

THE MISSING FUTURE: MoMA AND
MODERN WOMEN / GRISELDA POLLOCK

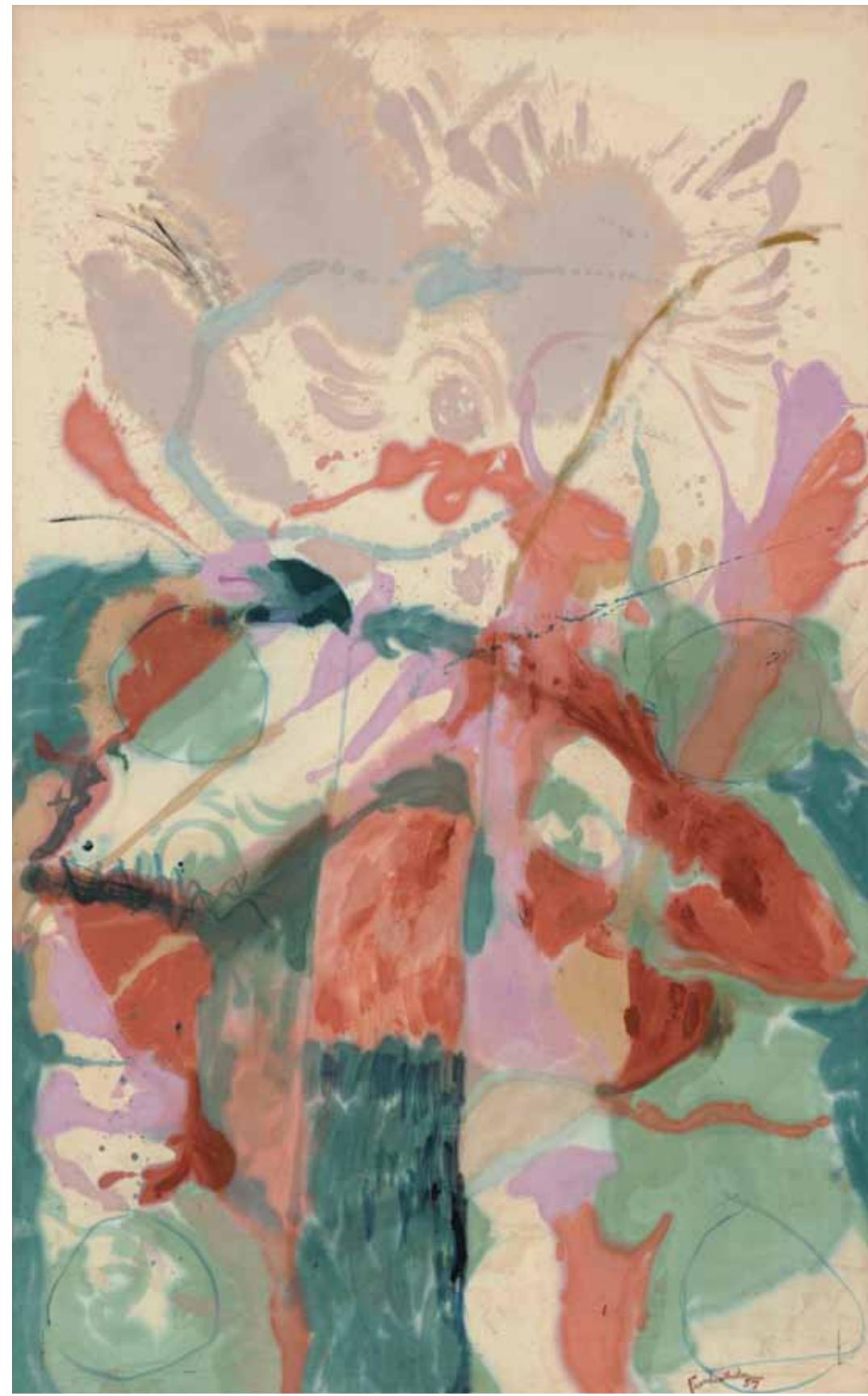


Among the many reasons women took to the streets in 1970 was, perhaps surprisingly, art. Angry artists, critics, curators, and art historians stomped militantly around The Museum of Modern Art, protesting the unrepresentative picture of the modern century perpetuated by institutions that appeared to exhibit only the work of men, and thus to educate their ever-expanding publics in a half-truth about the nature of art and modernity, one that would continue to “disappear” contemporary women artists. That same year, at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, curator Henry Geldzahler showed forty-three artists in the exhibition *New York Painting and Sculpture, 1940–1970*. Only one was a woman. Helen Frankenthaler (no. 2) was rightly included, but Nell Blaine, Elaine de Kooning, Grace Hartigan (no. 3), Lee Krasner, Joan Mitchell (no. 1), and Louise Nevelson (no. 4)—to name just a few—were not. If artists who were women were still being kept from public knowledge, what would happen if the institutions and their selective stories were not challenged in the name of both the erased past and the missing future?

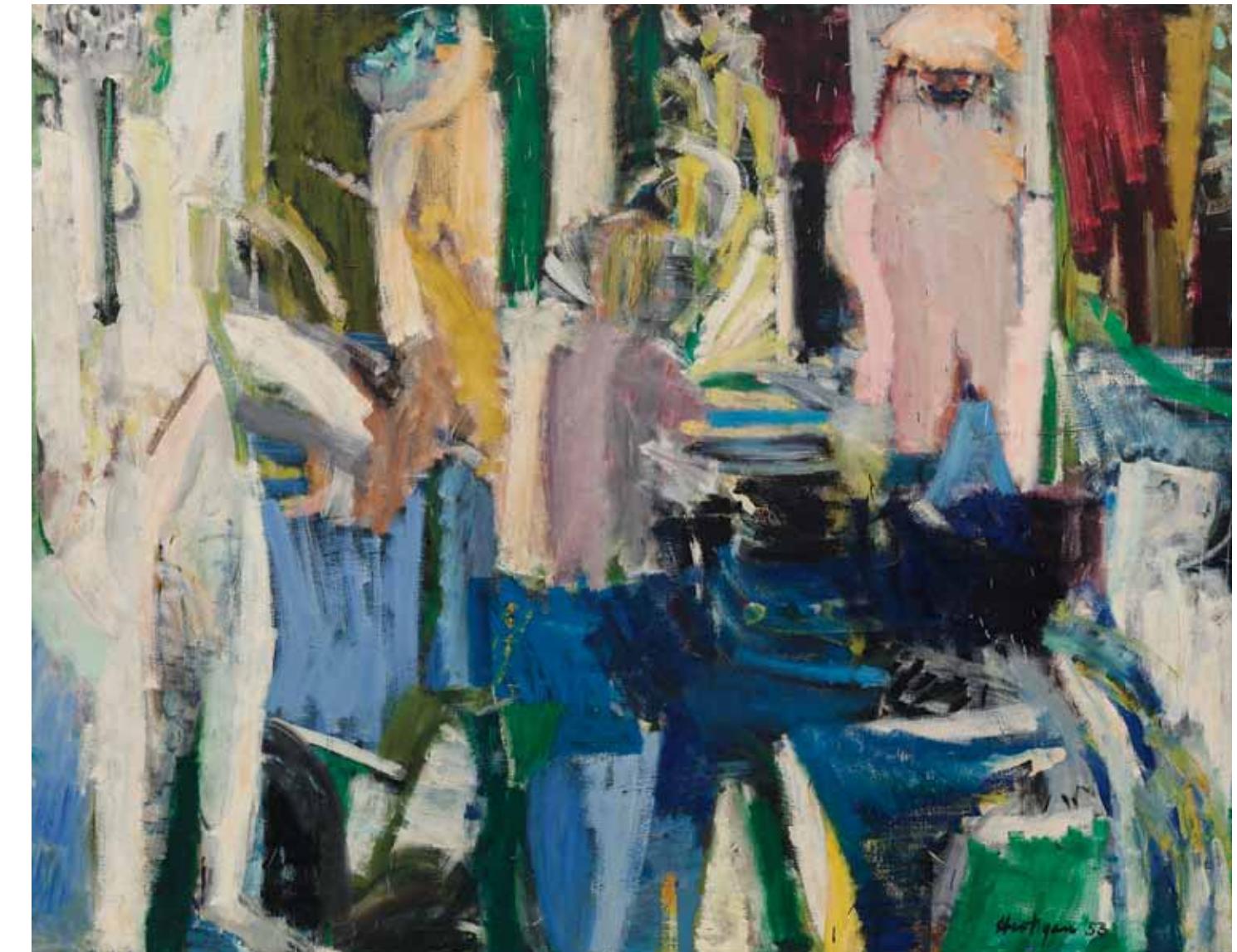
WOMEN FOUND THE MUSEUMS

The history of museums, taste, and the collecting of modern art in the United States owes much to influential women amateurs. The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s marvelous collections of later-nineteenth-century French art are based in Louise Havemeyer’s remarkable holdings, astutely assembled under the thoughtful guidance of American painter Mary Cassatt.¹ The involvement

