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ANDROGYNOUS PROTECTION: A Linda Stein Retrospective

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(Front cover)
Dorothy Dehner,
Prelude and Fugue (1989),
painted black steel,
99" x 103" x 33".
Photo: Berry Campbell
Gallery, New York.
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2 PARALLEL PERSPECTIVES

By Joan Marter and Aliza Edelman

PORTTRAITS, ISSUES AND INSIGHTS

3 SHIFTING SCALE, FRAMING OBJECTS:

DOROTHY DEHNER AND WOMEN SCULPTORS AMONG
THE ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISTS

By Sophie Lachowsky

16 MONIR SHAHROUDY FARMANFARMAIAN: IN HER WORDS (1985)

By Donna Stein

26 THE VIBRANT MATERIAL OF FRANCES KUEHN By Heather Cammarata-Seale

35 SHADES OF GRAY:

THE POSTMODERN PORTRAITS OF ROMAINE BROOKS
AND THE SLIPPAGE OF GENDER REPRESENTATION

By Elizabeth Richards Rivenbark

REVIEWS

43 *Transnational Belonging and Female Agency in the Arts* Edited by Basia Sliwinska and Catherine Dormor Reviewed by Maria Costantino

47 *Bisa Butler—Portraits*

Edited by Erica Warren Reviewed by Lisa Farrington

49 *Gillian Wearing: Wearing Masks*

By Jennifer Blessing, Nat Trotman, and Gillian Wearing
Reviewed by Sigourney Schultz

52 *Dismantling the Patriarchy, Bit by Bit: Art, Feminism, and Digital Technology* By Judith K. Brodsky Reviewed by Charlotte Kent

54 *Faith Ringgold: Politics Power*

By Faith Ringgold, Michele Wallace, and Kirsten Weiss
Reviewed by Lisa Farrington

56 *Women Artists on the Leading Edge: Visual Arts at Douglass College*

By Joan Marter
Reviewed by Heather Cammarata-Seale

59 *The Traumatic Surreal: Germanophone Women Artists and Surrealism after the Second World War*

By Patricia Allmer Reviewed by Andrea Gremels

63 *Magnetic Woman: Toyen and the Surrealist Erotic* By Karla Huebner Reviewed by Ashley Busby

65 *Women's Lives, Women's Voices: Roman Material Culture and Female Agency in the Bay of Naples*

Edited by Brenda Longfellow and Molly Swetnam-Burland
Reviewed by Brigitte Keslinke

Woman's Art Journal was honored to receive many longtime and new friends at the annual College Art Association's onsite book and trade fair in New York. We recently launched our newly revamped website and social media campaign, where readers and contributors can find our updated editorial policies, at <https://womansartjournal.org>. For WAJ's Spring/Summer issue, the editors have assembled articles that retrieve the histories of fiercely ambitious, dedicated women artists. Two contributions probe the epic personal narratives of postwar twentieth-century artists pushing the boundaries of three-dimensional space, an excellent pendant to two incisive, thought-provoking essays on the unorthodox practices of modern and contemporary portraitists.

Our feature article by Sophie Lachowsky explores the connections among women sculptors of the Abstract Expressionist era. Recent publications have granted attention to women painters of the 1950s, however, this generation of women sculptors was relegated primarily to monographic studies. Only a few scholars have proposed the social and artistic interactions of Dorothy Dehner and Louise Nevelson, or the related works, in wood, by Louise Bourgeois. Lachowsky carefully considers the interrelated sculptural experimentations by Dehner, Nevelson, and Bourgeois, three women whose pioneering approaches to art in three dimensions—propelled by the utilization of innovative materials—established original methods and dramatic displays. Nevelson's stacked wood installations, culled from recycled materials, strongly parallel the interior scenes of Bourgeois's *Personages*. Dehner's surprising update to the traditional lost wax process, via the creation of openwork constructions, explains her success in the 1950s and thereafter. All three artists were at the forefront of postwar sculptural installations, but only in recent decades have they received international recognition.

Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian is presented by Donna Stein as one of the most accomplished multidisciplinary artists of her generation in Iran and the US. An expert on Iranian art, Stein retrieves from her archives an important interview with Monir from 1985, a fascinating recollection that explores the artist's enterprising and ambitious travels to Indigenous communities throughout Iran. Monir developed important relationships with the artisans from nomadic and settled tribes, and she acquired traditional paintings, jewelry, ceramics, textiles, and carpets. Some of these exquisite historical examples impacted the direction of her contemporary work. "In Her Words" is a revelatory encounter that illustrates Monir's indebtedness to the Iranian craftspeople whom she met throughout her singular career, many influencing her technical development of bas-relief constructions, tapestries, and Persian *ayeneh-kari* (mirror work).

A graduate of Rutgers University's Douglass College and MFA program, Frances Kuehn studied with Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Watts, and Geoffrey Hendricks. The progressive curriculum of Black Mountain College was favored by the great artists and teachers then making up the faculty at Rutgers, and Kuehn's exposure to this nonconventional arts education inspired her freedom to explore many new directions. Like George Segal, also then on the Rutgers campus, Kuehn pursued a deeply personal response to the study of the figure. Heather Cammarata-Seale's article begins with Kuehn's images of family members. Her paintings take a different course by 2003. Fabrics

and garments, arranged in grid-like configurations, dominate the canvas and elicit natural, mimetic, and animated bodily and nonhuman forms. Cammarata-Seale calls them *nature vivante* paintings—still lifes-cum-portraits—fabricating a "thing power" from their compositional vitality. Kuehn says "all our possessions speak about us in silent ways."

The portraits of early-twentieth-century painter Romaine Brooks offer sibylline representations of decadent queerness. Drawn to Whistler's subdued color palette and dandy iconography, Brooks utilized an anachronistic Decadent style associated with Symbolism and Aestheticism. Elizabeth Richards Rivenbark argues that Brooks' aesthetic and ideological tendencies align more comfortably with the later postmodern era, a position that advances how the radical gender slippage portrayed by Brooks' portrait sitters transformed the visual and sexual tropes of modern lesbianism.

Our meticulous WAJ book reviews editor, Alison Poe, has brought to fruition an exceptional corpus of criticism. Examining the "place-based strategies of transnational sisterhood and solidarity," Maria Constantino's review on global women artists explores the collective strategies of "belonging" and "unbelonging" that operate from the "in-between" spaces, borders, and geographies of nation states, political structures, and patriarchal institutions. Charlotte Kent's intertwined narratives of art and technology chart the feminist and gender-fluid histories of new media and digital projects, including AI, VR, and AR. Lisa Farrington surveys two book projects: on Bixa Butler's exhibition catalogue of quilted portraits, Farrington sumptuously harnesses the artist's capacity to guide, by way of fabric, the viewer's focus beyond race with the "seeming ease of wielding a paintbrush"; and in a separate volume, Faith Ringgold, renowned for her story quilts, is showcased by a lesser-known decade of her political agendas and activities. Joan Marter chronicled the leading women's postwar arts program and exhibition series at Douglass College, reviewed in depth by Heather Cammarata-Seale.

Contextualizing the rich histories of feminism, eroticism, and sexuality in the interwar period, Ashley Busby uncovers the mysterious persona and art of the avant-garde Czech surrealist, Toyen. Andrea Gremels's review likewise unsilences the histories of Germanophone women artists and trauma theory, extending the "palimpsestic" character of surrealism's feminist landscape beyond World War II. Sigourney Schultz unveils the intimate truths and human experiences of Gillian Wearing, a British multidisciplinary artist who "exhorts her audience to be who they would like to be, not what others want them to be." Brigitte Keslinke sheds light on the perpetually marginalized status of ancient Roman women and other communities in the scholarship of the ancient Mediterranean, recuperating the deep silences from the rich archeological bounty of textual and material evidence in the Bay of Naples, and turning an extraordinary volume of female-centric narratives and proposals into an "inclusive toolbox" for examining the Roman world.

WAJ is immensely grateful for the continued support of Guy Griffiths and Ed Farnsworth at Old City Publishing.

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

SHIFTING SCALE, FRAMING OBJECTS

DOROTHY DEHNER AND WOMEN SCULPTORS

AMONG THE ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISTS

By Sophie Lachowsky

In the summer of 1956, Louise Nevelson (1899–1988) realized that she would not be able to stay much longer in her home and studio, in lower Manhattan, because that area around Kips Bay would eventually be demolished. Her close friend, Dorothy Dehner (1901–1994), photographed its unique interior filled with the tools and scavenged fragments of wood that Nevelson hoarded for her modular constructions of nested objects (Figs. 1–2). Photographs offer an essential complement to sculptural possibilities and a unique perspective on how works of art are shaped by the location in which they are made. Many critics have related Nevelson's oeuvre to her idiosyncratic living space.¹ By fully integrating her own aesthetic sensibilities, Dehner reveals her deep understanding of Nevelson's "endless sculptural environment," but also her ease with the camera.² Dehner's expert eye captured the essence of what would become known as installation art and enhances our understanding of its meaning. Her abilities to shift scale and frame objects, demonstrating her knowledge of spatial composition, defy the limits of archival documentation and enter the realm of art making.³

Dehner and Nevelson met at Atelier 17, Stanley William Hayter's printmaking workshop, and became lifelong friends (Fig. 3).⁴ Dehner was at a turning point in her life and career when she took the pictures of Nevelson's studio. While she already possessed a significant body of work as an accom-



Fig. 1. Dorothy Dehner, *Louise Nevelson Studio* (1958), glass-slide photograph. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Louise Nevelson Papers, circa 1903–1979. ©2023 Dorothy Dehner Foundation for the Visual Arts.

Fig. 2. Dorothy Dehner, *Louise Nevelson Studio (Sculptures Obstructing Space)* (1958), glass-slide photograph. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Louise Nevelson Papers, circa 1903–1979. ©2023 Dorothy Dehner Foundation for the Visual Arts.



plished painter, she was on the cusp of becoming a talented sculptor and an active participant on the New York art scene. An involvement with forms and materials was to dominate the rest of her life. This article will focus on Dehner's sculptural career and explore how her profound spatial understanding of volume and scale can be mapped onto her investigations of architectonic structures and techniques of coloring, drawing, and engraving.



Fig. 3. Helaine Messer, Dorothy Dehner and Louise Nevelson at the Storm King Art Center Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Luncheon, April 27, 1985, photograph. Photo: © 2023 Storm King Art Center.

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Dehner came from an educated, sophisticated, and politically liberal background. Her father was a pharmacist, her mother an active suffragist, and she absorbed their progressive attitudes towards women's roles in society. Orphaned at a young age, she was left independently wealthy to pursue her interests in the performing arts and travel around Europe. Upon her return to the U.S., she enrolled at the Art Students League in New York, where she initially considered being a sculptor. For Dehner, the League's principal sculpture teachers, William Zorach and Robert Laurent, carved in a mawkishly diluted version of modernism, and "there was nobody there worth studying with." She eventually discovered a mentor in Jan Matulka, with whom she reconnected with the Cubist and avant-garde forms and "the exciting stuff" she had admired in Paris.⁵ This experience gave her a strong sense of autonomy, unusual for women of her generation.

There were many artistic couples among the Abstract Expressionists of the New York School. Their overlapping, intimate, and professional relationships, while initially appearing to form only a loose lattice of ties, morphed over the years as their community grew.⁶ In many cases, the women took a more supportive and discreet role, allowing their partners to glow in the limelight. They gave the careers of their male partners center stage, keeping the flame of legacy alive after death. Like many of their male counterparts identified as first-generation Abstract Expressionists, Dehner, like Lee Krasner

(1908–1984) and Elaine de Kooning (1918–1989), was politically engaged and fully committed to her art. However, their dual identities as a "wife of" (Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, respectively) hindered their due recognition as artists. Dehner had a significant and tumultuous marriage to sculptor David Smith, often considered an appendage when they were together and felt liberated from him when they parted.⁷

Hailed by Clement Greenberg as "the greatest sculptor America has produced," Smith was and remains, to a certain extent, one of the most revered artists, who did more than any of his contemporaries to bring the plasticity of forms and the use of unconventional materials to the vanguard of abstraction. At a time when sculpture was criticized or even dismissed as a by-product of painting, Smith's dominant personality and his art, against which Dehner has been continually measured, always loomed large.⁸ Only a few scholars have addressed the complex relationship of Dehner and Smith. Until Michael Brenson's recent 2022 biography, *David Smith: The Art and Life of a Transformational Sculptor*, the influence or mere presence of Dehner in his life was overlooked or ignored. Although Brenson's title suggests acclaim, in line with previous Smith hagiographers, the author reveals a much more nuanced and objective portrait that reconciles the deeply flawed man with the groundbreaking artist. Brenson also redresses the imbalance between the extensive literature on Smith and the sparse coverage of Dehner's own critical merit. He unearths facets of their shared intellectual and creative aspirations during their marriage, and the mutual respect and "uneasy friendship" that subsisted throughout their lives and that increased once they were sufficiently far apart, so as not to compete with each other's medium and creativity.⁹ In 1950, after twenty-three years of marriage—and one too many of Smith's violent outbursts—Dehner left their marital home in Bolton Landing, New York, the farm near Lake George that the couple had acquired in the twenties, mostly with Dehner's personal income. They finally divorced in 1952.

Aggressive and cruel behaviour, often fuelled by alcohol, was prevalent within their close circle of artists. As much as heavy drinking powered their camaraderie and their imagination, it was also their undoing. A code of silence was observed around the unstable temperaments, bordering on dangerous, of Greenberg, Pollock, Smith, John Graham, and other male protagonists of the American avant-garde. Their contempt for social norms stimulated not only their creativity but, it seems, the irreconcilable extremes of their irresistible sexuality, devastating charisma, and vulnerability.¹⁰ The Cedar Tavern, Five Spot Café, and Waldorf Cafeteria have become an integral part of the legendary fraternizing of the Abstract Expressionists, infamous spots for the macho antics and drunken bravado of their artistic patrons. These hangouts were also unique social hubs fostering creativity and stimulation, where kindred spirits could share tips on good studios and art materials. Dehner described the gossips of Romany Marie, the bohemian Greenwich Village café, as a crosspollination of information that had a real impact on spreading reputations and determining careers.¹¹ The Club,

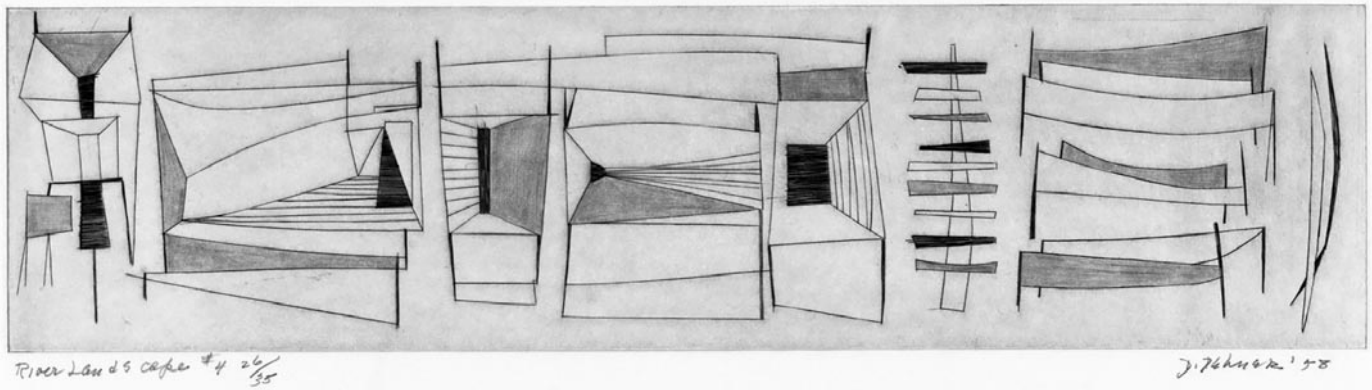


Fig. 4. Dorothy Dehner, *River Landscape #4* (1958), engraving with roulette, 8 3/8" x 22 1/4". Gift of the Dorothy Dehner Foundation for the Visual Arts, New York. Photo © 2023 Dorothy Dehner Foundation for the Visual Arts.

at 39 East Eighth Street, was another popular haunt to congregate. The founding crowd in 1949 was mostly impoverished male artists, emerging from the Depression era Federal Art Project. Elaine de Kooning paved the way for women members. Round table discussions, held on Wednesdays, gradually evolved into a structured program of Friday lectures, symposiums, and concerts to welcome eminent scholars, philosophers, and critics, such as Hannah Arendt, William Barrett, John Cage and Robert Goldwater, whose wife, Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010), became an active participant. Moreover, the place was a nonpartisan sanctuary where “politics was left at the door and no single aesthetic credo dominated.”¹²

As their gendered representation was marginal to the general spirit that suffused early Abstract Expressionism, women artists tended to cooperate rather than compete. Their broader relationships and sources of support were formed in cultural interest groups, stimulating working environments, and educational programs, where they could assert their artistic intentions.¹³ Atelier 17 was another organization that provided essential frames of reference for women’s stylistic ambitions and solidarity. This experimental print studio for the graphic arts was formed in Paris in 1927 and moved to New York in 1940. It enjoyed a reputation for innovative and collaborative approaches, including the development of simultaneous color printing. In this inspiring setting, sculptors and painters, including Alexander Calder, de Kooning, and Pollock, and more significantly, Bourgeois, Worden Day (1912–1986), Sue Fuller (1914–2006), and many other women artists, shared ideas and learned experimental printmaking techniques favoring spontaneous attitudes to rigorous technical processes. As the print scholar Christina Weyl contends, many women of Atelier 17 questioned the perceptions and prejudices associated with crafts and femininity. They



Fig. 5. Dena, *Dorothy Dehner in her studio* (1964), silver gelatin photograph, 7 1/2" x 9 7/8". Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Item ID: 5954.

challenged preconceived ideas about physical strength and labor-intensive production methods together with the constraints of recalcitrant materials and hazardous instruments.¹⁴ Although Bourgeois, for example, found engraving and working in tridimensionality “terribly exciting,” she associated these practices with muscles and manliness, which constituted challenges for her slender frame.¹⁵

For Dehner, however, the act of “[d]igging into the plate with a burin was a marvellous experience.”¹⁶ Possibly less motivated by a conviction to the medium than the need to distance herself from Smith’s volatile behavior, Dehner had worked mostly on paper during their marriage. She perceived his attitude as a prohibition against her possible career ambitions as a sculptor and felt that he rejected the possibility

of collaboration, let alone the prospect of competition.¹⁷ The carving and operation of equipment eased her entry into the contested pathways associated with male creativity and productivity and revived her desire “of working three dimensionally.”¹⁸ Dehner also explored the resilience and flexibility of copper and the technical combination of intaglio printmaking processes, such as lift-ground (sugar-lift aquatint), drypoint, and open bite etching with aquatint. By alternating between intaglio and relief printing and by letting the ink collect along the abstract forms, she emphasized the print’s sculptural qualities. She employed these techniques for her *River Landscape* series, prints astutely interpreted as sculptural constructions on paper (1954–56; Fig. 4).¹⁹ These engravings portend the titles and compositional elements of her later horizontally oriented sculptures, such as *Low Landscape No. 3* (1961), which explore the transition between two and three dimensions. Dehner made *Low Landscape No. 3* using her signature technique of a one-off solid bronze cast from a hand-crafted wax model. The sculpture’s unique architectural scale and planar disposition draw on Constructivist methods, granting the viewer the simultaneous impression of being immersed in a landscape while lifted from an aerial vantage point. The work’s multiple orientations and perspective demonstrate Dehner’s adroit skills for developing a structure of significant dimensions incrementally, and a comprehension of the possibilities and limitations of sculptural materials.²⁰ *Low Landscape Sideways* (1962; Pl. 1 and Fig. 5) displays a greater pictorial multi-positionality, placed upright and erect, attached to a plinth.

Following the tradition at Atelier 17, Dehner kept some of her copper plates. They became essential for enabling Stewart Nachmias, a Master printer and cast paper artist, to publish later editions of her prints in the 1980s. A few of these copper plates were displayed next to their corresponding works on paper and engravings at *Dorothy Dehner: Drawings, Prints, Sculpture*, the artist’s 1995 retrospective at the Cleveland Museum of Art. Besides providing viewers a rare opportunity to observe the deep grooves of the markings, these techniques demonstrate Dehner’s ability to work seamlessly between two and three dimensions and to illuminate further her investigations of matter and volume on the flat surfaces of prints and metals. When Atelier 17 closed in 1955, Dehner joined the Sculpture Center, a member-based sculpture workshop and gallery, where she experimented in wax to create her unique bronzes. At the time, sculptors who were working in direct metal used bronze casting with lost wax, turning to Constructivist methods and compositions. Dehner had become familiar with this approach through David Slivka, her fellow printmaker at Atelier 17. Slivka later wrote in *Art News* about the freedom of expression and versatility of molding sheets of wax into undulating shapes to achieve the volume and space of sculpture, utilizing a combination of traditional methods and abstract negative forms.²¹

Dehner enjoyed the exploration of malleable materials that did not possess the messiness of clay.²² Manipulating the surfaces both before and after casting, she assembled small pieces of metal connected by interlocking planes and linear



Fig. 6. Dorothy Dehner, *Torgate* (1957), bronze, 16 1/4" x 12 1/2" x 9". Photo: © 2023 Dorothy Dehner Foundation for the Visual Arts.

components constructed from slabs of wax. Demonstrating her expertise in sculpting and printmaking, these faceted elements required less physical strength than engraving, and the imprint of her sensual touch shifted to enliven the surfaces and create tensions between light and shadow. James Mellow wrote that this process gave “her sculptures a sturdy visual elegance.”²³ Dehner iterated the textural effects from her earlier experimentations during her days studying under Matulka, when she painted semi-abstract forms, mixing oil with cement, pebbles, and even ground coffee.²⁴ His teaching transcended the boundaries between painting and sculpture, and he encouraged his students to work across all artistic media. Matulka considered how photographs of artworks could be works of art in their own right because they were essential for the complete understanding and experience of art.²⁵ Photography exceeded the formal record of capturing the appearance of three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional surface by implicitly questioning the material nature of sculpture.²⁶

Joan Marter has observed that Dehner emphasized contour over mass, underscoring how the artist actively contrasted linear with spatial components, a process that bestowed a Constructivist rather than a modelled quality onto her small-scale, architectonic works.²⁷ Departing from the solidity and



Fig. 7. Dorothy Dehner, *Egyptian King* (1972), bronze, 65 1/2" x 15 1/4" x 12". Photo: © 2023 Dorothy Dehner Foundation for the Visual Arts.

roundness offered by a monolithic approach to materials, Dehner was influenced by modernist sculptors who had also benefited, formally and aesthetically, by the textural layers of Picasso's collages and Julio González's "drawing in space."²⁸ Dehner's open structures were well suited for her distinctive technical method of casting the alloy directly onto the wax, thereby destroying the original model and creating what Dore Ashton called "sensitively fashioned bronzes."²⁹ The prohibitive cost of raw materials further limited the size of her work; nevertheless, an intimate scale creates a haptic pull between the surface of the sculpture and the beholder. The materialistic facture of handling bronze—its heft and durability—has affinities to artistic acts of heroism and to eternal space and time. Similarly, the noble materials utilized in her earliest bronze pieces, such as *Jacob's Ladder* No. 2 (1957; Pl. 2) and *Torgate* (1957; Fig. 6), added both a monumentality in concept and a refinement in scale. Their open, spiky, horizontal grids are made with slabs of lost wax rather than by welding rods or sheets of metal into position.³⁰

Although Dehner's sculptures are mainly abstract, they often refer to the human figure and her own foreign travels, whereas some of her more architectural structures, featuring thrusting or piled elements, resemble city skylines.³¹ Many of her pieces have a totemic aspect; their forms, textures, and titles refer to mythology and religious icons of classical antiquity, ancient Egypt, and early cultures in Africa and South America. *Egyptian King* (1972; Fig. 7) contains a vertical row of bronze geometric shapes incised with symbols inside a narrow rectangular frame. The contrasting open or negative spaces and solid intricately worked surfaces are enhanced by the metal's radiance and glinting light of faceted elements. The light reflecting off *Hanging Piece* (1960; Pl. 3), vertically displayed, accentuates the sculpture's shimmering surface. Its kinetic potential echoes the hanging columns from Nevelson's painted wood series *Dawn's Wedding Feast* (1959–60; Fig. 8), shown at the Museum of Modern Art around the same time as Dehner's *Hanging Piece* was made. Rosalind Krauss has observed that most postwar American sculptors had shared interests in the treatment of matter and forms to create votive signs and emblems at the

Fig. 8. David Heald, *Dawn's Wedding Feast* (1959–60), painted wood, installation view of *The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson: Constructing a Legend*, The Jewish Museum, New York, 5 May–16 September 2007. Photo: © 2023 David Heald / ©2023 Estate of Louise Nevelson / Artists Rights Society (ARS), N.Y.





Fig. 9. Dorothy Dehner, *Encounter* (1969), bronze; six parts, 50" x 7" x 7", 40" x 6" x 6", 39" x 5" x 5", 38" x 41 1/2" x 41 1/2", 27 1/2" x 5" x 4 1/2", 14 1/2" x 5" x 4". Committee on Painting and Sculpture Funds and partial gift of the Dorothy Dehner Foundation for the Visual Arts, MoMA, New York. Photo: © 2023 Dorothy Dehner Foundation for the Visual Arts.

boundaries of the human figure and the natural world. Krauss, who makes exceptions for Smith in most of her scholarship, points to his totemic figures as a point of reference for works by Nevelson, Bourgeois, David Hare, Seymour Lipton, and Isamu Noguchi. It is particularly disappointing that Krauss completely ignores Dehner.³²

A new visual language transcending the natural and figural worlds became the formal counterpart to the cultural and symbolic meaning of such venerated objects, so sacred they could barely be looked at, let alone appropriated. Totemic forms have evolved through time and space in unpredictable sequences: a disjunction exists between their frontal and profile views, refusing the viewer a sustained vantage point, and endowing the work with complete autonomy—a pivotal link to modernism.³³ In the bronze sculpture *Encounter* (1969; Fig. 9), Dehner plays with isolated and clustered figures to investigate verticality, separation, and scale. By unifying skeletal objects of various sizes and proportions, Dehner's *Encounter* sheds various material characteristics in order to enhance anthropomorphic or totemic aspects, while its rigidly abstract delineations deny any specific identification. Drawing on surrealistic and psychoanalytic tropes, the sculpture's displaced bodies, incongruously juxtaposed on a disorienting scale, transform ordinary forms into vehicles for fetishism and desire. Provocatively challenging the viewer's sense of comfort and familiarity to invoke what Freud called "the uncanny" experience, the image may be read as "arous[ing] dread and horror," or the expression of sublimated and repressed fantasies. Likewise, its defiance of normality may inspire a positive impulse to redefine and understand reality.³⁴ The crescent moon head, curved line, and simplified organic shapes—reminiscent of Joan Miró's surrealistic forms—invite

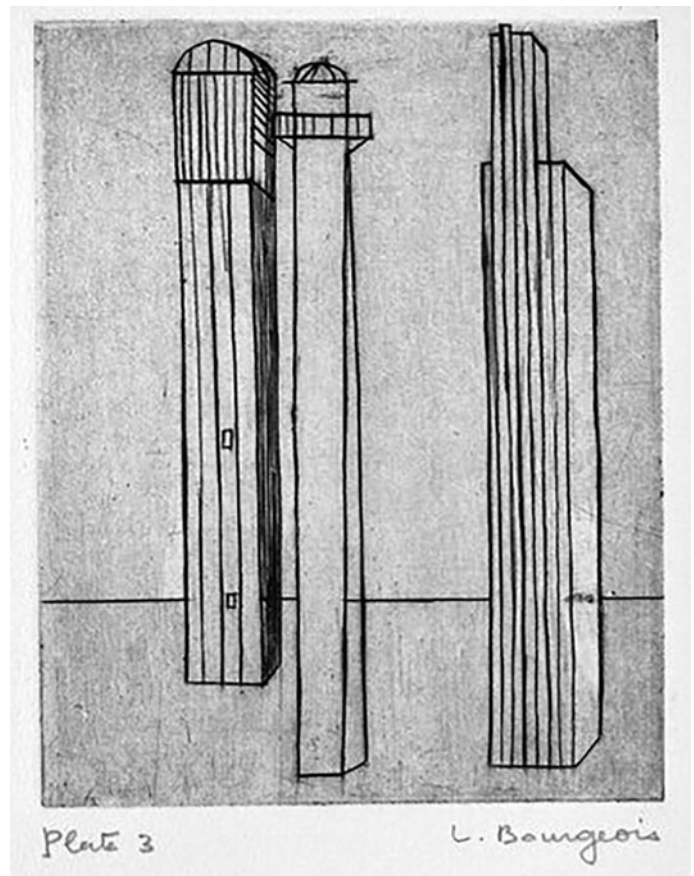


Fig. 10. Louise Bourgeois, *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* (1947), plate 3, engraving, 10" x 14". Collection The Easton Foundation, New York. Image Credit: Christopher Burke © 2023 The Easton Foundation.

the viewer to peer as an intruder into the mysterious rites conducted in an intimate space.

Louise Bourgeois achieved a similar effect with her series titled *Personages*, assembled wooden sculptures created between 1945 and 1955 that pushed the boundaries of postwar American sculptural forms. Originally conceived as a portfolio of engravings printed at Atelier 17, titled *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* (1947; Fig. 10), the human-like striated boxes gradually emerge in the freestanding totemic figures in *Personages*, surrogate bodies secured in position by a thin support, casting their shadows across the gallery floor; they were shown in three consecutive shows—1949, 1950, and 1953—at the Peridot Gallery, New York (Fig. 11). The practice of minimizing or eradicating the base was instrumental in integrating the works in the room and creating a "social space," an environment where, Bourgeois offered, "You had the very strong sense of something going on."³⁵ By removing the physical barrier of a base or podium, the sculptures engaged in an active space and stage between figuration and abstraction. As Marie-Laure Bernadac and Hans Ulrich Obrist explored, these sculptural compositions could be shifted into arrangements "between the isolated individual and the shared awareness of the group," as if mapped on a "readable floor graph."³⁶ Bourgeois created a kinaesthetic space wherein the

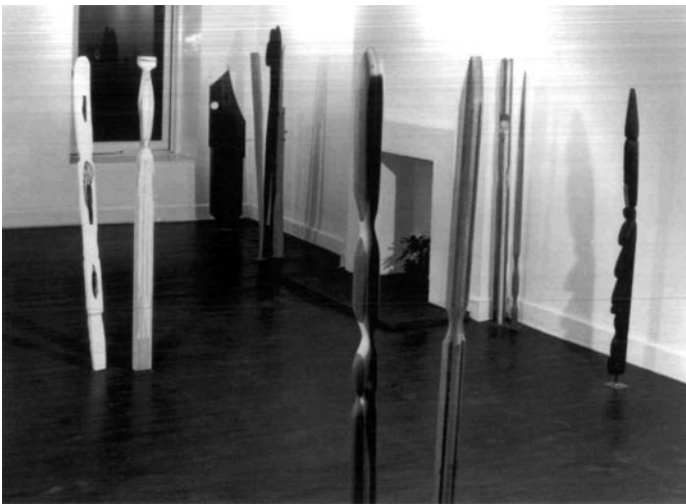


Fig. 11. Aaron Siskind, *Installation View of Louise Bourgeois: Sculptures*, Peridot Gallery, New York (1950), gelatin silver print, dimensions unknown. The Easton Foundation, New York. Photo: ©2023 The Easton Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY, and Aaron Siskind Foundation. Courtesy of Bruce Silverstein Gallery, NY.

beholder moves, a highly charged orbit of vulnerable figures endeavouring to communicate with one another. Their verticality, scale, and basic morphology appear vaguely familiar as their human elements defy definitive gender or sexuality. Depending on the viewer's position, the work's traits and identity markers change, frontal and anterior planes indistinguishable. Further, the generic term "personage," neither requiring nor deserving identification, invites ambiguity, imagination, and ample misinterpretation as to whether they are sculptural objects, human silhouettes, or architectural compositions.³⁷ Bourgeois often referred to her *Personages* as stand-ins for the family and friends she left behind in France before moving to New York in 1938.³⁸

By contrast, Dehner's *Encounter* feels more intentional in its compositional grouping. The figures lean in, akin to huddled relatives or a standoff, and with what look like vertebrae or thorns, they appear more articulated than Bourgeois's thin silhouettes, helpless and hostile at the same time. Dehner's *Gateway* (1979; Fig. 12) retains the totemic aspects of *Encounter*, but the sculpture's wooden grain and tall architectonic frame, interrupted by breaks of light, also suggest a dynamic interaction between the interior and exterior planes. The geometry of the negative spaces is just as significant as the solid areas.

In 1958, Louise Nevelson's exhibition *Moon Garden Plus One* (Fig. 13) opened at the Grand Central Moderns Gallery in New York. The show embodied the extension of her home to an entire environment and established Nevelson as an artist deserving of critical acclaim. Regrettably, the rare surviving images of *Moon Garden* or, for that matter, any of her large-scale exhibitions, hardly do justice to the concurrent written descriptions. Dehner's photographs from her friend's studio (see Figs. 1–2), however, offer a compelling account of an

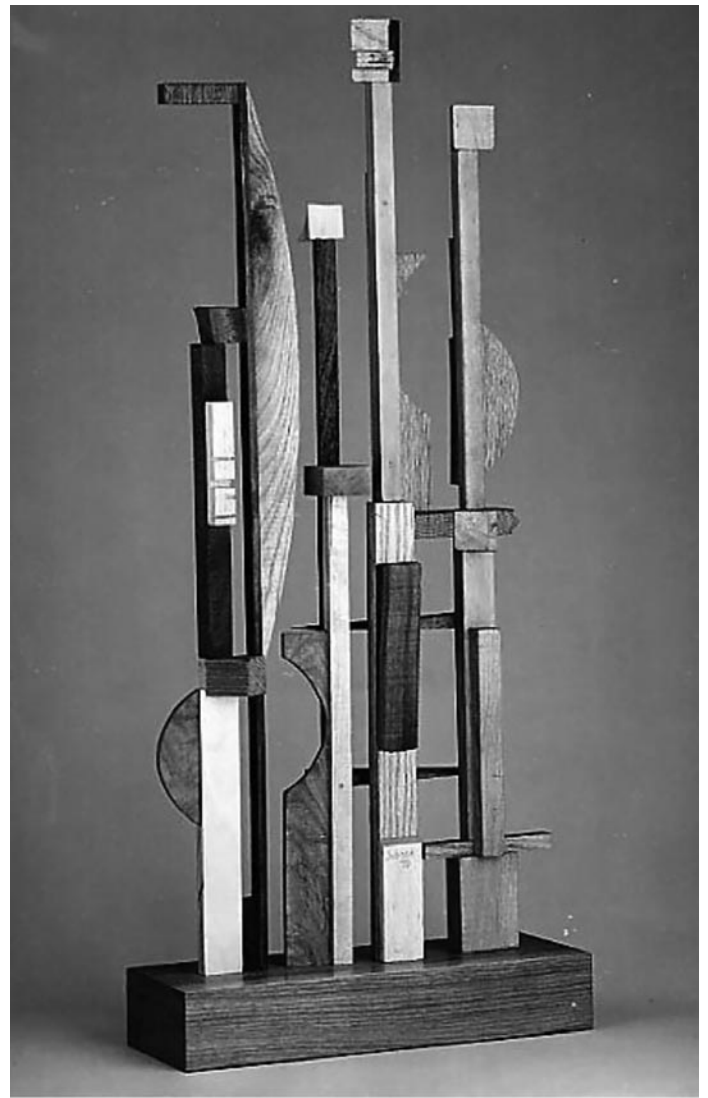


Fig. 12. Dorothy Dehner, *Gateway* (1979), wood, 38" x 17" x 6 7/8". Purchase, Jo Anne and Norman M. Schneider Gift, 1979. Photo: © 2023 Metropolitan Museum of Art.

experience rooted in the private realm that expands into the public arena of the gallery. Photography's immersive process collapsed the distance between the home and the total work of art.³⁹ Dehner neither trained as a photographer nor published her pictures, but she took snapshots of friends and family.⁴⁰ Further, she likely had no choice in specifying the photographic paper or chemical basis that would have altered the resulting surface or print grain;⁴¹ bound by the dictates of the photographic lens and metering exposure, Dehner's talent is still indicated by her capturing and revealing Nevelson's world. More broadly, Dehner's technical dexterity and photographic foresight to seize a critical juncture in the creative process might be compared to the casting of bronze in her lost wax compositions.

