artist should engage. In the end, we must take Walker's advice and let the works speak for themselves. •

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Notes

1. The Basel installation photographs can be viewed at https://kunstmuseumbasel.ch/en/exhibitions/2021/kara-walker.

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Volume 43, Issues 1-2 (64 pages/issue, 8.5" x 11")

Joan Mitchell

Edited by Sarah Roberts and Katy Siegel, with lead essays by Éric de Chassey, Jenni Quilter, and Richard Shiff, and contributions by Karli Wurzelbacher, Tracey Bashkoff, Marin Sarvé-Tarr, Meredith George Van Dyke, Mara Hoberman, Erin Kimmel, Cecilia Wichmann, David Max Horowitz, Rachel Mochon, and Amy Rahn
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Yale University Press, 2021

Reviewed by Ellen G. Landau



Fig. 1. Joan Mitchell in her studio at 10 rue Frémicourt, Paris (1962). Photo: Jean-Pierre Biot. Paris Match via Getty Images.

Joan Mitchell, a profusely illustrated, beautifully produced, comprehensive exhibition catalogue of 385 pages, was published in concert with the artist's foundation to accompany a retrospective of Mitchell's career co-organized by the Baltimore Museum of Art and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Its editors, who also authored some of the ten sections that supplement the three featured essays, are curators at these institutions: Katy Siegel at Baltimore and Sarah Roberts at SFMoMA. The two jointly provide an introduction to what's to follow, titled provocatively "Beautiful Weed." Mitchell, bilingual in English and French, Siegel and Roberts explain, considered herself a "*mauvaise herbe*." She used this odd term to designate an obviously continuing unruliness of personality, as well as the "out of place" feelings which remained constant throughout her singularly peripatetic life (14).

These feelings began when Joan was a wealthy child in Chicago, the daughter of a somewhat well-known poet, Marion Strobel, whose career was circumscribed by gender and her patriarchal husband, Joan's father. They continued when, as an adult, Mitchell became counted among the so-called "second generation" painters of the New York School (a designation she disdained), then took yet another form for her when living for decades among latter-day School of Paris artists and fellow expatriates in France (with regular trips back and forth to Canada and America). Eventually she moved from Paris to Vétheuil, near where one of her heroes, Claude Monet, had painted at Giverny, to also be able to work in more solitary peace. Mitchell's somewhat fraught transatlantic identity (the French considered her too American and the Americans too French), and her increasingly troubled, almost twenty-five-year personal and artistic relationship with Canadian painter and *abstraction lyrique* "art star" in Europe, Jean Paul Riopelle, played a significant role in her life and, as such, somewhat dominate the narrative expounded throughout this book.[1]

In their introduction, Siegel and Roberts promise that these and other aspects of Mitchell's fascinating trajectory will now be given the deep scholarly consideration that has always been called for, "the kind largely reserved for a tiny number of white male [painters]." "With this book, and the exhibition it accompanies," they state, "we wanted to tell the story of a woman who … was foremost and without qualification a great artist" (12). In order to do so, they divide her life and career into "chapters," in which biographical aspects are interwoven with analysis and critique. To establish "new historical models" for understanding Mitchell's oeuvre (12) and ascertaining once and for all her world-class standing as an abstract expressionist—not merely a top female exemplar of that movement—each chapter is complemented by additional, more concisely framed commentary on one specific painting.

Written by a variety of authors, these shorter sections illuminate particular works, either discussed in or related to what precedes them. For example, Roberts's essay covering 1959–62 called "Frémicourt" (the name of a street Mitchell and Riopelle lived on in Paris for nine years) (Fig. 1), follows Éric de Chassey's lead essay "A Country of Her Own: Joan Mitchell and France, 1948–1967." Roberts presents an additional aspect of Mitchell's artistic risk-taking, athleticism, and sensuality in the somewhat more "violent" compositions Mitchell began in Paris in the early 1960s (100). This interpretation, in turn, is followed by a shorter, more in-depth study of *Mud Time* (1960) written by Amy Rahn. Yet another approach is presented in the very last section of the book, where well-known artists, authors, etc.—these include Joyce Pensato, Paul Auster and poet Eileen Myles, among others—react to her work in their own personal ways.

De Chassey's essay—he is a professor of art history at the École normale supérieure de Lyon and general director of INHA, Paris[2]—delves into the importance of the French artistic context on the creation and reception of Mitchell's work, and her "reverse influence" on this environment (90) for so many years of what she produced. Although he admits that she professed indifference to this situation, de Chassey establishes the parameters of a productive transnational dialogue that ensued, variously both "consonant" and "dissonant," as he frames it (88). He goes

into depth in describing her connections with and to important French artists (both living, like Simon Hantaï, and dead, Matisse and Van Gogh as well as Monet) plus key French critics like Georges Duthuit. Riopelle, is, of course, the main protagonist and their mutual influence is approached seriously, including in regard to Mitchell's greater embrace of lyricism in color and composition after she meets him, and her adaptation of the palette knife, one of Riopelle's trademarks. De Chassey interrogates the marked similarity of their works at the height of their relationship and what this reversible impact meant to each of their careers.

Another featured essay, "'Love is the Condition of Arriving at Infinity': Joan Mitchell and Poetry," was written by Jenni Quilter, a professor at New York University and a specialist on the relations between New York School painters and the so-called New York School poets. Quilter goes into Mitchell's specific associations with the latter, most notably James Schuyler, John Ashbery (who overlapped with her in Paris for a decade), Kenneth Koch, Barbara Guest, and especially her very close comrade-in-arms, MoMA curator and poet, Frank O'Hara. Mitchell (like her fellow abstract expressionist Grace Hartigan) sometimes collaborated with both Guest and O'Hara. In 1975, she developed a set of "color abstracts" by overlaying washes over short poems or fragments of his text.

Roberts had paved the way for Quilter's essay in an earlier biographical section where the impact on her daughter of Strobel's career was introduced, highlighting the important poets and writers whom Mitchell, as a child, met as her mother's guests at home, and Joan's own publication of poetry when she was only ten. Referencing her being able to see Lake Michigan (knowing Canada was on the other side) directly from the window of her family's tenth-floor Lake Shore Drive apartment, Quilter writes, "For Mitchell, poetry was a call across water, a model for hailing one another. It gave her a form in which to feel the world" (197). Quilter also discusses Mitchell's extremely close and important rapport in Paris with playwright Samuel Beckett. "Everything Beckett has ever done," Mitchell would maintain, "is important to my painting."[3]

The final lead essay, "Add Red, or Not," written by Richard Shiff, a University of Texas at Austin professor and director of the Center for the Study of Modernism there, explains the impact on Mitchell's mature work of her also long-standing interest in Paul Cézanne, an artist who is one of Shiff's particular specialties. Another of Mitchell's statements, "I want to hold a surface in space. I deny the horizon," encapsulates Cézanne's impact, according to Shiff. Mitchell's explanation, "You can't enter a Cézanne because it pushes you back. The eye is pushed back to the surface right away. That's why I like him," provides an added point of reference (286).[4] Shiff importantly asserts that Mitchell experienced "feeling-as-abstraction" as opposed to "feeling-as-representation" (290), and he interprets this as underlying another key statement, "I get feelings from the outside and I get moved by their colors together on a flat surface" (286).[5] The title of his chapter refers to Mitchell's admission that she does not think when she paints; as a result, red or no red is a feeling, not a thought, for Mitchell, Shiff states.

Mara Hoberman, a Paris-based critic, is one of another set of authors who consider Joan Mitchell's mature works from a variety of additional points of view in their shorter, more focused commentary. Hoberman's interpretation of an untitled work the artist made in Vétheuil in 1969 points at how clearly this painting was impacted by Van Gogh's famous sunflowers, perhaps a cliché, but seen by Mitchell in a very different way from the average public. "Sunflowers are something I feel very intensely," Mitchell would assert. "They look so wonderful when young, and they are so very moving when they are dying. I don't like fields of sunflowers. I like them alone, or of course painted by Van Gogh."[6] As Hoberman elucidates, Mitchell would return periodically to this motif as a means of self-reflection, inflecting each iteration with mood and season (127).

Katy Siegel's discussion of Mitchell's move to Vétheuil (at first with Riopelle) and her life at La Tour, a house once owned by Monet located on an estate with a magnificent view of the Seine, rounds out the book's primary narrative. Bored by the too-busy café social life of Paris, here, where the painters of the past she so admired still seemed alive and present—Siegel calls them her "peer group"—Mitchell was able to develop fully the stunning atmospheric landscape-based abstractions that this gorgeous publication with its magnificent color plates (sometimes presented as gatefolds) impresses—unforgettably—on our senses. Even if the reader just studies these illustrations without standing in front of the actual paintings, its authors' assertion of Mitchell's greatness rings true. •

Ellen G. Landau, Andrew W. Mellon Professor Emerita in the Humanities at Case Western Reserve University, is the author of a monograph on Jackson Pollock (1989); *Lee Krasner: A Catalogue Raisonné* (1995); *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique* (2005); and *Mexico and American Modernism* (2013). Recent catalogue essays include a study of Krasner's charcoal drawings done at the Hofmann School (2019); two in-depth studies of the little-known career of Michael (Corinne) West (2019; 2021); and an essay on Elaine de Kooning's portraits of herself and husband Willem for the Denver Art Museum's *Women of Abstract Expressionism* exhibition catalogue (2015).

