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(Front cover) Émilie Charmy, *Autoportrait au peignoir ouvert* (Self-Portrait in an Open Dressing Gown) (c. 1916–18), oil on canvas, 36 1/4" x 28 3/4". Fralin Museum, University of Virginia, © ADAGP, Paris / DACS, London.

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The precarity of women's artistic labors, in their pursuit of careers and economic and sexual freedoms, takes center stage in our Fall/Winter issue of *WAJ*. Separated by decades yet united by the shared struggles for survival and self-care, from the early twentieth-century salons of Paris to the hustle and bustle of New York's Times Square, the artists presented in our articles created opportunities for their work beyond the expectations of their time—in expanded fields of their own making, outside the structures of traditional galleries, institutions, or studios.

Émilie Charmy's autonomous "sexual voice" commands our cover. For Charmy's nude self-portrait (c. 1916–18), female sexuality is a pleasurable subject for the artist *herself*. In her 2023 book, *Painting Her Pleasure: Three Women Artists and the Nude in Avant-Garde Paris*, Lauren Jimerson completes her study on the overt sexuality of women artists of the École de Paris. For *WAJ*, Jimerson spotlights the daring, fiercely loyal art dealer Berthe Weill. Even with her own precarious economic standing, she favored the professional attention of women artists such as Suzanne Valadon and Charmy; her groundbreaking exhibition space, Galerie B. Weill, promoted the uncensored display of male and female nudes and bathers, thereby legitimizing the vanguard oeuvres by women artists, and financially supported them, in a radical departure from the moral values and obscenity laws of France. Jimerson wisely spent her years in Paris locating photographic archives that confirmed previously undocumented exhibitions installed at Weill's gallery.

For Farren Fei Yuan, understanding the art of Rosemary Mayer inspires a deep critical investigation into the artist's "disjunctive" relationship to her own time, one where she "adopted the precariousness" of Postminimalism and Conceptualism of the late 1960s and 1970s, and sought the past eras of Mannerism and the Baroque, to arrive at a new feminist sensibility of temporality and history. Departing from the primary scholarship on Mayer's fabric sculptures and site-specific installations, Yuan turns to her "image-text" mixed-media pieces that work through unfixed artistic categories to strategically interact with the poetic articulations of her time. Not unlike Chryssa, Mayer's works are rooted in women's temporal "subjective experiences," her own time-structures and indeterminacies shaped by socioeconomic forces on women's daily lives. It is this "communicative exchange" between the artwork and audience, "straddling" conceptual contradictions and resisting capitalist productivity, Yuan writes, that propel the work's existence.

Gemma Cirignano discusses Chryssa's rapturous fascination with Times Square in the mid-1960s, the glitzy illumination and graphically seductive advertisements that inspired her extraordinary discipline to learn neon and transpose its craftsmanship into revelatory, abstract sculptures. Focusing on the cent sign and Chryssa's masterpiece, *The Gates to Times Square* (1964–66), Cirignano explores how the artist harnessed the capitalist motives and "mechanisms of signage" in New York's "commercial" center and exposes her precarity in doing so as an immigrant woman. By utilizing the "energy of the light itself," in Chryssa's words, she overcame her technical dependence on male labor to fabricate neon, later welding and assembling large-scale sculptures with temporary assistants.

We are immensely grateful to Melissa Mednicov for her keen editorial eye and seamless communication with thirteen international scholars to bring today's most interesting books to our wider attention. Agnieszka Anna Ficek's study on the obsessive eighteenth-century porcelain collecting practices of Western Europeans, and the fraught histories of Chinoiserie, centers the critical voices of Asian women. In early twentieth-century China, Meng Yi explores new cultural strategies for women's national and global identification with modernity and the "domestic" arts. In her expert review of the visual legacies of Pre-Raphaelite Elizabeth Rossetti (Siddall), Susie Beckham sheds light on the often unreliable myths attached to the renowned model of *Ophelia* and offers new critical frameworks for Siddall's scintillating life and growing artistic agency. Julia K. Dabbs covers three exceptional books devoted to the trailblazing lives of American women landscape painters: monographs on Fidelia Bridges and Susie M. Barstow, nineteenth-century artists whose landscape studies in nature created intimately "epic" views; and an ambitious transhistorical exhibition catalogue expanding the discourse, encompassing Bridges and Barstow, their contemporaries, and twentieth-century global multidisciplinary practitioners. Cross-generational interviews and Native feminist narratives are deliberated in Elizabeth S. Hawley's two-book review on Indigenous artist and MacArthur genius-grant awardee Wendy Red Star (Apsáalooke Crow). Our examination of Indigenous identities continues in Jillian Russo's dual coverage, both milestones: one focused on the curatorial and activist practices of the late Jaune Quick-to-See Smith in her major survey on other Native artists—curated by her—at the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers, and the first monograph on Alaskan Sonya Kelliher-Combs.

Damon Reed returns to avant-garde Paris and expressions of modern female agency captured in the nude case studies of Charmy, Valadon, and Marie Vassilieff, masterfully illuminated by our lead author Lauren Jimerson. Dwelling in Paris, Jimerson explores the significant production and tumultuous biography of early twentieth-century sculptor and portraitist Chana Orloff, a Jewish émigré who navigated artistic communities and hybrid cultural identities in Montparnasse, Tel Aviv, and beyond. Catherine Hall-van den Elsen explores the wealth of quotidian and luxury objects in the collection of the MFA, Boston, that elucidate the daily lives of elite women in the Italian Renaissance. Elizabeth Catlett's radical legacy is encapsulated by Funda Karayel. Kathleen James-Chakraborty examines the underrecognized yet productive careers of women at work in the fields of modern architecture and landscape design in the interwar and postwar decades. Visual art activism and reproductive rights "artivism" is amplified in the sweeping anthology reviewed by Karolina Majewska-Güde. Paulina Avila Esqueda enounces Tomashi Jackson's sonic video projections and collages, vehicles of poetry, paintings, and joy. Lastly, Erin Devine praises the patronage of Eileen Harris Norton, whose extraordinary presence is elevated in this major collection catalogue.

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

Curating Radicalism

Berthe Weill and the Women Who Redefined the Nude

By Lauren Jimerson

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the nude remained the most ambitious subject of painting—bearing the highest artistic prestige and anchored in the academic hierarchy of art. With the rise of the avant-garde, the genre became the arena in which artists demonstrated their ingenuity, testing new styles and challenging tradition. Yet it was still, stubbornly, the domain of men. Women in France were barred from life drawing classes with nude models in the École des Beaux-Arts until 1897.[1] Even after these restrictions eased, social codes still discouraged women from gazing at—let alone painting—naked bodies, whether their own or those of others. A woman artist who dared to paint and exhibit bold female or male nudes risked moral scandal, accusations of obscenity, and professional isolation.



Fig. 1 (above). Émilie Charmy, *Autoportrait* (Self-Portrait), c. 1910–20, oil on canvas, 32" x 25 1/2". Private collection, © ADAGP, Paris / DACS, London.

Fig. 2 (below). Émilie Charmy, *Portrait de Berthe Weill* (Portrait of Berthe Weill) (c. 1910–20), oil on canvas, 35 1/2" x 24". Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, © ADAGP, Paris / DACS, London.



Yet Suzanne Valadon (1865–1938) and Émilie Charmy (1878–1974) defied these boundaries.[2] They painted the nude with uncompromising frankness, positioning themselves not as passive muses or amateurs but as authoritative creators. Both women exposed their bodies and those of their models in ways that unsettled traditional expectations of beauty, decorum, and gender. Their ability to do so was encouraged, and given visibility, by the daring Berthe Weill (1865–1951), one of the few dealers of the period willing to exhibit women's nudes and to champion female artists.

Weill, who operated Galerie B. Weill from 1901 to 1939, played an outsized role in promoting modern art in Paris.[3] She was the first dealer to sell works by Picasso, the first to exhibit Matisse, and she gave early exposure to countless members of the avant-garde.[4] Unlike most of her male colleagues, she did not dismiss women artists as dilettantes. Instead, she showed their work repeatedly, often at great financial risk. Between 1913 and 1936, she mounted twenty-three exhibitions of Valadon, including three solo shows, and more than twenty exhibitions of Charmy.[5] Without Weill's backing, these artists' most provocative works—especially their nudes—may never have reached public view.

This article examines Weill's relationship with Valadon and Charmy through two lenses. First, it reconsiders Valadon's oeuvre in light of a recently uncovered set of installation photographs from her 1929 exhibition at Galerie B. Weill,

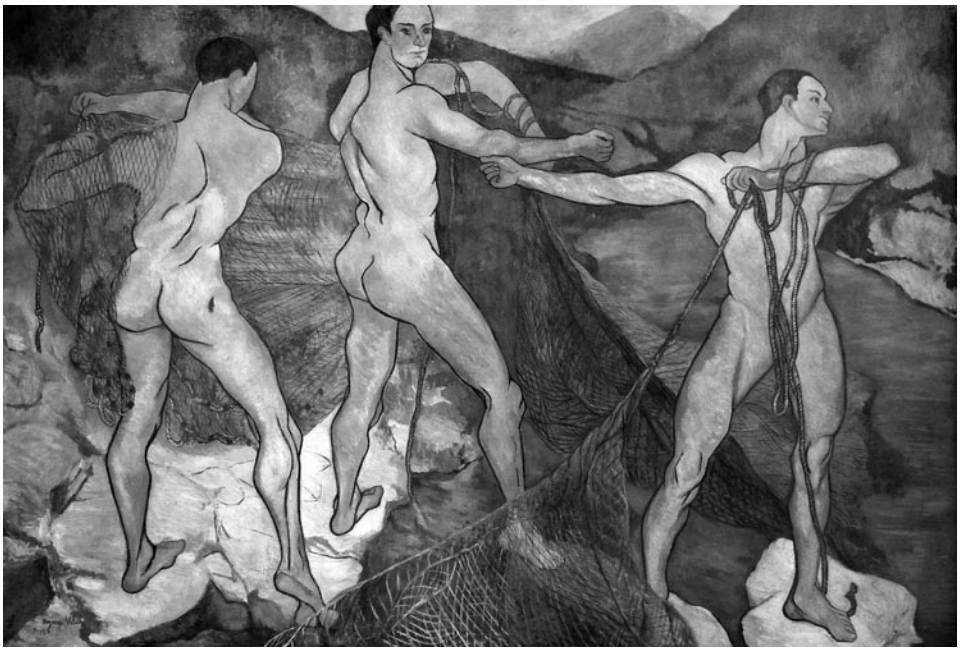


Fig. 3. Suzanne Valadon, *Le Lancement du filet* (Casting the Net) (1914), oil on canvas, 118 1/2" x 79 1/4". Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, public domain.

discovered in the Fonds Robert Le Masle at the Bibliothèque Kandinsky.[6] These photographs, catalogued only recently, show that Weill exhibited Valadon's most provocative nudes and preparatory sketches for her large-scale paintings in uncensored form—before Valadon's later alterations that veiled male genitalia or softened erotic impact. Second, it explores Weill's connection with Charmy through what may be read as a portrait pair—Charmy's own *Autoportrait* (Self-Portrait) (Pl. 1 and Fig. 1; c. 1910–20), and her depiction of Weill (Pl. 2 and Fig. 2; c. 1910–20)—alongside her unconventional treatment of the female nude. Together, these case studies illuminate how Weill not only supported women artists materially but also legitimized their most daring artistic explorations.

Before turning to the artists whose vanguard oeuvres she promoted, it is necessary to pause on Berthe Weill herself—a figure both central to the Parisian avant-garde and, until recently, curiously absent from its histories. Between 1901 and 1939, Weill ran Galerie B. Weill with a tenacity that belied her precarious finances. She was, as far as we can tell, the only woman dealer in Paris to sustain a gallery across those four decades, a distinction that profoundly shaped how she was perceived by artists, collectors, and critics.

Where men like Ambroise Vollard, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, and the Bernheim-Jeune brothers (Gaston and Joseph) built reputations (and fortunes) by backing the great names of modernism, Weill operated on the margins: small space, small sales, outsized influence.[7] Her significance lay less in "firsts" than in her willingness to champion what her colleagues ignored—especially women artists. She showed them not once or twice for novelty, but repeatedly, with sustained conviction.[8] Valadon and Charmy are among the most prominent examples, alongside dozens of others who appeared in her exhibitions.[9] Weill's status as a woman dealer inflected every part of her career. She was known for her brusque manner, her refusal to flatter wealthy collectors, her sharp tongue with artists—traits tolerated, even admired, in male dealers, but pathologized in her case as eccentricity or bitterness. Yet these very qualities also insulated her from co-optation: she was no society hostess, no *salonnière* trading charm for access. She insisted on professional authority in a milieu that struggled to grant it to women.[10]

Her memoir, *Pan! dans l'œil! ... ou trente ans dans les coulisses de la peinture contemporaine*, from 1933, is one of the rare first-person accounts by a dealer of this period.[11] Characteristically caustic, it recounts three decades of bartering, cajoling, hanging, and hustling with dry humor and unvarnished realism. Thanks to the recent English translation, *Pow! Right in the eye!: thirty years behind the scenes of modern French painting* (2022), Weill's voice is now newly accessible to Anglophone readers, allowing her sharp observations and unsparing self-portrayal to reach a broader audience and to be integrated more fully into narratives of modernism.[12] Weill presents herself not as a *grand seigneur* of the avant-garde but as its backstage worker—fixing frames, pleading with landlords, coaxing recalcitrant artists, and enduring insults. Importantly, she insists on her role as the only dealer to show women consistently, a claim that exhibition records corroborate.

Why, then, did she vanish from art history? Part of the answer lies in her lack of institutional afterlife. Kahnweiler cultivated his reputation through theoretical writings; Vollard commissioned portraits and memoirs; Bernheim-Jeune anchored their name with gallery records and catalogues raisonnés. Weill, by contrast, died in obscurity in 1951, her gallery long shuttered, her archive scattered.[13] Gender bias compounded this neglect: a woman dealer was easier to remember as a footnote than as a protagonist in the story of modernism. Recent scholarship has begun to redress this absence. The traveling exhibition, *Berthe Weill: Art Dealer of the Parisian Avant-Garde*, first displayed at New York University's Grey Art Museum in 2024, presented her as a central figure in the network of modernism, foregrounding not only her role in the careers of Picasso and Matisse but her sustained advocacy for women. Feminist art history, too, has made Weill newly legible within a constellation of women—artists, dealers, and critics—whose contributions had been systematically minimized.[14]

To place Weill alongside Vollard, Kahnweiler, and Bernheim-Jeune is not to argue that she matched their financial

clout or historical reach. It is to recognize that she pursued a distinct mission: making space for what others ignored or deemed too risky. She exhibited works that tested the boundaries of decorum, including Valadon's male bathers in their initial, uncensored presentation, and she maintained a steady program for Charmy even when collectors hesitated. If Vollard and Kahnweiler built the market for modernism, Weill built its margins—a zone where women could experiment with unorthodox forms of representation without being erased altogether.



Fig. 4. *Suzanne Valadon*, installation view, Galerie B. Weill, Paris, 1929. Centre Pompidou–MNAM/CCI, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Fonds Robert Le Masle, phot. Cl. Bernès, Marouteau & Cie. © Centre Pompidou–MNAM/CCI, Bibliothèque Kandinsky–Fonds Robert Le Masle.

It is against this backdrop that Valadon's and Charmy's nudes must be understood. Neither artist would have gained recognition in quite the same way without Weill's intervention: she was not only their dealer but their advocate, the structural support that made their artistic risks possible. In Valadon's case, Weill provided a public venue for nudes—male and female—subjects that official salons demanded be censored. In Charmy's case, Weill's own account of their first exchange, coupled with her consistent promotion of Charmy's work, demonstrates a sustained championing of her career.

Born into poverty in rural France and raised in Montmartre amid the upheavals of the Commune, Suzanne Valadon entered the Parisian art world as a model for Puvis de Chavannes, Renoir, and Toulouse-Lautrec. By the 1880s, she transitioned from posing to painting, a rare reversal of roles.[15] Lacking formal academic training, she learned instead through direct observation—absorbing techniques while working as a model. Encouraged by her friend and neighbor Edgar Degas, she developed a style marked by bold contours, awkward angles, and unusual perspectives.[16] Valadon's nudes resisted the conventions that polished bodies into symbols of timeless beauty. Flesh sagged, limbs twisted, fatigue marked faces: she insisted on the body as lived and embodied, not idealized.[17]

From early on, Valadon turned her eye toward women and men, using her son, Maurice Utrillo, and later her partner, André Utter, as models. She executed and exhibited monumental paintings of male nudes at major Parisian Salons that scandalized critics accustomed to passive female bathers or heroic male athletes.[18] By placing men in poses historically reserved for women—reclining, bathing, sleeping—she inverted the gendered codes of the nude. The male body, rarely subjected to erotic availability, became the object of her gaze and her pleasure. Still, her paintings of male nudes could not be shown without modification: to *Adam and Eve* (1909), she later added fig leaves to Adam in order to show the work at the 1920 Salon des Indépendants; to *Le Lancement du filet* (Casting the Net) (1914; Fig. 3), she strategically positioned fishing nets to obscure the male groin before exhibiting it at the Salon des Indépendants of 1914; and to *La Joie de vivre* (1911), she relegated the male figure to the side and rendered him in profile, genitals concealed, before its display at the Salon d'Automne of 1911.[19]

An astonishing discovery, only recently brought to light, significantly sharpens our understanding of both Valadon's audacity and Weill's commitment to supporting her. Upon first consultation of the Le Masle archive at the Bibliothèque Kandinsky (Centre Pompidou) in 2016, no photographs of Valadon's 1929 exhibition were catalogued. Since then, however, new material has surfaced: a group of gallery installation photographs, newly added to the Fonds Robert Le Masle, now transforms our view of the artist and her dealer. Until these images came to light, Valadon's 1929 exhibition at Galerie B. Weill was known to have taken place, but no checklist survived.[20] The photographs reveal that Weill gave public space to Valadon's most provocative works—drawings and canvases of male and female bathers, displayed side by side, naked, unidealized, and emphatically embodied.

In the first installation view from 1929 (Fig. 4), Valadon's bathers and figure studies are aligned in an evenly spaced frieze. At center, a preparatory sheet for *Le Lancement du filet* (1914; Fig. 5) reveals Utter's body in its original, uncensored form. The fishing net has not yet been adjusted to conceal him, leaving his genitals fully visible within a trio of poses conceived as a classical rotation in space (Fig. 6). Flanking them in the gallery are women conceived with the same blunt command: on the far left, a statuesque nude appears next to an adolescent; and, on the far right, a nude painter seen from behind—female agency inscribed in the act of mark-making.[21] The grouping makes the curatorial point clear—in Valadon's oeuvre, male and female nudes are treated with the same unsparing contour and everyday directness, presented side by side without myth, allegory, or décor to neutralize their charge.

Another installation photograph from 1929 (Fig. 7) shows a study for *Adam and Eve* (1909; Fig. 8), with Utter's genitals exposed—no fig leaf—surrounded by sheets of female bathers in candid, quotidian poses.[22] The women sponge, stretch, and lounge; a profile head and several rapid life drawings punctuate the wall. The mix refuses the conventional segregations of the nude: Valadon's male is neither heroic nor idealized, and her women are neither ornamental nor sensual. As Degas himself noted, everything is "drawn like a saw"—

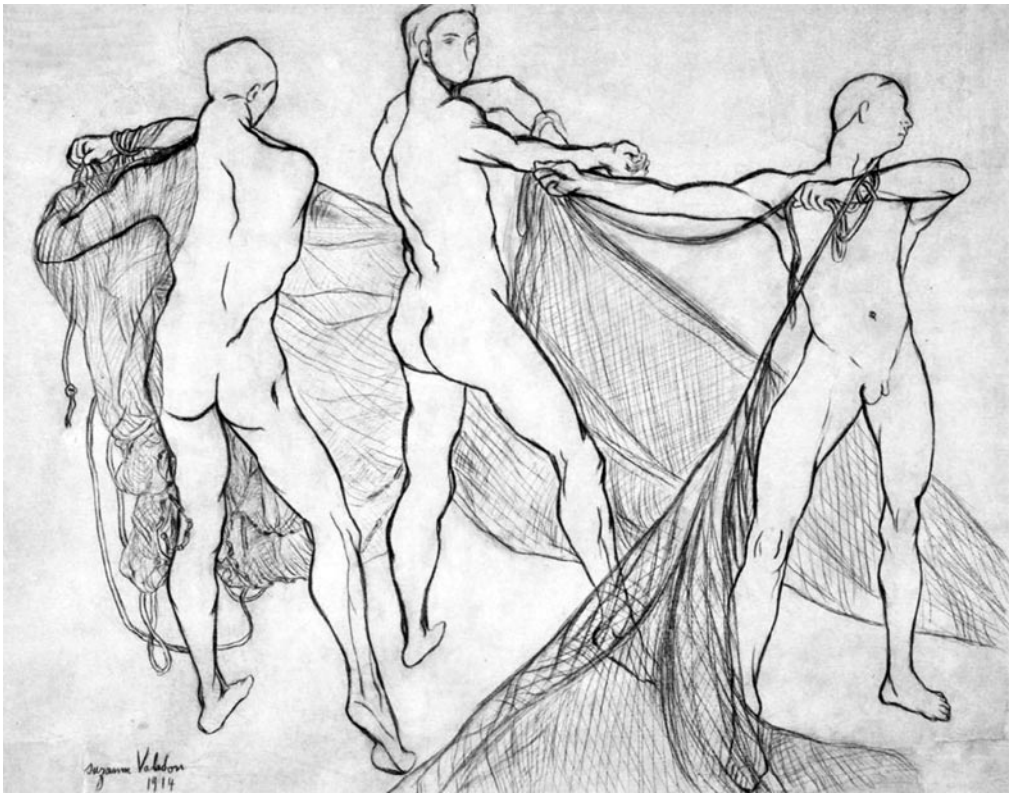


Fig. 5. Suzanne Valadon, *Etude pour le lancement du filet* (Study for Casting the Net) (1914), charcoal on tracing paper, 32 1/4" x 24 1/2". Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou (photograph by the author).

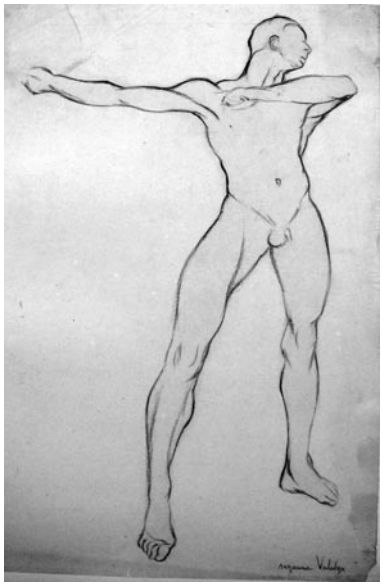


Fig. 6. Suzanne Valadon, Study for *Le Lancement du filet* (Utter from the front) (1909), Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou (photograph by the author).

heavy contour, scant shading, bodies caught mid-gesture—so that sex and flesh emerge as part of the very fabric of her line.[23]

In a subsequent installation image (Fig. 9), a preparatory study for *Joie de vivre* (1911; Fig. 10) introduces another exposed male bather (Utter), hung amidst a dense constellation of female nudes of different ages and conditions: girls climbing into tubs, adolescents curling on mattresses, grown women reclining, huddling, or caught in the awkward hinge between standing and sitting. The sheets read like pages from a sketchbook—reversals, inversions, slight shifts of angle—underscoring Valadon's method and the objective of her project: to render bodies—male and female—unidealized, openly physical, and embedded in ordinary routines. Seen together, these installation views make visible what the later, censored canvases can only imply: that Valadon developed her transgressive male nudes in the same studio grammar as her female bathers, and that Weill chose to hang them together, allowing viewers to experience that equivalence in real time. The photographs confirm that Weill did not soften or veil Valadon's provocation—she presented it in full view of the public.

These installation images also show another provocative work by Valadon, her *Sleeping Venus* (1919), with a Black model posed in the idiom of the classical Venus. While the rear-view composition recalls problematic tropes of objectification, its very inclusion was daring in 1929. Valadon granted a Black woman a place within the canon's most hallowed form. This work is one of a series of Black female nudes Valadon painted in 1919, including *Vénus noire* (Black Venus), a female nude standing as Venus pudica, exhibited in November 1919 at the Salon d'Automne.[24] If imperfect in its racial politics, it nonetheless disrupted hierarchies that cast whiteness as the sole vessel of the ideal nude.[25]

Valadon's sustained engagement with the male nude set her apart from her contemporaries. She repeatedly placed men in roles coded as feminine: the passive bather, the vulnerable sleeper, even Adam stripped of biblical dignity. Where the reclining nude had long been a female archetype—from Giorgione to Manet—Valadon turned that archetype male. The effect was startling. The male body became sexed and carnal, subject to a woman's scrutiny, without the protective alibi of mythology or athleticism.[26] In *Adam and Eve* (see Fig. 8), her own body is rendered with sexual confidence—pubic hair exposed—while Utter appears awkward and hesitant, a reversal that inscribes Valadon into art history as a woman unafraid to assert female heterosexual desire.

Crucially, Weill exhibited Valadon's controversial male bathers and uncensored nudes in 1929, granting visibility to works that directly challenged artistic conventions. Valadon's male figures exposed and reversed the traditional dynamics of looking, transforming the male body into an object of the female gaze and pleasure—an inversion with few precedents before the latter twentieth century. Without Weill's willingness to promote such radical imagery, these works may have remained unseen, a fact that reinforces her role not only as a



Fig. 7. *Suzanne Valadon*, installation view, Galerie B. Weill, Paris, 1929. Centre Pompidou–MNAM/CCI, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Fonds Robert Le Masle, phot. Cl. Bernès, Marouteau & Cie. © Centre Pompidou–MNAM/CCI, Bibliothèque Kandinsky–Fonds Robert Le Masle.

champion of women artists but as an advocate for their most boundary-pushing, provocative creations.

Exhibiting such works was not without risk. French law had a long history of prosecuting *outrage aux bonnes mœurs* (offenses to public decency) in art, and as late as the 1920s, paintings or prints deemed obscene could be seized by the authorities.[27] Dealers usually erred on the side of caution, showing only safely marketable works. Weill, however, repeatedly chose otherwise.

Amedeo Modigliani caused a scandal when he exhibited fully nude women at Weill's gallery in December 1917. Displayed in the gallery's front window, the canvases drew such crowds that the police intervened. In her memoir, Weill recalled being summoned to the prefecture, where she was ordered to remove the works: *"Yes! And I order you to take all this filth down…. These nudes… these nudes have h-h-h-air!"*[28] Though she was forced to dismantle the window display, the exhibition itself remained open.[29] It was the visible pubic hair that the police deemed indecent, a reminder of the risks that came with challenging the bounds of propriety in art. Against this backdrop, Valadon's decision to present male bathers—and Weill's willingness to host them—must be understood as acts of extraordinary defiance.

Weill's defense of Valadon extended beyond her gallery walls. The official institutions of French modernism proved far less willing to grant her recognition. While Marie Laurencin (1883–1956) and Jacqueline Marval (1886–1932) were extolled by Louis Vauxcelles in his textbook on French art, *Histoire générale de l'art français de la Révolution à nos jours*, Valadon was nearly absent, and Charmy only briefly acknowledged.[30] A few years later, both were excluded from a major exhibition showcasing French modern art, *Cinquante ans de peinture française* (1925), during the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes*, also organized by Vauxcelles.[31] When Weill confronted him, he dismissed their work outright: "I don't like Valadon's painting; not more than Charmy's!"[32] Recounting the exchange in her memoir, Weill lamented:

> The history of women's painting is written according to what the [male] author likes or deems worthy; artists who fail to please him are to be erased from the history of art. 'Art,' plain and simple, is far too abused at the mercy of speculation and self-interest.[33]

In this episode as much as in her exhibitions, Weill stood as Valadon's advocate, refusing the critical erasure of women's art. Her confrontation with Vauxcelles, together with the 1929 installation photographs, confirms what art historians only suspected: Weill did not simply accept Valadon's audacity, she curated it. She placed uncensored male nudes on her walls at a time when they directly violated conventions of gender, sexuality, and decorum. In so doing, Weill created a platform for Valadon to expose male vulnerability, to invert the dynamics of looking, and to insist that the nude could be a site of female authority and desire.

If Valadon's "uncensored" presence in Weill's gallery makes visible a dealer willing to test the limits of decorum, Émilie Charmy illuminates how Weill nurtured a different but equally radical mode of modernism—one grounded not in the

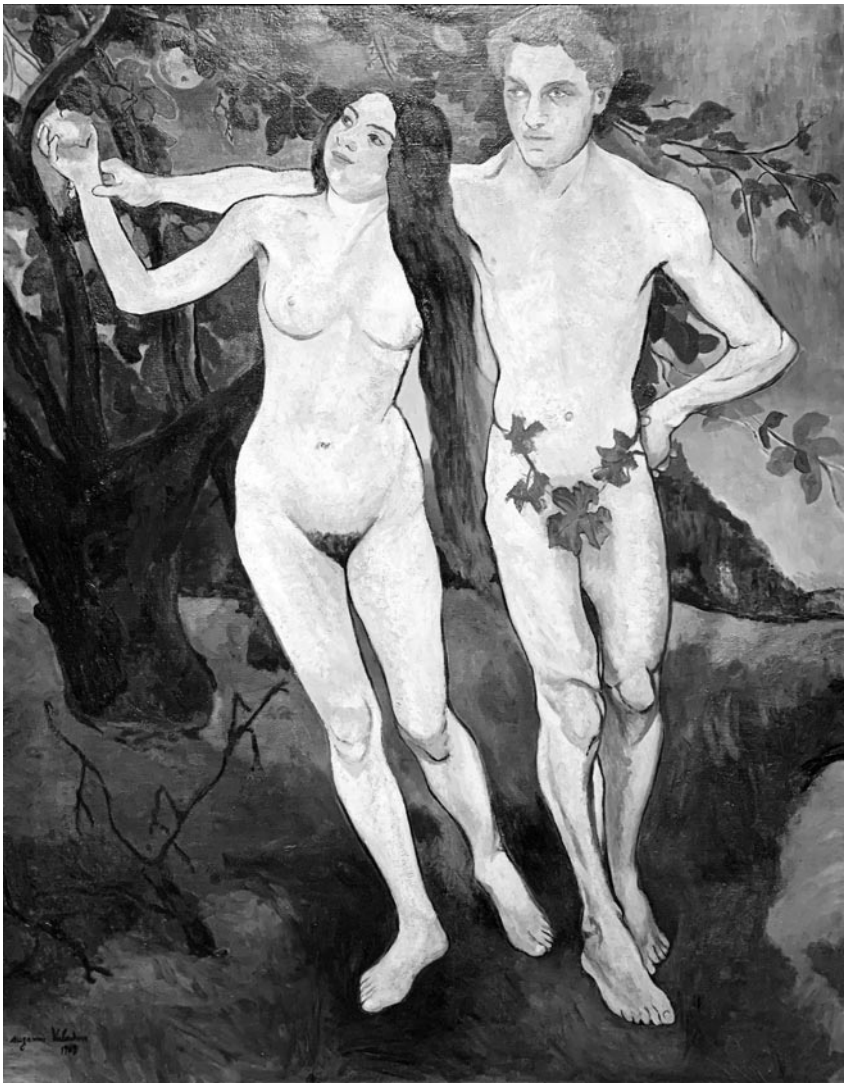


Fig. 8. Suzanne Valadon, *Adam et Eve* (Adam and Eve) (1909), oil on canvas, 63 3/4" x 51 1/2". Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou (photograph by the author).

reversal of the male gaze but in the articulation of a distinctly female sensuality. During an artistic career spanning more than fifty years, Charmy painted alongside the Fauves at the beginning of the twentieth century. She exhibited regularly in France and internationally, including at the New York Armory Show in 1913, and was awarded the Legion of Honor in 1926. Yet, despite these achievements, she has been largely forgotten.

At the very launch of the movement, Charmy was engaging with Fauvist techniques, including dense impasto, liberated brushwork, and vibrant, non-naturalistic colors evident in her early still lifes and landscapes. In the 1905 Salon d'Automne—the very exhibition that earned Matisse, André Derain, and Charles Camoin the name "fauves"—Charmy's canvases hung nearby, though critics placed her in the lineage of Lyonnais still life rather than among the "wild beasts."[34] Her *Still Life with Pomegranates* (c. 1904) and *Corsican Landscapes* (c. 1906–10), nonetheless, show her experimenting with jarring chromatic contrasts and tactile facture. Weill played a decisive role at this juncture. Discovering Charmy's paintings at the 1905 Salon des Indépendants, she sought the artist out. In her memoir *Pan! dans l'œil*, she recalled:

> I notice paintings by a young woman who has not yet presented her work to me, whom I do not know, in whom I sense a true personality. I write to her asking her to bring me a painting or two, which she does. I sell one in a subsequent exhibition. After that, Mademoiselle Charmy became my best friend.[35]

Charmy subsequently joined the roster of Fauve artists, including Matisse and Camoin, that Weill was showing at her gallery.[36] It is likely that Weill facilitated Charmy's introduction to Camoin sometime between 1906 and 1908. Their personal and professional rapport, nurtured in this shared avant-garde milieu, carried them to Corsica and the South of France, where their paired landscapes echoed the collaborative spirit of Matisse and Derain in Collioure.[37] However, scholars have yet to agree on a precise chronology of their sojourns and the details remain blurred.[38] Traveling as a young single woman with a male companion would certainly have raised eyebrows. Unfortunately, Charmy's correspondence from this early period has also vanished.

What remains are her early *plein-air* landscapes, luscious still lifes, bold portraits, and striking nudes, which, by 1910, diverged from Fauvism in style, subject matter, and technique. Increasingly, Charmy advanced an idiom that critics struggled to categorize: painterly, tactile, materially voluptuous, and overtly sensuous. Her facture—dense impasto, dragged and kneaded pigment, lines that contour and then dissolve—became her signature. It is not accidental that her most daring canvases feel "touched" as much as painted. They stage what I have elsewhere termed an *aesthetics of female jouissance*, brushwork and flesh reciprocally charged.[39] If Valadon's agency is legible as a reversal of the gaze, Charmy's is legible in the medium itself, in paint handled as a mode of pleasure.

Critics of the period reached reflexively for gendered metrics—"paints like a man" declared Roland Dorgelès—because they lacked a vocabulary for an art that made pleasure and tactility coterminous.[40] Yet Weill recognized and appreciated Charmy's singular voice early, as her memoir evinces, and offered continuous support for her art and career. She exhibited Charmy's work repeatedly and helped position her in a Parisian market that habitually relegated women to the margins. Weill's support was not opportunistic but steadfast, a form of professional solidarity rare in the competitive Parisian art market. Weill recommended her to



Fig. 9. *Suzanne Valadon*, installation view, Galerie B. Weill, Paris, 1929. Centre Pompidou–MNAM/CCI, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Fonds Robert Le Masle, phot. Cl. Bernès, Marouteau & Cie. © Centre Pompidou–MNAM/CCI, Bibliothèque Kandinsky–Fonds Robert Le Masle.

Eugène Druet, facilitating the 1911 solo show that affirmed her professional standing. That exhibition not only secured Charmy's credibility in Paris but also paved the way for her inclusion in the Armory Show of 1913, where her painting *L'Estaque* (c. 1910) was acquired by collector Arthur Jerome Eddy and later entered the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.[41] Over the next three decades, Weill's unrelenting advocacy sustained Charmy's reputation even in leaner years. This constancy allowed Charmy to safeguard the privacy of her most intimate canvases while still earning a living from her art and building a professional and distinguished profile in France—one ultimately crowned by the Légion d'honneur.[42]

A crucial lens onto Charmy's and Weill's relationship is what evidence suggests is a portrait pair—Charmy's *Self-Portrait* (see Fig. 1; Pl. 1) and her *Portrait of Berthe Weill* (see Fig. 2; Pl. 2) from the 1910s–20s. Seen together, the canvases operate like facing pages in a book: distinct voices, shared grammar. Each deploys a restrained, near-monochrome palette—midnight blues, blacks, a corridor of creams and flesh tones—punctured by incisive accents: a scarf, a cravat, a flash of coral at the lips. In both, the sitter faces the viewer with uncompromising self-possession, their heads slightly tilted, their mouths set with deliberation.

In *Portrait of Berthe Weill*, Charmy pays homage to her dealer and confidante. Weill appears erudite and enterprising in her long frock coat and matching scarf, gold-rimmed spectacles, and modern wristwatch. The paint is worked, not smoothed; volumes are modeled by accumulations rather than glazes, so that Weill's body reads less as outline than as gravity and mass. Her body, swathed in black fabric, accords her a looming presence that recalls Auguste Rodin's *Monument to Balzac* (1898).[43] Charmy emphasizes Weill's discerning gaze with her pursed lips and single raised eyebrow. A filament of vanilla-hued pigment bisects her right eye, like a lightning bolt of attention certifying Weill as reader of paintings, negotiator, and witness. The portrait refuses the trope of dealer-as-gentleman-collector; this is a woman whose power is pragmatic, earned in bargaining, hanging, and risk. The formidable impression aligns with Jean-Paul Crespelle's later description of Weill as:

> One of the most original figures in the arts business; we consider her today with Vollard, Kahnweiler, and Paul Guillaume as one of the main promoters of the art of the 20th century…. With her pale complexion, her pursed mouth, her shapeless smock, she was both the chairwoman of the church and the teacher who has just tamed her class.[44]

Charmy's *Self-Portrait* answers in kind. Structured by the same chromatic weight and frontal address, it offers a painter in full command of her image. Charmy's attire and coiffure echoes Weill's, and their postures form a deliberate counterpoint—Charmy, hand on hip, facing forward with openness and assurance; Weill, hands in her pockets, turning outward with a discerning glance, her hair pulled back in pragmatic elegance. The brushwork is assertive and unsparing, contouring the face with strokes that neither flatter nor correct; the gaze is analytic rather than confessional. As in many of Charmy's portraits, the hands are sketched with cursory, almost crude strokes, their fingers dissolving into the dark navy of her blouse—an unfinished effect that underscores facture over finish. When these portraits are positioned side by side, the two subtly turn toward each other, creating a quiet but unmistakable dialogue. The visual rhyme reads as intentional solidarity.

What appears, in effect, are two professional identities rendered with the same painterly values: Weill and Charmy as partners in modernism, each conferring stature upon the other. While scholars and descendants often disagree on dating, these works may be read as a pair, painted around the same time—an emblem of Weill's model of patronage, premised not on subordination but on mutual recognition.[45] Weill's memoir—recounting their exchanges and shared challenges—makes clear that this professional alliance was also a lifelong personal bond. The portrait pair, in this sense, is more than formal dialogue; it crystallizes a relationship sustained in daily life as much as in artistic exchange.

In her memoir, Weill recorded intimate impressions of Charmy's character, insights available only to someone within her inner circle. She described Charmy as reserved, often mistaken for proud, a quality she reframed as integrity:

> As she does not belong to any school, her reserve, of which a great degree is shyness, was attributed to pride, disdain. If it is to be proud for not straying in order to follow fashion, from the line of conduct that one has traced in art to impose one's personality, then yes! She is very proud! And a pride that I consider strongly.[46]

In both the visual and verbal accounts, Charmy and Weill reinforced each other's stature: one through painterly likeness, the other through language that framed individuality and self-possession as virtues.

Although Charmy's long relationship with Galerie B. Weill is well documented—she exhibited there roughly twenty-five times between 1905 and 1936—no photographic record of those shows survives, leaving critical gaps. This lacuna is not unique to Charmy but reflects a broader scarcity of exhibition documentation in early twentieth-century Paris, when catalogues were often cursory and installation photography rare before the 1920s. The problem is compounded by the generic nature of Charmy's titles—"Nu" or "Nu assis"—rarely allowing scholars to identify with certainty which paintings were exhibited unless illustrated. Only in the later 1920s did photography become more affordable and systematic, though it was still most often reserved for world's fairs, official salons, or landmark expositions. It is in this context that the Valadon photographs survive: her 1929 exhibition fell precisely at the moment when such documentation was starting to become common practice for commercial galleries. For Charmy, this absence was unsurprising, if unfortunate. It underscores, nonetheless, how archival silences, rather than curatorial timidity, shape what can be recovered today.[47] It may also reflect the contingencies of survival, the discretion of the artist or her family in shaping her legacy, or the broader neglect that has often consigned women's records in art history to obscurity. Crucially, the missing photographs also point to Charmy's own agency—she exercised careful control over the nudes entering public view.

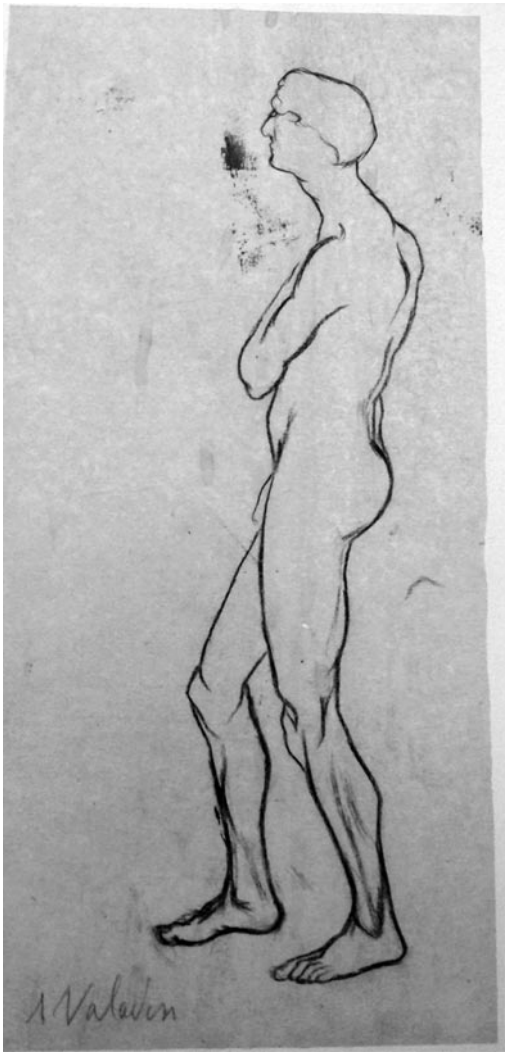


Fig. 10. Suzanne Valadon, *Utter nu de profil* (Utter nude profile view), study for *Joie de Vivre* (1911), charcoal on tracing paper. Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou (photograph by the author).

Many of her most transgressive works—*Nu au divan rouge* (Nude on Red Sofa) (c. 1925; Pl. 3), *Nu tenant son sein* (Nude Holding Her Breast) (c. 1920–25; Pl. 4), and *Autoportrait au peignoir ouvert* (Self-Portrait in an Open Dressing Gown) (c. 1916–18; Fig. 11 and front cover)—were never illustrated in catalogues and never appeared on exhibition lists. The nudes Charmy did exhibit aligned with the stylized *forme féminine*—the decorative female figures so prevalent in early twentieth-century French painting as described by Vauxcelles.[48] As Gill Perry first argued—and as I developed further in my book, *Painting Her Pleasure*, through a dialogue with feminist theory—Charmy's decision to present one register of the nude while withholding another was deliberate.[49] In a market conditioned by male desire and critical gatekeeping, subversive content had to be censored or kept private. The split was not ambivalence but strategy. The studio, not the gallery, became the site where she could paint sexually charged female nudes and nude self-portraits without hesitation.

These "private" canvases are among Charmy's most radical in composition, style, and execution. Charmy's surfaces thicken palpably at breasts, thighs, bellies; edges are scratched back and redrawn; contours both hold and slip. The facture itself—dense, tactile, and materially erotic—made paint a mode of touch, a form of her *jouissance*. *Nude on Red Sofa* depicts a woman arching back in ecstasy, black hair spilling over crimson upholstery as her body dissolves into swirls of red; pigment thickens at breast and pubis, turning sensa-

tion itself into form. In *Nude Holding Her Breast*, her hand presses into flesh, pigment coagulating around the breast so that touch becomes weight, paint anchoring caress in palpable materiality. The artist bares her own figure in *Self-Portrait in an Open Dressing Gown*, her robe falling open to reveal a frank, self-possessed body—assertive and unyielding to the expectations of an external gaze. In all of these nudes, pigment gathers at the point of caress, redirecting eroticism inward rather than staging it for a male spectator. Together, these works register a mode of female erotic autonomy too audacious for the public sphere of the interwar art market.

Here the importance of Weill's continuous support cannot be overstated. For Charmy, her gallery served as an anchor of legitimacy, a platform that allowed her to remain present in the public conversation without exposing every work to the vagaries of taste or the risks of scandal. Through this affiliation, Charmy could maintain a public presence without relying exclusively on the official salons, which often proved inhospitable to women and to works that contravened accepted gender norms. Weill's advocacy thus offered an alternative structure of validation, one less dependent on the fluctuating judgments of juries and critics.

No aspect of Charmy's oeuvre makes this clearer than her pregnant nude self-portraits from around 1915—works so radical in subject and charge that they remained hidden for over a century (Pl. 5–6). Two paintings, long buried in storage, were unveiled to the author by the artist's descendants in the final stages of completing *Painting Her Pleasure*. In both, the pregnant nudes are restless. One hugs her waist while balancing her leg in the air. The other wraps an arm around her swollen abdomen, extends her leg out horizontally, and drapes the other past the edge of the sofa or bed. She cocks her head back in a pose that conveys sexual satisfaction. The gritty texture of coagulated paint is visible on the thighs, hips, breasts, and stomach. Both nudes are submerged in color—Prussian blue with accents of pink in one, and luscious shades of red in the other. Contrary to what one might expect of a pregnant nude in art, these works have nothing to do with fecundity. Charmy effectively divorces the pregnant body from the theme of maternity. These are transgressive: not only is the subject matter new to the history of art, but they also exude a woman's sexual voice. In defiance of the expectations of motherhood as fertile, nurturing, and protective, Charmy shows her pregnant body in a state of ecstasy.

Where nineteenth-century portraiture routinely disguised pregnancy (Berthe Morisot's [1841–1895] decorous concealments), and where even avant-garde modernists avoided making it the subject of the nude, Charmy centered her own gravid body—not as Madonna, not as allegory, but as erotic, sovereign self.[50] The closest parallel is Paula Modersohn-Becker's (1876–1907) *Self-Portrait on the Sixth Wedding Anniversary* (1906), but Charmy's canvases press further—they refuse to treat pregnancy as symbolic, presenting instead the artist's own body as an active site of pleasure. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that these works did not enter the public sphere: they broke the tacit compact of the avant-garde about what aspects of female sexuality could be shown.



Fig. 11. Émilie Charmy, *Autoportrait au peignoir ouvert* (Self-Portrait in an Open Dressing Gown) (c. 1916–18), oil on canvas, 36 1/4" x 28 3/4". Fralin Museum, University of Virginia, © ADAGP, Paris / DACS, London.

Weill's loyalty suggests a deep familiarity with Charmy's practice and prompts an inevitable question. To what extent was the dealer aware of the "private" nudes that never entered public view, and, if so cognizant, had she urged Charmy to exhibit them? The surviving evidence is inconclusive. Charmy's own reticence—she rarely titled or dated works, and she controlled circulation tightly—means we lack documentary confirmation. Yet it is not difficult to imagine that Weill had at least glimpses. Dealers build their programs on studio visits and conversations; the portrait pair itself suggests a closeness that was professional and personal.

If Weill was willing, in 1929, to hang Valadon's male bathers in their uncensored state—an action we can now document

thanks to the newly listed installation photographs—it stands to reason that she would not, on principle, have balked at Charmy's boldest female nudes, nude self-portraits, or pregnant nudes. The real obstacle was less Weill's appetite for risk than the matrix of constraints—commercial, legal, reputational—within which both women worked. Crucially, Valadon's nudes, even when provocative, were rarely cloaked in allegory or elevated by heroic convention. Her bathers sprawled in ordinary landscapes or cramped interiors, bodies unidealized and overtly sexed, presented without the protective guise of mythology or academic narrative. This rawness was itself destabilizing, yet the fact that her models were male—her son, her partner—also disrupted entrenched hierarchies of the gaze. Having once worked as a model herself, Valadon may have been emboldened to claim that same gaze as her own, repositioning both male and female nudity as subjects of her authorship.

For Charmy, the challenge was different. Many of her most sensual nudes were self-portraits, images of female erotic self-possession with no narrative alibi.[51] Unlike male nudes, which could be veiled in classical or sportive conventions, a woman's self-pleasuring body offered no such cover. To portray it was to confront taboos at the nexus of sexuality, gender, and propriety—taboos compounded by the expectation that a bourgeois woman of her standing preserve discretion. Her pregnant nude self-portraits made this audacity even starker, collapsing maternity and bodily agency in ways virtually unprecedented. It was, perhaps, too transgressive for any public stage. A dealer might withstand controversy over a man's nudity; a woman's unapologetic erotic autonomy posed a deeper affront to the morality of the period. In this light, Charmy's self-censorship is best understood not as hesitation but as self-determination: an artist choosing when and how her most intimate works would enter the world, if at all.

Even without exhibiting the full spectrum of Charmy's nudes, Weill materially enabled her experimentation. Her support didn't demand Charmy make the private public. She showed Charmy often enough to secure critical notice and sales, without forcing the artist to adapt her most experimental practice to prevailing taste. She framed Charmy—like Valadon—not as a curiosity among *hommes célèbres* but as a modern painter deserving sustained attention on her own terms. Viewed in concert, the portrait pair underscores this alliance—two women affirming each other's authority in a milieu that rarely granted it to them.

