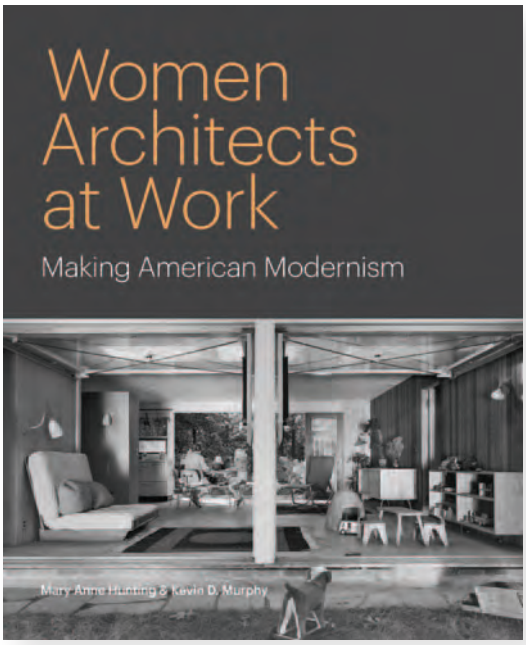
Woman's Art Journal

SPRING / SUMMER 2025 VOLUME 46, NUMBER 1 $25.00





Women Architects at Work:
Making American Modernism

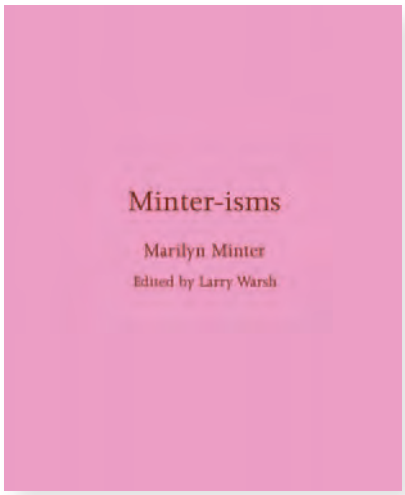
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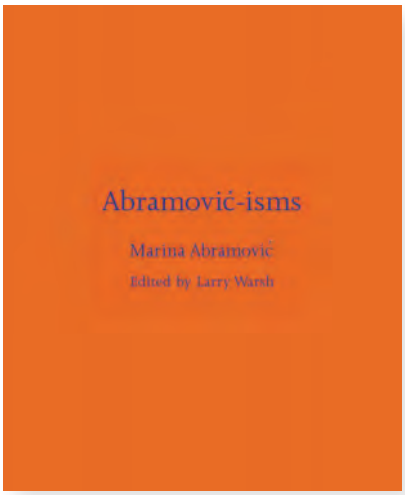
Fortuna and the
Immortality Garden
(Machine)

Kara Walker
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Minter-isms
Marilyn Minter
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Abramović-isms
Marina Abramović
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(Front cover) Rebecca Horn, *Finger Gloves* (1972), performance, fabric, and balsa wood, 27 1/2" (length). Photograph by Achim Thode; Published by Galerie Eric Franck, Harvard Art Museums/ Busch-Reisinger Museum, Gift of the artist. © 2025 Rebecca Horn / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

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The lived experience is the unifying concept of *Woman's Art Journal*'s Spring/Summer 2025 issue. All four articles chronicle artistic practices and worldly relationships as a methodological lens reflecting heightened aesthetic and subjective spaces of sexuality, reality, abstraction, and biography. Rebecca Horn's prosthetic body extensions, employed in her 1972 performance *Finger Gloves*, on our front cover, center radical infirmity as her *lived experience* in the new field of disability studies and disability art history, charted in Amanda Cachia's extraordinary feature essay. Having coined the term "hospital aesthetics" to prescribe habitable and hospitable stations for chronic illness and "preponderances of pain" that counter traditional measurements of medicine and therapy, Cachia presents disabled artists Yo-Yo Lin and Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen, amongst others, as contemporary heirs to Horn's earlier artistic visions in the pursuit of an expansive language of infirmity.

Johanna Amos's article on the Bayard Memorial, dedicated in 1907 near the Delaware Art Museum, challenges the stated purpose of public memorials to historical male figures, their power and promise as permanent landmarks of glory. More interesting than the "life of the sculpture" is Amos's focus on the sculptor herself: Euphrosyne "Effie" Stillman, a British-American artist working in the late nineteenth century, and her correspondence with the Delaware art collector and patron, Samuel Bancroft, Jr. Recounting the memorial's presence through the lived experiences of a young woman sculptor brings an entirely new perspective to the competitive politics around public commissions and, most revealingly, to Stillman's own ambitious artistic training and aspirations. The memorial's lasting impression is, in fact, a "testament to women artists' perseverance."

The timely article by Rachel Winter on Palestinian artist Samia Halaby, born in Jerusalem, challenges her marginalization from Palestinian art histories and the broader exclusion of Arab diaspora artists from the canon of American art. Halaby's paintings reverberate with her language of abstract picturing, universal and local depictions of reality through her general principles of experiences, and her distillation of abstraction to the essential attributes bridging art and daily life. These connections, Winter argues, communicate "living cultural processes" through global and local notions of place and space. Halaby's abstractions are discussed across the geographical axes of Palestine, New York, and the Midwest, but their roots are securely fastened to the Arab world.

Luke Williams conveys the labyrinthian histories of slavery and the calculated template of the Black figure in contemporary art markets in his forceful presentation of multidisciplinary artist Trina Michelle Robinson. By embracing archival and nonperformative strategies in printmaking and video that redact and abstract her own family's reckoning with enslavement, Robinson denies the viewer's expectations of Black representation, instead emancipating herself and her audience "toward freedom sought in the kink, the fugitive, [and] the otherworldy." Through fabulation, glitch, and nonperformance, Robinson accesses "the lived experiences of her ancestors."

Our illustrious new book reviews editor, Melissa Mednicov, has successfully begun her tenure at *WAJ*, succeeding Alison Poe who graciously guided this issue's early development, and supported by Erin Devine and Sierra Holt. Ana Vivoda engages the distinctions between the terms decolonial and post-colonial in art and textile in her review of a "pluriversal," anti-racist educational research study critiquing hegemonic white feminisms. Mickalene Thomas exercises bell hooks's inspirations on love, vulnerability, and eroticism, a love letter and "love ethic" to queerness and Black women, in a recent survey catalogue discussed by Grace McCormick. The art, writing, teaching, curating, and Black feminist activism of Howardena Pindell are presented in two significant books, covered by crystal am nelson, where surface tension, abstraction, materiality, and collage work in unison to reveal the artist's political position and past, haptic creative strategies argued as "Black feminist modernisms." Emma Oslé considers the vernacular language of Latinx abstractionist Virginia Jaramillo, based in Los Angeles, whose painting series undulate and vibrate with the "force of fighting colors" to engage directly with the environment. Roja Najafi undertakes two reviews about postwar women Abstract Expressionists, the first addressing the formation of a singular art collection, the second strategically expanding the reach of gestural abstraction to global geographies and movements beyond a Euro-American framework.

Ruth Asawa's captivating drawings are given equal attention to her hanging looped-wire sculptures, "drawings in space," in a joint review by Mark Bloch, one a fascinating graphic novel that retells the artist's troubling yet mesmerizing biography in innovative ways. Nancy E. Green covers a magisterial exhibition catalogue on Sonia Delaunay, showcasing a "living art" that dissolves boundaries between modern life and art in form and color. Disregarding Vasari's ideas of creative male genius to recover anonymous labor and collaborative networks, mostly female, Elizaveta Kushnareva's review reveals women's vast contributions in painting as well as lacemaking and needlework, among other neglected arts, from the early Renaissance to the early modern period. Claudia Goldstein explores a comprehensive monograph on seventeenth-century Dutch botanist Agnes Block, whose troves of scientific and horticultural knowledge, cultivated self-fashioning, and meticulous collection of botanical watercolors place her firmly in the revisionist histories of Dutch Enlightenment.

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

A Firm Infirmity

Extending Rebecca Horn's Prosthetic Aesthetics to Disability Studies

By Amanda Cachia

On September 6, 2024, German artist Rebecca Horn (1944–2024) passed away at the age of eighty. Just before her death she was able to see a major survey of her work on display at the Haus der Kunst in Munich, curated by Senior Curator Jana Baumann.[1] Like all of us, Horn experienced disability, illness, and infirmity, but it was her early experience in the studio most frequently chronicled in her biography, when, in the 1960s, she became sick due to the exposure of harsh chemicals and toxins in her art materials. At that time, whilst only in her twenties, Horn developed a lung infection and had to be hospitalized for a period. She recovered in a sanatorium in Barcelona over the course of a year, and it was this time in convalescence that proved to be greatly impactful to the augmentation of her creative ideas. To cope with the isolation and tedious nature of her experience in the sanatorium, she drew sketches of body extensions and prosthetics inspired by medical equipment to explore both the limitations and possibilities for the body. By eventually developing her drawings into sculptural three-dimensional prosthetics and performances, Horn was able to experiment with how the body retains malleable qualities by which it shifts and transforms into new shape and form based on the physical and social conditions in which it is found, whether imposed by exterior, unwelcome conditions or bodies, or by choice. In numerous interviews, Horn has described how her time in the hospital was difficult as she was neither given a precise estimation on how long her recovery would take, nor how long she would be there.[2] After one year of restless waiting, she took matters into her own hands: she walked out of the sanatorium by her own admission and recovered at home on bedrest, still taking medications for a prolonged period.

This qualification between imposition and choice is an important difference to dwell on, because it may be argued that Horn's work was a direct response to the agency she undoubtedly sought over her own body in a time when she felt vulnerable, weak, and immobile, without ability to feel and to sense, as she likely once did. Perhaps she even felt threatened or frightened? By imagining and then actualizing her wondrous prosthetic creations, Horn was able to devise and redefine the world of the medical industrial complex into a more habitable and hospitable space for herself, and for others, conceivably, that would feed her intellectual and creative inquiries for years to come. Her prostheses could move and feel and sense the world in ways that indicated, arguably, an overcompensation for her lack of ability to do those same things in the stages of her illness, wherein they gave her superpowers and a heightened experience of her surroundings at a time when she felt disempowered. Her prosthetic extensions were sensual and gave the artist access to explore desire and sexuality through tactile sensation typically denied or repressed when one is weak or ill. Her prosthetic extensions were possibly viewed as strange, perceived even antagonistically by and toward others, yet gave her control over an environment that was equally unfamiliar to her. And her prosthetic extensions were mysterious and allowed her to remain elusive, undefinable, and powerful, like a stranger in the night. All these qualities—captured within Horn's astounding reworking of objects—*firmly* extends to the language of radical infirmity and the generative power that this vernacular wields within the scholarly framework of disability studies.

This essay argues that the oeuvre of Horn's cockfeathers, fans, and arm, leg, shoulder, and head extensions, and in fact much of her artistic and epistemological reach, is more capacious than previously credited. Horn's experiences with illness and disability intuitively and profoundly shaped her approach to artmaking and to the objects she produced, yet there is little other scholarship on how her work is connected to disability studies. In concert with disability studies, this essay shows how Horn's work is very much connected to hospital aesthetics, a neologism I have recently coined, and also the title for my forthcoming second book, *Hospital Aesthetics: Disability, Medicine, Activism* (2025).[3] Operating from



Fig. 1. Rebecca Horn, *Measure Box* (1970), steel and aluminum. Copyright 2025: Rebecca Horn / Moontower Foundation, Photographer: Achim Thode. © 2025 Rebecca Horn / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

a place of empowerment and agency, hospital aesthetics is defined as artwork by disabled artists, exploring the ever-subjective experience of being sick and ill, set apart from, and outside of, a clinical and therapeutic setting, and in opposition to the medical model of disability. Horn's work falls within this realm, indeed, it was a direct response to the agency she was undoubtedly seeking over her own body. This essay seeks to articulate these qualities of hospital aesthetics within this new critical framework. In turn, this alternative reading of Horn's work contributes new discourses to the flourishing field of disability art history, wherein the lived experience of disability is centered, and where disability is deployed as a core methodology in art praxis. A disability lens offers new readings of art from the recent past and provides a much-neglected narrative of contemporary art that most art historians did not even realize was missing.

In the following sections, Horn's work is framed within disability studies terminology to provide a theoretical and philosophical apparatus grounding this paper's arguments: terms applied, such as the lived experience of disability and hospital aesthetics, complicate Horn's use of the prosthesis, and several of Horn's early works are detailed to animate this perspective. Then, two contemporary disabled artists, whose works build off Horn's in dynamic and exciting ways, are presented: the emerging, interdisciplinary Taiwanese-American artist Yo-Yo Lin (b. 1993), currently living and working in Taipei; and Finnish artist Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen (b. 1974), recently featured in the Finnish Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennale. By holding up Horn's earlier activities alongside the careers of Lin and Wallinheimo-Heimonen, we may productively and generatively bring the former's practice into disability art discourse for an even deeper, more complex understanding of her subjects.

In 2022, the disability and design scholar, Sara Hendren, wrote a small text for *Art in America* entitled "Impairment as Impetus," a response to the magazine's elucidation on how five different historic works, including Horn's 1972 performance, *Finger Gloves* (see Fig. 2 and front cover), was "spurred by disability."[4] Despite Hendren's astute observations, and acknowledging that Horn's experiences with illness and disability profoundly shaped her approach to artmaking, there is little additional scholarship on how her work is connected to disability studies.[5] To this point, Horn's lived experiences of disability *always already* indicated a fundamental relationship to this discipline, which emphasizes the importance, in scholarship, of chronicling the lived experiences of disability in order to aid our understanding of the ever-increasing nuances and complexities of disabled embodiment. Like Horn's prostheses, the human body is equally precarious and intricate; disability studies not only explicate these narratives but push them forward as legitimate discourses, especially as the academy itself comes to learn and receive disability as an insightful pedagogy and methodology for the canon. While Horn's praxis is aligned with the important works by her generation of female artist peers from the 1970s—including Senga Nengudi (b. 1943), Carolee Schneemann (1939–2019), Marina Abramovic (b. 1946), Valie Export (b. 1940), Lygia Clark (1920–1988), Hannah Wilke (1940–1993), Ann Hamilton (b. 1956), and Niki de Saint Phalle (1930–

2002), amongst others—when, collectively, they were consumed by experimentation with the bodily corpus across various socio-cultural, geographic, and racial contexts, Horn's work, individually, offered something else not emphasized or articulated in satisfactory or illuminating ways. That is, how much her work intertwines with those examples by disabled artists and the disability art movement generally, where Horn intergenerationally and unequivocally finds compatibility with artists from the 1980s and 1990s, such as Bob Flanagan, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Jo Spence (1934–1992), who used their ailing health as a palette for their art, namely cystic fibrosis, AIDS, and breast cancer, in that order. It is important to acknowledge that, in this essay, the definition of disability is necessarily capacious and utilizes disability studies scholar Robert McRuer's crip theory, which advocates for a broader definition of disability that incorporates sickness and immunocompromised conditions across intersectional axes of identity and difference.[6] By engaging in disability as an affirming and encompassing term, Horn's life-threatening illness is treated as part of this corporal spectrum.



Fig. 2. Rebecca Horn, *Finger Gloves* (1972), performance, fabric, and balsa wood, 27 1/2" (length). Photograph by Achim Thode; Published by Galerie Eric Franck, Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Gift of the artist. © 2025 Rebecca Horn / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

Historical and canonical artists have used prostheses in problematic ways that denigrate the experience of being an amputee and a prosthesis user. Artists critiqued in earlier writings, including by this author, ranging from Hans Bellmer and Robert Gober to Matthew Barney, used the trope of the prosthesis as a prop to evoke trauma, pathos, and violence that placed disability—real disabled bodies—into a limiting and stereotypical framework conditioned on fear and the monstrous.[7] The work of scholar and prosthesis-user Vivian Sobchack is invoked, who similarly argued for scholarship grounded in the lived experience of the amputee, and their relationship with their prostheses, rather than a metaphorical opportunism so frequently deployed across visual culture.[8] In this context, metaphorical opportunism means that individuals will take advantage of opportunities that may present themselves in relation to the prosthesis by using clichéd metaphors. At first glance, Horn's work also appears to fall into a deployment of this opportunistic trope, especially because her work has also been described as Surrealist, another movement critiqued in relation to its fetishism towards disabled hybrid forms.[9] By contrast, Horn's artistic inquiries about her own lived experience of illness set her apart from opportunism and redundant stereotypes with far-reaching prosthetic explorations. There are other interpretations of Horn's work that intentionally refuse or avoid discussion of her biography and prosthetic use. But literally and metaphorically drawing from one's lived experience within a sanctioned and uncompromised disability justice framework is an acceptable practice within disability studies scholarship, a practice that has extended into contemporary disability art practice as well.[10] Scholarship around a distinct disability art history is still evolving, and positing the lived experience of disability as a critical methodology in art practice helps to complicate and enrich the language and definition of disability art. The relatively current literature developed by other curators and art historians on Horn's prostheses allowed her to sense the world around her more profoundly, and that her human/animal or human/machine hybrids gave her access to other speculative worlds where her imagination could run rampant.[11] But a connection to disability studies is strikingly absent, and so, too, is the explication of Horn's lived experiences with the medical industrial complex and how it shaped the methodology for her art praxis.

In 2019, Diana Bularca wrote an essay entitled "Rebecca Horn: Devising Intersubjective Connections," which focused on Horn's earlier works from the 1970s in a bid to draw more attention to them over her films, installations, and mechanical sculptures.[12] At the same time, Bularca steered away from focusing too much on Horn's inspiration for these early works, acknowledging that while Horn's "subjectivity … drove her artistic production," she wanted to treat "her life experiences … as parallel to what [she argued] her early works imply."[13] In a proselytic move, Bularca suggests that Horn's work was much about intersubjective relations and establishing

connections with others through her prosthetic objects. Despite the fact that this desire arose from Horn's loneliness and isolation in the hospital, Bularca states, "Her work does not simply engage with her subjectivity but aims to incite the individual to find a beneficial interaction and effect."[14] However, why must Horn's subjectivity—her lived experience—be cleaved from the problems and complexities that her work offers us, and indeed, her desire to establish intersubjective connections and relations? Why must her lived experience—quite separate to the facts of her biography—remain in a silo, as though it has no bearing on her methodology and the executed work itself? Bularca draws from other art historians to validate or justify her position (ranging from the likes of Mignon Nixon, Lynne Cooke, and Katharina Schmidt), proposing that despite the artistic trend to decenter subjectivity, biographical interpretation is still an attractive temptation when we interpret art and (presumably) should be avoided at all costs.[15]

There are many important theoretical strands of disability studies scholarship that center the lived experience. The introduction to Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander's 2005 edited volume, *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, states: "The notion that disability is a kind of performance is to people with disabilities not a theoretical abstraction but lived experience."[16] Sandahl and Auslander continue that, while the constructive precepts put forth by postwar sociologist Erving Goffman on the "the performance of everyday life," as well as those by late twentieth-century philosopher Judith Butler on the "performativity" of gender and queerness, are familiar psychoanalytic frameworks within related academic disciplines, the notion that disability is a performance, too, is still not widely theorized.[17] Sandahl and Auslander are, therefore, arguing for the validity of the lived experience of disability, and that the way that the disabled body must perform on a daily basis is one that must be scrutinized and catalyzed in academic circles, so that we may all benefit from the new insights it brings.

It is even more important to consider those analyses informed by feminism and gender studies. Community health scholar Christine Kelly speaks of the value of "building bridges with accessible care," by which disability studies and feminist care inform each other's scholarship.[18] Indeed, Kelly's work shows us that ingrained in disability studies is the desire to build connections and community with others, very much in line with Bularca's interpretation of intersubjective connections at play in Horn's work. While feminist and queer art historians, including the seminal Linda Nochlin, Griselda Pollock, Amelia Jones, Maura Reilly, Jenni Sorkin, and Jack Halberstam, have successfully theorized Horn's work in relation to artists Clark, Wilke, and others, drawing from feminist, performance-based, therapeutic, and body art practices, Horn's oeuvre would benefit significantly from additional framing, particularly from the research of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson and Petra Kuppers, both disability studies scholars invested in disabled movement, dance, and choreography. What these esteemed scholars bring to the table is an additional layering of theory, an intersectional reading of Horn's work that accounts for the lived experience.[19] In her essay "Dares to Stares: Disabled Women Performance Artists and the Dynamics of Staring," Garland-Thomson examines the ocular dynamics of staring, and how the performance-based works of Cheryl Mae Wade (1948–2013), Mary Duffy (b. 1961), and Carrie Sandahl (b. 1968) deflect and return the incriminating glare of the non-disabled person, drawing from the "daily experience shared by all disabled people of managing, deflecting, resisting, or renouncing stares."[20] Garland-Thomson further acknowledges a key difference between the male gaze that desires a non-disabled female body versus a disabled body—the male gaze desiring a female breast considered a "normal" erotic interest, the same male gaze desiring the limb of an amputee considered pathological and deviant.[21] Wade, Duffy, and Sandahl challenge and disrupt these modalities of staring at disabled female bodies.[22] In a related sense, the expression of hospital aesthetics identifies disabled artists charting immunocompromised bodies, disabling medical assistive devices (including prostheses), and eschewing a radical sensorial approach to hospital aesthetics by unapologetically demanding desire and a fulfilling sex life despite being deemed asexual by society at large.[23] Horn's presence and her artistic legacy is most certainly felt as a profound forebear of sick body discourse, and this article argues for her lineage to be centered and acknowledged across art historical and visual culture writings, curatorial and museum studies, disability studies, and many other related fields.

Horn's early works from the 1970s activate these theories. Her *Measure Box* (1970; Fig. 1) shows a white woman, dressed in a black sweater, black jeans, and black shoes, standing upright and still, her arms casually placed on each side of her body, hands resting on her thighs. She stares off to the side with a neutral facial expression, seemingly unaffected by the fact that she is caged by a rectangular black box filled by horizontal rows of steel spokes that spear diagonally through the frame. *Measure Box* likely alludes to Horn's experiences of being measured during her prolonged time in the hospital for all kinds of vitals, such as height, weight, temperature, and blood pressure, which are always taken during regular visits to the doctor's office—so the notion, for doctors, that the body is an objective source of statistics is a familiar one. But Horn's imaginative measuring box-cum-tool clearly functions over and above the act of measuring and shows the viewer something more. Katharina Schmidt has alluded to how Horn's oppressive hospital experiences spawned her medical equipment-inspired sculptures.[24] Horn was also likely poked and prodded by the hands and devices of all kinds of groping doctors, and in the asylum, she was confined and isolated in a chamber or cell, with only very small windows from which to peer onto the outside world. The box is a metaphor for her literal and psychological confinement, where she probably felt as though the walls of her room were caving in on her from all sides, sharply and painfully, with no means of escape or reprieve.

From a feminist and disabled viewpoint, we can also productively take away from *Measure Box* how Horn's body is

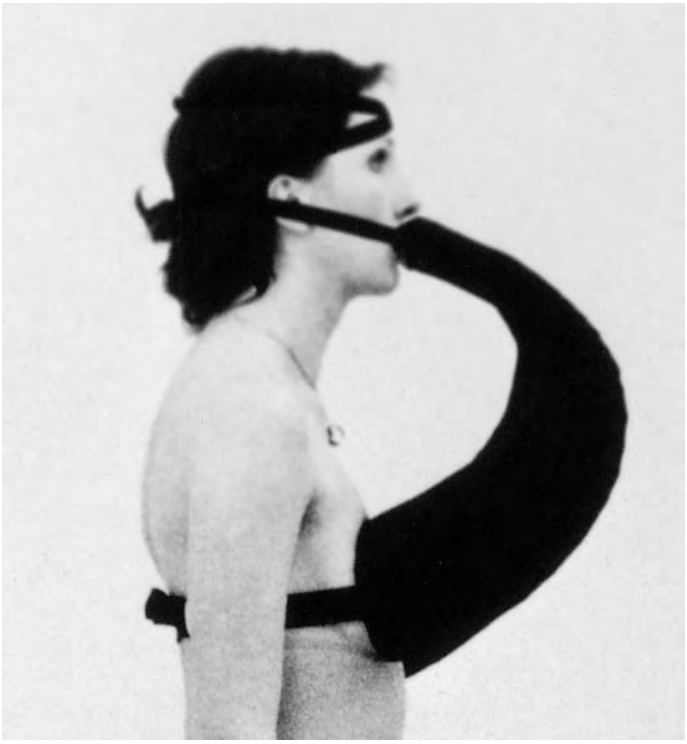


Fig. 3. Rebecca Horn, film still for *Cornucopia, Séance for Two Breasts* (1970). © 2025 Rebecca Horn / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

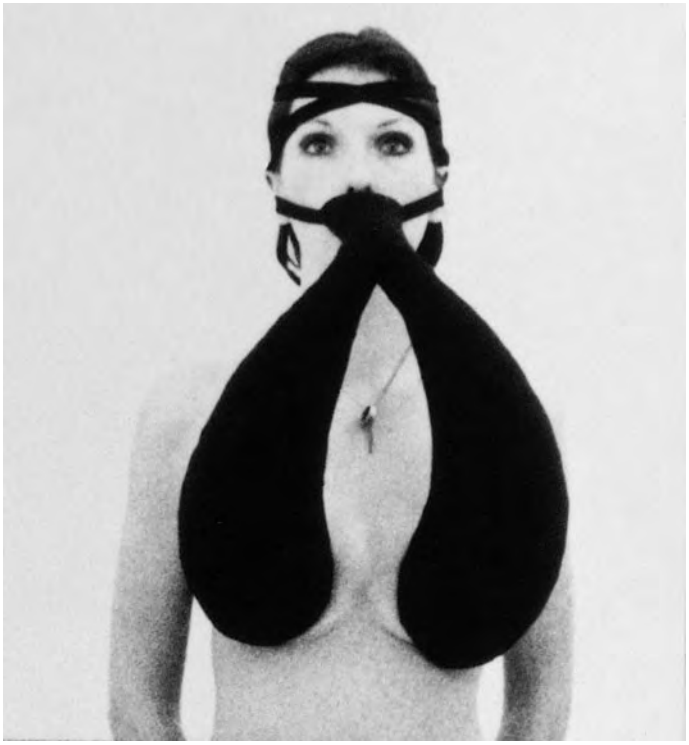


Fig. 4. Rebecca Horn, film still for *Cornucopia, Séance for Two Breasts* (1970). © 2025 Rebecca Horn / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

mapped onto space by real-world measurements (as opposed to an ideal or supposedly "normal" body size, like the mathematical, harmonious proportions that architect Le Corbusier used in *The Modular* from 1948).[25] Yet the body is less than perfect; further, it is sensory and fluid, and society's worldly measurements ought to honor them. Horn's body is variously measured and trapped by the medical establishment, by the male gaze, and by society's impossible standards, but here, she shows an unwillingness to conform to perfectionism, the so-called ideal for a woman's body.

As a child and teenager, my height was constantly measured at the doctor's office for metrics of growth progress. Given my rare form of dwarfism making me much shorter in stature than the average young person, the measure process was always a metaphorical pain point; options were offered to take growth hormonal therapy and endure limb lengthening surgery (to increase length and "correct" height) in order to cosmetically "fit" into society, yet this is notoriously painful with a long recovery process. Ironically, for me, Horn's *Measure Box* evokes both literal and metaphorical preponderances of pain, where the threatening steel prongs directed from the four diagonal sides surrounding Horn's body promise suffering and even bloodshed.

Horn's *Finger Gloves* (1972; Fig. 2 and front cover), one of the most popular cited works from early in her career, aimed to extract more sensory information by using the elongated gloves made from wooden sticks covered with black fabric—the prosthetic gloves were strapped to the wearer's wrists and extended a little over thirty-five inches from the hands and fingers. Horn was known to have worn them several times during performances, some captured on film. They gave her the ability to reach things much further beyond her regular grasp and to refine and enhance her senses beyond ordinary human capacity. Horn gained a new spatial cognition through new faculties and an imaginative apparatus that, according to Schmidt, "challenge[s] the extent of dexterity and flexibility, and the extremes of sensory perception."[26] Calling them "ladyfingers," Schmidt brings a feminist reading to *Finger Gloves* in line with her erotically-charged observations.[27] There is a politics to this work, where Horn also empowers herself with these greater capacities historically out of metaphorical reach for women and disabled people.

The empowerment of *Finger Gloves* is manifest for disabled people through the engagement of a fantastical prosthesis that offers Horn agency, as opposed to a prosthesis forced upon her by doctors in a bid to "correct" or "fix," apropos the medical model of disability. In her essay, Giuliana Bruno talks about how Horn's contraptions recall nineteenth-century orthopedics commonly seen in textbook medical drawings, inclusive of wheelchairs.[28] In these primitive armatures, the body is an instrument to be manipulated, where the user, rather than being empowered, is subject to medical experimentation and societal fascination. Indeed, the body becomes immobilized instead of mobilized, a complete antithesis to the purpose behind the prosthetic construction. Having devised the term "hospital aesthetics," many

contemporary disabled artists are discussed for developing their own medical tools and equipment to empower themselves and their bodies as a reaction against the inhumane treatment received at the hands of the medical industrial complex: artists like Sunaura Taylor (b. 1982), Jesse Darling (b. 1981), and Bhavna Mehta (b. 1968), amongst many others, utilize all kinds of prostheses—the medical X-Ray, the cane, the walker, and dehumanizing photographs of disabled people in medical textbooks—to challenge the vulnerability and violence experienced in medical settings both historically and at present. Indeed, Horn literally took matters back into her own hands, exploring the world around her with a curiosity that might be considered as an over-compensation for what she missed during her year-long forced stay in the asylum.

Horn's *Arm Extensions* (1968; Pl. 1) continues the ideas stemming from *Finger Gloves*, although there is a more obvious erotic element to this work than a suggestive one. The photograph shows the whole back and legs of a standing nude woman, from her shoulder-length brown hair to her feet, facing a white wall on a concrete floor. Her arms are wrapped and layered in a very thick padding of red bandages, from her elbows down to the supportive ground, so much so that they almost resemble enlarged boxing gloves; likewise, her body is wrapped from mid-torso to her ankles with the same red bandage, although it only circles around and cris-crosses her body minimally, displaying plenty of her flesh in-between. The erotic element comes into play because Horn toys with the tension between revealing and concealing the woman's nude body: the buttocks are clearly discerned beneath the criss-crossed fabric, and the viewer knows and understands that the woman's breasts are also exposed but hidden from our gaze. Horn's red straps may also allude to a possible erotic fantasy between doctor and patient, via the bonds that oscillate between domination and complicity. The bandages' bright red shade is, of course, highly symbolic of many powerful bodily affects, including passion, blood, fury, emergencies, fire, danger, lust, and love. Bruno uses all kinds of descriptive language to describe how passion and illness can be bound together, literally and figuratively.[29] The intermingling of these zones can be generatively applied to a feminist and disability reading as well, where rage and protest can find a home alongside a reclaiming of a sexual body that can be minimized and erased within a hospital setting.

Another aspect of hospital aesthetics describes how imagery by artists showing disabled subjects have agency over their own sexuality.[30] Sexual desire is commonly assumed by medical personnel to be non-existent for a disabled person. The BDSM (bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadism and masochism) performances captured on film and video by Canadian-born, Black American disabled artist Panteha Abareshi (b. 1999) particularly resonates with Horn's work, because she enlists hospital devices and props as fetishistic tools to explore her own body—and her own experiences with sickle cell zero beta thalassemia, a genetic blood disorder—within the constraints of bandages, canes, and walkers. Abareshi is interested in turning concrete physical forms into gestural abstractions as a metaphor for how her own body is studied, objectified, and dissected as a specimen in the hospital environment. Horn's *Arm Extensions* might also be seen, then, as both a repression and expression of sexual desire bound to the trappings of the hospital whilst giving us a hint of libidinal desire and fantasy beneath the medical sterile veneer. Another interesting component is how Horn has restricted her own movement as part of her self-mummification process, where the red stumps suddenly become improvised bodily supports or pillars that connect her to the ground. Horn is literally disabling her body into alternative configurations that simultaneously limit and amplify its structural workings. The bandages are a material capable of stimulating and arousing both sexual and non-sexual possibilities for the body. Through the act of prohibiting movement, Horn shows how we can conceive and articulate bodily movement or bodily stasis in line with a disabled equilibrium.

Flowing from this work is Horn's equally iconic *Cornucopia, Séance for Two Breasts* (1970; Figs. 3–4), another radical prosthesis composed of black fabric hollow tubes fitted over each breast, extended and curved off the breasts, and fused together over a mouthpiece strapped on the wearer's face. Nancy Spector describes this work as a desire for the body to be in communication with itself, given that the breasts and the mouth are literally being joined together.[31] Yet, the mouthpiece could also be perceived as a physical block in communication, given that the woman's lips are literally sealed from speaking. From a feminist and erotic perspective, Horn appears to give her wearer permission to self-pleasure and become more intimately connected to oneself. Spector equates this self-pleasuring and even sadomasochism with a "liberated and decisive female desire."[32] Bularca explores the work as a "self-centered instrument charged with a sense of self-nourishing," where self-pleasuring can be equated as a form of self-nourishment."[33] The title of the work, cornucopia, which means nourishment and abundance, also emphasizes these ideas. Incidentally, Horn seems to have excelled at visually replicating the latter meaning of cornucopia, an ornamental container shaped like a goat's horn. Many iconic female figures have replicated the pointed cone bra, ranging from Marilyn Monroe to Madonna, to symbolize female empowerment and defiance. From a disability studies position, the horn can also allude to medical equipment, which likely inspired Horn during her hospital stay, more specifically for this piece the breathing tubes that disabled, sick, and immunocompromised individuals use. In some cases, breathing tubes are connected to ventilators to keep persons alive beyond the hospital setting, such as for disabled activist and writer Alice Wong.[34] If the tube is a means to survival for a disabled person, then it is not a blockage but a type of umbilical cord, providing a vital connection to radical self-care and survival. Here, like breast-feeding and the act of nursing itself, Horn's cornucopia prosthesis feeds the body in many physical, social, emotional, and sexual ways.

For our current generation of disabled artists, Horn has provided an important template and choreography for bodily experimentation as it engages infirmity. This includes Yo-Yo Lin and Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen, both artists the focus of this continued discussion because of the



Fig. 5. Yo-Yo Lin, *The Walls of My Room Are Curved* (2019), courtesy of artist Yo-Yo Lin. Photo by Steve Dabal.



Fig. 6. Yo-Yo Lin, *The Walls of My Room Are Curved* (2019), courtesy of artist Yo-Yo Lin. Photo by Steve Dabal.

many connections their pieces have with Horn's reflecting the genre of performance, and because each artist powerfully explores themes of movement and restriction, the body's limits and possibilities, debilities and pliability. Other potential artists include Shawanda Corbett (b. 1989), Carmen Papalia, and those mentioned so far, Abareshi and Darling. Like Horn, each of these artists have devised idiosyncratic prostheses ranging from the comical to the formal, the antagonistic to the performative, as vehicles to explore spatial and psychosocial identity as it rubs up against metaphoric and literal limbs, wounds, and scars. In innumerable ways that share much in common with these disabled artist contemporaries, Horn's work ducks and weaves across humor, antagonism, supercrip narrative, sexuality, and pathos.

Currently based in Taipei, Lin, an interdisciplinary new media artist, uses animation, projection, movement, and performance to document and creatively engage with her chronic illness experience. Lin has been researching and developing these artistic methodologies to process and reclaim her chronic health trauma, building a space around the generative nature of chronic illness and disability, and facing an *invisible* disability regarding the way she experiences reality, which is not often recognized by society at large. Of particular focus is Lin's movement-based work, specifically *The Walls of My Room Are Curved*, performed in collaboration with Despina (a Brooklyn-based producer, DJ, and composer) at Gibney Dance in New York for forty-minutes on December 13, 2019; and the one-hour performance *channels*, in collaboration with Despina and Pelenakeke Brown (b. 1988), commissioned by The Shed in New York, and performed on July 8 and 9, 2020.

In *The Walls of My Room Are Curved* (Figs. 5–6), Lin attaches numerous sonic devices to her body as it moves to capture the sounds that her body makes in space. Living with a



Fig. 7. Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen, *Am I Your Inspiration, Really?* (2021), photograph and performance costume: empathy objects–series, recycled textiles, garden chair, wheelchair wheels, hand embroidery and honeycomb pleating, 27 1/2" x 27 1/2" x 51 1/8". Dress, photo, and copyright: Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen. Modelling: Counsellor of Social Welfare Sari Loijas with her guide dog, Citta.

connective tissue disorder, the microphones that have been taped and wired to Lin's small frame pick up the creaks, crackles, and crunches as her bones and joints shift, extend, and rotate. Joining Lin in this performance was her collaborator, Despina, an electronic musician who used Lin's body sounds as an impetus to synthesize new beats into a musical score in real time.[35] On Lin's artist website, it states:

> This generative feedback loop of dance creating music/ music creating dance blurs the lines between body and musical instrument, organic and synthetic, human and device. 'The walls of my room are curved' is an invocation to listen deeply to the body, a challenge to crip the cyborg figure, and a meditation on the promise (and process) for interdependence.[36]

These themes productively link to the works by Horn discussed in the previous section, where the artist's intermingling with her prosthetic creations equally provokes theorizing around the cyborg, intersubjectivity, and relations with the self and others, how the body can be constrained and full of possibility at once. Lin's very clever prosthetic devices for amplifying her body through sound can also be equated to the way Horn also literally elongates her own sensorial capacities, be it through red-bandaged pillars, extra-long fingers, or horned breasts. Horn's *Measure Box* shares similar attributes to Lin's curved room, where both are private dwellings offering new spatial orientations and disorientations during periods of isolation, frustration, and eventually, regeneration. Horn's box and Lin's room share uncanny psycho-geographic properties that truly convey not only how Horn's work can be productively theorized in a disability aesthetics framework, but how she provides a clear prototype for a new generation of sick and immunocompromised artists.

Lin's *channels* (Pl. 2–3) was similarly executed to *The Walls of My Room Are Curved*, although in this iteration of her performance, she worked with more collaborators, including interdisciplinary artist Brown, who is based in New Zealand and participated in the performance virtually.[37] As the performance's name implies, *channels* (split into three thematic circuits) attempted to explore the many sensory circuits and pathways of Lin's body, which includes both physical and metaphysical interconnecting webs of information.[38] While Lin amplified the crunchy noises of her bodily tissues, as she did in *The Walls of My Room Are Curved*, she also wove into the piece other embodied performers to illustrate the body's interdependent relationships of caring from the perspective of someone with an immuno-compromised health condition.[39] An important, overarching concept of this performance was Lin's focus on *qi* (chi), a term from Eastern and Chinese medicine and philosophy referring to the circulating life force. Once again, Despina turned Lin's embodied sounds into a generative and experimental soundscape. Lin used her body as an instrument in much the same way that Horn wielded her prosthetic armature; another generative comparison was how both wanted to make visible the seemingly invisible nature of their illnesses, the pain and slow process of healing and recovery. Like Horn, whose completed sketches during her stay in hospital provided much information and content for her sculptures, Lin has kept a *Pain Resilience Journal* since 2019 that documents and archives all her soft data.[40] Throughout each year, the artist will record seven different dimensions of her illness every day, which includes feeling chronic pain, logistical problems (for example, when she must ask for

help), body image, social pressures, doctor visits (inclusive of at-home care), future visions, and past memories. The journal was an opportunity for the artist to think about how better to put language to her chronic illness experience that wasn't coming from a medicalized perspective. For *channels*, Lin also performed inside a transparent cube-like structure on the main stage made up of sheer curtains that illuminated the artist at play inside, whilst colorful projections of neon squiggles, lines, and circles animated the walls with spontaneous and interpretive movement.

Wallinheimo-Heimonen is a Finnish artist and activist with an interdisciplinary art practice primarily focused on disability rights and disability justice. Born with osteogenesis imperfecta (a genetic bone disorder also known as brittle bone disease), she is also interested in violence wrought against women and disabled people, especially when care is turned into acts of discrimination. Her work has recently come to greater prominence as it was displayed in the Finnish Pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale in Italy in 2024, featured in the project *The Pleasures We Choose*, where an artist with a disability was represented in a national pavilion for one of the first times ever at this prestigious international art exhibition.[41]

In her 2020 performance, *Form* (Pl. 4), Wallinheimo-Heimonen created a long banner-like dress of repeating, government paper forms that she loosely wrapped around her body like a billowing scarf.[42] The document is the EV256 distributed by the Finnish National Pension Fund named KELA, and every few years, disabled Finnish citizens must fill it out by answering open-ended questions about their impairments to qualify for the pension. In a statement on her website, Wallinheimo-Heimonen writes:

> PWDs [People With Disabilities] have to sell their privacy to get money and services. Instead of recognizing strengths and abilities … society is teaching us to define our precious bodies as a list of faults. Our benefit system is symptom-centric. It doesn´t focus on structural barriers that threaten people's dreams and well-being. Forms can even be harmful because such a negative way of defining oneself affects the self-image and can make PWD more vulnerable to ill-treatment and abuse.[43]

In the stills from *Form*, Wallinheimo-Heimonen looks as though she is tossing the papers through the air with one hand whilst leaning on her black crutch in the other image. The fanning ribbon across her body does similar work to Horn's bandages, which constrain, bind, and liberate in one swoop. Scholar Jos Boys, who trained as an architect and works in feminist, disability and community-based practice, calls the artist's action a refusal to answer questions that only perceive the disabled body as "a malfunctioning deviation from the norm, [which] only deserves basic functional support."[44] Wallinheimo-Heimonen's rejection and critique of simplistic and degrading categorizations have been treated with wit, irony, and playful humor, where the apparatus of the government becomes the material with which to file scathing artistic critique. This is once more akin to Horn's own work where her bandages evoke emotive memories from periods of isolation and loneliness, which the artist was keen to reject, given the lack of agency and control she had over her environment and her body.

In *Am I Your Inspiration, Really?* (2022; Pl. 5 and Fig. 7), Wallinheimo-Heimonen alludes to a common ire for the disabled community—the tendency for non-disabled people to treat disabled people as overly sentimental inspirations, a.k.a. "inspiration porn." The late, Australian disabled activist, Stella Young, is an idol for Wallinheimo-Heimonen, as Young tirelessly advocated against inspiration porn and famously gave a TED Talk about the dangers of it.[45] Young also had osteogenesis imperfecta like Wallinheimo-Heimonen. In her piece, we see the torso of a standing, tall white woman, with a big smile and short blonde bob, wearing an ornate floor-length white dress encased inside a wheelchair.[46] The woman does not sit, but stands, so her legs look as though they have busted through the seat of the wheelchair. The wheelchair seat cushion encircles her waist; the wheels rest against each side of her body; and her back rubs up against the wheelchair's back and headrest. Wallinheimo-Heimonen selected Sari Loijas to be her model for this work. Loijas has low vision and is accompanied by her guide dog, Citta, in part of the performance (she also works as a counsellor of social welfare). By donning an evening gown with the wheelchair, the artist comments about how disability ought to be integrated into fashion and considered part of the literal fabric of our culture. Wallinheimo-Heimonen asks, "Why [can't] the most common symbol of ours—the wheelchair—[…] be part of an evening gown for walking people as well?"[47] Further, the wearable sculpture is a statement about access and lack of access, how the wheelchair is still considered an anomaly, and how it is a prosthesis that marks the user as atypical who must function in a society that wasn't architecturally built for the wheelchair's use. Horn used the wheelchair in various ways throughout her body of work, particularly characters in her films that were wheelchair users. The wheelchair was an important prosthetic device that impacted Horn's development of her own prosthetic creations, given the regular contact she likely had with them in the hospital and the sanatorium. Like Horn's hybrid experiments, where the female figure came into contact with cockfeathers, fans, and corporal extensions of all kinds, in this work, Wallinheimo-Heimonen, too, has provided us with an unusual configuration for a wheelchair and its unlikely user to give voice to a prosthetic aesthetic within a framework of disability justice and disability activism.