1. Joan Mitchell (American, 1925–1992). *Ladybug*. 1957. Oil on canvas, 6' 5 7/8" x 9' (197.9 x 274 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase



2. Helen Frankenthaler
(American, born 1928).
Jacob's Ladder. 1957. Oil on
unprimed canvas, 9' 5 3/8" x
69 3/8" (287.9 x 177.5 cm).
The Museum of Modern Art,
New York. Gift of Hyman N.
Glickstein



3. Grace Hartigan (American,
1922–2008). *River Bathers*.
1953. Oil on canvas, 69 3/8" x
7' 4 3/4" (176.2 x 225.5 cm).
The Museum of Modern Art,
New York. Given anonymously



of wealthy women in culturally enriching activities was an extension of their widespread nineteenth-century role in philanthropy and social service.² Collecting and museum building were, furthermore, social strategies and cultural mechanisms for legitimating the very visible forms of social difference and privilege created by both old and new wealth in the modern industrial era.³ As modernist critic Clement Greenberg, in his most left-wing moment, astutely pointed out in 1939, the artistic avant-garde, while attempting to escape ideological subservience to the new bourgeoisie by its self-imposed social exile, was nonetheless inevitably, and inescapably, tied to the representatives of social and economic power by “an umbilical cord of gold.”⁴ Without the financial resources of those adventurous and progressive sections of the new moneyed class, the independent enterprise of individualist, avant-gardist art-making could not have been sustained. Modernism and modern social processes were thus inextricably, if sometimes contradictorily, aligned. They crossed most visibly in the formation of The Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1929.

Legend has it that on a journey to Egypt in the winter of 1928–29, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller met modernist art collector Lillie P. Bliss. They discussed the project for a museum of modern art. On her return crossing Rockefeller traveled with Mary Quinn Sullivan, who became the third key woman player in the founding of The Museum of Modern Art, which opened in November 1929.⁵ In her detailed historical account of the varied intellectual origins of the Museum, Sybil Kantor revises the narrative by reminding us that the creation of a museum dedicated to modern art was already being discussed in New York during the 1920s.⁶ Conditions for such an initiative had been set by the first major exhibition of modern art in New York: the Armory Show in 1913, organized in part by Arthur B. Davies, who also advised Bliss on her pioneering

collection of modern art (later donated to MoMA). Kantor also points to the impact of the patronage of modern art by the collector John Quinn, another organizer of the Armory Show, whose substantial collection was put up for auction in New York in 1926 and was thus made visible, for a brief moment, to the small but influential groups of collectors, artists, and emerging curators interested in modern art, for whom the idea of a more permanent display was thus stimulated. (Quinn was an indefatigable collector and patron of Gwen John. In 1971 his sister gave John’s *Girl Reading at a Window* [1911, no. 5] to the Museum.)

In addition, Kantor identifies the important work of Katherine Dreier (no. 6), who with Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray founded the Société Anonyme in 1920, an experimental project they called a Museum of Modern Art. The group fostered the exhibiting, collecting, and teaching of European and American modernist art, and produced a major show at the Brooklyn Museum in 1926 (no. 7).⁷ As yet another factor behind the founding of MoMA, Kantor notes *Museum Work and Museum Problems*, an innovative curatorial program at Harvard University directed by Paul Sachs. MoMA’s first director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., participated in the course in 1924–25, encountering, as would other influential museum curators after him, Sachs’s method of connoisseurship, which itself was based in that of Bernard Berenson.

Historical events are always the effect of many determinations and relations rather than the product of individual initiatives. It is, however, the very contradiction between the undoubtedly influential role of certain women in founding and shaping MoMA and the vision of modern art that the Museum disseminated—which radically *disappeared* the equally vital and visible role of women in making that modernist art, as artists—that we have to explore and reframe.

4. Louise Nevelson (American, 1899–1988). *Sky Cathedral*. 1958. Painted wood, 11' 3 1/2" x 10' 1/4" x 18" (343.9 x 305.4 x 45.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ben Mildwoff

THE PARADOX OF MoMA'S MISSING MODERNIST WOMEN

At the heart of MoMA's history lies a profound paradox. The 1920s were a self-consciously *modern* moment, in which women from all walks of life and social classes and many countries were, for the first time in history, actively shaping societies and making democratizing changes. Yet MoMA created a vision of modern art that effectively excluded the new and, importantly, *modern* participation of women.

In the film and book *Paris Was a Woman* (1995), Greta Schiller and Andrea Weiss recovered a rich archive of photographic and filmed footage that once again revealed the vitality of Paris from 1900 to 1940 as the center of a cultural revolution *for* and *by* women.⁸ By now, a mass of scholarship firmly disproves the idea that there were no women modernists. There were—in numbers. It is not that their work lacked quality, relevance, originality, or importance. Modernist women were creating and innovating alongside, and often in partnership with, their male colleagues, husbands, lovers, rivals. It is not that their work was unexhibited, unreviewed, unavailable to be collected through dealers. In the United States, advanced women artists were active in forming avant-garde artistic organizations such as the American Abstract Artists. They participated in groups, journals, and events, and were present in every aesthetic move and major “movement,” including Dada and Surrealism, that MoMA would chart as modernism.

Modernist consciousness was fundamentally engaged with the changing social roles, economic activity, public visibility, and cultural articulation of women in urban society at the levels of both lived processes and cultural representation. So how can we account for the counterintuitive fact that despite every form of evidence to the contrary, and despite everything that made the *modernization of gender roles* fundamental to modernity itself, the dominant vision of modern art created by the most influential American museum systematically failed to register

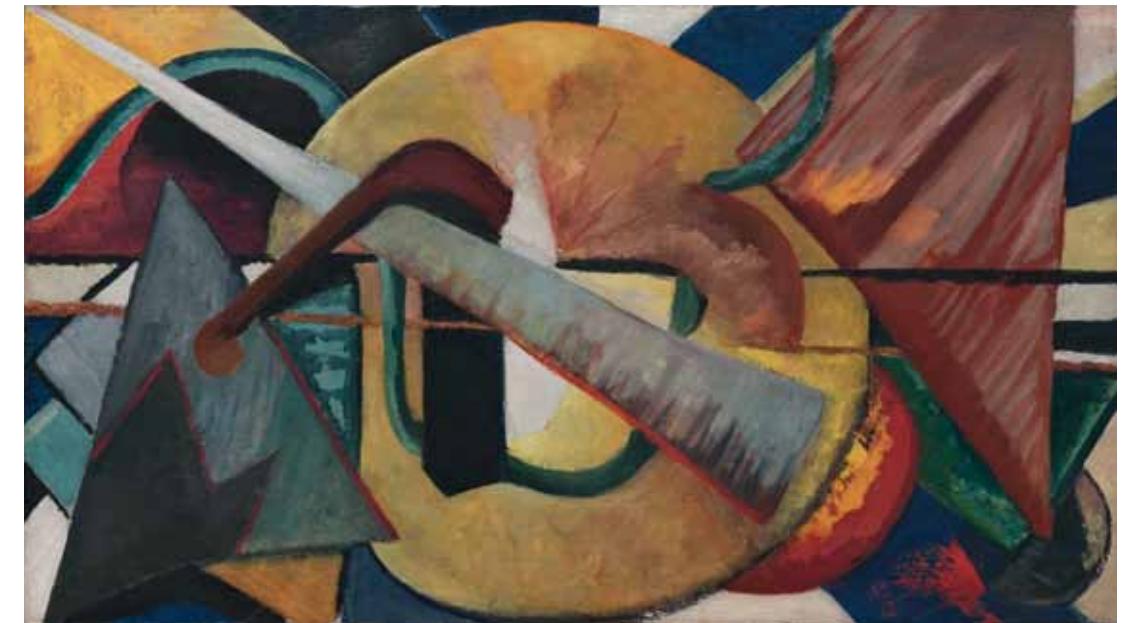


the intensely visible artistic participation of women in making modernism modern? And why has it taken so long for this problem to be addressed and redressed?