Taken together, the cases of Valadon and Charmy compel a reconsideration of Berthe Weill's place in modern art. She was not merely the first dealer to sell Picasso or to launch Matisse, nor simply a partisan of Fauvism, Cubism, or any one movement. Rather, she built a gallery where women could work simultaneously within the avant-garde and at its edge—where a male nude could be displayed without the fig leaves or drapery softening its charge, and where a painter of female erotic imagery could maintain a public career without surrendering her most intimate works to public consumption.

The recently surfaced installation photographs from Valadon's 1929 exhibition at Galerie B. Weill sharpen this argument. They demonstrate that Weill did not shy away from controversy but curated it with acuity. On her walls, Valadon's subversive male nudes were granted public space next to her bold female bathers. These images also register the racial stakes of Valadon's project, as in *Sleeping Venus*, where a Black model assumes the posture of a classical nude. The gesture does not resolve the tensions of objectification, but it nonetheless unsettles the hierarchy that long reserved such roles for white bodies.

Charmy's most sensual canvases, by contrast, largely remained in the studio, at least as far as we know. The survival of Valadon's 1929 installation photographs and the absence of any such documentation for Charmy points to the uneven history of exhibition photography itself, which left some groundbreaking practices visible, and others shrouded in archival silence. The case of Charmy reminds us to read the archive not only for what survives but also for its omissions: missing checklists, belated insertions, or inventory numbers that hint at a fuller record of images than the catalogue provides. Modernism's outward face—exhibitions, reviews, sales—was inseparable from its private continuities found in studio practices, friendships, and solidarities. The portraits of Weill and Charmy crystallize this dynamic. Two women meet the viewer's gaze, each authoring the other's visibility.

In this light, to recognize Weill as a catalyst is to acknowledge that modernism was not grounded on manifestoes and masterpieces but also on the daily labor of those who organized exhibitions, took risks, and insisted that women's art be taken seriously. To reframe Valadon's male bathers within the context of their 1929 showing at Weill's gallery is to return to the history of the nude at a moment when the male body was claimed as the object of a woman's gaze without censorship. To consider Charmy's private nudes alongside Weill's steadfast support is to recognize that radical art sometimes required discretion—and that in this case, the absence of exhibition records leaves open the question of what was ever shown.

At Weill's gallery, the modern nude—seen and unseen—was neither a genre stabilized by tradition nor the sole preserve of avant-garde men, but a living problem reworked by women who claimed both the right to pleasure and the freedom to desire. Valadon's uncensored bathers, Charmy's self-pleasuring bodies, and the portraits that bound artist and dealer together became foundations of an alternative modernism—evidence of a sustained collaboration toward an avant-garde expansive and progressive enough to recognize women's experiences as subjects in their own right. •

Lauren Jimerson is an art historian specializing in modern art, with a focus on gender studies and women artists. She holds degrees from Cornell University, The Courtauld, and Rutgers University (PhD). Her research explores the role of women in reshaping body imagery and visual culture in France and the United States. A former Fulbright scholar in Paris, she has contributed to major exhibitions at the Barnes Foundation, Musée de Montmartre, Musée du Luxembourg/Grand Palais, and the Centre Pompidou. Her book, *Painting Her Pleasure:*

Three Women Artists and the Nude in Avant-Garde Paris (Manchester University Press, 2023), highlights the groundbreaking contributions of Émilie Charmy, Suzanne Valadon, and Marie Vassilieff. She is the founder of Art *with* Friends, which promotes scholarship and education on women and underrepresented artists, and she is also a frequent commentator on France 24 and other international media outlets.

Notes

This essay adapts and expands my presentation delivered at the Grey Art Museum, New York University, on February 26, 2025, as part of the exhibition *Berthe Weill: Art Dealer of the Parisian Avant-Garde*. It also draws from my book, *Painting Her Pleasure: Three Women Artists and the Nude in Avant-Garde Paris* (Manchester University Press, 2023), and builds on my long engagement with the subject, developed across more than a decade of research and writing, first at The Courtauld Institute, then at Rutgers University, and finally at the Sorbonne and the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, supported by a Fulbright fellowship. I am deeply grateful to Leah Sweet, Head of Education and Programs at the Grey Art Museum, for inviting me to present this research at NYU; to Susan Sidlauskas, Professor Emerita at Rutgers University, whose sage mentorship shaped my scholarship, as well as to Joan Marter, Professor Emerita at Rutgers and co-chief editor of *Woman's Art Journal*, for her unwavering support in publishing both my earliest research on Valadon and the present article.

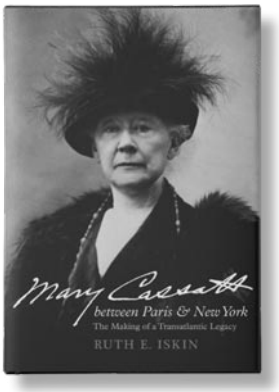
I also thank Valérie Juilliard and the Bibliothèque Kandinsky for granting me access to the complete set of photographs in the Fonds Robert Le Masle.

Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the French are by the author.

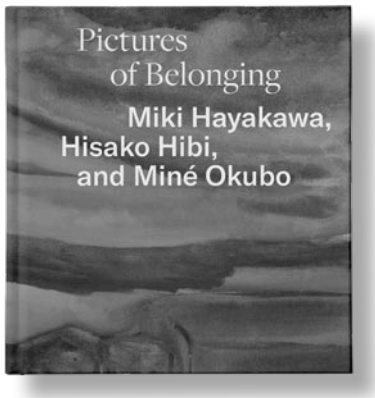
1. Tamar Garb, *Sisters of the Brush: Women's Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Yale University Press, 1994), 63–67.
2. Lauren Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure: Three Women Artists and the Nude in Avant-Garde Paris* (Manchester University Press, 2023); Lauren Jimerson, "Defying Gender: Suzanne Valadon and the Male Nude," *Woman's Art Journal* 40, no. 1 (2019): 3–12; Lauren Jimerson, "Defying Gender—Redefining the Nude: Female Artists and the Body in Early 20th Century Paris" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 2018); and Lauren Jimerson, "Defying Gender: The Nude in the Art of Suzanne Valadon" (Master's thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2011).
3. Lynn Gumpert et. al., *Berthe Weill: Art Dealer of the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Flammarion, 2024), 50. The book accompanied the traveling exhibition survey from 2024 to 2026 at the Grey Art Museum, New York University, NY; Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal; and Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris.
4. *Berthe Weill*, 46, 50–55.
5. *Berthe Weill*, 121, 144.
6. Fonds Robert Le Masle, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre Pompidou. © Centre Pompidou – MNAM/CCI, Fonds Robert Le Masle, phot. Cl. Bernès, Marouteau & Cie.; repr. in *Berthe Weill*, 28–29.
7. *Berthe Weill*, 18, 20.
8. *Berthe Weill*, 53, 58–64.
9. *Berthe Weill*, 74–82.
10. *Berthe Weill*, 41–42, 46–49, 53–55.
11. Berthe Weill, *Pan! dans l'œil! … ou trente ans dans les coulisses de la peinture contemporaine, 1900–1930* (René Debresse, 1933).
12. Berthe Weill, *Pow! Right in the Eye! Thirty Years Behind the Scenes of Modern French Painting / Berthe Weill*, ed. Lynn Gumpert, trans. William Rodarmor (University of Chicago Press, 2022).
13. *Berthe Weill*, 18–20, 53–55, 74–82.
14. Paula J. Birnbaum, *Women Artists in Interwar France: Framing Femininities* (Ashgate, 2011/2016); Katy Deepwell, *Women Artists Between the Wars: "A Fair Field and No Favour"* (Manchester University Press, 2010).
15. Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure,* 135–36. See also Damon Reed's review of *Painting Her Pleasure* in this issue of *WAJ* 46.2 (Fall/Winter 2025): 62–64.
16. Edgar Degas and Marcel Guérin, *Degas, lettres* (Bernard Grasset, 1945).
17. Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure,* chap. 3, "Suzanne Valadon: A Man as Her Muse," 135–191.
18. Arthur Cravan, "L'Exposition des Indépendants," *Maintenant* 4 (March–April 1914). Quoted in Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure*, 161–62.
19. Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure*, chap. 3, 135–191.
20. Centre Pompidou – MNAM/CCI, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Fonds Robert Le Masle, items 478–490, phot. Cl. Bernès, Marouteau & Cie. Reproduced in *Berthe Weill*, 28–29.
21. The figure was a preparatory sketch for a poster commissioned by the artists' aid society, *L'Aide Amicale aux Artistes*, in 1927. Suzanne Valadon, *L'Aide Amicale aux Artistes* [poster], lithograph, 1927, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90137762.item#.
22. Some of Valadon's bathers, particularly her male nudes, were executed on tracing paper, a material that Degas frequently utilized in the 1890s. Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure*, 189; George Shackelford, "The Body Transformed: Degas's Last Nudes," in *Degas and the Nude,* ed. Shackelford and Xavier Rey (MFA Publications, 2011), 173.
23. Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure*, 148; Degas and Guérin, *Degas, lettres*, 216, 233.
24. Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure*, 168–77.
25. For a discussion of Valadon's *Black Venus* series, see Adrienne L. Childs, Nancy Ireson, Lauren Jimerson, Denise Murrell, and Ebonie Pollock, "Disrupting Tradition: Suzanne Valadon's Black Venus," in *Suzanne Valadon: Model, Painter, Rebel*, ed. Nancy Ireson (Barnes Foundation, 2021), 30–41; Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure*, 168–177; and Ebonie Pollock, "Suzanne Valadon's Black Venus: The Representation and Reception of the Black Artist's Model in Interwar Paris" (B.A. thesis, Washington University in St. Louis, 2019).
26. Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure*, chap. 3; Jimerson, "Defying Gender: Suzanne Valadon and the Male Nude;" Jimerson, "Defying Gender—Redefining the Nude"; Jimerson, "Defying Gender: The Nude in the Art of Suzanne Valadon."
27. See Helen Craske, "Periodicals as Proxénètes: Erotic Complicity in *Don Juan* (1895–1900)," *French Studies* 76, no. 3 (July 2022): 366–91, which details how businesses risked financial ruin after criminal prosecutions for "outrages aux bonnes mœurs." See also the seizure of Alfred Choubrac's advertising posters in 1891 under public decency laws, a case that underscores the persistent reach of morality policing of visual culture into the early twentieth century, in Karen L. Carter, "Unfit for Public Display: Female Sexuality and the Censorship of Fin-de-Siècle Publicity Posters," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 8, no. 2 (May 2010): 107–24.
28. Weill and François Roussier, *Pan! dans l'oeil!* (L'Échelle de Jacob, 2009), 227–29.
29. Griselda Pollock. "Modigliani and the Bodies of Art," in *Modigliani Beyond the Myth,* ed. Mason Klein (Yale University Press, 2004), 56.
30. Louis Vauxcelles, *L'Histoire générale de l'art français de la Révolution à nos jours* (Librarie de France, 1922), 321.

31. *Cinquante ans de peinture française, 1875–1925* (Éditions Albert Lévy, 1925).
32. Weill, *Pan! dans l'oeil!,* 294.
33. Weill, 294–95.
34. Louis Vauxcelles, "Le Salon d'Automne," *Gil Blas* (October 17, 1905); Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure*, 89.
35. Weill and Roussier, *Pan! dans l'oeil!,* 62.
36. Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure,* 90–93. See also Gill Perry, "Gender and the Fauves," in *Art of the Avant-Gardes*, ed. Steve Edwards and Paul Wood (Yale University Press, 2004).
37. Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure*, 92–93.
38. Dating discrepancies of landscapes are prevalent: Matthew Affron, *Émilie Charmy* (The Fralin Museum of Art, 2013); Sylvie Carlier, *Émilie Charmy* (Musée Municipal Paul-Dini, 2008); Perry, "Gender and the Fauves"; Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde*; Claudine Grammont and Bruno Ely, *Camoin dans sa lumière* (Lienart, 2016). Summarized in Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure*, 92.
39. For an analysis of Charmy's "aesthetics of female *jouissance*," drawing on Luce Irigaray and feminist theory, see Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure*, chap. 2, "Painting Pleasure: Émilie Charmy and the Aesthetics of Female Jouissance," 84–124.
40. Henri Béraud, Roland Dorgelès et al., *Émilie Charmy* (Galeries d'Oeuvres d'Art, 1921); see also Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure,* 10; 84–124; Birnbaum, *Women Artists in Interwar France*; Norma Broude, *Impressionism: A Feminist Reading: The Gendering of Art, Science, and Nature in the Nineteenth Century* (Westview Press/Icon Editions, 1997); and Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde*.
41. Émilie Charmy, *L'Estaque* (c. 1910), Armory Show 1913; coll. Art Institute of Chicago.
42. Émilie Charmy, awarded Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur, decree of 13 Jan. 1926 (promoted Officer 1938).
43. Auguste Rodin, *Monument to Balzac,* 1898, bronze, Musée Rodin, Paris.
44. Jean-Paul Crespelle, *La vie quotidienne à Montmartre au temps de Picasso: 1900–1919* (Hachette, 1978), 217.
45. Dating of Charmy's works is inconsistent, with family attributions often earlier than stylistic evidence suggests. The Grey Art Museum's *Berthe Weill* exhibition followed these designations despite clear divergences in facture and style, underscoring the need to rely on visual and material analysis over descendant testimony (*Berthe Weill: Art Dealer of the Parisian Avant-Garde*, 2024, 118–23).
46. Weill, *Pan! dans l'oeil!*, 62.
47. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995); Sussan Babaie, "The Global in the Local: Implicating Iran in Art and History," in *Dissonant Archives: Contemporary Visual Culture and Contested Narratives in the Middle East*, ed. Anthony Downey (I.B. Tauris, 2015).
48. Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure*, 8, 9, 110; Vauxcelles, *L'histoire Générale,* 321; Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde.*
49. Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure*, 84–124; Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde*, 107–18, 127.
50. For a discussion of Charmy's pregnant nudes, see Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure,* 96–98. On those by Paula Modersohn-Becker, see Diane Radycki, *Paula Modersohn-Becker: The First Modern Woman Artist* (Yale University Press, 2013).
51. For a discussion on Charmy's nude self-portraiture, see Jimerson, *Painting Her Pleasure,* chap. 2, 84–124.

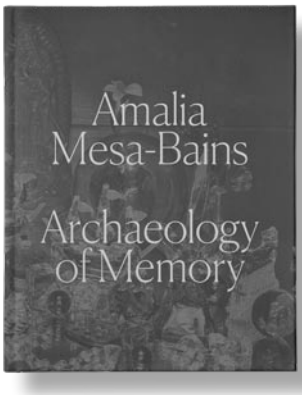
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"Words in Art are Signs Returned"

Rosemary Mayer and the Poetics of Time

By Farren Fei Yuan

The contemporary is the untimely.
—Roland Barthes, Collège de France[1]

In his inaugural lecture in theoretical philosophy at IUAV University of Venice, in 2006, the Italian philosopher and political theorist, Giorgio Agamben, posed this question to his audience: "What Is the Contemporary?"[2] Citing Barthes's reflection on Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* (1874), Agamben proposed a seemingly paradoxical definition: Contemporariness describes "a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it, and at the same time, keeps a distance from it."[3] The true contemporary relates to their own time not by perfect synchrony with it but through anachronisms and disjunctions, which allows them to perceive the otherwise invisible links between one's own age and other periods.

To truly understand the art of Rosemary Mayer (1943–2014), one must recognize her disjunctive relation to her own time and her deep investment in earlier eras. Born and raised in Ridgewood, Queens, Mayer completed a bachelor's degree in classics from the University of Iowa before returning to New York to pursue an artistic career. From 1964 to 1965, she attended the Brooklyn Museum Art School, then studied painting at the School of Visual Arts from 1967 to 1969. Early on, her circle of fellow artists included Sol LeWitt, Adrian Piper (b. 1948), Donna Dennis (b. 1942), Nancy Wilson Kitchel (b. 1941), Sylvia Sleigh (1916–2010), Ree Morton (1936–1977), and Maureen Connor (b. 1947), many of whom would remain important interlocutors in her career.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were an exciting time of change for art history: like most progressions of art historical movements, the peak of the orthodox, formalist school of Minimalism in the mid-1960s was followed, incontrovertibly, by periods of fragmentation and dissent. The white, heteronormative identity of Minimalism, its rigid theoretical doctrines and rhetorical indifference towards its social-political environs provoked waves of transgression and calls for alternative modes of art.[4] Minimalism was soon "overturned" by art whose practitioners took from its experiments in form and materials a means to challenge all that it represented. Within the span of five years, three seminal exhibitions landed on Manhattan Island—Lucy Lippard's *Eccentric Abstraction* (Fischbach Gallery, 1966), James Monte and Marcia Tucker's *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* (Whitney Museum of American Art, 1969), and Kynaston McShine's *Information* (The Museum of Modern Art, 1970)—marking a tidal shift toward Postminimalism and Conceptual art. As David Getsy suggests, while Minimalism enforced an illusion of universal experience that left little room for differences, Postminimalism signaled an expanded field encompassing a variety of open-ended, crossmedia experimentations by the previously disenfranchised.[5]

Mayer's career took shape at these art historical junctures. She was connected to the center of these developments, not only through SVA, but also through her sister, the prominent language poet, Bernadette Mayer (1945–2022), and Rosemary's former husband, Vito Acconci, who studied at Iowa alongside her, completing a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing before turning to Performance and Conceptual art. From 1967 to 1969, Rosemary was closely involved with *0 To 9*, a conceptual art journal edited by Bernadette and Vito, and, in 1972, she was invited to co-found the first women's artist-run cooperative gallery, A.I.R. Throughout her career, Rosemary maintained a critical detachment from the artistic tendencies of her time even while participating in them. Her cultivated interest in European art history, particularly Mannerism and Baroque art and their unorthodox expressions of time and history, also contributed to an artistic language that diverged from the prevailing aesthetic sensibilities of her contemporary artworld.

Despite admiration from critics at the time, such as Lawrence Alloway, Barbara Cavalière, April Kingsley, Bruce Kurtz, Richard Milazzo, Roberta Smith, and Alan Sondheim,

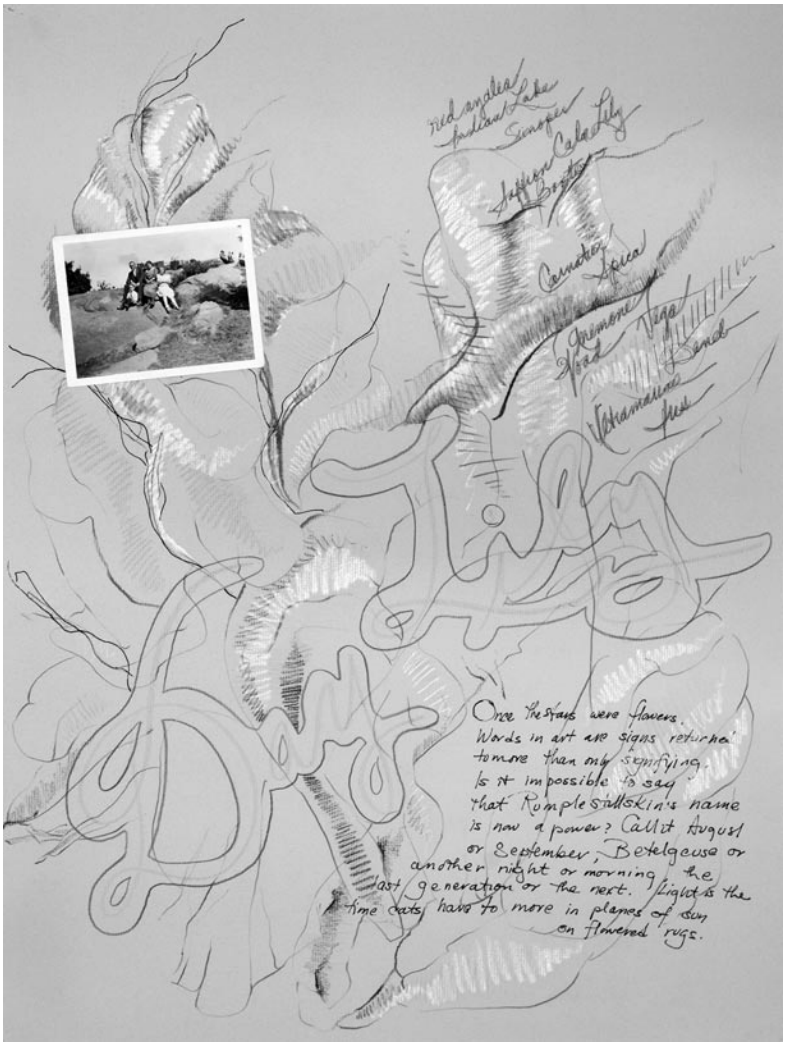


Fig. 1. Rosemary Mayer, *Day Lily (In Time Order)* (1978), ink, oil crayon, and photograph on paper, 23 4/5" x 18". Courtesy of the Estate of Rosemary Mayer.

the recognition of Mayer as an important artist of her generation arrived posthumously, thanks largely to the work of Marie Warsh, the artist's niece, an art historian and co-director (together with Max Warsh) of the artist's estate, as well as a community of like-minded gallerists, feminist scholars, writers, and curators.[6] Mayer's return to the artworld's critical consciousness began with a roster of solo shows organized by commercial galleries, starting in 2016 at Southfirst (Brooklyn, NY), ChertLüdde (Berlin, Germany, 2020), and Gordon Robichaux (New York, NY, 2021), and culminating in her first institutional retrospective, *Ways of Attaching* (2021–22), which traveled from the Swiss Institute in New York to three locations in Europe.[7]

Despite Mayer's ever-increasing visibility, scholarship thus far has tended to focus on her fabric sculptures and outdoor works from the late 1970s to 1980s—specifically her series of relational, site-specific installations that involved tethering painted helium balloons on the ground with ribbons, rope, or wooden rods, to which she gave the name "temporary monuments" (1977–82).[8] Less attention has been paid to her conceptual pieces, mixed-media drawings, magazines, and artist's books. While most of these "image-text" pieces have been exhibited, they have yet to be studied in great depth—and, more importantly, in relation to her practice as a whole.[9]

Without undermining the significance of Mayer's sculptural works, this article argues that her artistic practice cannot be fully understood without closely studying her image-text works. Indeed, among visual artists of her time, Mayer was unusually erudite in European history and literature (she had declined a fellowship offer in classics from Harvard University to devote herself to art). As Cavalière noted in her 1977 review of Mayer's solo show at Monique Knowlton Gallery the previous year: "Mayer … is equally fluent in sculpture and in the written word."[10] Mayer contributed art criticism to *Art In America* and *Arts Magazine*, and published essays in newly founded independent publications, such as *Tracks: A Journal of Artists' Writings* (1974–77), *White Walls: A Magazine of Writing by Artists* (1978–2002 [?]), and *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* (1977–93).[11] Beyond her conceptualist pieces for *0 To 9*, Mayer made artist's books, completing, in 1976, *Diary of Jacopo da Pontormo Written During the Time He Painted the Choir at San Lorenzo*, as well as *Transitions* and *Passages*—the latter two exhibited at Martha Wilson's Franklin Furnace in fall 1976.[12] In 1977, she created an artist's issue for the independent magazine *Art-Rite*, entitled *Surroundings*, and the following year produced a series of mixed-media drawings, *In Time Order*, that combined photographs, drawings, and writings. This rich body of work, in which visual and textual content are equally significant, holds the epistemic key to Mayer's feminist critique of time and history.

Notably, credit must be given to Marie Warsh and art historian Gillian Sneed, both of whom laid the groundwork for this article's direction of research in their *Brooklyn Rail* essay from 2016, "Diaries of an Artist," where they reflected on Mayer's use of "writing and the book form" to commemorate and record the passage of time and to tell stories.[13] Sneed's subsequent essay, for *Temporary Monuments: Work by Rosemary Mayer, 1977–1982* (2018), examines the artist's books Mayer created for her "temporary monuments;"[14] and the introductory texts by Warsh and Sneed for the second edition of *Excerpts from the 1971 Journal of Rosemary Mayer* (2020) and *The Letters of Rosemary & Bernadette Mayer, 1976–1980* (2022), respectively, further illuminate the centrality of journaling and everyday life in Mayer's art.[15]

Still missing from this admirable body of scholarship, however, is sustained engagement with Mayer's intimate relationship to Conceptual art—a crucial framework for understanding the significance of text and image in her work. In her obituary for Mayer in *Artforum*, Piper too quickly dismissed her friend as "not a Conceptual artist" who "didn't much care for Conceptual art"—despite subsequently

crediting Mayer for influencing the development of her own work in that direction.[16] A key work in this context is *Surroundings* (the focus of my later discussion): an *Art-Rite* magazine issue—composed of nonlinear narrative, drawings, reproduced photographs, and Mannerist imagery—that engages with the feminist critique of representation more often associated with the Pictures Generation of artists in the mid-1970s (working in film, photography, video, and performance), as well as the critical documentary tradition heralded by American photographer Allan Sekula. From Mayer's early experiments in *0 To 9* to her writings for independent publications and artist's books, and finally in *Surroundings*, she read and interrogated formalist discussions of time—particularly as they related to the concepts of indeterminacy, change, and seriality—through the lens of her own and other women's lived experiences. If, as LeWitt proposed in *0 To 9*, Conceptual art is defined as art in which the idea takes precedence over form, then, in Mayer's work, form and materiality acquire conceptual significance.[17]

Many scholars have emphasized Mayer's *difference* from her contemporaries, as if to justify her marginalization from canonical art historical narratives. It is true that Mayer was unusual for her time in remaining faithful to the values of beauty, the artist's studio, and the handmade, when many others, such as the Land artist and writer Robert Smithson, claimed such "refined" painterly practices a disease of "leaky minds," a comment that propelled Mayer's own response in her journal, that perhaps she preferred "lost causes."[18] More recently, in her catalogue essay for *Ways of Attaching*, Jenny Nachtigall asserted that Mayer did not engage with "the Duchampian legacy of art's investigation of its own meaning, value, and institutionality," which was central to advanced art in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s:

> She aimed instead to find an artistic language that was hers alone. Paradoxically, this made her work less, not more, legible to influential feminist critics like Lucy Lippard…. Lippard was also the one who recommended Mayer to the A.I.R. Collective, probably after a studio visit in 1971. However, as the decade wore on, it became apparent that this artist's repertoire was perhaps ultimately too eccentric even for Lippard.[19]

By insisting on Mayer's "eccentricity" and "illegibility" within art history, Nachtigall seemingly locates the cause for her belated critical and commercial recognition in the artist herself, rather than in institutional and structural biases. Yet this claim can be challenged by simply introducing "Contexts," an essay Mayer coauthored with Kitchel, published in *Tracks* in 1977.[20] In what is perhaps Mayer's most explicit political statement, this lengthy text offers a Marxist critique of the "legitimating" and "mediating" structures that isolate art from society and its audiences. It allows us to reframe Mayer's career in terms of a sustained "Duchampian" negotiation with the institutional and discursive contexts of art—those that, as the authors wrote, produce "the difference between the artist and the shopping-bag lady."[21] Mayer's turn to cheap and often ephemeral

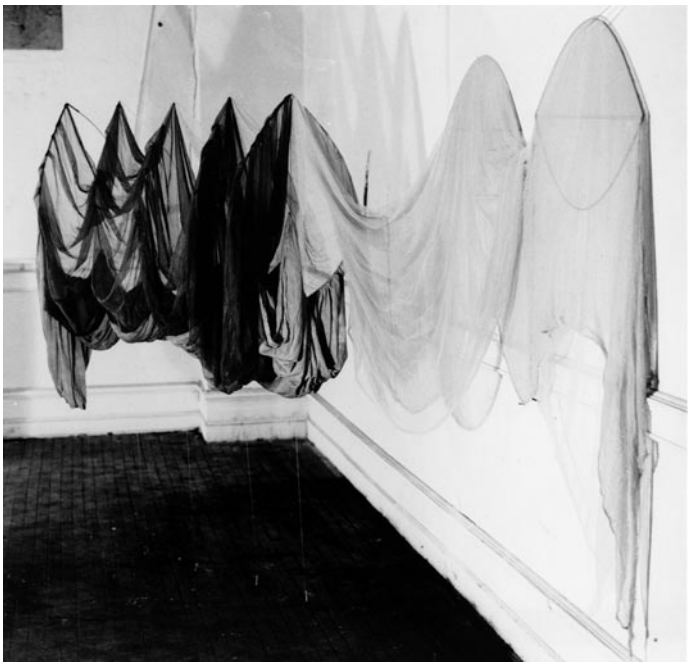


Fig. 2. Rosemary Mayer, *Hypsipyle* (1973), satin, rayon, nylon, cheesecloth, nylon netting, ribbon, dyes, wood, and acrylic paint, 48" x 108" x 6". Installation view from the exhibition "Discussions: Works/Words" at the Clocktower Gallery (May 11–June 30, 1974), MoMA PS1 Archives, III.A.1, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. INPS1.17.10. Photograph by Christopher Coughlan.

materials, such as fabrics, paper, magazines, books, wooden rods, plastic, and even snow and wax, demonstrate her desire for a new definition of art, one that moves beyond existing institutions "to search for a new field, a new audience."[22] A close study of her image-text works and writings shows that Mayer did not work in isolation from her surrounding artistic contexts; rather, she adopted dominant aesthetic strategies of her time and deployed them for her own ends.

In the same way that Mayer (and subsequent art historians) grappled with her relationship to her own time—falling "in" and "out" of it—Mayer's career was driven by her persistent, self-reflexive investigation of time as it manifested in the constancy of change, in daily life, and in the cycles of history.[23] In one of Mayer's most explicit engagements with the subject of temporality, *In Time Order* (1978), she replaced the Gregorian calendar with a personal, symbolic order of time. The twelve drawings in this series loosely correspond to the calendrical year, associating flowers, saints, or colors with specific dates, months, or seasons. Dismantling chronological and calendrical sequences, Mayer introduces first-person narratives and collaged photographs that, in some examples, produce flashbacks or anticipate future occurrences within a single composition, as in *Roses*. Time stretches thin in four drawings spanning June and July; it also contracts in six that collapse two months into one, as in *May/June* and *July/August*. While addressing objective time as a linear system, Mayer ultimately transgresses it. Made during the same period as her "temporary monuments," *In Time Order* is both a "celebration

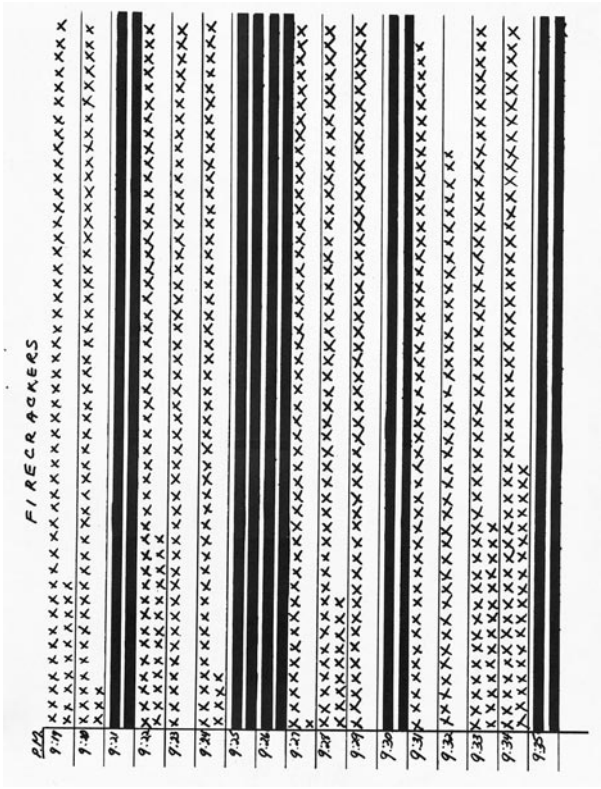


Fig. 3. Rosemary Mayer, first page of "Firecrackers," *0 To 9*, Issue no. 5 (Jan. 1969), ed. Bernadette Mayer and Vito Hannibal Acconci, typescript on paper, 8.5" x 11" (JSTOR).

of different connections, of disjunctions," and an invitation to imagine alternative relations to time.[24]

This article's title takes a phrase inscribed on a drawing from this series, *Day Lily* (1978; Pl. 7 and Fig. 1): "Words in art are signs returned." Not unlike the connected, non-orientable surfaces of a Möbius strip, the phrase encapsulates the hybridity of Mayer's art, articulating her poetics and politics of time. Here, "words" signify utterances—implying the time of the now, what Agamben and Benjamin called, respectively, *Jetztzeit* (in German), or *kairos* (in Greek)—whereas "signs" refer to a linear sequence of repetitions that inscribe the present.[25] The former emphasizes space; the latter, time. Enlightenment philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing used this duality of time and space to distinguish between the visual and literary arts. Yet, in Mayer's work, as in the writings of Agamben and Benjamin, these two temporalities are neither diametrically opposed nor mutually exclusive. If *chronos* refers to the flow of linear time, *kairos* rises above it, and points to the moment of seizing, of artmaking, in which history is interpellated by the artist such that ordinary, chronological time (*chronos*) is transformed. *Day Lily* best expresses the generative entanglement of time and space, the sign and the index. In the drawing, the outlined, hand-drawn letters, "Day Lily," hang on a flowering bush from which grow enigmatic words of flora, pigment, and constellations: red azalea, Sinoper, saffron calla [sic] lily, Boötes, carnation, Spica, and anemone. These flower names and stars possess an indexical power—that is, the ability to call ideas into being—much like the ancient German tale of Rumpelstiltskin, cited in the verse below it, and the found photograph on the left side of the composition. Words take on spatial dimensions, while the activities of drawing and viewing—visually tracing the lines and deciphering the texts—become emphatically temporal, transformative endeavors. As we shall see, Mayer mobilizes this alternating rhythm to evoke women's relation to everyday time and historical cycles (*chronos*) in an attempt to transcend them (*kairos*), thereby enacting a feminist poetics and politics of time.

Mayer was not the only figure among postwar American artists preoccupied with questions of time. As Pamela Lee argues in *Chronophobia*, artistic production and its critical reception in 1960s America were marked by "an obsessional uneasiness with time and its measure."[26] The period's technoscientific acceleration—alongside a rapidly expanding technological-bureaucratic apparatus encompassing automation, cybernetics, real-time media, and corporate management systems—fostered a pervasive sense of temporal dislocation. Turning to anthropologist George Kubler's *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (1962), artists such as Smithson (Lee's central case study) borrowed concepts from the physical sciences to confront this rupture. Smithson framed entropy and geologic deep time as counters to linear, industrial "clock time." Actuality, he claimed, is but an endlessly elapsing feedback loop between the present and the past—a condition expressed in what he called "time-structures": emphatically inorganic, "detemporalized" objects that nonetheless contain "ideas of time," exemplified by works such as Alberto Giacometti's *The Palace at Four A.M.* (1932–33), Eva Hesse's (1936–1970) *Laocoon* (1966), or Ad Reinhardt's Black Paintings.[27]

Mayer was certainly aware of—but did not embrace—the technophilic discourse circulating in New York's artworld at the time. Even as Smithson rejected traditional avant-garde

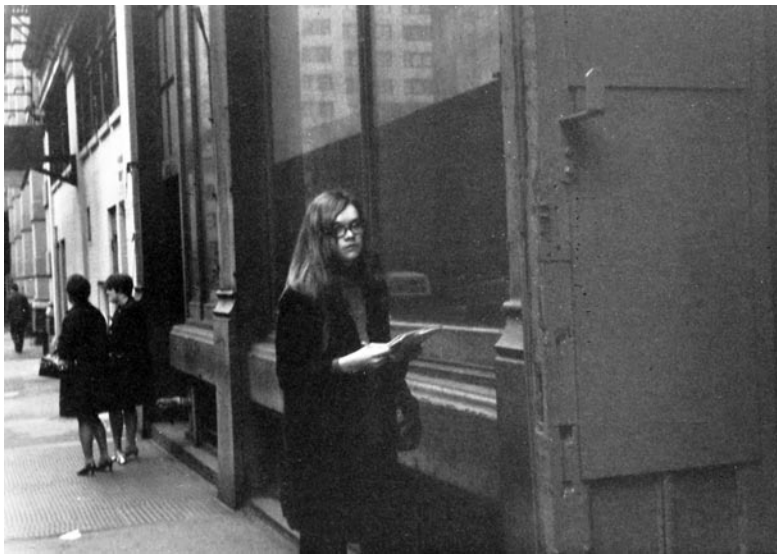


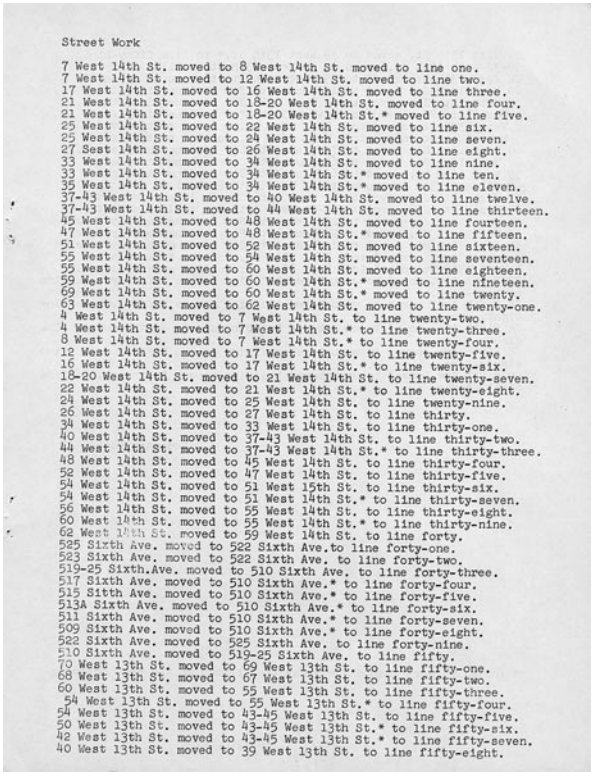
Fig. 4. Rosemary Mayer changing mailing addresses in New York City as part of *Street Works*, 1969. Courtesy of the Estate of Rosemary Mayer.

ideals, his writings buttressed a new "advanced" theory of art that privileged inorganic, crystalline forms over the "biomorphic" metaphors found in Impressionist and Abstract Expressionist painting.[28] While Mayer adopted the serial strategies of the conceptual, system-based work she encountered at SVA, her work expresses "ideas of time" rooted in an entirely different set of concerns: the socioeconomic forces shaping women's daily lives and a meditation on organic decay and mortality. For a committed feminist, Smithson's conception of a static, entropic present eliminates the possibility of transformation. Mayer's time-structures, by contrast, articulate women's subjective experiences of time and history in an effort to better understand—and ultimately transform—their present conditions.

Despite Mayer's unequivocal feminist commitments, she was notably absent from the waves of feminist art survey exhibitions from the mid-1990s to early 2000s, which have since shaped the critical reception of feminist art history.[29] In part, this absence reflects the limited recognition and understanding of her artistic practice within the mainstream and commercial artworld during her lifetime.[30] While publications dedicated to feminist organizing, discussion, and community building were crucial to the movement, the production of books and magazines (a large portion of Mayer's work) were still often seen as secondary to sculpture, video, and even expanded art forms such as relational art, events, and performances.[31] Many of her works were also fragile and ephemeral, surviving only through documentation.[32] Yet Mayer never intended to cater to the mainstream art-going audience, choosing instead to work in "alternative" media and spaces, as expressed in her 1971 declaration, "If I were to make art—this art is what I would do—rich or poor—to sell or not."[33]

Indeed, her art calls into question "the construction of feminist art's historical narratives," as Cornelia Butler wrote in her catalogue essay to *WACK!*, including the binary division between the iconographical and the scripto-visual, as theorized by Griselda Pollock in 1988,[34] and instead articulates the differential positions of "simultaneous feminisms."[35] Mayer's engagement with historical women—less celebratory than that of Judy Chicago and other cultural feminists[36]—was informed by her examination of the cultural, social, and economic conventions that inscribe contemporary women's identities and everyday lives. These concerns were shared by contemporaries such as Mary Kelly (b. 1941) and Martha Rosler (b. 1943). Skeptical of any universalizing imagery or claims, Mayer instead explored how societal or historical structures shape individual experience, drawing on her own life, family, and friends.

During a group meeting held on the occasion of A.I.R. Gallery's opening in 1972, Mayer and Nancy Spero (1926–2009) disagreed over the merits of "women-only" organizing.[37] Founded in response to the lack of exhibition opportunities for women artists, the gallery intended to provide a democratic space in which decisions were made collectively and members took turns exhibiting their works.[38] Yet Mayer saw the limitations of the gallery's separatist politics and exclusivity. As the feminist art historian Jenni Sorkin has noted in her analysis of the debate, such binary models risk being "trapped



Street Work

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18-20 West 14th St. moved to 21 West 14th St. to line twenty-seven.
22 West 14th St. moved to 21 West 14th St.* to line twenty-eight.
24 West 14th St. moved to 25 West 14th St. to line twenty-nine.
26 West 14th St. moved to 27 West 14th St. to line thirty.
34 West 14th St. moved to 33 West 14th St. to line thirty-one.
40 West 14th St. moved to 37-43 West 14th St. to line thirty-two.
44 West 14th St. moved to 37-43 West 14th St.* to line thirty-three.
48 West 14th St. moved to 45 West 14th St. to line thirty-four.
52 West 14th St. moved to 47 West 14th St. to line thirty-five.
54 West 14th St. moved to 51 West 15th St. to line thirty-six.
54 West 14th St. moved to 51 West 14th St.* to line thirty-seven.
56 West 14th St. moved to 55 West 14th St. to line thirty-eight.
60 West 14th St. moved to 55 West 14th St.* to line thirty-nine.
62 West 14th St. moved to 59 West 14th St. to line forty.
525 Sixth Ave. moved to 522 Sixth Ave.to line forty-one.
523 Sixth Ave. moved to 522 Sixth Ave. to line forty-two.
519-25 Sixth.Ave. moved to 510 Sixth Ave. to line forty-three.
517 Sixth Ave. moved to 510 Sixth Ave.* to line forty-four.
515 Sixth Ave. moved to 510 Sixth Ave.* to line forty-five.
513A Sixth Ave. moved to 510 Sixth Ave.* to line forty-six.
511 Sixth Ave. moved to 510 Sixth Ave.* to line forty-seven.
509 Sixth Ave. moved to 510 Sixth Ave.* to line forty-eight.
522 Sixth Ave. moved to 525 Sixth Ave. to line forty-nine.
510 Sixth Ave. moved to 519-25 Sixth Ave. to line fifty.
70 West 13th St. moved to 69 West 13th St. to line fifty-one.
68 West 13th St. moved to 67 West 13th St. to line fifty-two.
60 West 13th St. moved to 55 West 13th St. to line fifty-three.
54 West 13th St. moved to 55 West 13th St.* to line fifty-four.
54 West 13th St. moved to 43-45 West 13th St. to line fifty-five.
50 West 13th St. moved to 43-45 West 13th St.* to line fifty-six.
42 West 13th St. moved to 43-45 West 13th St.* to line fifty-seven.
40 West 13th St. moved to 39 West 13th St. to line fifty-eight.

Fig. 5. Rosemary Mayer, first page of *Street Works*, *0 To 9*, Issue no. 6 (supplement), July 15, 1969, typescript on paper, 8.5" x 11" (JSTOR).

… forever … reproducing the alternate, or the other."[39] This was the point of divergence between Mayer and Spero, as Mayer questioned the exclusionary foundations of the gallery. Rather than focusing solely on representation, she turned to examine the structural conditions underpinning women's oppression, taking their relation to time and history as her subject. Within two years—further frustrated by the lack of community and the committee's refusal to admit new members—Mayer, along with Kitchel and Harmony Hammond (b. 1944), resigned from A.I.R.[40]

During Mayer's time at SVA in the late 1960s, the syllabus was still dominated by Color Field painting and the formalistic criticism of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. As Piper recalled, for one of the painting classes, Mayer presented a pair of grid paintings in the "hard-edge Minimalist/Color Field" style:

> For the first, she divided the surface of the canvas into a grid, bisecting each square cell diagonally to form two triangles. She determined the color of each triangle by combining the primary colors in couplets, mixing them, and recursively applying the same combinatorial formula…. For the second, she repeated the operation, except she began with a different combination of primary colors in the first cell…. But here she constructed each cell as a separate stretched canvas that she affixed to all of the others at the back of the frames with small hand vises.[41]

Creating a pair of abstract canvases based on a single combinatorial system, Mayer demonstrated a firm grasp of the serial methods found in the Minimalist works of Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, and Frank Stella—methods theorized by Mel Bochner in his 1967 essay for *Artforum*, "The Serial Attitude."[42] However, feeling disconnected from and dissatisfied with this strictly formalist discourse, Mayer left SVA within two years.[43] An essay she wrote for an SVA class reveals that the only relevance she found in Minimalism was an understanding inflected by the musical philosophy of John Cage, particularly his principles of indeterminacy and change.[44] While Minimalist artists claimed to reduce their authorial control through a "spatial dislocation" affected by the literal objecthood of their installations' material properties and formats,[45] this ostensibly impersonal aesthetic was, at the same time, the result of absolute control—soon undermined by the artists' outsized personality and paradoxical desire to dictate how their work was read, experienced, and collected.

For Mayer, indeterminacy was more than a formal principle—it expressed a fundamental sense of transience and change. This understanding was profoundly shaped by her lived experience: the loss of her parents during her teenage years, and later, the deaths of friends and family members whom she commemorated in temporary monuments, such as in *Spell* (1978) and *Some Days in April* (1979).[46] In 1975, in search of her family history and identity, Mayer traveled to Europe, visiting art collections and cathedrals across Britain, France, Italy, and southern Germany, where her family had originated. Postcards, photographs, and notebook entries from the trip formed the basis of *Passages* (1976; Pl. 8), a thirty-eight-page artist's book composed of reproduced images, drawings, and handwritten texts arranged in collage.[47] These visual-textual "passages" weave ekphrastic reflections on art and architecture with fragments of family biography, meditating on how images, objects, and names survive, change, or disappear over time, shaping our access to the past.

From the outset, Mayer understood that transience could not be expressed by way of a system—an abstraction from reality with a set of premises—as was often the case in Minimalism and Conceptual art. Mayer asked, "How does one keep something really indeterminate without using a system?"[48] Process art, introduced to the public by the aforementioned 1969 Whitney exhibition, *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials*, offered one solution. In "Passing Thoughts," an unpublished text from November 4, 1978, Mayer cited Robert Morris's felt pieces, and the works of Alan Saret, Hesse, and Richard Serra, as inspirations for her experiments with fabrics as a sculptural material from the late 1960s to the early 1970s.[49] Unlike the Process artists' emphasis on spontaneity and their iconoclastic stance—what Marcia Tucker described as "anti-form," "anti-illusion," "non-symbolic, non-ordered, non-referential, non-realistic"— Mayer's work was defined by deliberate formal decisions, in which form, color, and volume each carried specific significance.[50] She also resisted essentialist readings of her fabric sculptures titled after historical women. While some (mostly male) critics insisted on reading the female figure into these works—for example, Lawrence Alloway sought how "the feminine figure is absent as well as present, missing as well as given," or Sondheim conceived them as "containers of the spirit … a revelation of essence"[51] —for Mayer, they were "a deliberate feminist gesture to connect these works to a large body of female experience, but not to any particulars, especially not to sex, as silly folk have chosen to read these works."[52]

Indeed, sculptures such as *The Catherines* (1972–73), *Hypatia* (1972), *Galla Placidia* (1973), and *Hypsipyle* (1973) (Fig. 2), formed part of the artist's broader feminist investigation into time, memory, and history. Their precarious and ever-shifting materiality—subject to the forces of air currents, gravity, and deterioration—suggest the historical elusiveness of women figures in patriarchal narratives. The productive interplay of translucency and opacity finds its clearest expression in the sculpture dedicated to Hypsipyle, the mythological queen of Lemnos who saved her father from the Lemnian women's massacre of men and bore two sons—though little else is known of her life. Here, satin, nylon, and dyed cheesecloth, in shades of purple, orange, pink, and ochre, hang on a movable, multi-part wooden armature, which, depending on the site of installation, produces varying degrees of folding and horizontal expansion. This abstract construction fuses the regal and the prosaic, evoking stage curtains, sails, or waves. *The Catherines*, likewise, consisting of fabrics attached to a serial structural support, invokes a possible matriarchal lineage linked by shared names. As these sculptures demonstrate, Mayer experimented with different methods of construction—hanging, knotting, draping, and layering—to create what she described as a sensually satisfying "visual complexity," a sense of "variety in unity" that encapsulates the tension between the individual experience and women's collective experience across times and places.[53] Two modalities of time co-exist: that of the present duration of viewing, and the infinitely receding and reverberating past gathered in the sheer power of the name. Adopting the formal expressions of indeterminacy, duration, and change from Process art, she imbued them with feminist, epistemological significance.