Notes

1. *Abstraction lyrique* is also known as *Art Informel*, *Tachisme* and sometimes *Art autre*. These various designations helped French curator and art critic Michel Tapié to promote the work of Paris artists in the 1950s and 1960s as European competitors to American abstract expressionism.
2. INHA stands for Institut nationale d'histoire de l'art, Paris.
3. Judith Bernstock, *Joan Mitchell* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1988), 106.
4. Interview with Philippe Dagen, *Le Monde* (Paris), August 2–3, 1992, 11.
5. Interview with Yves Michaud, August 7, 1989, transcript, n.p.
6. Yves Michaud, "Conversations with Joan Mitchell, January 12, 1986," *Joan Mitchell: New Paintings* (New York: Xavier Fourcade, 1986), n.p.

Louise Bourgeois: Freud's Daughter

By Philip Larratt-Smith,
with an essay by Juliet Mitchell
Yale University Press and the Jewish Museum, New York, 2021

Reviewed by Nathalie Hager

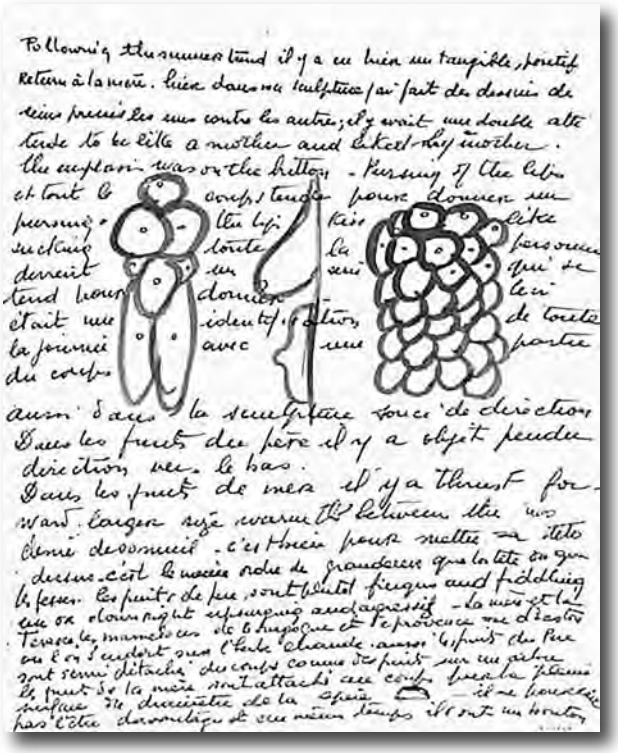


Fig. 1. Louise Bourgeois, loose sheet of writing (c. 1959), handwritten in blue ink on off-white paper, 11" × 8 1/2". LB-0464.

This is the second book by Philip Larratt-Smith to explore Louise Bourgeois's relationship to psychoanalysis via two of the artist's parallel outputs: her art and her psychoanalytic writings. In 2004 and 2010, Bourgeois's longtime assistant, Jerry Gorovoy, discovered caches of the latter in the artist's Chelsea townhouse in New York. Larratt-Smith's *The Return of the Repressed* (2012) first brought together Bourgeois's roles as artist and author by pairing this rich mine of writings with a selection of the artist's two- and three-dimensional works. Now, in *Freud's Daughter*, Larratt-Smith continues the work of refreshing the study of an artist (1911–2010) who long visualized and vocalized her Oedipal writhings. The show and catalogue provide a new curation of Bourgeois's drawings and sculptures interspersed with notes and musings that process her almost-daily psychoanalytic therapy sessions. For any reader who might not expect psychobiography to forward the interpretation of an artist's oeuvre, *Freud's Daughter* answers the call for an original contribution of knowledge, linking Bourgeois's artistic production not only with the facts of her biography but also with her Freudian self-analysis that dissected those facts across a span of some thirty years. It is this interdisciplinarity—art paired with self-psychoanalysis—that is the publication's strength, but perhaps its blind spot too.

Larratt-Smith is Bourgeois's literary archivist, caretaker of close to one thousand loose sheets of the artist's psychoanalytic poetry and prose.[1] Some pages are typed, but most are written by hand and annotated, and many alternate between French and English. While Bourgeois kept diaries through most of her life—many of these self-published—her psychoanalytic writings were kept private and separate, and for a time they seem to have replaced the daily routine of more quotidian thought-keeping. The writings begin in 1951, the year of her father's death, just before Bourgeois entered psychoanalysis with Dr. Henry Lowenfeld in 1952, and they end in 1985, when Lowenfeld died. Yet the bulk of Bourgeois's psychoanalytic writings date between 1951 and 1966—by far her most intensive period of psychotherapy, during the midst of which, from 1955 to 1960, Bourgeois all but ceased making art. Instead, facing severe depression, the artist collapsed past with present to write about the process of psychoanalyzing her childhood relationship with her parents and its psychic effects on all intimate connections thereafter. It is this sublimating act that interests Larratt-Smith, and the resulting written psychoanalytic archive is the principal object of his concern: a textual surrogate for art that Bourgeois didn't make, especially in the fallow years of 1955–60, and, according to Larratt-Smith, the unlocking key to Bourgeois's extant visual archive.

The publication opens with a series of high-quality color plates of Bourgeois's art, beginning with *Untitled* (1940), a family triad depicting a diminutive child at the center whose frontal silhouette overlaps two outward-facing profile heads, one shaded in a bloody, violent red. Next are two early works from *Personages*, the artist's first major body of sculpture: *Persistent Antagonism* (1946–48) and *Dagger Child* (1947–49), enigmatic and vaguely anthropomorphic vertical monoliths that scholars suggest embody key figures in Bourgeois's life—totems of those both loved and hated. Following is *Self-Portrait* (1947) and two later monolithic sculptures, *Knife Couple* (1949) and *Untitled* (1953). It is at this juncture in the catalogue, as in Bourgeois's oeuvre, that the written materials eclipse the visual to become Bourgeois's creative output of choice. Opening the sequence is a loose sheet dating to 1952, followed by a dozen or so pages of psychoanalytic writings organized by year (Fig. 1), ending in circa 1965. Here, in an echo of Bourgeois's return to the art world—it was in 1964 that she began exhibiting again, displaying a fresh body of work in New York that marked a shift away from upright sculptures to poured plaster works—the image archive resumes with two small-scale, introspective sculptures dating to 1963: *Le Regard* and *Rondeau for L*, the latter's inward spiraling a reference to Lowenfeld (Bourgeois periodically dedicated excerpts of her psychoanalytic

writings "to L"). The rest of the plates trace Bourgeois's career to its end, in 2010, the year of her death, including various works on paper; a robust body of three-dimensional works; and a series of large-scale, brooding installations, *The Destruction of the Father* (1974) being particularly iconic. Together, this chronological sequence of art, writing, and then art again tells the story of continuous creativity in which, no matter the type of output, Bourgeois was constantly, obsessively working to process her psychic self.

And what, exactly, was Bourgeois processing in her art and in her writings? As biographical studies have long noted, Bourgeois had a fraught, sexualized relationship with her father, Louis, and nursed first resentment toward her mother, Josephine, in her role as loyal daughter and then guilt as her mother's (somewhat) unwilling caretaker. There was also palpable tension with her husband, the successful art historian Robert Goldwater; a mundane domestic life with three children; and a tight but contentious network of friends and acquaintances. The notion of "place" figures prominently in her writings as well: The family home in Antony, France, and her house in New York are frequently mentioned and often ruminated upon. Throughout her dual oeuvre, feelings of loss and longing but also of rage and frustration and aggression—all the angst that ruled the artist's psyche—are made tangible by Bourgeois's hand in distorted physical and psychological portraits and self-portraits, and in words that cycle between anger, resentment, abandonment, and self-deprecating questioning. Lurking in the background is Bourgeois's relationship with psychoanalysis itself—an internal process that drives her mind round and round with no rest: no rest for the artist and none for her viewers or readers. If Bourgeois entered psychotherapy to heal and redeem her parental relationships, it becomes quickly apparent that she never did.

Three authors dialogue with the artworks and psychoanalytic writings. Larratt-Smith opens, addressing the publication's title and proposing Freud as a symbolic father rising to fill the absences left by Bourgeois's physical one. Next is Juliet Mitchell, a longtime practicing psychoanalyst whose interest is sexuality and psychoanalysis with a focus on feminist practice.[2] Mitchell builds on her contribution to Larratt-Smith's first book with an exploration of the ever-presence of Freudian psychoanalysis in the dual strains of Bourgeois's work. Last comes Bourgeois's own voice in a reprint of "Freud's Toys," originally published in *Artforum* in 1990—a prescient essay making clear Bourgeois's feeling that "Freud did nothing for artists, or for the artist's problem, the artist's torment" (151).[3] Together, the chapters explore more than the relationship between Bourgeois's art and her psychoanalytic writings. The full, weighted argument of the volume focuses on the artist's immersion in psychoanalysis and the effects both on her and on the science of analyzing one's own mind. Made clear is that across three decades of talk therapy, Bourgeois brought to bear her extant knowledge and interest in Freudian thought yet expressed some dissatisfaction about the value of the field. Bourgeois's voyage to self-discovery in her writings is a discovery of the fruits and inevitable poisons of psychoanalysis. Bouts of physical and emotional restlessness and exhaustion—and even psychic devastation—result from the constant examination of the human mind: ego and id, subconscious and unconscious. Do not expect a pleasant journey, for it is not.

But who laid this path and asked us to follow? Well, it was Bourgeois, and that is part of the problem. While questioning the Freudian process, Bourgeois also deferred to psychoanalysis in almost every media interview, offering it as a roadmap for understanding both her and her art: "I carry my psychoanalysis within the work," Bourgeois famously declared—a quotation Mitchell seizes upon to open her essay on Bourgeois's self-analysis (127).[4] What are we to make of an artist telling us not only what to think but how? There is no doubt that the trove of Bourgeois's written words is a remarkable and valuable find, richly supplementing the extant scholarship devoted to the artist and her work. But there is also great risk in following an artist too far in the direction they lead. Ought we not think for ourselves? Freudian psychoanalysis may not be the skeleton key Larratt-Smith proposes.