This irony needs to be further underlined. It is not an incidental or trivial fact. We cannot dismiss it as the mere residue of older attitudes, or of embedded sexist prejudices that would eventually be swept away with natural liberalization. In fact, research since 1970 into the history of women in the arts has yielded incontrovertible evidence

Opposite:
5. Gwen John (British, 1876–1939). *Girl Reading at a Window*. 1911. Oil on canvas, 16 1/8 x 10" (40.9 x 25.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Mary Anderson Conroy Bequest in memory of her mother, Julia Quinn Anderson

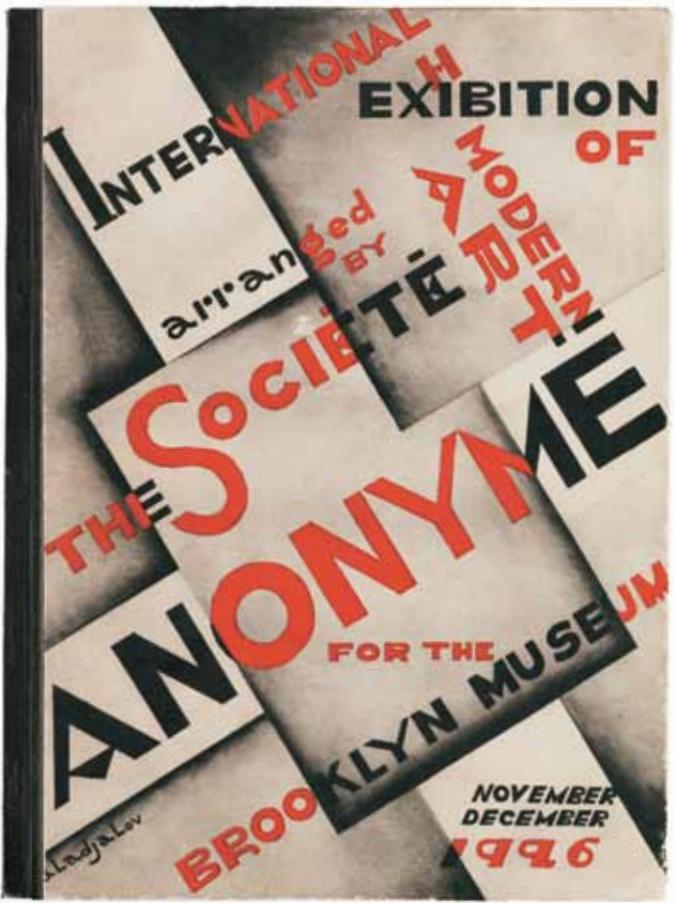
6. Katherine S. Dreier (American, 1877–1952). *Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*. 1918. Oil on canvas, 18 x 32" (45.7 x 81.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund



of a continuous history of women participating in, and being acknowledged for, art-making throughout the centuries and cultures, culminating in their massive presence both in the professional art world by the end of the nineteenth century and in avant-garde groupings from the beginning of the twentieth century. Women studied and exhibited at salons and academies. They founded independent organizations, won prizes, challenged limitations, took the lead in projects. “The Independents,” as Cassatt insisted on calling the artists we know better as Impressionists, not only included four women in their core group of ten or so but were financially and aesthetically supported by them. One of these highly intelligent and creative women, Berthe Morisot, was hailed by French critic Claude Roger-Marx as perhaps “the only true Impressionist.”⁹ By the dawning of the twentieth century, and notably after the long-fought campaigns for political emancipation had borne fruit and a world war had proved women’s resilience and adaptability to hard industrial labor, women clearly felt rising confidence in their ability to assume an equal role in making modern society and its cultures, a potential that was also increasingly registered by the cinema industry in its representations of women at work and enjoying social and personal agency.

If the exemplary museum dedicated to curating, preserving, and disseminating distinctively modernist cultural forms in all their manifestations, from painting to cinema, architecture to design, photography to graphics, systematically produced and maintains an incomplete (universalizing, masculinist, Eurocentric) picture of its subject, we have to ask: How could this have happened? What made that extraordinary selectivity possible at the very moment when living reality delivered evidence of new diversity? What aspects of modernist culture itself have been suppressed in the manner in which the history of modernism has been curated in museums such as MoMA? Of what is it symptomatic that we can now work positively to transform for the future?

Two answers to my first question about selectivity spring to mind and must be disposed of swiftly. The first is good old-fashioned sexist prejudice against women per se. But that is hardly interesting. Selectivity is often presented as a matter of self-evident quality. It is possible that those seeking generously to create a museum of modern culture simply chose the best, *as they saw it*. It seems, problematically however, that the best happened to be more or less created by men, and white men at that, with little consideration of sexualities. Without denying



7. *International Exhibition of Modern Art: Arranged by the Société Anonyme for the Brooklyn Museum, November–December 1926*, exhibition catalogue with cover illustration composed by Katherine S. Dreier and Constantin Aladjalov. Katherine S. Dreier Papers/Société Anonyme Archive, Yale Collection of American Literature, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

the immense creativity of those distinguished men selected by MoMA as the representatives of major modernist art and culture, we cannot accept that women somehow are just less creative than men, less intelligent, less innovative, less thoughtful, less important articulators of modern human experience. It is unhistorical. It would, moreover, be completely unmodernist to do so.

MODERNIZATION, MODERNITY, AND MODERNISM

A museum of modern art negotiates three interconnecting terms. “Modernization” refers to the radical transformation of economic, social, and political processes through industrialization and urbanization; “modernity” refers to the cultural consciousness emerging in this epochal change that reshaped the world; and “modernism” is the cultural negotiation and critical representation of this new consciousness. The rights of “man” [sic] were boldly declared but just as quickly restricted and betrayed. The inclusion of women and of working-class and nonwhite men had to be struggled for again and again. Traditional forms of social authority were contested by revolution, and new, dynamic urban-industrial economies were formed, generating cities with their urban subjectivities and all the attendant issues of labor, consumption, and sexuality. Campaigns against enslavement, for workers’ rights, and for the emancipation of black men and all women typify modernizing society. From the moment British writer Mary Wollstonecraft wrote “A Vindication of the Rights of Women” in 1792 to the meetings of the first American feminists at Seneca Falls in 1848 and on to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, which gave all American women the vote on equal terms with men, in 1919 (in Britain this occurred in 1928), gender was an important feature of and issue for modernity. Gender, in fact, became a central symbolic axis of power and meaning as caste and estate waned and the possibility of change became fundamental to modernizing societies.

The nineteenth-century women’s movements were testament to a newly created consciousness of the collective experience of women *as women* in a world that was restricting what they could and could not do or be in clear, gendered, and gendering terms. Alfred Tennyson’s poem “The Princess” (1847) declared starkly:

Man for the field and woman for the hearth:
Man for the sword and for the needle she:
Man with the head and woman with the heart:
Man to command and woman to obey:
All else confusion.¹⁰

Public and private spheres were gendered masculine and feminine, respectively. Changes in and challenges to these concepts and the relations of gender generated conservative ideologies that moralized motherhood and privatized domesticity as much as incited feminist demands for women’s equal rights to education, economic independence, sexual freedom, and self-determination. In various forms—political, social, and cultural—the questions of sex, sexuality, and, above all, the meanings of gender as a power relation run like brightly colored thread through modern societies and agitate all forms of their culture; they are still unfinished business to this day.

The anxieties created by destabilizing traditional relations between the sexes and exploring new terms for the experience of gender across the new cities—public and private spaces, workplaces and entertainment sites—constituted a vital theme in modernist culture that was manifested in visual art, literature, opera, dance, poetry, theater, and film.

Yet literary theorist Rita Felski has posed the question: “What is the gender of Modernity?”¹¹ Can a historical period have a gender? No. Felski argues that the selective and self-interested representations that scholars have made of modernity have created a gendered orientation. Thus the exemplary figures of modernity—Faust, Karl Marx, Gustave Flaubert, Charles Baudelaire, and Pablo

Picasso, for instance—render masculine experience typical, reducing the complexity and ambivalence of cultural history as it struggled with change and the diversity of resulting possibilities. We are taught to understand modernity’s gender politics through the crass opposition between the *flâneur* (a figure of masculine sexual freedom and intellectual mobility, identified since Baudelaire with the image of the modern artist) and the double imaging of woman as prostitute (a sexual object) or hysterical (muted and/or mad, hence like the childish masses).¹² Cultural historian Andreas Huyssen has argued that authentic, serious high-modernist culture has generally been identified with masculinity and self-restraint and structurally opposed to a mass culture that is itself represented as intrinsically “feminine.” This use of gender to create not only an opposition but also a hierarchy creates a problem of “the persistent gendering as feminine as that which is devalued,” and vice-versa.¹³ Hence, in modernist discourse the feminine becomes not one face of a multifaceted modernity but modernism’s defining other: the matter, materiality, and nature that culture masters and refigures as art. To be properly modern, all traces of feminine gendering must be effaced, allowing the masculine to present itself as universal and exclusively modern. According to Huyssen: “The universalizing ascription of femininity to mass culture always depended on the very real exclusion of women from high culture and its institutions.”¹⁴ He notes:

The deeper problem at stake here pertains to the relationship of modernism to the matrix of modernization which gave birth to it and nurtured it through its various stages. In less suggestive terms, the question is why, despite *the obvious heterogeneity of the modernist project* [emphasis mine], a certain universalizing account of the modern has been able to hold sway for so long in literary and art criticism, and why it is even today so far from being decisively displaced from its position of hegemony in cultural institutions.¹⁵

What has kept in place such an obviously selective, canonical, masculine version of the history of art, despite the evidence for a more complex history of modernism produced by the last forty years of critical scholarship?