This essay argued that Rebecca Horn's early work, conceived during her time grappling with a serious lung infection in hospital and then sanatorium—her lived experience—had monumental impact on her art practice that must move beyond simple acknowledgement for her larger career. Her work must be analyzed and discussed within a disability studies framework, pushing beyond art historical discourse in Surrealism, performance, body art, and even feminist art. Horn's lived experience as a sick person is an

important and vital part of the work of disability studies, and, therefore, this part of Horn's experience and how it impacted the aesthetics and the development of her praxis must be taken into consideration. The title of this essay—"a firm infirmity"—thus alludes to the thinking about Horn's illness that is required in application to her art, in much richer, deeper, and more meaningful ways, that can help all of us gain even more understanding and perspectives on her practice. Horn's remarkable prosthetic aesthetics is inextricably entwined with disability aesthetics and hospital aesthetics, all of which emanated from primitive drawings in a sketchbook as she lay isolated in a hospital bed. Further, her work has discernable connections to younger generations of disabled, sick, and immunocompromised artists like Lin and Wallinheimo-Heimonen. Examining the incredible similarities across each of their practices has proved enlightening because it further reinforces how Horn's work is much more akin to disability aesthetics than we may have initially realized. As art history begins to reconcile with disability studies and how it can—and must—be integrated into its hallowed halls, the analyses presented in this essay demonstrate how a generative discourse can play out when these two fields are productively braided together. •

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Notes

My sincere thanks to Jana Baumann, senior curator at Haus der Kunst, Munich, for inviting me to participate in the symposium, "Rebecca Horn: Bodies in Motion," held at the museum on Oct. 12, 2024, which became the impetus for this article.

1. The retrospective exhibition, *Rebecca Horn,* curated by Jana Baumann with Radia Soukni, was organized at Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany, April 16–Oct. 13, 2024, https://www.hausderkunst.de/en/eintauchen/rebecca-horn. See Baumann, *Rebecca Horn* (Haus der Kunst; Spector Books, 2024).
2. For example, see Rebecca Horn with Germano Celant, "The Bastille Interviews I: Paris 1993," in *Rebecca Horn* (Guggenheim Museum and Rizzoli, 1993), 14–22, to accompany the Guggenheim's *Rebecca Horn: The Inferno–Paradise Switch* of the same year.
3. Amanda Cachia, *Hospital Aesthetics: Disability, Medicine, Activism* (Manchester University Press, 2025).
4. Sara Hendren, danilo machado, Jasbir K. Puar, and Emily Watlington, "Impairment as Impetus: Five Historic Works Spurred by Disability," *Art in America*, October 12, 2022, https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/five-artists-disability-art-1234642880/.
5. As a disabled art historian and curator, I have long been interested in digging more deeply into Horn's oeuvre precisely to assign new language to her work that resonates with disability studies scholarship.
6. Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York University Press, 2006).
7. Amanda Cachia, "The (Narrative) Prosthesis Re-Fitted: Finding New Support for Embodied and Imaginative Differences in Contemporary Art," *The Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* 9, no. 3 (October 2015): 247–64; and Cachia, "The (Narrative) Prosthesis Re-Fitted: Finding New Support for Embodied and Imaginative Differences in Contemporary Art," in *Contemporary Art and Disability Studies*, ed. Alice Wexler and John Derby (Routledge, 2019), 101–114.
8. Vivian Sobchack, "A Leg to Stand On: Prosthetics, Metaphor, and Materiality," in *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future* (MIT Press, 2006), 17–41.
9. Amanda Cachia, "Disabling Surrealism: Reconstituting Surrealist Tropes in Contemporary Art," in *Disability and Art History*, ed. Ann Millett-Gallant and Elizabeth Howie (Routledge, 2016), 132–54.
10. S. Kay Toombs, "The Lived Experience of Disability," *Human Studies* 18, no. 1 (1995): 9–23.
11. In addition to the Guggenheim's 1993 exhibition catalogue on Horn, see *Rebecca Horn: Drawings, Sculptures, Installations, Films 1964–2006*, organized by the Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, with essays by Armin Zweite, Katharina Schmidt, and Doris von Drathen (Hatje Cantz, 2006).
12. Diana Bularca, "Rebecca Horn: Devising Intersubjective Connections," *World Art* 9, no. 3 (2019): 329–49, https://doi.org/10.1080/21500894.2019.1637639.
13. Bularca.
14. Bularca.
15. Bularca.
16. Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander, "Introduction: Disability Studies in Commotion with Performance Studies," in *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, ed. Sandahl and Auslander (University of Michigan Press, 2005), 2.
17. Sandahl and Auslander. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Anchor Press, 1959); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 2006).
18. Christine Kelly, "Building Bridges with Accessible Care: Disability Studies, Feminist Care Scholarship, and Beyond," *Hypatia* 28, no. 4 (Fall 2013), 784–800.
19. See Petra Kuppers, "Bodies, Hysteria, Pain: Staging the Invisible," in *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, 147–62.
20. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Dares to Stares: Disabled Women Performance Artists and the Dynamics of Staring," in *Bodies in Commotion*, 30–41.
21. Garland-Thomson.
22. Garland-Thomson.
23. Horn could easily appear across all these chapters in my *Hospital Aesthetics: Disability, Medicine, Activism*.
24. Katharina Schmidt, "Rebecca Horn: Drawings from 1964 to 2004," in *Rebecca Horn: Drawings, Sculptures, Installations, Films 1964–2006*, 50.
25. Fondation Le Cobusier, *Le Modulor* and *Modulor 2* (Birkhäuser, 2000), https://doi.org/10.1515/9783035604092.
26. Katharina Schmidt, "A Different World," in *Rebecca Horn* (Inferno-Paradise Switch), 45–62.
27. Schmidt.
28. Giuliana Bruno, "Interiors: Anatomies of the Bride Machine," in *Rebecca Horn* (Inferno-Paradise Switch), 78–95.
29. Bruno.

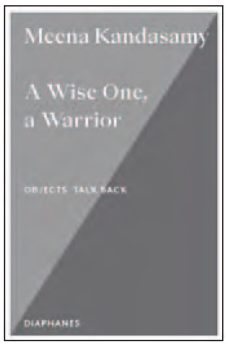
30. Cachia, *Hospital Aesthetics: Disability, Medicine, Activism*.
31. Nancy Spector, "Neither Bachelors Nor Brides: The Hybrid Machines of Rebecca Horn," in *Rebecca Horn* (The Inferno-Paradise Switch), 59.
32. Spector.
33. Bularca, "Rebecca Horn: Devising Intersubjective Connections."
34. Alice Wong, "I'm disabled and I need a ventilator to live. Am I expendable during this pandemic?," Vox, April 4, 2020, https://www.vox.com/first-person/2020/4/4/21204261/coronavirus-covid-19-disabled-people-disabilities-triage.
35. Yo-Yo Lin artist website, https://www.yoyolin.com/the-walls-of-my-room-are-curved.
36. Lin.
37. Pelenakeke Brown artist website, https://www.kekebrown.com/.
38. On Lin's *channels*, see https://www.yoyolin.com/channels. For more information at The Shed, see https://www.theshed.org/program/189-open-call-yo-yo-lin%20Accessed%20November%2011.
39. Lin.
40. On Lin's resilience journals, see https://www.yoyolin.com/resiliencejournal.
41. In 2011, the Irish Pavilion was represented by Irish artist Corban Walker. Walker has achondroplasia, the most common form of dwarfism.
42. Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen artist website, https://www.jenni-juulia.com/form-lomake/index.html.
43. Wallinheimo-Heimonen.
44. Jos Boys, "Disrupting the Gallery," in *The Pleasures We Choose*, catalogue to accompany the Pavilion of Finland at the 60th Venice Biennale, Italy, April 20–Nov. 24, 2024, curated and edited by Yvonne Billimore and Jussi Koitela, with Pia Lindman, Vidha Saumya, and Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen, 69.
45. Stella Young, "I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much," TEDxSydney, April 2014, https://www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much?subtitle=en.
46. Wallinheimo-Heimonen, https://www.jenni-juulia.com/am-i-your-inspiration-really/index.html.
47. Wallinheimo-Heimonen.

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"The penalty of my 'woman's work'"

Euphrosyne Stillman and the Bayard Memorial Commission

By Johanna Amos

Amid the debates surrounding public commemorative sculpture that marked the early part of this decade, the British academic and journalist Gary Younge made a persuasive argument for the removal of all statues of the kind depicting individual people. He suggests that monuments "are poor as works of public art and poor as efforts at memorialization," depicting, as they frequently do, figures whose achievements are largely forgotten a few generations after a work's completion.[1] Thomas Francis Bayard (1828–1898), a former state senator of Delaware and the subject of the Bayard Memorial (Pl. 6; Figs. 1–2), dedicated June 22, 1907 near the soon-to-be-established Delaware Art Museum in Wilmington, Delaware, would, according to accounts, have tended to agree. When a commemorative gesture was first proposed following Bayard's death in 1898, his widow "hoped that the Memorial would not take the form of a statue, as she was sure Mr. Bayard would have liked something of a more useful nature."[2] Younge echoes this sentiment, arguing that commemorative monuments of historical figures do not actually help us remember the words and deeds of those rendered in metal or stone; rather, they are often overlooked and remain unvisited.[3] Anecdotally, at least, this holds true. When visited today, it is rare to find more than one guest in the vicinity of the Bayard Memorial. And the sculpture's location in Rockwood Park, ringed by a parkway, is not conducive to visitors or even to an awareness of the sculpture's existence. Unlike other memorial sculptures near museums, it is not positioned close to the museum entrance. It attracts no particular reverence and appears more an afterthought in the city's current landscape.

Those who coordinated the sculpture's creation conceived of it differently. They saw it not only as a monument to Bayard and the respect he had come to command through a life of public service—as a United States senator, secretary of state, and the first US ambassador to Great Britain—but also as a reminder of the qualities integral to citizens of a "great nation."[4] As J. Harvey Whiteman, the president of the work's commissioning organization explained in his remarks at the sculpture's unveiling,

> As this statue shall stand in the years to come, so may its presence recall to each succeeding generation the indefatigable efforts of Thomas Francis Bayard, […] and may the contemplation of this incorruptible patriot in his earnestness of endeavor and simplicity of character be a lesson and an inspiration to all, drawing men continually together as members of a common country and teaching us all to take a higher and more ennobling view of our duties as citizens.[5]

Former President Grover Cleveland, under whom Bayard served as secretary of state and ambassador to Great Britain, similarly felt the work was a tribute to Bayard's character and an example to the American populace; however, he also noted the monument's role as observer. From its elevated vantage point in Rockwood Park, the Bayard Memorial would, according to Cleveland, oversee the nation and act as a safeguard against political immorality: "What we do here is not for the dead, nor is it for ourselves alone. We reveal to sight a witness which as long as our nation lives shall testify to American citizenship everywhere of lofty patriotism, of civic righteousness, of unselfish endeavour and of knightly courage."[6] Monuments, of course, have no such power, and the stated promise of Bayard's memorial has largely been lost. Unvisited and uninspiring, the life of the sculpture might seem to end here—another historical footnote and proof that Bayard himself was right not to want such a permanent and physical marker of his legacy.

However, a collection of letters exchanged between the sculpture's creator, the British-American artist Euphrosyne ("Effie") Stillman (1872–1911), and Samuel Bancroft, Jr. (1840–1915), a prominent Delaware art collector and member of the Bayard Memorial Association, the organization that



Fig. 1. Euphrosyne ("Effie") Stillman, *Thomas Francis Bayard* (dedicated June 22, 1907), bronze, granite pedestal, and exedra. Rockwood Park, Wilmington, Delaware. Photograph: Johanna Amos.

coordinated the monument's commission, offers an alternative means of thinking through the sculpture's presence. The correspondence details a multi-year struggle between Stillman, whose design for the statue was selected in a semi-blind competition in the early months of 1900, and the Memorial Association and its committee of artistic experts in her bid to bring the work to eventual fruition in 1907. While little has been written about the sculpture or Stillman's artistic career more broadly, the few existing references to the memorial point to financial concerns as the major impediment in realizing the sculpture.[7] The accounts of the association confirm that money posed a problem for the committee and indicate that the majority of fundraising for the sculpture was accomplished in the months leading up to the work's unveiling.[8] However, the letters between Bancroft and Stillman point to another possible reason for the committee's delay—Stillman's identity as a young woman. Thus, rather than analyze the work by focusing on whom it portrays, this article considers what it marks through its creation, namely, the persistence and ambition of its maker.

The challenges faced by women who pursued success in the visual arts in the nineteenth century have now been well documented. Since Linda Nochlin's groundbreaking essay on women artists published in 1971, research that not only recuperates creators long overlooked by virtue of their gender, but which also examines the conditions under which they produced—or failed to—has flourished.[9] Through such



Fig. 2. Photograph of a bronze replica of the Bayard Memorial by Euphrosyne Stillman (c. 1906). Box 16, folder 27, Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Pre-Raphaelite Manuscript Collection, Helen Farr Sloan Library & Archives, Delaware Art Museum.



Fig. 3. Eveleen Myers, *Effie Stillman* (1890s), platinum print, 11 1/4" x 9 1/4". © National Portrait Gallery, London.

work, the tremendous creative output for which women were responsible in the nineteenth century has become apparent, as have the circumstances that prevented them from achieving the highest levels of success in the fine arts and, in particular, the difficulties women encountered accessing formal academic artistic training and obtaining membership in professional artistic societies. However, as recent scholarship by Pauline Rose and Shannon Hunter Hurtado has shown, the majority of this recovery work has focused on female painters.[10] Women sculptors, they suggest, faced similar challenges to those who primarily employed the brush, but they also confronted hurdles peculiar to their medium, including questions regarding their potential to physically complete large-scale work in metal or stone and lack of professional exposure, given the general preference for painting over sculpture in both exhibition venues and the art press.[11] Considering the work of Stillman and her ambition to complete the memorial, then, helps to complicate our understanding of nineteenth-century British female artistic experience. Through her exchanges with Bancroft, Stillman highlights how the process of creating the Bayard Memorial required her to challenge gendered expectations for female sculptors, navigate a precarious financial landscape, and cultivate and leverage alternative networks to those typically employed by her male peers. Through this lens, the memorial can be seen as a testament, a witness, not to American patriotism, but to women artists' perseverance to make a mark on the world and be taken seriously as masters (or mistresses) of their craft.

Like many nineteenth-century women practising in the visual arts, Stillman (Fig. 3) came of age in an artistic household, supported in her pursuit of the profession by her family. Her mother, Marie Spartali Stillman (1844–1927), was a celebrated Pre-Raphaelite painter and model; her father, William James Stillman, a journalist, writer, and photographer; her half-sister, Lisa, the daughter of W. J. Stillman and his first wife, Laura Mack, worked primarily in portraiture; and her brother, Michael, became an architect with McKim, Mead, and White in New York. Stillman initially learned to paint and draw from the Pre-Raphaelite artist and dealer Charles Fairfax Murray but later took up sculpture, studying under French sculptor Charles Desvergnes in Rome and French artist Alphonse Legros at the Slade School in London.[12] By 1890 she was working formally as a sculptor, specializing in small-scale work—portrait medallions and statuettes—and exhibiting regularly at the New Gallery in London from 1892.[13]

Stillman was living and working in London when Bayard was appointed as the first US ambassador to Great Britain in 1893 and came to know Bayard and his wife before they returned to Delaware in 1897. Towards the end of Bayard's tenure, Stillman worked on a small series of portraits of the ambassador, including a bronze portrait medallion (1897; Fig. 4), a plaster bust (c. 1898; Fig. 5), and a small silver gilt bust (1897), which was the crowning feature on a loving cup presented to Bayard by the Lord Mayor of London upon his retirement. Bayard died in 1898 and, shortly following, a memorial committee was struck in his native state to find a means of honouring the former senator.

Stillman became aware of the plans for a memorial early on through the Wilmington industrialist, Bancroft, a mutual friend, prominent collector of Pre-Raphaelite art—including many works by Stillman's mother—as well as a member of the Bayard Memorial Association. Although Stillman initially resisted the notion of a sculpted memorial, noting the general consensus among those close to the former senator that another form of tribute would be more appropriate, once the form of the memorial was settled, Bancroft encouraged her to submit a design.[14] Certainly, Stillman seems to have greatly admired the senator and had already proven her ability to capture his likeness, albeit on a more intimate scale; however, Bancroft's invitation may have also stemmed from the

particular interest he took in the careers of young women artists.[15] As curator Margaretta S. Frederick writes of the collector, "Bancroft showed a particular affinity for the work of women artists.... With many he developed a fatherly, mentorlike relationship bearing some resemblance to that of Ruskin and his female protégées."[16] Indeed, Bancroft would become an important ally for Stillman throughout the project, keeping her abreast of the selection committee's progress, the financial status of the project, and acting as intermediary to communicate some of the finer points of Stillman's design and suitability for the commission to the other members of the committee.

The Bayard Memorial Association began accepting design proposals for the project during the autumn of 1899, and received twelve submissions in addition to Stillman's, including several from celebrated American sculptors.[17] Nevertheless, when the association's committee of experts, which included the sculptor Charles Grafly, architect Frank Miles Day, and painters Howard Pyle and Clawson S. Hammitt, met in early 1900, they determined Stillman's model to be the most promising. As Bancroft enthusiastically reported to Stillman, "The Committee of Experts appointed to decide on the merits of the various designs for the Bayard Memorial, unanimously were of the opinion that yours was best and most artistic,– so far as the figure is concerned, – and that there was scarcely a second!"[18] At this point, Stillman's work was ranked first on a shortlist of three, with the ten other works eliminated from the competition.[19] According to Bancroft, the second-place work was selected for its architectural merits, and there was some discussion among the association about whether the architects for the exedra of the second-ranked work might agree to work with Stillman, replacing the figure proposed in their design with her own.[20] Bancroft further relates that the architect Day found Stillman's design "the most artistic of the whole."[21] However, he also reports that almost immediately upon learning the identity of the young artist, the committee began to raise questions about Stillman's personal circumstances and qualifications. Grafly, for instance, "asked if you could carry out your design as well as you began; and asked me a good deal as to your personal equation."[22] It was suggested that Stillman submit a slightly larger statuette of her design, taking into account some of the group's critiques of the work, before the committee finalized its decision. According to Bancroft, the "general query" among the entire board of the association was, "'Has she done anything big yet?'"[23]

Prior to the Bayard commission, Stillman specialized in cast medals and statuettes, small-scale works that were fashionable at the end of the nineteenth century, particularly among female artists. Cast medal techniques formed part of the curriculum at the Slade School, which, unlike many art academies of the period, was open to male and female students "on precisely the same terms."[24] Casting was introduced into the curriculum by Legros, who became an instructor at the Slade in 1876; he advocated for a return to the cast medal processes of the Italian Renaissance because they allowed for greater artistic control and emphasized hand-wrought techniques, in contrast to the



Fig. 4. Euphrosyne ("Effie") Stillman, *Thomas F. Bayard* (1897), bronze medallion, 4 1/8". Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Pre-Raphaelite Manuscript Collection, Helen Farr Sloan Library & Archives, Delaware Art Museum. Photograph: Johanna Amos.



Fig. 5. Euphrosyne ("Effie") Stillman (1872–1911), *Bust of Thomas F. Bayard* (c.1898), plaster, 16" × 8 1/2" × 7". Delaware Art Museum, Gift of Thomas and Mona Bayard, 2013.



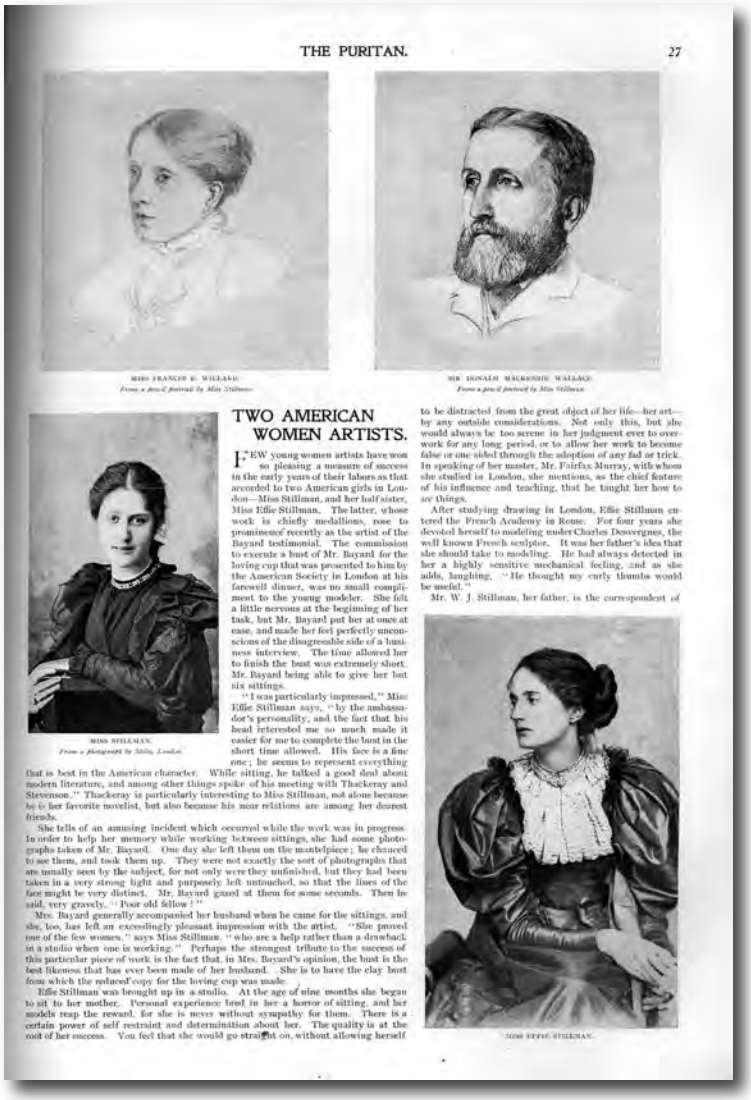
Fig. 6. Anne Whitney, *Charles Sumner* (1900, after an 1875 design, installed 1902), bronze. Harvard Square, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Photograph: Daderot, Wikimedia Commons, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.5 Generic.

mechanised processes used to produce struck medals, which had become more common.[25] A portrait medallion depicting Marie Spartali Stillman (1886; Pl. 7), and made by her cousin, the artist and Pre-Raphaelite model Marie Zambaco (1843–1914), who was also one of Legros's pupils at the Slade, illustrates some of the expressive and sculptural qualities that differentiate the cast medal from its struck counterpart.

The immediacy and scale of the cast medal were also prized qualities of the statuette, a form in which many female sculptors found success precisely because they worked on the small scale. Stillman's intimate plaster portrait of her mother (Pl. 8), for instance, was one of two works she exhibited in Brighton in 1904, which were praised for their fine modelling and as works that "do this clever sculptor the greatest credit."[26] However, while female sculptors often engaged with the trend for statuettes as a consequence of their limited financial means, their male peers tended to participate by scaling down larger commissions to sell as miniature replicas, even though these works were not as formally successful; they had not been designed with the small scale in mind.[27] At exhibition, both medals and statuettes were often classed as decorative arts, alongside jewelry, meaning they were allocated to display spaces in which it was culturally more acceptable to view the work of women, potentially easing tensions around their inclusion.

Nevertheless, memorial statuary and other large-scale public commissions remained the most visible and prized forms of sculpture in the period, and women were often excluded from this work. In part, this exclusion was based on the popular perception of women's physical abilities—because of their generally slighter stature, women were not regarded as capable of completing large sculptural commissions. This was despite the fact that, as Hurtado points out, many nineteenth-century sculptors only worked the model for large-scale projects, while the enlargement into marble or bronze was typically completed by other laborers.[28] Aside from the mistaken impression of women's physical abilities, the unwillingness of commissioning committees to grant large-scale work to women was shaped by social and cultural concerns for their intellectual and moral wellbeing, particularly when such commissions required women artists to work life-size replicas of the male body. This form of hesitation was perhaps most famously documented in the case of the American sculptor Anne Whitney (1821–1915), who won a blind competition to design a likeness of the Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner for a memorial in the Boston Public Garden in 1875. Upon learning the sculptor's identity, however, the memorial committee purportedly backtracked over concern that completing the work would have required Whitney to sculpt a man's legs.[29] As one commentator wrote to the *Woman's Journal* in 1877, "Had she [Whitney] been a man, the great merit of her model would doubtless have settled the question in its favour. The objection was in fact raised that a female artist could not have a chance to become well skilled in the structure of a masculine figure."[30] The commission was subsequently awarded to another sculptor, though a full-scale version of Whitney's design was eventually erected in 1902 (Fig. 6).[31] While the moral panic around Whitney's potential labor might be read as "spurious grounds" on which to gauge women's abilities, it underlines the ways in which middle-class views of female gentility complicated women's entry into the sculptural field in a manner that did not affect their male counterparts and heralds a system of gatekeeping that was used—intentionally or not—to keep women out of the profession's more lauded roles.[32]

There is no overt reference to the Bayard Memorial Association's potential unease around inviting a female sculptor to work the body of a male subject in the correspondence between Bancroft and Stillman; however, the letters do reveal that Stillman's personal familiarity with Bayard and experience bringing forth his form were not readily seen as an advantage. In the early stages of the selection process, Bancroft had prompted Howell S. England, who served as secretary of the Memorial Association, to agree that Stillman's previous portraits of Bayard put her "at a decided advantage over the rest of the competitors as far as likeness goes," but once the competition closed and it became apparent that Stillman was to be awarded the commission, the conversation turned to her qualifications in terms of scale and



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MISS FRANCES E. WILLARD.
From a pencil portrait by Miss Stillman.

SIR DONALD MACKENZIE WALLACE.
From a pencil portrait by Miss Stillman.

TWO AMERICAN WOMEN ARTISTS.

FEW young women artists have won so pleasing a measure of success in the early years of their labors as that accorded to two American girls in London—Miss Stillman, and her half sister, Miss Effie Stillman. The latter, whose work is chiefly medallions, rose to prominence recently as the artist of the Bayard testimonial. The commission to execute a bust of Mr. Bayard for the loving cup that was presented to him by the American Society in London at his farewell dinner, was no small compliment to the young modeler. She felt a little nervous at the beginning of her task, but Mr. Bayard put her at once at ease, and made her feel perfectly unconscious of the disagreeable side of a business interview. The time allowed her to finish the bust was extremely short. Mr. Bayard being able to give her but six sittings.

"I was particularly impressed," Miss Effie Stillman says, "by the ambassador's personality, and the fact that his head interested me so much made it easier for me to complete the bust in the short time allowed. His face is a fine one; he seems to represent everything that is best in the American character. While sitting, he talked a good deal about modern literature, and among other things spoke of his meeting with Thackeray and Stevenson." Thackeray is particularly interesting to Miss Stillman, not alone because he is her favorite novelist, but also because his near relations are among her dearest friends.

She tells of an amusing incident which occurred while the work was in progress. In order to help her memory while working between sittings, she had some photographs taken of Mr. Bayard. One day she left them on the mantelpiece; he chanced to see them, and took them up. They were not exactly the sort of photographs that are usually seen by the subject, for not only were they unfinished, but they had been taken in a very strong light and purposely left untouched, so that the lines of the face might be very distinct. Mr. Bayard gazed at them for some seconds. Then he said, very gravely, "Poor old fellow!"

Mrs. Bayard generally accompanied her husband when he came for the sittings, and she, too, has left an exceedingly pleasant impression with the artist. "She proved one of the few women," says Miss Stillman, "who are a help rather than a drawback in a studio when one is working." Perhaps the strongest tribute to the success of this particular piece of work is the fact that, in Mrs. Bayard's opinion, the bust is the best likeness that has ever been made of her husband. She is to have the clay bust from which the reduced copy for the loving cup was made.

Effie Stillman was brought up in a studio. At the age of nine months she began to sit to her mother. Personal experience bred in her a horror of sitting, and her models reap the reward, for she is never without sympathy for them. There is a certain power of self restraint and determination about her. The quality is at the root of her success. You feel that she would go straight on, without allowing herself to be distracted from the great object of her life—her art—by any outside considerations. Not only this, but she would always be too serene in her judgment ever to overwork for any long period, or to allow her work to become false or one sided through the adoption of any fad or trick. In speaking of her master, Mr. Fairfax Murray, with whom she studied in London, she mentions, as the chief feature of his influence and teaching, that he taught her how to see things.

After studying drawing in London, Effie Stillman entered the French Academy in Rome. For four years she devoted herself to modeling under Charles Desvergnes, the well known French sculptor. It was her father's idea that she should take to modeling. He had always detected in her a highly sensitive mechanical feeling, and as she adds, laughing, "He thought my curly thumbs would be useful."

Mr. W. J. Stillman, her father, is the correspondent of

MISS STILLMAN.
From a photograph by Stillie, London.

MISS EFFIE STILLMAN.

Fig. 7. Kathleen Waldron, "Two American Women Artists," *The Puritan: A Journal for* Gentlewomen 2, no. 1 (October 1897). Image courtesy of the Northern Regional Library Facility, University of California, Berkeley.

reputation, suggesting that the committee's perceptions of women's abilities were indeed a factor in the selection process.[33] This situation again parallels the circumstances surrounding Whitney's failure to gain the Sumner commission. As the art historian Elaine Tufts notes, "Although Whitney's model received the most votes, Charles Slack, secretary of the committee, later admitted in a letter to her [Whitney] that once it became known that the winning model was by a comparatively inexperienced sculptor, the committee feared the possibility of failure."[34]

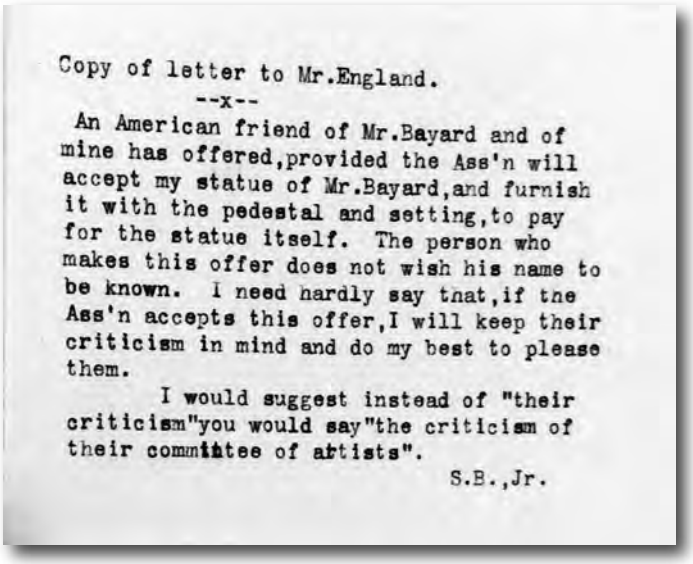
Stillman did attempt to defend her qualifications and abilities to the association, noting that although she had not "done anything over life-size, or as important" as the Bayard Memorial, she had completed a few significant works of the type, including "a marble memorial tablet for the Calentha Cathedral, and a life-size, half length, low relief portrait in bronze for Bath College"[35]—as well as the bust of Bayard which had originally drawn Bancroft's eye during a studio visit two years prior, and which Bayard's own wife had deemed "the best likeness that has ever been made of her husband."[36] Nevertheless, a remedy to reassure the committee was sought, and Stillman complied with the association's request to produce a slightly larger maquette of her design. However, she did so reluctantly, noting to Bancroft that such a task would be a waste of both "time and money."[37]

Stillman's second, enlarged, and slightly modified model was ready to be presented to the association in January of the following year; however, due to scheduling difficulties, it was not shown until April when the members convened to assess the work. The committee's decision is missing from the correspondence, but the results are alluded to in a May 23, 1901 letter from Bancroft to Marie Spartali Stillman: "I wish I could have sent better news to Effie, but I know that she will rise superior to all obstacles, and will make a success of the Bayard yet. I hope she will write me at once saying that she is going at it again!"[38] It seems that, once again, the association did not outright reject Stillman's design, but rather requested a further model with some modifications to the figure's stance: "See if you can make him stand straight (!)."[39] Bancroft's other correspondence during this period indicates that fundraising for the memorial also remained an issue: "The subscription lags."[40] However, Stillman's own assessment of the situation suggests the association's hesitations lay elsewhere:

> It is impossible for me to do the model over again without any guarantee that I should be better off when it was finished than before. I have already spent more time and money than my career and my purse can afford. I have done this with my eyes open, because I was ready to risk a good deal in order to be able to express what I feel for one of the noblest natures I have come across. It is not usual, at any rate over here, when an artist has been invited to compete, and his design has been accepted in the competition, for him to have to send in a larger model before the work is finally accepted. But this I realized was the penalty of my "woman's work," which is always being thrown at our heads.[41]

Stillman thus suggests that the association's minor quibbles over aspects of the design are a subtle and superficial means to address the broader perception that female sculptors were not capable—whether physically, intellectually, or artistically—of completing significant commissions on a grand scale.

Stillman's situation also illustrates the precarious position placed on women seeking prestigious commissions. In the May 1901 letter outlining her frustrations with the association's request for a third model, Stillman alludes to the strain the project has put on her career, both in terms of her



Copy of letter to Mr.England.
--x--
An American friend of Mr.Bayard and of mine has offered,provided the Ass'n will accept my statue of Mr.Bayard,and furnish it with the pedestal and setting,to pay for the statue itself. The person who makes this offer does not wish his name to be known. I need hardly say that,if the Ass'n accepts this offer,I will keep their criticism in mind and do my best to please them.
I would suggest instead of "their criticism"you would say"the criticism of their committee of artists".
S.B.,Jr.

Fig. 8. Copy of Euphrosyne Stillman's letter to Howell S. England, outlining Samuel Bancroft's anonymous offer to fund the sculpture, with Bancroft's suggested edits (undated [Sept. 1, 1902]). Box 16, folder 5, Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Pre-Raphaelite Manuscript Collection, Helen Farr Sloan Library & Archives, Delaware Art Museum.

personal finances and time dedicated to the work. Elsewhere in the correspondence she remarks on the impossibilities of finding time to create more generally; in her letters to Bancroft and his wife, she laments the challenge of trying to find time to herself "with friends staying here & people coming and going," and of her desire "to make two days out of one," especially as she juggled entertaining guests, maintaining personal correspondence, and caring for sick family members, and shuttled between family residences in London and Surrey and those of friends and relatives in Boston and New York.[42] Stillman's concerns were common to many women artistically engaged at the end of the nineteenth century, as they attempted to balance a career with familial and social obligations. As Hurtado writes, Britain's female sculptors existed "in a culture that prized female self-effacement"; it was expected that domestic concerns would take precedence over women's own professional aspirations.[43] In Stillman's case, these expectations seem to have limited the extent to which she could fully achieve artistic pursuits—even within an artistic household—and her letters express a desire to use her time pragmatically, on projects that would advance her career. Although prestigious commissions such as the Bayard Memorial had the potential of garnering a sculptor widespread acclaim and recognition, Stillman's letters help to illuminate the paradox women faced: while female sculptors were unlikely to earn major commissions, their time might be more advantageously spent on small-scale works.

Similarly, Stillman's limited financial means seem to have shaped the choices she could make about her practice. As Rose has pointed out, "Sculpture is an expensive practice," requiring not only access to quantities of materials such as marble or bronze, but access to suitable studio spaces that could accommodate large-scale work.[44] By virtue of their gender, female sculptors were less likely to have access to these types of resources. In Stillman's case, the request to produce model upon model for the chance to even be considered for the Bayard commission registered as a strain, as did the expectation to set up a studio space for completion of the work. Indeed, it was not until details of the commission were finalized that Stillman permitted herself to locate and set up a studio space for the "heavy" work of the project.[45] The financial implications of Stillman's particular devotion to the Bayard Memorial were further underscored by her father. In the months before his death from a long illness, W. J. Stillman was ruminating on the precarious financial position in which he was leaving his family, writing to Bancroft, "We are all hoping that the Bayard statue will be accepted otherwise Effie will be financially ruined as she has had no commissions this year."[46]

When Stillman submitted her initial sketch at the end of August 1899, she included a cost estimate for the work at $10,000, a sum which was well within the committee's advertised budget of $15,000.[47] However, in a letter to Bancroft, she privately expressed her trepidation at naming such a price, caught as she was in the paradox of wanting to be paid fairly for her work as a professional artist, but also recognizing how beneficial it might be for her professional career to do the work—even at a reduced price. If proposing to complete the commission for a more modest sum were to make here chances of success in securing the project more likely, Stillman suggested that this might ultimately be worth her while. In relaying her concerns to Bancroft, she invited him to judge the situation accordingly and act as an intermediary if necessary. As she writes,

> I have written to Mr. England giving my estimate as ten thousand dollars. This is what would really pay me, and it is bad for one's work to offer it at too low a price. If the Committee find this too much, I would rather do it at less than not do it at all, & seven thousand dollars would just pay me. That is the price I should have given if left to my own devices. Will you please, if you think well, & if the price is a difficulty, let the Committee known this?[48]

Bancroft was sympathetic: "I note what you say about cost, and will make such use of it as I think will do you the most good at the end."[49] Ultimately, Stillman agreed to complete the work for a fee of £1200—slightly less than the reduced fee of £1400 ($7000) initially discussed with Bancroft, though the association agreed to cover the £200 for a pedestal in addition to the sum paid to Stillman.[50]

Whether the Bayard Memorial would have increased Stillman's artistic reputation and professional profile in America remains unclear. In 1905, she married William Ritchie and, like many nineteenth-century female artists, seems to have struggled to balance the demands of married life and a professional career. She ceased to exhibit publicly following the birth of her first child in 1907.[51] Moreover, children

effectively and finally terminated Stillman's career; she died following complications from tuberculosis and the strained birth of her third child in 1911.[52]

While the networks Stillman developed through family and friends did limit the time she was able to devote to her craft, they were also essential to her development of a professional career—and to the completion of the Bayard Memorial. This is not to suggest that Stillman did not participate in more traditional opportunities for publicizing her abilities. In 1897, for instance, Stillman and her half-sister, Lisa, were featured in the ladies' magazine *The Puritan* (Fig. 7), in a profile that celebrates Stillman's care for her sitters and her ability to set them at ease.[53] Stillman also sought exhibition opportunities, and her work appeared in a handful of notable exhibitions at the turn of the century, including those at London's New Gallery, Liverpool's Walker Art Gallery, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and the Royal Academy.[54] However, as for many female sculptors, her exhibition opportunities would have been limited. As Rose indicates, female sculptors were doubly disadvantaged when it came to exhibiting, partially by virtue of their gender and subsequent lack of professional connections, but also because of the general preference for painting over sculpture at major art exhibitions.[55] Nevertheless, the opportunities in which Stillman participated did not garner the same level of sustained support as that honed through membership in professional societies, and these affiliations were often essential for winning major public commissions.

Indeed, a rather curious entry in Bancroft's correspondence highlights this fact. In an apparently unsolicited letter, William Rudolf O'Donovan, an American sculptor who specialized in the kind of commemorative figurative works the Memorial Association sought to construct, wrote to Bancroft, outlining the criteria he felt the association ought to consider when selecting the artist for Bayard's statue:

> If I want to know the status of a lawyer or doctor or literary man, I make inquiries of their colleagues and my deductions from what I gather. In the matter of the competitors for the Bayard Memorial, such like procedure would of course, be impracticable, but the judges could learn which of the competitors have received recognition from the great body of artists by election to membership in their various societies and this I should think would be found a sure means of arriving at a just conclusion. You know very well, of course, that in many cases men of great popular reputation have little or no standing with the body of artists, and that their work is not the kind that lasts. In the matter of a competition of this kind therefore, it is not only the work of a public nature done by the competitors which should be considered but the recognition it has gained from artists. While it is true that Academies and societies of artists have too often in membership, men of very mediocre ability, it is seldom a man of mature age who has not received such recognition, deserves it.[56]

O'Donovan's letter not only highlights a key assumption about artistic labor in the period—that it was performed by men—it also suggests that alignment with professional artistic societies, the kind from which women were often barred in the nineteenth century, is the best measure of skill.[57] Similarly, he argues that artists of "mature age" are more likely to have the reputation necessary to successfully execute a commemorative project, such as that planned for Bayard. That O'Donovan's perspective echoes the prevailing assumptions of the day is further reflected in the correspondence by Marie Spartali Stillman, and her apparent surprise that her daughter would receive such a prestigious commission. As she confessed to Bancroft,

> It seemed improbable to me, that, with so many American sculptors seeking commissions, that a young lady little known to some should obtain such an interesting monument. In the first instance the names of the aspirants not being known her sketch *might* be the one they preferred, tho' the experts would not continue so unpopular a proceeding as to approve them giving away the commission. From what I have seen of these things both in England and in Italy these matters are managed very much by favor or position and patronage and outsiders have no chance at all.[58]

Stillman herself was not unaware that this was how commissions were won. As she wrote to Bancroft, "I do not much expect to succeed what I think of the many older and more experienced men who will go in for it."[59]

Knowing that admission to major professional societies was largely inaccessible to her, Stillman seems to have cultivated her own network of artists who might speak to the character and artistry of her work—and makes strategic references to these individuals throughout her letters to Bancroft. For instance, following the rejection of the second maquette by the Memorial Association and their committee of experts, Stillman dismisses the evaluating artists' opinions and offers the assessment of gallerist Charles Hallé instead:[60]

> Your experts will say they have been justified in the event … and it is not pure conceit that makes me feel otherwise, but the opinion of all who have seen the model in the studio, who have found it much better than the sketch. Mr Charles Hallé who was with me just after I got your letter and who, as director of one of the biggest London galleries, has some experience in these things, was amazed that anyone should think the sketch the better. May I say, between you and me, that I don't believe your sculptor expert can have studied the matter very profoundly if he finds the construction better in the sketch than in the model, or if he thinks it possible that the execution can be the same in a sketch, a model, or again in a finished statue, which by its very size would be broader in effect![61]

Elsewhere in the correspondence, Stillman indicates that she might appeal to the British artists Onslow Ford, William Blake Richmond, and G. F. Watts to testify to her "capacity for doing the work,"[62] and further proposes enlisting artists apparently outside her network, including Daniel French and Herbert Adams, who "have shown by their criticism that they understand the aims of my work," and the celebrated American sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, "whose work and opinions I care for more than anyone's and whom I think I could get to interest himself in the case."[63] Throughout these conversations, Stillman not only positions herself in proximity to some of the leading *male* British and American artists of the nineteenth century, but also discredits the judgment of the Memorial Association's panel of experts, arguing that their artistic ideals and vision for the project were wholly out of step with the looser arrangement and effect she was attempting to achieve through the work.[64]

She further seems to have cultivated her relationship with Bancroft and his wife with an awareness that he might prove a valuable patron for her work. And so he was. After myriad delays, the matter of the Bayard Memorial was ultimately settled when Bancroft himself offered to pay for the work, provided certain conditions were met. As he wrote to Stillman,

> In your Mother's note of April 15th she asked me about the Bayard Memorial Ass'n; but I have been so disgusted with the whole management of the matter that I haven't cared to write you about it until I had made up my mind as follows. If I remember rightly—you told me that you could make the statue for £1400,—or $7,000.00. Now, if you still are of the same mind, and feel that you can do it justice, you may write to Mr. England, as Sec'y of the Ass'n, that an American friend of yours and of Mr. Bayard, if the Ass'n will accept your statue, and will furnish the pedestal and setting, has offered to furnish the statue to them. He, and they, are not to know who the donor is.[65]

Bancroft's anonymous offer (Fig. 8) was accepted, and Stillman worked on the memorial from 1904 to 1906. The work was finally unveiled at a ceremony on June 22, 1907. Grover Cleveland was scheduled to attend and deliver remarks at the unveiling, but illness prevented him from doing so. However, Bancroft later sent a photograph of the memorial to the ailing former president, who replied, praising the statue: "I feel like congratulating you and all who have taken part in the completion of the memorial, upon the striking likeness which the sculptor has been able to present of our friend."[66]

It is unclear from the correspondence exactly why Bancroft offered to pay for the work. Given that he liked to see himself as a mentor and patron to artists, especially young women, it is possible he felt somewhat responsible for Stillman's precarious financial and professional situation after encouraging her repeatedly to apply for the commission. Alternatively, or perhaps simultaneously, he might have felt ashamed that the fundraising efforts of the association—of which he at one time served as president—had stalled and sensed that Bayard's wife would be slighted if nothing ever came of the committee and its work—regardless of her initial opposition to the statue. Perhaps most intriguingly, it is possible that Bancroft shared Stillman's frustration and outrage with the committee of experts' artistic opinions and the association's hesitancy to grant the commission to a young woman. After all, how could it be that the best design was rejected because of the artist's youth and gender?