Mitchell's essay suggests that through science, Bourgeois's mind can be known, and that this knowledge can inform our understanding of her art and her writing. Indeed it can, but by studying so intently Bourgeois's relationship with psychoanalysis, and even privileging it, we ensconce Bourgeois in the roles of not only patient and artist *but also analyst and critic*. What is left for us to do, then? If psychoanalysis links sexuality with subjectivity, and subjectivity is determined—here by the artist herself in myriad ways—then how ought we frame our roles as viewers, as readers, as audience members? The attendant gallery exhibition, *Louise Bourgeois, Freud's Daughter*, was held at New York's Jewish Museum in the spring-summer of 2021. It reminded us that the art is what brings us closest to the mind of the artist. Let us not lose sight of this, even as we dive into Bourgeois's psychoanalytic writings. •

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Notes

1. Today the pages are part of the Louise Bourgeois Archive in New York, of which Larratt-Smith is curator; the archive is maintained by the Easton Foundation, of which Gorovoy is president: http://www.theeastonfoundation.org/.
2. Mitchell is the author of *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), a groundbreaking challenge to critics of a "patriarchal" psychoanalysis.
3. Louise Bourgeois, "Freud's Toys," exhibition review of *The Sigmund Freud Antiquities: Fragments from a Buried Past*, University Art Museum, State University of New York, Binghamton, *Artforum* 28, no. 5 (January 1990): 111–13.
4. "Interview: Paulo Herkenhoff in Conversation with Louise Bourgeois," in *Louise Bourgeois*, ed. Robert Storr, Paulo Herkenhoff, and Allan Schwartzman (London: Phaidon, 2003), 14.

The Heart: Frida Kahlo in Paris

By Marc Petitjean, trans. Adriana Hunter
Other Press, 2020

Frida Kahlo: The Complete Paintings

Edited by Luis-Martín Lozano, with essays by Andrea Kettenmann and Marina Vázquez Ramos
Taschen, 2021

Upper Bohemia: A Memoir

By Hayden Herrera
Simon & Schuster, 2021

Reviewed by Salomon Grimberg



Fig. 1. Frida Kahlo, *The Heart* or *Memory* (1937), oil on canvas, 15 3/4" x 11". Private Collection.

Frida Kahlo. The name immediately conjures interest and a growing list of publications that pull insatiable minds in different directions: the Mexican painter, the handicapped artist, the wife of muralist Diego Rivera…. Three recent publications add further understanding of the painter and the person: an account of a love affair discovered in a forgotten cache of letters that illuminate three months she spent in Paris; an updated catalogue raisonné; and the autobiography of Hayden Herrera, Kahlo's official biographer.

In *The Heart: Frida Kahlo in Paris*, Marc Petitjean brings to life the brief and bittersweet love story of Michel Petitjean, his father, and Frida Kahlo (1907–54) that developed during her nearly three months spent in France, where she traveled to attend the vernissage of her exhibition in Paris at the Renou et Colle Gallery in March 1939. The book takes its title from *The Heart* or *Memory* (1937; Fig. 1), a painting Kahlo gifted Michel prior to their goodbye.[1] The image refers to the moment in adolescence when meeting Rivera eviscerated her heart, and she became a woman. Frida left France, and a smitten Michel, longing to be remembered, wrote and wrote. She replied only once, with a telegram sent from the ship: "Thinking of you tenderly" (Petitjean, 176).

In Frida Kahlo's French interlude, the twenty-nine-year-old, baby-faced Michel Petitjean was her guide and lover. Kahlo moved out of the Bretons' apartment on rue Fontaine and moved in with Petitjean to rue Hallé, home of Mary Reynolds, Marcel Duchamp's companion, who let them use the house while she was away. On January 26, 1939, the night Barcelona fell to the Nationalists, the first night they spent together, Petitjean had taken Kahlo to dine at the home of Surrealism's great patroness, the vicomtesse Marie-Laure de Noailles—Petitjean's "official mistress," twenty years his senior (with whom he'd been living since 1936). Thereafter, Kahlo would be invited to dine there two or three more times. That evening, among the guests, Charles Ratton and Yves Tanguy sat by the radio listening to the news from Spain. Kahlo, who had been keeping abreast of the Republican struggle, joined them. Petitjean had been involved in the Republican cause since the beginning of the war, and had traveled to Barcelona during the Trotskyist-leaning Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM) trials. Marc Petitjean describes another

gathering attended by his father and Kahlo to listen to Marceau Pivert, the leader of the Workers' and Peasants' Socialist Party (PSOP), speak about the people's betrayal by their leaders and Stalinists. Kahlo spoke to the group in Spanish, with Remedios Varo translating, about the Mexican Revolution and the need to raise funds for Spanish refugees, and Mexico's pledge to take in refugees (Petitjean, 91). Thanks to the generosity of Noailles, Petitjean showed Kahlo a Paris few could have seen, travelling to the Loire, and meeting many of his friends—Benjamin Péret, Salvador Dalí, Paul Éluard, René Crevel, Georges Hugnet, Man Ray, Elsa Schiaparelli, and others who were making history in the art world.

In his research about Kahlo's French sojourn, Marc Petitjean made significant discoveries about her visit, like the laudatory article on Kahlo's painting in *La Flèche* (Petitjean, 152–53), and an unknown letter from Jacqueline Lamba to Diego Rivera describing the show, "Everyone agrees and recognizes that her paintings are the best by a woman to date" (Petitjean, 159). He also sets the record straight about apocryphal information that has become legendary such as Schiaparelli—as Rivera asserted—designing a "Robe Madame Rivera." She did not. Nor was Kandinsky's face "streaming with tears of pure emotion" during the exhibit. Rather, when he wrote to Josef Albers, who had a fascination with Mexico, about the show, he mentioned Kahlo and the exhibition but elaborated about her Mexican costume (Petitjean, 158–59).

The newly discovered Michel Petitjean file at the Frida Kahlo Museum in Mexico, plus an unpublished interview about his recollections of Kahlo, gathered by art historian Nancy Deffebach, makes for a priceless contribution that fills in the time gap of these months. With its readable and entertaining descriptions of the exhibition and all the activities around Kahlo during her stay in France, the book is a valuable addition to the growing Kahlo bibliography.

Some factual problems and misquotes need correcting for future editions, e.g., Petitjean writes that Kahlo was 32 in Paris, but was 31; that Rivera's affair with her sister started in 1931, the year he was working in the US; that Kahlo met Max Ernst and Paul Éluard together, not possible during her visit, for Ernst was not living in Paris and Éluard had been excluded by Breton from the Surrealist group. Also, the book needs an index and a bibliography.

For *Frida Kahlo: The Complete Paintings*, Luis-Martín Lozano et al. built an impressive new catalogue raisonné. At 624 pages, the book includes all 152 previously reproduced paintings by Kahlo, plus scores of photographs reproduced for the first time. The book is not only an ambitious task but a tour de force. Like all Taschen books, it is beautiful and lavishly illustrated in glorious colors. Lozano is best known for his specialty in Diego Rivera's art. With Juan Coronel Rivera, Rivera's grandson, he published, also with Taschen, a definitive study of Rivera's mural work. Andrea Kettenmann, whose specialty is German-Mexican artist Olga Costa, co-edited the 1988 *Frida Kahlo: Das Gesamtwerk*, the first catalogue raisonné of Kahlo's work. With art historian Marina Vázquez Ramos, who specializes in modern Mexican art, they have added critical descriptions for each painting, with eye-opening iconographic sources, as well as references to important art historical information.

The editors had access to the rarely seen archives in the Frida Kahlo Museum. They gathered a great deal of information previously documented but never brought together until now to answer questions as well as provide data on vital paintings, including extensive notes and bibliography. Reproduced is a newspaper article that might have triggered *A Few Small Nips* (Lozano et al., 138), and a reproduction of the miniature self-portrait in its original butterfly-shaped tin frame Kahlo gave to Jacqueline Lamba on her departure from Mexico (Lozano et al., 169). Finally, we are shown together the process of images, unfinished paintings, and drawings Kahlo intended for a painting criticizing Capitalism; we get to read the original news article that informs her 1938 painting of Dorothy Hale's suicide. Several *Diary* pages and letters that provide direct access to her unfiltered mind are photographically reproduced, including letters to Rivera; her niece, Isolda; her physician, Dr. Leo Eloesser; her first boyfriend, Alejandro Gómez Arias; New York art dealer, Julien Levy; lover and photographer, Nickolas Muray; friend, Georgia O'Keeffe; Rivera's assistant Emmy Lou Packard; and many more.

An occasional blind spot will jump out at the educated reader—like the incorrect date of the historical *What the Water Gave Me*, 1934, which the editors still date 1938 (Kahlo described painting the work in a 1934 letter); or a sorely missed color image of *The Wounded Table* (1940), lost since 1955 and reproduced here in a small black and white image. Regardless of these minor issues, which are to be expected in such a monumental document, the work is otherwise so thorough that it will likely be considered definitive.