In her 1977 photo-essay, "Two Years," published in *Individuals: Post-Movement Art in America*, Mayer paired photographs of her sculptures with lists of women bearing the same name, from Catherine Sforza to Catherine of Valois, thereby establishing a serial rhythm.[54] Her methodical descriptions—"yellow-orange under lavender, lavender on yellow-green, lavender on green, green on lavender"—echo this visual and linguistic repetition.[55] The list form is crucial, however, for it reflects the iterative nature of memory and history; it could also serve as a "mode of discourse"—as Sondheim proposes in his introduction to *Individuals*, which itself replaces the usual editorial preface with a "list" of thought fragments. A list implies a looser, more spontaneous connection between its individual elements than the self-enclosed coherence expected of a linear narrative.[56]

Concurrent with her turn toward sculptural fabrics, Mayer contributed serial, text-based Conceptual art to three issues of *0 To 9*. Like Process art, Conceptual art offered another means of exploring authorship, indeterminacy, and change. Although Mayer was already familiar with serial methods from her

studies at SVA, it was within *0 To 9* that she began to experiment with the concrete properties of language and the magazine itself as an alternative medium for artmaking and exhibition.[57]

Nearly all of her contributions to the magazine reflect an expanded definition of art—one that incorporates the sequential and serial logic of the printed format alongside the viewer's active participation (through reading and physically flipping the page). For example, in "Untitled," published in Issue 6 (July 1969), Mayer investigated the conceptual interplay between visual and linguistic significations across three pages. On the first page, she drew a pear-like shape and listed three possible interpretations: "shape, line, boundary." On the second page, she overlapped the original shape with an identical one, generating two new interpretive sequences: "two shapes, two lines, two boundaries; three shapes, three lines, three boundaries; five shapes, five lines, five boundaries." On the third page, she connected the two shapes with a line, producing a new conceptual entity ("object") alongside a total of four possible sets of interpretation.

Other contributions directly experimented with the representation of temporal duration and change. In "Firecrackers" (Issue 5, January 1969), published in the same issue as LeWitt's seminal text, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," Mayer set herself the task of recording the firecrackers heard from her Broome Street apartment on Independence Day (1969; Fig. 3). Over four hours and ten minutes, she marked an "x" in a timetable each time she heard a sound and crossed out two rows when they became filled with x's. The resultant piece consists of both the instruction and execution, the latter featuring fifteen pages of alternating rows of x's and black lines that index time and the sonic rhythm of exploding firecrackers. Mayer would later apply the same method to record the time it took to smoke a packet of Chesterfield King Size cigarettes. Both works employ the serial method to represent an otherwise unrepresentable entity: the passage of time. In each, the final form of the work emerges from the unpredictable unraveling of an external event, with the artist positioned as a mere cataloguer of time.



Fig. 6. Adrian Piper, *Catalysis III* (1970), documentation of performance series, three black-and-white photographs, silver gelatin on baryta paper (prints approx. 1998), 16 1/8" x 16 1/8" each. Generali Foundation Collection-Permanent Loan to the Museum der Moderne Salzburg, © Generali Foundation, Photograph: Rosemary Mayer.

Mayer's contributions to *0 To 9* were crucial for her exploration of the "expanded field" of artmaking beyond the confines of the gallery or museum, as well as the so-called "dematerialized" forms that would prove formative to her "temporary monuments" series. In addition to turning to the magazine as a medium, Mayer also participated in *Street Works*, a conceptual intervention organized by *0 To 9* contributors John Perreault, Marjorie Strider (1931–2013), and Hannah Weiner (1928–1997). Fueled by widespread discontent with mainstream institutional structures and a rising call for alternative venues, *Street Works*—staged in several iterations—sought to construct "new ways of contacting the public" by situating art within "non-art" contexts, such as the streets of New York City.[58] The concept of "street work" drew on the antagonistic legacies of Dadaist street theater and 1960s experimental art forms, such as Allan Kaprow's Happenings, Fluxus actions, and Situationist dérives, all of which aimed to expand art's sociopolitical reach. It was further inspired by the militant activism of the Art Workers' Coalition and the vernacular practice of "street art." In 1969, the project unfolded over three installments, involving approximately one hundred announced or unannounced participants; documentation of selected contributions was published as a supplement to Issue 6 of *0 To 9*. In his *Village Voice* report on the project, Perreault described Mayer's piece, which involved disrupting systems of mail delivery by switching address labels from one side of the street to the other (1969; Fig. 4).[59] While her full intentions remain unclear, Mayer documented the work in *0 To 9* by listing the address changes she made (Fig. 5). The cascading sequence of lines—visualizing a highly serialized operation—mimics the kinetic force of her action within the urban grid. Like Smithson's contributions of maps and photographs elsewhere in the journal, the numbered address shifts correspond to spatial coordinates in the external world, effectively turning the magazine page into a "non-site."

Like Happenings, the sporadic pieces of "street works" occurred spontaneously (largely without prior notice, even though the organizers sent out seven hundred announcements).[60] As Perreault recounted, some works were interrupted

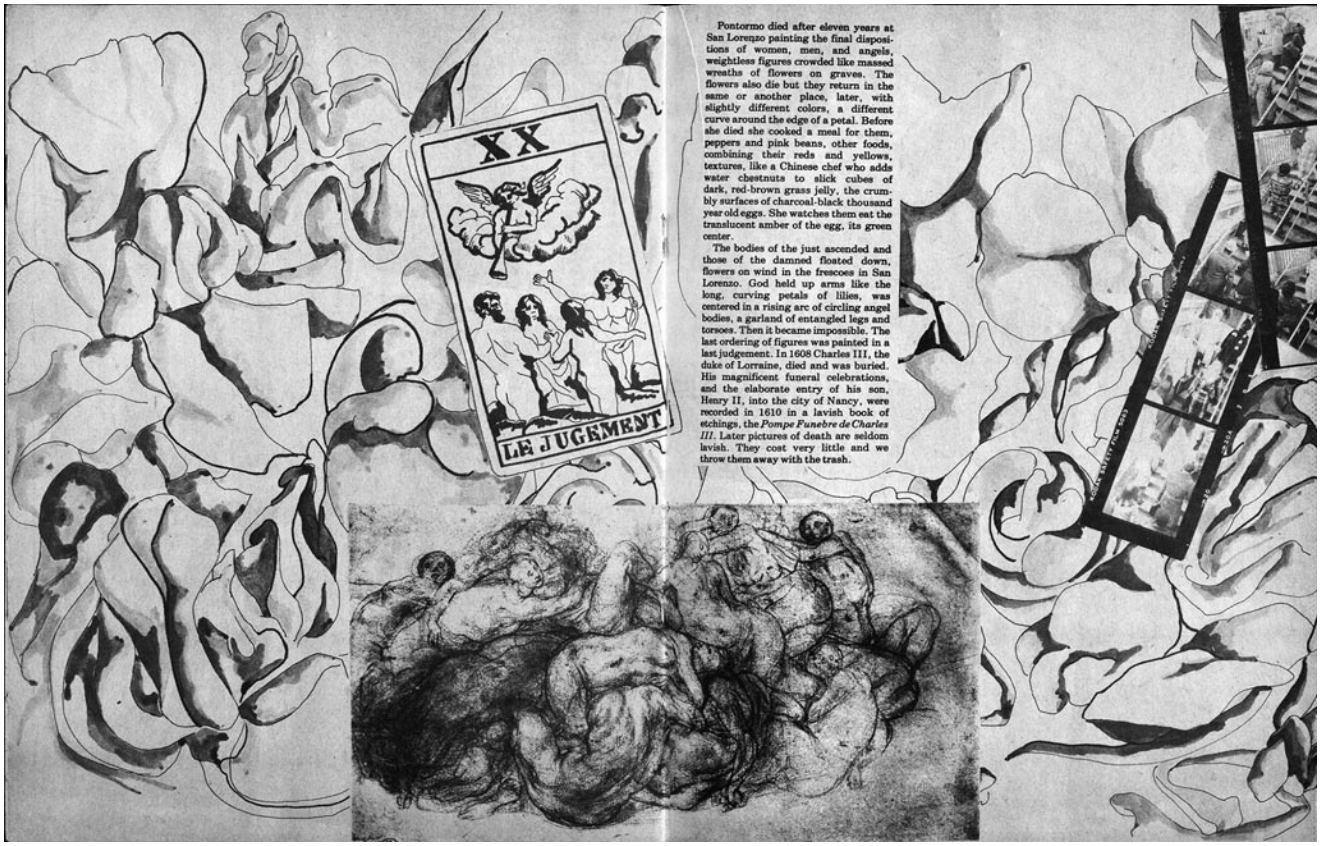


Fig. 7. Rosemary Mayer, detail of *Surroundings*, *Art-Rite* 15 (1977), page 13, offset-printed newsprint, 14" x 11". Courtesy of the Estate of Rosemary Mayer.

by the police, others passed largely unnoticed, and most were known only through word of mouth or artists' documentation. Lacking fixed physical boundaries, these works were, by nature, indefinite—their forms and actions contingent on the specific circumstances of their realization and reception.

Perhaps inspired by this foray into the street—a crucial site for gender and race identity formation, "passive and active transactions"—Mayer collaborated the following year with Piper on *Catalysis*, a performance series in which Piper traversed New York City, dressing or acting in ways that challenged social norms.[61] Taking place as a sequence of five performances, the work was, in Piper's words, "uncategorized, undefined, non-pragmatic."[62] Mayer served as the photographer for two actions: in *Catalysis III* (1970; Fig. 6), where Piper painted her clothing with sticky white paint, affixed a sign reading "WET PAINT," and went shopping at Macy's department store. In *Catalysis IV*, Piper rode the subway with a large red bath towel stuffed in her mouth.[63] While visualizing and documenting these otherwise "undefined" actions, Mayer's photographic acts subtly reinstated the boundary between performance and audience, between art and life.

Catalysis reveals a key divergence between Piper and Mayer's definitions of art—a debate Piper addressed in her essay "Answering Rosemary Mayer (How I Can Call It Art When There's No One There To See It)."[64] For Piper, a work of art exists in relation to the art category and to the world at large, whereas for Mayer, the presence of an audience is necessary to complete the work.[65] Whether in *Street Works* or *Catalysis*, documentation for Mayer becomes as important as the event itself, functioning to certify, describe, and distribute the work's existence. Even as she grew disenchanted with the commercialized artworld, Mayer did not embrace the notion of "dematerialized" art—fully aware of its internal contradictions. For her, material, spatial, and visual qualities encoded meaning and crucially shaped the communicative exchange between artwork and viewer, operating as non-linguistic, epistemological vessels. Indeed, in their 1968 article introducing the term "dematerialization"—defined as "an ultra-conceptual art that emphasizes the thinking process almost exclusively"—Lippard and John Chandler acknowledged the contradiction at its core. They observed how this apparent rejection of form was quickly undermined by a new formalism of order (in the hands of largely male, white conceptualists), in which "order itself, and its implied simplicity and unity, are aesthetic criteria."[66] It soon became clear that Conceptual artists were still producing objects that participated in the economy of institutional accumulation and capital flows.

Straddling such contradictions, Mayer never sought to fully "dematerialize" her art. As she wrote in a characteristically poetic and elliptical manner: "I wanted to make things float away, dissolve, and still be there."[67] Her delicately balanced sculptures—initially made of fabrics, later of glassine and rods—were meant to capture a tension that, for Mayer,

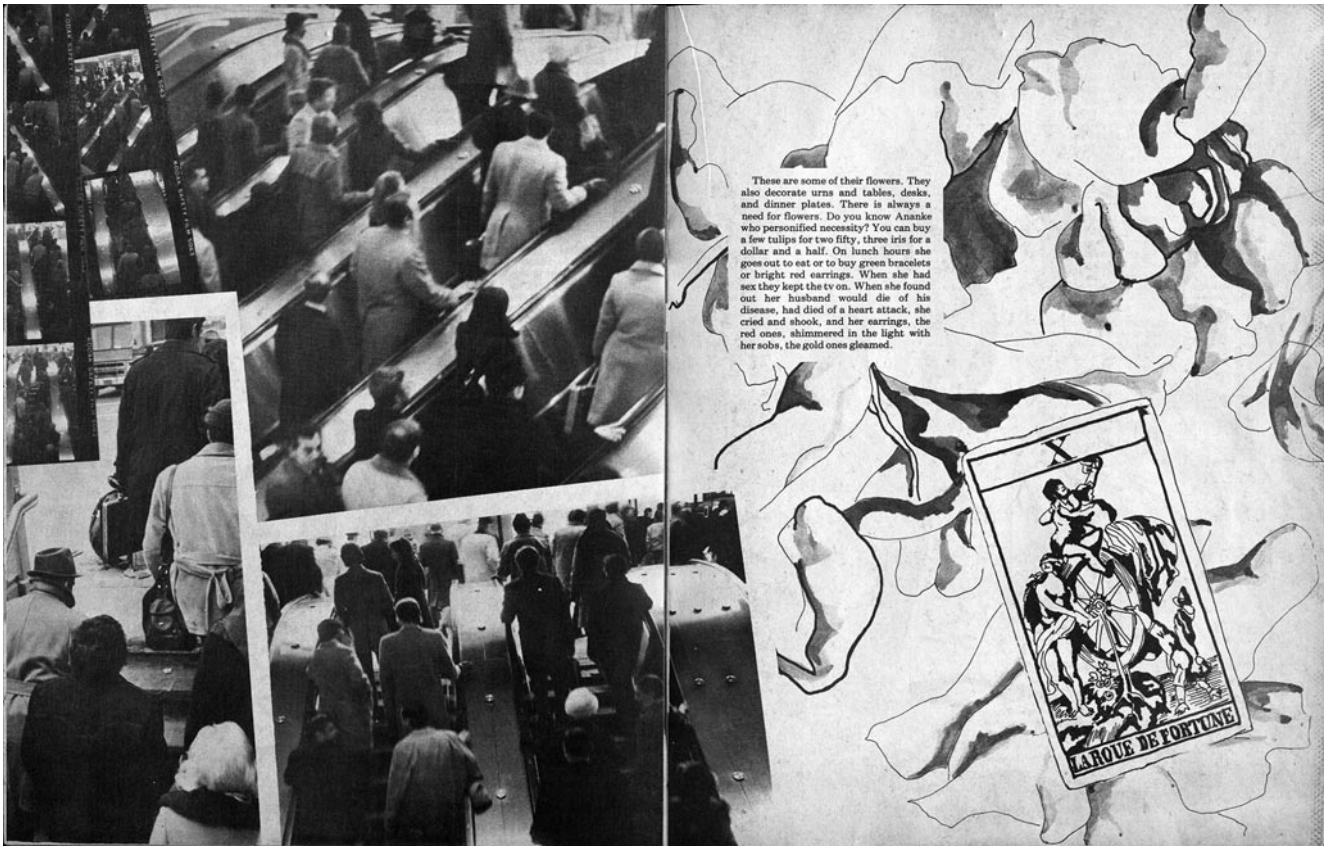


Fig. 8. Rosemary Mayer, detail of *Surroundings*, *Art-Rite* 15 (1977), page 14, offset-printed newsprint, 14" x 11". Courtesy of the Estate of Rosemary Mayer.

reflected the state of contemporary life while evoking the possibility for spiritual transcendence. In her words, her sculptural works are "related to Serra's concerns but present a fragility, a delicacy, where it is just possible for them to continue existing;" they evoke the threshold between life and death.[68]

While adopting the formal precariousness of Process art and Postminimalism, Mayer deployed these strategies to signify the material conditions of women's lives and those of other oppressed communities. This sense of precarity was rooted, at least in part, in her own lived experience as a woman artist. She struggled financially throughout her life, collecting unemployment for extended periods in the early 1970s and modeling for other artists to make ends meet.[69] In "Some of My Stories," an article published in the "Coming of Age" issue of *Heresies* in 1988, Mayer wrote fragmentary biographical accounts about herself and the women she knew.[70] Unhappy marriages (including her own experience of obtaining a divorce in Mexico), unfulfilling careers, prolonged silences, psychological struggles, and the accompanying recourse to drugs, alcohol, or early death constituted a shared experience among these women. If the 1970s is often remembered today as a period of hard-won if uneven progress, Mayer viewed it instead as a "period of exhaustion, withdrawal, desperation."[71] She may have been alluding to the post-1960s economic downturn and the psychological reckoning that followed the US withdrawal from Vietnam. In one journal entry, she recalls being woken up by a truck and dreaming of "an end of civilization bec. of a bomb dream.… We kept running out of things & figuring out substitutes. Then we dec. all the women had to keep having babies."[72]

In this context of change and instability, journaling—recording daily thoughts and experiences—offered Mayer a way to maintain a sense of control and alleviate anxiety. In her diaries, she frequently used lists to document, almost obsessively, her daily activities, diet, locations visited, and people she interacted with. Her entry for Friday, July 6, 1968, recounts:

raspberries
canvas
Vito
Cathy
the New York Times
pumice stone
things I have to do tomorrow
peppers
my lunch
aspirin
chestnuts
Mex floor cleaner
Adrian
wine and brandy
firecrackers[73]

The seriality inherent in listing or cataloguing—a rhythm of "one thing after another," in Donald Judd's words—provided a kind of anchoring, like the steady ticks of a metronome, to the fragmentary but concrete matters of Mayer's everyday life, which often formed the source material for her art.[74] Her peculiar attention to the quotidian was likely shaped by her participation in the consciousness-raising efforts of radical feminists in the early 1970s. She attended weekly "women's meetings," where women artists, writers, and other cultural workers discussed personal topics—relationships with men and women, professional frustrations, and sexual experiences—subjects long considered too private, taboo, or unworthy of serious attention. While she had mixed feelings about their political efficacy, Mayer nevertheless found strength and a sense of community in these gatherings.[75]

The substance of daily life and the list form are carried over into Mayer's artwork and essays. For example, *Some of My Stories* and *Two Years* both relate individual lives to collective experiences through lists, anecdote, and biography. The latter—a canonical mode of history writing conventionally used to convey male genius—is here repurposed as a feminist, political medium.[76] The accumulation of lives highlighting women's shared experiences maps an alternating rhythm of repetition and variation. Seriality, in Mayer's case, does not primarily allude to the logic of mechanical reproduction or unconscious drives—as in Hesse's remark that "If something is absurd, it is much more exaggerated, much more absurd if it's repeated."[77] Rather, the serial form enacts a feminist temporality shaped, on the one hand, by the dailiness that governs women's relation to objective time, and on the other hand, by the fate of cyclical repetition that has historically inscribed the female figure. Precisely in exposing these temporal patterns of oppression, Mayer developed a literary language of resistance—one that sought liberation from the patriarchal regime of time.

Mayer's approach to the quotidian shares close affinities with the poetry of her sister, Bernadette, with whom she maintained a close relationship from the mid- to late 1970s. Bernadette's poetry collections, such as *Studying Hunger* (1975) and *Midwinter Day* (1982), are characterized by diaristic, nonlinear, and fragmentary snapshots of everyday life. Her first major work of art, *Memory* (1971–72), uses both language and photography to capture the mental and temporal flux of daily experience.[78] For a month in 1971, Bernadette took a roll of film each day and kept a journal, producing over a thousand photographs and two hundred pages of text. When *Memory* was exhibited in February 1972 at Holly Solomon Gallery, the photographs were arranged in a grid and accompanied by a six-hour audio recording of the poet reading her journal. Like Rosemary's drawings, texts, and images in *In Time Order*, space and time become enmeshed in an attempt to capture subjective temporality—an experience that, unlike clock time, is decidedly unquantifiable and unrepresentable.

Rosemary also drew parallels between her own era and sixteenth-century Italy, describing them as "two periods that follow times of consensus, in which art has to proceed from particular experiences."[79] The end of Minimalism marked, for her, the collapse of the last universal narrative—art could no longer operate in isolation from its social and historical contexts. The feminist movement further contributed to this sense of fragmentation, or what some have described as the emergence of a postmodern sensibility.[80] In the sixteenth century, the High Renaissance ideals of harmony and balance, represented by Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo, gave way to the elongated forms and compositional tension of Mannerism. Mayer became especially interested in Jacopo Pontormo, a key figure of the Mannerist style. Despite his technical brilliance and prestige (he studied under Leonardo and received commissions from the Medici), Pontormo was described by Giorgio Vasari, in his *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (1550; 1568), as a melancholic eccentric, preoccupied with death and resistant to classical norms of order and proportion.[81] Mayer likely saw in Pontormo a kindred spirit—not only for the striking parallels in their biographies (both lost their parents young and valued diligence and solitude), but also for his decorative sensibility and acute expression of time and decay.

In 1975, Mayer, a trained classicist and polyglot, began work on the first English translation from the vernacular Italian of Pontormo's diary and letters to Benedetto Varchi. The result, *Pontormo's Diary*, was published as a paperback in 1982 by Out of London Press, produced in collaboration with Julia Ballerini and Richard Milazzo, and accompanied by images of Mayer's own artwork.[82] Her original manuscript took the form of a velvet-clad artist's book, in which her handwritten translation is overlaid with annotations and drawings based on Pontormo's surviving preparatory sketches for the fresco cycle at the Church of San Lorenzo in Florence (1976; Pl. 9). For her essay "Portae," included in the 1982 volume, Ballerini observes how Pontormo's frescoes defy the "controlling logic" of Filippo Brunelleschi's early Renaissance architecture.[83] His figures resist the classical ideals of order and restraint, instead dramatizing "the mutability of flesh wherein the only stability is the certitude of change."[84] Mayer herself described the figures as "entangled corpses," their flesh possessing a "slippery surface like dead flowers in water."[85] In this sense, Vasari's portrayal of Pontormo as morbid and eccentric seems apt: under his hand, human bodies are animated equally by life and by the imminence of death.

Pontormo's diary, consisting largely of mundane details and events, reveals his acute awareness of time. As Mayer notes, almost self-reflexively, Pontormo "uses his diary to know which days were passed, what foods had kept him well enough to work … very little happens—just dreams and buying food or colors."[86] The painter's unusual preoccupation is echoed by art historian Elizabeth Pilliod, who writes: "Pontormo's detailed but terse account of food eaten, symptoms of illness, the weather, encounters with friends and other artists, and most famously, his bowel movements, is unlike any other artist's diary."[87] Like Mayer, Pontormo used his diary as a form of timekeeping, counting days by recording his diet or simply writing down a date as a placeholder for time's passage:

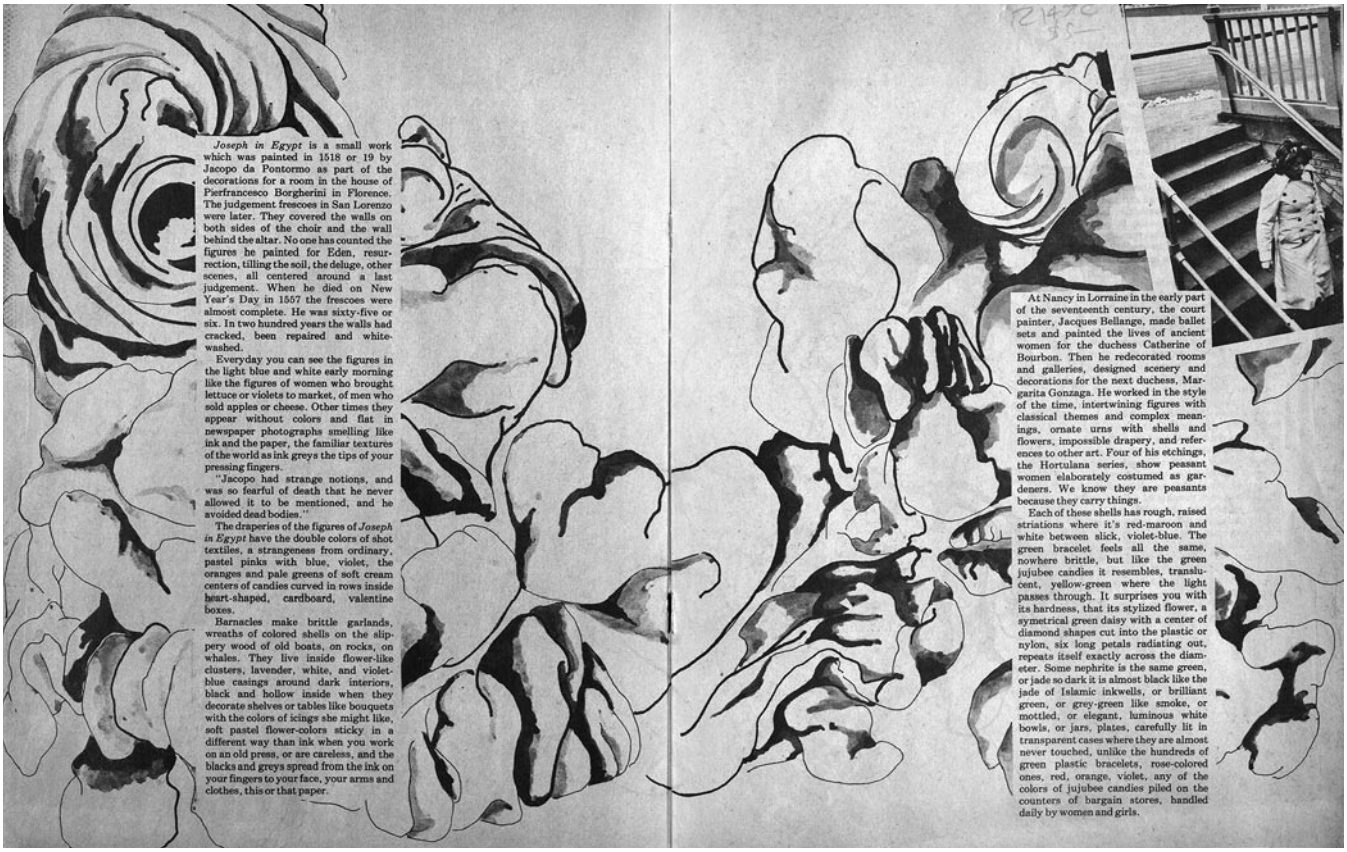


Fig. 9. Rosemary Mayer, detail of *Surroundings*, *Art-Rite* 15 (1977), page 5, offset-printed newsprint, 14" x 11". Courtesy of the Estate of Rosemary Mayer.

Monday evening I ate a salad that was of borage and a half-lemon, and 2 eggs in an omelet.

Tuesday evening I was all hoarse and ate a rosemary bread and an omelet and a salad and some dry figs.

Wednesday, fasted.

Thursday evening, a rosemary bread, an omelet of one egg and a salad and 4 quattrini of bread, in all.

Friday evening, salad, pea soup, and an omelet and 5 quattrini of bread.

Saturday, butter, salad, sugar, and an omelet.

On the 1st of April, Sunday, I ate lunch with Bronzino. And in the evening I did not eat dinner.

Monday evening I ate boiled bread with butter and an omelet and 2 ounces of torte.

Tuesday.

Wednesday.

Thursday.

Friday.

Saturday I went to the tavern: salad and omelet, and cheese, and I felt good.

Sunday I ate lunch and dinner with Bronzino.[88]

It goes on. The absolute ordinariness and bland repetition reduce an artist's life to its most basic terms—food, ingestion, the body—all archived according to the days and weeks of the Gregorian calendar. Mayer, too, routinely recorded what she ate, how many cigarettes she smoked, the quality of her sleep, and her dreams. In Pontormo's work, she saw herself: journaling and artmaking were both balancing acts, offering stability amidst uncertainty, like "a thing to hold onto the way kids hold balloons, but not like the balloons, like the tension in the hand that holds the cord."[89] To echo the famous second-wave feminist slogan, the quotidian—a vehicle for the personal—was political.[90] These ideas and reflections informed her making of *Surroundings* the following year, in which the mundane takes center stage, becoming a site of critical investigation and potential liberation.

In 1973, the independent publication, *Art-Rite*, was founded by Edit DeAk, Walter Robinson, and Joshua Cohn, three young writers and critics who had met in Brian O'Doherty's seminar on art criticism at Columbia University. With O'Doherty's help, they secured funding from the National Endowment for the Arts to launch a magazine of their own, one unencumbered by the formal conventions of art writing and publishing.[91] With its half-tabloid, staple-bound newsprint pages and hand-stenciled logo, *Art-Rite* positioned itself as a direct counterpart to glossy magazines like *Artforum*. During its five-year run, thirteen themed issues were published,

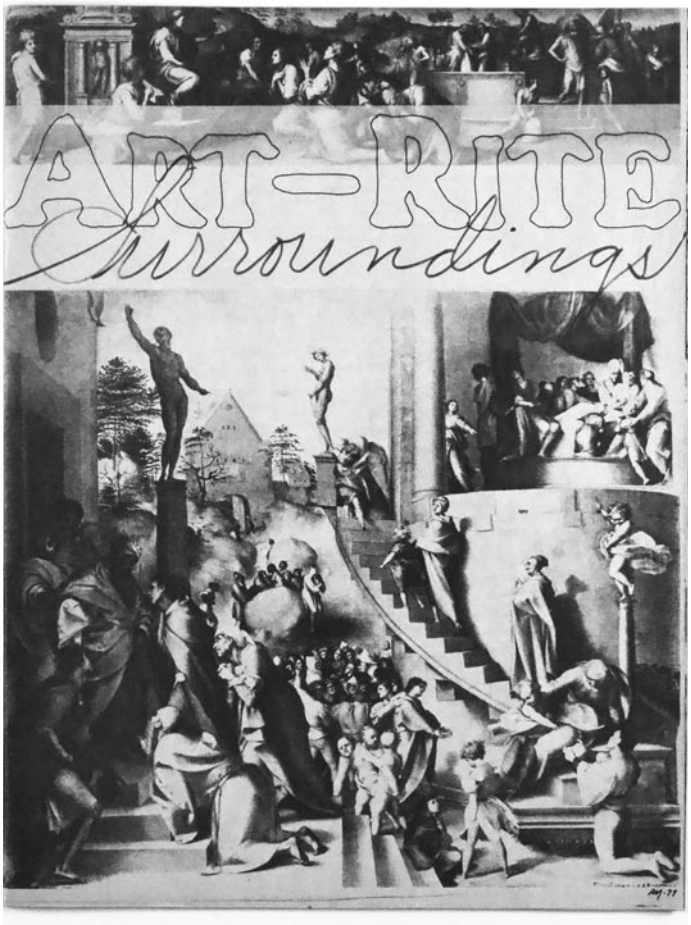


Fig. 10. Rosemary Mayer, cover of *Surroundings*, *Art-Rite* 15 (1977), offset-printed newsprint, 14" x 11". Courtesy of the Estate of Rosemary Mayer.

featuring experimental art criticism, interviews, statements, and reviews that foregrounded artists' voices. For its final installments, the editors commissioned six artists—including Mayer, Image Bank, Judy Rifka (b. 1945), and Alan Suicide—to each create a twenty-four-page issue, collectively known as the "Dollar Art Series."[92]

Mayer's issue of *Art-Rite*, titled "Surroundings," is an intricate textual collage that weaves together an auto-fictional narrative about two women, Florence and Marie; episodes from the lives of Pontormo and fellow Mannerist Jacques Bellange; and descriptions of the life cycles of flowers and barnacles (1977; Fig. 7). The text is literally "surrounded" by offset reproductions of Bellange's prints, Pontormo's drawings, and Mayer's own sketches that evoke flowers and fabrics. These are further layered with reproductions of Tarot cards and filmstrip photographs she took of commuters around subway stations in New York. This stacking of drawings, images, photographs, and typescript creates a dynamic composition that exceeds the limits imposed by the page's borders. On one level, she invokes the Cubist- and Dada-derived tradition of collage, juxtaposing disparate materials and media—even though the printing process visually "levels" them—and importing fragments of daily life such as the Tarot cards and the commuter photographs.[93] On another, echoing cinematic montage, these visual collisions serve narrative and critical ends through both associative links and, by contradistinction, deliberate clashes of fragments.[94]

As the first work to incorporate Mayer's own photography, *Surroundings* signals her determined turn toward "society in general" and, more specifically, toward workers' relationships to time, beauty, and economics.[95] The text reveals that Florence and Marie—former colleagues of Mayer when she had an office job—are middle-aged women navigating economic precarity. Florence, "a big woman," has lost her house to a swindler and helps support a husband with Parkinson's, partly through her daughter's income after the daughter left school to work. Marie, the eldest daughter of immigrants, studied stenography and typing, graduated at sixteen, and works as a secretary at a rubber company. The two women's names resonate symbolically elsewhere in Mayer's work. In *Passages*, she notes that Florence is both her middle name and her godmother's name, while Marie was her mother's name and later that of her niece, Bernadette's daughter. Mayer also writes about Florence, the Medici city, and Marie, daughter of Duke Francesco I de' Medici, who was named after his late sister.

In *Surroundings*, the serial rhythms of time—first explored in *0 To 9* and in Mayer's journals—reappear as an almost obsessive catalogue of the two women's everyday lives:

> Florence leaves work every day at 5 P.M. Near the end of each day she calls her apartment and talks about what to have for dinner. On Mondays and Thursdays, when the stores are open late, she sometimes goes shopping after work. Occasionally she goes to the library to look for books on decorating, new things to cook, and how to entertain in a small apartment. She says, 'Good night, girls,' as she leaves the office. Tomorrow she is bringing us photographs of the fourteen room house she sold.… Marie made clothes for herself, and for her daughters. She made drapes and slipcovers. She went out shopping every morning. She kept the house very clean. She visited Dottie up the block. She prepared the meals every day. She bought sheets and woolen blankets at sales and she stored them on the high shelves of a closet near the kitchen. They bought a car and took the children on picnics and to the beach on weekends. The children were well-behaved and always did well in school. She did embroidery or crocheted or read travel books. She wanted a house in the suburbs.[96]

Mayer narrates the women's daily activities in the third person yet with diaristic immediacy. Their lives revolve around the domestic sphere: replacing and rearranging furniture, cooking, decorating, crocheting. Their employment is repetitive, tedious, and time-consuming. Florence, for example, is an assistant in photo licensing and archiving—"replacing someone who was very careless," she must "check up on a backlog of old requests or pictures." Marie, after raising two children and then losing her husband, becomes a legal secretary.[97] Mayer's impersonal, exhaustive prose mirrors the

cyclical and repetitive rhythms she describes, underscoring how women's experience of time and money—earning, buying, and losing it—is shaped by entrenched, gendered structures of labor and care.

Mayer's textual narrative about Florence and Marie is paralleled by her serial photography (1977; Fig. 8), which reprises aspects of her 1970 photographs of Piper's *Catalysis*: both series were shot in spaces of transit (subways and streets), and in each the photographer adopts the stance of a detached observer, avoiding direct eye contact. The commuters—photographed from behind or above—remain largely anonymous, though a few close-ups reveal figures identifiable as women (1977; Fig. 9). Formal echoes further link the subway escalators to the sweeping staircase in Pontormo's *Joseph with Jacob in Egypt* (1518) reproduced on the cover (1977; Fig. 10). Just as Joseph leads his sons up the steps to their dying grandfather, Jacob, Mayer's commuters ascend into the city's daily grind, while the moving crowds recall the famine victims in Pontormo's panel who petition Joseph for relief.[98] As Pontormo used stairs as a compositional device to combine different moments of Joseph's life into a single, continuous narrative, Mayer's subway stairs stand in for the symbolic passages between home and office—the threshold linking women's domestic and public roles. Mayer likely saw Pontormo's oil-on-wood painting, and its five companion pieces, during her 1975 trip to Europe, when she visited the National Gallery in London. This painting cycle—"the best work Jacopo did in his life," according to Vasari[99]—was part of a series of fifteen panels depicting episodes from the life of Joseph, created to decorate the marital bedchamber of the Florentine banker Pierfrancesco Borgherini and Margherita Acciaiuoli.[100] The painting alludes to the traditional values of family, loving conduct, and fiscal acumen—ideals that Florence and Marie negotiate.[101]

Mayer's photographs in *Surroundings* resonate with Sekula's *Untitled Slide Sequence* (1972; Fig. 11), a sequence of black-and-white photographs documenting workers leaving the aerospace factory at General Dynamics Convair Division after a day's shift. As if to stress the importance of the work's serial structure, Sekula insisted it be presented as a continuously looping 35mm slide show. Later, speaking on what he called "dissembled movies," Sekula positioned his photography against the illusionistic effect of popular cinema.[102] Mayer, too, strips photography of idealizing conventions, positioning her images somewhere between the candid snapshot and the voyeuristic gaze. By capturing successive movement in short sequence, she generates a serial rhythm reminiscent of Sekula's slideshow, in which "the regular click of the passing slide relates the time of the projected slides to that of the factory clock."[103] Both *Untitled Slide Sequence* and *Surroundings* probe the boundary between work and leisure, public and private spheres (Sekula would later extend this inquiry into the domestic realm with *Aerospace Folktales*, made the following year).[104] If Sekula breaks the representational frame by confronting the worker's gaze, Mayer maintains a distance from her subjects. And while both artists take the condition of the working class as their subject, Sekula situates his camera in a markedly male space—the factory—whereas Mayer makes visible the lives of working women in the city. As Mayer's writing makes clear, for women, the line between work and leisure is blurred—the unscripted demands and roles imposed by patriarchal society render both serialized.



Fig. 11. Allan Sekula, detail of *Untitled Slide Sequence* (1972), installation of slide-projection at 13-second intervals: 25 black-and-white slides, 35mm; total duration 17:20 mins; black projection-space, projection area approx., edition 3/5. Courtesy of the Estate of Allan Sekula and the Generali Foundation.

The representation of women's living conditions in *Surroundings* complements Martha Rosler's video work, such as *The Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1970), in which she enacts a trenchant feminist critique of domestic roles through a dramatization of the serial pulse. Taking on the persona of the American middle-class housewife in the modern kitchen, Rosler demonstrates the use of kitchen tools by mechanically repeating actions—grating, cutting, pressing, chopping—accompanied by verbal cues. The unsettling effect of her repetitive enunciations and movements serves to expose the suffocating roles assigned to women while instilling a quiet sense of revolt. Appropriating the format of the cooking show—a popular television genre marketed at housewives—Rosler critiques both its content and its addictive appeal. In dialogue with *Surroundings*, the domestic sphere, traditionally hidden from public view, becomes a central site of political inquiry. As Mierle Laderman Ukeles (b. 1939) declared in her *Manifesto for Maintenance Art* of 1969, "Maintenance is a drag; it takes all the fucking time (lit.) The mind boggles and chafes at the boredom. The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs = minimum wage, housewives = no pay."[105] Indeed, much of Florence and Marie's lives revolve around what Ukeles calls "maintenance work": the shopping, cooking, cleaning, embellishing, decorating, cataloguing, and correcting the mistakes of careless (male) bosses. These repetitive tasks are equally marked by spatial confinement and temporal stagnation—and are, in economic terms, deemed unproduct-

ive. This modality of time has inscribed women for centuries; one need only recall Penelope in *The Odyssey*, who spent her days weaving and unweaving a shroud as she waited for her husband's return.[106]

If Rosler's serial exposition of oppression inscribed women's temporal lives, Mayer further dramatized it through aesthetic means, where seriality functioned not merely as a constraint but as a language of resistance. Serial rhythm, after all, belongs to the temporality of boredom and irrational speech ("babbling," for instance, as Rosalind Krauss put it); within capitalism, it is unproductive even as it produces (writing, artmaking, and other functionless yet creative endeavors); in the framework of teleological history, it engenders a temporal stasis that interrupts the forward thrust of progress.[107] In *Surroundings*, Mayer mobilizes serial rhythm as an affirmative mode of action: Florence and Marie are almost constantly *doing* things. Their labor is echoed in the artist's own—evident in the accumulation of writing, drawing, and printing. Mayer's exhaustive account of the women's lives is punctuated by descriptions of Pontormo or Bellange's lives and works, as well as the life cycles of flowers and barnacles. These moments of ekphrastic excess generate spatial dilation within time, extending it to the point of rupture. The composition's visual density—its layering of images, text, and drawings—foregrounds Mayer's process of making, which, though labor-intensive, refuses the demands of capitalist productivity. It is also worth recalling that despite her prolific output, Mayer faced persistent financial difficulty throughout her life.

Sekula, who knew of Mayer through Kitchel, praised *Surroundings* in a letter dated December 24, 1977, particularly for its stylistic and thematic deployment of "decoration." Sekula wrote: "I like [S]urroundings, perhaps because it defies a more coherent metaphysical space than most collage writing. You've got decoration, embellishment down as both banal and utopian (maybe ecstatic is a better word), as encoded in the dead artifacts of the renaissance high culture and inscribed as well in daily life, in the cheesiest commodified arrays of assembly line goods."[108] For Sekula, the hybridity of images and styles in *Surroundings*—engraving, ink drawings, mass-produced Tarot cards, oil paintings, frescos—constitutes a pointed critique of high culture, collapsing its boundaries with kitsch through the mechanics of mass reproduction. He admired what he called a strategy of "calculated preciousness," perhaps referencing Mayer's delicate decorative drawings that work to undo the physical and symbolic authority of both the printed page and Old Master works. The "cheesy" commodities also appear in Florence and Marie's cheap pleasures: green bracelets, red earrings, an inexpensive folding table for entertaining, "a few tulips for two fifty, three iris for a dollar and a half."[109] Gwen Allen has noted that *Art-Rite* was reportedly named after a brand of mass-produced Christmas ornaments.[110] In this light, Mayer's issue exemplifies the magazine's antagonism towards the hierarchies of the mainstream art world.

The strategic acts of "embellishment," to use Sekula's word, are not only encoded in the decorative style of Mayer's drawings and the works of Pontormo and Bellange, but also in the women's daily activities. Mayer describes how Florence goes shopping for furniture and clothing, while Marie "made clothes for herself and for her daughters" or "made drapes and slipcovers." Both women are introduced by their appearance: "Florence is a very big woman.… She never wears pants and always wears stockings;" "Marie had broad shoulders and small hands with lovely nails."[111] Self-adornment and beautifying the home function as self-enforced forms of labor, maintaining their desirability for men (Mayer herself went on diets to lose weight). Yet Mayer also gestures toward the possibility of transcending these constraints. As Sekula observed, embellishment in *Surroundings* is both "banal"—marking the social delimitations of gender—and "utopian," as if such acts of embellishment could prolong time and counter its erosive force by attempting to revert aging and defer death. Seriality refers at once to the temporal structures dictating women's everyday lives and to practices *in* time that offer routes of escape. In her famous 1964 essay "Notes on 'Camp,'" Susan Sontag proposed the subversive potential of embellishment—as a vehicle of artifice, seduction, and duplicity.[112] In *Surroundings*, too, the decorative—whether in the protagonists' lives or in Mayer's elaborate drawings—signals a marginalized aesthetic that privileges texture, surface, and sensuous pleasure over the zero-sum logic of capitalist exchange.

In his 1978 essay, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," written the year after his letter to Mayer, Sekula called for a critical documentary practice that renounces complicity with the mass spectacle and "points openly ... to possibilities of concrete social transformation."[113] Citing Rosler's *The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems* (1974–75), he praised contemporary photographers who "openly bracket their photographs with language, using texts to anchor, contradict, reinforce, subvert, complement, particularize or go beyond the meanings offered by the images themselves."[114] While Mayer did not identify as a photographer, and Sekula did not mention her in that essay, their earlier exchange may have provided inspiration. The complex composition of *Surroundings*—with its entwined visual and textual elements, its very *in*coherence, as Sekula has emphasized—serves to deconstruct dominant representations of women and construct, in their place, a transformative feminist temporality.

Mayer reinterpreted contemporary formalist discussions of indeterminacy, seriality, and duration through the lens of women's experience, articulating their subjective relation to time (*chronos*) and history (*kairos*). This reframing runs across her conceptual works, fabric sculptures, writings, and image-text compositions—most notably, *In Time Order*, *Passages*, and *Surroundings*. In this richly intermedial body of work, time manifests in the formal and literary techniques of repetition—listing, biography, reproduction; in her descriptions of the dailiness and cyclical rhythms that shape contemporary women's lives; and in her elaborate drawings that evoke robes, flowers, and fabrics associated with rituals that establish alternate temporal orders while also indexing the artist's

practice *in* time. By adopting seriality as an expansive concept—one that binds together form, language, and materiality while enabling multiple, coexistent temporalities—Mayer mapped a familiar aesthetic trope onto women's relation to the patriarchal temporal regime, deploying it as a language of critique and resistance. •

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Notes

1. Roland Barthes, quoted in Giorgio Agamben, "What Is the Contemporary?," in *"What Is an Apparatus?" and Other Essays* (Stanford University Press, 2009), 40.
2. Agamben, "What Is the Contemporary?," 39–54.
3. Agamben, 41.
4. See Anna C. Chave's critique of Minimalism's relation to structures of gender, power, and authorship in Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts* 64, no. 5 (Jan. 1990): 44–63; and "Minimalism and Biography," *Art Bulletin* 132, no. 1 (March 2000): 149–63.
5. David Getsy, "Introduction," in *Queer Behavior: Scott Burton and Performance Art* (University of Chicago Press, 2022), 1–42.
6. Scholars, editors, writers, and curators who have contributed to developing interest in Rosemary Mayer's work include but are not limited to Eva Birkenstock, Katie Geha, Julia Klein, Laura McLean-Ferris, Jenny Nachtigall, Tausif Noor, Lisa Pearson, Jacob Robichaux, Jenni Sorkin, and Amy Tobin.
7. Select exhibitions of Rosemary Mayer's work include: "Rosemary Mayer: Conceptual Works and Early Fabric Sculptures, 1969–1973," Southfirst, Brooklyn, NY, 2016; "Rods Bent Into Bows: Fabric Sculptures and Related Drawings, 1971–1973," ChertLüdde, Berlin, Germany, 2020; "'Pleasures and Possible Celebrations': Rosemary Mayer's Temporary Monuments, 1977–1981," Gordon Robichaux, New York, 2021; "Rosemary Mayer: Ways of Attaching," Swiss Institute, New York, NY; Ludwigforum, Aachen, Germany; Lenbachhaus Museum, Munich, Germany; Spike Island Gallery, Bristol, UK, 2021–22.
8. Rosemary Mayer, announcement for "Spell," unpublished typescript, Jan. 16–Feb. 3, 1977, The Estate and Archive of Rosemary Mayer, Brooklyn, NY (hereafter RM Estate/Archive).
9. I refer to these works collectively as "image-text" to underscore their resistance to fixed categories of medium, wherein image and text operate in an irresolvable referential loop, characterizing a kind of hybridity that, as Jérôme Gâme argues, privileges the generative process of hybridization over any finalized products. See Jérôme Gâme, "Genealogies of the Porous: The Text/Image Relationship from Representation to Differentiation," in *Porous Boundaries: Texts and Images in Twentieth Century French Culture*, ed. Jérôme Gâme (Peter Lang, 2007), 9–30.
10. Barbara Cavalière, "Rosemary Mayer," *Woman Art* (Winter/Spring 1977): 45–46.
11. For a brief history of *Tracks*, see Jo Melvin, "Tracing the way to work: *Tracks*, a journal of artists' writings, New York 1974–1977," *Sculpture Journal* 17, no. 1 (June 2008): 89–93, http://dx.doi.org/10.3828/sj.17.1.8. Gwen Allen offers a brief description of *Whitewalls* in Allen, "Appendix: A Compendium of Artists' Magazines from 1945 to 1989," in *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (MIT Press, 2011), 311. Archives of past issues and records of The Heresies Collective can be found at Rutgers University Special Collections and on the Heresies Film Project website, http://heresiesfilmproject.org/archive/.
12. Mayer exhibited *Pontormo's Diary* and *Passages* in a two-person show with artist Nancy Kitchel at Franklin Furnace in fall 1976 (Sept. 24–Oct. 14), where they also gave a slide lecture about their work on October 5, 1976. See Franklin Furnace Calendar of Events for September–December, 1976, specificobject.com; and "Chapter One: 1976," in *The Letters of Rosemary and Bernadette Mayer, 1976–1980*, ed. Marie Warsh and Gillian Sneed (Swiss Institute, 2022), 27.
13. Marie Warsh and Gillian Sneed, "Diaries of an Artist: The Art and Writing of Rosemary Mayer," *Brooklyn Rail* (April 2016), https://brooklynrail.org/2016/04/criticspage/art-and-writing-of-rosemary-mayer/.
14. Gillian Sneed, "'Pleasures and Possible Celebrations': Rosemary Mayer's Temporary Monuments, 1977–1982," in *Temporary Monuments: Works by Rosemary Mayer, 1977–1982*, ed. Marie Warsh and Max Warsh (Soberscove Press, 2018), 15–17.
15. Marie Warsh, "Editor's Introduction," in Rosemary Mayer, *Excerpts from the 1971 Journal of Rosemary Mayer*, 2nd ed., ed. Marie Warsh (Soberscove Press, 2020), 17–21; Sneed, "Introduction," in *Letters of Rosemary and Bernadette Mayer*, 13–21.
16. Adrian Piper, "Rosemary Mayer (1943–2014)," *Artforum* (Dec. 11, 2014), https://www.artforum.com/columns/adrian-piper-on-rosemary-mayer-1943-2014-222497/.
17. Sol LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," *0 To 9*, no. 5 (Jan. 1969): 3–5.
18. Robert Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," *Artforum* (Sept. 1968): 44–50. Responding to Smithson, Mayer wrote in her journal: "He seems to think paint is a disease of 'leaky minds,' studios are obsolete & brushes, canvases as hopeless lost causes. Maybe I like lost causes. I wish I were Henri Matisse." Mayer, unpublished journal entry, Sept. 13, 1968, RM Estate/Archive.
19. Jenny Nachtigall, "Our Lady of the Flowers: On Rosemary Mayer's Ways of Almost Not Making Sculpture," in *Rosemary Mayer: Ways of Attaching*, ed. Eva Birkenstock, Laura McLean-Ferris, Robert Leckie, and Stephanie Weber (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, 2022), 33.
20. Rosemary Mayer and Nancy Wilson Kitchel, "Contexts," *Tracks* 3, no. 1 & 2 (Spring 1977): 82–90.
21. Mayer and Kitchel, 87.
22. Mayer and Kitchel, 90.
23. The discussion of Mayer's contemporaneity was first explored in preparatory meetings between the author and Tausif Noor for the online webinar, "Artmaking/Writing as Timekeeping," April 4, 2024, Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, New York.
24. Announcement, "Pleasures and Possible Celebrations," Jan. 15–Feb. 16, 1979, organized by Rosemary Mayer, RM Estate/Archive.
25. See François Hartog, "Chronos, Kairos, Krisis, The Genesis of Western Time," The Eighth History and Theory Lecture, *History and Theory* 60, no. 3 (Sept. 2021): 425–39; Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey, ed. Werner Hamacher (Stanford University Press, 2005), 65–68; Agamben, "The Time that Is Left," *Epoché* 7, no. 1 (Fall 2002): 1–14; Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Schocken Books, 1968; 1985), 253–64.
26. Pamela Lee, "Preface," *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (MIT Press, 2004), xii.
27. Smithson, "Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space," *Arts* (Nov. 1966): 28–31; repr. *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (University of California Press, 1996), 36–37.
28. Smithson, 35; Smithson, "Ultra-Moderne," *Arts* (Sept./Oct. 1967): 31–33; repr. *Collected Writings*, 62–65.

