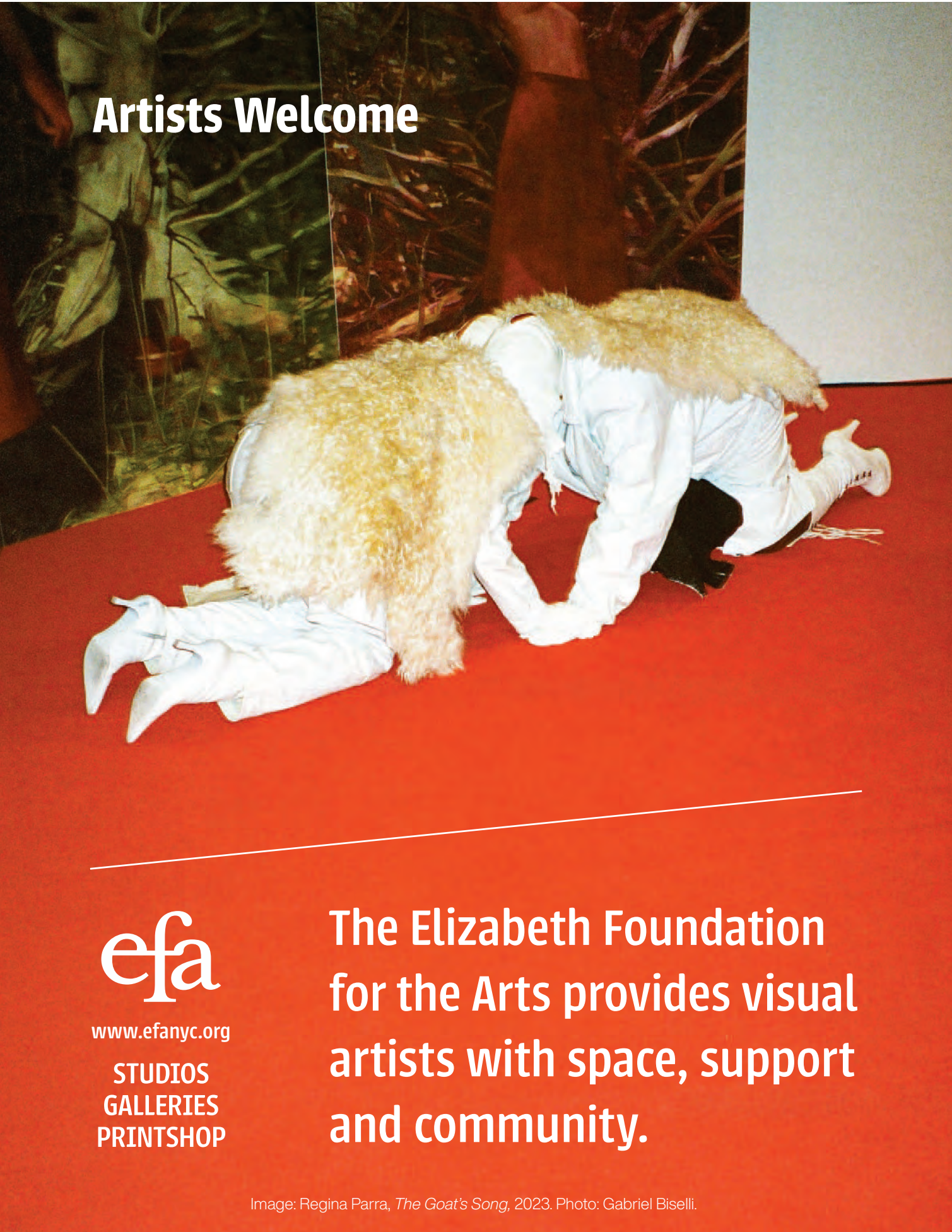


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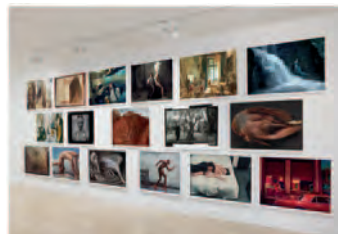
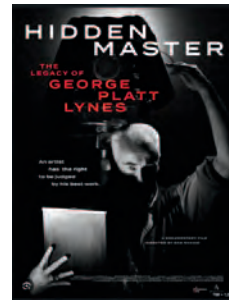
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(Front cover) Kati Horna, *Remedios Varo Wearing a Mask by Leonora Carrington* (1957), gelatin silver print, 10 1/2" x 10 9 7/8".

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PARALLEL PERSPECTIVES

One hundred years after the publication of André Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto* of 1924, the irrefutably patriarchal international art movement continues to invite admonition from feminist art historians. As the *Woman's Art Journal* has focused on art-historical discoveries since our very first issues from the 1980s, perhaps there is no better act bringing to light Surrealism's untold feminist narratives than Julia Skelly's presentation on Kati Horna's "alchemical" photographs. Made in Mexico City, Horna's illuminating series of dolls and masks, like Remedios Varo's knitting women and Leonora Carrington's kitchens and spells, serve not only as sites of transformation but games of magic and witchcraft. On our cover, Horna's tremendous 1957 triple portrait, portraying Varo enveloped in Carrington's handmade mask, is characterized by Skelly as the "three witches of Surrealism," a new conceptualization offering the powerful prospect of changing identities. Several women featured in WAJ's Fall/Winter volume share an interest in Mexico and its artists, and others determine to advocate for women's rights as well as cultural and personal autonomy.

Drawing on the folk magic of Mexico's *brujería* (witchcraft) to protect feminist artists and women under patriarchy, Mónica Mayer has fostered a unique artistic practice through her vast social networks and collaborative praxis attuned to Mexican traditions and sensibilities. Bárbara Tyner's stirring article on Mayer presents the chronological span of the artist's career bookended by her signature performance, *El tendadero* (The Clothesline) of 1978, still reactivated globally, and her most recent, riveting photography series, *inter-Pelación* of 2024. Mayer's deeply-rooted grip on feminist art in Mexico is constantly tested by the judicial structures that normalize misogyny and *feminicidio*/femicide. On *El tendadero*'s benign yet ruthless nature, Tyner writes that it is, as Breton described Frida Kahlo, "*Un listón alrededor de una bomba*" ([A] ribbon tied around a bomb).

Tamara Trodd turns to archival sketchbooks to reconstruct the feminist histories and criticisms in the US and UK surrounding British artist Helen Chadwick's singular installation, *Of Mutability (The Oval Court)*, in 1986 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. Chadwick's career, technical processes of photocopy collage, and poetic influences are grounded in pleasure and materiality of the naked body, aligned by Trodd to "goddess" imagery of the 1970s and '80s. Both Mayer and Chadwick responded to Frida Kahlo's discourses on the body and pain. Horna's artisanal masks, Mayer's homemade *tendederos*, and Chadwick's xeroxed goddesses embody the principal characteristic of change, generating polyvalent *mutations* not only in the sexed female body but in feminist movements.

Not unlike Chadwick's cut-paper shards and fragments, the collage paintings of postwar artist Libbie Mark offer new constructive exercises and formal discoveries that contribute to the rich histories of collage. Mark painted on the margins of Abstract Expressionism, and her venues for creating and exhibiting her work were limited initially by the demands of family life on Long Island. Jillian Russo frames Mark's history

and visual relationships within the durable networks of women artists in New York and Massachusetts, building her friendships and associations with Betty Holliday Deckoff, Grace Hartigan, Helen Frankenthaler, and others. Eventually studying with Hans Hofmann in Provincetown, Mark's vibrant paintings and collages were her personal response to the color and spatial complexes of Abstract Expressionism, a movement that was shared by other women, and one uniquely developed by Mark until her early death from cancer.

WAJ's stellar lineup of book reviews was rigorously developed and guided by book reviews editor Alison Poe, supported by contributing editor Erin Devine. Em Kapp brings to life an exhibition catalogue tracing modernism's indebtedness to the objects, techniques, and materialities making up the vital field of textiles—inspired by the woven histories and studies of queerness, Indigeneity, labor, disability, and technology. Discussions on nature, the body, color, and selfhood, comprising the thematic sections of an ambitious exhibition catalogue on women's portraits and figuration at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, are framed by Gabrielle Stecher in the broader context of contemporary politics and the engagement of gender, race, ageism, and sexuality that bear on the subject. Sally Brown brings insight, humor, and uplifting prose to her comparative review of two uniquely challenging approaches to autobiography, memoir, and storytelling, manifested in the advocacy and activism of their fearless authors, the eco-feminist Betsy Damon and the groundbreaking curator Lucy Lippard.

Julia Alting reflects upon the mechanics of feminist and queer curator and podcaster Helen Molesworth's non-hierarchical and nonlinear art criticisms, a "thinking-as-writing" across generations, kinship, and time, explored over her scintillating thirty-year career. Discerning the multifarious roles and theoretical positions of the female gaze in fashion magazines fixated on the "woman-child" trope, Debbie McCarthy's review explores the social and sexual nuances of identity formation caught between childhood and womanhood as conceived and manipulated by the fashion industry. Enhancing her feature article in this issue on Kati Horna, Julia Skelly presents a major book on twentieth-century women photographers in Mexico that foregrounds Indigenous and Afro-Mexican subjects. Staying true to the feminist principle (espoused by our board members Mary Garrard and Norma Broude) that alternate forms of women's agency are worthy of study, Funda Karayel attends to the trailblazing Black art space, JAM, founded by visionary Linda Goode Bryant. Michelle Donnelly investigates postwar graphic arts in *The Contemporaries*, an innovative woman-run printmaking workshop-gallery, eventually merged with Pratt Institute, led by the enterprising Margaret Lowengrund. Lily Scott engages the complex arguments on Marie Laurencin's sapphic modernist aesthetic in early twentieth-century Paris. •

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

DOLLS, MASKS, AND WITCHES

KATI HORNA'S ALCHEMICAL PHOTOGRAPHY

By Julia Skelly

Born in Budapest, Hungarian Jewish artist Kati Horna (née Katalin Deutsch Blau, 1912–2000) took the photographs at Leonora Carrington's wedding to Hungarian press photographer Emerico (Chiki) Weisz in Mexico City in 1946; she appears in one photo, taken that day, most likely by her husband, José Horna (Fig. 1).¹ Portraits of Horna are rare, but one extant photograph shows her from the side, her eyes concealed by the camera (Fig. 2).² Horna, who famously (but not famously enough) fled Budapest, then Berlin, then Paris, then Barcelona, emigrated under duress to



Fig. 1. José Horna, *Untitled* (1946). Wedding of Leonora Carrington and Emerico (Chiki) Weisz with their guests at the home of Kati and José Horna in Mexico City. Front, l–r: Kati Horna, Chiki Weisz, Leonora Carrington, and Gunther Gerzso; Back: Benjamin Peret and Miriam Wolfe. Gelatin silver print, 7 5/8" x 7 1/4". © Sucesión Kati y José Horna/The Estate of Kati and José Horna. Photograph courtesy of Dr. Salomon Grimberg.



Fig. 2. Ana María Norah Horna y Fernández, *Untitled* (Portrait of Kati Horna) (1983), gelatin silver print, 8" x 10". © Sucesión Kati y José Horna/Estate of Kati and José Horna.

Mexico in 1939. There she met English painter Carrington (1917–2011) and Spanish artist Remedios Varo (1908–1963), among other Surrealist expats, becoming part of the circle of "Surreal friends" in Mexico.³ As art historian Nancy Deffebach has demonstrated, in the Mexican postrevolutionary period (1920–1940), women artists were important figures in the fight for women's rights. Deffebach refers explicitly to "European surrealists" Carrington, Horna, Alice Rahon (1904–1987), and Varo.⁴ All of these artists, according to Deffebach, created their most important work in Mexico. Carrington, Rahon, and Varo became known as the "three fairies of Surrealism." In what



Fig. 3. Kati Horna, *Remedios Varo Wearing a Mask by Leonora Carrington* (1957), gelatin silver print, 10 7/16" x 10 11/16". © Sucesión Kati y José Horna/The Estate of Kati and José Horna.

follows, the focus will be on Carrington, Varo, and Horna as the three witches (*las tres brujas*) of Surrealism, reflecting on a series of portraits that Horna took depicting Varo as the starting point and core objects of analysis for this article in connection with her photographs of dolls and masks.

In 1957, Horna created one of her most well-known photographs, which depicts Varo in profile, wearing a mask made by Carrington (front cover).⁵ This photograph's broader meaning and interpretation, like the 2010 exhibition, *Surreal Friends*, will depart from the previous conceptualization of female Surrealists in Mexico as "fairies" to what will be described here as the "three witches of Surrealism," namely Carrington, Varo, and Horna. There are several photographs from Horna's session with Varo, including Varo facing forward (1957; Fig. 3) and in a three-quarter profile. Varo migrated to Mexico in 1941; Carrington arrived in 1942.⁶ The black lace embellishing the mask's two embossed faces, possessing large staring eyes mirrored by those of the sitter, Varo, can be read as

a mantilla (a Spanish or Latin American shawl), or, from a distance, as its own dark unruly hair. Either way, this is the crone, the wise woman, the witch.⁷ This photograph can be read as a triple portrait of Varo, Carrington, and Horna, recalling the three Weird Sisters of *Macbeth*, or the three fates of Greek mythology. Carrington was well versed in Celtic history and symbolism, and she likely discussed it with Horna.⁸ The triquetra is a Celtic three-cornered symbol, and it signifies the power of three. From a pagan perspective, it symbolizes the maiden, the mother, and the crone.

While Carrington and Varo have received an abundance of scholarly and critical attention, not so Horna, although importantly, several of her photographs were included in the exhibition, *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States*, organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2012.⁹ More recently, there have been two solo exhibitions of Horna's work in Paris and New York (discussed below), and her photographs are

included in a large thematic exhibition of Latin American artists, many negotiating Surrealist subjects, titled the *Third Eye*, at Fundación Malba, Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires, in Argentina (2024–25).¹⁰ In 1995, Miriam Basilio observed, “Despite her importance for Mexican photography, [Horna’s] work has not been thoroughly documented.”¹¹ In a review of the catalogue of the 2010 exhibition, *Surreal Friends: Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Kati Horna*, Pamela Simpson noted that “someone looking at the title of this book might ask, ‘Who is Horna?’”¹² Simpson adds the important context that

Carrington and Varo were part of Mexico’s avant-garde, and with the feminist movement’s rediscovery of women artists their reputations have continued to grow. But Horna was never as well known, partly because she rejected publicity and refused to exhibit. She was a professional photographer doing magazine work and teaching to earn her living, and not even her daughter knew about the surrealist montages Horna had been creating since the 1930s. It was not until after her death [in 2000] that this rich cache came to light. This exhibit was one of the first opportunities for the public to discover the photographs.¹³

Although there are many possible answers to Simpson’s question, “Who is Horna?,” this article offers one primary answer: Horna was a Jewish, anti-fascist, feminist, and empathetic photographer who migrated several times under duress. These subject positions, lived experiences, and political stances informed most, if not all of Horna’s photographs, including her *Hitlerei* (Hitler) series from 1937 discussed in the next section, her photographs taken during the Spanish Civil War, and her depictions of fellow female artists in Mexico.¹⁴ Since the 2010 exhibition *Surreal Friends*, exhibitions and publications dedicated to Horna’s work have focused on the influence of Mexico on her photography and, more recently, her war photography, specifically the photographs she took during the Spanish Civil War at the request of the Spanish Republican government between 1937 and 1939.¹⁵ Some of these photographs depict women as both mothers and members of the militia. For instance, she photographed a woman wearing the militia’s overalls for a propaganda album commissioned by the National Worker’s Confederation.¹⁶ The title of the 1937 photograph is *Manola, la madre de los milicianos, Ingrés (División Ascaso)* (Manola, the Mother Militiaman, Ingrés [Ascaso Column]). According to Basilio, “As an emancipated and highly-mobile young woman herself, the question of gender equality was one within which [Horna] engaged critically—if arguably, somewhat discreetly—with her wartime body of work.”¹⁷ In 2014, the first retrospective of Horna’s work was organized by the Museo Amparo in Puebla, Mexico, and the Jeu de Paume in Paris, France.¹⁸ Her war photography is significant and places her in the important group of female war photographers that includes Americans Lee Miller (1907–1977) and Margaret Bourke-White (1904–1971).¹⁹



Fig. 4. Kati Horna in collaboration with Wolf Burger, *Untitled* from the series *Hitlerei* (Hitler) (1937), gelatin silver print, 6 5/8" x 4 3/5".
© Sucesión Kati y José Horna/The Estate of Kati and José Horna.

Horna’s humorous, anti-Hitler photograph of 1937 (Fig. 4) shows us vividly that she was an anti-fascist photographer. It is possible to put Horna’s *Hitlerei* series in dialogue with a photograph that portrays Claude Cahun (1894–1954) with a Nazi badge trapped between her teeth. This photograph was taken in 1945 after Cahun and Marcel Moore, her longtime partner, had been released from prison by the Allies. They had been imprisoned for several years in German-occupied Jersey for taking part in the French Resistance. In her self-portrait, Cahun stands confidently, even rakishly, against a doorframe, staring down the camera, with a Nazi eagle badge clenched in her teeth like the cat who has caught the canary. By contrast, Horna’s photograph from the *Hitlerei* series was produced in Paris, in collaboration with Wolfgang Burger, depicting an egg (in an egg cup) sporting a frowning Hitler face (recognizable by his mustache) and tiny arms that appear to be made out of twisted metal wire, raised above other unadorned, faceless eggs (the faceless German mass, perhaps). A finger (possibly Burger’s) enters the photograph from above and presses down on top of the egg’s head. This is not “the creative power of the egg/woman” that Janice Helland discusses in relation to Carrington’s paintings.²⁰ Of her series of photographs depicting eggs, Horna once said:

Before I left [Paris in 1937], everyone mocked me, “there’s the photographer,” I was the photographer of eggs. I had this idea of being the first one to do things, not with figurines, but little stories with eggs, and it was that wonderful draughtsman who subsequently committed suicide who did the faces for me.... The first was the romantic story of a carrot and a potato. The carrot declared its love to the potato. He always did the faces and I staged the scenes. I took the photos with my big camera with 4 x 5 negatives.²¹

Basilio observes that Horna’s “ironic sense of humour” was first evident in her *Café de Paris* series (1934–35).²² With her *Hitlerei* series, Horna turned her ironic (or sardonic) sense of humor towards a fascist dictator, using egg symbolism to reveal her understanding that he was not only a tiny little man with dangerous ideas, but also a fragile and vulnerable one. This was not Horna’s only entrée in political visual culture. She contributed photographs to several anarchist publications in Spain as well as for the anarchist-feminist magazine *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women) that accompanied the independent organization of the same name (Madrid, 1936–37); following her experiences photographing the Spanish Civil War, she became a staunch anti-fascist.²³

In the introduction to her book about the feminist uncanny, Alexandra Kokoli asks, “Why witches?”²⁴ She observes: “The Greek mythical monster, Medusa, famously discussed by Freud in reference to the castration complex, became a cipher for intrepid femininity that made ‘an explosive, utterly destructive, staggering return,’” citing Hélène Cixous’s important feminist essay, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” of 1975.²⁵ Kokoli continues: “Through the seventies and for the duration of the feminist second wave, a networked collaborative manifesto appears to have been woven across a growing body of theoretical writing as well as visual art practices, in which witches and female monsters are not merely reclaimed but reimagined as symbols of resistance and even of revolutionary agents.”²⁶ Building upon Kokoli’s feminist revolutionary line of thought, this article also asks, Why witches? One answer is: Because witches are, more than anything else, powerful.²⁷ It is not insignificant that in her memoir, *Waking the Witch: Reflections on Women, Magic, and Power*, the writer and curator Pam Grossman includes a chapter entitled “The Dark Arts: Magic Makers and Craft Women,” in which she discusses, among others, Varo and Carrington, as well as Leonor Fini (1907–1996), Ithell Colquhoun (1906–1988), and Dorothea Tanning (1910–2012).²⁸ As Grossman observes, Varo’s “work is full of images that blur the boundaries between magic and science: alchemists experiment with musical notes, crystals and plants; time and space are represented as a translucent woven basket or a window overlapping itself; strange lands are populated with clocks, wheeled vehicles, architecturally complex towers.”²⁹ Carrington “began to develop her own notions about kitchens as magically charged spaces to concoct potions, weave spells,

prepare herbs, and conduct ‘alchemical’ cooking experiments,” Susan Aberth writes about the artistic domains of the hearth’s alchemy and magic;³⁰ in the mid to late 1940s, Carrington “became preoccupied in her work with the transformation of the feminine domestic sphere into a site of magical power, specifically through the correspondence between food preparation, magic and painting.”³¹ Kitchens appear in several of Carrington’s paintings, including *The House Opposite* (1945), where, at the lower right, three female figures in long robes stir a clear cauldron full of translucent, bubbling green liquid; they materialize again in the later *Grandmother Moorhead’s Aromatic Kitchen* (1975). Both works were included in the 2022 exhibition, *Surrealism and Magic: Enchanting Modernity*, at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.³²

Grossman further remarks that “Varo’s work often depicts textiles being spun or sewn, and she sometimes reveals them as being the fabric of the universe itself.”³³ Painting, sewing, and photography can all be productively thought of as alchemical processes. According to Mary Warner Marien: “The basic meaning of the word ‘photography’ is light writing.... When a nineteenth-century photographer placed a leaf on light-sensitized paper and exposed the paper to sunlight, the result was a photograph.”³⁴ In other words, photography, like painting, turns something (a piece of metal or paper) into something else of greater value (the photograph) through a process of transformation (exposure to light), and, as such, many artists, critics, and scholars have identified photography with alchemy.³⁵ Taken further, we can define “alchemical desire” as a desire for transformation from a “base” material (or an unsatisfactory society) to a greater, more valuable material (or a more progressive society). To ascribe alchemy or the *alchemical* to Varo’s knitting women, Carrington’s kitchens, and Horna’s photography is to identify these acts and spaces as sites of transformation and as sites of feminist “worldmaking.”³⁶

Drawing on her wartime experiences, Horna’s doll photographs, series that also include her *Muñecas del miedo* (Dolls of Fear) series from 1939, hold significance for her representations of female subjects, both animate and inanimate. Her dolls invite a consideration not only of German artist Hans Bellmer’s fragmented and mechanical dolls—which Mary Ann Caws describes as his “famously terrible and terrifying images”³⁷—but also some of Dada artist Hannah Höch’s (1889–1978) work, for example, *The Bride (Pandora)* (1924–27), a painting (resembling a collage) portraying a bride with the concerned (or perhaps befuddled) face of a baby doll.³⁸ Ruth Hemus underscores the fact that three female Dadaists—Höch, Emmy Hennings (1885–1948), and Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889–1943)—all created dolls or puppets. For Hemus, their “use of dolls ... constitute an ongoing engagement with and exploration of representations of the female body, the doll being deeply entrenched as a cultural signifier for the female body.”³⁹ Horna’s photographs depicting dolls and masks create mysterious, even mystical, visions of women that combine sex and magic, but also the violence of the Medusan gaze.⁴⁰ This gaze constructed by the woman Surrealist petrifies the (male) viewer and interpellates

the female/femme viewer, inviting rather than pathologizing an erotic response informed by a sense of the viewer's own sexual desires and embodied pleasures. It may be argued that Horna's mask photographs are a departure from her doll photographs in that the dolls speak to the infantilizing gaze of the male Surrealist in early twentieth-century Europe, while her masks are an erotic, perhaps even angry riposte to the Surrealist male desire for muse and *femme enfant*, or, put another way, for a sexy doll rather than a sexually mature female subject. While the male Surrealists talked a big game about sexual equality, as Gwen Raaberg has demonstrated, their art (and indeed their treatment of their many wives, mistresses, and muses) revealed a desire, perhaps unconscious, for a passive female partner.⁴¹ Acknowledging the shared if not divergent "psycho-social formations" of men and women, as Griselda Pollock does for modernism's co-creation, in Horna's photography dolls do not kill nor are they killed, yet they are fragmented, not unlike Bellmer's photographs of his dolls.⁴² This portrayal of Surrealist violence reaches a zenith, of course, with Alberto Giacometti's bronze sculpture, *Woman with her Throat Cut* (1932), which was apparently inspired by the artist's own violent sexual fantasies that helped the poor man sleep.⁴³

Dawn Ades observes that, like several of her contemporaries, Horna engaged with the rich and troubled symbolism of the doll.⁴⁴ In Horna's *La muñeca* (The Doll) from 1949 (Fig. 5), a close-up of a baby doll's head rests on wavy-patterned, wooden floor planks. This is a departure from many paintings by male Surrealists where the female subject-object is headless, reduced to a mere body. It cannot be a coincidence that Horna has turned this trope on its head, including the face, but no body. The head as site of not just identity and individuality but also intellect and interiority is present rather than erased. The uncanny fragmentation here repels the expectant gaze; anticipating the naked female body rather than a baby doll face is the stuff of horror movies and nightmares. Varo, Carrington, and Horna all engaged with a range of esoteric subjects, Basilio points out, simultaneously exploring hermeticism, Eastern religions, and alchemy, as well as psychoanalysis. Referring in all three artists' works to their "blurring of boundaries between the animate and inanimate," masks and dolls encompass two tropes that were of clear interest to Horna, so much so that she sometimes combined them in one photograph.⁴⁵ In another 1948 photograph from the *Doll* series, a puppet-like doll that Horna made wears a headdress and a beaded garment with a diamond-shaped papier mâché face. Basilio further connects these features in her observation that "the doll's appearance bears a striking resemblance to that of the central figure in Carrington's painting *Temple of the Word* of 1954." She continues, "Both figures possess a third eye, symbol of visionary powers. A series known as *Woman and Mask* of 1963 incorporates many of the images and themes Horna shared with Varo and Carrington. Tableaus of objects that appear in many of her photographs (dolls, masks made by Varo, Carrington, and Horna); [and] items associated with femininity and the private sphere ... are part of a number of representations of domestic



Fig. 5. Kati Horna, *La muñeca* (The Doll) (1949), gelatin silver print, 9 11/16" x 7 5/8". © Sucesión Kati y José Horna/The Estate of Kati and José Horna.

settings as sites of transformation and artistic creation present in the work of all three artists."⁴⁶

In Horna's photographs, the doll is both victim and threat. An earlier untitled 1939 photograph from Horna's series *Dolls of Fear* (Fig. 6), produced in Paris, depicts two—a doubling—of doll faces, one cracked in multiple places, eyes dislodged, filling the pictorial space. Are the dolls stand-ins for fearful women, or are viewers meant to be afraid of these broken-faced, bodiless, and fractured looming dolls? On the left she has the tiny red bow-shaped mouth of the sexualized baby doll, yet her eyes are mostly scratched out, leaving white, gaping blanks, increasing the image's eeriness and the doll's uncanniness—just a head, vacant expression, and lipsticked mouth suggesting a degree of personality, although a malignant one. Doll and mask tropes combined, the doll head as abject threat is underscored through excess (that is, the sheer number of the dolls) in a photograph from the 1961–63 series *Mujer y máscara* (Woman and Mask) (Fig. 7). Striking a diagonal, balletic pose, a woman with dark hair in a black sweater, plaid skirt, and black tights is depicted holding a monstrous mask with horns and fangs. At her feet are at least twenty dirty, discarded doll heads. Their eyes appear to be gouged from their heads, enhancing their threatening appearance that seem to encroach on her feet. Or, read a different way, they are part of her army; she is not afraid of them but seeks to avenge their destruction. A doll's



Fig. 6. Kati Horna, *Untitled* from the series *Muñecas del miedo* (Dolls of Fear) (c. 1939), gelatin silver print, 8" x 10". © Sucesión Kati y José Horna/The Estate of Kati and José Horna.

appearance by male artists suggests that women (perceived as dolls) are fungible, discardable, whereas in Horna's photographs, the doll head (and fragmented body) is the return of the violently repressed feminine. By clutching and possibly dancing with a monster mask, although in this instance she does not wear it, the female subject in Horna's photograph is harnessing the power of what Barbara Creed has called the monstrous-feminine, the threatening, and thus powerful woman, that exists in horror films.⁴⁷

Might this mask be that of the minotaur? In her article on animal symbolism in Carrington's paintings, Helland discusses the minotaur, and it seems highly likely that, like the crone mask in the portrait of Varo (see Fig. 3 and front cover), this horned mask was also made by Carrington.⁴⁸ Varo, Carrington, and Horna regularly had dress-up nights, wearing homemade costumes and masks as a kind of Surrealist game of changing their identities for the evening. Then, they would all incorporate these masks into their work.⁴⁹ On the appearance of the minotaur theme in Carrington's esoteric feminism, Helland states:

In the 1953 painting *And Then We Saw the Daughter of the Minotaur*, Carrington's two young children, Gabriel and Pablo, are introduced to an elegant, gentle "Daughter of the Minotaur." The children gaze at the white "Hathor-horned" creature.... Again, most of the components of

the painting are symbols for female deities or magic: the white dog and the grain are symbols of the Greek goddess Demeter; the butterfly can be associated with the Minoan goddess or with a female deity in general.... But the most interesting symbol in the painting is the white cow who is the Daughter of the Minotaur. The cow is a symbol of the female deity, while the minotaur was an important theme for the Surrealists. The Surrealist minotaur was a creature of the libido, the epitome of unfettered passion. He is the beast/man about to encounter Theseus, who suggests intellect and rationality. The minotaur was sex, sadism, violence, and debasement; to the Surrealist, he represented the unconscious mind and unleashed irrationality.... Carrington, twisting the theme to her own purposes, depicts a white cow (goddess) as a "Daughter" of the minotaur. The image is serene, calm, commanding, and sovereign. Dread, debasement, and erotic violence are absent.⁵⁰

For many Surrealists, the minotaur symbolized "sex, sadism, violence, and debasement," however, if the mask in Horna's photograph is read as the minotaur rather than, for example, Carrington's white cow-goddess Hathor, can we sit with the discomfort of acknowledging that not all women want the same kinds of power, positionality, or sex? The elegant woman



Fig. 7. Kati Horna, *Untitled* from the series *Mujer y máscara* (Women and Mask) (c. 1963), gelatin silver print, 8 1/2" x 7 3/4".
© Sucesión Kati y José Horna/The Estate of Kati and José Horna.

pictured in Horna's photograph holds the mask away from her face while contemplating the fallen, destroyed dolls. What happens next when she dons the minotaur mask? Symbolically, she may harness the power of that mythological figure—one that signifies violence, sex, pleasure, and even destruction. From her beginnings in Europe as an anarcho-feminist artist who had survived both the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, to her long-lasting émigré status in Mexico, might the minotaur serve for Horna as a seductive metaphorical figure to embrace, the monstrous-feminine creature that allowed women the possibility of imagining and inhabiting not just sexual pleasure but also violent revolution? It is not just the male Surrealists who had access to violent fantasies and dreams, sexual or otherwise.

While Horna never photographed herself in a mask—although she conceals part of her face with the viewfinder of her camera in a portrait taken by her daughter, Ana María Norah Horna y Fernández (see Fig. 2)—she did capture Varo from various angles behind a mask made by Carrington in her series of portraits all titled *Remedios Varo Wearing a Mask by Leonora Carrington* (see Fig. 3 and front cover). This is a triple portrait of three Surrealist women: in semiotic terms, the

photograph functions as an icon of Varo's spectacular face; the mask is a stand-in for Carrington and indeed the handmade object indexes her touch; and the photograph itself indexes Horna's body in Mexico at this specific moment in 1957. It is now widely known that both Varo and Carrington were deeply interested in magic and alchemy. So was Horna.⁵¹ The mask appears human-like, but the rough hair and sharply exposed features suggest nothing so much as a witch. Although Horna's work was not included in the 2022 exhibition, *Surrealism and Magic: Enchanting Modernity*, the catalogue productively brought to light questions about Horna's practice, particularly those images depicting dolls and masks. While photography is an alchemical process, how are Horna's photographs illuminated when examined in relation not only to Surrealism, but in terms of magic, witchcraft, and alchemy?⁵²

Horna's *Oda a la necrofilia* (Ode to Necrophilia) of 1962 (Fig. 8) is her most Surrealist series of photographs juxtaposing unexpected objects—mask, umbrella, book, veil, and candle—and creating scenes that have the irrational shifts characteristic of dreams.⁵³ The images are also portraits of Carrington. Notably, the series was first published in the avant-garde



Fig. 8. Kati Horna, *Untitled* from the series *Oda a la necrofilia* (Ode to Necrophilia) (1962), gelatin silver print, 9 7/8" x 7 1/8". © Sucesión Kati y José Horna/The Estate of Kati and José Horna.

reading, the mask may be seen as a stand-in for a female lover, or alternatively, a non-human (or supernatural) subject, suggesting a metaphysical, sexual encounter.

These heavy white masks are, surely, death masks.⁵⁵ Basilio describes this series as "enigmatic," "suggesting absence and loss."⁵⁶ However, if Woman is associated with death, then necrophilia, in the context of a Surrealist photograph by a female artist, suggests sex with the self, or self-pleasuring. The mask on the bed signifies not *only* sex, but the pleasurable relief of displacing one's mask without revealing to the viewer what is behind the mask. Spotlighting the complexities of women Surrealists portraying themselves artistically, Caws speaks of the "problems of female creation and self-portraiture."⁵⁷ Rather than arguing that Horna's photographs are psychological self-portraits, the *Ode to Necrophilia* speak to possible strategies of opacity employed by her as the artist, that is, the intentional lack of access to the human face, and thus the refusal to the viewer of access to the subject's interiority.⁵⁸ Rather than providing the reader with information about the female protagonist or subject,

journal *S.nob* under the section heading "Fetiches." Again, it is possible to read their narrative and scenic manipulation of large white masks as connected to the fragmented face and body, a common Surrealist trope by male artists; but they may also be understood as a fetishistic device (fetishizing the face rather than the phallus, as Louise Bourgeois [1910–2011] did with her sculpture *Fillette* in 1968) and as a sign of the Surrealist woman's performance of the mask or masquerade. Interestingly, the mask in Horna's series is remarkably similar to that used in Cahun's 1928 self-portrait but without the makeup; and the mask for Cahun as well as for Horna, like the various costumes and poses of Cindy Sherman's (b. 1954) photographs, speaks to the ways that women had and still have to perform femininity in patriarchal society and a patriarchal art world.⁵⁴ The masks in Horna's *Ode to Necrophilia* are eroticized—frequently placed near the naked female body, resting on the pillow—but the face (and perhaps the mind) is fetishized rather than the breast or the high heel. Smooth, ageless, and fearless, indeed with a small smile or smirk, the mask suggests a desire to control the female protagonist's body and emotions. Undertaking a queer

the stone face on the necrophiliac's bed is petrified and petrifying, just like the powerful figure of the Medusa.⁵⁹ According to Jane Harrison (as quoted by Griselda Pollock), in the story of Medusa, "Her potency only begins when her head is severed, and that potency resides in the head; she is in a word a mask with a body later appended ... the basis of the *Gorgoneion* is a cultus object, a ritual mask misunderstood."⁶⁰ The Greek etymology of the word Medusa "means guardian or protectress."⁶¹ Alluding to the powerful structures of the mask and masquerade for women throughout history, Pollock writes: "The beautiful mask is, however, double-edged. While allaying the fear that sexual difference inspires, fetishism continually marks the very spot of the anxiety of difference. It veils what remains menacingly hidden: displacing and yet intensifying the threat of what is concealed beneath that glossy packaging."⁶² We never see the woman's face in the *Ode to Necrophilia* series. Rather than beautiful masks, Horna returns to the monster, the Medusa, the witch. She removes the beautiful mask to reveal the powerful witch behind it.⁶³

This article has sought to push the discussion of female Surrealist artists forward by considering Horna's anti-fascist

photography in dialogue with her more explicitly Surrealist work depicting dolls and masks, two common tropes in Dada and Surrealist photography, and offering the framework of the Medusan gaze embodied by the “three witches” in light of Horna’s 1957 portrait series depicting Varo dressed in a Carrington mask. It is possible that Horna has received less scholarly attention than Varo and Carrington because she worked in photography. In their 2024 edited volume, *Women Photographers and Mexican Modernity: Framing the Twentieth Century*, Julia R. Brown, Radmila Stefkova, and Tamara R. Williams propose that, in Mexico, the question of whether photography was an art form, rather than a craft, was still being hotly debated in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶⁴ In addition to increasing visibility for both women photographers in Mexico and their female, often Indigenous subjects, Horna’s teaching is noted for its influence on the next generation of photographers in Mexico, including the feminist activist Mónica Mayer (b. 1954).⁶⁵ Horna taught photography classes at the Escuela de Diseño (Design School) at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, and from 1973 until her death in 2000, she directed the Photography Workshop at the Academy of San Carlos.⁶⁶ Horna has steadily received scholarly and museum attention since the 2010 *Surreal Friends* exhibition. Setting out to raise awareness of Horna’s political, empathetic photography from the twentieth century and to expose its continued importance for the twenty-first, this article argues for a growing conceptual framework (the witch, the Medusa, the monstrous feminine) to discuss Horna’s revolutionary works in order to locate them as explicitly feminist and anti-fascist. •

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Notes

1. Susan L. Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (London: Lund Humphries, 2010), 58. I am grateful to Dr. Salomon Grimberg for providing the photo by José Horna.
2. This photograph is most often identified as a self-portrait. However, the *Told and Untold* exhibition catalogue captions the image as taken by Horna’s daughter, Dr. Ana María Norah Horna y Fernández, and dates it to 1983. It would seem that the identification and date are correct given that the photograph is reproduced in a text written by her daughter. Ana María Norah Horna y Fernández, “Memory and the Recovery of Lived

Experiences: Kati Horna, ‘Invisibilist,’” in *Told and Untold: The Photo Stories of Kati Horna in the Illustrated Press*, ed. Gabriela Rangel, trans. Christopher Leland Winks (New York: Americas Society, 2017), 12. If the image is not a self-portrait, we can still consider Horna’s pose in terms of the camera-as-mask; the word “invisibilist” suggests someone who disappears behind the camera.

3. Stefan van Raay, Joanna Moorhead, and Teresa Arcq, eds., *Surreal Friends: Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, and Kati Horna* (Farnham; Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries in assoc. with Pallant House Gallery, 2010).
4. Nancy Deffebach, *Maria Izquierdo and Frida Kahlo: Challenging Visions in Modern Mexican Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 3. According to Deffebach: “One of the peculiar characteristics of the Mexican postrevolutionary period (1920–1940) is that women artists emerged earlier than women writers as prominent figures who combined creativity with the struggle for women’s rights.... Between 1939 and 1943 the European surrealists Leonora Carrington, Kati Horna, Alice Rahon, and Remedios Varo fled war-torn Europe and settled in Mexico, where, without exception, they created their most important visual work,” 3.
5. The Museum of Modern Art dates it to 1962; however, the correct date is 1957, as recorded in Horna’s own archive. My thanks to Dr. Salomon Grimberg for this information. It is also listed as 1957 in Caitlin Haskell and Tere Arcq, eds., *Remedios Varo: Science Fictions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023), 158. The portraits are also held by The Museum of Fine Arts Houston, the Princeton Art Gallery, and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
6. For an extended discussion of Varo’s time in Mexico, see Masayo Nonaka, *Remedios Varo: The Mexican Years* (Barcelona: RM Verlag, 2020). The frontispiece is a 1959 photograph of Varo leaning over a banister that was taken by Horna in Mexico. According to Nonaka: “Varo made another close friendship with Kati Horna, a Hungarian photographer who fled Spain for Mexico in 1939 with her Spanish husband, José Horna, a sculptor who had been Varo’s fellow student at the San Fernando Academy in Madrid. All three women [Varo, Carrington, and Horna] were strong-willed artists in exile, confident within their respective creative media of painting and photography. Varo and Horna, however, forged a different kind of friendship. Horna was a person of sparkling brilliance and somewhat anarchic intelligence. Her avid reading ranged from mechanics to the humanities. Horna was deeply versed in psychology, and this was a facet of her that Varo would render with irony in *Woman Leaving the Psychoanalyst* (1960). It is likely that the two women also discussed the German Romantics and shared their deep reverence for nature,” 11. This is a fascinating suggestion, namely that Varo’s painting, *Woman Leaving the Psychoanalyst*, may be a portrait of Horna. Nonaka also suggests that Varo’s *Towards the Tower* (1960), which she painted three years before her death, was inspired by a dream that Horna had about a large group of girls storming a tower. From a feminist-psychoanalytic perspective, this seems to be a strikingly feminist dream about toppling the patriarchy, wherein the tower is of course the phallus, the symbol of masculine social power. The last page of Nonaka’s book is another photograph taken by Horna. It represents Varo looking at the camera with a paintbrush in her right hand and a cigarette in her left (along with another paintbrush). She sits in front of her painting, *Farewell*, in her studio on Avenida Álvaro Obregón in 1960. On Leonora Carrington’s travels to Mexico, see Salomon Grimberg, “Traveling Toward the Unknown: Leonora Carrington Stopped in New York,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 38, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2017): 3–15.
7. In her analysis of Carrington’s 1937–38 *Self-Portrait (Inn of the Dawn Horse)*, now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Aberth remarks that Carrington’s right hand points “in the direction of the hyena, it binds the two in an occult pact, transforming them into the witch and her familiar.” Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 33. According to Aberth, the hyena represents “the intrusion of the wild into a domestic space,” 32.