To answer this question we might turn to psychoanalysis, which can shed light on why we invest in certain ways of seeing the world. Looking at art historians of his moment, Sigmund Freud asked: what do we desire from the stories of art, from the writing that so often celebrates art through the mythic figure of the artist? Freud suggests that art history combined *theological* and *narcissistic* tendencies. The story of art as a story of great men, and only men, registers a specifically masculine narcissism; primary, infantile idealization of the father gives way to, and is compensated for by, the creation of a hero, who must be like the heroizing self but also an idealization, a figure elevated above that self. As French philosopher Sarah Kofman, analyzing Freud's aesthetic theory, writes:

The cult of the artist is ambiguous in that it consists in the worship of father and hero alike; the cult of the hero is a form of self-worship, since the hero is the first ego ideal. This attitude is religious but also narcissistic in character. . . . This religious and narcissistic attitude toward artists can be observed at all levels of cultural production. It explains for instance people's interest in biographies. . . . Yet it is essential that distance be preserved: the artist and his work must remain "taboo" in a sense. . . . Freud's unmasking of this dynamic, however, consists in showing that the theological attitude of worship toward the artist is simply the other side of narcissistic identification.¹⁶

Thus we can recognize the psychological investment in an art history that is shaped as a history of great men. Those who determine the history of art seek in their narratives of exceptional individuals a gratifying but heroic reflection of themselves, an ideal other, embodied in the

mythicized figure of the creative artist. For a masculine establishment in control of the discourse and evaluation of art, which then shapes the whole discipline and practice in its own image, the artist cannot be a woman and perform this function. Even women entering the discipline professionally learn to become intellectual "transvestites" by identifying with masculinity, the only ideal, precisely because the devaluation of the feminine offers no compensatory gratification for those who would study artists who are women.

Not a mere reflex, *modernism* emerged as the critical site of refractions of, and reflections upon, both the articulated issues and the unspoken, even unconscious, dimensions of radically changing, heterogeneous experiences, social relations, and subjectivities in industrial, urban, colonizing, and later imperial lifeworlds. The structural transformations typical of urban-industrial-imperial *modernization* undid the former fixity of ideas about masculinity and femininity and opened up the destinies of men and women, promising and betraying the possibility of determining what those destinies could be. During modernization, some women became the pillars of powerful and conservative groupings in modern society, while others embraced the radical potential for change. As writers, poets, dancers, thinkers, designers, filmmakers, and artists, avant-gardist women embraced the opportunities offered by modernity, translating them into the newly open and experimental forms of modernist culture. Flocking to the mostly European centers of modern cultural practice, such as Paris, from Shanghai, Tokyo, Seoul, Berlin, Prague, Moscow, Bern, Worpswede, Tallin, Warsaw, Budapest, London, and New York, modernist women entered the cultural field in substantial numbers between 1900 and 1940.

What is needed is not a belated recognition of hitherto-neglected women modernists as a second tier in the great modernist pantheon. We shall need different systems or modes of seeing, assessing, and understanding art in order not to perpetuate fundamentally flawed, psychically

invested, and selective versions of modernism. Modernism was never a one-sided project that (white) men simply did better. Nonetheless, whatever it was that modernist women were introducing into culture through their newly emancipated and active embrace of the modernist revolutions in aesthetics was both recognizably new and sufficiently different to have seemed "other" to the early masculinist curators. Was that because of the latter's deployment of specific, already-gender-impregnated art-historical models for categorizing modern art? Or was it because of the concomitant mythologies of the artist that already prejudged art and artist as fundamental, symbolic enunciations of idealized masculinities? Gender ideology was always-already at work in art history and its sustaining mythologies. Far from being gender-neutral and indifferent, museological art history has been a powerful inscription of a self-reflecting, narcissistic, masculinist vision in which men act and create and "woman" is positioned as other, a resource for art, a part of the world of nature, reproduction, and matter which masculine creativity strives to master and reform in an activity—artistic creation—that makes (the) man. Such processes occur at levels beyond individual consciousness, intent, or even purposeful understanding.

MODELING ART HISTORY FOR MODERN ART

So how did the manner in which people were trained to do art history and develop it into curatorial strategies produce this contradiction whose effects we are now seeking to undo? During the 1920s, when men like Barr and his highly educated Harvard colleagues, who would direct so many key American museums, were traveling to discover firsthand what was happening at the Bauhaus and in Berlin, Moscow, Paris, Prague, and Warsaw, they would have seen for themselves the widespread participation of men and women in modernism—in Constructivism, Surrealism, Dada, design, cinema, dance, art dealing, and

art writing. In cases of specifically revolutionary culture, such as the first decade of the Soviet experiment, the equality of the sexes was axiomatically fostered. Spending time in Paris would have meant experiencing that, again, *Paris was a woman*.

Biographical studies of Barr's formative travels indicate that he was not unaware of women as artists; he met Lyubov Popova with Aleksandr Rodchenko in Moscow (no. 8), saw Gunta Stölzl and Anni Albers at the Bauhaus, and invited Meret Oppenheim to exhibit at MoMA in 1936 (no. 9). We also know that when solicited by Peggy Guggenheim in 1942 for names of women artists he respected, he was forthcoming, naming five "female abstract painters who on the whole seem to me as good as the best of the men in the American Abstract Artists group."¹⁷

Yet no department of MoMA had a one-woman exhibition until 1940, when the photographer Thérèse Bonney was thus honored.¹⁸ The first woman painter to be featured was Josephine Joy in 1942, followed over the course of the next seven years by photographers Genevieve Naylor and Helen Levitt; industrial designer Eva Zeisel; painters Georgia O'Keeffe, Florine Stettheimer, and Loren MacIver; and textile designer and printmaker Anni Albers. Joy (no. 10) was a self-taught painter who worked for the WPA California Project, showed in Los Angeles, and was brought to the attention of New York dealer Sidney Janis, who included her in his book *They Taught Themselves* (1942). A few of her paintings were purchased and shown at MoMA, and the artist was recognized posthumously in 1981 at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, in Washington, D.C., in the exhibition *In Their Own Way*, and in 2009 in a show at the Galerie St. Etienne in New York, under Janis's title. Stettheimer, for all her interesting work, might also appear eccentric to the mainstream modernist story.

In 1936 Barr organized two definitive companion exhibitions: *Cubism and Abstract Art* and *Fantastic Art and Dada*. Barr bifurcated modern art into a rational strand, which included both geometric and organic abstraction,



8. Lyubov Popova (Russian, 1889–1924). *Untitled*. 1917. Cut-and-pasted colored papers on paper mounted on board, $9\frac{3}{8} \times 6\frac{1}{8}$ " (23.9 x 15.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Deutsch



9. Meret Oppenheim (Swiss, 1913–1985). *Object*. Paris, 1936. Fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon, cup $4\frac{3}{8}$ " (10.9 cm) diam., saucer $9\frac{3}{8}$ " (23.7 cm) diam., spoon 8" (20.2 cm) long, overall height $2\frac{7}{8}$ " (7.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase



10. Josephine Joy (American, 1869–1948). *Prisoner's Plea*. c. 1935–37. Oil on fiberboard, 23 7/8 x 28" (60.8 x 71.0 cm). Smithsonian American Art Museum. Transfer from The Museum of Modern Art

such women could only appear as exceptions, tokens, outsiders by virtue of their gender. Furthermore, most of the more recent one-woman exhibitions at MoMA have originated at other institutions, including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Clementina, Lady Hawarden, 1990); the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (Hannah Höch, 1997); The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (Yayoi Kusama, 1998); The Art Institute of Chicago (Julia Margaret Cameron, 1999); and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (Lee

and its antithesis: the irrational, the fantastic, the uncanny. What does it tell us that the first women to have a special exhibition of a few works were artists so completely contradicting the deeply logical, formally interrelated system created to tell the story of modern art? MoMA had acquired *The Sleeping Gypsy* (1897) by autodidact Henri Rousseau in 1939, donated by Olga Hirsch (Mrs. Simon) Guggenheim. Vincent van Gogh, before Rousseau, represents the powerful effect of an untutored but imaginative painter in the newly opened field of modernist experimentation. But both of these men now take their place in the grand narrative and are not sequestered to a special category of outsider artists, of whom—along with children, the mentally distressed, and the non-European—European modernists have been so freely appropriative.