When Flaubert was asked "Who is Madame Bovary?" he did not hesitate to reply, "*Madame Bovary, c'est moi*" (I am Madame Bovary). Something similar might be said after reading *Upper Bohemia*, the autobiography of Hayden Herrera. This most welcome addition to the literature on Frida Kahlo reveals how Herrera's internal reality influenced the emotional content in her seminal 1983 book, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo*. When a biographer writes a life, the subject becomes their child, and Kahlo could not have chosen a better parent than Herrera: considerate, kind, patient, tolerant. To manage her severe separation anxiety, Kahlo shapeshifted into a professional seductress to draw attention and avoid loneliness that otherwise might overtake her. She was compelled to satisfy her own needs without consideration of others.

When Herrera wrote her doctoral dissertation on Kahlo, she had lived in Mexico, spoke the language, knew the culture, and was able to interview a great number of the original players who were eager to help, including Alejandro Gómez Arias; Lucienne Bloch, Rivera's assistant in Detroit and New York; and Bertram Wolfe, Rivera's

biographer. Afterward, encouraged by Harper and Row editor Frances McCullough, she turned it into the biography that broke ground and continues to educate and inspire. Herrera wrote about Kahlo without losing track she was writing about a complex person whose multifaceted personality needed to be carefully balanced—or be distorted. Readers of *Frida* learned that Kahlo projected magic to distract herself from feeling empty. But it was not like that at all times; magic moments were actually few and far between, although angst was constant. However, Herrera's empathic attunement to Kahlo's suffering turned her hardened life into the fascinating fairy tale of the "heroine of pain," as she was referred to in Mexico. In the end, Herrera imbued the story of Kahlo's lifelong feelings of neglect with the compassionate attention she longed for during her lifetime, and created a universal mirror that enables those who feel neglected to transcend their pain when looking into it. The world would be a better place if people loved as Herrera loved Kahlo.

Herrera's autobiography helps readers understand how she was able to empathize with Kahlo's early feelings of neglect because of what she herself experienced. Herrera's parents, who divorced when she was three and went on to marry ten times between them, were so caught up in their own narcissism that caring for their two daughters was a distant secondary concern. (Today, the girls would have been removed from the home by Child Protective Services.) Hayden was five when her mother took her and her sister shopping and Hayden got lost. A kind Samaritan saw her crying on the street and took her back to their apartment—Hayden had memorized her address. After the mother returned, she "thanked the woman who said it was nothing. My mother barely looked at me" (Herrera, 50). Another time, the girls were left with Ellie, a nanny they met on the day their mother moved them into an apartment away from where she and her new husband lived. And once, when the girls were living with their father in the US, their mother, then living in Mexico, arrived unannounced when he was away briefly and took them back with her. He never tried contacting them.

Besides her groundbreaking work on Kahlo, Herrera researched and wrote acclaimed biographies of Mary Frank, Isamu Noguchi, Matisse, and Arshile Gorky. There were personal connections with these subjects as well. For example, one of her father's wives was Mougouch Gorky, the widow of Arshile. And while researching her biography on Matisse (which Herrera wrote to please her mother), she learned that once, when Matisse's work was not selling and he could not support the family, instead of selling a painting he owned by Cézanne, he sent the children to live with relatives.[2] (No surprise why this anecdote left an impression on Herrera.) *Upper Bohemia* questions nature versus nurture. Does a person learn compassion or is one born with the capacity to experience it? What stands out in Herrera's autobiography is that she had no one to model after yet expressed empathy for the adults who raised her. And although their poor parenting harmed her, so that in time she would seek psychotherapy to help address the damage, never does she judge or accuse them. Instead, she sees them kindly, through the lens of compassion, of understanding, of acceptance. Fortunately, Herrera's extraordinary work, especially her biography of Kahlo, a study in compassion if there ever was one, finally brought her well-earned acknowledgment and well-deserved love.

These three original books about Frida Kahlo's fascinating story continue to confirm that, regardless of how much is known about her life, new information continues to emerge. There is still more to learn and understand, not only for art historians but for general readers as well. •

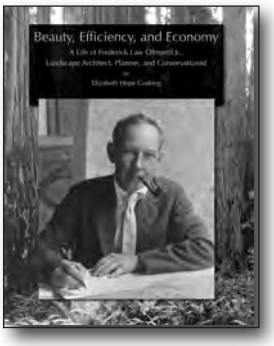
Salomon Grimberg, M.D., a psychoanalytic art historian, has authored several books on Kahlo, and is currently working on the authorized catalogue raisonné of the paintings of Leonora Carrington.

Notes

1. For an analysis of the work see Salomon Grimberg, "Frida Kahlo's *Memory*: The Piercing of the Heart by the Arrow of Divine Love," *Woman's Art Journal* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1990–Winter 1991): 3–7.
2. Personal communication with Herrera.

BEAUTY, EFFICIENCY, AND ECONOMY
A LIFE OF FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED JR., LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT, PLANNER, AND CONSERVATIONIST

BY ELIZABETH HOPE CUSHING



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Meret Oppenheim: My Exhibition

Edited by Nina Zimmer, Natalie Dupêcher, and Anne Umland, with Lee Colón and Nora Lohner
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2021

Reviewed by Barbara Stehle



Fig. 1. Meret Oppenheim, *Une parente eloignée* (*A Distant Relative*) (1966), molded white Rugosit in bronze-colored iron frame with mirror, 10 3/4" x 9" x 6 1/4". Klewan collection.

The German Swiss artist Meret Oppenheim (1913–85) is finally getting her due with her first American retrospective this year at the Menil Collection in Houston and at MoMA (after an initial stop at the Kunstmuseum Bern). The show and the publication of its accompanying catalogue together constitute a long-awaited event for an artist who gained instant recognition in New York City at the age of twenty-three after being introduced with only one work: *Object* (1936), a fur-lined teacup, saucer, and spoon. André Breton named it *Déjeuner en fourrure* (Breakfast in Fur) as a reference to Édouard Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, and it is this title that Oppenheim used in the conceptual exhibition she planned for herself in a series of drawings in 1983. Until now, *Object* (1936) has been the most iconic of Oppenheim's works. The curator-authors of *Meret Oppenheim: My Exhibition* use as a template the artist's 1983 retrospective on paper, which Oppenheim originally called her "Imaginary Exhibition" and later "M.O.: My Exhibition," to widen our perspective on the artist's whole body of work.

MoMA director Alfred H. Barr Jr. was in Paris for the legendary 1936 *Exposition surréaliste d'objets* curated by Breton at the Galerie Ratton. The catalogue for that exhibition listed Oppenheim's fur cup in the category "Objets Surréalistes." Looking at installation photographs, Natalie Dupêcher notes in her essay on Oppenheim's early period, "Finally! Freedom! The Work of Meret Oppenheim, 1932–1954," that two more pieces by the artist were on display: *Head of a Drowned Man*, a blue-painted board studded with almonds (now lost), and *Ma gouvernante—My Nurse—Mein Kindermädchen*, a pair of high-heeled shoes trussed on a platter like a turkey. The first work has disappeared; the second features on the cover of the catalogue. Oppenheim's first solo show had already taken place in Basel earlier that year. Max Ernst, by that time her ex-lover, wrote the Basel invitation, his text conveying how struck he was by Oppenheim's poetic inventions: "A comma in her hand turns into a wand.... At twenty, she locks herself into an air crevasse and swallows the key" (16).[1] Barr's discovery of Oppenheim at the Ratton show led to his request of all three works for his MoMA exhibition, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*. Only *Object* came to be included, but it created a stir. *Object* came to define the essence of Surrealism for a generation of American viewers. We are left wondering what happened to the other loans, and what would have happened to Oppenheim's career if all three works had been featured.

Shortly after the show ended, Barr wrote about *Object*, "Few works of art in recent years have so captured the popular imagination.... The 'fur-lined tea set' makes concretely real the most extreme, the most bizarre improbability. The tension and excitement caused by this object in the minds of tens of thousands of Americans have been expressed in rage, laughter, disgust or delight."[2] The sensation created by Oppenheim's fur cup, which almost equaled the reception of Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* at the Armory Show a quarter-century prior, was a blessing and a curse all at once. The artist was soon to realize that having her whole work and reputation summed up to one piece was extremely problematic and difficult to correct. This experience puts into perspective Oppenheim's firm desire to work on her own retrospective exhibition with her 1983 "Imaginary Exhibition" drawings.

In exploring the narratives around *Object*, Dupêcher begins with Oppenheim's arrival at Montparnasse in the summer of 1932 to study painting. One feels the freedom and buoyant creativity of these formative years in Paris as Oppenheim engaged in tremendously stimulating artistic dialogues and friendships. Dupêcher highlights the artist's connections to Ernst, Alberto Giacometti, Leonor Fini, Man Ray, and Marcel Duchamp. For Oppenheim's later life, the authors of the two other catalogue essays, first Nina Zimmer, then Ann Umland with Lee Colón, likewise refer to many artists—among them Jean Tinguely, Daniel Spoerri, and Niki de Saint Phalle—with whom the artist had very close ties.

In the late 1930s and 1940s, however, Oppenheim did not have a chance to push beyond the success of the MoMA show. A year after the Galerie Ratton and MoMA shows, Hitler opened the *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) exhibition attacking modern art. Oppenheim's financial situation in Paris became untenable, forcing her to depart for Basel. There, she joined anti-Fascist modernists, looked for ways to make money as an art restorer, and focused on painting and mask-making. She would not come back to creating objects until 1954.