Whatever the case, the memorial now stands, albeit awkwardly, in the parkland near the Delaware Art Museum, the current home of Bancroft's impressive Pre-Raphaelite collection. Largely unremarkable in its appearance, it is a likeness of a former statesman not dissimilar to many others. However, given the context of the Bancroft correspondence, the narrative this sculpture tells is not one of a man's political achievements, though that may also be true. Rather, it marks one woman's unfailing dedication to a project she knew she could achieve if only given the opportunity. ●

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Notes

1. Gary Younge, "Why Every Single Statue Should Come Down," *Guardian*, June 1, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/jun/01/gary-younge-why-every-single-statue-should-come-down-rhodes-colston.
2. Euphrosyne Stillman to Samuel Bancroft, Jr., June 10, 1899, box 16, folder 4, Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Pre-Raphaelite Manuscript Collection, Helen Farr Sloan Library & Archives, Delaware Art Museum (hereafter cited as Bancroft MSS).
3. Younge, "Every Single Statue."
4. J. Harvey Whiteman, "Address by Hon. J Harvey Whiteman, President of the Bayard Memorial Association," in *Exercises at the Unveiling of the Memorial Statue to Thomas Francis Bayard* (Mercantile Printing, 1907), 7.
5. Whiteman, 7. While the statue of Bayard has not been a focal point of recent protests, it is likely that some of Bayard's political positions, particularly during the Reconstruction era, would not be regarded favourably today. See "Man of High Ideals," *Boston Daily Globe*, September 29, 1898, 6.
6. Grover Cleveland, "Address of Hon. Grover Cleveland," in *Exercises at the Unveiling of the Memorial Statue to Thomas Francis Bayard*, 17.
7. In his edited volume of the correspondence between Bancroft and artist and dealer Charles Fairfax Murray, for instance, Rowland Elzea notes, "Not all of the relevant correspondence is available, but it seems that the committee had difficulty in fund raising." See Rowland Elzea, ed., *The Correspondence between Samuel Bancroft,*

Jr., and Charles Fairfax Murray, 1892–1916 (Delaware Art Museum, February 1980), 168, n1. For a general overview of Stillman's work, see Philip Attwood, "Effie Stillman: Sculptor and Medallist," *The Medal* 14 (1989): 48–59.

8. Receipts, Expenses and Money On Hand of the Bayard Memorial Association, July 1907, box 62, folder 4, Bayard Family Papers, Delaware Historical Society Research Library and Archives.
9. Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971), in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (Harper & Row, 1988), 145–78. Stillman's mother, the Pre-Raphaelite artist and model Marie Spartali Stillman, is among those who have been selected for further research and celebration and was the focus of a retrospective at the Delaware Art Museum in 2015. See Margaretta S. Frederick and Jan Marsh, *Poetry in Beauty: The Pre-Raphaelite Art of Marie Spartali Stillman* (Delaware Art Museum, 2015).
10. Shannon Hunter Hurtado, *Genteel Mavericks: Professional Women Sculptors in Victorian Britain* (Peter Lang, 2012); and Pauline Rose, *Working Against the Grain: Women Sculptors in Britain, c. 1885–1950* (Liverpool University Press, 2020).
11. Rose, *Working Against the Grain*, 3, 73.
12. Attwood, "Effie Stillman," 49; "Effie (Euphrosyne) Stillman," *Mapping the Practice and Profession of Sculpture in Britain and Ireland 1851–1951*, University of Glasgow History of Art and HATII, 2011, http://sculpture.gla.ac.uk/view/person.php?id=ann_1269557422.
13. Attwood, "Effie Stillman," 51.
14. Bancroft to Stillman, June 13, 1899, box 16, folder 4, Bancroft MSS.
15. Stillman, for instance, wrote to Bancroft, "It will be a great joy to me to have a chance of representing a character which is to me an ideal one." Stillman to Bancroft, June 10, 1899, box 16, folder 4, Bancroft MSS.
16. Margaretta S. Frederick, "Samuel Bancroft: Collector of the Pre-Raphaelites," in *Waking Dreams: The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites from the Delaware Art Museum*, by Stephen Wildman et. al. (Art Services International, 2004), 38.
17. Among those who submitted designs were Louis Amateis and Henry J. Ellicott, known for their work with bronze portrait busts, and John J. Boyle and Frederick Wellington Ruckstuhl, both of whom were admired for their large-scale figurative works. See "Among the Sculptors," *The Monumental News: A Monthly Journal of Monumental Art* 11, no. 10 (October 1899): 574; and "Proposed Monuments," *The Monumental News: A Monthly Journal of Monumental Art* 11, no. 8 (August 1899): 474.
18. Bancroft to Stillman, February 12, 1900, box 16, folder 5, Bancroft MSS.
19. "Among the Sculptors," *The Monumental News: A Monthly Journal of Monumental Art* 12, no. 3 (March 1900): 172.
20. Bancroft to Stillman, February 12, 1900, box 16, folder 5, Bancroft MSS.
21. Bancroft to Stillman.
22. Bancroft to Stillman.
23. Bancroft to Stillman.
24. Charlotte J. Weeks, "Women at Work: The Slade Girls," *Magazine of Art* 6 (1883): 325.
25. Philip Attwood, *Artistic Circles: The Medal in Britain, 1880–1918* (British Museum Press, 1992), 10.
26. "Studio Talk," *The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art* 30 (1904): 255.
27. Rose, *Working Against the Grain*, 99.
28. Hurtado, *Genteel Mavericks*, 75–76. Hurtado further demonstrates how this division of labour was leveraged differently depending on the gender of the maker. Whereas the division was generally perceived as a distinction between intellectual and manual work, women's use of assistants was sometimes attributed to their inabilities to engage in fine physical work.
29. Eleanor Tufts, "An American Victorian Dilemma, 1875: Should a Woman Be Allowed to Sculpt a Man?," *Art Journal* 51, no. 1 (1992): 51.
30. L. Maria Child, "Anne Whitney's Model of Charles Sumner's Statue," *Woman's Journal* 8, no. 18 (May 5, 1877): 137.
31. Thomas Ball's bronze sculpture of Sumner was installed in the Boston Public Garden in 1878.
32. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (I.B. Tauris, 2013), 103.
33. Bancroft to Stillman, August 31, 1899, box 16, folder 4, Bancroft MSS.
34. Tufts, "An American Victorian Dilemma," 52.
35. Stillman to Bancroft, February 12, 1900, box 16, folder 5, Bancroft MSS.
36. Kathleen Waldron, "Two American Women Artists," *The Puritan: A Journal for Gentlewomen* 2, no. 1 (October 1897): 27.
37. Stillman to Bancroft, February 12, 1900, box 16, folder 5, Bancroft MSS.
38. Samuel Bancroft, Jr. to Marie Spartali Stillman, May 23, 1901, box 16, folder 11, Bancroft MSS.
39. Samuel Bancroft, Jr. to Euphrosyne Stillman, July 29, 1902, box 16, folder 12, Bancroft MSS.
40. Samuel Bancroft, Jr. to Charles Fairfax Murray, July 3, 1900, in Elzea, *Correspondence*, 169–70.
41. Stillman to Bancroft, May 31, 1901, box 16, folder 8, Bancroft MSS.
42. Stillman to Bancroft, November 11, 1900, box 16, folder 5, Bancroft MSS; Stillman to Mrs. Bancroft, October 10, 1899, box 16, folder 4, Bancroft MSS.
43. Hurtado, *Genteel Mavericks*, 6.
44. Rose, *Working Against the Grain*, 6.
45. Stillman to Bancroft, December 9, 1903, box 16, folder 13, Bancroft MSS.
46. W. J. Stillman to Samuel Bancroft, Jr., January 31, 1901, box 16, folder 6, Bancroft MSS.
47. Euphrosyne Stillman to Samuel Bancroft, Jr., August 29, 1899, box 16, folder 4, Bancroft MSS; "Proposed Monuments," *The Monumental News: A Monthly Journal of Monumental Art* 11, no. 6 (June 1899): 350.
48. Stillman to Bancroft.
49. Bancroft to Stillman, October 11, 1899, box 16, folder 4, Bancroft MSS.
50. Stillman to Bancroft, October 19, 1902, box 16, folder 13, Bancroft MSS. Interestingly, Stillman agreed to a price in British pounds; when she sold a portrait medallion to Bancroft in 1898, she quoted the price in guineas. See Stillman to Bancroft, August 20, 1898, box 16, folder 3, Bancroft MSS.
51. Attwood, "Effie Stillman," 48.
52. Attwood.
53. Waldron, "Two American Women Artists," 27.
54. See "Effie (Euphrosyne) Stillman," *Mapping the Practice and Profession of Sculpture in Britain and Ireland 1851–1951*; *The New Gallery 1892: A Complete Illustrated Catalogue of the Summer Exhibition; with Notes by Henry Blackburn* (Chatto and Windus, 1892), 5:27; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, *Catalogue of the Seventieth Annual Exhibition, January 14 to February 23, 1901* (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1901), 73.

55. Rose, *Working Against the Grain*, 36–37.
56. William Rudolf O'Donovan to Samuel Bancroft, Jr., December 13, 1899, box 5, folder 40, Bancroft MSS.
57. For instance, women could not be elected to the Royal Academy (founded 1768) or the Royal Society of British Sculptors (founded 1905) until 1922. The Art Workers' Guild (founded 1884) elected its first female member in 1964.
58. Marie Spartali Stillman to Samuel Bancroft, Jr., June 4, 1901, box 16, folder 11, Bancroft MSS.
59. Euphrosyne Stillman to Samuel Bancroft, Jr., August 19, 1899, box 16, folder 4, Bancroft MSS.
60. Charles Edward Hallé cofounded London's New Gallery with J. Comyns Carr in 1888. Like the Grosvenor Gallery, where Hallé and Carr had worked previously, the New Gallery specialized in aesthetic and Pre-Raphaelite art; it also hosted a number of arts and crafts exhibitions.
61. Stillman to Bancroft, May 31, 1901, box 16, folder 8, Bancroft MSS.
62. Stillman to Bancroft, February 12, 1900, box 16, folder 5, Bancroft MSS.
63. Stillman to Bancroft, May 31, 1901, box 16, folder 8, Bancroft MSS. Saint-Gaudens would eventually become involved in the project and linked to the Stillman family. The scheme for the pedestal was shown to Saint-Gaudens by Lisa Stillman on January 14, 1901, during a visit to America, and Michael Stillman later worked with the sculptor.
64. Stillman to Bancroft, May 31, 1901, box 16, folder 8, Bancroft MSS.
65. Bancroft to Stillman, July 29, 1902, box 16, folder 12, Bancroft MSS.
66. Grover Cleveland to Samuel Bancroft, Jr., February 11, 1908, box 62, folder 7, Bayard Family Papers, Delaware Historical Society Research Library and Archives.



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Placing and Spacing Abstraction

The Life and Work of Samia Halaby

By Rachel Winter

In 1999, painter Samia Halaby (b. 1936) traveled to Amman, Jordan, a place she went frequently to visit family and her close friend, Mona Saudi. Halaby documents her memories of that trip in *Evening Sky in Amman*, painted the same year, when she sat in a solarium drinking tea, looking out through the trees to see the lights from the mosque illuminate the "dusk sky" (1999; Pl. 9 and Fig. 1).[1] Halaby translated this experience into a painterly abstraction of sage green, ice blue, periwinkle, pale rose, lilac, and plum, punctuated by bursts of gold. There is no foreground or background, center or periphery. Her painting keenly encapsulates the landscape, a multisensorial reality that distills the impression of lights illuminating the environment and her fleeting experiences.

Evening Sky in Amman exemplifies Halaby's multifaceted career as an abstract painter who renders pictures that directly engage with reality by harnessing the innovative potential of abstraction. This article argues that place impacted Halaby's painterly trajectory, particularly her approaches to developing a new, abstract visual language across her nearly seven-decade career. As Halaby moved around the United States and traveled globally, her visual language continuously evolved in relation to her experiences in new places and her various roles as student, teacher, and artist. Halaby's work sometimes shifted subconsciously in response to her environment. Yet, in hindsight, one can trace an arc from her initial efforts as a student to develop a non-objective abstraction to her later analytical studies of abstraction as an educator, and her ultimate realization that abstract picturing reflects reality, a progression and disposition that took shape across different locations and generated a proliferation of painterly abstractions.

Only within the last decade have scholars and museums more seriously reconsidered the artistic, avant-garde importance of Halaby's practice.[2] This shift in recognition partially began when Halaby joined Ayyam Gallery in 2007, a contemporary art gallery that was established in Syria in 2006, and then realized exhibitions in London, Beirut, and Jeddah, before relocating to its permanent home in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Acknowledgment of Halaby's work accelerated with her retrospective at Ayyam Gallery in Dubai in 2014, arguably the foremost blue-chip gallery in the UAE, accompanied by an impressive monograph written by art historian and curator Maymanah Farhat. In 2017, the group exhibition *1970s: Women and Abstraction*, curated by Barbara Stehle, a historian of architecture and abstraction, at Zürcher Gallery in New York—a city Halaby felt had shunned her—addressed Halaby's importance to abstraction in this decade.[3] Feminist art historian Kathy Battista's recent 2019 book on the legacy of New York feminist art also discusses Halaby's significance during a male-dominated era.[4] In her text on women artists from the Arab world, Nadia Radwan, a preeminent art historian of both abstraction and women artists in the Arab world, cites Halaby alongside Lebanese-American

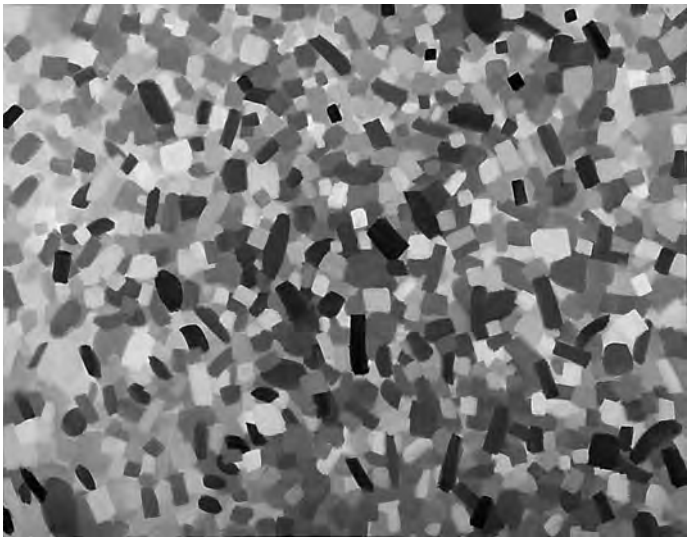


Fig. 1. Samia Halaby, *Evening Sky in Amman* (1999), oil on canvas, 36" x 46". Courtesy of the artist, New York. Photo and © Samia Halaby, New York.

artist and writer Etel Adnan (1925–2021), Egyptian painter Gazbia Sirry (1925–2021), and Jordanian sculptor Mona Saudi (1945–2022), as groundbreaking yet overlooked artists, and in the case of Adnan and Halaby, artists who transformed abstraction.[5] In fall 2023 the Sharjah Art Museum held Halaby's first museum retrospective, which was accompanied by a significant publication. Still, Halaby is excluded from American art history, a field reticent to include Arab diaspora artists in its chronicles of twentieth-century art, while her work likewise sits on the periphery of many Palestinian art histories.

Halaby's itinerant career has been singularly focused on abstraction as the visual language of our time, and as an intellectual and aesthetic theorization it provides a framework for interpreting her oeuvre. In 1987, Halaby published her influential article "Reflecting Reality in Abstract Picturing" in *Leonardo*, where she argues abstraction is a visual language that reflects reality by depicting the general principles of an experience or concept.[6] Abstraction outlines the overarching contours of the processes that impact reality as seen in motion over time, while a camera documents one static view in a specific moment, for instance. Abstraction is the ideal visual language for this because it distills whatever it depicts to its essential attributes, and abstraction as a system of meaning is connected to daily life. Halaby also posits abstraction as rooted in social change and embedded in the society that produced it.[7] Subsequently, Halaby often refers to her paintings as pictures and her process as abstract picturing in order to connect with pictures as a "living cultural process" developed over millennia as a language and method of communication.[8] Because abstraction represents reality, the outcome is a picture, or a document of a "living cultural process." Halaby later noted that her paintings work if we recognize our experiences in them, meaning the general principles of reality are identifiable and relatable.[9] Halaby's theorization was a sharp pivot from her initial efforts to develop a non-referential abstraction, instead committing to using abstraction to engage with reality by capturing its processes of motion, growth, and decay.

While Halaby's theory of abstraction is well-discussed, especially by the artist herself, *place* offers a new lens through which we can think about abstraction and view the work of a preeminent woman painter customarily overlooked in canonical art histories. Place framed Halaby's first American museum retrospective titled *Samia Halaby: Eye Witness*, on view at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University (MSU) from June 29 to December 15, 2024.[10] Spanning six decades of creativity across a selection of sixty-nine paintings, works on paper, artist's books, and kinetic paintings, *Eye Witness* followed Halaby's creative journey to invent an abstract visual language that records and conveys her experiences and how she sees the world around her, proposing that place was formative to her visual thinking and artistic journey. Through abstraction, one can illustrate fleeting multisensorial experiences as an eyewitness in tune with the self and the surrounding world. Her experiences between places—from the Midwest to the East Coast, Europe, and the Arab World—shaped her perspectives as an artist knowledgeable of art history seeking to produce something innovative. Furthermore, her reflections on these places often became the subject of her work. Halaby's visual language demonstrates experiments with colors, shapes, lines, and movement, but it is not about the artist's feelings; rather, it exemplifies a scientific process to capture the general principles of a multisensorial, ephemeral reality through abstraction.

Halaby's time at MSU from 1959 to 1960 was the impetus for the exhibition, thus reclaiming the artist's Midwest roots while reframing her artistic genealogy in ways that recognized the importance of Michigan to Halaby as a young artist. MSU's Archives & Historical Collections were an important resource for discovering Halaby's student work and the dynamics of her graduate education. In its curatorial framework, place offered both an innovative and original way of thinking about Halaby's work retrospectively, while MSU provided an entry point for local audiences, particularly those unfamiliar with the artist. Since Halaby moved through multiple styles in quick succession, place helped to more clearly outline the artist's intellectual and artistic growth as opposed to a conventional, chronological approach.

For this essay and the MSU exhibition, the meaning of place is multivalent. Place collectively refers to geographic locations, their visual characteristics, and one's individual perception and experience of a locality; this framework encompasses Michel de Certeau's thinking about both space and place, as well as their entanglements.[11] Whereas place is fixed, space is in flux and produced by people; the way individuals move through and utilize a place constitutes a space, or the site of a lived experience.[12] While Halaby's subjects are often de Certeau's places, meaning locations, she employs abstraction in ways that demonstrate de Certeau's concept of space by illustrating the general principles of experiences, or de Certeau's practiced places, referring to something produced through a series of varying operations. By painting, for example, her perception of the lights as they illuminate the dusk sky, Halaby is not illustrating the place (the solarium she sat in as a fixed geographic marker) but the "stories" that make a space through one's actions and experiences.[13]

While not always immediately visible, Halaby also accounts for the social, political, and cultural forces shaping these environments and experiences, following Henri Lefebvre's triad of "the perceived, the conceived, and the lived."[14] Also conceptualized as "spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces," Lefebvre addresses how a society produces a space, which is then represented by "scientists, planners, urbanists" in a scientific manner, and then lived in and described by its inhabitants in less-fixed systems of meaning.[15] Through abstraction, Halaby captures a summation of historical processes (spatial practice), such as the development of the city in its interaction with alternative and potential ideologies, or observations of a moment and the processes that impact it (the lived, or representational spaces). Halaby toys between the ideological systems underpinning both de Certeau and Lefebvre's thinking.[16] As she studies space and place, Halaby asserts space as a site of potential while abstraction provides the visual language for this exploration.

Samia Halaby was born in Jerusalem in 1936 when Palestine was under British Mandate. At age three, Halaby moved to the northwest port city of Yafa for her father's business, where her neighbor was the famous painter Tammam al-Akhal.[17] Halaby recalls her early childhood fondly, noting the importance of family and the Mediterranean landscape.[18] Facing imminent danger, Halaby and her family fled Palestine in 1948 during the Nakba (meaning "catastrophe" in Arabic) when British forces withdrew from the area, numerous Palestinian families were forcibly displaced, and the modern state of Israel was founded. She lived in Lebanon until 1951 when the Halaby family immigrated to the US. As Halaby tells the story, after the family arrived by boat to Ellis Island, her parents selected Oregon as a special place to live. They began their great cross-country drive and soon made a stop in Cincinnati, where they ran into a cousin who convinced them to stay.[19] While the US offered opportunities for a young Halaby to become an artist, she felt nostalgic for Palestine and lamented the dull, closed-in nature of the Midwest landscape.

The American Midwest was critical to Halaby's early artistic formation. From 1954 to 1959, Halaby attended the University of Cincinnati and earned a BS in design. Her undergraduate years included a foray into the physics of color and theories of color perception. She encountered Ralph Evans's *An Introduction to Color* (1948), a book she continually returned to throughout her aesthetic endeavors.[20] Halaby also learned drafting skills that were integral to design and later to her paintings. Her teachers taught about social realist artists like Ben Shahn, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Steuart Curry, sparking Halaby's thinking about socio-political issues in art.[21] In 1960, she received an MA in art from Michigan State University, and after taking a gap year, an MFA in painting from Indiana University, Bloomington (IU), in 1963. Halaby became an influential university educator, working at the University of Hawai'i, the Kansas City Art Institute, the University of Michigan, and IU Bloomington, before becoming the first woman to be full-time faculty in the art department at Yale University.[22] After being dismissed from Yale due to her activism for Palestine, Halaby dedicated herself solely to painting.[23] She has lived in New York since 1976.

As Halaby traversed these many locations, she embarked upon numerous artistic experimentations that later culminated in her trademark theorization of abstraction: with its foundation in reality and lived experience, her mode of abstraction is simultaneously bound to space and place as the subject of and influence on her work. As Halaby transitioned between places, her painterly approaches shifted in response to her surroundings, further suggesting place was integral to Halaby's efforts to develop and theorize abstraction. Upon reflection, Halaby recalls that these shifts were not always intentional but rather unfurled dialogically and symbiotically with her different positions and travels.[24] Each place, or geographic location, was a conduit for experiences that filtered into the artist's thinking. Places became spaces, and spaces became subjects of Halaby's pictures, ranging from multicolor to monochromatic and miniature to monumental, each one an opportunity to understand abstraction as a revolutionary visual language for capturing reality. As one of the most prolific and important abstract painters of her generation, this article follows Halaby's artistic journey through case studies of key works featured in her first US institutional retrospective, and conceptualizes her efforts to make paintings intimately bound, both as subjects and influences, to place and space.



Fig. 2. Samia Halaby, *Landscape* (1959), oil on Masonite, 36 1/2" x 24 1/2". Courtesy of the artist, New York. Photo: Rachel Winter. © Samia Halaby, New York.

Halaby's one-year master's program at MSU marked the true start of her efforts to become an abstract painter, where she learned in patriarchal environments and forged her own path against anti-abstraction tendencies. She had arrived at MSU in 1959 confident she wanted to be an abstract painter, yet unsure of how to do so.[25] There, she also began painting in earnest with oil on canvas—her preferred medium. The culture shift from the University of Cincinnati to MSU was dramatic. Halaby explains: "It was 'macho' time in the art world that year I spent at Michigan State University in East Lansing and male supremacy in the arts began to replace the more egalitarian student fellowship that I experienced in Cincinnati."[26] One year prior to Halaby's arrival, there were only four female faculty out of twenty-two at MSU; the gender imbalance was similar during Halaby's year.[27] Halaby primarily studied with Boris Margo, John De Martelly, Ralf Henricksen, and Charles Pollock, none of whom were abstract painters. James McConnell was listed as the head of her committee.[28] Henricksen was perhaps her most influential teacher, encouraging her in times of doubt, and emphasizing the value of keeping her early work to look back on. While these faculty encouraged Halaby to experiment with different media and styles, including De Martelly introducing her to printmaking, Halaby also had to defy her environment to articulate her nascent artistic voice.[29]

Halaby's earliest canvases show her attempts to realize a non-referential abstraction, which instead are more indicative of visualizations of spaces. In works such as *Landscape* (1959; Fig. 2), she pictures a gestural landscape through quick strokes in a manner reminiscent of Impressionism and Fauvism. The



Fig. 3. Samia Halaby, *Lilac Bushes* (1960), oil on Masonite, 24" x 32". Courtesy of the artist, New York. Photo and © Samia Halaby, New York.

colors are vivid and imaginative, departing from literal representation and the naturalistic landscapes of her teachers Pollock and Henricksen in the 1930s and 1940s. Instead, Halaby alludes to shifting perceptions of the environment where the passing of time is implied through color gradations. The spontaneous and free nature of the brushstrokes, which have a direct, fingerpaint quality, hint at an intuitive approach to painting that works to understand the medium and pursue a pure abstraction but instead comes to evoke an experience with nature.

The same year, Halaby furthered her inquiry into landscape in *The City (Al Quds)* (1959; Pl. 10)—albeit unintentionally. The painting is composed of a series of shapes delineated through color blocking. Darker hues form a frame, while more vibrant colors populate the central area, and closer to the center, a gold semi-circle, bearing a striking resemblance to a dome, stands out for its effervescent qualities. *The City* abstracts Halaby's birthplace in Jerusalem, its gold dome referencing an architectural feature ubiquitous throughout West Asia, and the brilliant blues on the periphery evoke the Mediterranean. Halaby similarly began this painting as an experiment to create a non-referential abstract painting with shapes and colors. However, after finishing it, she realized she made a cityscape that recalled Jerusalem and named it accordingly.[30] *The City* is significant as one of a few paintings where, across her nearly seven decades of work, Halaby semi-literally depicts the Arab world. This pseudo-geometric style reappears later in her career in paintings focused on the same subject, while Jerusalem is a constant source of inspiration because it is home to critical examples of Arabic abstraction, to borrow Halaby's term.[31] Both paintings would later prove to be examples of an important learning curve, having initiated a chain of events whereby Halaby worked toward, yet fell short of, a non-referential abstraction, slowly yet surely beginning to unravel her belief that such an aesthetic form was possible.

After graduating from MSU in 1960, Halaby moved back home to Cincinnati and worked making bas reliefs and illustrations for a small company.[32] This year was similarly experimental and fruitful as Halaby played with a form of color field abstraction. One notable example is *Lilac Bushes* (1960; Fig. 3), which Halaby began at MSU and finished in Cincinnati. Color areas range from deep aquamarine to evergreen; maroon, burnt sienna, and sun-kissed yellow carefully coalesce; and an impasto-like application of paint adds texture and depth to the canvas. Much like *The City*, Halaby started this painting as an effort toward non-representational abstraction. Upon its completion, Halaby realized it reminded her of the impressive lilac bushes she saw in Michigan, and named the painting after them.[33] Rather than painting flowers naturalistically, Halaby's composition illustrates the impression of seeing, smelling, and experiencing Michigan's flora—imitating the reality of being in tune with the environment. Somewhat unbeknownst to her, and inspired by Michigan, Halaby had already begun employing abstraction to reflect reality.

After her gap year, Halaby went to IU as an MFA student from 1961 to 1963 where she remained steadfast in her objective of becoming an abstract painter. In Bloomington, Halaby was again in a male-dominated environment where, for her, "all traces of abstract expressionism" had disappeared.[34] Her teachers were painters James McGarrell and Harry Engel, and printmaker Rudy Pozzatti. The three men primarily worked on figurative subject matters through realism and naturalism. Halaby also remembers her teacher William Bailey, a figurative painter who showed her different kinds of abstract painting, which Halaby found inspiring.[35]

Halaby's paintings at IU reflect her continued exploration of pseudo-color field painting, now combined with a new consideration of art history. In Halaby's *The Apron, After Gorky's Mother* (1963; Pl. 11), shown at her MFA exhibition in 1963, her use of impasto application dissolves paint into flat, more clearly distinguished sections of color. Saturated shades of goldenrod and burnt sienna contrast with muted tans and greys painted with smooth brushstrokes that render clean, soft lines. Farhat has described Halaby's interest in Cubism at the time as an important, innovative effort to deconstruct painting by eliminating spatial depth between foreground and background. Likewise, Farhat discussed how Halaby's color palette reflects her interest in Josef Albers's relativity of color.[36] Yet these potential interlocutors were not what influenced *The Apron*'s subject.

Through art historical dialogue, Halaby makes place her subject by virtue of its dialectical pair—absence or placelessness. The title, *The Apron, After Gorky's Mother*, explicitly names Armenian painter Arshile Gorky (about whom Halaby read at IU). Notably, Gorky and his family fled Armenia in 1915 due to the impending genocide, and his life, like Halaby's, was shaped by violence and displacement.[37] Halaby also draws clear visual references to Gorky's painting, *How My Mother's Embroidered Apron Unfolds in My Life*.[38] Halaby adopts Gorky's deep sage greens, subsequently mimicking his arrangement by placing those colors on the perimeter of her work; she similarly employs a shade of amber yellow, now making it the central feature of

her painting. Gorky's complex lines and loose brushstrokes indicate an unfolding, whereas Halaby presents an image of stillness, as if the apron is folded and placed on an implied surface. By formally alluding to Gorky's painting, Halaby not only indicates but intervenes in her art historical knowledge, pointing both broadly and singularly to the formative influence of being disconnected from place. Far from non-objectivity, Halaby's abstraction reveals a space of dislocation, a window into a reality untethered yet embedded in place.

The Apron was a turning point for Halaby. As Halaby noted, these flat color sections revealed that her "affinity to abstraction had finally asserted itself."[39] This intellectual, personal, and aesthetic conversation with abstraction was a biproduct of her time in Indiana and the culmination of her student years, a period when Halaby endeavored to understand what abstraction was and what it meant to be an abstract painter; this was an inner experiment to develop her own visual language and an outward one that pushed against patriarchal environments that did not advocate for abstraction. Her aesthetic inquiry worked in tandem with finding new ways of thinking about abstraction in art history that also uncovered the political and art historical roots of abstraction.[40] While Halaby never achieved her original goal of realizing a non-objective abstraction, her inadvertent and intuitive studies of space and place paved the way for her later realization that abstraction is a way to imitate reality.

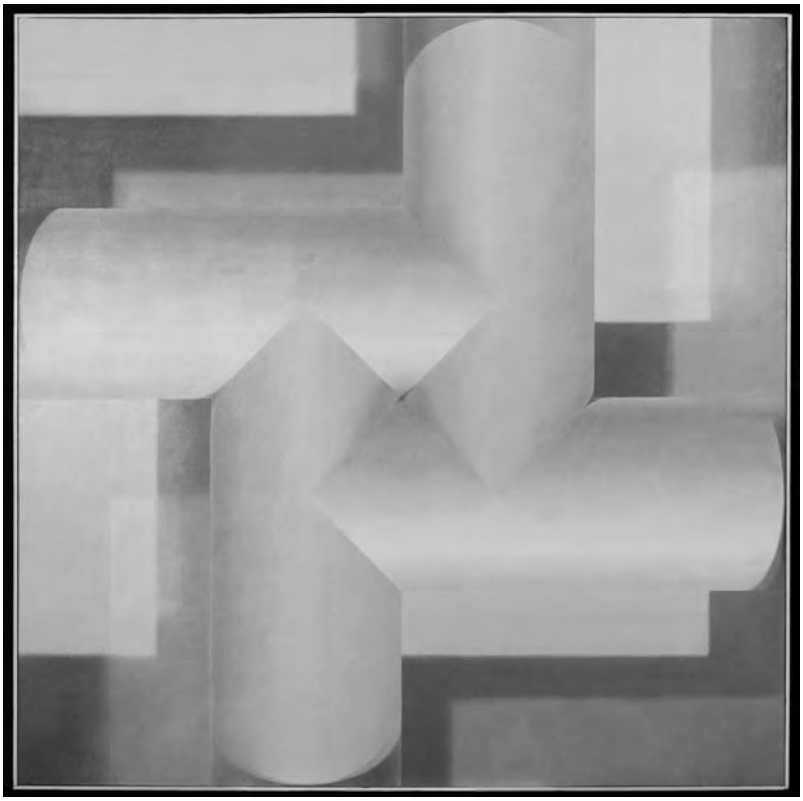


Fig. 4. Samia Halaby, *Fifth Cross/White Cross* (1968), oil on canvas, 66 3/8" x 66 3/8". Photo: Eskenazi Museum of Art/Shanti Knight. Courtesy of the artist and the Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University, 71.87. © Samia Halaby, New York.

After completing her MFA in 1963, Halaby embarked on a remarkable career as a university educator throughout the Midwest and the East Coast. Halaby's teaching years were a time of relearning perception and close looking that helped generate a new abstraction. After a one-year visiting position at the University of Hawai'i in Honolulu, Halaby's first full-time role was as an assistant professor at the Kansas City Art Institute (KCAI) in Kansas City, Missouri, from 1964 to 1966. Halaby joined KCAI following a period of growth that contributed to the establishment of a cultural center facilitated by KCAI's proximity to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (formerly the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art). Halaby chaired the "first year foundation department," which was an important part of the BFA program that emphasized basic skills of perception and the "relationship between ideas and visual communication."[41] Halaby's student assignments were unorthodox: for example, she asked them to build something with mud and other non-traditional self-sustaining materials; she also focused on dissecting shapes in an advanced visual analysis.[42] Much like before, most of Halaby's colleagues were male artists not inclined toward abstraction.[43]

Halaby returned to the Midwest with mixed emotions. She saw new beauty in the "wildness," "weeds," and winding country roads.[44] Halaby also found herself frustrated with painting, uninspired and unsure of what to do next. She realized she needed to shake off the influences of her teachers and return to her instincts as an artist in order to pursue abstraction.[45] Petrus Christus's *Virgin and Child in a Domestic Interior* (c. 1460–67) partially sparked this epiphany.[46] Halaby viewed this work as a paradigm of early Northern Renaissance painting and realized it employed abstraction to depict reality through its use of perspective to create a three-dimensional scene on a two-dimensional surface. This prompted Halaby to return to the basics of perception, how one sees and how light and color interact with shapes, which influenced her subsequent work.[47] This investigation was similar to concepts she taught her students in the first-year program.

Halaby's epiphany led to a series of analytical paintings focused on perception, vision, and geometry, which she pursued throughout her teaching years, as seen in *Kansas City Studio* (1966; Pl. 12). Lit from above by two spotlights, Halaby's painting depicts her desk situated within her own studio, which acts as a stage for modeled shapes and platforms that she used to set up still life paintings; the floors and walls are filled with different paintings composed of geometric shapes from the same period. What Halaby renders is a visual inventory of her studio with four paintings from 1966: *Yellow Sphere*, *Pink Sphere*, *Green Sphere*, and *Blue Window*. These works exemplify how Halaby studied individual shapes in Kansas City, and her choice to present the works inside her studio provides a window into her artistic process at the time. Halaby's move to Kansas City unequivocally prompted a

transition from abstraction toward paintings focused on geometry and rendered in a naturalistic manner unparalleled elsewhere in her career. *Kansas City Studio* and other similar works from this period juxtapose naturalistic depictions of place with Minimalism's focus on clean lines and geometry, one which ran counter to common practice. Halaby's geometric Minimalism is instead objective, scientific, and rational, much like her later abstraction.

Halaby furthered her analytical geometries in Dexter, Michigan, when she became an assistant professor at the University of Michigan from 1967 to 1969. Halaby remained one of a few female faculty members, illustrated by the list of exhibiting artists in the *Art Faculty Annual I* at the University of Michigan's Museum of Art in 1969. Halaby showed what were described as "hard-edge paintings" alongside seventeen other artists, some of whom were now working in abstraction.[48] While Halaby fondly reminisces about her Midwest years, Ann Arbor was one of few places where she remembers her students experiencing racism and discrimination.[49]

More than Ann Arbor, Halaby's studio in the nearby town of Dexter impacted her work. There, Halaby continued her analytical geometric studies in a method she refers to as visual conjugation, or the dissection and reconstruction of shapes.[50] *Fifth Cross/White Cross* (1968; Fig. 4) furthered the inquiry undertaken in *Kansas City Studio* by putting four cylinders together to make a cross. In similar fashion to a still life from a model of a cross, Halaby outlines the intersection of the four cylinders, including a gap in the center, using different color values to illustrate the shadows generated by interacting shapes. Its greatest difference from previous work was in size: *Fifth Cross/White Cross* was one of Halaby's largest paintings to date, measuring an impressive 66 x 66 inches. The exact dimensions are significant: the width is equivalent to the artist's wingspan, meaning Halaby is working at her scale.[51] Halaby's Dexter studio was her largest so far, which physically supported her expanding her work.[52] The scale of *Fifth Cross/White Cross* is thus a declaration in support of taking up space, defying the subjugation of women in art history where women are relegated to smaller spaces, lesser status, specific media and subjects—patriarchal ideas of grandiose paintings only belonging to the sphere of male artists, and implicitly taking aim at the social and art historical categories used to divide people.

The penultimate stage of Halaby's analytical geometries continued when she returned to IU as an associate professor (with tenure), from 1969 to 1972. Halaby's new role focused on building a foundations program, which included redesigning the initial studio courses. She co-directed this program with William Itter, also new, and participated in team-teaching.[53] Pedagogically, Halaby was committed to working with her students to shape the curriculum based on their feedback.[54] For the first time, the departmental demographics also began shifting.[55] Halaby enjoyed teaching in the Midwest, always appreciating the students' openness to learning and experimentation.

Halaby continued painting on a greater scale in Indiana, but she moved to a new phase of her geometric studies by analyzing helixes and helicoids. *Aluminum and Steel* is comprised of pseudo-elliptical shapes that masterfully overlap and intersect.[56] Neutral gradients of silver and grey outline and define the helicoids, further framed by horizontal lines in deep blues and tans. Vertical strokes of pastel yellows, pinks, and blues add dimension by illustrating the effect of light interacting with the subject. The shapes evoke movement, further emphasized by the varying lines and colors, without giving way to the illusionism of Renaissance painting. The motion of *Aluminum and Steel* exemplifies a major transition.[57] The helix was a logical progression from cylinders, squares, spheres, and crosses toward a diagonal plane. Halaby harnessed her undergraduate training in drafting to plot the helixes on graph paper before rendering the shapes precisely on canvas.[58] The color palette also evolves. Halaby argues that metals are the only substance with naturally colored highlights. This is demonstrated in *Aluminum and Steel* by showing natural, multihued, and dynamic characteristics of metals as they are revealed when light strikes their surfaces and through the relationships among colors due to movement and shifting light. She then names the painting accordingly. *Aluminum and Steel* indicates motion and a simultaneity of perspectives, an important breakthrough that became a key component of Halaby's vision for abstraction because motion is integral to depicting reality and seeing the world while moving through it.

Halaby left IU in 1972 for Yale University, where she became the first female full-time faculty member in the art department. Aesthetically, Halaby came full circle, arriving at an institution founded in Albers's Bauhaus pedagogy, whose thinking about color was influential on her as an MFA student.[59] However, she recalled Yale as a challenging period. As Marta Kuzma explains, the year 1972 was one of structural change: Yale's School of Art and School of Architecture formally split into two institutions, and although partially unrelated, years of unrest regarding representation of and support for underrepresented students finally subsided. The Equal Rights Act and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act also passed in 1972, which should have ended gender discrimination. Even so, Halaby speculates that her hire killed two birds with one stone—as a woman and an ethnic minority, claims supported by years of experience with sexism and racism in a chauvinistic department. Student Bird Brenner remembered Yale as a "boy's club;" artist Judy Pfaff recalled the largely all-male critiques, which Halaby joined at times.[60] Halaby's time at Yale abruptly ended in 1981 when she was denied promotion and reappointment (by an all-male faculty board) despite being promised tenure for years and significant support from departmental colleagues.[61]

Despite this difficult environment, New Haven's landscape sparked another epiphany for Halaby, as seen in the small gouache on paper, *Leaf Study One (Autumn Leaf)* (1975; Pl. 13), illustrating one of many leaves Halaby found wandering around the city. Her application of thin layers of paint call to mind graduate paintings from her time at IU, while her choice to dissect the leaf employs her method of visual conjugation in a new context: organic and amorphous swathes of pinks,

purples, greens, and tans fill the picture field and coalesce; one subtle evergreen line splits the work diagonally, an axis further segmented by five perpendicular vertical veins. Halaby's close study of the leaves helped her realize that for her paintings to be successful, they must capture the growth and decay of a leaf.[62] Leaves represented a larger process of depicting change—the cycles of transformation—that Halaby found relevant to abstraction, an ideology whose attention to the general principles, such as changes in nature, paved the way for abstraction's reflection of reality. New Haven's landscape helped her understand the subject of abstraction, subsequently pushing her paintings in a new direction.