29. As Cornelia Butler acknowledges in her catalogue essay for *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution* (organized by Butler, 2007–09), the curatorial need for a set of "selection criteria" goes against the attempt of the exhibition to decenter the feminist canon. See Butler, "Art and Feminism: An Ideology of Shifting Criteria," in *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Lisa Gabrielle Mark (MIT Press, 2007), 21.
30. Arguably, her underrepresentation in mainstream feminist art historical accounts was also related to her absence from the art market of the 1990s. During this period, she took up full-time teaching and writing jobs to support herself. While she continued to make art, the scale became more modest due to limited time and resources. See Sneed, "Introduction," in *Letters*, 20.
31. For a brief history of feminist art publications in the US from the 1970s to 1990s, see Carrie Rickey, "Writing (and Righting) Wrongs: Feminist Art Publications," in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact,* ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 120–29.
32. Documentation (photographic or otherwise) and ephemera constitute the primary record for the following works by Mayer: *Veils* series (1971), *Snow People* (1979), *Wax People* (1979–80), *Moon Tent* (1982), and "Temporary Monuments."
33. Mayer, statement from Wednesday, January 27, 9:30 PM, 1971, *Excerpts*, 31.
34. Griselda Pollock, "Screening the Seventies: Sexuality and Representation in Feminist Practice—a Brechtian Perspective (1980)"; repr. Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity, and the Histories of Art*, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2008), 212–68.
35. Butler, "Art and Feminism," 16.
36. Cultural feminism gained force in the mid-1970s, eclipsing the radical feminist movement in the late 1960s. Art historian Morgan Falconer described it as a move "away from directly opposing male dominance" and "toward the creation of a female counterculture, a space from which male values might be banished and female values nurtured." See Falconer, "Touchstones: Lucy Lippard's *Overlay* and the Politics of Prehistory," *Art Journal* 82, no. 2 (September 2023): 24.
37. "A.I.R. 1972: Opening & Discussion," A.I.R. Gallery, https:// vimeo.com/352984911. Mayer: "I think things are changing so fast that in a year or two there'll be no longer a need for this kind of cohesive feminism, but I think then, A.I.R. has still got it all over people by making a cooperative endeavor viable as quality art.… I mean feminism is the immediate issue, but I think the more important thing about A.I.R. in terms of the whole artworld rather than one part of it, is that artists can get together, choose other artists, and show what work they wanna show." Transcribed by the author.
38. A.I.R. Gallery Opening Announcement, 1972, RM Estate/Archive.
39. Jenni Sorkin, "The Feminist Nomad: The All-Women Group Show," in *WACK!*, 460.
40. Mayer, letter to A.I.R. Membership, March 22, 1974, RM Estate/Archive. "Lack of involvement with the gallery and lack of concern for individual members were primary causes of the kind of disillusionment which led me, and I think, Nancy and Harmony, to leave the gallery.... A.I.R. is not just a place to have a show, it is also a commitment to work to alter the situation of women artists."
41. Piper, "Rosemary Mayer."
42. Mel Bochner, "The Serial Attitude," *Artforum* 6, no. 4 (Dec. 1967): 28–33.
43. Piper, "Rosemary Mayer."
44. Mayer, unpublished typescript, 1968, RM Estate/Archive.
45. Kynaston McShine, "Introduction," in *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors*, exh. cat. (Jewish Museum, 1966), n.p. See also Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," *Artforum* (Feb. 1966): 42–44.
46. Mayer, "Passing Thoughts," November 4, 1978, RM Estate/Archive. "The evanescence of everything is a notion that has always appealed to me, perhaps because I lost my parents when I was young," Mayer wrote.
47. *Passages* was also published as a two-part essay in *Tracks*. See Mayer, "First Passages from a Text in Progress," *Tracks* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1976): 56–58; and Mayer, "Passages," *Tracks* 2, no. 3 (Fall 1976): 23–36.
48. Mayer, unpublished typescript, 1968, RM Estate/Archive.
49. Mayer, "Passing Thoughts," 2.
50. Marcia Tucker, "Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials," in *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials*, exh. cat. (Whitney Museum of American Art, 1969), 33.
51. Lawrence Alloway, "Rosemary Mayer," *Artforum* (Summer 1976): 36–37; Alan Sondheim, "Rosemary Mayer," *Arts* (Sept. 1975): 34. In contrast, both Roberta Smith and Aline Dallier read these sculptures as abstract endeavors; see Smith, "Rosemary Mayer," *Artforum* 12, no. 1 (Sept. 1973): 83, https://www.artforum.com/events/rosemary-mayer-2-233483/; and Dallier, "Le feminist art aux USA," *Opus International*, no. 50 (May 1974): 70–75.
52. Mayer, "Passing Thoughts," 2.
53. Mayer.
54. Mayer, "Two Years: March 1973 to January 1975," in *Individuals: Post-Movement Art in America*, ed. Alan Sondheim (E.P. Dutton, 1977), 191–212.
55. Mayer, "Two Years," 195.
56. Sondheim, "Introduction," 23.
57. See Allen, *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art*.
58. John Perreault, Art, *Village Voice*, May 1, 1969, 14–15.
59. Perreault.
60. Perreault.
61. Alexander Alberro, "Adrian Piper: In and Out of Conceptual art," in *Charting Space: The Cartographies of Conceptual Art*, ed. Elize Mazadiego (Manchester University Press, 2023), 44–55.
62. Adrian Piper, "Concretized Ideas I've Been Working Around" (Jan. 1971), in Piper, *Talking to Myself: The Ongoing Autobiography of an Art Object* (Entretien avec moi-même: L'Autobiographie évolutive d'un objet d'art) (Hossman / MTL, 1974), 53–55; Artist's book, 61 pp., offset-printed, sewn bound, first edition, 20.4 x 13 cm, The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York.
63. Lucy Lippard and Adrian Piper, "Catalysis: An Interview with Adrian Piper," *The Drama Review* 16, no. 1 (March 1972): 76–78.
64. Piper, "Answering Rosemary Mayer (How I Can Call It Art When There's No One There To See It)" (Nov. 1972), in Piper, *Talking to Myself*, 20–21.
65. Piper, "Answering Rosemary Mayer," 20–21.
66. Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," *Art International* 12, no. 2 (Feb. 1968): 31–36; repr. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, ed., *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (MIT Press, 1999), 48.
67. Mayer, "Passing Thoughts," 4.
68. Mayer, 3.
69. Money was a constant issue for Mayer. She writes in her journal, on Jan. 27, 1971: "I have to do something abt.$ [….] There's no more & bills to pay. & Vito to repay." Mayer, *Excerpts*, 31. She recorded collecting unemployment multiple times in 1971; Mayer, *Excerpts*, 59, 63. Mayer modeled for Raphael Soyer for many years and the two became close friends, see *Excerpts*, 59, n19.
70. Mayer, "Some of My Stories," *Heresies #23: Coming of Age* 6, no. 3 (1988): 58–60.

71. Mayer, "Passing Thoughts," 5.
72. Mayer, journal entry for Wed. [Aug. 11], *Excerpts*, 110.
73. Mayer, unpublished manuscript, July 5, 1968, RM Estate/Archive.
74. Donald Judd, "Specific Objects" (1964), *Arts Yearbook* 8, New York (1965): 74–82; repr. *Art in Theory: 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 812.
75. In her journal, she wrote candidly about how at times she attended women's meetings more for socializing or to pass "empty time," and at other times, "A lot of what gets said […] I think everybody already knows & doesn't need to be said (but I guess someone needs to say it)." Mayer, *Excerpts*, 28, 97, 140.
76. The story form was frequently used by radical feminists for political rallying. For example, Maggie Doherty wrote about the abortion story "as a public narrative told for political reasons," in Doherty, "The Abortion Stories We Tell," *Yale Review* (June 24, 2022), https://yalereview.org/article/dobbs-roe-abortion-stories.
77. Cindy Nemser, "An Interview with Eva Hesse," *Artforum* (May 1970); repr. Robert Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism: American Art of the Decade* (Out of London Press, 1977), 62.
78. Janique Vigier, "Bernadette Mayer: Bernadette Mayer remembers *Memory* (1971)," *Artforum* (May 25, 2020), https://www.artforum.com/columns/bernadette-mayer-remembers-memory-1971-247702/.
79. Mayer, "Passing Thoughts," 4–5.
80. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, "Introduction: Feminism and Art in the Twentieth Century," in *The Power of Feminist Art*, 10.
81. Giorgio Vasari, "The Life of Jacopo da Pontormo, Florentine Painter [1494–1556]," in *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford University Press, 1998), 394–413.
82. Rosemary Mayer, Julia Ballerini, and Richard Milazzo, *Pontormo's Diary* (Out of London Press, 1982).
83. Ballerini, "Portae," in *Pontormo's Diary*, 22.
84. Ballerini.
85. Mayer, *Pontormo's Diary*, 141.
86. Mayer, "1977," in *Pontormo's Diary*, 87.
87. Elizabeth Pilliod, "Ingestion / Pontormo's Diary: Food and the Management of the Artist's Melancholy," *Cabinet Magazine* 18 (Summer 2005), https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/18/pilliod.php.
88. Pilliod.
89. Mayer, "1977," 86.
90. Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation, Major Writings of the Radical Feminists*, ed. Shulamith Firestone (Radical Feminism, 1970), 76–77. Duke University, Repository Collections & Archives, Women's Liberation Movement Print Culture, https://repository.duke.edu/dc/wlmpc/wlmms01039.
91. See exhibition, *From the Margins: The Making of Art-Rite*, April 21–June 21, 2023, Printed Matter, Inc., New York, https://www.printedmatter.org/programs/events/1613.
92. *From the Margins*; Allen, "The Magazine as An Alternative Space: *Art-Rite*, 1973–1978," in *Artists' Magazines*, 129.
93. Susan Sontag discusses Happenings' reinterpretation of this tradition in her essay, "Happenings: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), 262–74.
94. Sergei Eisenstein, "Word and Image," in *The Filmic Sense*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (Meridian Books, 1957), 3–68.
95. Mayer, "Passing Thoughts," 242.
96. Mayer, *Surroundings*, *Art-Rite* #15, 9.
97. Mayer, 8.
98. Frederick Mortimer Clapp, *Jacopo Carucci da Pontormo: His Life and Work* (Yale University Press; Oxford University Press, 1916), 21–24; 157–58.
99. Vasari, "The Life of Jacopo da Pontormo," 402.
100. Another panel from the series, "Scenes from the Life of Joseph," from *Jacob's Brothers Beg for Help* (or *Jacob Revealing Himself to His Brothers*), is reproduced above the title.
101. Salvatore S. Nigro, *Pontormo: Paintings and Frescoes* (H.N. Abrams, 1994), 15.
102. Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973–1983*, ed. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Robert Wilkie (The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), 106. Sekula described his *Aerospace Folktale* (1973) as "disassembled movies," composed of "three separate narrative elements: images, a spoken 'sound track,' and a written commentary." While *Untitled Slide Sequence* contains no textual components, its looping slide format similarly disrupts the continuity of conventional filmic narrative.
103. Benjamin J. Young, "Arresting Figures," *Grey Room* 55 (Spring 2014): 102–3, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43832265.
104. Young.
105. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "Maintenance Art Manifesto 1969!": Proposal for an exhibition, "CARE," box 1, folder 2, Mierle Laderman Ukeles papers, 1965–2018, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.
106. This idea was inspired by the discussion in Angela Rosenthal, "Penelope and the Weaving of Narrative," in *Angelica Kauffman: Art and Sensibility* (Yale University Press, 2006), 15–41.
107. Rosalind Krauss, "LeWitt in Progress," *October* 6 (Autumn 1978): 55, https://www.jstor.org/stable/778617.
108. Sekula, unpublished letter to Rosemary Mayer, Dec. 24, 1977, RM Estate/Archive.
109. Mayer, *Surroundings*, 15.
110. Allen, "The Magazine as An Alternative Space," 125.
111. Mayer, *Surroundings*, 9, 7.
112. Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'" (1964), in *Against Interpretation*, 275–92.
113. Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," *The Massachusetts Review* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1978): 862, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25088914.
114. Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism," 866.

Precarity in Pop

Chryssa's Cent Sign

By Gemma Cirignano



Fig. 1. Chryssa, *The Gates to Times Square* (1964–66). Courtesy Buffalo AKG Art Museum. © Estate of Chryssa, National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York. Image courtesy Dia Art Foundation.

> *I hate PENNIES. I wish they'd stop making them altogether. I would never save them. I don't have the time. I like to say in stores, 'Oh forget it, keep those pennies. It makes my French wallet too heavy.'….The only time YOU LIKE A PENNY is when you need ONE MORE.*
>
> —Andy Warhol, 1975[1]

After centuries of discrete financial regulation of the circulation of art, Pop surfaced money as a blunt symbol of capitalist America in the late 1950s.[2] Manifestations of currency, in the form of banknotes, dollar signs, and portraits of Wall Street financiers, made their way into the iconography of contemporary art.[3] The new commodity culture of New York, fraught with faulty technologies disguised behind glittery advertisements, supplied abundant fodder for aesthetic, material, and critical investigations by artists. The Greek-born Chryssa Vardea (1929–2013), known artistically by her first name, endeavored on a nearly two-decade fixation with the United States' lowest monetary denominator: the cent.[4] When Chryssa moved to Manhattan in 1958, a newly maritally separated, immigrant woman, she quickly learned about the precariousness of life in the US. Her repeated iconographic analysis of the cent sign—in sculptures, prints, and drawings—contend with the penny's obsolescence as if to express her own fear of devaluation, living and working during the socio-political context of the Cold War in New York City.[5] Despite the logistical, financial, and psychological difficulties of her large-scale, industrial, material-based practice, the sizes of her cent sign sculptures grew alongside the artist's precarity in the city.[6]

Chryssa's retrospective lecture at the Evanston Art Center in Illinois, on April 21, 1981, marks a rare moment of public candor about her precariousness in New York. She boldly introduced her talk with the following revelation:

> Even when my works were sold out, which they did, my expenses for making them and my primitive survival were hardly covered. I had to face approximately 26 times the fear of eviction with sculptures, large metal sculptures and also neon sculptures, which made this fear to be thrown in the streets even more intense.[7]

The threat of eviction introduces a shared liminality between the cent sign's value and Chryssa's life in New York. Although a single cent may hold the so-called power to change a business's solvent status, from the red to black—that is, profitable—the operations still remain dependent on and limited by the dollar

and the fiduciary monetary system under which it operates.[8] Similarly, the combined whims of the art market and costly art materials, coupled with Chryssa's visa status, gender, and sexuality, imposed invisible labor barriers, both artistic and financial, in her efforts to achieve economic freedom.

Notably, the Dia Art Foundation's 2023 exhibition catalogue, *Chryssa & New York*, is the first publication to define Chryssa as a queer artist. In his contributing essay, art historian Jonathan Katz places her within a tradition of twentieth-century European feminist intellectuals, whose structuralist outlook on language informed their fragmentation, and *queering*, of it. He describes Chryssa's use of signs as "language deployed not to communicate but to interrogate the conditions of communication."[9] Conceived as a case study on *The Gates to Times Square* (1964–66; Pl. 10 and Fig. 1), this article considers the conditions by which Chryssa investigated the cent sign from the perspective of a postwar immigrant from Greece, where the drachma (₯) was the official currency at the time. Her queer, foreign outlook on US symbols empowers her to redefine the cent sign from mere monetary symbol to emblem of the unexpected precarity immigrant artists faced in the rising age of neoliberal globalization.

Born in Athens, Chryssa lived through the rise and fall of Ioannis Metaxas's regime, the Italo-Greek War, the occupation by Axis Powers, and the subsequent Greek Civil War (1946–49), which decimated the nation's economic resources.[10] She pursued a career in social work at the age of eighteen, but quickly became disillusioned by the nation's bureaucracy when the Greek government prioritized the restoration of churches over homes for their citizens after a seismic earthquake, and she abandoned her heroic mission in favor of an art education.[11] Her early exposure to the self-serving biases of the political sphere, and its strategic economic maneuvers, left a mark on her.

After a brief period in Paris, Chryssa moved to the US to be with her then-husband, the artist Jean Varda, in 1955.[12] On her way to Varda's houseboat in San Francisco, she made a portentous visit to New York.[13] Not yet mythologized by the passage of time, the modern electric energy of Times Square, lined with intricately bent, illuminated neon tubes, instantly enchanted the Athenian artist.[14] In New York, the glimmering possibilities of success in art and life that have lured countless immigrants also compelled Chryssa to leave Varda and return, in 1958, to pursue her full-time artistic career.[15] Despite his disappointment, Varda set her up with an apartment at 863 Broadway, where she lived for the following eight years.[16]

Chryssa frequently walked north the twenty-eight blocks from her apartment, located just above Union Square on Fourteenth Street, to Times Square, and recorded her steps in a notebook with drawings of storefront signs and billboards that caught her attention.[17] In an interview, she compares the impact of the triangular city-square's advertisements to that of a foreign script: "I saw Times Square with its lights and its letters, and I realized it was as beautiful and as difficult to do as Japanese Calligraphy."[18] This capitalist lexicon of Latin letters, numbers, and symbols, as alien to the Greek immigrant as Japanese calligraphy, required discipline for her to translate. She redrew and reinterpreted each sketched sign-fragment until the letter or symbol became unique and abstracted with new meaning, a process that often took her months.[19] Despite her "queering" of letters, to borrow again from Katz, the cent sign maintained its straight, capitalist legibility.

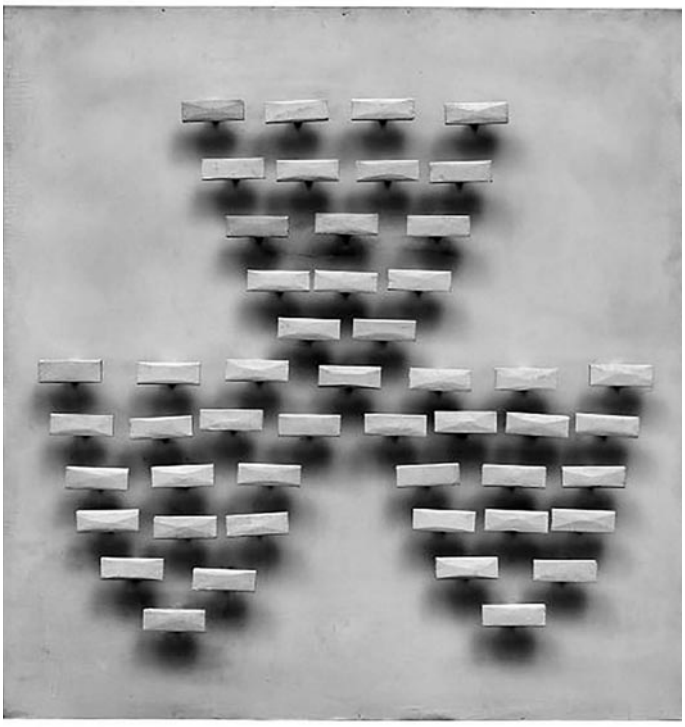


Fig. 2. Chryssa, *Projection #2* (1960), metal, paint, and wood, 35 3/8" x 34" x 2 1/2". Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, The Joseph H. Hirshhorn Bequest, 1981. © Estate of Chryssa, EMΣT | National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens.

Before neon light, Chryssa harnessed the city's natural light and commercial motifs in her *Projections* (1957–60; Fig. 2), a series of metal and plaster assemblages with protruding nail-like forms that aptly projected a shadow onto their surface. Along with her ongoing series of *Newspaper* prints, Chryssa quickly garnered the attention of New York's art world.[20] In 1961, she earned two major solo exhibitions: first at Betty Parsons Gallery (January 10–28, 1961), leading to her earliest representation by a major gallery, and second at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (November 14–December 17, 1961).[21] The artist's reverence for the US "commercial capital" of Times Square, akin to the reverence many tourists and visitors experience before the Acropolis, captivated critics, such as Nicolas Calas, a Greek-American poet who wrote a glowing spread about her Guggenheim exhibition, that concludes, "Chryssa was visited by the gods!"[22]

Chryssa's early success provided her with the financial resources to push her investigation of American commercialism further through the material properties of neon light itself. She explained her transition to neon:

> I attempted to project light and shadow by casting forms which existed in the signs themselves. But I found this approach to light rather static.... Then I decided to utilize the energy of the light itself.[23]



Fig. 3. Chryssa, Untitled sketch (c. 1964–1966). Photo reproduced in Pierre Restany, *Chryssa*, trans. John Shepley (Harry N. Abrams, 1977).

Chryssa described the luminosity of Times Square's neon signs as if they contained the aura of a work of art, an aura classified earlier by German-Jewish critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin as the value of a work of art in its uniqueness.[24] However, the electricity of Times Square in the 1960s produced an artificial substitute for an aura activated by capitalist motives, which Benjamin termed, relatedly, the "phony spell of a commodity."[25] Despite the square's proliferation of commodity advertisements, for Camel Cigarettes and Coca-Cola, the bustling hub was actually an information and services economy.[26] In 1966, when pedestrians saw "7¢" painted on a newsstand sign, they knew it corresponded to the price of a daily issue of the *New York Times*, and when they encountered "25¢" bent into neon lights, they automatically understood the form of entertainment dancers offered inside.[27] Not surprisingly, the employees and clients of the surrounding corporate headquarters often traversing the area, sometimes became paying customers of its burgeoning sex and entertainment industries.

After Chryssa's numerous rejections from unionized sign fabricators, due to her gender and nonunion status, Milton of Milton Signs agreed to teach the artist neon and metal typography, or, as she called it, the "ABCs of the sign language."[28] She likened her time inside Milton's neon workshop, watching fabricators craft glowing signs, to a form of cultural entertainment akin to Broadway productions, whose Baroque theaters lined the blocks adjacent to Times Square.[29] Neon fabricators, like actors, perform dynamic physical movements—heating, bending, and blowing into glass tubes before bombarding and filling them with a noble gas recipe, most commonly neon or argon.[30] Without membership to the union, Chryssa depended on male trade workers for access to neon fabrication materials, facilities, and technical knowledge. She overcame this patriarchal labor barrier, however, and began a career-long practice of sketching and materializing the commercial landscape of New York's neon signs.

Chryssa returned to neon its aura of authenticity when she removed or stripped the artifice of "capitalist greed" from her sign fragments. Even so, the costly sculptural transition to outsourced industrial fabrication outweighed any surplus in funds she had received from her growing gallery sales, and such demanding financial investments became a point of contention between the artist and her gallerists. She left Betty Parsons in late 1962, and exhibited briefly at Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery, before signing with Pace Gallery in 1964.[31] A letter from the artist's lawyer, Lewis Harris, to Arne Glimcher of Pace, on April 14, 1966, illustrates the persisting severity of her financial anxiety. Harris writes:

> I must remind you that Chryssa has urgent financial problems. First, she must pay suppliers and fabricators in connection with the works that have already been sold. Secondly, she needs a modest amount of money for her own subsistence. If she does not get an apartment at once, psychologically I think that Chryssa will be completely and totally unable to work.[32]

In the same letter, Harris argues that given the $50,000 fabrication budget Pace allotted Louise Nevelson (1899–1988), Chryssa's request to increase her fabrication budget from $1,000 to $5,000 would be a mutually beneficial decision.[33] Although the question of whether Pace abided by Harris's demands remains unanswered in the gallery's archive, Chryssa left the gallery shortly after her second solo exhibition in 1968 on litigious grounds.[34]

Despite frequently insufficient funds, Chryssa defied the social pressures of a system that prioritized commodification and continued to utilize costly industrial materials.[35] At first, she sought out the most affordable foundries, and in 1964 she established a private studio in a vacant warehouse in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Here, she could fabricate many of her sculptures herself, which not only saved her the cost of paid labor but increased her artistic freedom. When she required additional assistance to weld and assemble large metal sculptures, she hired laborers who sought temporary employment to receive their unemployment benefits.[36]

From 1964 to 1966, Chryssa lived predominantly in her studio while she created her monumental, ten-cubic-foot metal and neon sculpture, *The Gates to Times Square* (1964–66). As a culmination of her sign sketches, *The Gates* embodies her finalized alphabet of one hundred thirty-two unique letter fragments displayed in four connected, planar, and ascending vertical layers. The final layer features original reclaimed fragments, which she sourced from a local scrapyard.[37] In her discussion of precarious practices in contemporary art, art historian Anna Dezeuze terms such postwar trans-

formations—of discarded garbage into new, desirable art objects—"junk aesthetics." These acts serve as a form of politically precarious decision-making in a consumer culture that thrives off planned obsolescence, that is, a finite lifespan.[38] Chryssa's self-constructed alphabet of sketched fragments and discarded signs spotlight the paradox implicit in her depiction of excess through the representation of lack. She goes a step further when she subverts not just any commodity but the mechanisms of signage whose sole purpose is to advertise the value of other commodities.

In *The Gates*, much like a Times Square advertisement, Chryssa replicates her alphabet three or four times, in sheet metal and neon, in the sculpture's second and third strata. She collaborated with the neon fabricator John Goodleaf, of Broadway Maintenance Corp., to bend and bombard its icy blue argon-mercury tubes.[39] Her application of commercial-grade neon technology demonstrates the artist's genuine admiration for the craftsmanship of sign manufacturers. A major fabricator of Times Square's signage in the 1960s, Serota transformers were not typically available for public purchase, yet *The Gates* displays them. Chryssa also employs the glass tube supports of large, multilayered, commercial neon signs between her neon tubes, even though the scale of her design did not functionally require them.[40] These formal decisions and her collaboration with commercial fabricators resulted in a sculpture that not only references American advertising as a central subject but likewise shares its materiality.

The primary plane of *The Gates* is introduced by two halves of a stainless steel, uppercase letter "A," framed by a pair of textured aluminum cast wings, each supporting at the top a plexiglass box filled with cut-out stencils for the sculpture. Although these now brittle rolled plans remain in sealed cases, a series of photographs of the artist, published in Pierre Restany's 1977 monograph, *Chryssa,* document the creation of those sketches. Among these photographs, a vigorously shaded cent sign dominates the composition of a drawing on Chryssa's desk (Fig. 3).[41] The artist's singular hand reveals itself in her slight modulation of the commercial symbol: the spine of the "c" curves slightly downward as if pulled by the weight of gravity, and rather than fully intersecting the letter, vertical lines extend from either end to keep intact its hollow interior. Despite its low resolution, the photograph marks the beginning of the artist's recuperation of the cent sign.

The backward or inverted cent sign from Chryssa's sketches remains the only unfragmented motif in *The Gates* (Pl. 11 and Fig. 4), the presence of which, as the lowest denomination of currency in Chryssa's sculpture, perhaps alludes to the concurrent degeneration of Times Square throughout the mid-1960s—from the site of America's greatest advertising to the city's sexual underbelly, when both straight and queer patrons had begun to overtake its prime real estate.[42] Although the humble cent sign was absent from its grand, high-rise neon billboards, it proliferated in illuminated sex-shop windows, where plugs for peep shows, adult films, and "GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS" promoted low prices of just twenty-five cents.[43]



Fig. 4. Chryssa, *The Gates to Times Square* (1964–66). Courtesy Buffalo AKG Art Museum. © Estate of Chryssa, National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York. Image courtesy Dia Art Foundation.

Without any allusion to bodily figuration, Chryssa evokes the seductive, seedy hypnosis of Times Square in the central crevasse of *The Gates*, by seemingly luring the visitor to walk into and enter the "A"—an act, in fact, encouraged in the work's inaugural installation during the artist's first solo exhibition at Pace Gallery in 1966 (Fig. 5).[44] Writing about Chryssa's presentation, the neon fabricator matt dilling likens this formal break or opening to Times Square's "shadow side as a transient space," which ascribed anonymity and thus safety to those who traversed these city blocks.[45] While this interactive feature does not appear in subsequent installations of *The Gates*, the work's engulfing scale and reflecting light continue to mediate the gender dynamics and queer freedoms at play in Times Square throughout the 1960s.

As she maneuvered her way around New York's art world, Chryssa recognized the mechanisms by which her social



Fig. 5. Chryssa, *The Gates to Times Square* (1964–1966), photograph of inaugural installation during the artist's first solo exhibition at Pace Gallery, New York, c. 1968. Photo: Howard Harrison.

currency directly impacted her financial currency. Despite her inclusion in early Pop exhibitions, for instance, in *Beyond Realism* at Pace in 1965, she constantly contended with male fabricators and Pop critics' perceptions, which ignored the gendered role of labor in contemporary consumerism.[46] Although most of Chryssa's work is not explicitly identity-driven, her participation in the 1960s fight for women's rights was made apparent in *Pill* (c. 1970), a sculpture of an unlit, blue glass tube featuring full packs of birth control pills (*Time Magazine* commissioned it for the cover on the anniversary of the contraceptive). Chryssa's cover was ultimately not used, a frustration she shared in her aforementioned Evanston Art Center talk. In the same paragraph, she described herself as "beyond political compromise."[47]

In the 1960s and '70s, the artist's most active decades in New York, women earned fifty-seven to sixty-one cents to the dollar of male earnings in the US, a prominent pay disparity in the art world.[48] In her letter to friend and patron Dominique de Menil, Chryssa expressed the desire to "view the works of my contemporary man or woman artists under the same conditions," having noticed how many more books art historians had published about her male contemporaries.[49] She navigated the male-dominated trends of Pop and Minimalism in New York alone, often as an unrepresented artist with an educated understanding of, as she writes, "the commercial side of the art world with its investment values: gallery groupings and their establishing auction values and prices."[50] Without the support and influence of an established gallery, however, the artist witnessed her value within the economics of the art world dwindle by the late 1960s.

Even with Chryssa's resourceful approach to *The Gates*, the artist's expenditures ultimately outweighed her sales. In his aforementioned letter, Harris refers to a discussion about reconsidering the commission for *The Gates*, since the standard fifty-percent split between artist and gallerist, which amounted to $25,000 each, would not cover the material and fabrication cost of the sculpture.[51] Later, when interviewed, an anxious feeling of resentment arose when Chryssa recalled how "All those pieces … have been for me a disaster, financially and in every way. When I work on a large scale, I must invest everything I have materially, and my entire existence, my health, in my work."[52] Her financial stress only increased when she parted ways with Pace in 1968, now fully responsible for fabrication, material, and warehouse bills. Although the prospect of displacement from her studio scared Chryssa, she voiced an even greater fear about how eviction may negatively impact her artwork's safety, particularly her fragile and massive metal and neon sculptures.[53] She described the "psychologica[l] traumas" of storing damaged artworks in her warehouse when sculptures were returned to her from exhibitions, and she could not fund repairs or proper conservation.[54] Shortly after, she relocated to a smaller studio at 712 Madison Avenue for the next four years, and relied on a storage unit for extra square footage.[55]

That same year, in 1968, Chryssa created the sculpture *Cents Sign Traveling from Broadway to Africa via Guadeloupe* (Pl. 12). The approximately three-and-a-half-feet-tall cube, in transparent gray plexiglass, houses two parallel rows of outlined, sans serif neon cent signs, eight equidistant signs repeated per row. The inclusion of four phosphor-coated neon tubes produces pairs of monochromatic cent signs—in warm shades of yellow and red on the left column, and cool shades of green and blue on the right. The tubes seamlessly connect to the base of the plexiglass box containing the electrodes, four transformers, and a sequencer. The sequencer animates the neon tubes to create a repeating eighteen-second cycle turning the yellow, red, green, and blue lights on in sequential order before turning off and on again.

Cents Sign Traveling from Broadway to Africa via Guadeloupe can be considered alongside a series of fifteen sculptures that individually reimagine many of *The Gates*'s neon sign fragments. Known collectively as the Studies for *The Gates*, Chryssa produced this series over the course of the next two

years. Twelve of the Studies exemplify a style Chryssa dubbed "neon boxes": enclosing the neon inside a specific container—"Plexiglass Grey #2164"— simulated the nightly environment of Times Square and effectively conjured the disorienting haze of city lights through the reflective quality of the boxes repeating the cent sign in all directions.[56] Despite *Cents Sign*'s formal resemblance to the Studies for *The Gates*, Chryssa excluded it from the series' object file.[57]

Chryssa's distinguished treatment of the cent sign motif versus her other fragments confirms its unique significance to the artist.[58] In *Cents Sign Traveling from Broadway to Africa via Guadeloupe*, the primary motif may be understood as leaving the comforting environment of Times Square's local information economy to confront its unstable value in the global market. Her uncharacteristically long, anecdotal title suggests an attunement to Cold War era economics, particular as it deconstructs a cent's change in value as it "moves" from the street she lived on in New York City, also home to Wall Street, to an island and continent she never visited.[59] Even as Chryssa rarely spoke of her ideological stance as it concerned American politics, her sculpture begins to betray a preoccupation with the rapid neoliberal globalization surrounding her. Nor did she publicly express or record her intention for *Cents Sign Traveling from Broadway to Africa via Guadeloupe*, however, as a resident of the financial capital of the world and former government employee, the artist educated herself about the state of global affairs. This point is supported by Chryssa's *Newspaper* prints (1961–63; Fig. 6), works elucidated by art historian Christine Poggi: "Given the power of the modern mass media during this period, no reconfiguration of a major newspaper could appear as a neutral act."[60] Chryssa integrated economic themes into her work as if to process her precarious survival in the increasingly expensive metropolis; consequently, she would have known about the promotion of the US dollar (and cent) to the world's reserve currency after World War II.[61] As the US GDP grew at an unmatched rate, the cent's buying power increased whenever it entered a less economically stable country, for example, in Greece, despite its depreciation in the local market.[62] *Cents Sign Traveling from Broadway to Africa via Guadeloupe* appears to parse the paradoxical identity of the cent's decreasing and increasing value in the local versus global economy, respectively.

Just one year after Chryssa completed it, in 1969, she created a second, much larger metal and plexiglass sculpture dedicated to the cent, *Cents Sign* (Pl. 13). This sculpture consists of a singular row of four vertically aligned, hollow, scarlet-red steel cent signs, atop a clear plexiglass base of equal height. The base contains five horizontal shelves, each with a congruent kelly green, enamel-painted cent sign. Scaled up to six-and-a-half-feet tall, the humble cent is transformed into a dominating form.

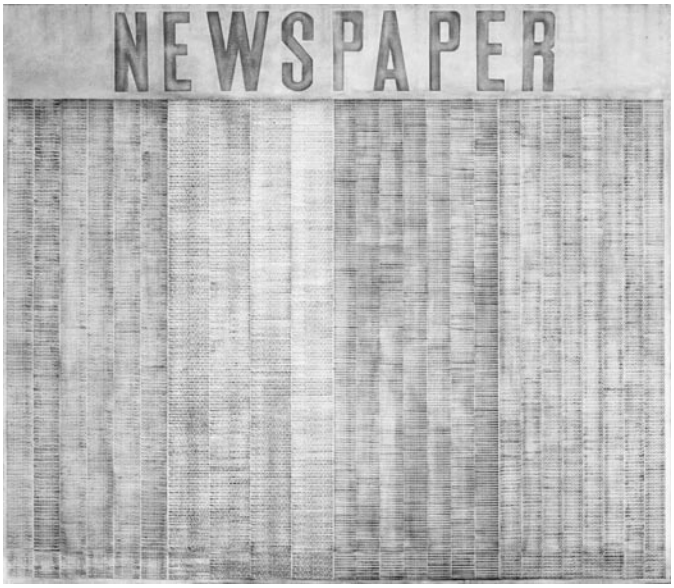


Fig. 6. Chryssa, *Newspaper* (c.1962), transfer print and graphite on canvas, 104 1/2" x 120 1/2" x 1". The Menil Collection, Houston. © Estate of Chryssa, EMΣT | National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens.

Capitalism and communism collide in *Cents Sign* to expose Chryssa's personal investment in the ideological conflict of the ongoing Cold War.[63] The curved red steel arches bear a striking resemblance to the Marxist sickle, perhaps indicative of the artist's growing ambivalence toward capitalist America. Such a reading calls to mind Karl Marx's analysis of the commodity in which he determines value based on the amount of labor a commodity takes to produce.[64] Since consumers cannot readily calculate labor, they rely on its price, that is, the monetary expression of its value. To use money as the "universal

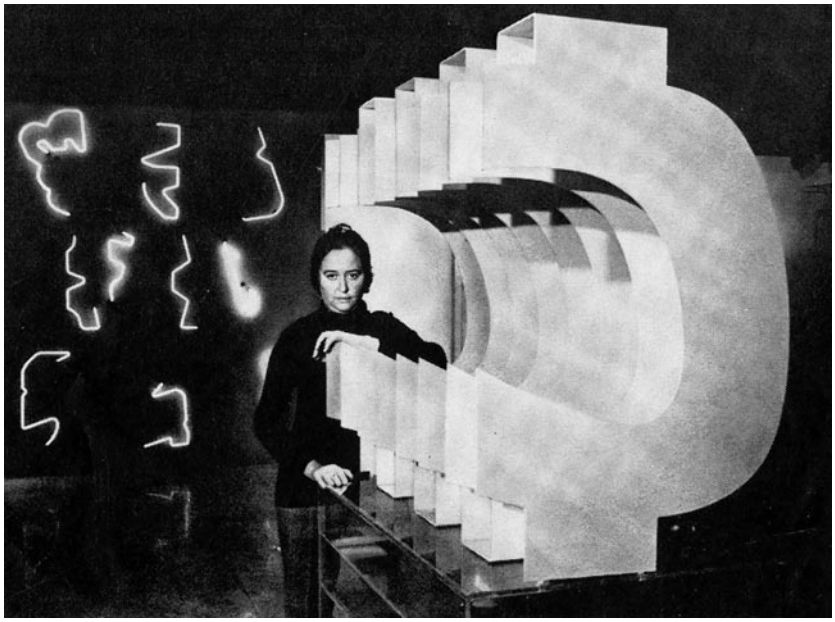


Fig. 7. Chryssa with *Cents Sign; That's All* in background, *Time Magazine*, June 4, 1973. Photo: David Gahr.

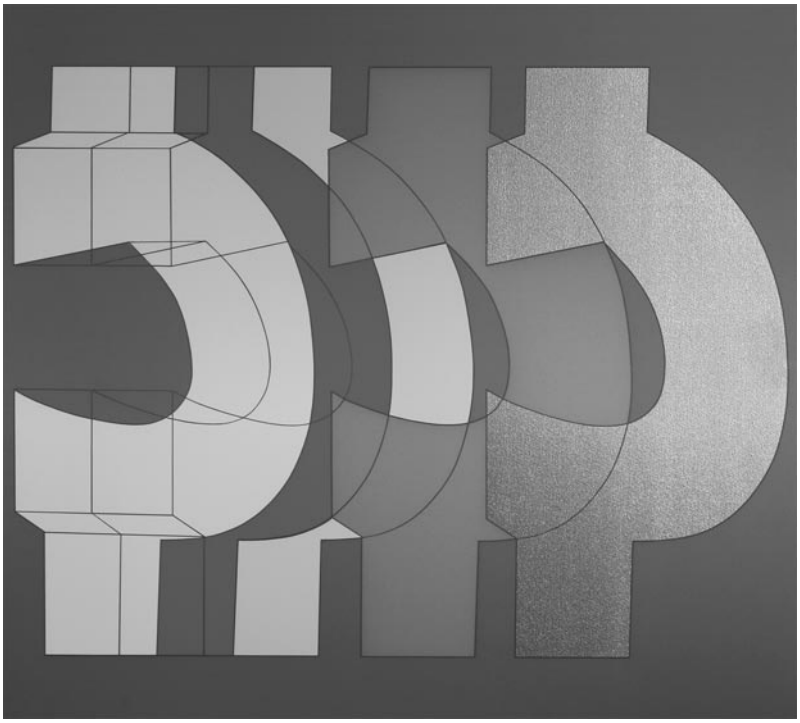


Fig. 8. Chryssa, *Series 2* (c. 1979), screenprint on Arches. Image courtesy of RoGallery 2025 © Estate of Chryssa, EMΣT | National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens.

measure of value," however, as Marx proposed, a "purely ideal or mental form" of the value of labor must replace the actual value of labor, which accounts for variation in skill and specialization.[65] In theory, capitalism's disinterest in the nuance of human labor directly impacted Chryssa's artistic practice, reliant on specialized labor, like neon fabrication, to scale up her work to monumental size and incorporate electricity. She paid close attention to the technological advances in neon bending and subsequently integrated its latest inventions, such as new colors, sequencers, and rheostats.[66] Her sculptures honor neon fabricators and return an auratic quality to a technical craft, which, arguably, capitalism shuts down as soon as an assembly line forms to bend letters or to flick a switch, illuminating an advertisement or "open" sign.[67]

Positioned as an outsider by way of her profession, gender, and citizenship, Chryssa admitted to her wavering belief in capitalism, professed in an uncharacteristically political paragraph that reflects on her life experiences, from her imprisonment as a child to the fraud she witnessed as a social worker to her rejection from the art world. Concluding her Evanston Art Center talk, and after likening her artwork to children, she posed a series of rhetorical questions to the audience that ends with:

> Would you reinduce them [your children] to political fears such as that of the iron curtain, which makes me think that escaping to Russia IF SUCH "WORKING" AND "INSPIRING" CONDITIONS CONTINUE HERE, IN AMERICA WITH SUCH DIFFICULTIES WITH FABRICATORS, MAYBE IT IS NOT SUCH A BAD IDEA.[68]

The transcript's shift to capitalized letters discloses a growing sense of desperation thinly cloaked in humor. As Chryssa witnessed how the capitalist economy weaponized cash against those who exist outside of the corporate consumer system, she grew increasingly skeptical of it. Fully disillusioned by the freedom of the American cent, she now yearned for structure.

A 1973 portrait of Chryssa, leaning against *Cents Sign* for *Time Magazine*, exposes the symbol's dominant, almost monstrous presence, as the interior of the sharp, steel-edged C-shape engulfs the artist's head (Fig. 7).[69] Her decision to not only pose with *Cents Sign* but frame her face with it speaks to an ontological connection she felt with the symbol, one that illustrated for a woman artist the limitations of the 1960s macho, capitalist New York art world. Even advocates of her work, like the art historian Sam Hunter, dismissed Chryssa's precarity. In his 1974 monograph, Hunter fails to consider the greater power systems she faced, writing: "One also entertains the suspicion that Chryssa generates crises of anxiety and creative tension purposely, if unconsciously, to provide a motive for then dispelling them—through the catharsis of work."[70] Hunter's evocation of the clichéd tortured-artist trope negates the reality of life as an immigrant woman and independent artist in the US.

When Chryssa emigrated from Greece, she shifted professionally from a government employee to an unnaturalized immigrant. Based on her immigration paperwork, Chryssa took the Oath of Allegiance to become a US citizen on February 19, 1985, at which point she had left her permanent residence in New York.[71] The artist's slippery status as a visa holder while living in the city peaked in February 1976 when she misplaced both her Greek passport and her permanent US residence visa upon her return from Europe. She recalled how US immigration authorities forced her to live out of hotel rooms as she waited for a temporary permit. With this financially debilitating lifestyle, she ran out of money and slept in various hotel lobbies for the final six or seven nights.[72] Living off cents rather than dollars, it only took the misplacement of one document to jeopardize Chryssa's well-being and the life she built in New York over the course of eighteen years.

Chryssa's evolving aestheticization of the cent sign through the 1960s and 1970s exemplifies the rate at which her precarity increased in New York's free market system, especially as an unmarried immigrant woman with a fluctuating income, one where she processed her existence by challenging capitalist notions of planned obsolescence in precarious materials, namely neon and recycled metal. Although neon gas has a potentially infinite lifespan, neon signs eventually break down as a result of the finite duration of the transformer that powers the glowing light, or the fragility of the glass tube. Chryssa did not just accept the

dark fate of her neon sculptures, she planned for it. In a lecture she gave at New York University on January 10, 1968, she shared:

> The nature and the technology of the material should not interfere with the sculpture itself. For instance, a light sculpture need not be lit, a kinetic sculpture need not move. If the value of the sculpture depends on these elements then it becomes a gimmick.… A piece of sculpture should neither stand nor fall … it should be.[73]

She finds valuable significance in her sculptures regardless of their functional status. *Cents Sign Traveling from Broadway to Africa via Guadeloupe* demonstrates its comfortable independence from illumination when the sequencer briefly turns off all the lights.

Although *Cents Sign* marks the last metal or neon sculpture Chryssa created featuring this emblem, the motif persisted in her two-dimensional works in the decades that followed. She scaled down her lexicon of Times Square fragments for prints and paintings, which she produced for the remainder of her career. The artist inverted the cent sign backward again and arranged it at the top center of her neon and acrylic works on canvas, including *Today's Special* (1970–73), and her corresponding screen print, *Memories of American Cityscapes* (1997–99). In the screen print *Series 2* (1979; Fig. 8), the cent sign repeats in a graphic multicolored row reminiscent of *Cents Sign Traveling from Broadway to Africa via Guadeloupe*.

The enduring presence of the cent sign in Chryssa's oeuvre holds little space in the relatively limited scholarship about this artist. The few scholars who have mentioned the cent's iconographic significance perform brief and outdated analyses of it. Restany, who famously championed Nouveau Réalisme, American Pop Art's European counterpart, poses, yet fails to answer, the question: "Was the [cent] sign chosen as a result of its plastic beauty and facility of structural integration, or as a direct and powerful allusion to the harsh law of money?"[74] Similarly, the longest discussion of Chryssa's cent sign, which exists as a single paragraph in Douglas Schultz's 1990 book, *Chryssa: Cityscapes,* dedicates one sentence to its analysis: "The artist chose this symbol both for its beauty and boldness of shape and for its ironic reference to money—the smallest symbol of important force in contemporary society."[75] Descriptors like "plastic beauty" and "ironic" seek to fit Chryssa's cent sign within the dominant and detached definitions of American Pop from the late twentieth century, rather than consider her persisting social and economic insecurity in New York.[76]

Chryssa uncovered the tensions within the cent sign as a signifier of both value and worthlessness, and like the majority of independent artists, she learned to live, albeit precariously, within this paradox determined by capitalism. She transformed it into an autobiographical expression of her precarity as a self-employed, immigrant woman fighting for her place within New York's capitalist society. Although her gender, visa status, and profession all contributed to a financially insecure existence, Chryssa persisted to create her demanding metal and neon sculptures. While many of the artist's reflections about her own New York career focus on her financial and psychological distress, her worldview permits her to look back with a tinge of nostalgia saved by artistic persistence. Perhaps, Chryssa expressed this best in her own period characterization—"utterly alone, broke and very happy."[77] ●

Gemma Cirignano is an art historian and researcher based in Brooklyn, New York. She received her M.A. from the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University in 2023. Her art historical writing provides new perspectives on neon light by drawing on feminist and queer theories of artistic labor. Recently she contributed the central essay for *Nat Mayer Shapiro: Joy and Rigor* (Silvana Editoriale, 2024), and curatorial research for *Chryssa & New York* (Dia Art Foundation, 2023). Cirignano currently works full-time as the Senior Collection Researcher for Masterworks, where she launched and leads the collection's museum loan program.

Notes

1. Andy Warhol, *THE Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 136.
2. Peter Stupples, "Pop Art Makes Money," in *Art and Money*, ed. Peter Stupples (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 25.
3. Stupples, 24–26.
4. Chryssa frequently changed her birthdate during her lifetime. According to Betty Parsons' artist file and leading publications about the artist, Chryssa's birthday is December 31, 1933. However, numerous archived legal records suggest her birthday may have been in December of 1929. The student visa registration of The California School of Fine Arts listed her birthday as December 13, 1929, and her Petition for Naturalization in the United States, dated December 30, 1929, were consulted. See Megan Holly Witko, "Chronology," in *Chryssa & New York*, ed. Megan Holly Witko, Sophia Larigakis, and Michelle White (Dia Art Foundation and The Menil Collection, 2023), 173.
5. Witko, "Chronology," 164.
6. My employment of the term Pop as it pertains to Chryssa's practice is greatly informed by Mona Hadler and Kalliopi Minioudaki's edited collection of essays, *Pop Art and Beyond: Gender, Race, and Class in the Global Sixties* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022). In their introduction, Hadler and Minioudaki define Pop as a global framework rather than an Anglo-American art movement, exploring dialogues of contemporary art in the 1960s with the realities of postwar culture and society, 3.
7. Chryssa, "Experiences in Art and Life by Chryssa of Several Years Internationally, April 21, 1981, at Evanston Art Center, Illinois," Item #023, Rosalind Constable Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 1.
8 Robert E. Hall, "Optimal Fiduciary Monetary Systems," *Journal of Monetary Economics* 12, no. 1 (1983): 33–50, https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-3932(83)90047-8.
9. Jonathan Katz, "World Unmaking: Chryssa's Queer Fragmentation of Language," in *Chryssa & New York*, 140. Future scholarship will benefit from a deeper engagement with the impact of Chryssa's queerness on her artistic labor.
10. See Kalliopi Minioudaki, "Chryssa from Here to There," in *Chryssa & New York*, 154; and Thomas W. Gallant, *Modern Greece: From the War of Independence to the Present* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 190–252.