8. Janice Helland, "Surrealism and Esoteric Feminism in the Paintings of Leonora Carrington," *RACAR: revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review* 16, no. 1 (1989): 57n23.
9. Ilene Susan Fort and Tere Arcq, eds., *In Wonderland: The Adventures of Female Surrealists in Mexico and the United States* (London: Prestel, 2012). Her work was also included in the recent exhibition, *Women Behind the Camera* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2021).
10. The exhibition, *Third Eye: The Costantini Collection in Malba*, is curated by María Amalia García, where Horna is placed in the "Transforming Reality" section, alongside Varo, Grete Stern, and Anna Maria Maiolino, among others.
11. Miriam Basilio, "The Art of Kati Horna," *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas* 28, no. 51 (1995): 71.
12. Pamela H. Simpson, review of *Surreal Friends: Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Kati Horna*, ed. Stefan van Raay, Joanna Moorhead, and Teresa Arcq, *Woman's Art Journal* 32, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2011), 57.
13. Simpson, 58. Simpson notes that some of the photographs show "Carrington, posing with home-made masks and costumes."
14. For a brief discussion on Horna's 1960 photograph of female sculptor Helen Escobedo, see Ryan Long, "The Margins and Potential Horizons of Mexico's Postrevolutionary Modernity in Four Photographs by Tina Modotti, Kati Horna, Mariana Yampolsky, and Elsa Medina," in *Women Photographers and Mexican Modernity: Framing the Twentieth Century*, ed. Julia R. Brown, Radmila Stefkova, and Tamara R. Williams (London: Routledge, 2024), 31–42. See Julia Skelly's review of *Women Photographers and Mexican Modernity* in this issue of *Woman's Art Journal* 45, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2024): 60–64.
15. See Gabriela Rangel, ed., *Told and Untold: The Photo Stories of Kati Horna in the Illustrated Press*, published in concert with the first retrospective of Horna's work in the US; and Lisa Pelizzon, "Una fotografia. Una narrazione: Kati Horna e la Guerra civile spagnola [A Photograph. A Narration. Kati Horna and the Spanish Civil War]," *RiCognizioni: Rivisti di lingue, letterature e culture moderne* 7, no. 14 (2020): 73–88, <https://doi.org/10.13135/2384-8987/4662>. Pelizzon's article is in Italian, but the abstract reads: "In 2019, a researcher found in Amsterdam the unknown negatives the Hungarian photographer Kati Horna took in Spain during the Spanish Civil War, from January 1937 to March 1938. When the Second World War broke out, Horna was forced to escape to Mexico and, in the attempt to save her work, she decided to send it elsewhere. This unexpected discovery revives the cultural debate on three different aspects: Kati Horna's role as a Jewish woman photographer in Europe during the Thirties; her photographic work and its peculiar way to use the picture as a powerful narration device; and finally, the necessity to include her name among the important ones for her contribution to history and photography. These aspects weave together and need to be explained through a biographic and visual path I propose for this article." Pelizzon wrote her doctoral dissertation on Horna, completed in 2012.
16. There is an excellent chapter in *Women Photographers and Mexican Modernity* that discusses Frida Hartz's photographs of Indigenous women and children in the context of war in Chiapas, Mexico. Tamara R. Williams, "A Record of Things Seen: The Photographs of Frida Hartz in Irma Pineda's *Guie'ni Zebe/La flore que se llevó*," 119–32.
17. Miriam Basilio, "'First We Win the War!': Kati Horna, Gendered Images and Political Discord During the Spanish Civil War," in *Told and Untold: The Photo Stories of Kati Horna in the Illustrated Press*, 61.
18. Sergio Flores, ed., *Kati Horna* (Barcelona: RM Verlag; Museo Amparo, Mexico, and Jeu de Paume, Paris, France, 2024).
19. See, for example, Margaret Bourke-White's photograph *Liberation of Buchenwald* of 1945.
20. Helland, "Surrealism and Esoteric Feminism in the Paintings of Leonora Carrington," 55. As Helland has noted, "The symbol of the egg is important in Carrington's work. She explores alchemical symbolism in [M.E.] Atwood as well as Orphic symbolism" found in Carl Jung's writings. Atwood published *Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy* in 1850.
21. Horna, quoted in *Kati Horna*, ed. Sergio Flores, 6.
22. Basilio, "The Art of Kati Horna," 71.
23. Basilio. See "Free Women and AMA: Associations and Their Magazines," Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina, Sofia, <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/research-projects/women-civil-war/free-women-ama>.
24. Alexandra Kokoli, *The Feminist Uncanny* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 1.
25. Kokoli. See Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen, Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1976): 875–93. The French version is from 1975.
26. Kokoli, 2.
27. For a discussion of the witch in contemporary feminist performance, see Adam Alston, "'Burn the Witch': Decadence and the Occult in Contemporary Feminist Performance," *Theatre Research International* 46, no. 3 (2021): 285–302.
28. Pam Grossman, *Waking the Witch: Reflections on Women, Magic, and Power* (New York: Gallery Books, 2019), 177. For more on Surrealist art, magic (including witchcraft), and occultism, see Tessel M. Bauduin, Victoria Ferentinou and Daniel Zamani, eds., *Surrealism, Occultism and Politics: In Search of the Marvelous* (London: Routledge, 2018).
29. Grossman, 177.
30. Aberth, cited in Grossman, 178.
31. Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 64.
32. Gražina Subelytė and Daniel Zamani, *Surrealism and Magic: Enchanted Modernity*, ed. Vivien Greene, Michael Philipp, Karole P. B. Vail, Ortrud Westheider, et al., exh. cat. (New York: Prestel, 2022).
33. Grossman, *Waking the Witch*, 178.
34. Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2014), xiii.
35. See, for instance, Shun-liang Chao, "The Alchemy of Photography: 'Grotesque Realism' and Hybrid Nature in Jerry Uelsmann's Photomontages," *Criticism* 59, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 301–28.
36. See Marsha Meskimmon, "Citizens, Migrants and Worldmaking Denizens," in *Transnational Feminisms, Transversal Politics and Art: Entanglements and Intersections* (London: Routledge, 2020), 45–70.
37. Mary Ann Caws, *The Surrealist Look: An Erotics of Encounter* (London: MIT Press, 1997), xv.
38. Ruth Hemus, *Dada's Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 115.
39. Hemus, 123.
40. On Surrealist photography, see David Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* (London: Routledge, 2019).
41. Gwen Raaberg, "The Problematics of Women and Surrealism," in ed. Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli, and Gwen Raaberg, *Surrealism and Women* (London: MIT Press, 1991), 1–10.
42. Griselda Pollock, *Killing Men and Dying Women: Imagining Difference in 1950s New York Painting* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), 24.

43. Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995). Although not all Surrealism scholars will agree that fragmentation in works by male Surrealists is misogynistic, this article is building upon important work by feminist art historians, such as Caws, in *The Surrealist Look*. It is difficult to deny that Giacometti's sculpture is an explicit instance of misogynistic violence.
44. Dawn Ades, "One Hundred Per Cent Photographic," in *In Wonderland: The Adventures of Female Surrealists of Mexico and the United States, 194*. In the same volume, see Ilene Susan Fort, "In the Country of Reinvention: The United States," 51.
45. Basilio, "The Art of Kati Horna," 72.
46. Basilio.
47. Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," in *The Monster Theory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 211–25.
48. For a discussion of animal symbolism in Carrington's paintings, see Georgiana M.M. Colvile, "Beauty and/Is the Beast: Animal Symbolism in the Work of Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Leonor Fini," in *Surrealism and Women*, 159–81.
49. Arcq, "In the Country of Compulsive Beauty," in *In Wonderland*, 83. On the mask in Surrealist photography, see Jane Livingston, "Man Ray and Photography," in *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism*, ed. Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 115–51.
50. Helland, "Surrealism and Esoteric Feminism," 58.
51. See, especially, Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*. See also Whitney Chadwick, "Women Artists and the Hermetic Tradition," in *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 181–218.
52. See Subelyt and Zamani, *Surrealism and Magic: Enchanted Modernity*.
53. Ades, "One Hundred Per Cent Photographic," 189–90.
54. See Katy Kline, "In or Out of the Picture: Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman," in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, ed. Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 66–81.
55. For a discussion of the fragmented face and head in Western art, see Linda Nochlin's argument, for example, that depictions of the severed head in eighteenth-century graphic art recall "that of the Medusa." See Linda Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 11.
56. Basilio, "The Art of Kati Horna," 73.
57. Caws, *The Surrealist Look*, 13.
58. Candice Lin, *A Hard White Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 54–56.
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60. Jane Harrison, cited in Pollock, 171. As Pollock writes, "Harrison reclaims Medusan Power."
61. Pollock, 170.
62. Pollock, *Killing Men and Dying Women*, 65.
63. For more on fetishism in Surrealist photography, see Whitney Chadwick, "Fetishizing Fashion/Fetishizing Culture: Man Ray's 'Noire et Blanche,'" *Oxford Art Journal* 18, no. 2 (1995): 3–17.
64. Julia R. Brown, Radmila Stefkova, and Tamara R. Williams, "Introduction," in *Women Photographers and Mexican Modernity*, 1–14.
65. See the article on Mónica Mayer in this issue of *Woman's Art Journal*: Bárbara Tyner, "More than *El Tendedero*: A Reckoning of Mónica Mayer's Half-Century in a Hurricane," *Woman's Art Journal* 45, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2024): 14–24.
66. See especially Long, "The Margins and Potential Horizons of Mexico's Postrevolutionary Modernity," in *Women Photographers and Mexican Modernity*, 35.

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MORE THAN *EL TENDEDERO*

A RECKONING OF MÓNICA MAYER'S HALF-CENTURY IN A HURRICANE

By Bárbara Tyner

On May 28, 2024, to commemorate her seventieth birthday, Mexican feminist artist Mónica Mayer (b. 1954) shaved her head. She did it neither for medical or spiritual reasons, nor for fashion, but because, she confided, “I always wanted to do this.”¹ Because she is a performance-based artist with nearly half a century of practice—a personal motto that art and life are the same thing—and because the shearing happened not quite on her birthday in March, but two months later, we trust she had something else up her sleeve. Was it the play of hair (or lack thereof) within gendered stereotypes, perhaps? In typical Mayer style, she is showing, not telling.

Although body modification is not her usual *modus operandi*, this performance project, part of a new collaborative series called *inter-Pelación* (a pun on the word “interpellation”), created with her daughter, Yuruen Lerma Mayer, who holds a doctorate in feminist studies, and videographer Natali Olac Farfán, encapsulates most of the hallmarks characterizing her lifelong work (Fig. 1). The shearing ceremony featured hairstylist Olga Valencia at the razor, and a host of family and friends as participants and celebrants.² It appears exclusively in her posts on social media platforms.

Addressing the performative and gendered nature of hair is not new to Mayer. In 2005, she donned a false beard as part of the exhibition and performance project *La inquietante semana internacional de las mujeres barbudas* (The Disturbing International Week of Bearded Women), noting, “Putting on a beard was incredible!”³ Over the last two decades, she has mused about being called *señor* (mister) because of her comfort-driven androgynous uniform of t-shirts, corduroy jackets, jeans, and sensible shoes.⁴ In the weeks following the initial head-shaving, the artist documented her adventures as a *pelón* (m)/*pelona* (f) (bald or hairless man/woman) on her widely viewed Facebook and Instagram posts. In one set of photographs, Mayer’s silhouette echoes that of her husband, Víctor Lerma, and adult son, Adán, all domed heads and ears akimbo, captured in shadows on the cracked sidewalk and against concrete walls of her tree-lined street in the quiet Colonia Del Valle neighborhood of Mexico City. She notes

reactions of passersby, and how pronouns change depending upon her attire.

Mayer’s latest project serves as an ideal point of reckoning for her position and place over a nearly fifty-year career, possibly because it appears to reflect the artist’s *own* reckoning. It is impossible not to view the side-by-side photos of the shorn artist today at seventy and her infant self nearly seventy years ago—both faces dominated by large, inky eyes, and identical unflinching gazes—as a comparative model through which the artist herself reckons with the passage of time, age, and identity, even as she leaves us to fill in the blanks. Mayer has been foundational in the development of the feminist art movement in Mexico, given her production as an artist, critic, educator and activist since the 1970s.⁵ Her influence on generations of feminist artists and collectives and impact on public awareness of feminist concerns in Mexico have been essential to the ongoing nurturing of the movement. Her work ranges in media from graphic arts and works on paper to socially engaged non-object-based performance, in person and on internet-based social media. Feminist concerns underlie her work: violence against women, gender discrimination, sexuality, reproductive justice, and maternity, among many other topics. According to the artist, her work “doesn’t respond to the grand causes, but rather to everyday experiences.... It’s a struggle against an internalized patriarchy and that which surrounds me.”⁶ She works conceptually allowing her various art activities, including twenty years of critiquing art and social culture at the newspaper *El Universal*; giving innumerable public lectures (what she calls *conferencias performanceadas* or performed conferences); and interventions in archiving and self-archiving to fold into the category of performance. Her magic is and has been that of inspiring generations of activists, scholars, and others to consider feminism—not just politically, but personally—in her signature non-dictatorial, open-ended way.

Such a reckoning of the artist calls for an equal reckoning with the fifty years Mayer has spent in the company of a hurricane—a shadow protagonist or backdrop in the artist’s



Fig. 1. Mónica Mayer, Yuruen Lerma Mayer, and Natalí Olac Farfán, from the series *inter-Pelación* (2024), mixed media digital photograph, Facebook, May 30, 2024. Courtesy of Archivo Pinto mi Raya.

work. That hurricane is patriarchy, gender-based discrimination, aggression and violence against women, and an accompanying rate of impunity for perpetrators surpassing 96 percent (99.1 in Mexico City), as well as an institutional deafness to complaint.⁷ Mayer's native Mexico has ranked at or near the top in feminicides in Latin America since such numbers have been counted,⁸ and Patricia Galeana, director of the Museo de la Mujer (Museum of Women) in Mexico City, has named Mexico the country with the highest number of feminicides of any country not actively at war.⁹ The term *feminicidio*/feminicide is used here intentionally. As a standard usage in Mexico and throughout Latin America, it encompasses the term "femicide": the intentional murder of women because they are women, in addition to a political component holding responsible not only the perpetrators but also the state and judicial structures that normalize misogyny.¹⁰ Mayer's work can be seen as a vital, transformational force against the onslaught of that hurricane. Her participant-based performances have probed and poked fun, offered moments of optimism, possibly shelter, and the kind of reflection that leads to change. That she and other artists have worked successfully in this context not only underlines their resilience, but points to what can be seen as a particularly Mexican phenomenon: the paradoxical presence of simultaneously contradictory and oppositional things, as in the Spanish term *sopa seca* for rice, meaning "dry soup" (rice is after all made with water and boiled dry).

Although Mexico today has more legal protections for women than almost anywhere, feminicides are increasing, not decreasing.¹¹ Echoing Mayer's ongoing dialogue between the personal and the political, by chance, this art historical reckoning of Mexico's most celebrated feminist artist is being presented just as Mexico greets its first woman president. *Sopa seca*.

Mayer's career spans chronologically from the starting to the "now" points on a timeline of the feminist art movement she helped initiate nearly fifty years ago. The movement, like the artist herself, has been analyzed and richly characterized.¹² It is an intentional movement grounded in feminist theory and based in social practice, non-object-based performance, and participatory and collaborative praxis attuned to Mexican traditions and sensibilities.¹³ Core early artists (several of whom are still working) include Maris Bustamante (b. 1949), Lourdes Grobet (1940–2022), Magali Lara (b. 1956), Ana Victoria Jiménez (b. 1941), Pola Weiss (b. 1947), and Carla Rippey (b. 1950), joined by newer women artists including Cerrucha (b. 1984), Lorena Wolffer (b. 1971), and Elina Chauvet (b. 1959).



Fig. 2. Pinto mi Raya (Mónica Mayer and Víctor Lerma), photo stills from *Abrazos (Hugs)* (2008–9), performance. Courtesy of Archivo Pinto mi Raya.

Mayer's origin story as a feminist artist begins in two places: Mexico, where she grew up in a comfortable, upper middle class family of European background and social and artistic leanings; and the US, specifically her affiliation with the Feminist Studio Workshop (FSW) and the Woman's Building in Los Angeles, where she studied for two years in the late 1970s with Leslie Labowitz (b. 1946) and Suzanne Lacy (b. 1945).¹⁴ Mayer did not show up in Los Angeles as a blank slate. Before FSW, she had participated in four feminist art works in Mexico City, including the first self-proclaimed feminist art exhibition held in Latin America, *Collage íntimo* (Intimate Collage), in 1977 at Mexico City's *Casa del Lago*.¹⁵ Her binational foundation is important to her story. As a student in the 1970s at the *Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas* (ENAP), in Mexico City's Centro Histórico, her unfamiliarity with the transcendent history of twentieth-century women artists in Mexico was not unusual but speaks to the simultaneous coexistence of the contradictory: in her daily life, she personally knew important living women artists creating that history.¹⁶ She studied with Kati Horna (1912–2000), the Mexican/Hungarian photographer in exile.¹⁷ Born four months before Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) died, she had visited Casa Azul and the Museo de Arte Moderno (MAM) since childhood, where she could take in a wealth of work by women artists—Olga Costa (1913–1993), Elizabeth Catlett (1915–2012), Fanny Rabel (1922–2008), and Lola Cueto (1897–1978)—artists who also began their art studies in the same Centro Histórico some thirty years earlier. Art and artists were everyday life to the young girl whose mother studied painting and held weekly Saturday lunches for a kaleidoscopic group of sixty, artists and others, at their house in the *Pedregal* district south of the city center.¹⁸ But feminism and art had not yet met at that table, or at any other in Mexico, and feminism was not yet on the agenda for political artists who grew up with class struggle as their focus. In fact, Mayer has said, it was the feminists who saw no need for art in their struggle.¹⁹

That changed in 1975 with a seminar on the state of women in the arts initiated by critic and curator Carla Stellweg (b. 1942) at MAM.²⁰ The proceedings, published in 1976 in one of the first bilingual contemporary arts magazine, *Artes visuales*,

edited by Stellweg and including interviews and texts by Judy Chicago (b. 1939), Arlene Raven (1944–2006), and Lucy Lippard (b. 1937), reached the hands of twenty-one-year-old Mayer. This was the catalyst that transformed the course of her life, giving her an address on North Spring Street in downtown Los Angeles and a destination: the Feminist Studio Workshop at the Woman's Building. After attending a two-week workshop, she spent the next two years in Mexico working to fund her return, while immersing herself in existing feminist organizations such as the *Movimiento Feminista Mexicano* and *Colectivo Cine-Mujer* (1975–81), the groundbreaking feminist film group founded by Rosa Marta Fernandez, Beatriz Mira, and Odile Herrenschmidt. Just before leaving for Los Angeles in 1978, she performed the first iteration of the piece for which she is best known, *El tendedero* (The Clothesline), conceived for the biennial exhibition, *Salón 77–78: Nuevas tendencias* (New Trends), at MAM in Mexico City (Pl. 1).

In her two years at the FSW, Mayer *lived* the feminist art experience of small groups, consciousness-raising, and collaborative approaches not all that different from the modalities employed among the artists in the *Movimiento de los Grupos* (Groups Movement) emerging in the late 1960s Mexico with whom she had cut her teeth.²¹ Their shared vocabulary included collectivity, performance, and non-object driven practices that challenged traditional art forms and processes, for differing but similar reasons. Just as feminist art in the US was being met with resistance and derision, Mexico and its artists were still struggling under the kind of governmental repression and violence that had led to the massacres of students at Tlatelolco in 1968 and Corpus Cristi (*El Halconazo*) in 1971. The anonymity of the individual in collaborative work meant safety, whether it was spelled group or *grupo*.²²

The second version of Mayer's *El tendedero* (Pl. 2) was produced in 1979 as part of Lacy's *Making it Safe: A Project on Violence Against Women in Ocean Park*, a collaborative, multi-component social project based in the coastal neighborhood between Santa Monica and Venice beaches. Mayer's piece invited women to identify what made them feel unsafe there, and she hung the answers to her question, written on pieces of

paper, on a makeshift clothesline.²³ Mayer may have arrived with this piece already part of her repertoire, but working with Lacy, Labowitz, and other FSW members formalized her practice in a way Mayer has described as “*organizada*” (organized), a different attitude from how she had worked in Mexico: “The *tendedero* I made in Mexico was intimate, with tender assistance of friends and family.”²⁴ This preference for working in a warm, familial environment would shape feminist art in Mexico upon her return. By 1983 she was teaching the first feminist art course at her alma mater, the ENAP, a seed-sowing that quickly produced several feminist art collectives, including *Tlacuilas y Retrateras* (Women Scribes and Portraitists) and *Bio-Arte* (Bio-Art). Mayer’s collective *Polvo de Gallina Negra* (PGN) (Black Hen Powder), active from 1983 to 1993 and formed with Bustamante (an artist previously associated with the group No-Grupo), and, briefly, with Herminia Dosal, was the first by a matter of months.²⁵ *Polvo de Gallina Negra* is a playful reference to women’s folk wisdom invoking elements of *brujería* (witchcraft) and *curanderismo* (folk healing). Black hen powder wards off the “evil eye,” a protection needed by feminist artists under patriarchy—one of their most popular performances involved a ceremonial recipe and concoction against rapists. The protagonists of the feminist art scene in Mexico—the art historians, critics, and scholars—emerged from these groups.

Today, it is impossible to imagine a Mexican feminist artist better known than Mónica Mayer. Mayer has authored or co-written several books²⁶ and has shown in numerous national and international exhibitions—most recently she was celebrated for her participation in the landmark group show, *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985*, that traveled from Los Angeles to São Paulo between 2017 and 2018; and her critically acclaimed 2016 retrospective or “retrocollective,” *Si tiene dudas ... pregunte: Una exposición retrocolectiva de Mónica Mayer* (When in Doubt ... Ask: A Retrocollective Exhibit), at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) in Mexico City.²⁷ Reactivations of her signature piece, *El tendedero* (The Clothesline), have appeared at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., in 2017, and India’s Kochi Biennale in 2019.²⁸ Her popularity increases internationally and at home as femicide in Mexico and the accompanying feminist protest activities become global news. Her career and production have served as a model for feminist art throughout Latin America.²⁹ It is not impossible to imagine that Mónica Mayer has displaced Frida Kahlo as a thesis topic among students in higher education.

Mayer describes her process as “working in cycles over time.” It is not easy to coax her work onto a timeline.³⁰ Shifts in genre or medium reflect changing life situations (including her



Fig. 3. Mónica Mayer, *Lo normal* (*Quiero hacer el amor*) (On Normality [I want to make love]) (1978), series of ten postcards with stamps, 4 1/2" x 5 7/8". Courtesy of Archivo Pinto mi Raya.

children’s participation in performances by age two, for example), as well as changes in available technology. Works with PGN differ from those created in the context of Pinto mi Raya (PMR) (I draw my line), a collective and archival project Mayer began in 1989 with her husband, the artist Víctor Lerma, initially founded as an experimental gallery space.³¹ PMR strategically addresses social institutions (taking on the art system in Mexico), personal boundaries, as in the *Abrazos* (Hugs) performances (Fig. 2), nationalism, collecting, and documentation. Its digitization (a performance piece in itself) permits access to many of the projects over five decades. This includes *Raya: Crítica, crónica y debate en las artes visuales* (Line: Criticism, Chronicles, and Debate in the Visual Arts, 1991–2014), a twenty-five-year-long newspaper clipping project currently gaining new life online, and *Archiva: Masterpieces of Feminist Art in Mexico* (2013–14).

Earlier works might be edgier, erotic pieces, such as *A veces me espantan mis propios sentimientos, mis fantasías* (Sometimes I’m Frightened By My Own Feelings, My Fantasies) (1977), which presents a set of male and female genitalia; and *Lo normal* (*Quiero hacer el amor*) (On Normality [I Want to Make Love]) (1978; Fig. 3), which plays with boundaries around “acceptable” or “normal” sexual desire in a series of ten postcards. The middle years (1987–2009) focus on family matters and hegemonic gendered roles, as in the *¡Madres!* (Mothers!) series of performances and actions (1983–90) with *Polvo de Gallina Negra*, including a televised piece in 1987 titled *Madre por un día* (Mother for a Day) (Fig. 4) involving a hilarious romp with Mayer, Bustamante, and “Nuestro Mundo” television host, Guillermo Ochoa, who was persuaded to dress up and play “mother for a day” complete



Fig. 4. Polvo de Gallina Negra (Maris Bustamente and Mónica Mayer), video still from the televised performance of *Madre por un día* (Mother for a Day), with Guillermo Ochoa on "Nuestro Mundo" program (August 28, 1987). Courtesy of Archivo Pinto mi Raya.

with frilly apron, pills for pregnancy cravings, and a false pregnant belly. Recent works are marked by Mayer's increased use of technology, as generative, archival repositories, and as online presences. Newer performances include *El día después* (The Day after Protest) (2012; Pl. 3), a fabricated and documented protest march created with the *Taller de Activismo y Arte Feminista* (TAAF) (Feminist Art and Activism Workshop), rejecting enforced social mores surrounding motherhood and pregnancy, and pointedly, held the day after Mother's Day. Her current exhibition, *Hija de su madre* (Daughter of Her Mother) (the title an intentional pun in Spanish), curated by Marisol García Walls and Mayer's daughter, Yuruen Lerma Mayer, reflects both the nostalgia of a retrospective look at Mayer's family-oriented work and still-resonant family trauma (the suicide of her mother while Mayer was at the FSW in 1980), another indication of Mayer's own reckoning.³² As a consequence of Mayer's 2016 retrospective at MUAC, previously dormant or unavailable works are gaining new popularity through archive-rummaging and reactivations of works at different sites, including *El tendedero* at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City in 2009, and PGN's 1987 *Madre por un día* performance (see Fig. 4).³³ Mayer uses the word "reactivate" specifically to describe the *performing* of works previously performed, to convey the sense of their being brought into being or activated by being performed.

Although Mayer's oeuvre resists categorization, certain commonalities characterize her work.³⁴ Humor is the most discussed, followed by an attunement to Mexican sensibilities, Mexican humor, *modismos*, or rich, insider-knowledge colloquialisms; Mexican perspectives on gendered roles and culture; sophisticated language play in the style of Mexico's notorious "*albures*" engaging clever, double- and

triple-entendre wordplay; and collaborative and collective ways of working that owe to feminist and Mexican social practices employed by artist groups since the *posrevolucionario* (for example: the Taller de Gráfica Popular [The Popular Graphic Arts Workshop], and socialist puppet theater troupes, such as *Rín Rín*, *Cómino* and *Colibrí*, as well as the later artists of the Grupos movement). Mayer's adherence to the feminist touchstone, that the personal is political, is a constant, as is her embrace of the archive—self-archiving and archiving others—as a means of non-erasure. The open-endedness characterizing her works is also Mexican in terms of suggesting, not insisting, not dictating, allowing meaning to unfold. Of course there is also an element of performance, in which the viewer and participant completes the work. She is, as Yoko Ono described her own performance, "Mak(ing) something happen by throwing a pebble into the water and creating ripples."³⁵

As part of Mayer's reckoning, this article demonstrates how these traits are evident in the two key works currently bookending her career: *El tendedero* and the current work from the *pelona* series, *inter-Pelación*, as representative of her approach to feminist art making and to her position in the field overall. Frida Kahlo is employed as an analytical touchstone, an appropriate parallel as the other most resoundingly prominent (although historical) woman artist in Mexico, and because art does not happen in a vacuum.

Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010) has her spider; Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929) has her dots. When an artist can be evoked and recognized across audiences in a single image or object, that artist has achieved iconic status (or at least the image/object has). In Mayer's case, that object is a little pink square of paper. Clipped to a horizontal line that could be wire, yarn, string, or digital line on a computer screen, that little pink paper becomes part of a makeshift clothesline, or *tendedero*, the work that best exemplifies how Mayer's work actually works. It is also the one with perhaps the greatest impact and reach over time because of its early inception (1978), its repeated reactivations locally and internationally, and its transferability to online platforms. In Spanish or English, a *tendedero* or clothesline connotes women's work and women's spaces, and conveys associations with sharing, gossip, and airing dirty laundry. Mayer offered:

In 1978, I participated in an exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico. The theme was the city. I made a piece on sexual harassment in the public space, which is something I faced every day. I printed the question, "What do you dislike most of the city?" on small pink pieces of paper and asked women from different areas and diverse classes, ages and professions to answer. Many shared similar violent experiences. The result was presented as an installation. It was a way of visibilizing a problem seldom spoken about.³⁶

Aesthetically, the physical object of *El tendedero* takes form as a free-standing, up-right frame structure, likely pink, strung loom-like with horizontals. Mayer does not dictate the structure's shape or style, and each group creates their own.

Her only requirement today is an insistence that the theme of *acoso* (harassment) be present.³⁷ By nature it is low-tech and replicable. The project begins when Mayer is asked to activate the piece. She facilitates a workshop to generate ideas, share stories, gather information, and build the work's focus. Group members then enter into the community, little pink papers in hand, with their questions to ask.

The lightning bolt that strikes with each reenactment of *El tendadero*, why this action continually succeeds, is this "ask." Mayer does not tell. She asks. Her first "ask" was a groundbreaking action in its time. There were many things women could have hated about Mexico City in 1978—pollution, corruption, lack of opportunity, economic pressure, increasing industrialization, and an ever-present if under-discussed gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, and violence. But what *women* liked or did not like was not on the agenda in a city bent under more than a decade of government-fronted social and political oppression. In asking, Mayer gathered a time-capsule dataset of women's individual and collective subjectivities and experiences. The interchange between practitioner and participant *crackles*, as inquiry, vulnerability, care, defiance, and growing awareness galvanized and defined feminist art activity at that moment in Mexico City and has characterized Mayer's subsequent practice. Significantly, in asking women, Mayer sidesteps the greatest pitfall of first- and second-wave feminisms in most other parts of the world: a blindness to intersectional experiences of oppressions, an insensitivity to relevant local context. *Asking* reveals what is important to the asked. This way of working also conforms to Mexican social mores.

Women sharing confidences is not news. Neither were sexual assault and aggression in the city in 1978, nor were they part of public conversation. "In the 70s, I was the only one working in this theme of harassment," the artist noted.³⁸ The responses gushed forward in handwritten script on little pink papers and continue to do so each time the piece is reactivated, creating not just a record, but giving voice to an intergenerational, transnational, and increasingly diverse woman and woman-identifying population. Visitors to the first exhibition could not resist scrawling their own responses and experiences wherever space was found on those papers already hanging, prompting Mayer to provide additional papers at every reactivation. *El tendadero* was a baseline act, autochthonous in origin, with immeasurable resonance and reach. This is essential Mayer: offering the prompt, the space, the pen, the little pink paper for the public's participation in an experience both personal and universal, focusing on "building a collective voice from individual ones."³⁹

The pre-feminist artist Frida Kahlo may have painted women's pain, but we may read it always as an ongoing cat-and-mouse between her reflexive and deflective impulses (in paintings such as her 1944 *The Broken Column*, among many).⁴⁰ There is no ambiguity in what Mayer's *El tendadero* offers three decades later: women openly reporting women's pain themselves. Such frankness, an art work so gendered, public, private, and documentary, was novel in Mayer's Mexico. Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda explored its multi-layered meaning:

By placing a clothesline in an art gallery and exhibiting the ways in which women's experiences of urban space were mediated through their bodies in highly gendered and sexualized terms, *El tendadero* transgressed the divide between the public and the private.... *El tendadero*, then, is a statement about how the politics of gender and sexuality are present in everyday life situations, dissolving the boundaries between the private and the public as well as the personal and the political.⁴¹

It is indeed transgressive and unmissable, but here we see the inherent traits characterizing Mayer's work that have enabled its extreme social criticism to be overlooked or ignored, and what paradoxically has allowed it to flourish in an environment relatively inhospitable to such critique (*sopa seca*, again). The most obvious and emblematic of Mayer's work is the dialogue between the personal and political. Less obvious is the performance of *El tendadero* as archive, each pink paper a tessera translating individual into collective experience, and the *tendadero* a recording of the work, and the work itself.⁴² But ultimately, what makes this work, and what contributes to its continued resonance is Mayer's engagement of humor, especially her attunement to Mexican social mores and themes. Here we have an example of ironic humor in the construction of its spindly apparatus, charmingly pink and delicate, packed with psychological and social power. Its Mexicanness is in the folkloric reference of the *tendadero* as a place for women's talk lightening burdens, the Mexican mode of making difficult things bearable through humor, and the collaborative ways of working emulating Mexico's vanguard twentieth-century artist groups. Mayer's trademark non-hierarchical style of asking, not telling, not dictating the *tendadero's* shape, style or physical form, and her allowance for privacy through the anonymity of unsigned pink papers, reflects Mexican sensibilities of indirectness and consideration, politeness, even, and a generosity that aligns with Mexican social norms and culture.⁴³ Again, this open-endedness is a Mayer trait, Mexican-informed but also inherent to much of performance in general. Aesthetically, the work skews stereotypically feminine, leaning on Mexican associations that interpret women's domain as a world somehow defanged. This has been a superpower in Mayer's arsenal. Invoking the feminine as Mayer's visual branding—not only through content and domestic references but in its materiality—has masked *El tendadero* in a pink invisibility cloak. Call it "Barbie" style—a winking "just kidding," keeping it (and its participants) non-confrontational, and thus, safe. The aesthetic of *El tendadero*, then, has conceptually aided its resilience and longevity. The color is better branded "*transporte*" or "*el vagón rosa*" (women's car pink), the shade metro cars were painted in 1970—just one year after the inauguration of Mexico City's public transportation system in 1969—designating them as women-only havens and spaces safe from harassment and assault. *Tendadero*-pink has since colored feminist protest imagery from the painted wooden crosses marking ephemeral



Fig. 5. Mónica Mayer, Yuruen Lerma Mayer, Natalí Olac Farfán, from the series *inter-Pelación* (2024), digital photograph, Facebook, June 7, 2024. Courtesy of Archivo Pinto mi Raya.

graves of missing women in Ciudad Juarez to *pintas* (graffiti) covering some of the city's monuments, post-protest. Deployed today in feminist protests, pink has gone sparkly, with glitter becoming a meaningful signalling tool. A news video captured the inauguration of the "Glitter Revolution" (Pl. 4) when protests erupted on August 12, 2019, over mishandled reports of the rape of a teenager by four police officers (and three other reports of rape by police within the same period). During a press conference, Mexico City's Secretary of Security Jesús Orta Martínez called the protesters radical and insulting and was bombed with the "Barbie/women's car/tendedero-pink" glitter. Pink glitter became the official protest tool with the tagline: "You don't protect us, You Rape us." Coincidence or not, it may be that Mayer got there first, in 1978, imagining the power of pink as a marketing tool and recognizable symbol.

That *El tendedero* is used internationally beyond Mexico, including places renowned for their historical violence against women, speaks to its good design and efficacy of disguise: it is

rendered seemingly "harmless" thanks to the inoffensive nature of little pink papers and the association with the domestic world of women. That it is not authored but facilitated, that it is processual, requiring reading and writing, time and focus, presence and patience, and that it is private or anonymous, all muffles its gestalt punch. As an art piece it is, as André Breton described Kahlo, "*Un listón alrededor de una bomba*" ([A] ribbon tied around a bomb).⁴⁴

As an object and concept, *El tendedero* has become part of the current landscape. Documentation of the original piece appeared in the 2007 traveling exhibition, *Wack: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, organized by The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Mayer's 2016 retrospective exhibition at MUAC fomented a surge of attention and public embrace of her work, amplified by a reactivation of three different versions of *El tendedero* that encouraged significant visitor participation (Pl. 5). Little pink papers became a social media meme across a broad range of platforms. "Mónica Mania" was spreading through the city when two things

happened around the same time in 2017: the exhibition, *Feminicidio en México. ¡Ya Basta!* (Femicide in Mexico. Enough!), at the Museum of Memory and Tolerance in Mexico City, and the #MeToo movement. The first of its kind situated in the heart of Mexico City's tourist district, *¡Ya Basta!* exposed and named femicide in Mexico *visually*, reaching a massive local and international audience.⁴⁵ A wave of tensions over the increase in femicides and violence met with increased public awareness and alarm pulsing from the emerging #MeToo movement. *Tendedero*-pink crosses became official memes of femicide, planted not only in the country's northern tier where the tradition began, but along the manicured medians of the Paseo de la Reforma corridor in the nation's capital.

Mayer conducted her first internet-based *El tendedero* during the pandemic, and now often facilitates workshop components with groups online, as she did with her 2024 exhibition in Veracruz.⁴⁶ In the past decade she has made over thirty reactivations and more than forty have been made by others. *El tendedero* is featured in one of the official textbooks of the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria* (National High School).⁴⁷ *El tendedero* has a life of its own. That it became a tool used by Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to denounce politicians not in conformity to his policies speaks to its embrace within the cultural landscape.⁴⁸ It is not so common to have the work of a feminist artist co-opted by the president.

Mayer's current pelona-project, *inter-Pelación*, so very un-pink, so extraordinarily quiet, stark and striking, may seem a hawk as compared to a flamingo. But as an equally conceptual performance-based work, it shares much with the iconic piece, including most of the essential Mayer traits. Both are public-private pieces. Both require a public to create and complete the work's meaning. Both have a documentary function and emerge as testimony and imprint of earlier activities (the writing on little pink papers; the ceremony of depilation), and response to overarching feminist concerns. Both indicate the artist's technique of ruffling surfaces and provoking dialogue with a well-aimed prompt. The artist's commitment to the personal as political is evidenced by her confidence that the experience of a seventy-year-old woman who shaves her head will resonate with others. The work functions as a self-archive and as an art piece about self-archiving, while simultaneously expanding the feminist art archive. Her collaborative efforts are multifold, featuring co-subjects, participants, and co-producers. Mayer's online audience is also a critical part of the work's collaborative base. This is a different kind of participation: less active, more reflective, and lightning quick. "I share my artistic processes on social networks," Mayer professes, "because at the end of the day I am a performer. There, the echoes of the dialogues with the public are integrated.... For my way of working, the model of the artist in solitude in her studio is over."⁴⁹ Her followers participate with their attention, "likes," emojis, and comments. Early comments centered on astonishment and horror at the artist's bravery ("I would never do that!"). Some murmured about possible illness. As with *El tendedero*, it is their own experience they are communicating in response to her visual

prompt. Her relationship to the audience is interesting. Mayer knows many of her followers personally. Such subjectiveness can be seen as a recurrent tendency in *El tendedero*, especially when responses are gathered in a primed or formal context, such as a civic art gallery, for example, at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, in Washington, D.C. (not exactly a flaw, but an opportunity for influence, which is also compelling). Her followers include many celebrated feminist artists and scholars, a not inconsequential layer to this work, creating what could be considered an online salon.

The first several portraits in the *inter-Pelación* series are the most confrontational, the balder the bolder, perhaps, and the most transgressive, appropriate to their online transmission to a public scrolling countless images. Humor is intentional if understated: the juxtaposition of the bald artist at seventy with her bald self at seven months is visually striking and hilarious; it is appallingly amusing to wait for her next installment of her pelona adventures. Mexicanness suffuses the work, particularly concerning ideas about women and hair. Not only is long hair for women long tied to the national image of Mexico, constructed in the years post-revolution, it also has complex significance linked with ideas of indigeneity, post-colonial and post-revolutionary nationalism, and femininity.⁵⁰ Mayer conjures feminist and art historical connections, riffing on what is known as the "Pelona Wars" of 1920s Mexico, when young, freshly bobbed Moderns were harassed and assaulted and pejoratively called "Pelonas" (baldies);⁵¹ and alludes to Kahlo and her twice-shorn head (first as a teen flirting with gender ambiguity in a 1924 photo by her father Guillermo Kahlo, and sixteen years later in the 1940 painting *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*). The pre-feminist artists of Mexico—from María Izquierdo (1902–1955) to Cueto—managed elaborate coiffures before heading to their studios, which may have assuaged other social demands on their behavior (maintaining what was seen as a feminine presentation cloaked a multitude of liberties, perhaps). We can see this feminine coiffure as feminine mask.⁵² Mayer's outlandish act of erasing that hair (willfully, not through cause or condition) disrupts and disturbs sociocultural norms in a way that seems to delight the artist while it alarms others (Fig. 5).

In another comparison to Kahlo, both share self-portraiture-as-performance strategies. Both provide a self-portrait as a proxy with minimal interpretive prompt (title or content), inviting viewer participation through their own subjectivities in different ways. Both deploy Mexican sociocultural loaded information conveying multiple meanings through indirectness and humor. Neither can be trusted to be working at face value. The pelona works read as more personal than others in Mayer's repertoire: we may remember Kahlo's proxy-self in a similarly playful non-binary pelona style, serving as both mirror and mask. References to androgyny, aging, hair, and nostalgia are obvious, but like Kahlo, who loaded her work with coded meanings, decoy images, and subterfuge, in both *El tendedero* and the *inter-Pelación* series, Mayer facilitates but leaves the meaning-making for others.