In 1976, Halaby moved to New York. When asked why she relocated, Halaby said, "It was not a life I would enjoy; it was not the life that was my direction."[63] She moved into a garage-turned-welding studio in Tribeca, and made it into her home and studio; she has lived there since. From 1976 to 1981, Halaby took the train from New York to New Haven two to three times a week to teach part-time at Yale. She visualizes this commute in *A Train Ride to New York City* (1976–77; Pl. 14), her round-trip journey from sunrise to sunset as perceived in motion utilizing abstraction to illustrate a series of sequentially experienced spaces through lines and colors: shades of burgundy, red, and blush pink command the center of the canvas; bright oranges and greens are interspersed throughout; and lighter pinks and tans on the left shift to blues, then on the right, purples transition to green. Diagonals allude to the train moving through space; the sun rising and setting; power lines ebbing and flowing on the horizon; and trees in the distance, the view out the window zooming through a vast landscape. Here, like Halaby's dissection of the leaf's life cycle, she breaks down her perception of the passing scenery, distilling a lengthy train ride into an idyllic scene of witnessing nature's changes as the day goes on.

A Train Ride to New York City concluded Halaby's series of geometries and prefaced the end of her years as an educator. Halaby's diagonals, stemming from the helixes, suggested flight and allowed her to show distant planes, spaces, and simultaneities without resorting to one-point perspective.[64] Although Halaby would not publish her treatise on abstraction for another decade, in 1987, this sophisticated painting demonstrates how abstraction reflects reality, imitates the general principles of motion, nature, and the passing of time, and comprehends the world while moving through it. Yet Halaby felt these diagonals were a dead end, as if she exhausted the possibilities of this inquiry. The insights gleaned from the diagonals, along with moving to New York, were the impetus for a period of growth and experimentation that generated new approaches to abstraction. The end of Halaby's Midwest years and her geometries heralded the start of a new era of freedom, innovation, and exploration of abstraction in New York.

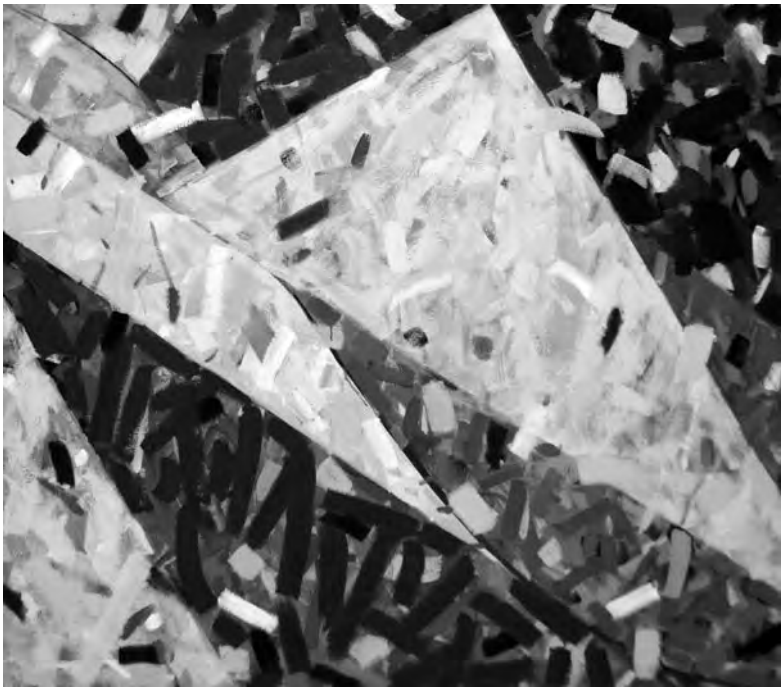


Fig. 5. Samia Halaby, *Broadway Below Chambers* (1982), oil on canvas, 42 1/10" x 48". Courtesy of the artist, New York. Photo and © Samia Halaby, New York.

Halaby frequently wandered New York City documenting her multisensorial observations in sketches, notes, and photographs. These experiences generated a "storehouse of visual experiences and ideas" for Halaby that became the subject of her abstract pictures, particularly during the 1980s.[65] From the 1980s through the early 2000s, New York was often the subject of her paintings (although not the only one). Her approach in some cases was shaped by visual observations in her native Palestine, therein creating a nexus between New York and Palestine in exile.

Halaby's early studies of her New York neighborhood are exemplified in *Broadway Below Chambers* (1982; Fig. 5), a painting whose title identifies its subject—Halaby's Tribeca neighborhood. Triangular shapes divide the canvas into discrete parts, each filled with dashes in shades of ice blue, pale purple, sunny yellow, and deep brown, as a synecdoche for its location (triangle below Canal) and as a practiced place where people, buildings, and other happenings are viewed in motion. Rather than capturing one moment, Halaby's brushstrokes outline the overarching contours of a vibrant area, like people walking by and a constantly evolving environment that reflects the weather and seasons, distilling into one picture Tribeca's multifaceted and dynamic character.

Halaby's approach to *Broadway Below Chambers* draws on her previous visual recollections of both New York and Palestine, thus collapsing transnational temporalities and experiences. The color palette harkens back to Halaby's first impression of New York from 1951 as a brown city, which she thought to be an odd color.[66] Three decades later, Halaby overwhelmingly depicts it through a spectrum of browns, making the city of her childhood that of her young adult life—



Fig. 6. Samia Halaby, *Occupied Jerusalem 1, June 9, 1995* (1995), watercolor on paper, 22 1/4" x 15". Courtesy of the artist, New York. Photo: Rachel Winter. © Samia Halaby, New York.

a *tabula rasa* for rethinking abstraction and being a painter after leaving Yale. Concurrently, Halaby was also pursuing her series *Dome of the Rock*, influenced by her 1966 trip to Palestine, Egypt, and Syria, funded by a faculty research grant from KCAI that provided her the opportunity to study the architecture of mosques and the abstractions adorning their exteriors; this trip was her first return since fleeing Palestine in 1948.[67] Halaby's findings abroad led to the conclusion that the roots of abstraction are in the Arab world, and the geometric underpinnings of architecture and mosaics in and around Palestine later influenced her reconceptualization of abstraction. Her brushstrokes in *Broadway Below Chambers* function similarly to the cut tesserae that compose marble inlay on buildings such as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Halaby thus brings Palestine to New York, positing parallels in the ways space is visually analyzed across time and geometry, in turn revealing similarities between two places dear to her.

It comes as no surprise that Halaby has strong opinions about the question, "Where is Palestine in your paintings?"[68] The visual lexicon of Palestine plays a complex role in Halaby's work. She specifically took note of structure, symmetry, and converging shapes in architectural ornament throughout the Arab world; how the relationship among those parts provided a new understanding of the picture plane that she employed in her paintings.[69] In other works, Halaby also attended to the landscape and architectural features of Palestine through abstraction. More so than Palestine itself, the logic of abstraction as it was defined, articulated, and applied in the Arab world is prominent within Halaby's oeuvre. Attending to this nexus neither suggests her paintings are only about Palestine, nor asserts that Palestine is always present in her work, but further delineates the role of visual memory in her practice and the global roots of abstraction as they have shaped Halaby's thinking.

Broadway Below Chambers predates another transition wherein Halaby's attention to place shifted from New York to the Arab world. In the 1990s, Halaby traveled to the Arab world more frequently to perform with her Kinetic Painting Group and participate in exhibitions and residencies, including several trips to Palestine.[70] During this period her experiences and observations abroad, particularly in Palestine, featured prominently in her work, and by utilizing her visual language of abstraction, practiced places became the subject of her paintings. In the intimate watercolor *Occupied Jerusalem 1, June 9, 1995* (1995; Fig. 6), Halaby draws a pencil frame and populates it with brushstrokes of varying size and color, an approach similar both to *Broadway Below Chambers* (1982; see Fig. 5) and the later *Evening Sky in Amman* (1999; see Fig. 1), yet a marked departure from the majority of her work in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including *For Jean Gordon* (1990). Uniquely, Halaby annotates the work, writing:

> It is as though I am here to witness the last moments in the life of this beautiful ancient city of Jerusalem. My Jerusalem is being murdered. And I make this painting feeling the pain and beauty of Jerusalem.

The painting is an abstracted landscape that captures her observations of her birthplace, one that inserts color and buoyancy into a city Halaby sees as faltering under occupation.

Occupied Jerusalem 1 not only embodies the duality of place and space as subject and influence, but this modestly sized watercolor, at only 22 1/4 x 15 inches, also inspired the title of her retrospective, *Samia Halaby: Eye Witness*. Each painting a window of bearing witness, from the mundane to historical, the retrospective demonstrated how place was formative to Halaby's visual thinking and her efforts to theorize abstraction. Beyond an immediate field of vision, witnessing expands into a complex physical, emotional, environmental, and intellectual experience that can transcend time and place—including the intersections between New York and Palestine, one that for Halaby serves as a radical form of presence that exceeds the present.

In her New York studio, Halaby's abstractions evolved in the 1980s and 1990s through experiments that worked to break free from the confines of the stretcher. In the painting *Centers of Energy* from 1989, exhibited that year at the third Havana Biennial, Halaby pinned the work directly to the wall at a carefully selected angle—shifting the picture plane and traditional hanging methods. Such theoretical endeavors remained connected to ideas about abstraction and reality, and some were also inspired by place. In 1995, Halaby led a workshop for students about papier mâché at Bir Zeit University in Ramallah.[71] Again, this experience prompted her



Fig. 7. Samia Halaby, *I Found Myself Growing in an Old Olive Tree* (2005), acrylic on polyethylene, 37 6/10" x 29 9/10". Courtesy of the artist, New York. Photo and © Samia Halaby, New York.



Fig. 8. Samia Halaby, *Carrying the Moon* (2015), acrylic on paper, 13" x 10". Courtesy of the artist, New York. Photo and © Samia Halaby, New York.

to rethink the form of painting, for example, in *Little Palestine* from 2003 (Pl. 15), a composite canvas that collectively reimagines place, space, and painting. For *Little Palestine*, Halaby repurposed four small canvas pieces from her larger painting, *From the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea* (2003), and stitched them together with leather needles to fabricate a painterly collage. The varying shapes, colors, and overlays reference Palestine's flora, fauna, and the Mediterranean Sea to picture the Palestinian landscape not as a cartographic or topographic re-creation, but an ode to a multi-sensorial impression of a landscape in perennial bloom. The work's irregular boundaries and its amorphous, shifting nature, when installed, reflect how Palestine's landscape and borders are similarly unfixed. In its fracturing and assembling, the work makes a home and place from fragments, a construction that echoes the ongoing Palestinian struggle for land and sovereignty, and asserts *sumud*—the steadfast perseverance of the Palestinian people.

Other considerations of the Palestinian landscape are present in *I Found Myself Growing in an Old Olive Tree* (2005; Fig. 7), a painting indicative of Halaby's view of herself at that time. Having just travelled in 2005 to Galilee and spent time in the olive groves, Halaby returned to New York to find an invitation to participate in a self-portrait competition with an imminent deadline.[72] In response, Halaby's painting reflected on her trip, a self-portrait that captured her unique state of jetlag and nostalgia, and one she argued she could not recreate.[73] Halaby's face dominates the composition: strokes of black and grey obscure certain features; one eye stands out, subtly rendering her present and strong. Dots, curves, and swirls blossom out from Halaby's head, in place of her bust or hair, like branches from a tree. Halaby depicts herself inside the olive trees she just experienced in Galilee. Yet it also documents the artist and her self-conception, a picture of a woman resolute in her artistic work and unwavering in her strong view of herself, her direct gaze a symbol of her confidence. The painting dissolves the boundaries between places and notions of the diasporic self while locating Halaby's nostalgic being in the Palestinian olive groves.

Simultaneously during this period, Halaby created physical spaces for Palestinian artists who, like her, felt shunned by the New York art world. In 1981, she joined the artist-run gallery 22 Wooster Street where, in 1983, she put Yale University "on trial" for her abrupt dismissal. From 1991 until 1995, she collaborated with the Arab Women Artists Committee, influential in planning the groundbreaking 1994 exhibition, *Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World*, at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, DC. In 2002, Halaby co-curated *Williamsburg Bridges Palestine: The Face of Palestinian Humanity through Art & Culture* at the Williamsburg Art and Historical Center. This was a collaboration with the group Al-Jisser (the Bridge), the Arab-American Media Center,

and the Arab Women's Solidarity Center, which exhibited circa fifty Palestinian artists from around the US. She then continued working with Al-Jisser to prepare *The Subject of Palestine* at DePaul University in Chicago in 2005. At the same time, she helped organize *Made in Palestine* at the Station Museum in 2003, an exhibition Halaby was at first unsuccessful at bringing to New York. She partnered with Al-Jisser to launch a non-profit art space in Chelsea called Bridge Gallery, which eventually hosted the show.[74] Such grassroots endeavors indicate the ways Halaby and others created alternative spaces when unacknowledged in hegemonic contexts, but also shed light on the ways these venues acted as platforms for diasporic artists to present Palestine as a practiced place, to assert its significance and relevance within a climate hostile to Palestine and Palestinian artists.

Halaby never stopped painting, and her approaches to abstraction further proliferated after the turn of the century, including angular works, for instance, *Angels and Butterflies* (2010), alluding to her fascination with the Russian Suprematists, and *Sun* (2015), a test of color theory. After nearly fifty years of painting, Halaby's representation by Ayyam Gallery in Dubai in 2007 significantly aided her ability to flourish.[75] Unlike earlier decades, Halaby's twenty-first-century works defy periodization and categorization, and its complexities resist identification of a few emblematic works. The significance of this multiplicity is two-fold. For one, increased tangible support catalyzed a new period of aesthetic freedom and experimentation in a diversity of styles and subjects. More importantly, this creative expanse was not an arbitrary aestheticism or formalism but visual evidence that supported Halaby's theorization of abstraction. If abstraction reflects the general principles of reality, then Halaby's numerous subjects and approaches to painting across the last two decades acknowledge and illustrate a diversity of lived experiences, perspectives, and practiced places as they evolve and unfold. To attempt a classification of these perspectives risks oversimplifying them and flattening the very complexities of reality that generate abstraction in its multitudes.

Halaby's recent work returns to her earliest inquiries into abstraction—a moment of coming full circle. In *Carrying the Moon* (2015; Fig. 8), Halaby fills the picture plane with large swathes of color, brushwork visible against the paper's texture showing the artist's hand and process, additionally emphasized by the work's intimate size. This reinterpretation recalls the color sections of *Lilac Bushes*, now rendered with a smooth application of paint and seen in early works like *The Apron, After Gorky's Mother*. In *Mother of Pearl II* (2018; Pl. 16), diagonally oriented squares and rectangles project movement from left to right as the colors shift from deep blues to pastel pinks and oranges, and the intersecting, overlapping shapes and colors indicate simultaneity. In its subject and style, Halaby returns to one of her very first subjects: Jerusalem. Like *The City (Al Quds)*, geometric shapes constitute the overarching contours of Halaby's birthplace. Nearly sixty years later, the color palette is more vibrant and saturated, but the rich cobalt blue remains unchanged. Jerusalem brings Halaby's painterly journey full circle—from her first to her most recent subject since 2018, from the birth of abstraction in the Arab world to the apex of the artist's development of abstraction, from Palestine to New York and back again.

This article's brief overview advocates for the ways space and place were formative to Halaby's nearly seven decades of abstraction. However, her travels and accolades far exceed those in this study: she has visited or exhibited in Greece, Venice, Yugoslavia, Hawai'i, Morocco, Spain, and Cuba, among others in Europe and the Middle East.[76] She was also a pioneer of digital art. In 1986, she purchased an Amiga and taught herself to code in order to create what she called "kinetic paintings" that bring shapes and colors to life in moving abstractions. In 2023, she received an honorary doctorate from Bir Zeit University. In 2024, she was the first Palestinian painter to be featured in the Giardini at the Venice Biennale.

Abstraction was always at the core of Halaby's practice, never emotions or feelings, but an objective, rational visual language that reflects reality. In the work discussed here, Halaby's abstractions were shaped by and responsive to places and spaces, rendering pictures of multisensorial realities, and cognizant of the socio-political processes that affect reality. Such an aesthetic theorization pushes abstraction in new directions where plays on color and form indicate nuances of perception and experience that subsequently upend dominant ways of thinking. Halaby thus posits the roots of abstraction in the Arab world, an understanding of abstraction as objective as the same mathematic equations and geometric formulas used in Arab abstraction since the seventh century. In her hands, abstraction is a conduit for engaging with reality, inviting shared experiences, and in turn asserting the importance of a simultaneity and multiplicity of lived experiences and perceptions. Halaby's theory of abstract picturing is not merely an artistic breakthrough but a rejection of the valorization of Euro-American modes of abstraction canonized in Western art history. •

Rachel Winter is an award-winning curator and art historian whose research spans modern and contemporary art from the SWANA region and the US. Currently, she is Assistant Curator at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. She recently curated *Samia Halaby: Eye Witness*, the artist's first American museum retrospective in 2024, and, with Elliot Josephine Leila Reichert, co-edited the book, *Samia Halaby: Centers of Energy*, named outstanding monograph by the Midwest Art History Society. She received her Ph.D. in the History of Art and Architecture from the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 2024.

Notes

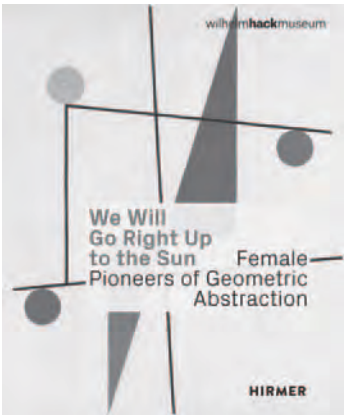
1. Samia Halaby, interview with the author, New York, June 2024.
2. While Halaby has been in major museum collections, such as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Art Institute of Chicago, she exhibited more in alternative spaces. See Maymanah Farhat, "Imagining the Arab World: The Fashioning of the 'War on Terror' through Art," *Callaloo* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 1223–31.

3. The exhibition, *1970s: Women and Abstraction*, was curated by Dr. Barbara Stehle at Zürcher Gallery, New York City, https://www.galeriezurcher.com/1970s-women-and-abstraction-curated-by-dr-barbara-stehle-nov-12-2016-jan-15-2017.
4. Kathy Battista, *New York New Wave: The Legacy of Feminist Art in Emerging Practice* (I.B. Tauris, 2019), 132.
5. Nadia Radwan, "Women Artists from the Arab World: On the Discourse of Abstraction and Other Misconceptions," *AWARE*, August 7, 2022, https:// awarewomenartists.com/en/magazine/femmes-artistes-du-monde-arabe-sur- le-discours-de-lart-abstrait-et-autres-idees-recues/. Halaby also wrote to Adnan, while Saudi often introduced Halaby to many artists and curators. Notably, this text by Radwan is a brief overview of her much larger and still ongoing research.
6. Samia Halaby, "Reflecting Reality in Abstract Picturing," *Leonardo* 20, no. 3 (1987): 241–2.
7. Samia Halaby, "On Politics and Art," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 2/3 (Spring/Summer 1989): 155–65.
8. Samia Halaby, *Growing Shapes: Aesthetic Insights of an Abstract Painter* (Palestine Books, 2016), 6.
9. Samia Halaby, "The Political Basis of Abstraction in the 20th Century as Explored by a Painter," *Manazir Journal*, no. 1 (2019): 77–90; Halaby, "Reflecting Reality in Abstract Picturing," 243.
10. See the accompanying exhibition catalogue, *Samia Halaby: Centers of Energy*, ed. Elliot Josephine Leila Reichert and Rachel Winter (Hirmer, 2023).
11. Michel de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 2011).
12. As de Certeau says, space, as opposed to place, is "like the word when it is spoken." De Certeau also adds that place is an "an instantaneous configuration of positions," in *Practice of Everyday Life*, 117.
13. De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 118.
14. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 39.
15. Lefebvre, 37–40.
16. Where de Certeau looks to define a system of meaning and operations that borrows from semiology and articulates a script that cannot be changed, only performed, Lefebvre builds on the socio-historical processes embedded in Marxist thinking and studies of geography to consider how space is a site of innovation and transformation. Halaby's work adheres to de Certeau's rationality through her investment in perception, and her paintings often refer to fixed places as they index a larger map. Yet Halaby's choice to use abstraction is not only a vehicle for her to capture experiences and multisensorial reality, or interventions into space, but abstraction also connects her work to social change and how society produces its surroundings, aligning her thinking and work with Lefebvre's ideas of intervention and production.
17. Ulf Thomas Moberg, *Palestinian Art* (Almquist and Wiksell, 1998), 75.
18. Manal Ataya, "In Conversation with Dr. Samia Halaby," in *Lasting Impressions: Samia Halaby* (Sharjah Art Museum, 2023), 339–42; and Rachel Winter, "On Place: A Conversation with Samia Halaby," in *Samia Halaby: Centers of Energy*, 37–38.
19. Winter, "On Place," 38.
20. Halaby, interview with the author, Zoom, March 2023. Evans's thinking came to bear on later work, for example, *Sun* (2015) and *Mathematician* (2023), where Halaby attempted to make a painting using only the lightest values on the color palette.
21. Samia Halaby, "Early Life," *Selections* no. 68 (Spring 2024): 36, https://issuu.com/selectionsarts/docs/selections-issue_68-samia_halabi-full-sp.
22. Some of Halaby's visual reflections were also prompts for student assignments. Pivotal to her work was the imperative to look closely. See Halaby, *Growing Shapes*; Ataya, "In Conversation with Dr. Samia Halaby," 333–35.
23. On Halaby's termination, see Ruth Santer, Craig Flanagin, and Samia Halaby, "Art and Liberation," *Aurora, A Feminist Magazine* (Spring 1982): 5–8.
24. Winter, "On Place," 53–55.
25. Halaby, interview with the author, March 2023. She chose MSU with her friend Karen Stith after reviewing catalogues of universities and their faculty, and remembers the Midwest as a supportive and welcoming place.
26. Halaby, "My Education," *Selections*, 39.
27. Unpublished Annual Reports from 1958–59, 1959–60, and 1960–61, Box Annual Reports, Department of Art Records, UA-16.15, Michigan State University Archives & Historical Collections.
28. Notably, the graduation program lists sixteen MAs, seven awarded to women. *Michigan State University 100th Annual Commencement*, June 12, 1960 (Michigan State University, 1960), 25.
29. Winter, "On Place," 39–41; Halaby, "My Education," 38–39.
30. Reichert, "Samia Halaby: Centers of Energy," in *Samia Halaby: Centers of Energy*, 20.
31. For a description of this, see Halaby, "On Politics and Art"; and Suheyla Takesh, "Eye to Brain: Samia Halaby's Abstract Work, 1960s–1980s," in *Lasting Impressions: Samia Halaby* (Sharjah Art Museum, 2023), 294–301.
32. Winter, "On Place," 42–43.
33. Winter, 42.
34. Mary Trasko, "Samia Halaby: 'Art is a Living Thing,'" *Indiana Alumni Magazine* 43, no. 2 (October 1980): 11.
35. Winter, "On Place," 43; Halaby, "My Education," 39.
36. Maymanah Farhat and Samia Halaby, eds., *Samia Halaby: Five Decades of Painting and Innovation* (Booth-Clibborn Editions, 2014), 20–21.
37. Reichert, "Samia Halaby," 20.
38. Arshile Gorky, *How My Mother's Embroidered Apron Unfolds in My Life* (1944), oil on canvas, 40" x 45 1/16". Seattle Art Museum, Gift of the Virginia and Bagley Wright Collection, 74.40.
39. Halaby, "Early Painting: Reminiscences of Palestine," *Selections*, 57.
40. See Halaby, "The Political Basis of Abstraction in the 20th Century as Explored by a Painter."
41. *Kansas City Art Institute and School of Design College Bulletin* LXXIX, no. 2 (April 1965): 28. Halaby also proposed teaching "visual communication" in her application. See "Personal Information Form: Samia A. Halaby," c. 1964, Folder Samia A. Halaby, Archives Faculty, Kansas City Art Institute Jannes Library.
42. Halaby, interview, March 2023.
43. These included Harold Bruder, James Crate, Dale Eldred, Kenneth R. Ferguson, Richard Hollander, Rosa Lee Lovell, William Lovell, William W. McKim, Andrew Morgan, Wilbur Niewald, and William Paul, Jr. See *Art of Two Cities: Kansas City and Minneapolis* (General Mills, 1965), np.
44. Halaby, interview, March 2023.
45. Reichert, "Samia Halaby," 21.
46. Petrus Christus, *Virgin and Child in a Domestic Interior* (ca. 1460–67), oil on wood panel, 27 3/8" x 20 1/16". Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, purchase, William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 56–51.
47. Halaby, interview, March 2023.
48. These included Julia Andrews, Mignonette Cheng, Phillip Davis, Joseph De Angelis, Ray Elmore, Lee Haner, Wendell Heers, Gerome

Kamrowski, Thomas Larkin, Gerald Mast, John Rush, Richard Sears, John Stevenson, Albert Weber, Emil Weddige, Richard Wilt, and Leonard Zamiska. See "Faculty Works on Display," *The Ann Arbor News*, January 16, 1969, 33.

49. Halaby, interview, March 2023.
50. Halaby, interview, March 2023; Farhat and Halaby, *Samia Halaby*, 39.
51. Elliot Josephine Leila Reichert, Curator of Contemporary Art, Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University, Bloomington, virtual lecture, April 25, 2024, Tufts University, Zoom.
52. Winter, "On Place," 47.
53. "College Art News," *Art Journal* 29, no. 4 (Summer 1970): 460; Halaby, interview, March 2023.
54. Winter, "On Place," 48; Halaby, interview, March 2023. This approach partially responded to the political climate of the Vietnam War.
55. Her colleagues included Itter, Barry Gealt, Jerrold Maddox, and Bonnie Sklarski, who was the first female tenure-track professor in painting. "Six Faculty Painters," Nov. 8–Dec. 18, 1970, Indiana University Art Museum, Archives of the Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University.
56. Samia Halaby, *Aluminum and Steel* (1971), oil on linen, 66" x 66 1/4". Mead Art Museum at Amherst College, gift of Anne and Jack Thompson (Class of 1946), AC 1986.16.
57. Notably, Halaby also made this work in the basement of Indiana Memorial Union in her studio, a space she referred to as making her think she was in a submarine. See Reichert, "Samia Halaby," 23; Trasko, "Samia Halaby: 'Art is a Living Thing,'" 12.
58. Winter, "On Place," 39. This effort was further supported by recent readings about how plumbers built heating systems and drawings about interpenetrating pipes. See Ala Younis, "Paintings; Weird Things or, Using the Material for What It Is Capable of Doing," in *Lasting Impressions: Samia Halaby*, 292.
59. Marta Kuzma, *History of an Art School* (Yale School of Art, 2021), 12.
60. Kuzma, 23–33, 43, 53, 63; Winter, "On Place," 49–50. Kuzma also recounts Inge Druckery's story of discrimination at Yale, which resonates with Halaby's.
61. Kuzma, 51.
62. Halaby, *Growing Shapes*, 46; Farhat and Halaby, *Samia Halaby*, 112–22.
63. Winter, "On Place," 50.
64. Farhat and Halaby, *Samia Halaby*, 76.
65. Halaby, *Growing Shapes*, 98–107.
66. Halaby, interview, March 2023.
67. Winter, "On Place," 45–46.
68. See Halaby, "On Politics and Art," 160.
69. Reichert, "Samia Halaby," 35; Winter, "On Place," 45–47.
70. Halaby began working with the Amiga, a personal computer by Commodore, to create moving paintings that bring shapes and colors to life while adding sound, compositions she refers to as kinetic paintings. In 1993, she formed the "Kinetic Painting Group" with musicians Kevin Nathaniel Hylton (her former student at Yale University) and Hasan Bakr. The group continues globally: Halaby recreates her kinetic paintings live while Hylton and Bakr improvise music simultaneously. For a history of Halaby's work with digital art, see "My History with Digital Art," in *Samia Halaby: Centers of Energy*, 135–52.
71. Farhat and Halaby, *Samia Halaby*, 223.
72. Valerie Anishchenkova, *Autobiographical Identities in Contemporary Arab Culture* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 31.
73. Halaby, *Growing Shapes*, 107; Halaby, "Olives of Palestine," *Selections*, 99.
74. Reichert and Winter, "From Jerusalem to New York: Biography and Timeline of Samia Halaby," in *Samia Halaby: Centers of Energy*, 176–84.
75. Halaby explains that Ayyam's support allowed her to continue painting because she was running out of space to work. Farhat and Halaby, *Samia Halaby*, 246; Claire Messud, "Samia Halaby: Breathing Poetry into a War-Torn Landscape," *Wasafiri* 29, no. 4 (2014): 66.
76. Halaby, "Early Life," 34–5; Farhat and Halaby, *Samia Halaby*, 324–25; Halaby, *Growing Shapes*, 68.

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Trina Michelle Robinson

Black Figures Out of Focus

By Luke Williams

A long, slow, spiritual wail draws out over video footage of a river glistening in the sun. The grainy camera pans across the enormous body of water that flows out of sight and to the horizon. It is the Ohio River: a pioneer path of western expansion, a trade route downstream to the Mississippi, and a border between the slaveholding state of Kentucky and the free state of Ohio. Framed by these diametric oppositions, the camera travels along the river, sitting in the liminal space between capture and freedom.

This footage is part of a two-panel video installation by Trina Michelle Robinson (b. 1975) titled *Elegy for Nancy* (2022; Fig. 1 and Pl. 17). As the video begins, the words of Lucille Clifton's poem, "blessing of the boats," appear on screen:

> may the tide
> that is entering even now
> the lip of our understanding
> carry you out
> beyond the face of fear
> may you kiss
> the wind then turn from it
> certain that it will
> love your back

Delivered in the second person, the poem sounds like a prayer. One for love and safety, it is full of care but also longing. The poem captures hope and sadness simultaneously as its addressee is sent out to uncertain destinations beyond the speaker's embrace. The words appear against the Ohio River's backdrop, overlaid visually, blending in with the waterway suggesting a conflation in its address. Is the lyric form meant to address the water, the listener, or a distant beloved? Perhaps they are all one and the same. The answer remains elusive. The poem remains incomplete. Instead, as viewers of *Elegy*, we are left with longing, certain only that the lip of our understanding is receding over the horizon and out of view. Left only with more longing, we are invited to dwell in the space of uncertainty to see what we might find.



Fig. 1. Trina Michelle Robinson, still from *Elegy for Nancy* (2022), single-channel video with sound (4:09 minutes), San Francisco, CA. © Trina Michelle Robinson.

Robinson's early career turns to strategies of nonperformance that articulate her longing for freedom. Examined here are three of Robinson's works created in 2022: *Elegy for Nancy* (see Fig. 1); *Liberation Through Redaction* (Pl. 18); and *Refuge* (see Fig. 5). The year 2022 marked Robinson's completion of her MFA from the California College of Arts and her first museum solo exhibition.[1] It is no coincidence that Robinson was preoccupied with longings for freedom as she attempted to establish herself as a professional in the art market, which, at that moment, placed a premium on representations of Black figures. Robinson developed these works to challenge what she perceived as a hunger for "any type of victimization story,"[2] especially from people of color or from women. For the art world, as she understood it, the stories of her enslaved ancestors offered a type of "trauma porn" for an overwhelmingly white bourgeois viewership.[3] Under a white gaze, representations of Black figures (their bodies) are reduced to things subject to consumption and exploitation, a process that Black feminist cultural critic Hortense Spillers refers to as "pornotroping."[4] The deep irony subtending the art market demand for

representations of slavery is that it compounds Black suffering by trafficking in representations of people who were themselves bought and sold. The reality of the art market poses a challenge for Robinson who nevertheless aims to claim her family history. In these three works, Robinson attempts to obliquely embrace the history of slavery without making the Black figure available for voyeurism. This tension leads her to explore strategies that are identified as nonperformance in her visual art practice.

This reading of Robinson's artwork through a performance studies framework is meant to account for the processual experience of creation that precedes the index which we recognize as the work of art. Beyond a metaphorical analogy, studio artists rehearse the creation of their artwork as they refine the process that most authentically captures their voice. Robinson's work makes clear the importance of an audience who witnesses the object, and her preparation demonstrates the anticipated reception and impact of her artwork. Performance studies is uniquely situated to account for this impact. As Performance studies scholar Jennifer DeVere Brody writes, "What a performance theory-based reading of a work of art can do ... that art historical readings tend not to do, is to make the painting come to life as a force in the world."[5] Meaning, reading artworks through a performance studies lens seeks to account for the ways that art objects mediate the relationship between the artist and her context, gesturing to systems of circulation and power in which the art work arrives. While not paintings themselves, *Elegy for Nancy*, *Liberation Through Redaction,* and *Refuge* are pieces of art that codify Robinson's simultaneous acknowledgement and reconciliation of her audience, and thus, by default, market forces, through her artwork. *Liberation Through Redaction* and *Refuge* are two photopolymer intaglio prints, while *Elegy for Nancy* is a video-based work.[6] *Elegy* follows Robinson's previous video documentary work, such as *Revival* (2021) and *Meditations on Migrations* (2016–22). An evident throughline in Robinson's artwork is that she uses her art practice to archivally excavate her personal family history. She follows the stories of family figures through stories of migration, racial passing in the military, and enslavement. *Elegy for Nancy* differs from Robinson's previous documentary work as it is the first piece she made that documents the life of a female ancestor. Though Robinson is a practiced archival scholar, she previously uncovered stories of her male ancestors far more often. Focusing on them was less of a conscious decision and more one that demonstrates the subtle sexism of the archive that documents the lives of men more than women. As a result, *Elegy for Nancy* offers a moment to read against the grain of the archive to bear witness to history that is otherwise unobserved. Visibility isn't necessarily an end unto itself; rather, *Elegy for Nancy* attempts to strike a balance between spotlighting the story of her ancestor and ensuring the evoked figure is respected by viewers. The performative tactics Robinson employs interrogate the discourse of Black representation, introducing an aesthetic intervention to visual arts that can only be described as nonperformance.

"Nonperformance," a term theorized by Fred Moten, gestures to performative actions that appear outside of, or more accurately, before, a modern legal, socio-political, and economic dialectic of actions.[7] It is not to be confused with refusal, which ultimately reasserts the normative with its position against it. What can be done when all action is rationalized and coopted into capitalist modes of commodification and consumption? Nonperformance seeks a type of doing that attempts to do the thing that is not logical within the range of accepted actions. The impulse of nonperformance is an orientation toward freedom sought in the kink, the fugitive, the otherworldly.[8] In the late 2010s and early 2020s, when Robinson was completing her MFA at California College of the Arts, Black portraiture sold at a premium.[9] Figurative art by well-known Black artists, such as Amy Sherald (b. 1973), Kerry James Marshall, and Kehinde Wiley sold in secondary markets at record-breaking levels.[10] The secondary market records for these contemporary painters was but one data point in a zeitgeist of focus on living Black artists. The culture reflected the content of the paintings of Sherald, Marshall, and Wiley, and in these works the Black figure loomed large. Amidst this commercial influx, Robinson felt her challenge, then, was how to represent Black figures without indulging a bourgeois desire to buy representations of the Black figure. The strategies she employs in response to that challenge are all various iterations of nonperformance, which might more specifically be called redaction, abstraction, and glitch.

By tracking Robinson's aesthetic interventions in the figural genre across multiple mediums, this article argues that artists like Robinson pursue a type of freedom. Though not the same as her enslaved ancestors seeking legal emancipation, it is not entirely distinct and might be understood along a continuum of freedom from exploitation, hypervisibility, and objectification.[11] It might be described as the longing for the opportunity to be absolutely creative without the burden of a white gaze. However this freedom is characterized, Robinson's continual pursuit demonstrates how the words of W.E.B. DuBois, in his chapter "Our Spiritual Strivings," still ring true: "Freedom, too, the long-sought, we still seek."[12] Even post-emancipation, freedom continues to be pursued because it remains not yet fully realized. Post legal emancipation, the market takes the place of the whip.

Encountering Robinson's work, it is amazing what is seen and what remains hidden. *Liberation Through Redaction* (see Pl. 18) is a reproduced document from the archives of Robinson's family history. Specifically, it was the last will and testament of James French, a Kentucky plantocrat, who bequeathed his property at the time of his death to his children, including his son, Richard French, a future member of the US House of Representatives. Listed among the property were the names of Robinson's ancestors, including her great-great-great-grandfather, Martin, and his mother, Nancy.[13] As the slaves of the deceased, her ancestors were legally transferred by their owner to his heirs, as one might a family heirloom. The lives of Robinson's ancestors, like many enslaved Africans and their descendants, appeared in history

as fragments only when, as cultural historian Saidiya Hartman writes, "extrapolated from an analysis of the ledger or borrowed from the world of her captors and masters and applied to her."[14] Robinson's archive, history's archive, lacked the evidence to represent the full humanity of the enslaved. They were doubly dehumanized—reduced to objects in the past and erased into the future. History itself was hardly visible, its contours only gleaned in passing mentions and conjured glances. In those passing mentions, Robinson's ancestors were only seen as chattel. Nevertheless, that could not have been the full story, leaving Robinson only the gaps to explore for potential life.

In *Liberation Through Redaction*, Robinson captures her own experience of looking into the past to imagine freedom for her ancestors. The document's gaps and ruptures represented an emotionally charged archive of the past that she wanted to confront. Though she had been conducting research on her family history for years prior, Robinson turned to creative expression to provide potential in the ruptured archive. "The only way for me to process the history is creatively," Robinson emphasizes. "Without the art practice I was completely stuck, but the creative process helped me tell my story."[15] In order to look at and metabolize her history, she needed to approach it artistically through the positionality of an autoethnographic genealogical practice. Nevertheless, it was impossible for her to completely conceptualize the horrors of slavery. At times brutal and at other times mundane, the institution of slavery turned an entire geography and lexicon into an environment of persistent fear and pain. In *Liberation*, Robinson instead asks and imagines what freedom might look like for her ancestors. We can feel in her material choices the experience of gaps and uncertainty, the moments of high emotion, perhaps even anger, but also elegance. The ink is made with soil collected from Senegal, charred cedar, and bone black dry pigment. The sisal is dyed with hibiscus from Senegal. From the raw cotton-paper sourced from a Black-owned farm in North Carolina, the thread frays much like the narrative, as traces of the past slip in and out of the fabric of history. As Robinson notes, she used the thread to intervene in the historical narrative: "I've redacted every word that does not focus on my ancestors' humanity." The alteration with sisal-dyed thread into the text of French's last will and testament offers Robinson a means to "take control of the narrative so all that is left [in this section] is 'The man … Martin … free.'"[16] Reaching back into that past, she obscures mentions of enslavement to imagine freedom in its absence.

Robinson discovered, however, that there are high stakes to making slavery visible. While in her MFA program, Robinson received feedback from some faculty members suggesting that for increased market viability she lean farther into histories of slavery as a foundation of her practice. The sentiment frustrated her, as she felt it reduced her family history to a popular commodity for sale. In Robinson's words:

> While I was in grad school, some people only wanted to hear the stories of my enslaved ancestors. I was trying to focus on stories of migration, and the great migration, which is part of my family history. I wanted to start focusing on that and not talk about enslavement. I noticed they pretty much only wanted to hear about that part of my history and American history.[17]

Robinson felt her instructors made their recommendations because art by Black people about slavery was recognizable to audiences, and, if recognizable, could be sold to support Robinson's emerging career. As satirical YouTube art critic Hennessy Youngman advised in *ART THOUGHTZ: How to Be A Successful Black Artist*: "As a n**** artist, if you don't have anything particular to say, you always have slavery to fall back on…. [W]hite people don't have any shared cultural traumas … as n***** we can really bring in the dough."[18] Youngman's reduction of slavery to a commercial token grossly and inappropriately exploits the real lives of people, and that's the point. His satire mirrors the trend he sees at play in the art world. He summarizes:

> In conclusion, as a n**** artist be angry, be unpredictable and exotic to white folks. Appear to be aligned with Black intellectual fads and what not. Exploit slavery in the production of art objects in order to satisfy the voyeuristic needs of bourgeois white consumer audiences, and say you're doing it to challenge them, so when they leave your provocative and challenging solo exhibition, they have something to talk about while they eat dinner at The Russian Tea Room. Follow that and you'll be a successful n**** artist.[19]

Youngman's words are meant to be satirical, and like all good satire, there is a kernel of truth. Many artists draw upon the history of US slavery to inspire their creative work. Some have become commercially successful. The paradigm creates an ethical dilemma for any emerging artist navigating the market. Robinson was repulsed by the thought of exploiting her family history for commercial benefit, especially for the benefit of a bourgeois viewership transfixed on the history of slavery. It is the continuity of exploitation that collapses history to reveal the capitalization on African Americans as antebellum labor and postbellum cultural commodities.

Robinson sought to circumvent exploiting her ancestors by reconsidering not only how the story of her enslaved ancestors is told, but how it is received. "Okay," she said to herself at the time, "If you want me to talk about slavery, I'm not going to give it to you. I'm going to redact every mention or reference to slavery in this document."[20] In *Liberation Through Redaction*, the sisal is not randomly placed, on the contrary, it is meant to strategically redact text created from the specially made ink. Obscuring the text also covers the material referents to history, and yet, they remained buried beneath the surface. As a nonperformative strategy, redaction is a creative intervention that reorients the observability of its target. Redaction obscures, removes, and reorganizes the availability of the written word and the official record even if it cannot completely erase it. It is often associated with secrecy and privacy. Most popularly, redaction recalls blacked-out text from intelligence agency dossiers, like the FBI, which kept files



Fig. 2. Alexandra Bell, *A Teenager With Promise* (2017), screenprint and archival pigment print on paper.

on American citizens and political movements like the Black Panther Party. J. Edgar Hoover's infamous COINTELPRO files conspicuously redacted information to target Americans they deemed a threat.

Black artists like Alexandra Bell (b. 1983) have coopted the same tools of the surveillance state to rescript archives of state violence. Consider Bell's *A Teenager With Promise* (2017; Fig. 2), a reprint of covers from the *New York Times* depicting news coverage in the aftermath of Michael Brown's killing, on August 9, 2014, by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. Bell redacts the text that evinced bias for Wilson and against Brown, leaving the reader with the core narrative to consider. By heavily redacting the newspaper's editorial voice, it becomes possible, as Christina Sharpe suggests, that "we might hear" what Brown's defenders might say in his defense.[21] Sharpe theorizes, "Black redaction and Black annotation … are ways of imagining otherwise."[22] When applied to *Liberation Through Redaction*, redaction is used to cover up text that speaks to the enslavement of Robinson's ancestors by spotlighting, as if through found poetry, reorganized syntax that rescripts her ancestors in their humanity. "Martin … the man … free" is a reimagining of how his memory might have existed in a different reality where he was liberated rather than enslaved. The textual nonperformance does not resist what has actually been, instead opting to selectively rescript what aspects of the past can be seen so that new meanings might become visible in the future.

Nevertheless, redaction remains a method of concealment, and the sisal thread which obscures words reveals the sheer effort to reimagine *the otherwise*. The thread splits and frays into tangled offshoots: in the less dense areas, the words are nearly visible; in more dense pockets, the red bursts onto the page, indexing the repetitive, threading motion required to obscure as much as possible (Fig. 3). Black redaction proposes that the partial obscurity from an outside antiblack gaze acts to prevent surveillance and permit fugitivity. The textual gaps overwhelm the document, and the tangles of thread accumulate in densities that speak to the immense effort required to fabulate around the past. The approach is proximate to what Hartman introduces as "critical fabulation" to recuperate the possibility of "what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done."[23] Fabulation is not to be misunderstood as a means of making up history. Rather, fabulation is an act that indexes the absences of unarchived histories, which leaves only fabulation as a means to access the past. While redaction reveals an alternative perspective on the embodied archive, it also traces its own concealment and the mitigated efforts to metaphorically and materially create an alternate reality. As a result, *Liberation Through Redaction* speaks to itself across an aporetic duality: even as Robinson labors to put distance between herself and the historical past, she reaches back to connect to the memory of her ancestors. It is an impossible difference, a push and pull in opposite directions, which in turn reframes the conditions of nonperformance. Representing this contradiction allows Robinson's ancestors to come into focus through the archives even as she obscures history from view.