Nevelson's immersive environment was a precursor to what became known as "installation art."⁴² This new sculptural experience was informed by profound psychological meaning, arguably initiated by Bourgeois at the Peridot Gallery. Artists

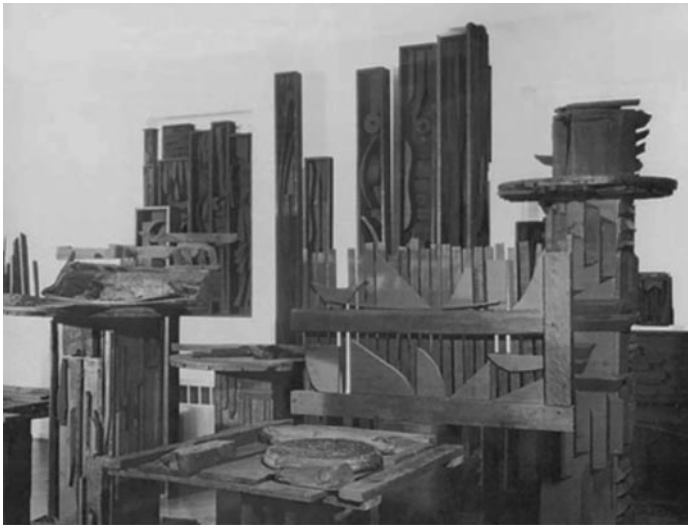


Fig. 13. Louise Nevelson, *Moon Garden Plus One*. Exhibition at the Grand Central Moderns Gallery, New York, January 1958. Photo: © Estate of Louise Nevelson / SODRAC 2007.

were “recruiting” viewers as active agents in the staging of art works. They rejected the traditional “academic space of display” and relied on emotional and kinetic responses by interpolating the beholder into the sphere of the work and adding the dimension of time.⁴³ The experience of viewing sculptural objects involves not only the act of looking at them but the process of moving through them. Dehner and Nevelson shared a passionate commitment to the performing arts. Their working methods were greatly inspired by the styles of free form modern dance, incorporating how sounds and sensations move with the body through space. Nevelson studied dance under the innovative teaching of Ellen Kearn, whose strong discipline, sensual physicality, and spiritual healing may have informed her sculptural practice, even more so than the studies of form and color after Diego Rivera and Hans Hofmann.⁴⁴ Nevelson was also a devotee of Martha Graham, whose choreography was a mode of self-examination and paralleled the preoccupations of her Abstract Expressionist contemporaries in their explorations of American Indian rituals, Jungian themes, and Greek mythology.⁴⁵

Dehner had studied at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, performed in several Off-Broadway productions, and was taught by one of the original members of the Denishawn School of Dancing and Related Arts.⁴⁶ The principles of balance, structure, and gesture that guide her career relate to an innate sense of improvisation. A spatial and kinaesthetic awareness procured from her early training in movement enabled her to decode the performative functions and rituals of Nevelson’s sculptural environments. As David Smith wrote in his foreword to the catalogue of Dehner’s 1948 solo exhibition of drawings and gouaches at Skidmore College: “In [Dehner’s] work there are qualities of the dance, delicacies, refinements and harmony.”⁴⁷ As an embodiment of its title, the erect spine and arched limbs of



Fig. 14. Dorothy Dehner, *Arabesque* (1976), bronze and wood, 8 1/2" x 7 3/4" x 31". The Levett Collection. Photo: © 2023 The Levett Collection.

Arabesque (1976; Fig. 14) seem engaged in gracious and poised ballet movements. These innovative relationships between the viewer and artwork, and the unique convergence of sound, sight, and expression, coincided with contemporary critical discourse on the perception and reception of the arts in America. The reimagination of the sculptural idiom that placed the viewer at the center of the work of art offered challenging alternatives to formalist theories that dominated postwar sculpture.⁴⁸

By comparison, Nevelson’s use of rough found materials and her preference for monochromatic color schemes generated new formal qualities. The sheer scale and ambition of her work matched her male peers’, but her methods of ripping, breaking, nailing, or stapling constituted different interactions with the medium from joining, carving, casting, or welding.⁴⁹ While corresponding to Dehner’s employment of texture and metallic contours, Nevelson’s sensibilities for wood did not share the hard feel of metal or its linear purity.



Fig. 15. Jeremiah Russell, *Interior View of Louise Nevelson's Home on 30th Street in New York City* (c. 1955), photographic print, 8 1/4" x 9 7/8". Louise Nevelson papers, circa 1903–1982. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Digital ID: 9782.

We can only guess how Dehner reacted when encountering Nevelson's lifestyle. Disorderly interiors amount to quiet acts of subversion that disrupt the expectation of traditional homemaking as a sanctuary of balance and harmony (Fig. 15). Dehner recalled that Nevelson's "house was just crammed full of sculpture, lined with it, stacked with it all over. I couldn't take photos of any separate pieces because there wasn't enough room."⁵⁰ Nevelson's sprawling universe offered a sharp contrast with the domesticity, rural setting, and frugality that Dehner experienced with Smith at Bolton Landing, where her own working space was limited to a "little table in the corner of their living room."⁵¹ By the time the couple was trying to rebuild their relationship around a new home, where Dehner would claim a room of her own, their marriage had irretrievably broken down.⁵²

In the 1930s, Dehner rarely showed her work and did little to promote herself, but from 1941 onwards she frequently pursued opportunities to participate in juried exhibitions, showed regularly at the Whitney Annual Exhibitions, and steadily reached a wider audience.⁵³ In 1952, supported by the critic

Howard Devree, she had her first one-person exhibition at the Rose Fried Gallery in New York. Among other influential critics, Emily Genauer considered it an "auspicious debut bespeaking skill, sensitivity and individuality;"⁵⁴ and Dore Ashton acknowledged her "lyric fidelity."⁵⁵ Following a group show in 1953 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dehner sold a drawing to MoMA. In 1955, at the age of fifty-five, she had her first solo sculpture exhibition at the Willard Gallery. Although Marian Willard was officially Smith's gallerist at the time, their relationship had begun to fray. Willard nevertheless decided to represent Dehner, as her work with bronze was sufficiently distinct from Smith's.⁵⁶ (Smith even advised her to be vigilant and keep abreast of market value.⁵⁷) Through subsequent shows at Willard, Dehner came to the attention of museum curators, which resulted in exhibitions at the Albany Institute of History and Art, New York, in 1964, and the Chicago Institute of Art in 1955. In 1965, she had a ten-year sculpture retrospective at the Jewish Museum in New York. Dehner's reputation steadily reached foreign shores. In 1960, together with Nevelson, Bourgeois, Lin Emery (1926–2021), Lily Ente (1905–1984),



Fig. 16. Dorothy Dehner, *Prelude and Fugue* (1989), painted black steel, 99" x 103" x 33". Photo: Berry Campbell Gallery, New York. © 2023 Dorothy Dehner Foundation.

Theodore Roszak, and Ibram Lassaw, Dehner was part of the group show *Aspects de la Sculpture Américaine* at the Gallery Claude Bernard in Paris.⁵⁸

When her eyesight began to fail, Dehner purposely worked with smaller elements and changed her medium from cast metal to wood. She cut circular and rectangular shapes from wooden blocks, positioning them in an active relationship among negative spaces. Her works, ranging from small to life-size objects, were laminated or joined, using traditional carpenter's skills. These sculptures had different textural surfaces than her bronze pieces, but the variations of the grain provide comparable sensual effects. For example, *The City to the Bridge* (1970; Pl. 4) and other compositions in wood may represent a strong response to her friendship with Nevelson.⁵⁹ Eventually, she adjusted the scale of her creations and began to work with fabricators to create monumental steel sculptures enlarged from her samples of small lost-wax casted models. The painted steel sculpture *Prelude and Fugue* (1989; Fig. 16 and front cover) represents a culmination of Dehner's treatment of matter and form. Despite its colossal size, the formal relationship between space and mass exudes a subtle energy and delicate balance consistent with her earlier work.⁶⁰

In 1993, the year before she died, the Katonah Museum of Art presented a retrospective of her work, which later travelled to the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.⁶¹ Dehner's reputation and career, alongside those of other

women of Abstract Expressionism, are being rediscovered and recognized.⁶² In 1955, Dehner wrote:

I have a number of ways of working, and they are all part of the same way, and I seldom disregard ways, but add to them and use the old ones and carry them all with me.... I want to express my feelings and thoughts, and I want to distill them so they will be pristine and clear and come back at me ... with a new life they never had when inside me.⁶³

Dehner's manipulation of sculptural forms and materials stems from her use of texture, contour, and volume, a mastery of tracing in space honed from her practices in performing, printing, and painting, all greatly amplified by her teaching experience.⁶⁴ The deliberate adoption of Surrealist and Constructivist approaches articulated her desire to view her photographs as statements in the broader context of a work of art. As a result, Nevelson's environments may be critically analyzed in different ways in future scholarship. Dehner's contributions to postwar American art, along with Nevelson's and Bourgeois's, expand our perceptions of the Abstract Expressionist canon. Their works resonate with contemporaneous critical discourses in the histories on matter and form. Dehner's persistence and resilience were pivotal in her abilities to reinvent and reshape the sculptural idiom. Eva Hesse (1936–1970) called this "the expanded expansion" of materials, the conceptual changes achieved by sculpture.⁶⁵ Like Hesse, Dehner's deep understanding of all mediums she deployed is an exceptional testimony to her individual journey and creative development, an artist who charted further sculptural territories and established new standards for the reintegration of the arts. ●

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Notes

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1. Elyse Speaks, "Space, Gender, Sculpture: Bourgeois, Nevelson, and the Changing Conditions of Sculpture in the 1950s," *Women's*

- Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 40, no. 8 (2011): 1084; Harmon Siegel, "The Black Wallpaper: Louise Nevelson's Gothic Modernism," *The Art Bulletin* 99, no. 4, (2017): 171; Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Keeping House with Louise Nevelson," *Oxford Art Journal* 40, no. 1 March (2017): 115–16; and Oral History Interview of Louise Nevelson with Arnold Glimcher, transcript of tape recording, Jan. 30, 1972, 3, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as AAA).
2. Hilton Kramer, "Nevelson, Her Sculpture Changed the Way We Look at Things," *New York Times*, Oct. 30, 1983, sec. 6, 28.
 3. Geraldine Johnson, "All Concrete Shapes Dissolve in Light: Photographing Sculpture from Rodin to Brancusi," *Sculpture Journal* 15, no. 2 (2006): 202–03; Lucy Lippard, "Preface," in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (London: Studio Vista, 1973), 5.
 4. They met after Dehner admired proofs of Nevelson's large inked etchings hanging on the walls. Dorothy Dehner, interview by Laurie Wilson, June 17, 1977, tape 3a, side 1, repository Laurie Wilson; Joan Marter, "Dorothy Dehner," *Woman's Art Journal* 1, no. 2 (1980): 49. See also Laurie Wilson, *Louise Nevelson: Art is Life* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2016), 100.
 5. Colette Roberts Papers and Interviews with Artists, 1918–1971: Interview with Dorothy Dehner, TN: 65384, Format: MP3 (sent to the author by the AAA on April 22, 2021 (no transcript available); Oral History Interview with Dorothy Dehner by Garnett McCoy and Rosalind Krauss, Oct. 1965–Dec. 1966, AAA, 3; Interviews by Gordon D. Rapp (1981–1984), AAA. See also Dehner, "Memories of Jan Matulka," in *Jan Matulka, 1890–1972* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980), 77–80; Joan Marter, "Dorothy Dehner," 48; Paula Wisotzki, "Dorothy Dehner's Early Career: Leftist Politics and Complicated Myths," in *American Women Artists 1935–1970: Gender, Culture, and Politics*, ed. Helen Langa and Paula Wisotzki (New York: Ashgate, 2016), 62; and Christina Weyl, "Biographical Supplement," *The Women of Atelier 17: Modernist Printmaking in Mid-Century New York* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2019), 123.
 6. See, for example, the seminal article, Anne M. Wagner, "Lee Krasner as L.K.," *Representations* 25 (Winter 1989): 42–57; and Barbara Donoghue, "The Canonisation of Willem de Kooning: Artist as Conductor," (MA thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, 2021), 1.
 7. Joan Marter, "Identity Crisis: Abstract Expressionism and Women Artists of the 1950s," in *Women and Abstract Expressionism: Painting and Sculpture, 1945–1954* (New York: Baruch College/CUNY, 1997), 5.
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 9. Brenson, *David Smith*, 348–49.
 10. Brenson, 87, 123; Mary Gabriel, *Ninth Street Women*, Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning, Grace Hartigan Joan Mitchell, and Helen Frankenthaler: *Five Painters and the Movement That Changed Modern Art* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2019).
 11. Irving Sandler, "The Club," *Artforum* 4, no. 1 (September 1965): 27–31; Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swann, *De Kooning, An American Master* (New York: Little Brown, 2018), 107.
 12. Carter Ratcliff, "An Improvised Community," in *Abstract Expressionism*, ed. David Anfam (London: Royal Academy, 2016), 80. Gabriel, *Ninth Street Women*, 394–95; Stevens and Swann, *De Kooning*, 286–90; Brenson, *David Smith*, 340–41; and Debra Balken, *Harold Rosenberg: A Critic's Life* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2021), 268.
 13. Daniel Belasco, "See Us Now: The Feminist Positions of Helen Frankenthaler and Grace Hartigan, 1957–1962," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History* 83, no. 2 (2014): 67–68; Oral History Interview of Louise Nevelson, 2.
 14. Weyl, *The Women of Atelier 17*, 65, 83; Adrian Stokes, "Stones of Rimini" (1934), in *Modern Sculpture Readers*, ed. Jon Wood, David Hulks, and Alex Potts (Leeds, UK: Henry Moore Institute, 2007), 114.
 15. Marie-Laure Bernadac and Hans Ulrich Obrist, ed., *Destruction of the Father, Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews, 1923–1997*, by Louise Bourgeois (London: Violette Editions, 1998), 302.
 16. Dehner's interview quoted in Joan Marter, Judith McCandless, and Michael Zakian, *Dorothy Dehner and David Smith: Their Decades of Search and Fulfillment* (New Brunswick, NJ: The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1983), 25.
 17. Joan Marter, *Dorothy Dehner: Sixty Years of Art*, exh. cat. (Katonah, NY: Katonah Museum of Art, 1993), 9. See also Joan Marter, "Arcadian Nightmares: The Evolution of David Smith and Dorothy Dehner's Work at Bolton Landing," in *Reading Abstract Expressionism*, ed. Ellen G. Landau (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2005), 635. The interview with Dehner was conducted over several days in June 1985 (Wisotzki, "Dorothy Dehner's Early Career," 62; and Brenson, *David Smith*, 331).
 18. Quoted in Marter, McCandless, and Zakian, *Dorothy Dehner and David Smith*, 25; Weyl, "Inky Fingers, Digging into Printmaking," in *The Women of Atelier 17*, 89.
 19. Jane Glaubinger, *Dorothy Dehner: Drawings, Prints, Sculpture*, exh. cat. (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1995), np.
 20. Catherine Craft, *New Acquisitions: Works by Dorothy Dehner*, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, TX, July 24, 2019, np, <https://www.artsy.net/nashersculpture/article/nasher-sculpture-center-new-acquisitions-works-dorothy-dehner>.
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 22. Dehner, interview Jan. 1979; cited in Marter, *Sixty Years*, 15, n10.
 23. James R. Mellow, "New York Exhibition, Dorothy Dehner," *Arts Magazine* 33, no. 5 (Feb. 1959): 57.
 24. Marter, "Arcadian Nightmares," 638.
 25. Patterson Sims, "Jan Matulka; A life in Art," in *Jan Matulka, 1890–1972*, 25; Dorothy Dehner to Margaret Haggerty, Sept. 6 1967, David Smith, I.32. MoMA Archives, New York.
 26. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (1979): 34; Sarah Hamill, "Picturing Autonomy: David Smith, Photography and Sculpture," *Art History* 37, no. 3 (2014): 6.
 27. Marter, "Dorothy Dehner: Journeys, Dreams, and Realities," in *Dorothy Dehner: A Retrospective of Sculpture, Drawings and Paintings* (New York: Baruch College/CUNY, 1991), 3.
 28. Marter, "Arcadian Nightmares," 637–39; Elaine de Kooning, "David Smith Makes a Sculpture [1951]," in *Reading Abstract Expressionism*, 165–71; Alex Potts, "Modernist Sculpture," in *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), 159, 166–67; and David G. Getsy, "Tactility or Opticality, Henry Moore or David Smith: Herbert Read and Clement Greenberg on The Art of Sculpture, 1956," in *Anglo-American Exchange in Postwar Sculpture, 1945–1975* (Los Angeles:

- Getty, 2011), 113, 116, https://www.getty.edu/museum/symposia/pdf_stark/stark_getsy.pdf.
29. In the traditional lost wax process, a heavy surface of wax adheres to a plaster model covered with an outer mold. When molds are heated, the liquefied wax runs off, leaving a layer of bronze that hardens around the mold. Ultimately, the inner plaster is removed, and the final form is a hollow bronze sculpture. However, in the case of Dehner's work, the sculpture is not hollow but a solid form. The wax melts away and is replaced by the bronze. Dore Ashton, "Dorothy Dehner," *New York Times*, May 11, 1957.
 30. Weyl, "The Women of Atelier 17," *Online Biographical Supplement*, <https://atelier17.christinaweyl.com/artist-biographies/dorothy-dehner/>; Marter, *Sixty Years*, 7, 9–12; Glaubinger, *Dorothy Dehner*, np; and Marter, "Arcadian Nightmares," 639.
 31. Marter, *Sixty Years*, 15; Glaubinger, *Dorothy Dehner*, np.
 32. Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1981), 148.
 33. Krauss, *Passages*, 154–58; Hamill, "Picturing Autonomy," 7; Potts, "Installation and Sculpture," *Oxford Art Journal* 24, no. 2 (2001): 11.
 34. Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" [1919], S.E. 27, *Studies in Parapsychology*; cited in Elizabeth Wright, "The Uncanny and Surrealism," in ed. Peter Collier and Judy Davies, *Modernism and the European Unconscious* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1990), 265.
 35. Bourgeois acknowledged: "The space of the viewer becomes the space of the maker." Susi Bloch, "An interview with Louise Bourgeois," *Art Journal* 35, no. 4 (Summer 1976): 370–73; and Lynn Somers, "Louise Bourgeois's Objects to Be Used," *Roundtable 2* (1), 3 (2019): 10.
 36. Bernadac and Obrist, *Destruction of the Father*, 66.
 37. David J. Getsy, *Abstract Bodies, Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2015), 62; Alex Potts, "Personages: Imperfect and Persistent," in *David Smith: Personage*, exh. cat. (New York: Gagosian, 2006), 17.
 38. Pesella Levy, "Review: Louise Bourgeois," *Art Digest* 25 (October 1950): 16; Speaks, "Space, Gender, Sculpture," 1060; Somers, "Louise Bourgeois's Objects to Be Used," 9–10.
 39. Hilton Kramer, "The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson," *Arts Digest* 32 (June 1958): 26–29; Colette Roberts, lecture, "Louise Nevelson's 'Elsewhere,'" (1960), Colette Roberts papers, AAA; and Georges Mathieu, quoted in Wilson, *Louise Nevelson: Art is Life*, 180.
 40. Dehner mentioned to Garnett McCoy that she photographed David Smith taking photos of his sculpture on the dock at Bolton Landing, as well as snapshots of John Graham's family from their trip in Russia. Interview with Dorothy Dehner by Garnett McCoy and Rosalind Krauss, Oct. 1965–Dec. 1966, AAA, np.
 41. Presumably, she did not have access to a dark room, commercially processed her photographs, and had no control over variables, such as tonality, opacity, or translucency, modified at a later stage if she had the resources to develop her own prints. See for example, Carl Chiarenza, "Form and Content in the Early Work of Aaron Siskind," *The Massachusetts Review* 19, no. 4 (1978): 808–33.
 42. Elyse Speaks, "Experiencing Louise Nevelson's Moon Garden," *American Art* 21, no. 2 (Summer): 96; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), viii; Potts, "Installation and Sculpture," 7. In the same year as Nevelson's *Moon Garden*, Allan Kaprow exhibited *Beauty Parlor*, his first installation-environment at the Hansa Gallery in New York. See Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay: The Art of Allan Kaprow* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2004), 21.
 43. Alex Potts, "Louise Bourgeois: Sculptural Confrontations," *Oxford Art Journal* 22, no. 2 (1999): 46; Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Routledge, 2005), 6–10; and Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 207. See also Martina Reuter, "Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Pre-Reflective Intentionality," *Synthese* 118, no. 1 (1999): 69–88.
 44. Michael Stanislawski, "Louise Nevelson's Self Fashioning: The Author of Her Own Life," in Brooke Kamin Rapaport, *The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson: Constructing a Legend* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2007), 35.
 45. Wilson, *Louise Nevelson*, 92; Stephen Polcari, "Martha Graham and Abstract Expressionism," in *Reading Abstract Expressionism*, 490.
 46. Marter, *Sixty Years*, 6.
 47. David Smith, "Foreword," in Dorothy Dehner: Drawings, Paintings," exh. cat. (Saratoga Springs, NY: Skidmore College, 1948).
 48. Kelley, *Art of Allan Kaprow*, 21; Elizabeth A. Smith, "What can be done, what I must learn, what there is to do...": Process, Materials and Narrative in the 1950s," in *Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947–2016*, ed. Paul Schimmel and Jenni Sorkin (Milan: Skira; New York: Hauser & Wirth, 2016), 22–25.
 49. Jack Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The Effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of this Century* (New York: George Braziller, 1968), 101–02; Interview with Dorothy Dehner by Garnett McCoy and Rosalind Krauss, 18.
 50. Dehner, interview with Laurie Wilson, Dec. 4, 1975 (Wilson, 179).
 51. Dehner, quoted in Holland Cotter, "Conquering Metal at a Dauntless 91," *New York Times*, Nov. 20, 1993.
 52. By 1955, Dehner was remarried to Ferdinand Mann, a supportive partner of her career. The largest room of their New York City apartment became her work area until she moved to her own studio on Union Square. Marter, "Dorothy Dehner," *Woman's Art Journal*, 49. See also Flora Esther Tornai, "The Sculpture of Dorothy Dehner: The Abstract Expressionist Work," (Ph.D. diss., Yale Univ., 1999), 19, 47, n23; and Brenson, 330.
 53. In 1942, she participated in the Butler Institute of American Art's Annual New Year Show in Youngstown, Ohio; the San Francisco Art Association's exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Art; and the annual presentation of Artists of the Upper Hudson at the Albany Institute of History & Art. In 1942, she had one-person shows featuring her *Life on the Farm* paintings at Skidmore College, in Saratoga Springs, NY, and in 1943 at the Albany Institute of History & Art. Checklists for these exhibitions appear in Dorothy Dehner Papers, 1920–1987, reels D298:1104, D298:1107, and D298:1111. See also Marter, "Dorothy Dehner," *Woman's Art Journal*, 48.
 54. Emily Genauer, "Dorothy Dehner," *Herald Tribune* (New York), May 9, 1952.
 55. Dore Ashton, "Dorothy Dehner," *Art Digest* (May 1952): 19.
 56. Smith left the Willard Gallery in 1965. Brenson, 434, 506.
 57. David Smith to Dorothy Dehner, n.d., Dorothy Dehner Papers, AAA, reel D298A, frame 1759.
 58. Judd Tully, "The New Sculpture Group: A Look Back 1957–1962," Jan. 1, 1988, <https://juddtully.net/criticism/the-new-sculpture-group-a-look-back-1957-1962/>; Debora Wye, *Louise Bourgeois* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1982), 112.
 59. Marter, "Dorothy Dehner," *Woman's Art Journal*, 50; Marter, *Sixty Years*, 13; Sandra Kraskin, "Dorothy Dehner: Sixty Years of her Art," in *Dorothy Dehner: A Retrospective*, 3; and De Bethune and Dehner, "Dorothy Dehner," 35.
 60. Marter, "Journeys, Dreams, and Realities," 3; De Bethune and Dehner, "Dorothy Dehner," 35–37.
 61. Marter, "The Dorothy Dehner Foundation," *Artists' Estates: Reputations in Trust*, ed. Magda Salvesen and Diane Cousineau (New Brunswick, London, 2005), 294–302.

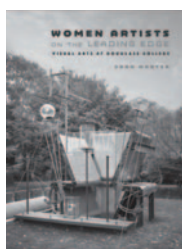
62. While not always displayed, Dehner's works are included in the following permanent collection of major US and international museums: MoMA, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Art Institute of Chicago, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Nasher Sculpture Center, and Storm King Art Center. The British Museum owns a fine selection of her works on paper; she is also featured prominently in distinguished private collections.
63. Dehner, statement in brochure from Terrain Gallery, Dec. 5, 1955–Jan. 15, 1956 (in artist's scrapbooks), cited by Marter, *Sixty Years*, 6.
64. In an interview with Colette Roberts from 1969, Dehner explains how her artistic development was amplified by her teaching experience. "Teachers educate but artists should be able to teach how to make art." Colette Roberts, "Interview with Dorothy Dehner," Colette Roberts Papers and Interviews with Artists, 1918–1971: Interview with Dorothy Dehner, TN: 65384, Format: MP3.
65. Cited in Anne Wagner, "What Women Do, or the Poetics of Sculpture," in *Revolution in the Making*, 78–91.



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



CALLING MEMORY INTO PLACE
Dora Apel



WOMEN ARTISTS ON THE LEADING EDGE
Visual Arts at Douglass
College
Joan M. Marter

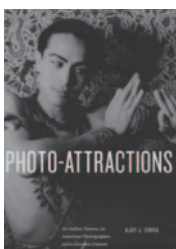


PHOTO-ATTRACTIONS
An Indian Dancer, an
American Photographer,
and a German Camera
Ajay Sinha

"A triumph of archival research and art historical scholarship..."

Christa Clarke's *The Activist Collector* is a revelation of the astonishing degree to which symbolic and spiritual connections to South Africa were shared by African Americans at every social level as much as a century ago. In stunningly insightful analyses of the collection of art objects that Lida Clanton Broner gathered as she engaged in a one-woman campaign for black liberation throughout apartheid South Africa almost a century ago, Clarke has resurrected from the archives a story that reveals the power and magic of courage, imagination, and the belief that the battle for freedom must be pursued one speech and one art object at a time."

— Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Director of the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at Harvard University

THE ACTIVIST COLLECTOR
Lida Clanton Broner's 1938 Journey from Newark to South Africa
Christa Clarke
62 images
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MONIR SHAHROUDY FARMANFARMAIAN

IN HER WORDS (1985)

By Donna Stein

As artists of the Middle East and Islamic World are now a vital part of the global art market, the exceptional work of Iranian artist Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian (1922–2019) has gained the widespread interest of students, historians, curators and collectors.¹ A greater understanding of Monir's motivation and aesthetic approach will render accessible the meaning and value of her work within Islamic tradition and modern and contemporary art histories (Fig. 1).² When Monir's father was elected to Parliament in 1932, her family moved from a traditional home in Qazvin, in the northwest of Iran, to the capital in Tehran.³ Her passion for art began as a schoolgirl, where her talent for drawing was recognized by her teacher. In Tehran, she was also able to study art with a private tutor who was educated in Europe and opened a world of possibilities to her. Because there were limited resources in Iran for a Western-style art education, she learned by copying postcards of landscapes, still lifes, and portraits.⁴

In 1943, Monir enrolled at the College of Fine Arts at Tehran University. She had hoped to study art in Paris, but because of the difficulties of travel to Europe during World War II, she ended up in the United States, landing in Los Angeles in February 1945 and soon thereafter leaving by train for New York City.⁵ She completed her education by learning English, attending summer classes at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, studying fashion illustration at Parsons School of Design (graduating in 1949), and taking evening classes at the Art Students League. She became immersed in the artistic environs and social circuits of postwar New York, befriending Willem de Kooning, Joan Mitchell (1925–1992), Louise Nevelson (1899–1988), Milton Avery, and Andy Warhol, among other artists, collectors, and dealers.⁶ Her burgeoning friendship with Arthur Upham Pope, the prominent art historian and curator of Iranian art and architecture, led to important curatorial commissions and museum associations.⁷ While living and working as a designer in New York (1945–57), Monir made dress and textile designs for bed linens and other fabrics (commissioned by magazine editors and agents) to



Fig. 1. Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian at her solo exhibition *Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian: Infinite Possibility. Mirror Works and Drawings 1974–2014*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2015. Photo: David Heald © Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, courtesy the estate of the artist and Haines Gallery.

supplement her income as a fashion illustrator at Bonwit Teller Department Store.

Monir returned to Iran in 1957 after an absence of fourteen years. Voraciously seeking the vestiges of her Persian past, she travelled widely throughout Iran into villages and towns to see the monuments of art and architecture and to follow the pathways of the nomadic and settled tribes (Fig. 2). These adventurous experiences resulted in a new perspective of her ancient heritage and provided the cues and directions for her own creative future. Since the 1960s, the source of Monir's imagery has derived from the traditional Persian palatial, sacred, and folk arts. Overwhelmed by her encounters with Iran's long-established vernacular and religious architecture, which has always been the primary focus for the development of aesthetic precepts and decoration in the Islamic world,



Fig. 2. Monir Farmanfarmaian wearing a Turkoman coat in her New York City apartment (c. 1990s), surrounded by other ethnographic weavings and rugs. Photo: Leonor Caraballo. Courtesy the estate of the artist and Haines Gallery. © Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian.

Monir began to adapt ideas in her art that she first saw on the walls, ceilings, windows, and doorways of buildings. After traveling throughout Iran, learning about the country's historic visual heritage, and collecting examples of traditional handicrafts—coffeehouse paintings (narrative and religious scenes from the early nineteenth century displayed in public and private spaces), antique glass paintings, jewelry, textiles, artisanal objects, ceramics, and painted door panels and window frames (*orsi*)—her sincere interest in tribal and folk traditions led her to discover a new way of working.⁸ Later in that decade, she started using geometric design, reverse-glass painting,⁹ and mirror mosaic techniques with the help of well-trained Iranian craftsmen whose technical expertise in *ayeneh-kari* (mirror work)—a Persian, artisanal technique that developed in the mid-seventeenth-century Safavid period—matched her ambition and design abilities. These technical attributes are observed in *Relief Polygon* (1977; Fig. 3), an ambitious sculpture wherein thin, alternating strips of mirror and painting behind the glass, cover and define the contours of the shape.

Monir's first series of bas-reliefs, inspired and constructed with these new approaches and, in some instances, incorporating fragments of Qajar paintings on glass, were created and exhibited beginning in the early 1970s at the Iran-

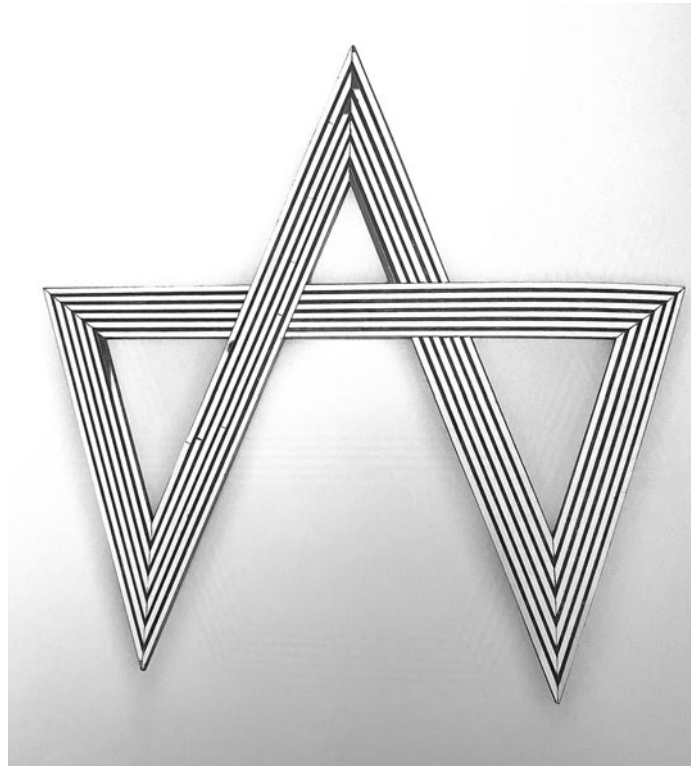


Fig. 3. Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, *Relief Polygon* (1977), mirror work and reverse glass painting, plaster on wood, 25" x 26" x 1 1/2". Collection Darya Isham, New York. © Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian.

America Society in 1973. This led to her first solo exhibition in New York at the Jacques Kaplan Gallery / Mario Ravagnan Gallery in 1975, and at Galerie Denise René, Paris and New York, in 1977 (Fig. 4).¹⁰ *Jewels* (Pl. 5), a transitional piece from 1974, retains figurative references, specifically attention to the Turkoman jewelry, in the composition. For her European debut, I wrote:

Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian's revival of ancient ideas is not a self-conscious attempt to preserve a dead tradition, but rather the exploitation of a genuine aesthetic potential. She has assimilated the decorative impulses of a non-representational art and in her most recent reliefs and sculptures continues to explore aspects of the Islamic past.¹¹

There was a hiatus of about twenty-five years when she lived in the United States, a period of exile broadly defined by the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and subsequent Islamic religious leaders, during which she did not have the technical support needed to continue the explorations for important, site-specific commissions.¹² In 2004, when she returned to Tehran to live permanently, after brief trips in 1992 and 2002, she reconnected with her retired former master craftsman, Hajji Ostad Mohammad Navid, who helped her find workers trained in this dying art form and technique, and, with a refreshed vision after many years of studying geometric



Fig. 4. Donna Stein and Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian (1977), Galerie Denise René, Paris.

design, began to create anew.

Connections with ancient Iran are most prominent in Monir's choice of media—stucco, mirror, and painted glass. The use of stucco plaster as building material has a history of some twenty-five hundred years. This malleable substance, a gypsum mortar, attained a high level of expression in Persian art, particularly as interior decoration, for it permits treatment with color pigments, provides a fine background for the application of ornamental materials, and can be carved in relief and in profile. Fragmented mirror and color glass mosaics were first introduced into Persian art during the Safavid Empire (1501–1736). Craftsmen from Isfahan, a central Iranian city and the capital of Persia from the sixteenth to eighteenth century, adapted ceramic methods to minimize the loss of valuable imported mirrors and glassware that arrived badly damaged from Europe. The mirror mosaics of three classic Iranian religious and secular monuments have been a source of constant inspiration for Monir's art: the Shah Cheragh Shrine, Shiraz (1344–49); the Golestan Palace, Tehran, a north-central palace complex constructed by the Qajar dynasty (1785–1925) beginning in the late seventeenth-century on the site of a Safavid citadel; and the Imam Reza Shrine Complex in Mashad, in northeastern Iran, with historical references and structures dating to earlier than the fifteenth century. Painting behind glass, a Russian technique introduced into Persia during the seventeenth century, flourished first as architectural embellishment and later under the Qajars as an



Fig. 5. Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, *Hexagon* (2010), mirror on plaster and wood, 29 1/8" x 59 1/2". Photo: courtesy the estate of the artist and James Cohan Gallery. © Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian.

autonomous art form. As an aristocratic (Western influenced) and naïve (dramatic) style, this popular art was abandoned more than one hundred years ago. The fragile nature of these materials corresponds to the Islamic identification of the dissolution of material surfaces through light, reflecting the impermanence of human existence.