Reading Dupêcher, one realizes how much the misperception of Oppenheim's work is linked to unfortunate timing. Oppenheim's early recognition took place right before the world shut down—violently so, for a German Jew like her. The artist's crisis was part of a larger world one, and it was not only creative but also personal, as she expressed to Fini in 1940: "When it comes to me, I am less optimistic than ever, I expect to lose everyone" (19).[3]

Among the many artists with whom Oppenheim forged strong bonds, it is Duchamp, perhaps, who stands out as the artist's closest kindred spirit.[4] Oppenheim shared with him a lifelong interest in diagrammatic works, a witty use of language, and a knack for modified ready-mades, self-representation, and wide-ranging experimentation. Umland and Colón in their article "The Art of Retrospection: Meret Oppenheim's 'Imaginary Exhibition' Drawings, 1983" compare Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* (1935–41) to Oppenheim's twelve 1983 pencil renderings of a career-spanning selection of her work. While Duchamp created a portable museum, the authors point out, Oppenheim was curating a show for herself. Her intent was to offer a conceptual proposition, a "self-authored model" for a retrospective, rather than an object. Analyzing each drawing meticulously, the essay authors argue that the drawings' "narrative constructions" and Oppenheim's choices about what works to include and how to arrange them reveal self-reflection concerning her oeuvre and history (33).

Zimmer's article, "Meret Oppenheim as a Contemporary Artist: Five Close-Ups, 1966–1982," considers the many ways in which the artist escaped classification. From androgynism to hermaphrodism, Oppenheim embraced a definition of being that went beyond gender conventions. She did not need an alter ego like Duchamp's Rrose Sélavy or an alias to be fully in the world. "The spirit is androgynous," Zimmer quotes her as saying (23),[5] relating the sentiment to Oppenheim's hermaphroditic combination of breasts with a phallus stuck between them in *A Distant Relative* of 1966 (Fig. 1). Framed by an old mirror, the work is funny and smart. Oppenheim wittily takes on a symbol associated with Venus and evokes the possibility of a hermaphrodite's identity. Zimmer sees in its formal expression a relation with Pop art and proposes Tom Wesselmann's 1960s *Great American Nude* series for comparison "in their constellations of household goods and sexualized figures" (23).

Along with *A Distant Relative*, the four other works Zimmer analyzes in depth, *Octavia* (1969), *Genevieve* (1971), *Flower of Fog* (1974), and *Hand (Tower)* (1964–82), belong to the lesser-known period of Oppenheim's postwar production. The works differ in their media, stylistic elements, and art-historical references. As Zimmer puts it, "Oppenheim strenuously objected to being claimed by any movement or category." A television interviewer complained to the artist, "It's impossible to pin you down" (21).[6] Zimmer does not try; she skillfully summons neo-Dadaism, Nouveau Réalisme, Pop art, Arte Povera, and postmodern architecture and design to shed light on Oppenheim's body of work. Surrealism still lingers, mostly in spirit, transformed over the decades of Oppenheim's career. That spirit ties together the early and late works, Oppenheim's entire production being "interrelated, reciprocal, and of equivalent significance" (35).

Oppenheim was a woman and artist who strived to free herself from any limitations or prescribed roles, adopting multiple strategies to reach a sort of *Hors Catégory*—a category beyond classification. The *Meret Oppenheim: My Exhibition* catalogue offers new scholarly perspectives and a rich body of imagery (more than 160 plates), assuring that the artist's renown will go beyond *Object* affording and the greatest pleasure for the reader. ●

Barbara Stehle is the founder of the custom art history service Art Intelligentsia and teaches at the Rhode Island School of Design. She writes primarily on German art, architecture, and women's contributions to the artistic fields.

Notes

1. Max Ernst, invitation to Meret Oppenheim exhibition, Galerie Schulthess, Basel, 1936, quoted in Bice Curiger, *Meret Oppenheim: Defiance in the Face of Freedom*, trans. Catherine Schelbert (Zurich: Parkett; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 29.
2. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., "Surrealism: What It Is in Literature and the Arts, Its Origin and Future," *World Today* 4, no. 4 (April 1937): 4.
3. Letter to Fini, August 1–5, 1940, in Oppenheim, *Worte Nicht in giftige Buchstaben einwickeln*, ed. Lisa Wenger and Martina Corgnati (Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2015), 229.
4. See also Heike Eipeldauer, "*Ça continue*: Meret Oppenheim and Marcel Duchamp," in *Meret Oppenheim: Works in Dialogue from Max Ernst to Mona Hatoum* (Milan: Skira, 2017), 37–39.
5. "Meret Oppenheim: Keine Legende: Portrait einer Künstlerin," interview with Ruth Henry, Südfunk, broadcast September 23, 1978.
6. "Vis-à-vis: Meret Oppenheim im Gespräch mit Frank A. Meyer," interview, Schweizer Fernsehen (DRS), August 21, 1983, trans. Gerrit Jackson.

Sophie Taeuber-Arp: Living Abstraction

Edited by Anne Umland and Walburga Krupp with Charlotte Healy
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2021

Reviewed by Gabrielle Rose-Curti

The prolific and immersive career of Swiss abstract artist Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889–1943) is the subject of a 2020–22 landmark exhibition held at the Kunstmuseum Basel, the Tate Modern, and, most recently, MoMA. It stands as the most comprehensive and internationally wide-ranging show of her work to date, comprising close to four hundred pieces amassed from its three hosting institutions and from the Foundation Arp, Clamart, France; the Stiftung Arp e.V., Berlin; and the Fondazione Marguerite Arp, Locarno, Switzerland, as well as from numerous other public and private collections in Europe and the United States. The show and accompanying catalogue, *Sophie Taeuber-Arp: Living Abstraction*, bid final adieu to the limited perception of Taeuber-Arp as a painter, sculptor, and draftsperson, a legacy secured posthumously by her "well-intentioned" (19) husband, Jean (Hans) Arp, in conformance with the purified, formalist Zeitgeist of the post-World War II years. In fact, Taeuber-Arp's largely non-objective style ran the gamut of applied-art and fine-art disciplines, forms, materials, and techniques. Exhibitions and studies in more recent decades have restored the multifarious nature of her career, but most of them in piecemeal ways.[1] Now, with her textiles, stage-production work, objects, furnishings, architectural and interior-design projects, and even photographic work back in original company with her paintings, drawings, and sculpture, the staggering diversity and interdependency of the oeuvre to which she directed her abstractive energies can be fully assessed.

The exhibition catalogue, published in English and German editions, stands as a feat of editorial direction under MoMA curator Anne Umland and independent curator and leading Taeuber-Arp expert Walburga Krupp. Featured throughout the book are 387 superbly reproduced plates and scores of archival photographs of Taeuber-Arp's work and of the artist herself, often with family and friends. The editors' express task is to newly illuminate, expand, and rectify our understanding of this artist and her work—the latter, importantly, addressed "on its own terms" (20) and with more rigorous, evidentiary methodologies. Meticulous effort underpins the book's comprehensive illustrated chronology, created jointly by Krupp and Laura Braverman. This chronology scaffolds the sweeping and necessary overview of Taeuber-Arp's career in Krupp and Umland's co-written introduction. No less crucial is the exhibition checklist assembled by Charlotte Healy, Annie Wilker, and Krupp. Here the identifying information established in the last major cataloguing of Taeuber-Arp's work in 1948 receives overdue updating and correction, based in part on the artist's "own way of identifying and differentiating" her works (314) in exhibition lists she produced. The supplementary essay "Planning and Precision: Sophie Taeuber-Arp's Working Methods" by MoMA paper conservator Wilker offers revelations about the artist's exacting technical processes, which sometimes involved the handling of tools and materials in "unexpected" ways (301).

This comprehensive revisiting of a nearly three-decade-long career observes a rigorous commitment to accuracy while maintaining a laudable manageability of content. Plates are digestibly grouped among each of the six chapters. And these "chapters," arranged thematically around the artist's evolving disciplinary foci in overlapping chronological periods, present a total of fourteen incisive, illuminating essays of modest length authored by a diverse array of scholars and curators (including those who directed the Taeuber-Arp exhibition: Krupp, Natalia Sidlina, and Eva Reifert).

Chapter 1 examines Taeuber-Arp's formative applied-art beginnings in Zurich between 1914 and 1929. Krupp's opening essay sets the stage by considering Taeuber-Arp's rich body of early textiles, works on paper, and beadworks. Krupp explores the textiles' endless repertoire of bold, emotive colors and variant geometric rhythms, importantly noting the way Taeuber-Arp developed these qualities within embroidery's regularized, orthogonal structure, a framework she "transferred to all other areas of art" (33). T'ai Smith and Sidlina's lively studies look at Taeuber-Arp's radical application of geometric abstraction to her beaded handbags of 1916–18 and ball costumes from the 1920s. Both studies offer sharp analysis of the mutually generative relationship between her two-dimensional, graphed designs and these pliable objects in fluid motion.

The activated and interdependent nature of Taeuber-Arp's applied arts production is also the focus of chapter 2, "Dada, 1916–20," which treats her affiliation with the Zurich Dada group. Mark Franko, a historian of modern dance, opens with an essay on her expressionist, avant-garde dance and choreographic practice, which she learned under Rudolph von Laban at the School of the Art of Movement and through her exposure to such major figures as Isadora Duncan and Sent M'Ahesa. With the famous still photo believed to be of Taeuber-Arp performing in full costume at the opening of the Dada Galerie in 1917—the only extant image of her in the composite role of dancer and choreographer—Franko illustrates the artist's part in Dada's rebellious critique, with its transrational, "primitivistic" underpinnings. Franko's principal thesis, however, is the reciprocity between her practice in dance and choreography and the suggestively embodied actions at play within her two-dimensional work in this period. His assertion of Taeuber-Arp's "choreographic imaginary" (92–93) finds support in Medea Hoch's careful study of the artist's project for the 1918 *King Stag* production, a "pedagogical Gesamtkunstwerk" (95)—an integration of visual art with a spectrum of other arts into a cohesive, instructive whole—under the auspices

of the Applied Arts Department of Zurich's Trade School, where she taught from 1916 to 1929. Fortified by reproductions of all seventeen of Taeuber-Arp's turned-wood marionettes and by original photographs of them in performance against her painted backdrops, Hoch furthers our appreciation of the marionettes as exquisite character studies in form, color, and material composition and of the artist's coordination of relational effects through space and time.