Even though *Liberation Through Redaction* foregrounds the absenting of text, what remains is equally important. The printed text appears fuzzy. The otherwise sharp cursive is replicated irresolutely due to a layered intaglio printmaking process. Robinson reproduced the archival document by converting the image of the document into a mylar positive, which is then transferred onto a photopolymer plate. The plate is ink-pressed to reproduce the image onto her handmade cotton paper. Precision is lost in the multiple rounds of translation and transfer, so that by the time the text is replicated on the paper, it appears fuzzy—especially as the process is repeated for multiple editions in a series. Print's capacity as a process medium contributes to the dissolution of clarity and capture, through what Jennifer Robert's describes as print's "primordial grammar."[24] The language itself, when it



Fig. 3. Trina Michelle Robinson, detail of *Liberation Through Redaction* (2022), photopolymer intaglio print, ink made with soil collected from Senegal, charred cedar, bone black dry pigment, sisal dyed with hibiscus from Senegal, raw cotton paper sourced from a Black-owned farm in North Carolina. Courtesy of the artist.

appears, is unstable.[25] This is a point underscored by Glenn Ligon, whose etching and aquatint, *Untitled (Four Etchings)* (1992), illustrates the degradation of text. In one specific etching from the suite (Fig. 4), the words are taken from an essay by Zora Neale Hurston. They lose the sharpness of their edges as the repeated phrase blurs into indecipherability. At the point where the eye fails, the imagination activates.[26] In 1990 Ligon produced a work with this text in oil stick on a door found in his studio, but in print, the contradiction between the assumed immediacy and facticity of print media is challenged by the text's illegibility and necessity of fabulation in creating that time-based immediacy.

While critics might argue that fabulation is more fantasy than archival intervention, Robinson's *Liberation Through Redaction* destabilizes the archive's assumed veracity through the performance of printed text. Suddenly, all that is solid melts into abstraction. Yet, it is an abstraction deeply embodied and informed by the artist's identity. We might ground *Liberation* within a tradition of "Black Feminist Modernisms" as Sarah Louis Cowan defines it, whereby Black women artists use "diverse creative practices that strategically utilize modernist idioms in order to unsettle racist and sexist logics."[27] The hapticity of the document is akin to a textile, thus drawing upon a repertoire of Black women's communal practice. We might then ask, What does *Liberation Through Redaction* share with a Faith Ringgold (1930–2004) "story quilt," or a Delita Martin (b. 1972) portrait that blurs the abstraction of print with the traditionally feminized labor of quilting? By looking closely at abstraction, we can begin to see figures in the shadows.

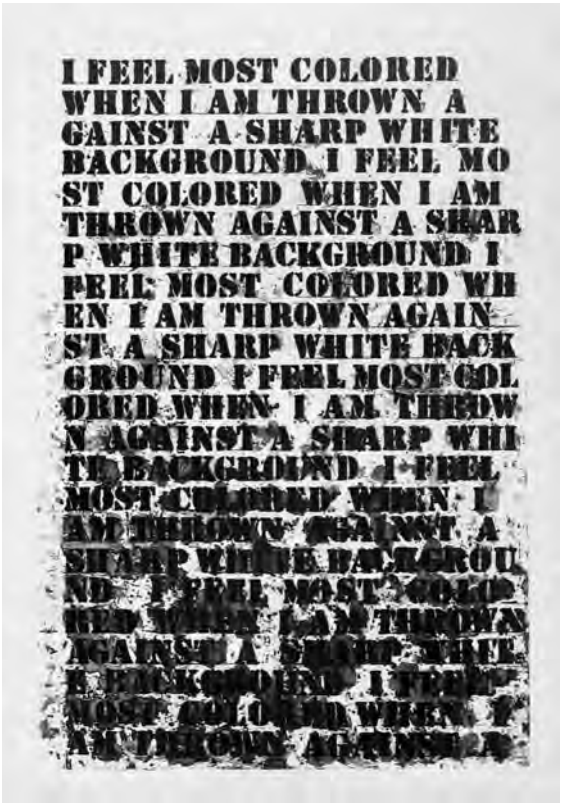


Fig. 4. Glenn Ligon, *Untitled* (*Four Etchings*), 1992 (detail). Suite of four; softground etching, aquatint, spit bite, and sugarlift on paper. Each: 25" x 17 3/8" (63.5 x 44.15 cm). Edition of 45 and 10 APs. © Glenn Ligon; Courtesy of the artist, Hauser & Wirth, and Thomas Dane Gallery.

One might imagine figures hiding in Robinson's photopolymer print, *Refuge* (2022; Fig. 5). The intensities of ink rolled across the print awaken abstraction's potential to engage nonperformance. Abstraction casts doubt on the presence, or the imagined presence, of the Black figure. *Refuge* extends many of the commitments established in *Liberation Through Redaction* yet differs by leaning harder into the translatory process of printmaking and the material absorptions and affordances of cotton. The blurred image, a product of the intaglio translation from an etched, inked plate to paper, produces a terrain that keeps the viewer anxiously shifting in and out of focus. Bright repeating patterns of variously pointed shapes cluster like footprints darting across the page; they scurry, isolated and occasionally exploding into an eruption of dramatic movement; and sharp angular lines swoop up from the bottom left and center over toward the right sides. The violent, white diagonal lines are offset by large pockets of intense black pools, though the dark spots are not monochromatically black but rather gradients of black. The eye searches around these pockets of never-ending depth, searching for something, or someone, to emerge from the darkness. The chiaroscuro contrast feels like a Rorschach test, seemingly unintelligible patterns of black and white shift through dramatic action for wild moments—monsters, a gnarled face, a boat? Fleeting, these images take shape and vanish. Unknowingly, it is an attempt to make sense of a work of art in partial darkness.[28] While *Refuge* does not depict any of these, the patterns invite viewers to notice how their own psychological gestalts play out in their imagination. Abstraction offers opportunities for strategies of nonperformance because of its potential to engage the imagination.



Fig. 5. Trina Michelle Robinson, *Refuge* (2022), photopolymer intaglio print, 6" x 8". Courtesy of the artist.

Refuge sutures the historical terrain with the formal surface of the image's texture. The image was taken on the patch of land



Fig. 6. Dawoud Bey, *Untitled #18 (Creek and House)* (2017), gelatin silver print, 44" x 55". © Dawoud Bey, courtesy the artist and Sean Kelly, New York/Los Angeles.

where Robinson's ancestors were enslaved in Kentucky. She came across it on a research visit. According to the current owners, it was part of a swath of forests and wooded areas that likely had not been altered since Robinson's great-great-great grandparents had grown up there.[29] The landscape conjures the histories of those who once inhabited it and achieves a feeling similar to that of Dawoud Bey's 2018 series of landscape photographs, *Night Coming Tenderly, Black* (2017; Fig. 6), which reimagine darkness as cover for fugitive slaves.[30] Robinson's landscape print recreates the "spatial and sensory experience" to represent subjects via spatial environment.[31] Where *Refuge* differs is in the particular material qualities it achieves as a print. Rather than the sharpness achieved in Bey's gelatin print, Robinson leans further into irresolution and the image appears blurry at the edges (as if out of phase). It is the combination of the paper's thickness and the iterative repetitions, as the image is translated from surface to surface, and through repeated printings, from artist's proof to final edition of four, which produces its blurred density. The foliage seems to be thicker as a result, the terrain even more dangerous, the dark recesses even more full of mystery. The full effect of the image arrives as a joint product of the topographical environment of Kentucky and the topographical surface of the image rendered in abstraction.

The uncertainty evoked by *Refuge*'s visual abstraction produces anxiety. This is where its power lies. As Leigh Raiford argues, "Abstract art that specifically moves away from figuration potentially offers a means of challenging white supremacy."[32] It does so by animating and reflecting our imaginative capacities and revealing the nature of our viewing habitus. In *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing*, art historian James Elkins recounts a personal story of a tourist trip to a swamp, where he took pictures of dangerous and poisonous animals. When the image was developed, he realized he could no longer find the animals. As he writes, "The photograph has a residual echo of that sensation, since I know it is not just a picture of undergrowth. In other photos from the same series, I can just discern the smooth curve of a snake or an alligator's snout. Here I cannot see anything, and the more I look at the picture the more alarming it becomes."[33] The animals were camouflaged and protected by their habitat. The knowledge of their presence but impossibility of their identification might be said to "thicken" or "curdle" the photograph with latent meaning and sunken bodies.[34] Their concealment, and by proxy Elkins' own exposure, struck a sense of fear into him. Nonperformance could perhaps also describe the presence a body has in absentia.

How does one see when nothing is there? In particular, and for *Refuge*, how does the process of seeing change when details of the object are inferred by proximity to an enslaved past? In this light, the symbolism of the cotton betrays its materiality. Cotton, as Anna Arabindan-Kesson remarks, is a "material with a memory," which she takes to characterize "as an object redolent with associations both political and cultural, cotton continues to exist in the present as an artifact charged with the traces of labor under slavery…."[35] As a material, cotton has a history of production and circulation that touched people across class through connected markets. Cotton is "charged" with "traces" of the historical institution of slavery. Wherever it appears, cotton maintains this trace. Even when abstracted. The cotton makes it so that the Black figure is, to borrow a phrase from Huey Copeland, "bound to appear."[36] We cannot help but see the legacy of slavery.

Kara Walker's (b. 1969) silhouettes dramatically demonstrate what we see when nothing is there. The silhouette,



Fig. 7. Kara Walker, detail of *The Sovereign Citizens Sesquicentennial Civil War Celebration* (2013), cut paper and adhesive on wall, approx. 157 1/2" x 984 1/4" (dimensions variable). Installation view from the exhibition, *We at the Camden Arts Centre/MAC are Exceedingly Proud to present an Exhibition of Capable Artworks by the Notable Hand of the Celebrated American, Kara Elizabeth Walker, Negress*, Camden Arts Centre, London, United Kingdom, 2013. Photo: Angus Mill Photography. © Kara Walker, courtesy of Sikkema Malloy Jenkins and Sprüth Magers.

according to Walker, is "a blank space, but it's not at all a blank space, it's both there and not there."[37] Her large silhouettes (2013–14; Fig. 7) merely suggest grotesque scenes of antebellum horrors. Our imaginations do the rest. As art historian Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw remarked upon seeing Walker's work for the first time, "Were these elegant black silhouettes actually doing the horrible and ghastly things that I imagined, or was I projecting my own nasty thoughts onto them?"[38] Perhaps both: spectators fill in the gaps with expectation and inference. The viewing relationship is foregrounded here as we become aware of our anticipation, and perhaps desire, to color in the blanks with our imagination's monstrous details. To a more subtle degree, the same is also true for Robinson's *Refuge*. When the anxious imagination intersects the imago of Blackness, as it does in *Refuge*, the animals turn into figures. In the dark recesses it seems that a figure could emerge at any time. Absent of a Black body to anchor our gaze, they proliferate in hiding. They are nowhere, and everywhere, all at once. What we see collides with what we think we see. We might have the sinking suspicion of being watched, in a moment of what Simone Browne would refer to as "dark souseveillance."[39] Here, dark sousveillance describes the counterpractice of evasion while critiquing regimes of surveillance such as the bourgeois gaze. Fundamentally, the uncertainty of close looking at *Refuge*'s abstraction excites an embodied reaction to failure, in this case the embodied affects of being *unable* to surveil that is so unsettling. *Refuge* reveals that the interests of the slave holder and the interests of the bourgeois art viewer are one in the same: to look and to find. Failing to locate bodies within this processual, nonperforming abstraction creates abiding feelings of anxiety. The heightened imagination is so strong you can feel it.

For Robinson, history is more than simply a metaphor. It is an experience she can touch, and through touching, imagine what might have been. To create the paper from the raw cotton, she must first separate the seeds from the boll. The meticulous work is painstaking labor that causes her fingers to ache. She deduces that her ancestors must have felt that ache when they first picked cotton or did other manual labor. Robinson's approach to touching cotton as a means of "touching history" depends on an imaginative connection available in trace. The imaginative connection to the past echoes Robinson's work in *Liberation Through Redaction* to conjure her ancestors through critical fabulation. Critical fabulation for Robinson also includes what might have been felt. Fabulation occurs here not simply as an act of fantasy. Rather, Robinson attempts to access the lived experiences of her ancestors through a phenomenological approximation. It is by no means true that all of her ancestors picked cotton, but she shares an aching pain with them across geographies and across time. It is through the body that Robinson feels closest with her ancestors.

The phenomenological experience functions as an alternative means of accessing an archive to the past. The endeavor illustrates not only the touching of history, but also "how one is *touched* by history."[40] Perhaps this is fitting given



Fig. 8. Carrie Mae Weems, *A Distant View* (2003), gelatin silver print, 20" x 20". Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York, Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.

that Robinson's body, literally her DNA, is a direct inheritance from her ancestors. She uses her body as the medium through which she imagines the past, and specifically how she imagines the lived experience of her ancestors. This dynamic is complicated in Robinson's video *Elegy for Nancy*, as she records herself from a moment of her fabulatory, phenomenological practice. She makes an embodied practice, one typically internal, public for viewers to see. The result raises questions about the presence of the body on screen, and how raced and gendered bodies reconcile the embodied with the scopic through nonperformance.

Shortly after poet Lucille Clifton's words appear on the screen in *Elegy for Nancy* (Pl. 19), they fade away, replaced by two projected panels appearing side by side. On one is the footage of the previous river captured in Super 8mm, on the other, a ceremonious scene developed in digital. A basket of flowers is gathered by a brown-skinned woman in a tangerine cotton dress who slowly settles down between grass and wheat at the banks of the river, water already beginning to creep up her ankles and cling to the dress's hem. She pauses a moment, looking forward in determination. The scene of the Ohio River fades away. Her gaze settles on the absence, where the Ohio River was, before. She blinks once, twice, the glare of the sun in her eyes, and then her eyes scan as if looking for something or someone. At that moment, her figure buzzes out of focus (Pl. 20). It is as if her body itself glitches. Amidst the otherwise calm landscape and pensive feeling of the scene, the glitch is dynamic, dramatic, and evocative. It is a small but effective disruption that upends the supposed stability of the scene. Suddenly, Robinson's body snaps back into place. The viewer is left, however, with a lingering sense of unease; her presence now seems capricious, as if, at any moment, she could disappear from view.



Fig. 9. Trina Michelle Robinson, still from *Elegy for Nancy* (2022), single-channel video with sound (4:09 minutes), San Francisco, CA. © Trina Michelle Robinson.

Elegy for Nancy differs from Robinson's other works this year in several immediately obvious ways. While *Refuge and Liberation Through Redaction* were print reproductions, *Elegy* is a digital video altering the presentation and materiality of the image. Additionally, *Elegy* embraces the figure in a way that the works on cotton do not. Whereas the print works eschew any type of candid figural representation, in *Elegy*, Robinson appears on screen in an auto-self-portrait style—she captures herself on video.

Robinson's body and her dress-turned-costume in *Elegy* provide the medium for sensory fabulation. Just as cotton provided the phenomenological "emotional memory" of the imagination in her print work. In her desire to recuperate this impossible past, her body becomes an "archive" that both "re-enacts" "an affective mode of historicity" and opens up afterlives in the future.[41] Through her skin, and the touching and being touched by history, she inhabits a truth through her imagination and the phenomenology of her experience. But, for viewers, this experience is mediated, only visible on the screen. There is a difference between what history Robinson imagines through her embodied practice, and what history she imagines an audience sees when they see her body on screen.

Consider, by way of comparative analysis, Carrie Mae Weems's (b. 1953) *A Distant View* from *The Louisiana Project* (2003; Fig. 8). Weems's photograph echoes Robinson's *Elegy.* In both, we see a brown woman slightly reposed in a cotton dress. In *A Distant View*, the plantation house in the background anchors the geography within slavery and its afterlife. The Ohio River in *Elegy* is another such geography; though water, not land, it is a place that retains the history of slavery's institutions. In both works, history, thought to be distant, is collapsed into the present.[42] The figures are haunted by history. As their flowy garments suggest, however, these figures also suggest becoming the ghosts of history. Geography and history collapse into the figure and they become linked by virtue of the body's presence. Discussing Weems's 2006 *Roaming* series in concert with *The Louisiana Project*, Kimberly Juanita Brown emphasizes how the artist "has positioned her body with an eye toward the bifocality of sight and site." Brown continues, "We see the structures the figure presents to us. We see them through her and with her body's permission."[43] The same is true for Robinson. Her body becomes the site that enables sight. It becomes an "afterimage" of slavery itself, a residual trace from which the history can be gleaned. But who gave permission for Robinson's body to become the vehicle through which history becomes present for an unidentified "we" viewing her? Here the doubling of slavery's presence on the Black female body is accounted for, in that permission is *assumed* to be given for us to look, even if that is not the case.

In *Elegy for Nancy*, Robinson attempts to engage nonperformance by glitching as opposed to redacting the representation of her body on screen. Even though she fabulates the past through an embodied practice of touching and feeling, Robinson was hyperaware of the possibility that audiences might see her Black female body as a symbol for slavery. She did not want her estimation of Nancy's experiences to be read as a *repetition* of it. She wished to avoid turning her body into a "cipher" through which images of slavery could be projected, imagined, and read, as Rizvana Bradley elegantly defines "those subjects who immediately recognize themselves as their audience."[44] To avoid falling into that exploitative viewing dynamic, Robinson turned to the glitch. Much like the redaction of the sisal thread in *Liberation*, and the abstraction of *Refuge*, the glitch functions as a strategy for nonperformance meant to disrupt a viewing public's visual access.

When placed side by side with *Liberation Through Redaction* and *Refuge*, *Elegy for Nancy* registers nonperformance as a shared ethical and formal commitment with Robinson's works on cotton. In Robinson's print works, she uses redaction and abstraction to disturb the access of a white gaze. Similarly, in *Elegy,* Robinson incorporates many disruptions through image and time. Her juxtaposition of two video channels creates a temporal distinction throughout the video. The left-hand channel where she appears is captured with digital video, rendered in high definition and color; the right-hand side footage of the Ohio River is recorded in Super 8 to display the film footage. Looking between the two, there is a clear suggestion that these scenes take place in different places and times. Robinson's aim is to disrupt the audience's fixation on a historical retelling of slavery. She jumps back and forth chronologically to keep the viewer unsteady. The most jarring moment of the video is when Robinson's body phases in and out of focus. It is by disrupting her depiction she most assertively intervenes, by staging what might be called a "glitch." Highlighting this intentionality, it is only her body in the otherwise smooth digital landscape buzzing, phasing in and out, in short, glitching. "Within glitch feminism," as defined by Legacy Russell, "glitch is celebrated as a vehicle of refusal, a strategy of nonperformance. This glitch aims to make abstract again that which has been forced into an uncomfortable and ill-defined material."[45] The glitch reintroduces uncertainty into that which is read as authentic. The glitch turns Robinson's figure into an inhospitable surface for viewer projection and consumption. Her application of the glitch signals her continued concern with problematic viewing dynamics. As a



Fig. 10. Trina Michelle Robinson's paper-making process of cooking cotton in pot.



Fig. 11. Trina Michelle Robinson's paper-making process of cooking cotton in pot.

result, Robinson's nonperformance in *Elegy for Nancy* invites viewers to consider the changes occurring in the spaces between the material and the maternal—the object and the flesh.[46] Robinson's figure, once available, becomes a mystery.

The glitch casts doubt on the authenticity of Robinson's presence. The failure of the machine to function is also the failure of the video to deliver images that can be trusted objectively. The glitch activates what Shane Denson refers to as "discorrelation," which is defined as "a phenomenological disconnect between viewing subjects and the object-images they view."[47] Robinson's image ceases to be a direct representation of her actions and intentions. Her body transforms from a cipher into an object-image on screen. It reveals the constructed nature of the video, and by extension, the straining effort of the viewer to connect to the past history through her body. After the glitch, her body is flattened back into the two-dimensional plane. The viewer is forced to question the whole video as it dissolves into doubt. What else is staged, manipulated, or otherwise altered? Robinson's glitching façade emphasizes the constructed medium of the video object, undermining any direct link between her body as a cipher for histories of the enslaved. Her performance yields a nonperformance.

Just after Robinson's body glitches, her image settles back into place. But there is a sense that she might glitch and disappear at any moment. Her body, rendered an elusive abstraction, merges with the materials of the frame. We see Robinson's feet in the shallow water at the banks of the river as the water climbs up the hems of her dress. In the archival footage in the adjoining frame, members of a Black Baptist church are gathered in a river. Robinson's frame disappears, and we are left with the baptismal scene on the right where we see a pastor with his right hand raised up before he lowers a woman dressed in all white to plunge into the water (Fig. 9). Robinson reemerges on the left-hand channel, now seated in the water. She is picking the petals off flowers and scattering them in the river. Time passes. She lowers further into the water, the same determined look on her face. Not ecstatic, not uncomfortable, perhaps only quiet. For a moment Robinson floats, and then she pushes her head backwards and into the water.

Towards the end of the video, Clifton's "blessing the boats" completes:

> may you
> open your eyes to water
> water waving forever
> and may you in your innocence
> sail through this to that

In the final section of "blessing of the boats," water takes on a life of its own. The poem previously left us with a sense of a departure occurring before a journey, but it leaves us with a sense that water is not only an obstacle to overcome in that journey but perhaps a partner in the journey itself. Water is animated, "water waving forever," as it bids a safe voyage and endlessly undulates in waves. The contrast of the double-meaning here signals the departure as a moment of loss, and the repetition of that loss, as somehow foundational to the enduring role that water plays in both sending off and welcoming travelers throughout time.

Water holds a key to how we might otherwise conceptualize history. In *Elegy for Nancy*, water's moving, from this to that, destabilizes sites of subjectivity and objectivity attendant to Robinson's body. Clifton's animated and anthropomorphized

water takes on significance in the movement from "this to that." In this reading, "this to that" is more than the distance from one place to another, but also an invitation to consider the porous fluidity of water's materiality. Water reveals the "trans-corporeality" of the human body, after all, more than half of the human body is made up of water. As Stacy Alaimo argues, "Tracing substantial interchanges renders the human permeable, dissolving stable outlines."[48] The stable sense of self as a subject breaks down. Opening ourselves to water as material proposes, in Moten's terms, we give our consent not to be a single being.

Robinson's process of making paper by hand from raw cotton underscores the permeability of history. To create her print, she immerses herself in the materiality of cotton in both the picking and the processing of the material. The cotton is boiled in water for hours at a time, suffusing into pulp that eventually becomes the paper stock on which *Refuge* and *Liberation Through Redaction* are printed (Figs. 10–11). One wonders, as the object charged with the traces of slavery diffuses into the water, what happens to its memory? How do symbolic potencies bleed into objects and by extension into subjects? Water moving "from this to that" proposes that memory, history, and the present might flow together. Instead of seeing history as a distant object held at a distant, and a commodity to be purchased, could history be like water? Rather than history existing in a thing to be looked at, could it be felt all around and through us as a persistent and permeable sense of an unending moment? If history were to change, so, too, might its subjects. Nonperformance upsets the expectation of the market by directing us toward a more porous form of Black bodily exchange. *Elegy* offers a bold possibility that we might trouble our established modes of viewing. Robinson proposes, through her practice and her nonperformance, that we might feel history as a part of us and ourselves as part of each other. •

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Notes

1. Trina Robinson's first solo exhibition, *Excavation: Past, Present, Future,* was held at the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) in San Francisco, curated by Selam Bekele, in 2022. It debuted *Elegy for Nancy* and *Refuge*, among other works.
2. Trina Robinson, interview with the author, October 2022.
3. Robinson. See also Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18, https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6.
4. Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 66–67.
5. Jennifer DeVere Brody, "Black Cat Fever: Manifestations of Manet's Olympia," *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 1 (March 2001): 96.
6. *Elegy for Nancy* is a video-based work, however, when it debuted at MoAD in 2022, it was presented as part of a shrine. Information on the shrine framing the video is included here: Wenge Wood sourced West or Central Africa and Gaboon Ebony from West Africa, cotton bolls from a Black-owned farm in North Carolina painted with 24 ct gold leaf, water collected from the Ohio River, glass jar, cowrie shells covered with cyanotype portrait of an ancestor, terracotta bowls, from Senegal: cedar, soil, white hibiscus, chili peppers, baobab fruit and moringa seeds, indigo dyed cotton fabric. Credits: Indigo dyed cotton fabric meditation cushions made by Nicki Shockz. Glass Jar made by Jon Garfield.
7. Fred Moten, *Stolen Life* (Duke University Press, 2018), 248. Nonperformance is elaborated on by André Lepecki as "a qualified, highly strategic, and highly political refusal to perform under the normative (ir)rationalities that condition and impose their own (i)logics as the only possible/permissible/acceptable ones." See André Lepecki, *Singularities: Dance in the Age of Performance* (Routledge, 2016), 14.
8. The distinction is captured in Moten's difference between the "anti" and the "ante." Where Blackness exists prior to Western philosophy, which situates the subject as a single contained being, and Blackness as failure to meet this norm. Moten offers a reframe where normativity is the imposition on the Blackness of everything prior. Fred Moten, "Blackness and Nonperformance," virtual lecture, Sept. 15, 2015, Afterlives: The Museum of Modern Art Live, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2leiFByIIg.
9. John-Baptiste Odour, "The Politics of Black Figurative Art Today," *Frieze* 240 (2024), https://www.frieze.com/article/john-baptiste-oduor-black-figuration-240.
10. Laurianne Simonin, "New Records for Amy Sherald and Kehinde Wiley," *Barnebys*, Dec. 10, 2020, https://www.barnebys.com/blog/new-records-for-amy-sherald-and-kehinde-wiley.
11. Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford University Press, 1969), 15–16.
12. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Dover Publications, 1994), 7.
13. Robinson is currently conducting her own historical research on the census archives of Covington, Kentucky, where her family lived in 1860. Her work provides an example of artist scholarship to recover her ancestors in the archive.
14. Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 2, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/241115.
15. Robinson, interview with the author, November 2022.
16. Robinson. See also Robinson's website, https://www.trinamrobinson.com/papermaking-print-alternative-photography.
17. Robinson, October 2022.
18. Hennessy Youngman, "ART THOUGHTZ: How to Be A Successful Black Artist," Oct. 7, 2010, YouTube video, 6 min., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3L_NnX8oj-g&ab_channel=HennessyYoungman. Redactions my own.
19. Youngman.
20. Robinson, October 2022.
21. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016), 123.
22. Sharpe, 115.
23. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11.
24. Jennifer L. Roberts, *Contact: Art and the Pull of Print* (Princeton University Press, 2024), 3.
25. See Glenn Ligon, "Glenn Ligon: 'Language is Unstable,'" YouTube video, 6 min., Hauser & Wirth, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51KxJqFSXek&t=112s&ab_channel=Hauser%26Wirth%E2%80%93ArtGallery.
26. Darby English reads Ligon's text pieces as activating a "strain" between observation and imagination that makes the viewer aware of their own "imaging consciousness," a term he attributes to Jean-Paul Sartre. In Darby English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (MIT Press, 2007), 220.

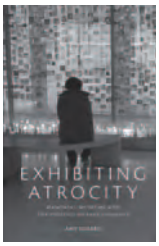
27. Sarah Louise Cowan, *Howardena Pindell: Reclaiming Abstraction* (Yale University Press, 2022), 6.
28. English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*.
29. Robinson, interview with the author, May 2023.
30. Curated by Valerie Cassel Oliver at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2023–24, *Dawoud Bey: Elegy* (2023), gathered three series of Bey's landscape photography. The name's similarity to Robinson's *Elegy for Nancy* (2022) is coincidental, but poignant for the impulse they both share to speak to the past through absence felt amidst an atmospheric landscape.
31. Dawoud Bey, quoted in Jessica McDonald, "Portfolio of photographs acquired from Dawoud Bey's *Night Coming Tenderly, Black*," *Ransom Center Magazine* (Spring 2020), https://sites.utexas.edu/ransomcentermagazine/2021/02/22/portfolio-of-photographs-acquired-from-dawoud-beys-night-coming-tenderly-black/.
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33. James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing* (HarperCollins, 1997), 79.
34. For a discussion on curdling and the thickness of the image, see Philip Kelleher, "Curdling the Photographic Image: Ana Mendieta's Silueta," *Woman's Art Journal* 44, no. 2 (2023): 13–14. See also, María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppression* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023).
35. Anna Arabindan-Kesson, *Black Bodies, White Gold: Art, Cotton, and Commerce in the Atlantic World* (Duke University Press, 2013), 3.
36. Huey Copeland, *Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America* (University of Chicago Press, 2013).
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38. Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker* (Duke University Press), 4.
39. Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Duke University Press, 2015), 21.
40. Ann Cooper Albright, "Touching History," in *The Sentient Archive: Bodies, Performance, and Memory*, ed. Bill Bissell and Linda Caruso Haviland (Wesleyan University Press, 2018), 73.
41. André Lepecki, "The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances," *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (2010): 35. See also the repetition of behavior described as surrogation by Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (Columbia University Press, 1996), 30.
42. Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, "The Wandering Gaze of Carrie Mae Weems's The Louisiana Project," *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 4 no. 1 (2018), https://journalpanorama.org/article/riff-african-american-artists/the-wandering-gaze/.
43. Kimberly Juanita Brown, *The Repeating Body: Slavery's Visual Resonance in the Contemporary* (Duke University Press, 2015), 191.
44. See Rizvana Bradley, "Picturing Catastrophe: The Visual Politics of Racial Reckoning," *The Yale Review* 109, no. 2 (2021): 158–77.
45. Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (Verso, 2020), 8.
46. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 8–9. See also Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe."
47. Shane Denson, *Discorrelated Images* (Duke University Press, 2020), 26.
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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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De-/Anti-/Post-colonial Feminisms in Contemporary Art and Textile Crafts

Edited by Katy Deepwell
KT Press, 2023

Reviewed by Ana Vivoda

Keen to explore the important differences between three hyphenated feminist approaches, Katy Deepwell brought together a project that encompasses art historical, political, and sociological research. The book is the result of four online seminars bearing the same title, organized in 2022 by Katy Deepwell, Neelam Raina, and Neda Mohamadi at the Middlesex University, that gathered authors who actively work at different geographical locations, from both secure countries and conflict zone regions, to analyze diverse perspectives that intertwine art and craft practice with education, art history, and theory; socio-political, anthropological, and PhD research with contemporary art projects; and craft with educational or public projects and lifelong art practices. The essays continue the thread of the commonly understood distinction between the terms decolonial and post-colonial (articulated in the scholarly work of Walter Mignolo, Anibal Quinjano, Maria Lugones, Gloria Anzaldúa, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, et. al.) and call for "a decolonial anti-racist recognition of alternative being and doing" (7). Reading the book as a sum of divergent voices that intertwine theoretical concepts and participatory artistic practices, a pluriversal complex emerges, inexhaustive of the critique of hegemonic white feminisms and distinct elaborations of autonomous decolonial feminist concerns and strategies grounded in geographically and culturally diverse communities.

The debate opens with Françoise Vergès's critique of universal feminist positions in France, emphasizing the interrelations of white Global North feminist discourses with the homogenizing category of "woman" and capitalist and colonial worldwide dominance. She states that "European feminism has yet to undertake a radical decolonisation and deracialisation process, re-reading its major texts and actions" (13). In her analysis of the colonial history of feminism and its offshoots (as State feminism, femo-nationalism, "civilising feminism," universalist feminism and femo-imperialism), she emphasizes crucial conceptual differences with "the forms of feminism that articulate the questions of class, age, and gender with those of sexuality, racialisation, imperialism, the fight against environmental destruction, land rights, indigenous peoples' rights and so on" (10). Vergès advocates for "decolonial feminism," not to impose a doctrine or theory but to allow women from the Global South and "all those in most vulnerable and insecure positions" to define their own struggles. Highlighting the racial structure of capitalism, she calls for inclusive, pluralist, multidimensional approaches to various multilayered forms of oppression entangling class, age, racialisation, gender, sexuality, public health and conditions. Critical points in her essay read as an invitation for other chapter contributors to provide possible pathways and approaches that put theory into practice.

Dalida Maria Benfield continues this decolonial thread, defining culture as a "site of struggle for marginalized and excluded communities, a place for emergent forms of social possibility from which to imagine the world" (48). She reflects upon her personal art and educational work, accentuating important projects and collaborations during a lifelong practice that reflects the colonial history of the US in Panama. Drawing on her individual family histories throughout her essay, she continues to dwell on the diverse dimensions of oppression and resistance beyond the horizons of Eurocentrism. She highlights her collaboration with Lugones on the video *Mujeres de Pilsen* (Women of Pilsen) (1992) and with the Video Machete collective, approaching the process of creation as a transformative space for all participants. The summary is concluded by a collective work of the Center for Arts, Design + Social Research (CAD+SR), a residency project Benfield founded in Kenya that advocates for "the recognition of pluriversality of planetary culture" (47).

Michelle Williams Gamaker actively engages in developing decolonial, anti-hierarchical, and anti-racist pedagogical methodologies in a fine art practice-based, higher education context. In an essay co-written with colleagues, she outlines the project A Particular Reality (APR) co-founded with Joanne Addison to support Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPoC) in a "cross-institutional, educational collective where co-learning is a paramount" (139). Here, they developed an active critique of white-centric curricula, lack of diversity in cultural experiences, and marginalization of artists of color (Fig. 1). This ongoing project, conceived as a dialogic platform for reflecting different identities and realities, includes a large number of contributors—artists, thinkers, and pedagogues—who participate in a diverse range of activities (more than seventy events engaging over seven hundred fifty students) across various institutions (Kingston University, Goldsmiths University, Manchester Metropolitan University, and Middlesex University). The project opened a safe space "to discuss the intersectional experiences of gender, race and nationality" (148) and encourages participants to create proposals for inclusive, anti-racist/anti-sexist curricula through collective practice. From the other side of the Atlantic, Leslie C. Sotomayor II seeks to improve the marginalization of a BIPoC population from a LatinX and activist perspective that advocates for a "decolonial unlearning that interweaves acknowledgements of mainstream education's continuation of colonial trauma" (160). Her claim for more inclusive curricula, in contrast to APR project that proliferates through numerous participants and different activities, is based on introducing a teaching method (developed upon Anzaldúa's self-knowledge practices of *autohistoria-teoría*) as a student-led learning process reinforcing self-awareness (*auto-consciencia*). Drawing parallels between educational and curatorial practices, lived experiences and histories, Sotomayor sees "feminist curating of educational spaces" (168) as a decolonizing practice of demarginalization of lived experiences and histories through creative acts or "curating empowerment

through reframing socially inscribed narratives" (171).

Aarti Kawla provides a historical overview of the education of women and their participation in craft production during the pre- and post-independence period of India. With indepth analysis of extensive literature on the role and importance of crafts in turbulent social, political, and economic transformations of the country, she expounds on the differences in understanding women's capacities to participate in economic self-reliance and anti-colonial politics. Her feminist perspective lends insight to the increasing participation of women in craft production, the rise of educational and training programs that enable empowerment, the advancement of women's rights, and the economic stability of artisan families throughout the course of the last one hundred fifty years. The chapter serves as a perfect segue to Neelam Raina's essay regarding the position of various craft practices in contemporary South Asian conflict zones. She presents findings based on the research conducted as part of the Culture and Conflict project, exploring the capacity of craft to enable women from Kashmir, India, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan with a level of economic stability that improves their lives and the lives of their families. In tune with Kawla's findings, she detects a prominent "gendered lens" in historical accounts of craft production that prioritized the work of men over women. Understanding that conflicts influence the re-gendering of labor and home-based craft production, Raina positions craft as an attainable, safe option for the employment of women that represents "resilience and community based and owned development initiatives, which can transform livelihoods and build sustainable incomes" (123).

With emphasis on empowering women in conflict zones, Fatima Hussain analyzes the differences between post-colonial and decolonial approaches to craft practices and highlights the Culture and Conflict project of the Upper Chitral Valley in Pakistan as a relevant example. Confronting different understandings of empowerment beyond economic gains, Hussain offers a comprehensive understanding of community interrelations that create craft practices and value the process of making over the final product. Decolonial principles of the exchange of knowledge through collaboration between researchers from urban centers—here textile designers and students from the National College of Arts—with community craft-makers contrasts with post-colonial initiatives that provide short-term solutions in order to supply more products to larger markets. In this way, Hussain effectively argues that commercially successful commodities devoid of their environment and meaning disregard the cultural significance of craft practices, particularly within rural communities.



Fig. 1. Michelle Williams Gamaker and Jo Addison lead the first A Particular Reality: session 1: *Pairing*, Raven Row (February 2019) (copyright of the authors)—a project for inclusive, anti-racist/anti-sexist curricula through collective practice.

Madina Tlostanova analyses differences between the terms post- and decolonial in the post-Soviet context in an effort to contextualize "the post-Soviet experience through a decolonial lens" (21) and indicate how "art remains the only provisionally allowed form of critical thinking and venue for designing an alternative image of the future" (22). Tlostanova investigates the work of three prominent artists belonging to ethno-national minorities that conceptualize their works by reclaiming memories and histories and reimagining native cultures in post-Soviet and wider global contexts. Through a complex multilayered prism of "decolonial aestheSis" (Mingolo and Vàsques), she introduces the work of Kazakh Saule Suleimenova, Chechen Aslan Gaisumov and Dagestan Taus Makhacheva. Despite the absence of reproductions of at least some of the works discussed in the essay, Tolstanova manages to give insight into heterogeneous bodies of work that reflect on the "decolonisation of collective and personal memories" (22). Tlostanova strongly emphasizes the position of art as a path to re-futuring, through the process of grappling with ethnic-national stereotypes in relation to consumer society and troubled relations to the past (historical and family traumas) through acts of paying homage and commemoration. Similar processes of measuring and recording time are central in the writings of Ayanna Dozier, who analyzes creative practices of Black women in experimental film in the US and the UK during the last three decades of the twentieth century. In an essay developed from her PhD research, she developed the term "mnemonic aberration" to critique concepts of time as "the normative colonial structure of measurement of financial value and labor," analyzing memory and the history of Black women, struggle and colonial resistance evident in lived experiences, alternative knowledge systems, and cultural practices present in Black women films (72).

Understanding Black African feminist work as decolonial by definition, Sharlene Khan created a platform for dialogue that represents South African women's creativity in its multiple forms and expressions within the collaborative project Art on Our Mind. This series of public dialogues with South African women of color established a kind of "speaking archive" of lived experiences of creative women from various ethnic or educational backgrounds at different stages of their careers as visual artists, curators, and theorists. The project and website was inspired by bell hooks's understanding of creativity and cultural production, "focusing on the power of

representation for individuals and communities and the struggles of being black and/or woman creative." (53). The initiative was developed inside the university context and was accompanied by other complementary projects founded or co-founded by Khan (Black Feminist Killjoy Reading Group, Decolonial AestheSis Creative Lab, and African Feminisms [Afems] Conference), that co-create a holistic basis for feminist creativity and the learning environment. The project seeks to give insight to individual experiences and art practices within particular historical, economic and socio-political circumstances, to generate knowledge, to empower community, and to imagine alternative ways of living and creating for the future.

Artistic production of Indigenous artists that critiques "domination, colonial violence and gender violence that undergird the social existence of Indigenous women in Americas" (90) is in the focus of research of Shanna Ketchum-Heap of Birds. Her PhD research analyzes the work of different artists and collectives to indicate how creative practices represent the acts of decolonization and feminist resistance. Balancing between performance studies and Indigenous studies enables her encompassing overview of social and political analyses of the performance activities of Spiderwoman Theater, which documents and memorializes "feminicide" while articulating a performative voice to the complex set of issues around alarming rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

As stated in the introduction, the contributions articulate post- and decolonial strategies in art, textile craft, and education, as well as broach different feminisms in the Global North and Global South. These multifaceted research projects acquaint the reader to different histories, economies, and social structures, and the communities that sustain them. Essays reflecting on community craft projects (Raina, Hussain) are well-documented visually, and substantial visual material is also present in essays reflecting on global education projects. Even though it is not evident from the title of the book, contributors seriously consider not only de-/anti-/post-colonial feminisms in contemporary art and textile craft, but thoughtfully reflect on educational processes. Several authors call for significant transformation of the dominant knowledge-building platforms (Khan), demanding more inclusive curricula (Gamaker, Sotomayor), which is highly valuable contribution of the publication and deserves adequate attention and emphasis in the book title.

The book spotlights only some aspects of de-/anti-/post-colonial feminisms, researching, representing, and constructing platforms for non-Eurocentric means of knowledge, even as the authors by no means aim to deplete the discussion or claim to provide decisive arguments. The essays are a continuation of long-term scholarly research that invites further and more inclusive analysis, as Deepwell suggests in her closing remarks. She advocates for contributions of the discussion from artists and researchers from other corners of the world, suggesting to build upon Mohanty's landmark thoughts on feminism without borders and Spivak's pioneering theory of a "planetary consciousness." ●

Ana Vivoda is a visual artist and full professor of Art Education at the University of Zadar, Croatia. Her research fields include print-based art practices dealing with questions of identity, feminist, and environmental issues, while her art educational projects nourish collaborative and participatory aspects of art. Her work has been shown in solo and collective exhibitions in the country and abroad (Poland, China, Germany, USA, France, Taiwan, Spain), receiving awards and acknowledgments.

Mickalene Thomas: All About Love

By Mickalene Thomas, Kristian Conteras, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Christine Y. Kim, Darnell L. Moore, Renée Mussai, Claudia Rankine, Ed Schad, and Rachel Thomas
Artbook | D.A.P. and Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2024

Reviewed by Grace McCormick

Mickalene Thomas's (b. 1971) recent retrospective exhibition and its accompanying catalogue draw inspiration from bell hooks's seminal book *All About Love* (1999). The evocative phrase suggests an iterative thread present in Thomas's body of work grounded in fluid and disruptive formulations of love, vulnerability, and eroticism that hooks laid out in her pivotal study. This survey invites viewers to reconsider and expand their understanding of love against the complexities of the twenty-first century and Thomas's dynamic artistic practice. In collaboration with the artist, the organizers of the exhibition adapted hooks's bestselling book as a fitting framework for Thomas, a contemporary artist who is best known for her bejeweled collages, colorful photographs, and richly painted tableaux of fabulous Black women lounging in 1970s interiors (Fig. 1). Her images both evoke and transcend art historical portraiture, to reclaim and reimagine the beauty, sexuality, and power of her sitters and the presumably Black viewer. Her practice expands beyond affirming portraits into video works, immersive installations, and curatorial explorations that have yet to be fully investigated in her nearly twenty-five-year career, a sentiment echoed by the artist herself in a recent interview with Jerry Saltz.[1] Within the seven essays and brief chronology of the artist, the book explores how Thomas's work serves as a love letter to queerness, Blackness, and the innate power of Black women. Though it does not offer lengthy and rigorous recalibrations of the scholarship on Thomas, the catalogue provides important interventions and concise analyses of the artist's career.