Monir relied on instinct and intuition rather than theory, which she had assimilated. The sense of rhythm and spirit of geometry, the two poles of all artistic expression in the art of Islam, are the life-structure of her art. The integration and mathematical combination of simple geometric shapes—triangle, circle, square, hexagon, heptagon, and octagon—form the basis of a symbolic vocabulary referring to all aspects of the Universe.¹³ They provide a structural skeleton that establishes the identity of a pattern while the interplay of overlaid grids orchestrates the motifs. The laws of balance (*mizan*), proportion, symmetry, and unity (*tawid*) define the spatial linkages for these abstract artworks, exemplified in *Hexagon* (2010; Fig. 5).¹⁴ A continuous and intricate harmonious cycle, without beginning or end, is achieved through regularity and simple repetition, a characterization of the timeless unity and infinite quality of Islamic religious concepts. Color and space-revealing elements of the environment are discovered through light reflection and refraction, ideas embedded in her 2009 mirror mosaic *Gabbeh* (Pl. 6). Related to her later drawings and the dynamic asymmetry shown in her carpet designs, *Gabbeh* demonstrates an intricately woven triangular pattern as the backdrop for colorful polygons and diagonals, repeated motifs that recall the rugs made by the nomads of the central Zagros mountains in Iran.¹⁵

In the 1990s, Monir, who had briefly learned to weave carpets as a seven-year-old in Qazvin, was inspired by the two-knotted pile tribal carpets that she once collected on her

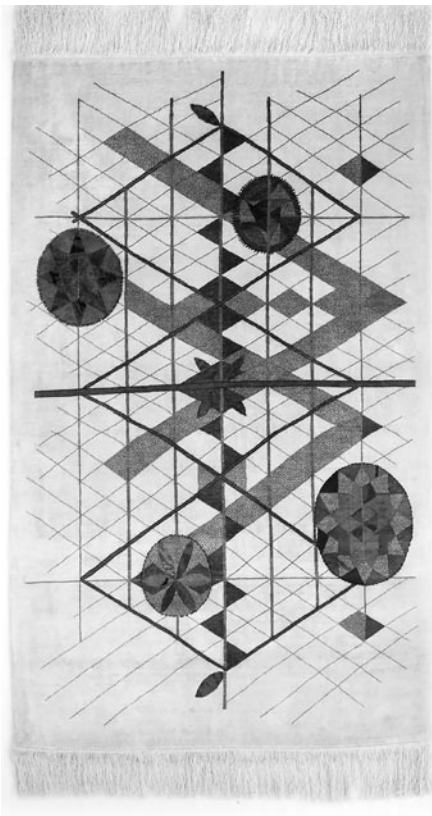
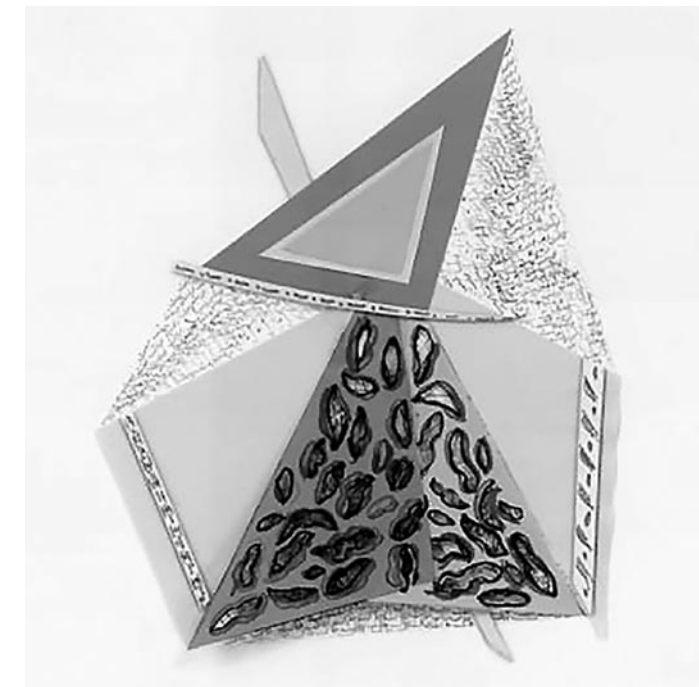


Fig. 6. Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, *Tapestry Work 11* (2012), naturally dyed silk and wool, hand-woven in Tabriz, 74" x 40". Photo: courtesy the estate of the artist and Haines Gallery.
© Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian.

Fig. 7.
Monir Shahroudy
Farmanfarmaian,
*Nomadic Tent (Chador
6)* (1977), mixed media,
13 3/4" x 16 7/8". Photo:
courtesy the estate of
the artist and James
Cohan Gallery.
© Monir Shahroudy
Farmanfarmaian.

travels in the 1960s and 1970s, and she began creating her own designs for carpets and rugs (although only a handful were produced later in Tabriz, a city in northwestern Iran known for its weaving) (Fig. 6 and Pl. 7). The Qashqai, Turkmen, Lori, Yomut/Yamut, and Kurdish tribal craftspeople were renowned for their artisanal production: "Modest in size, the carpets correspond to the short, narrow rugs produced on looms built for use inside nomad tents."¹⁶ In the 1970s, Monir also produced an abstract series of *Nomadic Tents* (Fig. 7), drawings on paperboard collages, whose flattened and folded sculptural planes reflect the architectural spaces inhabited by Iran's tribes, particularly those structures produced by women and the woven ornamentation of carpets and storage bags that hung on their walls. Monir's utilization of traditional forms and methods from Iranian crafts reinterprets and exploits inherent aesthetic possibilities. She assimilated the decorative impulses of non-representational art in her drawings—beautifully depicted in the never-ending circular and square geometrical patterns (Fig. 8)—as well as in her reliefs and sculptures that explored aspects of the Islamic past with renewed vigor. The resplendent mirror adaptations showcased in the series of *Untitled (Muqarnas)* (2012; Pl. 8) reflect the ubiquitous ornamental vaulting in honeycomb motifs throughout Iran.

The following recollection by Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian was recorded in New York City during a conversation with the author on March 4, 1985 (previously

unpublished). Monir discusses and identifies the primary source materials from which many of her later art works and techniques have generated. She explores in penetrating detail her early travels and firsthand experiences as an intrepid woman journeying independently throughout Iran. Her burgeoning identification and research on the artisanal and craft traditions and ceremonial habits of the nomadic tribal communities of the Turkoman, also known as Turkmen—a presence for over a millennium in northeastern Iran and adjacent parts of southwestern Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Russia—underscore the artist's progressive and philosophical approach to the cultural heritage of Islamic and Persian art.¹⁷ The Turkoman's robes, jewelry, silver ornaments, rugs, paintings, and artifacts were purposefully and steadily purchased and studied by Monir, and these objects formed a significant portion of the artist's ethnographic collections (Fig. 9). In November 1978, an exhibition from the artist's exemplary Turkoman collection was scheduled for the Negarestan Museum of 18th and 19th Century Iranian Art in Tehran: *Turkmen Art: Jewelry, Costumes, Textiles (A Selection from the Collection of Monir and Abolbashar Farmanfarmaian and Others)* (Fig. 10). Unfortunately, with the onset of the Islamic Revolution, the exhibition did not take place. Subsequently, much of the artist's collection, in addition to her modern Western artworks, were stolen and dispersed, although some of the inventory later reappeared, unbeknownst to the artist, in various museums and auctions.¹⁸

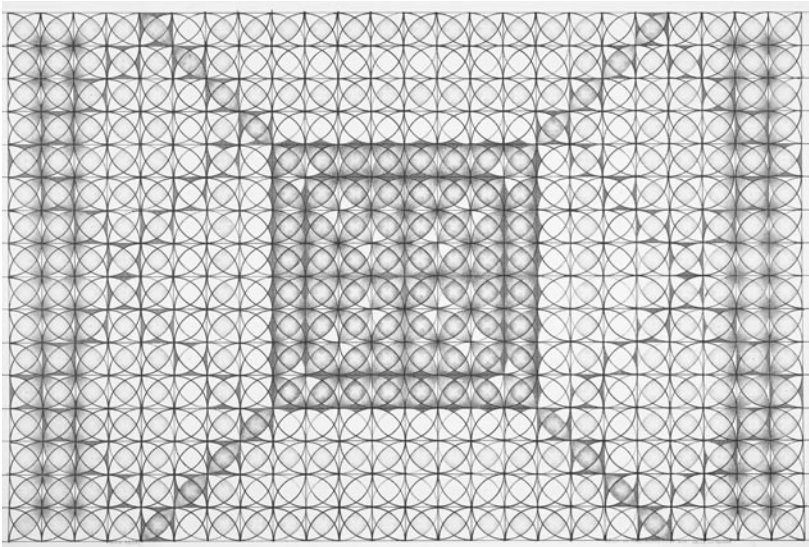


Fig. 8. Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, *Untitled (Circles and Squares)* (2014), felt-tipped marker and colored pencil on paper, 26" x 39". High Museum of Art, gift of the estate of Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian and Haines Gallery, San Francisco, 2019.173. © Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian.

Recollection by Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian

I left Iran as a young girl to seek formal art training abroad. I wanted to study art in Paris, but it was impossible because of World War II so I came to America. I finished high school in New Jersey and attended Cornell University for a year, but I was dissatisfied with their art program and decided to return to New York City. I attended the Art Students League and completed my college education in graphic design and fashion illustration at Parson's School of Design. Through this training, I became acquainted with many museums and libraries for research and pleasure and became newly aware of how Western societies appreciate their own heritage as well as the history and treasures of other cultures. After living in the United States for fourteen years, I returned to Iran in 1957 where everything had special meaning.

At the end of the 1950s, when I began to collect, I didn't know any other Iranians interested in tribal artifacts. Later on, some relatives and friends saw a few of my purchases hanging on my bedroom wall as decoration, [and] they started to collect, too. In the early years after I returned to Iran, I had many collecting interests: silverwork from Shiraz; Russian porcelain; Luristan bronzes; Bohemian crystal; painted wood paneling from Qazvin; and coffeehouse paintings. I remember how I learned about coffeehouse paintings. I was riding through the streets of Tehran one day and suddenly saw a painting hanging on the second floor of a building. I asked my driver to stop the car saying, "I want to go there," pointing at the balcony. He told me no, "Please, you can't go up there. It's a coffee house, only men go there." So I said, "Never mind, it's ten o'clock in the morning." So I went up to the second floor and saw this beautiful large painting of a bride riding a white horse with a cortege behind her of people playing musical

instruments. When I asked the proprietor, "What is this painting?" he said, "Oil on canvas." I don't know why they called it "coffeehouse" because it was actually a teahouse.¹⁹ For more than three hundred years, men gathered in the "coffee houses" to discuss politics and philosophy of the day. A storyteller would come and loudly, with a stick in hand, describe the painting and talk about the event depicted. Usually, it was a religious theme: how Ali [Alī ibn Abī Tālib, successor of Muhammad, first imam of Shi'ism] came to the war, how Mohammed [the prophet of Islam] arrived, etc. I learned that every coffee house had paintings by itinerant artists and began to collect those I could acquire. Stylistically, they derived from Persian miniatures of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but were more realistic, using light and shadow and some perspective. They also had a quality of surrealism or suggested effects from the Italian masters.

Two major collections of mine were Turkoman artifacts and paintings behind the glass from the south of Iran, which were very colorful, bright, and beautiful. I thought these naïve paintings were better than a Matisse drawing or painting. I traveled a great deal in the south with a dealer friend of mine; we went from one nomadic tent to another collecting more than sixteen



Fig. 9. Turkoman objects displayed in the living room of Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian's home in Tehran, before 1979.

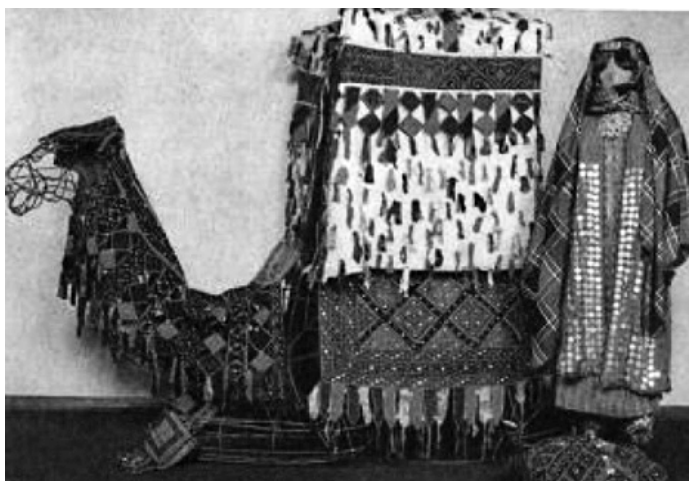


Fig. 10. Installation of ethnographic collection at the proposed exhibition organized by the Negarestan Museum, Tehran, 1978.

hundred paintings over the years of religious subjects, ladies and men's portraits, pictures of birds, including peacocks. I met one of the painters who was blind and no longer painted. I told him, "Your painting is beautiful." He said, "No. I lived all year through these paintings and made a good income." I thought if I collected these fragile glass paintings, I could save some of Iran's national patrimony and keep it safe for a museum. For example, I had more than twenty paintings behind the glass by Abdul Mormén, who was known for his portraits of different women holding a watch that registered the time as a quarter to ten. Like primitive early American portraits of women, the watch was a sign of the wealth of that woman. Eventually, I curated an exhibition at the public library in downtown Tehran. However, by the 1970s, I only looked for Turkoman objects (Fig. 11). It was both the delight and disease of my life. No other Iranian collection was as extensive as mine because it was amassed over a period of twenty years. I had about one thousand kilos, with more than four hundred fifty pounds of silver and gold objects.

The first time I saw Turkoman art I was in an antique shop in Tehran. While I was looking around, a man arrived with a big sack filled with silver and gold jewelry studded with polished stones. He poured the sack's contents onto a table telling the proprietor, "I have some new stock for you." The owner selected what he wanted and bought about seven or eight pounds, paying by weight. I knew that the man was Turkoman but I had always associated members of that tribe with the Mongols and only knew of their exploits as great horsemen, warriors, and thieves. I never realized they had a great artistic tradition, too. When he left, I began to ask the dealer, "What are you going to do with this silver and gold jewelry?" He said, "Well, very few customers buy these things. Maybe you'll buy some. A few other pieces I can sell. But with the rest we melt the silver and make new jewelry." Hearing that upset me greatly, so I decided I should buy these treasures and preserve them. I was impressed by the fine decorative and technical quality of the jewelry and immediately selected five or six pieces. At that time, Turkoman jewelry was very cheap,



Fig. 11. Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian wearing an Uzbek scarf with a Turkoman friend, early 1960s. Photo: courtesy the estate of the artist.
© Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian.

especially considering the high silver content and gold ornamentation. For a small cylindrical bracelet I may have paid as little as three or four dollars.

Initially, I didn't wear tribal jewelry. I just appreciated them as objects and thought I might use them as presents for foreign friends and visitors. After about five or six months, I returned to the same shop and inquired if the owner had new things to show. Again, I bought a few pieces, but it took me about two or three years to realize just how magnificent Turkoman jewelry is and to decide to form a serious collection.

Iranian land abutting the Caspian Sea is divided into three provinces: Mazandaran, Golestan, and Gilan. Today, the Turkoman people reside in the flatlands of the northeastern section of Iran called Gorgan or Golestan, which is adjacent to the southern tip of the Caspian Sea. They also live in southern Russia and northwestern Afghanistan (formerly Turkmenistan). They are a nomadic people who moved across the central mountains and plains of Asia from Mongolia and China to Turkey several centuries ago. They are Sunni Moslems. There are two major tribal groups: the Yomut and the Tekke. Generally, Turkoman people have "slanted eyes" like the Japanese or Chinese, high cheekbones and brown skin, but some are completely European looking, and others are a gorgeous combination of light complexion, blonde hair and "Oriental" features. They speak a dialect that is different from the Turkish language as spoken in Turkey and parts of Persia. Traditionally, they live in domed, felt-covered, round tents called yurts, which may be as large as thirty or forty feet in diameter and can be easily dismantled. During the reign of Reza Shah (1925–1941), Turkoman tribes were forced to become sedentary in order to maintain peace. Today, they work as cotton farmers and breeders of highbred horses of mixed Arab and Iranian stock that are beautiful and very fast. Several times a year different tribal groups meet for horse races. On sporting occasions both women and men don their finest costumes and most elaborate jewelry. Even the horses' bridles and saddles are handsomely decorated!

The Tekke style in silverwork is more sophisticated and quite distinct from the Yomut. In general, Tekke ornaments are gold-plated over silver and chased with arabesque designs, which derive from the metalwork of the Sassanian period (c. 226–c. 640 A.D.). They are embellished with carnelian agate. I rarely saw designs repeated by the Tekke silversmiths. The hand embroidery of the Tekke is very similar in design to the motifs decorating jewelry. Yomut pieces also have a silver base, but are set with lozenge and crescent-shaped decorations of very thin embossed gold and pieces of carnelian as well as colored glass imported from Russia or Venice, Italy. The Yomut repeated designs since their decorations were pressed from the same mold. All the work on Tekke jewelry was hand incised, and thus it was very unusual to find two pieces exactly the same. In the case of bridal and ceremonial crowns, each customer commissioned a craftsman to create a unique design according to her specifications—size, height, and length. Crowns were made-to-order, never readymade, and I've never seen a design repeated.

In 1961, I was visiting an Iranian friend I had met at Cornell in 1945, who had a house in Shahrud—a town not far from Gorgan. She was well educated and an adventurous traveler, and she suggested taking a sightseeing trip to Gorgan. Against the wishes of her driver, the two of us took off in her jeep through snowy mountain passes. A flat tire forced us to halt near a mountainside covered with partridges. Several truck drivers had stopped to catch the birds that can only fly about two feet high and soon get tired of trying to escape. The truckers caught several birds by the legs, put them in a sack, and offered some to us. We were surprised and said, "What can we do with live partridges?" Eventually, these nice men fixed our tire and we arrived in Gorgan later that day. We were exhausted and went to a restaurant called "Miami" that specialized in kebab to refresh ourselves. There was a fabulous mural on two walls featuring a fantasy scene inspired by Miami Beach, Florida, complete with flamingos. Apparently, they had copied a picture postcard. We were the only women in the restaurant, which was frequented by truck drivers and workers, and they were all shocked by our presence, especially when we ordered vodka. In retrospect, I realize we were very brave because it was very unusual for two young women to travel those parts alone.

I returned to Gorgan on a buying trip that same year. I knew the Turkomans held an outdoor bazaar every Wednesday and Friday at Bandar Shah and Pahlavi Dej, where all the tribes would sell and exchange their wares. You can find everything from potatoes and onions, to camels, horses, and rugs. It's like a party! The women and men are all beautifully dressed in colorful costumes. In one corner of the bazaar, I noticed a man had spread a beautiful red silk fabric on the ground and had a few pieces of old jewelry for sale. I asked him how much it was. He thought I was a foreigner and said to me, "English?", because the price was always different for foreigners and Iranians. When I explained that I was Iranian he said, "All right, then, a different price for you!" Nearby, a Turkoman boy about seventeen or eighteen-years-old observed this encounter and came over to me afterwards and

said, "I speak English." He was a student and teacher and wanted to practice his English. Mahmad became my faithful Gorgan guide.

Over the years I became very friendly with Mahmad's family and would even stay in their tent. Because they were kind and helpful to me, I reciprocated whenever I could. On one occasion, when I was having dinner with the women and girls of Mahmad's family (stepmother, grandmother, and sister-in-law Tushan), I noticed that one by one they disappeared (Fig. 12). When I asked where everyone had gone, they took me to another tent where the women were busy weaving rugs by the light of a kerosene lamp. The rug weaving in Turkoman is different than in any other part of Iran. Usually, a rug hangs from the ceiling down and the weavers sit as they work. But in Turkoman, it is on the ground/floor, and they sit bent over the rug. When I returned to Tehran, I used some pull to get electric power installed in their village. The women were so grateful that they wove a small rug for me that featured my name in English and Farsi.

Mahmad lived near Gombad-i-Qavus, which is very close to all the Turkoman villages and far away from the town of Gorgan, the capital of that province. There were many jewelry shops in Gombad-i-Qavus, but they would only display modern pieces. I would have to ask to see old silver objects. As the Turkoman women became more sophisticated, they didn't want to wear the heavy old silver bracelets and necklaces. They preferred lightweight gold jewelry and exchanged their possessions for necklaces with Russian, Iranian, or American gold coins. Through Mahmad I was able to go to the source for objects I wanted and avoid all the middlemen. Once Mahmad's neighbor told him of a woman who was willing to sell some of her coats and other artifacts. So we went to her house and I bought a coat from her. It was much cheaper for me, but also advantageous for the woman, because she was able to sell it to me at a higher price than to a dealer. On another occasion, we heard about a woman in Gorgan that had some clothes and silver objects to sell. Mahmad took me to her house and we knocked on the door. A very elegant woman answered and when we said, "We heard you have some objects to sell," she became frightened and answered that the lady of the house was not home. At the same moment, two of her young children ran up to the door and asked, "Mother, are these the people who want to buy some things from you?" It was very embarrassing, so I politely thanked her and told her the name of my hotel and pretended that she wasn't the person I was supposed to see. A few days passed and she called and gracefully apologized for being scared and lying and asked me to come to her house again. When I arrived, she spread a plastic tablecloth on the floor and offered me the traditional welcoming tea—tea in a china bowl with lots of sugar and freshly baked warm bread. I bought an extraordinary coat and several silver ornaments.

In the beginning, I went often—about every two or three months. Later, when I learned the location of all the best villages and shops, I had a good idea where to buy what I wanted. I contacted several dealers who sent me things or brought them to Tehran. Eventually, I developed a network of



Fig. 12. Three Generations of Turkoman Women (Mahmad's grandmother, sister-in-law Tushan, and two nieces), c. 1960s. Photo: courtesy the estate of the artist. © Monir Shahrourdy Farmanfarmaian.

five or six dealers I liked and trusted. They had my telephone number and address, and whenever they came to Tehran would stay in my house for two or three days. Thus, I had first pick of whatever they brought and then would call my friends and relatives to come to my house, or these dealers would go directly to their homes. The leftovers would be taken to the antique shops. These private dealers realized much more money by selling directly to clients than working through the antique shops. I remember one dealer from Gombad-i-Qavus had become so rich that he asked me to influence my friends who owned the Mercedes-Benz franchise so he would not have to wait one or two years to buy a new car.

In the late 1950s, it was difficult to tell how old the objects were. A few of the ornaments were signed and dated, but it is difficult to tell the exact age of most pieces. I would guess most were between seventy-five and one hundred fifty years old. In recent years, the Turkomans have not worn their elaborate jewelry and fancy clothing in daily life. These objects are reserved for special occasions, as a way of showing wealth. Not only brides but also all female guests wear the crown or headband for wedding festivities, however the way their hair is plaited identifies their marital status. Women also wear pairs of massive cylindrical bracelets. Although these bracelets are

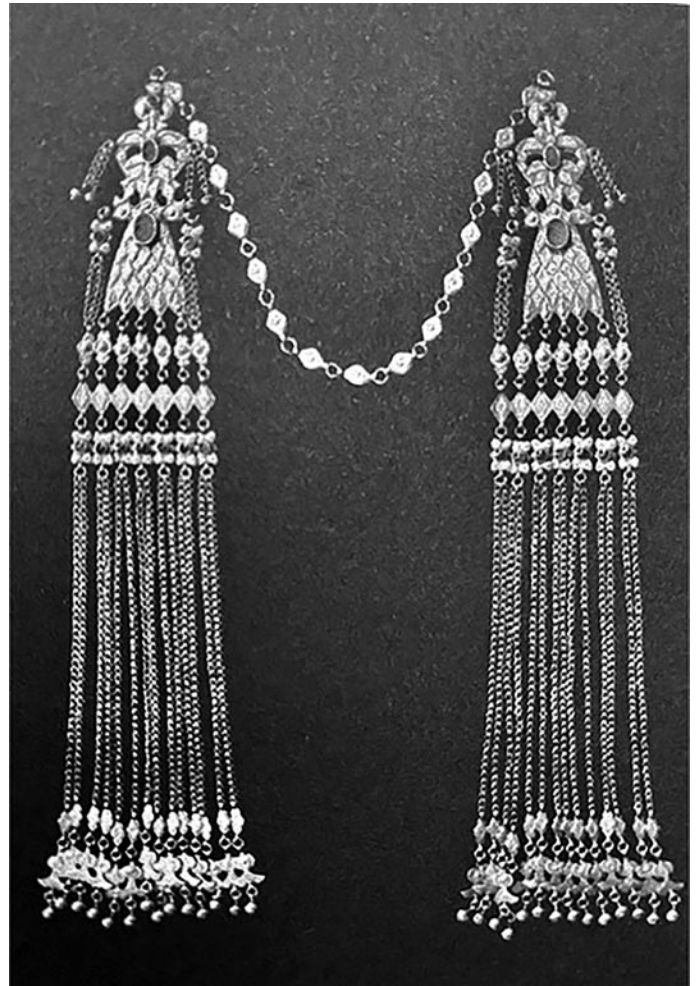


Fig. 13. Turkoman jewelry from the collection of Monir Shahrourdy Farmanfarmaian. Photo: courtesy the estate of the artist. © Monir Shahrourdy Farmanfarmaian.

very beautiful, they are often damaged in some way—dents, cracked stones, etc., because before the bride leaves for her husband's house, there is a ceremonial fight between the women of each family, in which the bride's relatives pretend that they don't want her to get married and hit the groom's relatives with their bracelets. "Aid-i-ghorban," the holiest day of the Sunni Moslem religion, also represents an appropriate opportunity to dress up. Because the ornaments were so heavy, they were mostly worn around the neck and shoulders. The women wore elaborate silver collars, breast plaques, pendants, as well as earrings, bracelets, and belts (Fig. 13). Some of the pendants had a long cylindrical tube, containing a prayer of protection or a quotation from the Koran.

Certain people in the tribe specialized in working with silver and making jewelry. The craft was passed down from generation to generation. The silversmiths were not considered artists. It was their job. If a craftsman made better jewelry or used better quality silver, his business improved. In the mid-1970s, I heard of an enterprising Yomut jeweler who bought a press in Italy for embossing gold decorations and creating gold beads. The craft was modernizing little by little.

There was a tradition of handing down family heirlooms from generation to generation. Ceremonial silk and fur-lined coats, musical instruments with a very long neck like a sitar, horse ornaments, and swords were given to their sons and jewelry went to the daughters. Jewelry was always sold by weight, however, if the craftsmanship was better on one piece than another, the price would go higher. Crowns generally had such refined workmanship and the bracelets were so heavy (as they had a bitumen core), they were priced individually.

On one occasion I was cheated, when I bought a lot of Yomut jewelry through a young man, only to find out later that it was new stuff. The next time I visited Gombad-i-Qavus, I asked one of the jewelers if there was someone making good new jewelry. He offered to take me to the workshop. We went to a small dark hut where a very fat woman was sitting on the floor in front of the charcoal fire at work. She was an expert silversmith and had many apprentices. She told me, "Whatever you want, I can make it for you." I had one of the contemporary reproductions and showed it to her. Very proudly she said, "Yes, I made this." I complained to the young man from whom I had originally purchased her jewelry, but he refused to do anything about it.

By the 1970s tribal artifacts were in vogue in Paris and there was a fabulous antique shop on the Rue de Seine that I frequented. I bought two magnificent crowns and several bracelets, which I later took back to Iran. I had never seen such fine examples. They were expensive, but worth their price. I think I paid about three thousand dollars for each crown, which would have been about four times the price for a similar piece in Gorgan, if such things had been available. They were not from old collections in France. Apparently, they had been purchased directly from Afghanistan and Iran. I also found many fine ikat silk coats and dresses as well as some jewelry at a shop in New York City call Knobkerry. It was on Spring Street in Soho. I used to wear the dresses, which were beautifully decorated and hand woven. I also gave some to friends to wear. My cousin married in Boston, and all the women wore Turkoman dresses, even the bride, whose dress was white silk and really unusual. I bought whatever I thought was beautiful. The Yomut people, for example, used buttons to fasten their clothes and jewelry, which were quarter-size to almost four inches in diameter. I had about three hundred of these buttons. Each one was unique and ornamental.

I was shocked when a Tehran antique dealer told me that most of the silver was melted down for new jewelry. His truthfulness upset me. My immediate reaction was to preserve these beautiful objects, which eventually included camel and horse blankets and decorations, saddles, boots, swords, hats, silk embroidered shawls, rugs, cushions, and saddlebags. As I grew to appreciate Turkoman artifacts and began to build a comprehensive collection, I imagined donating it to a museum. I hoped the younger generations in Iran would gain knowledge about their heritage through these objects and works of art, just as I took advantage of and learned from American museum collections like the Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In the late 1970s,

I noticed that the Russians and the French had published books about their Turkoman collections. So I was pleased that I had the foresight to collect and preserve the culture of the Turkoman tribes in Iran. •

—Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian (1985)

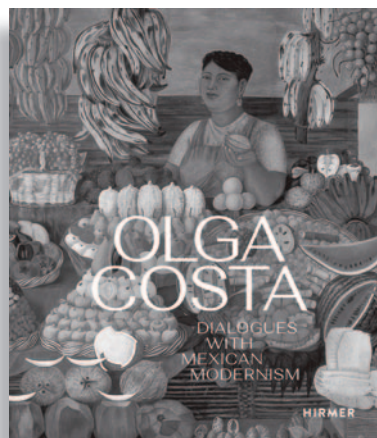
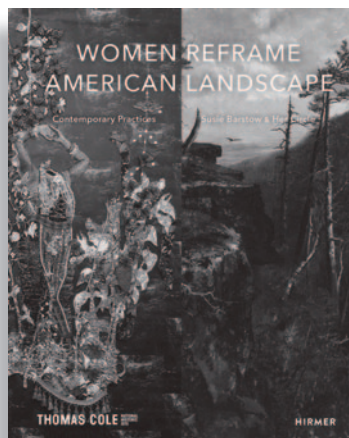
Donna Stein is an art historian, curator, and critic who served as an art adviser on western modern art for the Secretariat of Her Imperial Majesty, the Shahbanou of Iran. Stein's memoir, *The Empress and I: How an Ancient Empire Collected, Rejected and Rediscovered Modern Art*, was published by Skira Books in 2020. She has published extensively on Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian's ideas and work since 1977.

Notes

1. I wrote the first serious essay about Monir's work and interviewed her for a brochure published in French, in conjunction with the artist's first European solo exhibition, *Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian*, at Galerie Denise René, Paris, March 25–April 24, 1977, which later that year traveled to New York City. In the intervening years, I have interviewed her several times. In 2006, I contributed three short texts, "Beyond Geometry 2004–2005," "Sculptural Models: Hexagonal Variations and Minarets, 1976–2003," and "Minaret, 2004–2005," to *Mosaics of Mirrors. Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian*, a book edited by Rose Issa, with a foreword by Frank Stella, published by the Nazar Research and Cultural Institute, Tehran, in association with Rose Issa Projects, London; this coincided with Monir's exhibition, an installation and launch of the Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. I contributed the text, "A Reflection," to *Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian: Cosmic Geometry*, ed. Hans Ulrich Obrist and Karen Marta (Bologna: Damiani Editore; Dubai: The Third Line, 2011).
2. See, for example, the following exhibition catalogues accompanying recent career retrospectives: Suzanne Cotter, ed., *Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian: Infinite Possibility. Mirror Works and Drawings, 1974–2014* (Porto: Fundação de Serralves, 2014); and Rachel Thomas, ed., *Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian: Sunset, Sunrise* (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art; UAE: Sharjah Art Foundation, 2018).
3. In collaboration with Zara Houshmand, Farmanfarmaian wrote a well-received and engaging memoir, *A Mirror Garden: A Memoir* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 40.
4. For an extensive chronology on the artist's early and late development, influences, and travels to and from the United States and Iran, see Donna Stein, "Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian: Empowered by American Art, An Artist's Journey," *Woman's Art Journal* 33, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2012): 3–9.
5. Monir's journey to the US was facilitated by Donald N. Wilber, an American archeologist who published an important book on the gardens of Persia in 1962. Later he was infamous for his 1986 memoir recounting his primary role as an intelligence agent and major operative for the Central Intelligence Agency to dethrone Mohammed Mossadegh in the 1953 coup.
6. See Stein, "Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian," *Woman's Art Journal*, 4.
7. In 1938–39, Arthur Upham Pope and Phyllis Ackerman edited the first of the multi-volume series, *Survey of Persian Art from Prehistoric Times to the Present* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press). Pope directed the headquarters of the American-Iranian Society in New York, relocated to Shiraz in 1966.

8. On Monir's early travels throughout Iran in the late 1950s, see Rose Issa, "Journeys of Discovery and Building Collections," in *Mosaics of Mirrors*, 13–14; and Farmanfarmaian, *A Mirror Garden: A Memoir*, 151. In 1957, she was recruited by the Ministry of Agriculture (Marshall Plan), "for a project adapting traditional handicrafts to appeal to foreign markets, with the intention of promoting exports and tourism." Farmanfarmaian, 159.
9. Reverse-glass painting is the application of paint to the underside of a piece of glass (which may or may not be colored), an accumulation of painted layers providing both abstract and narrative images.
10. Monir exhibited these in 1973 at the Iran-America Society (IAS), founded in Tehran to promote understanding between the country and the US. See Stein, "Monir Shahrudy Farmanfarmaian," *Woman's Art Journal*, 5.
11. Stein, text translated from the French, in *Monir Shahrudy Farmanfarmaian* (Paris: Galerie Denise René, 1977), n.p.
12. Monir's site-specific commissions in New York City included a reverse-glass painting and mirror installation for the reception area of an apartment building on Park Avenue in 1983, and a stained-glass window for the Dag Hammarskjöld Tower in 1988.
13. See Issam El-Said and Ayse Parman, *Geometric Concepts in Islamic Art*, foreword by Titus Burckhardt (London: World of Islam Festival Pub. Co., 1976).
14. See Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar, *The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*, foreword by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1973).
15. See accompanying wall text, "Carpets," to the exhibition, "Monir Farmanfarmaian: A Mirror Garden," High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia (Nov. 18, 2022–April 9, 2023).
16. See accompanying wall text to the exhibition, "Monir Farmanfarmaian: A Mirror Garden."
17. In 2000, the Brooklyn Museum secured a promised gift of Iranian Turkmen silver ornaments and costumes from the collection of Monir Shahrudy Farmanfarmaian in memory of her late husband, Abolbasha Farmanfarmaian. On the geographical and political history of the Turkmen tribes and their various customs, see Layla S. Diba, *Turkmen Jewelry: Silver Ornaments from the Marshall and Marilyn R. Wolf Collection* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2011).
18. See "Monir Shahrudy Farmanfarmaian in conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist," in *Monir Shahrudy Farmanfarmaian: Cosmic Geometry*, 29.
19. *Qahve Khaneh* means "coffee house" in Farsi.

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THE VIBRANT MATERIAL OF FRANCES KUEHN

By Heather Cammarata-Seale

Humanity and nonhumanity have always performed an intricate dance with each other. There was never a time when human agency was anything other than an interfolding network of humanity and nonhumanity; today this mingling has become harder to ignore.

—Jane Bennett,
*Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*¹

The human body, whether present or not, has always been a driving force in the work of Frances Kuehn (b. 1943). While she began her career as a figurative artist, Kuehn now paints objects of everyday life with the same attention and detail she used to paint the human form. The fabrics and clothing that adorned Kuehn's sitters are now the main characters in their own still life paintings. Although people no longer populate her work, Kuehn wields the power of material to evoke a living, bodily presence.

Kuehn enrolled at Douglass College, a residential women's college housed at Rutgers University, in 1960. She completed her BA in 1964, and immediately entered the MFA program.² She suspended her studies after a pregnancy and returned in 1969 to complete the two-year degree.³ Throughout her undergraduate and graduate career, Kuehn was taught the fundamentals of studio art by Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Watts, and other faculty members. The progressive curriculum was "[b]ased in part on the pedagogy of Black Mountain College, ... heavily indebted to John Cage's media course at the New School, [and] emphasized artistic innovation and links to everyday experience...."⁴ The birthplace of Fluxus and an important venue for the development of Pop, Douglass was a place of artistic experimentation, "on the cutting edge of a new Art."⁵ Although a presence on this non-traditional scene, Kuehn chose to move counter to the counterculture and stay on a more conventional path, committing herself to the art of figure painting.

Kuehn was given the freedom to forge her own artistic path, surrounded by avant-garde art forms that offered her "the opportunity of comparison, and aided her determination in *not* moving with the prevailing tide."⁶ Encouraged by



Fig. 1. Frances Kuehn, *Hineni, A Self-Portrait* (1972), acrylic on canvas, 108" x 72". © Frances Kuehn.

Lichtenstein to pursue working in a figurative mode, and influenced by George Segal (a graduate student while Kuehn was an undergrad) to find beauty in banality and the body, Kuehn developed an idiosyncratic style that blended photorealist technique with an expressionistic handling of

paint. In a class with Watts, when she demonstrated an “interest in painting realistic flower imagery,” he gave her a catalogue of flowers “to help her draw and paint by copying photographs.”⁷ Once Kuehn discovered the benefits of using photographs as an artistic tool, photography became a permanent feature of her process.