If the artist does not tell, she certainly engages *telling* as a transformative act—the daring of telling in *El tendedero* is

nearly a match for the daring of the artist who wields a razor to defy gendered social norms for women. The metaphor is shared: telling, like shaving off one's gender-telling hair, is revealing. Both exposures elicit public responses of awe, in the mixed sense of admiration and fear, as being unguarded and bold is brave and dangerous. These characteristics marking Mayer's work are lodged in pushing social boundaries *safely*. Telling, safely. Mayer's ongoing social media text piece *Soy tan, pero tan vieja, a dicho*, or "saying," roughly translating to, "I am so old so old," is a folksy, exaggerated, Mexican style of approaching challenging tough topics with charm and humor, freeing her to say what she wants and to be likeable while doing it. This charm is the frilly apron she used in Polvo de Gallina Negra performances referencing kitchens and babies; the pink of *El tendadero* and its unassuming slips of paper; the wink inherent to each *inter-Pelación* pelona post. Mayer's soft approach to hard things offers safety and opens conversation.

For Mayer's 2016 retrospective, *Si tiene dudas... pregunte*, Griselda Pollock wrote: "This is ... an artist who is as active and creative now, in this very moment, as she has been during a lifetime of work over forty-plus years. The book is not closed. There are new pages being written every day."³³ Many foundational, iconic feminist artists are working through their seventies and beyond, which speaks well of feminist art as a healthy lifestyle. But Mayer's activity is exceptional, especially within the context of those increasing hurricane winds. Since her retrospective, Mayer has attained the rare status of becoming very well known. Although it is not an artist's job to create social change, she has done so. Her productivity and visibility have exploded in cadence with the exploding numbers of feminicides, perhaps not the most pleasant cipher, but there is some comfort in her continued presence in these battering winds. Mayer and her work have been a backbone of art and conversation that dissents. The question is *how*? Not just how she dared in those early days when conversation about women's issues was *sotto voce*, or how she maintained and transmitted optimism as the numbers of feminicides and other violence against women rise. But even more important to our reckoning: As her presence and exposure grow, and her audience and impact expand globally, how has she continued to be not just important and relevant, but to be so in a world that bores very quickly? Because she listens to others? No. Because she gets them to talk, to tell. The secret to Mónica Mayer's work, over half a century in a hurricane, is that she asks. •

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Notes

All translations are by the author unless indicated otherwise.

1. Mónica Mayer, interview with the author by Zoom, June 3, 2024.
2. Mayer began working with Olga Valencia as part of La Brigada de Belleza Itinerante, a group of itinerant beauty stylists providing beauty services (*apapachos estéticos* or "style hugs") in 2016, in association with Mayer's retrospective exhibition (Feb. 6–July 31, 2016). See Sol Henaro, Mónica Mayer, Karen Cordero Reiman, Griselda Pollock, et al., *Si tiene dudas ... pregunte: Una exposición retrocolectiva de Mónica Mayer* (When in Doubt ... Ask: A Retrocollective Exhibit of Mónica Mayer), exh. cat. (Mexico City and Barcelona: Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo [MUAC], Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México [UNAM]; Alumnos 47; Editorial RM; and RM Verlag, 2016).
3. Mayer, "¡Ponerme la barba fue increíble!", from *La Travesti Involuntaria* (The Involuntary Cross-Dresser), quoted in Mónica Mayer, *Intimidaciones...o no. Arte, vida y feminismo* (Intimacies ... or Not. Art, Life and Feminism), compiled by Julia Antivilo and Katnira Bello (Mexico City: Editorial Diecisiete, 2021), 265–66.
4. Mayer, interview with the author, April 6, 2024, Veracruz and Mexico City.
5. Karen Cordero Reiman, "When in Doubt ... Ask: Mónica Mayer's Artistic Project," in *Si tiene dudas ... pregunte*, 33–42.
6. Mayer, "Fragments of a Correspondence: Exchanges between María Laura Rosa and Mónica Mayer on Feminism, the Everyday, and Creation," in *Si tiene dudas ... pregunte*, 195.
7. See *México Evalúa*, 2023, <https://www.mexicoevalua.org/newsletter-2023/>.
8. In 2019, not long after Mexico began recording and classifying femicide data, Tania Reneaum Panszi, Executive Director of Amnesty International and Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), stated that Mexico occupied the first place in feminicides in Latin America, reaching 3,357 cases in 2017. For news articles, see Margarita Rodríguez, "México ocupa primer lugar en feminicidios en América Latina," Oct. 28, 2018, <https://www.elsoldemexico.com.mx/mexico/sociedad/mexico-ocupa-primer-lugar-en-feminicidios-en-america-latina-2380344.html>; "México, el país que más mata mujeres en América Latina," March 16, 2023, <https://news.culturacolectiva.com/mexico/mexico-es-primer-lugar-en-feminicidios-en-america-latina/>. See also Ana María Hanssen, "Latin America: Urgent need for regional response as rates of femicide spiral," International Bar Association, <https://www.ibanet.org/article/6A981E06-DC9F-4B07-B690-632DEF63E366>. Since then, as other countries in Latin America initiated reporting and measurement protocols, Honduras, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic have moved to the top in per capita feminicides (rate per 100,000 women). It should be noted that there is no consistent rubric across nations in terms of reporting or defining feminicides. In terms of absolute numbers, however, Mexico and Brazil remain the top two countries in feminicides in Latin America: see the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe) data: <https://oig.cepal.org/es/indicadores/feminicidio>. For a narrative digest of current statistics on femicide in Latin America and measurement rubrics, see Laura Glanc, Tatiana Rein Venegas and Alejandra Otamendi, *Américas Quarterly*, June 27, 2024, <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/progress-on-reducing-latin-americas-femicides-has-stalled/>.
9. Patricia Galeana, in a public speech at the Museo de la Mujer (Museum of Women), Mexico City, March 18, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/UNAM.MX.Oficial/videos/951887272185946>.
10. It emerged through the LIX Mexican Chamber of Deputies Special Commission on Femicide, headed by Marcela Lagarde, beginning in 2003, and was adopted by the legislature in 2006.

11. Daniela Cerva, professor at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos, who studies feminist movements and the criminalization of their protests in Mexico, has said that Mexico actually has a surplus of laws in favor of women's rights, but those in charge of enforcing them fail to do so. Such legislation includes the General Law of Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence, introduced in 2007 and updated regularly; *La Ley Olimpia* (Olimpia Law) addressing cyber-assault; *La Ley Ingrid* (Ingrid Law) protecting the images of victims of violence from exploitation in the press; *La Ley Vicaria* (Law of Vicariousness) protecting women from a partner using their children as a means of extortion/harm; *La ley el agresor sale de casa* (Aggressor Law: Leave the House) mandating the evacuation of an abuser from a residence, established in 2020.
12. See Mónica Mayer, *Rosa chillante: Mujeres y performance en México* (Mexico City: Pinto mi Raya avjediciones, 2004), <http://www.pintomiraya.com/pmr/images/stories/pdf/rosa-ch.pdf>; Edward J. McCaughan, "Navigating the Labyrinth of Silence: Feminist Artists in Mexico," *Social Justice* 34, no. 1 (107), *Art, Identity and Social Justice* (2007), 44–62; Araceli Barbosa Sánchez, *Arte Feminista En Los Ochenta En Mexico: Una Perspectiva De Genero* (México D.F.: Casa Juan Pablos; Cuernavaca, Morelos: Casa Juan Pablos: Universidad Autonoma del Estado de Morelos, 2008); Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda, "'¿Cosas de Mujeres?': Feminist Networks of Collaboration in 1970s Mexico," *Artelogie* 5 (October 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4000/artelogie.5618>; Andrea Giunta, "Feminist Disruptions in Mexican Art, 1975–1987," *Artelogie* 5 (October 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4000/artelogie.5103>; and Cordero Reiman, "When in Doubt ... Ask: Mónica Mayer's Artistic Project," in *Si tiene dudas ... pregunte*.
13. Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda, *Women Made Visible: Feminist Art and Media in Post-1968 Mexico City* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2019); and McCaughan, "Navigating the Labyrinth of Silence." See also, Teresa Eckmann, review of *Women Made Visible: Feminist Art and Media in Post-1968 Mexico City* by Aceves Sepúlveda, *Woman's Art Journal* 42, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2021): 59–60.
14. Mayer earned a master's degree from the now defunct Goddard College during this time, with the thesis, "Feminist Art: An Effective Political Tool," supervised by Suzanne Lacy.
15. Julia Antivilo Peña, "Feminist Art and 'Artivism' in Latin America: A Dialogue in Three Voices: Julia Antivilo Peña, Mónica Mayer, and María Laura Rosa," in Cecilia Fajardo-Hill and Andrea Giunta, eds., *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985* (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum; New York: DelMonico/Prestel, 2017), 41.
16. Formerly the Academy of San Carlos, ENAP moved to Xochimilco in 1979, concluding a more than two-hundred-year reign of the Centro Historico as a center of arts education and production in Mexico, and as a political hotspot for dissent. ENAP later merged into the Faculty of Arts and Design (FAD) at UNAM in 2012.
17. On Kati Horna, see the article in this issue by Julia Skelly, "Dolls, Masks, and Witches: Kati Horna's Alchemical Photography," *Woman's Art Journal* 45, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2024): 3–13.
18. Mayer, interview with the author, April 6, 2024, Veracruz and Mexico City.
19. Mayer, interview with the author, September 13, 2022, Mexico City.
20. In 1975, Carla Stellweg's first-ever feminist seminar in Mexico was held as a response to Linda Nochlin's 1971 foundational essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"; it also served as a counterpoint to a series of government sponsored exhibitions in Mexico celebrating the United Nation's first International Women's Year Congress held in Mexico City, including *La mujer en la plastica* (Women in Art) at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, and *La mujer como creadora y tema de arte* (Woman as Creator and Art Theme) at Museo de Arte Moderno. Both exhibitions were seen as contentious. Mayer has said that much of the focus was less on women artists but on male artists depicting female subjects. Mayer, in conversation with the author, March 3, 2018. See the 2023 exhibition on Stellweg: *Cultivate. Homage to Carla Stellweg*, curated by Andrea Valencia and Pablo León de la Barra at the Museo Tamayo, Mexico City (May 27–Aug. 27, 2023): <https://www.museotamayo.org/exposiciones/cultivar-homenaje-a-carla-stellweg>.
21. For a detailed account of the feminist "grupos" of Mexico and the Los Grupos movement, see Gladys Villegas Morales, "Los grupos de arte feminista en México" (The Feminist Art Groups of Mexico), unpublished thesis, <https://cdigital.uv.mx/bitstream/handle/123456789/192/2006137P45.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>. See also Arden Decker, "Los Grupos and the Art of Intervention in 1960s and 1970s Mexico," abstract (PhD diss., Graduate Center, City University of New York, 2015), https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/901.
22. Aceves Sepúlveda notes that, during the years of the official start of Mexico's feminist movement in art, members of feminist groups and collectives were surveilled, their daily activities recorded and photographed by the Mexican Bureaus of Secret Intelligence (Dirección Federal de Seguridad [DFS], and Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales [DGIPS]). This came to light through a law promoting freedom of information (*La Ley de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información* [LTAI]) implemented in 2002. But according to Aceves Sepúlveda, who came upon this information by surprise, it was not a surprise to certain members of the feminist groups of that era, including feminist photographer and activist Ana Victoria Jiménez, who told Aceves Sepúlveda, "Sabíamos...." ("Yes we knew...."). See Aceves Sepúlveda, *Women Made Visible*, 149–65.
23. I was a high school student in a nearby neighbourhood at that time and can attest that no one was asking such a question there until she did.
24. Mayer, "El tendadero que hice en México fue íntimo, con tierna ayuda de amigos y familiares [1979]," quoted in Mayer, *Intimidades...o no. Arte, vida y feminismo*, 38.
25. See Araceli Sánchez Barbosa, "Polvo de Gallina Negra," in *Arte feminista en los ochenta en Mexico: Una perspectiva de genero* (Feminist Art in 1980s Mexico: A Gendered Perspective), 113–38.
26. In addition to *Rosa chillante: mujeres y performance* (2004) and *Intimidades...o no. Arte, vida y feminismo* (2021), books authored by Mayer include: *Juanita, las pochotas y una bolsa de preguntas* (Juanita, the Pochota Tree and a Bag Full of Questions) (IMO, 2009); *Escandalario: los artistas y la distribución del arte* (Scandalous: Artists and Art Distribution) (Mexico City: CONACULTA-INBA-FONCA, AVJEdiciones, Ex-Teresa Actual, Pinto mi Raya and Fundación Bancomer, 2006); *Pinto mi Raya: de la colección Escoge tu Museo* (Pinto mi Raya: From the Collection "Choose your Museum"), coauthored and edited with Víctor Lerma (Editorial Santillana, 2004); *Las mujeres que no se fueron* (The Women Who Did Not Leave), text by Mayer, photography by Juan Carlos Reyes García (Oaxaca: Instituto de La Mujer Oaxaqueña, 2003); *Una década y pico* (A Decade and A Bit) (Mexico City: Pinto mi Raya, Ediciones al vapor, 2002); *Si somos muchas y no somos machas* (Yes, We Are Many and We Are Not Manly) (Mexico City: Pinto mi Raya, Ediciones al vapor, 2002).
27. Fajardo-Hill and Giunta, eds., *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985*; Cordero Reiman, "When in Doubt ... Ask: Mónica Mayer's Artistic Project," in *Si tiene dudas ... pregunte*.
28. Mayer's *El tendadero* was presented at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C., Nov. 10, 2017–Jan. 5, 2018, <https://nmwa.org/exhibitions/el-tendadero/>; and at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, *Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life*, Kochi, Kerala, India, Dec. 12, 2018–March 29, 2019, <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/211346/kochi-muziris-biennale-2018possibilities-for-a-non-alienated-life/>.

29. Andrea Giunta, *The Political Body: Stories on Art, Feminism and Emancipation in Latin America*, trans. Jane Brodie (Oakland: University of California Press, 2023).
30. Mayer, interview with the author by Zoom, June 3, 2024.
31. See Pinto mi Raya's website for an extensive collection of archival materials, projects, books, and individual performances and practices: <http://www.pintomiraya.com/pmr/>.
32. The exhibition opened at the Exconvento Betlehemita in the city of Veracruz on April 4, 2024, and in Xalapa Veracruz, at the Galería de Arte Contemporáneo of Xalapa, July 4, 2024.
33. *Madre por un día* reemerged in the public realm in the wake of Mayer's 2016 retrospective at MUAC: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abaDXr3HKck>.
34. See Giunta, "Feminist Disruptions in Mexican Art, 1975–1987"; Aceves Sepúlveda, "'¿Cosas de Mujeres?';"; Cordero Reiman, "When in Doubt ... Ask"; Barbosa, "Polvo de Gallina Negra"; and McCaughan, "Navigating the Labyrinth of Silence."
35. Yoko Ono, interview with Tony Eliot, *Time Out Magazine* (London), no. 77, August 6–12, 1971.
36. Mayer wrote this text as documentation of her process for a group exhibition featuring her work among other women artists, filmed and recorded by Eve Fowler. The show, *Please recall to me everything you have thought*, was presented at Gallery Morán Morán in Los Angeles, July 12–Aug. 24, 2024, <https://www.pintomiraya.com/redes/categorias/visita-al-archivo-pinto-mi-raya-2/el-tendedero/el-tendedero-en-moran-moran.html>.
37. Mayer decided after an uneasy *El tendedero* experience in Belfast in 2018 that all her subsequent *tendederos* would specifically address assault/violence against women in some form: <https://www.pintomiraya.com/redes/categorias/visita-al-archivo-pinto-mi-raya-2/el-tendedero/el-tendedero-de-belfast.html>.
38. Mayer, "En los 70 era yo sola que trabaja el tema del acoso," quoted in María Laura Rosa, "Mónica Mayer. Si tiene dudas ... pregunte: Una exposición retrocolectiva," *MAV (Mujeres en las artes visuales)*, March 12, 2016 <https://www.m-arteyculturavisual.com/2016/03/12/monica-mayer-una-exposicion-retrocolectiva/>.
39. Mayer, "Fragments of a Correspondence," a conversation with María Laura Rosa, in *Si tiene dudas ... pregunte*, 197.
40. The term "pre-feminist" follows Jean Franco's usage in *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), xxiii. It refers to the women artists working in Mexico during a period of time prior to the emergence of the feminist movement in art in Mexico in the mid-1970s, differentiating this from the term "proto-feminist" as a temporal category especially apt for artists who denied feminist affiliation in large part because of existing tensions between feminism and the prevailing Marxism embraced by artists in Mexico at this time. The artists I consider pre-feminist in this context include Frida Kahlo, María Izquierdo, Aurora Reyes, Lola Cueto, Olga Costa, Elizabeth Catlett, Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, Mariana Yampolsky, Kati Horna, Fanny Rabel, Lola Álvarez Bravo, among others. See also Barbara Tyner, "El florecimiento de las mujeres artistas en México: Estrategias, sorpresas y resistencias (1938–1958)" (The Florescence of Women Artists in Mexico: Strategies, Surprises and Resistances 1938–1958) (PhD diss., Centro de Cultura Casa Lamm, Mexico City, 2022).
41. Aceves Sepúlveda, "'¿Cosas de Mujeres?,' "12.
42. Aceves Sepúlveda's interpretation of *El tendedero* as an archive is incisive in *Women Made Visible*.
43. See J. César Félix-Brasdefer, "Indirectness and Politeness in Mexican Requests," in *Selected Proceedings of the Seventh Hispanic Linguistics Symposium*, ed. David Eddington (Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project), 66–78, <https://lingref.com/cpp/hls/7/paper1087.pdf>.
44. Andre Breton, *El arte de Frida Kahlo es ... un listón alrededor de una bomba: Una mirada sobre el arte mexicano*, exh. cat. (Mexico D.F. Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1996).
45. The *Feminicidio en México. ¡Ya Basta!* (Enough!) exhibition (referred to here as *¡Ya Basta!*) was held at Mexico City's Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia (Museum of Memory and Tolerance) in 2017. Curated by the museum's director of temporary exhibits, Linda Atach Zaga, *¡Ya Basta!* offered the first comprehensive look at feminicide in Mexico through artistic expression. Works included, among others, Mayra Martell's photographic series, *Ensayo de la identidad* (Essay on Identity) depicting empty bedrooms of feminicide victims, hauntingly preserved; Teresa Margolles's *Pesquisas* (Inquiries), a large-scale installation of photographs of thirty flyers pinned to outdoor surfaces in Ciudad Juárez from the 1990s to 2016, each announcing the details of a missing woman; feminist cartoonist Cintia Bolio's graphic posters in tendedero-pink, white, and black; and Teresa Serrano's 2003 video *La Piñata*, depicting unexpectedly brutal gendered violence involving a baseball bat and a "female" piñata proxy. Two earlier exhibitions addressing feminicides in Ciudad Juárez were shown in the US: notably *Frontera 450+* at the Station Museum of Contemporary Art, Houston, in 2006; and *Ni Una Más, Not One More: The Juárez Murders*, Leonard Pearlstein Gallery, Drexel Univ., Philadelphia, May 15–July 16, 2010.
46. Veracruz is a known hotspot for feminist art and activism, especially Xalapa, where Dr. Gladys Villegas Morales of the University of Veracruz in Xalapa has been a pioneer in Mexican feminist art scholarship and "research-creation" since 1981, when she simultaneously joined the Feminist Collective of Xalapa and began her university studies. The exhibition in both Veracruz City and Xalapa featured a variety of opportunities for community involvement, including workshops with the numerous local feminist artists and collectives in person and online to generate collaborative works such as activations of *El tendedero*.
47. Mayer, interview with the author by Zoom, June 3, 2024.
48. Lidia Artista, "Morena anuncia 'tendederos' con nombres de diputados" (The Morena Party Announces "Tendederos" with the Names of Deputies), April 18, 2022, https://politica.expansion.mx/presidencia/2022/04/18/morena-anuncia-tendederos-con-nombres-de-diputados-que-votaron-contrareforma#google_vignette.
49. Mayer, "Comparto mis procesos artísticos en las redes sociales porque al fin y al cabo performancera. Ahí, los ecos de los diálogos con el público y la pública se integran.... Para mi forma de trabajar, el modelo de la artista en la soledad en su estudio ya fue," Facebook, June 24, 2024.
50. See Manuel Gamio, *Forjando patria: pro-nacionalismo* (Forging a Fatherland: For Nationalism), trans. Fernando Armstrong-Fumero (Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press, 2010), 211–12.
51. Anne Rubenstein, "The War on *Las Pelonas*: Modern Women and Their Enemies, Mexico City, 1924," in Jocelyn H. Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughn, and Gabriela Cano, eds., *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 57–80.
52. This may also be mapped to general social acceptance of male homosexual behaviour between straight-presenting men and "vestidas," other men presenting as very feminine. See Annick Prieur, "Bodily and Symbolic Constructions among Homosexual Men in Mexico," *Sexualities* 1, no. 3 (1998): 287–98, <https://doi.org/10.1177/136346098001003004>.
53. Griselda Pollock, "Mónica Mayer: Performance, Moment, and the Politics of Life," in *Si tiene dudas ... pregunte*, 122.

HELEN CHADWICK'S *OF MUTABILITY*

VISUAL PLEASURE AND GODDESS IMAGERY IN BRITISH AND AMERICAN FEMINIST ART AND THEORY OF THE 1970S AND 1980S

By Tamara Trodd

In October 1986, a review of Helen Chadwick's (1953–1996) large-scale, multi-media installation, *Of Mutability* (1984–86; Pl. 6.), displayed at London's Institute for Contemporary Arts (ICA) between May and June of that year, was published by Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton in *Art Monthly*.¹ Focused on *The Oval Court*, the central mosaic of blue-toned photocopies at the installation's heart, Allthorpe-Guyton argued that "it throws not only Chadwick's position into jeopardy, but also threatens the ground recently gained by women artists and writers. The problem lies in Chadwick's use of the image of her body.... [T]he question is whether she has succeeded in representing herself as a subject of desire, or has merely reduced herself to the object of visual pleasure."² Four years later, in 1990, Hilary Robinson repeated similar criticisms in an essay published in the *Women Artists Slide Library Journal*.³ Like Allthorpe-Guyton, Robinson confronted Chadwick's work for contributing to sexist "idealisations" of the female form as well as for the "fascistic" connotations of sadism in her imagery. And yet, partially defending Chadwick, Robinson described *Of Mutability* as "Chadwick's outstanding achievement." Despite her potential objectification of the female body, Chadwick's metaphor of the pool allowed "the boundaries between subject and object" to become "significantly blurred." Robinson concluded, "What I think Chadwick enabled the woman viewer to do when looking at *Of Mutability* was to be in a constant state of pleasurable flux, slipping between being the desired object and the desiring subject."⁴

Chadwick reacted strongly to such arguments, recalling, in 1994, "I was nearly massacred in the mid-'80s for presenting the female body naked;"⁵ and, "I was aware of the wing of feminism which I have perhaps unkindly called Stalinist, that was advocating absolutely no representation of the female body was possible."⁶ Neither the tone nor substance of



Fig. 1. Helen Chadwick in debate with Susan Hiller, film still from the documentary *Imaginary Women* (1986), Channel 4, dir. Gina Newson. © Tatooist International Ltd/Channel 4. Courtesy of the BFI National Archive.

Robinson's or Allthorpe-Guyton's commentaries seem to support such a reaction—both are broadly supportive—yet it is possible that Chadwick was subjected in person to stronger opposition. Chadwick's participation in the 1986 Channel 4 documentary, *Imaginary Women*, taking the form of a dinner party conversation amongst feminist artists, chaired by Marina Warner, shows the artist's face, flushed and furious, in response to a challenge by Susan Hiller (1940–2019) on her use of the female form (Fig. 1).⁷ Two years after making *Of Mutability*, Chadwick decided to change her work: "I made a

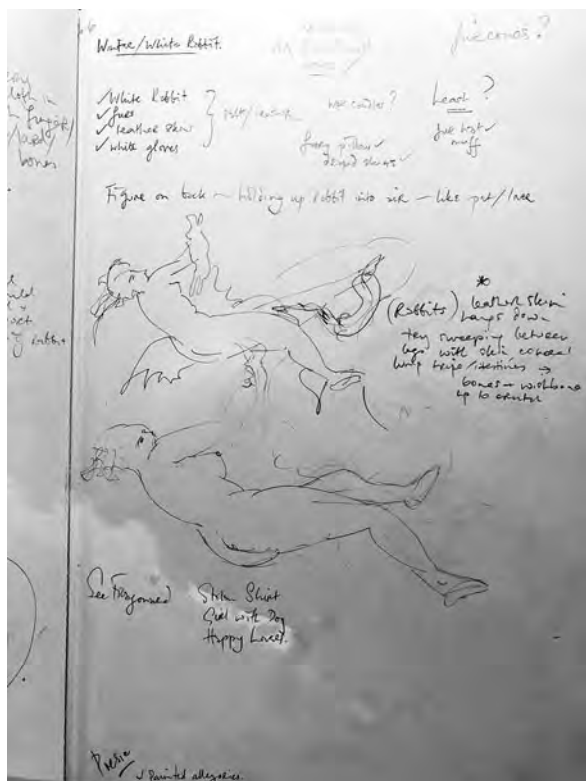


Fig. 2. Helen Chadwick, sketchbook study of third figural group from *The Oval Court* (1984–86). Photo: Tamara Trodd. Sketchbook (1984–86), Helen Chadwick Archive. © The Estate of Helen Chadwick, Courtesy The Henry Moore Institute, Leeds.

conscious decision in 1988 not to represent my body. It immediately declares female gender and I wanted to be more deft.”⁸ In later works, Chadwick turned to medical imaging technology in order to explore the interior of the body and its processes, as in *Blood Hyphen* (1988).

It would be easy to surmise that *Of Mutability* was a failure in Chadwick’s view, since she apparently abandoned the ways of working represented by its installation. Yet, from a twenty-first-century standpoint, it’s important to reach back, to grasp what *Of Mutability* meant on its own terms and the ways it helps us reconstruct art historical tensions and, indeed, *mutations*, within feminist theory at that time. It is also necessary to return with fresh eyes and perspective to Chadwick’s voluminous notebooks and archives that contain personal collections of newspaper clippings and articles held at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds. In what follows, Chadwick’s extraordinary work of the mid-1980s is understood as part of a wider return in British and American feminist art and theory to questions of visual pleasure and the female body. In this context, it may be argued that Chadwick mediated traditions of so-called “goddess” imagery through unexpected sources—a sixteenth-century poem by English poet Edmund Spenser, from which *Of Mutability* takes its title, as well as through the elaborate self-portrayals of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo (1907–1954)—both having supported the artist as she navigated these debates. In her development of an

emblematic and allegorical visual language of the late twentieth century, we may trace how she journeyed from the aniconic “scripto-visual” tradition of the 1970s and early 1980s to find new ways to ground her work in the pleasures and materiality of the body. At the same time, she reconfigured models of artistic practice invoking “essential” feminine identity in order to dissolve and expand restrictive models of gender representation. In this sense, *Of Mutability* remains a pivotal work for understanding the alive, ever-changing nature of feminist theory in these formative combative years, and how it may continue to inform our present.

Of Mutability was designed as a multi-media installation comprised of three individual interrelated works: *Mirror* (1984), an engraved Venetian glass hand mirror, with two silver weeping eyes at its centre; *The Oval Court*, the centerpiece, an intricate mosaic of twelve figural compositions; and *Carcass*, a no-longer-extant seven-foot-tall glass box containing rotting compost (for which Chadwick used leftover vegetable matter from the production of *The Oval Court* as well as from sacks of food waste collected from her neighbors in Hackney). As Mark Sladen reported, “Chadwick had not anticipated how actively *Carcass* would ferment during the course of its showing,” and eventually it began to leak, then explode.⁹ As a result of this loss, *Of Mutability* has never again been installed in its original three-part format. In its earliest iteration at the ICA, the spectator was presented with the twelve collaged figural groups on a low blue platform, as if the photocopied figures were “floating” in a blue pool; hence the title, “The Reflecting Pool,” Chadwick sometimes used for this element of the installation. Five large, gold-painted wooden spheres were placed on top of the photocopies, and around the walls hung computer-generated drawings of Solomonic “barley sugar” pillars, based on the seventeenth-century baldacchino columns designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini in St. Peter’s Basilica, Rome. Each pair of columns was topped by a photocopied image of Chadwick’s own face, crying, collaged to the columns by blue-toned photocopied swags of various leaves and foliage.¹⁰ The overall effect recalled a Baroque ceiling, tipped onto the floor. In her accompanying catalogue essay, Marina Warner described Chadwick’s installation as staging a “post-lapsarian Paradise,” analyzing the ways the “Pool Figures” evoke allegorical figures, subvert moralistic ‘Vanitas’ traditions, and embrace “worldly beauty and corruption.”¹¹ Drawing extensively on Chadwick’s own notes that conveyed her desire to represent “pleasure,” Warner presents Chadwick as pursuing a project to subvert traditional representations of female sexuality as sinful. While she is “mischievously aware of ... the criticism she could attract,” Warner writes, her ambition is to “defy restrictions of all kinds.”¹² “One of the taboos has been an exploration of one’s own body,” Warner quotes Chadwick. “One has to move in the face of theory into areas that cannot be comprehended by theory.”¹³ This article follows Warner in focusing on the installation’s central mosaic, *The Oval Court*, and understanding the work as an exploration of visual pleasure, while acknowledging the important ways in which its meaning continues to be inflected by the holistic elements of

the original installation, signalling, respectively, themes of “reflection” and “decay.”

The figures comprising *The Oval Court* are collaged together from shards and fragments cut up from hundreds of blue-toned photocopies (details of this technique shown in Pl. 7). Although the collaged figures are near life-size, most of the paper shards are no larger than a human hand. Together, the collages (some of which have never been discussed or reproduced) compose twelve figural groups, eleven centrally featuring Chadwick’s own naked or semi-naked body displayed in relation to a wide range of animal and vegetable bodies.¹⁴ Throughout the bodily groups appear a multiplicity of disembodied hands grasping materials, supporting objects, and scrambling anatomical logic. For the first figure (1984–86; Pl. 8), Chadwick’s splayed body, head bandaged, is posed with a goose, her left arm raised, her right hand spilling insect-like maggots. On her breast lightly rests the goose’s curved head, its foot pressed against her waist, cinched tightly on the other side by a third human hand whose appearance partly transforms the goose into human form—reaching out its arm to grasp her, like a staged embrace, perhaps, in reference to the mythological theme of Leda and the Swan. However, the scene is also deathly: as bandages unfurl like winding-cloths, the figure appears headless amidst scattered maggots, and a long, viscous, shiny eel-like creature expelled from the goose’s leg connotes internal viscera, or an enormous worm.

The second figure, referencing and inverting imagery of the *cornucopia*, shows a head spewing out food: one hand clutches a pineapple; a net wraps about its thighs and lower legs; a noose ties around one ankle, the other end wrapped around the figure’s neck, as if a ritual form of hobbling. The image simultaneously conveys abundance and vomit, waste and decay. For the third image, eyes closed, face peaceful, Chadwick holds up a white rabbit while the other arm reaches above her head, elevating stems of dead flowers. Surrounding her are dead rabbits, a furry skin cloaked around her waist, pulled tight by a third hand. Her left toes clasp rabbit skin, small bones piled around it. Chadwick’s sketchbook drawings (Fig. 2) explore this figure’s formulation: as her own notes attest, its pose was inspired by a number of paintings by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, including *The Stolen Shirt* of 1770.¹⁵ Again, her notes condense imagery of sex and death: “Rabbit: fecundity, lust, fertility, playmate,” she writes in pencil on one side of the sketchbook page; “Tripe, lard, bones,” she lists on the other.

The fourth shows a blindfolded Chadwick holding up a mirror. In her notes, Chadwick explains that the multiple imagery in *The Oval Court* deploying blindfolds, or eyes otherwise wrapped and concealed, indicate that the gaze (her own, as well as the viewer’s) should be understood as directed inwards: “into feeling and sensuality of the flesh—internalised experiences of pleasure. Erotic intimacy, floating like a dream.”¹⁶ Chadwick’s fifth bodily composite appears to dance upside-down during a gravity-defying handstand, her head tilting up as if to kiss the smiling face of a lamb, who, similarly weightless, dances toward her. Such impossibly staged encounters beg the question, How on earth did Chadwick



Fig. 3. Photograph of Helen Chadwick photocopying a dead lamb for *The Oval Court* (1984–86). © The Estate of Helen Chadwick. Courtesy of the Helen Chadwick Archive, The Henry Moore Institute, Leeds.

make them? A photograph from Chadwick’s archives, in Leeds, shows us straightforwardly: Chadwick is captured photocopying a dead lamb (Fig. 3), its small frame splayed across the glass plate, lid removed to accommodate its form. When photocopying her own body, Chadwick slightly reduced the photocopies, so that the human figures appear slightly less than life-size (the xeroxed animals are sometimes enlarged, shown here).

Chadwick’s sketchbook contains preparatory drawings for the sixth figure in wide-mesh fishnet tights. The drawings show more clearly than the photocopy itself a large fish’s head at the figure’s crotch, its jaws opening wide to the smaller fish swimming between the woman’s legs. The accompanying note makes plain the sexual connotations of the figure: “vagina – legs. Enclose womb. Through net/labia.” The seventh figure in the group is the only one not to be represented by a woman’s body. Instead, the enlarged form of a skate is shown, the same size as the sixth woman beside it, and posed as if the skate might be the woman’s prey. The skate appealed to Chadwick, as she described in an interview from 1995: “I remember seeing one in a tank in an aquarium in Plymouth and this ghostly thing just flew up against the side of the glass like a fleshy UFO and you could see its little mouth which is an upside-down smile. It comes up to you with its genitals hanging down and it’s absolutely extraordinary and visionary. Very sexy.”¹⁷ The fish as an obscenely erotic female substitute underlines the robustly bodily and sexual implications inspired by Chadwick’s *The Oval Court*.¹⁸

The aqueous maritime theme continues in the eighth composition, where Chadwick’s gently curving figure has long strands of seaweed called ‘bladder wrack’ extend from her hands, completing her C-curve, and where, on closer inspection, the central form is revealed as the monstrously enlarged, open mouth of a monkfish. Bubbles, emerging from Chadwick’s mouth, are photocopied shells, a long string of pearls spooling out from around her neck, a second, pearl-like string composed of ribbons and seaweed emanating from her navel. The familiar disembodied third hand is placed gently at

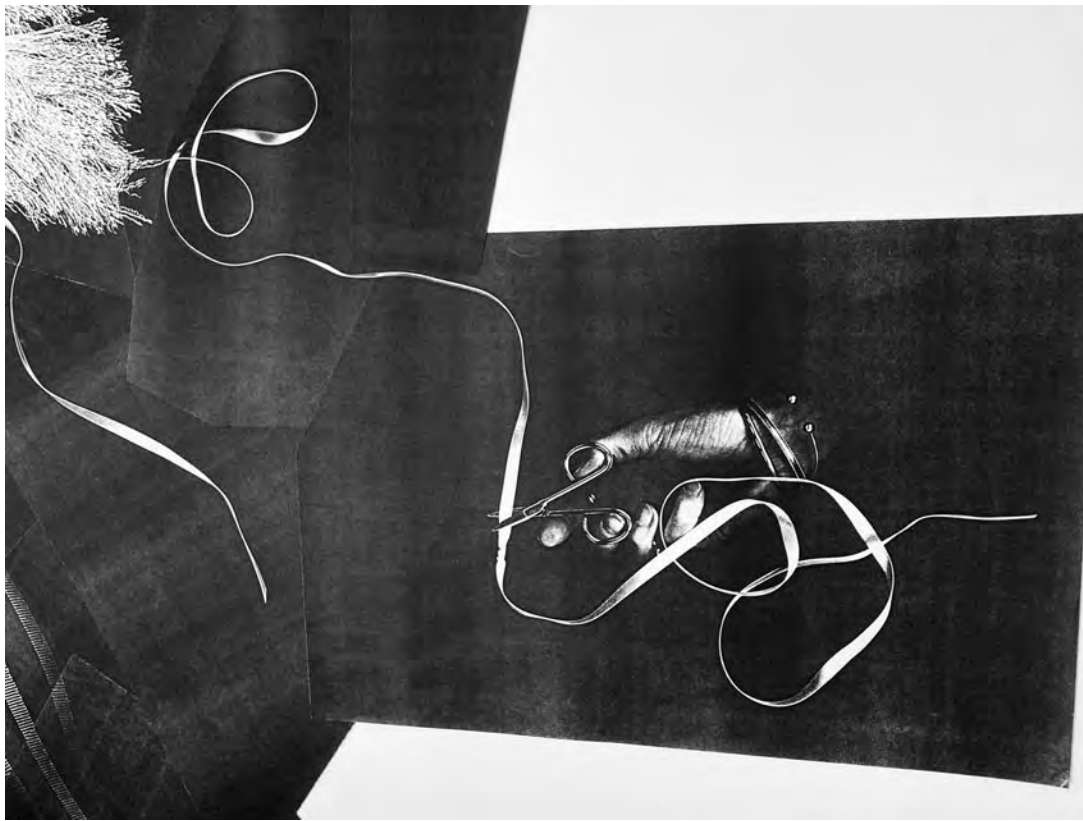


Fig. 4. Helen Chadwick, detail of the tenth figure from *The Oval Court* (1984–86). Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Photo: Tamara Trodd. © The Estate of Helen Chadwick, Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome, and New York, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Chadwick's abdomen, as if cradling her womb. Enlarged photocopies of shells, accented by pale, curled labial edges circle the margins of the scene. In her sketchbook, Chadwick named this group "Pool placenta": her drawing clarifies the image of the fish's head, labelled "foetus," its widened eyes and bared teeth staring up from the center of what she termed the "whirlpool."

The only group showing Chadwick's eyes open, the ninth, was captioned by the artist "figure as wind," describing the "direction of wind: up bum – out of mouth."¹⁹ Her pose seems to restage François Boucher's *Odalisque* paintings of Marie-Louise O'Murphy (1745–52), as others have noted,²⁰ and the Leeds notebook contains two pages of related drawings, making the continued sexual theme clear: "Orgasm as flight/flying. Filled up with explosive erotic energy."²¹ One of the least photographed, the tenth group, shows a smiling Chadwick, face turned to one side, upper body and arms entangled, battling away a storm of ribbons. Her legs are encased in sheer, striped stockings, which in the photocopy take on the appearance of bones, as if it were an X-ray. Swags of tasselled cloth are hugged around her crotch, and another ghostly hand is laid on her hip. A fourth hand appears near the bottom of the group, holding scissors and cutting a ribbon (1984–86; Fig. 4). In an important detail which has not previously been noted, this is a gesture Chadwick borrowed from a statue she photographed in Asamkirche, a church in Munich which she visited for research purposes during the period she was working on *Of Mutability*. At Asamkirche it appears in a sculpture of Death, a gilded skeleton reaching out

his bony hand, holding scissors, to cut the thread of life held by a chubby cherub (Fig. 5).²²

One of the most well-known compositions, the eleventh, makes particularly explicit the thematic union of sex and fertility, death and decay. Chadwick is shown as a double-headed figure, two faces in profile: on the right-hand side, we see icons of the harvest and fecundity—her arm holds a sheaf of wheat; on the left, her arm holds a bouquet of dead blooms and seed heads, while rags and graveclothes loosely bind her foot and lower leg. Most jarringly, her right hand pulls tight a rope bound around the handle of a small axe, lodged upside down within her opened abdomen, its head and blade at her crotch. Chadwick's open abdomen quotes Kahlo's 1944 self-portrait, *The Broken Column*, as Warner has pointed out.²³ In her painting, Kahlo's face is bathed in tears, a detail mirrored by the photocopies of Chadwick's face resting atop the columns surrounding *The Oval Court*'s "pool" figures; while the Mexican artist's body is swathed in bandages and fabric, as are so many of Chadwick's bodies.

The twelfth and final figure has not previously been reproduced (Fig. 6). Chadwick's naked body is shown knotted and contorted, her bottom wedged at the center of the composition, her legs jutting out at impossible angles in an anatomical puzzle generated by her method of collaging separate photocopies together. Most strikingly, the artist's face appears just atop her buttocks, eyes shadowed, tongue pointing out, as if in an attempt at self-pleasure. Her extended tongue and multiple limbs, coupled with the swastika-like pose, also recall representations of Kali, the Hindu goddess of

time, change and death, understood as simultaneously all-nurturing and all-devouring.²⁴ This complex figure, like the other eleven, supports the copious statements preserved in Chadwick's archives, describing the need to overcome the gaze, subvert objectification, and compel women to feel and express desire as subjects, summarized in her note: "Woman as sovereign amorous subject (not object). Woman as strong/independent/sexual and erotic. But not subject to sexual possession by another. Solitary and sublime states of pleasure."²⁵ In this sense the work confirms Robinson's earlier claim that in *Of Mutability* the viewer is enabled "to be in a constant state of pleasurable flux, slipping between the desired object and the desiring subject." And yet here, as in the other eleven figures, the way in which pleasure is interwoven with references to death and decay suggests a need to acknowledge another dynamic of dissolution at work in the work's polyvalent assemblage of the female form.