Travelling between the Hayward Gallery in London, the Barnes

Foundation in Philadelphia, The Broad in Los Angeles, and the Musée-Frac Occitanie in Toulouse, works for the exhibition were drawn from local collectors, the artist herself, and the collections of each institution, resulting in a publication that showcases the diversity of Thomas's work in roughly one hundred thirty-three illustrations. Rather than solely focusing on the well-known paintings that are often discussed in the body of literature on Thomas, the book features lesser-known works, such as her *Wrestlers* series. The sumptuous volume is beautifully designed, and Thomas's colorful works come alive on the page. The book's folio pages of gold that divide the bodies of work and its woven cover strikingly resound with Thomas's own tactile materials. The contributing authors to the volume include celebrated curators, scholars, and critics alongside writers and poets. As a whole, the publication embraces the narrative style of hooks's writing, functioning both as an affectionate and critical account of the artist's work grounded in literary and art histories. Furthermore, it is also interesting to think about the artist's role in this publication. Thomas has taken considerable ownership of the volume in promotions of the catalogue. Over the years, the artist has increasingly taken on curatorial and editorial roles in projects such as her *A Moment's Pleasure* (2019–22) installation at the Baltimore Museum of Art and *A Portrait of an Unlikely Space* (2023–24) at the Yale University Art Gallery, so it would not be surprising to see that extended into her most recent project. Perhaps this book could also function as a record of Thomas's thinking on her work in this moment and calls for scholars and curators to investigate its variety and breadth, as the writers in the catalogue do so expertly.

All About Love begins with an extensive introduction by the exhibition's initiator, Hayward Chief Curator Rachel Thomas, and an accompanying conversation with the artist. The interview interestingly shifts the attention away from the figures in, and muses for, Thomas's work to the time periods and spaces the artist constructs. The conversation helps to reveal how spatio-temporal elements are just as important as the figures at the center of Thomas's paintings and collages. Rachel Thomas's curatorial deftness in considering the artist's work is evident in both her essay and her compelling interview, which together set the stage for the rest of the catalogue to further investigate essential yet overlooked elements of the artist's practice.

In the second contribution to the catalogue, "All About Us: Loving Black Women," Beverly Guy-Sheftall and Kristian Conteras explore Thomas's more recent *Resist* series and call attention to the ways in which Black, female, and queer presence and pain have been dismissed and belittled, particularly in the context of Black political action. In its memorialization of masculine, cisgender, and heterosexual victims of hate crimes, the movement has often failed to recognize both the vitality and suffering of queer and femme bodies who have equally bore the consequences of racism in America. Thomas's series began in 2016, reflecting on a chain of murders of Black men and women between 2014 and 2022. Its visual material was culled from archival photos, and the works feature Thomas's signature rhinestones and bright colors to create images of Black resistance, resilience, and community. Guy-Sheftall and Conteras argue that the series "dip[s] our fingertips in the waters of resistance and the many names of ancestors taken by police brutality" (58), particularly of Black queer women as seen in works like *Say Their Names (Resist #6)* (2021), which includes the names of Sandra Bland, Miriam Iris Carey, Charleena Chavon Lyles, Tyisha Shenee Miller, and Breonna Taylor. With these works, Thomas pushes Black women who have previously been obscured and forgotten back into histories of resistance.



Fig. 1. Mickalene Thomas, *November 1977* (2023), rhinestones on dye sublimation prints, 60 3/4" x 48 7/8" x 3". Courtesy of the artist.

Renee Mussai's essay explores Thomas's numerous iterations of Edouard Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1862–63). For Mussai, Thomas's works display the expansive possibilities of Black feminine beauty to create an "aesthetic kinship" similar to what hooks calls a "love ethic" in the sixth chapter of her book. For both hooks and Mussai, this kinship or ethic transcends the personal, instead embracing a global vision where we see our actions and lives reflected and connected to all others. Mussai writes, "Here, in Thomas's cauldron of aesthetic kinship, where self-regard and self-love reside abundantly, representational potentialities and compositional formalities of exquisitely rendered, deliciously gendered féminitudes—collective and individual—are harnessed, amplified, beautified, and brazenly eroticized; revisited, and made anew" (71). For Mussai this reformulation of femininity, beauty, love, and power—in part—is achieved through Thomas's repeated return to particular subjects and compositions, in this case Manet's iconic painting. By revisiting and revising these subjects, Thomas draws attention to the multiplicities of the abundant kinship of Black femininity.

In her essay, Mussai mimics the iterative nature of Thomas's practice by using many terms to describe the artist's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe: Les trois femmes*

noires (2010), and like Thomas, to explore a multitude of definitions for what it means to be Black and female. The short essay brings in Calixthe Beyala's "féminitude," a term meant to differentiate between a specifically African diasporic feminism and a Western formulation that has historically been anti-African and imperial.[2] Mussai also uses Hortense J. Spillers's phrase "representational potentialities," which comes from a chapter in her book *Black, White, and in Color,* a semiotic study of the complex vocabulary around Black femininity. The phrase points to the capacity for understandings of Black female identity to be reimagined and redefined through a reclaiming of terms once used to complicate their gender identity.[3] Mussai also cites Tsitsi Dangarembga's use of the term "melanated," which moves away from the socio-psychological implications of Black and white for a more variable term of highly melanated and less melanated. By focusing on melanin, Dangarembga highlights the varying experiences of oppression on the basis of the color of one's skin while evading the historical and cultural baggage of the false Black and white binary.[4] While these terms are helpful and conceptually rich, Mussai could more successfully define these complicated ideas or adequately explain why she has elected to use them and what they mean in relation to Thomas's work. Her deliberate selection of these terms and references to these scholars are important to her argument, however. They echo how the forms of feminism, femininity, and Blackness that Thomas represents in her work transcend the typical "Western" understandings of these topics. Morever, her use of a multitude of terms points to the integral nature of iteration in Thomas's practice—that no one term or visual representation can capaciously describe what it means to be and identify as both Black and a woman. While lyrically written, the article ultimately leaves the reader wanting more time and space to fully engage with these powerful ideas.

Following Mussai's essay about love for others, Claudia Rankine's contribution tackles self-love. It starts with Thomas's relationship with her mother, the initial inspiration for her exploration of Black female beauty, and moves on to explore her other muses such as Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953), hooks, and Sojourner Truth. For Rankine, the artist's loving and powerful references to these women helped Thomas depict herself as a radically self-possessed woman. Here "muses" are given conceptual weight and are discussed in terms of ideas and words rather than solely faces and beauty. For example, Thomas's early 2000s video series, *Ain't I a Woman*, echoes both hooks's 1981 book that referenced the quote traditionally attributed to Truth.[5] Here, again, Thomas demonstrates her constant conversation with artists and writers. Throughout, the artist's committed celebrations of Black women are given brief yet significant attention to tease out both Thomas's portraits and self-portraits as evidence of a life-affirming ethic of love that has allowed her to become, as Rankin aptly states, "our culture's most life-affirming muse" (88).

Aside from the other chapters, which explore the theme of love in all of its revised and expanded forms, Christine Y. Kim's essay, "Experimentation in the Early Aughts," is a fascinating exploration into the politics of desire, focusing on the period directly after Thomas received her MFA from Yale University, a time of intense experimentation when she began to delve deeply into portraiture and to feature more elaborate backgrounds and sets. In the photograph *(If Loving You is Wrong) I Don't Want to Be Right* (2006/2014), for example, Thomas placed nude or semi-nude models in texturally rich and patterned spaces. Through these environments, Kim demonstrates how Thomas forged "entanglements" with canonical and diasporic art histories, including Manet and Henri Rousseau as well as Malian photographers Seyduo Keïta and Malik Sidibé. In one instance, the author brings Thomas's *Madam Mama Bush* (2006) photograph into relief against Manet's *Olympia* (1863). In Thomas's photograph, the Black female is no longer the dutiful maid at the courtesan's side, nor is she the subject of Oriental desire, but she is a self-possessed woman fully at ease with herself, her sexuality, her space, and her photographer—her daughter. Kim argues that in these works Thomas prioritizes the women in her paintings—their desires, their sense of self and self-image over that of the objectifying voyeur, and in turn asks the viewer to consider why such an act is so radical. Kim's strong essay brings out the importance of experimentation, environment, intimacy, and desire in Thomas's early career in a brief but convincing account.

Darnell L. Moore's essay, "To Be Black and a Woman is to Live Queerly", explores how Thomas's works strikingly reflect and reclaim Black women's constant subversion of social norms. The deeply personal essay begins with a discussion of Moore's own mother and the boundaries and expectations put upon her and other Black women in the 1970s. Moore explores how Thomas's images of radically self-possessed women, depicted within 1970s tableaux and fashioned in vintage costumes, tenderly elegize both the author's and the artist's youth and yet deconstruct the "misogynistic narrative of socio-economic decline" among Black women in that era. Their "pernicious caricatures" in American conservative politics are suppressed under the confident gazes and regal statures with which Thomas endows her subjects (144). Particularly placed against elaborate backdrops—markers of affluence and style—the images emerge against "queer" white and heteronormative narratives. For Moore, there is an easy confidence in the women of Thomas's works and their expressions of queer love. In works such as *Sleep: Deux Femmes Noires* (2012), two women captured on polaroid film lie entangled together, completely natural and at ease. Moore understands this image of casual queerness as radically rebellious, accentuating how Thomas and her muses embody freedom despite a culture of anti-Black racism, homophobia, and misogyny.

The catalogue concludes with an essay by Ed Schad, who considers Thomas's artistic practice as a love ethos. Following a visit to her Brooklyn-based studio, Schad reflects on Thomas's working environment and her continual revisitation of subjects and motifs. Though she has changed her stylistic approach to collage many times, Thomas retains a sense of

adoration for her figures, in all of their various distortions, divisions, and disruptions. Schad addresses a new work by Thomas that debuts as a part of the exhibition, *Din avec la main dans le miroir et jupe rouge* (2023). The work is one of numerous encounters we have with Din in Thomas's body of work. For Schad, these serial portrayals of Din, as well as of Thomas's other muses, make clear that the artist's studio ethic is one of personal relation, with Thomas exhibiting a strong commitment to the sitter as she continues to rework and refine their image. Finally, Schad looks at the history and the future of collage more broadly, placing Thomas's work within a lineage of Black collage artists who similarly embody an ethic of love, such as Romare Bearden and Deborah Roberts (b. 1960). It is a fitting conclusion to the catalogue, recapitulating many elements discussed throughout the volume by the contributing scholars and friends of the artist.

Mickalene Thomas: All About Love points to the cracks in our understanding of Thomas's work and reveals that there is still much more to say about the multidisciplinary artist. The Black woman subject and its engagement with histories of portraiture and representation continue to be essential in her work, but space, history, futurity, repetition, and iteration are just as crucial facets that warrant more rigorous examination. None of the brief essays entirely unravel the concepts that anchor Thomas's work, but they necessarily complicate our understanding and convincingly argue for the framework of a love ethic as introduced by bell hooks. Together these essays read as a tribute not only to hooks and Thomas's shared devotion to love as a necessary creative practice, but also to Black mothers, sisters, mentors and lovers—all of which are beautifully honored through Thomas's art of collage. ●

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Notes

1. In response to why she has not been included in a Whitney Biennial, despite her celebrated career, Thomas stated, "I think the curators that usually are selected aren't thinking of my work or its breadth. When they think of Mickalene Thomas, they're thinking of portraiture. They're not looking at all the different bodies of work that I work within. From photography to collage, to installation, performance, creating immersive spaces, video, and film. I think most curators are lazy. There's not enough risk-taking. They're staying confined, choosing artists that seem safe. My work isn't easy." See Jerry Saltz, "Mickalene Thomas Doesn't Need the Whitney Biennial," *Vulture*, January 9, 2025, https://www.vulture.com/article/mickalene-thomas-doesnt-need-the-whitney-biennial.html.
2. Nicki Hitchcott, *Calixthe Beyala: Performances of Migration* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), 26.
3. Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 228.
4. Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Black and Female* (Faber, 2022), 150.
5. It is worth noting, as Claudia Rankine does in her own essay, that more recent scholarship by Nell Irvin Painter has convincingly argued that it is likely that the phrase, "Ain't I a woman," was never said by Sojourner Truth in her 1851 speech for the Women's Rights Convention, but instead inserted into the transcript of her speech by white abolitionist Frances Gage. See Nell Irvin Painter, "Sojourner Truth was a New Yorker, and She Didn't Say That", American Antiquarian Society lecture delivered October 19, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_O4neDiYQ38, and Painter's forthcoming book of the same name.

Howardena Pindell: A New Language

Edited by Fiona Bradley with contributions by Fiona Bradley, Andrew Nairne, Robert Leckie, Anna Lovatt, Amy Tobin, Adeze Wilford, and Howardena Pindell
Fruitmarket and Kettle's Yard, 2021

Howardena Pindell: Reclaiming Abstraction

By Sarah Louise Cowan
Yale University Press, 2022

Reviewed by crystal am nelson

Over the last six years, Howardena Pindell (b. 1943) has been the subject of several exhibitions that qualify the artist, writer, and curator as a one of the art world's most important thinkers and makers. In 2018, The Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in Chicago mounted *Howardena Pindell: What Remains to Be Seen*, the first major survey of Pindell's work, which was accompanied by a substantial catalogue. In 2020, at The Shed, she had her first solo institutional showing in New York City in almost thirty years. Simultaneously she had another major survey at Art Omi, a sculpture and architecture park in Ghent, New York. The following year, in 2021, she opened *A New Language* in the United Kingdom, mounted at the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh, in collaboration with Kettle's Yard at the University of Cambridge, and Spike Island, an international center for contemporary art in Bristol. In addition to the 2018 catalogue published by the MCA, two books have been published about Pindell reflecting her sustained relevance over her sixty-year career.

To accompany *A New Language*, Fruitmarket and Kettle's Yard published a catalogue comprising a Directors' Foreword, three essays, the transcripts from two of Pindell's videos, and a reproduction of her report on racism in the art world. One of the strongest essays in the collection is Adeze Wilford's "Facing It: Howardena Pindell and Activism that Is Personal." Its strength lies in the way Wilford, curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami, Florida, and organizer of The Shed installation, establishes a strong and clear throughline from Pindell's art practice to her anti-racism activism. The author sees Pindell's artistic, writing, and curatorial productions, as well as her teaching and mentorship, as critical aspects of her activist identity. For Wilford, the artist's



Fig. 1. Howardena Pindell, *Autobiography: Water/Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts* (1988), acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 9′ x 10″ x 5′ x 11″. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1989.17.

video works, *Free, White and 21* (1980) and *Rope/Fire/Water* (originally conceived as a performance in the 1970s, premiered in video format at The Shed in 2020) are bookends to a career that demarcated Pindell's commitment to effecting substantive change in the wider contemporary art world. Recognizing the artist's switch to a more confrontational mode as indicative of her growing impatience with the continued social, cultural, and political attacks on Black people, Wilford places Pindell's video-performances within a long tradition of Black feminist activism that includes the Black journalist Ida B. Wells (1862–1931)—from whose eye-opening pamphlet-cum-treatise on lynching, *A Red Record* (1895), the artist borrowed for *Rope/Fire/Water*—and entertainer Billie Holiday (1915–1959), whose singular and haunting rendition of "Strange Fruit" has a visceral charge. In her essay "Surface Tension," art historian Amy Tobin examines Pindell's play with surfaces: "How she brings things to the surface level, how she suspends things across surfaces, how she creates depth in surfaces that speak to the material effects of emotional experiences" (40). Tobin cites Pindell's 1989 interview with curator and educator Kellie Jones:

> Afro-American artists are very often involved in the extended surface. We get involved in crossover surfaces into sculpture-painting, painting-sculpture [….] There may be beads, there may be blood, there may be hair, there may be cloth, there may be shells. A very rich surface empowers the piece. I find that often Afro-American art has this aspect even if it's one material that has a sense of density of texture. Surface tension.[1]

Tobin argues, not only did the artist's interest in materiality rise to the surface, but so, too, did her politics. This is made particularly evident in her autobiographical work, such as the *Autobiography Series* (Fig. 1), begun in 1986. One of eight paintings that comprise the series, *Autobiography: Water (Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts)* (1988) is a densely layered collaged canvas about the artist's multicultural family heritage and American history. For this self-portrait, Pindell laid her body on the canvas, cut her shape out, and sewed the tracing back into the painting. Surrounded by eyes and faces of various types of people, the painting alludes to the diversity in her ancestry because of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The author explains that, for Pindell, the importance of surfaces lies in their ability to bring uncomfortable truths to the fore.

Anna Lovatt's essay offers a cogent historiography that highlights the most consequential moments in Pindell's life. Its strength is founded in her bridging the two facets of the artist's professional life—working by day as a museum professional and by night as a professional artist. Particularly, Lovatt notes the way Pindell's office job at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) influenced her practice, as evidenced by her use of manila folders to produce the characteristically vibrant painted chads with which she produced her increasingly abstract work. Qualified at that time as a "pink" profession because it was dominated by women workers, Pindell's position at MoMA, argues the author, places her among other women artists who similarly performed office duties and incorporated administrative practices into their artwork, such as Adrian Piper (b. 1948) and Rosmarie Castoro (1939–2015). Lovatt carefully and with nuance recounts key moments in Pindell's career(s), such as the controversial exhibition, *N—r Drawings* (1979), by white artist Donald Newman,[2] and the devastating car accident she survived after which she was constrained with a hip injury and memory loss. Although these events had a devastating impact on Pindell, they also led to positive developments in her art practice. To assist with recuperating her memory, Pindell began producing autobiographical work, including *Free, White, and 21* and the *Autobiography* series, through which she explored her experiences with anti-Blackness. The final two essays in the catalogue, both by Pindell, are reprinted from *The Heart of the Question: The Writings and Paintings of Howardena Pindell* (1997). Compiled under the heading "Art World Racism," Pindell's contributions offer an in-depth examination of the mainstream contemporary art world's complicity in perpetuating racial inequity. By closing the catalogue with the artist's indictment of the art world, the directors not only punctuate her activism for equitable representation in the visual arts but also, in a way, offer their own critique of the mainstream contemporary art world.

While *Howardena Pindell: A New Language* possesses the same limitations and virtues of many exhibition catalogues—what they lack in critical, discursive content they make up in design and presentation—Sarah Louise Cowan's *Howardena Pindell: Reclaiming Abstraction* offers readers a near exhaustive study of the artist's career. Across four body chapters, Cowan argues Pindell creates what the author identifies as "Black feminist modernisms," a "term that signifies diverse creative practices

that strategically utilize modernist idioms in order to unsettle racist and sexist logics" (6), such as seen in the work of Faith Ringgold (1930–2024), Beverly Buchanan (1940–2015), and Senga Nengudi (b. 1943), to name a few of Pindell's contemporaries. According to Cowan, the artist made her most significant contributions to Black feminist modernisms using a haptic approach to abstraction, an engagement that enabled Pindell to pursue African diasporic, feminist, and modernist aesthetics, the ideologies of which she critiqued with a combination of techniques that emphasize tactility, from collage to mending and handicraft. The first chapter, "Moving Modernisms," takes up Pindell's early abstractions produced between 1968 and 1973. For Cowan, this group of several dozen paintings and drawings shows the ways Pindell contested dominant Black cultural and modernist discourses that defined the relationship between artistic form and the artist's subjectivity. Rather than embrace the dominant beliefs that urban geography was linked to race and one's position relative to abstraction and figurative idioms, Pindell claimed New York modernisms as a Black woman using multiple strategies, including deploying the circle as a symbol of motion, using color in novel ways, and appropriating cartographic tools, like the grid (35).

Chapters two and three examine the artist's contributions to US postminimalist art and abstraction. In chapter two, Cowan focuses on Pindell's use of collage through which she performed an extensive "investigation into questions about Black women's labor and the possibilities of an embodied pleasure" (89). According to Cowan, Pindell turned to collage, like many Black and woman artists before her, out of necessity. She began working vigorously in the form as a response to her inability to afford the large canvas rolls she used previously to make sprayed paintings, and her inability to continue to store the large-scale works she had produced for several years. Cowan argues Pindell worked in collage as a form of therapeutic practice to help her cope with the stress induced by her job at MoMA, quoting the artist:

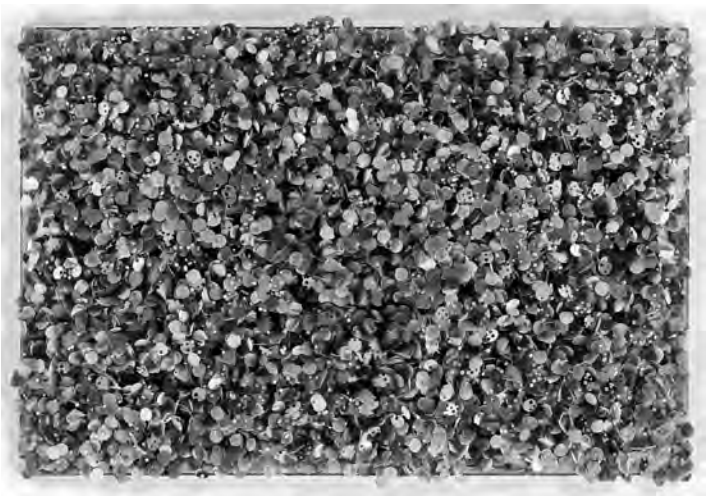


Fig. 2. Howardena Pindell, *Untitled #57* (1974–75), acrylic, watercolor, punched graph papers, gold, and computer tape.

> I utilized a repetitive process of hole-punching in the construction of works made of accumulated circles to heal myself of the stress of fending for myself in a job category often inhabited by dormant, frustrated artists who had permanently stopped producing art to work in a museum. This accumulation process, therefore, reflected my emotional state.... Produced in isolation, these were symbolic works evoking my painful experiences working in isolation straddling two worlds, the museum and that of an artist's life (117).

Formerly considered a women's creative practice, collage had been adopted by early modernists to highlight juxtaposition and difference. African American modernists, such as Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence, adopted models of collage, art historian Kobena Mercer argues, that grappled with the structural dilemma issues of race, racism, and representation. Pindell's earliest collage works harken to Bearden's figurative cut-paper collages and photostats. However, for reasons not discussed by the author, Pindell abruptly stopped making figurative collage works and continued her exploration of form through abstraction.

Significantly, her encounter with African art and culture in the *African Textiles and Decorative Arts* exhibition—on view at MoMA in 1972—had a profound effect on her art practice and collage techniques. Specifically, she began experimenting with dense accumulative textures, as seen in her paper chad collages (Fig. 2). *Untitled #*57 (1974–75) is a beautiful example of Pindell's experimentations with assemblage, the bright, multicolored chads across the surface of the substrate evidence of her investment in the exploration of materiality and color. Over the following decade, Pindell honed her approach to the surface of her work, drawing from West African textiles as a source of abstraction. In this transition Pindell also drew from her labor as a museum administrator; Cowan refers to this as "bureaucratic materials and processes" (110), whereby the artist "embraced collage as a demanding form of both bureaucratic and feminist labor" (111). Rather than imbue collage with a politics of identity, Cowan offers, Pindell treated it as "'visceral, visual' work" (128), an approach the author recognizes as in alignment with Audre Lorde's theory of the erotic.

Between 1977 and 1981, Pindell produced several paintings using a cut-and-sewn technique, introducing raised, textured surfaces to her paintings. She also introduced scent by spraying these paintings with cheap, highly fragrant perfume. In chapter three, "Mending

Abstraction," Cowan discusses how these new techniques and materials broadened the artist's horizons beyond New Haven and New York. By experimenting with the sensorial, Pindell "enlists [the] audience in a realignment with the external world through 'haptic activation'" (131). In this way, Pindell develops a specifically Black feminist abstract practice through which she both participated in and contested institutional modernist painting. Citing art historian Huey P. Copeland, who theorized Black women "turned to the haptic as a resource for self-fashioning and for the preservation of memories otherwise lost to history" (162), Cowan avers that amidst the women's rights movement of the 1970s, the haptic had a significant role in the reclamation of Black women's historically devalued cultural practices. For Cowan, through her deployment of the haptic and the situating of her work within a genealogy of Black women's material culture, Pindell sought to repair abstraction.

In her introduction, the author cites queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory of the haptic among recent affect theory scholarship that identifies the haptic as a specifically minoritarian strategy (11). However, Cowan is circumspect about this implicit optimism, and takes care to acknowledge Black feminist scholars Rizvana Bradley and Hortense Spillers, both of whom assert that any emancipatory theories of touch must be contextualized within histories of violence, especially the trans-Atlantic trade in enslaved Africans and chattel slavery (11). The author claims that this theoretical discourse resonates with Pindell's use of the haptic. Cowan reminds us that, on one hand, Pindell developed an intensely physical engagement with her paintings to create pleasurable, healing experiences. On the other hand, she established a new form of artmaking in response to a sense of loss, an alienation she felt from her African ancestry. However, the artist forged a greater connection through MoMA's exhibition, *African Textiles and Decorative Arts* (1972), and her sojourn to Africa with her colleague and friend, curator Lowery Stokes Sims. These two experiences, formative in their impact on Pindell's handling of her materials, altered her cultural and political consciousness. She developed a greater awareness of her relationship to Africa ("the Motherland") as a Black woman. Highlighting Sims's own revelatory understanding of their trip to Africa, Cowan contends they opened "a professional Black woman's space for relating to 'the Motherland,'" a position that countered the patriarchal bent of the Black Power movement embraced at the time by many of their peers (145).

In 1979, Pindell endured several traumatizing events that led to a major shift in her practice: in addition to Newman's controversial *N—r Drawings* (1979), Pindell's MoMA colleagues grew more hostile to her active participation in the protests. She left MoMA and grew even more distant from the white feminist circles that she had been involved with as a co-founder of the A.I.R. Gallery. Then, while carpooling to her new job as a tenure-track professor at SUNY Stony Brook, she survived the devastating car accident that resulted in severe head trauma and memory loss. These consecutive occurrences led to Pindell's growing political consciousness around racial discrimination in the art world and its institutions. She recognized that abstraction was removed from these pressing issues and turned toward more autobiographical works in which her figure appeared. She also turned towards mass media to create a more immediate critique of the art world's complicity with white supremacy. In the final chapter, Cowan attends to Pindell's engagement with mass media, from her video drawings (1973–76) to her arguably most recognizable work, *Free, White, and 21* (1980). For Cowan, these works subject racial whiteness to scrutiny and place representational burdens, typically foisted upon women of color, back on it. In this way, the artist joined a tradition of Black feminist critique that interrogated how, in mass media, Black women are simultaneously hypervisible and underrepresented. Chapter four is titled "Screen, Skin," however, Cowan only addresses skin as a metaphor in Pindell's work towards the end of the chapter. Given the attention paid to the artist's exploration of surface textures in her abstract paintings, and the way she plays with bodily surfaces in *Free, White, and 21*, the chapter falls short of its proposed thesis.

Howardena Pindell is an extraordinary artist whose career is deserving of the critical attention presented by *Howardena Pindell: A New Language* and *Howardena Pindell: Reclaiming Abstraction*. The former catalogue, due to the constraints of the design, does not offer the depth and breadth of Cowan's study; even so, the contributing authors nicely set the stage for the level of engagement we see in the latter text. Cowan's book is well-researched, presents key aspects of the artist's practice, executes historiography well, and solidifies Pindell's place in modernist and conceptual discourses. Cowan also demonstrates the artist's much-needed interventions in second-wave feminism. She rightfully positions Pindell as a pioneer, in the way the artist herself brings together a sophisticated critique of dominant race and gender politics. Cowan's book is exhaustive, and it stands as an indispensable text adding to a growing discourse on an equally vital artist. •

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Notes

1. Kellie Jones, "Interview with Howardena Pindell," in *Eyeminded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art* (Duke University Press, 2011 [1989]), 231.
2. Donald Newman's exhibition was controversial for his use of an anti-Black racial epithet to title a body of charcoal abstract drawings that neither depicted nor made any clear reference to Black people.

Virginia Jaramillo: Principle of Equivalence

Edited by Erin Dziedzic, with contributions by Matthew Jeffrey Abrams, Barbara Calderón, Iris Colburn, Elizabeth Kirsch, and Courtney J. Martin
Kemper Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2023

Reviewed by Emma Oslé



Fig 1. Virginia Jaramillo in her studio in front of *Quanta* (2021), acrylic on canvas, 72" x 144". Courtesy Virginia Jaramillo and Hales Gallery. Photo by JSP Art Photography.

From the outset, the brightly-covered crisscrossed lines and radiant glow on the cover, crafted from a detail of the 2021 painting, *Quanta* (Fig. 1), situate the reader within a complex entanglement of temporalities, identities, and processes that delineate the edges of the work of Mexican American abstract artist Virginia Jaramillo (b. 1939). Each crisp and brightly colored "string" of paint in *Quanta* weaves and intersects between and through the others, producing a complex lattice of color that ebbs and flows. This ebb and flow is just as prevalent in Jaramillo's artmaking practice as a whole, which has shifted and pivoted substantially over more than seventy-five years of artmaking.

Though Jaramillo was born in southwestern Texas, she moved to Los Angeles as a toddler, proving to be a widely influential shift that would alter the trajectory of her artmaking career for the foreseeable future. As a student from 1958 to 1961 at the Otis College of Art and Design, LA, her work was selected for exhibitions at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) multiple years in a row (1959–61), during the same period when she married and had two children. The works created during this period, often referred to as the *Black Paintings*, are said to have reflected the "dark, tense political climate in Los Angeles at the time," quickly coming to a head in 1965 with the onset of the Watts Riots, in Jaramillo's own neighborhood.[1]

It is more constructive, however, to read her paintings through an ecocritical lens, reflecting on the cracked, broken earth of her grandparents' turkey ranch in Imperial Valley, CA (15). An ecocritical lens—a way of analyzing art that considers the relationship between humans and the environment—appears regularly in her work and offers a foundational inroad to understanding her practice as one that is directly engaged with the environment around her; this is well-reflected in the essays accompanying the catalogue from the 2023 exhibition, *Principle of Equivalence*, held at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri, curated by Erin Dziedzic.

After a brief stint in Paris in 1965, Jaramillo and her family moved to New York City, into a "narrow, four-story townhouse and studio near the Fulton Fish Market" (166). There, she began some of her most well-exhibited works of the *Curvilinear* series, from the late 1960s into the early 1970s, which she utilized as a means to establish her abstract language for nearly a decade before beginning her next series known as the *Stained Paintings* (1975–79). Where the *Curvilinear* paintings boast crisp, undulating lines visually cutting through intensely colored positive and negative space—in such a way as to make their very boundaries vibrate with the force of fighting colors—the velvety smooth, earthen-toned *Stained Paintings*, however, seem to eliminate the presence of positive and negative altogether, lacing Jaramillo's physical treatment of the surface of the canvas with spiritual resonance and odes to ancient mythologies.

Her work's connection to the metaphysical world continues in her handmade paper pieces of the late 1970s and 1980s, which persist into the new millennium. Not aligned closely enough with either the feminist or Chicano movements of the 1970s and '80s to garner their acceptance, Jaramillo stuck to her own vanguard, experimenting with handmade paper made from natural linen fibers through texture, color, and size for over twenty-five years, through the 1990s and 2000s. She still found inroads to these movements, however, including a stint on the board of the New York Feminist Art Institute and as a co-editor of *Heresies* magazine.

Jaramillo utilized her painterly techniques in producing her handmade papers, many made at the Dieu Donné Paper Mill in Brooklyn, crafting unique ways of generating translucency and layering within the medium on an exponential scale; in recent years, a shift in the artist's practice has returned to the traditional canvas. The most recent paintings, like *Quanta* of the catalogue cover, reflect back onto Jaramillo's devotion to the earth and to ecocritical concerns as a major aspect of her oeuvre. They are a culmination of decades of experimenting with the language of abstraction and a lifetime of inquiry and intrigue in regard to history, myth, and archaeology.

The richly illustrated catalogue from

the Kemper showcases an astounding seventy-three works with fifty-six additional figures in full color, bringing together archival documentation, sketchbook drawings, and processual documentation into one. Ultimately, the catalogue, like the exhibition itself, offers a revisionist history of one artist's place within the chronicles of abstraction in the US and Latin America, whose art career has largely been elided through the various silences surrounding her work. As Jaramillo is quoted saying, attention to her work has always been "sporadic," and when her work has been featured in exhibitions and catalogues, her name and practice has been largely left out of the actual textual record.[2]

Alongside critical, high-quality documentation of the work itself, the catalogue offers an introduction, five scholarly essays, and an interview with the artist that frame her career chronologically through the various periods of artmaking that produced some of her most well-known exhibited series. Providing an overview of her life and practice, the essays cover Jaramillo's formative years in LA, her famed *Paris Paintings* (1965) and *Curvilinear* series, her forty-year devotion to papermaking, and the continuation and "resurgence" of her traditional painting practice in recent years.

Dziedzic's introduction situates Jaramillo's place within American abstraction, offering to the reader stepping stones from which one might understand her involvement with varied social and political movements within the US. Barbara Calderón's "Freedom to Interrogate Earth" positions Jaramillo's work within and against the Chicano Movement of the 1960s, making inroads as to why her art is largely unknown within the field of Latinx Art. Further, Calderón establishes the ways that Jaramillo's practice resists categorization while simultaneously highlighting the universality and generative qualities of the work. "Paris to Paper," also by Dziedzic, accentuates the importance of the universal to Jaramillo by stressing intersectional differences including race, motherhood, and gender alongside the underlying frameworks that define her life and practice. By placing emphasis on Jaramillo's *Paris Paintings*, Dziedzic takes a comparative approach by bringing in references to other artists working at the time, situating Jaramillo within a growing history of American abstraction alongside such artists as Huguette Caland (b. 1931), Howardena Pindell (b. 1943), and Mildred Thompson (1936–2003). The *Paris Paintings* include more color than Jaramillo had worked with previously and a smaller overall footprint. Ochres, reds, and oranges peek out from behind rippling layered surfaces of deep browns and blacks, surfaces that strongly resemble those of the earlier *Black Paintings* with smoother mark-making and more of a smeared, rather than a cracked surface.

Proffering a compendium of processual information and archival imagery in full-color, high-resolution reproductions, "Handmade Papers, 1980–2005," by Elisabeth Kirsch, embraces Jaramillo's twenty-five years of papermaking as a process, medium, and intellectual space. Though Jaramillo's handmade papers shared several features with Process Art, Earthworks, and Minimalism, which were all happening at the same time, they received little to no critical attention. Kirsch's essay begins to bridge that gap, establishing a trajectory that positions Jaramillo between mediums and against the art-world canon. In "VJ, Angel Queen" by Matthew Jeffrey Abrams, the author attempts to define something he coins as Jaramillo's "politics of the earth" (127). Tracing a history of making artworks through an ecocritical lens, Abrams situates Jaramillo's work within the geographic context of the landscapes of Morenci, Arizona, and LA, and her more recent bodies of work that engage mythology most directly and pointedly.

The last two catalogue contributions shift slightly in perspective. The first, an essay, presents what Dziedzic refers to as a "coda" (13) to the other largely chronological essays, and the second offers an interview with a longtime friend of Jaramillo. In contrast to the art world's inherently colonialist need to "discover" artists and "save" their works from within the silences of the canon, Iris Colburn's "coda," "Painting onto the Edge of Midnight," positions Jaramillo within the context of the varied temporalities that inform her work, and prompting consideration of the futility of memory and the perpetual absence of an awareness of Imperial histories within the art world that necessitate galleries and museums to take the same "beginning steps" (148) into representing women and BIPOC artists, over and over again. Colburn attends to Jaramillo's "return to canvas" (151) as an extension of her papermaking practice and one that indicates a continuation, both an extension of her artmaking practice and an extension of the temporal pressures within the work itself. And, finally, "Virginia Jaramillo in Conversation," an interview with Courtney J. Martin, establishes critical biographical information about the artist, including discussion of her childhood, early artistic years, schooling, personal life, and exhibition and making history.

The chronology, also the final section of the book, offers additional archival documentation that spans Jaramillo's life from her earliest years in El Paso and beyond. This compendium of information will prove to be a seminal resource for any scholar wanting to further analyze her exhibition history and her inclusion/exclusion in subsequent publications. Though there is no formal bibliography, the detailed attention to exhibition history in the chronology serves as a functional listing of potential avenues for further study.

Fittingly, just as *Quanta* (see Fig. 1) visually succeeds on the cover, each of these authors' texts map an entangled history of space, place, and identity that makes Jaramillo's work both distinctly unique yet able to speak to a certain universality at once. The essays overlap one another, adding additional insight even as they cover similar decades and mediums. Some refer to it as an "unfolding of time" that takes place within the work itself, a converging of past and present, history and futurity.[3] Jaramillo's *Black Paintings*, however, an early series of works that were inspired by "her early obsession with the fissured land beneath her squeaking bicycle,"

come up often within the essays yet receive a minimal footprint within the plates of the catalogue itself (18).

In Latinx Art, we often say as a discipline that the "archive" itself truly lies in the exhibition catalogue. *Virginia Jaramillo: Principle of Equivalence* is no exception. Surely, this catalogue will remain a key resource for scholars and students of American Art, global abstraction, and Latinx Art, who will find benefit within the work and its accompanying texts. •

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Notes

1. Virginia Jaramillo, "Artist's Statement," Pace Gallery, October 17, 2023, https://www.pacegallery.com/artists/virginia-jaramillo/.
2. See Jaramillo, *The Artist Profile Archive: Virginia Jaramillo* (2021), June 7, 2021, YouTube video, 5:05–5:25, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_EZqPtNNyY.
3. Eva Recinos, "Virginia Jaramillo's Sprawling Career Takes Her 'East of the Sun': 'No One Expected Me to Survive as an Artist,'" *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 2023, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2023-05-17/virginia-jaramillo-paintings-career-east-of-the-sun-west-of-the-moon.

Abstract Expressionists: The Women

By Ellen G. Landau and Joan M. Marter
Merrell, 2023

Reviewed by Roja Najafi

Abstract Expressionism is often associated with iconic male figures like Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Willem de Kooning. In recent years, the women artists who played a pivotal role in shaping this dominant mid-twentieth-century movement have gained recognition for their significant contributions. *Abstract Expressionists: The Women* showcases the groundbreaking work of artists such as Claire Falkenstein (1928–2011), Perle Fine (1905–1988), Grace Hartigan (1922–2008), Lee Krasner (1908–1984), Joan Mitchell (1925–1992), Elaine de Kooning (1918–1989), Dorothy Dehner (1901–1994), Mercedes Matter (1913–2001), Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011), Pat Passlof (1928–2011), and Alma Thomas (1891–1978).

This meticulously researched volume centers on the Levett Collection, a private collection of art devoted to women Abstract Expressionists. The book features essays by Ellen G. Landau and Joan M. Marter that illuminate the critical roles these women played from the early 1940s through 1970s in a male-dominated art world. Landau examines their contributions to Abstract Expressionism's evolution, while Marter focuses on the innovative approaches and materials of women sculptors. Together, their essays offer a nuanced perspective on the social and cultural challenges these artists faced, highlighting their creativity, resilience, and determination to assert their voices.

The preface by British art collector Christian Levett adds a unique perspective to the book, focusing on his collecting process since the mid-1990s. Levett, a former British investment manager with a deep passion for art and history, is known for being a dedicated and ethical patron. He reflects on his journey, which began by focusing on classical antiquities, Old Masters, and the establishment of the Mougins Museum of Classical Art (MACM) in 2011, before evolving toward a commitment to postwar abstraction, particularly by women. In recent years, Levett has shifted his attention toward championing female artists, a dedication that culminated in the transformation of MACM into the Female Artists of the Mougins Museum (FAMM), near Cannes, open to the public since June 2024. The FAMM collection spans several major artistic movements, from Impressionism to contemporary art. *The Women* focuses on more than one hundred twenty paintings and sculptures by American women Abstract Expressionists, mostly active from the early 1940s up to the 1970s.

The FAMM holdings greatly expand a more limited selection featured in the celebrated 2016 Denver Art Museum exhibition and catalogue, *Women of Abstract Expressionism*.[1] Levett reflects on how the postwar era and the rise of Abstract Expressionism followed a period marked by immense suffering, devastation, and global turmoil. This bleak backdrop was soon overshadowed by a wave of hope, renewal, and optimism, sparking a remarkable economic recovery and in turn fostering the modern art world. Despite societal pressures in the US that restricted women's roles and gave men center stage in the workforce, female artists during this time remained resolute in their pursuit of artistic practices. Defying traditional expectations, they focused solely on their aesthetic processes, succeeding in ways that were groundbreaking. Levett notes that this era led to some of the most significant artworks in modern history, and he calls it both "extraordinary" and "exhilarating" to have the opportunity to collect, study, and immerse himself in these works.

In her essay, "Working 'In a Different Way': Women and Abstract Expressionism," Landau underscores how women navigated a male-dominated art world to develop groundbreaking interpretations of abstraction, often engaging in transatlantic dialogues that enriched their artistic practices. She highlights that one of the remarkable aspects of the Levett Collection lies in how its carefully selected works allow us to trace the increasing originality of women artists throughout more than three decades of the mid-twentieth century. Landau investigates the evolution of women Abstract Express-



Fig. 1. Grace Hartigan, *Two Women* (1954), oil on canvas, 54" x 36". The Levett Collection.

ionist painters following the sources and influences that enabled such artists to recognize their talents as equal to—if not surpassing—their male counterparts who had initially dismissed them.

A distinguished scholar and curator and Andrew W. Mellon Professor Emerita at Case Western Reserve University, Landau is widely recognized for her expertise on Abstract Expressionism with a focus on women artists. Her essay highlights key features of the Levett Collection, particularly its significant subset of early works that document the initial steps toward adopting Abstract Expressionist styles and approaches. These include pieces by renowned figures like Mitchell and de Kooning, as well as lesser-known artists, such as Ruth Armer (1896–1977) and Emiko Nakano (1925–1990), whose contributions reflect the movement's West Coast geographic and stylistic diversity.

Landau situates these artists within the broader movement's two dominant tendencies, both emerging before 1950. The first, led by Barnett Newman, Adolph Gottlieb, and Rothko, known as Abstract Imagists or Color Field painters, was characterized by simplified forms and saturated fields of color that evoked the sublime. Frankenthaler's later innovations in her soak-stain technique paved the way for post-painterly abstractions of the 1960s. The second approach, gestural abstraction, emphasized spontaneous, improvisational compositions, epitomized by first-generation painters Pollock, Franz Kline, and Willem de Kooning. By the early 1950s, women including Hartigan, Krasner, and de Kooning were also working in this mode, demonstrating their command of dynamic, action-driven techniques, many incorporating figurative and representational strategies with abstract and expressive tendencies. For example, Hartigan's early oil on canvas from 1954, *Two Women* (Fig. 1) depicts poet and editor Daisy Aldan alongside her partner, Olga Petroff. The composition features two loosely defined female figures emerging from overlapping layers of paint and dynamic bands of color. Hartigan employs a palette dominated by earthy browns, greens, and ash, punctuated by strokes of yellow, white, blue, and deep black, seamlessly blending the foreground and background. The figures appear fragmented and distorted, their outlines only partially discernible, emphasizing expressive force over strict representation. Thick brushstrokes and impasto reinforce the physicality of the paint, heightening its tactile presence. Through these elements, Hartigan creates a dynamic tension between abstraction and figuration, imbuing the figures with emotional intensity and presence. In *The Journals of Grace Hartigan, 1951–1955*, Hartigan documents the painting's progress across multiple entries. On May 4, 1954, she reflects on her process, writing: "Hard work on *Daisy & Olga* today. I think what I feel for is the point where the paint seems to resist me, to come from the canvas outwards instead of being 'laid on'" (116).