Kuehn began photographing her sitters as a way of creating a faithful representation of their likeness while grasping some larger truth about the captured moment. Photographing the scene ensured that the model was always available, guaranteed that no attribute or feature was disturbed, and produced a “detailed [black and white] drawing” that flattened three-dimensional space.⁸ Kuehn then divided the photograph into a grid which she copied and transferred, much enlarged, onto her canvas, adding color along the way. Color choices—recalled or invented—imbued the works with a shared sense of nostalgia and the imperfection of memory. Because of her fidelity to the appearance of her sitters, Kuehn considered these works not just figure paintings but portraits that “defin[ed] something true,” not idealistic.⁹

Kuehn painted *Hineni, A Self-Portrait* (1972; Fig. 1 and Pl. 9) a year after she completed her MFA. The title is derived from the Hebrew word *Hineni* (hee-neh-nee), a phrase comprised of two short words: ‘hineh’ and ‘ani’, meaning “here” and “I.” Often translated as “here I am,” the term can also be understood as meaning “behold.”¹⁰ In the work, the artist directly confronts the viewer with her physical presence. Perched on a stool in the corner of a white-walled room between two windows, wearing a modest red sleeveless top and blue jeans, Kuehn’s hair falls in soft curls around her bespectacled face, hands clasped in her lap. Her gaze is penetrating yet calm, her countenance still yet inquiring, her pose casual yet calculated. Both skin and fabrics are handled with expressionistic brushstrokes. Kuehn’s skin appears mottled, even vegetal, echoing the green foliage outside the window. The dappled sunlight enhances the details in her clothing: the loosened neck of her tank top, how it wrinkles around her bent torso; the wide, crumpled hem of her well-worn denim; the intricate weave of her huarache sandals. Just like her facial expression and body language, these garments give clues to Kuehn’s character, letting us know that she is self-assured yet unfussy, casual yet detailed oriented, confident in her abilities as an artist, and unafraid to sit in front of an audience and allow them to behold her in simple terms, just as the title suggests.

George, Portrait Near Window (1970; Fig. 2), a similarly posed portrait of her then husband, George Kuehn, a sculptor and fellow Rutgers alum, was included in that year’s Whitney Museum annual show. The following year, Kuehn joined the Max Hutchinson gallery in New York City, where she had her first individual exhibition. Throughout the 1970s, she exhibited in both solo and group displays. Following her divorce in the 1980s, Kuehn shifted her focus to graphic arts, earning a living as a commercial photographic retoucher, which taught her to be meticulous and made her comfortable working on a small scale.¹¹ In 1990, after remarrying and spending a year in India with her second husband, the



Fig. 2. Frances Kuehn, *George, Portrait Near Window* (1970), acrylic on canvas, 102" x 70". © Frances Kuehn.

mathematician Ray Hoobler, she once again painted full-time.

In 1999, Kuehn began exclusively featuring either herself or her husband in her work. Focusing on self-portraiture, she could investigate herself “as a woman, as a human” and explore “that autobiographical thing.”¹² Many pieces from this time present scenes that place Kuehn in the throes of a Sisyphean task, ruminating on the absurdity of modern life, such as *Turning the Stone* (2003; Fig. 3), with which she culminated her investigation of the human form. From that point, Kuehn gave her full attention to the clothing and fabrics that had preoccupied her since the beginning of her career. Two paintings would prove prescient as they present the artist and her husband shrouded in large swaths of cloth, bodies hidden from view. With these works, “Kuehn challenged herself to convey identity without revealing specific physiognomy,” and to use something flat to define something three-dimensional.¹³ In *Personal* (1998; Fig. 4), a large white sheet is thrown over a seated figure in an armchair. A pair of crossed ankles and feet, adorned with black almond-toed heels, peak out from the rarely used chair, letting the viewer know that there is, in fact, a person beneath the heavily



Fig. 3. Frances Kuehn, *Turning the Stone* (2003), acrylic on canvas, 48" x 60". © Frances Kuehn.

creased textile. *Personal*'s creation was inspired by "two specific inputs."¹⁴ First was the desire to respond to the inane critique of a dealer who considered showing Kuehn's paintings but ultimately decided that they were "too personal."¹⁵ Second was *Kusama's Self-Obliteration* (1967), a documentary film about Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929), in which the artist is shown "obliterating" herself and others with polka dots; she also obliterates a cat and man by covering their bodies with fallen leaves.¹⁶ According to Kusama, "Our earth is only one polka dot among a million stars in the cosmos. Polka dots are a way to infinity. When we obliterate nature and our bodies with polka dots, we become part of the unity of our environment. I become part of the eternal, and we obliterate ourselves in Love."¹⁷ Kusama believed that by covering oneself with polka dots or elements of the immediate environment—such as leaves in a forest or a sheet thrown over an unused chair—one would "obliterate" or destroy the individual and allow them to "become one with eternity."¹⁸ In *Personal*, Kuehn attempts to merge herself with

the immediate environment but, alas, she is unable to be completely consumed by the setting, cheekily reminding us that her work is, indeed, personal.

This theme reappears a few years later in *XY* (2001; Pl. 10). A "portrait" of Hoobler blanketed in a white fabric patterned with a blue grid, the title, *XY*, is not only a reference to the symbols for the pair of male chromosomes but the axes of the Cartesian coordinate system. Although only the cuffs of his pants, socks, and shoes are visible, viewers can ascertain some information about his character: swathed in what is essentially a huge piece of graph paper, he is consumed by a passion for his mathematical profession. Compared to *Personal*, the painting *XY* appears less about "obliteration," the draped material less obviously linked to his immediate environment and the outlines of his frame more pronounced. The horizontal draping of *XY* traces the contours of Hoobler's figure, while the vertical creasing of *Personal*, more concealing, extends beyond Kuehn's body to cover the chair. The geometric pattern offers clues as to how Hoobler's body occupies space,

expanding and contracting as the fabric molds to the curves of his limbs, and pooling where no flesh lies beneath.¹⁹ Furthermore, Kuehn paints the material with a sense of fluidity, sheen, and motion that bestows the inanimate cloth with an energy all its own.

In 2003, when the figure left Kuehn's practice, fabric and clothing were allowed to exist unencumbered by humans, no longer relying on the body to give them form, life, or meaning. In *Three by Two, 2* (2004; Fig. 5), XY's gridded fabric fills the entirety of the canvas. Hoobler is absent. Instead of exemplifying an aspect of Hoobler's personality, the blue and white material exists of its own accord, the painting's subject. Stretched tautly in the background, haphazardly pooled in the center, and straightened again in the foreground, the fabric alone creates a landscape effect. The pattern's distortion gives clues as to how space functions in the painting, and how the textile moves within that space. Paradoxically, Kuehn explains, "the grid tends to enhance the illusion of volume."²⁰ The ability to manipulate material, turning something familiar into something unfamiliar, excited Kuehn and became something she would continue to explore for years.²¹

The vertical and horizontal lines of *Three by Two, 2*'s composition speak to Kuehn's long running interest in structure. As previously mentioned, the grid was foundational to Kuehn's practice. With the aid of a grid, she composed her early figurative works, providing an internal geometric framework to her paintings.²² With time, an underlying grid began to reveal itself. By explicitly removing the figure, Kuehn allowed this hidden scaffolding to infiltrate her subject matter while she purged the human form from her process. Although Kuehn resisted the use of digital photography for a long time, she eventually gave up her 35mm camera for new technology in the early 2000s.²³ Using a digital camera, Kuehn adapted her technique for transferring an image: she projected her color photographs directly onto the canvas and traced the exterior and interior contours of the image, eliminating the need to erase or paint out grid lines.²⁴

As Rosalind Krauss argues in "Grids," her seminal 1979 essay: "... the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art. Flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, antimimetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature."²⁵ However, Kuehn complicates this autonomous notion in her works by arranging fabrics and clothing into grid-like configurations, adding the natural, mimetic, and real back into the flat, geometric, and ordered patterns. Kuehn denies "the lateral spread of a single surface" and the regularity of the grid's organizing principles by focusing on what Krauss says the grid refuses, that is, imitation, volume, texture, and mass.²⁶ Kuehn brings the grid into the realm of still life painting with works such as *Monochrome Curved Squares, Green* (2006; Fig. 6), *Second Drawer Right, Bottom Shelf Left* (2008; Pl. 11), and *Foursquare* (2022; Pl. 12).

Monochrome Curved Squares, Green, part of a larger series, demonstrates Kuehn's interest in geometric planes and subverting the grid.²⁷ It depicts a haphazard pile of square-cut art papers that were bowed by an elastic band.²⁸ The title of *Second Drawer Right, Bottom Shelf Left* reads like a pair of



Fig. 4. Frances Kuehn, *Personal* (1998), acrylic on canvas, 50" x 30".
© Frances Kuehn.

coordinates on a Cartesian plane, giving the still life a firm location in space. The drawer's clothing items, seen from above, are not folded into perfect squares, but rather contained within the orthogonal contours of a rectangular drawer, whose front edge neatly abuts the floorboard beneath, offering a scene constructed with inherent depth an undeniable sense of flatness.²⁹ The shallow shadows cast by the books on the floor, coupled with the layered garments in the drawer, remind us that the space of this painting is in the realm of three-dimensions, not two.

"Wanting to create something more sculptural in [her] subjects," says Kuehn, she began experimenting with the dimensional possibilities of flat textiles.³⁰ In 2012, after visiting the exhibition *John Chamberlain: Choices* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Kuehn painted a series of still lifes entitled *Homage to John Chamberlain* (2012; Fig. 7). Kuehn "felt that there was some similarity of intent between her paintings



Fig. 5. Frances Kuehn, *Three by Two, 2* (2004), acrylic on canvas, 24" x 16". © Frances Kuehn.



Fig. 6. Frances Kuehn, *Monochrome Curved Squares, Green* (2006), acrylic on canvas, 14" x 14". © Frances Kuehn.

and Chamberlain's sculptures." Underscoring their formal relationship, Kuehn reiterated: "Just as vehicles were made from metal in sheet form, clothing was made from fabric yardage."³¹

A Black Mountain College alum, Chamberlain, much like Kuehn, was trained to challenge the status quo and see the beauty in the everyday; eventually, Chamberlain landed on his signature style when he began assembling discarded car parts into sculptures that highlighted the "deep volumes and eccentric folds" of his manipulated colored steel.³² In *Foursquare* of 2022, painted ten years after her *Homage* series (see Fig. 7), Kuehn continued her investigative interplay between geometry, flatness, mass, and volume. Here, Kuehn arranges four vibrantly colored silk blouses into a foursquare grid, though a grid that is soft, textured, and malleable, rather than hard, planar, and rigid, with each quadrant filled by the crevices, folds, and ridges of whorled materials.

Early in her career, Kuehn says she was taken with the idea of painting the likenesses of sculptures on canvas, turning something three-dimensional into something flat.³³ Now, asserting, "when one makes a still life arrangement it is like making a sculpture," she is doing just that.³⁴ She sets up vignettes and then flattens them by painting the three-dimensional subjects onto a two-dimensional canvas. Kuehn's paintings echo art historian Susan Davis's claim about Chamberlain's sculptures, "with their deep folds, [they] resemble Renaissance drapery studies that imply the underlying presence of a figure, or conversely, a void."³⁵ Although neither Chamberlain nor Kuehn includes the human

figure in their works, both allude to the presence or absence of the human body.

By definition, still life paintings do not depict the human figure; instead, they feature, as described by artist Michael Petry, a "tight focus on an assortment of objects sitting on a flat surface, depicted not as a subsidiary element in a wider narrative but as a subject in its own right."³⁶ Traditionally, still life pictures commented on contemporary matters through allegory and symbolism, and some can be categorized under the term *nature morte*, or "dead nature," coined in the late eighteenth century to describe a genre metaphorically engaged with "the transience of life and ever-present threat of death."³⁷ At the turn of the twentieth century, artists and stylistic movements, such as Paul Cézanne and the Cubists, used still life arrangements to conduct formal experiments and investigate the nature of representation. Lighting, perspective, texture, color, and technique were no longer ancillary but of primary concern. Kuehn honors modern perspectives on still life painting by centering formal aspects, subtly subverting traditional outlooks, and underscoring the ever-present certainty of life, not death. Rather than classifying her paintings as *nature morte*, it is more apt to qualify them as *nature vivante*, or "alive nature," even though the *nature* in Kuehn's paintings is fabricated. Her still life paintings are occupied by ribbons, pieces of fabric, and personal garments,

all of which are created, from either natural or synthetic fibers, and do not easily deteriorate. Due to the manufactured qualities of Kuehn's subjects, they remind viewers that the potential for creativity and enduring splendor, not decay, is all around us. Moreover, while abstractly referencing the absent human body, Kuehn's still lifes imbue a sense of vitality and corporeality all their own.

The word vitality is used here in accordance with Jane Bennett's definition of the term. In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Bennett argues: "By 'vitality' I mean the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own."³⁸ She goes on to say that by living amongst "animate things not passive objects," matter is not inert but altering. The food we eat, the weather we endure, the clothes we wear all impact our lives, thoughts, and behaviors. All things have agentic power, or specifically 'thing-power,' that enables them "to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle."³⁹ For example, things, such as a piece of clothing, can "call to" someone from a shop window, enticing them to make a purchase.⁴⁰ Wearing that piece of clothing can dramatically impact one's mood, comfort, and sense of self or belonging. Or, that piece of clothing might "call to" an artist, asking to be included in an artwork.⁴¹ Kuehn's still life paintings thus harness the "thing-power" of her subjects, reminding viewers that inanimate objects pulse with energy, have affective affinities, and are worthy of our attention.⁴²

When selecting the garments and materials showcased in her still life paintings, Kuehn shops her home, choosing items she already owns. "You can find all the means that you need easily available," urges Kuehn.⁴³ It is the object's specificity and uniqueness that attracts Kuehn to a certain item at a given moment. "It is not just my thing, it's that particular thing, that particular shirt, that particular wrinkle."⁴⁴ Individuality, not sentimentality, is the driving factor. "With a few exceptions," Kuehn chooses items based on their formal qualities, as they still emit a "whiff of intimacy," aromas of past people, events, and memories.⁴⁵ The field of Object-Oriented Ontology (the OOO movement), according to philosophy professor Timothy Morton, asserts that all forms of life, both animate and inanimate, coexist because they not only share space but exchange molecules. Because of this transference of matter on a molecular level, borders cannot be easily drawn around anything, human or nonhuman. We cannot "construct a 'within' (where life lives) and a 'without' (where it doesn't)."⁴⁶ Applying this theory, which aligns with Kusama's notion of "obliteration" in terms of becoming one with the environment,



Fig. 7. Frances Kuehn, *Homage to John Chamberlain 2* (2012), acrylic on canvas, 20" x 15". © Frances Kuehn.

the clothing and fabric samples of Kuehn's paintings contain particles of every place they have inhabited and everyone that has worn them. Their individuality is thus inextricably linked to their surroundings. Although these fabricated, inanimate objects don't have blood running through veins, they do have a "vital materiality" or "thing power" that pulses with a unique energy culled in part from their past experiences.

In *Enclosure* (2016; Pl. 13), pink, red, and tan garments spill out of an unbuttoned stone-gray coat. The "flesh and blood" colors permeate the scene with a bodily presence.⁴⁷ Pink fabric turns into a beating heart, red ribbons morph into arteries and blood, and stockings transform into organs. For Kuehn, enclosure is partly understood as a principle of construction, along with concentricity and adjacency,⁴⁸ dealing with how everything in a scene

relates to each other: everything is inextricably linked.⁴⁹ *Enclosure* "seems inevitably to suggest the body, and [hold] sexual implications," Kuehn further offers, while investigating notions of interiority.⁵⁰ While harnessing the power of material, Kuehn's work evokes the presence of the human body even when the human body is nowhere in sight. The composition of *Enclosure* is partly sealed from view, exhibiting how "the body just isn't an impermeable, closed form."⁵¹ The bright white highlights and deep pink creases of the central form suggest the presence of a muscular heart, even though the seams and stitching of the garment remain visible. "The colors depend on each [other]," whereby the color of one fabric impacts the tone of its neighbors, either intensifying or muting their visual effects.⁵² The personality of each garment is thus determined by its company.⁵³ *Enclosure*, as Morton might conclude, is borderless, for it does not easily draw boundaries between the human and nonhuman, the internal or the external. Instead, it speaks to the notion that all things, living and nonliving, "are connected in a mesh without a center or an edge," an open-ended place where interrelations "blur and confound boundaries at practically any level: between species, between the living and the nonliving, between organisms and the environment."⁵⁴ What's inside is outside; what's inanimate is animate; what's nonhuman is human.

Interiority is a common theme in Kuehn's recent work. *Enclosure with Pink and Black* (2016; Fig. 8), appears vaginal, with its black exterior and layered pink interior, but is more about depth than a particular body part. The still life, *Mirror Love with Pink and Gold* (2018; Fig. 9), was arranged in front of a mirror "to get even deeper into space."⁵⁵ Every wrinkle, crease, stitch, and seam on the garments is shown from multiple viewpoints. The doubling of the vignette manifests "interesting confusions," says Kuehn, encouraging the scene to



Fig. 8. Frances Kuehn, *Enclosure with Pink and Black* (2016), acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18". © Frances Kuehn.

take on bodily connotations, with the reflection of the iridescent pink shirt appearing organ- or limb-like.⁵⁶ While an unworn piece of clothing can invoke "absence, even death, and beg the question of whether its owner will ever wear it again," Kuehn's pieces of clothing do not demand an exterior source of energy.⁵⁷ They don't need a human body to be animate, to be worthy of attention. They are the site of a unique interior world, the source of their own vitality.

Kuehn not only elicits human bodily forms in her still lifes but nonhuman ones as well. In *Bouquet 3* (2020; Fig. 10), for example, pink, white, and red vestments, arranged in a quasi-grid, are transformed into artificial flowers, in full bloom, never to decay. Beauty and love were driving forces in the era of Victorian floral still life painting because "flowers made up a complex system of codes that allowed lovers to communicate covertly their desires."⁵⁸ As proclaimed in *Nature Morte*, "For many contemporary artists [today], the flower in bloom not only encapsulates the notion of beauty at its peak—that moment before death becomes inevitable and the bruise overtakes the perfect velvet petal—but also alludes to heightened sexual pleasure."⁵⁹ While Kuehn has not intentionally painted a sexualized picture, floral imagery has long been associated with attraction, desire, and female genitalia. Georgia O'Keeffe's (1887–1986) close-up depictions



Fig. 9. Frances Kuehn, *Mirror Love with Pink and Gold* (2018), acrylic on canvas, 20" x 20". © Frances Kuehn.



Fig. 10. Frances Kuehn, *Bouquet 3* (2020), acrylic on canvas, 18" x 24". © Frances Kuehn.

of flowers elicited erotic interpretations, although she "consistently disavowed the sexual theme" on which critics often focused their claims, and she even campaigned "for alternative interpretations."⁶⁰ O'Keeffe "was especially heartened by the critics who detected spiritual meaning in her painting," for through her paintings of flowers, vegetables, and other plant life, O'Keeffe aimed to present a "view of nature as a living presence and the locus of communion and love."⁶¹ As art historian Bonnie L. Grad asserts, O'Keeffe was deeply inspired by the work of author D.H. Lawrence, who created in his writing bonds between floral imagery, sexuality,

and the natural world.⁶² O’Keeffe’s images of nature as alive and growing aim to capture the beauty in the “little things,”⁶³ such as the growth of small patches of grass, while encouraging everyone “to meet and cross with the universe,”⁶⁴ to recognize and appreciate their connection to the environment. Similarly, Kuehn’s still lifes of clothing-cum-flowers encourage viewers to look closely at their domestic surroundings and appreciate the power of the objects with which they live. Works like *Enclosure* and *Bouquet 3* recognize the depth, beauty, and energy of inanimate things while reminding us that all things are intimately connected.

Although the tradition of *nature morte* focuses on themes of decay and mortality, Kuehn’s *nature vivante* paintings emphasize that all objects are alive, connected, and beautiful. Kuehn acknowledges how “all of our possessions speak about us in silent ways.”⁶⁵ Objects owned, collected, and worn express volumes about their possessors and will continue to speak about them once they are separated because they can never be truly unconnected. Through their dynamic interrelationships, the nonhuman entities in Kuehn’s works underscore that they will forever share molecules and memories with the human bodies they have and touch. The materials, fabrics, and garments populating Kuehn’s paintings—as well as the paintings themselves—are durable, for they will live far longer than any human.⁶⁶ Their “thing-power” endures. As Jane Bennett declares, their “material vitality is me, it predates me, it exceeds me, it postdates me.”⁶⁷ •

Heather Cammarata-Seale is an independent scholar, educator, and curator of Modern and Contemporary Art. Her research interests, which focus on the human-animal relationship and new materialism, are interdisciplinary in nature, extending beyond the boundaries of art history into the fields of posthumanism, ecocriticism, and animal studies. She earned her PhD and Certificate in Curatorial Studies from Rutgers University and has worked in the curatorial departments of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Princeton University Art Museum, and other institutions. She has taught as an adjunct professor at Drew University, the Tyler School of Art and Architecture, Temple University, and elsewhere.

Notes

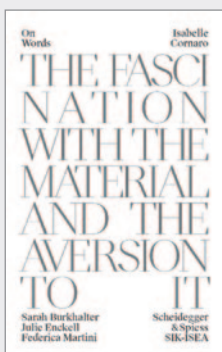
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5. Marter, 3.
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13. Judith E. Stein, “New Paintings by Frances Kuehn,” in *Frances Kuehn*, exh. cat. (Wayne, NJ: Ben Shahn Galleries, William Paterson Univ., 2002), 1.
14. Kuehn, e-mail to the author, Nov. 15, 2022.
15. Kuehn, e-mail to the author, Nov. 15, 2022.
16. Kuehn, e-mail to the author, Nov. 15, 2022. See Midori Yoshimoto, *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2005), 72.
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18. Yoshimoto, 72.
19. Kuehn, Interview.
20. Kuehn, Interview.
21. Kuehn, Interview.
22. Wechsler, *Twelve from Rutgers*, 6.
23. Kuehn, e-mail to the author, Nov. 2, 2022.
24. Kuehn, e-mail to the author, Nov. 2, 2022.
25. Rosalind Krauss, “Grids,” *October* 9 (Summer 1979): 50, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/778321>.
26. Krauss, 50.
27. Kuehn, Interview.
28. Kuehn, Interview.
29. Kuehn, Interview. Kuehn said she likes to play with the flatness in her drawer paintings by picturing “things on top of things on top of flat surfaces.”
30. Kuehn, e-mail to the author, Dec. 14, 2022.
31. Kuehn, e-mail to the author, Dec. 14, 2022.
32. Susan Davidson, “A Sea of Foam, an Ocean of Metal,” in *John Chamberlain Choices* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Pubs., 2012), 18.
33. Kuehn, Interview.
34. Kuehn, Interview.
35. Davidson, “A Sea of Foam, an Ocean of Metal,” 26.
36. Michael Petry, *Nature Morte: Contemporary Artists Reinvent the Still-Life Tradition* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2013), 6.
37. Petry, 6.
38. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, viii.
39. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 6.
40. Jane Bennett, “Powers of the Hoard: Further Notes on Material Agency,” in *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Goleta, CA: Punctum Books, 2012), 240.
41. Bennett, “Powers of the Hoard,” 247.

42. Engaging the practice of Pierre Bourdieu's affect theory, sociologist Steven Threadgold developed a "concept of affinity that seeks to theorize connections, potencies and relations between people and things." Threadgold argues that "the specific emotions produced in any affective encounter derive from one's relation to the elements of that encounter, specifically one's *affinity* with all the phenomena present," underscoring the power of things in our everyday experiences and on larger social structures, particularly class. Steven Threadgold, *Bourdieu and Affect: Towards a Theory of Affective Affinities* (Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press, 2020), 3.
43. Kuehn, Interview.
44. Kuehn, Interview.
45. Kuehn, Interview.
46. Timothy Morton, "Coexistence and Coexistents: Ecology without a World," in *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, ed. Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby (Charlottesville and London: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2011), 169; and Morton, "Guest Column: Queer Ecology," *PMLA* 125, no. 2 (March 2010): 275–76.
47. Kuehn, Interview.
48. Kuehn, e-mail to the author, Dec. 22, 2022. On concentricity and adjacency, Kuehn writes: "Being concentric ... suggests a sort of hierarchy, the most perfect example of which is a target," in contrast to "[b]eing adjacent, which can suggest equality if parts are equal."
49. Kuehn, Interview.
50. Kuehn, e-mail to the author, Dec. 22, 2022.
51. Morton, "Guest Column: Queer Ecology," 274.
52. Kuehn, Interview.
53. Kuehn, Interview.
54. Morton, "Coexistence and Coexistents: Ecology without a World," 169.
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56. Kuehn, e-mail to the author, Dec. 22, 2022.
57. Petry, *Nature Morte*, 133.
58. Petry, 22.
59. Petry, 23.
60. Bonnie L. Grad, "Georgia O'Keeffe's Lawrencean Vision," *Archives of American Art Journal* 38, no. 3/4 (1999): 3.
61. Grad, 3.
62. Grad, 3.
63. Georgia O'Keeffe, "I Can't Sing, So I Paint! [New York Sun, Dec. 5, 1922]," in Barbara Buhler Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz, and the Critics, 1916–1929* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989), 181. Quoted in Grad, "O'Keeffe's Lawrencean Vision," 5, n.35.
64. Grad, "Georgia O'Keeffe's Lawrencean Vision," 15.
65. Petry, *Nature Morte*, 132.
66. In her exploration of the hoarding mindset, Jane Bennett proposes: "One way to explain the ability of paper, plastic, wood, stone, glass to 'overwhelm' humans is in terms of their comparative advantage over human flesh when it comes to endurance, patience, waiting it out. This is the first of the insights about thing-power made possible by a close encounter with various hoards. It concerns the 'speed' of the thing, the relative slowness of its rate of change.... Their relatively slow rate of decay presents the reassuring illusion that at least something doesn't die." Bennett, "Powers of the Hoard," 252.
67. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 120.

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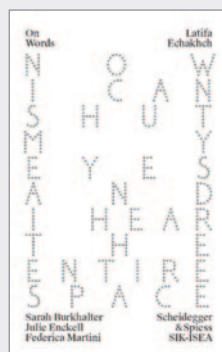
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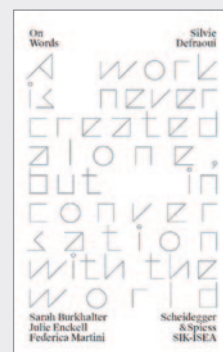
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SHADES OF GRAY

THE POSTMODERN PORTRAITS OF ROMAINE BROOKS AND THE SLIPPAGE OF GENDER REPRESENTATION

By Elizabeth Richards Rivenbark

As a woman artist of some distinction and infamy, Romaine Brooks (1874–1970) has received consistent attention over the last few decades, though her art is often discussed in terms of her life experiences, contacts, and class, with authors finding interest in everything from her cosmopolitan upbringing to her non-normative sexuality; some scholars even find her fashionable interior furnishings more worthy of conversation than her paintings (Figs. 1–2). The reason for this lack of painterly analysis seems, partly, in finding such private matters interesting and, partly, in the notion that Brooks' paintings lack originality. In "The Originality of the Avant-garde," Rosalind Krauss stated modernism identifies originality as part of a binary, with its non-privileged opposite, repetition. Analyses of the avant-garde and modernism prioritize originality, thus repetition is negatively viewed.¹ It doesn't take much knowledge of nineteenth-century art history to see that Brooks was heavily influenced by the decadent fin-de-siècle painter James Abbott McNeill Whistler, both in tone and style, and Brooks made no secret of her interest in the artist. Whether to imitate or merely to act upon her fascination, Brooks even moved for a time to a studio on Tite Street in the London neighborhood of Chelsea—the same street where Whistler's studio had been located.²

Brooks' style is certainly a reflection of Whistler's with its restricted, subdued color palette, strong outlines, thinly painted surfaces, and simple, atmospheric backgrounds, though as Whitney Chadwick stated, Brooks herself saw Whistler's work as "lacking of psychological complexity."³ A brief look at one of Whistler's paintings shows the similarities between the two artists. Whistler's *Mother of Pearl and Silver: The Andalusian* (1888–90; Fig. 3), for example, is a life-size



Fig. 1. Perou, photograph of Romaine Brooks (c. 1910). Romaine Brooks papers, 1910–1973. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



Fig. 2. Romaine Brooks, *Una, Lady Troubridge* (1924), 50 1/8" x 30 1/8". Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the artist, 1966.49.6.

figure painting of Whistler's sister-in-law, Ethel Philip, who modeled for the artist on multiple occasions. The painting is not, however, a portrait of Ethel, as she is faced away from the viewer with only the slightest glimpse of her profile. Instead the painting is a study of color and value and a reflection of Whistler's interest in fashion. The British art historian Richard Dormant even argued that the painting is more a portrait of a dress than a woman.⁴ Subject aside, the painting reflects a subdued color palette of browns, greys, and blacks, a thinly



Fig. 3. James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Mother of Pearl and Silver: The Andalusian* (1888(?)–1900), oil on canvas, 75 3/8" x 35 3/8". Harris Whittemore Collection. 1943.6.1. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

painted surface, and an empty, shallow background, as was typical of Whistler's portraits. Lacking in psychological complexity, its main focus is rather formal in nature: an exploration of gradations of neutral colors. In turn, many scholars find Brooks' paintings merely derivative of Whistler's style and only find interest in her subjects or portrait sitters (mostly her circle of lesbian friends and acquaintances). Even though Brooks' portraits are certainly not "lacking of psychological complexity," her subject matter—portraiture—was deemed old-fashioned. Portraiture in the late nineteenth century was often considered unoriginal and commercial, especially with the competition of photography, and the genre was criticized as unimaginative. Detractors easily ignored Brooks as an aristocratic woman painting aristocratic women in a style that had found favor a generation beforehand.⁵ Seen in this light, it is no wonder contemporary scholars overlooked her paintings in favor of artists who participated in modernist stylistic tendencies. But Brooks' portraits were not like the products of commercial studios; she had appropriated the Decadent style associated with Symbolism and Aestheticism—a literary and artistic approach characterized by intellectualizing symbolism and preoccupations with

Fig. 4. William Merritt Chase, *James Abbott McNeill Whistler* (1885), oil on canvas, 74 1/8" x 36 1/4". The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Bequest of William H. Walker, 1918. 18.22.2.



mysticism, excess, sensual self-indulgence, and death—to utilize its ideologies and associated gendered tropes in the development of a new visual iconography for lesbian self-fashioning.⁶ For this reason and others about to be outlined, Brooks should not be held up to the authorial criterias of modernism, such as the experimentation of form, as her work is, arguably, anti- or post-modern.

Breaking with art historical tradition, canon, and chronology, this article suggests that Brooks, an artist from the early twentieth century, was working in a postmodernist vein, even as the term—postmodernism—is frequently used today to refer both to a temporal era as well as a theoretical position and typically applied to artists working no earlier than the Pop decade of the 1960s. The term was first employed in a contemporary context by the British macrohistorian Arnold Toynbee in 1939, who observed that the Postmodern age had arrived as early as the late nineteenth century or by the time of the First World War. Toynbee's writing identified postmodernism as a cultural shift in Western civilization away from imperialism and toward the rise of mass culture.⁷ Although Toynbee was not referring to the emerging field of art history, his situating the end of modernism at World War I places Brooks at the forefront of the postmodern movement.⁸ The term postmodernism first appeared in the discourse of art history in Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979),

which identified the theoretical proposals of postmodernism in art as those instances that react to perceived failures of modernism.⁹ A brief look at the ideological presumptions associated with postmodernism will show that Brooks was working in the manner we still associate with the movement. Postmodernism is not merely what falls after modernism but is a radical reaction against modernism. Modernist ideas broadly assume a utopian chronology of progress—the experimentation with color and form in the arts is the focus of most art histories from the mid-nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century with very little attention paid to artists working outside of these Western avant-garde formal concepts and movements.¹⁰ In neatly packed survey courses, for example, art historians locate the rejection or close of the modernist era in the canonical movements of Pop and Minimalism of the 1960s. It is then rather heretical to identify a "postmodern" artist among the ranks of early twentieth century modernists, for that would imply, misleadingly, that later modernists were not progressive or avant-garde. Approaching such delimited art historical periods from a different viewpoint, it may be shown that Romaine Brooks' work aligns very closely with the characteristics of art duly



Fig. 5. Romaine Brooks, *Le Trajet (The Crossing)* (ca. 1911), oil on canvas, 45 3/8" x 75 3/8". Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the artist, 1968.18.3.

prized in the postmodern period, and that the exploration of these aesthetic and ideological tendencies of her art deserve more attention and investigation.

The years 1910 to 1920 were a quick succession of avant-garde movements from Fauvism to Cubism to Dada, each one experimenting with new representational modes and alternative art making practices. Modernist art history privileges such experimentation as originality and identifies a clear line of progression as each avant-garde artist or movement is, in turn, rebuffed by the next generation of vanguard artists; modern artists were known to reject conservative values of art, such as the realistic depiction of subjects, and to focus instead on abstraction and the visual materialization of processes in their finished work. Appearing to look backward, not forward, to the aesthetic style of the Decadents, Brooks ignores the current trends of progressive studies on color, space, and automatic and multimedia processes. It is in her reversal in outlook and rejection of the vanguard artistic trends of her time where her forward-thinking, postmodern sensibilities are found. This is not merely a derivative convention on her part but a self-conscious borrowing of historic style and social context, a process that exemplifies one way in which Brooks' work and approach parallel examples by postmodernists who intentionally choose or glean iconic forms in their historic and ironic inspirations and appropriations. In addition to showing an interest in past artistic styles and artists, the postmodernists of the late twentieth century, such as the Neo-Expressionists or the Young British Artists of the 1990s, were also interested in a return to figurative and naturalistic imagery. Brooks aligns with postmodernist principles in this manner as well, by embracing the historic tradition of portraiture and its accompanying social and economic associations with upper class wealth and stature as the framework on which she builds her new vision of womanhood.

In her portraits of transgressive women, Brooks appropriated both Whistler's iconic style and decadent iconography of the dandy, turning for inspiration to the often overlapping nineteenth-century movements of the Decadents, Symbolists, and Aesthetes, even though these artistic styles and affiliations were a generation behind and largely considered by some antiquated.¹¹ Decadent models appealed to a handful of women artists in the early twentieth century, including another artist in Brooks' circle named Gluck (the pseudonym of Hannah Gluckstein [1895–1978]), because of its association with sexual and gender unorthodoxy. David Weir, a scholar on decadence, has argued that this cultural period of study in the late nineteenth century is typically overlooked in favor of the Cubist heritage arising from Post-Impressionism, yet decadence was still a modernist movement because it emphasized the individual over any "authoritarian requirements," especially those of the academy.¹² Decadence favored artifice, poetry, and stylizing over naturalism, similar interests to the Symbolists with whom they are frequently grouped and from which a modern homosexual male identity emerged, where costume expressed much more than social class. The decadent dandy was characterized as impeccably dressed in fashionable attire, complete with the accessories of a walking cane or formal tall hat, but more than that, the dandy was a man whose social class was unclear due to the commercial availability of contemporary male fashion trends, which opened an opportunity to glide fluidly between the worlds of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. Whistler, though associated with Aestheticism (not its offspring, decadence), was himself an example of a self-fashioning dandy.