Leah Dickerman's essay addresses the subject of chapter 2 in greater depth than Franko or Hoch, in consideration of Taeuber-Arp's six spheroid sculptural objects of painted wood known as "Dada Heads." Dickerman concentrates on the well-known photograph Taeuber-Arp submitted to Tristan Tzara's *Dadaglobe* publication in 1920, which featured the artist, in hat and veil, partially obscured behind the most iconic Dada Head (Fig. 1). The performative posture of this self-crafted photograph is decidedly Dada, as Dickerman argues, in its farcical, ambiguous antics of signification: between the Dada Head and Taeuber-Arp's; between mask and portraiture; and between sub-rational "collective ... inner quality or force" (100) and individual, conscious ego. Significantly, Dickerman's study classifies the image's distinctive mediating tactics among Dada's fertile photographic exploits. One of the book's unique contributions, in fact, is its multiple examinations of the ways Taeuber-Arp used photography. Maria Gough's essay on the artist's "camera peripatetica," which composes the whole of chapter 5, discusses how Taeuber-Arp's gouache and pencil landscapes and cityscapes from 1921 through 1945 were informed by the artist's self-taken travel photographs. Gough argues that Taeuber-Arp valued these photographs as indexical of her bodily movements through a site, and that they suggested structural and rhythmic possibilities for the correspondent series of (surprisingly) figurative drawings. Jana Teuscher's study in chapter 3 considers the artist's little-known c. 1930 "Presentation Album," which comprises her selective curation of her work through professional photographs. Teuscher argues that the album played a role in fashioning not only Taeuber-Arp's sense of artistic accomplishment and identity but also how she may have wished to market herself professionally.



Fig. 1. Sophie Taeuber with *Dada Head* (1920), photograph by Nic Aluf, gelatin silver print on board, 4 5/8" x 3 3/4". Stiftung Arp e.V., Berlin.

Chapter 3 explores Taeuber-Arp's multiple interior and architectural projects undertaken between 1926 and 1935, further elucidating her interdisciplinary, Gesamtkunstwerk sensibility in an area of her work that has been generally dismissed in scholarship. Juliet Kinchin's study places Taeuber-Arp among the impressive handful of women who worked within the context of modernist International Style architecture and design, making inroads into a venture that was groundbreaking but still historically masculine, as was its rationalist-functionalist credo. Kinchin's close look at Taeuber-Arp's designs for the Arps' home in Clamart, built in 1927–28, reveals that the artist utilized the same compositional efficiency, clarity, and dynamic modularity in her architectural projects as she did in her other artistic modes. Taeuber-Arp's distinctively "embodied conception of space" (126) and facility in pivoting from the best-laid plans to practical, ad hoc solutions comes through as well in Kinchin's study of this project. Michael White's text on Taeuber-Arp's 1926–28 interior compositions for the "Five O'Clock" tearoom in the Aubette Bar in Strasbourg brings unprecedented scrutiny to Taeuber-Arp's handling of color in this project to achieve surprising spatial, even tactile operations. In the Aubette studies and final compositions, White shows the ways that Taeuber-Arp drew upon an eclectic range of well-established and contemporaneous theoretical writings on color, both embracing and subtly subverting their tenets through her own deliberate, relational color choices.

Chapter 4 turns to Taeuber-Arp's non-objective paintings and drawings and to her positioning in relation to abstract artist associations and groups in the fertile years between 1929 and 1939. In pendant analyses by Briony Fer and Eva Reifert, one finds satisfying reprises of leitmotifs established in other chapters, such as White's characterization of Taeuber-Arp's approach as systematic yet idiosyncratic. For Fer and Reifert, however, the artist's practice now functions in contraposition to the rationalist, purist directive dominating non-objective art during the interwar years. Taeuber-Arp navigated simultaneously within and outside of the hold of the constructive systems of pure abstractionism, much as she worked with the modular armature necessary for textile design. As Fer observes, Taeuber-Arp's lines and shapes—notably the circle, put into the mix as visual protagonist—decidedly resist "absolute resolution" or any fixed "state of equilibrium" (170). Further, elements are divested of metaphysical aura and instead given "corpo-

reality" (170) as lively choreographic actors, as in the artist's 1932 gouache-and-pencil *Six Rooms* (Fig. 2). Reifert makes analogous points regarding Taeuber-Arp's many constructed relief sculptures, produced, like the artist's marionettes and Dada Heads, in painted wood. Somewhere between shape and object, the optical and the physical, figure and ground, these liminal sculptures worked doubly in their tension between "stasis and dynamism, order and chance" (175). Reifert correctly suggests that in the artist's late sculptural work, one finds the elegant consolidation of the many directions and applications of Taeuber-Arp's art prior to this point. Taeuber-Arp's aversion to any ideological conformity drove her (along with Arp), Fer explains, to leave the Abstraction-Création group in 1934 due to its hard-line orthodoxy, which left little room for Taeuber-Arp's embodied and destabilizing transgressions. Adrian Sudhalter points out, however, that when faced with the accelerating Fascistic climate of the 1930s, Taeuber-Arp put ideological scruples aside and took the helm of abstraction's urgent "rescue mission" (179) in her oversight of the multilingual journal *Plastique/Plastic*, published in five issues between 1937 and 1939. Sudhalter shows that Taeuber-Arp was a sharp editorial strategist who brought together disparate "strains" of non-objective abstraction and rejuvenated its practice to the cause of "free thought" (181, the latter quoted from Abstraction-Création's *Cahiers* 1932, 1933).

The advent of World War II and its poignant convergence with the last years of Taeuber-Arp's life and career are explored in Jodi Hauptman's study, "Drawing Without End," which forms the final chapter of the book. Emergent from the artist's questioning of the value of art-making in a time of existential crisis was her resolve to continue doing it, as an act not merely of personal survival but also, in her own words, of "maintain[ing] culture" as it teetered on the brink of collapse (266, letter to Paule Vézelay, 1940). Her resulting non-objective line drawings in pencil are arguably the most "unmoored" and free in movement of her entire oeuvre. Hauptman astutely links these qualities

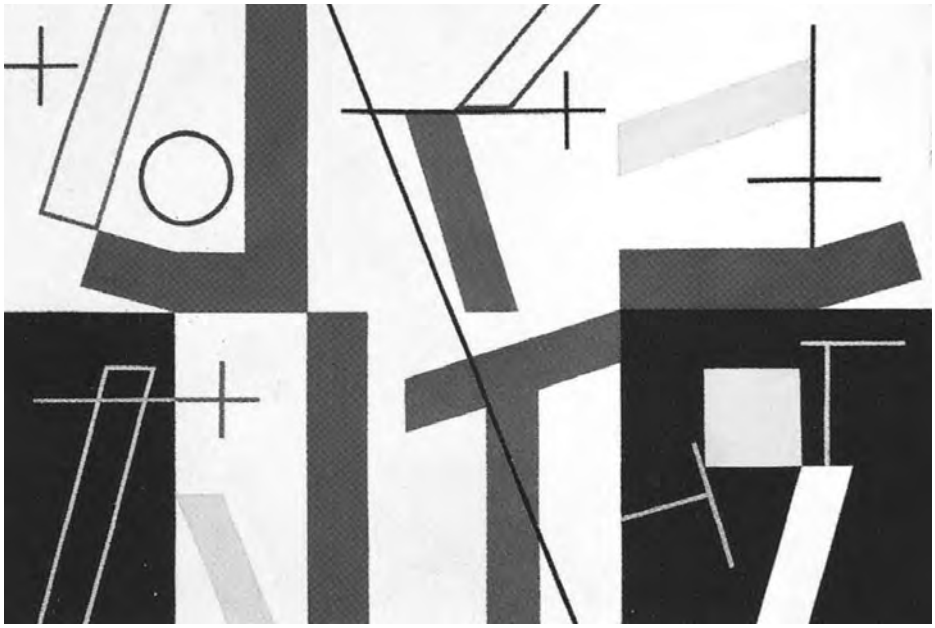


Fig. 2. Sophie Taeuber-Arp, *Six Rooms* (1932), gouache and pencil on paper, 11 7/16" x 16 3/4". Fondazione Marguerite Arp, Locarno, Switzerland.

to Taeuber-Arp's uncertain and "nomad[ic]" existence in exile (267) as she and Arp fled first to the South of France and then, in late 1942, to Zurich. Yet one also discerns a recurrence of the theme of freedom within limits—in this case, within the externally imposed constraints of wartime life.

This collection of sharply focused texts does well to contextualize Taeuber-Arp's vibrant engagement with other artists across disciplines, styles, and ideologies and her critical positioning within various artistic orbits. Longer essays might have allowed such considerations to be developed further, but necessary space constraints have left the elaboration of this subject, and of Taeuber-Arp's working relationship with her artist-husband, to other studies. Notably, the 2021 biography *Sophie Taeuber-Arp: A Life through Art* by Silvia Boadella—great-niece to the artist—complements the present catalogue by exploring Taeuber-Arp's personal and professional relationships in more intimate fashion. In their great variety, the examinations in the present catalogue preclude any monolithic, arcing narrative and thus eminently suit Taeuber-Arp's non-hierarchical, multidisciplinary practice, providing manifold important routes toward an understanding of this polymathic artist. *Sophie Taeuber-Arp: Living Abstraction* towers as a seminal contribution to scholarship; through myriad lenses, and with crucial insights, it illuminates this overlooked female artist in the totality of her achievement. In the end, it rightly situates her at the center of modernism's boundary-breaking enterprise. •

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Notes

1. Umland and Krupp note that the last major exhibition of Taeuber-Arp to include a "large number" of her applied artworks took place in 1977 at the Kunstmuseum (now Kunst Museum), Winterthur, Switzerland, and the Musée d'Art Moderne (now the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain), Strasbourg, France (20).