Another important section focuses on the tremendous set of charcoal and pencil figural drawings inspired by the students of Hans Hofmann, the German émigré and master teacher who taught at the Art Students League and his own school in Provincetown, MA. Unlike many of their male counterparts, women Abstract Expressionists actively drew from transatlantic influences, a theme powerfully represented by Mitchell, Falkenstein, Amaranth Ehrenhalt (1928–2021), and Janice Biala (1903–2000) in the Levett Collection. Landau's essay not only affirms the significant contributions of these women but also illustrates how their art reshaped the movement, challenging and expanding its boundaries.

Joan M. Marter, Distinguished Professor Emerita at Rutgers University, and a renowned curator and specialist in modern and contemporary art, explores one of the most overlooked and neglected media from this postwar era—sculpture—in her essay "Abstract Expressionist Women in the Third Dimension." Highlighting the inventive processes and unconventional materials employed in three dimensions by Lee Bontecou (1931–2022), Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010), Dehner, Louise Nevelson (1899–1988), Jeanne Reynal (1903–1983), Falkenstein, and even Frankenthaler (1928–2011), who turned to sculpture in 1972, Marter's essay underscores the lack of recognition these women received, despite their active and groundbreaking contributions to the movement, and their presence in foundational exhibitions, galleries, and events, for instance, at Willard, Betty Parsons, Martha Jackson, the Stable Gallery Annuals, and the Artists Club.

Abstract Expressionism is often regarded as a revolution in painting, but the movement also included sculptors whose work, often overshadowed, challenged traditional conventions of the medium. Male sculptors, like David Smith, who was married to Dehner until 1952, created welded steel structures that defied the heavy mass typically associated with carving and casting methods. Philip Pavia, founder of The Club (1947–1957;1959–1970), Seymour Lipton, a dentist-turned-artist, and Ibram Lassaw also gained recognition alongside their male painter counterparts. Women sculptors within Abstract Expressionism were doubly marginalized, facing both gender bias and the dominance of male artists, and in response turned to unconventional,

often scavenged found materials, or explored and utilized experimental techniques and processes in terracotta, clay, cement, or lost-wax. For example, Dehner adopted affordable, openwork, Constructivist-inspired lost-wax formats in cast bronze following her travels in Europe. Nevelson and Bourgeois pioneered sculptural installations, with Nevelson placing her assemblages against the wall to match the grand scale of her painter contemporaries. Reynal integrated mixed-media materials to evoke painterly abstraction in her contemporary approaches to mosaic; Bontecou used welded metal armatures (blackening areas of terracotta over reinforced concrete) and canvas to create confrontational, variable surfaces for her wall-mounted sculptures. Such dynamic, life-sized works broke with tradition, embracing new forms and installations often placed directly on the floor. The innovations of these women rivaled those of their male counterparts, offering bold responses to evolving ideas about dynamism and abstraction in sculpture during the 1950s and 1960s. Marter calls for greater recognition of their contributions, which expanded the boundaries of Abstract Expressionism into three dimensions. Despite this, women sculptors were largely overlooked until the 1960s, as collectors and critics focused primarily on large-scale, gestural paintings.

Following the essays, *The Women* presents colored plates of over fifty vibrant paintings, collages, and sculptures from the Levett Collection, each accompanied by insightful quotes from the artists that offer a glimpse into their aesthetic strategies, creative processes, and personal philosophies. The book also includes an illustrated chronology and detailed biographies of thirty-five artists that enrich the reader's understanding of historical and personal context. Far from simply showcasing the breadth of the Levett Collection, *Abstract Expressionists: The Women* serves as a thoughtful exploration of innovation, perseverance, and the enduring contributions of women to the development of this era, a compelling perspective on the artists whose careers have long deserved wider recognition. ●

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Notes

1. Joan Marter, ed., *Women of Abstract Expressionism*, exh. cat. (Denver Art Museum and Yale Univ. Press, 2016). See also Ann Eden Gibson, review of *Women of Abstract Expressionism*, *Woman's Art Journal* 38, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2017): 35–36.

Action, Gesture, Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction, 1940–70

Edited by Laura Smith, with contributions by Griselda Pollock, Laura Smith, Elizabeth A. T. Smith, Candy Stobbs, Agustin Pérez Rubio, Joan M. Marter, and Iwona Blazwick
Whitechapel Gallery, 2023

Reviewed by Roja Najafi

Amid a milieu of global anxieties and politically charged tensions, artists after the Second World War channeled new forms of dynamic, gestural expressions and materials in various modes of abstraction. Numerous art histories have likewise classified gesturalism as an American triumph of personal and political freedom over Social Realism, an officially sanctioned art style idealizing Soviet life under communism. Through the narrow lens of so-called "Western" art history, notions of American "freedom" were paradoxically and predominately confined to European and North American male artists, however, the often overlooked story of gestural abstraction is far more diverse and deeply rooted in the contributions of women—spanning continents and defying singular definitions.

Action, Gesture, Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction, 1940–70 is the catalogue accompanying the traveling exhibition of the same name, highlighting women's contributions to mid-twentieth-century gestural abstraction on a global scale and featuring over eighty artists: well-established North Americans, such as Lee Krasner (1908–1984), Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011), and Alma Thomas (1891–1978); as well as lesser-known figures, Bertina Lopes (Mozambique/Italy; 1924–2012), Behjat Sadr (Iran/France;1924–2009), Gloria Gómez-Sánchez (Peru; 1921–2007), Maliheh Afnan (Palestine/UK;1935–2016), and Wook-kyung Choi (South Korea; 1940–1985).[1] The contributors explore the international influences that have transcended patriarchal art-historical narratives by offering insights into how women's artistic strategies intersected with the social, political, and economic dimensions of the postwar era. The directors' introduction sets the thematic foundation for the exhibition and catalogue. Bice Curiger, Gilane Tawadros, and Christina Végh emphasize the urgency of revisiting art history to amplify the voices of women artists by highlighting the global scope of their project, showcasing artists from a range of cultural and geographic backgrounds, and broadening our understanding of Abstract Expressionism's impact.

Griselda Pollock's essay, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Strategies of Histories of Abstraction with Women on Your Mind," delves broadly into the challenges faced by "artist-women" in a

predominantly male art world. Pollock introduces her neologism, "artist-women," to challenge implicit biases in language, arguing that terms like "women artists" or "Black artists" unintentionally reinforce the assumption that the default artist is male or white (14). She suggests that the term "artist" is inherently preconditioned by societal norms and proposes using "artist-women" and "artist-men" as more equitable alternatives, allowing further qualification without perpetuating exclusionary connotations. A renowned art historian and cultural theorist, Pollock has profoundly influenced art history and visual culture through her feminist scholarship, reassessing traditional narratives that marginalize women artists. She examines the dual challenges faced by artist-women between 1940 and 1970, navigating cultural symbols and opposing gender ideals in the global emergence of gestural abstraction, as many artists developed practices independently of American influences. Her analysis emphasizes the intersection of gender, race, class, and psychoanalysis in the creation, perception, reception, and interpretation of art, abstraction, and modernism. Nearly all the essay contributors reference Pollock's scholarship in one way or another, underscoring her significant impact on the field.

Pollock's conceptual framework for *Action, Gesture, Paint* examines these key formal elements through the investigatory evolution of "art as gesture" and "painting as action." She asks, "When and why did we begin to think of art as gesture or painting as action? How did it come to pass that these three elements might become conceptual keys to a diversity of artistic creation on so many continents at the same time in the middle of the twentieth century?" (17). She further critiques and questions the organization of Abstract Expressionist exhibitions that marginalize women or exclude them almost entirely (also raising the issue of "isolating artists as *women*" in all-women exhibitions) (14). Even so, exhibitions dedicated to women artists recalibrate perceptions, showcasing their equal significance in modern art, and highlighting the diverse ways in which artist-women engaged with the possibilities of paint, gesture, and action, enriching the movement with a multitude of approaches and forms.

Pollock demonstrates how embodiment, gesture, and subjectivity deepen our understanding of modernism and gestural abstraction, arguing that modern art has always been *co-created* by diverse artists, a "radical condition of modern consciousness" allowing for "novel aesthetic experiments" (14). Such artists frequently gathered in major cultural hubs—New York, London, Paris, Madrid, Buenos Aires, Zurich, Lahore, Delhi, São Paulo, and other cities—where modernism took shape through avant-garde consciousness and vibrant interactions within small, like-minded artistic communities. Due to its brevity, Pollock's otherwise well-crafted eight-page essay prevents her from fully addressing the complex, open-ended questions she raises throughout, and for readers unfamiliar with her postcolonial feminist framework, these arguments may be particularly dense to follow. That said, having read Pollock's groundbreaking *Vision and Difference* (1988), which revolutionized art history by critiquing its male-centric canon and introducing and expanding feminist methodologies, I found this essay to be enriched by her references to her subsequent works, including *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (1999), and *Killing Men and Dying Women: Imagining Difference in 1950s New York Painting* (2022). However, a non-specialist reader might benefit from more detailed elaborations, especially for her arguments about abstraction, or "symbolic-aesthetic" practices (a term drawn from the eminent Cuban art historian Gerardo Mosquera), longstanding norms across diverse cultures challenging the restricted Western notions of "proper" materials and processes for "serious" art (18). Abstraction disrupted the traditional preferences for mediums like stone, metal, or paint on canvas, instead embracing clay, textiles, and performative rituals, a compelling concept inviting further discussion, particularly the tendency to label Euro-American traditions as Western. For a catalogue addressing "global abstraction," we might expect critical challenges to the primacy of problematic Western practices and European-American frameworks that propose even more expansive and inclusive definitions of "global" and "abstraction" to our understanding of materials, methods, and interpretations. Other catalogue contributors address many of these issues, underscoring Pollock's significant impact on the field.

In "Arenas in which to Act," Laura Smith further examines the exhibition's mission of scrutinizing the traditional American "machismo" narratives that frame Abstract Expressionism, explaining that the project—both the exhibition and catalogue—redefines gestural abstraction to offer broader, more inclusive perspectives through global and local exchanges, and highlighting how global movements like Art Informel, Tachisme, and Gutai evolved alongside Abstract Expressionism through a mix of diverse influences shaped by both modernist trends and political contexts (e.g., "*modernisms*" vs. Modernism) (28). The title of Smith's essay is inspired by American art critic Harold Rosenberg's seminal 1952 essay, "The American Action Painters," famously describing the canvas as a performative space, reinforcing the physical, immediate nature of gestural abstraction by creating unified fields acting as arenas for actions and direct engagement.[2] While artists worldwide shared common sources of inspiration, they infused their work with distinct regional, personal, and political perspectives. Following the Second World War, the US emerged as a global power, but by the 1950s, post-war optimism shifted Cold War fears of communism, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), established in 1947, included cultural art as part of its Cold War strategy.[3]

In redefining gestural abstraction, and prescribing a Rosenbergian analysis expanded to women, Smith offers how artworks often exploit the physical properties of paint through action—dripping, pouring, leaking, staining, scratching, and pushing—to evoke tactility, movement, aggression, enigma, and lyricism, while constantly questioning the common use of structure and composition (24). Few women, Smith

explains, are remembered as part of this story, despite those featured in this exhibition and catalogue having achieved varying degrees of recognition during their lifetimes, an exclusion from the established canon that has left the movement without a recognized artistic "matrilineage" (25).

Elizabeth A. T. Smith's essay, "Material, Process, Time," delves into artists' individual gestural and technical processes of abstraction, with a focus on unconventional materials and textures, such as collaging and layering, compositional strategies offering innovative applications that shaped the global evolution of abstract art. Such artists as Yuki Katsura (Japan; 1913–1991); Aiko Miyawaki (Japan; 1929–2014), Marta Minujín (Argentina; b. 1943), Gloria Gómez Sánchez (Peru; 1921–2007), Elsa Gramcko (Venezuela; 1925–1994), among others, engaged with their materials by navigating the compositional balance between spontaneity and control while situating their practices within their regional traditions. Katsura's *Work* (1958–62; Fig. 1) is a striking example of her formal and material experimentation in the early 1960s, a period shaped by her solo travels to Paris, New York City, and the Central African Republic. Begun in New York in 1958 and completed in Tokyo in 1962, the painting reflects the global influences she absorbed while engaging with key figures during frequent visits to exhibitions at Betty Parsons Gallery. In New York, Katsura began incorporating handmade Japanese washi paper into her work, owing to its availability in Greenwich Village. In *Work*, she layers this delicate yet durable material with thick applications of paint, creating a richly textured surface. The tactile buildup of paper and pigment evokes the roughness of stucco or stone, suggesting an organic, almost geological presence. This textural depth may also hint at Katsura's experiences in Central Africa, where she encountered new visual and material cultures that likely informed her approach to surface and abstraction. *Work* depicts a large yellow area with fringes threatening the edges of the frame, creating a composition that is both dynamic and restrained, balancing the saturated yellow with deliberately darker edges of the background. Katsura's use of collage—a medium she increasingly explored during this period—challenges the traditional boundaries of painting, merging the painterly and the sculptural. Through these material and conceptual choices, *Work* exemplifies Katsura's ability to fuse diverse artistic traditions into a singular, compelling visual language.

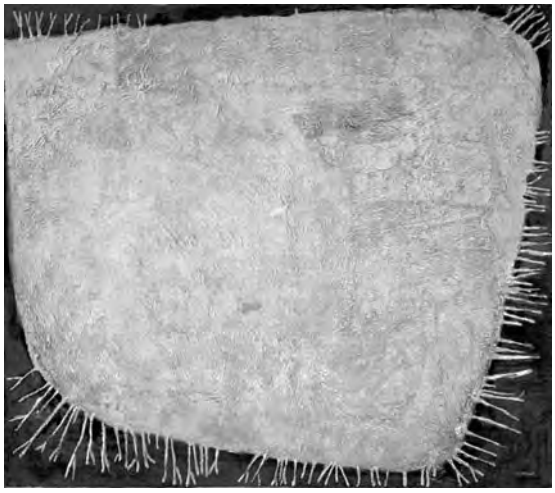


Fig. 1. Yuki Katsura, *Work* (1958–62), oil and paper on canvas, 40 3/8" x 45 7/8". Courtesy of Alice and Tom Tisch, New York.

In "Myth, Symbol, Ritual," Candy Stobbs examines the interplay of chance, gestural forms, and symbols as artistic strategies for conveying universal themes—mythology, alchemy, goddesses, and ancient rituals—especially for those working in exile or fleeing communism. She links the mark-making of women artists to automatism and Surrealism, turning to Alice Rahon (France/ Mexico; 1904–1987), Erna Rosenstein (Ukraine/ Poland; 1913–2004), Grace Hartigan (US; 1922–2008), Lopes, Sadr, and Krasner. Stobbs explores, for example, how some artists integrated influences of Chinese and Arabic calligraphy to express complex emotional and intellectual themes, while others were enabled by innovative approaches to abstraction to communicate profound human experiences.

Agustin Pérez Rubio's essay, "Being, Expression, Empathy," translated from the Spanish by Edward Dormandy, examines the philosophical and emotional dimensions of gestural abstraction by tracing feminism, phenomenology, and existentialism. His essay explores how women artists expressed their sense of being and empathy using gesture and form to convey profound human experiences, in some cases utilizing "destruction" as an aesthetic strategy, and incorporating elements of rupture, fragmentation, and material decay into their work. He views this approach as a form of resistance, where destruction becomes a creative act that challenges the political and artistic norms in the post-war era. This interplay of destruction and creation, according to Pérez Rubio, allowed women artists to push the boundaries of abstraction and create works that embody the tensions of their experiences in a sociopolitical context.

Joan M. Marter's essay, "Performance, Gesture, Rhythm," introduces performative aspects of gestural abstraction, emphasizing physicality in women's creative processes and defining how movement, gesture, dance, music, and rhythm were integral conduits to artists' dynamic engagement with their materials. Marter highlights how gesture became a performative act, in the case of Elaine de Kooning's notion of painting as "a verb, not a noun" (162), and embedded the artist's movements into the work. Rhythm introduced temporal flow and emotional intensity, enhancing the art's impact, diagrammed by Marter's discussion of painter Judith Godwin (US; 1930–2021), whose "sweeping gestures" and acts of "freedom" reference her dance studies with the renowned choreographer Martha Graham. Another important section reviews the Japanese women artists working in NYC who expanded traditional notions of abstraction through calligraphy, particularly Shinoda Tōkō (Japan; 1913–2021).[4]

In "Environment, Nature, Perception," Iwona Blazwick examines the intense connection between gestural abstraction and the fragmented landscape in the aftermath of World War II—a time when no continent escaped the war's devastation and

trauma. She highlights how women, including painters Maria Helena Vieira da Silve (Portugal/France; 1908–1992)), Britta Ringvall (Sweden; 1912–1987), and Helen Kahl (US/Lebanon; 1923–2009), for example, used the canvas as a medium to capture the phenomenological experiences of space, texture, form, light, and atmosphere, deeply informed by their perceptions of nature and the environmental contexts in which they worked. This interplay between nature and abstraction not only shaped the creation of their works but also influenced how these pieces were received and understood.

Action, Gesture, Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction, 1940–70 boldly confronts the entrenched gender biases in art history, offering a long-overdue reevaluation of abstraction's legacy. Highlighting the contributions of eighty women artists from across the globe, it challenges the conventional narratives of Abstract Expressionism and gestural abstraction as predominantly male and American. Richly illustrated with compelling photographs of artists in their studios and detailed, high-quality color plates of their work, this publication serves as an indispensable resource for both enthusiasts and scholars. It emphasizes the centrality of materiality, process, and performative gesture for artistic practice while addressing the complexities and paradoxes of single-sex retrospectives. Ultimately, this ambitious project elevates underrecognized voices and encourages a broader understanding of modern art as dynamic, collaborative, and richly diverse. •

Roja Najafi is an art historian, translator, educator, and curator. She received her PhD in art history from the University of Texas at Austin in 2016. In a global context, her research explores materiality, evaluates the fluidity between abstraction and figuration in postwar and contemporary studio practices, and concentrates on the reception of avant-garde and countercultural practices in Iran and the United States. She currently leads the Art History program and serves as a curator at Chandler-Gilbert Community College (CGCC) in Arizona.

Notes

1. The exhibition traveled from Whitechapel Gallery, London (February 9–May 7, 2023), to Fondation Vincent Van Gogh, Arles, France (June 3–October 22, 2023), and then to Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Germany (December 2, 2023–March 3, 2024).
2. Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Art News* 51, no. 8 (December 1952), 22–23, 48–50; repr. Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New* (Horizon Press, 1959), 23–39.
3. In 1959, the agency partially funded the "The New American Painting" exhibition at London's Tate Gallery, showcasing seventeen American artists—sixteen of them men—to promote American ideals of liberty and independence during its European tour.
4. See Kimihiko Nakamura, "Shinoda Tōkō: Ink, Abstraction, and Radical Individualism," *Woman's Art Journal* 43, no. 1 (Spring/Sumer 2022): 21–30.

Ruth Asawa: Through Line

Edited by Kim Conaty and Edouard Kopp
Menil Collection and Whitney Museum of American Art, 2023

Ruth Asawa: An Artist Takes Shape

Written and illustrated by Sam Nakahira
Getty Publications, 2024

Reviewed by Mark Bloch

These two recent books on Ruth Asawa (1926–2013) could not be more unalike, but they complement each other well. With much written in a short period of time since the art world's "discovery" of Asawa, it is not surprising that *Through Line* focuses on a less widely known aspect of her work, namely her drawings, rather than what has been familiar thus far: her captivating biography and her unique hanging looped-wire sculptures. The graphic novel *An Artist Takes Shape* retells the story of her life, but in a fresh way, while *Through Lines*, the catalogue of an exhibition at the Menil Collection in Houston and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, reveals what lies behind the sculpture: a lifetime of drop-dead-gorgeous Asawa drawings. Both books show how Asawa externalized her sensitivity through her quirky yet profoundly sensible ways of working. Both reveal, too, how this praxis was acquired: through a lifelong dedication to pedagogy, as both learner and teacher.

Through Line comprises four medium-sized essays and eight mini-essays, all heavily illustrated. As the Menil and the Whitney had begun planning Asawa drawing shows simultaneously, they "happily joined forces," explain the respective directors of these two American institutions, Rebecca Rabinow and Adam D. Weinberg (now former), in their foreword to this large tome (6).The editors of this impressive volume are the show's curators, Kim Conaty, the Steven and Ann Ames Curator of Drawings and Prints at the Whitney, and Edouard Kopp, the John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation Chief Curator at the Menil Drawing Institute. The five-page exhibition checklist totals some one hundred thirty-five works, mostly drawings on paper in graphite pencil, colored pencil, ink (sometimes stamped or painted), crayon, pastel, oil, and/or gouache, but also collages, copper reliefs, and wire sculptures as well as photographs of Asawa in the act of drawing or of folding paper. Drawn from a wide variety of sources, including Asawa's papers at Stanford, the Black Mountain College archives in North Carolina, and many private collections, the works and photographs have been supplemented here in the catalogue by several dozen additional images. But while the first chapter traces Asawa's steps through her drawing life, no formal chronology graces *Through Line*; readers receive a much more systematic understanding of Asawa's biography, or at least its first quarter-

century, from the graphic novel.

In *An Artist Takes Shape*, published by the Getty and Abrams Books, illustrator Sam Nakahira (she/they) from Los Angeles evokes the milestones of Asawa's life pictorially, weaving a tale for audiences of almost all ages and levels of sophistication, approaching difficult subject matter directly with comic-book user-friendliness. Billed as her debut graphic novel, the slender hardcover volume lives up to Nakahira's intention for all of her work as laid out in "About the Author": exploring overlooked histories within Japanese and Japanese-American history and mythology. In simple black outlines and shades of gray, she depicts the first twenty-five years or so of Asawa's life with honesty, grace, and charm: Asawa, determined, courageous, and unconventional, lets nothing stop her from becoming an artist, even when confronted with profound, deeply disturbing prejudice. In a suggested reading list at the end of the book are the documentaries, interviews, and secondary sources upon which Nakahira has relied.

Nakahira portrays Asawa's youth idyllically on her family's farm in Southern California—until Pearl Harbor is bombed and West Coast Japanese Americans are forced into camps. *An Artist Takes Shape* shows Asawa's father being hauled away for incarceration and sixteen-year-old Ruth being sent, along with her mother and most of her siblings, to a detention center at Santa Anita Racetrack. Exclamations like "UGH! Nothing will get the horse smell out of my clothes" and "I wish I'd brought my flyswatter" humanize the experience of the detainees (24–25). During her imprisonment at the racetrack and then, for a longer time, at an internment camp in Arkansas, Asawa dreams of becoming an artist, and a fortuitous string of knowledgeable teachers nurture her interest and skills, including three Walt Disney Studios animators also held at Santa Anita: "Everything was gray until I met the cartoonists" (28). Asawa attends Milwaukee State Teachers College to become an art teacher, but after a student-teaching placement falls through due to more anti-Japanese hostility, she travels to the experimental Black Mountain College (BMC) in North Carolina. The BMC community comes alive in Nakahira's panels—above all, the influential professor Josef Albers, who points outdoors and tells students, "I want to see what you can make with the simplest of materials. Open your eyes and see" (55). Asawa is attentive to her new BMC friends and to these new ways of learning. After a trip to Mexico in summer 1947 where she has "the most beautiful encounter" with wire egg baskets (65), she returns to BMC and meets her life partner, the architect Albert Lanier, who admires "all those mad little gardens on campus" Asawa has planted (69). Against their parents' wishes, they marry and construct a loving postwar domestic life in San Francisco, where they start a family. The older photographer Imogen Cunningham (1883–1976) becomes a close friend and offers advice on being a woman artist. Asawa's wire basket-making leads to a groundbreaking development: the creation of the hanging wire sculptures Asawa is now increasingly revered for. Asawa describes her first experiment in this medium as "so exciting and alive!" (88; Fig. 1). The final page spread presents Nakahira's drawings of some of these sculptures and of iconic photographs of Asawa that appear in *Through Lines*, including one by Cunningham.



Fig. 1. Ruth Asawa teaching paper-folding, John Swett School Workshop, Avocado School Arts Workshop (c. 1980s). Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

The story of Asawa's life beyond the early 1950s, the point at which Nakahira's book ends, emerges piecemeal from the exhibition catalogue *Through Lines*. Just as BMC professors Albers, Buckminster Fuller, and Anni Albers (1899–1994), and fellow BMC students Ray Johnson, Hazel Larsen (1921–2001), and others had embraced her personality, contributions, and style, including her willingness to experiment and her appreciation for collegiality, so too did communities of family members, friends, and artists in the Bay Area, who provided needed support while reaping reciprocal benefits from her presence. Asawa's life played out in the form of public art commissions; gallery and museum exhibitions; membership in the San Francisco Arts Commission; involvement in local educational programs, including the Alvarado School Arts Workshop, which she co-founded with artist and architectural historian Sally Woodbridge (1930–2019); and the near-constant practice of art-making, concurrently with raising her six children and then onward until her death in 2013. Even during a difficult convalescence with lupus, she never stopped drawing.

Through Line argues that Asawa's sketching and mark-making practice was the unifying thread in her artistic practice as a whole and intimately connected to her now-familiar sculptural style, which she referred to as "drawing in space" (11). A wonderfully varied output from the late 1940s to the 1990s, including many daily page spreads shown here, became a way for Asawa to see and understand the world; they now provide a way we can understand her. *Through Line* traces Asawa's journey in the drawing medium from before her first formal art lessons in internment camps through her formative time at BMC and beyond, featuring a comprehensive overview of the artist's drawings in several media, including many never before published.

After the acknowledgments and a preface by Conaty and Kopp, the pair of editors embark individually on their respective parts of the book's four major essays, Conaty first with "'Your Hand Is Already Flowing': Ruth Asawa's Daily Practice of Drawing," while Kopp concludes the four with "Instinct and Inquiry: Ruth Asawa's Use of Drawing Materials and Techniques." In between

and shorter are "Drawn Together: Ruth Asawa and Community" by Aleesa Pitchamarn Alexander, the Robert M. and Ruth L. Halperin Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at Stanford, and an exploration of "The Pedagogical Value of Paper" by Jordan Troeller, a postdoctoral researcher, historian and theorist at the Freie Universität Berlin.

Setting the stage for the essays, Conaty's ideas are joined by many examples of Asawa's sketchbook pages focusing on people, plants and patterns, miniaturized but still intriguing, readable and beautiful, opened to spreads, and strategically assembled to create new spreads that pepper, then follow the words in sumptuous mini-reproductions. Some Arkansas high school yearbook pages also populate the twelve pages of text (including endnotes) that explore how Asawa's youth in a Japanese American farming household with six siblings, with each expected to help out, resulted in Ruth's careful eye-hand coordination and became useful later when she wielded a brush, studied "breathing lines" (13) in Albers's BMC Design and Color classes, and echoed the cultural traditions of her childhood in the Asawa-Lanier household.

In "Drawn Together," about community, Alexander explores Asawa's commitment to relationships with plants and animals as well as humans to ensure survival, supplemented by images: sculptural forms in more sketchbook spreads; drawn and photographed images of plaster masks of the faces of friends, family members, and fellow artists; she created and an image printed in 1982 on the program cover of the fifth annual Imogen Cunningham Award presentation, drawn a year before her friend's death. Whether teaching gardening to children, creating public art commissions in the 1970s and 1980s, or supporting her spouse's architectural work, Asawa's art practice was abundantly linked to complex community situations she weathered, contributed to, and thrived in.

In "The Pedagogical Value of Paper," including one sketch and ten photos of paper and paper-folding, and several stunning in black and white, illustrate the medium's intersection with pedagogy in Asawa's work, where no distinction existed between the professional artist and public school systems, past and present, manifesting the tessellated forms she and her husband's professional practice both inherited from (and deeply respected in) Albers's routines and ideas that evolved from his own training in Wilhelmine, Germany, as a primary school teacher and drawing instructor before he developed and embodied the Bauhaus foundation course, a bedrock of BMC. Finally, "Instinct and Inquiry" expands on the preceding chapter regarding Asawa's exposure to radical experimentation in Albers's Basic Design (or Werklehre) course at BMC based on a merging of perception and tactility in the matière and leaf studies that cultivated Asawa's use of drawing materials and techniques, broken down into five brief subsections: "Matière," "Layering," "Stamping," "Marking," and "Paper." The materiality and hands-on experiences of her schooling come to life in repetitive brushstroke, pen and printed images, as do Zip-A-Tone illustrations she later employed using layered dots or photomechanical processes with Xerox machines. In the concluding essay, Asawa explains how "I try to stay out of the picture" while remaining very present (60).

In the second half of the book, a section of eight short thematic essays on aspects of Asawa's oeuvre cuts across time, reflecting an art practice often built of lines but emanating from Asawa in ways that were more circular and cyclical than linear. Each of the "Eight Themes" is followed by about fifteen pages of images reproduced in exacting detail. The first mini-essay, "Learning to See," is by Isabel Bird, a Menil Drawing Institute pre-doctorate fellow. Bird discusses how Asawa employed strong color contrasts, repeated and deconstructed shapes, and object rotation to "rigorously test the dimensions of positive and negative space" (69). The sixteen plates provide elements arranged in patterns, from circles and parts of parallelograms to realistically captured jello molds, hands, and feet to number and letter forms appearing in series.

Next comes the mini-essay "Found and Transformed," highlighting Asawa's resourcefulness in using scavenged objects to stamp marks onto paper. Authored by Scout Hutchinson, who at the time of the book's publication was a Curatorial Fellow at the Whitney and is now an Associate Curator of Exhibitions at the Parrish Art Museum, the essay looks at Asawa employing fish, leaves, potato prints, rubber laundry stamps, and a bike pedal as art-making tools, examples of the type of "scroung[ing] around," as Asawa herself put it (89), that the artist did at and after BMC. For Asawa, Hutchinson submits, "working with found objects was the result of growing up on a working farm where … art emerge[d] from the remnants of daily life" (90).

Hutchinson also contributed three other essays. "In and Out" treats Asawa's lifelong interest in the methods of paper folding. Hutchinson demonstrates that Asawa's work in this medium was rooted in Albers's and Fuller's pedagogy at BMC as well as in Asawa's own forays into origami as a child. Asawa recalled Fuller speaking of "how paper breathes" and Albers telling students that "folded paper had its own heartbeat" (124). Paper folding was essential to drawing and sculpture classes at BMC because of what the page is capable of: bearing weight, tolerating twists, and holding memories of its history (123–4; see also 40). Asawa not only created paper-fold works, including large-scale props for a 1989 dance performance, but also rendered folded forms in two dimensions, like her 1951–52 screenprints of logarithmic spirals.

Hutchinson's "Curiosity and Control" showcases Asawa's watercolors and ink paintings. Asawa had taken calligraphy lessons at age eight and resumed them in the mid-1950s, this time with a Buddhist priest at a San Francisco mission. In applying watercolor and ink, Asawa's awareness of not just what her brush did but also what it didn't do; her use of swift stroke successions, each dependent on a predecessor; her approach of doing less to get more; and her sensitivity to how

different types of paper absorbed and repelled water all served to bring persimmons, a watermelon, lilies, irises, trees, and more to life. "My favorite time is when I'm doing watercolors," she once said (179).

Hutchinson's final leitmotif, the book's last, "Life Lines," further unwraps Asawa's "less-is-more" philosophy, this time in the portraits and organic subjects on sketchbook pages that unleash plants, animals, her six children, her husband, and her friends. In distilling her own experiences as well as those of the subjects who sat for her, knowingly and unknowingly, Asawa captured essences, from an infant's hair to a blanket's wrinkles to pianist David Tudor's hands. Asawa transformed even the humdrum—pieces of furniture, colleagues at bureaucratic business meetings—into pure romance.

Kirsten Marples, a Curatorial Associate at the Menil Drawing Institute, contributed three two-pagers. In "Rhythms and Waves," she shows how Albers's lessons on the meander motif taught Asawa's eye to move ahead of her pencil as she turned the form on itself, folding and unfolding or coiling and uncoiling the shape. In 1950s and 1960s marker drawings, she made incisions into felt-tipped pens that yielded multiple parallel lines, allowing her to create fine patterns that visited her world in the form of babies on quilted blankets (Fig. 2), plants, fruit, row houses, Brentwood rockers, trees, undulating hills, and waves, as well as purely decorative patterns.

In Marples's "Growth Patterns," we learn that Asawa's method of working outward from a central point in concentric rings or diverging branches to produce mandala-like drawings first took shape in 1962, when friends returned from a trip to Death Valley with a gift to draw: a dried plant, bundled at the center, dividing outward. Haptically untangling what she saw came first; a series of tied-wire sculptures emerged before the artist translated onto paper or thin metal sheets what the wire had taught her. The works, Marples argues, reflect Asawa's attentiveness to "radiating implications" (165) not only in nature but also within communities.

"Forms Within Forms" offers insight into how Asawa's hanging sculptures relate to her drawing practice. Marples adduces a letter from Asawa's fellow BMC alumnus Johnson in which he professes admiration for one of those sculptures, with its "forms within forms within forms" (103–104), after seeing it in the Laverne Originals showroom in Manhattan in 1952. Asawa herself traced the inspiration for her rippling sculptures in part to the curvilinear, nearly abstract, almost cell-like "Dancers" in drawings and watercolors she had made at BMC.

I originally became aware of Asawa in the 1980s because of her and Johnson's shared affection for Josef and Anni Albers.[1] As Kopp points out, Josef's "Matiere" studies in which students created new contexts for found materials, were a defining exercise of BMC teachings, training students to see in unorthodox ways. In *An Artist Takes Shape* (58), a cartoon, Asawa wonders, "How can I trick the eye?," observing, "when one digs beneath the fallen leaves, the distinction between leaves and earth is nearly gone." The greatest strength of *Through Line* is its images: gorgeous, sumptuous, and impeccably printed in Italy, with at least one on every page spread. The choices in imagery hit the intellectual points admirably, making the continued turning of these pages irresistible. One small weakness of this tome's essays, however, is their repetitiveness, not the fault of these gifted writers but inherent somehow in the book's structure. The themes in the eight mini-essays are continually replucked, not only in the other seven mini-essays but also in the four foundational essays, to the point that the reader sometimes loses track of which chapter is which. For me, it muddied the clarity of the book's arguments. In the end, though, every image is illuminated by every point in every text, not only made and remade but well-made.

Both *An Artist Takes Shape* and *Through Line* reveal how, despite her attentiveness to strong mentors, Asawa created her own terms. Art and life merged in her, transforming both, echoing the exploratory marks that dance, determinedly and effectively, across the works on paper discussed and illustrated in *Through Line*. *An Artist Takes Shape* and *Through Line* similarly obscure figure and ground, blending Ruth Asawa's art with her life. •



Fig. 2. Ruth Asawa, *Untitled* (FF.1211, Paul Lanier on Patterned Blanket) (1961), incised felt-tipped pen on paper on board, 31" x 21". Private collection.

Mark Bloch is the author of *Robert Delford Brown: Meat, Maps and Militant Metaphysics* (Cameron Art Museum, 2008). He calls himself a pan-media artist, named for his work in the Postal Art Network, specializing in mail art and performance art as well as writing and archiving. He is currently writing a biography of American correspondence artist and collagist Ray Johnson.

Notes

1. See also Mark Bloch, "Josef and Anni and Ruth and Ray at David Zwirner," *Whitehot Magazine*, November 2017.

Sonia Delaunay: Living Art

Edited by Waleria Dorogova and Laura Microulis
Bard Graduate Center and Yale University Press, 2024

Reviewed by Nancy E. Green

> *It was my life and I worked the whole time, but I wasn't working—I was living—and that is the difference* (493).

Defining the work of Sonia Delaunay (1885–1979) has been a notoriously Sisyphean task. She was prolific, indefatigable, and adept in so many of the arts: painting, printmaking, textiles, mosaics, rugs, wall hangings, ceramics, embroidery, and designs for books, posters, theater, ballet, interiors, furnishings, and clothing. Color was her subject and her style, known as Simultanism, which sought to work across, within, and between media, breaking down the barriers that divided them. So where to place her in the artistic pantheon? This catalogue, which accompanied the exhibition at the Bard Graduate Center, New York, seeks to answer that question with twenty-three contributors weighing in over twenty-eight essays (some writers took on more than one aspect of Delaunay's career). As a massive book of over five hundred pages, it serves as both a monograph and biography, which the title, *Living Art*, presages. Delaunay, indeed, lived her art on every level (Fig. 1).

Born Sara Elievna Stern in Odessa, then part of the Russian Empire (now Ukraine) in 1885, to poor Jewish parents, at the age of five she was sent to St. Petersburg to live with her uncle, Henri Terk, and his wife, Anna, and changed her name to Sofia Ilinichna Terk (nicknamed Sonia). With them she led a very different life, traveling extensively throughout Europe, going to galleries and museums, and spending summers at their vacation home in Finland. At age eighteen she went to Germany to attend a private art academy in Karlsruhe, and in 1906 she moved to Paris. There she discovered the works of Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, and the Fauves, and married the gallerist Wilhelm Uhde. However, that changed the following year when she met Robert Delaunay, an artist with whom she shared a love of color and all that was modern in life. She didn't hesitate, and in 1910 they were married.

This is the bare outline of Delaunay's early life and explains what brought her to Paris and why she stayed. Meeting her second husband is the key; they formed a close partnership built on their mutual respect and their shared exploration within the arts of the *avant garde*. While doubtless it must have occasionally irked to have her work, more often than not, compared unfavorably with his, this never daunted her. This catalogue is a fittingly grand testament to her art and her life. Delaunay is presented in her totality. As she once described herself, "I was a force of nature, invulnerable, a little unreal, one who would smile at fate, never complaining and with an innate sense of happiness"(88).



Fig. 1. Willy Maywald (photographer), Sonia Delaunay in her studio on rue de Saint-Simon, Paris, 1955. Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris, Fonds Delaunay.

Delaunay's arrival in Paris coincided with a surge among contemporary artists to radically distinguish their creations from those of their predecessors. They were also attempting to dissolve the boundaries between art and life, celebrating the new in their lives as well as in their artwork, and moving into the realm of the non-objective. Delaunay's earliest works in this vein were the pieced and sewn cubist-style crib cover she made for her son, Charles, in 1911, and her book covers, which consisted of geometric forms. Not yet thirty, Sonia had found her métier, no matter what medium. Form and color were her inspiration for the rest of her life.

Guillaume Apollinaire, a friend of the Delaunays, labeled their work "Orphism" or "Orphic Cubism." These terms are sometimes used interchangeably with "Simultanism," which derives from the theories of Michel Eugène Chevreul, whose book, *De la loi du contraste simultané des couleurs* (On the Law of the Simultaneous Contrast of Colors), was published in Paris in 1839, and closely examined color relationships. Both Robert and Sonia explored these juxtapositions, first in painting, but eventually Sonia began to apply these principles to the decorative arts and to how life could be lived.

Delaunay was, in her way, obsessed with modernity, from trains to planes, electricity to film, while it was her husband who was often credited with championing these new technologies in his work. The use of color was similar in the couple's oeuvre, but Sonia's use of bright, saturated colors was seen by some as "evidence of an emotional need to capture the 'primitive' colors associated with her Eastern origins" (171), although one Guatemalan critic perceptively noted, "Movement keeps no secrets from her. How does she manage to have at her command speed, flight, vibrations?" (171). Up to her husband's untimely death in 1941, unfavorable comparisons of her work to his was something with which she often had to contend, but she chose to ignore these criticisms.

Delaunay's work in the applied arts was also a cause for denigration by the critics, or just simply overlooked. A lesser person might have been daunted but Sonia simply ignored the naysayers. She

formed partnerships with artistic friends; opened her own interior design firm, Casa Sonia, which created both domestic and commercial spaces; designed costumes for Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes; and registered her fashion house, "Sonia," from which she created Simultané fabrics while she continued to exhibit her work at various venues. At Sonia Workshop she employed up to a dozen workers and stayed away from producing ready-to-wear designs, preferring to maintain control of her products. Her vibrantly colored garments epitomized the tenets of Simultanism. Robert praised her fabrics: "She has combined this visual poetry of color with multiple rhythms that are quintupled by simultaneous changes of speed, that is, regulated by masterful intuition" (330). As early as the 1920s, museums in France and Germany recognized the avant-garde aspect of these fabric designs and mounted exhibitions of them.

Living Art is a physical testament to how much Delaunay accomplished in her ninety-four years. Given the multitude of voices, the text manages to present a cohesive whole, each essay effortlessly flowing into the next, partly because each author reiterates Delaunay's drive, discipline, and openness. In their editors' introduction, Waleria Dorogova and Laura Microulis make the case for the catalogue's title, as they reflect on the ways she seamlessly integrated her art into how she lived her life. In the first essay, Rachel Silveri situates the artist squarely within the milieu of pre-World War I Paris and blames some of her lack of name recognition on male bias as well as the pejorative stamp of "decorative art" placed on much of her output, while simultaneously showing just how *de rigueur* Delaunay's designs were for their time. Cécile Godefroy writes of the artist's meeting with her husband Robert, and their blending of interests in their use of color and celebration of modern life as they moved inexorably towards abstraction.

Gail Levin's chapter explores Delaunay's Russian/Jewish background and the influence it had on her life and work. The Delaunays saw out the First World War in Portugal and Spain but the threats were uglier two decades later. She was not religious but recognized the threat to the Jewish community and protected herself as best she could in the Second World War by moving away from Paris. Margarete Zimmermann writes sympathetically of these years in occupied France, beginning with their move in June 1940 to Montepellier, where Robert passed away. Jean Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889–1943) invited Sonia to join them at their home in Grasse, where she remained until 1944.

Co-editor Dorogova contributed many essays to the catalogue which explore Delaunay's Russianness and her connections to the Russian expatriate community in Paris. She also examines the artist's work for Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes, especially her seminal designs for *Cléopâtre* (Cleopatra), which opened in 1918 at the London Coliseum. Elsewhere in the catalogue, Dorogova provides a detailed study of Delaunay's interior designs for Georges Guercheenovich's Paris apartment. An engineer who had emigrated from Poland in 1925, he was a partner in a French textile firm in the first half of the 1930s. Dorogova's additional chapters explore Delaunay's fabric and interior designs for Madeleine and Robert Perrier, also in the 1930s, using her signature palette of red and blue, often accented with green, gray and white, as well as her designs for children, beginning with her emblematic crib cover for her son, Charles.

Hilde D'Haeyere and Steven Jacobs discuss a lesser-known aspect of Delaunay's experimentation in the field of cinematography, creating two feature length productions. Tamar Kharatishvili reiterates the artist's exploration of modern advancements in her painting when she moves further into abstraction, absorbed aesthetically by the effects of electricity and light. Jazz, of course, was all the rage, and Delaunay's son was a devotee as well as a professional critic and record producer. Celeste Day Moore explores how the musical form informed the work of his mother and her contemporaries. Cars, too, enthralled the Delaunays, and Dirk Van Oost writes about Sonia's enthusiasm for design in motorcar fashion as well as her painting of the exterior of Maurice Kaplan's Ariès Torpédo, which was most likely upholstered in one of her fabrics.