The famous full-length portrait, *James Abbott McNeill Whistler* (1885; Fig. 4) by William Merritt Chase, captures the artist as the visage of the dandy in costume and pose. Chase was an admirer of Whistler's work and intentionally imitated



Fig. 6. Paul Kehren, Romaine Brooks' studio (c. 1970). Romaine Brooks papers, 1910–1973. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Whistler's style of portraiture, referencing the elongated figure and range of dark valued colors. But Whistler's presentation as a dandy was part of his own self-fashioning. In Chase's portrayal, Whistler adorns a tailored jacket cinched slightly at the artist's slim waist, a detail typically associated with the waistlines of female mannequins, and sports a walking cane and monocle, accoutrements that showcase the dandy's pastime of strolling and analyzing the modern urban environment. In the 1890s with the very public trial of Oscar Wilde, the visual iconography of the dandy became the cultural marker of the deviant or homosexual male identity.¹³ The dandy's social transience became a cue for other experiences, specifically non-normative sexual experiences outside the margins of accepted society. The decadent artists (from literary figures like Oscar Wilde to artists such as Aubrey Beardsley) often established complex self-fashioned gender roles with men assuming a symbolic femininity in their attention to costuming and presentation; in their physical presentation, the Decadents, in fact, were often associated with androgyny for adopting characteristics of grace, elegance, and an attention to beauty usually assigned as feminine or female behaviors and attributes. Bridget Elliot also underscored that the Decadents acquired feminine elements in their personal and projected identities all while exhibiting highly misogynistic tendencies toward women, especially those women defined under the newly formed identity of the 'New Woman,' as though only men could transgress social boundaries.¹⁴

Like the Decadents, Brooks applied artifice and stylizing to her sitters both in her figurative paintings and portraits. As exemplified in *Le Trajet* (The Crossing) (1911; Fig. 5), Brooks painted several nudes and partial nudes with symbolic content. *Le Trajet* depicts the model, the Russian dancer and art patron Ida

Rubinstein (1883–1960), as a reclining nude laying on a white form, the shape of which resembles a wing, a symbol of purity and innocence, angelic in nature, though its sinuous lines remove both the form and figure from any familiar spiritual implications. The body also suggests something beyond the reclining nudes of the Renaissance, not the voluptuous forms typically drafted for the male gaze. As a ballerina, Rubinstein's body was slim and elongated (at almost six-foot-tall, she was especially known for her height). Yet, Rubinstein's body is erotically charged, laying vulnerably as if asleep on a white plane surrounded by a dark ambiguous background, representing a different ideal, one for the queer female gaze, not the normative heterosexual male viewer. Other examples of symbolic nudes by Brooks include *Azalées Blanches* (White Azaleas) (1910; Pl. 14 and Fig. 6), *Spring* (La Primavera) (c. 1910–13), and *Chasseresse* (The Huntress) (1920; Fig. 7).

Though Brooks is often identified as merely derivative of Whistler, she, too, was working in an avant-garde way. Brooks was engaged not just in painting portraits of aristocrats but in using and subverting decadent iconography through

translation, interpretation, and appropriation, the artistic and stylistic approaches later assigned to postmodernism, in the service of making early-twentieth-century lesbian culture identifiable and accepted, an application that aligned her work with postmodernist tendencies more than modernist ones.¹⁵

Brooks and other twentieth-century female artists like Gluck and Una Troubridge (1887–1963; see Fig. 2), an aristocratic British sculptor and writer, recognized that the social mobility assigned to the dandy and deployed by decadent androgynous artists to gain acceptance for their transgressive gender and sexual slippage could also be used to create a lesbian visual iconography. It was simple enough to transmit the dandy's appearance of androgyny and sexual slippage onto lesbian portraits, as some women were in fact wearing more masculine clothes at this point in history. Brooks' sitters appropriated masculine fashion, an enactment not only realized during the hours spent in front of Brooks, the portraitist, but in their day-to-day lives.¹⁶ In Brooks' portrait of Gluck, titled *Peter* (A Young English Girl) (1923–24; Pl. 15), the sitter is self-fashioned androgynously wearing masculine clothes. Gluck went so far as to flaunt a man's short hairstyle, not the gender-bending styled bob popularized in 1920s flapper fashion. Gluck was gender non-conforming in hair, dress, and name, abandoning Hannah Gluckstein in preference of Gluck, and sometimes known as Peter, as identified in the portrait title.

Brooks herself appropriated decadent fashion conventions in *Self-Portrait* of 1923 (Fig. 8) wearing a male-tailored riding hat and coat of her own design.¹⁷ Sporting attire like riding clothes was popular among upper-class women before World War I, but Brooks' choice to tailor her costume even more masculine—straighter waistline and less flair—aligned her attire with that of the dandy's. Brooks' bobbed hairstyle and direct gaze also point

to the androgyny the artist was self-fashioning in life and in paint. Brooks' various portraits show women wearing top hats, monocles, tailored suit coats and pants, accessorized by one masculine item or an entire ensemble, on display in her *Self-Portrait*. By the turn of the century, cross-dressing was quite popular among bourgeois women who wanted to convey a modernist identity through self-fashioning.¹⁸ This was in part the result of the "New Woman" imagery flaunting independence, but also the result of a growing number of women entering the professional public sphere, where wearing pants made it easier for them to work; once they became accustomed to wearing pants, women were then interested in wearing similar items for comfort in their private lives.¹⁹ In the first decade of the twentieth century, bourgeois and aristocratic women (heterosexual and homosexual) adopted tailored jackets, cropped hair, and, in some revolutionary cases, sported pants. According to Lillian Faderman, cross-dressing had been illegal, historically, in much of Europe, but in most instances, the guilty party would receive mere reprimanding by authorities, except in those cases where the accused was, blatantly, a lesbian who refused to "reform" or when the woman attempted to claim male social privileges, whereby they were often prosecuted to the full extent of the law.²⁰ Brooks and her circle of friends participated in androgynous fashion and maintained it even when trends swung back towards more feminine appearances after World War I. Sheltered by the trappings of aristocratic wealth and relations, they could afford to dress as they pleased and were known to spend large sums designing clothes to fit their particular tastes.²¹ Their cross-dressing was not to adopt masculine privilege but gender ambiguity and androgyny. Through their fashioning, neither Una Troubridge nor Romaine Brooks sought to proclaim masculine privileges, for instance political leadership or economic privilege; their androgyny was a statement of their separateness from heterosexual, patriarchal societal norms. Although the following terms apply to Brooks' sitters, hybridity and ambiguity are also terms academically aligned with postmodernism, in opposition to the modernist traits of purity and clarity of style and form, especially sought after by abstract artists.

Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace make an interesting argument that some of Brooks' detractors were actually showing anti-aristocratic sentiments in their criticism and a disavowal of the artist and her circle: critics stated that they were not serious, professional artists because they were aristocratic and therefore could choose their sitters, a transaction making their subjects personal.²² Elliott and Wallace contend that mainstream academics tend to champion the middle class while feminist scholars support radicalism; though Brooks' lifestyle could be identified as radical, her style, at first glance, could not.²³ Another argument may be made that such criticism against Brooks' subject matter is much more likely an anti-lesbian sentiment than an anti-aristocratic one, for it is in Brooks' lesbian iconography that we find its greatest originality and postmodernity.

Brooks was not the first artist to represent lesbians; in fact, lesbian iconography was well established by the early twentieth century, but it was an iconography ruled by the male

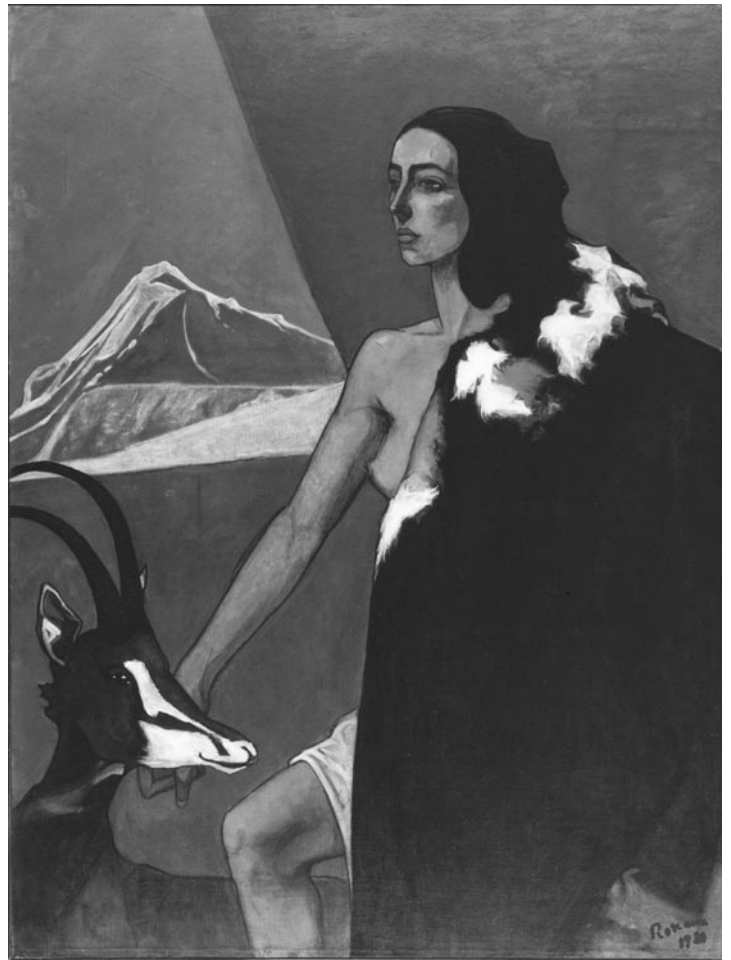


Fig. 7. Romaine Brooks, *Chasseresse (The Huntress)* (1920), oil on canvas, 51 3/8" x 38 3/8". Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the artist, 1968.18.1.

gaze.²⁴ Queer women were typically presented in one of three ways: in erotica or erotic situations appearing as the fantasy objects of heterosexual male desire; as grotesques or as outcasts in other ways ridiculed to preserve heterosexual normativity; or as repressed figures, perhaps intended to evoke sympathy but again to preserve heterosexual normativity.²⁵ Brooks' paintings are at times erotic but of singular figures; her nudes are more akin to the genre of the female nude as figural studies and studio models (see, for example, *White Azaleas*) and symbolic lenses (*Le Trajet*) than the lesbian erotica by Edgar Degas or Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec depicting women in brothels. Brooks' nudes are almost all modeled on actress Ida Rubinstein (one of Brooks' love interests whose own sexuality was kept hidden from the public to preserve the nature of her stage character), a reversal whereby the female nude is not the object of the male heterosexual gaze but the object of a lesbian female gaze. Whereas male paintings of lesbian erotica most frequently show the act of two women together, Brooks' nudes rely on an intellectual approach to beauty and sensuality. *Le Trajet*'s eroticism is shrouded by its subject matter of death—another

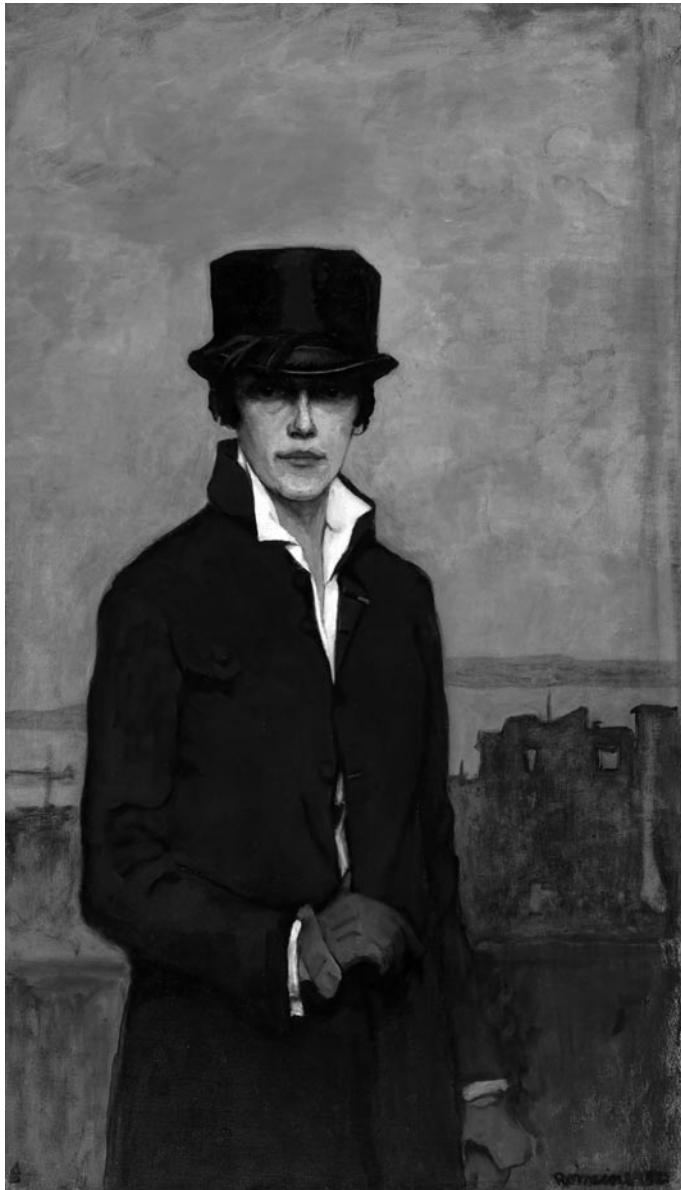


Fig. 8. Romaine Brooks, *Self-Portrait* (1923), oil on canvas, 46 1/4" x 26 7/8". Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the artist, 1966.49.1.

subject with great popularity and sensual overtones in the nineteenth century, especially among the Decadents and Symbolists—and the figure's sexuality imbues an atypically heterosexual, female nude fantasy as the female figure neither interacts with the viewer through her gesture or gaze nor appears alluringly disposed other than by her stark nudity. Brooks' *White Azaleas* is formally reminiscent of reclining nudes from art history. Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538) and Édouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863) readily come to mind by comparison (when Brooks first exhibited *White Azaleas* in 1910 at Durand-Ruel Gallery in Paris it was identified by at least one contemporary critic as redolent of *Olympia*).²⁶ Each reclining nude languishes on a couch in the proximity of a floral bouquet: Titian's *Venus* holds a small bouquet while Manet's *Olympia* is presented with one by her servant. But

whereas Titian and Manet presented their ideally male viewer with a symbolic nude representative of femininity, sexuality, and the availability of the female body in varying forms of sexual interaction, Brooks' nude represents an unconventional femininity, an alternative sexuality, and an indifferent accessibility. One end of the spectrum is Titian's *Venus* as a mistress or bridal figure coyly inviting the viewer's interaction. Alternately, Manet's figure was critiqued for sexually presenting her body with an apathetic air suggesting a business transaction instead of a romantic liaison. Brooks' nude goes even further by making her body positionally available (even tilting her body towards the viewer) but allowing the subject to appear indifferent to the viewers' presence, looking off into the distance with heavy lids. Brooks has not cloaked her nude in the acceptable guise of mythology or allegorical symbolism or even contemporary social commentary but has presented her own lover in her own apartment on her own couch. *White Azaleas*, then, is not the symbolist trope a first glance might assume but a very personal and erotic moment captured by the artist. The viewer's gaze is aligned with Brooks' lesbian gaze upon her lover.

At times, Brooks' paintings of lesbians also fall into the other two categories: for example, although not grotesque, some of her portraits lean towards caricature, such as *Una*, *Lady Troubridge* (see Fig. 2).²⁷ Brooks' paintings are mostly divided into portraits and symbolist images—her early work evoking symbolist images of the female nude and her more mature period focused on portraiture, although she never fully avails herself of her symbolist tendencies. Moreover, it could be argued that all of her portraits are in fact conduits for channeling her own notions of lesbianism, beauty, and femininity. The portraits of Brooks' social circle manifest her overt use of translation, interpretation, and appropriation in the emphasis of the visual and sexual references to the nineteenth-century dandy. Even as Brooks' sitters were familiar for their appropriation of masculine dress, the artist was also known to heighten their masculine nature through stylization in order to further notions of gender ambiguity. Brooks' *Una*, *Lady Troubridge* showcases the sitter, a sculptor, writer, and translator, who, like Brooks, is often better known for her romantic life (she was the partner of Marguerite "John" Radclyffe Hall, author of the lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* of 1928, famously banned in England for obscenity). Brooks' portrait of Troubridge has been characterized more as a caricature than a portrait by Hall's biographer, Michael Baker, who called it a "brilliant caricature of Una, one that caught both her eccentricity and that element of class arrogance."²⁸ Baker's assessment appears to be a reasonable one since, by Brooks' own admission, the painting was intended to be symbolic of the state of feminism in the age.²⁹ Troubridge's exceedingly slender figure, firm right hand placed on her dachshund, severe bobbed hairstyle and fringe, and, of course, distinguished monocle, are all symbols of a slippage of masculinity and femininity, prominently found in Brooks' lesbian social circles. When Troubridge saw the painting she even asked Brooks if that was really what she looked like, but

the portrait was not intended as a facsimile of the person; it is a likeness to be sure, but it is much more than an object of verisimilitude. In a letter by Brooks, the artist recognized the portrait's potential as a symbolic object, writing that the painting was "a sign of the age which may amuse future feminists."³⁰ She was right. As is fitting of postmodernism, Brooks' feminism does not insist on the modernist binaries of masculine/feminine, which inherently subordinate but represent such binaries as parts of a whole, pieces among a plurality. This stance calls forth American art critic Craig Owens' argument that feminism can be read through a postmodern lens if it rejects the notion of binaries, marked and unmarked, instead permitting no subordinated element.³¹ Furthermore, Owens identified the representation of women as subjects—not as objects—a positionality historically prohibited from modern Western representation,³² and, likewise, a rejection and subordination denied by Brooks in the making of images of queer women, where both subject and object are female. Owens points out that one of the challenges to feminists opposing the master/male narratives is that they are assimilated broadly into "liberation movements." In this way, feminism is treated as homogenous, thereby ignoring the intersectionality of the movement and minimizing the specificity of feminist critiques of the patriarchy.³³ Stepping beyond Owens' discourse of identifying feminism within postmodernism, Brooks' non-normative subjects (and objects) challenge a plurality of narratives by questioning who conveys knowledge, who is granted representation, and what can be signified in terms of gender and sexuality.

Troubridge was not dressing up to play a role for her sitting with Brooks. Just the opposite, Troubridge was known for being quite of-the-moment in her fashion choices, and the masculine attire that she wears reflects high fashion for the time. Only a month before the painting was completed in 1924, the *Daily Express*, a national British tabloid, published a "Masculine Note in Fashion," proclaiming women's new spring fashion: "ultra-masculine" with "masculine close-cropped" hairstyles accompanied by a key seasonal piece, the black satin coat with a high, stiff collar.³⁴ The *Daily Express* was essentially describing Troubridge with her close-cropped hair, her black jacket, and her high straight collar. The adoption of masculine attire in the 1920s was followed by women of all sexual preferences; however, there were musings that masculine attire was, in fact, a symbol of non-normative sexual preference, and certainly the overwhelming sanction of the style in known lesbian circles encouraged this interpretation. The resulting effect was that women who followed such high fashion trends, especially those of upper-class means and privilege to dress as they pleased, were flirting not just with a slippage of masculinity/femininity but with non-normative sexual identities as well.

Like so many aspects of Troubridge's fashion, her modeling of a monocle is intentional, au courant, and, potentially, a signal of her non-normative lifestyle. The monocle was another aspect of the dandy's attire along with the form fitting tailoring and top hat. The latter aspects of the uniform

represented the dandy's transgressive social positioning and thus privilege. The monocle was also an ornament of scrupulous self-fashioning; an opportunity to express oneself through adornment was appreciated by the set, but it also powerfully symbolized the dandy's discerning observation and appraisal (typically of the social type).³⁵ Art historian Jillian Taylor Lerner went so far as to state that wearing a monocle as part of one's fashion suggested a "conviction of one's own superiority of taste" and certainly an excessive attention to detail.³⁶ In the context of Troubridge's portrait, the monocle adds other layers of self-fashioned gender slippage.

The monocle, beyond fashion choice or symbol of social privilege, is a visual device. The monocle—a masculine accessory to aid visual analysis—may stand in for the male gaze, which is not just absent but rejected in the interchange, a rejection reinforced in portraiture's interaction or exchange as Brooks, a queer woman, is painting women. Troubridge does not merely hold the monocle as a symbol but wears it with a knowing air, more than a piece of costume jewelry. The monocle is traditionally associated with a gendered masculinity, and although records show a trend of women using monocles in the 1820s, it was fleeting once the monocle was adopted by young men of the fashionable set (dandies).³⁷ As a symbol of the gaze, moreover, the monocle becomes evidence of the wearer's empirical vision and interpretive insight; empiricism has long been associated with the masculine gender.³⁸ Troubridge's experience as a sculptor and writer placed her in a masculine working sphere with a focus on visual and intellectual analysis, not merely a display of modern chic. As an artist, she could claim a superiority of taste while she certainly lived a life of social privilege. In Brooks' portrait, her monocle rejects and replaces the masculine gaze as there is little of Troubridge's fashion or form to draw masculine attentions, and her appraisal, in return, places the viewer under incisive scrutiny. Troubridge's adoption of masculine attire was in sync with the fashion of the age, but in particular, the inclusion of the monocle made the reference to the dandy and the appropriation of the dandy's transgressive and transitional natures all the more overtly evident to Brooks' audience. The association with masculinity and empiricism implied by the monocle's appearance was not enough to confer Troubridge's self-identity masculine, but it augmented the gender slippage already present in the portrait.

Brooks utilized postmodern tropes and attributes, such as the masculinizing monocle, to transform the visual iconography of modern lesbianism and homosexuality. Unlike the avant-garde of her generation, Brooks was not concerned with the spatial constructions of abstraction or expressionist uses of color. Her art was not breaking visual barriers but was, instead, synthesizing styles and symbols familiar to her viewers to re-fashion the transgressive representation of a whole social group and class. Brooks appropriated historical styles in the costume of the dandy and in the painting style of the Decadents, most notably Whistler; emphasized androgyny and a gendered slippage in her portrait sitters; and presented an alternate approach to viewing the female nude. Through these postmodern visual devices, Brooks created a new vision

and multiplicitous version of lesbian iconography, one that she created using postmodern strategies to break from the tradition of the patriarchal male gaze. •

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Notes

- Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1981), 151–70.
- Her fellow painter and acquaintance, Hannah Gluckstein (1895–1978), who called herself “Gluck,” actually rented out Whistler’s former studio a few years after the artist died. See Bridget Elliott, “Performing the Picture or Painting the Other: Romaine Brooks, Gluck and the Question of Decadence in 1923,” in *Women Artists and Modernism*, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester, UK, and New York: Manchester Univ. Press, 1976).
- Whitney Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room: The Art of Romaine Brooks* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press; Washington, D.C.: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 2000), 17. See also Cassandra Langer, “Review: Amazons in the Drawing Room,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 22, no. 2 (Fall–Winter 2022): 44–47.
- Richard Dormont, “Mother of Pearl and Silver: The Andalusian, 1888(?)–1900” in *James McNeill Whistler*, ed. Richard Dormont and Margaret F. MacDonald, exh. cat. (London: Tate Gallery Pubs., 1994) 275–76.
- Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace, “Fleurs du Mal or Second-Hand Roses? Natalie Barney, Romaine Brooks, and the ‘Originality of the Avant-Garde,’” *Feminist Review* 40 (Spring 1992): 13, 15. See also Catherine McNickle Chastain, “Romaine Brooks: A New Look at Her Drawings,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1996–Winter 1997): 9–14.
- John R. Reed, “Decadent Style,” *The North American Review* 266, no. 4 (1981): 59–61.
- Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vols. I–VI [1935–1961] (1946; repr. London: Oxford University Press, 1974).
- If prioritizing originality, it could be argued that Brooks was, in fact, avant-garde by achieving postmodernism at such an early stage of this shifting temperament; however, one of the very ways that Brooks diverges from modernism is the rejection of the privileging of originality.
- Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1979) 71–82.
- Artists like Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, arguably one of the most influential artists of the mid- to late nineteenth century, is practically ignored today in art historical surveys; William Morris and other artists of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and the wildly innovative architects and graphic artists of the myriad Art Nouveau branches, like Aubrey Beardsley and Alphonse Mucha, are so often side notes (as here) to the mainstream.
- Elliott and Wallace, “Fleurs du Mal or Second-Hand Roses,” 7.
- David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 6.
- Elliott and Wallace, “Fleurs du Mal or Second-Hand Roses,” 22.
- Elliott, “Romaine Brooks, Gluck and the Question of Decadence in 1923,” 77.
- Elliott and Wallace, “Fleurs du Mal or Second-Hand Roses,” 10, 19, 23.
- Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2000), 96.
- Cassandra Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 128–29.
- Esther Newton, “The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman,” *Signs* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1984): 558.
- Elliott, “Romaine Brooks, Gluck and the Question of Decadence in 1923,” 77.
- Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men* (New York: William Morrow, 1981), 47–61. In France, laws against sodomy and homosexuality were repealed as early as the late eighteenth century, but a law making it illegal for women to wear pants, unless riding a bicycle or a horse, was only revoked in 2013 (though not enforced after the mid-twentieth century).
- Their androgynous fashion choice was interpreted by some as an example of wealthy eccentricity (again, an anti-aristocratic ideology). Since she was not required financially to take commissions, Brooks painted whomever and whatever she liked. Elliott and Wallace, “Fleurs du Mal or Second-Hand Roses,” 23.
- To refute this, Elliott and Wallace argued that Brooks’ subjects are no more or less autobiographical than Picasso’s, and no one is arguing that his work is too personal to be taken seriously. Elliott and Wallace, 12.
- Elliott and Wallace, 11.
- The male gaze in art is well-established; a seminal resource is Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6–18.
- Sandra L. Langer, “Fashion, Character, and Sexual Politics in Some Romaine Brooks’ Lesbian Portraits,” *Art Criticism* 1, no. 3 (1981): 27.
- Smithsonian American Art Museum, “The Art of Romaine Brooks,” 2016, <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/azalees-blanches-white-azaleas-2869>.
- Michael Baker, *Our Three Selves: The Life of Radclyffe Hall* (New York: William Morrow, 1985), 254.
- Baker, 254.
- Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room*, 30.
- Smithsonian American Art Museum, “Una, Lady Troubridge,” <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/una-lady-troubridge-2926>.
- Craig Owens, “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983): 71.
- Owens, 68.
- Owens, 71.
- “Masculine Note in Fashion,” *Daily Express* (London), April 8, 1924, 5.
- Jillian Taylor Lerner, “A Devil’s-Eye View of Paris: Gavarni’s Portrait of the Editor,” *Oxford Art Journal* 31, no. 2 (2008): 239.
- Lerner, 239.
- Richard Corson, *Fashions in Eyeglasses* (Chester Springs, PA: Dufour, 1967), 142.
- The monocle acting as a masculine device related to empirical knowledge and judgment is an idea that sprang from a conversation between the author and Dr. Christina Lindeman, a specialist in art of eighteenth-century Europe, who is currently investigating the use of the monocle and its relationship to gender in her forthcoming manuscript on painter Anna Dorothea Therbusch. This line of thinking also appears in Lerner, “A Devil’s-Eye View of Paris,” 244.

Transnational Belonging and Female Agency in the Arts

Edited by Basia Sliwinska and Catherine Dormor
Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023

Reviewed by Maria Costantino

This book brings together thirteen essays in which the contributors—artists, curators, writers, academics, and activists—variously examine place-based strategies of transnational sisterhood and solidarity employed by women artists, showing how, in confronting globalization, feminist artists can operate in the “in-between” spaces (1), reach across differences, be acknowledged, and empower the vulnerable. Each contributor takes their own reference points and contextual positions in contributing to what Marsha Meskimmon calls “dialogues in difference.”¹ Co-edited by Basia Sliwinska and Catherine Dormor, the volume presents transnational belonging as an expression of feminist agency that poses material and metaphorical challenges to nation-state structures and to the concepts of borders and marginalization that these structures promote. By exploring these themes through artists’ works, the contributors make visible the global processes that affect and limit the embodied self.

While scholarly, *Transnational Belonging and Female Agency in the Arts* is highly accessible. Using interdisciplinary methods, the authors synthesize key theorists (although not all make it into the index) and theoretical concepts in ways a student-reader will find familiar and useful in informing their own related practices, including research, writing, and art-making. Keeping biographical details succinct and focusing instead on wider historical, social, cultural, and political contextualization does much to situate the artists and their works locally and across various types of borders. The essays address examples of female agency in works of art that explore the notions of transnationalism, belonging/un-belonging, and displacement, sometimes of the artists, sometimes of their works’ subjects. The contributors

demonstrate how “belonging” is a fluid concept: it can mean the emotional or ontological sense of attachment or of being at home, but since it is also situated and socially constructed, the term must be redefined in each new context. Belonging is politicized, too, such as when the patriarchal institutions that seek to construct it (and patrol/control its borders) are challenged through women’s embodied agency, either singularly or collectively.

The inclusion of a wide range of textiles, paintings, prints, performances, installations, videos, and curated

exhibitions does much to advance understanding of women’s position in art history. The book draws attention to an array of feminist contributions to modern and contemporary aesthetics and art practices that have been relegated to the margins of art-historical discourse, just as mending operates at the edges of fabrics and on the periphery of the textile production system, a similarity Dormor notes in her chapter. The volume encourages the reader—as it did for this review author—to consider their own embodied experience, knowledge, and subject position as a lens



Fig. 1. Zina Katz, *164 Nights* (2018), detail, installation of hand-stitching on found fabrics, dimensions variable. Image: Artist.

through which understanding and creative practice can be developed.

In the introduction, the co-editors divide the essays into three thematic groupings that deal with modes of belonging: the spatial, the affective, and the collective. The reasoning that dictated the choice of essays for each grouping may not be entirely apparent to readers of the chapters themselves, as all three themes recur in essays throughout the book; short introductory texts to each thematic group would have helped to put those particular essays into more direct intersectional dialogue. The volume treats spatial belonging as an attachment to the home, the state, or any other physical place imbued with meaning; they also consider it metaphorically, in relation to the centers and edges of sociopolitical structures, with focus especially on people at the margins and on communities built across borders. Affective belonging, as the editors define it, is the “agency between bodies [within] social, familiar and migratory relationships” (11). In hegemonic systems, the book’s essays emphasize, affective belonging can be lost or curtailed when bodies become subject to dispute because of their gender, race, affiliations, and/or citizenship status. The authors consider collective belonging as it is forged through collaborative creative practices and through feminist acts of “friendship, generosity and care” (13) that serve to counter patriarchal oppression, transcend boundaries, and unite individuals and groups.

In the first of the four essays explicitly devoted to spatial belonging, co-editor Dormor’s “Frayed and Fraying: Textile Actions and the Edges of Belonging” discusses the figurative work of Malawi-born South African artist Billie Zangewa (b. 1973) and Argentine-born artist Zina Katz (b. 1956) using found fabrics and stitching. Dormor focuses especially on the frayed edges of these artists’ textiles, noting that the “disorderly behaviour and disruptive alliances” of the fray afford Zangewa and Katz a space “to explore and express human experience at the boundaries of culture” (33). In *164 Nuits*

(*164 Nights*, 2018; Fig. 1), Katz uses embroidery to render passport photographs of artists awaiting asylum decisions, the edges and reverse sides revealing loose, messy threads. Katz not only affirms the concrete existence of her subjects but also, in highlighting the potential of her images to unravel, articulates the migrant’s (and her own) experience of transience, instability, and un-belonging. Dormor notes that repairing and reweaving can make the fray, like societal borders, a site of care. In “Species of Space: Marisol, Marta Minujín and Nicola L on Party-Going, Domestic Mayhem and Nomadism,” Flavia Frigeri examines three artists’ works in relation to Georges Perec’s “species of spaces.” Perec’s formulation focuses on the relationship between people and places, with spaces of every form, size, and function helping define the identity of those moving through them.² When artists imbue overlooked ordinary spaces and objects with layers of memories and experiences, Frigeri shows, everyday movements gain new meanings and perspectives. In the performative work *The Red Coat* (1969–70) by French artist Nicola L (1937–2018), a raincoat for eleven people journeyed across Europe, the “mobile vestment” providing its wearers with an alternative, albeit temporary, community and collective identity (40). The sculptural tableau *The Party* (1965–66) by French-born Venezuelan American artist Marisol (1930–2016), with its fifteen life-size female characters constructed from wood and a variety of other media, invokes the coded social space of upper-middle-class New York in the 1960s, its women “solid and static, ... no more than glorified mannequins, acting on society’s fictitious stage” (43). The installation *La Menesunda* (Mayhem, 1965) by the Argentine artist Marta Minujín (b. 1943) subversively represented an urban street and domestic interior as a labyrinthine environment of sixteen disorienting and dysfunctional spaces, critiquing patriarchal norms of conventional behavior within the public and private spheres.

Helena Shaskevich’s “‘With my portapak on my back’: Identity and Belonging in Shigeko Kubota’s Broken

Diary” addresses two early 1970s video projects by Japan-born artist Shigeko Kubota (1937–2015) along with Kubota’s 1972 “Video Poem,” works that engage with the artist’s transcultural identity as an Asian woman artist traveling in Europe and the United States. *Europe on ½ Inch a Day* (1972), with its intercuts of Vietnamese War protest posters, reminds the viewer that the body of Kubota carrying her portapak camera is, like the Vietnamese mother carrying her child in “Video Poem,” “inherently deemed Asian and, therefore, ... subject to violence from the West” (67). *Video Girls and Video Songs for Navajo Sky* (1973) critiques the social and material inequities experienced by the Navajos of the reservation in Chinle, Arizona, whose bodies, like Kubota’s, are in and of America yet marked as “other.” While fellow video artist Nam June Paik, Kubota’s future husband, embraced theorist Marshall McLuhan’s ideal of an electronically connected “global village,” Kubota avoided totalizing narratives, instead highlighting “far more immediate and local modes of transcultural understanding,” Shaskevich observes (76). Expanding the concept of the citizen-stranger is Jane Chin Davidson’s “Patty Chang: Body, Performance and Transnational Border Crossings,” which focuses on the exhibition *The Wandering Lake 2009–2017*, a retrospective of performative video work by Chinese American artist Patty Chang (b. 1972). For these performances, California-based Chang crossed regional and cultural borders in China to challenge assumptions about ethnicity and nationality and to demonstrate the artificiality of the territorial divisions constructed by the state and global capitalism. For the video project *Shangri-La* (2005), Chang staged a make-believe wedding to a white man (collaborator David Kelley) in a Chinese tourist resort; in *The Product Love (Die Ware Liebe)* (2009), Chang fashioned a screen relationship between Chinese actors playing the French philosopher Walter Benjamin and Chinese American film actress Anna May Wong, who formed the subject of Benjamin’s essay “A Chinoiserie Out of the Old West.” Both works, Davidson explains, question

the patriarchal, heteronormative stereotypes of race and gender that underlie the sexual fetishization and commoditization of Asian women.

The second section of the volume, joined under the rubric of affective belonging in relation to transnationalism, comprises four essays focusing on social and migratory relationships and on ways belonging is constructed and maintained across histories and borders. Cristina Nualart in “*Borderless and Undocumented: Day by Day in Southeast Asia*” considers works by Vietnamese artists Nguyen Thi Thanh Mai (b. 1983) and Lena Bui (b. 1985) that employ personal artefacts metonymically to render visible the precarious, exploited state of undocumented Vietnamese in “floating villages” in Cambodian territory (Mai) and of working-class women in Vietnam (Bui). For *ID Card* (2014), Mai heat-transferred the data of more than three hundred participants onto rectangles cut from their old clothing to fabricate soft, playful signs of identity without government markings. In *Borderless* (2016), Bui unpicked and shredded a working-class woman’s two-piece *do bo* so that it became see-through, thus articulating how women’s work—especially that of the *do bo*’s wearers—is unseen and unremarked upon. The inclusion of the *do bo* in a museum setting challenges the Vietnamese state’s valuations of gender and class. Aliza Edelman’s “*Suspended: Bahar Behbahani’s Displacement and Longing in the Persian Garden*” examines how Iranian artist Bahar Behbahani (b. 1973) maps the complex geopolitical and cultural relationships between herself, Iran, and the West. In her painting series *Persian Gardens* (2013 onward), Behbahani’s textural surfaces unsettle their subjects, such as the Baghe Fin garden in Kashan, as sites of traumatic events in Iranian history and as the basis for often Orientalizing cartographies and art histories. In her video trilogy *Suspended* (2007), *Saffron Tea* (2009), and *Behind the Mirrors* (2015), the artist inserts her body—inverted and suspended, submerged, or upright and revolving in front of mirrors—into a home garden in Tehran, a domestic interior containing Iranian and Western objects, and a bright Cappadocian



Fig. 2. Keren Anavy, *Garden of Living Images* (2018), detail, installation in the Sunroom Project Space, Wave Hill, the Bronx, New York, ink and colored pencils on transparent Mylar, polyethylene ponds, water, vinyl, dimensions variable. Photo: Stefan Hagen. Courtesy of the artist and Wave Hill.

landscape respectively. She thus traverses personal memories of displacement, longing, belonging, and unbelonging in gendered private spaces as well as in places of geopolitical and cultural convergence to imagine new social networks and geographies.