Mary of Hungary, Renaissance Patron and Collector: Gender, Art and Culture

Edited by Noelia García Pérez
Brepols, 2020

Reviewed by Catherine B. Scallen

This valuable collection of essays stems from a 2017 conference held at the Centro de Estudios Visuales of the Universidad de Murcia entitled "Art, Power, and Gender: Mary of Hungary and the Patronage of Art in Renaissance Europe." The conference papers and resulting essays in the book are intended to provide an "interdisciplinary and transversal analysis ... within the critical framework of visual and gender studies" (13). This ambitious goal is reflected in the variety of humanistic disciplines in which the contributors specialize. These authors, some established, some newer to their fields, draw on the renewed historiographical interest in Mary of Hungary in the last twenty years, which has emphasized her role as a contributor to Habsburg iconography and art patronage, particularly in her time as regent of the Netherlands.

Mary of Hungary's life (1505–58) was eventful. After the death in 1506 of her father, the Habsburg Philip the Fair of Burgundy, she was raised first in the southern Netherlands at the court of her aunt, Margaret of Austria, regent of the Netherlands (r. 1507–15, 1519–30), and then at the Vienna court of her paternal grandfather, Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I. Married at age ten to young Louis II of Hungary, she moved to Maximilian's court at Innsbruck before beginning her married life with her husband in Hungary in 1521. Louis died in the aftermath of a battle against the army of Ottoman Emperor Süleyman the Magnificent in 1526, and Queen Mary ruled Hungary for a year as regent. In 1531, Mary's brother, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, appointed her to succeed her aunt as regent of the Netherlands. Mary of Hungary inherited this regency at a time when the rise of Protestantism and internal revolts against the central authority of the emperor made the position a challenging one; she nonetheless held it until 1555, when she retired to Spain, leaving the rule of the Netherlands to her nephew, Philip II.

In the Anglophone world of scholarship, Mary of Hungary is perhaps less well known as a female ruler of importance than her aunt, Margaret of Austria. That imbalance makes the publication of this volume in English especially timely, for, as the authors represented in the book amply demonstrate, Mary played as central a role in Habsburg rule as her aunt had done, both directly and through the promotion of the arts. She was clearly a woman of intelligence and fortitude in the face of her many life challenges. Never simply a pawn in dynastic politics, Mary of Hungary refused to remarry and wore the attire of a widow for the thirty-two years she survived her husband. She also clearly enjoyed the fruits of her patronage during a rich period of creativity in music and the visual arts, promoting innovations in both areas. In the realm of painting and sculpture, she favored Italian artists; for tapestries, she heavily patronized the workshops of the southern Netherlands. Her intellectual bent extended to the study of philosophy and theology, including an early interest in the ideas of Martin Luther, which was soon discouraged by her brothers, Ferdinand and Charles, and later directed towards the writings of Erasmus. Her life and actions provide rich material for scholarship, as evidenced in this collection of essays.

An introductory essay by Noelia García Pérez, associate professor of Art History at the Universidad de Murcia and editor of the book, opens the volume. García Pérez supplies a brief biography of Mary of Hungary, sets out the book's interdisciplinary aims, and offers abstracts of each essay, noting the division of the book into two parts, "Mary of Hungary in Context" and "Mary of Hungary and the Arts." Of necessity, Mary of Hungary is best understood in a dual manner: through her own patronage and collecting, and in relation to her Habsburg family, most notably to her predecessor as Netherlandish regent, Margaret of Austria, and to Charles V as her brother and Holy Roman Emperor. García Pérez previews the approach of all the book's authors in her closing statement that the "multiple identities" of Mary of Hungary as patron, Habsburg princess, and female regent can be understood through the "seminal language" of the visual arts, music, and contemporary literature (19).

The two opening essays in part 1 offer important revisionist understandings. In "Challenging Images: Charles V's Relationship with Art, Artists and Festivities," M. J. Rodríguez-Salgado presents a convincing reappraisal of the Holy Roman Emperor's art patronage. A well-established scholar on the Habsburg rulers, Rodríguez-Salgado confidently disputes the idea of a strong personal investment in the arts by Charles V, at least until his last years. Rather, she provides evidence that many of the works of art, both permanent and temporary, occasioned by imperial victories and entries into cities were in fact commissioned and paid for by others. Rodríguez-Salgado emphasizes that Mary of Hungary's role as artistic patron of Titian and other artists played a significant part in furthering Charles's image.

Dagmar Eichberger, in her essay "Like Aunt Like Niece? Assessing the Value of Margaret of Austria's Collection for Mary of Hungary," similarly contests an older scholarly trope, in this case about the importance of the collection inherited by Mary from her aunt. Comparing inventories of Margaret of Austria's possessions with those composed after Mary's move to Spain and shortly after Mary's death in 1558, Eichberger finds that only a limited number of the works of art and books from Margaret accompanied Mary into retirement, most of them textiles; Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Double Portrait* (1434) was one of the only paintings. Objects of what we might deem sentimental value, including a marble portrait statue of Margaret and painted portraits of Mary's brothers in younger years, were not taken to Spain. This essay strongly suggests that "magnificence and ... a comfortable living standard" (57), not sentimental attachment,

were primary determinants in Mary's choices of what went with her and what remained behind.

Annemarie Jordan Gschwend's essay, "Alessandro Nogarola's Rediscovered *Vita* of Mary of Hungary, Regent of the Netherlands," explicates a previously overlooked sixteenth-century life of Mary as ruler and woman. Composed by a courtier to Mary and published in 1553, the encomium offers insight into how this dowager queen of Hungary and longtime governor of the Netherlands was viewed by her contemporaries: with admiration for her rulership, intellect, and probity. Nogarola's access to Mary was extraordinarily facilitated by his marriage to Lucrecia di Cavalli, lady-in-waiting to the regent. The account of the close relationship between Mary and Lucrecia, begun years before Nogarola appeared at Mary's court, is as fascinating as the discussion of the *Vita* itself. Gschwend and Eichberger are among the established scholars who have already made signal contributions to our understanding of Mary of Hungary; their essays here continue that record.



Fig. 1. Pompeo Leoni, Leone Leoni, *Mary of Hungary* (1553–55), marble bust, 37" tall. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

García Pérez opens part 2 with her historiographical survey, "Mary of Hungary, Patron and Collector, from Political to Cultural History: The State of the Question." Her essay is remarkable for its concision and comprehensiveness, offering an invaluable contextualization of previous scholarship on Mary of Hungary and the arts as well as suggesting avenues for future research. Her essay is followed by specific interventions along these lines of inquiry. Miguel Falomir Faus, scholar of Renaissance art and director of the Museo del Prado in Madrid, deepens our knowledge of Mary as a patron of the Venetian painter Titian, an artist so often associated with the Habsburgs, in "Titian, Mary of Hungary and *Venus and Psyche*." Mary's numerous commissions from Titian are discussed, including the lost painting of Psyche presenting Venus with waters from the spring of Hades. Faus suggests that the patron herself may have chosen the subject, perhaps inspired by moralizing interpretations of Psyche's tale as an allegory of spiritual ascent. He argues that Mary demonstrated a more knowledgeable engagement with this painter than did Charles V.

In "'A Woman Who Is So Much Like a Man': Mary of Hungary, Female Rulership, and Portraits by the Leoni," Kelley Helmstutler Di Dio gives close readings of portrait busts and full-length statues of Mary produced by father-and-son sculptors Leone and Pompeo Leoni starting in 1549. Helmstutler Di Dio explores how the artists nuanced their depictions of Mary to accentuate her public persona as widow and governor over her private qualities and physical form. In a marble bust by Pompeo now in the Prado, for example, Mary wears widow's garments, including an elaborate wimple and thick mantle, which frame a somber, lined face and minimize the curves of her torso (Fig. 1). The Leoni portraits "emphasized the 'manly' traits" that contemporary authors praised in descriptions of Mary's rule (122).

Anne-Sophie Laruelle's contribution, "A New Perspective on Mary of Hungary's *Labours of Hercules* Tapestries," uses a c. 1535 tapestry set as a lens into Mary of Hungary's role as a major patron of the era's ultimate luxury art. The essay is an in-depth exploration of the creation of the series—possibly based, the author proposes, on drawings from the Brussels workshop of Flemish artist Bernaert van Orley—and of the widespread identification of Maximilian I and Charles V with Hercules. Laruelle argues that Mary commissioned the set to "consolidate and propagate the mythical and heroic image" of her brother the emperor (134). José Luis Gonzalo Sánchez-Molero's "Mary of Hungary: Female Reading and Dynastic Bibliophily" presents a deeper understanding of Mary's varied intellectual interests beyond rulership, including natural philosophy and theology; he helps us to understand her as an especially important example of the female literary patron and reader of high status in that era. Camilla Cavicchi's essay, "Mary of Hungary, Patron of Music," concludes the volume with documentary evidence attesting to Mary's deep patronage of music and musicians, both sacred and secular, and her extensive collecting of instruments and music books.