The women who were exhibited during the 1940s were all American artists and designers, and promoting American modernism was an important part of the Museum's mission. But without a more complete international representation of women from the earlier moments of modernism on both sides of the Atlantic,

Bontecou, 2004). To gain a sense of proportion, we can note that of the 2,052 exhibitions at MoMA since 1929, ninety-five have focused on a woman (five percent) and seven have been group shows with all women exhibitors (three percent).¹⁹

THE WOMEN: PEGGY GUGGENHEIM AND THE ART OF THE CENTURY

Peggy Guggenheim arrived in New York in 1942, in flight from Nazi-occupied France, having had to give up her idea of creating a museum/gallery of modern art in Paris and, before that, in the later 1930s, in London. She opened the gallery Art of This Century in October 1942 at 30 West Fifty-seventh Street (no. 11) with a women-only exhibition she had organized, only her second exhibition of any kind. By 1942 it was already necessary to produce a specific exhibition to show the work of artists being ignored or marginalized by MoMA and the other institutions determining the public knowledge of modernism. Alternating between abstraction and Surrealism in the two special

11. Peggy Guggenheim seated on Frederick Kiesler's Correalist Rocker (1942) in Art of This Century gallery, New York, c. 1942. Visible are René Magritte, *The Voice of the Air* (1931); Leonor Fini, *The Shepherdesses of the Sphinx* (1941); Leonora Carrington, *The Horses of Lord Candlestick* (1938); and Joan Miró, *Dutch Interior II* (1928).

galleries designed by Frederick Kiesler, Guggenheim organized a range of shows that would include several exhibitions devoted to individual women (Irene Rice Pereira, Janet Sobel, Pamela Bodin, Virginia Admiral, Marjorie McKee, Sonja Sekula).²⁰ On January 5, 1943, Guggenheim opened *Exhibition by 31 Women*. Two years later a second show, titled simply *The Women*, was held. Poorly archived and difficult to research, these two exhibitions tell us something extremely important about the situation of modern art in New York as perceived by another woman who, enabled by family wealth, played a leading role in sustaining modern creativity. Guggenheim clearly felt that there was a need to focus attention on many women, to provide space for numbers of women artists that was otherwise unavailable in New York.

Only O'Keeffe was in a position strong enough to decline to participate. I do not imagine that feminist O'Keeffe's refusal to show as a "woman artist," as cited in the letter she wrote in response to Guggenheim's offer, was a rejection of solidarity with women.²¹ It was more a recognition of the dangers of a move that, however necessary, only consolidated the sex segregation against which the modernist woman was fundamentally struggling. To be an artist and a woman is to integrate the whole of one's humanity into an open contribution to the world; to be labeled a "woman artist" is to be disqualified by sex from membership to the group known as "artists." We radically misunderstand those earlier-twentieth-century women who wanted to be considered artists if we fail to grasp Huyssen's point that femininity in any form had become antithetical to, and could entirely disqualify, authentic modernism or that, when discerned, it would become the only quality for which the work was recognized and by which it was then diminished and set apart.

Guggenheim's initiative reveals the parlous situation in which artists who were women were already placed: to

be seen through the hospitality of Guggenheim's pointed initiative highlighting the necessity of bringing women into view was also to risk being labeled, like Édouard Manet at the Salon des Refusés, one hundred years before, with outsiders, to be put in a category whose gendered framing immediately undid the term "artist." Without any qualifying adjective, the term disguises its normal colonization by the masculine sex.

The idea behind *Exhibition by 31 Women* was proposed to Guggenheim by Duchamp (long associated with Dreier's more open modernism) to counter the dominant Surrealist myth of woman as only mistress, muse, or *femme-enfant*. With the exception of Guggenheim herself, the jury





12. Maria Helena Vieira da Silva (French, born Portugal. 1908–1992). *Dance*. 1938. Oil and wax on canvas, 19 1/2 x 59 1/4" (49.5 x 150.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Alfred Flechtheim Fund



13. Esphyr Slobodkina (American, born Russia. 1908–2002). *Tamara Abstraction*. 1945. Oil with mixed-medium attachments on wood board, 19 1/2 x 41 1/2" (49.5 x 105.4 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Frank B. Benson Fund and A. Shuman Collection

selecting the show was, however, composed exclusively of men, including critic James Johnson Sweeney and MoMA curator James Thrall Soby. As I mentioned before, Barr was consulted, and he offered the names of Suzy Frelinghuysen, Pereira, Esphyr Slobodkina, Gertrude Greene, and Eleanor de Laittre. Guggenheim's show included the first three of these artists as well as Djuna Barnes, Xenia Cage, Leonora Carrington, Maria Helena Vieira da Silva (no. 12), Eyre de Lanux, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Leonor Fini, Valentine Hugo, Nevelson, Frida Kahlo, Buffie Johnson, Oppenheim, Hedda Sterne, Dorothea Tanning, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Sekula, and Jacqueline Lamba.

Let me expand on just one of the artists included. Slobodkina (no. 13) was born in Siberia and during the Russian Revolution moved to China, where she studied art before emigrating to the United States in 1929. With her Russian husband, Ilya Bolotowsky, as well as Josef Albers, Hananah Harari, and Rosalind Bengelsdorf, she founded the American Abstract Artists in 1936, an artist-run organization that still operates today. In 2008 the AAA curated a memorial exhibition for her at the Painting Center in New York. In her work she expanded a flattened abstract style by collaging various materials, including wood, plastic, metal, and disassembled typewriters. She also became renowned as an illustrator. She is represented in the collections of most major American museums, except MoMA. I have to say that until doing this research, this feminist art historian was unaware of Slobodkina, her work, or her foundation. None of the women identified by Barr in his letter to Guggenheim were collected by MoMA. Most of the artists had to wait until art historians inspired by second-wave feminism began recovering their work and restoring it to its place in the history of art.

In the summer of 1945, Guggenheim showed another thirty-three artists, including Krasner, Blaine, Louise Bourgeois, MacIver, Pereira, Charmion von Wiegand, and Sobel. MoMA would acknowledge two of these artists, but belatedly: Bourgeois in 1982, by then seventy-one years

old, and Krasner in 1984, after her death. The 1982 retrospective for Bourgeois occurred thanks to the arrival of Deborah Wye, who was already engaged in a curatorial project on Bourgeois before her appointment as a curator in the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books. The posthumous exhibition devoted to the relentlessly innovative and self-renewing Krasner (no. 14) came much too late for her to figure in the archive of exhibitions contemporary with her Abstract Expressionist moment, from which future scholars will derive their sense of what was considered important and influential during the 1940s, 1950s, and on to the 1980s. Nothing can now undo the effects of such failures to create the shows *in time* that would have educated the public, generated the scholarly studies, and constituted the material records for future histories of an inclusive twentieth century.

FORMALISM, ABSTRACTION, AND THE ARTIST IN MoMA'S MODERNISM

MoMA's masculinism can be understood as a symptom of the story of modern art created by Barr. We can acknowledge Barr's brilliance in being the first to chart the apparently chaotic profusion of radical stylistic communities and intellectual coteries that composed the distinctive modernist moment of art-making between 1880 and 1935. In place of confusion, however, he reduced diversity to a coherent and logical progression toward a single telos in art: abstraction.

Some background is needed to understand Barr's project. Modernist art-making shifted from the nineteenth-century practices of official, often centralized, state-organized or -sponsored salons or academies to being created and sustained by independent, private enterprise—what has been named “the dealer-critic system.”²¹ Non-centralized innovation offered many new spaces and generated diversity rather than conformity in art practice. During the same period (1870–1920), the academic

14. Lee Krasner (American, 1908–1984). *Gaea*. 1966. Oil on canvas, 69" x 10' 5 1/2" (175.3 x 318.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Kay Sage Tangy Fund



discipline of art history developed rapidly from its initial nineteenth-century foundations in the German university, swiftly taking root in the United States in the midcentury when the first university chairs in art history were granted. The major schools of art history sought to establish methods for studying visual culture. These were dominated by concepts of art as an intelligible succession of styles placed within national cultures subject to chronological periodization. Thus around 1929, when MoMA was founded, modernist art's diversification encountered art-historical systematization; the latter tamed the former into the story MoMA and all other modern museums and art-history textbooks have subsequently told.