Margarida Brito Alves and Giulia Lamoni’s “Through Walls and Windows” interrogates two mixed-media installations in Lisbon by Brazilian artist Irene Buarque (b. 1943), *As Muralhas de Lisboa* (Lisbon City Walls) (1975) and *Leitura e Contra-Leitura de um Espaço Limite: Janela* (Reading and Counter-Reading of a Space Limit: The Window, 1978), in which the artist used motifs of walls (*muralhas*) and windows (*janelas*) to explore and problematize the relationships between interior and exterior, internal and external, close and far, seeing and being seen. Buarque’s work captures the embodied experience of her own in-betweenness, having migrated in 1973 from one oppressive regime, the military dictatorship in Brazil, to the last moments of another, the Estado Novo in Portugal. Samantha A. Noël’s “Disrupting Subaltern Geographies” argues that the collagraphic prints of Black Cuban artist Belkis Ayón (1967–1999) establish spaces of agency for

Black Cuban women of the kind denied to them by the power structures in Cuba as well as by the Abakuá Secret Society, a mutual-aid organization open only to men. Ayón’s emphasis is on Princess Sikán, the only—but foundational—female figure in the society’s mostly oral mythology, who was sacrificed for disclosing that she had discovered a sacred fish. Invested with Ayón’s own portrait, the images of Sikán restore to the princess, to Ayón, and to all women Sikán’s silenced voice. In *La Cena* (The Supper, 1988), deliberately reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper* (c. 1495–98), Ayón portrays most of the disciples as women and replaces Jesus with Sikán-Ayón, disrupting not only the male domination of Abakuán myths but also the sexism of contemporary Cuban society.

The final five chapters of the book, grouped together under the theme of belonging as a collective endeavor, open with “Keren Anavy’s *Garden of Living Images: Transnational Landscapes as Spaces of Ecological Order*” by Ketzia Alon and Aliza Edelman (with Alon’s contribution translated from Hebrew by Sivan Raveh). Landscape, water, and light form the core of an installation by Israeli artist Keren Anavy

(b. 1974) entitled *Garden of Living Images* in New York's Wave Hill, the Bronx (2018), where painted hanging Mylar scrolls took on water and ink from basins below (Fig. 2). As Edelman observes also regarding Behbahani's work (chapter 6), Anavy imbues gardens with concepts of home and homeland that are closely tied to her country of origin yet deeply transnational. Anavy's landscape is a contested paradise where states like Israel impose ecological order in the age of the Anthropocene, seeking to control what cultural historian Irit Rogoff terms "exhausted geographies" and their histories (182);³ the land can be detoxified, however, through Meskimmon's "worlding ecologies of transnational feminisms" (180).⁴ The garden's vitality offers solace to mourners, not least to the artist, who grieved her father's passing in Israel from New York.

In their essay "Collective Agency: Creative Communities in Australian Feminist Art," Rachael Haynes and Courtney Pedersen point out that the Australian feminist art movement suffered from a dearth of Indigenous perspectives and intersectional projects until the early 2010s. They demonstrate how new art-based activism in Australia is fostering both local and transnational collaboration among woman artists of different generations and with emergent communities of artists. The consciousness-raising projects of the feminist art collective LEVEL (2010–18), for example, ranged from public discussions in various formats to picnics and banner-making events and from the operation of an all-women gallery-studio in Brisbane to the installation of a ballot box for visitor surveys about marriage equality in the 2017–18 "femi-buster" exhibition *Unfinished Business* at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (212). Caroline Stevenson offers an alternative form of collaborative practice in "'Woman Writing' as a Curatorial Method," framing her conversations with Mexican artist Chantal Peñalosa (b. 1987) and British artist Bridget Smith (b. 1966) as rewriting the central authority figure of the curator into a practitioner of what Meskimmon terms "vulnerable listening" (221)⁵ who "makes connections and seeks solidarity

and friendship, ... carv[ing] a space for voices to emerge over time and across distances" (234). Stevenson connects Peñalosa's photographic diptychs of clouds from both sides of the Mexico-US border (2017) with Smith's prints and videos relating to, and exhibited in, the beachfront resort town of Southend, England (2015). Both artists, Stevenson notes, make emotionally charged use of the color blue, and both focus on borders in flux, whether marked by the flow of migrants from one country to another or infused with a "feeling of being in two places at once" by the seasonal arrivals and departures—and economic ups and downs—of a seaside town (230).

The last essays in the volume turn to two post-Soviet countries, Latvia and Poland. The authors cast light on women artists' agential, often collective actions in these patriarchal states to reclaim female bodies from the forces of marginalization, hostility, violence, and heteronormativity and to establish interpersonal and intercultural belonging beyond legal-political and ideological borders. Jana Kukaine and Jānis Taurens in their collaboration "A Smuggler, a Butcher and a Fairy: Doing Things with One's Body" explore the works of Latvia-born, Estonia-based Diāna Tamane (b. 1986) and the well-known Latvian feminist artists Rasa Jansone (b. 1973) and Ingrida Pičukāne (b. 1978). Women's agency manifests itself in everyday objects of material culture in the photographs and documents of Tamane's "Flower Smuggler" series (2019), which respond to an attempt by the artist's grandmother to cross into Russia with flowers for her husband's grave, and in the chopping blocks that compose Jansone's *Ritual Place* (2108–19), which are printed with twentieth-century photographs exemplifying Latvian gender norms. Pičukāne's comic book *Three Sisters* (2016), in which three delicate French-speaking women send a naked, foul-mouthed Russian man off to drown, transposes fairy-tale tropes and Chekhov's heroines into art that transcends national, linguistic, and cultural borders. Co-editor Sliwinska's essay draws the volume to a close with an analysis of *Nieme Szaty Królowej*

(Queen's Silent Robes), a collective feminist act of walking staged outside Warsaw's Palace of Culture and Science in November 2020 to protest Poland's criminalization of abortion. Conducted in anonymizing white robes with red spatters evoking blood, the activist walk was reenacted by the association Elles Sans Frontières in Brussels on the 2020 International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the first "budding" of many planned walks in an "iterative ... project [that] develops and grows via dialogic relationships and sharing" (274). Offered as an agentic gift, Queen's Silent Robes epitomizes affective, communally embodied, transnational feminist engagement, the "we" of the project emerging from, and joining together, individual and collective selves.

Some of the insightful observations in this volume about the precarious position of feminist artists and the marginalization of their works within institutional discourses might be applied to publisher Bloomsbury's approach to the book itself. There are too few pictures to accompany the texts, and the images that do appear are generally small and reproduced in black-and-white. The color plates are limited to one example per essay (and are repeats of monochrome reproductions), gathered together on four inserted pages that are spatially and contextually divorced from the chapters that discuss them. While the authors do well to describe the forms, motifs, techniques, and materials of the unillustrated as well as illustrated works, and while each essay's valuable endnotes direct the reader to an array of print and electronic resources that provide further images, the small scale of the monochrome figures and the limited number of color plates do the discussions no favors, especially when the contributors address palette and detail. At over \$100 for the hardback book (despite its being perfect-bound, with the pages glued rather than stitched), and at \$93 for the digital edition, the price is in danger of excluding many individual readers and limiting the number of copies that institutions might purchase. The production shortcuts and high cost are thus at odds with the aims of this important feminist text.

Transnational Belonging and Female Agency in the Arts deals with a wide range of women artists who challenge sociopolitical boundaries, borders, edges, and exclusions to open up new spaces for creative, collaborative dialogues. One hopes that Bloomsbury will issue a less expensive soft-cover edition to ensure that this collection of eloquently written essays becomes much more accessible to the wider, strongly interdisciplinary readership it deserves. •

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Notes

1. Marsha Meskimmon, *Transnational Feminisms, Transversal Politics and Art: Entanglements and Intersections* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2020), 1. Meskimmon's volume is reviewed by Julia Skelly in *Woman's Art Journal* 43, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2022), 45–47.
2. Georges Perec, "Species of Spaces/ Espèces d'espaces," in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, trans. J. Sturrock (London: Penguin Classics, 2008 [1974]), 1–95.
3. Irit Rogoff, "Oblique Points of Entry," in *Contemporary Art from the Middle East: Regional Interactions with Global Art Discourses*, ed. Hamid Keshmirshekan (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 38–41.
4. Meskimmon, *Transnational Feminisms*, 73.
5. Meskimmon, *Transnational Feminisms*, 2.

Bisa Butler—Portraits

Edited by Erica Warren
Art Institute of Chicago, 2021

Reviewed by Lisa Farrington

Edited by Art Institute of Chicago Associate Curator of Textiles Erica Warren, this volume is the catalogue for an exhibition of works by Bisa Butler (b. 1973) that was on view at the Institute as well as at the Katonah Museum of Art in 2020 and 2021. The ninety-five-page fabric-covered *Bisa Butler—Portraits* is sumptuously printed with nearly forty high-quality color images that permit a surprisingly detailed visual reading of the fabric and stitching in Butler's quilted portraits. Butler is an inheritor of the legacies of the kaleidoscopic collage art of Romare Bearden and the painted quilts of Faith Ringgold (b. 1930). Unlike her predecessors, however, Butler uses neither paper nor paint in her work but instead creates portraits of African American personae exclusively with fabric. She manipulates her medium with the seeming ease of wielding a paintbrush, using vibrantly hued textiles to create volume and modeling as well as flat patterned backgrounds for each figure or figural group.

Butler's aesthetic was nurtured at the HBCU¹ Howard University (alma mater of Vice President Kamala Harris, among hundreds of renowned African Americans) under the mentorship of founders of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s. Among these mentors was Jeff Donaldson, who served as



Fig. 1. Bisa Butler, *I Am Not Your Negro* (2019), cotton, wool, and chiffon, appliquéed and quilted, 79" x 60". Private collection.

professor, chair, and dean of Fine Arts at Howard for twenty-five years, until the late 1990s, and was the original leader of the 1960s and 1970s agitprop art group AfriCOBRA (African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists).

Included in the catalogue are three succinct and thoughtful essays by the show's curators, Warren, Michèle Wije, and Jordan Carter. Warren's contribution, "Rearranging Memory: Bisa Butler's Portraits and the Discourse of Art History," addresses not only the sexist and racist approaches to quilting history but also the conventional hierarchies of media (fabric versus painting and sculpture) that have detrimentally affected a true appreciation of quilts and their makers for more than a century. Warren sees Butler's fusion of portraiture and quilting as the impetus for a revisionist understanding of quilt-making and of its erstwhile reputation as "women's work" and as a "lesser" art designated as "folk," "applied," "decorative," or "vernacular" (17). Warren argues further that, even when addressed by historians and museum curators as "high" art, quilts have been lauded for their similarity to Abstract Expressionist painting—a generally white and male purview—rather than for any intrinsically unique qualities of form or content. Also of concern for Warren is the tendency of scholars to homogenize quilters as a nebulous group rather than considering them as individual masters each with their own discrete approach to the genre. (Warren notes that the quilters of Gee's Bend, Alabama, are part of what she terms an "exceptionalist narrative" that singles this group out as unlike all other quilters and as akin to such modernists as Paul Klee and Henri Matisse [19–21].) Citing the research and writing of quilting historians Cuesta Benberry and Carolyn Mazloomi, Warren points to new ways of envisioning quilt-making as its own form of high art deserving of the same quality of criticism and analysis as painting and sculpture.

Then-Katonah Museum curator Michèle Wije's essay, "Photography and Quiltmaking Transformed: A New Approach to Portraiture," examines Butler's use of vintage black-and-white

photographs as springboards for her compositions. Wije makes several comparisons between the quilts and their respective photos, including a 1936 FSA² photograph by Dorothea Lange (1895–1965) and Butler's quilt *I Am Not Your Negro* (2019; Fig. 1), in which Butler reimagines her sitter by changing both the form (from black-and-white to color and from paper to fabric) and the narrative of the original photograph (from a Mississippi "Negro," as the title of Lange's image terms her sitter, wearing visibly patched pants, to an erudite US expatriate in an aeronautic-patterned fabric that evokes jetting from Europe to Africa and Asia). Wije notes that one of Butler's aims is to use intense color palettes that eschew the skin tones of the racial divide and thus move the viewer's point of focus beyond race to individuality and personality (although this aim seems more desire than fact, as Butler's figures are clearly persons of African descent, be their fabric skins blue, orange, violet, or yellow).

Chicago Art Institute curator Jordan Carter's "Fabulating Blackness: Bisa Butler's Fluorescence and Faith Ringgold's Black Light" compares the iridescent palettes adopted by these artists in their articulation of Black skin. Following Tavia Nyong'o and Saidiya Hartman in identifying a "fabulist" as a creator of alternative possibilities through the telling of tales (37, 39), Carter contends that both Ringgold and Butler employ color in a fabulist way. He cites Ringgold's 1967–69 *Black Light* series and her 1971 mural *For the Women's House* as examples of Ringgold's fusion of intense colors and Congo Kuba textile designs to create new ways of seeing Blacks and women as empowered and beautiful.³ Carter refers to Ringgold's *Black Light* palette as "dark" (as opposed to Butler's vibrant hues), but a look at the entire series reveals that Ringgold's use of intense reds and electric blues is at odds with this designation. In point of fact, as a quote Carter adduces from Ringgold illustrates, the artist noticed when learning chiaroscuro that the technique was racist by its very nature, in that its relegation of dark colors to the more

distant parts of a composition made no accommodation for dark-skinned sitters who occupied the foreground.⁴ Hence, Ringgold rejected traditional modeling and chose colors other than black for Black skin. This fact actually supports Carter's very valid point that both Ringgold and Butler have embraced non-local color to express skin tones as a way to avoid traditional racial signifiers. Carter also associates Butler's prismatic imagery with the "Kool-Aid" colors of AfriCOBRA artists like Wadsworth Jarrell—an equally appropriate observation.

Following the curatorial essays are twenty-one plates, each accompanied by individual catalogue entries—some penned by the artist, others by the curators or by Art Institute of Chicago curatorial fellow Isabella Ko—that examine iconographic and compositional elements in each work of art. Most convincing and insightful in *Bisa Butler—Portraits* is Warren's essay, which skillfully compresses the expansive art history of American quilting into a concise article. Wije's close read of Butler's reinterpretation of vintage photos is likewise enlightening. Unexpected and conceptually original is Carter's observation that Butler's take on skin color has precedents in the art of AfriCOBRA and Ringgold. With the exception of its slim size, one is hard-pressed to find fault with this beautifully and perceptively produced volume.

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Notes

1. The acronym HBCU refers to the nearly one hundred Historically Black Colleges and Universities founded in the US immediately following the Civil War for

the education of African Americans who, at that time and for many decades afterward, were barred from attending the same institutions of higher learning as whites.

2. FSA refers to the US Government Farm Security Administration, which commis-

sioned photographers to document the American rural worker during the years of the Great Depression and afterward (1935–44).

3. Also on the *Black Light Series* and *For the Women's House*, see Faith Ringgold, Michele Wallace, and Kirsten Weiss,

Faith Ringgold: Politics Power (Weiss Publications, 2022), and my review of that book in this issue of *Woman's Art Journal*.

4. Faith Ringgold interviewed by Eleanor Munro, *Originals: American Women Artists* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 412.

Gillian Wearing: Wearing Masks

By Jennifer Blessing, Nat Trotman, and
Gillian Wearing

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2021

Reviewed by Sigourney Schultz

Gillian Wearing (b. 1963, Birmingham, England) is one of the most influential women artists of the twenty-first century, notable for a multidisciplinary practice that employs photography, video, sculpture, and painting to challenge fixed notions of identity by exploring the boundaries of privacy and publicity. The Turner Prize winner's work is deeply resonant with the human experience, offering a safe space for Wearing's subjects—including, often, herself—to reveal intimate truths. The masks that form an evolving motif in the artist's work serve as both a physical prop and a metaphor for the performances we all stage in our day-to-day lives. As Guggenheim curator Jennifer Blessing writes in *Gillian Wearing, Wearing Masks*, "The artist exhorts her audience to be who they would like to be, not what others want them to be" (77).

The catalogue comes out of the artist's first North American retrospective, held at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. As director Richard Armstrong notes in his foreword, the Guggenheim's relationship with Wearing started in 1997 with the museum's acquisition of her video work *Sacha and Mum* (1996). Since then, Wearing has become a central figure in the museum's initiative to promote the work of women artists, especially those who work in photographic media. The Guggenheim's survey exhibition and its catalogue chart the museum's nearly twenty-five-year-long engagement with Wearing's

practice and extend yet further back into the artist's oeuvre to include such early works as a Polaroid self-portrait from 1988 and a painted self-portrait from 1985. Half of the book focuses on her works from the last eight years, among them *Lockdown* (2020), a series of watercolor and oil self-portraits Wearing made during the COVID-19 pandemic while contemplating the isolation of quarantine. The catalogue offers a poignant new take on Wearing's work in relation to the pandemic: the ubiquitous mask-wearing, the turn towards screens to connect individuals, and the growing influence of technology in the construction of our identities—both online and in real life.

The first essay is by Blessing, Senior Curator of Photography at the Guggenheim, who provides an in-depth historical analysis of Wearing's practice in three parts, addressing her early photographic works involving public participants; her *Spiritual Family* series, initiated in 2008, wherein Wearing poses as other prominent artists; and her most recent work to incorporate digital technology, the short video *Wearing, Gillian* (2018). Blessing's aim here is to "trace key elements and themes in *Wearing, Gillian* back to their roots in the artist's earlier oeuvre, paying special attention to how the use of literal and metaphorical masks develops over time" (44).



Fig. 1. Gillian Wearing, *Self-Portrait* (2000), chromogenic print, 68" x 68" x 1". Collection of Sherry and Joel Mallin, New York. Courtesy Maureen Paley, London; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York/Los Angeles; Regen Projects, Los Angeles.

Blessing bookends the essay with the earliest and latest of Wearing's video works, *Dancing in Peckham* (1994) and the deepfake-style *Wearing, Gillian*. In the former, Wearing dances in a London shopping mall to music that only she can hear for twenty-five consecutive minutes. The artist is seemingly unabashed by onlookers walking past or gawking at her innermost expression of self. For *Wearing, Gillian*, created in partnership with the advertising agency Wieden + Kennedy (known for their visually arresting advertisements for Nike), more than fifteen actors took on the challenge of imitating the artist; their faces were then merged with Wearing's using advanced AI digital technology. The video's "monologue" was scripted, but the actors introduced some of their own improvisations, and the work concludes with the statement that "if there is one thing that is 100 percent true" about Gillian Wearing, it is that she likes "dancing, wildly and uninhibited" (40–41), recalling the theme of *Dancing in Peckham*. Blessing's analysis of these two works helps the viewer understand the evolving nature of Wearing's practice, which responds directly to technology's innovation while also consistently reflecting on the authenticity—or inauthenticity—of one's public and private performances of self.

Wearing's theoretical approach to media and performance is informed by the 1956 sociological treatise *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, in which Erving Goffman argues that people engage in everyday performances to uphold the "self we would like to be," likening social behavior in public to Method acting on a theatrical stage (45).¹ Blessing applies Goffman's theory to early works in which Wearing photographed or videotaped volunteer participants revealing intimate thoughts or traumas. In *Signs that say what you want them to say and not Signs that say what someone else wants you to say* (1992–93), the first piece in which Wearing engaged with strangers, the artist approached hundreds of passersby on the streets of London to write an opinion or thought on a blank card before she photographed them holding it. Participants

frequently revealed something that proved contradictory to the façade they presented on camera: a smug-looking man in a suit, for example, wrote on his placard, "I'm desperate." This confessional-style performance, informed by candid street photography, is typical of Wearing's works from the 1990s and forms the basis for Blessing's first chapter section.

Wearing's ongoing *Spiritual Family* series connects its maker to the prominent conceptual artists and photographers who have paved the way for her practice. The fourteen life-size and larger photographs depict Wearing in the guise not only of female subjects but also of male and gender-fluid ones, among them Albrecht Dürer, photography pioneer William Henry Fox Talbot, Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879), Claude Cahun (1894–1954), Meret Oppenheim (1913–1985), Diane Arbus (1923–1971), and Eva Hesse (1936–1970). Wearing employs custom-made clothes, prosthetic masks, and elaborate sets to emulate her subjects, usually recreating or modifying the compositions of well-known preexisting self-portraits by the artists. Her meticulous renderings that transcend age and gender serve to collapse the boundary between artist and subject. Blessing argues in her second chapter section that *Spiritual Family* is a feminist intervention that breaks from the male-dominated narrative of art history. Wearing inserts herself into the canon by offering a fluid perspective on gender and identity while embodying the specific experiences of each individual she portrays.

Blessing's last thematic section investigates works in which Wearing turns to herself as subject. These self-portraits make one concept very clear: one's private sense of self is fundamentally unfixed and fragmented. In some instances, the artist even wears a mask of her own face. These works reflect the subversion of prevailing ideas about self-imaging in the age of social media wherein one's physical appearance is conflated with one's identity. Wearing's meditation on aging, *Rock 'n' Roll 70* (2015), features a wall of potential future self-portraits of the artist at seventy years old, depicted in a

range of clothing, hairstyles, and social roles. The photographs are rendered with the kind of age-advancing technology used by law enforcement for long-term missing persons. By exploring the continued mutability of identity over time, Wearing confronts the negative connotations of aging, especially for women: "I wanted to go beyond the stereotype that older age homogenises everyone and show that your identity/lifestyle/work can still be in flux and changeable. It is not about who you once were but who you are at any age" (76).² However intimate this series may appear at face value, the artist uses technology to continue her masquerade performance, taking on the role of an actress performing an older version of herself rather than revealing her true, present image.

After a series of beautiful full-page reproductions of Wearing's *Spiritual Family* series, the catalogue features "An Interview with Myself," in which Wearing ("Me") poses questions for herself ("G. W.") to answer. The artist offers rare insights on *Lockdown*, the watercolor and oil paintings of herself, unmasked, that she created during the pandemic: "I have been so used to wearing masks in my work, I wanted the paint to be a substitute for that, so I could manipulate it and create different styles and moods. Lockdown provided the time to explore" (107). Regarding the making of *Wearing, Gillian*, she explains that artificial intelligence, like masking, allows "an exploration in what is real or not real" (108). She concludes by stating her gratitude at the prospect of being able to see her work installed at the Guggenheim: "This is a significant moment for me.... I can't wait to spend time with my own work and know that it will be precious and eventually locked forever in my memory" (109).

In the catalogue's final essay, co-curator Nat Trotman offers a refreshing perspective on Wearing's work in the current age of social and political instability, with reference to the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements. Citing Whitney Phillips and Ryan N. Milner's *The Ambivalent Internet: Mischief, Oddity, and Antagonism Online* (2017), Trotman notes that social media has become a

crucial tool for users to amplify their voices, find solidarity, and enact social change, but that the architecture of social media at the same time has increased polarization and drowned out marginalized voices, diminishing the potential for true connection. Because Wearing understands these “double-edged power dynamics embedded in mass media,” she is able to successfully employ many of the technical processes of these media to amplify the voices of common people, always with an “unflappable commitment to empathy and compassion” (143). Wearing’s work thus inherently reflects upon social life online, in which users constantly consider themselves in relation to others and where “empowerment and vulnerability are inextricably intertwined, and we can never be entirely confident of the truthfulness or intention of what we encounter” (152). The author observes, following Jia Tolentino’s essay “The I in the Internet” (2019), that while the #MeToo hashtag enables women to share their traumatic experiences for a moment of visibility and solidarity, these women’s contextual positions remain unseen. By contrast, in Wearing’s disturbing series *A Woman Called Theresa* (1998), an alcoholic woman who lived on the street appears in photographs alongside seven different

male lovers in their bedrooms, accompanied by often disparaging handwritten letters about her from each man. Wearing notably omits Theresa’s voice, failing to let her speak for herself, but unlike the self-promotional noise of social media, this silence could potentially endow Wearing’s subject with either “vulnerability or ... authority” (147).

Gillian Wearing: Wearing Masks treats the artist’s oeuvre from a variety of enlightening perspectives. Blessing’s study traces throughlines in Wearing’s practice over time, from confessional performances by ordinary individuals to introspective documentations of the artist as subject. Wearing’s interview with herself gives insights into her technical methods and how they serve her aim to “capture humanity” (107). Trotman’s pertinent, timely chapter contextualizes Wearing’s oeuvre within the current climate of social media and performative allyship. Both curators’ texts could have been supplemented with more installation images and descriptions of the work in relationship to the exhibition’s framing at the Guggenheim, especially for readers who, like this reviewer, have not seen the exhibition in person. The culminating work, *Wearing, Gillian*, was inaccessible online in full and could

have received a more systematic, sustained analysis in Blessing’s essay. Nonetheless, *Gillian Wearing: Wearing Masks* is a wonderfully informative monograph that extensively surveys the artist’s three-decade career to date, highlighting feminist viewpoints that center Wearing’s practice in the art-historical canon of primarily male photographers and conceptual artists. Through the artist’s evolving engagement with performativity and masking, Wearing considers the complexities of authentic identity in our increasingly media-saturated world. •

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Notes

1. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1959 [1956]), 19, quoting Robert Ezra Park, *Race and Culture* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1950), 249.
2. Wearing interviewed by Sarah Howgate in *Gillian Wearing and Claude Cahun: Behind the Mask, Another Mask* (London: National Portrait Gallery; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 166.



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Dismantling the Patriarchy, Bit by Bit: Art, Feminism, and Digital Technology

By Judith K. Brodsky
Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2022

Reviewed by Charlotte Kent

The perception that men dominate both art and technology forms part of a problematic narrative. Women have contributed to both fields throughout their respective histories, and the convergence of the two fields is replete with women's involvement. A focus on women as such, however, is limiting, since an array of identities needs recognition. In considering the intertwined narratives of art and technology, Judith Brodsky rightly shows that the feminist endeavor in art history has aimed to raise awareness of marginalized voices generally, and that although it has unfortunately reiterated some systemic injustices, it has also laid theoretical ground that has better shaped the discourse. *Dismantling the Patriarchy, Bit by Bit: Art, Feminism, and Digital Technology* offers a survey of projects engaging with new media and computer arts that have embraced a feminist ethos by confronting social injustices perpetuated by hegemonic systems.

Chapters 1 through 4 provide a roughly decade-by-decade discussion of creative, conceptual, and technical innovations cultivated by artists in their assorted practices that employ computers or other electronic media. The other ten chapters consider thematic topics like digital language, queerness, and surveillance as well as the regionally specific subject of Japanese feminism and anime. While each chapter offers a few close readings of works or practitioners' biographies, the text tends to proceed quickly through numerous key artists whose technological projects present an intersectional feminist position. These overviews are necessarily incomplete given the broad scope of the book, but they offer a useful reference for scholars and a helpful introduction for students. Given the extensive existing literature on video works' engagement with feminist

issues, those chapters on video art are of lesser interest and utility, but their presence is justified, as Brodsky explains in the conclusion, because such practices contributed to legitimating digital art (207).

The introduction lays out the broad understanding of feminism that the book applies to digital art: "Post-colonialism, queer, and critical race theory recognized the basis of feminism as a social justice movement but transformed it to become inclusive of gender fluidity, race, power, and oppression in general. It became an intersectional movement" (1). The first chapter provides an overview of women in the early history of computing, from mathematician Ada Lovelace, who devised algorithms for the Babbage Analytical Machine in the nineteenth century, to the pioneering artists in the 1960s who experimented with early computers and electronic media. The second chapter offers a familiar history of feminism and digital art in the 1970s, with mention of the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) and of the many artists there and elsewhere who used video and television to address patriarchal culture. In addition, however, this chapter introduces the ways that women participated in the development, manufacturing, and dissemination of new technologies in that decade, a valuable addition to the survey of artists that continues throughout the text. Among a significant group of Chicago-based women digital and video artists, for example, were Ellen Sandor (b. 1942), who helped develop early attempts at Virtual Reality (VR), and Janine Fron, an early game designer (34). Chapter 2 also emphasizes the role that university educators played in expanding interest in computer arts and feminist theories. With so much content in each chapter, the presentations of each person and project remain brief, but the book invites readers to learn more through the excellent resources in citations provided conveniently at each chapter's end.

The chapter "Reimagining the Binary Nature of Digital Technology" nicely condenses Sadie Plant's ideas in *Zeroes +*

Ones (1997) about the dependence of computers' binary code on the same values that underlie binary social constructs around gender (as does, this reviewer might add, the designation of plugs/ports as "male"/"female"). Brodsky presents how the feminist rejection of the hegemonic structures and visual orders within computer science was expressed through manifestos by the activist collectives VNS Matrix and Laboria Cuboniks as well as by artist Rosa Menkman (b. 1983) and curator Legacy Russell. While scholars frequently, as Brodsky notes, credit Plant with the coinage "cyberfeminism," many audiences associate this term with the *Cyberfeminist Manifesto* (1991) of VNS Matrix, a group whose vitriol culminated in their *Bitch Mutant Manifesto* (1996). The *Xenofeminist Manifesto: A Politics of Alienation* (n.d.) of Laboria Cuboniks responded against the kind of essentialism that had been pervasive in much feminist thinking to instead espouse a more progressive politics around gender identity. Menkman's *Glitch Studies Manifesto* (composed 2010 and published in the artist's 2011 *Glitch Moment/um*) argued for disrupting normative computer and web-based interactions at a time when concern about transnational corporate control over the internet was gaining traction. Russell's *Glitch Feminist Manifesto* (2013) injected a Black and queer perspective into the metaphor.

Brodsky's Chapter 4 explores how personal computers and an increasingly accessible internet enabled web-based activism. Chapter 5 shifts away from visual systems to examine women artists' use of language in electronic media, especially the adoption by Jenny Holzer (b. 1950) of public displays; it then moves into the phenomenon of hypertext literature. Brodsky's transition here might create unease for scholars of art and text who prefer to distinguish between the use of language in creative visual practices and the composition of text-based narratives. While digital media enable play with language's visual context and elements, maintaining distinctions remains helpful, despite the intersections Brodsky emphasizes. The excellent

discussion of three hypertext novels, Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995), Judy Malloy's *its name was Penelope* (1993), and Carolyn Guyer's *Quibbling* (1992), reminds readers about early world-making techniques, such as participant interaction and choice arising out of a fragmented structure, that are relevant to today's much-hyped virtual realms (also known as cyberspace, and in popular media as "the metaverse"); they relate, too, to video games, the subject of chapter 11.

Writing is also important for the artists discussed in the subsequent chapter, "Queerness, Race, and Digital Art." Brodsky explains that lesbian, transgender, queer, and intersex digital artists, many of them nonwhite, have frequently employed writing as part of their intersectional politics, which seek to dismantle "patriarchal society as a whole (use of language, capitalism, government control of the body, the militaristic basis of technology) through the lens of gender and race" (75). From the classic lesbian lovemaking video *Female Sensibility* (1973) by Lynda Benglis (b. 1941) to the trauma-suffused installation *Four-Year-Old Temptress?* (2017) by Alex Mawimbi (formerly Ato Malinda; b. 1981), this chapter presents an impressively wide range of challenging works by artists whose practices attest to the complexities of identity constructs around the world. Other examples addressed here include the Golden Lion-winning live work *Faust* (2017) by Anne Imhof (b. 1978), orchestrated at the Venice Biennale via smartphones; the satirical social media video *Masculinities and Male Bodies on the Internet* (2013) by Jennifer Chan (b. 1988); and works by Zach Blas (b. 1981), micha cárdenas (b. 1977), Shu Lea Cheang (b. 1954), Jesse Darling (b. 1981), and Vaginal Davis (b. 1969).

The chapters "The Avatar" and "The Female Body Disappears" present well-worn discussions about mediated representations of the self and about the move away from essentialism towards an understanding of how perceptions of bodies are socially constructed; such a survey can only begin to gloss the extensive literature on both topics. Given the complexities of scientific

discourse, Brodsky does an admirable job in "Creating Feminist Paradigms of Knowledge Through Digital Technology" of explaining how digital artists have used feminism to shift perceptions of science and medicine: Ellen K. Levy, Laurie Anderson (b. 1947), and Addie Wagenknecht (b. 1981) have addressed space exploration; Kathy High (b. 1954) and Patricia Piccinini (b. 1965), Darwinian evolution; Neri Oxman (b. 1976), Mary Mattingly (b. 1978), Diane Burko (b. 1945), and Marina Abramović (b. 1946), material ecology; Heather Dewey-Hagborg (b. 1982), gene technology; and Anicka Yi (b. 1971), biotechnology. Brodsky's whirlwind overview creates a sense that there is much more to learn about artists engaged with laboratory sciences.¹ Some of these artists' practices also invite sociological paradigm shifts in a manner similar to creative projects mentioned earlier in the book. The Iranian artist Morehshin Allahyari (b. 1985), for example, has developed the notion of "Additivism" as her attempt to overcome the binary of human/animal and of so many other systems; Allahyari's self-imposed exile from Iran makes her acutely aware of how digital technologies can reinforce colonial attitudes of othering, particularly since the technologies are largely designed and developed by white people (121). Using three-dimensional printing with clear resin, Allahyari reconstructed twelve sculptures destroyed in 2015 by ISIS to produce the series *Material Speculation* (2015–16; Fig. 1). Each sculpture contains a memory card and flash drive with texts, videos, and GPS location data and maps of the sites where the originals stood, preserving the history of the ancient works for the future. Brodsky concludes this chapter with the use by Sondra Perry (b. 1986) of stationary exercise equipment to illustrate the racial inequalities in health care that Black Americans face within the legacy of slavery.

The last five chapters show some of the strengths and challenges of the survey genre. Philosopher Jeremy Bentham's notion of the panopticon, further developed by Michel Foucault, contextualizes most of the works in the



Fig. 1. Morehshin Allahyari, *Material Speculation: ISIS, Priest with Eagle* (2015), 3D-printed resin and electronic components, 12" x 4" x 4". Courtesy of the artist.

chapter "Surveillance"; it represents the kind of controlling opticality that undermines—and is in turn undermined by—recent creative practice addressing digital technologies' algorithmic information bias. Brodsky presents artists' resistance to the visibility of surveillance through works like *Index of the Disappeared* (ongoing since 2004) by Mariam Ghani (b. 1978) and Chitra Ganesh (b. 1975), a filing cabinet of index cards about ostensible terrorism suspects who have gone missing since 9/11, and *The Library of*

Missing Data Sets (2016) by Mimi Onuoha (b. 1989), which invites viewers to open a physical file cabinet containing empty folders labeled with topics that lack established or publicly available data (e.g., “English language rules internalized by native speakers,” “Cause of June 2015 black church fires”). The chapters “Feminist Artists and the Gaming Industry” and “Japanese Feminism, Video Games, and Anime” are both excellent introductory texts that can serve as memory lists for those familiar with these topics.

The pitfalls of condensing information are evident in the chapter “Artificial Intelligence, Facial Recognition, and Virtual Reality,” which limits its discussion of AI to robotics, ignoring many other important artistic practices involving machine learning and algorithms. This is a shame, as a broader treatment would have brought the book full circle by returning to artists mentioned in the first chapter, like Vera Molnár (b. 1924), whose art practice over the last sixty years has playfully explored the potential of algorithms, and whose work has recently been referenced by numerous contemporary practitioners of generative art. The section on VR makes no mention of Char Davies (b. 1954), whose *Osmose* (1995) responds to users’ breath in their navigation of the virtual space, reinforcing phenomenological relations between the self and the world; it remains one of

the most thought-provoking applications of VR. Brodsky focuses on artists’ use of VR to comment on global sociopolitical issues, but the immersive nature of VR also raises other feminist discourses, particularly that of embodiment, and many artists cultivate this more personal dimension of the medium. Distinguishing VR from Augmented Reality (AR) is increasingly important, and the last chapter’s examination of “Digital Public Art and Augmented Reality” helpfully addresses AR’s greater accessibility, discussing artists who employ smartphone apps to introduce people, landscapes, abstract shapes, sounds, historic landmarks, and/or imagined elements into viewers’ experiences of their environment. The artists are major figures, but the works selected are didactic in a way that does not do justice to their practice. While the emergent medium bears great potential for broadening audience engagement with climate change, community histories, social dynamics, and other issues addressed across Brodsky’s book, it also offers beauty and subtlety that are not conveyed here.

With the explosion of interest in digital art recently, *Dismantling the Patriarchy, Bit by Bit: Art, Feminism, and Digital Technology* provides a needed overview of the creative and critical work that artists in this realm are doing to disrupt hegemonic forces. The faltering discussions of assorted practices in a few

of the chapters disappoint, but such lapses are inevitable in a book that covers so much ground. The feminist critique of dominant social systems expressed by technology is the responsibility not only of artists but of scholars as well. Brodsky’s book is an important survey that can easily be excerpted for particular use in courses on digital culture or gender studies, but much more must still be written about the convergence of art and technology through an intersectional feminist lens. •

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Notes

1. On approaches to the biological sciences in art, see recently Ellen K. Levy and Charissa N. Terranova, eds., *D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson’s Generative Influences in Art, Design, and Architecture: From Forces to Forms* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021), reviewed by Christine Filippone in *Woman’s Art Journal* 43, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2022): 41–44.