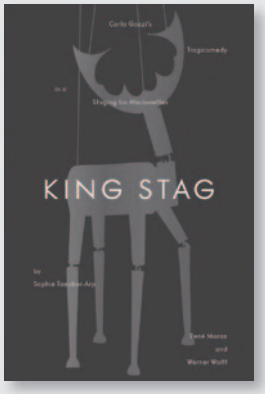
11. Given the inconsistencies around her birthdate, this recorded age may be off by a few years. Pierre Restany, *Chryssa*, trans. John Shepley (Harry N. Abrams, 1977), 12.
12. Witko, "Chronology," 164.
13. Witko.
14. Barbara Rose, "Chryssa's Memory: Antiquity as Modernity," in *Chryssa: Cycladic Books, 1957–1962* (Nicholas P. Goulandris Foundation Museum of Cycladic Art, 1997), 13.
15. Witko, "Chronology," 165.
16. Chryssa to Rosalind Constable, July 16, 1973, Correspondence #01930, Rosalind Constable Papers, Menil Archives, the Menil Collection, Houston, 4.
17. Chryssa, "*Chryssa*: Comments by Don Cyr," interview by Don Cyr, *School Arts* 66, no. 7 (March 1967): 23.
18. Restany, *Chryssa*, 18.
19. Chryssa, "Lecture by Chryssa at New York University, January 10, 1968," transcript, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1; Chryssa, "There's Only So Much You Can Put on a Hot Dog," interview by Ann Geracimos, n.d., Pace Gallery Archives, New York, 8.
20. Christine Poggi, "Inflections of the Times," in *The Shock of the News*, ed. Judith Brodie (National Gallery of Art, 2012), 125. In his 2020 biography on Andy Warhol, Blake Gopnik also credits Chryssa with inspiring Warhol to incorporate newspaper prints into his practice.
21. Witko, "Chronology," 166; "Chryssa" Exhibition Pamphlet, November 14–December 17, 1961, #A0008, Artist File, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Archive, New York.
22. Nicolas Calas, "Chryssa and Time's Magic Square," *Art International* 6, no. 1 (February 1962): 37.
23. Chryssa, "*Chryssa*: Comments by Don Cyr," 23.
24. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations,* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Schocken Books, 1969), 3.
25. Benjamin, 11–12.
26. Daniel Makagon, *Where the Ball Drops: Days and Nights in Times Square* (University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 41.
27. "Price of The Daily News Raised from 5 to 7 Cents," *New York Times,* April 5, 1964.
28. Chryssa, "*Chryssa*: Comments by Don Cyr," 23. Neon fabrication is an historically male-dominated field, in the category of blue-collar manufacturing work. However, as neon fabrication receives more scholarly attention as a handicraft—a term historically reserved for women's work—the industry has also become more inclusive. See Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2011), 63.
29. Collette Jacqueline Roberts, "Interview with Chryssa," March 1966, recording #278, 11 minutes, Colette Roberts Papers and Interviews with Artists, 1918–1971, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
30. Michael F. Crowe, "Neon Signs: Their Origin, Use, and Maintenance," *APT Bulletin: The Journal of Preservation Technology* 23, no. 2 (1991): 34.
31. Witko, "Chronology," 167.
32. Lewis Harris to Arnold Glimcher, April 14, 1966, folder 14, General Correspondence 1965–67, Pace Gallery Archives.
33. Harris to Glimcher.
34. Glimcher to Chryssa, May 20, 1993, folder II 12, General Correspondence 1965–67, Pace Gallery Archives.
35. Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 33–41.
36. Chryssa, "Experiences in Art and Life," 1.
37. matt dilling, "Neon Care in Chryssa's Work," *Chryssa & New York*, 59.
38. Anna Dezeuze, *Almost Nothing: Observations on Precarious Practices in Contemporary Art* (Manchester University Press, 2017), 39–44. In her critical examination of the gimmick, Sianne Ngai identifies "planned obsolescence and routinized innovation" as one of the contradictions of capitalism. A capitalist society encourages the creation of new technologies but desires such technologies to break down over time to create repeat sales and increase profitability. See Sianne Ngai, "Theory of the Gimmick," *Critical Inquiry* 43 (Winter 2017): 494.
39. Chryssa, "Oral History Interview with Chryssa," interview by F. Teri Wehn, June 26, 1967, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 17.
40. dilling, "Neon Care in Chryssa's Work," 59.
41. Restany, *Chryssa*, 57.
42. Christoph Ribbat, *Flickering Light: A History of Neon* (Reaktion Books, 2011), 109.
43. Ribbat, 101.
44. Elisabeth C. Baker, "Chryssa," *ARTnews* 65, no. 1 (March 1966): 12.
45. dilling, "Neon Care in Chryssa's Work," 55.
46. The disenfranchisement of women within the context of US postwar economics, especially as it relates to women's marginalization in Pop discourse, is more deeply explored in Kalliopi Minioudaki's essay, "Facing the Maid: Gendered Shades of Labor in American Pop," in *Pop Art and Beyond*, 175–204. Chryssa's contributions to Pop were reevaluated, alongside artists Niki de Saint Phalle, Rosalyn Drexler, Marisol, Yayoi Kusama, Jann Haworth, Vija Celmins, Lee Lozano, Marjorie Strider, Idelle Weber, and Joyce Wieland, among others, in Sid Sachs's groundbreaking 2010–2011 exhibition and accompanying catalogue, *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958–1968*, co-edited by Sachs and Minioudaki (University of the Arts, Philadelphia/Abbeville Press, 2010). The exhibition, which featured Chryssa's *Cents Sign Traveling from Broadway to Africa via Guadeloupe* (1968), was organized by the Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery of the University of the Arts, Philadelphia, and traveled to the Brooklyn Museum, New York, and Tufts University Art Gallery, Medford, MA.
47. Chryssa, "Experiences in Art and Life," 9.
48. Mary Leisenring, "Women Still Have to Work Three Months Longer to Equal What Men Earned in a Year," United States Census Bureau, March 31, 2020.
49. Chryssa, "Experiences in Art and Life," 6. See also Chryssa to Domenique de Menil, August 18, 1975, Domenique de Menil Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 13.
50. Chryssa, "Experiences in Art and Life," 15.
51. Harris to Glimcher, April 14, 1966.
52. Chryssa, quoted by Sam Hunter, *Chryssa* (Harry N. Abrams, 1974), 21.
53. Chryssa, "Experiences in Art and Life," 1.
54. Chryssa, 3.
55. Chryssa, 13.
56. Chryssa, "Lecture by Chryssa at New York University, January 10, 1968," 8.
57. Catherine Scrivo Baker, email to the author, November 8, 2021.
58. A few of Chryssa's Studies for *The Gates* have unique titles, but they are prefaced with "*Study* #." For example, *Study for The Gates #14 (Clytemnestra),* 1967. Chryssa also created neon boxes that are not part of the Study for *The Gates* series (they do not contain fragments from *The Gates*).

59. "Cents Sign Travelling from Broadway to Africa via Guadeloupe," Brooklyn Museum, object label, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/objects/113271.
60. Poggi, "Inflections of the Times," 125.
61. Richard Best, "How the U.S. Dollar Became the World's Reserve Currency," *Investopedia*, September 24, 2022.
62. Reinold Widemann, "Global Exchange: Around the World with Currency," in *Artists' Conceptions of Money: Money Art and Artificial Money* (Aspekt Publishers, 2018), 114.
63. Ian Jackson, "Economics and the Cold War," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (Oxford Academic, 2013), 50–66.
64. Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels (Progress Publishers, 1887), 26–29.
65. Marx, 67.
66. Diane Waldman, "Chryssa," *Art International* 12, no. 4 (April 20, 1968): 44.
67. Chryssa, "There's Only So Much You Can Put on a Hot Dog," 5.
68. Chryssa, "Experiences in Art and Life," 9.
69. Robert Hughes, "Mysteries of Neon," *Time Magazine*, June 4, 1973, 97.
70. Hunter, *Chryssa*, 21.
71. "Petitions for Naturalization, 1906–1991," NAID: 593882, Petition 613014, Box 145, vol. 1935, Asset ID HC1-121442501, National Archives at Chicago, Illinois, https://catalog.archives.gov/id/593882.
72. Chryssa, "Experiences in Art and Life," 7.
73. Chryssa, "Lecture by Chryssa at New York University, January 10, 1968," 14–15.
74. Restany, *Chryssa*, 84.
75. Douglas Schultz, *Chryssa: Cityscapes* (Thames and Hudson, 1990), 15.
76. Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, 153–68.
77. Chryssa, quoted by Sam Hunter, "Chryssa: 'esthetic sobriety, finesse and fanatical patience,'" *ART News* 72, no. 1 (January 1973): 63.

Artistic Women







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Monstrous Beauty: A Feminist Revision of Chinoiserie

Edited by Iris Moon, with contributions by Marlise Brown, Patty Chang, Anne Anlin Chang, Elizabeth Cleland, Patricia F. Ferguson, Eleanor Soo-ah Hyun, Cindy Kang, Ronda Kasl, Joan Kee, Pengliang Lu, Lesley Ma, Iris Moon, David Porter, Joseph Scheier-Dolberg, Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace, Chi-ming Yang, and Yao-Fen You
Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2025

Reviewed by Agnieszka Anna Ficek



Fig 1. Chinese, made for the European market. *Woman with a Pipe* (ca. 1760–80), reverse-painted crown glass. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

"Shopping is rarely perceived as heroic. It is only when the history of porcelain belongs to elite men that the stories of obsession, possession, and desire are legitimate and positively epic" (19).

Iris Moon's summation of gendered accumulation drives *Monstrous Beauty: A Feminist Revision of Chinoiserie*, a well-timed and critical addition to the scholarship on porcelain collecting, Chinoiserie, and exoticism more broadly, which are conceived through a feminist, antiracist, and decolonial lens. In centering and problematizing the collection practices of elite European women, the volume integrates the fraught history of Chinoiserie into the contexts of collecting practices, racially charged representation, and female agency. Moon sets out to provide a new vocabulary through which to understand eighteenth-century accumulation, *Porzellankrankheit* (porcelain sickness), and the gendered framework through which the "Chinese taste" developed in Western Europe—a vocabulary that the field of art history has sought for decades.

The introduction positions Chinoiserie as both a style and an ideology: a "decorative skin" that effaces the labor involved in producing luxury objects, and a racial imaginary that projects fantasies and fetishes about the foreign and exotic onto the figure of the Asian woman (16–17). At the same time, Moon, Associate Curator, Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and organizer of the accompanying exhibition and catalogue, proposes an expanded definition of the term, exploring how Chinoiserie gave voice to the elite European women who engaged with it, while simultaneously silencing—until now—the women depicted on objects made "in the Chinese taste" (23). The title of the book (and exhibition) is drawn from David Porter's influential 2002 essay, "Monstrous Beauty: Eighteenth-century Fashion and the Aesthetics of the Chinese Taste."[1] Like the exhibition it complements, *Monstrous Beauty* is a conceptual publication that challenges the conventional survey format. It comprises interrelated essays by Moon interspersed with plates of objects from the exhibition and concludes with shorter "object encounters" by leading scholars in the field.

The first chapter and introduction, "The Woman in the Mirror," takes its cues from a reverse-painted Chinese mirror made for the European market showing an elaborately-dressed Chinese woman smoking a pipe (Fig 1). Moon uses this object to explore the concept of the "diffractive lens" put forth by Donna Haraway, a leading philosopher on the history of consciousness and feminism, which is central to the catalogue's theoretical framework: rather than reflecting difference, diffractive looking maps the effects of difference (21). Although the mirror and its Chinese subject might at first suggest surface-level ornamentation, Moon's application of a diffractive approach explores the complex entanglements of gender, genre, history, and culture beneath the mirrored surface, and repositions the woman as subject rather than simply decorative motif. The woman in the mirror becomes "a cipher for the world of sensuous surfaces" (24). Moon inserts herself—metaphorically and literally—into the

object, explaining that, at the moment of reflection, she no longer saw Chinoiserie as superficial but analogous of how the past continuously shapes the present. In its reflectiveness, the object invites a diffractive mode of looking—it forces the viewer to reposition herself, and evokes the conceptual depth generated by standing beside a figure crafted for European consumption yet rooted in Cantonese artistry.

The five subsequent essays expand upon this diffracted history of Chinoiserie by focusing on porcelain and tea, a return to mirrored and lacquered surfaces, and later manifestations of the "Chinese taste" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Chapter two, "Shipwrecks and Sirens: Early Arrivals of Porcelain in Europe," begins in 1613 with the sinking of the *Witte Leeuw* (White Lion) off the coast of Saint Helena—a three-mast ship owned by the Dutch East India Company. Through this episode, Moon introduces the first arrivals of porcelain in Europe and explores early modern European speculations about porcelain's mysterious composition and the catachresis of its name. This chapter lays the foundation for the story of porcelain within vast maritime networks linking Canton, Batavia, the Islamic world, and the ports of Europe. The narrative culminates in Meissen with the establishment of Europe's first hard-paste porcelain manufactory, through which the European lust for porcelain could be satisfied locally and reduce reliance on Chinese imports.

The third chapter, "Surrogate Bodies: Mary II, Succession, and Porcelain Obsessions," highlights the significance of Chinoiserie at the late seventeenth-century court of William and Mary in England with specific attention to its role in Queen Mary's (1662–1694) self-fashioning. Cast as the progenitor of England's taste for Chinoiserie, Mary adorned royal residences such as Hampton Court—particularly the Water Gallery—and Kensington Palace with her extensive collection of Chinese porcelain and European faience that imitated Ming-era blue-and-white Jingdezhen ware. Moon traces the preference for Chinoiserie to the women of the House of Orange, notably Amalia van Solms, William III's grandmother, who initiated a tradition of *kunstkammers* filled with Chinese and imitation-Chinese wares. While the purchasing practices behind the *kunstkammer* are typically associated with male collectors, Moon repositions the Chinoiserie-themed *kunstkammers* of the Orange women at the center of her analysis. In doing so, she illuminates the deliberate and enthusiastic collecting practices of northern European women and their engagement with "Chinese taste," emphasizing a maternal lineage of moveable luxury and exotic goods.



Fig 2. I.M.P (French), *Teapot*, mid-eighteenth century, silver, ebony. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

"Spilling Tea: Performing Politeness and Domesticity" examines the everyday lives of porcelain objects, focusing on the ritual of taking tea as a key medium through which Chinoiserie was integrated into English domestic culture. A foreign commodity, tea—along with porcelain—was domesticated as an English pastime, shifting from exotic object to a staple of affluent domestic life. As women faced increasing restrictions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the tea ritual emerged as a space of female possession and agency, exemplified by teapots emblazoned with women's names. While analyzing how the tea table allowed and enabled white women to assert a degree of autonomy, Moon also foregrounds the racial dynamics embedded in luxury objects: a silver teapot with a blackamoor handle (Fig. 2), a tête-à-tête service with the heads of a Black man and a Chinese man atop a sugar bowl and teapot. Moon notes, "Small things … have a subtle way of surfacing uncomfortable truths" (90). Tea services, she argues, reveal how systems of racialized slavery and exploitation were mapped onto the same spaces where elite women sought to negotiate autonomy within increasingly patriarchal strictures.

In "Artificial Mothers: Figurines and Fantasies of the Female Subject," Moon explores the synthetic fantasy of Asian femininity in eighteenth-century Europe, mediated through the porcelain figurines that arrived via global trade well before the physical presence of Asian women. These objects proposed a foreign femininity that was framed by European artists as colorful and gaudy—deliberately contrasting the restrained, white aesthetic of the academic nude that also came into fashion at the time. Moon focuses on how religious and cultural symbols, such as the Chinese *Guanyin* (a female deity), were appropriated by European manufactories like Meissen and syncretized with Marian imagery,



Fig 3. Jennifer Ling Datchuk, *Pretty Sister, Ugly Sister* (2014), porcelain and hair. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

blending the sacred and the exotic. She also considers Europe's fascination with animating the inanimate, particularly the *pagode*—bobble-headed, Buddha-like figurines described as "toylike, emasculated automata" and reduced to objects of ridicule (118–19). The chapter further investigates the entanglement of Chinoiserie and sexuality through François Boucher's Chinese-themed prints, which align eroticized fantasy with the desirability of Asian luxury goods. In the French context, such figures expressed not only fantasies but also anxieties of *métissage* (miscegenation) or racial mixing, both with China and in colonial spaces. Ultimately, Moon argues that these figurines reflected unstable and shifting notions of womanhood, shaped by the tastes and foreign fantasies of their European creators.

The final chapter, "Afterlives of Chinoiserie," examines the visual and cultural legacies of Chinoiserie through two of the most iconic Asian and Asian-American women of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908) and Anna May Wong (1905–1961).[2] Moon explores how their images both absorbed and reshaped the lingering aesthetics and stereotypes rooted in earlier Chinoiserie. In the context of a newly globalized capitalist economy, familiar tropes persisted. Opium was the new *Porzellankrankheit*, while the Western fascination with foot-binding revived the eroticized obsessions and racialized fetishisms of the past. The spoils of the Opium Wars (1839–42; 1856–60), presented to Queen Victoria of England and Empress Eugénie of France, replenished royal *kunstkammers*, now once again brimming with Chinese exotica. Not to be outdone by the Old World, Moon also interrogates the missionary zeal of American imperialism within the emerging violence of global capitalism. In turning to Cixi, Moon highlights how she navigated and manipulated these structures, using them to craft her own imperial image and authority. With Wong, however, the story reveals the enduring limits of representation: she was repeatedly cast in hypersexualized and villainous roles yet never permitted the position of the leading lady.

Each chapter is richly illustrated and culminates with color plates from the exhibition, notably featuring at least one work by a contemporary Asian or Asian American woman artist. Examples include a still from Jen Liu's (b. 1976) *The Land at the Bottom of the Sea* (2023), or Jennifer Ling Datchuk's (b. 1980) *Pretty Sister, Ugly Sister* (2014; Fig. 3). Such contemporary interventions—physically installed in the exhibition amongst the historical objects—underscore Moon's curatorial and editorial project: to center the voices of Asian women in the story of Chinoiserie—a story that has historically rendered them ornamental and denied them cultural and critical agency. By incorporating pioneering, ambitious works by twenty-first-century women artists, Moon not only reframes the ornamental figures of Chinoiserie as subjects with voice and power, but also highlights the persistent influence of the long eighteenth century on contemporary artistic practices and identities.

The "Object Encounters" section of the exhibition catalogue demonstrates the true collaborative nature of the project. It opens with Anne Anlin Cheng's lyrical and historically layered reflection on the work of South Korean sculptor Yee Sookyung (b. 1963). Cheng moves fluidly across temporal frames—from the time of Marco Polo to the nineteenth century to 2010—interweaving the history of porcelain with narratives of Asian women, including Korean "comfort women" of World War II, and excerpts from interviews with the artist. David Porter, who coined the exhibition and publication's title, turns to the fan leaf *Interior of a Chinese Shop*, interrogating the gendered dynamics of Chinoiserie, shopping, and the line between collecting and accumulating. Anchoring the publication within the canonical history of porcelain, Pengliang Lu explores the Chinoiserie of the Dragoon Vases, which were famously traded from Frederick the Great of Prussia to Augustus II "The Strong" of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth for six hundred well-trained Saxon cavalrymen.

Other contributors focus on the intersection of gender, material culture, and self-fashioning. Elizabeth Cleland and Patricia F. Ferguson both revisit the Chinoiserie of Mary II: Cleland through tapestries made for the Queen's privy chamber, and Ferguson through an earthenware milk pan from the Queen's dairy. Artist Patty Chang (b. 1972) and curator Lesley Ma engage in a compelling dialogue—Chang reflects on the corporeality of the *Flower Pyramid* (ca. 1695), while Ma contextualizes Chang's performance art within broader frameworks of Asian female self-objectification. Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace explores the subversive potential of the tea table, noting how women used it as a site to engage with and resist patriarchal structures, especially in the context of the tea trade.

Yao-Fen You examines Buddhist imagery, such as the *Guanyin*, and its circulation through European interiors, highlighting the devotional and aesthetic dimensions of Chinoiserie. Meanwhile, Chi-ming Yang uncovers the "Orient-animalist" layers embedded in the Met's *Elephant Vases*, produced at the renowned manufacturing site at

Sèvres, Hauts-de-Seine, France, around 1761. Marlise Brown investigates the influence of eighteenth-century print culture on porcelain design, tracing a visual dialogue between the Bow manufactory's *Ki Mao Sao and Worshippers* and its source material in Watteau's prints. Joan Kee reimagines continental allegories by crossing the Indian Ocean, proposing racialized aesthetic dialogues between Asia and Africa. Joseph Scheier-Dolberg mediates on the role of calligraphy, integrating poetry and ink drawings to deepen the historical resonance of the medium. Taking her cue from the Met's Costume Institute, Cindy Kang returns to the image of Anna May Wong and how, through her glamorous self-fashioning, she was able to resist the orientalist gaze. The volume finishes with Eleanor Soo-ah Hyun's analysis of Lee Bul's (b. 1964) cyborg porcelain, which pushes Chinoiserie into speculative and contemporary dimensions, imaging a futuristic present.

The exhibition's checklist is included at the end of the volume—a crucial addition, given that eighty-two objects from the exhibition are not reproduced in the publication. This omission positions the book more as a companion to the exhibition than a comprehensive catalogue. In this regard, the volume would have benefitted from an expanded format that included a more exhaustive visual and textual survey of the objects on display. Such an inclusion would offer a more lasting record of the exhibition and mitigate the ephemerality inherent to the museum experience.

While the publication demonstrates impressive breadth, it remains focused largely on French, Dutch, and English applications of Chinoiserie with some attention to later US interpretations. Ronda Kasl's essay, "Chinoiseries and the Mexican Garden," is a notable exception that offers valuable insight into Chinoiserie's manifestations in the Spanish so-called "New World." The volume's limited engagement with southern European and Latin American Chinoiseries is one of its few shortcomings. A more robust inclusion of geographically diverse case studies could deepen the reader's understanding of Chinoiserie as a truly transnational phenomenon. Even so, like the reverse-painted mirror it features, *Monstrous Beauty* offers multiple perspectives and subjectivities simultaneously, resulting in a rich and nuanced contribution to a complex and often fraught topic. The volume addresses the layered histories of Chinoiserie with scholarly rigor, engaging both historical and contemporary dimensions of the phenomenon. It resists a monolithic narrative, instead foregrounding a multiplicity of voices and interpretive approaches that enhance the reader's understanding of Chinoiserie's cultural work.

While there exists a growing body of scholarship on the subject—including Stacey Sloboda's *Chinoiserie: Commerce and Critical Ornament in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2014), Christopher Johns's *China and the Church: Chinoiserie in a Global Context* (2016), Christiane Hertel's *Siting China in Germany: Eighteenth-Century Chinoiserie and Its Modern Legacies* (2019), and Judy Sund's *Exotic: A Fetish for the Foreign* (2019)—*Monstrous Beauty* offers a distinctive intervention. It reexamines the experiences of women who consumed objects in the Chinese taste, and gives voice to those historically reduced to ornamental motifs. In doing so, the volume reanimates Chinoiserie in innovative and critical ways, expanding its interpretive boundaries and implications for feminist and postcolonial art histories. ●

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Notes

1. David Porter, "Monstrous Beauty: Eighteenth-Century Fashion and the Aesthetics of the Chinese Taste," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 3 (2002): 395–411.
2. Empress Dowager Cixi, a Manchu noblewoman, wielded de facto control over the Chinese government during the late Qing dynasty for nearly five decades as empress dowager and regent, while Anna May Wong (Wong Liu Tsong) is widely recognized as the first Chinese-American film star in Hollywood.

Beyond Ophelia: The True Legacy of Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti

By Glenda Youde
Unicorn, 2025

Reviewed by Susie Beckham

The narrative of John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* (1851–52) has frequently been interpreted as an extension of the story of its model, Elizabeth Siddall (1829–62),[1] with her supposed tumultuous romantic relationship with Dante Gabriel Rossetti (whom she married in 1860) and her premature death by overdose of laudanum. To address and challenge "The *Ophelia* Problem," where Siddall exists in the public consciousness as "the pathetic figure drowning in the stream" (2–3), Glenda Youde sets out to establish the scope of Siddall's artistic career, creative genius, and visual legacy of her drawings and watercolors on the development and character of Pre-Raphaelite art.

Part one focuses on the central myths. Chapter one addresses the various heightened stories, from Siddall's "discovery" in a bonnet shop, her illness after modelling for *Ophelia* in a cold bathtub, her possible suicide, and the exhumation of her coffin so Rossetti could reclaim his buried poems. Chapter two provides an excellent, close consideration of how these myths have become so entrenched in the public consciousness via their popular retellings in literary fiction and theatrical produc-



Fig. 1 Elizabeth Siddall, *Lady Clare* (1854–57), watercolor, 13 1/4" x 10". Private collection.

tions.[2] By identifying the origins of these stories (with their often unreliable sources), Youde brilliantly destabilizes the mythic concept of Siddall, providing a fresh foundation from which she builds the rest of the book. Chapter three considers Siddall's historic and modern recognition as an artist, reviewing important, formative scholarship on this figure by academics like Jan Marsh, in addition to exploring the contemporary reception of Siddall's work and the problem posed by much of her known output being untraced or held in private collections, inhibiting close analysis. There are some erroneous statements here, though.[3] A notable example is the statement that "The one occasion that Elizabeth's work was exhibited during her lifetime" was at a show at 4 Russell Place in London (May–June 1857) (37). As Youde acknowledges, Siddall's work was also exhibited in the US in 1857–58 and subjected to harsh criticism (38).[4] The conflation of the two shows diminishes the contemporary recognition of her art. With regards to its slightly more modern study, Youde considers the Whitechapel Gallery's centenary exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite art in 1948, drawing from a singular review to conclude that "Focus was placed firmly on the male members of the circle," with "no mention of Elizabeth as a contributor," indicating that "Elizabeth's public acceptance as a member of the circle appears to have lapsed again" from reviews of her work a year earlier (40). Other reviews of this show conflict with this statement.[5]

Part two looks at Siddall's artistic interests and collaborations. Chapter four examines the production of photographs of Siddall's various drawings and their collation as albums. Given their importance to establishing the breadth of Siddall's output and its posthumous legacy—plus its limited consideration by previous scholars—this close attention to the portfolios' technical production, arrangement, dissemination, and survival is much welcomed and will certainly provide a strong foundation from which further scholarship might be undertaken.[6] This section is likely to be of particular interest to scholars and technicians engaged in Victorian photography. Chapter five, intended as a deep-dive "at what made Elizabeth's work so special" (71), draws from John Ruskin's critique of artistic genius as exhibited by "Turner, Watts, Millais, Rossetti—and this girl [Siddall]" (75). Youde argues that "By calling her a 'genius' here, Ruskin is effectively placing Elizabeth on an equal level with the four male counterparts he names" (75). The choice of "Ruskin's Genius" for the chapter title unfortunately infers Ruskin's possession of Siddall. Accompanied by the use of subtitles like "Gabriel's Wife" and "Gabriel's Pupil" elsewhere, this language further subordinates Siddall to male figures in her life. This undercuts the well-motivated recovery efforts of the book via emphasis on her status and relationship to men instead of highlighting her agency, independence, and self-governance. The chapter's primary visual case studies are Siddall's drawing *The Lady of Shalott* (1853) and her unlocated painted *Self-Portrait* (1853–54).

The former design receives a close reading that will provide a useful blueprint for future scholars, albeit with some points of connection potentially overread or misdirected. Nevertheless, while many artists took advantage of creative licence to expand upon an existing literary narrative for their designs, Youde's emphasis on the original details contained in Siddall's take on Tennyson's story is well placed, supporting Siddall's re-categorization as an independent creative force rather than Rossetti's imitator. Chapter six considers the artist's more developed illustrative compositions, successfully demonstrating Siddall's command of narrative conceits and talent as a visual storyteller. There is sometimes a lack of balance, however. Siddall's exclusion from the Moxon Tennyson illustration project is theorized as being due to her status of being "a lesser-known artist—and female," with Moxon appearing "to have employed his business expertise by rejecting Elizabeth's work in favour of the more popular male artists" (112–13). While influential figures like Emily Tennyson encouraged Siddall's inclusion, this does not mean that the designs were of an acceptable standard for publication or that they were consistent with the quality exhibited by other contributors. For example, a critical engagement in Siddall's inconsistent (and at times limited) command of perspective, anatomy, and proportions is absent; a consideration that is perhaps unsurprising given the book's celebratory tone but nevertheless relevant to a discussion of Siddall's artistic success and ability to cultivate a visual legacy. While Youde's investigation of several designs as possible book illustrations is well considered, the argument that Siddall "appears to have been a pioneer in Pre-Raphaelite book illustration" is not supported by the material evidence, with an oeuvre primarily consisting of rough sketches, with no book illustration ever reaching publication (113).[7] To make such a claim, attention needed to have been given to defining "Pre-Raphaelite" book illustration, with stylistic interrogation of Siddall's work within this specific mode. Chapter seven's biographical interpretations of Rossetti's pictures of Siddall and images of women in Siddall's own work sees the practicalities of artistic creation (e.g. the temptation to omit unnecessary, undesired, or technically tricky details in one's studies) dismissed in favor of finding personal meaning. For example, the hair in Siddall's mouth plus down-cast gaze in *Study for the figure of Delia* (1851) is attributed to her nervousness "while Gabriel was preparing to sketch her, which then resulted in the pose being adopted for the drawing" (118) rather than the pose being directed by the artist.[8]

Part three explores the imitation of Siddall's "original" conceptions, exploring her influence on Rossetti before and after her death in chapters eight and nine, with chapter ten focused on the wider dissemination of her ideas.[9] To this end, the author conducts a series of compare-and-contrast exercises to varying success. For example, close study of the compositional similarities of Rossetti's *La Castagnetta* (c. 1863) and Siddall's *Angel with Cymbals* drawings (c. 1855) is suitably convincing, building upon the distinctiveness of these designs' features. Less convincing arguments include the comparative analyses related to what Youde defines as the "*Lady Clare* Effect"—a watercolor by Siddall that supposedly influenced a number of other artists' productions (Fig. 1). While an interesting contention, the originality of the titular figure's bent neck seems overstated, with due consideration of external influences or sources ignored. What of the extended necks and hunched shoulders of Botticelli's various Madonnas or Siddall's access to her circle's medieval manuscript collections with their own angular poses? Alternate "origins" or influences on *Lady Clare*'s production (or these other artists' productions[10]) are overlooked in favor of presenting Siddall as a completely independent creative originator. A problematic argument for Rossetti's reliance on Siddall's compositional genius is found in the analysis of an undated, minimally detailed sketch of a girl (presumed to have been produced by Siddall's hand but stylistically very different to her oeuvre[11]) that Youde suggests is a portrait of a ten-year-old Lucy Madox Brown. With this attribution, the drawing is given a dating concurrent with Rossetti's *Bocca Baciata* (1859). That the two pictures feature bust-length female figures looking off to the side with delicately folded hands is interpreted as evidence that "Gabriel appears to have borrowed the idea for this major painting from Elizabeth's drawing which surely would have been in the studio" (145). To Youde, these "visual similarities ... cannot be ignored" (145), but perhaps they should when the connection is so limited. As the author notes, Rossetti was keenly influenced by Venetian portraiture—a far more convincing source, surely, than an incomplete sketch of an unremarkable pose with unclear authorship. In an attempt to reinsert Siddall into the narrative of Rossetti's creative practice, Youde places too much significance on this drawing, arguing that "Something triggered this change" in Rossetti's art that saw him move away from medievalist watercolors to intimate, sensual portraiture in oils: "potentially it was Elizabeth's drawing *Head of a Girl*" (145). The notion that this drawing "provid[ed] Gabriel with the stimulus needed to try something new, thus bringing about a directional change in the visual development of Pre-Raphaelite art" (146) is unsupported by the speculative "evidence" provided.

The book treads a somewhat unclear line between a specialist, scholarly monograph that seeks to establish the importance of new source material and readings, and, on the other hand, a more casual text intended for general readership. The two are not mutually exclusive, of course; some of the best art history publications are those that avoid unnecessary academic jargon and clearly communicate their ideas. The issue posed by *Beyond Ophelia* is that important groundbreaking research is presented alongside speculative or unevidenced attributions and observations without this being flagged to the reader. The perception of *Beyond Ophelia* as more of a coffee-table book is encouraged by its numerous, high-quality illustrations and biographical focus in place of theory-driven investigations into artistic influence and quotation,[12] twenty-first-century feminist scholarship, or consideration of the queer potentials of Siddall's material legacy and its disruptive visual formulations.[13] The book highlights the scope of this artist's compositional and narrative aptitude and brings much-needed attention to the value of the photographic albums that

warrants its commendation. While it remains unclear how Siddall's creative oeuvre was "critical" to the later developments of Pre-Raphaelite art, I look forward to seeing this idea explored in more depth in future scholarship. While Siddall might now have finally left the bathtub and moved beyond her conception as a passive model and tragic figure, a new Elizabethan era of Pre-Raphaelite Studies is still to be written. ●

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Notes

1. Youde refers to Siddall by her married name due to her husband's creation of an embossed "EER" monogram on a manuscript copy of one of her poems, with the additional incentive of wishing "to restore her to her rightful place within this historic literary and artistic family" (x). Since the pair were married for just two years and the majority of her known artworks (several of which feature an artist's signature of "EES") appear to have been produced prior to the marriage, I retain the use of her maiden name with its original double-L spelling to retain separation from the mythologized, overfamiliar concept of "Lizzie Siddal" that is so often repeated in these histories.
2. Youde's discussion of a particular production notes that "Unfortunately, the way in which Elizabeth's story is told in this play is not known, nor whether she is 'The Merciless Lady' mentioned in the title" (26). There is in fact a review of the show that explains that Siddall was indeed the titular "merciless lady" and gives brief details about how her story was told in the play, in addition to noting how multiple descendants of the Rossetti family were in attendance for the performance (a detail that would have added evidence to Youde's proposal that the play "seems to have been significant"): "A Rossetti Play: 'The Merciless Lady' at Birmingham," *The Era* 98, no. 5010 (Oct 10, 1934): 3.
3. For example, a letter from the *Sheffield Independent* in 1862 (13) and Coventry Patmore's review of Siddall's work in the *Saturday Review* in 1857 (37) disputes Youde's assertion that "The first brief references to Elizabeth occurred after Gabriel's death in 1882, when his early biographers began to mention her," with "her status as an artist" and "talent" acknowledged "for the first time in literature" in William Sharp's biography of Rossetti (32). The argument that "All the known 'factual' accounts were written after Gabriel's death, by his biographers" (31) fails to factor in this (and other) material.
4. This was a different exhibition to the one in London, constituting a second showing of Siddall's work in her lifetime.
5. Siddall's *Madonna and Child* identified as a "beautiful" work in the show, representing "a most tender and human study": "Fulham History Society – Visit to the Pre-Raphaelite Exhibition," *West London Observer*, May 28, 1948, 4.
6. It should be acknowledged that a statement in this chapter that "There had been friction between Holman Hunt and Gabriel regarding the leadership of the Brotherhood" (67) appears to be the result of a mistranslation of a letter Rossetti sent to the critic Ernest Chesneau in 1868. Here, Rossetti not only rejects the mantle of being the PRB's leader (a view he repeated elsewhere) but argues against his work being titled "Pre-Raphaelite" at all, instead positioning Hunt as the principal Pre-Raphaelite artist. Any tension between the pair on this subject seems to have been one-sided.
7. Nat Reeve's recent study of Siddall and Georgiana Burne-Jones's collaborative project for an illustrated book of fairy tales, included in Youde's own co-edited book, would have made an important contribution to the analysis of Siddall's engagement in contemporary book illustration: Nat Reeve, "Queer Tombs and Reframing Doom: Elizabeth Siddal and Georgiana Burne-Jones's Unfinished Collaborative Project," in *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters: Art, Poetry and Female Agency in Victorian Britain*, ed. Glenda Youde and Robert Wilkes (Peter Lang, 2022), 179–204.
8. The hair in the mouth emphasizes the fact that it is unbound, linking to the narrative from Tibullus's elegy about Delia waiting for him with her loose hair.
9. This research thankfully goes in a different direction to that implied by the book's blurb that frames the influence of Siddall's work on other artists as evidence of them having "*shamelessly copied* the ideas from Elizabeth's small sketches to create their own large masterpieces which have since become the epitome of Pre-Raphaelite art" [emphasis my own].
10. For example, the "awkward pose" of Rossetti's *A Sea-Spell* (1875) is said to "clearly originat[e] from *Lady Clare*" (153). There are alternate possibilities or additional influences to consider, however. For example, could we not as easily say that Rossetti borrowed this pose from *The Virgin and Child* (ca. 1445–1510) by Botticelli's workshop (acquired by the National Gallery in 1867)?
11. Despite this inconclusive attribution, it is argued that *Head of a Girl* is an "integral part of her oeuvre ... embod[ying] Elizabeth's ambition and determination to become an artist, working on a close-up portrait of someone known to her" (146).
12. Elizabeth Prettejohn's book *Modern Painters, Old Masters: The Art of Imitation from the Pre-Raphaelites to the First World War* (2017) is frequently cited while wider attention to the concept of imitation and copying (and reference to other scholars' work on this subject) is absent.
13. For example, see Louise Tondeur, "Elizabeth Siddal's Hair: A Methodology for Queer Reading," *Women: A Cultural Review* 22, no. 4 (2011): 370–86; Nat Reeve, *Queer Reading the Work of Elizabeth Siddal*, unpublished PhD thesis (Royal Holloway, University of London, 2023); and Nat Reeve, "'An Hour before the Day': The Dismembered Book of Hours in Elizabeth Siddal's *Clerk Saunders*," *Word & Image* 38, no. 2 (2022): 73–87.

Fidelia Bridges: Nature into Art

By Katherine Manthorne
Lund Humphries, 2023

Susie M. Barstow: Redefining the Hudson River School

By Nancy J. Siegel
Lund Humphries, 2023

Women Reframe American Landscape: Susie Barstow & Her Circle

By Nancy Siegel, Kate Menconeri, and Amanda Malmstrom
Hirmer, 2023

Reviewed by Julia K. Dabbs



Fig. 1. Fidelia Bridges, *Chickadee and Thistle* (1875), watercolor and gouache on paper, 14" x 9 1/2". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

As the plethora of books and exhibitions in recent years has aptly shown, historical women artists could work in any genre of art: history painting, portraiture, scenes of daily life, and still life. But what about landscape painting? Can you name a woman artist who worked in this genre prior to the twentieth-century painter Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986)? The three publications reviewed here significantly help to resolve that question, at least in terms of American women artists. At the outset, however, we should credit Lund Humphries for publishing the monographs on Fidelia Bridges (1834–1923) and Susie M. Barstow (1836–1923), contemporaneous nineteenth-century artists, as part of their "Northern Lights" series, which seeks to bring attention to historically marginalized artists.[1] Their beautifully illustrated and produced books, reasonably priced and accessibly written by leading scholars in the field, establish an exemplary model in academic and trade publishing (along with their "Illuminating Women Artists" series) for significant contributions to the study of art history and gender.

The first book to be considered here, Katharine Manthorne's *Fidelia Bridges: Nature into Art*, skillfully examines the life and artistic legacy of the "best-selling female artist in post-Civil War America" (9), and is the first extensive study to do so.[2] Bridges was born in Salem, Massachusetts, and after training with landscape painter William Trost Richards established a life-long career as a critically-acclaimed artist who focused on intimate views of nature, in striking contrast to the epic celebrations of the American landscape by male contemporaries such as Frederic Church or Thomas Moran. As Manthorne sets out in the Introduction, Bridges' work merits particular attention in five areas: as a watercolorist, a painter of field flowers, an artist-ornithologist, a popular illustrator, and a nature conservator (12), which she then expands upon in subsequent chapters.

Manthorne logically employs a chronological sequence for the chapters, while also heightening interest through the incorporation of thematic headings. The first chapter, "Apprenticeship, Ambition, and Adventure, 1850s–1860s," is the most foundational, as it details how Bridges began to pursue serious artistic study after receiving the then gender-appropriate level of instruction for young women in



Fig. 2. Susie M. Barstow, *Pool in the Woods* (1885), oil on panel, 9 1/2" x 7". Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, Hartford, CT.

drawing and watercolor while growing up in Salem. Two events seem to have been especially significant: the first was the death of both parents in 1850 (when Fidelia was then sixteen), which left the children to forge their own livelihoods and careers. For Fidelia, this initially meant working as a governess, a suitable role for unmarried young women, albeit in the art-centric world of New York City. Then, her lifelong friend from Massachusetts, the sculptor Anne Whitney (1821–1915), invited Fidelia to come study art with her in Philadelphia, which she eagerly did, attending the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.[3] Bridges additionally took private lessons from Richards, who was then one of the few American landscape artists adept in both watercolor and oil technique. Richards was also amongst the small number of artists associated with the American Pre-Raphaelite movement, and their adherence to John Ruskin's dictum, "Paint the leaves as they grow" (31), through a direct study of nature, strongly resonated with Bridges, who would live out this creed for the rest of her life.

But there was another source of influence for Bridges that harkened back to her family upbringing, and that was Asian art, which she had direct access to in the objects brought home by her seafaring father. Manthorne discusses in chapter three how Bridges' aesthetic choices in her paintings of the 1860s and 1870s, as seen in the small watercolor and gouache on paper, *Chickadee and Thistle* (1875; Fig. 1), clearly evoke the visual language of Japanese artists such as Hokusai. Manthorne makes use of effective visual analysis to support and elucidate her points, as for example, when she writes "Slender tendrils of sea grass and the hairy, lobed leaves of the thistle lace her foreground, allowing nature to whisper rather than shout" (64). Significantly, as Manthorne relates, this interest in Asian art was embedded in Fidelia's life, a fact which is reinforced by the inclusion of books on Asian art, literature, and religion in her personal library (helpfully listed in an Appendix, 110–114) and in fact predates the influence of John LaFarge, who is "usually credited with initiating that strain in American art" some years later (12).

Other chapters continue to examine Fidelia's independence as she staked out a career as a professional artist while maintaining her abiding love of the natural world. For example, we learn in chapter two that she enjoyed mountain climbing in New York (40), and that when she travelled for an extended period to Europe with friends, in 1867–68, she still travelled solo at times, even though that was countercultural for women to do. Curiously, Bridges was apparently more interested in exploring the natural settings rather than studying art; as Manthorne notes, there are few extant drawings or paintings from her trips abroad (52). Perhaps the new environments and grand vistas were incompatible with Bridges' typical focus on more intimate scenes of nature, as is apparent in her watercolor *Rhone Glacier, The Falls & Klein Furkahorn from Grimsel Pass* (1867), which Manthorne rightly notes "fails to convey a convincing sense of space" (50).

Upon returning to the US in October 1868, Bridges' skill as a watercolorist came to greater notoriety as American collectors sought Japanese-inspired scenes of nature for their homes (64). In 1873, Bridges was elected an Associate of the National Academy of Design, one of only two women to receive that honor up until that time, leading Manthorne to state that Bridges was now "a leading figure in American art" (64). Yet Bridges was not one to rest on her laurels, and instead sought new avenues to bring her art to middle-class audiences; her primary effort was to team up with printmaking innovator Louis Prang, so that her sketches could be chromolithographed onto notecards and calendars. Manthorne provides very helpful context here to explain the process, as well as to demonstrate the demands it put upon Bridges as an artist. Fidelia continued this work into the 1880s, designing holiday cards (as did Winslow Homer, notes Manthorne [80]), and then collaborating on finely illustrated books that celebrated bird life observed directly in nature, in contrast to John James Audubon's moribund specimens. Manthorne credits Bridges' books (and others) with helping to conserve avian life in the US, which at the time was being mercilessly decimated for the sake of providing feathers for fashionable women's chapeaus (91).

Manthorne's ability to interweave art with social, cultural, and natural history is one of the strengths of the monograph, certainly broadening the appeal and impact of an artist who otherwise might have been historically relegated to the limited category of bird and flower painter. We also learn of Bridges' feminist inclinations, such as her strenuous hiking excursions, including being the only one of her party to ascend Mt. Rigi in the Swiss Alps on foot (52); her bold bicycle riding (which Manthorne describes as a "political act" for women) (92), allowing them greater freedom and visibility, and her ability to stand up to powerful men in the art world, such as when Prang attempted to renege on a production schedule (70). Yet at times I was left wanting more information; for example, to what extent was the celebrated

American author Mark Twain a patron of Bridges (81)? Did she have other notable patrons? Was the major exhibition of her work at a New York City gallery in 1877 a success, either financially or critically (75)? Perhaps answers to these questions are not possible at this time? Even so, as a foundational monograph, the readability and visual bounty of Manthorne's *Fidelia Bridges: Nature into Art* serves as an outstanding introduction to an important American artist.

Nancy Siegel, a long-established scholar of American art (as is Manthorne), published on landscape painter Susie M. Barstow back in 2010, but this is the first monographic study of the artist, by any historian. *Susie M. Barstow: Redefining the Hudson River School*, a substantial book at one hundred ninety-two pages and over one hundred color illustrations, aims to unpack Barstow's life and art, and does so with substantial depth and verve. Siegel's passion for her subject is readily apparent, as she powerfully states in the Introduction, "Susie Barstow was undaunted" (10). But that is not an exaggeration: Barstow was a literal trailblazer, whether hiking, mountain climbing, advocating for women artists to study from the male nude, or as a renowned landscape painter who happened to be female, and who encouraged other women artists to consider landscape as a field of study.

Siegel follows the trajectory of Barstow's life and career in a mostly chronological order. Like Bridges, Barstow, born Susanna (Susie), grew up in a middle-class family and initially learned art at New York City's Rutgers Female Institute (later College) in 1853, the first institution of higher learning where women could receive bachelor's degrees, and where "employable" skills were taught in its curriculum (19), and the Cooper Union (1861). Yet, also like Bridges, Barstow wanted more—a career as a professional painter of landscapes. She was similarly influenced by Ruskin's writings on "Truth to Nature" (21), and thus immersed herself in nature whenever possible, first in the Catskills Mountains of southeastern New York and later branching out to the White Mountains of New Hampshire, to Maine, the American West, and even an around-the-world trip when she was in her sixties. Siegel provides excellent in-depth background on each of these areas as tourist destinations, and includes context from contemporary guidebooks, such as May Alcott Nieriker's *Studying Art Abroad and How To Do It Cheaply* (1879), on expectations and advice for women travelers. Due to her hiking prowess, Barstow garnered a great deal of positive publicity from the New York press, which undoubtedly also helped her art sales. Indeed, Barstow seems to have had little difficulty selling her landscapes, as they were scenes that suited the taste of American collectors for their naturalistic and later more tonal approaches celebrating the beauty of untouched American sites. Unlike the founding "father" of the Hudson River School of landscape painting, Thomas Cole, Barstow did not include references in her landscape paintings to literary subjects and rarely represented any human figures, despite the ubiquitous presence of hikers and tourists in the locales she frequented (43). Instead, she often visually framed her compositions such that the viewer, alone, can enter the pristine setting following a welcoming path (43). Unlike Bridges' work, Barstow's settings are generally deep and vast with an excellent use of perspective; as Siegel writes, "She would return to these wooded interiors of the Catskills for decades with a strong similarity or type emerging in her style: leaning, framing boughs and a foreground water feature, pulling the eye through a deep recessive space to the light beyond with an overall sense of beauty, calm and quietude…." (43). Their compelling, illusory space makes it quite surprising to learn that the oil paintings themselves are usually relatively small, demonstrated in *Pool in the Woods*, at just nine and a half by seven inches (Fig. 2). Although Siegel notes that smaller-scale landscapes dominated the art market following the American Civil War (45), is it possible that this smaller format made them more "acceptable" for a woman artist to produce, and to then market and sell to middle class buyers? Despite her evident skill set, why did Barstow never attempt more "epic" views of nature (her largest canvases, of which there are only a few, measured thirty by twenty-two inches [43])? These are a few of the gender-related questions the reader may still be curious about; but overall Siegel's approach to the material is thorough, well-written, effectively analyzed, and well-supported by primary sources, including Barstow's own writings. An appended "List of Known Works Exhibited by Susie M. Barstow" helpfully documents the extent and success of Barstow's career (168–171). We are left with little doubt that Susie Barstow bestowed an impressive legacy through her paintings, teachings, and life experiences that deserve to be better known today.

The third book is an exhibition catalogue produced by the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, and which, in two sections, brings together the works of nineteenth-century women landscape painters in the circle of Barstow and Bridges with more contemporary, cross-generational, and global practitioners of the genre, showcasing such well-known painters and multidisciplinary artists as Kay WalkingStick (b. 1935), Jean Shin (b. 1971), Teresita Fernández (b. 1968), and Cecilia Vicuña (b. 1948).[4] The catalogue itself is composed of two essays, an interview, a section in which contemporary artists write about their included works, a useful chronology titled "Women, Land, and Art: A Brief and Incomplete Timeline," and a section on "Artist and Contributor Biographies." There is no overall bibliography, but sources are included in the essays and in the biographical material. There is also no index, which would have been useful given the number of artists included and the apparent desire to show connections and divergences from past to present. There are, however, numerous excellent quality illustrations throughout.