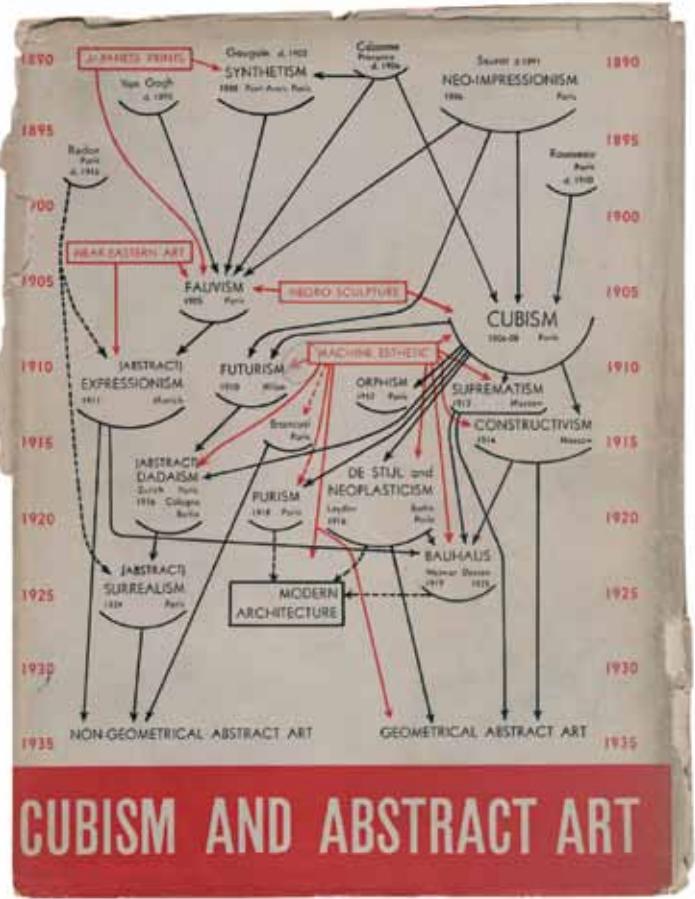
We now know that the many trajectories within modern, and certainly postmodern, art have made Barr's assumption that art inevitably progresses toward abstraction untenable. If art was moving inexorably toward abstraction and losing figuration as a mirror of the human, the cult of the artist emerged as compensation. The artist, even while making abstract art according to geometric or organic principles, provided modern art with human interest. The heroic modern artist was presented as an active agent in the changing of styles, as well as an entrepreneur of an independent, free-enterprise system, after art-making had been unmoored from larger structures such as ecclesiastical, state, or aristocratic patronage and government-regulated art training, rewards, and censorship. Individuation created a new concept of the artist for modern capitalist times.²² In Barr's art-historical narrative, the concept of the artist was reshaped in mythic terms: adventurer, explorer, individualist, entrepreneur. All these terms were coded in modern culture as masculine, as were the qualities of leadership and creative authority, even while women as much as men embraced the view of the artist as a singular and free adventurer.

Barr linked his studies of systematic stylistic evolution, undertaken with Charles Morey at Princeton, with a third element to constitute his new discipline of art history: connoisseurship, which he had experienced in the museum course with Sachs at Harvard. Typically

connoisseurship performs a curious combination of two apparently antagonistic elements. The first involves discerning the imprint of distinguishing artistic and figurative habits by which artworks can be attributed to a specific artist. Once a body of work has been created as an oeuvre with a single creator, a persona can be produced for that creator, which then allows for the emergence of the deeper, humanistic significance of the work, symptomatized by these formal habits. Thus the seemingly impersonal formal elements of an art object become attached to an explanatory biography of the subject of art: the artist. Hence Barr is also remembered for monographic projects, for establishing the oeuvres and artistic evolution of modernist masters Picasso and Henri Matisse.²³

This conjunction of formalism and persona remodels both the artist and art in relation to deeper concepts of modernity itself, as it suggests that art is always going somewhere, moving on, developing from and reacting against what has been. It means that we think of modern art as driven by an inner logic. Modern art becomes an unfolding story that can be mapped as a flow chart, as Barr famously did for his important *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition in 1936, then translating the image—an indeed brilliant model of the relations between artists' coteries and events between 1890 and 1935 (no. 15)—into the architecture of the Museum itself: a chain of rooms experienced by the visitor as both a pedagogical passage and a spiritual adventure. Here artworks become elements of a story, like sentences in a book or shots in a film.

Such combinations may in fact suggest important, formal relations that matter art historically. Stylistic innovation is a feature of, and undoubtedly a driving force behind, modernist art consciousness. The point, however, is that it is not the only one. Emphasizing formal relations to the exclusion of all other factors and possibilities has distorting effects. Doing so makes many evidently important aspects of the modernist enterprise in which women participated, alongside men, apart from men, and in their own voices, unthinkable, invisible, unassimilable to modern art as it was charted by Barr.



15. *Cubism and Abstract Art*
exhibition catalogue, by Alfred
H. Barr, Jr., with cover chart
prepared by Barr (New York:
The Museum of Modern Art,
1936). Offset, 10 1/8 x 7 3/4"
(25.7 x 19.7 cm). Alfred H. Barr,
Jr., Papers, 3.C.4, The Museum
of Modern Art Archives,
New York

map, its linking of the United States and Europe through conflict, its transforming of the experience and roles of women

while men were at the front, which served to hasten the victory for the vote.²⁴ To have chronology without history means ignoring the Russian Revolution and Joseph Stalin's rise to power, the rise of Italian and German Fascism, the economic catastrophe of the Depression, the rise of the Left, the New Deal, the development of the motorcar, the airplane, telephones, communication systems, new kinds of consumption and urban service employment. It misses the invention of cinema, discoveries in philosophy and science, and the emergence of psychoanalysis, all of which provided new ways of understanding ourselves. Artists were deeply impacted by these epoch-making changes, which occurred on all fronts: travel, technology, revolution, civil rights, sexuality, race relations, immigration, politics. Modern art negotiated its historical conditions in many ways, and in that negotiation differences were generated according to a multitude of factors shaping the subject positions from which that modern history was being experienced and represented by men and women of different classes, ethnicities, cultures, locations, sexualities, and histories. Without abandoning the insights of formalism, inclusive histories of modern art must be complex, expanded, and multifocused.

AN ICONOLOGICAL READING

In nineteenth-century art history, formalizing and connoisseurial trends that classified art only through period and style were countered by other intellectual trends. Aby Warburg argued that art is not merely a formal process; it is also a *symbolic* activity that produces images and meanings by which cultures address topics of great importance to human thought and feeling. Art both registers new situations and revives, where necessary, long-lived

Look again at Barr's infamous image for *Cubism and Abstract Art*. It did confer intelligibility and dignity on what might have seemed to those not yet converted to modernism an anarchic mess, a cacophonous clamor of juvenile noise and fury signifying nothing so much as the breakdown of culture itself. Instead, Barr provided a coherence of mutual influence and expanding relations by means of which visitors could move from work to work, from room to room, and see all of it as exemplifying the inevitability of abstraction as it occurs over a unidirectional sequence of time.

What disappears from such diagrammatic representations of influence, however, is history, which shaped modern art and artists with all the immense traumas and significance attached to World War I and its terrifying industrialization of conflict, its vast numbers of dead or mutilated bodies, its radical rewriting of the European

and persistent traditions in imagery, visually remembering and encoding human experience and emotions. These mnemonic figurations Warburg named *pathos-formel*: the image as a formalization of remembered and intense feeling.²⁵ For Warburg, art was not merely a formal, problem-solving exercise. The image as formalization negotiates, visually and aesthetically, fundamental aspects of human experience: pain, death, suffering, love, jealousy, power, anxiety, hatred, violence. If we approach art in Warburg's *iconological* manner (which does not and cannot ignore the precise forms by which such visual engagements with meaning and experience are performed and renovated), we may be able to understand more of what was produced in the modern period by more artists, while also understanding the specific symbolic narrative enacted in The Museum of Modern Art as an institutionalization of a modernism that negotiated an anxious and heroic masculinity.²⁶

As early as 1979 art historians Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach offered such an iconological analysis of the hanging of, and the visitor's subjective experience passing through, MoMA's formalist display.²⁷ These authors were the first to analyze a museum display in this way and to make such a reading of the classic arrangement of MoMA's galleries at the time. In 1989 Duncan would provide a comparable reading of the 1984 reinstallation of the main galleries.²⁸ (Recent rehangings have become more experimental and inclusive while still rehearsing the fundamental narrative for the earlier twentieth century.) It was not, however, for its absenting of women that Duncan and Wallach critiqued MoMA's hangs. Paradoxically, they were pointing to the massive presence of the feminine, but not as artists. The feminine was everywhere as image, in what, drawing indirectly on Warburg's antiformalist model, Duncan and Wallach identified as the Museum's iconological program. Reading the Museum as the producer of a narrative experience through the carefully plotted display of major works, Duncan and Wallach argued that MoMA can be read as a form akin to ancient, ceremonial architecture in which the viewer undergoes not merely instruction

in the history of art but a transformation of his or her consciousness and self-perception through orchestrated encounters with symbolically and affectively charged images. Entry into a specially designed building, with its flights of stairs or vast halls and atria, separates the viewers from the everyday world outside in order to prepare them for another level of nonprofane experience. The interior spaces are laid out in a series of interlocking rooms, passage through which becomes an ordeal similar to classical adventures in the labyrinth, where the hero was challenged to survive an encounter with a monstrous other. In the case of MoMA, the monstrous other the viewer encounters through art is almost always represented by a female figure, prime among which are the staring prostitutes of Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907), which is always placed prominently in the Museum's art-historical narrative. If the hero of the adventure is confronting the monstrous feminine as its other, irrespective of his or her actual gender or orientation, the experience of this adventure masculinizes the spectator.²⁹

In this artistic labyrinth, the visitor is inducted, through a series of symbolic encounters mediated by the paintings and sculptures, into a mythic ordeal of menaced but ultimately triumphant masculinity while also being ideologically restructured as the individual subjectivity typical of the capitalist system:

But inside the labyrinth, the principle of creativity is defined and celebrated as a male spiritual endeavour in which consciousness finds its identity by transcending the material, biological world and its Mother Goddess. . . . The labyrinth ordeal is articulated by the iconographic programme. Since the architectural script has cast you as pure subjectivity [suspending everyday life and time], at any point within the labyrinth, the iconography tells you what your consciousness should be. In other words, once you are inside the labyrinth, the labyrinth is inside you.³⁰

The proposed path through the story told by The Museum of Modern Art works through the selection of objects that deal with dramatic struggles with material, bodies, and desires. As we progress, this journey reveals an attenuation of subject matter in favor of resolved formal solutions: abstraction. (Here the two systems of formalist logic and iconography converge.) The passage plotted out by a selective version of the history of modern art can be read as performing the celebration of thought over matter, light over darkness, masculine logic over feminine materiality. It leads toward the mystical triumph of the spirit. Punctuated by major paintings such as *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* or Willem de Kooning's *Woman, I* (1950–52) or majestic sculptural female bodies by Aristide Maillol or Pierre-Auguste Renoir, one's journey is menaced by the dangerous encounter with, and inspired by the ultimate transcendence over, the multifaced Gorgon-Whore whose many manifestations constitute the feminine otherness that is represented in art as being in contrast to the energetic signature of the masculine creator: the artist. This inflects our very understanding of gendered values in the modern:

But the passage through the labyrinth is not simply a mythical struggle between male and female consciousness. This iconographic programme encodes a structure of ideas and cultural values. In the labyrinth, the female spectator—the Mother Goddess—stands for lived, sensuous experience, human needs and human love . . . which must be renounced . . . [in favor of purely] aesthetic detachment . . . The ritual clarifies social experience by recreating it imaginatively in symbolic form. In this way the labyrinth nightmare exalts as positive values the competitive individualism and alienated human relations that characterize contemporary social experience.³¹

Two vital points emerge here. First, the Museum layout helps to determine the detached nature of the

subjectivities that come to be experienced within it. Second, the collection and display of the representative works of the major movements of twentieth-century art can be read to disclose a deeper, unconscious script that would not be visible in, and will not be noticed through, the dominant forms of published art history, which focuses on individual artists or on groups, styles, and movements. Duncan and Wallach argue, therefore, that there is a mythic dimension of sexual difference in the canonized selection and display of modern art in the Museum. They indicate the ways in which the orchestration of “an ordeal and a triumph” of a historically specific form of masculine subjectivity (modern, adventurous, individualistic, competitive) over the materialized and often monstrous representation of the maternal/prostitutional feminine can be revealed as the underlying story of the modern, capitalist subject that we encounter when we visit the Museum, thinking we are there merely to learn a sequence of styles and marvel at individual genius displayed with objective scholarship on the neutral walls of a museum space.

In her 1989 review of the 1984 reinstallation of MoMA's core historical collection, Duncan drew once again upon the iconological tradition in art history to explicate more fully how the DNA-like double helix of the narrative plotted in the Museum's galleries works, furthermore, to make the very idea of *woman as artist* impossible to accommodate. One strand is a formalist story of the progressive struggle for artistic and spiritual transcendence over matter, darkness, and nature, represented by the victory of abstraction in the battle against a feminized materialism, sometimes figured, sometimes signified by medium itself. The other strand provides for the viewer/visitor a performative encounter with a symbolic drama of masculine anxiety in the face of, and the conquering of the image of, “Woman,” whose evacuation from representation is tracked in many artists' development and presented as artistic innovation, leading us to value above all else dissociation from ordinary, daily, lived human relations.

Thus stylistic succession laid out through the historical galleries celebrates enlightenment through the progressive mastery over and abstraction from the world of the everyday, from matter and materiality, which has been identified as feminine. Yet at the same time the Museum is crowded with images of women, as lovers, prostitutes, tarts, and entertainers who are socially debased and often formally disfigured. The female nude from Paul Cézanne and Paul Gauguin to Picasso and Matisse and on to de Kooning and Tom Wesselmann is often the recurring site of major stylistic and individual statements. Duncan suggests that we must acknowledge that these paintings, which plot out such individual stylistic innovation and implant the signature of that creative individual mastery of the challenge posed by the world to the artist, also enact a deeper psychic drama about *sexual* identity. Thus the search for spiritual transcendence through aesthetic victory over materiality does not seem contradictory “if we understand the modern-art museum as a ritual of male transcendence, if we see it organized around male fears, fantasies and desires, then the quest for spiritual transcendence on the one hand and the obsession with a sexualized female body on the other, rather than appearing unrelated or contradictory, can be seen as parts of a larger psychologically integrated whole.”³²

Clearly never consciously planned, the Museum's cultural scripting of experience through the works it has selected and this double narrative it tells have real effects on its ability to see the work of women artists and integrate what they created from their sexually different experiences and psychic economies. Thus Duncan tellingly concludes, “Since the heroes of this ordeal are generically men, the presence of women artists, in this mythology, can only be an anomaly.”³³ Their numbers or coexistence with the male artists could never be allowed to dilute the unconscious masculinity of this fundamentally mythopoetic space or to degender the masculinizing ritual of the passage through it.

WHERE TO NOW?

The Museum, therefore, must be confronted as an author of a specific narrative and the architect of a cultural experience whose structural elements actively render the acknowledgment of women's place as creators in the modernist enterprise difficult to imagine or integrate, even as some initiatives are being made to place more works by more women on view. Anyone who visits recent installations of contemporary art at MoMA that are genuinely inclusive will already experience a different ethos in the spaces, perhaps a sense of more possibilities, shifting perspectives, varied moods, each indicating the sensibility/intellectuality of the artist, man or woman, and offering something expanded and polyphonic. How people interpret this variableness is open. For the Museum to change and enable visitors to experience modernism as diverse, created from heterogeneous, even conflicting positions, articulating through formal experimentation and iconographical invention varied ethnic, sexual, gendered cultural experiences of a multifocalized world, we shall need to open ourselves to radically different models of understanding the whole of modernist culture.

Critical feminist, postcolonial, and queer museological and art-historical theory has experimented with ways of creating new and inclusive, rather than merely corrective or supplementary, ways of representing the histories of art. “Inclusive” means understanding that modern art was created by diverse men and women, side by side, in various forms of conversation, rivalry, and difference.

I vividly recall a visit to the modernist galleries of the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra in 1986, where in the darkened and cavernous spaces paintings were suspended on wires so that they floated in space, allowing the visitor to pass among them. It was there that I first saw a Krasner painting (*Cool White* [1959]) that was hung in the same space as a Jackson Pollock (*Blue Poles* [1952]), not side by side, for this hanging system allowed each painting to be met in its own discrete space. The impact

was immediate and extraordinary, as I sensed the deep, long, and often difficult conversation between two equally brilliant, ambitious, and extraordinary painters. No doubt they talked about killing shallow space, felt Greenberg and Barr as éminences grises looming over them as they wondered every day if the work they had each done was indeed a painting. They also shared an interest in Surrealism, in indigenous cosmologies, in ancient art, myth, and ritual. Using anthropologist Clifford Geertz's study of culture as a form of deep play typically associated with gambling in sport, I suggest that the most powerful and affecting works of art are those that work with the deepest of plays.³⁴ I am also suggesting this: that for an artist like Krasner to choose to live and work in the most intimate proximity with an artist like Pollock, whom she considered to be one of the most significant forces emerging in the New York art world, in whose creation she ambitiously desired to share while daring also to create beside it her own vision, was one such deep play. Art history remains impoverished for not yet fully being able to recognize Krasner's paintings, one of which, for instance, used to be shown only intermittently at Tate Britain (before the creation of Tate Modern and its innovative thematic hangs). Typically, the Krasner was exhibited strictly when the Pollock was not. Thus the very nature of the deep play that occurred during and after their time together was never visible for us to experience in the art ring.

Another inclusive and non-Eurocentrically international model is organized around the terms "generations" and "geographies."³⁵ This involves exploring the specific and singular axes and moments from which each artist produces his or her work. Art is made in relation to time, family, and larger collective social and cultural histories: generations. It is also made in space, in relation to geopolitical configurations that may include home or migration, exile or displacement, national identity or cosmopolitanism: geographies.³⁶ Each artwork or practice is produced across these axes but does not represent or exemplify them. From specific locations and singular histories, artists speak to the world in particular modes whose specificities

the art historian aims to plot out and indicate as the ground from which a particular aesthetic gesture is being made. Thus the aim is not to categorize, confine, classify, or render exemplary, but to ask: What am I seeing? Who is speaking? From where?