In its exploration of pleasure and central reference to her own naked body, Chadwick's 1986 *Of Mutability* differed sharply from one influential, well-theorised trend in feminist art-historical theory from the prior decade: the "scripto-visual" tendencies named and analysed by artist Mary Kelly (b. 1941) and scholar Griselda Pollock, among other feminist critics, in articles of the late 1970s and early 1980s.²⁶ The "scripto-visual" was defined as work that, in its adoption of an analytical approach, aimed to expose the social constructions of the feminine and the social processes contributing to women's oppression. Artworks taking this approach, often cited now as seminal examples, include Kelly's best-known piece, *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79), first installed in 1976 at the ICA in London, and Martha Rosler's (b. 1943) short video, *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), shown in the US. Both used conceptual techniques to foster the spectator's critical distance, for example, using text combined with images to produce a "critical awareness ... of the construction of femininity," "transform[ing] the spectator from a passive consumer [of images] into an active producer of meaning."²⁷ This approach was contrasted to what Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman termed "feminist essentialism" or "the glorification of an essential female power," represented, for example, by the use of "'vaginal' forms in painting and sculpture," reflected in Judy Chicago's (b. 1939) famous *The Dinner Party* (1974–79) and the feminist performance art of Gina Pane (1939–1990) and Hannah Wilke (1940–1993). Such work was criticised as too often reaffirming rather than critiquing sexist stereotypes.²⁸ By distinction, the use of images of women was avoided or problematized in scripto-visual practices. As Kelly wrote in her "Preface and Footnotes to the Post Partum Document" (1983), "To use the body of the woman, her image or person, is not impossible but problematic for feminism."²⁹ As a result, "She is usually not present, visibly, in the work."³⁰

Alongside Pollock and Kelly, the film theorist and filmmaker Laura Mulvey made important contributions to this debate.³¹ In her essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," written in 1973 and published in 1975, Mulvey famously analyzed classic Hollywood-styled films, such as Alfred



Fig. 5. The gilded statue of Death cutting the thread of life at Asamkirche (Church of St. Johann Nepomuk) (1733–1746), Munich, Germany.

Hitchcock's *Vertigo* of 1958, as constructing a "male gaze," enabling a form of patriarchally-coded "visual pleasure," which even female spectators are coerced into adopting by the film's structures of editing, construction of shots, and narrative control.³² In no uncertain terms, Mulvey declared her aim to "destroy" such pleasure, to achieve a "total negation of the ease and plenitude of the narrative fiction film," describing this "destruction of pleasure as a radical weapon."³³

In an interview with Mark Haworth-Booth in 1994, Chadwick acknowledged that she was aware of scripto-visual practices, which she called "the whole image-text movement" (notably, the examples she gave were all male artists, including Victor Burgin). But Chadwick complained, "The idea of a denial of one's body as a no-go area to explore themes of sexuality and desire seemed so tortuous that, although I could sympathise with the theoretical position ... it just didn't square with my own needs, the choices that I wanted to make." She explains that she wanted to find a way to make for herself "something more physical, more material, less to do with the world of analysis."³⁴

Some of Chadwick's most well-known early performances and installations from the mid-1970s and early 1980s had explored feminist concerns including stereotypical associations of domesticity, in *Domestic Sanitation* (1976) and *In the Kitchen* (1977–79); sexual harassment in *Train of Thought* (1978); and unemployment in the broader socio-political context of Thatcher's Britain in *Model Institution* (1981–83). In a detailed analysis focusing on *In the Kitchen*, Madeleine Newman and Leonie O'Dwyer have interpreted this piece in line with much feminist work of the 1970s exploring "issues surrounding the ... constructions of feminine identity and the fetishization of the female body in the media, fashion and advertising."³⁵ And yet, looking back in 1994, Chadwick described "that sort of sociological phase as peter[ing] out really" as she became "more and more alienated from my own sense of myself." Instead, she desired to return specifically to herself and her own body, after "an estranged period, I suppose, of the sociopolitical arena."³⁶



Fig. 6. Helen Chadwick, detail of the twelfth figure from *The Oval Court* (1984–86). Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Photo: Tamara Trodd. © The Estate of Helen Chadwick, Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome, and New York, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

as evidence of “Mother Goddess” worship and as indicating forms of matriarchal organization in ancient societies.³⁸ The idea of a matriarchal prehistory was itself a much older concept drawn from nineteenth-century anthropology, where it was used to support a narrative of “progress” towards patriarchy, as Cynthia Eller has documented.³⁹ However, revived in the context of second-wave feminism, this idea took on a polemical focus, critiquing the Judeo-Christian religions and the role they supposedly played in obliterating earlier goddess-worship, establishing and maintaining patriarchy, and controlling and regulating women’s bodies and their sexuality.⁴⁰ Artists such as the Swedish-born British-based Monica Sjöö (1938–2005), whose formative painting *God Giving Birth* (1968) captured a cosmically inspired composition of a baby’s head (her son’s) emerging from the vaginal matrix, hoped that by imagining “God as a woman” they could begin to overturn the subordination of women

Evidence of her reconnection from an estranged self is apparent in the installation *Of Mutability*, in which her radical invitation to reflection and cognition is expanded to include a more deliberate appeal to the senses and a rich language of emotional affect. Chadwick vividly described its “strategies of seduction, luring you into the space of the work so that, despite yourself, you are drawn in,” wanting to “open up a territory for desire, how to depict desire and physical sensation and pleasure.”³⁷ In this sense, Chadwick’s development of a rich visual language, weaving references to a long history of representations of the female form, and its address to pleasure, have more in common, arguably, with the tradition of so-called “goddess” imagery rising to parallel prominence in British and American feminist art and theory in the 1970s and 1980s; even as, we shall see, her project pulls against, fragments, and transforms any “essentialist” tendencies.

In feminist “goddess” literature, prehistoric figurines and Neolithic and Paleolithic art were interpreted by some

to which patriarchal religions have contributed.⁴¹ Allying these historical and spiritual claims and critiques to the contemporary feminist movement, the idea of goddess worship was revived, as Gloria Steinem wrote in her popular book dedicated to celebrating Wonder Woman, to enable women to “remember our Power,” taking strength in the feminist struggle from recovering a supposed lost matriarchal past.⁴²

Goddess worship theories and matriarchal prehistories, proposed as fact in some texts and acknowledged as myth in others, have been criticised as lacking secure evidence, an interpretive product of projection and wishful thinking.⁴³ Simone de Beauvoir gave one of the earliest critiques on strategic grounds, in terms later echoed by social-constructionist feminist analyses.⁴⁴ Following Beauvoir, Sherrie Ortner’s 1974 article, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?,” and Sheila Rowbotham’s “When Adam Delved and Eve Span,” published in *New Society* in 1979, argued that theories of goddess worship and prehistoric matriarchy are

counterproductive for feminism, since they risk confining women in maternal, reproductive roles, ultimately confirming essentialist stereotypes of the “feminine.”⁴⁵

Nevertheless, some American and British artists, inspired by goddess theory, sought to embrace and reclaim imagery of the female body for themselves, to express their own experiences of embodiment and sexual pleasure. This is charted by Lucy Lippard in her book, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, which she began writing in 1977 while living in Britain, and which was first published in the US in 1983.⁴⁶ Citing Carolee Schneemann’s (1939–2019) early performance, *Eye Body* (1963), Lippard exalted her “graphic reflection of the goddess’s dominion over the serpent—a universal symbol of rebirth and fertility.”⁴⁷ In her film *Fuses* (1967), Schneemann’s strategies, Lippard argued, “were designed to free women from the bonds of male-defined pornography, to give women their own natural eroticism, which has been suppressed in America’s puritan culture.”⁴⁸ This chimed with the emphasis in some second-wave feminist texts on goddess worship as a means of supporting a politics of sexual liberation, overcoming shame, and challenging the patriarchal regulation of women’s sexuality. Chadwick sought similar liberatory achievements in *Of Mutability*, recording in her notes that the idea of “Eden regained, overcome[s] Christian shame.”⁴⁹

During the period Chadwick worked on *Of Mutability*, she produced another collage with the photocopier called *One Flesh* (1985; Pl. 9), compositionally modelled upon the Renaissance Madonna and Child enthroned.⁵⁰ In Chadwick’s version, however, the infant Jesus is female, a point made more emphatic by the Virgin Mary’s right hand gesturing to her genitals.⁵¹ There is evidence that Chadwick was interested in medieval depictions of God with both male and female characteristics.⁵² Kahlo’s *My Nurse and I* of 1937 (Pl. 10) also serves as a modern art-historical precedent for refashioning the Christ child as a girl; moreover, in this instance, the artist herself is shown suckling at the breast of her nurse, an Indigenous Mexican woman. Chadwick declared it to be her favourite of Kahlo’s paintings, commenting, “I’m sure she was aware of the irony of her body standing in for Christ.”⁵³

For Chadwick’s *One Flesh*, the baby’s attachment to her umbilical cord, which the mother visibly cuts with a pair of scissors held in her left hand, contributes to the scene’s unusual depiction. This, once again, harkens back to the detail from Chadwick’s observation of the statue in Asamkirche representing Death, cutting the string of life held by a cherub that was adapted for *The Oval Court*. In *One Flesh*, Chadwick transposes this gesture by transforming its meaning from a memento mori into a symbol referencing life’s beginnings, contextually shifting pictorial themes of the Mother and Child and anchoring them in the specific bodily details of human birth. Chadwick’s translation of the sacred to a fleshier register continues around the central figure, where photocopies of several cut-out, collage-like anatomical drawings of bodily organs appear. Most evocatively, a placenta with trailing umbilical cord floats above the woman’s head like a materialised halo. At bottom left, a black and white cut-out of

baby’s booties draws the eye diagonally up toward the infant’s head nestled in drapery resembling tube-like intestines. At the apex, a photocopy of fleshy labia, like a miniature, hooded Madonna, or goddess figurine, flutters like a cherub above the placenta, perhaps Chadwick’s most Chicago-inspired memento.⁵⁴

And yet, in *Of Mutability*, there is no direct invocation of a prehistoric “Mother Goddess” whose primitive strength is counterposed to the Christian God. Chadwick’s work is more ironic and literary than that of either Sjöö or Schneemann. Instead, *The Oval Court*’s parade of goddesses has an unexpected source: the English poet Edmund Spenser’s *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie*, first published in 1609, an unfinished fragment of his larger work, *The Faerie Queen* (1590–96). Chadwick’s ICA exhibition catalogue quotes an extract from Spenser’s poem for its epigraph, a source that brings her work a very different charge. In her use of Spenser’s poem, we find Chadwick taking up a version of “goddess” imagery infused with its own dynamic potential for critique—embodying a goddess whose principal characteristic is change.

While Spenser’s poem has been acknowledged previously as a source for Chadwick’s installation, little interpretive attention has been paid to its significance, especially the poem’s narrative framework and evocation of specific imagery. In his verses, Spenser describes how the goddess ‘Mutabilitie’ rose up against Jove and all the other gods and goddesses to claim precedence over them. Nature is called to adjudicate this claim—one by one, the gods and goddesses of the elements, the seasons, the months, the hours, the night and the day, and, finally, life and death, are summoned to appear. After witnessing their procession, Nature’s final verdict is that Mutabilitie does not rule; although she has demonstrated that all things change, such changes merely enable a being to “dilate,” and, indeed, become more perfect in their own state.

The twelve figures in Chadwick’s mosaic readily represent Spenser’s pageant of deities: each stanza describes the appearance of a particular god or goddess decked in suitable attributes (Autumn wreathed in ears of corn, May strewing flowers, e.g.). The twelve figures in Chadwick’s mosaic echoes the calendrical emphasis in Spenser’s poem—the twelve months, each named, the seasons and hours—as well as his use of astrological imagery. Most fundamentally, Chadwick’s intertwining themes of growth and life, decay and death, are in tune with how Mutabilitie describes her power, in the verses recalled in the catalogue by Chadwick:

For, all that from [Earth] springs and is ybredde,
How-euer fayre it flourish for a time,
Yet see we soone decay; and being dead,
To turne again vnto their earthly slime:
Yet, out of their decay and mortall crime,
We daily see new creatures to arize;
And of their Winter spring another Prime,
Vnlike in forme, and chang’d by strange disguise:
So turne they still about, and change in restlesse wise.⁵⁵

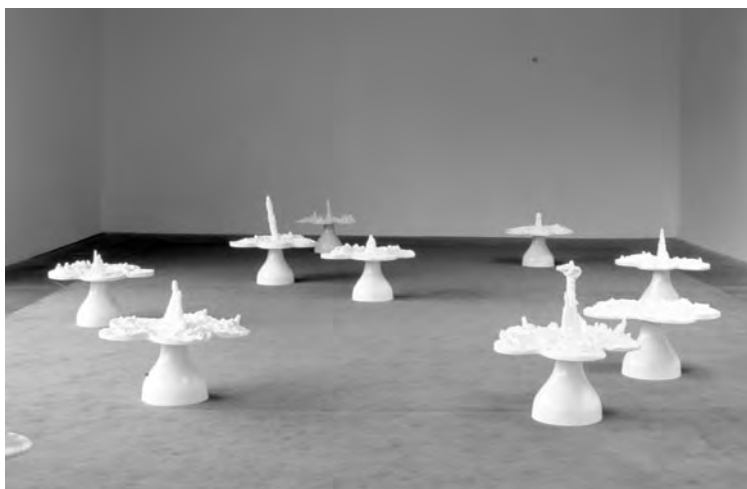


Fig. 7. Helen Chadwick, *Piss Flowers, No 1–12* (1991–92), bronze and cellulose lacquer, twelve parts, each approx. 27 1/2" x 25 5/8" x 25 5/8". Installed at the Serpentine Gallery, London, 1994. © The Estate of Helen Chadwick, Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome, and New York.

Echoed in popular themes of later feminist goddess literature, Spenser's poem stages a contest between male and female principles, telling a story of a goddess seeking to overthrow a god and remind him of her ancient priority. Long before they were revived by second-wave feminism, such stories of goddess worshipping matriarchies overthrown by patriarchal sky-gods were told for centuries. Indeed, rather than serving any feminist purpose, as Eller has argued, they often functioned ideologically to reassure the audience that the patriarchal order of things is modern, legitimate, and right.⁵⁶ These stories typically end, as does Spenser's poem, in the reassertion of patriarchal order, as the goddess is set back to her proper, subordinate place. And yet, despite this narrative conclusion, Spenser's poem seems to enact another progression in its richness of language and imagery: savouring the untenability of any fixed order and the dissolve of all things into their opposites. It is this dreamwork of dissolution that Chadwick's installation takes further. The faces crying tears into the pool in Chadwick's *The Oval Court* perform what Spenser tells of "[A]ll watry living wights / Still tost, and turned, with continuall change, / Never abiding in their stedfast plights."⁵⁷

Chadwick's imagery in *The Oval Court* does not exactly illustrate Spenser's poem. She takes up his themes of flowery and creaturely abundance, as well as Spenser's reference to zodiacal signs. The elements of Water and Air, Leda, and the Harvest are all induced by Spenser and Chadwick. But to these she also intermixes a rich vocabulary of other imagery: to Spenser's abundant Harvest she adds elements, like a hanged figure recalling the Hanged Man of the Tarot cards as well as folkloric imagery of corn dolls; and in the vomiting head, an image of overabundance, waste, and abjection. As we have seen, the Hindu goddess Kali is likewise referenced in the twelfth figure's extended tongue, multiple limbs, and animated swastika-like pose. Furthermore, Chadwick

suggested "Greek pottery" as one of her inspirational sources for this series with its choreographed, processional "dance of figures" (a source important to Schneemann, too).⁵⁸ Overall, we find Chadwick stitching together references to and resonances with multiple and varied forms of goddess imagery in what she called "a kind of bower-bird theft of facets from everywhere."⁵⁹ But it is her repurposing of Spenser's poem that brings a revolutionary difference to this tradition: a modelling of "goddess" imagery founded on terms of mutability rather than essence. This in turn helps us understand how Chadwick's own *Of Mutability* is positioned in relation to the feminist movement, which in the 1980s was itself alive and changing.

Pollock has described feminist theory and practice of the 1980s as inaugurated by the perception of a divide between "theory and pleasure," a divide she sought to bridge.⁶⁰ Pollock's 1982 essay, "Theory and Pleasure," for the exhibition *Sense and Sensibility* at Nottingham, defended the importance of a sensuous aesthetic appeal as the means by which "subjective validity can be given to knowledge."⁶¹ In a similar vein, Kelly wrote, in the

following year, of wanting to reclaim the pleasure that comes from cognition: grouping herself as one of those artists inspired by Brecht and Godard, "Obsessed with pleasure, but with the kind to which [Roland] Barthes referred when he wrote 'knowledge is delicious.'"⁶²

Mulvey, too, returned to the problem of pleasure in an essay of 1983, looking back at the art and theory of the 1970s to which she had contributed, acknowledging that the aesthetics of the time were "negative" and generated "notoriously difficult art work." "Pleasure as a factor in art went into crisis," she concluded.⁶³ Returning to her famous essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Mulvey emphasised her own history of cinephilia and pleasure in viewing Hollywood film.⁶⁴ Her writing and filmmaking after this essay can be seen as an effort to recuperate and remodel something of that pleasure.⁶⁵

Mulvey's journey to iconicity and visual pleasure was supported, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, by recourse to one particular artistic example: that of Kahlo.⁶⁶ Beginning in 1979, for a period of three years, Mulvey and her then partner, Peter Wollen, worked on an exhibition project, *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti*, which opened in 1982 at the Whitechapel Gallery (near to where Chadwick lived, on Beck Road, Hackney).⁶⁷ Mulvey and Wollen co-authored the exhibition catalogue, and also made a film for the British Film Institute: *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti* (1983, color, sound, 28 minutes). In 1992, Chadwick followed suit with her documentary, *Artists' Journeys: Helen Chadwick on Frida Kahlo*. In her film, Chadwick interspersed imagery from *The Oval Court* immediately after showing Kahlo's self-portraits. Chadwick's film also uses some of the same archival footage of Kahlo with Rivera that Mulvey and Wollen had earlier employed; in her case, Chadwick projected it onto her own hand, as if she were 'holding' Kahlo on her own body. It may be suggested that Chadwick's reception of Kahlo was importantly mediated by

Fig. 8. Helen Chadwick, installation view from the exhibition, *Helen Chadwick: Effluvia*, Serpentine Gallery, London, (1994), showing *Cacao* (1994), chocolate, aluminum, steel, electrical apparatus, and *Wreaths to Pleasure*, No 1–13 (1992–93), set of thirteen Cibachrome photographs mounted on aluminum, each in powder-coated steel frame. © The Estate of Helen Chadwick, Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome, and New York.



Mulvey and Wollen's multifaceted presentation of the older artist's work, in film, exhibition, and essay, which enabled a greater understanding of Kahlo's project of self-imaging as intervening in the context of contemporary feminist debates.

In particular, we may see Chadwick as taking up what Mulvey and Wollen describe as Kahlo's "obsession with her own image," and the innovative formal language she found to express it.⁶⁸ Mulvey and Wollen's exhibition and their catalogue essay show how Kahlo offers a formalized, artificial self-image, repeated and multiplying across several pictures (and sometimes within the same canvas). The face of this figure, like that in Chadwick's *Of Mutability*, is always the same: depersonalizing Kahlo's "self-image," so that it takes on larger symbolic significance. Through this hieratic, formalized approach, Kahlo combines a masked self-image with many smaller images joined to the central figure with strings, ribbons, vines, tendrils, roots, and veins, realized, for example, in *My Grandparents, My Parents and I (Family Tree)* (1936). In her documentary film, Chadwick imitated this feature in the altar she constructed to Kahlo: by winding red ribbon around the objects and images she collected, referred in the film as "a mesh, a web."

Other painterly subjects are sometimes painted in a contrasting style—as in the anatomical diagrams of uterus and foetus surrounding the central figure in *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932; Pl. 11)—making them appear like cut-out, collage elements, not unlike the gynaecological and vulval images in Chadwick's *One Flesh*, or the many references to shells, flowers, fruits, and fish in *The Oval Court*. In Kahlo's case, these elements function like Baroque "emblems" and "attributes," Mulvey and Wollen argue, supporting Kahlo's development of an allegorical language and taking her paintings beyond mere personal self-representation: "Through the resources of emblems, she was able to transcribe her physical pain and suffering into a form of graphic language which could be read by the spectator. The appeal is not to an imaginary identification with herself as subject of pain, but as a symbolic reading of herself as vehicle of suffering."⁶⁹ In this way, Mulvey and Wollen describe Kahlo's style transcending mere personal self-portrayal, achieving instead an allegorical language, which they term a kind of "popular baroque."⁷⁰

It is this argument, developed for Kahlo's paintings, which may have supported Chadwick in her belief that, despite her use of her own naked photocopied body in *Of Mutability*, the complex allegorical poses she used, together with the inclusion

of narrative "emblems," attributing powers and identities to the figure (like those of the "Harvest," "Death," or "Wind"), would enable her work to transcend mere self-representation—so that the figure is read *not* as "Helen Chadwick" but more abstractly, as a language of the female body the spectator could also imaginatively inhabit, and as part of a wider feminist project. In particular, Mulvey and Wollen's proposal, that Kahlo's mask-like stylization of her face and her highly ornamented decorative form of self-presentation amounted to a form of "masquerade," and that "the imaginary look is that of self-regard, therefore a feminine, non-male and narcissistic look" evading the male gaze previously theorized by Mulvey, possibly led Chadwick to hope that her own stylization of her image in *Of Mutability* might achieve the same thing. Most deeply, perhaps, Kahlo's self-portraits, such as *Roots* (1943), a painting expanded beyond the self to include imagery of the body "twined and enmeshed with plants" as Mulvey and Wollen put it, may also have been useful to Chadwick.⁷¹ Kahlo's *The Dream* (1940), likewise, shows two bodies: one a dead skeleton, the other flesh and blood, seemingly asleep, from which vines, roots and leaves are growing; presented one above the other, they illustrate the idea of life and death as two realms connected together in a manner strikingly comparable to Chadwick's *Of Mutability*. In *Moses* (1945), Kahlo is conjoined to her parents, ancestors, plants, and even a jellyfish—all linked by ribbons, vines, and veins. Kahlo produces a "discourse of the body," Mulvey and Wollen write, that is "inscribed within a kind of codex of nature and cosmos."⁷² This analysis well evokes Chadwick's extraordinary self-imaging in *Of Mutability*, as she is represented hand in hand with rabbits, skate, a dead lamb, shells, and flowers. And Chadwick's audacious fabrication of a Baroque visual language for its installation (the inverted vaulted ceiling, tipped onto the floor; the Bernini columns; the language of tears melting Rococo mouldings; the ribbons and drapery) suggest an equally compelling comparison to Kahlo's articulation of her "popular baroque."

For Kahlo, the popular baroque remained within the bounds of painting. For Chadwick, working forty years later, it was the technology of the photocopier that assisted her translation of Kahlo's "collage-like" paintings into an installation practice, expanded to three dimensions, and staged at the scale of a room. Just as Kahlo multiplied her self-image across her oeuvre, so the photocopier enabled Chadwick to present a multiplication of herself, performing, like Kahlo, a dissolution of the individual into emblematic symbolic parts, staging an expansion of the self into animal, vegetable, and cosmic worlds. In *Of Mutability*, the photocopied, redoubled female is not intended to reconfirm a single female "essence" but rather to multiply and "de-realize" it in an effort to dissolve fixed identity and instead embrace metamorphosis and change: from animal to vegetable to human, from living to dead.⁷³

It is this interest in dissolution that confers how *Of Mutability* became a gateway to Chadwick's later work. As previously discussed, a couple years after its installation, Chadwick moved away from representing the surface of the female body toward work that dissolved distinctions between male and female bodies. Chadwick wrote in her own exhibition catalogue, *Doubles*, in 1991: "Why do we need to establish gender and wish absolutely to sex the body that confronts us?"⁷⁴ Rather than being set aside, we may understand the themes originating in *Of Mutability*, and its particular re-envisioning of the female image, as establishing her later work.

An exhibition including several of Chadwick's works from the early 1990s was held at London's Serpentine Gallery in 1994. *Helen Chadwick: Effluvia* displayed a number of pieces that operated in relation to one another to disrupt fixed gender binaries and disorient the viewer, as exemplified in her *Piss Flowers* (1991–92; Fig. 7), for which twelve sculptures were cast from snow, melted into different shapes by the separate urine streams of Chadwick and her male partner; and *Wreaths to Pleasure* (1992–93), exhibiting thirteen Cibachrome tondi, each showing flowers arranged to look like male and female genitals (or both) in the center of vats of differently coloured, viscous household liquids (Fig. 8). These were grouped around a central sculptural element, *Cacao* (1994), a bubbling chocolate fountain that, calling forth her *Carcass* debacle at the ICA ten years earlier, contributed a strong olfactory sensation and connotations of the disgusting and abject, coupled with sense of organic animation.

Smaller works shown in the exhibition, including *I Thee Wed* (three priapic cacti, each surrounded by a fur) and *Mister Pum Pum* (an illuminated, circular Cibachrome of an erect penis and anus mounted on a striped canvas shaped like a flower), continue the themes of the combination, elision, and/or inversion of male and female genital imagery. Georges Bataille's "The Language of Flowers," which reads flowers as graphic sexual invitations, provided a conceptual architecture for the show.⁷⁵ *Cacao* was placed below a solar window in the Serpentine's ceiling, materializing Bataille's interest in inverting the "high" (the sun) and the "low" (the anus), and setting in motion a dynamic of inversion sending the viewer's mind spinning. The *Wreaths to Pleasure* resemble vulgar,

explicit versions of Op art or hard-edge American abstract painting but set in domestic cleaning fluids (Windowlens) and food (lime marmalade). Overall, the exhibition was designed to produce a dizzying, sensorial vertigo, promoting the undoing of conceptual polarities.

As an exhibition, *Effluvia* mirrored *Of Mutability*: each included a centrally placed large-scale sculpture (*Carcass* in *Of Mutability* and *Cacao* in *Effluvia*), contributing smelliness, base materiality, and connotations of decay and shit. Around or adjacent to it, each installation placed a pattern of twelve or thirteen works with, apparently, decorative "feminine" themes (the twelve *Piss Flowers*; the thirteen *Wreaths to Pleasure* in *Effluvia*; and the twelve figures in *The Oval Court*). In *Effluvia*, however, unlike in *Of Mutability*, there is no "female" body at the center; instead, there is the Bataillean dialogue between the solar window in the ceiling of the gallery and the "anus" of *Cacao*, bubbling like "liquid manure." Surrounding this sculpture on the walls, like bubbles blown from the chocolate fountain, *Wreaths to Pleasure* combine and conjoin references to female and male anatomy, resembling cells forming, joining, and dividing, as if picturing a body remade at a cellular level. This is work that *Of Mutability* began: dissolving the singular, sexed body to discover its potential for transformation. In this sense, far from being a failure, *Of Mutability* offers us a way to understand the works Chadwick made in the rest of her much-too-short mature career and provide an art-historical throughline from the debates of the 1970s to feminist "mutations" today, extending a hand (or three) to us in the present. Above all, in its sumptuous visual address, the work regrounds us in a loving and empowered language of the female body, presented through a playful and irreverent historical revisioning, charged with a dazzling sense of the endless possibility and inextinguishable energy that continues to animate feminist projects today. •

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Notes

This essay developed from papers given at two conferences: "Xerography: Women Artists, 1965–1990," at the Institut national d'histoire de l'art, Paris, Nov. 18–19, 2021, and "Women Artists and Xerography," at the Getty Research Institute, Nov. 15, 2022. I would like to thank the organizers, Zanna Gilbert and Judith Delfiner, and all the conference participants for their questions and discussion on both occasions.

1. Helen Chadwick's *Of Mutability* was exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, from May 28–June 19, 1986, and subsequently toured through 1987 at the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham; Spacex Gallery, Exeter; Third Eye Centre, Glasgow; and Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston.
2. Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton, "Helen Chadwick," *Art Monthly* 100 (October 1986): 18–19.
3. Hilary Robinson, "Helen Chadwick," *Women Artists Slide Library Journal*, no. 31–32 (Jan.–Feb. 1990): 20–22.
4. Robinson, 22.

5. Chadwick, quoted in Marina Warner, *Helen Chadwick: The Oval Court* (London: Afterall, 2022), 59.
6. Chadwick, "Interview with Mark Haworth-Booth," in *Helen Chadwick: Stilled Lives* (London: Portfolio Gallery, 1996), np.
7. See *Imaginary Women*, directed by Gina Newson (1986), presenter Marina Warner, including participants Toyah Wilcox and Chadwick, British Film Institute identifier 200086. The discussion focusing on Chadwick's earlier installation, *Ego Geometria Sum* (1983), suggests that the program was filmed before the opening of Chadwick's latest exhibition, *Of Mutability* (1986).
8. Chadwick, quoted in Mark Sladen, "A Red Mirror," in *Helen Chadwick*, ed. Mark Sladen (London: Barbican Gallery; Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje-Cantz Verlag, 2004), 20.
9. Sladen, 17n14. See also Andy Beckett, "What a Swell Party It Was," *Independent on Sunday*, June 2, 1996.
10. Marina Warner notes that the ornate canopy over the high altar in St. Peter's Basilica is "likewise topped by crying female faces," and that, "according to legend, the sculptor was paying tribute to the Pope's favourite niece who had suffered recently from a protracted labour." See Warner, *The Oval Court*, 25n7.
11. Marina Warner, "In the Garden of Delights: Helen Chadwick's *Of Mutability*," in Chadwick, *Of Mutability* (London: ICA, 1986); repr. Chadwick, *Enfleshings*, ed. Mark Holborn (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), 39, 46.
12. Warner, "In the Garden of Delights," 48.
13. Warner, 58. Warner has developed her analysis of this work further in her most recent 2022 book, *Helen Chadwick: The Oval Court*.
14. The Prints and Drawings Study Room at the Victoria and Albert Museum has preserved a collage made from cut-out drawings of the figures; a separate photocopy of this collage numbers the figures, and it is that sequence followed here.
15. This sketchbook page reads "See Fragonard. Stolen Shirt/Girl with Dog/Happy Lovers." Helen Chadwick, Sketchbook (1984–86), in Helen Chadwick Archive, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds (hereafter cited as HMI), Box 20.
16. Chadwick, Sketchbook, in Helen Chadwick Archive, HMI, Box 20.
17. "An Opera for Milly Mudd: Artist Helen Chadwick in Conversation with Judith Collins," in *From Marble to Chocolate: The Conservation of Modern Sculpture*, ed. Jackie Heuman (London: Archetype Publications, 1995), 154. Explaining the substitution of a woman with a creaturely fish, Chadwick explains that "female skates are known as 'fishermen's friends. Their genitalia are used by fishermen while at sea, and in port I dare say.'"
18. The Victoria and Albert Museum Archive houses two "spare" collaged female figures listed as "study" figures for *The Oval Court*. It seems reasonable to suppose that one of these was originally intended as the seventh female form, before Chadwick chose to replace it with the skate. However, the floral prettiness of both "study figures," one sprinkled with daisies, the other clad in lacy lingerie, lacks the power of the unexpected, creaturely, and implicitly obscene image of the skate.
19. Chadwick, Sketchbook, in Helen Chadwick Archive, HMI, Box 20.
20. See, for example, Mary Horlock, "Between a Rock and a Soft Place," in *Helen Chadwick*, ed. Mark Sladen, 37.
21. Chadwick, Sketchbook, in Helen Chadwick Archive, HMI, Box 20.
22. An album in her archive at the Henry Moore Institute includes photographs of this statue, as well as several photographs of Asamkirche's ceiling. Helen Chadwick Archive, HMI, Box 66.5. A reference to the appearance of this hand in *The Oval Court* is in a note on a sketchbook page: "No. 5, figure with ribbons. Add scissors to this with ribbon caught in holy tiny hand too." Helen Chadwick Archive, HMI, Box 20.
23. Warner, "In the Garden of Delights," 54.
24. On the swastika's association with the goddess Kali in Hindu iconography, see *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/swastika>. On the interest amongst Western feminists in taking up Hindu goddesses to overturn feminine stereotypes, see Rita Gross, "Hindu Female Deities as a Resource for the Contemporary Rediscovery of the Goddess," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46, no. 3 (Sept. 1978): 269–91. For a critique, see Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, "Is the Hindu Goddess a Feminist?," *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no. 44 (Oct. 31–Nov. 6, 1998): WS34–WS38.
25. Chadwick, Helen Chadwick Archive, HMI, Box 1.
26. In her edited book with Roszika Parker, Griselda Pollock used the term "scripto-visual" in her introductory essay, "Feminism and Modernism," in *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement, 1970–85* (London: Routledge, 1987), 81, 104. Before this, Mary Kelly used the term in a 1977 conference paper (AIR, London), and in her book, *Art and Sexual Politics*, ed. Brandon Taylor (Hampshire, England: Winchester School of the Arts Press, 1980); repr. Kelly, *Imaging Desire* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 6–7. A key source for its definition is Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman, "Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art Making," *Screen* 21, issue 2 (July 1980): 35–48. My thanks to Vicky Horne for discussion of this point.
27. Barry and Flitterman, "Textual Strategies," 47–48.
28. Barry and Flitterman, 36–39. A similar critique had been articulated three years earlier in Pollock's essay, "What's Wrong with Images of Women?," *Screen Education* 24 (1977); repr. Rosemary Betterton ed., *Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media* (London: Routledge, 1987), 45.
29. Mary Kelly, "Preface and Footnotes to the *Post-Partum Document*" (1983), in *Imaging Desire*, 43.
30. Kelly, "Art and Sexual Politics," 9.
31. Indeed, "[A]round 1970," Mulvey reports that she and Kelly were both members of the same women's reading group, "which we called the History Group." "Laura Mulvey and Mary Kelly in Conversation" (1983); repr. Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, 30.
32. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Oct. 1975): 6–18; repr. Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 20. See also Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Framework* (Summer 1981): 12–15; repr. *Visual and Other Pleasures*.
33. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 16.
34. Chadwick, "Interview with Mark Haworth-Booth."
35. Madeleine Newman and Leonie O'Dwyer, "Home Furnishings: Revisiting the Interior Spaces of Helen Chadwick's 'Living Kitchen,'" *Third Text* 29, no. 4–5 (Sept. 2015): 389, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09528822.2016.1169637>.
36. Chadwick, "Interview with Mark Haworth-Booth."
37. Chadwick.
38. The key text supporting and elaborating the idea was Marija Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974); repr. *The Goddesses and Gods of Ancient Europe, 6500–3500 BC* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). For analyses of the influence of these ideas on feminist art, see Gloria Feman Orenstein, "Recovering Her Story: Feminist Artists Reclaim the Great Goddess," in *The Power of Feminist Art: Emergence, Impact and Triumph of the American Feminist Art Movement*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 174–89; and Jennie Klein, "Goddess: Feminist Art and Spirituality in the 1970s," *Feminist Studies* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 572–602.

39. Cynthia Eller, *Gentlemen and Amazons: The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory, 1861–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
40. See Merlin Stone, *The Paradise Papers: The Suppression of Women's Rites* (London: Virago, 1976), published in the US as *When God Was a Woman* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1976).
41. Monica Sjöö later wrote a book with Barbara Mor, *The Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth* (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 1987), based on her original pamphlet, *The Ancient Religion of the Great Cosmic Mother of All* (1975), which further contributed to the emerging genre of feminist goddess literature. The long institutional neglect of Sjöö's work has begun to be corrected with the recent exhibition and accompanying catalogue, *Monica Sjöö: The Great Cosmic Mother*, ed. Jo Widoff and Amy Budd (Stockholm: Moderna Museet; Modern Art Oxford, 2023).
42. Gloria Steinem, *Wonder Woman* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1995).
43. See Lynn Meskell, "Goddesses, Gimbutas and 'New Age' Archaeology," *Antiquity* 69, no. 262 (March 1995): 74–86. Cynthia Eller argues that prehistoric figurines don't definitively prove goddess worship, and even if a goddess had been worshipped in early human societies, that doesn't prove anything about how actual women were treated at that time. Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).
44. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* [1949], trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley (Middlesex: Penguin, 1972), 102. "Social-constructionist" is used here as a term for those feminists in the 1970s who, following Beauvoir's famous assertion that "one is not born, but becomes a woman," rejected the idea that women possess any 'essential' feminine characteristics, and argued instead that gender is socially constructed.
45. Sherrie Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?," *Feminist Studies* 1/2 (Fall 1972): 5–32; Sheila Rowbotham, "When Adam Delted and Eve Span....," *New Society* 4 (January 1979); repr. Rowbotham, *Dreams and Dilemmas: Collected Writings* (London: Virago Press, 1983), 199–207. See also Jo-Ann Hackett, "Can a Sexist Model Liberate Us? Ancient Near Eastern 'Fertility' Goddesses," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 65–76.
46. Lucy Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).
47. Lippard, 66.
48. Lippard, 67.
49. Chadwick, quoted in Eva Martischinig, "Getting Inside the Artist's Head," in *Helen Chadwick*, ed. Sladen, 52–53. Marina Warner has recently argued for understanding Chadwick as aligned with "third-wave" sex-positive feminism, placing an emphasis on gender as performative. See Warner, *The Oval Court*, 83–84.
50. For an insightful discussion of this work, see Leila McKeller, "The Word Made Flesh: Re-Embodying the Madonna and Child in Helen Chadwick's *One Flesh*," in *The Sacred and the Feminine: Imagination and Sexual Difference*, ed. Griselda Pollock and Victoria Turvey Sauron (London: IB Tauris, 2007), 202–12.
51. Chadwick made this work by photocopying the bodies of her neighbour, Paula, and her newborn daughter. Paula was an artist and married to the musician, Genesis P-Orridge, of the band *Throbbing Gristle*. It is reported that Paula P-Orridge (also known as Alaura O'Dell) had an interest in "New Age Goddess worship," and, in 1996, "established an independent, niche travel company, Sacred Journeys for Womyn. The company offers educational, experiential and healing tours exclusively to women, visiting sites of significance revered for a tradition of Goddess worship," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paula_P-Orridge.
52. A photocopy of an article by Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg," published in 1986, on which Chadwick underlined passages about medieval artists representing God with both male and female characteristics, survives in Chadwick's archive. Helen Chadwick Archive, HMI, Box 1.
53. Chadwick, in *Helen Chadwick on Frida Kahlo*, BBC documentary, 1992.
54. Warner reports this is the "infibulated labia of her friend, the mother in the picture," in "In the Garden of Delights," 62; see also Warner, *The Oval Court*, 71. For discussion of Chadwick's work in relation to Judy Chicago's, see Rachel Dickson, ed., *Judy Chicago and Louise Bourgeois, Helen Chadwick, Tracey Emin* (London: Lund Humphries, 2012). Chadwick's own notes refer to Chicago's use of vaginal imagery, with the comment, "Limited effectiveness. Equate ♀ = nature as objects for male." Helen Chadwick Archive, HMI, Box 1.
55. Spenser, *Of Mutabilitie*, 7.7.18.1–9, in Spenser, *The Faerie Queen*, ed. A.C. Hamilton, revised 2ed; text edited by Hiroshi Yamashita and Toshiyuki Suzuki (London: Pearson, 2001; 2007), 704.
56. Eller, *Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*, 176–78.
57. Spenser, *Of Mutabilitie*, 7.7.21.1–3, in *The Faerie Queen*, 704.
58. Chadwick, "Interview with Mark Haworth-Booth," np. On the importance of Greek pottery and mosaics to Schneemann, see Lippard, *Overlay*, 67.
59. Chadwick, "Interview with Mark Haworth-Booth."
60. Pollock and Parker, *Framing Feminism*, 48–51.
61. Pollock, "Theory and Pleasure" (1982), repr. *Framing Feminism*, 248. See also Rosemary Betterton's discussion in *Looking On*, 204–207.
62. Mary Kelly "The Purloined Image" (1983), in Pollock and Parker, *Framing Feminism*, 253.
63. Mulvey, "Dialogue with Spectatorship: Barbara Kruger and Victor Burgin" (1983), repr. Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 128.
64. Mulvey, "Introduction," in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, viii.
65. Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, xi; Mulvey, "Dialogue with Spectatorship;" Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press, 1996); and Mulvey, *Death 24 x a Second* (London: Reaktion, 2006).
66. Lippard also discusses Kahlo in her chapter on goddess imagery in *Overlay*, 47–49.
67. Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1982).
68. Mulvey and Wollen, 8–10.
69. Mulvey and Wollen, 25.
70. Mulvey and Wollen, 25.
71. Mulvey and Wollen, 26. In her original catalogue essay, Warner quotes Chadwick citing a remark she attributes to Kahlo, concerning "the vegetable miracle of my body's landscape." See Warner, "In the Garden of Delights," 56.
72. Mulvey and Wollen, 27.
73. For a comparable reading of the Goddess-inspired work of the American feminist artist Mary Beth Edelson, and her use of technologies of reproduction including photocopies, see Amy Tobin, *Women Artists Together: Art in the Age of Women's Liberation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023), 156–61.
74. Chadwick, quoted in Marina Warner, "In Extremis," in *Helen Chadwick: Stilled Lives*, np.
75. Georges Bataille, "The Language of Flowers," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–39*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekel, with Carol R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 10–14.