The catalogue's foreword by Elizabeth B. Jacks briefly sketches a few goals of this transhistorical exhibition: to "bring women to the forefront," and to bring "forward the outstanding work of the intrepid artist Susie Barstow" (7). More is developed by Nancy Siegel, one of the

show's three curators, in her essay "Susie M. Barstow: Redefining the Hudson River School," where she notes that the exhibition serves as the first retrospective for Barstow (14), while adding that "the narrative surrounding nineteenth-century women landscape painters" is also expanded here and placed "in conversation with contemporary artists" (13–14). Siegel provides a readable, interesting introduction to Barstow's accomplishments with useful historical context, although it would have been helpful to specifically expand on *how* Barstow defied "numerous social, educational, and professional expectations" (32), especially for general audience readers of this exhibition catalogue. What particularly distinguishes this essay from Siegel's book, however, is the section on "Susie Barstow's Circle," wherein a brief background, illustrations, and illuminating visual analyses are expanded to other women landscape artists who either knew or exhibited with Barstow, such as Bridges, Julie Hart Beers (1835–1913), and Eliza Pratt Greatorex (1819–1897). It is heartening to hear that many of these women will be the subject of their own retrospectives or monographs in the future (48).

The second main essay, authored by curators Amanda Malmstrom and Kate Menconeri, "Women Reframe Land: Contemporary Practices," takes on a topic made particularly challenging given the variety of perspectives and media in which artists today have responded to the notion of land and landscape, or even more specifically, to the Hudson River School. As curators for this part of the exhibition, Malmstrom and Menconeri helpfully frame their content by explaining and applying Rebecca Solnit's concept of how the landscape has developed from being "scenery," as perceived by white male artists, to "the spaces and systems we inhabit" (52), as understood and realized by contemporary artists today. Their goal, and I would respectfully suggest the goal of both parts of this joint exhibition, is to have the reader/viewer "continually rethink landscape art in the United States as dynamic, multifaceted, and evolving, and as also created and interpreted by women" (54). They then proceed to discuss each artist-contributor to the exhibition generally, as well as more specifically in terms of their exhibited pieces. Some, such as Anna Plesset (b. 1977) and Tanya Marcuse (b. 1964), directly engage with nineteenth-century perspectives of landscape in their contemporary creations, particularly interesting given the joint nature of this exhibition. Meanwhile, other artists broaden the notion of "landscape" by interrogating landscape and possession, landscape and beauty, and landscape and climate change. Wendy Red Star (b. 1981) and Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (1940–2025) importantly address historically stereotypical depictions of Indigenous peoples and their relationships to the land.

Indigenous approaches are further amplified through the inclusion of an extended transcription of a 2022 interview between Candice Hopkins (b. 1977) and Jolene Rickard (b. 1956). Both identify as Indigenous, and, among other roles, are immersed in the artworld as curators. Their interview, "Upturning the Map: Native Women and Representations of Land and Landscape," emphasizes the ways in which Native art, specifically the creations of women, incorporates the land rather than merely depicts it as is so often found in Western art. As they eloquently explain, women deploy more complex, collaborative, and active processes that focus on articulating relationships to the land, embodied by Quick-to-See Smith's mixed media series, *Upturning the Map*. The essay provides an important and profound contribution to this catalogue, as well as to the subject of landscape and art more generally.

The catalogue concludes with "Artist Texts and Plates," a section in which the thirteen contemporary exhibited artists discuss their concepts and approaches. The one exception is the Guerrilla Girls' famous 1989 poster, *Do women have to be naked to get in the Met. Museum?*, originally commissioned by the Public Art Fund in NY, which has no accompanying text. Although it is briefly mentioned in the catalogue, the lack of explanatory text and the lack of a tighter connection to the landscape theme make it a questionable addition.

However, in sum, *Women Reframe American Landscape* is an important addition to the literature on this under-explored topic and of great interest to read both for its new historical content on nineteenth-century American women artists as well as its contemporary perspectives and practices. In tandem with Manthorne's *Fidelia Bridges* and Siegel's *Susie Barstow*, we now have important pathfinders, both artistically and art historically, which reveal that women artists have much to express through the field of landscape art, despite the social and professional barriers that were historically against them. May other curators, art historians, and artists now follow their lead. •

Julia K. Dabbs is a Professor Emerita of art history at the University of Minnesota, Morris, and has researched and published on historical women artists for the past twenty-five years. Her most recent book is *May Alcott, Author and Advocate* (Anthem Press, 2023).

Notes

1. Additional material on this series may be found at https://www.lundhumphries.com/collections/northern-lights.
2. Bridges had previously been the focus of an exhibition catalogue and essay some decades ago: May Hill, *Fidelia Bridges, American Pre-Raphaelite* (Berry Hill Gallery, 1981).
3. For a recent study including Anne Whitney, see Johanna Amos, "The Penalty of My 'Woman's Work'": Euphrosyne Stillman and the Bayard Memorial Commission," *Woman's Art Journal* 46, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2025): 14–24.

Wendy Red Star: Delegation

Contributions by Jordan Amirkhani, Julia Bryan-Wilson, Josh T. Franco, Annika K. Johnson, Layli Long Soldier, and Tiffany Midge
Aperture, 2022

Wendy Red Star: Bíilukaa

Conversations with Wendy Red Star and Wallace Red Star, Molly Malone, Chelsea Malone, Annika Johnson, and Adriana Greci Green
Radius Books, 2023

Reviewed by Elizabeth S. Hawley



Fig. 1. Wendy Red Star, *Indian Woman Standing*, from the series *Indian Woman* (2005), pigment print, 30" x 20".

In 2024, Apsáalooke Crow artist Wendy Red Star (b. 1981) received a MacArthur Fellowship—popularly known as a "Genius Grant"—for "engaging with archival materials in works that challenge colonial historical narratives."[1] The award marks a significant institutional recognition of Red Star's practice, and by extension a broader critical consideration of the art production of Native women artists, who have long contended with the dual biases of race and gender in the mainstream art world. Works produced by Red Star and her contemporaries, including Andrea Carlson (b. 1979; Ojibwe/European), Marie Watt (b. 1967; Seneca Nation), Dyani White Hawk (b. 1976; Sičáŋǧu Lakota, herself a 2023 MacArthur Fellowship recipient), Sarah Sense (b. 1980; Chitimacha/Choctaw) and Rose B. Simpson (b. 1983; Santa Clara Pueblo)—not to mention foremothers like Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (1940–2025; Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation) and Kay WalkingStick (b. 1935; Cherokee Nation)—are increasingly appearing in group and solo exhibitions at major institutions, as well as in monographs and artist's books such as the volumes under review here.[2] *Wendy Red Star: Delegation* and *Wendy Red Star: Bílukaa* follow *Wendy Red Star: A Scratch on the Earth*, the catalogue published on the occasion of the artist's first career survey exhibition at the Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey, in 2019.[3]

Released by Aperture, a publisher dedicated to photography, *Wendy Red Star: Delegation* focuses on the lens-based aspects of Red Star's multimedia practice, and the book follows an *Aperture* magazine special issue on Indigenous photography that Red Star guest edited in 2020.[4] As Documentary Arts president Alan Govenar observes in his foreword, "Red Star's practice as a photographer … illuminates an expansive prescience, reverberating with the relationships between cultural identity and the complexities and contradictions of the contemporary world" (25). Many of these complexities and contradictions are rooted in issues of gender, and Red Star's position as a Native woman and avowed feminist is repeatedly underscored in the chapters of the book, which include a conversation between the artist and Josh T. Franco; essays by Julia Bryan-Wilson, Tiffany Midge, Jordan Amirkhani, and Annika K. Johnson; and poems produced by Layli Long Soldier.

"Back to the Blanket: Wendy Red Star in Conversation with Josh T. Franco" is a wide-ranging conversation between Red Star and Franco, an artist and art historian. They discuss how her art has evolved and consider her pivotal works, including the early *Interference* from 2004, which involved installing tipi poles on heavily trafficked areas of her college campus. Red Star recalls her revelation at the Crow perspective that "the home is where the tipi sits, and the tipi is actually a woman. The interior is the womb and you're being hugged by

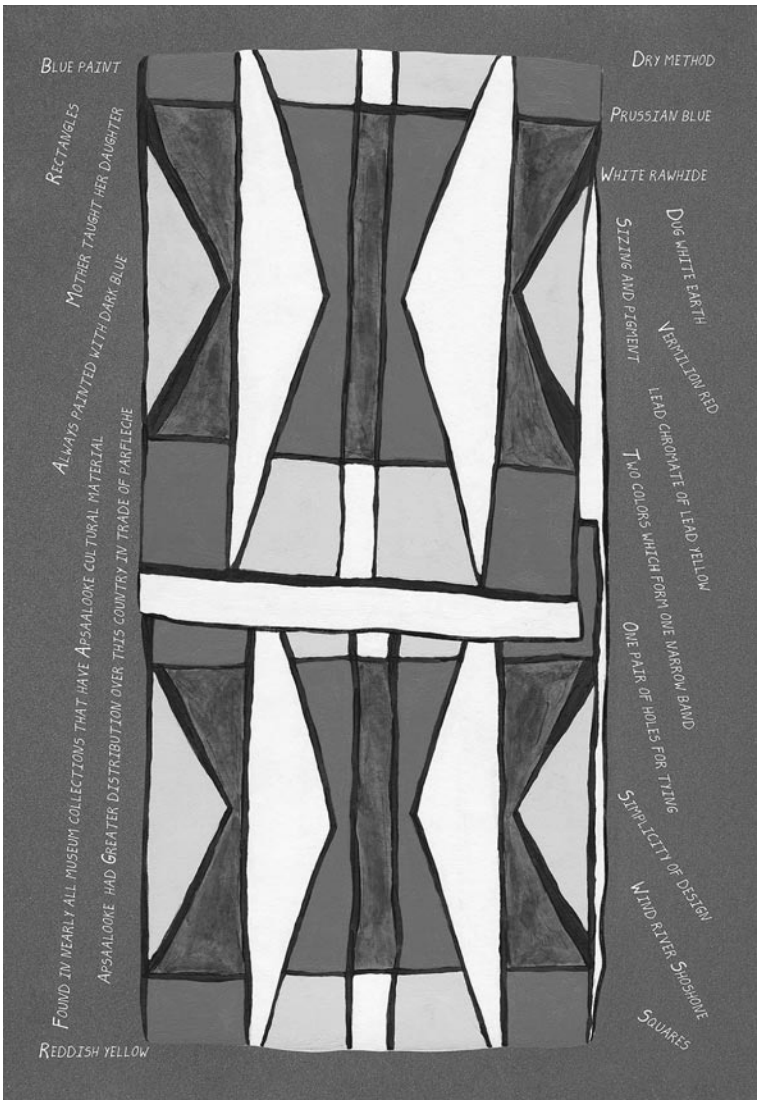


Fig. 2. Wendy Red Star, *Walks Pretty* (2022), digital print, 69" x 47". Commissioned by the Public Art Fund.

your mother, and to think the Earth is your mother" (30). Red Star has continued to foreground her perspective as a Crow woman, a strategy that has not always been well received. She notes that during graduate school at UCLA, she was the only Native student, and the identity-based work that she and other students of color produced was ridiculed for being overly didactic. Asked if feminism was part of the conversation, Red Star says: "Not at all. It was even about being genderless, more like not being a woman, was kind of the goal…. Me doing work about my culture and being a Crow woman was so not the deal" (31).

But Red Star has successfully made it her deal, as the ensuing essays in *Delegation* attest. In "Our Side: Wendy Red Star's Material Conceptualism," art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson praises Red Star's "distinctly feminist Indigenous perspective" (39) in works that draw from contemporary art movements including the appropriation of the Pictures Generation in the late 1970s, typologies of conceptual photography, and sculptural installations made for spaces outside the gallery. She aptly compares Red Star's work to that of Indigenous artists like Rebecca Belmore (b. 1960) and Marianne Nicolson (b. 1969) as well as the works of non-Native makers such as Cindy Sherman (b. 1954) and Bernd and Hilla Becher (1931–2007; 1934–2015)—thereby rejecting persisting notions that "Native art" and "contemporary art" exist in separate realms.

Poet, writer, and editor Tiffany Midge's (Standing Rock Sioux Nation) "Fifty Shades of Buckskin: Satire as a Decolonizing Tool" focuses on Red Star's *White Squaw* series (2014), a set of prints that reappropriate the covers of erotic novels published in the 1980s and 1990s under the same title. Red Star visually inserts herself as the protagonist, dressing in stereotypical Native garb and superimposing the resultant satirical self-portrait over the book jacket imagery, acting out and thereby sending up the lurid titles and taglines. Midge gives a brief overview of the "white squaw" narrative, noting that this story was based on the account of Jenny Wiley, a white woman who was supposedly taken prisoner by the Cherokee in the late eighteenth century, before eventually escaping. Hers is one of many "captivity narratives" in colonial literature that predate the modern "buckskin romance" of which the *White Squaw* books are a part. The salaciousness of the tales is laced with racism and sexism that Red Star found ripe for reappropriation. Midge observes that such misrepresentations of Native women are on the decline, stating: "And when the script is flipped, I realize how far we've come. And the distances our grandmothers, mothers, and aunties have traveled to help us arrive at this place in history" (134).

"Setting the Stage: Self-Portraits and the Politics of Looking" is a lyrically written essay based on sustained close looking, wherein art historian and critic Jordan Amirkhani centers an analysis of Red Star's self-portraiture practice on *Indian Woman* (2005; Fig. 1). This series features Red Star dressed in Apsáalooke regalia amid a contemporary interior setting that includes items that carefully connote both Indigeneity and contemporaneity; a beaded fan of feathers and an iPod rest on a side table, for example. As Amirkhani asserts, the amalgam of objects encourages viewers to question problematic notions of authenticity, applying pressure to superficial divisions made among categories like "Native," "modern," and "American," and making space instead for the "logic of the 'both/and'" (139).

Amirkhani notes that the staged tableaux of *Indian Woman* point to Red Star's deep familiarity with historical non-Native photographers who staged Indigenous sitters in primitivizing ways as well as contemporary Native photographers whose works counter such imagery with the rich admixtures of Indigenous life today.

In "The Indian Congress: Reconfiguring the Indigenous Archive," curator Annika K. Johnson foregrounds Red Star's installation *The Indian Congress* (2021), using the work to unpack the artist's move into a role that is less photographer and "more akin to an interpretive archivist who studies and interrogates, with an assertive subjectivity, image-making and its legacy" (211). *The Indian Congress* includes a life-size replica of a world's fair farm booth, the tiers featuring reproductions of archival photographs of hundreds of Indigenous figures that Red Star meticulously cut out along the contours of their bodies and attire. These men and women were citizens of thirty-five Native nations—including Red Star's—who attended the 1898 Indian Congress in Omaha, Nebraska. The convening was scheduled to coincide with the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition, a world's fair that celebrated westward expansion. The Indian Congress devolved into an ethnographic sideshow wherein Indigenous peoples were displayed as "primitive" foils to the "progress" of turn-of-the-century America. Johnson asserts that *The Indian Congress* "is a witty and powerful inversion of this logic," (212) concluding that Red Star's recent work "proposes an investigative photographic practice in the archives" (213).

Delegation closes with writer, artist, and activist Layli Long Soldier's (Oglala Lakota) poetry. "Mosquitos" includes three "found" poems taken from the text of Zitkala Ša's 1921 short story "The Widespread Enigma Concerning Blue Star Woman." In the original tale, Blue Star Woman is an elderly Sioux woman who is an orphan and therefore cannot provide the family documentation required to receive a land allotment. In dire straits, she allows two conmen to help her in exchange for half the land. When they succeed, tribal community members protest, and the Chief is arrested. The same conmen arrange for his release, for a portion of his land. The story illustrates issues of vulnerability, exploitation, and corruption, and Long Soldier explains that she "discovered that much of the language used over a century ago to articulate social, spiritual, political, and identity issues for Native people remains the same today" (np). Her poems offer choose-your-own-adventure navigation, with the reader given a selection of short excerpts to connect as they make their way down the page. "A Line Through Grief" features letters that incorporate submissions from gallery-goers asked about a person, place, or part of themselves that they grieved the loss of, combined with the author's own language and that of grieving friends and relatives. The questions that come out in the amalgamated letters—such as "Was it my fault? Could I have helped them?" (np)—seem to assume knowledge about a situation that the reader lacks. Yet the queries are as familiar as they are ambiguous, revealing that these questions are "shared, agonizing, deeply human, and often unanswerable" (np).

While *Delegation* follows the format of an academic monograph, *Wendy Red Star: Bílukaa* is a much more personal account of Red Star's life and practice. The book unfolds as a series of conversations between Red Star and her parents Wallace Red Star and Molly Malone, her sister Chelsea Malone, and curators Annika Johnson and Adriana Greci Green. Red Star is the interviewer in these sessions, and the discussions that follow reveal details about the lives and perspectives of the interviewees as well as the artist—a particularly unusual format in the case of the two curators. Illustrations feature her recent archivally-based work but also make space for family photographs and childhood drawings. Early in the book, *bílukaa* is defined as "a reference to what the Apsáalooke call themselves: *Our Side*" (9), and in a brief author's note, Red Star observes: "To be *bílukaa* implies not only common heritable ancestry but, more importantly, a community bound by language, spiritual beliefs, and social structures" (11). She muses that the book at hand "reveals and gives new form to what I have found during my research in public collections and archives while also honoring and connecting those materials to my family and community" (11).

Red Star's first two conversations are with her parents, Molly Malone and Wallace Red Star.[5] She prompts them to detail their early lives, how they met, their interracial relationship—Malone is white, Wallace is Apsáalooke—and their perspective on the artist's childhood years. Her mother's story is unusual: Malone moved to the Crow reservation for a job in 1978, following six years in the army including a stint in South Korea, where she adopted her first child, Chelsea. Mutual friends set her up with Wallace. Her memories of these years reveal layers of acceptance and discrimination. She recalls Wallace's parents being kind to her, but others were less accepting: "There were almost tier levels—if Big Boy had a Crow wife, that would have been the best. If you had a wife who was a Native woman from a different tribe, that's the second best. Then non-Indian was kind of like, they'll deal with it" (59). She and Red Star then discuss how the artist was called "half-breed" growing up, and Malone says, "It still makes your stomach clench when you hear people being referred to that way," though Wallace observes that the Crow term for half-breed, "axualuúpe," literally translates to "two bodies," and is not meant in a derogatory way (60). The exchange is a telling indication of the ways discrimination is perceived and experienced by people coming from differing subject positions.

Their second conversation centers on Crow Fair, a week-long annual celebration of Crow and other Native cultures that occurs near Billings, Montana, in August.[6] Red Star notes that the event has been a significant source of inspiration for her art, and she recalls camping during the fair, parading on horseback, dancing, wearing an outfit made for her by her grandmother, and receiving her

Crow name—"Aappiiwaaxaaxiish," or "Abalone Necklace." She peppers her parents with questions about their own memories of the fair, seeming to be genuinely surprised at some of their answers. She learns that her Crow name is connected to her grandmother and that the elder gave Red Star a cradleboard with abalone shells on it for protection when she was a baby. She also learns that her father assisted community members in getting fair leases for their land in transactions with non-Native agents. He reminds her that many Crow were unable to write their own names, much less read and understand the language on their leases, which they would sign with an X or a thumbprint. Red Star says: "That's my next title. 'He Put His Thumbprint On There'" (90).

Red Star's conversation with her sister, Chelsea Malone, is a laughter-filled exchange that reflects their deep sibling bond, even as they discuss difficult topics. As a biracial woman, Red Star has struggled with feelings of not fitting in; too white to be seen as entirely Crow, too Crow to be wholly accepted in non-Native spaces. She ruminates on working through these feelings as an adult and coming to the realization that Malone—a Korean adopted by a white woman and raised on the Crow reservation—must also grapple with complex issues of identity and belonging. Malone observes: "I got brought into this other family, and so that's really my culture, and that's where I fit in. It was always an intellectual struggle or disconnect to feel like, 'Okay, I'm not really Crow; I'm really Korean,' but none of that resonated with me because I didn't have Korean relatives or grow up in Korean culture" (126). The sisters discuss their shared love of Crow fair and how to ensure their children will continue to feel connected to Crow culture.

In a format that flips the typical script, the artist and ostensible subject of *Bílukaa*, Red Star, queries Annika Johnson about her background and how Johnson approaches her role as the Curator of Native American Art at the Joslyn Art Museum. Johnson, who is a specialist in nineteenth-century Native art but is not herself Indigenous, underscores her responsibility to Native communities in facilitating their relationships with the Native items held by the Joslyn, focusing on collaborations and conversations in what she terms "reciprocal research" (174). Toward the end of their conversation, Red Star and Johnson discuss the artist's parfleche works (Fig. 2). In this ongoing series, Red Star pulls images of parfleche—rawhide bags and containers used by Plains peoples for transport and decorated with distinctive geometric designs—from various institutions' digital collections, redraws them, and paints them. In the background of some of the works, she includes snippets of her handwritten notes, a common occurrence in Red Star's work that pictorializes in a very personal way the research and archival mining involved in her projects. She discusses the problems of cataloguing with Johnson, noting that some of the parfleches labeled as Crow are actually from other communities—misidentification that points to trade and cultural exchange, and also underscores the need for Native representation and access to museum holdings.

Red Star continues her discussion of mislabeling with Adriana Greci Green, the Curator of Indigenous Arts of the Americas at the Fralin Museum of Art. Like Johnson, Green is a non-Native scholar, and she stresses the need for curators to develop relationships in Native communities and provide collections access. She and Red Star talk about how Indigenous community members bring a wealth of knowledge to items otherwise locked away in museum storage, filling in information gaps and correcting misattributions. They also bemoan the gatekeeping that persistently keeps community members and other researchers away from some museum holdings, citing in particular curators who simply lock away materials that might be sacred or sensitive, rather than doing the work to determine how such materials should be presented, shared, or repatriated.

Delegation and *Bílukaa* are beautifully and abundantly illustrated; the glossy pages of the former befitting a book that focuses on Red Star's photography, while the matte pages of the latter connote the textures of the archives on which the works in this book are based. *Delegation* is geared toward a more academic audience and contains more explicit references to feminism and issues of gender, but both specialists and general interest readers will find much to glean from both publications.

Elizabeth "Betsy" S. Hawley is an art historian, writer, and curator specializing in modern and contemporary art and art of the Americas, with a focus on Native North American art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. She is working on two book projects: the first tracks the ways Pueblo and Anglo-American artists in New Mexico grappled with fallacies of authentic Indigeneity and biases regarding gender roles in art production during the first half of the twentieth century; the second considers how contemporary Indigenous artists incorporate Native feminisms in their practices. •

Notes

1. See Red Star's Fellow page on the MacArthur Foundation website: https://www.macfound.org/fellows/class-of-2024/wendy-red-star.
2. Of particular note are the exhibitions *Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists* (2019) at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, which featured the works of over one hundred fifteen artists spanning 1000 years, and *Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: Memory Map* (2023), the first retrospective of an Indigenous artist ever organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art. See Karen Kramer, review of *Hearts of Our People*, by Jill Ahlberg Yohe and Teri Greeves, *Woman's Art Journal* 41, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2020): 61–63.
3. Nadiah Rivera Fellah and Tricia Laughlin Bloom, *Wendy Red Star: A Scratch on the Earth*, exh. cat. (Newark, NJ: Newark Museum of Art, 2019).
4. Wendy Red Star, ed., "Native America," special issue, *Aperture Magazine* 240 (Fall 2020).
5. For clarity's sake, I refer to Wallace Red Star as "Wallace."
6. For further information on Crow Fair, see their website: http://www.crow-nsn.gov/crow-fair.html.

Indigenous Identities: Here, Now & Always

Edited by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, with contributions by Neil Ambrose-Smith, Mario Caro, Lou Cornum, Heid E. Erdrich, Lara M. Evans, Chelsea M. Herr, Raven Manygoats, Anya Montiel, Stacy Pratt, Jaune Quick-too-See Smith, Maura Reilly, and Jennifer Woodcock-Medicine Horse
Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, and Hirmer, 2025

Mark: Sonya Kelliher-Combs

Edited by Julie Decker, with contributions by Julie Decker, Candice Hopkins, Heather Igloliorte, Tanya Lukin Linklater, Taqralik Partridge, and Laura Phipps
Anchorage Museum and Hirmer, 2024.

Reviewed by Jillian Russo

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (1940–2025) and Sonya Kelliher-Combs (b. 1969), both artists, curators, and activists, have made an inestimable impact on Native artists, Indigenous communities, and the formulation of Native art histories. Engaged for decades with artmaking, community advocacy, and the organization of exhibitions that have brought local, national, and international attention to Native art, two recent books, milestones for the field and for them, provide overviews of their artistic and curatorial practices.

Indigenous Identities, the capstone on the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation painter and printmaker's five-decade-long career, is Quick-to-See Smith's largest curatorial enterprise. It was the final project she completed before her death, just weeks before the exhibition opened, and is one of the largest surveys of contemporary Native American art ever organized by an American museum. According to Quick-to-See Smith, it is also the first focused exclusively on identity instead of craft. The catalogue features over one hundred works by ninety-seven artists, representing more than seventy-four Native American nations and communities throughout the continental United States. In the foreword, Maura Reilly, Zimmerli Director, notes that the exhibition and catalogue are completely de-colonialized projects. Everyone involved, from the catalogue contributors to the copyeditor and book designer, are Indigenous. The designer, Kathleen Sleboda (C'eletkwmx/Nlaka'pamux), selected a typeface by Typotheque, a firm that works with Native communities "on language revitalization and preservation efforts" (12).

Mark is the first monograph on Kelliher-Combs, of Iñupiaq and Athabascan descent, known as a mixed-media artist in painting, drawing, sculpture, and installation that utilize traditional Alaskan materials, such as walrus gut and polar bear fur. Kelliher-Combs, who grew up in the Northwest Alaska community of Nome on the coast of the Bering Sea, and now based in Anchorage, has been exhibiting since the early 1990s, including solo presentations of her work at the National Museum of Indian Art in New York, Norway Art Museum, and the Alaska State Museum. One of five siblings, her family spent summers at an Alaskan camp, living a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. This experience, along with familial and communal traditions of making objects—basket weaving, wood carving, and sewing—shaped her interest in art. For example, the tusk form, which appears throughout the paintings, drawings, and sculptures in her "Secrets" series, an ongoing group of works begun in the early 2000s, was adopted from the trim on her grandmother's parka.

Works in the *Secret Portraits* series are composed of sequences of small mixed-media drawings that combine ink, beeswax, and sometimes human or animal hair. The delicate tusk drawings in *Secret Portraits* (2005; Fig. 1) are inspired by the Alaskan practice of scrimshaw, in which intricate designs are etched into whalebone. To give the drawings the translucent quality of vellum, Kelliher-Combs inks both sides of the paper and dips it in beeswax to make it transparent. Adorned with floral, textural, or geometric elements, the tusks often take on the quality of a protective, thimble-like container. In her interview, the artist discusses the tendency of Indigenous communities to bury the pain related to the prevalence of suicide in Native communities. The "Secrets" held inside these vessels

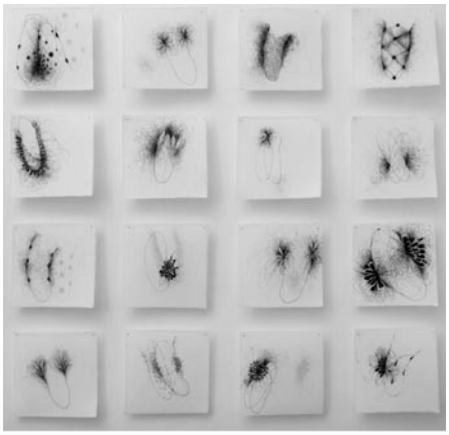


Fig. 1. Sonya Kelliher-Combs, *Secret Portraits* (2005), mixed media, dimensions variable. Private collection. Photograph by Kevin G. Smith.

are the traumas experienced by Alaskan Indigenous peoples.

While in graduate school at Arizona State University, Kelliher-Combs began to study art and abstraction formally, attracted to the work of Abstract Expressionists such as Robert Motherwell and Willem de Kooning. At the same time, homesick while in Arizona, she began working with items connected to her community, which she had brought with her, such as walrus stomach (mammal gut) and hide. After returning to Alaska in the late 1990s, she began using animal fur, beads, and thread along with commercial materials like acrylic polymers. In her interview with Candace Hopkins in the essay section of the catalogue, Kelliher-Combs emphasizes the influence of local craftsmanship in Nome, where "everyone in our community was a maker" (49), as well as local artists Harry Koozata and Marie Saclamanna (1939–2015). Her wide-ranging use of materials was also shaped by other Native artists such as Tlingit artist and educator Jim Schoppert, whose work spans painting, sculpture, and poetry.

Edited by Anchorage Museum Director Julie Decker, the plates in *Mark* are organized according to medium rather than thematically, emphasizing the process of artmaking and mark making. The term "mark" references colonization, geographic, and temporal boundaries, as well as scars inflicted on individuals and populations. Plates are grouped into sections for drawings,

paintings, sculptures, and installations. Interspersed among the artworks, many reproduced as full-page illustrations, are poems by Taqralik Partridge (b. 1975), a spoken word poet and curator. In her poem "Sea Woman" she writes in the voice of water: "I, I bring the clouds down to the ground / I, I am always traveling down" (201), articulating one of the throughlines in Kelliher-Combs' work, the relationship between the artist and the land. In Combs' words, "There is no line between the land, animals, and myself. There is no separation of segregation" (34). Another Partridge poem, "For Loretta, For Cindy," echoes Combs' commitment to activism, expressing Native women's struggle for justice and equality: "and if we are lucky, one day, we won't have to count ourselves lucky to be counted as human beings" (135).

Essays by Decker, Inuk scholar and curator Heather Igloliorte, and Alutiiq artist-choreographer Tanya Lukin Linklater (b. 1976) explore themes of land and community. In "Buried and Exposed," Decker considers the visceral qualities of Kelliher-Combs' work, arguing that each component embodies a connection to the land and to Native communities reshaped by climate change. Embedded in layers of translucent synthetic polymer are human hair (belonging to Combs or other family members), clothing, paper, net, fur, or walrus bones, conveying the painful experience of cultural loss borne by Indigenous peoples. For "Perseverance, Continuity, Ingenuity," Igloliorte discusses Kelliher-Combs' community-centered curatorial work, including her collaboration with Alaska State Museum on the exhibition *Visceral: Verity, Legacy, Identity* of 2023, which juxtaposed historical and contemporary works made from walrus gut. Kelliher-Combs and conservator Ellen Carrlee selected objects from different regions creating an exhibition of translucent artworks across time that emphasized perseverance and continuity. *Visceral* celebrated the ancestral practice of utilizing gut, preserving cultural understanding and introducing these techniques to future generations. Lukin Linklater, in "Gathering Buoyant," describes the practice of sewing gut as akin to oral history. She writes, "Like gut sewn by our grandmothers in the North, the material of language and song swell (43)." Igloliorte, Lukin Linklater, and Partridge's contributions share Indigenous perspectives and experiences across a variety of styles: academic, personal reflection, and poetry.

A biographical essay by Whitney Museum curator Laura Phipps discusses Kelliher-Combs' practice as a fusion between Indigenous and Western influences but cautions against interpreting her forms and materials through a Western art-historical lineage. Despite visual technical similarities with artists like Eva Hesse (1936–1970), Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010), and Bruce Nauman, all of whom worked in latex and rubber and employed seriality, Kelliher-Combs utilizes these materials differently, pairing them with organic elements to suggest continuities between humans and the natural world. Other works, for example, feature the American flag covered in polar bear fur, palpably conveying the violence deeply rooted in American history. The installation *Credible Idiot Strings* (2022), from her series *Idiot Strings*, initiated in 2005, is an arrangement of mittens empty of their owner's hands and a response to the suicide epidemic. As she expanded the series, Kelliher-Combs replaced the mittens with pouch forms made from hide or wool and suspended from yarn. Evoking the presence and absence of the body, these powerful works address trauma, memory, and solidarity.

Whereas *Mark* offers a comprehensive analysis of a single artist's practice, *Indigenous Identities* presents a broad state-of-the-field view of Native American art. Quick-to-See Smith did not include her own work in the catalogue or exhibition, focusing instead on championing the achievements of a diverse group of established and emerging artists who created work within the last fifty years. Browsing through the extensive catalogue plates provides an engaging introduction to Native art. Artworks are thematically grouped in sections—political, tribal, social, and land—topics central to the Indigenous experience in the twenty-first century. The majority of plates are accompanied by artist statements that are engaging, informative, and powerful.

Among these are works by women artists, Mikayla Patton (b. 1991, Oglala Lakota Nation), Erin Ggaadimits Ivalu Gingrich (b. 1990, Nome Eskimo, Koyukon Dené and Iñupiaq), Julie Buffalohead (b. 1972, Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma), and Emmi Whitehorse (b. 1957, Diné), among others. Patton's white sculpture, *Enduring* (2023; Fig. 2), features two suspended paper boxes adorned with porcupine quills. The biomorphic forms appear to hover above the floor, their leather, tentacle-like strings caressing the ground beneath them. Initially, the forms evoke Minimalism, but Patton's captions explain their meaning:

> The floating sculptures comprises two traveling-trunks bound together with leather that fringes to the ground and spills out, evoking a sense of journey and movement.… Porcupine quills, a symbol of strength and self-preservation in many Indigenous cultures, embody protection while paper is often viewed as fragile and delicate. When layered and manipulated, paper reveals an innate strength and resilience, much like the spirit (86).

Ivalu's wood and glass-bead sculpture, *Spawning Iqalukpik Double from Tustemena Lake* (2022), inspired by spawning salmon, addresses issues of environmental preservation and place, representing "the reality of subsistence harvesting and taking care of the gift of salmon" (134). In Buffalohead's acrylic, ink, and graphite work on paper, *The Great Divide* (2008), a woman serves a tray of cookies over a white fence to a group of animal characters, including a rabbit and a coyote, often featured in Native stories. According to Buffalohead, the autobiographical drawing seeks to "encapsulate my emotions about motherhood and to deconstruct ro-manticized visions of childhood and growing up in the suburbs," with characters that "sometimes attack stereotypes about Native people" (178). Whitehorse's dusty-

maroon color field painting, *Rushing Water* (2000), an oil pastel on paper on canvas, captures the experience of rainfall in the Navajo Nation after drought, which would "turn red as the water rushed over the sand" (254).

The catalogue features eight short essays proceeded by a conversation between Jaune and her son, Neal Ambrose-Smith, which discusses the varied aspects of Indigenous identity. Countering longstanding stereotypes, Jaune and Neal emphasize that culture, not appearance or blood quantum (the metric determining who is Native American), is the source of Indigenous identity (15–16). Cultural signifiers include language, food, and engagement with community, in recent decades bolstered by social media. Equally important are initiatives to restore lost cultural heritages, such as Salish weaving practices (destroyed by Christian churches), relationships with the spiritual world, and the centrality of storytelling and creative processes. She concludes, much has changed over the last fifty years: "Writers who record cultural changes are not keeping up with the changes in Native identities" (19).

Short essays by Chelsea M. Herr (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma), Lou Cornum (Diné), and Stacy Pratt (Mvskoke) explore the concept of contemporaneity in Native art. Herr argues that advocacy and storytelling, two prominent themes in recent Indigenous art, are rooted in generations of social activism and sustained efforts to amplify often ignored voices. In her words, "This determination to advocate and speak for ourselves is embedded in both our diverse traditions of storytelling and our understanding that our continued existence is an act of resistance" (23). Cornum contends that the technological rise of online media and an interest in decolonization has shaped the development of "Indigenous Futurism," which spans a range of media, including sculpture, performance, video, and installation, and draws themes from popular, digital, sci-fi, and street art cultures (27). The future of Native American art, he observes, is not confined to the traditional models of art making that shaped American museums and other institutions, and often involves challenging them through the work of artist collectives or community collaborations. Pratt's condensed history of Native American painting provides context for the development of contemporary Native art, beginning with ancestral practices, such as painting on hides or totem poles and the weaving of dyed porcupine quills into birchbark. In the nineteenth century, the practice of drawing on hides was transferred to ledger books, which enabled Native artists to continue working even as Indigenous populations were extinguished. In the mid-twentieth century, there was a resurgence of interest in Indigenous art, reflected in the establishment at the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa of an annual juried exhibition of Indian painting in 1946, and the foundation of the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe in 1962. IAIA continues to be an important center of experimentation for Native artists today, linking past and present.

Lara M. Evans (Cherokee Nation) and Anya Montiel (Tohono O'odham) explore the ways Indigenous sculpture reflect cultural practices. Evans observes that, in *Indigenous Identities*, rather than large-scale works made of stone, wood, or metal, there are many containers: handmade paper boxes, suitcases, and rawhide parfleche bags and boxes, surfaces adorned with organic geometric designs, and used for carrying or storing objects across the Plains, such as observed in Patton's *Enduring* (see Fig. 2). Often, Native sculptures do not reflect traditional art-historical definitions of the medium as freestanding three-dimensional objects. Sculpture worn on the body has the advantage of being portable and communal, a quality that Native peoples prized. Montiel considers the ceramic work of Roxanne Swentzell (b. 1962, Santa Clara Pueblo), Rose Bean Simpson (b. 1983, Santa Clara Pueblo), and Raven Halfmoon (b. 1991, Caddo Nation), tracing how their practices developed from ancestral pottery techniques. Coming from the American Southwest, Swentzell and Simpson reflect the traditions of those communities. Simpson incorporates Pueblo pottery designs in her ceramic and steel *X-Ray* (2021), and Swentzell's *Touched* (2011) uses handprints in original clay to commemorate her relationship with other Pueblo women. Halfmoon's monumental female figures combine techniques she learned from her Caddo elders, such as Oklahoma artist Jeri Redcorn, with influences from ancient Indigenous pottery and the sculpture of the Olmecs and Easter Island.



Fig. 2. Mikayla Patton, *Enduring* (2023), paper, deer lace, porcupine quills, medicine ash. Each 18″ x 22″ x 15 1/2″, 10′ hanging deer lace (70″ x 156″ x 156″ overall). Tia Collection. Addison Doty, courtesy Chiaroscuro Contemporary Art.

The remaining three essays address the diversity of media in contemporary Native American art, including photography, fashion, and poetry. Mario A. Caro (Colombian Mestizo) argues that Native photography acts differently than Western theoretical approaches, functioning not indexically (a direct relationship formed between photograph and subject) but as statements of relational kinship (24). Jennifer Woodcock-Medicine Horse addresses how stereotypes and misrepresentations of Native Americans, such as the story of Pocahontas, have obscured knowledge about the clothing and jewelry in North America, pre-European contact. During this fascinating period, fabrication was the product of enormous trade networks for cloth, gemstones, and shells. Clothing styles were further governed by local climate and activities, such as the creation of waterproof parkas in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest. Contemporary jewelry designers and weavers, working in the context of these historical techniques, are now gaining recognition in museum exhibitions and on the runway.

Finally, Heid E. Edrich (Ojibwe and Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa) traces the history of Native American poetry from the poems published in the first books printed in what would become the US, such as *The Eliot Bible*, named after the Christian missionary who "engaged" Indigenous interpreters and printers (31), to the struggle of Indigenous artists to enter the literary canon throughout the twentieth century, and the growth of Native publications since 2000. The *Norton Anthology of Native Nations Poetry* was finally published in 2020.

Indigenous Identities: Here, Now & Always and *Mark: Sonya Kelliher-Combs* each provide excellent introductions to contemporary Native American art. Although *Indigenous Identities* attempts to cover many complex topics in relatively short essays, I found it accessible and comprehensive, especially for those unfamiliar with the subject. The contributor biographies are incredibly useful, and the concise, thorough artist biographies written by Raven Manygoats (Diné) are a great resource that complement the artist statements accompanying the plates. While reading *Mark*, I found myself wishing there was an artist chronology and contributor biographies to provide additional context for the essays and poetry. Ultimately, I embraced the book's poetic and contemplative approach and patiently allowed understanding to unfold slowly, as I spent more time with Kelliher-Combs' works. Most importantly, both publications capture Kelliher-Combs and Quick-to-See Smith's immense contributions to championing the work of Indigenous women artists, paving the way for the next generation. ●

Jillian Russo is an independent curator and art historian. Her scholarship on women in the artworld includes contributions to the following exhibition catalogues: *Susan Watkins and Women Artists of the Progressive Era* (Chrysler Museum of Art, 2025), to which she contributed an essay on women artists in US art academies; *Wild and Brilliant: The Martha Jackson Gallery and Post-War Art* (Hollis Taggart Gallery, 2021); and *To Live is to Paint: Wilhelmina Weber Furlong, Dorothy Dehner and American Modernism* (The Art Students League, 2022). She has written articles for *American Quarterly*, *CAA Reviews*, *Panorama*, *Public Art Dialogue*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*. Her article, "Interplay: Libbie Mark's Collage Paintings and Women Artists' Networks," was published in *Woman's Art Journal* 45, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2024): 37–46.

Strong Women in Renaissance Italy

By Marietta Cambareri
MFA Publications, 2023

Reviewed by Catherine Hall-van den Elsen

The presence of strong women is very much in evidence throughout the text of this exhibition catalogue, which offers the reader an impressive array of objects made by, or for, elite women throughout Italy, providing us insight into their lived experiences. In taking this approach, author Marietta Cambareri, Curator of Decorative Arts and Sculpture, and Jetskalina H. Phillips Curator of Judaica, Art of Europe, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, has provided the reader with a display and a thoughtful explanation of objects that would have been familiar to noble and successful merchant women of the Italian Renaissance. Images of such women, and others from across social and economic strata, are represented in Cesare Vecellio's 1590 book, *De gli habiti antichi et moderni de diversi parti del mondo* (The Ancient and Modern Clothes from All Over the World), plates from which appear in the final pages of the catalogue.

Most items discussed in the catalogue, and indeed most of those displayed in the exhibition, were carefully sourced from the rich collection of paintings, ceramics, textiles, illustrated books and prints at the MFA, Boston, a timely reminder of the wealth of resources that lie in museum storage waiting for their moment to shine. Each of the eight chapters of the book reflects aspects of the exhibition that was held in Boston from September 9, 2023 to January 7, 2024.

In "Hidden Gold," the book's introductory chapter, the author references the metaphor of hidden gold to highlight a wealth of objects and information about women's lives that support a more inclusive re-evaluation of Italian Renaissance culture. More than Old Testament heroines and renowned women artists, the volume discusses objects that illuminate the lived experience of elite women from many walks of life. The discussion of Barna da Siena's *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* (c. 1340), with its portrayal of women in their roles of wives, carers, and advocates of harmony, exemplifies the approach taken in this book, in which different perspectives of female life are represented by paintings, sculptures, engravings, jewelry, embroidery, and everyday items.

Biblical and historical stories by authors such as the ubiquitous Pliny and Ovid, reinforced exemplary behaviour. Female figures represented the moralizing tropes of strength, piety, and virtue: Donatello's unflinching portrayal of the *Penitent Magdalene* (1453–55) at once repels us and extols the virtue of repentance and abnegation of personal desire; Judith's bravery, which belied her status in life, is reflected in Donatello's sculpture of *Holofernes and Judith* (1457–64); and a *cassone* panel of 1416 and a *desco da parto* (birth tray), decorated and used in the rituals of childbirth, from the third quarter of the fifteenth century tell the story of the Queen of Sheba who sought the wisdom of Solomon.

Luxury items associated with marriage in elite circles are discussed, including a betrothal portrait, a betrothal ring, luster-glazed maiolica plates that illustrate marital virtues and *cassoni* that were used to store textiles such as tablecloths, velvet, and lace. An unusual portrait medal produced by Pastorino di Giovan Michele de' Pastorini in 1558 accompanies the intriguing life story of a Jewish woman Gracia Nasi (1510–1569). Gracia was baptised as a new Christian in Antwerp and given the name Beatrice

de Luna. After travelling to Venice, she publicly reclaimed her family's original Jewish faith and was given the name Gracia de Nasi. Much of her married life was spent between Ferrara and Constantinople. The medal incorporates both Latin and Hebrew script to represent her family's proud heritage, and the fine details of her gown, headdress, and pearl necklace reinforce her family's wealth and status.

Titian's large painting, *St. Catherine in Prayer* (c. 1567), and Ludovico Carracci's intriguing *Portrait of a Widow* (c. 1585) celebrate women's religious devotional practices. The practices of Jewish women are illustrated in the margins of a Hebrew prayer book. Other devotional images designed to guide private prayer, both outside and within convents, include woodcuts, small dolls, painted panels, maiolica relief panels, and embroidered textiles to stimulate meditation on Christ's life, passion and death.

In order for women to develop and sustain their creative practice they needed both education and opportunity, which was rarely available to women outside the elite class. *Rime*, Vittoria Colonna's (1492–1547) volume of poetry, was first published without her consent in 1538, "the first single-authored printed book of poetry by a woman in Italy" (80). Colonna's growing popularity is evidenced by the publication of several later editions, including the 1542 edition that is included in the exhibition. In the same chapter, entitled "Artists Known and Unknown," we learn of the activities of a small number of women who achieved success in other fields. Artists who were trained in their family workshops include the painters Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614), Barbara Longhi (1552–1638), Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1653), and the printmaker Diana Mantuana (1547–1612). The reader is reminded of the importance of family connections in the case of Sofonisba Anguissola (1532–1625), whose father, a minor noble, did everything he could to advance her career-seeking opportunities, including writing to Michelangelo to seek his good opinion.

Renaissance interest in the ancient world is highlighted by Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi's magnificent sculpture of *Cleopatra* (1519–22) that may have been commissioned by Isabella d'Este (1474–1539). Maiolica plates featuring the *Death of Cleopatra* (1542), *Perseus and Andromeda* (1524), and the *Reconciliation of the Romans and the Sabines* (1510) illustrate the Renaissance use of ancient stories to extol virtue, but as the author notes, exemplars of strong women often featured extreme violence, such as that seen in Andrea Andreani's engraving after Giambologna's *Rape of a Sabine* (c. 1584); suicide in Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving after Raphael's *Death of Lucretia* (1511–12); and an horrific martyrdom in an anonymous engraving after Raphael's *Martyrdom of St. Cecilia* (sixteenth century).

Medea and Circe's ability to harness the power of the natural world posed representational challenges for artists in whose environments the activities of elite women were subject to stringent controls. A maiolica plate illustrates the use of masculine physical tropes to convey Medea's power (1530), while in Dosso Dossi's *Circe and Her Lovers in a Landscape* (1525), the sorceress is depicted using her feminine attributes to attract men, who she transforms into animals.

The popularity of lacemaking among elite women is reflected in lace pattern books, in which woodcuts of intricate patterns are accompanied by moralizing texts. The exhibition includes several by male pattern makers, and one (1625) of six known books produced by Isabella Catanea Parasole (1575–c. 1625), dedicated to noble female patrons. The exquisite woodcuts (Fig. 1) were designed to encourage women's creative potential, keeping their hands and minds busy, without challenging the taboos that existed around their virtuosity. Other examples of women's involvement in textile production include anonymous embroideries and the Torah binder that Honorata Foa (late sixteenth century) made in 1582–83.

Marietta Cambareri offers a compelling contribution to our understanding of the lives of Italian women of the Italian Renaissance. Some were anonymous, others were famous for their political power (Isabella d'Este and Eleonora Gonzaga), and still others for their artistic talent (like Sofonisba Anguissola, Lavinia Fontana, Artemisia Gentileschi), or their literary prowess, such as Vittoria Colonna.



Fig. 1. Isabella Catanea Parasole, woodcut from *Gemma pretiosa delle virtuose donne* (The Precious Gem of Virtuous Women), Rome, 1625.

This text and the exhibition that it accompanied contributes to ongoing and salutary efforts to reconstruct Renaissance women's histories. Cambareri builds on a growing body of scholarship to bring lived experience to the fore, connecting the readers with the physical and intellectual environments that affected women's lives. More than strong women, this enlightening and enjoyable text uses objects that reflect the female presence to lead us towards a more balanced, and most welcome, understanding of life in Renaissance Italy. ●

Catherine Hall-van den Elsen, who received her Ph.D. from La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia in 1992, has a long-standing interest in women artists of the early modern period. She is the author of *Luisa Roldán, escultora: Fuerza e Intimismo* (2nd edition CSIC, 2024), *Gender and the Woman Artist in Early Modern Iberia* (Routledge, 2024), and *Luisa Roldán* (Lund Humphries and Getty Publishing, 2021).

Painting Her Pleasure: Three Women Artists and the Nude in Avant-Garde Paris

By Lauren Jimerson
Manchester University Press, 2023

Reviewed by Damon Reed

It is nearly impossible to write about or teach the history of art without acknowledging the politics of representing the nude form. For centuries, the nude has been used to privilege the work of male artists while simultaneously marginalizing and excluding the production of women. In response, Lauren Jimerson's study sets out to expose and remedy some by now canonized fallacies by foregrounding modern women artists who depicted the nude on their own terms: Marie Vassilieff (1884–1947), Émilie Charmy (1878–1974), and Suzanne Valadon (1865–1938). Organized in reverse chronological order, Jimerson prioritizes Vassilieff and Charmy, those most notably neglected from the narratives of modern art history, and concludes with Valadon, the most thoroughly researched of the three. It is worth mentioning, however, that the writing on her compared to the male modernists is still quite sparse, and as such, Jimerson's contribution is a welcomed addition to the study of modernist art history.