Faith Ringgold: Politics Power

By Faith Ringgold, Michele Wallace, and Kirsten Weiss
Weiss Publications, 2022

Reviewed by Lisa Farrington

Authored by Faith Ringgold (b. 1930), her daughter Michele Wallace, and Kirsten Weiss of Weiss Publications in Berlin and New York, this 104-page volume illustrates and discusses the artist’s works from 1967, when her iconic *Black Light Series* was conceived, to 1981, when Ringgold began to create her story quilts. Linen-

bound with an embossed cover, the book features thirty-two color images and fourteen historic black-and-white photos and documents related to the artist’s political activities. Ideal for a student audience, the book pairs each image with a short essay that discusses the work’s significance or how its iconographic and formal elements communicate the artist’s political agenda. Each page spread is highlighted by a quote from Ringgold that further reveals the meaning of the featured work of art. For example, the painting *Black Light Series #1: Big Black* is heralded with the words “I wanted to paint dark tones ... to create *black light*.”

Ringgold’s words allude to the inherent racism in the classic technique of chiaroscuro, which relegates dark tones (including skin tones) to the background and utilizes light tones to bring forms forward.

The first section of *Politics Power* is devoted to *Black Light Series* #1–12 (1967–69; Fig. 1), in which Black figures—mostly heads and busts—or evocative words (e.g., “American,” “Black,” “Art,” and a racist imprecation incorporated into an American flag) occupy canvases either left whole or subdivided using color. Essays are, in some cases, straightforward descriptions of the works. Others offer insights into



Fig. 1. Faith Ringgold, *Black Light Series #11: US America Black* (1969), oil on canvas, 60" x 84". Private collection.

Ringgold's use of abstract forms derived from African sculpture and textiles; her inclusion of self-portraiture and autobiographical content in the series; her relationship to other artists of the 1960s, such as Jasper Johns; and the importance of poster art as an egalitarian medium—available to a wide public rather than only to the art-world elite. For those who have never seen the original paintings, some reproductions (especially those with figures) give the impression that the entire *Black Light* grouping is comprised of paintings that are quite dark, an element that conveniently jibes with the title of the series and with numerous references in the essays. The fact is that some images are printed darker than the paintings actually are—an aspect of the book that belies the artist's use of vivid reds and electric blues in addition to shades of black and brown. Such vibrant hues are indicative of the artist's search for a new palette with which to replace chiaroscuro and, one might speculate, to express the vivacity of Black people.

In the second half of the book, Ringgold's political posters are featured, as is the 1970 printed manifesto for the women's art group WSABAL (Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation), founded by the artist and her daughters. Posters include those dedicated to the Black Panthers, activist Angela Davis, and the Judson Three (Ringgold and artists Jean Toche and Jon Hendricks, who were arrested for "flag desecration" after organizing a 1970 exhibition of American flag imagery that harshly critiqued American racism and violence). Included as well are selections from the artist's *Feminist* and *Slave Rape* series, in the style of Tibetan *thangka* paintings (cloth-bordered and hung on dowels), her mural *For the Women's House* (dedicated to incarcerated women), and her masks, dolls, installations, and performances that honor the Black family and memorialize Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the more than two dozen Black youths murdered in Atlanta between 1979 and 1981.

Politics Power closes with a brief biography of the artist and a selected bibliography. It is a superb compilation of images from the period, of telling quotes from the artist, and of accessible analyses. Admittedly ideal for neophyte and student audiences, it will likely attract Ringgold devotees as well, due to its emphasis on a heretofore lesser-known decade in the artist's career. •

Lisa Farrington is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the City University of New York and past Associate Dean of Fine Arts at Howard University. She is the author of several books, including *African American Art: A Visual and Cultural History* (Oxford University Press, 2016) and the award-winning *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists* (Oxford University Press, 2005, 2nd ed. 2011).

Women Artists on the Leading Edge: Visual Arts at Douglass College

By Joan Marter

Rutgers University Press, 2019

Reviewed by Heather Cammarata-Seale

In these times when disillusionment with the established order is at an all-time high, a new energy begins to be felt.... Women are emerging from history because history needs them to show the way to peace and the way to another kind of strength and reflection.¹

Although painter and multimedia artist Joan Snyder (b. 1940), who received a Masters of Fine Arts degree from Douglass College in 1966, wrote these words in 1972, they remain pertinent to this day, and they speak to the philosophy under which *Women Artists on the Leading Edge: Visual Arts at Douglass College* operates. This book recounts the largely unknown postwar history and contributions of the radical visual arts program at Douglass College, the all-women's campus of Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, from the early 1950s through 1981. Author Joan Marter, a Board of Governors Professor Emerita at Rutgers, joined the department at Douglass in 1977 as one of its first full-time women professors and as a member of the advisory committee for its Women Artists Series exhibition program (renamed the Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series in 1987). Relying heavily on interviews with former students and teachers as well as on the author's firsthand knowledge, especially of the exhibition series, this book brings the largely overlooked achievements of the Douglass College visual arts program and its notable graduates to light. In the introduction, Marter makes clear that she aims to bring attention to the singular achievements of Douglass College alumnae as well as to provide an account of the curricula, programs, exhibitions, and events that laid the groundwork on which those students

built their successes. The curriculum at Douglass emphasized innovation. The department presented the student body with many different artmaking techniques and approaches—its central pedagogical tenet was, in the words of alumna Mimi Smith (b. 1942; MFA 1966), that “anything you did could be art” (128)—emphasizing that there were limitless artistic possibilities present in everyday experiences, and that one had to experience things to make meaningful work. Douglass became a hub for unconventional artistic activity by hosting Fluxus events, Happenings, exhibitions of contemporary art, feminist art lectures, and more.

Part 1 of the book focuses on the history of the Douglass visual arts department and its faculty. In 1955, the New Jersey College for Women officially became Douglass College; soon thereafter, under the helm of its progressive dean, Mary Bunting, it became a leader in avant-garde studio art education. Until the mid-1950s, the studio art curriculum at Douglass had been very traditional. Over the course of her five-year tenure, Dean Bunting not only hired several new instructors and launched a Master of Fine Arts program but also supported the visual arts faculty in their collective desire to develop a new curriculum inspired by the Bauhaus, Black Mountain College, John Cage's courses at the New School, and other cutting-edge artistic practices. These professors, including Robert Watts (who had initially been hired to teach in the Engineering department), Allan Kaprow, Geoffrey Hendricks, Ka Kwong Hui, and, from 1960 to 1964, Roy Lichtenstein, helped craft the inventive curriculum and arranged for such innovative events on the Douglass campus as Kaprow's first Happening (1958) and an experimental music and spoken word performance by Cage and David Tudor. The instructors-cum-artists sought an international perspective and interdisciplinary approach that underscored the connection between art and the everyday, which is not surprising given that most were either members of the Fluxus group or founders of the Pop Art movement. In 1957, with Dean Bunting's approval, Watts taught an experimental course that brought

together art and science, incorporating new media and audiovisual technologies into its syllabus. Not only did the course expose students to novel materials, but it also prompted an evolution in Watts's own practice: he began to produce fully fledged mixed-media works with electronic parts. In 1961, Lichtenstein created *Look Mickey*, his first Pop Art painting, not long after arriving at Douglass, showing the new work to colleague Kaprow before approaching the Leo Castelli Gallery with the painting and other new cartoon-inspired works that Castelli would exhibit the following year. Douglass students were thus intimately acquainted from the beginning with the groundbreaking and soon burgeoning Pop Art movement.²

Marter makes the important point, however, that no full-time members of the Douglass visual arts faculty were female (although Hendricks names watercolorist Evelyn Burdett as an untenured professor there in 1956 [21]) until the hiring of Carolee Schneemann (1939–2019) in 1976; even then, Schneemann was not offered a tenure-track position, and she taught for only two years. In 1977, Marter and photographer Amy Stromsten (b. 1942) joined the department as full-time professors. Painter Joan Semmel (b. 1932) was hired in 1979 and taught at Douglass and then Rutgers for a combined twenty-two years. While Semmel experienced some early resistance from colleagues and students who believed painting was “dead,” she brought new life to the medium. By incorporating her own nude, eroticized body into her work, Semmel created provocative pictures that spoke to the larger feminist discourse about sexual liberation, demonstrating that traditional approaches to artmaking could be radical.

The author's interviews with Hendricks (who passed away in 2018) and Lichtenstein round out this portion of the book. These conversations provide valuable context for the innovative artistic and teaching practices of the department's male faculty while underscoring the importance of its female dean. Hendricks relays that Dean Bunting put a lot of faith in the art department's faculty members, encouraging them to try new pedagogical tactics to achieve their

overarching goal of “get[ting] the students to be more open and free in expressing their ideas” (24). As a result, activities in foundational courses included readings in subjects outside of art history, discussions about Zen, and trips to New York City so that students could actively participate in the contemporary art scene. Lichtenstein recalls redesigning the Art 101 course to include such radical exercises as having the students draw from upside-down, out-of-focus slide projections of Baroque drawings while he slowly brought the images into focus. Faculty members also spurred one another to develop their own art practice in unexpected ways: Hendriks recalls that Kaprow warmly supported Lichtenstein as the latter began to express interest in creating paintings of enlarged comic strips.

Part 2 comprises eleven essays on notable Douglass alumnae, among them Alice Aycock (b. 1946; BA 1968), Smith, and Snyder. In addition to sketching their biographies, the chapters address how the artists’ time at Douglass impacted their career, offer a brief overview of their practices, discuss the major themes underpinning their oeuvre, and, when applicable, note the artists’ contributions to the feminist art movement. Much of the information is culled from interviews Marter conducted with the artists over the years. Part 2 concludes with the transcripts of interviews with Aycock, Smith, and Letty Lou Eisenhauer (b. 1935; BA 1957; MFA student 1961–62).

Aycock, who intended to major in Creative Writing and minor in Sociology, shifted her focus once she took an art history–studio art course with Sam Wiener, who introduced her to a literary approach to art. She recounts, as does Smith, how Douglass students traveled to New York City to see exhibitions in galleries as well as to attend lectures, performances, and events. A particularly formative experience for Aycock was attending “Nine Evenings,” the first set of performances by Billy Klüver’s Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) group, at the Sixty-Ninth Regiment Armory in 1966, echoes of which can be found in Aycock’s later *The Miraculating Machine in the Garden (Tower of the Winds)* (1980–82; Fig. 1). This



Fig. 1. Alice Aycock, *The Miraculating Machine in the Garden (Tower of the Winds)* (1980–82), glass, concrete, steel, sheet metal, copper, neon light, bells, cyclotron pipes, and vegetation, approximately 30' x 30' x 20'. Douglass College, New Brunswick, New Jersey. Photo: Mike Van Tassell.

of the Winds) (1980–82; Fig. 1). This monumental sculpture, composed mostly of glass, metal, concrete, and neon, is permanently sited in a low-walled sculpture garden adjacent to Douglass Library. Invading an environment meant for tranquility and contemplation, Aycock’s functionless machine investigates the bumbling nature of scientific progress and the potential for industrial technologies to be obtrusive (39). Smith recalls a memorable moment from Watts’s Experimental Workshop class when he took the students to Nam June Paik’s Canal Street studio: “Paik had us each make a two-minute video with a Portapak video camera. We each did a

Happening in front of [the] camera” (127). Many of the Douglass College artists discussed in this section extol their professors for having put them at the center of the contemporary art scene.

The essay on Snyder, on the other hand, emphasizes how much she prized the collaborative spirit within the female student body: “We were all supportive of each other. Seriously it was really an amazing atmosphere. For me, it wasn’t because of any faculty members” (94–95).³ Although Snyder cites Billy Pritchard, her first undergraduate studio art professor at Douglass (where she received a BA in Sociology before returning for her MFA), and Mark Berger, her first art history pro-

fessor, as having influenced her artistic development, she points to her relationships with other female students as the most nurturing aspect of her college and graduate school experiences. Snyder's frustration at the absence of female faculty members and role models spurred her to remain active on campus after graduating and to launch a landmark exhibition series that brought the work of female artists to campus.

Part 3 highlights Snyder's brainchild program: the Women Artists Series, now the Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series, held since its inception in the Mabel Smith Douglass Library. The inaugural exhibition opened in September 1971, curated by Snyder; for later shows, the head librarian assumed curating duties. As the oldest continuous exhibition program to feature large numbers of emerging women artists, the series is an important contribution to the feminist art movement, showcasing the works of over five hundred women to date. The series celebrates the work of artists at a range of career stages, providing a springboard for those at the beginning and a place of honor to those further along.

This section includes the text Marter wrote for the catalog *Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series: 25 Years, 1971–1996*, "Ages of Discovery, The Women Artists Series: My Memories." Her first-person account of teaching at Douglass College and being a member of the Women Artists Series advisory committee provides institutional knowledge of the selection process for the exhibitions—juried in some years, by invitation in others—and the committee's goals. Marter maintains that the creation and sustained presence of the series is essentially a political act, one that "assert[s] the importance of women's art to the larger community" (141) while upholding the mission of Douglass College to educate women and encourage their creativity. She names some of the distinguished artists whose work appeared in the shows through 1996, among them Dorothy Dehner (1901–1994), Loïs Mailou Jones (1905–1998), Miriam Schapiro (1923–2015), Nancy Spero (1926–2009), and Faith Ringgold (b. 1930).

The brief next chapter gives an overview of the exhibitions held from 1978 to 1982 in the Walters Hall Art Gallery, another venue on campus. The Walters Hall shows were organized in part by students in Marter's undergraduate Workshop in Curatorial Practice course, giving each student an opportunity to directly engage with a living female artist by visiting her studio and writing a catalogue entry. Excerpts from the exhibition catalogues for these shows reveal that the timely subjects included "Women and Autobiography" and Black women artists.

The conclusion provides more information on how Douglass College and Rutgers University continue to support women in the arts. The Center for Women in the Arts and Humanities now organizes the Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series at the Douglass Library as well as virtual exhibitions on its website. Numerous feminist archives and art collections now reside at Rutgers, including the Miriam Schapiro Archives on Women Artists and the collection of the National Association of Women Artists (NAWA), the oldest continuously operating women's art collective in the United States.⁴

Women Artists on the Leading Edge: Visual Arts at Douglass College allows the story of the groundbreaking visual arts program at Douglass College and work of some of its early female graduates to "emerge from history," to borrow alumna Snyder's words from the quote that begins this review. This book serves as a wonderful introduction to the department and the artists it shaped, encouraging further investigation. For example, it would be interesting to examine how the Women Artists Series influenced the artistic practices of Douglass art students and, after 1981, their Rutgers College successors. Since most of the artists discussed in this book graduated prior to the establishment of the exhibition program, the impact of this series on later generations of Douglass and Rutgers alumnae remains ripe for exploration. Another potential avenue for inquiry is how the pedagogy of the department developed over the years, especially after more female artists were hired as full-time professors. A selected bibliography of books, catalogs, and essays offers numerous

entry points for additional research. Approximately eighty archival photographs and reproductions of artworks, some in black-and-white, many in color, make the book visually accessible. Most importantly, this publication exemplifies the mission of Douglass College, demonstrating how women can and do support the work of other women. •

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Notes

1. Marter, 15, citing Joan Snyder, "Introduction," *Eight Women Artists: A Series of Exhibits at the Library, 1971–72* (New Brunswick, NJ: Douglass College Library, 1972), n.p. See also Molly Snyder-Fink, "My Mother's Altar: Joan Snyder Paints To Face Herself," *Woman's Art Journal* 39, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2018): 3–11.
2. On the artistic practices of Hendricks, Kaprow, Lichtenstein, and Watts, see also Joan Marter, ed., *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-garde, 1957–1963* (Newark, NJ: Newark Museum; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999).
3. Interview with Joan Snyder by Catherine Reed, April 9, 2004.
4. Other important feminist art-historical archives in the Special Collections and University Archives at Rutgers University are the Inventory to the Heresies Collective, Inc. (<http://www2.scc.rutgers.edu/ead/manuscripts/Heresiesf.html>) and the Elsa Honig Fine Papers Collection (<https://archives.libraries.rutgers.edu/repositories/11/resources/367>). The latter contains material and documents related to *Woman's Art Journal* founder Elsa Honig Fine's professional work as art historian, writer, and editor of the journal.

The Traumatic Surreal: Germanophone Women Artists and Surrealism after the Second World War

By Patricia Allmer
Manchester University Press, 2022

Reviewed by Andrea Gremels

After *Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism* (2009) and *Lee Miller: Photography, Surrealism, and Beyond* (2016), Patricia Allmer presents another groundbreaking book that offers new perspectives on female positions and lineages in the history of surrealism. Her new monograph on Germanophone women artists not only approaches the understudied period after the Second World War, a time during which surrealism has often been said to have ended or even failed, but is also the first study to probe the connection between surrealist art and trauma theory. With this triple focus—on women artists, the post-1945 period, and trauma—Allmer’s book is a significant contribution to the study of surrealism in an interdisciplinary mode. Moreover, it will surely have an outreach in the public debate on collective memory formation in Germanophone cultures, still permeated by Nazism’s aftermath as an uncanny presence, particularly in Austria.

The Traumatic Surreal attests to Allmer’s skill in detecting unexpected, intriguing connections and opening up new directions in research on surrealism by reading established canons and periodizations against the grain. The study is divided into five chapters on Germanophone women artists in the history of the traumatic surreal: each of the first four chapters focuses on a single artist, Meret Oppenheim (1913–1985), Unica Zürn (1916–1970), Birgit Jürgenssen (1949–2003), and Bady Minck (b. 1962), while chapter 5 explores the artistic genealogy connecting Leonora Carrington (1917–2011), composer Olga Neuwirth (b. 1968), and author Elfriede Jelinek (b. 1946). The works Allmer analyzes by these artists represent a wide variety of media, including not



Fig.1. Birgit Jürgenssen, *Hausfrau* (1974), pencil and colored pencil on handmade paper, 25" x 17". Private collection.

only the visual arts but also opera, film, poetry, and many genres of prose.

The introduction of the book contextualizes women artists’ work in the postwar history of Germanophone countries and locates them within the art history of surrealism and other parallel movements, such as *Magischer*

Realismus and *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Allmer takes as her point of departure the surrealist performance by German Jewish dancer Valeska Gert (1892–1978) in Paris in November 1926, which prompted a scuffle between followers of the two men claiming the term “surréalisme,” Yvan Goll and André



Fig. 2. Meret Oppenheim, *Einige der ungezählten Gesichter der Schönheit* (Some of the Uncounted Faces of Beauty, 1942), oil on canvas, 32"x 21". Private collection.

Breton. Allmer cites Gert's performance as an example of Germanophone women artists' impact on surrealism, not least on the debate over "proprietaryship" of the word (1), a debate with nationalistic undertones.

In Chapter 1, "Meret Oppenheim's Hauntologies," the originality of

Allmer's approach consists in unsilencing Swiss artist Oppenheim's practice in the years 1937–54, ostensibly a period of unproductivity due to psychological strain, according to the narrative nurtured by critics and by the artist herself. Allmer looks back at Oppenheim's prewar ink-and-gouache

Dann leben wir eben später (We Will Just Live Later, Then, 1933), in which a dark spectral form carries a white version of itself, to demonstrate that this early work's themes of traumatic haunting and distorted temporality relate closely to the artist's group of *Gespens* (Ghost) works of the 1950s as well as to her 1962 object *Gespens mit Leintuch* (Ghost With Sheet), a pale, masklike form growing on a stem from a draped cloth. Allmer discusses, among other works produced during Oppenheim's self-described crisis, the collage *Das Paradies ist unter der Erde* (Paradise Is Under the Earth, 1940), in which a tree fills a well in an upside-down landscape, and the painting *Das Tragisch-Komische* (The Tragic-Comic, 1944), in which animal limbs meld with machined material to convey an uncanny mechanical savagery. *Das Paradies* is dedicated to Max Ernst's son, Hans Ulrich, who was petitioning for his father's release from internment by the Vichy regime, and its downward-facing treetops create a sense of rootlessness, incarceration, and death (38). For Allmer, this painting anticipates Paul Celan's 1963 poem "In der Luft" (In the Air) and its image of deracinated roots being carried away by the air. Regarding Oppenheim's 1943 dark landscape painting *Krieg und Frieden* (War and Peace), Allmer establishes an inter-pictorial relation with the painting *Frieden und Krieg* (1937) by Walter Kurt Wiemken, a member of the Swiss avant-garde network Gruppe 33. Oppenheim's links to Wiemken, Gruppe 33, and the Allianz, another avant-garde artists' group in Switzerland, further contradict the notion of the artist's supposed inactivity during the war period, as Allmer argues.

Chapter 2, "Unica Zürn's Pathographies," re-envision German writer Zürn's work beyond its usual biographical, pathologizing interpretation as an expression of the mental illness that led to her confinement in a psychiatric hospital and ultimately to her suicide. Allmer situates Zürn's traumatic experience and writing within the broader background of her father's role in the German colonialist genocide in Namibia and her mother Helene's second marriage to a high-ranking officer of the

Third Reich, Heinrich Doehle. Moreover, while most scholars cite Zürn's intimate relationship to Paris-based surrealist artist Hans Bellmer as a source of influence, Allmer traces Zürn's aesthetics further back to her postwar involvement with the surrealism-inclined group in Berlin known for its 1949 cabaret *Die Badewanne* (The Bathtub).

With its focus on "Birgit Jürgenssen's Abjections," Chapter 3 extends the feminist history of surrealism into the postwar Austrian cultural landscape of the 1970s. Allmer looks at Viennese artist Jürgenssen's radical undermining of the traditional image of the Austrian *Hausfrau* (Housewife), characterizing Jürgenssen's claustrophobic, animalistic depictions of women in confined spaces and her fetishized *Schuhwerk* (Shoe-Work) series as "after-images" of the Holocaust in James Young's sense, namely as products of Holocaust cultural memory created by artists born after the war's end.¹ Among the book's approximately fifty figures of excellent quality are two versions of Jürgenssen's 1974 *Hausfrau* drawings. One, a woman's bust rendered nearly featureless by checkered patterns, illustrates the book's cover, while the other shows a tiger-headed, slipper-shod woman trapped in a cage (Fig. 1). Jürgenssen's bestial *Hausfrau* can be considered a key image of the "traumatic surreal" among the works of Germanophone women artists. Her abjection of the housewife, a main symbol of the repressive ideology of Nazism, vividly expresses the feelings of alienation, confinement, and bodily constraint and the impulse to escape that burden the "generation of postmemory," as Marianne Hirsch has termed the heirs of the collective trauma of the Second World War and the Holocaust.

In Chapter 4, "Bady Minck's Tourist Imaginaries," Allmer analyzes another female Austrian artist's critical engagement with iconic figures and national sites, revealing the pervasiveness of national-socialist discourse and ideology in shaping public perceptions of the country's history and landscapes. The chapter mainly focuses on Austrian artist Minck's 2003 "Science-Docufiction" film

Im Anfang war der Blick (In the Beginning Was the Eye), a disruptive and disturbing "journey into Austria's tourist imaginary" (169) centered on Erzberg Mountain and the city of Salzburg, destinations that represent, for Minck, the silenced memory of Nazism in Austria.

The final chapter, "Olga Neuwirth/Elfriede Jelinek: Temporality and Trauma," addresses Austrian composer Neuwirth's 2003 opera *Bählamms Fest*, for which the Nobel Prize-winning Austrian novelist and playwright Jelinek wrote the libretto. The opera is based on Carrington's 1940 play *The Baa-Lamb's Holiday*, written in English by the British Mexican artist but never published in its original language. Almost a transgenerational phenomenon, the trauma that Carrington suffered at the outbreak of the Second World War haunted Neuwirth at the end of the twentieth century as right-wing politics repeatedly gained ground in Austria.

Many of the relevant references to trauma theory in Allmer's study remain unmentioned in the introduction but are interwoven into each chapter's close readings. In this way, the author creates a close dialogue between the prominent contributions to this body of theory by Hirsch, Aleida Assmann, and Cathy Caruth and the postwar artistic practice of Germanophone surrealist women artists. Allmer also raises related theoretical concepts, such as Jacques Derrida's "hauntology," which characterizes aspects of the past as pervading the present like ghostly traces, remaining inaccessible through language, and Michael Rothberg's "multidirectional memory," which postulates that moments and places commingle and compete in remembrances of the past. One highlight of this productive dialogue with theory is the way Allmer relates Minck's *Im Anfang war der Blick* to Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory), the places, objects, or concepts that bear historical meaning for a community, particularly in national contexts and to Max Silverman's "palimpsestic memory," the workings of which traverse, condense, and entangle space and time. Allmer demonstrates how Minck's film creates "sound sites"

of memory within a palimpsestic, fragmented vision of Austria's "repressed history." Minck's collage-style overlapping of multiple images, and her use of myriad "sourceless monologic voices" (190), incidental sounds, and strains of music for the accompanying soundscape, produces a high level of discord and dissonance, evoking the symptoms of alienation and disturbed communication in the situation of trauma.

The "palimpsestic" character of *The Traumatic Surreal* itself is inherent not only in this layered application of theory but also in Allmer's method of reading her material along intertextual, inter-pictorial, and transmedial affiliations and relationalities. Readers can follow the author as she establishes connections, for example, between *Im Anfang war der Blick* and Elias Canetti's *Masse und Macht* (Crowds and Power, 1960), an analysis of mass behavior prompted by Canetti's first-hand experience of the July 1927 Vienna riots, and with the writings of Austrian poet Friederike Mayröcker (1924–2021), which exhibit, like Minck's film, a surrealist collage aesthetic. An even more obvious intertext, the biblical John 1:1, "Im Anfang war das Wort" ("In the beginning was the Word"), may underlie the discussion of Minck disorienting the viewer's "eye," *der Blick* of the film's title, an artistic strategy that undermines the authority of *das Wort*.

Allmer's capacity to weave a compelling history of the surrealist aesthetics of trauma across different media and historic periods, and to reveal underappreciated female alliances and artistic genealogies within surrealism, becomes most apparent in chapter 5. Neuwirth's opera *Bählamms Fest*, described by the composer as "Eine Musik der Verwirrung" ("a music of confusion," 197–98)² and by Allmer as threatening to "collapse ... into animalistic or mechanical noise" (203), corresponds to Carrington's staging in *Baa-Lamb's Holiday* of a brutal feast of family slaughter rituals. In the context of trauma, these outbreaks of violence can be considered a symptom of the "unspoken ... nightmare" (217) of historic violence that is inscribed within

the intimate microcosm of the family.

Oppenheim's screenplay *Kaspar Hauser oder Die Goldene Freiheit* (Kaspar Hauser or The Golden Liberty, c. 1942–43, reworked 1970) is the basis for another intriguing example of the book's intermedia approach. Allmer argues that the Berlin-born Swiss Jewish artist identified with her protagonist, Kaspar Hauser, the young man in nineteenth-century Germany whose mysterious origins—he supposedly grew up isolated in a cellar without light—and equally mysterious death by stabbing elevated him to near-mythical status. Allmer interprets the screenplay as ambiguously positioning Oppenheim “towards aesthetic alignment with Germanic cultural traditions ... and towards autobiographical alignment with the scene of myth as a surreal performance of the self in the process of becoming” (66). Hauser begins the screenplay in a golden mask but removes it in the hopes of gaining “Freiheit,” freedom; he nonetheless endures various scenarios of confinement and violence until he becomes the victim of a fatal shooting. In death, he returns to his golden-masked state. According to Allmer, Hauser's cyclical transformations—including turning into a statue and back into a human—and his relationship to the mask create a surrealist vision of a “fantasised, golden escape” (62). Allmer finds particular resonances between the screenplay and Oppenheim's 1942 painting *Einige der ungezählten Gesichter der Schönheit* (Some of the Uncounted Faces of Beauty; Fig. 2), which conjures Hauser's wandering exile through the use of German folkloric motifs that replace the head of a sitting woman. Read across media, Oppenheim's realignment with the Kaspar Hauser myth can be understood as a reflection of her own traumatic wanderings and “deep isolation” (70) during the Second

World War. At the same time, it also conveys a hope to escape the hauntings of trauma and move toward a sense of belonging to Germanic culture and cultural history, even if the process is painful.

Guilt is another significant leitmotif of trauma and its artistic expression. In the case of Zürn's writings, such as *Der Mann im Jasmin* (The Man of Jasmine, 1967), Allmer concurs with a translator of these texts that they reveal the “projected guilt at the atrocities of the Nazis” (90)³ in their images of shattered spaces and collapsing bodies. Zürn's unpublished narrative “Katrin” (1953), rescued from oblivion and persuasively analyzed by Allmer, foregrounds the relationship of the autobiographical teenage narrator to her mother. Read against the background of the author's family history, particularly her mother's second marriage to an SS officer, the narrator's feelings of insurmountable separation and the narrative's collapse into “the stuttering or stammering of linguistic break-up” (98) might stand in connection with this historical guilt.⁴

Also fascinating in *The Traumatic Surreal* is the way Allmer works through multiple layers of trauma and its meanings across languages, particularly German and English. She draws widely on the polysemy of such German terms as *Erschütterung*, signifying “shudder,” “devastation,” or “concussion”; *Zuflucht*, containing the meanings of asylum and flight simultaneously; and the Freudian *Das Unheimliche*, the uncanny, both as an antonym of hominess and as an expression of secrecy (*Heimlichkeit*). Allmer's readings of postwar Germanophone women artists' visual, textual, and auditory works thus contribute to the translation of artistic practices and expressions of trauma across languages, decades, and surrealisms. The great value and achievement of the author's transversal

and traversing perspective in this important book must be viewed against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic during which it was mainly written, a period of confinement, isolation, and immobility that for many was a source of trauma.

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Notes

1. The chapter on Birgit Jürgenssen draws extensively on James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).
2. Olga Neuwirth, *Bärlamms Fest: Ein venezianisches Arbeitsjournal, 1997–1999* (Vienna: Droschl, 2003), 258.
3. Christina Svendsen, introduction to *The Trumpets of Jericho*, by Unica Zürn, trans. Svendsen (Cambridge, MA: Wakefield Press, 2015), xii.
4. It would have been interesting to cross-reference Zürn's writings of the 1950s and 1960s more extensively with Leonora Carrington's 1943 autobiographical account *Down Below*, which deals not only with the traumatic experience of psychosis and confinement in a psychiatric hospital but also with the feeling of historical guilt. See Carrington, *Down Below*, ed. Marina Warner (New York: New York Review of Books Classics, 2017 [1943]).

Magnetic Woman: Toyen and the Surrealist Erotic

By Karla Huebner

University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020

Reviewed by Ashley Busby

Enigmatic Czech artist Toyen (born Marie Čermínová, 1902–1980) was recognized by fellow artists as a contributor to both the interwar Czech avant-garde and the international surrealist circle. Yet critical and scholarly attention to the artist has always been limited. While one might attempt to explain her absence from the art-historical literature as simply one of the challenges faced by female artists, Toyen's story is more complex. The inattention to and misunderstandings of the artist and her work can also be explained by a dearth of scholarship by non-Czech scholars on the history of the country's interwar period, the culture in which Toyen spent her formative years and much of her early career. Among other things, language barriers have prevented many scholars from adequately addressing and contextualizing her work.

In the first major English-language study of the artist, Karla Huebner deftly weaves together an account of Toyen's life and body of work that goes far beyond the traditional monograph. Faced with an artist who "avoided putting her thoughts into writing and was secretive about her background" (xiii), Huebner explains in the book's introduction that she has instead chosen to present her reader with careful renderings of the varied milieus and cultures in which Toyen lived and worked, and to consider their likely impact on her artistic subject matter and techniques. In so doing, Huebner provides extensive histories of Czech and international avant-garde movements as well as of Czech ideas on feminism, eroticism, and sexuality in the first half of the twentieth century. From these rich histories, we may better understand the artist's work, even if the exact details of her life remain shrouded in self-imposed mystery.

As Huebner's title suggests, the focus here is on Toyen's development of erotic iconography over the course of her long career. While those familiar with the artist's work from past publications on surrealism may only be aware of her work in painting, Huebner's text addresses Toyen's explorations of various media, including drawing, printmaking, illustration—mostly for avant-garde texts and journals—and collage. Huebner is also careful not to focus solely on the work better-known to Western audiences from the artist's engagement with the French surrealists after she moved permanently to Paris in 1947. Instead, the author demonstrates that Toyen's fascination with and deployment of erotic themes and subject matter was established much earlier, prior to the artist helping to found the Czech surrealist movement in 1934. For each period of Toyen's life, Huebner enriches her analysis of this imagery with the relevant cultural histories of sexuality and sexual practices.

Magnetic Woman proceeds largely chronologically. In the first chapter, Huebner uses legal documents and civic records to piece together the artist's early history. After leaving her family home in Smíchov, then an industrial suburb of Prague, at the age of sixteen, Toyen studied art and design at Prague's Artistic-Industrial School (UMPRŮM). Her arrival in the capital coincided with the creation of Czechoslovakia and the First Republic in 1918. As the young country sought to establish itself and forge its own cultural and political systems, Toyen, too, embraced the idea of self-creation. While her peers described Toyen in those years as an introverted individual with no family, a characterization that would be applied to her for the duration of her career, Huebner's research suggests that this vision of the artist was instead the product of self-mythologizing, a truly radical creative act that formed part of Toyen's artistic persona.



Fig. 1. Toyen, xylographic collage illustration in Vitězslav Nezval, ed., *Ani labut' ani Lúna* (Neither Swan nor Moon) (Prague: Otto Jirsák, 1936).

Huebner's discussion of Toyen as androgyne in this first chapter is laudable. She notes the artist's affinity for cross-dressing—contextualizing this practice as not abnormal within Czech culture at the time—and her use of masculine language forms as well as an indeclinable pseudonym (possibly from the masculine French *citoyen*) to refer to herself. Toyen expressed attraction to women, rejected romantic overtures from numerous men, and described her longtime relationship with painter Jindřich Štyrský as platonic, Huebner records. Still, the author refuses to make assumptions about Toyen's sexual preferences based simply on these acts of self-representation, nor does she attribute the artist's erotic compositions to a dismissal of traditional gender codes. As she proposes later in the text, "[Since] Toyen resisted making statements [about her sexual identity] that would allow us to categorize her more specifically than as a queer artist interested in transgressive sexuality, it is best not to try to pigeonhole her" (121). Huebner wisely avoids the trap of collapsing our understanding of an artist's biography with our analysis of

meaning in their artistic output, especially regarding concepts of gender expression and sexuality.

In chapter 2, Huebner focuses on Toyen's emergence as a member of a distinctly Czech avant-garde over the course of the 1920s. In these early years, Toyen established her strong working partnership with Štyrský, an important artistic collaborator and sounding board. Huebner observes that "while much of Toyen and Štyrský's work was closely related in style and content, each pursued specific directions that the other did not share" (38). In contemporary discussions of their work, Toyen was not cast in the role of sponge relative to her male peer, and each artist's work was recognized in its own right. The chapter provides a detailed history of the most active Czech interwar modernist group, Devětsil, of which Toyen and Štyrský were members (and with which even many scholars of twentieth-century European art are not familiar). Huebner proposes that Toyen's and Štyrský's free-associative, sexually charged collage illustrations for Czech books of the mid-1920s helped nudge some members of Devětsil toward surrealism.

In 1925, Štyrský received an inheritance that he used to fund a stay in Paris for himself and Toyen from 1925 to 1928. In chapter 3, Huebner maintains—partly on the basis of a Czech guidebook to Paris coauthored by Toyen, Štyrský, and a friend in 1927—that Toyen's time in the city exposed her to a particularly Parisian sense of sexual liberty in a place where eroticized entertainment, lesbian couples, and gender differences were visible and tolerated in many of the city's cultural circles. While Huebner argues that the city was "more a spur than a starting point" for Toyen's exploration of erotic subjects (80), the artist produced all of her earliest known erotic works in Paris in 1925 except one (her 1922 orgy scene *Polštář* [Cushion]), perhaps prompted to some degree by her exposure to the early André Breton-led surrealist group in the city. Nevertheless, Toyen and Štyrský created their own separate two-person movement, artificialism, in 1927, issuing a manifesto that called for detaching memories from

real-life experiences, "prepar[ing] the concept [of these remembrances] for painting, the essence and condensation of which immediately exclude[s] any reflections, and places the memories in imaginary spaces" (88).¹ Toyen's artificialist-period works are semi-abstract landscapes, often aqueous and sometimes rendered with sprayed or dripped paint.