INTERPLAY

LIBBIE MARK'S COLLAGE PAINTINGS AND WOMEN ARTISTS' NETWORKS

By Jillian Russo

The Abstract Expressionist painter Libbie Mark (1905–1972) first began painting in the late 1940s in a basement studio in her home in Great Neck, Long Island. In contrast to other women painters of the postwar era, and while raising two children with the support of her husband, Edward Mark, she was not forced to choose between her painting and her family life. As her children grew older and she painted full-time, her career flourished. From the mid-1950s until her death in 1972, Mark produced approximately one hundred fifty paintings and works on paper, as well as two fiber pieces and one sculpture. Her brightly-colored, jewel-like compositions feature broad brushwork and an elegant use of paper collage and heavy impasto to create textured surfaces that evoke the experience of place, capture a mood, and play with the viewer's perception of materials by demanding careful looking. Mark's emotive palette, ranging from dark and earthy tones to vibrant oranges and purples, reveals her innate talent as a superb colorist as well as her engagement with Abstract Expressionism.

While Mark left no writing or diaries documenting her artistic practice, her success was propelled by her involvement in networks that were supportive of women artists. It is possible to trace her career through the communities that shaped it. Jennifer Uhrhane, curator and consultant to the Libbie Mark Provincetown Fund, has reconstructed Mark's biography through research into her education and exhibitions, supplemented by oral histories provided by the artist's family.¹ Mark's studies at the Great Neck Adult Education (GNAE) fine arts program, where she was influenced by artist, critic, and feminist Betty Holliday Deckoff (1925–2011), and at the Art Students League, were essential to launching her career. Following in the footsteps of many postwar women painters, Mark also studied with the German-born painter and master teacher Hans Hofmann in Provincetown, Massachusetts, attending his School of Fine Arts during the last summer session in 1957. In the mid-1960s, she became involved with the New York-based artist group Vectors, comprised over time of twenty-three members—more than half women working in a variety of media and styles.

Circumventing the commercial gallery system, where few women artists found representation, Vectors organized exhibitions in alternative venues, such as at the 92nd Street Y and the Donnell Library Center, New York Public Library.

Born in 1905 in Jersey City, New Jersey, Libbie Mark (née Berman) belonged to the same generation as Lee Krasner (1908–1984) and Irene Rice Pereira (1902–1971). In 1927, while her contemporaries were studying art in New York City—Krasner at Cooper Union and Pereira at the Art Students League—Libbie married Edward. Throughout the Depression's New Deal initiatives, begun in 1933, the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project helped sustain Krasner and Pereira's careers, and by the end of the decade, they were creating biomorphic abstractions. During this time Mark was focused on her daughter Judith, born in 1935, followed four years later by her son Reuben. The family lived first in Queens and then moved to Great Neck in 1939. At the same time, Mark was always engaged in creative projects including fashion illustration, dressmaking, gardening, flower arranging, and later, ceramics.

Mark's formal art education began in 1948 when she enrolled at Great Neck Adult Education, where Deckoff, her most formative teacher at the school, had joined the faculty that same year.² Deckoff had studied painting at the Art Students League with Jon Corbino and Vaclav Vytlacil from 1942 to 1947, and at the time was pursuing an MA in Art History from Radcliffe College, completed in 1950. Deckoff was also painting in an Abstract Expressionist style that placed figurative elements in tension with bold gestural brushwork, combining influences from Willem de Kooning, Grace Hartigan (1922–2008), and Franz Kline. From 1950 to 1955, Deckoff worked as an editorial associate at *ARTnews*, a position that kept her engaged with the latest developments of the New York avant-garde. She became friends with Nell Blaine (1922–1996), Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011), Hartigan, Louise Nevelson (1899–1988), and Larry Rivers, all of whom she recruited to teach at GNAE between 1956 and 1957.³ Deckoff encouraged Frankenthaler and Hartigan, who perhaps hadn't considered teaching, to lead classes at GNAE.



Fig. 1. Libbie Mark, *Untitled* (1953), oil on canvas, 19 1/8" x 23 5/16". LMPF Inv. No. 01PMEN. Private Collection. Photo credit: Elizabeth Needham.

Frankenthaler wrote to Hartigan in 1957 that "to my delight and surprise, [I] have enjoyed teaching very much."⁴ Much later, Hartigan became an immensely influential professor, directing the graduate program at the Hoffberger School of Painting, Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), for more than thirty years. In describing her own painting, Deckoff noted that she pursued "an obsessive imagery," in which the "real subject is evocation through marks made on a sheet of paper ... that is the act of drawing."⁵

Little is known about Mark's initial sources of inspiration, but her first paintings suggest Deckoff's influence and possibly Hartigan's, along with a study of Post-Impressionism, particularly the works of Edgar Degas, Henri Matisse, and Vincent van Gogh. In a 1949 acrylic on paper sketch of her father, Harold Berman, Mark balances painterly brushwork with the strong contours of his face. Such tensions between the figure and gestural brushstroke also characterize many of Deckoff's and Hartigan's paintings. Other early works by Mark evoke Matisse's paintings of women reading and Degas's sketches of horses (1953; Fig. 1). Mark brilliantly uses dramatic and repeating black outlines to represent the energetic movement of the horses from various angles, creating a compact arrangement of interlocking figures. Degas's jockeys on horseback later inspired Hartigan's lesser-known 1992 painting *Degas Sketchbook*, which has a similar compositional structure with quick brushstrokes and variable perspectives. While studying with Deckoff, Mark began to move away from representational imagery. Her painting *Studio Interior* (c. 1948–1958) simplifies the planes of the room into colorful squares of paint, further defined by intersecting horizontal, vertical, and diagonal brushstrokes.

Mark and Hartigan became friendly in the 1950s. It is very likely that Deckoff was the connection between them, as she was an early champion of Hartigan's work and a tireless supporter of women artists' careers. In preparation to review Hartigan's third exhibition at Tibor de Nagy gallery, Deckoff visited her Lower East Side studio in March 1953. Hartigan noted in her diary: "I am expecting Betty Holliday from Art News late this afternoon to review the show, and I've been taking out ashes, garbage and laundry to clean up the studio a little."⁶ Hartigan's relative ease surrounding Deckoff's visit was a contrast to her meeting a few weeks later with critic James Fitzsimmons from *Art Digest*.⁷ Afterward Hartigan wondered, "He seems genuinely interested in my paintings—how personal it is I have no idea. This is one of the bitter-sweet problems of being a woman and an artist, but I wouldn't have it any other way."⁸ At this time, she was still exhibiting under the name George Hartigan, concealing her identity as a woman to circumvent public bias and as a means to play with her own gender identity, a theme she

was exploring in her painting at that time.

Deckoff's review of Hartigan's show, published in *ARTnews* in April, helped to shape the critical response to the exhibition at a precarious time for Hartigan, who was struggling to support herself through the sale of her work. Deckoff singled out a commanding portrait of a seated figure entitled *Persian Jacket* (1952). Inspired by Diego Velázquez's magnificent portrait of *Pope Innocent X* (c. 1650), Hartigan had used photographs of herself taken by Walter Silver in an ornamented thrifted velvet jacket as a basis for the image. Deckoff wrote, "The weight of a seated figure in the superb *Persian Jacket* makes itself felt just at the point where it is swept into a maelstrom of turbulent strokes (that are somehow independent and yet dependent upon the subject) as they cut across it to reach the edges of the canvas."⁹ The following month, in May, the Museum of Modern Art Director Alfred Barr visited Tibor de Nagy and brought *Persian Jacket* to the museum for approval by the acquisitions committee. However, while Hartigan was waiting for a final decision from MoMA, the sale of another work from the exhibition, *Venetian Self-Portrait* (1952), fell through, causing Hartigan a lot of distress. She noted in her diary that she was "in a terrible state of melancholy today ... I must get a job."¹⁰ In the following weeks or months, Mark purchased the painting in order to sustain Hartigan through a tough financial period. *Venetian Self-Portrait*—a tall, narrow, rectangular composition in rich venetian red, green, and umber hues—depicts Hartigan wearing an elegant high-collared coat and has remained in Mark's personal collection throughout her life and passed to her heirs.¹¹

Mark's decision to support Hartigan at this pivotal moment

reflected her admiration for a struggling artist and her early recognition of Hartigan's importance to the New York School. Mark and Hartigan had both grown up in New Jersey, but their lives had taken opposite trajectories as they grappled with the tradeoff of balancing a creative practice with the responsibilities of motherhood. Hartigan made the difficult decision to leave her son to be raised by his father's parents in order to paint full time, while Mark postponed the start of her career until her children were grown. With Mark's patronage through the purchase of Hartigan's *Venetian Self-Portrait*, painterly accomplishment and financial stability were exchanged between two women figuring out how to navigate the art world.

In 1956, with their children at college, Libbie and Edward decided to experiment with living in New York City so that she could study at the Art Students League. Mark enrolled in Vytlačil's classes on "Life Drawing, Painting and Composition," which met five mornings a week, attending from December 1956 through March 1958.¹² While she was in class, they initially rented an apartment at 15 East 63rd Street, then stayed in the Mayflower Hotel on Central Park West. In 1958, they moved into Manhattan permanently, renting a new apartment at 35 East 85th Street. Edward, who was a corporate executive, not only provided monetary support, but also fully embraced life in Manhattan so that Mark could be a part of an artistic community.¹³

Since the late nineteenth century, the League's high-quality instruction, open enrollment, and affordable tuition have made it very accessible for women seeking to professionalize their practice. For decades the institution played a significant role in launching the careers of women artists, including Lee Bontecou (1931–2022), Dorothy Dehner (1901–1994), Eva Hesse (1936–1970), Nevelson, and Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986). In the 1920s, Dehner attended the League because she was certain she wanted to pursue an artistic career. She tried several different instructors before settling on Czech-modernist Jan Matulka's class, one of the few in New York that emphasized vanguard European trends, especially Cubism and Surrealism. A decade later, Nevelson's studies helped her transition from a housewife to a professional artist. As biographer Laurie Wilson described Nevelson's position during this time, "She was close to committing herself to the life of an artist. But she wasn't quite there."¹⁴ In the 1950s, Bontecou studied with William Zorach and initially supported herself by working in the League library.¹⁵

Along with Hofmann and Matulka, Vytlačil played a prominent role in bringing European modernism to his native America. During the 1920s, he studied at Hofmann's school in Munich. In 1915, Hofmann had opened his first school after a decade of working in Paris, where he met Georges Braque, Robert Delaunay and Sonia Delaunay (1855–1979), Matisse,



Fig. 2. Libbie Mark, *Untitled* (1956), oil on canvas, 18" x 24". LMPF Inv. no. 24R. Libbie Mark Provincetown Fund Collection.

and Pablo Picasso. In 1928, Vytlačil returned to the US and shared what he had learned from Hofmann in influential lectures on modern art at the University of California Berkeley and the Art Students League. Throughout the 1930s, he divided his time between New York and Paris, while continuing to teach at several schools. In 1946, he joined the League as a full-time faculty member, a position he held for over thirty years. Vytlačil's approach to abstraction was enormously diverse in its subject matter. His oeuvre includes completely non-representational compositions as well as landscapes, cityscapes, and figuration that combine aspects of cubist structure, expressionist brushwork, and vibrant color.

In Vytlačil's class, Mark gained skill and confidence working abstractly, visible in her untitled painting from 1956 (Fig. 2). Here she utilizes a loose cubist grid format, composed of bold black brushstrokes interspersed with vibrant hues that seem inspired by nature: grass green, sunflower yellow, lilac pink, and royal blue. Mark applies layers of color in a pattern of horizontal and vertical strokes, highlighting the subtle grid structure of the painting. The grid pattern is further reinforced through scored marks, perhaps made with a comb, that mimic the textile weave of a piece of canvas. The painting is similar in palette and technique to Vytlačil's expressionist landscapes such as *Pines* (1951), a lush scene of soaring evergreen trees defined by calligraphic black lines. At the center of the canvas, the forest dissolves into angular abstract shapes, evoking the mountain range in the distance. Mark's painting, however, is not referential of any subject matter, utilizing color to capture the sensation of a place, without specifically defining it.

The following year, in 1957, Mark began an untitled collage painting (Pl. 12); years later she completed it, in 1965. As in her earlier abstraction from 1956 (see Fig. 2), she orients the canvas horizontally, but here she opens up the grid structure:

calligraphic black lines, reinforced with pieces of black folded paper, are broken apart by fields of white, olive green, light brown, lemon yellow, and a few strokes of vermillion. The painting's dominance of black and white, interrupted by highlights of color, parallels Franz Kline's work of the late 1950s. In 1956, Kline began introducing color into his black and white paintings, which featured broad, sweeping brushstrokes, and frequently employed a horizontal format, retaining connections with the landscapes and architectural structures from his childhood in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania. As she became more experienced with abstraction, Mark would begin to favor vertical compositions, often emphasizing downward, upward, or diagonal movement within the picture plane throughout her 1960s works.

As her painting skills developed, Mark reached out to Hofmann requesting permission to study with him in Provincetown. In her April 1957 letter she wrote: "It will be my honor and privilege to study with you ... if you will accept me as an applicant. I am at present studying with Vytlačil at the Art Students League and am encouraged by his comments on my work to seek the further advantages of studying with you."¹⁶ Mark was accepted and joined Hofmann's class from the beginning of July through the end of August. Among her fellow students were Red Grooms and Helen Levitt (1913–2009). Other artists working in Provincetown that summer included Milton Avery, Adolph Gottlieb, Allan Kaprow, and Mark Rothko.¹⁷ Under Hofmann's tutelage, Mark began to search for her own style, further maturing during her annual summer-long visits to Provincetown from 1957 through 1971. When she was in Provincetown, Edward visited every weekend and for several weeks of vacation.

Summers in Provincetown were a source of inspiration for countless artists, especially for a long lineage of women painters from Marguerite Zorach (1887–1968) to Marisol (1930–2016) and Judith Godwin (1930–2021). Throughout the twentieth century, Provincetown played a pivotal role in the development of American modernism. The art colony had an irresistible combination of natural beauty, spacious studios in colonial cottages, and a free-spirited community. Located at the tip of Cape Cod, the town's rugged landscape sports sweeping dunes covered with sea grass and wind-swept pines, an iconic bay rich with wildlife, and a tranquil setting for stunning sunsets. Sculptor Joyce Johnson (1929–2014) reflected that Provincetown offered "a sense of isolation hard to find elsewhere;" even during the summer season "one can find pockets of solitude on the beach and in the dunes."¹⁸ The community was somewhat removed from social norms, granting a sense of freedom to women and to LGBTQ+ artists including Marsden Hartley, the artist collective PaJaMa (composed of Paul Cadmus, Jared French, and Margaret French [1906–1998]), and Blaine. As Norman Mailer put it: "Provincetown has always been ahead of the rest of the nation. One of the things I love about this town and that I always tell people who haven't been here, is that this is the freest town in America."¹⁹

Hofmann's summer school, which opened in 1934, and ran

smoothly due to the attentive presence of his wife, Maria (Miz) Wolfegg, only added to the allure, especially for women artists. The atmosphere, as author Mary Gabriel observes, was more informal, "infinitely more relaxed than his New York School," located at 52 West Eighth Street, making it "popular among women from around the country, who were as interested in art as they were escaping their tightly choreographed lives back home."²⁰ When Krasner first visited Provincetown in 1938, she found it a respite from the constraints of the New York art scene, which had "no atmosphere then, no ambience. There was little support and no rewards. As an artist I felt like I was climbing a mountain made of porcelain."²¹ In 1949, Elaine de Kooning (1918–1989) went to Provincetown expecting to stay the weekend, but recalled she "just stayed on and on, because I liked it so much."²² She ended up dropping into Hofmann's classes and came to find them "extremely illuminating."²³ Perle Fine (1905–1988), who studied with Hofmann in the 1930s, maintained a studio in Provincetown throughout the 1940s, which allowed her the extra space needed for her work to advance. She explained, "I did a lot of painting in the summertime and I had the paintings around all the time so that one would tell me what was wrong with the other."²⁴ While she was married to Robert Motherwell, Frankenthaler spent every summer between 1960 and 1969 in Provincetown, where she also studied privately with Hofmann. She described it as a place that allowed for exceptional productivity, and in 1967 reflected, "I have done more work these past three months than I have in well over a year."²⁵

Despite his reputation as a chauvinist and a womanizer, Hofmann's principal teachings on space and color, popularized in his 1948 treatise, "Search for the Real," were groundbreaking exercises for his many women students. Hofmann considered light and color to be fundamental tools for shaping a composition. He wrote, "In symphonic painting, color is the real building medium.... Swinging and pulsating form and its counterpart, resonating space, originate in color intervals. In a color interval, the finest differentiations of color function as powerful contrasts. A color interval is comparable to the tension created by a form relation."²⁶ This tension created by contrasting colors, which he termed *push and pull*, imbued abstract paintings with three-dimensionality. Krasner recounted that Hofmann instructed on strategies for the plane's expanding and contracting forces, allowing "the two-dimensional surface to be punctured and [to] bring it back to two-dimensional again; in effect he was teaching the principles of Cubism." She admitted, "I really didn't get the full impact of [Cubism] until I worked with Hofmann," but considered how "the most valid thing that came to me from Hofmann was his enthusiasm for painting and his seriousness and commitment to it."²⁷ For Blaine, "His teaching was so dynamic and clear to me ... I didn't find it mystical. To me, he really demonstrated with his diagrams so clearly, and I always have taught something of that method."²⁸ Hofmann's theories made Cubism relatable and, equally important, his passion and dedication were infectious.

In 1957 Hofmann was pairing wide brushstrokes with

rectangles in contrasting hues, as shown in the color “complexes” of emerald green, yellow, and tangerine of his painting *Autumn Gold*. Mark’s untitled oil painting dated 1957 (Pl. 13) similarly offsets golden yellows, lavender, and royal blue, applying Hofmann’s “push-pull” color theories to her own practice. Mark, however, employs a more dynamic compositional structure beyond Hofmann’s color and line, instead emphasizing swirling diagonal movement as an organizing factor to activate the plane’s rotation counterclockwise. Her use of small impressionistic brushstrokes, characteristic of Blaine’s interior scenes and landscapes, illustrates that she was absorbing influences beyond Hofmann and Vytlačil. Another untitled work from the same year (1957; Pl. 14) features looser, broader strokes, and an overall organization of the composition in which colors fit together like puzzle pieces; this work evokes Willem de Kooning’s paintings of the 1950s, particularly his *Saturday Night* (1956). In this painting de Kooning created a collage-like surface, juxtaposing distinct irregular rectangles in shades of bubble-gum pink, royal blue, and magenta to capture the frenetic energy of the urban cityscape at night. Like de Kooning, who also prominently featured the figure in his work, Mark incorporates some figurative references in her 1957 painting, such as a shape resembling a green foot at the lower right corner. This painting is marked with an “-L” date suffix on the verso, indicating it was painted at the Art Students League. It is likely she started it while studying with Hofmann and completed it in Vytlačil’s class the following fall and winter.

In other 1950s paintings, de Kooning readily assimilated newspaper fragments into the surface, challenging the notion that Abstract Expressionist painting was non-referential by adding allusions to material culture. By breaking down distinctions between painting and collage, at times making them virtually and visually indistinguishable, de Kooning developed a technique that enhanced his painting’s materiality, an approach expanded upon by Mark’s style through the added component of texture. In 1957, Mark first introduced pieces of cut, torn, or crushed paper and other materials, embedding them into her painted surfaces, a collage technique that became a hallmark of her work in the 1960s. An untitled painting incorporating paper collage from this prolific decade (Fig. 3) suggests the influence of Motherwell, whose use of papier collé was intrinsic to his artistic practice. For Mark’s approach to collage painting, fragments of brown craft paper soaked with olive green and mustard colored paint define abstract forms that float above the color field. She also drips black paint to create a carefully controlled calligraphic line that separates the fields of fiery orange and yellow tones. The vibrant pigment is so thinly applied, however, that Mark appears to employ a staining technique, explored in other collage paintings from this period (c. 1960s; Pl. 15). Motherwell deploys a similar process in his works of the late 1950s and early 1960s: his *N.R.F. Collage No. 3*. (1960) applies brown and gray pieces of paper combined with energetic drips of black paint, yet the painterly splashes appear less controlled than in Mark’s application that features drips occasionally and

judiciously without making them a dominant component of the composition. In Mark’s *Collage Painting #37* (c. 1962; Pl. 16), drips of red paint are highly controlled, moving upwards off a central horizontal axis defined by rectangles of pasted paper and squares of paint, and although the drips are small, they are essential to the composition, adding a sense of dynamism.

Given that Mark, Frankenthaler, and Motherwell were in Provincetown during the 1960s, it seems likely that they spent time together. Libbie and Edward rented an apartment each summer at Hargood House, a bay-facing property at 493 Commercial Street with spectacular views, kitchen units, and maid service.²⁹ In 1963, Frankenthaler and Motherwell purchased a property overlooking the bay just down the block at 631 Commercial Street. They constructed a new home with studios nicknamed “Sea Barn.” It became the center of the 1960s Provincetown art scene as they frequently hosted artists, curators, and critics, including consecutive visits from Hofmann in 1964, 1967, and 1968.³⁰ Mark’s daughter, Judith (Tanur), recalled that her mother returned to Provincetown because socializing with other artists contributed to making it an ideal site for painting.³¹

While Frankenthaler had her studio at “Sea Barn” from 1963 until 1966, the bay was a major influence on her work.³² She enjoyed swimming and accessed the water directly from her back door. Her view from the deck on the upper level, which held her studio, provided a bird’s-eye perspective of the shoreline. Her friend Barbara Kafka noted that “to look at water was very important to her.... Provincetown I think was the beginning of that.”³³ In 1963, Frankenthaler created one of her breakthrough, large, soak-stain paintings, *The Bay*, an expanse of luminous blue and violet pigment seeping into a horizontal strip of light green paint. Beneath the field of green, at the bottom edge of the canvas, is a thin band of light gray. The forms correspond to the maritime features Frankenthaler would have seen from above: the water caressing the shoreline, separated from her house only by a strip of patio. An unexpected sienna dot on the left side is a whimsical, purely compositional touch added to offset other colors and shapes, and reminds us that *The Bay* is not a literal landscape. Instead, Frankenthaler captures the experience of being near or in the water. In her words: “Anything that happens affecting your sensibility has an effect on what you make. My work is not a matter of direct translations, but something is bound to creep into your head or your heart.”³⁴

A number of Mark’s collage paintings from the 1960s appear similarly inspired by the water. Her palette of deep blues, light greens, and even a few dabs of sienna in her acrylic and paper collage (see Pl. 15) closely parallel *The Bay*, and suggest Mark may have seen Frankenthaler’s work or spent time in her studio. As one of Mark’s largest paintings, measuring 72 x 48 inches, this piece also reinforces the possibility that she was responding to Frankenthaler, who frequently worked on a monumental scale. The affinities between the paintings end there, however. While Frankenthaler evokes water as tranquil, inviting, and easy to slip into, Mark’s strokes of blue and green paint, characteristically emphasizing diagonal movement, swirl



Fig. 3. Libbie Mark, *Untitled collage painting* (1960s), acrylic and paper collage on canvas, 23 1/8" x 23 1/8". LMPF Inv. no. 39JM. Libbie Mark Provincetown Fund Collection. Photo credit: Paul Mutino.

and churn with the energy of the tides. The central collaged paper defines an oval shape hinting at something hidden deep beneath the surface on the sea floor. Mark, who learned to swim only in adulthood and was never entirely comfortable in the water, captures the more mysterious aspects of the ocean in *#42* (1962; Pl. 17) and *Collage Painting #6* (1961; Pl. 18).³⁵ In the former, azure paired with fiery red elicit the sea's murky depths, while in the latter, eggplant, cerulean, and black hues evoke dimly lit coves or dunes at night. In both, Mark expands upon a classic theme of early Abstract Expressionist painting derived from Surrealist imagery employing the sea as a metaphor for the unconscious mind and a primordial source of life. As in the paintings of William Baziotes, Richard Pousette-Dart, and Rothko, Mark imagines an underwater world alive with the dangers and excitement of the unknown.³⁶ In contrast, the more lighthearted, small acrylic and collage on paper, *For Lisa* (1964; Fig. 4), dedicated to one of Mark's granddaughters, takes the contours of the sun-soaked coastline from an aerial view as inspiration. Passages of lime-green grass meet a band of dunes or rocks rendered in soft-pink hues. Crumpled paper, thickly coated in pink paint, is used to create an isolated textured form, just offshore, suggestive of a small island or a boat.

While Provincetown's artistic community and natural beauty were vital to Mark's development as an artist during the summers, she continued to paint in New York City as well. In 1962 Libbie and Edward moved again to what became their permanent residence at 176 East 71st Street. Elsewhere Mark also rented an apartment as a studio, but she eventually was able to use an additional one room apartment as studio space within the same building. The new arrangement allowed her to focus on painting (Fig. 5). The early 1960s were a turning point in her career, marked by her first and only solo exhibition, which opened in the city at Knapik Gallery, located at 1470 First Avenue, in 1962. The gallery was founded by Harold and Virginia Knapik, who had been part of the Parisian art scene during the 1950s, where they became friends with Alice B. Toklas, Man Ray, and his wife, Juliet Browner. The gallery was known for exhibiting Abstract Expressionists, including painters Sidney Delevante and Ben Wilson, who would later exhibit alongside Mark in the Vectors artist group exhibitions.³⁷

Among the works shown by Mark at Knapik were *Collage Painting #37*, *#42*, *Collage Painting #6*, and *Collage Painting #23* (see Pl. 16–19). As Uhrhane has noted, by the early 1960s Mark had fully integrated collage into the surface of her compositions.³⁸ In *Collage Painting #23* (1962; Pl. 19), she uses paper soaked in crimson and eggplant pigment, with thick swathes of latex paint, pieces of string, and strips of very thinly cut white paper to create a highly textured surface. At the center of the picture is an orb of primary red acrylic impasto around which pieces of paper saturated in marigold and pink circumnavigate. The celestial imagery is reinforced by thick dabs of orange paint illuminating the dark purple background. In *#42* and *Collage Painting #37* Mark refines her use of *trompe l'oeil* techniques, first employed in her 1956 painting (see Fig. 2), in which she applied paint with a comb to simulate the weave of fabric, leaving the viewer unsure about what is collage, what is paint, and what is the exposed texture of the canvas or paper board. In *#42* a heavily textured surface is built up with paint to suggest collage. Where fields of vivid crimson and sapphire blue interlock at the horizon line of the composition, Mark delineates a mauve rectangular form using a dappled application of white and light blue paint creating a crackled surface that evokes paint-covered cloth. In *Collage Painting #37* Mark so masterfully integrates pieces of paper adorned with brushmarks, splatters, and drips, that it is hard to distinguish elements of collage from the work's substrate. On the right

side, a horizontal rectangle of cut brown paper, with dabs of white and red paint, interrupts a black and red color field. On the left, the same brown paper color appears, forming a large vertical wedge shape, wider at the bottom than the top. It is decorated with splashes of blue and seafoam green along with lightly applied streaks of red and yellow. However, the rectangle is probably not collage but exposed paperboard, formed by her use of negative space. Mark's use of the collage medium to play with perception, a hallmark of Picasso and Braque's Synthetic Cubist paintings, sets her style apart from other Abstract Expressionists working with collage, such as Fine and Motherwell.

The critical reviews of the Knapik exhibition were overall very positive, emphasizing Mark's versatility as a colorist and her ability to balance "educated" collage technique with a sense of spontaneity.³⁹ Art critic Jane Jaffe noted the works were "high textured and rich in color brilliance," demonstrating "a profound and vividly sensuous response to visual experience." Perhaps describing *Collage Painting #23*, she wrote, "Areas of Prussian and Cerulean blue offset deep purples and wine reds." Possibly regarding *AT&T* (1961), Jaffe commented, "Chromatic variations of reds and pinks interweave, revealing minor color shocks and the mottled texture of dulled silver-foil." She continued, "Considering the technique used in many of these collages ... Mark's spontaneity is all the more remarkable. With a foundation of acrylic paint, varied types of tissue-thin paper are glued onto a gessoed Masonite board to form interesting transparencies of color and texture. These paintings are assuredly the work of a mature, imaginative, and dynamic artist."⁴⁰ Writing for *ARTnews*, Jill Johnston praised Mark's skill in using color to set distinct moods. She emphasized the striking contrast between "a high-toned noonday picture dominated by central red that tornadoes up into yellow, surrounded by green and blue-grey," and another composition with a "midnight carnival flavor in its deep purples and blues sparked with red and surprises of veiny greens."⁴¹

Building upon the success of her first solo show, Mark became involved with the artist collective Vectors, which organized at least fifteen exhibitions during its active years from 1957 to 1967. The group's membership varied but, along with Delevante, Wilson, and a few other men, included many women artists working in a variety of styles and media with ties to Provincetown and/or the Art Students League. Among them were cubist painter Helen Gerardia (1903–1988), landscape painter Mary Heisig (1913–1966), abstract and representational painter Mary Shaier (1905–1971), and figurative painter Rhoda Sklar (1914–2004). Ida Somkin (1906–2000) created brightly colored hard-edge abstractions, and Miriam Sommerburg (1900–1980) worked with wood



Fig. 4. Libbie Mark, *For Lisa* (1964), acrylic and paper collage on watercolor paper, 20" x 16". LMPF Inv. no. 17R, Private Collection. Photo credit: Paul Mutino.

sculpture and printmaking. Other prominent members were sculptor and textile artist Ethel Stein (1917–2018) and sculptor Evelyn O. Wilson (1915–2006), who was married to Ben, and known for small terracotta figures as well as works in hydrocal and bronze. The artists of Vectors were not bound together by a particular aesthetic, an exceptional facet of the collective distinguishing it from other contemporary artist groups, such as the American Abstract Artists, but rather promoted a broad manifesto to respect group members' mutual creativity and to exhibit together, appropriating the name Vectors, defined as "directional guides to various modes of expression from figurative to non-objective work."⁴² This was an open-minded declaration at a time when the New York art scene was increasingly subdivided into the competing movements of Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, and Pop Art. The commitment to different stylistic directions was embodied in the Vectors' name and logo, graphically featuring a series of arrows fanning in equally spaced angles from a common starting point. Sidestepping the dynamics of the postwar art market, the



Fig. 5. Dena (Dinah Rubinstein), Libbie Mark in her studio, 1959 or later. LMPF Inv. no. ARCHJM-002. Libbie Mark Provincetown Fund Collection.

Vectors exhibited at non-profit venues, often connected to institutions with a commitment to education or community-building. The group's first exhibition in October 1957 was held at the 92nd Street Y; the following year they showed at the Women's City Club of New York on Park Avenue. In 1959 they exhibited at the Riverside Museum on Riverside Drive, a venue known for showcasing emerging artists, to which they returned in 1960 and 1963. They also exhibited repeatedly at the Donnell Library Center at the New York Public Library's West 53rd Street branch in 1961, 1964, and 1966. Mark exhibited with the Vectors five times—at the Sixth and Seventh Annual Exhibition in January and December 1963; the Eighth and Eleventh Annual Exhibition in 1964 and 1967; and the *Vectors Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture* in 1964.⁴³

The *Vectors Eleventh Annual Art Exhibition*, held in 1967 at Manufacturers Hanover Trust Bank, perhaps reflected the increasing importance of corporate art collections. Mark presented four works including *Collage Painting #67-5* (Pl. 20).

An example of her mature signature style, the painting fuses a variety of techniques to achieve a multi-layered, textured surface with a high-degree of three dimensionality. The emphasis on diagonal movement, an enduring feature of her paintings, is achieved with a dramatic crimson line: with a single jagged stroke Mark bisects the composition from the lower left to the upper right canvas edge. The lower right quarter is a field of white paint with areas of primed canvas and highlights of magenta brushwork peeking through from below. In the upper left corner, a firework-like explosion of pink and turquoise paint combusts. At the top of the burst are two rectangles of orange pigment, applied very lightly to create a dappled pattern that mimics the textural surface of tape or fabric. The bottom edge of the "firework" is delineated by thin tissue paper, folded on a diagonal to create various levels of transparency. By the late 1960s, Mark was masterful at combining pigment and collage to manipulate translucency, allowing the eye to see through painterly layers at different points.

The Vectors's 1967 annual show was Mark's final exhibition, although she continued to paint through the early 1970s. In July 1972 she passed away at age sixty-six from lung cancer. Although her career spanned only two decades, it was intensely productive and technically accomplished: she quickly absorbed the stylistic principles of Abstract Expressionism—from Hofmann, Vytlačil, Frankenthaler, Motherwell, and others—to formulate a style centered around the interplays of painting and collage, impasto and transparency. Moreover, Mark's development was guided by networks heavily shaped by women artists. Her connection to the New York art scene began with Deckoff's leadership and mentorship at GNAE, later bolstered by the supportive communities at the Art Students League and in Provincetown. Through her alliance with Vectors artists, she gained further visibility. Mark's process of drawing inspiration from different sources in order to assemble something new is subtly reflected in her formal technique and attention to materiality, where grids are both inscribed and broken apart, and lines, threads, and assemblages of paper are deftly and seamlessly integrated with a richly colored acrylic impasto to form a cohesive image. Transcending Hofmann's colorful plastic intervals, this all-consuming substrate nourishes the thick body of paper and paint to form something previously unknown. Arguably, no other painter surpassed Mark's ability to interweave collage into the painted surface and generate dramatic visual effects. ●

Jillian Russo is an independent curator and art historian. Her scholarship on women in the artworld includes the exhibitions *Wild and Brilliant: The Martha Jackson Gallery and Post-War Art* (Hollis Taggart Gallery, 2021) and *To Live is to Paint: Wilhelmina Weber Furlong, Dorothy Dehner and American Modernism* (The Art Students League, 2022). She has written articles for *American Quarterly*, *CAA Reviews*, *Panorama*, *Public Art Dialogue*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*.

Notes

All Libbie Mark paintings are © Libbie Mark Provincetown Fund.

1. Jennifer Uhrhane's scholarship, including the exhibition catalogues, *Art of the Abstract Mark: Libbie Mark's Collage Paintings and Other Works, 1950s–1960s* (New York: Libbie Mark Provincetown Fund and National Arts Club, 2022) and *Libbie Mark Collage Paintings (1950s–1960s)* (New York: Berry Campbell, 2024), provides the foundation for this article. These two exhibitions are the first presentations of Mark's work since the late 1960s. An updated digital version of Uhrhane's essay, "The Vectors of Libbie Mark," in *Art of the Abstract Mark*, is available at <https://libbiemark.com/about-libbie-mark/>.
2. Uhrhane, *Art of the Abstract Mark*, 3.
3. 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 Company, 2018), 647. See also Daniel Belasco, "Between the Waves: Feminist Positions in American Art, 1949–62" (PhD diss., The Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 2008), 181n65.
4. Gabriel, *Ninth Street Women*, 647.

5. Deckoff, quoted in Surrey Farnham, *The Art of the Sister Chapel: Exemplary Women, Visionary Creators, and Feminist Collaboration* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 95.
6. William T. La Moy and Joseph P. McCaffey, eds., *The Journals of Grace Hartigan 1951–1955* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 72.
7. Hartigan's nerves stemmed from Fitzsimmons's continued criticism since her first one-person show at Tibor de Nagy, where he praised her evolution of "a personal style originally deriving from Pollock and de Kooning." J.F. [James Fitzsimmons], "Grace (George) Hartigan," *Art Digest* 25 (Feb. 1, 1951): 18–19.
8. La Moy and McCaffey, *The Journals of Grace Hartigan*, 74.
9. Betty Holliday Deckoff, "George Hartigan," *ARTnews* 52, no. 2 (April 1953): 39.
10. La Moy and McCaffey, *The Journals of Grace Hartigan*, 82.
11. Mark also purchased a work by Larry Rivers, a small *Portrait of Berdie* study, which is still in the family.
12. There is a break in enrollment during the summer of 1957 to attend Hofmann's summer session. She attended the Art Students League from Dec. 1956 through May 1957, and Sept. 1957 through March 1958.
13. Uhrhane, *Art of the Abstract Mark*, 11.
14. Laurie Wilson, *Louise Nevelson: Light and Shadow* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2016), 75.
15. Oral History Interview with Lee Bontecou by Dore Ashton, Jan. 10, 2009, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-lee-bontecou-15647>.
16. Libbie Mark, letter to Hans Hofmann, April 3, 1957. Hans Hofmann papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
17. Uhrhane, *Art of the Abstract Mark*, 6.
18. Johnson, quoted in Melissa Renn, "Via Provincetown: The American Avant-Garde on Cape Cod, 1913–1966," in *A Century of Inspiration: Provincetown Art Association and Museum* (Provincetown: Provincetown Art Association and Museum, 2015), 44.
19. Mailer, quoted in Renn, "Via Provincetown."
20. Gabriel, *Ninth Street Women*, 48.
21. Gail Levin, *Lee Krasner: A Biography* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 134–35.
22. Gabriel, *Ninth Street Women*, 264.
23. Gabriel, 267.
24. Oral History Interview with Perle Fine by Dorothy Seckler, January 19, 1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
25. Frankenthaler, quoted in Elizabeth T. Smith, "East End Light: Frankenthaler in Provincetown in the 1960s," in *Abstract Climates: Helen Frankenthaler in Provincetown* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 41.
26. Hans Hofmann, *Search for the Real and Other Essays*, ed. Sara T. Weeks and Bartlett H. Hayes, Jr. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1948), 67.
27. Krasner, quoted in Gail Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 123.
28. Reflecting on the vacuum that Hofmann left after his summer school closed, Blaine continued, "I just can't imagine anyone ever being Hofmann." Nell Blaine, Oral History Interview with Nell Blaine by Dorothy Seckler, June 15, 1967, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Similarly, Marisol, who studied with Hofmann from 1952 to 1956, remarked that "He was the only teacher that I ever had that I learned anything from." He inspired her to work on her own painting, although she soon gave it up to

focus on sculpture. See "Conversations Across Collections: Talking with Marisol," Archives of American Art blog, December 14, 2020, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/blog/2020/12/conversations-across-collections-talking-with-marisol>.

29. For information about the history of these special Provincetown properties, see <https://buildingprovincetown.wordpress.com/2010/01/07/493-commercial-street/>.
30. Daniel Belasco, "Banner Season: Helen Frankenthaler's American Summers," in *Abstract Climates: Helen Frankenthaler in Provincetown* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 19–20.
31. Judith Tanur, correspondence with the author, July 24, 2024. Tanur recalled that her mother loved the creative atmosphere in Provincetown.
32. In 1967 Frankenthaler rented a separate studio surrounded by pines at the Nelson Riding Stables, which she nicknamed her "tree-house" studio.
33. Kafka, quoted in Smith, "East End Light," 39.
34. Frankenthaler, quoted in Renn, "Via Provincetown," 91.
35. Tanur, correspondence with the author, July 24, 2024.
36. On Surrealism's influence on Abstract Expressionism and on Rothko and Baziotes's work, see Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 27–29, 127–29, 225–26. On water imagery in the work of Pousette-Dart, see Robert Hobbs, "Confronting the Unknown

Within," in Robert Hobbs and Joanne Kuebler, *Richard Pousette-Dart* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art and Indiana University Press, 1990), 87–96. Examples of ocean imagery in their work include Mark Rothko's *Slow Swirl by the Edge of the Sea* (1944; MoMA); William Baziotes, *The Flesh Eaters* (1952; Metropolitan Museum of Art); and Richard Pousette-Dart, *East River* (1939; Metropolitan Museum of Art).

37. For more information on the Knapiks, see Harold Knapik Papers, Indiana University Bloomington, <https://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/findingaids/view?brand=general&docId=InU-Li-VAB8106&doc.view=print>. Jennifer Uhrhane has documented that Wilson and Delevante exhibited at Knapik in her essay "Vectors Artist Group," <https://libbiemark.com/vector-artist-group/>.
38. Uhrhane, *Art of the Abstract Mark*, 7.
39. John Gruen, "Art Tour," *New York Herald Tribune*, May 19, 1962, 11.
40. Jane Jaffe, "News and Views of the Galleries: Mark at Knapik," *Manhattan East*, May 24, 1962, 4.
41. Jill Johnston, "Reviews and previews: New names this month," *ARTnews* 61 (May 1962): 18.
42. Catalog, "Vectors Eleventh Annual Art Exhibition, October 9–27, 1967," Manufacturers Hanover Trust, Ben and Evelyn Wilson Papers, George Segal Gallery, Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ.
43. Uhrhane, "Vectors Artist Group."