Jimerson's introduction does well to set up the sociocultural conditions that provide a backdrop upon which the careers of these three women come into relief. Although the three women artists examined here depicted the nude form in unique ways, they nevertheless have similarities. Indeed, these women lived and worked in similar circles, at times even exhibiting their works at the same venues. Primarily, despite the nude being considered a particularly masculine genre, Vassilieff, Charmy, and Valadon alike created an impressive corpus of modern nude paintings, drawings, and sculptures. Because it would have been considered indecorous for women to study the nude form in academies, these women were primarily self-taught—though all had figures who mentored them and helped them develop their individual styles. One of the ways that their nudes differ from that of contemporary male artists, is the references to pleasure defined by and for women, rather than the heterosexual male gaze, despite those terms being unavailable to them at the time. While their employment of the nude was certainly a departure from traditional cultural norms, they expressed other subject positions—working woman, single parent, divorcee—which were counter to bourgeois sensibilities. While readings of their works certainly invite feminist interpretations today, they never proclaimed to be feminist in their lifetime, and Valadon's antagonism towards "women's art" led to her refusal to exhibit at the Salon des Femmes Artistes Modernes (Salon of Modern Women Artists) until 1933, only after being persuaded to do so by a friend (3). While these three figures are distinct in many ways, they are rare in their commitment to living in ways that they found to be authentic, their expression of female sexuality, and their success in staking a claim in modernist art history.

The opening chapter traces the career of Marie Vassilieff, a woman who, with the patronage of the Russian Imperial family, specifically the Tsarina, was able to come to Paris and pursue a career as an artist. Studying at the academy of Henri Matisse, Vassilieff gained access to French avant-garde circles. Here, Jimerson argues that because Matisse was as much her friend as her mentor, Vassilieff was able to immerse herself in the Parisian avant-garde. Yet, despite this proximity, she remained on the margins due to her subject position as a woman artist. At various points in her career, Jimerson notes, Vassilieff ran art academies, founding her own Académie Marie Vassilieff in 1912, which gave women access to academic study or canteens that supported artistic communities both during and after World War I. Although her work embraces some of the stylistic concerns of Salon Cubism, her post-cubist experimentations and practice resist the movement's masculinist ideologies. Throughout her career, Vassilieff distinctively depicted both male and female bodies as gender fluid or androgynous, which resisted the binary



Fig. 1. Émilie Charmy, *Autoportrait au peignoir ouvert* (Self-Portrait in an Open Dressing Gown) (c. 1916–18), oil on canvas, 36 1/8" x 28 7/8". Fralin Museum of Art, University of Virginia.

views of gender that dominated avant-garde conventions of nude representation. By eschewing the gender binary that was common to her contemporaries, she forged a visual language that unsettled prevailing assumptions about the body and desire within modernist visual practices. Jimerson analyzes Vassilieff's sculptural works that take the form of a type of modernist doll, the *poupée portrait* (portrait doll). Importantly, Jimerson demonstrates the ways that these sculptural works participate in the visual language of European primitivism. As a result, while Vassilieff was progressive in her thinking about gender and sexuality, she nevertheless was a product of her own time, a time when modern artists were turning to African cultural practices for aesthetic inspiration. Jimerson's analysis of these modernist dolls highlights the way in which they are both self-referential as well as vehicles for self-transformation. Deviating from traditional portraiture conventions that prioritize mimesis, Vassilieff employs abstraction to blend her physical traits with that of the doll as well as the African cultures on which they are based to create a complex dialogue of self/other.

Jimerson's second chapter focuses on the career of Émilie Charmy, of the three the figure with the fewest archival materials available, and consequently, a mas-

terful reading of Charmy's works dependent on detailed and nuanced visual analyses and an evaluation of the gendered conditions of Paris during that period. Jimerson draws upon feminist philosophers, most importantly here Luce Irigaray, to argue that Charmy's thick application of paint is fundamental to a depiction of feminine *jouissance* (pleasure). Jimerson notes that by producing private nudes and nude self-portraits, often pregnant, Charmy's works collapse the positions of self/other and subject/object to create conditions that seemingly prioritized a female viewership and autoerotic pleasure decades before feminist academics had theorized the heterosexual masculine gaze. One of the ways that Charmy achieved this was through her pregnant female nudes, an intervention within this genre. Charmy's *Autoportrait au peignoir ouvert* (Self-Portrait in an Open Dressing Gown) (c. 1916–1918; Fig. 1 and on cover) presents the artist as an unabashed subject of her own pleasure. In a non-descriptive environment composed of thick, loose brushwork that builds on the stylistic conventions of Impressionism and Fauvism, Charmy appears seated, draped in an unfastened dressing gown of mottled greys and blues, the fabric falling open to expose her breasts. Her short, modern haircut frames a face flushed with a deep, almost fervent pink. Her lips part slightly, suggesting a breath drawn in either anticipation or release. In one hand, she holds a cigarette, the ember indicated by a swirl of smoke-like paint that blurs into the surrounding air, merging gesture with atmosphere. Her other hand reaches beneath a mass of fabric that covers her groin, an action that insinuates but does not expose a moment of sexual self-gratification. This also positions Charmy as the agent of her own erotic pleasure, rather than a passive figure to be consumed by the viewer's gaze. In addition to her careful analysis of Charmy's visual materials, Jimerson makes an extended comparison between Charmy and the author Colette (1873–1954) to highlight how literature presented women with opportunities to express non-heterosexual ways of living still stifled in the visual arts. Consequently, Colette was a useful point of comparison. In the same way that Colette's autofiction facilitated the discussion of female sexuality, Charmy's self-portraits became sites of self-exploration and female pleasure.

Concluding Jimerson's three case studies is an examination of works by the model-turned-artist Suzanne Valadon and her employment of the white male nude and Black female nude. Her practice employed the nude as a "vehicle of disruption" (135) and visually expresses the constructed nature of gender. Avoiding some of the more commonly explored aspects of Valadon's work, mainly those that align her with the male artists for whom she modeled, this chapter examines some of her most unconventional and understudied works. Her painterly subjects range from bathers to nude self-portraits, and from Black female nudes to white male nudes, revealing Valadon as a singular figure who crafted images that pushed the boundaries of representation—not only for women artists, but for male artists as well. Jimerson keenly spotlights how Valadon was both revolutionary and inconsistent, at times breaking from and at other moments perpetuating traditional conventions, sometimes, perhaps, unintentionally. In addition to Valadon's friendship with Edgar Degas and his influence on and her departures from his bathers, this chapter excels in investigating Valadon's depiction of the male nude (a continuation of Jimerson's research from her 2019 article, "Defying Gender: Suzanne Valadon and the Male Nude"), and the subject of the Black female nude.[1] This chapter explores the racist and imperialist conditions of Paris during the period and closely appraises Valadon's *Vénus noir,* one of five Black female nudes that she created that year. Valadon's rendering of the Black nude is one of the instances where she both conforms to and complicates the conventions of depicting the Black body in Western art. Jimerson argues that while this is one of the first non-primitivizing depictions of a single Black female nude, it is still complex and problematic in various ways due to the sociocultural conditions that frame it. By interrogating the sociohistorical challenges with this work as well its compositional arrangement, Jimerson considers how much more care the Black nude received from Valadon compared to many of her white nudes, thus contributing to an important dialogue about race and modern art history—an area that deserves more attention from the discipline as a whole.

Painting Her Pleasure is an important contribution to the study of modern art, particularly the position of women artists in relation to the European avant-garde. Jimerson's book is thoroughly researched, laden with endnotes, a useful bibliography, and lavish illustrations—featuring thirty-three black and white figures and twenty-seven colored plates—many of which are not often seen outside of their private collections or museum storage. Addressing the many barriers that women artists faced in accessing systems of production, patronage, and promotion, Jimerson builds on generations of feminist art history and theoretical discourse. For example, she hypothesizes that one reason for their absence from the canon is due to the limited number of archival sources about their lives and practice. Rather than shy away from such an ambitious and understudied topic, given their lack of records compounded by decades of scholarly neglect, Jimerson brings their contributions to the fore. Throughout, Jimerson compares Vassilieff, Charmy, and Valadon with their contemporaries. In this study, comparisons are more fully articulated when a female artist is compared with a male artist (apart from her chapter on Charmy). This tendency, I suggest, reflects the fact that the female figures raised as points of comparison are themselves frequently understudied. Such disciplinary patterns raise a critical question: What new interpretive possibilities might emerge if the male artists were removed from the narrative of feminine achievement? Could this kind of analysis be possible by engaging solely with the trajectories of women's careers, independent of male reference? Above all, Jimerson's book models a way to study such complex figures with varying degrees of archival materials vis-à-vis common artistic subjects and offers new and exciting conclusions about the gendered experiences of the Parisian art world. This book will be of

great use to art historians and admirers of modern art, bringing novel figures and research methods to the foreground. Specifically, its methodologies will inspire future art historical research, as Jimerson provides an innovative framework to discuss figures drawing from scant archival content. While this book and its many significant contributions will be of great use to scholars of modern art, it was also a *pleasure* to read. •

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Notes

1. Lauren Jimerson, "Defying Gender: Suzanne Valadon and the Male Nude," *Woman's Art Journal* 40, no. 1 (2019): 3–12.

Sculpting a Life: Chana Orloff between Paris and Tel Aviv

By Paula J. Birnbaum
Brandeis University Press, 2022

Reviewed by Lauren Jimerson

In this first monograph dedicated to the artist Chana Orloff (1888–1968), Paula Birnbaum offers a meticulously researched and deeply insightful biography of a Jewish sculptor whose life and work bridged the tumultuous cultural and political landscapes of the twentieth century. Through a career marked by migration, resilience, and innovation, Orloff emerges, with over five hundred documented sculptures, as a significant yet underappreciated figure in the canon of modern art. Birnbaum's account situates Orloff's contributions within a global context, foregrounding her dual identity as a cosmopolitan artist and a Jewish émigré navigating intersecting histories of displacement, gender, and nationalism.

Sculpting a Life: Chana Orloff between Paris and Tel Aviv reflects a clear chronological structure and geographically coherent organization. Contextualizing Orloff's artistic output across the phases of her life and corresponding socio-political and cultural frameworks, each chapter traces key periods, beginning with her formative years in Ukraine and her family's migration to Palestine, followed by her pivotal move to Paris to pursue artistic training. The narrative transitions through her integration into the Montparnasse avant-garde, her artistic development during World War I, and her establishment as a leading portraitist and sculptor of Montparnasse. The book continues by exploring Orloff's transatlantic travels, her role in building artistic communities, and her navigation of the Jewish art world during the 1930s.

The chapters dedicated to World War II detail her forced migration, exile, and eventual return, emphasizing the resilience and adaptability that defined her métier. The final chapters examine her dual identity as an Israeli artist with ties to the École de Paris and her legacy that extended across France and Israel. By combining a chronological approach with thematic insights—such as Orloff's role in the Zionist movement, her experience of displacement, and her contributions to avant-garde art—the book provides a comprehensive portrait of the artist while highlighting how each transitional stage informed her generative creative expression. The book spans four hundred forty pages and features sixteen color plates and ninety-six halftones, providing rich visual context for Orloff's extensive body of work.

From her origins in Ukraine to her final years traveling between Paris and Tel Aviv, Orloff's biography is one of continual reinvention. Birnbaum introduces her early life in Kamenka, also known by the name of Tsaraconstantinovka, then part of the Pale of Settlement (the region designated by the Russian Imperial government to confine Jewish communities), where she witnessed pogroms and systemic antisemitism that spurred her family's emigration to Palestine in 1905. This migration, shaped by the rising influence of the Zionist movement in their region of Ukraine, became a defining moment for Orloff and laid the foundation for her lifelong exploration of Jewish identity. Inspired by local Zionist leaders like Haim Bograshov and Benzion Mosinzon, Orloff and her sisters defied societal norms by actively participating in Zionist seminars, an unusual role for young women at the time. Supported by their progressive parents, Orloff's formative years were steeped in the ideals of cultural renewal and national aspiration that would profoundly influence her artistic and personal journey.

In Palestine, Orloff continued to challenge social convention by resisting early marriage and working as a seamstress to gain financial independence. Driven by dissatisfaction with its limited opportunities, her decision to leave for Paris in 1910 constituted a pivotal turning point and migration encapsulating themes of agency and displacement that permeate her life's work. Initially pursuing a diploma in fashion design, she faced significant challenges, including linguistic barriers, financial struggles, and societal discrimination as a Jewish émigré, which Birnbaum brings to light in a fascinating manner. Despite these obstacles, Orloff excelled, securing an apprenticeship at the prestigious haute couture house Jeanne Paquin, where she impressed her instructors with her design skills.

Encouraged by her talent for drawing, Orloff pivoted to fine art, gaining admission to the École Nationale des Arts Décoratifs—a notable achievement for a woman and immigrant at the time, as Birnbaum points out. However, formal training in sculpture remained difficult to access due to restrictive gender norms surrounding nudity, anatomy, and manual labor. Orloff began experimenting with sculpture informally, supported by mentors and peers who recognized her talent. Her early works, characterized by classical influences and bold, structured forms, began to attract attention and laid the foundation for her eventual success as a sculptor despite institutional and societal barriers. This period marked her transformation from seamstress to pioneering artist, over-

coming systemic barriers to carve out her place in the Parisian art world, and saw her immersion in the avant-garde circles of Montparnasse, where she befriended fellow Jewish artists such as Marc Chagall, Amedeo Modigliani, and Chaim Soutine. In 1916, Modigliani sketched a quick charcoal portrait of Orloff on the back of an envelope at a Montparnasse café, inscribing it with a playful, multilingual dedication that reflected their shared identity as Jewish émigré artists and marking a moment of friendship she cherished for the rest of her life.[1] She also engaged with a wider network of artists from diverse backgrounds that constituted the international Parisian avant-garde, including André Derain, Georges Braque, and Fernand Léger. These connections, documented through her portrait sculptures, anchor her within the broader narrative of the École de Paris.

She regularly attended Académie Vassilieff, founded by the trailblazing Russian Cubist artist, Marie Vassilieff (1884–1957), which provided studio and exhibition space, guest lectures, and opportunities for dynamic exchanges of ideas. Life drawing sessions were particularly significant, featuring live models of different genders, races, sizes, and shapes, and providing Orloff with invaluable experience and inspiration, especially in drawing from memory, allowing her to expand upon the classical training she received at Arts Décoratifs. This fusion of traditional techniques with Cubist influences profoundly shaped her artistic development and became central to her innovative sculptural approach. Birnbaum's analysis of works like *The Two Jews* (1912), a relief in plaster, and *Woman with Arms Crossed (Madonna)* (1913), an abstracted sculpted bust in bronze, eventually reproduced in various media, illustrates Orloff's integration of cubist influences with themes of modern Jewish identity. While the relief emphasizes stylized representations of Jewish features, the bust in bronze shifts toward abstraction and material exploration, signaling her evolving sculptural language. Together, these works reflect how Orloff, as a modern Jewish woman artist, actively redefined cultural identity through both subject and form. Such early pieces challenged antisemitic stereotypes by idealizing Jewish physiognomy, asserting dignity and fortitude. Through *Mother and Child* (1914), her first wood sculpture, Orloff began her lifelong engagement with her chosen natural materials as well as maternal themes, portraying motherhood as a source of strength, her "primordial power" (71), rather than merely passive nurturing. Her debut at the Salon d'Automne in 1913 and continued presence in subsequent Parisian salons signaled her stature as a serious artist within the competitive Parisian art world.

World War I disrupted Orloff's burgeoning career, forcing her to leave Paris temporarily. During this time, she created new wood sculptures that reflected endurance amidst adversity. Upon her return to Paris in the fall of 1914, Orloff faced further challenges, including the theft of several early works from her studio. Despite this, she focused on rebuilding her life and career with renewed determination, creating some of her most ambitious sculptures in a modest, dimly lit room in the Latin Quarter.

Birnbaum highlights *The Amazon* (1915; Fig. 1), a direct carving in wood later cast in plaster and bronze, measuring twenty-nine and one-half inches high. She argues that it is a groundbreaking sculpture that reimagines the Greek myth of the female warrior within the context of wartime. The hybrid "woman-horse" figure symbolized strength and independence, blending classical mythology with the aesthetics of modernity (95). Its bold reinterpretation of female power and the Modern Woman aligned with Orloff's growing exploration of gender roles and societal expectations during conflict. *The Amazon* was first exhibited on March 4, 1917, in Orloff's inaugural solo show, held in the Montparnasse apartment she shared with her husband, Ary Justman. Organized by the avant-garde magazine *SIC* as part of its *SIC Ambulant* initiative, the exhibition featured thirteen sculptures and ten drawings displayed in her home studio.[2] *The Amazon* was later prominently featured in exhibitions such as the *Salon des Indépendants* in 1920,



Fig. 1. Chana Orloff, *The Amazon* (1915), bronze, 29 1/2".

which Birnbaum argues cemented the artist's position as an innovative sculptor.

Amid these professional milestones, Orloff experienced significant personal events. She married Ary Justman, a Warsaw-born poet and writer deeply integrated into the Parisian avant-garde, in October 1916. Their marriage was the beginning of a partnership of mutual creative and intellectual support, despite their worldly challenges. On January 4, 1918, Orloff gave birth to their son, Élie, a moment of profound joy in a turbulent period. Tragically, Justman succumbed to the Spanish flu on January 12, 1919, just days after celebrating Élie's first birthday. Shortly after, Élie contracted polio, which left him partially paralyzed, adding a caretaking challenge to her life. Despite these immense personal losses, Orloff persevered, channeling her grief and maternal devotion into her oeuvre.

Known as the "portraitist of Montparnasse," Orloff's sculptures in the 1920s of her contemporaries, in wood, plaster, and later in bronze (via lost wax casting), constitute a major body of her work and underscore her role as a chronicler of the Jewish and artistic diaspora in Paris.[3] Her portraits of Jewish intellectuals like *Hayim Nahman Bialik* (1926) and *Edmond Fleg* (1922) demonstrate her technical versatility and emotional depth. Other notable examples include *Portrait of Ida Chagall* (1923) and *Man with a Pipe (Portrait of Widhopff)* (1924), which reflect her mastery of form and her ability to

imbue her modern subjects with psychological nuance. Moreover, Orloff frequently explored themes of motherhood and embodiment, including in her own self-portraits. In *Me and My Son* (1927), nine-year-old Élie is portrayed as if physically integrated with her ample, curvaceous form. Their simplified, geometric facial features evoke Cycladic statuary, while the composition emphasizes maternal warmth and the nurturing female body.

Birnbaum highlights how Orloff carefully negotiated artistic and cultural tensions, particularly the pressure to downplay a visibly "Jewish" identity, while also navigating critical reception shaped by antisemitism, sexism, and her assimilation of French culture. Critics often categorized her as a "woman sculptor" or emphasized her Jewish and Russian heritage, framing her art within reductive narratives. One exception was *Vanity Fair*, which played a notable role in shaping Orloff's public image. In 1922, the magazine featured one of her wood-carved portraits, presenting her as a leading figure in a revival of the medium and thereby contributing to her self-fashioning as both a modern woman artist and a Franco-Jewish intellectual.

Orloff's depictions of women, whether in portraits, maternal themes, mythological figures, or allegorical representations, celebrate strength, autonomy, and modernity, aligning with feminist and popular French national ideals of the postwar. However, these bold explorations of the female form unsettled some contemporaries. Having visited Orloff's Villa Seurat studio and home, in Montparnasse, Anaïs Nin remarked that her sculptures of women, often larger than life and depicting various stages of pregnancy, felt overwhelming and "oppressive" (175). Despite criticism, Orloff resisted being confined by stereotypes, asserting her autonomy as an artist. She blended French and Russian artistic influences with themes tied to Jewish identity and cultural renewal, creating a body of work that defied narrow categorization and celebrated both female strength and her multifaceted identity.

Following World War II, Orloff played a pivotal role in the visual culture of the nascent Israeli state. Her return to Palestine and later Israel was marked by public commissions that embodied national themes of resilience and sacrifice, such as *Mother and Son* (1952) at Kibbutz Ein Gev and the *Dov Gruner Monument* (1954) in Ramat Gan, Israel. These works, while aligned with state-building narratives, retained her modernist aesthetic. Birnbaum's analysis of these pieces reveals the tensions between Orloff's cosmopolitan sensibility and her contributions to a national artistic identity. Works like *Woman with a Basket* (1955), which was rejected—likely for not aligning with religious expectations—underscore the complexities of creating art in a nation-state with evolving cultural and ideological frameworks. Birnbaum situates these commissions within broader discussions of nationalism, migration, and diaspora, emphasizing Orloff's ability to navigate competing cultural and ideological pressures with nuance.

The escalating persecution of Jews during the Nazi occupation of France forced Orloff to flee to Switzerland, where she sought refuge. This harrowing escape, driven by the mortal danger she and her son faced, highlights the immense physical and emotional toll of her displacement. Birnbaum notes that during this period, Orloff temporarily stopped sculpting, overwhelmed by the challenges of refugee life and the trauma of war. Her eventual return to artistic creation, exemplified in works like *Eve* (1944)—a reworking of her earlier depictions of the subject from 1928 and 1940—marks her determination to persevere. Her postwar exhibitions in Paris and New York reinforced her international stature as she ambitiously rebuilt her studio and career.

Among her postwar works, *The Return* (1945) stands as a poignant reflection of the Holocaust's aftermath. Sculpted after extensive studies of concentration camp survivors, it portrays an emaciated, seated figure in a pose reminiscent of Rodin's *Thinker,* embodying despair and resilience. The textured, expressionistic style marked a shift in Orloff's approach, contrasting her earlier interwar sculptures. Birnbaum emphasizes its power as both a testimony to the Shoah's horrors and Orloff's personal reckoning with loss and survival. Though she kept it hidden for seventeen years, unveiling it only in 1962, *The Return* remains one of her most haunting and significant works, encapsulating her postwar artistic evolution.

Birnbaum's biography is not only a celebration of Orloff's artistic achievements but also a critique of the structures that have marginalized her work. The book examines how nationalist and gendered frameworks have shaped her legacy, with French critics emphasizing her contributions to modernism and Israeli commentators focusing on her Zionist works. Rather than framing Orloff as a strictly transnational artist, Birnbaum acknowledges the complexities of her multiple migrations, forced exiles, and intersecting identities as a woman, Jew, and émigré. She highlights how these experiences resist easy categorization within terms like "diaspora" or "cosmopolitanism," advocating instead for a broader, more inclusive model of art history. This approach challenges confining narratives and underscores the importance of biography in addressing historical omissions, particularly for women and gender nonconforming artists marginalized within the modernist canon. By contextualizing Orloff's life and work within her stories of migration, Birnbaum calls for a rethinking of art history's centers and peripheries, fostering a more global and inclusive understanding of artistic contributions.

Paula Birnbaum's *Sculpting a Life* combines rigorous scholarship and decades of in-depth research to contextualize Chana Orloff's work within the Parisian, Israeli, and global art networks of the twentieth century. Birnbaum highlights how Orloff, as a woman, Jewish émigré, and modernist, forged a unique artistic vision that navigated and responded to the cultural, political, and personal upheavals of her time. By examining Orloff's hybrid identities, Birnbaum provides a compelling framework for reconsidering the histories of modern art and diaspora.

While the book's depth may challenge readers unfamiliar with art historical methodologies, its contributions to feminist art history, transnational studies, and world histories are invaluable. By situat-

ing Orloff within a global context, Birnbaum not only restores her rightful place in the canon of modern art but also demonstrates how her life and work resonate with ongoing discussions about identity, agency, and global political conflict. The tragic events affecting Orloff's descendants during recent conflicts in Israel further underscore the significance of this topic and the enduring intersections of art history and personal trauma. ●

Lauren Jimerson is a frequent contributor to *Woman's Art Journal*. Her lead article, *Defying Gender: Suzanne Valadon and the Male Nude*, was published in *WAJ* 40, no. 1 (Spring/ Summer 2019): 3–12. Her recent book, *Painting Her Pleasure: Three Women Artists and the Nude in Avant-Garde Paris,* released by Manchester University Press in 2023, is reviewed in this issue, pp. 62-64.

Notes

1. While some accounts have suggested that Orloff was influenced by Modigliani, an assumption often applied to relationships between better-known male artists and their female peers, Birnbaum clarifies that this narrative oversimplifies their exchange. At the time Orloff created *Nude (Torso)* in 1912, Modigliani had not yet achieved significant recognition, and both were still early in their careers. Rather than a one-way influence, their artistic dialogue reflected mutual engagement, particularly around themes of Jewish identity. Orloff was certainly familiar with Modigliani's early stone sculptures and caryatid drawings, but the resemblance between her 1912 torso and his later nudes suggests that her work may have shaped his evolving style, rather than the reverse (80–82).
2. See page 88 for details on the *SIC* exhibition, the works shown, and the accompanying photograph of Orloff at the opening.
3. While Orloff favored direct carving in wood, by the early 1920s, she also embraced lost-wax casting (cire perdue) when client commissions allowed. She worked with the esteemed Eugène Rudier foundry, renowned for casting many of Rodin's bronzes. By entrusting her plaster models to the same atelier that had served one of France's most iconic sculptors, Orloff reinforced her professional stature within the modern sculpture scene (130–31).

Women of Chinese Modern Art: Gender and Reforming Traditions in National and Global Spheres, 1900s–1930s

By Doris Sung
Walter de Gruyter, 2024

Reviewed by Meng Yi

How can we reclaim women's contributions to modern Chinese art history without subsuming them within male-centric frameworks? And how can we forge critical approaches that fully acknowledge gendered artistic labor, historically relegated to "craft"? Doris Sung confronts these pivotal questions in her incisive monograph, *Women of Chinese Modern Art: Gender and Reforming Traditions in National and Global Spheres, 1900s–1930s*, by interrogating how female artists negotiated gender, nationalism, and modernity through traditionalist practices. Structured in three parts—the "artist-embroiderer," "new female scholar-painters," and collective women's art societies—Sung's study repositions embroidery, painting, and calligraphy, once confined to domestic spheres, as vital mediums that redefined Chinese artistic modernity. Her transnational lens, spanning Beijing, Shanghai, Nantong, and global exhibition venues, dismantles entrenched tradition/modernity and local/global binaries.

Part one centers on Shen Shou (1874–1921), whose career exemplifies how embroidery (historically labeled *Nügong*, or women's domestic work) was redefined as a modern art form. Sung begins with a striking photograph of Shen posing beside her embroidered portrait of Italian Queen Elena (1871–1952) of Montenegro (Fig. 1), featured on the cover of a progressive women's journal in 1911. This image, Sung suggests, encapsulates the interplay of gender, national identity, and transnational circulation. Why would a Chinese woman embroider a European queen, and why foreground her on a journal for "New Women"? These inquiries propel Sung's broader argument: that so-called feminine craft could negotiate both national and global cultural spheres.

Sung traces Shen's professional transformation by following her career from 1904 when Empress Dowager Cixiid (1835–1908) appointed her as an imperial embroidery instructor at the Qing court. After the Qing collapsed in 1911, Shen joined Zhang Jian's reforms in Nantong,[1] where Shen taught at the Women's Vocational School. Shen fused Western visual techniques with traditional embroidery to create a new artistic style. Her method included shading, perspective, and anatomical realism from oil painting and photography. Shen's works garnered international acclaim, especially at the



Fig. 1. Shen Shou with her embroidered portrait of Queen Elena, *Funü shibao 1* (June 11, 1911).

1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. Through extensive archival research, Sung demonstrates how Shen's pieces transcended domestic connotations and gained recognition as fine art. As Sung writes, "Her career, both in local and international contexts, highlighted the complexity of the shifting concepts of cultural heritage in the space where nationalism and women's artistic talent intersected. Shen had surpassed the traditional realm of *Nügong* and embraced the identity of an artist" (80).

Part two shifts focus to scholar-painters Wu Xingfen (1853–1930) and Jin Taotao (1884–1939) by examining the artists' family trees. These diagrams



Fig. 2. Jin Taotao, *One Hundred Images of Goldfish* (detail), 1909. Handscroll, ink and color on paper. Image source: The Palace Museum / Image copyright © The Palace Museum.

depart from the vertical, patriarchal structures that dominate traditional Chinese art historiography and construct an alternative epistemology rooted in affective ties, domestic mentorship, and intergenerational kinship. Rather than simply documenting relationships, they affirm the relational logic that structured women's creative lives. Building on this framework, this part explores how both artists worked within literati traditions while redefining the role of women in art and intellectual life. Through international exhibitions, bilingual publications, and strategic self-fashioning, they revitalized the *cainü* (talented woman) legacy, transforming it into a modern vehicle for public expression and cultural diplomacy. Wu Xingfen combined classical ink techniques with a global outlook. Her works were exhibited across China, Japan, Europe, and the United States, and her bilingual catalogues reflected a conscious negotiation between national tradition and international visibility. Wu's practice exemplifies a modern literati identity shaped not only by brush and ink, but also by transnational circulation and self-authored narrative.

Jin Taotao likewise expanded artistic practice into the realm of theory. In *The Joy of the Fish*, which Sung describes as "the only known painting treatise by a female author" since the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), Jin rejected hierarchical classification (132). She proposed what Sung calls an "impartial approach to the production of knowledge" (133). Her method relies on quiet observation and introspection. Jin's 1909 handscroll, *One Hundred Images of Goldfish* (Fig. 2), embodies this approach. Each fish appears in a slightly different pose or position. Some drift slowly, while others dart or hover. Their bodies tilt at various angles. These subtle shifts prevent and invite attention. The scroll reframes feminine labor as a process of inquiry. Its form teaches records and experiments. Jin thus treats embroidery, brushwork, and looking as epistemological and pedagogical values. Wu and Jin challenged conventional boundaries of femininity and artistic authorship, embodying what Sung identifies as "a distinctive characteristic of New Female Scholar-Painters": global experience and intellectual self-determination (149).

Part three shifts from individual case studies to the collective strategies employed by female artists, highlighting how they built professional networks and gained public visibility. Central to this narrative is the Chinese Women's Society of Calligraphy and Painting, which Sung identifies as "the largest all-women art organization in the early Republican era (1912–1949)" (2). By forming this society, women artists carved out a space for themselves in a male-dominated art world. The Society carefully curated its public image: members were photographed in *qipao*, a garment that signified modern femininity while evoking a sense of national refinement, set against backdrops of traditional elegance. This visual strategy reflected contemporary taste and embodied a conscious effort to integrate modern female identity with cultural continuity. As founding member Feng Wenfeng (1900–1971) asserted, "Expressing [women's] sense of beauty (*meiguan*) absolutely cannot be achieved by merely engrossing ourselves in the latest fashions" (1). In doing so, the Society positioned their artistic practice as both professional and patriotic, contributing to the cultural revitalization of the Republican era.

The epilogue extends the book's core argument by connecting early twentieth-century women's painting to contemporary artistic practices. Sung shows how artists such as Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961), Hu Xiaoyuan (b. 1977), and Chen Lingyang (b. 1975) work with embroidery, ink, and calligraphy as tools for transformation. Their use of these materials reveals aesthetics shaped by memory and media. Rather than tracing a direct stylistic lineage, these artists build affective ties to the past through material repetition and conceptual shifts.

While Sung's archival depth is impressive, at times her textual analysis overshadows formal analysis of the artworks themselves. Further exploration of how embroidered or painted images operated aesthetically would enrich our grasp of the political and social work these pieces performed. Similarly, although the study excels in tracing urban and transnational contexts, it devotes limited attention to regional or lesser elite women whose experiences might further complicate narratives of nation and modernity.

However, these are minor critiques measured against the value of Sung's overarching contributions. Her robust historical contextualization and wide-ranging archival discoveries will be essential for scholars of Chinese art history, gender studies, and global modernisms. Moreover, her portrayal of the Women's Society of Calligraphy and Painting suggests avenues for further inquiry: for example, how such organizations or networks adapted to the Japanese invasion of the late 1930s and 1940s, or how some women's practices carried forward into the People's Republic era. By bringing these artists and networks into the mainstream of modern Chinese art history, Sung challenges a previously male-oriented canon that focused on oil painters, Western-style training, or overt "modernist" movements.

In *Women of Chinese Modern Art*, Doris Sung offers a deeply researched, multi-layered reappraisal of early twentieth-century Chinese art, highlighting how women's so-called domestic arts became forces for national and transna-

tional change. By foregrounding the complex gender politics woven into embroidery, painting, and calligraphy, Sung underscores how female artists contributed to and were shaped by their historical moment, reconfiguring the meaning of "modern Chinese art." Scholars and graduate students alike will find in this book not just a trove of case studies but also a blueprint for interrogating gendered labor and the expansion of cultural heritage in a global framework. It is a significant addition to ongoing conversations on cultural diplomacy, feminism, and artistic modernities in Republican China. •

Meng Yi is a PhD candidate at the Institute of Art and Art Theory at the University of Cologne. Her research focuses on representations of the body in contemporary Chinese art, with particular emphasis on gender, visuality, and transnational modernity. Her work draws on feminist theory, visual culture studies, and East Asian art history. She reviewed, with Jane Chin Davidson, *Hung Liu: Portraits of Promised Lands*, in *Woman's Art Journal* 44, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2023): 57–59.

Notes

1. Zhang Jian was a leading industrialist and educator who sought to modernize Nantong through industry and education. He established factories and schools, promoted women's vocational training, and supported traditional crafts as part of national development.

Elizabeth Catlett: A Black Revolutionary Artist and All That It Implies

Edited by Dalila Scruggs
The National Gallery of Art, Washington, and Brooklyn Museum; University of Chicago Press, 2024

Reviewed by Funda Karayel

The story of Elizabeth Catlett (1915–2012) is one of resilience, revolution, and artistic rigor. As both an artist and an activist, she shaped a visual language that championed the dignity of Black and Mexican communities, fought against systemic injustices, and carved a space for politically engaged art in the modernist canon. *Elizabeth Catlett: A Black Revolutionary Artist and All That It Implies*, edited by Dalila Scruggs, is a long-overdue exploration into Catlett's nearly century-long career. The publication, accompanying a widely acclaimed museum retrospective, traveling from the Brooklyn Museum to the National Gallery of Art and Art Institute of Chicago, in 2024 and 2025, respectively, brings forth a revelatory look at her work, shedding light on lesser-known pieces while reaffirming her status as a formidable figure in twentieth century art. This brief review turns to its exceptional exhibition catalogue.

Elizabeth Catlett successfully navigates the artist's political and artistic complexities. As a collection of essays, the book traces key phases of Catlett's life and career in a collection of essays from a range of scholars—from her early development as an artist-activist, to her exile in Mexico, pedagogical legacy, and role as a social realist printmaker. Scruggs introduces the catalogue with "To That Degree and More," followed by two essays on the artist's activism at the center of the global sixties and her shaping of public space. Scruggs lays the foundation by situating Catlett within the broader context of Black feminist art history. She emphasizes that Catlett's radicalism was not incidental but deeply intentional—shaped by her lived experiences and the communities with which she engaged. Melanee C. Harvey explores Catlett's early development and activism at Howard University. Sarah Kelly Oehler examines her socialist networks in Chicago and New York. Julia Fernandez analyzes her iconic depictions of laborers, the sharecropper in the US and campesino in Mexico, surveyed in her linocuts *Sharecropper* (1952). J.V. Decemvirale discusses Catlett's pedagogy in Mexico. Mary Lee Corlett, in one of the book's great strengths, investigates her printmaking narratives, highlighting her technical skills and commitment to social realism through print. Catlett scholar Melanie Anne Herzog, in her close reading of the red cedar sculpture, *Homage to My Young Black Sisters* (1968; Fig. 1), sees it as a powerful blend of strength and radical vulnerability, interrogating her feminist and political aesthetics and examining her formative years and embrace of art as a political tool, particularly during her early career in the US and eventual decision to live in Mexico. Brooklyn Museum curator Catherine Morris reflects on Catlett's impact on institutional feminism. Lowery Stokes Sims closes the volume with a personal tribute, rounding out a multifaceted portrait of Catlett's radical legacy, followed by Rashida Witter's chronology.



Fig. 1. Elizabeth Catlett, *Homage to My Young Black Sisters* (1968), cedar wood, 36" x 10" x 8". Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

Catlett was born in Washington, DC, and educated at Howard University, where she studied under Loïs Mailou Jones (1905–1998) and James A. Porter. She later earned an MFA at the University of

Iowa under Grant Wood, whose insistence on art as a medium for storytelling left a lasting impact. Wood encouraged her to depict subjects from her own background, prompting her to create *Mother and Child* (1940), a limestone sculpture that won first prize at the American Negro Exposition in Chicago. Catlett's artistic journey took her to Harlem, where she became involved with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and connected with figures such as Charles White (whom she briefly married). However, it was her move to Mexico in 1946 that proved transformative. There, she joined the Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP), a collective dedicated to revolutionary printmaking. In Mexico, she married artist Francisco Mora, became a Mexican citizen, and raised three sons, while maintaining an unwavering commitment to social justice in her work.

A particularly compelling section of the book delves into Catlett's political exile. In 1959, the US government labeled her an "undesirable alien" due to her involvement with leftist organizations, including her work with the TGP, and denied her reentry into the country. In "An Artist-Activist at the Center of the Global Sixties," Scruggs examines how this forced separation deeply influenced Catlett's art, pushing her further toward themes of international solidarity, resistance, and diaspora identity. Her works from this period reflect not only personal displacement but also a global vision of justice.

The book draws powerful parallels between Catlett's exile and the experiences of other Black artists and intellectuals, such as Paul Robeson. Like them, Catlett found in exile both a form of refuge and a broader platform for political expression. Scruggs situates Catlett within this lineage, showing how such figures used their international visibility to critique US racism from abroad, transforming displacement into a form of cultural and political power. Catlett's exile, however, did not mean erasure. As Scruggs details in "Shaping Public Space," Black artistic networks, including institutions like the Studio Museum in Harlem, played a key role in preserving her legacy. Their 1970s survey, *Elizabeth Catlett: Prints and Sculpture*, which traveled to historically Black colleges, maintained her visibility in the US. She was finally allowed to return in 1971 (due to the powerful lobbying of the Studio Museum), and regained citizenship in 2002, decades after her initial ban.

While Catlett is often associated with social realism, this catalogue argues that her work resists rigid categorization. The latter chapters explore her sculptural practice, emphasizing how she moved fluidly between abstraction and figuration, and her material choices—cedar, mahogany, marble, and bronze—reflect both tradition and innovation. While the book offers a thorough examination of Catlett's career, it occasionally glosses over the contradictions embedded in her work. For instance, it does not engage deeply with critiques of her public commissions, such as her memorial statue of musician Louis Armstrong (1971–76), which she personally disliked. A more robust discussion of how Catlett navigated institutional demands and aesthetic compromises would have been equally valuable. The catalogue excels in analyzing Catlett's engagement with Black feminist thought, still leaving certain areas underexplored, such as her relationship with second-wave feminism, for example.

Despite such minor quibbles, *Elizabeth Catlett* is a vital contribution to scholarship on Black women artists. It positions Catlett not just as a chronicler of struggle but as a revolutionary force in her own right. In her lifetime, Catlett witnessed both neglect and recognition. While she lacked mainstream gallery representation for much of her career, she remained a revered figure within Black and Latin American artistic circles. This book reaffirms her place in history, ensuring that her legacy is not just remembered but actively engaged with. As Scruggs aptly writes, "Her dedication to Black pride, revolutionary change, and artistic rigor were not inevitabilities, but born of a series of dogged, hard-nosed, and impassioned choices. We can take no part of it for granted" (187). •

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Women Architects at Work: Making American Modernism

By Mary Anne Hunting and Kevin D. Murphy
Princeton University Press, 2025

Reviewed by Kathleen James-Chakraborty

From 1916 to 1942 the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, also known as the Cambridge School of Architectural and Landscape Design for Women and the Cambridge School of Domestic and Landscape Architecture for Women, staffed in part by faculty from nearby Harvard University, offered its entirely female student body entrée into architecture, a profession that was otherwise largely closed to them, and landscape architecture, a domain in which they had already made remarkable inroads. The school and its alumnae provide the point of departure for Mary Anne Hunting and Kevin D. Murphy's invaluable *Women Architects at Work: Making American Modernism*, a study of the position of women in the United States in these two fields across the interwar and postwar decades. The authors reveal that at a time when most architecture schools (although not that of the nearby Massachusetts Institute of Technology) were closed to women, a surprisingly sizeable cohort, many of whom lacked sustained scholarly attention, were able to exercise agency in shaping the built environment. They designed buildings and gardens, although less often public parks, and

found a rather astonishing variety of other meaningful and impactful ways to use the professional training they had acquired. Although by no means all were committed to modernism as defined by the best remembered male tastemakers of the day, such as the architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock and the curator, later turned architect, Philip Johnson, the authors make a persuasive case for the engagement of many of their female subjects in advocating for and effecting change, above all but not exclusively in the appearance of single family houses.

Already in the nineteenth century middle- and upper-class Anglophone and European women were charged not only with the upkeep of the house, but with maintaining appearances in a broader sense through the attention they were supposed to pay to the architecture, interior design, and landscaping of the home. It is thus not surprising that the Cambridge School's focus was at one point specifically on domestic architecture, about which middle class women were presumed throughout the twentieth century to have nearly innate expertise. And yet neither Hunting and Murphy nor their subjects remain confined to the home, although it might be noted their subjects did not often venture far outside the confines of the School's white and overwhelmingly Protestant milieu.

Handsomely designed with over a hundred and fifty illustrations, many in color, *Women Architects at Work* is divided into seven chapters bracketed by an introduction and a conclusion. The chapters are arranged thematically, taking us from the training available to women to the varied use they made of it. That their account is not strictly chronological may be slightly confusing to those not already familiar with the arc of the history of architecture and landscape design in the US during these years, and the authors struggle at times to weave all those women who did not study at the Cambridge School, but whose achievements they want to make known, into a compelling narrative. For anyone interested in the history of the built environment or of women in the workplace, this is a very small price to pay for a book that so enriches what we know about women architects. While there have been other important initiatives in the field, especially the International Archive of Women in Architecture at Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, Virginia, founded in 1985 by Milka Bliznakov (1927–2010), and the Beverley Willis Foundation's website, Pioneering Women of American Architecture, edited by Mary McLeod and Virginia Rosner, both of which the authors cite in their preface, no book has offered such a sustained and wide-ranging exploration of this subject.

Successive chapters address the education available to women in the US, their connections to the rest of the world (primarily Europe), and the networks they forged on their own side of the Atlantic. These topics are followed by examinations of collaboration, entrepreneurship, and housing. Finally, the authors turn their attention to the planning of suburban and resort developments as well as what they term "singular statements," a bit of a catchall for distinctive houses that did not fit neatly into their other categories. These include Azurest South, the house that Amaza Lee Meredith (1895–1984) completed in 1938 for herself and her partner Edna Mae Colson, adjacent to the campus of what is now Virginia State University, the historically Black institution at which both women taught. The book concludes with two appendices, the first providing basic information about the women who studied at the Cambridge School, and the second listing the articles Eleanor Raymond (1887–1989) published in *House Beautiful*, beginning when her partner Ethel Power (1881–1969) was its editor.

Women Architects at Work is anchored in a formidable amount of primary source material, ranging from the archives of individual architects, sometimes still in private hands, to a varied array of periodicals from the period, in which the shelter press (that is magazines such as *House Beautiful*, *House & Garden*, and *Better Homes and Gardens)*, devoted to the design and decoration of homes and gardens, figures prominently, valuably supplementing the journals targeted at the architecture profession, which were much less likely to feature the work of women. They also make use of a wide range of existing scholarship, going back to the pioneering work in the 1970s of Doris Cole (b. 1938) and Susana Torre (b. 1944). I missed a mention of Ilonka Karasz (1896–1981), a Hungarian immigrant better remembered for her *New Yorker* covers than her modern interiors and objects designed in the 1920s, but this is certainly by far the most thorough study of the subject to date.



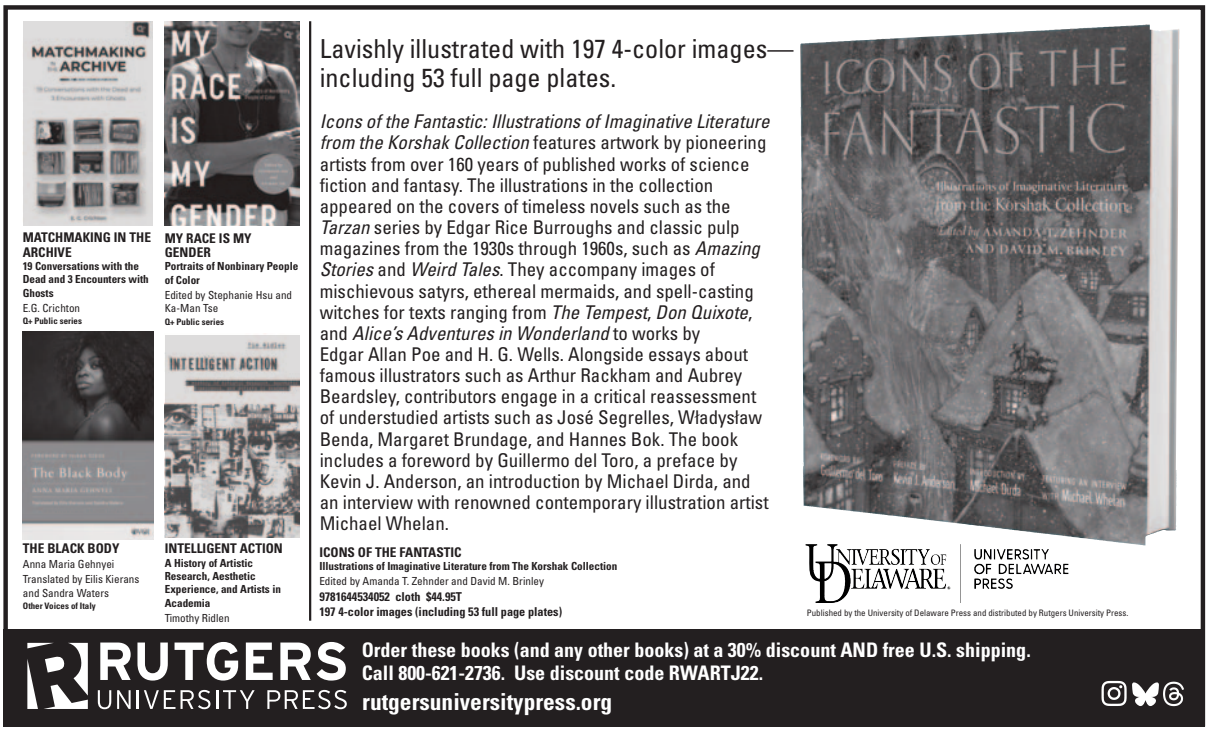
Fig. 1. Elizabeth-Ann Campbell, watercolor of one of the Cambridge School's drafting rooms, c. 1936. Private collection.

Hunting and Murphy highlight the importance of institutions and networks, developing impressive diagrams of the latter. For instance, they establish that Anne Griswold Tyng (1920–2011) began her study of architecture at the Cambridge School before joining Cambridge alumna Jean Bodman Fletcher (1915–1965) as a member of the first class of women to receive degrees in architecture from Harvard's Graduate School of Design in 1944. Fletcher later joined The Architects Collaborative (TAC), where she and Sarah Pillsbury

Harkness (1914–2013), who had been two years ahead of her at the Cambridge School and had first worked for Raymond, collaborated on the design of Six Moon Hill, a development in the Boston suburb of Lexington, where they raised their families. Although Hunting and Murphy argue that the Cambridge School provided such women with the personal and professional networks that enabled them to "reach a larger and broader audience to advance Modernism" (1) than employed by their male counterparts—by emphasizing comfort and not being afraid to reference history—Tyng, Fletcher, and Harkness were nothing if not committed to Modernism's abstract geometry. However, Hunting and Murphy's other subjects have, almost certainly, been overlooked not only because they identified as female, but also because their work fit less comfortably into the canon as defined before and after World War II by Hitchcock, Johnson, and other male gatekeepers. The point here is, as the authors argue, that modernism could take multiple forms. Those espoused by figures such as Carina Eglesfield Mortimer (1890–1978), whose Richard and Margert Haggott Flint House in New Haven, illustrated here (Fig. 1), was the first building pointed out to me as having been designed by a woman, were often more popular with the public than what was exhibited on the walls or in the garden courtyard of New York's Museum of Modern Art.

This highly readable volume challenges anyone who is interested in the US history of twentieth-century architecture to think about it in new ways. It also opens many avenues for further investigation. While Hunting and Murphy focus—like most twenty-first-century architectural historians—on the modernity of what their subjects designed, more might be said as well about why so many women remained cautious about modern styles, as opposed to household technologies that were almost universally embraced. Julia Morgan (1872–1957), the country's most successful female architect of the first half of the twentieth century and the subject of several monographs, is mentioned only in passing here. She mastered reinforced concrete construction without eschewing the lessons about ornament and proportion she had absorbed as the first woman to study at and graduate from the prestigious École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Progressive careers, progressive politics, and progressive styles do not always entirely align. More importantly, by focusing on women at work rather than simply women architects, Hunting and Murphy make clear that there were many other ways by which women, sometimes because they were shut out of a largely misogynist profession but also because they could be relentless in seeking out opportunities, made novel contributions, such as the design shops detailed in chapter five. These merit far more attention than they have previously received. In short, this is a pioneering study of the first order; all feminist historians of US architecture will remain in Hunting and Murphy's debt as they scour its pages, including a thorough bibliography, in order to build new structures upon this very firm foundation. •

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Transnational Visual Activism for Women's Reproductive Rights: My Body, My Choice

Edited by Basia Sliwinska, with contributions by Bracha L. Ettinger, Rebecca Mayo, Lucy Irvine, Katherine Carroll, Debbie Noble-Carr, Jana Kukaine, Nora Heidorn, Kitty Zijlmans, Raquel Ermida, Bruno Marques, Lieta Valeria Vivaldi, Elise Denis-Ramirez, Rachel Augusto, Thaynã Targa, Anna Krenz, Basia Sliwinska, Kimberly Lamm, Monika Fabijanska, Anna-Mari Almila, Vanessa Parent
Routledge, 2025

Reviewed by Karolina Majewska-Güde

The issue of women's reproductive rights has been addressed by feminist artists in the context of international protests and collective resistance, spreading globally over the past decade in response to conservative backlash. In this global contestation for the rights of bodily autonomy for women and femme-identifying people, an effective strategy for resistance is through direct action, encompassing marches and protests. The anthology, *Transnational Visual Activism for Women's Reproductive Rights: My Body, My Choice*, edited by Basia Sliwinska, expands the concept of visual art activism that encompasses a variety of feminist art practices and collectives who engage in reproductive rights "artivism," defined in Kitty Zijlmans's essay as "the crossroad where art and activism meet" (85).