Never one to be pigeonholed, and playing on her love of electricity, Delaunay developed luminous posters that used electric light to engage public attention. Ruth Hommelen examines the power of this advertising tool, making the posters clearly visible after dark. Though not the only artist to make use of light in this way, it shows how up-to-the-minute her experiments were, no matter the medium.

Though several of the contributors discuss Delaunay's interior design work, Marjan Sterckx and Werner Adriaenssens look at her early decorative concepts for her own home and the formation of Casa Sonia. Kasia Stempniak follows with a discussion of how Delaunay redesigned space, pulling all the threads together of painting, decorative art, and modern conveniences into a harmonious whole.

Fashion design was as important to Delaunay as her interior design and painting, and Maude Bass-Krueger looks at her pioneering work in that realm. Noah Dubay writes about her use of embroidery in creating unique garments, including embroidering words of poetry on some of her creations. Émilie Hammen looks at the artist's career in the Parisian fashion world in connection with couturier Jacques Heim. Laurent Cotta, in another chapter, goes deeper into this relationship by examining Heim's archives, which include designs and sketches by Delaunay, all donated to the Palais Galliera between 1987 and 1993.

Not surprisingly, Delaunay was involved in book design, discussed by Christoph Benjamin Schulz. In the teens, she designed book covers and continued to do so as well as creating artist's books into the last decade of her life. Given her propensity for trying her hand at everything and her immense interest in textiles, tapestries were also part of her oeuvre. Co-editor Microulis discusses this late career experimentation when the artist worked with Manufacture des Gobelins, the tapestry factory founded in the fifteenth-century in Paris, to realize



Fig. 2. Sonia Delauany, detail of *Prismes électriques* (1914), oil on canvas. Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, Paris, AM 3606 P.

her designs. Less successfully, she tried her hand at designing stained glass. Geoffrey Ripert writes about these designs and why they never came to fruition. More profitably, she created mosaics, beginning at age sixty-eight. Kaat Obbels examines these unique works and connects them with the artist's interest in Byzantine art, claiming that this medium was ideal for her as it is "inherently simultaneous" (457).

Microulis writes about the Artcurial Gallery's relationship with Delaunay that began late in her life. The gallery offered editioned work by artists that would reach a wider audience. A collection of "Simultaneous" creations was offered—wall-panels, cushions, screens, drapes, scarves, and shawls, among other household items—based on her iconic designs from the 1920s. Patrick Raynaud's epilogue is a more personal offering, recollecting his time working with the artist in her final years on a film about her life. A 1974 interview between Delaunay and Hugues Desalle completes this monumental examination of her life and work.

No one work could exemplify her life of creative endeavor but early on Delaunay showed where she was heading. In her painting *Prisms électriques* (1914; Fig. 2), her trajectory has already been set: the pulsating shapes and vibrant colors create a surface rhythm that vibrates and blinks, presaging her obsession with the modern and the new, electricity, light, automobiles, and Jazz. It is a work every bit as powerful as that of her husband but a reviewer, looking at this side-by-side with Robert's *Hommage à Blériot*, found his work "compelling" and labeled hers, "irritating," saying "[she] imposes on us a rigorously Slavic personality. That's enough said" (171). This dismissive attitude was one she met with throughout her career, though less so when she worked in one of the "female" arts, like weaving or textile design. As she said to Desalle in her interview, "I paint from morning until evening. [Or] I don't paint, but I think about my painting. I live life!.... That's is the way I can express what I feel." This commitment would sustain her throughout her long career.

This catalogue is a paean to Delaunay's many artistic gifts. It is hard to think of any other artist, woman or man, who worked in so many arenas with equal success. With an exhibition of her work at Tate Modern in 2015 and this current exhibition and publication, she is finally able to take her place among the most innovative artists of the twentieth century. The expansive text is worth the effort to discover the many facets of this accomplished woman. The one quibble I have relates to the catalogue's design. Many, but not all, of the captions are perpendicular to the illustrations and with a book this size, it creates an awkward dynamic between reader and catalogue, as it necessitates constantly turning the book sideways to read the caption. But this is, as I say, a quibble. Richly illustrated, the images capture the vibrancy of her palette and reiterates her commitment to color as subject.

The key to Delaunay's success was her endless curiosity in tune with what was contemporary; her passion for art, in whatever form it might take; and her refusal to be quantified in any way. Though sometimes miffed at negative comparisons to her husband, she blamed the critics and not her spouse. She went down many creative rabbit holes and seemed to have consistently returned with new and exciting ideas. She succeeded because she had a strong sense of herself and her talents, her ability to stay *au courant* with the changing art world while maintaining the integrity of her personal vision, and her refusal to bow to the criticisms aimed at her. Jewish by birth, she survived both world wars and, given the devastating times she lived through, there is a remarkable lack of political references or societal criticism in her work. Throughout her long life she remained true to her personal vision, and she sought out people who supported her goals. Here, we finally have the opportunity to know her much better. •

Nancy E. Green was the Gale and Ira Drukier Curator of European and American Art, Prints, and Drawings, 1800–1945, at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, where, during her tenure over thirty-seven years, she organized dozens of exhibitions with principal interests in American and European art from the nineteenth-century to the present. She has published numerous articles, exhibition guides, and catalogues, including *Japan/America*; A *Room of Their Own: The Bloomsbury Artists in American Collections*; *Byrdcliffe: An American Arts and Crafts Colony*; and *Susan Rothenberg: Drawings and Prints*. Green received her B.A. from Connecticut College and M.A. in Art History from Williams College, working at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center, Williams College Museum of Art, and Christies Auction House before joining Cornell. She continues to teach for the Cornell Adult University program, lecture for Smithsonian Associates, consult as a fine art print appraiser, and research a book about couples of the Arts and Crafts movement.

Making Her Mark: A History of Women Artists in Europe, 1400–1800

Edited by Andaleeb Badiee Banta and Alexa Greist, with Theresa Kutasz Christensen
Goose Lane Editions and Baltimore Museum of Art, 2023

Reviewed by Elizaveta Kushnareva

In light of the rising interest in material culture and women's accomplishments in creative fields, this timely publication makes a compelling contribution to feminist art historical scholarship by fusing the two. Accompanying an exhibition at the Baltimore Museum of Art, the catalogue, edited by the curators Andaleeb Badiee Banta and Alexa Greist, consists of nine major scholarly essays followed by seventeen medium-specific, shorter essays discussing the exhibited objects.

In the opening, "Not Seen, Not Heard," which introduces the premise of the exhibition and establishes the framework for subsequent texts, Banta criticizes the prevailing marginalization of so-called "unexceptional women artists" (10) and institutional disregard of works that fall outside the usual and comfortable categories of painting and sculpture. This practice can be traced back to Giorgio Vasari's *Le Vite de'Più Eccelenti Pittori Scultorri e Architettori* (The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects), first published in 1550, in which he promoted the idea of a single male creative genius and established the hierarchy of the arts. This approach completely disregards collaborative and anonymous labor that many women were heavily involved in from the 1400s onwards. Even when scholars and museums began to address the exclusion of women from the art historical canon, coinciding with second-wave feminism in the 1970s and 1980s, new exhibitions retained the longstanding Vasarian model. In 1981, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock published their *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, which attempted to disrupt the established hierarchy, and called to recognize the craft and domestic production of women artists. Allying closely with this argument, Banta seeks to spotlight the silent and the anonymous by presenting their various creations "on their own terms" (26).

Powerfully dispelling the myth of male-centered exceptionalism in the Western art canon, curators and authors of *Making Her Mark* highlight the diverse contributions of women from various socio-economic backgrounds of virtually all means and stages of artistic production from the Renaissance to the early modern period.

As women began to be excluded from professional activities in favor of relegating them into the private spaces of their homes in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, lacemaking and needlework became the most widespread and accessible forms of creative expression. More than just a pastime, these skills, possessed by women of all classes, were seen as symbols of virtue exemplified by the Virgin Mary herself and prepared young women for the running of a household, in which the making and mending of textiles was a practical issue. In the chapter "Prints and Needles," Greist gives an introductory account of the rise of printed textile pattern books as an aid to women and a means of creative production in their own right. Instructions on sewing and embroidery skills were passed down through generations, and once the young girls grasped its basic concepts and practicalities, they were given more elaborate and complex patterns to copy. Such pattern books, sometimes published by women themselves, were practical objects, few of which survived. They were traced, cut out, pounced, and more importantly, shared by women who adapted the elements of these patterns to suit their needs. Highlighting the social and practical aspects of needlework, as well as the collaborative nature of such practices, Greist brilliantly illustrates women's connection and invaluable contribution to the sixteenth-century print industry. Such technical and creative achievements in needlework are further explored in Yassana Croizat-Glazer's "Unravelling the Threads" essay, which situates women and their experience in relation to silk production from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries and explores its implications on female agency. Magino Gabrielli's woodcut illustrations from circa 1595, accompanying his reflections on the practice of raising silkworms, or sericulture, depicted women at the early stages of silk production, confirming their significant contribution to the industry. When, in the 1700s, London and Paris emerged as fashion capitals and trendsetters, Anna Maria Garthwaite (1688–1763) developed a thriving business in her Spitalfields house, producing designs for silks, damasks, and other fabric then copied by local weavers and translated into garments. Other milliners specialized in selling richly decorated accessories, such as nightcaps, jewelry cases, and caskets. Examining such designer-merchant women and offering a glimpse into their careers, as well as exemplifying women as consumers of such production, the author sheds light on the complex roles that women held in the silk industry and proves that, contrary to prevailing gender norms and expectations at the time, they held autonomous power in such structures.

Babette Bohn's essay "Designing Women" gives a comprehensive overview of the current state of scholarship on drawings by women artists in Florence, Rome, Venice, and Bologna from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, ascribing the scarcity of surviving sheets not to a presupposed lack of talent, but to a lack of contemporary interest and appreciation. A seventeenth-century artist named Elisabetta Sirani (1638–1665) enjoyed enormous success and is survived by a considerable body of work. She was the first Italian woman to gain fame for her draughtsmanship skills, with her drawings recorded in at least sixteen Bolognese inventories of the subsequent two centuries. Rosalba Carriera (1673–1757), an eighteenth-century Venice-based disegnatrice, was the most famous European woman artist of her time by virtue of her exceptional pastel portraiture. However, whilst it is tempting to focus on such exceptional figures, the author discusses other no-less talented women artists in relation to



Fig. 1. Maria Sibylla Merian, *Shoreline Purslane and Suriname Toad* (1702–3), watercolor and bodycolor with gum arabic over lightly etched outlines on vellum, 14" x 11.5". Royal Collection Trust, inv. no. RCIN 921217. © His Majesty King Charles III 2023.

their drawings, overlooked by their contemporaries for the supposed lack of invention. The notion that women did not have access to and were not allowed to draw the male nude from life until the eighteenth century is also challenged by Giulia Lama's (1681–1747) surviving sheets, which clearly illustrate the artist's familiarity with the male body.

Interpreting a wide range of engravings, etchings, and prints produced and inscribed by women printmakers for business or pleasure, Madeleine C. Viljoen situates early modern women in relation to the flourishing yet gendered contemporary print industry in the "Multiple Challenges, or the Challenge of Multiples" essay. Often relying on familial relations, many women found ways to engage in print production either as daughters or wives, as they were employed to engrave or copy after their male relatives' creations. However, as constrained and restricted as they were, these women display an acute awareness of their desire to craft their own identities and shape their own careers. It appears that a lot of women printmakers, such as Diana Mantuana (c. 1547–1612) and Catherine Cousinet (b. 1726), signed their sheets, often using their maiden names to avoid their work being mixed up with that of their husbands. Widowhood allowed further freedom, giving these women an opportunity to take over their late husbands' enterprises independently and on their own account. Drawing out the hurdles that women of different social classes and economic backgrounds had to overcome and illustrating various paths they could take, the author attests to the skill and inventiveness of women printmakers in the early modern period.

Women active in decorative arts production and workshops were often faced with similar fates and career paths. An invaluable addition to the newly developing scholarship is found in Brittany Luberda's "Women in Workshops," in which she reviews women's engagement and complex roles within commercial workshops in Europe between 1440 and 1800, with a particular focus on silver, ceramics, glass, textiles, and furniture production. In Isaac Claesz van Swanenburg's *Spinning, Shearing the Warp, and Weaving* (c. 1594–96), we see two women, shown engaged in a wool workshop, abruptly spin their heads around to gaze out at us, the viewers, in an almost startling proclamation of their presence in these spaces. However, their participation was not limited to menial manufacturing processes; it also allowed personal recognition as workshop owners and decorators. Excelling at glass decorating by the seventeenth century, Dutch craftswomen became identified with diamond-point and stipple-point engraving. At the same time, furniture and silver manufacturers were competing for court commissions all across Europe. This essay powerfully acknowledges these women as specialists and entrepreneurs who influenced all stages and fields of the decorative arts production market.

In 1687, Agnes Block (1629–1704), a Dutch botanical enthusiast, was the first person to successfully grow a pineapple in Europe. To commemorate this achievement and to document her extensive collection of flora and fauna, she commissioned multiple women artists to make drawings of them. Women, as botanists and artists, took on active roles during the period of the Scientific Revolution in Europe. In "Women and the Art of Science," Virginia Treanor explores the way in which women's botanical illustrations, still lifes and anatomical studies "dovetailed with … the scientific discourses of the day" (107). In the wake of the systematization of species and the rising popularity of cabinets of curiosities amongst collectors, women artists gained fame for their acute first-hand observations and the detailed illustrations that resulted from them. It is often assumed that subject matters such as still lifes, due to their lower position in the hierarchy of art genres, were more suitable to women and more widely painted by them. And whilst women artists did not limit themselves to these subject matters, those who specialized in them often competed with their male counterparts for commissions. Illustrations by Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717) were relied upon by leading male scholars and scientists (1702–3; Fig. 1), including Carl Linnaeus. Calling on recognizing collective efforts in the fields of botany, conchology, and medical science, rather than exceptionalism criticized by the exhibition's curator in the opening essay, the author urges us to re-evaluate the diverse contributions of women artists in their respective areas, which is necessary to enrich our understanding of this period.

At the same time as Europe saw the rapid growth of its scientific developments, this period was also characterized by political changes, the most obvious being the French Revolution of 1789. "Art and Politics" by Paris A. Spies-Gans places women painters and sculptors at the heart of these conflicts, as active participants whose roles were glorified and undermined in different

points of history. In 1789, Catherine the Great of Russia offered Mary Linwood (1755–1845), famous for embroidered replications of paintings of all genres, £40,000 for her entire body of work (127). Although Linwood refused such a generous offer, this story, amongst various others, showcases the importance of royal connections for women artists of this period. Another kind of self-promotion was to be found in the Royal Academies, in London and Paris, which began to exhibit women's art more frequently. The American and French Revolutions, however, changed the trajectories of the lives of many artists: Élisabeth Vigée-Le Brun (1755–1842), once the favorite artist of Marie Antoinette, fled the country and spent her subsequent years in exile, travelling through Italy, Germany, and Russia to attract patrons and secure commissions. Other women who braved to stay behind sought new valuable connections with rising political figures like Benjamin Franklin.

Banta, in a shared essay with Theresa Kutasz Christensen titled "Women of the World," concludes this section of the publication by adopting a post-colonial lens to analyze women as active participants in the global exchange of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. Travelling abroad, which was available to women artists of higher socio-economic means and those with family connections, increased the chances of meaningful encounters to further their careers. The authors challenge the idea that such paths were reserved exclusively for men and explore the lives and routes of various outstanding women, including Sofonisba Anguissola (1532–1625) and Giovanna Garzoni (1600–1670). More original and thought-provoking is their illustration of the effects of the global circulation of objects that inspired creativity of those with travel restrictions. Textiles, prints, and various other objects attest to borrowed iconography and designs those women developed as a response to the ethnographic material brought to European households and institutions. Women such as Elizabeth Godfrey (active c. 1720–1758) developed motifs and designs inspired by Asian flora and fauna, whilst others such as Garthwaite expanded her business from London to the North American colonies, bringing English fashion to American homes.

The second section of the catalogue, "Works Exhibited," neatly categorizes objects mentioned in the previous section and exhibited at the show according to their medium. Grouping these objects together in favor of a homogenous text instead of the usual monographic single-entry approach solidifies and summarizes the key findings in the previous texts and expands on some of them.

Both the catalogue and the exhibition dispel erroneous beliefs and preconceived notions regarding women's involvement in the development of the visual arts and material culture up to the 1800s. Whilst many of the publication's named and unnamed artists and craftswomen did not dominate their respective fields due to societal and gendered restraints, their roles and contributions in shaping them are yet to be fully comprehended. *Making Her Mark* offers stimulating investigations into these women's lives in the hopes of further examinations of these topics. ●

Elizaveta Kushnareva is a London-based art historian. She holds BA (Hons) and MA degrees from the Courtauld Institute of Art, where she specialized in Italian Renaissance Art. Her research focuses on the visual arts and culture of fifteenth-century Florence, with particular interest in female patronage and Christian iconography.

Gender and Self-Fashioning at the Intersection of Art and Science: Agnes Block, Botany, and Networks in the Dutch 17th Century

By Catherine Powell-Warren
Amsterdam University Press, 2024

Reviewed by Claudia Goldstein

The methods by which early modern women constructed their public identities through their belongings offer a fascinating approach to gender and art historical studies. Catherine Powell-Warren's comprehensive and meticulous volume on seventeenth-century Dutch botanist Agnes Block chronicles a subject about whom little is known. Interlacing Block's scientific knowledge, land cultivation, and public persona, Powell-Warren situates her within the dynamic cultural and intellectual context of the Dutch Enlightenment. Powell-Warren's productive inquiry and analysis result in a satisfying portrait of a passionate, visionary woman whose multi-faceted roles—as landowner, botanist, and arts patron—established her within a framework otherwise dominated by men.

The book unravels the features that constructed Block's identity, which were multiple and varied. Powell-Warren begins with a three-chapter analysis of Block's country estate, Vijverhof, then moves to Block's self-identification as Flora Batava, mythical goddess of flowers and a personification of Dutch national identity. The final chapters address Block's *Bloemenboek*—a collection of botanical watercolors—as a catalyst for botanical community and conversation. Although in some sense Powell-Warren's project is a monograph on Block, the author resists a strict monographic approach, instead considering her subject at the center of a wheel whose spokes extend out in disparate directions. Or, to use a more appropriate metaphor invoked by the author, her methodology mirrors the botanical concept of cross-pollination (17). For example, she asserts that Block's possessions—from physical plants, to watercolors, to Vijverhof itself—effectively place her among



Fig. 1. Jan Weenix, *Portrait of Agnes Block and her Family in front of Vijverhof* (c. 1687–93), oil on canvas, 33 1/8" x 43 3/4". Amsterdam Museum, SA 20359.

women in science during the early modern period, as well as afford her a peripheral yet significant position in the male-centered scientific community of seventeenth-century Amsterdam. This is a fruitful approach based largely on primary sources used to research the evidentiary lacunae that so often create stumbling blocks in the investigation, art historical and otherwise, of early modern women.

The book consists of seven chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. The introduction lays out known facts about Block, as well as Powell-Warren's methodology. As is so often the case, Block's gender, as well as misspellings of her name, have caused the loss of her identity and ceded her significant position in the world of seventeenth-century Dutch botany. The author's stated goal is to provide a "more complete and more nuanced version of Block's story, and to place that story in context," "highlight[ing] both the need for and the potential of an updated and multi-faceted approach to the research of early modern women, lest we simply end up with a revised canon dotted with the highest-profile, most exceptional women in history—what Merry Wiesner-Hanks refers to as the 'add women and stir' approach to scholarship." (16) Block's physical possessions, most prominently her country estate and collection of botanical watercolors, ground this study within art historical inquiry while productively utilizing that material culture to understand broader social, cultural, and feminist contexts. That evidence then foregrounds Block's unusual but not unique position as a woman in the male-dominated sciences while linking material culture to historical and sociological contexts in ways that only an art historian can.

In the inaugural chapter, "Vijverhof and the Pursuit of Nature," Powell-Warren asserts that Block's country estate was a central facet of her constructed identity. Vijverhof no longer exists and only minimal archival traces remain. However, through a combination of visual and literary references that include *hofdichten* (country house poems), beautifully reproduced color maps, and auction records of Block's exotic plants, Powell-Warren reconstructs the entire estate and its centrality to Block's public and private identities. The author is to be commended for archival research that attempts to understand the whole estate, convincingly reimagining a site in absence of complete visual evidence. In her willingness to examine a host of different kinds of sources, all of which yield only partial information, Powell-Warren's productive feminist and revisionist research permeates the book.

Chapter two approaches Vijverhof from the broader context of botany as an element of Dutch national identity in the seventeenth century, comparing Block to her possible role model, Magdalena Poulle, and Poulle's country estate at Gunterstein. By elucidating this comparison, Powell-Warren shows that Block was not unique as a woman in a male-dominated botanist's world, employing the documentary evidence around her role model to further understand Block's own identity construction. The final section of this chapter touches upon the dark underbelly of colonialism in the seventeenth century, to which "bio-piracy" or "bio-prospecting" Block implicitly contributed. This fascinating and important undercurrent could have been made a more central theme across the entire volume. A broader exploration of this practice, while not directly in line with Powell-Warren's thesis on Block's identity construction, would have productively complicated the "nuanced" picture of Block created by the author.

The last section to fully contextualize Vijverhof is chapter three, "Vijverhof as a Space of Knowledge Creation, Exchange, and Relationships." Here, the author focuses on women's place in the public sphere of botany, where a network of individuals across the Dutch Republic exchanged both ideas and specimens. However, their centrality ran in inverse proportion to the institutionalization of botanical practice. Powell-Warren argues convincingly for Block's importance on the "garden circuit," noting that she was cited in several botanical catalogues written by men (in Latin, no less). However, Block's sense of her own precarious position as a woman in the field was

evident in her private correspondence. This acknowledgment of the tension between public success and private self-doubt is one of the book's central themes, positioning it as an important and insightful contribution to feminist scholarship on art and scientific history.

Chapters four and five focus on Flora Batava, Block's alter ego and the mythical goddess of flowers, as seen through portraits of Block in both painting and portrait medal. Chapter four offers a careful iconographic analysis of these works, noting the significance of visual choices like the inclusion of a pineapple (which Block, against all odds, successfully grew) in *Portrait of Agnes Block and Her Family in front of Vijverhof* (c. 1687–93; Fig. 1) by Jan Weenix. In this painting, referred to as the Weenix portrait, sits a backdrop of the Vijverhof Estate and an array of objects—a drawing of a bird and a collection of specimens among them—which would have attested to Block's meticulous self-fashioning. Although commission records for the portrait are lost, Powell-Warren deploys its iconography and the timeframe of its completion toward a definition of Block's self-identification as both deeply personal and representative of the Dutch Republic.

Nearing the book's conclusion, the author has made an effective case for a three-decades-long arc of self-representation that culminates in Block's personification as Flora Batava. This is verified by an impressive bronze medal of 1700 that features Block's portrait and that of Batava in verso. Chapter five places Batava in the broader context of seventeenth-century conduct books for women, most notably Jacob Cats's *Houwelijk*, and their interpretation by modern scholars. While intriguing, this area of the book would have benefited from some images of the genre paintings Powell-Warren discusses, and a slightly broader look at modern genre painting scholarship. The chapter's subsequent analysis of widows' household inventories, however, is most welcome. Inventories of women's possessions in the early modern era can tell us a great deal about female agency in the decorations and collecting choices of individual households.

The book's final two chapters address Block's *Bloemenboek*, a "paper garden" of watercolors she commissioned of her own specimens. Arguing that the watercolors were part and parcel of the identity she had also constructed through Vijverhof, the watercolors are carefully analyzed as having been made directly from Block's living plants and as commemorations of those that had died. This section of the book has lovely color reproductions, and Powell-Warren argues that the watercolors served the dual functions of scientific accuracy and aesthetic pleasure. It was within the pages of the *Bloemenboek*, at the intersection of art and science, that Block's self-fashioning coalesced. This was especially the case, the author posits, because the watercolors functioned as a material manifestation of the social networks of which Block was clearly a part.

Powell-Warren has written a meticulous, clear, and intricately researched book. Its chapters are filled with subheadings which ease the reader's experience, and its extensive bibliographies, particularly of primary sources, make it a treasure trove for researchers on early modern women, botany, horticultural practices, and artistic patronage in the Dutch Republic. There are places, as in the author's discussion of genre painting in chapter four, where a broader discussion of secondary sources would have been welcome, as would a deeper discussion of the colonizing aspects of early modern botanical practice, and women's complicity in that "bio-piracy" or "bio-prospecting." Though Block's elevated social class is mentioned with some frequency, her privileged status and the inherent tensions that it engendered might also have been elaborated. Still, this neither diminishes Powell-Warren's methodological approach, nor the worthiness of this significant study of Agnes Block. •

Claudia Goldstein is Professor of Art History in the Department of Art at William Paterson University. She holds an MA in Italian Renaissance Art from Syracuse University's Florence Program, and a PhD in Northern Renaissance Art from Columbia. Her first book, *Pieter Bruegel and the Culture of the Early Modern Dinner Party*, won the Joop Witteveen prize from the University of Amsterdam in 2014. Her new book, *Beuckelaer and the Art of Dining: Northern Painting, Food, and Social Class in Early Modern Italy*, was just published this year by Amsterdam University Press.

Elsa Honig Fine
(1930–2025)

With deep sorrow, the *Woman's Art Journal* announces the death of our founding editor, Elsa Honig Fine (1930–2025), 94-years-old. When both *Feminist Art Journal* and *Womanart* magazine ceased by 1978, Dr. Fine proposed a new feminist publication at the Women's Caucus for Art's 1979 meeting in Washington, D.C. The next year, she founded the *Woman's Art Journal*. As editor and publisher for twenty-six years, she directed every aspect of the journal, with the full assistance and editorial partnership of Margaret Barlow. From its inception, *WAJ* proved vital to the academic community as a then-rare venue to publish burgeoning research on women artists. Louise Nevelson's pioneering sculptural assemblages enriched the journal's inaugural cover, setting the tone for the issue's articles and book reviews on such vital critical subjects as sexuality and maternity in the nineteenth and twentieth century, topics then at the margins of art historical research. *Woman's Art Journal* quickly became–and has remained–an invaluable resource for art historians, curators, and artists in this field.

A progressive and pioneering scholar and educator, Dr. Fine authored *The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1973) and *Women and Art: A History of Women Painters and Sculptors from the Renaissance to the 20th Century* (Abner Schram, 1978), both of which were groundbreaking and much-reprinted textbooks used in early university courses on African American and Women's studies. *The Afro-American Artist* documented the significant challenges and accomplishments of Black artists in America from Colonial times, while *Women and Art* surveyed the achievements of nearly one hundred women artists, providing social, cultural, and art historical contexts with particular reference to women's education, roles, and biography. In 1996, Fine was honored by the Women's Caucus with a Lifetime Achievement Award.



Dorothy Gillespie, *Portrait of Elsa Honig Fine* (1979), the year before *Woman's Art Journal* was founded.





In 1989–90, the journal celebrated its tenth anniversary with an exhibition titled *American Women Artists: The 20th Century* at Knoxville Museum of Art, Knoxville, TN, and Queensborough Community Art College, Bayside, NY. When Dr. Fine retired from the journal in 2006, Rutgers University Professor Joan Marter spearheaded an effort to continue *WAJ* under the joint sponsorship of Old City Publishing, led by Dr. Ian Mellanby and Guy Griffiths, and Rutgers. Dr. Marter served as co-editor with Ms. Barlow until the latter's retirement in 2021. Now in its forty-sixth year, *Woman's Art Journal,* the longest-lived feminist art publication, continues its distinguished legacy under the chief-editorship of Dr. Marter and Dr. Aliza Rachel Edelman. Materials, documents, and correspondence related to the founding and publishing of *Woman's Art Journal* are in the collection papers of Elsa Honig Fine, New Brunswick Special Collection, Rutgers University. •



Elsa Hong Fine studying with the master teacher and Abstract Expressionist painter, Hans Hofmann, at The Hofmann School of Fine Arts, Provincetown, MA, in 1950.



Pl. 1. Rebecca Horn, *Arm Extensions* (1968). Unknown photographer. © 2025 Rebecca Horn / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.



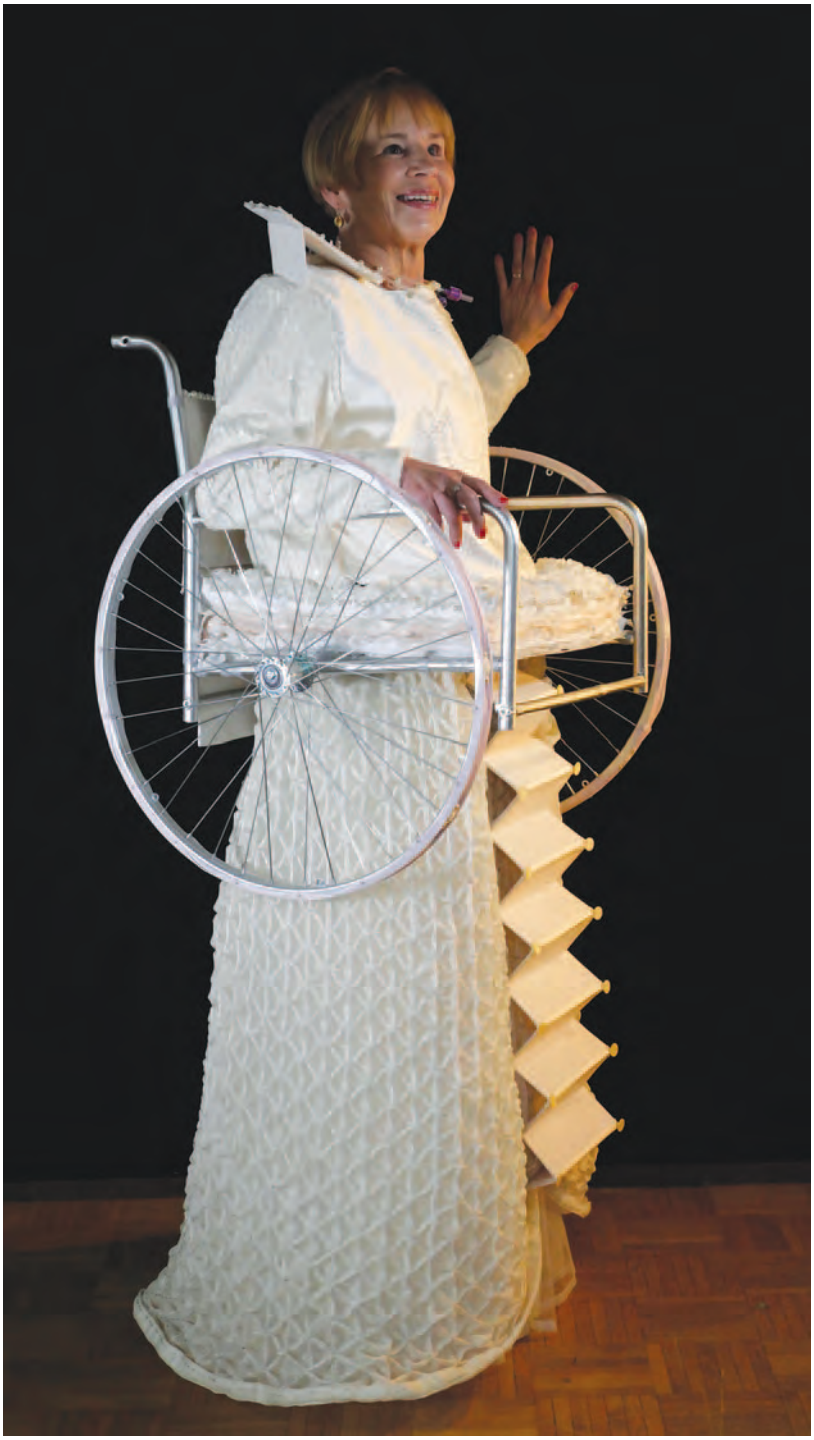
Pl. 2. Yo-Yo Lin, *channels* (2022), courtesy of artist Yo-Yo Lin. Photo by Zack Filkoff.



Pl. 3. Yo-Yo Lin, *channels* (2022), courtesy of artist Yo-Yo Lin. Photo by Ahad Subzwari (courtesy of The Shed).



Pl. 4. Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen, *Form* (selection of stills from video)**,** performance, and paper costume, 35 1/2 "x 35 1/2" x 43 1/4". Made for Möykky Club, 28 August 2020, hosted by Nuoren Voiman Liitto at Suvilahti, Helsinki, dress, film stills and copyright: Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen.



Pl. 5. Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen, *Am I Your Inspiration, Really?* (2021), photograph and performance costume: empathy objects–series, recycled textiles, garden chair, wheelchair wheels, hand embroidery and honeycomb pleating, 27 1/2" x 27 1/2" x 51 1/8". Dress, photo, and copyright: Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen. Modelling: Counsellor of Social Welfare Sari Loijas with her guide dog, Citta.



Pl. 6. Euphrosyne ("Effie") Stillman, *Thomas Francis Bayard* (dedicated June 22, 1907), bronze, granite pedestal, and exedra. Rockwood Park, Wilmington, Delaware. Photograph: Johanna Amos.



Pl. 7. Maria Zambaco, *Marie Stillman* (1886), cast bronze, 5 3/8" (diameter). © Trustees of the British Museum.



Pl. 8. Euphrosyne ("Effie") Stillman (1872–1911), *Marie Stillman* (c. 1904), white plaster, 7" x 4 3/16" x 5 3/16". Delaware Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. S. S. Auchincloss, 1974.



Pl. 9. Samia Halaby, *Evening Sky in Amman* (1999), oil on canvas, 36" x 46". Courtesy of the artist, New York. Photo and © Samia Halaby, New York.



Pl. 10. Samia Halaby,
The City (Al Quds) (1959),
oil on canvas, 39" x 44 1/4".
Courtesy of the artist, New York.
Photo and © Samia Halaby, New York.



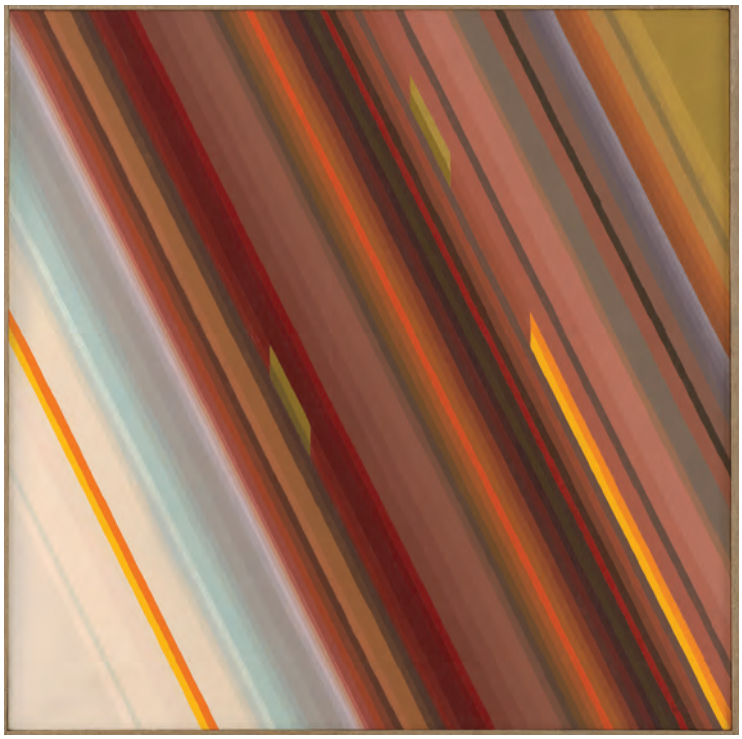
Pl. 11. Samia Halaby, *The Apron, After Gorky's Mother* (1963), oil on canvas, 32 5/8" x 42". Courtesy of the artist, New York. Photo and © Samia Halaby, New York.



Pl. 12. Samia Halaby, *Kansas City Studio* (1966), oil on canvas, 40" x 34 1/2". Courtesy of the artist, New York. Photo and © Samia Halaby, New York.



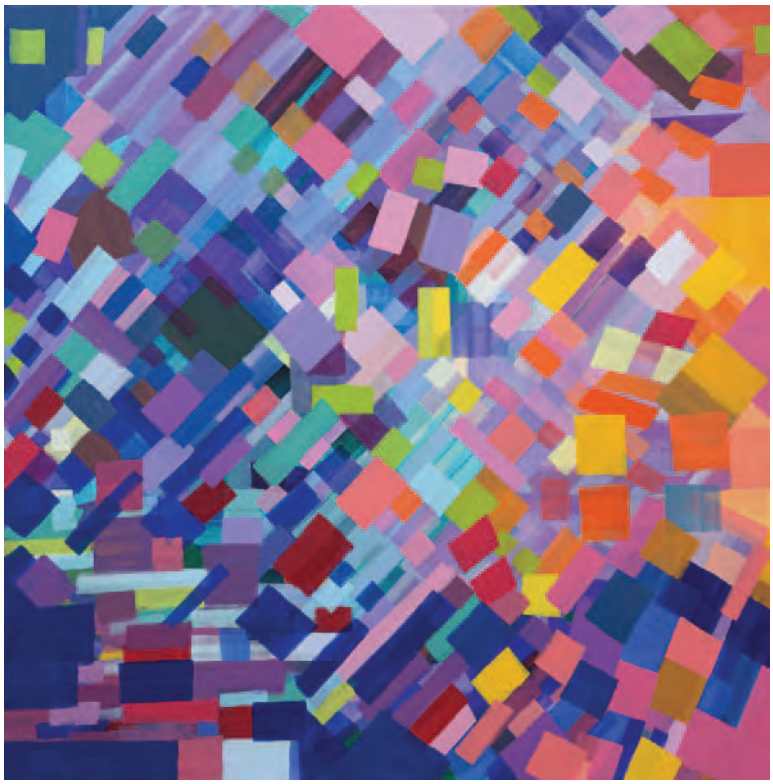
Pl. 13. Samia Halaby, *Leaf Study One (Autumn Leaf)* (1975), gouache on paper, 13 1/2" x 10 1/2". Courtesy of the artist, New York. Photo and © Samia Halaby, New York.



Pl. 14. Samia Halaby,
A Train Ride to New York City
(1976–77), oil on canvas, 24" x 24".
Courtesy of the artist, New York.
Photo and © Samia Halaby,
New York.



Pl. 15. Samia Halaby, *Little Palestine* (2003), acrylic on canvas collage, 46 1/2" x 27". Photo: Samia Halaby. Courtesy of the artist and the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University, 2024.16. © Samia Halaby, New York.



Pl. 16. Samia Halaby, *Mother of Pearl II* (2018), acrylic on canvas, 48" x 48". Courtesy of the artist, New York. Photo and © Samia Halaby, New York.



Pl. 17. Trina Michelle Robinson, still from *Elegy for Nancy* (2022), single-channel video with sound (4:09 minutes), San Francisco, CA. © Trina Michelle Robinson.



Pl. 18. Trina Michelle Robinson, *Liberation Through Redaction* (2022), photopolymer intaglio print, ink made with soil collected from Senegal, charred cedar, bone black dry pigment, sisal dyed with hibiscus from Senegal, raw cotton paper sourced from a Black-owned farm in North Carolina. Courtesy of the artist.



Pl. 19. Trina Michelle Robinson, still from *Elegy for Nancy* (2022), single-channel video with sound (4:09 minutes), San Francisco, CA. © Trina Michelle Robinson.



Pl. 20. Trina Michelle Robinson, still from *Elegy for Nancy* (2022), single-channel video with sound (4:09 minutes), San Francisco, CA. © Trina Michelle Robinson.

RESIDENCY UNLIMITED

Residency Unlimited (RU) is a nonprofit arts organization that fosters customized residencies and year-round exhibitions and talks for NYC, US-based and international artists and curators.

RU's main space is located at **360 Court Street,** Brooklyn, inside a historic South Congregational Church. In addition, RU has presence this year on **Governors Island** at the RU House on **404B Colonels Row**. We hope to see you there!

Learn more at **residencyunlimited.org**



2025 installation by Genuardi/Ruta



360 Court Street



RU House at Governors Island



2025 Artists & Curators

Alena Ahrens (US)
Aleksandar Ostojic (ME)
Amela Rasinlic (DE)
Ana Loureiro (PT)
Ayanna Dozier (US)
Bat-Ami Rivlin (US)
Beatriz Manteigas (PT)
Caecilia Göken (DE)
Cato Ouyang (US)
Chris Glabb (CA)
Chrislie Perez (CU)
Cristina Massena (PT)
Dana Nechmad (IL/US)
Daniela Ruocco (CH)
David Monnet (CH)
Deborah Hirsch (IT)
Dominik Stibernik (SI)
Eden Auerbach Ofrat (IL)
Eglė Ambrasaitė (LT)
fields harrington (US)
Gabriel Siams (PT/BE)
Genuardi/Ruta (IT)
Gerta Xhaferaj (AL/CH)
Gülistan Kenanoğlu (TR/US)
Igor Schiller (RS/NL)
Jana Zatvarnická (DE/SK)
Jesse Bandler Firestone (US)
Joan Horrach (GB)
Jose Capaz (CU)
Julia Feldens (BR)
Katarzyna Kozyra (PL)
Kemil Bekteši (BA)
Laura Lewis (CA)
Lianet Sanchez (CU)
Marcin Janusz (PL)
Margarita Kuleva (RU/US)
Marko Gutić Mižimakov (MK/BE)
Maya Bamberger (IL/US)
Milena Keller & Noah Reusser (CH)
Mimoza Liza (XK/DE)
Nikica Jurković (HR)
Oksana Zmiyevska (AT)
Oskar Helcel (CZ)
Rory Torstensson (US)
Rosario Aróstegui (DE/AR)
Sadrie Alves (BE)
Tamar Nissim (IL)
Thomas Moore (US)
Tsvetomira Borisova (BG)
Veronika Romhány (HU/BE)
Virginia Ariu (IT/CH)
Yakira Ament (IL)
Zahrasadat Hakim (IR/CH)

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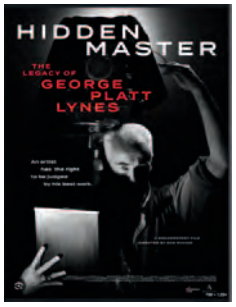
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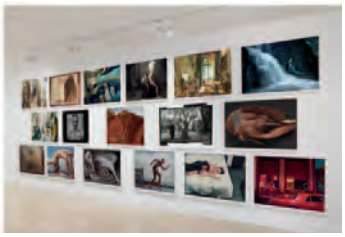












Annie Leibovitz
Cindy Sherman
Kiki Smith
Kara Walker
Janaina Tschäpe
LaToya Frazier
Laurie Anderson
Martha Rosler
Nan Goldin
Marina Abramovic
Patti Smith
Roni Horn
Sarah Charlesworth
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