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Woven Histories: Textiles and Modern Abstraction

Edited by Lynne Cooke, with essays by Elissa Auther, Darby English, Briony Fer, Michelle Kuo, and Bibiana K. Obler, and with contributions by Jeffrey Gibson, Ann Hamilton, Harmony Hammond, Ellen Lesperance, Carole Frances Lung, Ulrike Müller, and Lisa Oppenheim
National Gallery of Art and University of Chicago Press, 2023

Reviewed by Em Kapp

The 2011 painting *Syaw (Fishnet)* by Regina Pilawuk Wilson (b. 1948) expands and collapses into a series of imperfect squares and irregular grids (Fig. 1). The interwoven lines and boxes simultaneously refer to the fishing nets made and used by women of Wilson's tribe, the Ngan'gikurrungurr in Australia, and soften the grid's organizational structure, challenging the rigidity of verticals and horizontals that is so often celebrated in modernism. *Woven Histories: Textiles and Modern Abstraction* offers a rendering of the entire piece, but the reader's first encounter with *Syaw* occurs across from the table of contents in a seemingly boundless detail image that fills the page, highlighting the work's variations in line and color. An analogous multiplicity of both content and perspectives characterizes this richly illustrated exhibition catalogue as a whole.

Comprising six feature essays, including an introduction by volume editor Lynne Cooke, as well as seven mini-essays, *Woven Histories* accompanies an exhibition at the National Gallery of Art of some 160 artworks spanning the years 1913 to 2023. The catalogue aims to demonstrate that the process, visuality, and design discipline of textiles have contributed fundamentally to modernist abstraction. It also explores the tensions inherent in modernism's denial of its own influences. Because textiles bear profound cultural and historical associations with femininity and domesticity, the tendency remains to categorize them as purely functional or decorative objects rather than as works of art. *Woven Histories* combats these perceptions by

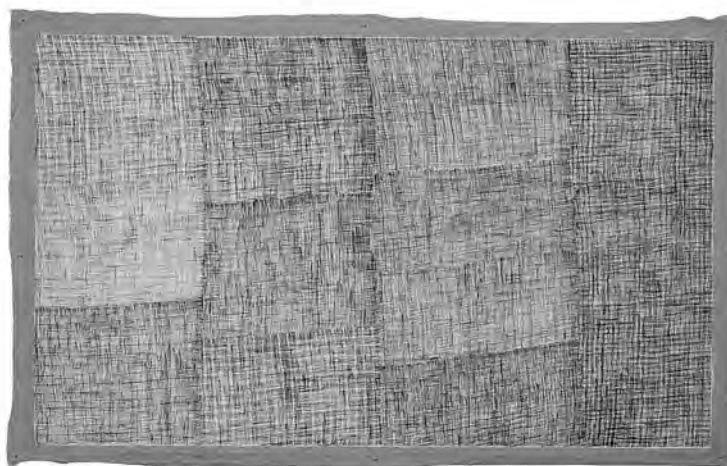


Fig. 1. Regina Pilawuk Wilson, *Syaw (Fishnet)* (2011), synthetic polymer paint on canvas. Collection of Dennis and Debra Scholl, Miami Beach, Florida.

attacking them from numerous angles, looking at the ways in which textiles complicate notions of design, function, aesthetics, culture, and identity. The essays also reckon with the intertwining of the medium with feminist, queer, and Indigenous histories as well as with technology innovations and labor issues. While at times limited in its treatment of some questions, such as the fine line between homage and appropriation, the book is thoughtful and rich in exploring how textiles have operated within modernism and how they have interlaced cultural traditions and identities.

In her wide-ranging introduction, Cooke, who also curated the exhibition, provides art-historical, cultural, and theoretical context for the subsequent essays and for the artworks in the catalogue. She begins by emphasizing the importance of the grid in the making of textiles, both in the structure of the loom and in the patterns woven on it. The grid form, Cooke reminds the reader, is, in Rosalind Krauss's words, "emblematic of the modernist ambition within the visual arts."¹ Specific to textiles, however, is an abstraction that Cooke describes as "not rooted primarily in metaphysics and formalist experimentation (modernist or otherwise), but rather in the everyday world: materiality is fundamental" (3). The author surveys the textile or textile-adjacent works of early twentieth-century artists better-known for their output in other media: the needlework, beaded bags, rugs, and other textiles of Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889–1943); the embroidery-

and lacework-informed "pattern-collages" of Hannah Höch (1889–1978); the fabric and clothing designs of Constructivists Liubov Popova (1889–1924) and Varvara Stepanova (1894–1958); and the apparel and domestic fabrics of Sonia Delaunay (1885–1979). She proceeds to the following generations of artists working in the medium, exploring the multiple ways in which textiles' forms and functions contributed to the history of modernist abstraction. Cooke devotes special attention to Anni Albers (1899–1994): the artist's wide impact in the Bauhaus weaving workshop (1922–33) and at Black Mountain College in North Carolina (1933–50); her solo show of textiles at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1949); and her essay "The Pliable Plane" (1957), which upholds textiles as a complementary medium to architecture. Cooke concludes with a look at contemporary artists working in textiles or evoking them in other artistic media. Some of these practitioners, she notes, place themselves in explicit dialogue with Albers and with other historical avant-garde textile artists. Many who belong to underrepresented groups create or make reference to textiles "to craft subject positions and to voice collective histories," like Wilson with *Syaw*, and/or to "[engage] with issues of social justice and sustainability" (31). Cooke's text stands in lively conversation with the other essays in the catalogue, where many of the artists introduced by Cooke recur.

Immediately following Cooke's introduction are the plates, which are paginated rather than numbered. The placement of this section at the center of the book asks the reader to consistently flip back and forth through the pages, introducing a variety of different connections between the works and the texts that address them as well as among the works themselves. In the seven mini-essays, artists whose own work interacts with the textile medium ruminate on specific works in the catalogue that resonate with their own practice, each author approaching their topic with a distinctive writing style.

In the first mini-essay, Lisa Oppenheim (b. 1975) addresses Varvara Stepanova in a 1924 photograph by Alexander Rodchenko, subverting the dynamic between photographer and subject by privileging the latter. Stepanova minimizes the assumed male gaze through her clothing, a comfortable stripe-and-circle-patterned dress she designed and sewed herself. Oppenheim sees the garment as representative of Stepanova's utopian views regarding the standardization and mechanization of garment design: "Is she wearing a specialized dress for art workers?" (34). In the book's introduction, Cooke notes that Oppenheim herself focuses on women as textile workers in such works as *Mildred Benjamin* (2016), a reinterpretation of an early twentieth-century photograph of a young sweatshop employee with scoliosis. Oppenheim's bisection of the image along Mildred's spine, Cooke argues, questions the "gender and class dynamics" of Benjamin's toplessness, critiquing the erotics of an image ostensibly meant to prompt labor reform (29).

Using short, illustrative sentences, Harmony Hammond (b. 1944) constructs a narrative about the methods employed by Agnes Martin (1912–2004) to produce subtly varying relationships among verticals, horizontals, and diagonals in *Untitled* (1960), a small oil on canvas resembling a salvaged woven hanging. Variations among the black, gray, and white lines speak to the hand of the artist. The work is closely comparable to Hammond's *Grey Grid* and *Pink Weave* (both 1974),

where the artist subverted materials by painting in oil what deceptively appears as a woven fabric (Cooke, 13).

Jeffrey Gibson's analysis of Alan Shields's 1976–77 *Shape-Up* portrays the large openwork grid of banded, irregularly painted fabric strips as a character who is "dandyish, clever, and queer" (76). Gibson envisions Shields interacting with feminist, LGBTQ+, Black American, Chicano, Native American, punk, and disco subcultures at the time of the piece's creation.

Ann Hamilton (b. 1956) employs a prose-poem form punctuated by slashes to approach *Pine Bark Pair* (1998) by Dorothy Gill Barnes (1927–2020), two woven brown cubes of bark and reed. She finds affinities between natural growth within the landscape and human labor: "what is the work of the tree? / what is the work of the artist?" (102). Hamilton's own (*side by side.coats*) of 2018/23 similarly "[seeks] a symbiotic fusion of the organic and manufactured" (Cooke, 25). The coats display a finished quality, while the fleeces Hamilton needle-felted onto them are raw materials, their protein fibers bursting out of them.

Ellen Lesperance (b. 1971) also finds meaning in material in *My Dear Colleagues* (1986) by Rosemarie Trockel (b. 1952). For Lesperance, the sleeves that Trockel knitted in everyday worsted yarn and attached to a clear plastic woman's torso resembling a clothing form make visible the "lesser-seen" addressees of the title, including Lesperance herself. As is the case for Gibson with *Shape-Up*, the ambiguity in *My Dear Colleagues* allows Lesperance to assign a character to the piece: the placement of red dye at the wrists (in one version of *Dear Colleagues*) or at the shoulders (in another) conveys "a threat that toggles between dual means of torment, self-harm and violence" (124). Lesperance's gridded gouache abstractions of sweater patterns, pulling from motifs worn by such activists as Angela Davis and the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp protesters, likewise celebrate the role of hand-knitting within feminist discourse (Cooke, 24). Lesperance's works of this type, including *Cardigan Worn by One*

Woman of the Boeing Five (2011) and *Pink Mountaintops* (2020), are akin to *My Dear Colleagues* in rendering the garments unwearable, leaving the viewer to reckon with their meanings.

Ulrike Müller (b. 1971) sees *Adiós al rombo, rosas blancas* (2015) by Spanish artist Teresa Lanceta (b. 1951)—a tapestry inspired by a *cojín*, or woven Moroccan pillowcase, acquired by Lanceta that the artist displayed next to her work—as a translation. Müller compares Lanceta's process to the translation of language and considers what is lost and what is gained. These questions more broadly address what appropriation means in a modernist context. Müller argues that drawing upon and showing a piece by an unnamed weaver belonging to a community tradition is "demonstrative rather than reparative" of the violence and problems "that arise when moving through the world and making connections" (142).

Carole Frances Lung (b. 1966) explicitly states that her interest in *The Threader*, a 2007 video projection by Senga Nengudi (b. 1943), lies in its relationship to her own work. Nengudi's piece honors the skilled labor of Ameer Baig, an hourly worker at a manufacturing facility for luxury passementerie. Lung devotes a respectfully detailed description to Ameer Baig's clothing in the film and to his activity of building up silk yarn among noisy machines; she also observes that his hourly pay is likely very low. The author ends with "one unanswered question: How many skeins were produced each day?" (156). While Nengudi focuses on the action of craft within a commodified environment, Lung's question relates more to her own project, *Frau Fiber vs. the Circular Knitting Machine* (2015), which is concerned with quantity: Lung's four-and-a-half-hour video presents its namesake character knitting one sock in front of a machine that produces nearly one hundred in the same span of time.

After the plates and mini-essays come the longer-format essays by art historians and curators that explore particular themes within modernist abstraction. Darby English's "Unavoidable

Nature" uses Albers's discussion of fabric partitions in her essay "Pliable Plane" as a framework for discussing the five hanging textile space dividers she exhibited in her 1949 solo show at MoMA. For Albers, whose article advocates for museums to employ such dividers, the appeal of these fabric panels included their potential for semi-transparency; their "airiness," which, as English points out, allows the panels to sway in response to visitors' ambulations; and their receptivity to being moved to new locations.³ The "imperfectly sustained" abstract grids that make up Albers's dividers permit the construction of meaning to be opened: "Association remains loose, electric" (176–77). At the same time, the panels' familiarity as handwork and their rendering in natural materials is "humanizing," in contrast to the intellectualization and remoteness often claimed for modernist abstraction (179).

In "Textile Thinking," Briony Fer connects Albers's 1957 essay to a contemporary work, *Habitation Is a Habit* (2012/19) by Zoe Leonard (b. 1961), a series of five photographs featuring bathroom linens and other textiles. The items in Leonard's images, shot up close with nothing else in the frame, exemplify the softness, warmth, and "luster or fuzz of fibers" that, for Albers, common textile objects can bring into a home.³ Fer is concerned with pliability—both the suppleness of textiles and the flexibility of imaginative thought—in relation to proximity, arguing that fabric serves to bridge temporal, spatial, and psychological distances of the kind that separate Albers from Leonard: "Each 'sample' of cloth mimic[s] not only the modern language of design prototypes, but also offer[s] its own personal, bodily set of memories, habits, and rhythms... and brings historical projection and retrospection into collision" (184). Textility exists within simulations of textiles, Fer maintains, whether in Albers's woven-looking drawing on corrugated paper (n.d.), in Leonard's *Habitation* series, or in the chain-link patterns inked onto paper with a laundry stamp by Ruth Asawa (1926–2013; *Untitled* [BMC.76], c. 1948–49), all of which propose a new kind of abstraction.

Fer's perspective on Leonard's series departs from the approach taken earlier in the volume by Cooke, who is more concerned with Leonard's critique of the way the manufacturing of textiles effaces human labor. The banality of manufactured designs, highlighted in Leonard's close-ups, discourages consumers from questioning the processes by which these fabrics are produced en masse (31).

The conversation returns to labor ethics in the following essay, "Not Your Grandmother's Labor," by Bibiana K. Obler, who starts with Lung's *Frau Fiber vs. the Circular Knitting Machine* and then explores "more optimistic" products of labor (197). Obler sees Lung's film as satirizing the glorification of handicraft, concluding that "Frau Fiber is no less alienated from her labor than the factory workers are from theirs," since the resulting object is a commodity regardless of its method of production (197). Obler uses Karl Marx's distinction between alienated versus unalienated labor—the latter entailing self-fulfillment or satisfaction in the process of making, in the object thus made, and in the consumption of that product by another—to evaluate the varying attitudes towards handwork of Taeuber-Arp, Asawa, and contemporary Black American weaver Diedrick Brackens. Taeuber-Arp sought to beautify ordinary objects but spoke about the drudgery of beading; Asawa introduced interconnections among labor, play, and meditation into her practice drawn from the work discipline of her immigrant parents;⁴ and Brackens "assert[s] the right and privilege to take pleasure in one's labor" by working with cotton, a material entwined with the history of slavery (207). Brackens's language of abstraction evades simple readings, inviting viewers to reflect instead on the making process and perhaps remember the domestic textile practices of their own kin.

Looking at another form of slow labor, Elissa Auther discusses basketry as a conduit for moving the modernist grid into three-dimensional space. Auther's "Dimensions of Basketry" emphasizes processes only achievable by hand with materials unsuitable

for industry, responding to the mechanization of textiles and to the dismissal of the basketry medium by Western culture. Auther focuses on Ed Rossbach's work and his publications on "new basketry" (including his 1976 book of that title), an approach that celebrated experimentation with unexpected materials, techniques, and forms, such as the painting of a basket's surface or the creation of unique asymmetrical shapes. "New basketry" drew on traditional and contemporary basket-weaving practices from around the world; Rossbach saw himself "in a vast historical network of antecedents" and lauded the basket for its ability "to move across history, culture, and context without being compromised or robbed of meaning" (218). Auther looks also at contemporary basket makers who are in direct conversation with Indigenous practices and decolonization while simultaneously transcending the boundaries of those traditions: Yvonne Koolmatrie (b. 1944) of Ngarrindjeri Country in Australia; Shan Goshorn (1957–2008) of the Eastern Band of Cherokee; and Japanese artists Nagakura Ken'ichi and Tanabe Yōta, who reinterpret the Japanese tradition of bamboo basket weaving for tea ceremonies through idiosyncratic plaiting, odd shapes, and other departures.

Michelle Kuo's "Textility and Technology" investigates the ways in which artists have engaged with mechanization to significantly shape modern and contemporary art in the textile medium. Kuo begins with the invention of the Jacquard loom in 1804–5 and concludes with *Silk Pavilion I* (2013) and *II* (2019), the collaborations conducted by artist Neri Oxman (b. 1976) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab to create enormous silk canopies of uneven thickness by bioengineering silkworms to follow machine-made scaffolds. Oxman's *Pavilions* trouble the expectations of regularity as opposed to irregularity in modernist design and epitomize the "infinite individuation, non-standardization, and non-identity" of contemporary textile art practices that incorporate technology

(243). Kuo discusses the invention and use of synthetic fibers, particularly nylon, the material employed by Kay Sekimachi (b. 1926) for her hanging, semi-transparent, wispy *Nagare* (Flow) sculptures (1967–70). With a prose style that is equal parts passionate, steeped in historical context, and accessible, Kuo acknowledges the drawbacks of textile technology under capitalism but focuses mainly on the possibility for “alternative forms of sociality” (227). Occasionally, Kuo’s neutrality towards ethically questionable technological developments unravels her writing: she mentions but skims past the role of the Du Pont Company, which introduced nylon in 1939, within the military-industrial complex, including its decision—facilitated in part by its practices in developing the fiber—to participate in the Manhattan Project. She also minimizes discussion of fossil fuel use in textile manufacturing. Without necessarily

condemning these developments outright, Kuo could have probed their ethical dimensions much further.

Woven Histories makes clear that the relationship between textiles and modernist abstraction is multifarious. The artists working at the intersection of the textile medium and the abstract mode enter a variety of different conceptual, aesthetic, technical, and technological spaces, some embracing handicraft traditions within a feminist context, others producing eccentric geometries, others moving toward new mechanics of making, and much more. Many situate their work in between different meanings, sometimes reflecting their diverse perspectives and experiences navigating feminist and social justice movements. Rather than strictly categorizing the works on offer in *Woven Histories*, editor Cooke gracefully accommodates for difference, bringing in a variety of voices and effectively

deconstructing the typical linearity of a catalogue in the structure of this beautiful publication. •

Em Kapp is an artist and a recent graduate from the Rhode Island School of Design specializing in textiles for the interior (emikapp.com). They aim to find different ways of archiving, reworking, and exaggerating the everyday.

Notes

1. Rosalind Krauss, “Grids,” *October* 9 (Summer 1979): 50.
2. Anni Albers, “The Pliable Plane: Textiles in Architecture,” *Perspecta* 4 (1957): 40.
3. Albers, “Pliable Plane,” 23.
4. On Ruth Asawa’s working methods, see also Julia Alting’s review of Helen Molesworth, *Open Questions: Thirty Years of Writing About Art* (London: Phaidon, 2023), in this issue of the *Woman’s Art Journal*.

Women Painting Women

Edited by Andrea Karnes, with essays by Andrea Karnes, Emma Amos, Faith Ringgold, and Lorna Simpson, and with a contribution by S. Janelle Montgomery
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and DelMonico Books/D.A.P., 2022

Reviewed by Gabrielle Stecher

In the conclusion of her essay “A Vision in Many Forms” for *Women Painting Women*, the catalogue of an exhibition of women’s portraits from the 1960s to the present that opened at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth in May 2022, volume editor and chief curator at the Modern Andrea Karnes reminds readers of the prolonged efforts women artists have made to “create forward momentum in investigating women as subjects” (119). Among the foremothers in these efforts are the first two artists mentioned in the book: Catharina van Hemessen (1528–c. 1587), whose 1548 *Self-Portrait at the Easel* is one of the first images of a woman artist at work by the artist herself, and Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614), whose *Minerva*

Dressing of 1613 constitutes one of the earliest known female nudes by a woman. More recent figurations by women and by genderfluid creators have further reclaimed these subjects’ own images from the purview of male artists and viewers. Exhibitions over the last sixty years of figurative works simultaneously of and by women have produced a dialogue that is critical to the praxis of representation in painting. Such images, and the exhibitions that highlight them, remain undeniably political today and are increasingly charged following the passage of the Dobbs decision overturning the federally protected right to abortion in the United States in June 2022, one month after the opening in Fort Worth. For emerging as well as established artists, engagement with artworks by women and nonbinary artists that depict women—in all their diversity of body types and identities—is crucial as a prompt to push boundaries. *Women Painting Women* offers exactly this kind of inspiration while establishing itself within a promising lineage of exhibitions centering and celebrating women.

Women Painting Women certainly testifies to the myriad careful ways in which women artists over the last half-century have engaged with the intersecting themes of gender, race, and sexuality as they relate to both individual and collective identity, and the related factors of “censorship, exile, community, and headspace, and sites that are public versus those that are private” (12). Karnes organizes her discussion of the exhibition’s sixty-five paintings by forty-six artists into four subsections, “Nature Personified,” “The Body,” “Color as Portrait,” and “Selfhood,” preceded by a defining thematic statement and accompanied by plates of the relevant works. This approach creates a “fluid framework” that encourages viewers to draw connections among diverse paintings (12), many of which could easily belong to more than one of Karnes’s categories. The format can sometimes be overwhelming, however, making it difficult for the reader to slow down, steady their pace, and delve deep enough to trace any one throughline.

“Nature Personified,” the first of the essay sections, “explores female

empowerment, relating anatomy to landscape and using the body as metaphor" (19). The first four associated catalogue works, each circa 1970, show women's nude bodies at close range, rendering them almost topographical; these paintings thus "investigate woman as landscape to connect to that tradition of the female form as earth" (21). *Crucifixion #1* (1969) by Eunice Golden (b. 1927), a strongly foreshortened view of a woman's torso and breasts, opens this section, and Karnes quotes the artist at length in 1981 urging women to "take control of their own image-making processes" and to "reclaim their sexuality" by employing explicitly erotic subjects that "may unleash a healthy appetite for a greater sense [of] awareness as well as unmask the fallacies of male power" (22).¹ By interweaving quotes from the represented artists' writings, Karnes allows the artists to speak through and to their art. Bodies also become landscapes—worlds, even—in the works of Joan Semmel (b. 1932) and Luchita Hurtado (1920–2020) as well as in the sienna-toned *Mary III* (1974) by Susan Rothenberg (1945–2020), which depicts actress Mary Woronov poised as if preparing to spring or gallop. *Mary III* recalls, for Karnes, the Paleolithic cave paintings in Lascaux, France, a comparison that tasks readers with envisaging a woman's body as an ancient heritage site, deserving of study and protection because of its natural, cultural, and historical significance. Approaches to the woman-as-cultural-landscape metaphor occur in *Wildflowers* (2017) and other paintings by María Berrío (b. 1982), a Colombian immigrant to the United States, who situates figures embodying mythological deities, folkloric characters, priestesses, and the Christian Madonna in fantastical settings that emphasize the characters' connections with nature, allowing Berrío to interrogate questions of women immigrants' identities using a postcolonial lens.

Pushing against the historically idealized forms of the female nude by male artists, "The Body" comprises "portrait[s] of flesh" (40) that celebrate the dignity, agency, and often sexual potency of voluptuous women,



Fig. 1. Mickalene Thomas, *A Little Taste Outside of Love* (2007), acrylic, enamel, and rhinestones on wood panel, 108" x 144". Brooklyn Museum, New York.

mothers-to-be, women with body hair, female wrestlers, lesbian couples, transwomen, and genderfluid subjects. Other works disrupt canonical representations of Black female bodies, as exemplified by the acrylic, enamel, and rhinestone-studded *A Little Taste Outside of Love* (Fig. 1) by Mickalene Thomas (b. 1971), which retrieves the nineteenth-century odalisque from Édouard Manet (*Olympia*, 1863) and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (*La Grande Odalisque*, 1814). Challenging the objectification of Black women and their dismissal as background servants by Manet, Ingres, and other painters of the odalisque type, Thomas refashions her subject as a "1970s pop culture icon" so that "here, the Black woman is clearly in a power position" (58). The famous painting by Sylvia Sleigh (1916–2010) *The Turkish Bath* (1973)—one of the few images of men in *Women Painting Women*—also reclaims the odalisque trope, borrowing from Ingres's painting of the same name (completed 1862), its six lifesize male nudes inviting the erotic gaze of "(straight) women" (and gay men?) and reversing the objectification once practiced solely by male artists (54).

"Color as Portrait" looks at the aesthetics of palette as it relates to the construction of identity. In *Donkey ride* (2021) by Nicola Tyson (b. 1960), the pairing of clashing, unnaturalistic colors with strange, reductive forms imparts humor onto the scene of a lone donkey-mounted pink figure, a stand-in for the artist, but also creates a sense of alienation. *Red Interior with Seated Figure* by Louise Bonnet (b. 1970), likewise painted in 2021 during the COVID pandemic, positions an enormous seated woman and two nude guardians, all three distorted and faceless, against a searing scarlet backdrop in a surrealist tableau that again evokes the loneliness of quarantine. Tyson's and Bonnet's cartoonish forms and bold hues "present figures that through bodily expression and setting create a private moment marked by introspection" (82).

The final chapter section, "Selfhood," moves past the solitude of *Donkey ride* and *Red Interior with Seated Figure* into an interrogation of social dynamics as expressed in portraiture. Karnes considers here, among other themes, collective versus individualized womanhood and the harms of generalizing about women at the cost of

celebrating idiosyncrasy. The merged figures of different skin tones in *Yayoi: Arrangement in Yellow Lake and Vermillion Clair* (2021) by Christiane Lyons (b. 1980) “creates a conversation about self in relation to other (subject/object) and is a subversive retrieval of the self by pointing to an image of woman that cannot ultimately be reconciled” (104). The girls composed through collage and painting in works by Deborah Roberts (b. 1962) like *The innocent and the damned* (2021) defy racial stereotypes by “suggest[ing] that not all women of color are alike,” the varying levels of ease in their poses implying their different levels of awareness about the systemic challenges they will face as Black women (106).

Following Karnes’s catalogue is a collection of three republished texts by Black artists represented in the exhibition: a 1982 *Heresies* article by Emma Amos (1937–2020); a chapter from the 1995 memoir *We Flew over the Bridge* by Faith Ringgold (1930–2024); and a 2020 poem by Lorna Simpson (b. 1960). Amos’s article, “Some Do’s and Dont’s for Black Women Artists,” offers trenchant humor about the racism, sexism, and ageism in the 1980s New York art world and invites readers to “shout ‘Hallelujah!’” for Black creative luminaries like Alma Thomas (1891–1978) and for supporters of Black artists like the Just Above Midtown gallery (123). Ringgold’s memoir chapter, “The 1970s: Is There a Woman’s Art?,” addresses her participation in the Woman’s Movement in that decade: “I got involved ... because I wanted to help my daughters, other women, and myself aspire to something more than a place behind a good man” (124), but “being black and a feminist was equivalent to being a traitor to the cause of black people,” while feminist artists “were aghast” at Ringgold’s suggestion that women and Black artists should be represented in the 1970 “Liberated” Venice Biennale in New York (125). Simpson’s poem, “We Have Been Whispering in Each Other’s Ears for Centuries” (2020), considers how acts of looking can forge connections with others outside of one’s place and time.

These three texts are intended, according to Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth director Marla Price in the catalogue’s preface, to provide “essential historical and insightful literary context” for the volume (8). More precisely, they offer much-needed perspectives on the lived experience of race for Black feminist artists in 1970, 1982, and 2020. Yet while they testify to Amos’s, Ringgold’s, and Simpson’s strengths as authors and activists, adding further intellectual texture to an exhibition that is as much about female voices as it is about women’s bodies, the writings feel loosely curated. Lacking any explicit framing, they leave to readers the task of constructing their relationship to Karnes’s essay, to the works of art in the catalogue, and to one another.

The lack of a critical framework for these texts feels at odds with the accessibility of Karnes’s essay, which concisely surveys major concepts in the domain of women’s art and portraiture and makes legible what some viewers may overlook or take for granted within the imagery. Karnes relies heavily, however, on second-wave feminism, including the foundational scholarship of Linda Nochlin and Laura Mulvey, which reflects a missed opportunity to engage substantially with recent theory and research. Her study would benefit from more robust endnotes, a bibliography, and an inclusive citation practice that testifies to the work being conducted currently by BIPOC scholars and critics.

The final section of the book, “Artists’ Biographies,” is authored by S. Janelle Montgomery, a curatorial assistant at the Modern, who provides brief snapshots of the contexts in which the artists under discussion live(d) and work(ed). Though *Women Painting Women* is “international in scope” (Price, 6), most of the forty-six artists represented are based in the United States. Seventeen of the American-born artists are, moreover, based in the Eastern US, with a strong showing in and around New York; five work in California, like Kim Dingle (b. 1951); Rothenberg and May Stevens (1924–2019) represent New Mexico; and

Roberts is in Austin, Texas. These numbers do not include the eleven artists who were born outside of the US but have since immigrated to either New York or California, such as Rita Ackerman (b. 1968, Hungary), Njideka Akunyili Crosby (b. 1983, Nigeria), and Hayv Kahraman (b. 1981, Iraq). By largely limiting its geographic focus in this way, the catalogue begs a key question about representation: how dramatically might this exhibition have evolved if there had been more coverage of artists working in the Deep South or Midwest, much less outside the US?

Much of the excitement of *Women Painting Women* lies in its attention to new works; a third of the paintings, seventeen in total, were created between 2020 and 2021. Nineteen more were produced in the mid- to late 2010s, including such works as the pop coquettes by Black British artist Somaya Critchlow (b. 1993). *Women Painting Women* thus gestures to a hopeful future, one in which women and genderqueer artists will continue to develop their approaches to women and their manners of figuration. The project not only celebrates what such artists have achieved in painting female subjects but exists also as a promise of where women and queer artists working in this mode are heading. For this catalogue, then, to borrow Amos’s expression of thanks, let us “shout ‘Hallelujah!’” •

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Notes

1. Eunice Golden, “The Male Nude in Women’s Art: Dialectics of a Feminist Iconography,” *Heresies* 12, no. 4, *Sex Issue* 3 (1981): 42. On Golden’s embrace of eroticism, see also Aliza Edelman, “Eunice Golden’s Male Body Landscapes and Feminist Sexuality,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 41, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2020): 16–27.

Water Talks: Empowering Communities to Know, Restore, and Preserve Their Waters

By Betsy Damon
Portal Books, 2022

Stuff: Instead of a Memoir

By Lucy R. Lippard
New Village Press, 2023

Reviewed by Sally Jane Brown

In two recent books that take unusual autobiographical paths, the influential author-activist-artist luminaries Betsy Damon (b. 1940) and Lucy R. Lippard (b. 1937) seamlessly blend the narratives of their lives with a steadfast commitment to catalyzing change. Both employ nonlinear storytelling, but a key difference arises: in *Water Talks*, Damon aims to mobilize action with clear instructions; in *Stuff*, Lippard takes a more intimate and folksy approach, utilizing household objects to reflect on a lifetime of experiences.

Betsy Damon has dedicated her career to environmental activism through art. Especially notable is her project *Living Water Garden* in Chengdu, China (completed 1998; Fig. 1), a large urban park with wetlands that naturally filter the polluted waters of the neighboring Fu and Nan Rivers. A model for sustainable water management, this project was instrumental in promoting ecological design and art in China. In 1991, Damon founded “Keepers of the Waters,” an organization still in existence today that connects artists and scientists across geopolitical borders to address water-related environmental issues.

Water Talks serves as an illustrated toolkit, empowering readers to understand, protect, and restore bodies of water locally and globally. Through practical case studies, she guides readers on ways to achieve these aims, from contacting libraries and government officials to starting community conversations and organizing artistic movements for change. The book tackles the heavy topics of climate change and government destruction of waterways while

maintaining a hopeful tone. Original illustrations by Molly McIntyre (b. 1980) and, in two cases, by Damon herself, along with a host of archival and contemporary photographs and inspirational quotes, create a sense of closeness with readers, encouraging their engagement with the narrative.

The author challenges prevailing mindsets by posing questions like “What species pollutes the source of life?” (7) and asserting, for example, “Water has rights, exactly the same rights as every other living form” (192). Addressing a society in which sprinklers and showers are used freely, she employs science-based statistics and her own findings to advocate for a fundamental shift in perspective, emphasizing the importance of working *with* the environment at both micro and macro levels.

In her chapter “The Arts,” Damon reflects on how the feminist movement led her to infuse introspection and listening into her artistic practice, on the premise that “art enables our minds to envision changing things that seem immutable” (54). The chapter details Damon’s process of creating *Living Water Garden* (Fig. 1), from taking initial trips to China for leisure to thinking about a water-based art project there; from attending a Chinese engineering conference, where she interested attendees in her initiative, to attracting

funding from individual donors and eventually from the utilities company American Standard (for toilets); from securing city government approval for the site to holding a two-week-long series of public art performances on the Fu-Nan riverbanks; from collaborating on the design with landscape architect Margie Ruddick (b. 1957) and hydraulic bioengineer Huang Shida to witnessing the successful first test of the park’s water-filtering system in April 1998. Damon concludes the chapter by underscoring the impact of art on environmental awareness, describing Earth care as “the biggest art project we do; our biggest collaboration” (84).¹

In true contemporary feminist fashion, Damon embraces diverse perspectives, acknowledging the embedded racism and classism in discussions of water access. She cites global examples of other water-based projects, detailing the community collaboration, fundraising, outreach, and awareness-raising they involved, even in cases when these processes stalled before completion or failed to achieve their goals. Damon’s approach challenges the traditional solo male genius narrative, highlighting how feminist art and activism can drive change through a sense of common purpose.

While Damon’s text can be didactic, McIntyre’s ink drawings are often



Fig. 1. Betsy Damon with Margie Ruddick and Huang Shida, *Living Water Garden*, Chengdu, China (completed 1998), aerial view.

playful, even sweet: a child on tiptoe filling a glass from a tap, for example, or hands touching each other within a frame of flora and charming fauna above the handwritten label "Art is the Change Agent of the World." The book includes an appendix with clearly articulated ideas for small and large projects to optimize drainage, improve filtration, reduce water use, and more, conveying the point that water issues should not be compartmentalized along the boundaries drawn by governments and industries. Damon underscores water's centrality in the survival of all living things and its interconnectedness with all aspects of human society, emphasizing the need for every new site development to have a sustainable water plan. *Water Talks* encapsulates the author's longtime commitment to environmental issues and demonstrates the enduring impact of art in advocating for, and bringing about, ecological change.

As *Stuff: Instead of a Memoir* attests, Lippard shares Damon's commitment to social justice through art. Her impressive curatorial and writing portfolio includes, she estimates, some twenty-seven books (13) and has earned her awards from literary and art associations. As one of the pioneers who advocated for the "dematerialization" evident in Conceptual Art, and as a longtime champion of feminist art, she has left an indelible mark on art discourse since the 1960s.

Stuff is less instructional than *Water Talks*; Lippard's slender volume is more akin to a narrated scrapbook. Lippard invites readers into her life through stories relating to the collection of art and objects she displays in "the one room house I built in 1993" (i) in tiny Galisteo, New Mexico, the book presenting, and constituting, an intimate platform for readers, an artwork in itself (Fig. 2). The meandering trip through her life begins with her ancestry and continues to the present day, with each point in the journey illustrated by photographs and works of art from that era.

A significant amount of Lippard's storytelling revolves around her encounters and friendships with myriad artists and curators, as well as her advocacy efforts for underrepresented



Fig. 2. Home of Lucy R. Lippard, Galisteo, New Mexico, 2023: "Bookcase in the guest room with fan, an old map of Ohio earthworks, Christy Rupp [b. 1949] cutout, Sabra Moore [b. 1943] (Leaves, 1988), and lots of other stuff," Lippard, *Stuff: Instead of a Memoir*, 131, caption for image opposite dedication page.

artists. In one exciting anecdote, Lippard tells of joining fellow members of the activist Art Workers' Coalition (AWC) in disrupting a trustee dinner at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and releasing cockroaches onto the table to protest the absence of Black artists in the museum's 1969 *Harlem on My Mind* exhibition. Browsing through the American Indian Community House in New York one day in 1980 leads, in Lippard's account, to her writing a 1985 catalogue essay for the major traveling exhibition of Native American artists *Women of Sweetgrass, Cedar, and Sage*; protesting Columbus Day in 1992; and publishing extensively on Native American art thereafter.

Lippard recalls the formation of *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* in 1977 with an "initial 'mother collective'" (70), among whose members she mentions by name Joan Braderman (b. 1948), Harmony Hammond (b. 1944), Elizabeth Hess (b. 1953), Joyce Kozloff (b. 1942), Mary Miss (b. 1944), "Mimi"

(Miriam) Shapiro (1923–2015), May Stevens (1924–2019), and Michelle Stuart (b. 1933), many of whom were already, or went on to become, Lippard's dear friends. Lippard tells of hiking near her home with Hammond in the 1990s to look for Ancestral Pueblo sites. Both women joined the Galisteo Volunteer Fire and Rescue in that decade; Lippard continues to be a member.

Lippard reflects in *Stuff* on many of her book projects and exhibitions and on the events and ideas that underlay them. Meeting Conceptual Art practitioners through the AWC, for instance, ultimately resulted in Lippard's curation of four conceptual "card shows" (1969–74) whose catalogues consisted of literal note cards and whose numerical titles gave the population of each city where the shows were exhibited. These seemingly simple gestures challenged prevailing curatorial and institutional determinations of what constituted fine art, though Lippard does not explicitly state this point.

Lippard provides snapshots of opportunities and experiences as if she's writing to a close friend. The elliptical quality of her narrative style often leaves readers to infer the context of her career successes. Unlike Damon, who mentions every invitation and details every aspect of her fundraising efforts, Lippard assumes readers will fill in the blanks through familiarity with the individuals she names. Readers might sometimes have appreciated more background, especially when Lippard discusses emerging artists. Many sections of the book involve Lippard being invited to publish, travel, or exhibit, but for some of Lippard's risky trips abroad, such as to Nicaragua in 1983 (illustrated object: Nicaraguan mask, 89, no. 178) and to El Salvador in 1984, the purpose remains unclear, the lack of context adding a perhaps unintended element of mystery to the narrative. Partly as a result of these omissions, Lippard's storytelling successfully prompts readers to pause, reread parts of the narrative, and engage in additional research to grasp the full depth and significance of her experiences.

The story closes with Lippard donating many of her artworks and archival materials to various repositories

(yet there is "still so much stuff," she observes). She ends with, "I'll keep writing because it's all I know how to do" (128), and with a smile and a wave in a recent photo by Mira Burack (b. 1974) labeled "*Goodbye for now...*" (143, no. 287). The book contains neither an appended chronology nor a bibliography, and the images that surround the text on every page are without captions, although the "Illustration Notes" at the end provide brief, often entertaining information about them. ("LRL peeling potatoes at land grant protest in Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico, 1988. Photo: Caroline Hinkley. In the background is a poster reading *Buenos Dias, Chinga el Inglés Official*, from a Colorado campaign against English Only legislation in the 1980s. I have a copy posted on my Galisteo front door, to the amusement of some delivery people," 139, no. 194.)

Neither Lippard nor Damon seems to entertain any plans of retiring; they clearly expect, and we readers can hope, that they will make further contributions to their legacy. While only Damon offers a direct guide for action, both authors serve to inspire beyond the page. Damon's didactic yet hopeful approach provides readers with actionable tools

and projects to address environmental issues. Lippard's more conversational narrative and the collection of works and photographs she shares encourage readers to expand outwards in the directions she points, whether to learn more about her history or to emulate her commitment to societal change. *Water Talks* and *Stuff* are testaments to the impact women can make in the arts and beyond. Damon and Lippard, with their enduring passion and determination, showcase the transformative power of art—and of innovative memoir-writing—in advocating for change. •

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Notes

1. Also on *Living Water Garden*, see Christine Filippone, "For the Blood of Gaia: Betsy Damon's Quest for Living Water," *Woman's Art Journal* 39, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2018): 3–11.

Open Questions: Thirty Years of Writing About Art

By Helen Molesworth, edited by
Donna Wingate
Phaidon, 2023

Reviewed by Julia Alting

In 1969, the Italian feminist author Carla Lonzi wrote that "the work of art felt to me, at a certain point, like a possibility for meeting, like an invitation to participate, addressed by the artists to each of us."¹ Lonzi's theorization of the possibilities for a non-hierarchical art criticism rang in my ears as I read Helen Molesworth's edited volume *Open Questions*, which compiles thirty years of Molesworth's writings on art. The author's desire to speak to and with both the work of

various artists and her own past writings makes the reader eager to participate in the conversation. Every section of *Open Questions* begins with a short reflection from Molesworth in which she looks back at her writing and situates it from her present perspective. A new postscript also closes the early essays and some of later ones that signal important changes in her career and life, like her "first explicitly lesbian text" (268). The opening to the volume is a new text, too, with her thoughts regarding art criticism, a positioning of sorts: writing offers a way of thinking, she muses, a possibility of working something out and resolving a problem, an avenue to address "the problematics of the relational" (29). By means of a reflective, meandering style, this thinking-as-writing renders the work of art an open question, an invitation to

start a dialogue of the kind that Lonzi envisioned between viewer and artist.