The volume is generously illustrated, including color reproductions of high quality as well as many black-and-white images. The volume is best characterized as the successful fulfillment of the authors' goals: to evaluate Mary of Hungary's relationship with the arts through patronage and collecting, and to see these activities as revealing her connections to the major figures and movements that helped to shape her life as a female ruler of note in the sixteenth century. •

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Pl. 1. Janet Culbertson, *2084 (Message to the Future)* (1985), collage, acrylic on rag paper, 22″ x 30″.



Pl. 2. Janet Culbertson, *Orwell Memorial (Descansos)* (2020), oil, collage, iridescent pigment on canvas, 48″ x 36″.



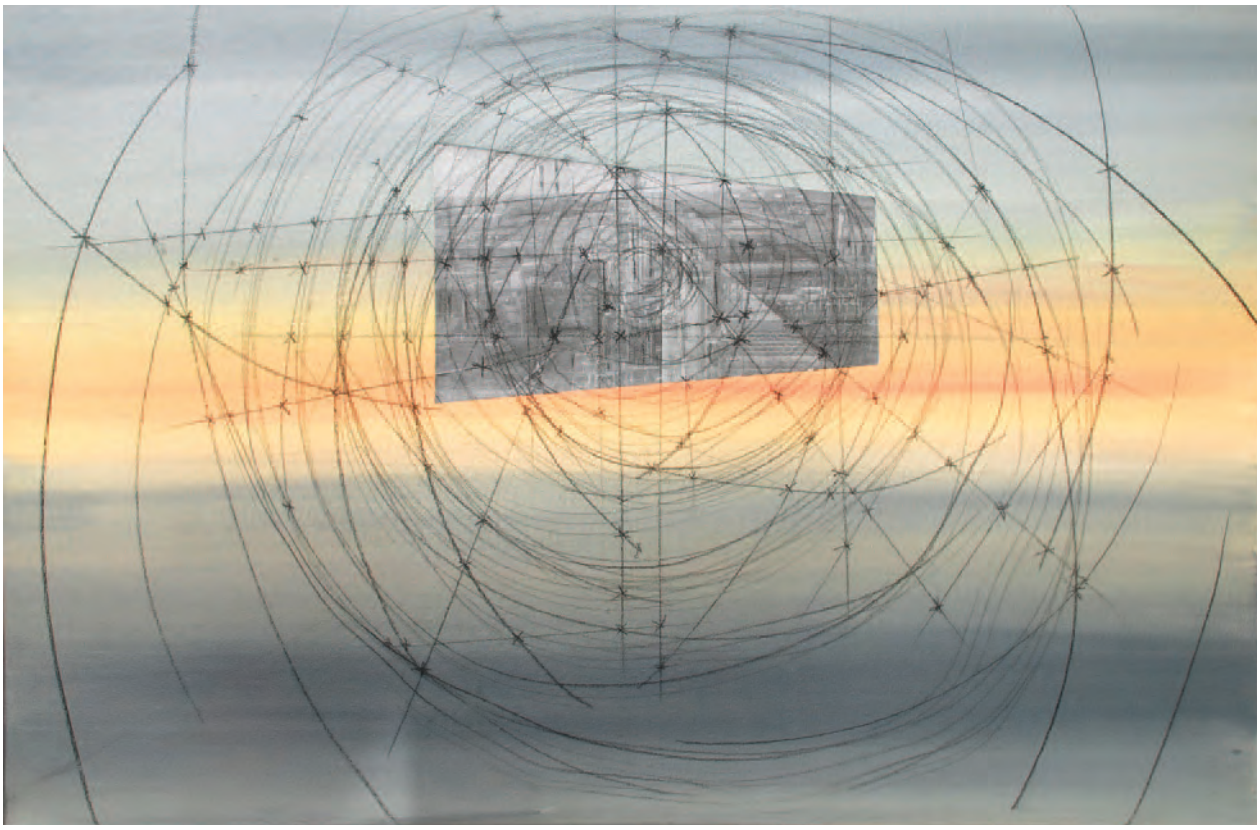
Pl. 3. Janet Culbertson, *World on Fire* (2021), oil on panel, 18" x 24".



Pl. 4. Janet Culbertson, *Canoeing Through Black Gold* (1969), oil on rag paper, 22"x 28".



Pl. 5. Janet Culbertson, *Another Last Billboard (Blue)* (2020), acrylic and collage on rag paper, 38" x 50".



Pl. 6. Janet Culbertson, *Seeking a New Planet* (2020), acrylic on canvas, 24"x 36".



Pl. 7. Inge Morath, *Natural Bridge, near Lexington, Virginia* (1960), photograph. © Inge Morath/ Magnum Photos.



Pl. 8. Inge Morath, *Highway entertainment at an 'Indian Trading Post,' before arriving at Albuquerque, New Mexico* (1960), photograph. © Inge Morath/Magnum Photos.



Pl. 9. Inge Morath, *Reno, Nevada* (1960), photograph. © Inge Morath/Magnum Photos.



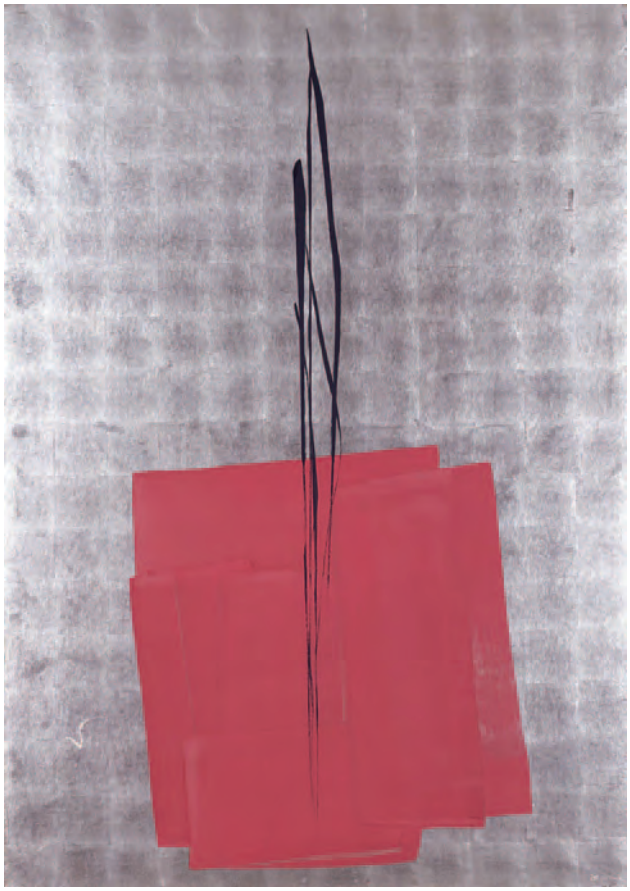
Pl. 10. Inge Morath, *Marilyn Monroe with script and fans, outside the Reno courthouse, Reno, Nevada, Set of* The Misfits (1960), photograph. © Inge Morath/Magnum Photos.



Pl. 11. Shinoda Tōkō, *Isshun* (A Moment) (1950–1955), ink on paper, 38 37/64" x 51 31/32". Gifu Collection of Modern Arts, Seki, Gifu.



Pl. 12. Shinoda Tōkō, *Seisō* (Elapse) (1954), ink on paper, 55 1/8" x 27 11/64". Gifu Collection of Modern Arts, Seki, Gifu.



Pl. 13. Shinoda Tōkō, *Hito yo (II)* (For Thee (II)) (1988), ink, vermilion paint, and silver leaf on paper, 82 3/32" x 58 17/64". The Museum of Fine Arts, Gifu City, Gifu.



Pl. 14. Shinoda Tōkō, *Hyaku* (A Hundred) (2012), ink, silver paint, and gold leaf on paper, 82 43/64" x 59 1/16". Gifu Collection of Modern Arts, Seki, Gifu.



Pl. 15. Gwen John, *Self-Portrait* (1899-1900), oil on canvas, 24" x 14 7/8". © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Pl. 16. Gwen John, *Self-Portrait in a Red Blouse* (c. 1900–02), oil on canvas, 17 5/8" x 13 3/4". Tate Gallery, London. Purchased 1942. Photo © Tate. N05366. CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported): https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/john-self-portrait-n05366.



Pl. 17. Gwen John, *Interior with Figures* (1898-99), oil on canvas, 18 1/8" x 13 1/8". National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia. Gift of C. H. Collins-Baker, 1947.



Pl. 18. Gwen John, *La Chambre sur la Cour* (1907–08), oil on canvas, 12 1/2" x 8 1/2". Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B2014.5.3.



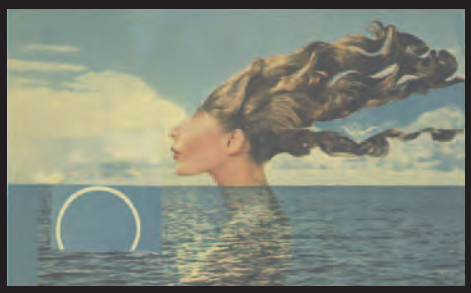
Pl. 19. Gwen John, *A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris* (1907–09), oil on canvas, 12 1/2" x 10 1/2". Sheffield Galleries and Museums Trust.

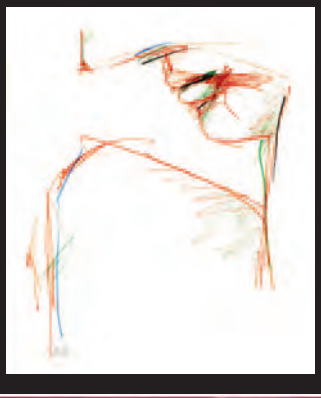
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