Toyen did not identify as a surrealist until well after she and Štyrský returned to Prague in 1928, and specifically not until they helped form the Prague circle in 1934, by which point erotic themes were a dominant and established motif in Toyen's artistic output. In chapter 4, Huebner relates the artist's erotic subject matter to ideas on gender and sexuality in contemporary Czech culture as well as more specifically within the Czech avant-garde. The author crafts multiple but interrelated histories of Czech interwar sexuality as related to, but different from, the sexual culture of Paris and of other places in Europe. The Czech New Woman "simultaneously represented modernity, cosmopolitan life, mass culture, and sexual freedom" (34), while the Czech sex reform movement brought previously taboo topics into public discourse, although the focus was on hygiene within heterosexual partnerships. Czech intellectuals in the 1920s were better-versed in Freudian psychoanalysis than their French surrealist contemporaries, Huebner demonstrates. This detailed background serves to contextualize an analysis of Toyen's extensive corpus of erotic subject matter from the 1920s and 1930s. Here, the author shines. She devotes a fruitful close study, for example, to Toyen's drawings in Štyrský's *Erotická revue* (1931–33): the earliest ones, from about 1925, are roughly sketched and pornographic; the later ones, more sophisticated and fantastical. While Huebner brings up works by Toyen's male peers in the Prague circle as comparisons, and while she links some of Toyen's non-erotic mutilation imagery to surrealist Georges Bataille's notion of the *informe* (formless), she maintains that Toyen's erotic work was not derivative either of her artist peers' output or of her place and time in the history of sexuality, but

rather radical, unique, and inventive.

In chapter 5, Huebner turns her attention more fully to the development of the Prague surrealist circle and to Toyen's role as a founding member of the group in 1934. The exhibition *Poesie* 1932 in Prague, for which Toyen served on an advisory committee, "pav[ed] the way for surrealism" (173) in Czechoslovakia, with most of its twenty-three contributing Czech and international artists working in a surrealist mode, including Toyen, Štyrský, and the principal French surrealists. Huebner sees the Czech surrealist circle as evolving from earlier Czech avant-garde movements, particularly Devětsil, while sharing affinities with their Paris counterparts. She identifies the Prague group as "surrealism's most significant early growth outside the francophone world" (190) and as an important step toward establishing a more international movement. This history, while in keeping with a welcome trend in recent scholarship on surrealism, is still refreshing.² Rather than presenting surrealism as a single entity proceeding rank-and-file behind the leadership of Breton—who visited Prague with Jacqueline Lamba (1910–1993) and Paul Éluard in 1935—Huebner takes the opportunity to complicate the narrative, framing surrealism as a shared spirit with multiple ideologies and outcomes.

The Prague surrealist movement was hobbled, however, as Huebner chronicles, by the dismantling of Czechoslovakia in 1938–39 and by the outbreak of World War II. Štyrský died of pneumonia in 1942; Toyen remained in Prague, hiding part-Jewish fellow surrealist Jindřich Heisler and collaborating with him on drawings that may evoke the era's horrors, but in 1947 she and Heisler departed for Paris.

Chapter 6, "Toyen's Visual Language," returns to a primary focus on Toyen's imagery, seeking to analyze the artist's recurring motifs as well as her use of a collage aesthetic in light of contemporary psychosexual theories and ideologies. The artist's 1930s figures of girls standing dazed in barren landscapes with corpses, animal parts, or doll fragments may invite the viewer to

identify with them, but the girls “ultimately should be seen as the image of the artist’s own dreaming psyche ... in an alien and hostile land” (217). Adult women’s bodies gradually disappear from Toyen’s imagery, a vanishing that Huebner links to Roger Caillois’s 1935 theory of mimicry, in which animals or disordered personalities assimilate into their surroundings because they can no longer distinguish their own borders. Huebner argues that Toyen’s empty garments, corporeal fragments, and ghostly forms represent these disappearing bodies both metaphorically and metonymically (contra scholars who discern only one or the other semiotic mode in surrealist art). Early instances of empty, sexually suggestive articles of clothing occur in Toyen’s xylographic collages for a 1936 surrealist anthology honoring Czech Romantic poet Karel Hynek Mácha, hailed by Czech surrealists as a forebear (e.g., Fig. 1, resonating with Mácha’s imagery of a nocturnal forest). With the repetition over time of these and other evocative motifs, Toyen’s body of work “often partakes of the Freudian uncanny and is a prime example of this kind of haunting, traumatic oscillation between the familiar and the strange” (241). In quintessential avant-garde fashion, Toyen assembled erotically charged fragments into collages and collage-like works that create space for traumatic memories, as do dreams in Freudian theory, while also leaving room for the comic.

Huebner’s chapter 7 details Toyen’s

engagement with surrealism after 1947 in Paris, where she spent the remainder of her years, and where her small, tight circle of friends included Breton and surrealist poet Annie Le Brun. Here, Huebner continues to recognize the surrealist movement as a constantly evolving entity, its postwar form quite distinct from its interwar incarnation. Many of Toyen’s favored motifs from her second Paris period are explicitly or suggestively erotic, including vaginal and clitoral forms, tongues, mouths, and animals. Some of the artist’s 1960s collages parody postwar gender norms, echoing the writings of surrealist Nora Mitrani. Images of shadows not cast by bodies in works of this period may assume the role of Toyen’s earlier ghostly figures, their “insubstantiality link[ed] to an ever-present desire” (275).

The concluding chapter ably summarizes the chief themes of the volume and posits that Toyen “expressed not just individual psychic wounds but also the repressed trauma of the women of her generation” (288). A bibliographic essay expands upon the challenges that have impeded study of the artist, especially until the 1989 Velvet Revolution gave Czech scholars latitude to treat surrealism and afforded Westerners more access to Toyen’s Prague works.

Huebner’s approach throughout the book is to explore multiple modes of understanding Toyen’s work rather than settling on any one analytic

distillation. The sheer number of original works by the artist that are reproduced and discussed at length serve to counter Toyen’s own attempts to occlude herself and her oeuvre. On the basis of thorough research and clever analysis, Huebner manages to piece together seemingly insufficient fragments into an intriguing and astute account of Toyen’s life and practice within the contexts of Czech and French intellectual and artistic culture. While the author bravely recognizes that questions remain, *Magnetic Woman* provides a rich history of this surrealist artist’s world and a well-founded reading of the deliberately mysterious woman’s works. •

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Notes

1. Jindřich Štyrský and Toyen, “Artificielisme,” *ReD* 1, no. 1 (October 1927): 28–30, trans. Huebner.
2. See, e.g., Stephanie D’Alessandro and Matthew Gale, *Surrealism Beyond Borders* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2021).

Women’s Lives, Women’s Voices: Roman Material Culture and Female Agency in the Bay of Naples

Edited by Brenda Longfellow and Molly Swetnam-Burland

University of Texas Press, 2021

Reviewed by Brigitte Keslinke

I was first introduced to the Bay of Naples nearly fifteen years ago in a Latin classroom, and to this day I can vividly recall the drama, intrigue, and

humor of the Roman texts that formed the subject of our lessons. Most of this dynamism, though, came from the men in our stories; female characters were typically quieter and confined to traditional roles. Such a treatment of women in the Roman world is hardly uncommon, even in 2023, and *Women’s Lives, Women’s Voices* is the latest in a series of attempts to shine light on those groups whose marginalization has been carried over into and, indeed, perpetuated by modern scholarship on the ancient Mediterranean. More specifically, as its editors lay out in their introduction, the

volume is intended to better reflect how ancient Roman women participated in their communities, and its contributors were encouraged to tackle this issue as inclusively as possible, with respect not only to the kinds of women chosen for study but also to the methods used to study them (2–3). Throughout, the authors consider a broad range of material evidence, a rich source often overlooked in histories of Roman women: architecture, paintings, sculpture, everyday objects, inscriptions, and graffiti, among other remains. This evidence survives in particular bounty in the Bay of



Fig. 1. Pompeian Forum scene, fragment 9 of Forum frieze (third quarter 1st century CE), fresco from room 24 ("atrium"/courtyard) of the estate of Julia Felix (II.4.3), Pompeii, approximately 25" tall. National Archaeological Museum, Naples, inv. no. 9063.

Naples, so it is to this region that the volume's contributors direct their attention.

For those unfamiliar, the Bay of Naples lies on the western coast of Italy roughly 125 miles south of Rome. In antiquity, as today, its coastline was teeming with activity, most of which was concentrated in its two relatively small yet bustling urban centers: Pompeii and Herculaneum. These cities were first inhabited by Italic and Greek peoples, drawn in part by the economic opportunities afforded by the bay, but by the first century BCE, they had become centers of both business and pleasure for Roman elites and members of the working class. By the time of Mount Vesuvius's eruption in 79 CE, the cities had reached peak prosperity. Given the relatively complete material and historical records preserved by this eruption, it seems that the gaps—or "silences," as the editors refer to them (2)—that exist regarding women's lives in those cities are largely of our own making.

This absence of women from historiographic narratives is clearly laid out in the first chapter of this volume by Lauren Hackworth Petersen, "Pompeian Women and the Making of a Material History," which acts as a kind of secondary introduction. In re-analyzing two fixtures in the study of Pompeii—the rebuilt Sanctuary of Isis (after 62 CE) and the atrium house type that proliferated across the city—she demonstrates how modern scholars have consistently elided the presence of women, even in spaces where they predominated, thereby creating a male-centric model for reconstructing the past. At the Iseum, for example, scholars have focused

largely on the six-year-old boy named in the inscription from the time of the sanctuary's rebuilding and have assumed that the child's father prompted the benefaction, despite the fact that his mother—Corelia Celsa—is named elsewhere in the space and that, more generally, this is a cult with good evidence for both female participants and priestesses.

Derived from a 2018 conference, this volume is dedicated to revisiting these supposed silences and to presenting a fuller picture of the daily lives of women in the Bay of Naples. Its contributions are roughly organized around three broad themes: "public and commercial identities," "women on display," and "representing women" (4). In practice, these three sections do not represent strict divisions, as is often the case in an edited volume, and numerous contributions speak to more than one of these themes. This kind of entanglement, in my opinion, is a productive one; it encourages interdisciplinarity and, in the end, yields a more comprehensive and balanced picture of the past.

The first section, to which Petersen's aforementioned chapter also belongs, is centered on the roles that women played in Pompeii's economy. Some contributions are a more generalized study of the professions that women might have held. Volume co-editor Molly Swetnam-Burland, for example, investigates the extent to which women handled money on behalf of others in her chapter "Women's Work? Investors, Money-Handlers, and Dealers." Taking as her starting point an inscription of the first century CE (CIL 6.8639) that mentions two female *nummulariae* (money-handlers), she reconsiders a

collection of receipts—both on wax tablets and in the form of graffiti—that attest to the women in Pompeii who managed, invested, and even lent money. Lauren Caldwell's chapter, "From Household to Workshop: Women, Weaving, and the *Peculium*," likewise considers the ways in which women in Pompeii, both free and enslaved, may have participated in the creation and maintenance of economic capital, in this case through the sale of textiles they wove in the home. By combining material, literary, and papyrological evidence on household weaving with the opinion of jurist Gaius on the *peculium* (the fund distributed by the *paterfamilias*, the male head of the household, for use by the children or enslaved individuals under his authority), Caldwell reconstructs a kind of domestic textile industry in which the daughters of propertied elites leveraged familial funds to generate a profit. So too, perhaps, did enslaved spinners and weavers, some of whom learned their craft—and possibly economic skills—through apprenticeships elsewhere.

The other two chapters in this section seek to identify and discuss individual actors within the broader economic system. Barbara Kellum investigates the role of three priestesses, Eumachia, Mamia, and Alleia Decimilla, in shaping the Pompeian built environment in her chapter "Buying Power: The Public Priestesses of Pompeii." Each of these women utilized locally derived wealth and prestige to leave their mark on their city's Forum with a major public building, thereby entangling themselves with commercial and religious matters and aligning themselves, as Kellum demonstrates, with the imperial women commissioning public projects in Rome. Finally, Eve D'Ambra's chapter, "Real Estate for Profit: Julia Felix's Property and the Forum Frieze," considers the wall paintings chosen for one of the few known Roman commercial complexes owned and operated by a woman. Through a close visual analysis of a large-scale, prominently situated frieze depicting the very same Forum described above, D'Ambra highlights just how many women—of varying classes—are represented as economic

actors. Two women in expensively dyed garments, for example, are shown purchasing cloth from male vendors, while a garlanded woman assists a second vendor (Fig. 1). D'Ambra pushes us to view this fresco as a reflection, at least in part, of the lived experience of its patron.

The volume's second section considers how and where women self-identified within the urban environments of the Bay of Naples. For some contributors, this involves a re-appraisal of a more traditional category of evidence: portraiture. Co-editor Brenda Longfellow, for example, brings two different types of public portrait into conversation in her chapter "Contextualizing the Funerary and Honorific Portrait Statues of Women in Pompeii." On the one hand, she explores the role that women played in commissioning portraits for the façades of private tombs as a means by which to experiment with the construction of a public persona. At the same time, she demonstrates the stylistic effect these sculptures had on the officially sanctioned honorific portraits used to commemorate women in civic spaces. For Eumachia, whose roughly life-size marble portrait (Fig. 2) stood prominently within the multipurpose building she erected in the Forum, the funerary sculptures may have provided models of "how a Roman community might recognize women both as members of families and as individuals" (127). Elaine K. Gazda's chapter, "Portraits and Patrons: The Women of the Villa of the Mysteries in Their Social Context," continues the discussion of commemoration but brings us into the private world of the Villa of the Mysteries. Although its megalographic murals are most often discussed in the context of the Dionysiac mysteries, these paintings can also reveal how female members of the family, both living and not, were remembered within the home. Through careful analysis of the figures' faces—their features rendered clearer by a recent restoration—and by comparison with contemporary funerary portraits, Gazda identifies the isolated veiled figure as the *materfamilias* and the bride to whom she directs her gaze as her daughter. The former, Gazda argues, is likely deceased, based on both her

resemblance to the divine figure of Ariadne on the far wall and to the miniature commemorative portrait (formerly thought to be a mirror) held up to her daughter; the latter is possibly the frescoes' patron. Gazda highlights the care that was taken to render the women as both individuals and as members of a single household, one that celebrated Bacchic rites.

In the next chapter, "'What's in a Name?': Mapping Women's Names from the Graffiti of Pompeii and Herculaneum," Erika Zimmermann Damer takes us from the visual world to the textual one and to something far less monumental in form than sculpture or paintings. Damer has compiled a corpus of 265 graffiti from Pompeii and Herculaneum that includes 161 different certain or probable feminine names, most of them *cognomina* or personal names (as opposed to the family-name-plus-personal-name convention of more monumental inscriptions). The graffiti come from a variety of public and domestic contexts, and the evidence tentatively suggests that the women they name belonged to a range of social and economic classes. Damer agrees with several scholars (including the contributor of the next essay) that some of the graffitists were probably women, either literate or partially so, which makes the graffiti compelling evidence for women's presence and participation in the city as individuals. The final chapter in this section, Sarah Levin-Richardson's "The Public and Private Lives of Pompeian Prostitutes," likewise focuses on issues of self-representation and perceptibility. In combining textual and material evidence, she pushes back on the assumed, or perhaps even prescribed, invisibility of sex workers and argues for their participation in multiple types of community. The graffiti written on the walls of the purpose-built brothel in Pompeii and in other spaces where sex was likely sold attest to prostitutes' relationships with clients and to the active role they played in meeting certain physical *and* emotional needs. At the same time, objects used for hygiene and self-care might be interpreted as the remnants of the bonds these sex workers had with one another and as the material



Fig. 2. Statue of Eumachia (early 1st century CE), marble with polychromy, from Eumachia's building in the Forum, Pompeii, 64" tall. National Archaeological Museum, Naples, inv. no. 6232.

remains of the purchases, errands, and responsibilities that carried them throughout the city.

In some ways, the volume's final section is a continuation of the previous one, offering varied explorations into how women were depicted in the Bay of Naples. At the same time, the contributions in this section introduce a deeper exploration of audience. In her chapter, "Women, Art, Power, and Work in the House of the Chaste Lovers at Pompeii," Jennifer Trimble considers how a female viewer, particularly one involved in the work of the *pistrinum* (bakery) that occupied much of the building, might have evaluated the highly gendered and erot-

ic images on the walls of its *triclinium* (dining room). Each scene depicts two partially clad heterosexual couples, variously identified as prostitutes with clients or as wives with their husbands, who drink in a luxurious setting and are attended to by figures whose less obvious gender markers likely helped to convey their enslaved status. On the one hand, Trimble argues that these images affirmed for their viewers certain realities about labor and commercial success and about class- and gender-based hierarchies. At the same time, though, she sees them as representing a kind of fantasy world that was alluring yet unattainable. Luciana Jacobelli's chapter, "The House of the Triclinium (V.2.4) at Pompeii: The House of a 'Courtesan'?", likewise investigates how presuming a female audience might upend more traditional interpretations. By tracing depictions of female authority in the lively banqueting frescoes adorning the home's *triclinium*, as well as in nearby paintings of women teaching philosophy (Diotima to Socrates) or poetry (Corinna to Pindar, Sappho to a follower)—all of which were placed, importantly, within the more public areas of the house—Jacobelli suggests what no one has before: that a woman, perhaps an educated courtesan, owned the House of the Triclinium and used it for both social and economic purposes.

Jessica Powers, in her chapter "Sex on Display in Pompeii's Tavern VII.7.18," investigates the role of erotic imagery in commercial establishments,

focusing in particular on a polychromed and gilded relief fragment of a coupling man and woman. Originally belonging to a marble krater or other vessel, Powers argues that the relief was deliberately reused to enhance the establishment's existing decorative scheme and to attract visitors, thereby driving up sales. It was also a multivalent image, one that, like the *pistrinum* paintings discussed by Trimble, both reflected reality and encouraged imagination among its viewers, in this case the tavern's non-elite patrons and workers. For women in particular, the scene may have elicited positive or negative associations—of luxury and pleasure or of a lack of bodily autonomy. The final chapter in this section, Margaret L. Laird's "Drawings of Women at Pompeii," encourages us to consider what the sketches of mortal and mythological female figures that accompany graffiti can tell us about attitudes towards women. On the one hand, she demonstrates that although depictions of women were relatively uncommon in this medium, they nevertheless engaged and challenged their viewers, employing conspicuous placement and other strategies to attract the eye. At the same time, Laird's data reinforces several valuable conclusions presented by her fellow contributors, namely that women and depictions of them were present in nearly all parts of the city.

Overall, *Women's Lives, Women's Voices* is an incredibly important and

enlightening volume for which its editors and contributors should be commended. Although evidence is at times scant, each chapter returns agency to one or another group of women in the Bay of Naples, and these re-centering efforts involve women of many more classes, statuses, and communities than is typical. Methodologically, the contributors have succeeded in creating the kind of "inclusive toolbox" that Allison L. C. Emmerson argues in her epilogue is necessary for remedying the silences that still plague the archaeology of antiquity (279); as a result, they have created a series of models for how this work can be done across the Roman world. The volume's extensive bibliography, high production quality (including seventy-six figures and sixteen full-color plates), and relatively affordable price only enhance its utility and accessibility. Altogether, this volume heeds the call put forth by Emmerson to ensure that the study of women forms more than just a "special interest group" (277) among scholars of the ancient Mediterranean. •

Brigitte Keslinke is a fourth-year doctoral student in the Art and Archaeology of the Mediterranean World program at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research centers on ceramics, feasting, and religion, and her dissertation seeks to explore the role that food played in the transmission and adoption of foreign cults in the Roman world.

Errata et Corrigenda

In the Fall/Winter 2022 issue, the review of Mona Hadler and Kalliopi Minioudaki, eds., *Pop Art and Beyond: Gender, Race, and Class in the Global Sixties* (Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2022), erroneously refers to post-Soviet socialist feminist Pop art in Yugoslavia, discussed in Lina Džuverović's chapter "Yugoslav Pop, Female Artists, and the Emergence of Feminist Agency," as "Soviet." The *Woman's Art Journal* regrets the error.



Pl. 1. Dorothy Dehner, *Low Landscape Sideways* (1962), bronze, 18" x 28" x 6". Photo: © 2023 The Hyde Collection, Glen Falls, New York.



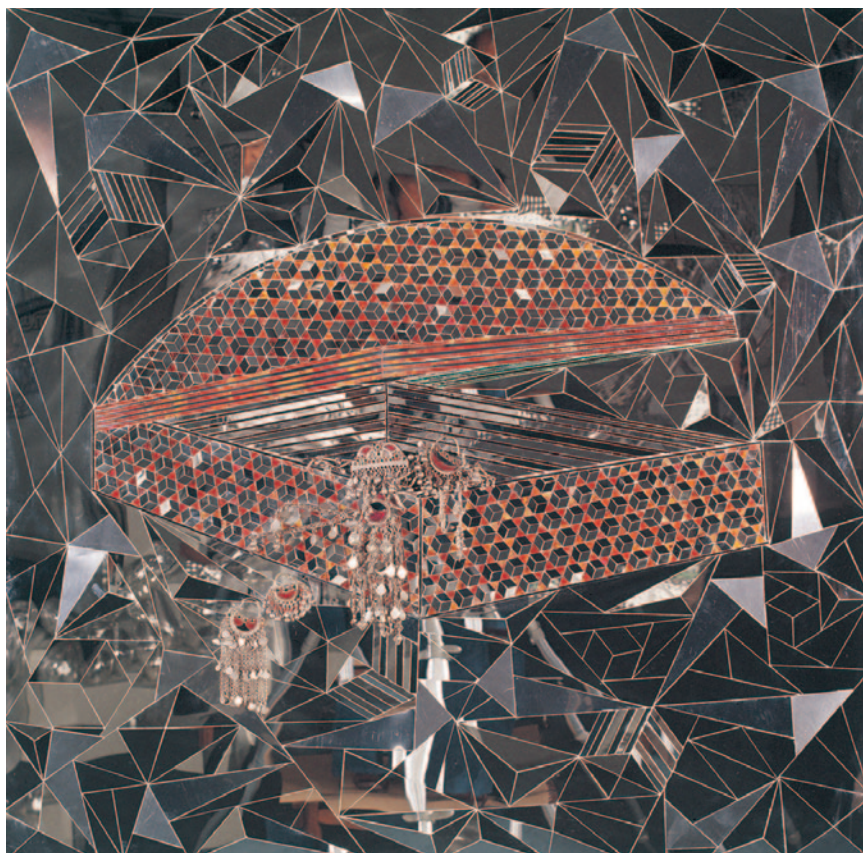
Pl. 2. Dorothy Dehner, *Jacob's Ladder No. 2* (1957), bronze, 31" x 8 3/4" x 7 1/4". The Levett Collection, Musée d'Art Classique de Mougins (MACM), France. Photo: © 2023 The Levett Collection.



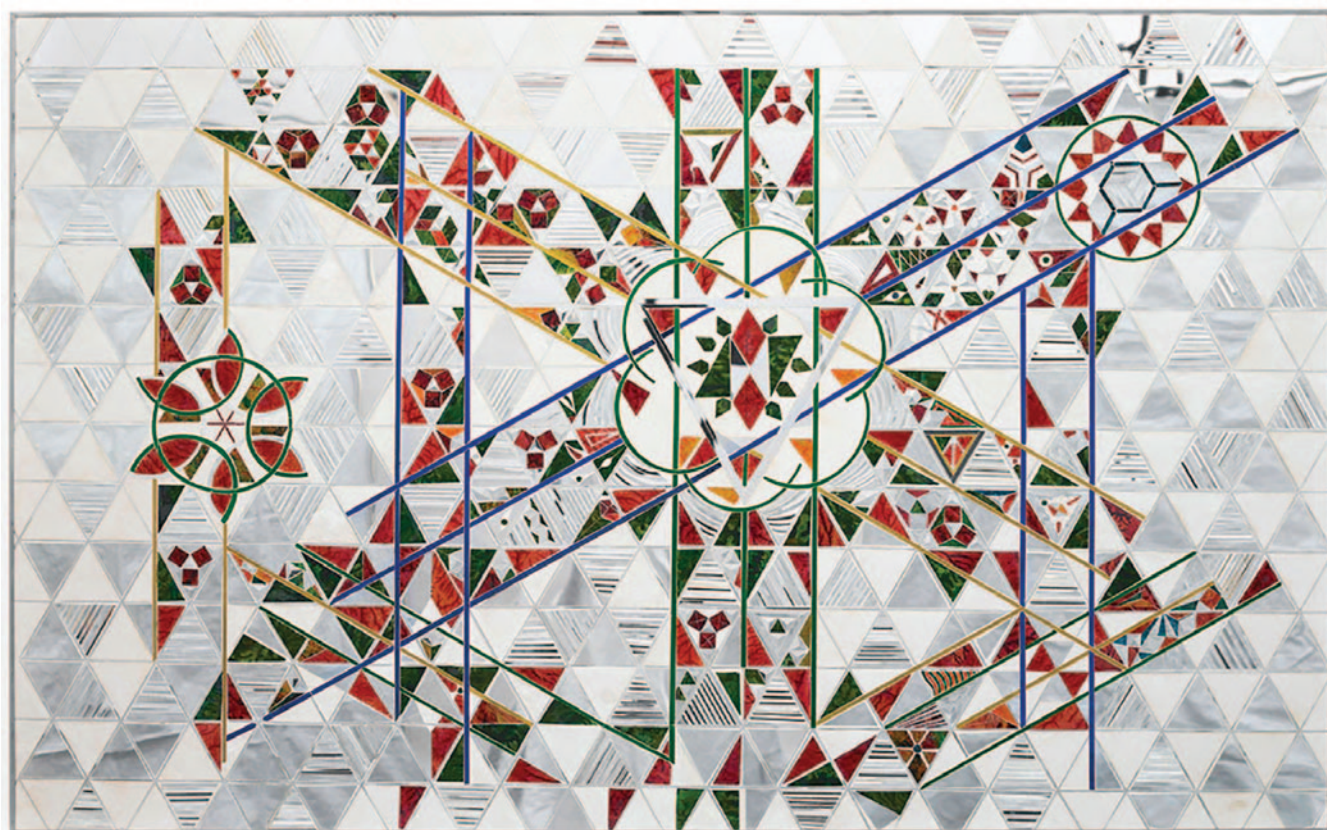
Pl. 3. Dorothy Dehner, *Hanging Piece* (1960), bronze, 32" x 5" x 4 1/4".
The Levett Collection. Photo: © 2023 The Levett Collection.

Pl. 4. Dorothy Dehner, *The City to the Bridge* (1970), wood construction, 14 1/2" x 34" x 3". Photo: Berry Campbell
Gallery, New York. © 2023 Dorothy Dehner Foundation.

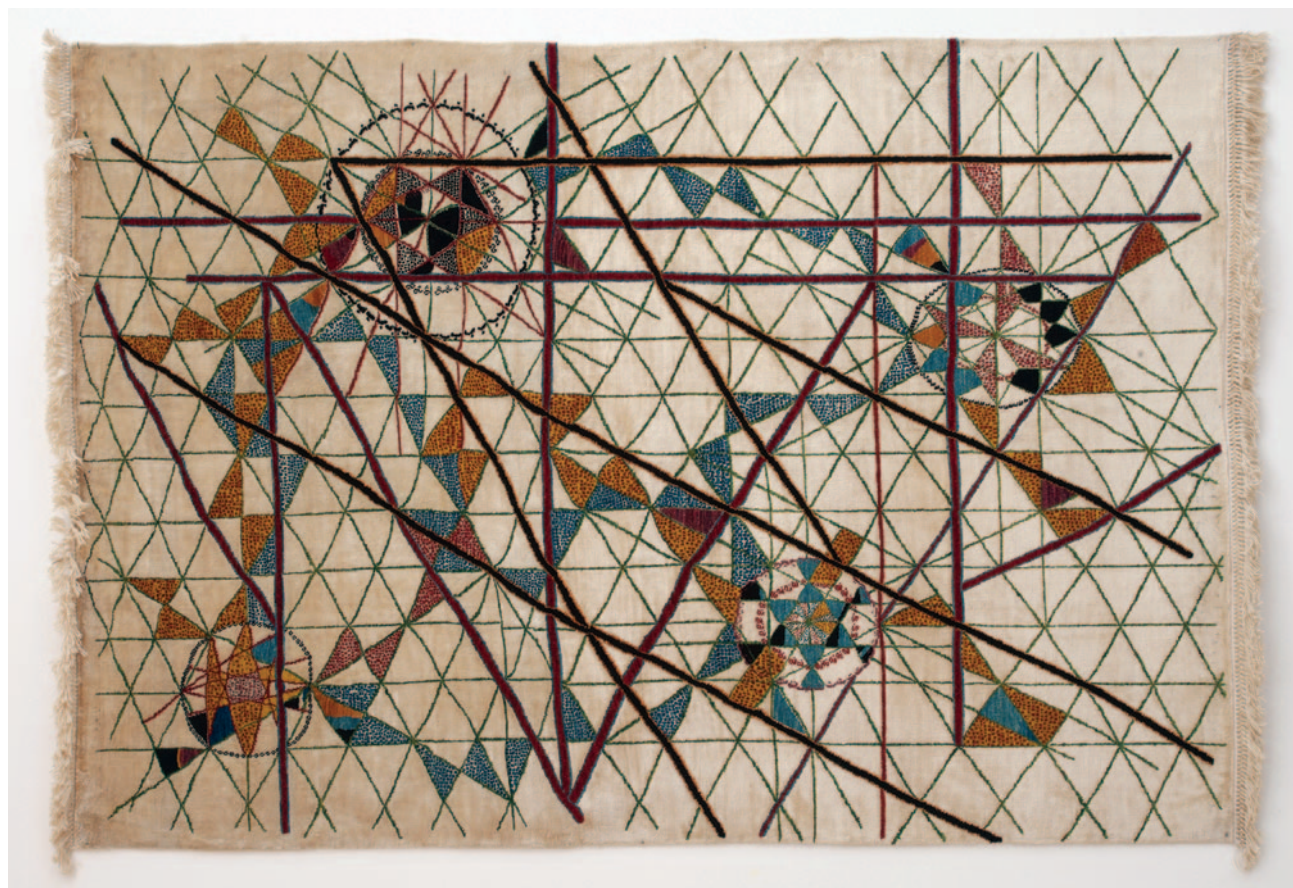




Pl. 5. Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, *Jewels* (1974), mirror, silver bedouin jewelry, reverse-glass painting, plaster on wood, 39 3/8" x 39 3/8". Central Bank Collection, Tehran. Photo: courtesy the estate of the artist and Third Line Gallery, Dubai. © Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian.



Pl. 6. Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, *Gabbah* (2009), mirror, reverse-painted glass, and plaster on wood, 37" x 59 1/2" x 2". Photo: courtesy the estate of the artist and Haines Gallery. © Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian.



Pl. 7. Monir Shahrourdy Farmanfarmaian, *Tapestry Work 12* (2012), naturally dyed silk and wool, hand-woven in Tabriz, 62" x 40".
Photo: courtesy the estate of the artist and Haines Gallery. © Monir Shahrourdy Farmanfarmaian.



Pl. 8. Monir Shahrourdy Farmanfarmaian, *Untitled (Muqarnas)* (2012), mirrors, reverse-glass painting, and plaster on wood, 59" x 86" x 12".
High Museum of Art, purchase with funds from the Farideh & Al Azadi Foundation, 2019.174. © Monir Shahrourdy Farmanfarmaian.



Pl. 9. Frances Kuehn, *Hineni, A Self-Portrait* (1972), acrylic on canvas, 108" x 72". © Frances Kuehn.



Pl. 10. Frances Kuehn, *XY* (2001),
acrylic on canvas, 68" x 38".
© Frances Kuehn.



Pl. 11. Frances Kuehn, *Second Drawer Right, Bottom Shelf Left* (2008), acrylic on canvas, 28" x 40". © Frances Kuehn.



Pl. 12. Frances Kuehn, *Foursquare* (2022), acrylic on canvas, 20" x 20".
© Frances Kuehn.



Pl. 13. Frances Kuehn, *Enclosure* (2016), acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18". © Frances Kuehn.



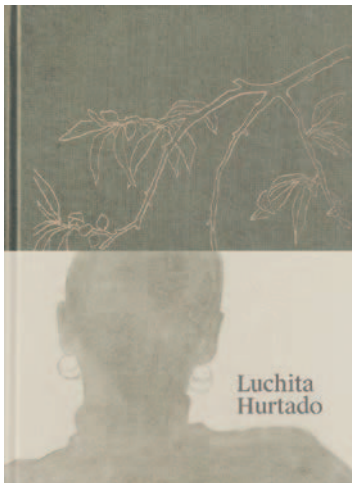
Pl. 14. Romaine Brooks, *Azalées Blanches (White Azaleas)* (1910), oil on canvas, 59 1/2" x 107".
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the artist, 1966.49.5.



Pl. 15. Romaine Brooks, *Peter (A Young English Girl)* (1923-24), oil on canvas, 36 1/8" x 24 1/2".
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the artist, 1970.70.



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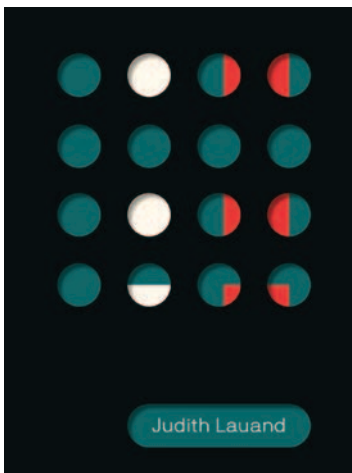
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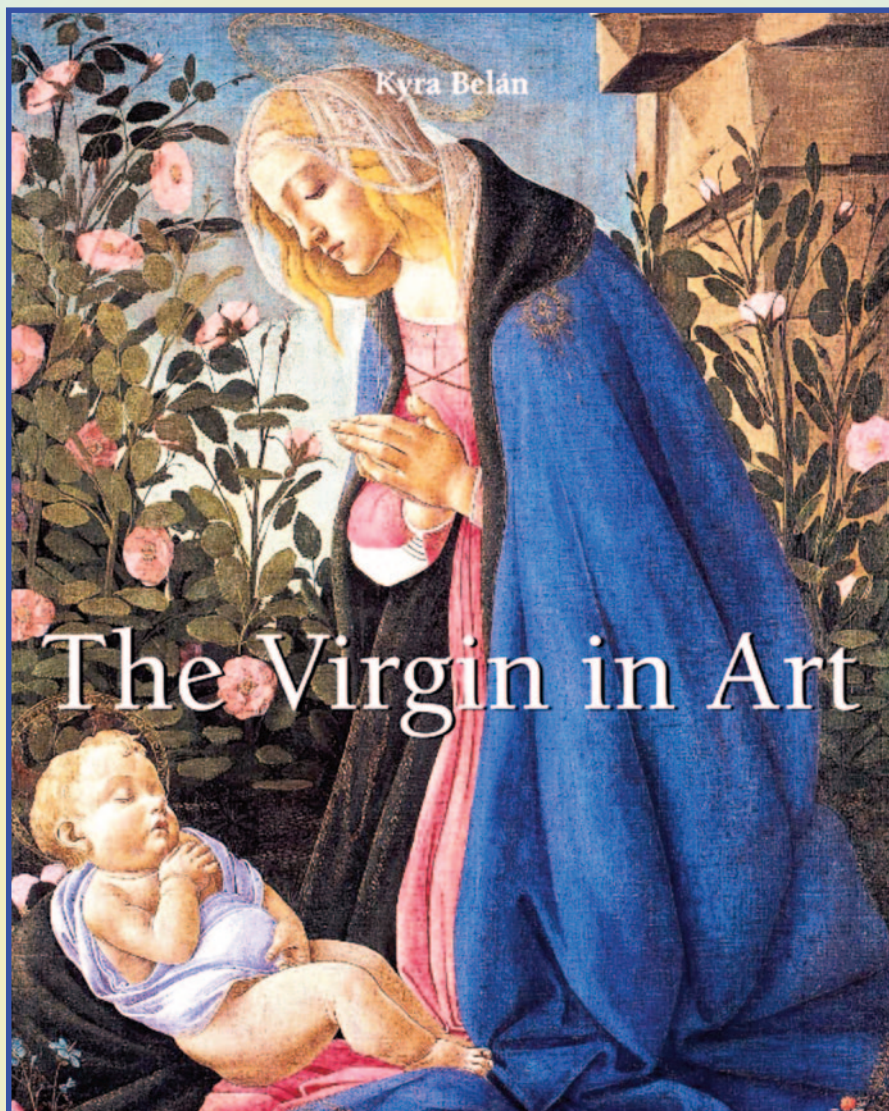
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