The book is structured in loosely chronological order, spanning Molesworth's career trajectory from her student days in the Whitney Independent Study Program to her PhD in Art History at Cornell University and from her curatorial posts at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles to her prolific work, after her abrupt dismissal from the latter institution, as a freelance curator, podcast maker, and writer.² In her introduction to *Open Questions*, Molesworth emphasizes her feelings of personal involvement with her projects and signals the (in)distinctions between her life and her work. In the opening section, "The Earliest Shots across the Bow," we can read early texts alongside



Fig. 1. Imogen Cunningham, *Ruth Asawa and her children at home on Saturn Street, San Francisco* (1957), silver gelatin print, 10" x 9 1/2". Imogen Cunningham Trust. Estate of Ruth Asawa.

the reflections on writing as such; the essays from her graduate days that she dedicated to Marcel Duchamp are gathered under the reassuring section title "Thinking about Marcel Duchamp, or Why I Think a PhD in Art History Is Still a Good Idea." "Full-Time Employment, or When I Really Became a Feminist" includes Molesworth's two most famous texts, both of which transcend the review genre: "House Work and Art Work" (2000), on Judy Chicago (b. 1939), Mary Kelly (b. 1941), Mierle Laderman Ukeles (b. 1939), and Martha Rosler (b. 1943), which argues that these artists' ostensibly disparate feminisms share a questioning of how public and private labor are valued; and "How to Install Art as a Feminist" (2010), which "think[s] through the translation of [feminist] discursive formations into the special logic and requirements of the museum" (118). The largest portion of the book is dedicated to essays focusing on the work of one artist, featuring Lee Lozano (1930–1999),

Catherine Opie (b. 1961), Noah Davis (1983–2015), Doris Salcedo (b. 1958), and many more. These monographic studies are grouped into the sections "On Why I Love Artists"—a clue to the book's intended audience—and "After All This, It Turns Out I Really Love Painting," in which she joins "a conversation that is six centuries long" about the painting medium (209). Interspersed among Molesworth's writings is an abundance of beautiful full-color reproductions of the artworks discussed.

Molesworth's very public firing from MoCA in 2018, apparently due to her practice of "undermining the museum," sent shock waves through the US art world.³ Although the details remain unknown due to nondisclosure agreements, the conflict between Molesworth and MoCA's then director Philippe Vergne cleaved along some of the fault lines of a polarized debate that is discernible in art history departments but perhaps more visibly tense in current

museum practice. A key sentence from Molesworth's 2018 *Artforum* review of work by Simone Leigh (b. 1967), a piece reprinted in *Open Questions*, was often adduced by the press at the time to make sense of the conflict: "More days than not I find myself wondering whether the whole damn project of collecting, displaying, and interpreting culture might just be unredeemable" (178). One of the known disputes between Vergne and Molesworth concerned the 2017 retrospective of the minimalist artist Carl Andre. Molesworth objected to the choice of artist due to his involvement in the circumstances under which the artist Ana Mendieta (1948–1985) met her death.⁴ Molesworth rather melodramatically disentangled the gendered and racialized power dynamics around Mendieta's death in her wildly successful 2022 podcast "Death of an Artist." The opposing positions seemingly exemplified by Vergne and Molesworth—on one side, the continuation of art history's "business as usual" in celebrating the white straight men of the canon; on the other, the challenging of this patriarchal story and its historical power asymmetries through the consideration of *difference*—can currently be seen in many countries' culture wars.

It is on this battleground between those who want to retain the canon and those who interrogate its structural absences that Molesworth's feminism comes most clearly to the fore in *Open Questions*, specifically in the pieces she wrote in the years leading up to her start as a full-time museum curator. Prefaced by disclaimers that her thinking on these matters at the time was not fully intersectional, in the sense of considering race and cisgenderedness, Molesworth continues to stand by the theoretical implications of these essays, and I would agree that they remain highly relevant: the problematics they raise are far from resolved. "How to Install Art as a Feminist" addresses the issue of the canon's historical erasure of women artists from the spatial parameters of the museum gallery. Moving beyond the existing poles of chronological and thematic displays, first limiting the representation of women artists to those working

today, the second suggesting similarity based on a supposed universal “womanhood,” Molesworth opts for another approach that departs from the *problem*. Her lightly transhistorical fantasy room brings together Joan Snyder (b. 1940), Dana Schutz (b. 1976), Amy Sillman (b. 1955), Cindy Sherman (b. 1954), and Wangechi Mutu (b. 1972), constructing a feminist genealogy that does not ignore 1970s feminist art practice but that also starts from the perspective of a working contemporary woman artist, producing a historical conjuncture. Exploring philosophies of nonlinear generational time and kinship, Molesworth posits an alternative way of looking at models of influence than the dominant Oedipal narratives. Her fantasy room—where Snyder’s “censorious strokes” reference historical forgetting (124)—would thematize the *challenge* of women artists working under the patriarchy instead of putting them together on the basis of an essentialized “feminine.”

Molesworth takes strong positions where she needs them yet leaves room for doubt and indeterminacy. Her writing style is politicized but not dogmatic, open to nuance and fluidity. She engages the age-old feminist proverb “The personal is political” in nondeterministic ways: Yes, identity matters. No, it is not the only thing that matters. In an essay on Ruth Asawa (1926–2013), Molesworth explores a photograph by Imogen Cunningham (1883–1976) of the artist at work (1957; Fig. 1): Asawa sits on the floor of her living room and looks down at her hands while working with wire, surrounded by four of her children and two of her hanging sculptures suspended from the ceiling. The photograph serves as a speculative starting point for Molesworth to define the subjectivity of the American artist in a new way, as an alternative to the phallic splatter in a more famous picture of a twentieth-century American artist at work. Molesworth’s formulation of this subjectivity does not merely rest on listing oppositional differences—man/woman, individual/family, floor/ceiling—but develops further into how those differences are translated in their

relationship to *form*. Asawa was not taken seriously during her lifetime because of her identity as mother and housewife; later feminists have tried to recuperate her as “genius” artist; Molesworth asserts the importance of *both over either/or*. When Molesworth’s questions intersect with aspects of her own identity as a white queer woman who grew up working-class, she reflects upon these entwinements. This self-awareness is palpable, for example, in a confessional exploration of lesbian desire and the erotically charged images of women by Lisa Yuskavage (b. 1962). The vulnerability of bringing in the personal and of exploring feelings (embarrassment, horniness, shame, guilt, sentimentality) is more permissible in art writing than it is within academic contexts, and the book documents the writer’s slow liberation from the latter.

In 1970s Italy, Lonzi’s feminist politics made her bid adieu to the art world in an uncompromising stance.⁵ Molesworth now considers herself to be more of a writer than a curator.⁶ Still, although she has disavowed hopes of reentering the art museum, she clearly remains an insider within the North American art world,⁷ her objections to “the whole damn project of collecting, displaying, and interpreting culture” notwithstanding. While Molesworth ruminates in *Open Questions* on the power structures of our art institutions, I would have liked to see her incorporate more theoretical ideas from outside the traditional male canon of art theory: for example, relating Roland Barthes’ “Death of the Author” (1967) to Lonzi’s reflections on authorship and spectatorship within patriarchal culture. Including women theorists of art outside of the United States, like Lonzi, Martiniquian anticolonial feminist thinker Suzanne Césaire (1915–1966), and Polish artist and theorist on creativity Fayga Ostrower (1920–2001), would have helped to open up our conversations around art even further. In the end, *Open Questions* left me with a desire to go out and look at art, ask questions, and look again. •

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Notes

1. Carla Lonzi, *Self-portrait*, translated by Allison Grimaldi Donahue (Brussels: Divided, 2021; first published in 1969 as *Autoritratto*), 13.
2. See also Grace Edquist, “How Helen Molesworth Became the Art World’s Most Beloved Provocateur,” *Vogue*, November 15, 2023, <https://www.vogue.com/article/helen-molesworth-essay-collection-interview>, accessed June 10, 2024.
3. Catherine Opie quoted in Julia Halperin, “Clashing Visions, Simmering Tensions: How a Confluence of Forces Led to MOCA’s Firing of Helen Molesworth,” *artnet*, March 16, 2018, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/moca-helen-molesworth-tension-1246358>, accessed May 30, 2024.
4. Mendieta fell from their apartment after a fight with Andre, her husband; he was acquitted of murder charges. See recently on the artist Philip Kelleher, “Curdling the Photographic Image: Ana Mendieta’s *Silhueta*,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 44, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2023), 13–21.
5. Lonzi refused to participate in the art world or attend the exhibition openings of her partner, as she believed the art world to be inherently patriarchal, as described in Giovanna Zapperi, “Challenging Feminist Art History: Carla Lonzi’s Divergent Paths,” *Feminism and Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice*, edited by Victoria Horne and Lara Perry (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 104–23.
6. Edquist, “Most Beloved Provocateur.”
7. Molesworth hosts Dialogues: *The David Zwirner Podcast* (ongoing since 2018) and curated the exhibition *Face to Face: Portraits of Artists by Tacita Dean, Brigitte Lacombe and Catherine Opie* at the International Center of Photography, New York, January 27–May 1, 2023.

Picturing the Woman-Child: Fashion, Feminism and the Female Gaze

By Morna Laing
Bloomsbury Visual Arts, paperback
2023 (hardcover 2021)

Reviewed by Debbie McCarthy

Morna Laing, an Assistant Professor in Fashion Studies at the branch campus of the Parsons School of Design in Paris, utilizes a combination of critical theory, reception studies, and visual analysis to explore the multifarious nature of the female gaze in relation to tropes associated with the “woman-child” in British and other European fashion magazines from 1990 to 2015. Laing’s goal in *Picturing the Woman-Child: Fashion, Feminism and the Female Gaze* is “to unravel the seeming contradiction between the visibility of female ‘empowerment’ in media discourse and the proliferation of childlike imagery of women in fashion media” (2).

Laing expands upon studies by Erving Goffman, Paul Jobling, and other scholars on the often sexualized childlike model in 1980s and 1990s fashion photography by “[putting] their findings in dialogue with the new wave of childlike femininities that emerged in the first two decades of the twenty-first century” (3, although Laing sets 1990 as the beginning of her study and 2015 as its end, 2). As she lays out in her introductory first chapter, Laing focuses primarily on photographs in British *Vogue*; in the woman-led Canadian magazine *Lula, Girl of My Dreams*; and in the British street style magazine *i-D*, but she also explores the intertextuality of these images with other European fashion periodicals. In the preface to the paperback edition, Laing takes great care to acknowledge that seismic shifts have occurred in the fashion discourse since 2015, most notably the much greater acceptance of gender fluidity and the much more widespread representation of people of color.

Part one of the book sets out the theoretical bases for Laing’s analysis clearly and thoroughly yet with admirable

brevity, a particular boon for readers unfamiliar with titans of critical theory like feminist scholars Judith Butler, Laura Mulvey, and Angela McRobbie. Laing’s explanation in chapter two, for example, of Butler’s conceptualization of gender as a physically enacted performance in dialogue with contemporary social norms lends nuance to Laing’s consideration of what it means to wear garments and embody signifiers associated with childhood rather than womanhood. This chapter, “Fashion Photography and Gender,” summarizes the arguments made by fashion theorists of the last quarter-century that the medium has its own visual codes that help to construct and reinforce certain types of “identity formation, value systems and perspectives on the world” (22). Consumption and capitalism, Laing reminds the reader, are at the heart of fashion images, whose purpose is to spur sales by “communicating the relevance of new fashion forms,” thereby “legitimizing the existence of the industry itself” (31). Repetition desensitizes viewers to that which has been historically framed as “taboo” and inserts the formerly outré into the sphere of “common sense,” an important frame for the images of sexualized childlike women considered in chapters six through eight. Because photography is often taken at face value as truth-telling—even in our current age of Artificial Intelligence and Photoshop—fashion imagery serves a frequently unquestioned site of discourse in the construction of women’s identity.

Chapter three, “Childlike Femininity: A History of Feminist Critique,” traces the role Western thought has historically played in aligning women with children. Following Philippe Ariés, Laing argues that the current Western conception of childhood arose from the eighteenth-century Romantic notion of the child as innocent and genderless. In Joshua Reynolds’s *Age of Innocence* (c. 1788), for instance, the titular quality is conveyed through the visual markers of the young child subject’s pale skin, light-colored dress, and indeterminate gender markers. As Laing points out, however, this identity was by no means universal; this Romantic codifying of “childhood” rendered whiteness as normative and effaced poverty. invisible. As

historical feminist thinkers Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, and Betty Friedan have observed, Western patriarchal society has often relegated women to childlike powerlessness and has portrayed them as inferior to adult men in intellect. The popularity of the woman-child in fashion from 1990 to 2015, Laing argues, reflects in part the “post-feminist” backlash against feminism in the 1990s (as described by McRobbie and feminist social critic Susan Faludi) as well as the 2010s “popular feminism” that ostensibly celebrated women by touting the power of consumerism (as identified by media scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser). Consent to objectification was paradoxically framed as a form of feminism.

Chapter four, “Between Image and Spectator,” argues for the usefulness of reception studies in making sense of childlike femininities in fashion media. Laing outlines the underlying precept of reception scholarship, namely that viewers (and readers) positioned within different socio-historical and personal contexts can invest images (and written texts) with different meanings—sometimes in line with creators’ intentions, sometimes departing from and even opposing those intentions—and applies this framework to her audience research on women’s responses to fashion images of the woman-child. “One’s social positionings,” she notes, “will have an influence on the way one experiences the world, including the way one looks at images of women” (67). Laing observes that fashion photography has long assigned a marginal position to Black women: In Alexandra Shulman’s tenure as editor-in-chief of British *Vogue* (1992–2017), Yasmin Jones-Henry has found that only eleven of 306 covers featured women of color. Laing conducted her audience reception study between 2012 and 2015 using focus groups of twenty women in total, ages sixteen to twenty-eight, all residents of the United Kingdom, “diverse in terms of [ethnic] background” (but fourteen of them white), some regular readers of fashion magazines, others not (62). The goal of this study was learning how women themselves responded to such imagery. Generally speaking, her findings sup-

ported the idea of the female gaze as multifarious rather than monolithic.

Part two applies the historical, theoretical, and methodological frameworks introduced in part one to the analysis of four specific woman-child fashion image types: the Romantic-style girl-woman; the Surrealist-inspired *femme-enfant-fatale*; the sexualized Lolita; and the Kinderwhore. Chapter five, "The Romantic Woman-Child, Lost from Home," examines the Romantic feminine ideal in Anglophone fashion media of the 1990s and early twenty-first century as delicate, young, middle-class, and white, with her racial identity often echoed and underscored by her white clothing. This whiteness is associated with purity and an angelic nature. Through such fashion editorials as Annabel Mehran's 2010 "Songbird" series in *Lula*, young women in soft white fabrics, feathers, and ruffles convey a nostalgia for angelic girlhood innocence. For the Russian models in Mario Testino's 2010 "Star Girls" feature in British *Vogue*, such clothing evokes the ice princesses of their native fairy tales. "The better life of traditional femininity or one's childhood lost," Laing observes about these images, "are open to be rediscovered through shopping" (114). The dark side of nostalgia emerges from the again all-white 2006 British *Vogue* "Heavenly Creatures" spread, perhaps a reference to the film of that name in which two girls commit matricide to preserve their friendship. When study participants viewed a British *Vogue* image from 2007 of a model clutching a lacy dress to her body, they invoked Miss Havisham from Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860–61), the rejected bride who cannot move beyond the past.

In chapter six, "Fashion's 'Femme-Enfant-Fatale': Surrealism, Curiosity and Alice in Wonderland," Laing employs Whitney Chadwick's work to summarize Andre Breton's conception of the Surrealist *femme-enfant* as embodying the innocence and unfettered imagination of childhood together with the near-mystical zeal of rebellion against bourgeois norms. In a Leith Clark-styled 2011 *Vogue Italia* photograph by Ellen von Unwerth (b. 1954) of the youthful Kiera Knightly

perched barefoot on a library ladder wearing a ripped white dress and dark makeup (Fig. 1), Laing sees the *femme-enfant-fatale* as defined by Catriona McAra—a powerful, sexualized woman cloaked in childlike purity—and a resonance with the 1942 surrealist painting *Jeux d'Enfants* by Dorothea Tanning (1910–2012) in which young girls tear at walls to reveal female genitalia. By holding a book, Laing argues, Knightly conveys a curiosity that recalls the figure of Alice in Wonderland; this curiosity "might ... hold feminist potential" (140), like the powerful drive for knowledge that Mulvey terms epistemophilia, but this curiosity might only be considered socially acceptable in children. Likewise, the insouciance of six-year-old Wednesday Addams (prior to her 2022 incarnation, which has even more in common with the fashion editorials presented but postdates the study), and her potential critique of middle-class family values, might only be tolerated because she is a child: Laing cites Beauvoir on adolescent girls gradually surrendering "the independent and imperious being that was she" (153).¹ In identifying the woman-child with Alice, who underwent sudden transformations in size, fashion might reinforce fears of weight gain or loss, Laing points out. The *femme-enfant-fatale* is, by her nature, a liminal creature, only existing for a short while before she becomes a full *femme fatale*. In this construction, women are only ever considered as archetypes.

Chapter seven, "Rewriting *Lolita* in Fashion Photography," addresses popular-culture treatments of *Lolita* as "mis-readings" (157) of the child character in Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel. Laing notes that the heart-shaped sunglasses associated with the character did not appear in the 1955 or 1962 films of *Lolita* yet became shorthand for the character. In subsequent iterations, such as Stanley Kubrick's 1962 film and a controversial 2011 advertising photograph for the Marc Jacobs fragrance *Oh, Lola!*, the character is no longer a pedophilia victim but rather a sexually precocious girl who telegraphs her availability (sometimes over heart-shaped glasses, as in fashion photographer Bert Stern's image for Kubrick's film poster). In fashion's use of the trope, the



Fig. 1. Ellen von Unwerth, *Keira Knightly* (2011), photograph in *Vogue Italia*, styled by Leith Clark.

photograph of seventeen-year-old Dakota Fanning with an oversized bottle of *Oh, Lola!* between her legs capped by a large suggestive flower reminds viewers that young bodies are preferable to womanly ones, and especially to maternal ones, which are scorned by Nabokov's predator. Here and in images of "naughty" teenagers like model Kate Moss, shot as "Charming Lolita" by von Unwerth for *Vogue Italia* 1992, fashion holds femininity within a liminal space of bad behavior between childhood and full womanhood. Depictions of petulance and impulsiveness, moreover, glorify the consumerism that fuels fashion sales. A woman's desire for new clothes or perfume is like that of a child: if the goods are not purchased, a tantrum ensues, as in Léa Seydoux's 2011 video for the Prada scent *Candy*.

In chapter eight, "Kinderwhore: From Catwalk to Slutwalk," Laing looks at the Kinderwhore aesthetic of the 1990s, which subverted childlike femininity through almost cartoonish exaggerations and jarring juxtapositions. While the style was widely popular in 1990s grunge fashion, its greatest icon was arguably lead singer Courtney Love, whose trademark pastiche of girlish signifiers (Peter Pan collars, gingham prints, Mary Jane shoes) and sexually coded ones (bleached-blond hair, strong makeup, a cigarette) exemplified punk-style recontextualization. The

visual disjunctures created by Love's adult body, her children's-style clothing, and her defiant body language encapsulate the paradox of the Kinderwhore woman-child. As in later adoptions of the trope, like a 1995 *i-D* homage to the Hole album *Pretty on the Inside* showing actress Drew Barrymore as a pinup in a pink gingham bikini, Kinderwhore "is a subject-position that provokes rather than defuses male anxiety—precisely because it melds categories that are habitually kept analytically discrete" (186). Fashion brand Meadham Kirchhoff's *Wolf in Lamb's Clothing* Spring–Summer 2021 show favored teddy-bear, rainbow, and heart motifs worn by confidently striding models, potentially an instance of McRobbie's "post-feminist masquerade" that reinstates normative femininity, but alternatively a type of same-sex drag or Butlerian "gender trouble" that allows wearers to parody and thereby problematize virginal models of femininity.

In her conclusion, Laing admits that she initially "interpreted childlike femininities as a straightforward backlash against the gains of feminism (in line with Faludi, *Backlash*). However, as the project progressed," the author became aware of "the extent to which different versions of the woman-child ... held potential for

subversive resignification in the present. My reception studies suggest that contemporary women might hold a number of different investments in childlike femininities, some of which are empowering and some of which are disempowering" (211–12). Rather than attempting to explain that which does not neatly fit into a singular concept, Laing plumbs what each concept has historically offered, as well as what the contemporary viewers in her focus groups gleaned from the images. Some interpretations aligned with "the logic of the fashion system, with its commercial imperatives and the tendency, in some quarters, to absorb, neutralize and ultimately commodify political discourse in pursuit of new fashionable forms" (215), but other receptions departed from or even opposed these readings. As Laing reminds us, meaning is continuously being constructed and is never static.

The sixty illustrations are printed in grayscale on the same matte paper used for the text. While the images range from a third of a page to a full page, even the largest measure no more than about seven inches tall, as the book itself is of modest size. The limitations of both size and color hamper understanding of these images and do not reflect the conditions under

which the originals would have been viewed: as full-page, full-color, glossy pages in magazines. While understandable from the perspective of external market forces, this presentation stands in opposition with the consistent care and attention to detail throughout the text. *Picturing the Woman-Child: Fashion, Feminism and the Female Gaze* presents a considered look at the various tropes associated with the woman-child within European fashion media of the 1990s through 2015, employing visual analysis, reception studies, and dense contextualization within critical and feminist theory to demonstrate how these images, while certainly serving the capitalist aims of the fashion media, offer women viewers multifarious ways, both feminist and not, of articulating the self. •

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Notes

1. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: New English Library, 1970 [orig. publ. as *Le Deuxième Sexe*, 1949]), 105.

Women Photographers and Mexican Modernity: Framing the Twentieth Century

Edited by Julia R. Brown, Radmila Stefkova, and Tamara R. Williams
Routledge, 2024

Reviewed by Julia Skelly

Contemporary Mexican photographers Koral Carballo (b. 1987) and Mara Sánchez Renero (b. 1979) are gaining recognition for their images of Afro-Mexicans, a section of the population that until recently has been deliberately ignored and erased in histories of Mexico and Mexican society. In Carballo's *Prologue*, from her series *Mystery of the Disguised* (2014–23), a figure wears a horned animal mask made

by artisan Octavio López Zaragoza as well as a large floral headpiece and a vibrant multicolored robe. The individual stands atop the sprawling base of a monumental tree, a yellow cross near their feet. Their clothes and mask suggest a ritual or ceremony; the cross evokes a burial. This shamanic figure is diminutive in relation to the natural setting, but they emanate power and authority. Carballo is here documenting the Afro-Mexican tradition of Carnival, which, during the era of slavery, was enslaved people's sole day of freedom. While Carballo and Sánchez Renero are still active today, they appear alongside women artists of previous generations who lived and worked in Mexico in the edited collection *Women Photographers and Mexican Modernity: Framing the Twentieth Century*. Comprising an introduction, ten chapters, and a brief epi-

logue, the book is a welcome addition to the literature on female photographers and on Mexican modernist and contemporary art.

In their introduction, editors Julia R. Brown, Radmila Stefkova, and Tamara R. Williams provide a brief but useful overview of photography in Mexico, noting such important milestones as the arrival of the daguerreotype in Mexico in December 1839, soon after its invention; the use of photography to "capture" different types of Mexican people in ethnographic photography (2, a problematic approach that Eli Bartra's essay unpicks); and the photographic documentation in the early twentieth century of scenes from the Mexican Revolution. While noting that photography in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a male-dominated field, the editors observe

that, “by many accounts, the arrival of Italian-born photographer Tina Modotti [1896–1942] on the Mexican avant-garde scene in 1924 ... was decisive for the direction the medium would take and for the role women would thereafter play in it” (3). Indeed, many of the photographers discussed in the book were not born in Mexico but rather migrated there either by choice or under duress, as was the case for Hungarian-born Kati Horna (1912–2000), who quickly became part of the circle of Surrealist expatriates in Mexico City after she arrived in the country in 1941. The editors of the volume, and several of the contributors, approach photographs as an “archive of feelings” (1), drawing on queer theorist Ann Cvetkovich. The book as a whole makes up an archive of work by female photographers who have spent various amounts of time in Mexico, photographs that Brown, Stefkova, and Williams describe as “attentive to corporeality, particularly to that of women, indigenous peoples, and marginalized communities, and other sectors of Mexico’s populations” (8). Many of the photographs, though not all, represent female subjects; most of them depart from the anthropological gaze that turns an individual into a type—or even into an object—and instead foreground individuality and agency.

The book is divided into three sections. The first, “Gendering the Gaze: Frame, Context, Collaboration,” consists of only two chapters. In chapter one, “In and Around Photographic Portraits (or Portraiture?),” feminist philosopher Eli Bartra considers the question of what constitutes a photographic portrait. Names, for Bartra, are usually necessary for a photograph to be classified in this way. By way of supporting this claim, Bartra briefly discusses the photograph taken in Mexico in c. 1900 by Natalia Baquedano (1872–1936) of her sister Clemencia wearing an Andalusian garment. As a contrast, Bartra reproduces a different Baquedano photograph of a woman seated on a bench with a toddler standing beside her, covering the woman’s eyes. Oddly, the caption reads *Portrait of an Unidentified Infant*, but the



Figure 1. Koral Carballo, *Prólogo: El misterio del disfrazado* (Prologue: The Mystery of the Disguised) (2017), from the series *El misterio dxi disfrazadxs* (2014–23), photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

photograph is certainly not a portrait of either subject, as the child has been given wings; if anything, the image is an allegory, possibly inspired by the cliché “love is blind,” with the winged infant performing the role of Cupid. The author writes, however, that because the photo was in Baquedano’s family archive, “I tend to think that it is the portrait of someone in the family” (24), an argument I find wholly unconvincing. Bartra contends, on the other hand, that ethnographic photographs, which are intended to depict a person as a type rather than as an individuated subject, are not portraits in the traditional sense. Bartra cites photographs of sex workers as an example of the ethnographic

genre: “Representing ‘otherness,’ [the sex workers] are photographed for what they are and do but these ... are not portraits. What is being captured is their job” (19). This passage flags a problem with Bartra’s chapter, which is the tendency to overgeneralize about what is or what is not a portrait. It could be argued, for instance, that the photographs of transwomen who have done sex work from the 2016 *Pistas de baile* (Dance Floors) series by Mexican artist Teresa Margolles (b. 1963) are portraits, even though Margolles chose the women for this series at least in part because of their profession. In each *Pistas de baile* photograph, a lone woman stands on the remains of a dance floor in the demoli-

tion rubble of a nightclub where she used to work. The women's names are not always included in the works' titles, though the subjects are often, if not always, named in the accompanying literature and on didactic labels in exhibitions. The subjects have chosen the clothes they wish to be photographed in as well as their pose (which is never the profile or full-frontal pose that characterizes so much ethnographic photography), and they are shot from a distance rather than being framed tightly in a claustrophobic space. The photographs speak to the subjects' own desires in terms of self-fashioning as well as their resilience in the face of transphobic violence in Mexico.¹ The editors of *Women Photographers and Mexican Modernity* note in their introduction that the book cannot be a comprehensive survey of female photographers in the country; nonetheless, it is surprising that Margolles is not mentioned at all, given her international status.

In chapter two, Ryan Long briefly discusses each artist he names in his title, "The Margins and Potential Horizons of Mexico's Postrevolutionary Modernity in Four Photographs by Tina Modotti, Kati Horna, Mariana Yampolsky, and Elsa Medina." Modotti is by far the best-known of the four. Horna has received less notice, especially compared to two of her female Surrealist contemporaries in Mexico, Leonora Carrington (1917–2011) and Remedios Varo (1908–1963), both of whom were her close friends, although Horna was included with Carrington and Varo in the 2010 exhibition *Surreal Friends* and was the focus of a solo retrospective in Puebla, Mexico, and Paris in 2014.² Yampolsky (1925–2002), who moved to Mexico from Chicago as a young adult, specialized in portraits of Indigenous women and children, that "contribute to a longstanding discussion about how Mexico's native and other marginalized populations relate to modernity" (31). Long examines Yampolsky's *Escuela mazahua* (Mazahua School) (1979), which depicts two young Indigenous girls in the foreground seated at a desk, one gazing off to her left, the other bending forward and looking intently at her papers, her finger

pressed to her lips. Of Long's four protagonists, Medina is the only photographer who was born in Mexico. Long discusses Medina's image of a male migrant lying on the ground and shielding his face from the camera in Zapata Canyon, Tijuana (1987). Medina photographed her subject's body foreshortened and close to the picture plane and with the empty landscape stretching out behind him, suggesting the long, exhausting journey that awaits. Horna's photograph is a 1960 portrait (despite the work originally being untitled) of Mexican sculptor Helen Escobedo (1934–2010), which Long reads in terms of "mutual support and co-creation" (38). By far the least compelling of the four photographs is Modotti's 1968 image of a visibly pregnant woman from Tehuantepec holding a naked baby in her left arm. Modotti photographed the woman in profile with her head cut off by the upper edge of the frame. Throughout the volume, Modotti is only lightly critiqued for employing the visual language of ethnographic photography. The profile pose of this image, though, as well as the subject's lack of face or name, certainly position this photograph in the category of anthropological imagery. The woman is a type, a faceless mother, rather than an individual. Long does not address this issue, however, instead focusing on the formal characteristics of the image, such as the way the curve of the woman's belly echoes the plumpness of the baby's limbs. Although Long sets out to undertake "detailed analyses" of this and the other three photographs (35), the shortness of the chapter means that he is not able to provide a sustained examination of each image. While there is certainly a strength in introducing (or reintroducing) his reader to four female photographers, one might wish for a longer, more in-depth discussion of one or two photographs rather than a fairly cursory (though close) look at four of them.

The second section, "Counter-Perspectives: Ideologies, Subjectivity, and Corporeality," begins with Elissa J. Rashkin's "Earth Images: Tina Modotti and Agrarian Radicalism in Mexico,"

which is one of the standout chapters in the book. In addition to discussing Modotti's little-known photographs of corn, which the artist took because of her "strong political commitment" to the radical agrarian movement, *agrarismo* (47), Rashkin offers an illuminating and excoriating critique of scholarship on Modotti that focuses on the artist's life—including her intimate relationships—at the cost of her art, the same problems that plague so much of the scholarship on female artists (e.g., Artemesia Gentileschi [1593–c. 1656] and Frida Kahlo [1907–1954], to name only two). Rashkin concludes her excellent chapter with this poignant passage: "[The] pleasure materializes, I believe, when we submerge our gaze in Modotti's earth images and perceive, in their textures and composition, a profound lucidity and compassion: the subterranean desire, repressed but never fully extinguished, for a better world, one more just, more free, more egalitarian. Modotti's radical photography, in that sense, brings together light and sustenance: the sustenance derived from labor, and the light, in a dark world, produced by art that also nurtures" (55).

In chapter four, "Fundamental Considerations for Mariana Yampolsky's Photography," Nathaniel Gardner goes further than Long in considering Yampolsky's work, providing a sustained analysis of her images for the photobook *Mazahua* (1993), which was furnished with text by Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska and is dedicated to the struggles of Indigenous girls and women. Yampolsky produced sixty-eight photographs for the project, and Gardner discusses six of them, focusing on three primary themes: ritual, creation, and youth. Ultimately, Gardner argues that Yampolsky was a humanist photographer who demonstrated through her photography the importance of Indigenous women in Mexican society. Rather than depicting the Indigenous female subjects as types, Yampolsky's works speak to the women's self-determination (73).

Tanius Karam's chapter, "Gaze as Mirror/Encountering the Other: On the Photographic Communication of Graciela Iturbide," discusses the work

of the Mexican photographer (b. 1942) using many semiotic terms without articulating why semiotics is a useful methodology for this particular artist. With no images reproduced in this chapter, it is more a biographical text than an art-historical one. Karam notes that, like Kahlo, Iturbide produced self-portraits, but the author does not undertake visual analysis of any of them beyond noting that they involve “theatricality” and “some symbols” (81). There is no clear argument that anchors the chapter, and the concluding section, “Revisiting,” merely restates some of the topics that were glossed over in the text, including themes in Iturbide’s photographs (birds and women), their formal characteristics (light and shadow), and aesthetic categories like beauty and originality (86).

Chapter six, “Unsettling Hyper-Heteronormative Masculinity: Lourdes Grobet’s Family Portraits,” by David William Foster, is another standout of the collection. In his fascinating discussion, Foster examines photographs by Grobet (1940–2022) that include Mexican wrestlers (*luchadores*) wearing their wrestling masks among their family members in distinctly middle-class domestic settings. The author demonstrates how both the portraits and Mexican wrestling paradoxically reify hypermasculinity and engage critically with it, the colorful costumes and oiled bodies facilitating “the flamboyant performance of hypermasculinity” (92). As Foster observes, Grobet’s series “not only redefines the limits of the heteronormative paradigm of family, it also upends preconceived notions of the hypermasculinity ascribed to the *luchador*” (102).

The final section, “Re-Presenting Gender and Race,” includes Viviane Mahieux’s chapter, “Solidarity and Witnessing in the Photographs of Marta Zarak,” which examines the photographs by Zarak published in the Mexico City daily *unomásuno* (One Plus One) in the late 1970s and early 1980s, such as her photograph of an Indigenous woman witnessing a political meeting in the nation’s capital in August 1979. Mahieux argues that Zarak’s photojournalism did not employ the “anthropological gaze” in

her depictions of Indigenous subjects: “The woman is not framed as a symbol of suffering, poverty or anguish, on the contrary, she is dignified and calm. Neither is she aestheticized as a national symbol, frozen in time, at odds with any signs of modernity” (107). Zarak was the first Mexican female photojournalist to cover a war zone when she was sent to Nicaragua in 1978 (111). Mahieux’s chapter, more than any other, grapples with the question of ethics in photojournalism, concluding with her unease over a 1978 photograph of a migrant boy struggling with a heavy bag. Mahieux notes that, according to Zarak, none of the photographers who surrounded the boy taking his picture helped him carry the bag, “not even her, an absent gesture that still haunts her” (116).

Williams’s chapter discusses photographs that Mexican photojournalist Frida Hartz (b. 1960) contributed to the long-form poem *Guie’ni zinebe/La flor que se llevó* (Stolen Flower) by Zapotec activist and poet Irma Pineda (2013). According to Williams, “Pineda’s poem is an extended elegy that explores the neglected histories, the overwhelming loss, and the rage, but also the agency and collective resistance, of women from rural indigenous communities in Southern Mexico that have been victims of multiple kinds of violence” (119). Williams’s insightful visual analysis of the photographs is a major strength of the volume. Hartz’s images are extremely powerful on their own, but Williams illuminates them with a clear eye and a beautiful handling of language. For instance, in her analysis of Hartz’s 1997 photograph *Barricada* (Barricade), she observes, “The tension of this photo ... is enhanced by the presence of a woman and child walking along the street through the occupied space.... The viewer’s eye is drawn to the pair, and ultimately to the woman’s white umbrella. Opened and held sideways to protect the child from the sun, the precarious shield also evokes the image of a white flag, the internationally recognized sign that signals a ceasefire or surrender and used to allow safe passage.... The striking juxtaposition of the assemblage

of soldiers in full gear, ... and the fragile strength of the woman and child as they move through the contested shared space, produces a dynamic image that is a quintessential quality of Hartz photography” (125). Every one of Hartz’s photographs reproduced in Williams’s chapter is astonishing in its depiction of Indigenous women as protectors of their land, families, and selves.

Chapter nine, Brown’s “Seeing and Feeling the 1990s,” focuses on photographs by Maruch Sántiz Gómez (b. 1975) and Xunka’ López Díaz (b. 1971) that portray Indigenous small-scale farming communities in the context of the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement. Brown reads their photographs as illuminating some of the ways that neoliberal reforms leading up to NAFTA impacted Indigenous communities, including “shifting divisions of labor.” An important link between Gómez’s and López Díaz’s photographs is the focus on material culture rather than on human subjects, which is “significant not only because it constitutes a rupture with photography used for institutional knowledge production: it also acknowledges the affective power that the artists, their families, their communities, and their cultural traditions ascribe to such objects” (135).

The final chapter, “The Untold Story of Black Mexico: Uncovering the Identity of the Afro-Descendant Woman in the Photography of Koral Carballo and Mara Sánchez Renero,” by Rosita Scerbo, is an extremely important contribution to the volume, because it brings visibility not only to these two female photographers but also to their Afro-Mexican subjects. Carballo is an Afro-Mestiza photographer born in Veracruz, Mexico, while Sánchez Renero is a Mexican photographer who lived in Spain for ten years before returning to Mexico City. Scerbo discusses Carballo’s project *siempre Estuvimos Aquí* (We Were Always Here, ongoing since 2017) in dialogue with Sánchez Renero’s *The Cimarrón and the Fandango: The Little-Known World of the Afro-Mexican* (2014–15), the term *Cimarrón* referring to a Black person during the colonial period

in the Americas who lived free on the margins of society after having escaped slavery. Drawing on the work of scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, Scerbo takes an intersectional feminist approach to the photographs, and she provides a crucial history of slavery in Mexico (150–51). According to Scerbo, “Both photographic works deal with issues of identity, violence, trauma, and the concept of reclaiming the Black history of Mexico. My focus on the national territory of Mexico is intentional and significant, as Mexico is one of the only two Latin American countries that for centuries did not officially recognize Afro-Latinos or Afro-descendant individuals in its constitution and one of the Hispanic countries that has systematically erased its Black past. Carballo and Sánchez Renero finally show the hidden face of the country that is based upon the consequences of what we could call collective amnesia” (148). The chapter is wide-ranging, covering scientific racism (155), the concept of the body as archive

(150), and the animal masks used in performance in Africa and the African diaspora (154).

“The Untold Story of Black Mexico” is an absolute must-read and a strong conclusion to an interesting and illuminating volume of essays. As a whole, *Women Photographers and Mexican Modernity* demonstrates that there remain many female photographers to discover and rediscover, thereby extending an invitation to other feminist art historians interested in photography to continue this important research. •

Julia Skelly is a specialist in nineteenth-century British art and visual culture, queer/feminist art, textiles, excess, decadence, and addiction. Her publications include *Wasted Looks: Addiction and British Visual Culture, 1751–1919* (Ashgate, 2014), the edited volume *The Uses of Excess in Visual and Material Culture, 1600–2010* (Ashgate, 2014), *Radical Decadence: Excess in Contemporary Feminist Textiles and Craft* (Bloomsbury,

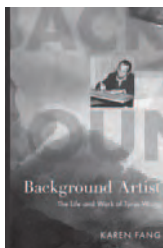
2017), and *Skin Crafts: Affect, Violence and Materiality in Global Contemporary Art* (Bloomsbury, 2022). Skelly’s next book, *Intersecting Threads: Cloth in Contemporary Queer, Feminist and Anti-Racist Art*, is forthcoming from Bloomsbury Academic. Her articles have appeared in a number of peer-reviewed academic journals, including *Visual Culture in Britain*, *Body & Society*, *Woman’s Art Journal*, and *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture*.

Notes

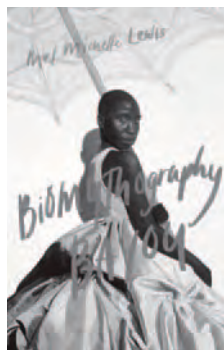
1. John Zeppetelli and Thérèse St-Gelais, eds., *Teresa Margolles: Mundos* (Montréal: Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, 2017), 14.
2. Stefan van Raay, Joanna Moorhead, and Teresa Arcq, eds., *Surreal Friends: Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, and Kati Horna* (Farnham, UK, and Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries in assoc. with Pallant House Gallery, 2010). See also on this artist the article in this issue by Julia Skelly, “Dolls, Masks, and Witches: Kati Horna’s Alchemical Photography,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 45, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2024): 3–13.



MATCHMAKING IN THE ARCHIVE
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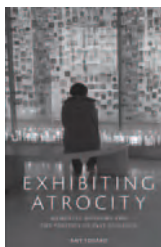


“In *Biomythography Bayou*, Mel Michelle Lewis renders a compelling literary gumbo with which to read across the mix of multiple theories of knowledge, including those found in autobiography, folk traditions, Black feminist praxis, poetry, scholarship, nature, photography, and Black queer studies. Beneath it all, the question emerges: where did the conversation around Black futurity begin? In our mothers’ mouths, in our ancestors’ breath, in the demand between not what is but what is possible? Written in language both erudite and of the folk, *Biomythography Bayou* invites more expansive engagement with Saidiya Hartman’s ‘critical fabulations’ and Toni Morrison’s ‘literary archaeology.’”

—Alexis De Veaux, author of *JesusDevil: The Parables*

BIOMYTHOGRAPHY BAYOU
Mel Michelle Lewis

Published by Bucknell University Press 



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A History of Artistic Research, Aesthetic Experience, and Artists in Academia
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—C. Riley Snorton, author of *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*

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Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces

Edited by Thomas (T.) Jean Lax and Lilia Rocio Taboada, in collaboration with Linda Goode Bryant, with contributions by Eric Booker, Brandon Eng, Thelma Golden, Linda Goode Bryant, Marielle Ingram, Kellie Jones, Yelena Keller, Thomas (T.) Jean Lax, Legacy Russell, and Lilia Rocio Taboada. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, 2022

Reviewed by Funda Karayel

In 1974, at the age of twenty-five, Linda Goode Bryant (b. 1949) embarked on an extraordinary journey as a gallerist, activist, and versatile problem solver. Then the Education Coordinator for The Studio Museum in Harlem, she secured the first of three successive locations in New York City for her gallery Just Above Midtown (JAM), a dynamic space for collaboration, experimentation, and mutual support that catered primarily to Black artists while embracing inclusivity. This catalogue of the exhibition *Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces* at the Museum of Modern Art presents Goode Bryant's groundbreaking endeavor as a testament to her visionary spirit and almost superhuman energy in creating an environment where artists could challenge conventional boundaries. Exhibition curator and catalogue editor Thomas (T.) Jean Lax argues in his essay that JAM has furnished the art community with an important precedent, belying "the supposed newness of the desire for black art in the United States" and constituting "an alternative model to desegregation that has already been realized" (69).