It presents a panorama of artistic practices based on a belief in the agency of feminist art and collective action. Situated at the intersection of feminist activism in the arts and emancipatory epistemologies, the volume makes a compelling case for the efficacy of such a perspective, demonstrating the transformative power of art embedded in a feminist ethic of care while advocating for an understanding of reproductive rights as human rights. In contrast to extant single-issue companions, this anthology does not concentrate on a specific aspect of reproductive rights, such as abortion or motherhood. Instead, it assembles a comprehensive array of issues that constitute reproductive rights. These include contraception, abortion, obstetric violence, freedom from coercion in healthcare, public sexual education, and issues essential to parental, perinatal and postpartum care.

In addition to an investigation of recent activist projects by artists and collectives, the book provides a platform for theorist-curators and artist-researchers to articulate their perspectives on reproductive rights, thereby contributing to the transdisciplinary discourse surrounding activist aesthetics. In so doing, the book serves to expand the scope of feminist activism in the arts. The anthology consists of fourteen chapters by international scholars and artists at different stages of their careers and, as Sliwinska argues, "accentuates the need to be attentive to stories told and shared via art practices to advocate, raise consciousness, and educate about the human right to reproductive health through the lens of transnational feminist practices" (2). The artists and theorists present the results of their practice-led research in the form of social actions, critical interventions into the canon, feminist networks of care, and collectively created objects and stories. The essays are complemented by color as well as black-and-white illustrations depicting works of art subjected to close analysis.

The theoretical underpinnings of the publication, along with its genealogy in the editor's curatorial activist praxis, are outlined in the introduction. Sliwinska refers to Bracha Ettinger's concepts of art as an "ethical form of compassion" (5); Lucy Lippard's definition of activist art as process-oriented and different from political art in that it does politics rather than represents political issues (6); Chandra Mohanty's advocacy of transnational solidarity (7); and Joan C. Tronto's interlinking of care with democracy in feminist transnational solidarities (8). However, in relation to the overall framework of reproductive rights activism, each chapter presents its own theoretical rationale for the artistic action, research, or curatorial engagement undertaken. As a result, the book provides a comprehensive overview of the theoretical foundations of transnational feminist activism. At the same time, the geographical breadth, with case studies from a range of nations that include Israel, Australia, Latvia, UK, Indonesia, China, Portugal, Chile, Brazil, Germany, Poland, US, and Finland, proves that transnationality is not only a theoretical postulate of feminist activism but empirically demonstrated and enacted through the publication itself.

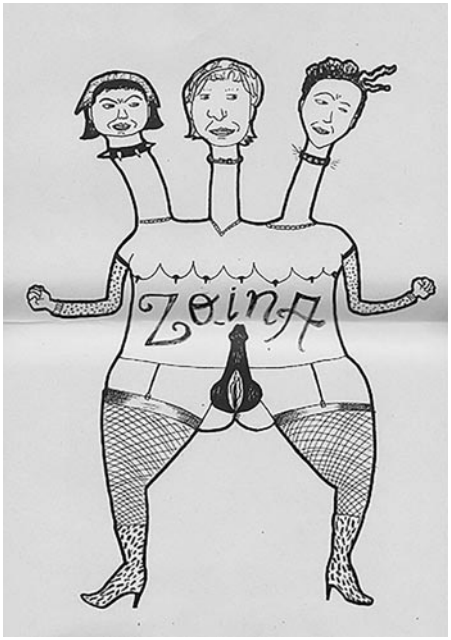


Fig 1. Rata#3, Photo: courtesy of ZOiNA.

The feminist visual activism discussed in each chapter is understood in a variety of ways, ranging from collective art making and collecting, didactic performance and agit-prop theatre, and subversions of existing visual language, to transdisciplinary projects in which art helps health professionals unpack existing narratives about reproductive health. The authors examine how artistic and performative practices stimulate and contest public and political discussions about abortion, sexuality, freedom, and bodily autonomy. They also consider how the arts contribute to the abortion movement and reshape restrictive narratives and imaginaries surrounding sexual and reproductive rights. The first four chapters are devoted to examining the notion of care in the context of activism.

Beginning with an essay on her own art, Bracha L. Ettinger (b. 1948) addresses care within the feminine-matrixial space as an affective and feeling-based



Fig 2. Monika Drożyńska, *Poroniła czy zabiła* (She Miscarried or She Killed) (2016), embroidery on repurposed duvet cover, 7 12/25" × 12 3/5" inches. Photograph by Monika Drożyńska.

knowledge. Ettinger underscores the need for ongoing renewal (rebirth) of ethical relationships with the world, articulating our trans-connectedness with others. The discussion on the ethics of care and knowledge, grounded in co-affective and matter-based communal experience, continues in the contribution by Rebecca Mayo, Lucy Irvine, Katherine Carroll, and Debbie Noble-Carr. They propose artistic activism directly rooted in caregiving, as manifested in their transdisciplinary project *Lactation after Loss Commemorative Quilt* (2023), which draws on the findings of an Australian Research Council study on lactation after infant death.

Women's reproductive autonomy in relation to childbirth is explored in the next two chapters. In the context of obstetric violence in Latvia, Jana Kukaine examines the artistic initiative entitled *My First Year Too* (2021–ongoing), launched as an Instagram account by Agra Lieģe-Doležko (b. 1988), Elīna Brasliņa (b. 1988), and Elīna Bērziņa (b. 1991), and developed into a transnational story-sharing platform. The initiative enabled women to share under-represented stories related to childbirth, focusing on postpartum depression, anxiety, breastfeeding difficulties, helplessness, and confusion. The visibility of the full range of birthing experiences is also at stake in Nora Heidorn's chapter on the Birth Rites Collection (BRC), a UK-based collection of contemporary art related to childbirth, initiated in 2009. Heidorn's investigation, which is among the most noteworthy in the volume, poses a compelling question regarding the curating and organization of an art collection as a form of activism. The investigation focuses on the dissemination and promotion of knowledge surrounding reproductive experiences that have historically been marginalized among health professionals and other audiences. This chapter, in conjunction with the preceding collective contribution on the *Lactation After Loss Commemorative Quilt*, provides the most compelling evidence of the efficacy of feminist art in the context of enhancing reproductive health procedures and women's experiences.

Kitty Zijlmans's analysis focuses on artistic strategies such as the use of the gendered body in works that explore bodily autonomy and reproductive rights violations in different geographical locations, from Mary Kelly's (b. 1941) *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79) to contemporary works of Deirdre M. Donoghue (b. 1971), Weronika Zielinska (b. 1984), Hu Bing (b. 1958), Xu Hong (b. 1963), Jiang Jie (b. 1963), and Arahmayani Feisal (b. 1961). Subsequent chapters concentrate on divergent forms of visual activism in support of abortion rights, ranging from particular iconographies, such as hybrid representations of collective bodies or genital imagery, to performance actions. Raquel Ermida and Bruno Marques undertake an analysis of the emancipatory activistic practice of one of Portugal's first feminist artists collectives, ZoiNA, founded in Porto in 1999 by Ana Medeira (b. 1977), Carla Cruz (b.1977), Catarina Carneiro de Sousa (b. 1975), and Isabel Carvalho (b.1977). The essay examines the visual strategies employed by ZOiNA (Fig. 1), particularly their use of subversive image-making. The authors demonstrate the ways in which artistic practice can serve as a medium for raising awareness concerning women's reproductive rights, including abortion, sexual education, access to contraception, and menstrual hygiene. The chapter by Lieta Valeria Vivaldi and Elise Denis-Ramirez is centered on the role of feminist art in the struggle for sexual and reproductive justice in Chile. A close examination of the creative, performative gestures and artistic actions of the Arpilleras, and feminist collectives such as Memorate and Las Thesis, underscores the significance of visual activism in demonstrations and theatre performances.

Rachel Augusto and Thaynã Targa focus on the singular artistic practice of Brazilian artist Aleta Valente (b. 1986) and her advocacy for abortion rights. The authors' examination of Valente's tactics for advocating reproductive rights emphasizes its transnational context through her collaboration with the project Milhas Pela Vida Das Mulheres (Miles for Women's Lives), a human rights organization that promotes and defends the sexual and reproductive rights of girls and women. The issue of transnational activism is also salient in the practice of Anna Krenz (b. 1976). The Berlin-based artist explores the concept of activism in the context of the Polish diaspora. In an auto-ethnographic manner, Krenz reports on the visual activist actions she initiated and orchestrated as part of the activities of the Polish migrant feminist collective Dziewuchy Berlin (Gals Berlin), which she founded in 2016. The next chapter, written by the volume editor, Sliwinska, looks at the work of Polish arts activists Marta Frej (b. 1973) and Monika Drożyńska (b. 1979; Fig. 2) and demonstrates how they camp-aigned for reproductive rights, particularly safe and legal abortions, in Poland. The study explores the question of how art activism imagines different futures by creating new ways of self-organizing. The central theme of this investigation is care—both a concept and a way of acting—with a focus on interdependencies and co-responsibilities.

Kimberly Lamm examines the artistic practice of Andrea Bowers (b. 1965), in particular her work *Wall of Letters: Necessary Reminders from the Past for a Future of Choice* (2006), in which the artist transcribed letters that were addressed to an activist trio known as the 'Army of Three' (Rowena Gurner, Lana Phelan, and Patricia Maginnis). Lamm's argument is that by focusing on language, it is possible to prevent the silencing of women and the infringe-

ment of their reproductive rights by legislation. Also focusing on the critical role of language and text, Monika Fabijanska explores the function of art in promoting legal literacy while also placing language as a site of women's subjugation at the core of her analysis. Fabijanska conducts a detailed analysis of Bang Geul Han's (b. 1978) artistic practice, with a particular focus on the five tapestries titled *Warp and Weft* (2022). In the subsequent chapter, Anna-Mari Almila explores the notion of visual activism and visual communication as a form of social engagement. This exploration is conducted within the context of Finland's restrictive sterilization law, which imposes limitations on individuals' self-determination regarding reproductive rights. She in particular analyzes two successful campaigns aimed to change the 'trans law' and the abortion law.

The final chapter of the book by Vanessa Parent is devoted to a discussion of the interrelation of bodily autonomy and queer rights. Employing a decolonizing framework, Parent explores works of two artists of LatinX heritage who are immigrants to the US: Viva Ruiz (n.d.) and Elektra KB (b. 1980). In Ruiz's interventionist work, such as the performance *Joyful Noise: Thank God for Abortion,* the struggle for abortion rights is positioned as a central element in the 2SLGBTQIA+ liberation movement. The critique of the nuclear family as a normative model is expanded in Ruiz's activist work. Elektra KB's multimedia work in textile, performance, and photography documents queer and trans reproductive health choices, linking queer rights with reproductive care (Fig. 3). Parent argues that abortion activism intertwined with queer liberation challenges a social and economic order rooted in patrilineal inheritance, which reinforces inequalities of gender and race. At the same time, she points out that the works of both artists challenge "the heterosexual biases carried forward within the queer community" (198). Furthermore, Parent interprets their use and queering of Christian imagery as a decolonial practice, with the aim of highlighting the central role of Christianity in the development of hegemonic Eurocentric capitalism and the colonial matrix of power.

The anthology is indicative of a certain pluralism in terminology related to reproduction and sexual health, demonstrated by its use of terms such as Heidorn's "m(other)" versus "mother" (64). This arises from the collaborative nature of the volume, suggesting that in this transnational conversation taking place in English, emancipatory language is still in the process of formation. The observed heterogeneity also suggests varying stages in the process of dismantling cis-sexism and the centrality of heterosexuality within the reproductive rights movement. The decision by the editor not to standardize terminology can be interpreted as an openness to local experiences. The authors' use of language is also an indication that dissimilar aspects of the struggle for reproductive justice are being emphasized in different national contexts. Ultimately, it is national law and the local version of patriarchy, profoundly influenced by decades of authoritarian regimes and human rights abuses, that provide the direct context against which emancipatory feminist struggles are activated.

The anthology represents a unique attempt to bring together diverse experiences and positions, thereby strengthening the transnational dimension of feminist reproductive activism and the artistic projects and practices they engender. As all the essays in this book demonstrate, feminist transnationality is a necessary response to organized efforts and actions aimed at limiting women's reproductive autonomy. The distinguishing characteristic of this publication is its focus on emancipatory epistemologies that combine affect-based knowledge with a specific political postulate. The publication offers a transnational and intersectional perspective, emphasizing a worldview of the interconnectedness of life and proposing radical care in the form of writing, scholarship, visual art, performance, and collaboration. In summary, this anthology can be considered as a representation of feminist academic scholarship realized as activist praxis. Despite originating amid a global backlash against reproductive rights, the book instills optimism by posing and answering a pivotal question: What potential does art hold in its capacity to influence societal transformation? Consequently, this anthology is a compelling resource for those interested in the transformative capacity of collective art making and self-organizing, and demonstrates that feminist art can function as a catalyst for positive change. •

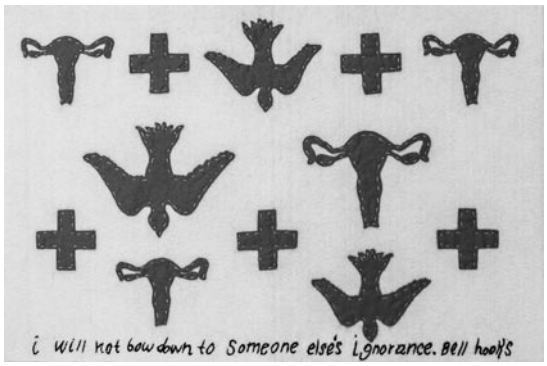


Fig 3. Elektra KB, *Women's Protection Unit (Writer's Unit)* (2015), felt and thread, 18" x 22". Courtesy of the artist.

Karolina Majewska-Güde is a researcher, art historian, and curator. She works at the Institute of Art History at the University of Warsaw. Her research focuses on the East-Central European neo-avant-gardes and feminist art, contemporary issues of circulation, translation, and production of knowledge through art-based research, and the artistic archives as a site of collaboration and maintenance. She is involved in collective research and curating at the intersection of transnational post-socialist art history and feminist art.

Tomashi Jackson: Slow Jamz

Edited by Mary Cason, contributions by Tomashi Jackson, Rebecca Uchill, Janiva Ellis, Kandis Williams, Helaine Posner, and Tracy Fitzpatrick
Neuberger Museum of Art, 2022

Reviewed by Paulina Avila Esqueda

Visual layers of colors, forms, and textures are woven together in the exhibition catalogue for multimedia artist Tomashi Jackson (b. 1980) presented at the Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, in 2022, a space and show informed by the contrasting experiences and policies affecting Black women, here guided by the sonic. This quality of weaving, physically and conceptually, is one that Tracy Fitzpatrick, Neuberger director, introduces in her foreword: "There is an eloquent way in which she threads concepts and imagery through the past and present to weave an extraordinary and sophisticated visual expression" (6). Fitzpatrick recalls her first meeting with Jackson years prior, setting the tone for the conversations and essays that follow, personal as well as deeply informed and political in nature. The constant exploration in Jackson's work comes through the embedded presence of empirical research and archival materials. The sonic quality derives specifically from R&B love songs, known as slow jams, the title appropriated for both the exhibition and catalogue. Jackson, born in Houston, TX, and raised in Los Angeles, CA, currently resides and works in Cambridge, MA, and New York City. As the 2022 Roy R. Neuberger Prize recipient, her award led to the culmination of *SLOW JAMZ* at the Neuberger, her first solo exhibition focused on her video projections or video collages, as described in the catalogue, created over a span of ten years between 2011 and 2021 (Fig. 1).

Jackson's acknowledgements, a short, sweet text worth reading, is where we get a glimpse into her trajectory, the key relationships, studies, and ideas in experimental film and video, painting, printmaking, and large-scale public works that led to this body of work. Particularly moving is the discussion of her childhood and her late mother's influences in the creation of these pieces, especially her mother's music collection, "songs about love across genres" (7), that "planted seed." Jackson invokes deep respect for her mentors, collaborators, and community peers, referencing muralist and educator Juana Alicia (b. 1953) as having been the one to introduce the idea of telling important stories and histories in public spaces using colors that take a large-scale approach. Jackson also describes her art as a visualization of "vivid sonic dreams" as well as a tool to deepen her research on the livelihood of women migrants in informal labor economies and poetry (7). Her distinctive style came about from the realization of the power of color within art and her thoughts on the possibilities of video as vehicles for poetry and paintings, as vehicles for meaning and joy.

In its development, the catalogue presents stills of her works and from the installation alongside texts that address, somewhat abstractly, the contextual complexity and production of her video collages. Curator Helaine Posner, in her introductory remarks, "Tomashi Jackson in Living Color," describes Jackson's varied techniques and influences, particularly her employment of the language of color and influence of Josef Albers's "optical color perception"—in her painting, sculpture, photography, performance, and video—as strategies to address sociopolitical issues comple-mentary to the language of US racial segregation and desegregation in the 1960s, now resonating in Jackson's artistic "ecosystem" (8). Most compelling are two interviews with Jackson, in "Lip-Sync" with Rebecca Uchill, and "Watery Mirror" with artists Janiva Ellis and Kandis Williams. These detailed conversations direct our sightline toward the extensive plates, grouped around four major themes within Jackson's work. Throughout, the catalogue's graphics deploy a yarn-like material, a woven fabric of letters introducing each section heading, alluding to Jackson's recurrent practice of knitting, often set against a background of blackness, and a nod to the seamless weaving of stories, concepts, Black authors, and personal histories incorporated by the artist. All these elements blend into her life to create something bigger, not unlike the "floor-to-ceiling cyclorama" greeting visitors to the show and readers alike, a multi-channel video installation spanning three walls, seamlessly flowing into a colorful rug and seating as if Jackson invited us into her home, the cyclical conversation that happens between life and art.

In "Lip-Sync," Uchill, director of the Center for Art, Design, and Visual Culture at the University of Maryland, and Jackson, friends from MIT, dive into the sonic quality permeating Jackson's work and earlier thesis and research during her studies at the Cooper Union, MIT, and Skowhegan School of Painting, ranging from her musical inspirations and creation of music videos, performances, and song lyrics. Most formative is her lyrics about actress Lindsey Lohan (and later video made at MIT), who was then struggling in the news, and other public figures, all while speaking to the value that the voice provides as an act of resistance or for letting go; the voice in the face of political and social issues; the voice within music; the voice within art spaces and academic institutions; and the voice as an act of expression. Meaning and sound may be transformed through appropriation, for her mainly the appropriation of R&B love songs commonly written and performed by men, with women as "muses" while targeted to female audiences. This is executed primarily in her videos where Jackson, or her alter-ego, Tommy Tonight, alongside artist collaborators, create lip-synching music videos utilizing "chroma-key imagery" for her collage process capturing these songs. Jackson recalls, "Looking back, I have the interpretation that the neck is where my voice reverberates and vibrates. I am lip-synching to a recording of myself singing a song that came to me in a dream. There was something about isolating the site of the vibration. I could have wrapped the whole scarf around my face—I could have explored blocking myself out and totally filling myself up with the story…." (15). Exploring the use of sound and voice, Jackson considers what the lack of it could mean, hinting at it visually with the constant use of the knitted scarf around her neck, allowing other layers to permeate it with the use of a green-screen technique. For *Untitled:*

Lindsay Lohan (2011), the knitted scarf suggests the constant media overflow that consciously or unconsciously enters our thoughts, giving it the power to alter the voice. Additional conversational segments cover Jackson's research and textual influences in Black literature, found in seminal works by Fred Moten, Toni Morrison, and Édouard Glissant, among others. While the catalogue attempts to transform such immersive experiences into text, it may feel frustrating not to be able to access that sound so passionately discussed by the artist.

"Watery Mirror," a 2021 conversation between Jackson and artists and educators Janiva Ellis (b. 1987) and Kandis Williams (b. 1985), touch upon multimedia practices of painting, collage, and moving image, breaking the constraints of a single medium to invite alternative ways of looking and creating a reflective surface, what Ellis calls "a watery mirror." The following plates serve as an uninterrupted, rhythmic flow of visuals that permit the eye to glide filmically through Jackson's works. Across four sections, starting with the project "Plain Cite, Plain Site, Plain Sight," overlays of images at different opacities, in predominant blue shades, address roles of Black women within informal domestic labor economies in the built environment, spaces that leave women vulnerable, with little protection; themes of mass media, migration policies, privacy, and intimacy are explored. Next, "The Subliminal Is Now," explores the history and remains of school desegregation litigation and legislation in the US; here we are confronted with the sight of not only the victims of failed policies and systems, including children continually facing police brutality and stripped of their anonymity, but as viewers we are forced to confront those committing such violent acts, again questioning news cycles. "Interstate Love Song" centers the work in and around Atlanta, specifically the past and present experiences surrounding the transportation-centered voting referenda leading to de facto segregation; the knitted scarf is predominant, shifting its meaning depending on what is hidden from the viewers. In these frames, surrounding spaces appear overrun by subjects and figures. Lastly, "Forever My Lady" focuses on LA and the links and contradictions that exist between participatory democracy and love across generations, where Tommy Tonight and collaborators take center stage in a series of performative pieces. At times, this crossover between text and visuals seem disjointed, yet the catalogue provides endless room for exploration and interpretation. If you're someone who likes to dissect the parts of meaning and conformism, then *SLOW JAMZ* is very much the book for you, the imagery granting the gift of time that a moving piece cannot provide. •



Fig. 1. *Tomashi Jackson: SLOW JAMZ*, installation view, Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, SUNY, 2022. Photo: Jim Frank Photography.

Paulina Avila Esqueda is a lens-based artist and writer born and raised in Mexico. Currently working at an art gallery in New York City, she completed her degree in photography with a minor in film production at Parsons School of Design.

All These Liberations: Women Artists in the Eileen Harris Norton Collection

Edited by Taylor Renee Aldridge.
Contributions by Taylor Renee Aldridge, Sophia Belsheim, Susan Cahan, Chelsea Mikael Frazier, Thelma Golden, Genevieve Hyacinthe, Kellie Jones, Gelare Khoshgozaran, Kris Kuramitsu, Sarah Elizabeth Lewis, Steven Nelson, Legacy Russell, Lorna Simpson, and Lowery Stokes Sims
Yale University Press, 2024

Reviewed by Erin C. Devine

Important collectors can take pride in advancing an artist's career, but it is rare for a collection—particularly one devoted largely to women of color—to help shape art history and curatorial practice. Such is the importance of the Eileen Harris Norton (EHN) Collection that it warrants a substantial volume from Yale University Press with roughly two hundred beautiful color reproductions and figures to catalogue its nearly fifty-year evolution and trace the unlikely rise of a former ESL public school teacher to one of the most influential American collectors of contemporary art. Harris Norton's story, as revealed through the essays, discussions, and interviews in *All These Liberations*, is undoubtedly inspirational, but the many artists and curators she has supported is equally gratifying, representing primarily women who are Black, Latina, Chicana, Asian, Middle Eastern, transnational, and diasporic.

Many benefiting from her patronage, such as Thelma Golden, Lowery Stokes Sims, and Kellie Jones, are also among the most important curators and scholars of art by women of color. They have contributed to a thoroughly researched catalogue that is richly collaborative with

Harris Norton herself. Taylor Renee Aldridge spearheaded the project as editor and derived "all these liberations" from a poem by Audre Lorde's (1934-1992) poem, "Who Said It Was Simple" (1973). The poem articulates dual meanings: firstly, of personal agency and social activism, and secondly, of intersectionality and lived experiences that are reflected in the works and artists represented within the EHN Collection. It is also a reflection of Harris Norton's own interests, identity, education, and career, which further drive her collecting methodologies. As first introduced to the reader in a Foreword by Lorna Simpson (b.1960), who was still a graduate student when Harris Norton began purchasing her work, she "was somewhat of an anomaly" among collectors, a Black woman from the Watts neighborhood "collecting at the rate that she was" and "somewhat othered" within the market sphere of contemporary art (9). And it is, perhaps, that fringe existence to the art market, "all too familiar to women of color" (9), that fueled intentionality within her collecting practice toward artists equally on the "boundaries of 'exclusion'" within art history and the gallery system (8).

Harris Norton's origin story as a collector is woven throughout the catalogue, revealing a practice of intuition coupled with intellectual rigor. She has been guided by her own instincts and interests rather than the management of art advisers, and that self-assuredness was established well before she acquired the wealth of a significant collector. Specifically, her collection began in 1976 with the purchase of her first artwork, *The Exhorters* (1976; Fig. 1), at the age of twenty-four, a linocut of the same year by the Los Angeles artist and activist, Ruth Waddy (1909–2003). In fact, this milestone in the EHN Collection holds so much heft in the thread of its story that reference and analysis of the image is recurring. A comprehensive essay on Waddy by Steven Nelson, "Ruth Waddy's Social Subjects," further shapes an understanding of the artist and why this print was so important to the propagation of the collection overall. Waddy had no formal education in art and did not arrive at making until her fifties. Nevertheless, her prints are "a mix of abstract and representational images that reveals her complex views of Black experience, politics, and diasporic history" (41), and she became a leading figure among African American artists in LA, founding the Art West Association in 1962, and co-authoring two volumes of *Black Artists on Art* (1969 and 1971) with fellow artist and art historian Samella Lewis (1923–2022).

Introducing readers to the collector's biography, Aldridge's essay assesses the similarities between Harris Norton and Waddy, two Angelenos who tirelessly advocated for their communities with eyes fixed upon the works of Black artists. It bookends the volume with Sophia Belsheim's chronology, which backdrops that biography with political and cultural history. Just fourteen when the Watts Rebellion broke out in 1965, Harris Norton seemed enlivened from that moment forward by the all-around "radicality and rebellion," (14) including the Black Power and Black Arts movements it informed. Not until her encounter with Waddy more than a decade later would she become acquainted with the prolific activity of artists that had surrounded her during that turbulent period. Yet education and exploration were vital within her multigenerational home, raised by an intelligent and encouraging single mother and two worldly uncles, one a writer and the other a photographer. Despite a modest middle-class upbringing, Harris Norton attended cultural events and travelled with her family, to Africa and across Europe, further instilling a love of global cultures before she completed a Master's in Bilingual Education.

It is gratifying to encounter a collector whose patronage arrived not from inherited wealth but a true passion for art, and who fortunately was enabled to expand those interests after she and her former husband, Peter Norton, were able to sell their software company in the 1980s. Already "students of contemporary art" (17), they had been purchasing works by emerging artists as a forward-thinking way of supporting the local community. But it was Harris Norton's perspective that largely determined their acquisitions, influenced by her "upbringing in Watts during the civil rights era and Black Arts Movement ... [and] her exposure to multiple countries" that "shaped and sharpened her consciousness of transculturalism and the interconnectedness of cultures" (17). The collection grew alongside her knowledge and yielded an exciting approach, "thinking globally while being rooted in her very specific Black and West locale" focused upon "emerging artists with strong political and social content" (17–18).

Harris Norton's eye for provocative art and creative talent was so prescient that many works in the collection would "become canonical in the discourse of contemporary art" (18). Some of the artists included in the pages of this volume are Renée Green (b.1959), Faith Ringgold (1930–2024), Betye Saar (b.1926), Kara Walker (b.1969), and Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953). The impetus for the publication began with an exhibition in 2020 curated by Erin Christovale and staged at Art + Practice (A+P), the space Harris Norton founded with Mark Bradford and Allan Dicastro that conjoins contemporary art with nonprofit social service providers to displaced and transition-age foster youth. According to Harris Norton in her interview with Golden, "2020 seemed like the right moment ... the year of the woman" (55), and Christovale's exhibition focused on the collection's women of color. The only essay to provide a broader contextual evaluation of that moment is Sarah Elizabeth Lewis's "Eileen Harris Norton's Collective Constellation: Art and Rights at the Centennial of Women's Suffrage." She recounts the intersectional activism of Black women since Sojourner Truth, situating Harris Norton's 'collecting' as "too narrow to describe what [she] has done for the art world and beyond" and defining the collection as "a compendium of how aesthetics are deployed to foresee embodied rights" (35). However, this is a collection, not an exhibition, catalogue. Rather than a catalogue of entries, which would be enormously valuable given the importance of many of these works, an

alternative approach has been taken, offering critical essays that follow an insightful interview with the collector conducted by Golden.

Of course, that only allows for future scholarship and another book on the collection. Meanwhile here, the authors theoretically suture what at first glance appear to be widely disparate works, producing comparative analyses that are a captivating read. For instance, "The Edge of the World is Not the End: On Black Feminine Beingness" by Genevieve Hyacinthe includes a fascinating reconsideration of Adrian Piper's (b.1948) *Food for the Spirit* photographs of 1971 (reprints in the collection from 1997). Hyacinthe proposes an expanded understanding of the work's performative and philosophical underpinnings to include not only Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), to which the work is indebted and to which Piper was attentively tethered while creating it, but the biography of the Enlightenment philosopher. Hyacinthe indicates that the loss of Kant's close friend, Johann Friedrich von Funk, who died of 'exhaustion' before conclusion of his own philosophical studies, haunts Piper's piece, citing her contiguous journals wherein thoughts on self-exhaustion from intense study were laid bare. For Hyacinthe, Funk's demise casts a shadow over Piper's readings of Kant's *Critique* and Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (200BCE–200CE), intensifying the quandary of transcendence of self/appearance of self central to *Food for the Spirit* and finding resolution in Piper's later intersubjective engagements with viewers, notably in a series of performances titled *Funk Lessons* (1982–84).

Hyacinthe states she is "aware of the potential dissonances inherent to making such a claim," yet the fluidity by which she arranges her argument, that 'Funk' as both the person "that existed in the *Food for the Spirit* mirror" and as "the Black sonic world of the era," is compelling (70). Reaching toward the broader contextualization of her essay that 'beingness' was at the heart of many practices and experimentations by women of color in the 1960s, from Alice Coltrane's (1937–2007) music to Yayoi Kusama's (b.1929) actions and infinity rooms, Hyacinthe arrives, unexpectedly, at Alma Thomas's (1891–1978) colorful abstractions and Xiomara De Oliver's (b.1967) more recent allegorical figurations as conduits to Piper's "corporeal and psychic expansion" (71). In Piper's early paintings, such as *LSD Self-Portrait from the Inside Out* (1966), and arguably her *Food for the Spirit*, viewers "behold her body as a liminal presence glowing and fading" that "resonates with paintings of the era by Alma Thomas, who similarly transgresses the contours of material experience and reveals the cosmic flow of all things" (71). Dissoluble contours undergird the liminality of being and becoming that surface later in De Oliver's *Parlor-B Girls* series (2005), or "Bombshell Girls" who derive from hip-hop culture, with its own evolution from Funk, to "dance through the fear or beyond it" against stark black backdrops (72). They "all look similar but not the same" and "thus, in their particularized way … bring the intersections of minimalism and second-wave feminism performed by Piper in the mirror to mind" (72).

Unaware of Alma Thomas until she saw a photograph of her painting hanging in the White House during the Obama years, Harris Norton soon after



Fig. 1. Ruth Waddy, *The Exhorters* (1976), linocut print, 21 1/8 x 17 1/4 x 1". Eileen Harris Norton Collection, Los Angeles. © Ruth Waddy.

acquired the artist's *Untitled* (1968) and *Azaleas in Spring* (1968), both pictured in Hyacinthe's essay. Her collection's absence of such an iconic figure in African American art who had lived in Washington, D.C., testifies to its West Coast milieu. Harris Norton's quick correction also underscores that her curiosity and continued education in art history heralds the collection's expansion that would come to include an impressive global focus. In Gelare Khoshgozaran's "Like Some Silent Catastrophe," the author attests that "The difficulty of portraying exile and the violences that surround and enable it are invoked in numerous works in the Eileen Harris Norton Collection" (82).

Much of Khoshgozaran's essay, however, investigates only Mona Hatoum (b.1952), whose works communicate the experience of diaspora and its attendant struggles of memory and loss. Hatoum's *Doormat* (1996), a sculptural replica of the stated object materialized by thousands of small, sharp pins, the standard 'Welcome' appearing across its surface via sunken relief, implies the pain awaiting one who moves across its threshold. Khoshgozaran's analysis of this and other works by Hatoum bears weight upon understanding the physical and psychological violences of crossing borders. Works in the essay also include Doris Salcedo's (b.1958) *Atrabiliarios* (1993), an installation of worn shoes affixed within small niches carved into walls and covered with sheens of animal skin, and Samira Yamin's (b.1983) ongoing series of cut news magazine covers into Islamic patterns. However, investigation of these works is cursory. Their developed analysis would have enriched the discussion and better underscored Harris Norton's firm transnational and ethical aesthetic that had clearly developed by the mid-1990s.

These are not easy works, for either viewers to digest or collectors to display, and Harris Norton takes the aesthetic and intellectual risks of a collector with a confident vision. Chelsea Mikael Frazier further considers this ethical aesthetic with "Feminine Ecologies: Wangechi Mutu, Maya Lin, and Julie Mehretu." Her summary effectively outlines the multiple ways their works present different approaches to land, especially Mehretu's (b.1970) *Landscape Allegories*, a series of etchings from 2004, and Lin's (b.1959) *Phases of the Moon* (1998), a sculpture of eight beeswax discs. Both evoke Minimalism's seriality and attentiveness to material. They may also be bound by liberational resiliencies and resistance to "masculinist and capitalist space-making" (96), but the terminology to which Frazier consistently returns warrants more introduction. Readers would benefit from a brief definition of "Africana femininity," particularly given the fraught conceptualizations of 'femininity' and perhaps tied to Clenora Hudson-Weems's great work on "Africana Womanism."

Frazier's work transitions well to Legacy Russell's clear and absorbing "Variations on Womxnhood," which returns the reader to themes of the self. Here, Russell's selections from the EHN Collection indicate a "Black womxn-hood" as "a critical agent of labor for a reversioned feminism, an impossible postindustrial self that must forcibly seize its personhood and citizenship in America" (107). Whereas Hyacinthe's earlier engagement with the self is far more philosophical, even mystical, Russell's critique is overtly political while also bringing cohesion to artists as diverse as Samella Lewis, Ana Mendieta (1948–1985), Mariko Mori (b.1967), and Paula Wilson (b.1975). Their "reimagined and revised selves in this terrain of non-citizenship" (107) intersect with public, domestic, technological, and historical spaces.

The book concludes with a curators' roundtable led by Aldridge, with discussion from Susan Cahan, Kellie Jones, Kris Kuramitsu, and Lowery Stokes Sims. They effectively bring into view the historical importance of the EHN Collection, as well as Harris Norton's community building, bringing full circle that 'collecting' is a limited description of her impact. The Norton Foundation has also provided grants that support curators with travel and research and expand the possibilities for exhibitions and acquisitions of women artists and artists of color. Harris Norton collected many of these artists, such as Lorraine O'Grady (1934–2024), before they were in museum collections. She built relationships, not only a collection, supplying ongoing stewardship to careers, a practice she began with Waddy (54). *All These Liberations* provides an introduction to students learning about contemporary art by women artists and an inspirational guidepost to collectors for cultivating their own ethical aesthetics. Looking again at Waddy's *The Exhorters*, I imagine a young Eileen Harris Norton—discerning and curious—identifying with the lone female figure in the print: someone who filters out the noise and stands firmly, resiliently, in her own vision. We're so lucky she did. •

Erin Devine is an artist and art historian based in Washington, DC, and Cologne, Germany. Her recent book, *Translation and Transgression in the Art of Shirin Neshat*, was published by Routledge in 2023. That same year, "Beyond Representation: The Evolution of Embodied Experience in the Early Art of Shirin Neshat," appeared in *WAJ* 44.2. She is currently a contributing editor to the journal's book reviews. Her forthcoming essay, "Displaying Iran: Shirin Neshat in the Global Exhibition," will be part of *Re-Focus: The Films of Shirin Neshat*, edited by Mahan Mazyar and Maryam Ghorbankarimi, from University of Edinburgh Press.



Pl. 1. Émilie Charmy, *Autoportrait* (Self-Portrait), c. 1910–20, oil on canvas, 32" x 25 1/2". Private collection, © ADAGP, Paris / DACS, London.



Pl. 2. Émilie Charmy, *Portrait de Berthe Weill* (Portrait of Berthe Weill) (c. 1910–20), oil on canvas, 35 1/2" x 24". Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal © ADAGP, Paris / DACS, London.



Pl. 3. Émilie Charmy, *Nu au divan rouge* (Nude on Red Sofa) (c. 1925), oil on canvas, 31 1/2" x 25 3/4". Private collection, © ADAGP, Paris / DACS, London.



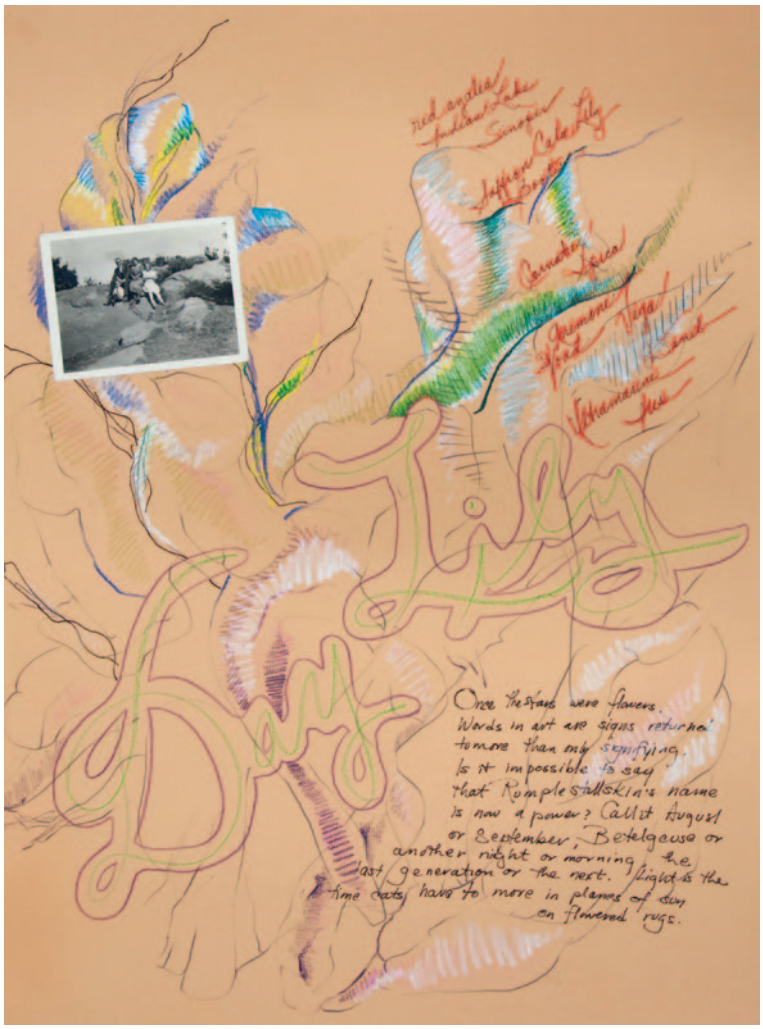
Pl. 4. Émilie Charmy, *Nu tenant son sein* (Nude Holding Her Breast) (c. 1920–25), oil on canvas, 36 1/2" x 28 3/4". Private collection, © ADAGP, Paris / DACS, London.



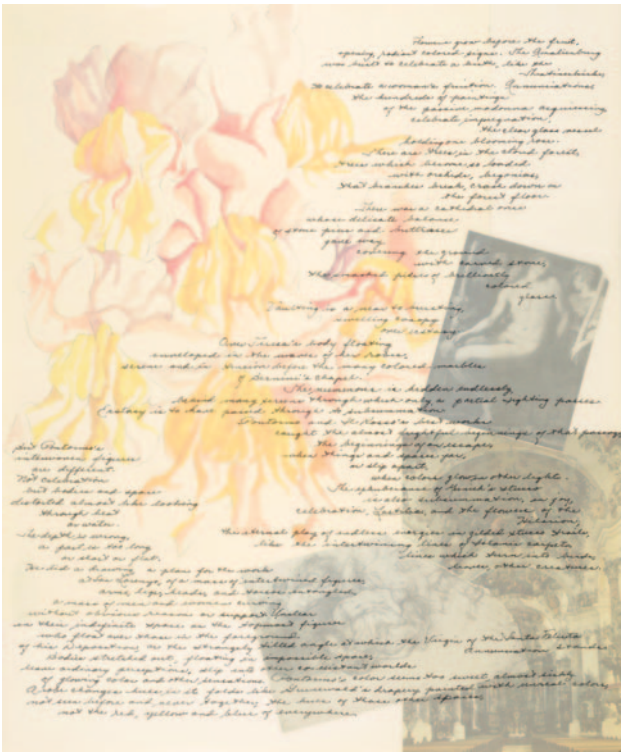
Pl. 5. Émilie Charmy, *Autoportrait nu enceinte sur fond rouge* (Pregnant Nude Self-Portrait on Red Ground) (c. 1915), oil on canvas, dimensions unrecorded. Private collection, © ADAGP, Paris / DACS, London.



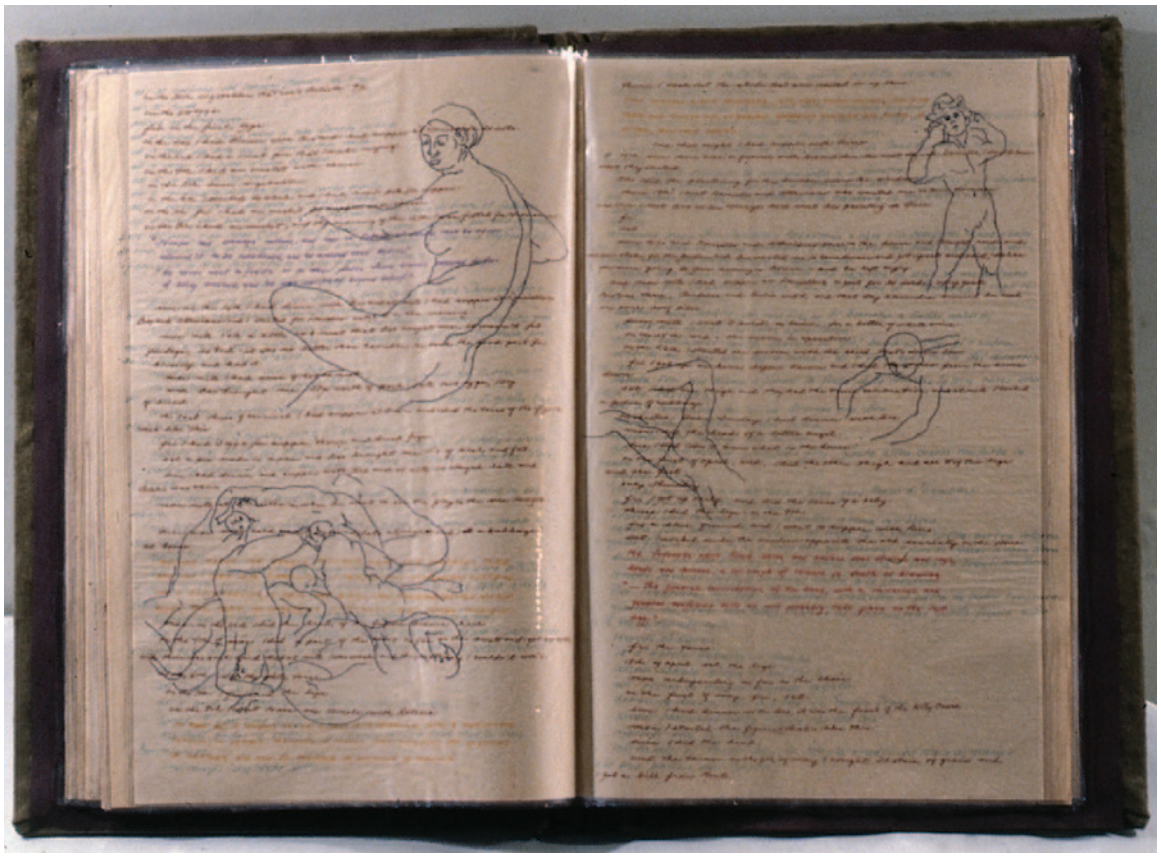
Pl. 6. Émilie Charmy, *Autoportrait nu enceinte sur fond bleu* (Pregnant Nude Self-Portrait on Blue Ground) (c. 1915), oil on canvas, dimensions unrecorded, private collection, © ADAGP, Paris / DACS, London.



Pl. 7. Rosemary Mayer, *Day Lily (In Time Order)* (1978), ink, oil crayon, and photograph on paper, 23 4/5" x 18". Courtesy of the Estate of Rosemary Mayer.



Pl. 8. Rosemary Mayer, detail of *Passages* (1976), graphite, colored pencil, ink, and watercolor on paper and vellum, with collaged elements including color photographs, black and white photocopies, postcards, and other printed materials from books and magazines, 17" x 14". Courtesy of the Estate of Rosemary Mayer.



Pl. 9. Rosemary Mayer, detail of *Diary of Jacopo da Pontormo During the Time He Painted the Choir at San Lorenzo* (1976). Handmade artist's book; cover: green velveteen and paper bound with thread and satin ribbon; twenty-one pages: paper and vellum with ink encased in plastic, 20" x 14". Courtesy of the Estate of Rosemary Mayer.



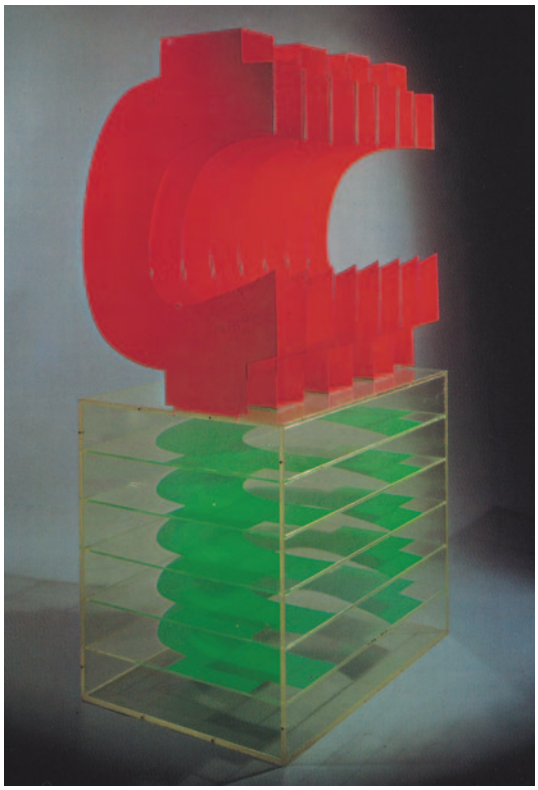
Pl. 10. Chryssa, *The Gates to Times Square* (1964–66). Courtesy Buffalo AKG Art Museum. © Estate of Chryssa, National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York. Image courtesy Dia Art Foundation.



Pl. 11. Chryssa, *The Gates to Times Square* (1964–66). Courtesy Buffalo AKG Art Museum. © Estate of Chryssa, National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York. Image courtesy Dia Art Foundation.



Pl. 12. Chryssa, *Cents Sign Travelling from Broadway to Africa via Guadeloupe* (1968), neon tubing, plexiglas, 43" x 35" x 28 1/2". Brooklyn Museum; gift of Sidney Singer, 85.290. © Estate of Chryssa, EMΣT | National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens.



Pl. 13. Chryssa, *Cents Sign* (1969), plexiglass, steel, and enamel paint, 78" x 42 1/2" x 28". © Estate of Chryssa, EMΣT | National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens.

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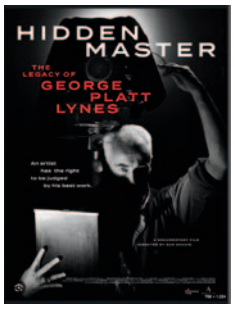
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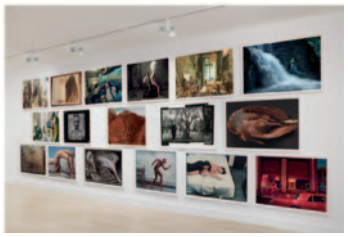












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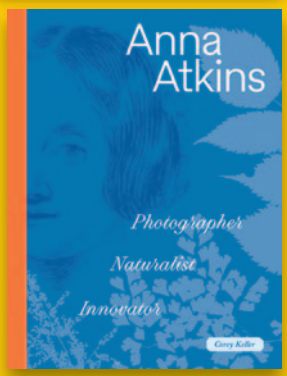












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