Throughout its twelve-year existence, JAM buzzed with productive energy, witnessing the orchestration of over 150 exhibitions, nearly as many performances, and fifty film screenings. The gallery moved from a 724-square-foot upper-floor space on Fifty-Seventh Street—where it shared a building with, among others, the gallery of Terry Dintenfass (1920–2004)—to two neighborhoods then on the cusp of gentrification: Tribeca in 1980, where JAM took

over a meatpacking facility, and SoHo in 1984, where it occupied 25,000 square feet and offered studio spaces to artists and filmmakers for experimental projects. Bryant revisits this history in an interview with Thelma Golden, Director and Chief Curator of The Studio Museum in Harlem (13–19). A comprehensive chronology with annotated entries by Eric Booker, Brandon Eng, Marielle Ingram, Yelena Keller, Legacy Russell, and catalogue editors Lax and Lilia Rocio Taboada provides a detailed overview of the exhibitions, performances, public programs, and other activities that took place in each of the three locations. The catalogue offers a wealth of rarely seen visual material from the gallery's history, including artworks exhibited there as well as ephemera and photographs documenting JAM's events and programs.

JAM played a pivotal role in shaping the contemporary American art landscape, fostering such talents as Lorraine O'Grady (b. 1934), Senga Nengudi (b. 1943), David Hammons, Howardena Pindell (b. 1943), and Maren Hassinger (b. 1947), artists whose early connection to JAM is not always acknowledged today. Goode Bryant's gallery embraced both figuration and abstraction across the vast spectrum of modernism and was a crucial hub for the evolution of conceptualism in the United States. As Kellie Jones points out in her essay, "The World According to Linda Goode Bryant," JAM's inaugural show, *Synthesis*, set the model by "[making] space for an expansive coalition," including West and East Coast Black artists of multiple generations (137–38). Among the works shown were a 1973 large-scale canvas of two women's heads by artist and gallerist Suzanne Jackson (b. 1944), then based in California, and the 1968 red cedar sculpture *Homage to My Young Black Sisters* by Elizabeth Catlett (1915–2012) of a lifesize, semi-abstract female figure raising her fist (Chronology, 29).

In the conversation with Golden, Goode Bryant looks candidly at the misogynoir she faced. When the interviewer asks her "what it meant to be a woman gallerist in that moment, particularly in relation to race," the JAM



Fig. 1. Lorraine O'Grady, *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire* (1980), performance at the opening of the exhibition *Outlaw Aesthetics*, JAM, second location, 178–180 Franklin Street, New York, in front of Maren Hassinger, *Palmettos* (1980), galvanized steel, each 18" x 18". Photograph by Freda Leinwand.

director recalls enduring "a lot of hostility from some of the gallerists on Fifty-Seventh ... [who] were angry with [real estate financier] Bill Judson for renting the space to me—Black and single with two kids." Goode Bryant notes, however, that "female dealers extended themselves: Terry Dintenfass and Betty Parsons [1900–1982].... They shared how hard it was to be a female in this business. The men didn't show us the same respect they showed each other. The women ... acknowledged how difficult it was for me to be Black and female. And I realized, 'This woman thing is everywhere'" (15).

Jones's essay devotes attention to the network Goode Bryant forged with other Black woman art historians of the period. The gallerist's circle included writers who covered JAM exhibitions in major media outlets: Judith Wilson, Faythe Weaver, Gylbert Coker, and Metropolitan Museum of Art Curator

Lowery Stokes Sims, all of whom demonstrated “a captivation with the participatory practices that became a signature of JAM” (141). Coker, Sims, and Weaver volunteered in various capacities at JAM, as did artists O’Grady and Janet Olivia Henry (b. 1947; 140). In Lax’s essay, “Up in the Air,” the author characterizes these kinds of “commitments and relationships built on reciprocity and duration” as being consistent with JAM’s “[making] debt the ground zero of its business model” both financially and philosophically, since “debt is a perverse name for a system that could also be described through the language of mutual aid and love” (72–73).

Goode Bryant served as a maternal figure at JAM, Lax argues, both by visibly involving her two young sons in activities there and by embracing works of art addressing motherhood, such as Nengudi’s mid-1970s *R.S.V.P.* series of drooping sand-filled pantyhose sculptures evoking the breasts of exhausted Black mothers and wet nurses (76). Even Lax’s four-year collaboration with Goode Bryant on *Changing Spaces* operated “in the register of the maternal,” he muses, with the JAM founder embodying an “alternative approach [that] has kept me afloat ... [and] finding ways, like the conceptualist she is, to deconstruct the

assumptions of what goes into making a show” (76–77). As brought out in this excellent catalogue, Goode Bryant’s legacy as a trailblazing gallerist and as an advocate for artistic diversity continues to inspire. •

Funda Karayel is a journalist specializing in contemporary art, a columnist on cultural diplomacy for the Turkey-based *Daily Sabah*, and an art events moderator. A graduate of Bahçeşehir University in Istanbul, she is an academician at Nişantaşı University in the same city, where she teaches culture and art.

A Model Workshop: Margaret Lowengrund and The Contemporaries

Edited by Lauren Rosenblum and Christina Weyl, with contributions by Sarah Archer, Ellen J. Benjamin, Noriko Kuwahara (trans. Chiaki Ajioka), Jillian Russo, and Rachel Vogel
Print Center New York and Hirmer, 2023

Reviewed by Michelle Donnelly

In 1951, artist Margaret Lowengrund (1902–1957) founded a hybrid printmaking workshop-gallery, the first of its kind in the United States, at 959 Madison Avenue in New York. Calling her new space *The Contemporaries*, Lowengrund integrated the production, display, and sales of prints within a single venue. While she provided presses and tools for practitioners in the back room, she exhibited lithographs, intaglio prints, woodcuts, and screenprints for purchase in the front. By the time of Lowengrund’s untimely death from cancer in 1957, *The Contemporaries* had split into two different Upper East Side locations, one a workshop and the other a gallery, before becoming part of the Pratt Institute in 1956. But Lowengrund’s novel enterprise remained committed to her stated goal: “to bring about a renaissance of graphic arts in this country” (42).¹

Published to accompany the exhibition co-curated by Lauren Rosenblum and Christina Weyl at the Print Center New York, *A Model Workshop: Margaret Lowengrund and The Contemporaries* is the first publication to investigate Lowengrund’s artistic practice, entrepreneurial vision, and legacy. Part monograph and part institutional history, it critically positions Lowengrund and her hybrid venture at the forefront of postwar printmaking, contributing to a growing body of scholarship on women-run art spaces in twentieth-century New York.² An introduction and two essays by the curators, as well as five shorter essays by contributing authors, seek to recuperate Lowengrund’s efforts as an artist, printer, and gallerist. At the same time, the authors situate her workshop-gallery in the broader context of the midcentury art world. Paralleling the structure of the Print Center’s exhibition, the catalogue’s color plates are divided chronologically into three sections: eleven examples of Lowengrund’s output as a printmaker and illustrator from the 1920s through the 1950s; ten works exhibited during Lowengrund’s ownership of *The Contemporaries* from 1951 to 1956 and two made soon after *The Contemporaries’* merger with Pratt in 1956; and six works from the *11 Prints by 11 Printmakers* portfolio published in 1961 by the Pratt Graphic Art Center (PGAC),

the teaching-exhibition space that evolved out of the Pratt-Contemporaries merger. A rich complement to the essays, this selection of images reveals the technical and stylistic breadth of works created by Lowengrund and by other artists associated with *The Contemporaries* and PGAC.

A Model Workshop reorients the conventional narrative of the postwar “Print Boom,” also called the “Print Renaissance” and the “Graphic Revival.” According to most scholarly accounts, the founding of collaborative workshops in the late 1950s through 1960s—such as Universal Limited Art Editions by Tatyana Grosman (1904–1982) in 1957, Tamarind Lithography Workshop by June Wayne (1918–2011) in 1960, and Crown Point Press by Kathan Brown (b. 1935) in 1962—stimulated unprecedented interest and creativity in the field of printmaking. Earlier in the century, artists had primarily maintained transactional relationships with professional printers, commissioning them to produce editions (limited sets of identical impressions). Postwar workshops, on the other hand, invited artists to experiment in a mutually beneficial exchange with trained printers over extended periods. In their introduction, Rosenblum and Weyl uphold the role of workshops in catalyzing innovative artistic expression but trace the origins of this nascent

artist-printer dynamic back to Lowengrund's project, several years prior to Grosman's, Wayne's, and Brown's. The coeditors argue persuasively that *The Contemporaries* served as a vital model for these later, better-known printshops, particularly through Lowengrund's relationships with Grosman and Wayne. Centering the first woman to open a workshop in the United States, Rosenblum and Weyl demonstrate how Lowengrund shaped the landscape of postwar printmaking.

A combination of factors, the coeditors contend, has contributed to the absence of Lowengrund and her workshop-gallery from scholarship: the dearth and dispersal of archival documents; *The Contemporaries'* shifting identities, operating models, and locations; and Lowengrund's premature death. *A Model Workshop* adeptly reconstructs the history of *The Contemporaries* and its successor PGAC by parsing papers stewarded by the Lowengrund family as well as by the Archives of American Art, the New York Public Library, the Pratt Institute, the Rockefeller Archive Center, and Yale University, among other institutions. The foreword by the Print Center's directors, Judy Hecker and Jenn Bratovich, recognizes the crucial role of Lowengrund's grandniece, Ellen J. Benjamin, a contributor to the catalogue, in documenting her great-aunt's work. An illustrated chronology and an exhibition history of *The Contemporaries* and PGAC at the end of the book serve as foundational resources for future scholarship.

Rosenblum's essay elucidates Lowengrund's thirty-five years of experience in academic printshops and shared artists' studios that she drew upon to found *The Contemporaries*. Over the course of the 1920s, Lowengrund studied at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the Art Students League (ASL) in New York, and the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London. Rosenblum frames Lowengrund's training at the ASL from 1924 to 1926 as particularly impactful. ASL printmaking professor Joseph Pennell had enacted an



Fig. 1. Margaret Lowengrund, *Loading Bricks* (1936), lithograph, 10 7/16" x 9 3/8". Princeton University Art Museum, Federal Art Project, WPA Loan.

apprenticeship system in which students learned all steps of etching and lithography, "from grinding stones and damping paper to the pulling of prints," as one classmate recalled (21). Also formative, Rosenblum argues, was Lowengrund's employment in the Graphic Arts Division of the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP), a US government relief program for artists during the Great Depression. Abiding by the strict protocol of the Graphic Arts Division's Manhattan workshop, Lowengrund did not print her lithographs herself. Rather, she drew each composition in her personal studio, submitted it for her supervisors' approval, translated it onto an FAP-supplied lithographic stone in her studio, and then had the in-house printer produce the edition on the workshop's press. Like many her FAP

colleagues, deemed "social viewpoint printmakers" by their peers (27), Lowengrund largely created images for the FAP that express solidarity with the working class. In *Loading Bricks* (Fig. 1), she portrayed a group of workers passing dried bricks down a stepped pyramidal formation. Rosenblum interprets the raised hands in the foreground as "the symbol of mechanized labor itself—brickworker and graphic artist alike—and a meeting point for their political solidarity" (26). In addition to cultivating Lowengrund's leftist politics, Rosenblum contends, the FAP's Graphic Arts Division likely introduced her to developments in color lithography, which she taught at the New School for Social Research in New York in 1939–40. These experiences provided Lowengrund with myriad models of collaboration for her to adapt

and reimagine in opening a workshop that was a site of learning, sociality, and technical innovation.

Rosenblum's text is complemented by a shorter essay by Benjamin, who surveys Lowengrund's prolific career as a newspaper illustrator, writer, and art critic. She asserts that Lowengrund combined "the investigative skills of a journalist, the insights of a storyteller, and the instincts of an organizer" (61) to document local figures, neighborhoods, and events as well as broader sociopolitical and economic turmoil throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In contributions to periodicals based in Philadelphia, New York, London, and France, among them the Marxist magazine *New Masses*, Lowengrund demonstrated her increasing attention to the conditions of poverty. She turned to art criticism in the 1940s in part to highlight developments in printmaking. Her support of modernist abstraction, however, led the US Congress to identify Lowengrund as a Communist threat; Republican representative George A. Dondero sensationally described her work in 1949 as "an attempt to glorify the vulgar, distorted, and the perverted" (61). Despite these accusations, Benjamin concludes, Lowengrund's work serves as a potent exemplar for contemporary artists engaged in activism.

While Rosenblum and Benjamin examine Lowengrund's artistic practice in the 1920s through the 1940s, Weyl chronicles the history of The Contemporaries and its successor, PGAC, from 1951 to 1966. She illuminates how The Contemporaries "coalesced around three functions: access, education, and professional services" (45). Its facilities enabled students and artists with a range of skills to experiment with lithography, etching, woodcut, and screenprinting at low cost alongside an expert printer who bestowed technical guidance. The workshop also offered artists competitive rates for contract printing by staff members using The Contemporaries' equipment, and it routinely held artmaking demonstrations for the public. As a counterpart to these activities, the gallery presented the work of over 250 contemporary artists in near-

ly one hundred exhibitions from 1951 to 1957 (as outlined in the catalogue's exhibition history), including solo shows for Wayne, George Biddle, Beatrice Grover (1901–1994), Sister Corita Kent (1918–1986), Richard Lippold, and Carol Summers. Lowengrund exhibited art across media, sometimes showing paintings or sculptures alongside prints, both to challenge traditional hierarchies that have devalued printmaking as a "craft" and to support operating costs by selling higher-priced works. By originally joining creative production and commercial sales within a single setting, Lowengrund created a vibrant meeting place for artists, printers, critics, curators, and collectors. In 1955, she expanded and reconfigured the workshop-gallery from 959 Madison Avenue into two nearby "physically separate but allied spaces" (48) on the Upper East Side: The Contemporaries Gallery of Sculpture and Graphic Art and The Contemporaries Graphic Art Centre. Following the Centre's merger with Pratt the next year and Lowengrund's premature death, PGAC moved to two successive Broadway locations and carried on Lowengrund's vision through a dynamic program of classes, benefit sales, and exhibitions. Practitioners from an impressive array of countries—including Bulgaria, Canada, England, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Poland, Japan, and Taiwan—moved through The Contemporaries and PGAC in a range of capacities: hired printers, visiting or exhibiting artists, teachers, staff members, and/or contributors to PGAC's semiannual journal, *Artist's Proof*.

Lowengrund's role in fostering a midcentury print market emerges as a key theme throughout *A Model Workshop*. Jillian Russo positions Lowengrund in the context of an influential cohort of white women gallerists in New York in the 1940s and 1950s that included Grace Borgenicht (1915–2001), Betty Parsons (1900–1982), Marian Willard (1904–1985), and Virginia Zabriskie (1927–2019). She contends that unlike an earlier generation of gallerists who relied on family wealth to run their spaces—such as Peggy Guggenheim (1898–1979), Edith

Halpert (1900–1970), and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942)—these midcentury entrepreneurs sought to build sustainable businesses through robust sales and the courting of collectors. Lowengrund not only offered prints at moderate prices to attract a middle-class clientele alongside wealthy buyers; she also promoted printmaking as a creative medium, setting a model that Martha Jackson (1907–1969) and other dealers followed. Sarah Archer then investigates The Contemporaries' partnership with interior designers, decorators, and architects to place prints in middle-class homes. Lowengrund presented prints as both more affordable and more adaptable for modern living spaces than sculptures, paintings, or murals: prints could be inexpensively commissioned for walls of any size and for rooms of any color scheme. In these ways, Lowengrund strategically appealed to a range of audiences, from fine art collectors to young homeowners, and broadened the consumer demand for prints.

The final two essays explore the global reach of The Contemporaries and PGAC. Noriko Kuwahara focuses on the Japanese artists who became involved with Lowengrund's enterprise, contextualizing their endeavors within the postwar culture policy of the US. The Contemporaries hosted solo shows of prints and other works by prominent abstract artist Hasegawa Saburō, 1951 São Paulo Biennial Japanese Prize winner Saitō Kiyoshi, and fellow São Paulo exhibitor Wakita Kazu. Lowengrund also mounted a group show entitled *Modern Japanese Prints* in 1956. At PGAC, partly with support from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Japan Society, other Japanese artists taught classes, offered demonstrations, exhibited works, and organized shows. Kuwahara argues that The Contemporaries and PGAC ultimately expanded the recognition of Japanese printmaking in postwar New York. Rachel Vogel similarly discusses PGAC as a significant center of international exchange but considers its impact upon a younger generation of Latin American artists. She proposes that PGAC's experimental environment led Luis Camnitzer and Liliana Porter (b. 1941), who came to New York from

Uruguay and Argentina respectively in the early 1960s, to redefine the medium of printmaking, not by its technical procedures but by its “conceptual affordances—seriality, multiplicity, reproduction, and permutation” (88–89). Along with Venezuelan artist José Guillermo Castillo, they founded the New York Graphic Workshop (NYGW) as an “alternative to Pratt” (85), in the words of Camnitzer. Yet they maintained close relationships with the institution, mounting NYGW’s first major exhibition at the newly renamed Pratt Center for Contemporary Print-making in 1967. Through the display of screen-printed Plexiglas, stamped stickers, disposable photocopies, and photoengraved steel cubes, NYGW mobilized its connections to a print community cultivated by Lowengrund and her successors to announce radical new directions for the field.

A Model Workshop excels at reassembling the expansive networks of The Contemporaries and PGAC. Establishing crucial groundwork for future scholarship, it opens the doors for further analysis both of the objects made at the workshop and of the technical experimentation undertaken by artists and printers. Clear definitions

of processes, such as lithography, etching, woodcut, and screenprinting, would advance the accessibility of such research for those less familiar with printmaking. Prospective researchers may also wish to address the role of gender in shaping Lowengrund’s enterprise. How accessible were The Contemporaries and PGAC to women artists and printers? What challenges might women have encountered, particularly BIPOC women, at a site overseen by a middle-class white woman and in a field still dominated by male printers? Such lines of inquiry would build on the catalogue’s critical archival work. Mapping fifteen years of activities across the iterations of Lowengrund’s workshop-gallery, *A Model Workshop* is a foundational contribution to scholarship on printmaking and twentieth-century art.

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making outside the traditional site of the workshop from 1935 to 1975 in the United States. •

Notes

1. Margaret Lowengrund, “The Director,” from proposal for “The Contemporaries Graphic Arts Gallery and Workshop,” December 19, 1955, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.
2. On other art spaces run by women in New York in the twentieth century, see recently Thomas (T.) Jean Lax and Lilia Rocio Taboada, eds., *Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces* (New York: Museum of Modern Art and The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2022), and the review by Funda Karayel in this issue of the *Woman’s Art Journal*; Jillian E. Russo, *Wild and Brilliant: The Martha Jackson Gallery and Post War Art* (New York: Hollis Taggart, 2021); and Rebecca Shaykin, *Edith Halpert, The Downtown Gallery, and the Rise of American Art* (New York: the Jewish Museum; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019). For texts that consider women-run galleries alongside other art spaces in New York, see Melissa Rachleff, *Inventing Downtown: Artist-Run Galleries in New York City, 1952–1965* (New York: Grey Art Gallery at New York University; DelMonico Books, 2017); and Lauren Rosati and Mary Anne Staniszewski, eds., *Alternative Histories: New York Art Spaces, 1960 to 2010* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

Marie Laurencin: Sapphic Paris

Edited by Simonetta Fraquelli and Cindy Kang, with essays by Simonetta Fraquelli, Cindy Kang, Christine Poggi, Jelena Kristic, and Rachel Silveri, and with contributions by Corrinne Chong and Oriane Poret
The Barnes Foundation, 2023

Reviewed by Lily F. Scott

After returning to her native city of Paris in 1921, Marie Laurencin (1883–1956) regularly painted large-eyed, youthful female subjects accompanied by tame animals in a palette dominated by soft grays, pinks, and blues. According to the exhibition and catalogue *Marie Laurencin: Sapphic Paris*, however, Laurencin was much more than a painter of pretty women; she

cultivated a distinctly feminine persona that enabled her “to create her own unique and quasi-timeless sapphic vision of the world” (11). Organized by The Barnes Foundation and co-curated by independent curator Simonetta Fraquelli and Barnes Foundation curator Cindy Kang, the exhibition enveloped visitors in Laurencin’s unique vision of early twentieth-century Paris. In this catalogue, eighty-five figures and fifty-one high-quality plates accompany the text, along with excerpts of Laurencin’s poetry. Brilliantly, even the endpapers play a part, displaying one of the artist’s whimsical wallpapers, a motif featuring two monkeys that Laurencin designed in 1912 for decorator André Groult, the husband of Laurencin’s later lover Nicole Groult. The curators write that they seek “to reestablish the importance of Laurencin’s work ... which has until

recently been obscured.... [The] project argues for the significance of her vision of a sapphic modernism in early twentieth-century Paris” (11). What “sapphic modernity” encompasses, however, remains somewhat nebulous in most of the volume.

By the time Laurencin designed the monkey wallpaper, in her mid-twenties, she was fully integrated into Paris’s avant-garde artistic scene as part of the “bande à Picasso,” engaging in stylistic conversations with her peers while simultaneously forging the “innately feminine” artistic persona that would set her apart. In 1914, Laurencin married Baron Otto von Wätjen and acquired German citizenship; the newlyweds were honeymooning in the South of France when World War I was declared. Because of their German nationality, Laurencin and the baron were unable to

return to Paris and therefore headed to Spain, where they would spend four years in exile, and then to Germany. It was not until three years after the war that Laurencin was able to return to her beloved Paris, where she would live and work for the remainder of her life. The 1920s saw the artist's first forays into costume and set design for the ballet, solo exhibitions of her paintings, and affiliation with the queer social circle cultivated by American writer Natalie Clifford Barney. Creative eclecticism, career successes, and sapphic affiliations would remain the major facets of Laurencin's life for the next three decades, until her death in 1956.

Following a forward by Barnes Foundation director Thom Collins, the catalogue's first essay, "Marie Laurencin: A Woman's World," jointly authored by coeditors Fraquelli and Kang, functions as an introduction to the publication. The authors define "sapphic modernity" as a sensibility in early twentieth-century Paris "based on an exclusively female aesthetic" (1); as they and the other contributors apply the term throughout the volume, however, it more specifically implies intimate romantic and platonic relationships between and among women and the social networks that ensue. Though the ancient Greek poet Sappho of Lesbos, celebrated in queer communities in the early twentieth century for her descriptions of same-sex desire among women, is mentioned in an endnote (11, n. 3), Fraquelli and Kang generally do not attend to the queerness of sapphism, nor the complications of sexual deviance during a time when queerness was pathologized and sometimes criminalized, contextual groundwork that would have been particularly helpful. There does seem to be a conflation between the homosocial and the homoerotic within this chapter, as well as between the sapphic and the feminine, which feels a bit removed from more contemporary understandings of sex and gender; as a result, the chapter functions much more successfully as an exploration of the feminine than of the sapphic. Since, later in the catalogue, the queering of sapphism does occur, I suggest reading the essays in reverse order to fully grasp how sapphism is

threaded through the exhibition and the publication. Fraquelli and Kang's discussions of Laurencin's early paintings, on the other hand, compellingly demonstrate the ways the artist began weaving an aesthetic world of complex femininity. Regarding *Les petites filles modèles* (The Perfect Little Girls), for example, a still life from 1913 that presents a framed likely self-portrait above a row of books with the work's title inscribed across their spines, the authors explain that the work evokes an 1858 children's book of this title about female friendships and thus "alludes to a theme that would become recurrent in Laurencin's work, namely the variety and complexities of relationships between women" (6).

Christine Poggi, a historian of modern and contemporary art and the recently retired director of the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, demonstrates in her essay, "Marie Laurencin's Cubism," that Laurencin's subjects and styles were not manifestations of her delicate or feminine sensibility, as they have often been interpreted, but rather of conscious choices informed by the work of her contemporaries and by historical models of art. Poggi provides numerous visual analyses to compellingly support her central thesis: that Laurencin's adaptation and application of Cubism enabled her to take a style renowned for its fracturing effects and instead use it to establish unity within the pictorial field and to "project a world of harmony, grace, elegance, and multisensory pleasure primarily inhabited by women" (37). Nowhere is Poggi's argument more effective than in her discussion of 1910's *Les jeunes filles* (The Young Women), a large canvas depicting four women gazing out at the viewer and likely dancing to a violin, as she notes the work's "formal linkages, echoes, and rhythmic patterns" (34). Throughout the essay, Poggi consistently emphasizes the innovativeness of Laurencin's style, often gauging it against the benchmarks of Pablo Picasso and George Braque. That said, she relegates the fuller contextualization of these two male artists' careers to the endnotes, appropriately allowing Laurencin and her work to shine in the main text. Poggi also provides perhaps the pithiest charac-

terization in the volume of Laurencin's style as it had evolved by around 1920, after she had separated from the Cubists: her pastel female figures "should be seen as a deliberate form of self-fashioning, in which she asserted a complex identity as a bisexual Parisian, at once elegant, sophisticated, naive, and openly interested in scenes of female friendship and eroticism" (29).

Curator Fraquelli's essay, "Life in Exile: Becoming 'Marie Laurencin,'" focuses on the time the artist was forced to spend time away from Paris. Fraquelli provides ample biographical information about Laurencin's life around the time of World War I, making excellent use of the artist's own writings from this period of exile and affording readers a glimpse into Laurencin's increasing desperation to return to Paris. The author's main thesis is that, during the war, Laurencin "began to develop a fantasy world, populated with only women and animals, to alleviate her sense of alienation and her nostalgia for Paris" (52). After mentioning visits by fellow Parisian Nicole Groult, with whom Laurencin began a long romantic and sexual affair, Fraquelli proposes that "from 1915 onward there appears to be a greater intimacy between the figures in her female portrayals" (51). More could be said here to substantiate this claim; it remains somewhat unclear how the author defines woman-with-woman "intimacy"—because, certainly, such intimacy is not inherently sapphic—or what she considers to be visual markers of said intimacy. As a result, the author's statement at the end of the essay about Laurencin's ability "to appeal to voyeuristic male admirers while speaking to the lesbian community to which she belonged" (57) feels unsupported. Still, Fraquelli engages brilliantly with a variety of Laurencin's art forms, including the beautiful paralleling of Laurencin's visual art by her poetry, highlighting the breadth of her output. With Laurencin's *Le zèbre* (1914), for example, a painting that Fraquelli identifies as a likely self-portrait with Groult, Fraquelli pairs a 1915 poem of the same name in which "Laurencin identified with the dancing zebra, while ... referring to the animal as male" (55): *Le zèbre est un danseur espagnol / Dont je*

raffole, “The [male] zebra is a [male] Spanish dancer / that I love” (66, trans. Nick Moudry).

In Cindy Kang’s essay, “Designing a World: Marie Laurencin’s Decorative Projects,” Kang persuasively demonstrates the various ways that Laurencin’s artistic pursuits beyond the canvas “allowed her to construct an aesthetic world in the flesh in ways that painting could not” (71). These multidisciplinary ventures—including the design of interiors as well as of theatrical sets and costumes—harnessed the artist’s ornamental aesthetic and created multisensory experiences that transported viewers and audiences into an immersive world of Laurencin’s making. Kang’s thesis is straightforward, and she effectively utilizes an assortment of primary sources to support it, including artist interviews, critics’ reviews, and early twentieth-century photographs—two of the *Maison Cubiste* at the 1912 *Salon d’Automne* featuring Laurencin’s marbled fireplace, mirrors, still life with fan, and roundels of women’s heads, and one of the *Ballets Russes* performing *Les biches* at the London Coliseum in 1925—as well as a contemporary photograph of a costume Laurencin designed and fabricated for this ballet. Kang’s analysis of Laurencin’s multifaceted involvement in the production of *Les biches* (a word meaning, among other things, “does,” “darlings,” and “lesbians,” as Kang points out, 76) is particularly thorough, from staging and set design to the jacket-and-bloomers costume for the androgynous principal figure, *La Garçonne* (“The Tomboy”), and the gray ensembles for two ballerinas who ignore handsome male characters. The author contends that Laurencin “was well-equipped to express the discreetly queer dynamics of the ballet’s characters, given her penchant for ‘figures of undecided gender’ and the ‘effect of a sort of androgyny’ that critics of the time noticed in her painting” (77). Kang makes an interesting point here, though I would caution against the outright conflation of androgyny and sapphism, particularly in the 1920s, when androgynous fashions for women were *en vogue* in France, England, and the United States.¹ A more nuanced and historicized explanation of the relationship between



Fig. 1. Marie Laurencin, *L'Amazone* (The Amazon) (1923), oil on canvas, 36 1/4" x 25 5/8". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

androgyny and queerness would be helpful here. Kang’s essay is nevertheless tightly written and highly comprehensible. Out of all the chapters in the catalogue, it provides the closest experience to visiting the exhibition in person, where one was also enwrapped by the versatile accomplishments of Marie Laurencin.

The essay “The Adroit Princess: Marie Laurencin’s Prints and Book Illustrations,” by art consultant and Laurencin scholar Jelena Kristic, centers on the figure of the *jeune fille* that

dominates Laurencin’s prints and illustrations. Often lacking the attributes of the literary characters they represent, and instead drawing upon stereotypes popular in nineteenth-century French and English book illustrations, these images of young women are easily reproducible, lending themselves to the medium; despite their nonspecific quality, however, they refer back to Laurencin’s own image, Kristic argues. Her central thesis concerns Laurencin’s self-fashioned role of the muse-artist as

the basis for many of these illustrations, a resolutely feminist point: Kristic contends that Laurencin's "entire practice's programmatic strategy of generating a space of self-determination [came] from within a position of staged subordination" (116). In the short 1922 book *Éventail* (Fan), for example, which comprises ten poems composed by male authors in honor of her return to Paris, Laurencin's engraved portraits of generic *jeunes filles* act as surrogates for the artist herself. Kristic convincingly claims that, for the *Éventail* engravings, Laurencin "pantomimed the role of muse to elicit and control the biographical pastiches produced by her male writer friends, having [the engravings] 'work in her stead.' In doing so, she redefined the role of muse, which traditionally inspired male artists, into a self-fashioned role of the woman artist who finds power behind the scenes" (113). A connection to sapphism is lacking throughout the text; this absence could perhaps have been remedied by a fuller discussion of Laurencin's illustrations for a 1950 French translation of poems by Sappho. Nonetheless, Kristic's essay compels the reader to pay greater attention to Laurencin's graphic output and to position it firmly within feminist discourse.

"No Modernism without Marie Laurencin: Picturing Queer Femininity" stands out as the contribution that most decidedly engages with the queerness of sapphism and with the adverse realities of early twentieth-century queer existence. Written by Rachel Silveri, a scholar of avant-garde modernist art and an Assistant Professor in the School of Art and Art History at the University of Florida, the essay declares its purpose from the outset: to "contend that Laurencin pursued a queer representation of femininity, but one whose queerness was strategically coded, enabling her to achieve success in a masculinist art world while nonetheless picturing non-normative desires" (123). Silveri uses Laurencin's 1923 painting *L'Amazone* (The Amazon) to exemplify how the artist mobilized classicism to proffer "an easy-to-consume image of femininity" to traditional buyers and viewers while implying sapphism to a select audience, in this case

to the community of expatriates and French-women thriving together in 1920s Paris within the coterie of Natalie Clifford Barney, who published *Pensées d'une Amazone* (Thoughts of an Amazon) in 1920. Given that Barney had earned the nickname *L'Amazone* within her circle and that the painted figure on horseback shares a likeness with photographs of a younger Barney—at least as much a likeness as Laurencin offered any of her other specific portrait subjects, like Coco Chanel, Mia Bergmann, and Helena Rubenstein—I would go so far as to argue that we can and should consider this painting to be a portrait of Barney, both in the literal and allegorical sense, as is the case for the 1920 painting of the same title by sapphic American painter Romaine Brooks (1874–1970). Another fascinating concept presented by Silveri is Laurencin's performative participation in the idea of herself as a narcissistic and mindless ingénue. The author indicates that Laurencin tactically camouflaged her own intelligence to be successful within a patriarchal system, saying in a 1926 article, "To please men, it's better to pass for stupid" (128). This strategy created space for the artist to "ultimately destabiliz[e] heteronormative assumptions ... 'making room' within the institutions of art and wreaking havoc within traditional concepts of gender" (129). Silveri's essay fulfills all the promises set forth in the catalogue's introductory essay and provides a highly contextualized and discerning study of Laurencin's interwar oeuvre.

Following the main essays, Barnes Foundation assistant curator Corrinne Chong provides an appendix entitled "Marie Laurencin's Female Network: Selected Biographies." Each accompanied by a photograph, the entries are well-researched and concisely informative. It remains a bit unclear how and why each of the fourteen women were chosen; the selection is not distinctly queer, which feels like a missed opportunity to detail the fascinatingly complex network of women-loving women artists, writers, and designers living and working among Laurencin in Paris. Here once again seems to be a conflation of female homosociality and sapphism. Next comes a chronology of Laurencin's life and a section entitled "Lifetime

Exhibitions of Marie Laurencin," both furnished by Oriane Poret, an independent scholar of French modernism and PhD candidate at the Université de Lyon. Each of these sections are thoroughly researched and provide excellent points of reference.

In contemporary queer vernacular, the word "sapphic" most commonly implies queerness, specifically among women and others assigned female at birth; the term, often considered to be more encompassing than "lesbian," leaves room for the inclusion of trans-feminine, transmasculine, nonbinary, and other gender-nonconforming individuals. Framing the entirety of the Laurencin exhibition around sapphism therefore feels a bit misleading, given the general lack of nuance in the contextualization and consideration of this queer artist and her work. The complex realities and subtle particularities of early twentieth-century queer femininity truly inform only one of the essays. While I am a steadfast advocate for more exhibitions and publications about sapphic modern art, it is my view that the exhibition and catalogue ought to have centered on subversive femininity instead, as it is a ubiquitous theme throughout the show and in Laurencin's career. Nevertheless, *Marie Laurencin: Sapphic Paris* provides a beautiful, in-depth consideration of the artist's life and her covertly complex oeuvre, ensuring her place in conversations about feminist art henceforward. •

Lily F. Scott is a PhD candidate specializing in American modernism with a focus on queer art and artists. Her dissertation, *Neither Then nor Now: Queer Temporalities and Interwar Portraits of Expatriate Sapphists*, examines the portraiture of/by queer American women artists living in 1920s Paris and employs several queer theoretical lenses, including those pertaining to reception, trauma, and temporalities.

Notes

1. See Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).



Pl. 1. Mónica Mayer, *El tendedero* (The Clothesline), from the exhibition *Nuevas tendencias* (New Trends), Mexico City (1978), mixed media performance. Photo: Víctor Lerma. Courtesy of Archivo Pinto mi Raya.



Pl. 2. Mónica Mayer, *El tendedero* (The Clothesline), from the exhibition *Making it Safe*, Los Angeles (1979), chromogenic print, 6 13/16" x 10". Photo: Víctor Lerma. Courtesy of Archivo Pinto mi Raya.



Pl. 3. Mónica Mayer, photo still from *El día después* (The Day After Protest) (2012), organized with the *Taller de Activismo y Arte Feminista* (Feminist Art and Activism Workshop). Photo: Yuruen Lerma Mayer. Courtesy of Archivo Pinto mi Raya.



Pl. 4. Film still of Secretary of Safety Jesús Orta glitter-bombed on August 12, 2019. Image source: El Universal.



Pl. 5. Mónica Mayer, installation view of *El tendedero* (The Clothesline) (2016), mixed media performance from the exhibition, *Si tiene dudas ... pregunte: Una exposición retrocolectiva de Mónica Mayer* (When in Doubt ... Ask: A Retrocollective Exhibit of Mónica Mayer), Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City. Photo: Karen Cordero Reiman.



Pl. 6. Helen Chadwick, installation view of *Of Mutability (The Oval Court)* (1984–86), photocopies and assorted media at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London (1986–87).

Photo: Edward Woodman.

© The Estate of Helen Chadwick, Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome, and New York.

Pl. 7. Helen Chadwick, detailed fragment of mosaic technique from *The Oval Court* (1984–86), photocopies with blue toner and assorted media. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Photo: Tamara Trodd.

© The Estate of Helen Chadwick, Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome, and New York, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.





Pl. 8. Helen Chadwick, detail of the first figural group from *The Oval Court* (1984–86), photocopy collage with assorted media. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Photo: Edward Woodman. © The Estate of Helen Chadwick, Courtesy The Henry Moore Institute, Leeds.



Pl. 9. Helen Chadwick, *One Flesh* (1985), collage of photocopies on paper, 66 1/8" x 44 1/2". Victoria and Albert Museum, London. © The Estate of Helen Chadwick, Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome, and New York.



Pl. 10. Frida Kahlo, *Mi nana y yo* (My Nurse and I) (1937), oil on canvas, 14 5/8" x 12". Fundacion Dolores Olmedo, Mexico City, Mexico. © Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. 2024 © Photo Schalkwijk/Art Resource/Scala, Florence.



Pl. 11. Frida Kahlo, *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932), oil on metal, 12" x 15 1/8". Fundacion Dolores Olmedo, Mexico City, Mexico. © Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. 2024 © Photo Schalkwijk/Art Resource/Scala, Florence.



Pl. 12. Libbie Mark, *Untitled collage painting* (1957–65), acrylic and paper collage on linen, 24" x 48". LMPF Inv. no. 19R. Private Collection. Courtesy Berry Campbell, New York. Photo credit: Roz Akin.



Pl. 13. Libbie Mark, *Untitled* (1957), oil on linen, 40" x 39 7/8". LMPF Inv. no. 50JM. Promised Gift to the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, Provincetown, MA. Photo credit: Paul Mutino.



Pl. 14. Libbie Mark, *Untitled* (1957), oil on canvas, 42" x 42". LMPF Inv. no. 46JM. Libbie Mark Provincetown Fund Collection. Photo credit: Paul Mutino.



Pl. 15. Libbie Mark, *Untitled collage painting* (1960s), acrylic and paper collage on canvas, 72 1/2" x 48 1/4". LMPF Inv. no. 04R. Private Collection. Photo credit: Paul Mutino.

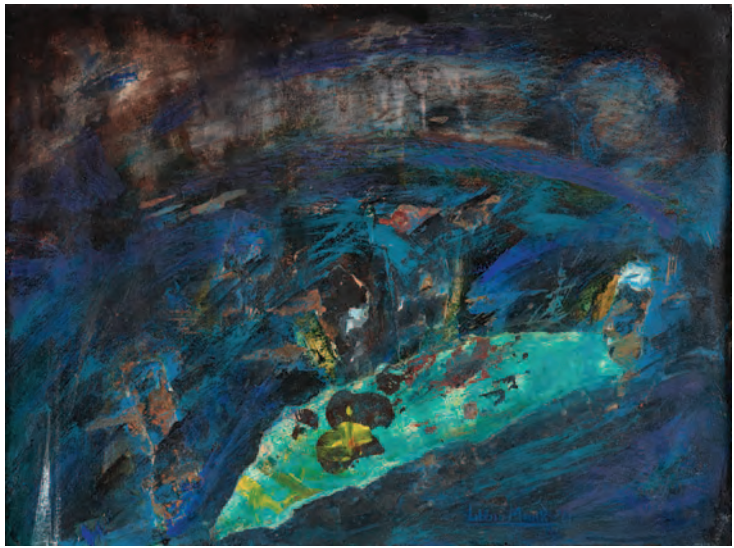


Pl. 16. Libbie Mark, *Collage Painting #37* (c. 1962), acrylic polymer latex and paper collage on paper, mounted on linen, mounted on Masonite, 30" x 24". LMPF Inv. no. 23R. Courtesy Berry Campbell, New York. Photo credit: Roz Akin.



Pl. 17. Libbie Mark, *#42* (1962), oil on canvas, 40" x 26". LMPF Inv. no. 16J. Libbie Mark Provincetown Fund Collection. Photo credit: Paul Mutino.

Pl. 18. Libbie Mark,
Collage Painting #6 (1961),
 acrylic polymer latex and paper collage on
 paper, mounted on composition board,
 18" x 24". LMPF Inv. no. 47JM.
 Courtesy Berry Campbell, New York.
 Photo credit: Roz Akin.



Pl. 19. Libbie Mark,
Collage Painting #23 (1962),
 acrylic polymer latex, paper, string,
 and other mixed media collage on
 paper, varnished and mounted on
 Masonite, 11 7/8" x 17 7/8".
 LMPF Inv. no. 34JM.
 Courtesy Berry Campbell, New York.
 Photo credit: Roz Akin.

Pl. 20. Libbie Mark,
Collage Painting #67-5 (1967),
 acrylic and paper collage on canvas,
 40" x 30". LMPF Inv. no. 03R.
 Private Collection.
 Photo credit: Paul Mutino.



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