A vital curatorial project was curated by Catherine de Zegher at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston in 1996, titled *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art, in, of and from the Feminine*. Rather than offering an alternative canon of missing women, the exhibition framed a series of complex encounters and groupings of artists, each working from generational and geographical specificity. More significant is what was implied by the subtitle and its phrase "in, of, and from the feminine." De Zegher made three important interventions in the curation, exhibition, and interpretation of twentieth-century art created by women.

The exhibition was focused around a temporal concept—the twentieth century—rather than an art historical category: *modern art* or any of its stylistic subcategories that form part of the model created by Barr's Museum of Modern Art for us to understand as a flow of mutually influencing stylistic movements: isms. By this means she refused the directional telos of a developmental, formalist schema for the unidirectional advance of modern art that makes it structurally impossible for art history to recognize the contributions and interventions made by creative women in the twentieth century that do not conform to this ahistorical chronological evolution of styles and movements.

De Zegher, therefore, proposed that there are several ways to plot the histories of art made during the long twentieth century. Hers was an *elliptical traverse*, a crisscrossing backward and forward as well as a circling movement across the terrain of aesthetic practices that involved placing in new and revealing relations artworks made from three moments of historical and cultural significance. Determined not by the formalist schema but by intersections of cultural history and sexual difference, the moments she brought together were the 1920s-'30s

(when modernist experimentation was contested by the rise of fascism), the 1960s-'70s (when new social movements put forth ideas of second-wave feminism, antiracism, and decolonization), and the 1990s (after the fall of the Berlin Wall and when globalization was under way). De Zegher, however, introduced into the manifold ways we could identify key cultural moments and politico-historical conjuncions a specific focus on the history and negotiations of sexual difference. Thus her elliptical traverse not only discerned new continuities across three generations of artists, from different countries, cultures, and practices, clustering around various modalities and problematics rather than styles; it also showed how a retrospective review allows the present moment, the "now-time" (*Jetztzeit*) in Walter Benjamin's terms, to bring a formerly indecipherable past into view and recognition.³⁷

De Zegher deployed both psychoanalytical notions of the reversal of time (anamnesis and the return of the repressed) and the idea of the now-time. "Anamnesis" refers to the undoing of forgetfulness or repression of the past, while the "return of the repressed" suggests that what was traumatic and could not be fully assimilated at the time may have been repressed or become latent and can return either to haunt and torment us or to be integrated retrospectively into an expanded and de-repressed present. Christine Buci-Glucksman explains:

To the empty linear time of a cumulative succession of events, Benjamin opposes the necessity of a temporal break, an interruption in time disclosed by the imaginaries of history. *Jetztzeit* is an intensive, qualitative time which becomes visible in "states of emergency," the moments when "culture engenders barbarism" and the infinitely repressed memory of "those without a name" (*Namenlosen*) finally reappropriates a history dominated by the historicism of the rulers.³⁸

Neither seeking to add the hitherto "unnamed"—that is, artists who have not registered as the authors

of significant artistic events in the grand narrative of modernism—nor proposing an alternative version of the same type of period-style-master-œuvre-work history of art, a feminist curatorial écriture in this field explores a radically different sense of how to encounter an expanded, heterogeneous, inexhaustible series of artistic events that collectively reveal to us deeply significant dimensions of culture and subjectivity, history and struggle, by means of aesthetic formalizations and practices.

An elliptical traverse that linked and repositioned the overlooked or marginalized past through what it had, often without contemporary recognition, seeded into culture, to flower decades later, was most significantly defined as "in, of, and from the feminine." Although the exhibition brought to light thirty-three artists who were women (including Anna Maria Maiolino [no. 16]), it could have shown work by men. It was not a women's show whereby the mere fact of gender formed the absolute bond between the exhibiting artists, who would thus be made only to exhibit this generalizing and unenlightening difference. Instead, the singularity of each artistic inscription could emerge precisely because the artists who were exhibited were so significantly diverse in terms of age, culture, sexuality, ethnicity, historical experience, and aesthetic choices and strategies, even while the discerning critic-curator could suggest, on this reading, deeper, symptomatic genealogies in the groupings she made around four themes: fragmentation and the body; inscription, silence, and textuality; weaving as practice and metaphor; and enjambment (the breaking of a syntactic unit so that meaning flows across the rupture). Indeed the artists demonstrated what Julia Kristeva has defined as the potential of aesthetic practices to bring forth "the singularity of each person . . . and . . . the multiplicity of every person's possible identifications . . . the relativity of his/her symbolic as well as biological existence, according to the variations in his/her specific symbolic capacities."³⁹

I cannot underline sufficiently the difficulty we face in overcoming the gross exclusion of women from the canon of modernism and even from contemporary art through



to today. That in itself requires bold gestures of scholarly recovery, while at the same time we have to deconstruct the resulting tendency to generalize these artists as merely exemplars of a gendered collective: women, a sexualizing nomination by which they are, as a category, lumped together, their singularity annulled. As "women artists," not artists who are women, they are excluded *a priori* from the category "artist," which has been symbolically reserved for men. We must bring women together as diverse artists who share, in unpredictable ways, their experience of sexual and other significant differences, in order to see their work (because of continuing marginalization and oblivion) and in order to find out, for the first time, what in fact each woman in her artistically signified yet gendered/sexual singularity is offering to the world, to us all, to attain more complete knowledge of that world as it is lived and thought from multiple positions over time and space.

Thus the work being done in this first-ever review of the women artists, designers, filmmakers, sculptors, and architects in the collection of MoMA cannot be viewed under the terms that dominated the formation of the Museum and its continued habits of exhibition. Four decades of research and analysis have identified major issues in museum and academic art-writing and offered new models for creating an inclusive, expanded, and self-critical presentation of the art of the modern and the contemporary. This clearly involves the active, creative, and mutually respectful encounter between museum, curator, and scholar so that expanded methods of cultural inquiry can radically open us up to the heterogeneity and creativity of the past, the present, and the future we may otherwise miss.

16. Anna Maria Maiolino
(Brazilian, born Italy 1942).
Buraco preto (Black hole)
from the series *Os buracos/ desenhos objetos* (Holes/ drawing objects). 1974. Torn paper, 27 x 27" (68.6 x 68.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

1. Frances Weitzenhoffer, *The Havemeyers: Impressionism Comes to America* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986).
2. Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
3. Calvin Tomkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989).
4. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 1939; reprinted in Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 3–21.
"No culture can develop without a social basis, without a source of stable income. And in the case of the avant-garde, this was provided by an elite among the ruling class of that society from which it assumed itself to be cut off, but to which it has always remained attached by an umbilical cord of gold." *Ibid.*, p. 8.
5. Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), pp. 4–8.
6. Sybil Gordon Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).
7. See Jennifer R. Gross, *Société Anonyme: Modernism for America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).
8. Andrea Weiss, *Paris Was a Woman: Portraits from the Left Bank* (London: Rivers Oram Press/Pandora Press, 1995).
9. Claude Roger-Marx, "Les Femmes peintres et l'impressionisme: Berthe Morisot," *Gazette des beaux-arts*, December 1, 1907, p. 50.
10. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *The Princess: A Medley*, 1847, section 5, lines 437–41.
11. Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 1.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism (Theories of Representation and Difference)* (Basingstoke, England: MacMillan Press, 1986), p. 53.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 55–56.
16. Sarah Kofman, *The Childhood of Art: An Interpretation of Freud's Aesthetics*, trans. Winifred Woodhull (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 19–20.
17. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., letter to Peggy Guggenheim, September 24, 1942; quoted in Susan Davidson and Philip Rylands, *Peggy Guggenheim & Frederick Kiesler: The Story of Art of This Century* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2005), p. 292.
18. This and other historical facts about The Museum of Modern Art were gathered from the Museum Archives, with the assistance of Romy Silver, Research Assistant, Modern Women's Initiative, Department of Drawings, and Michelle Elligot, Museum Archivist.
19. On Sonja Sekula, see Nancy Foote, "Who was Sonja Sekula?" *Art in America*, September–October 1971, pp. 73–80; and Ann Gibson, "Universality and Difference in Women's Abstract Painting: Krasner, Ryan, Sekula, Piper and Street," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 103–32. There is also an informative Web site dedicated to the painter: www.sonja-sekula.org/.
20. Jimmy Ernst, *A Not-So-Still Life: A Memoir* (New York: St. Martin's Press/Marek, 1984), p. 236; cited in Davidson and Rylands, "Exhibition by 31 Women," in *Peggy Guggenheim & Frederick Kiesler*, p. 291.
21. Harrison C. White and Cynthia A. White, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).
22. Those artists who opposed capitalism during the Soviet experiment specifically modeled their practice on socialized, collective, nonindividuating production.
23. Barr, *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1946), and *Matisse: His Art and His Public* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1951).
24. The critique was first mounted by Meyer Schapiro in "The Nature of Abstract Art," *Marxist Quarterly* 1 (January–March 1937): 77–98; reprinted in Schapiro, *Modern Art, 19th and 20th Centuries (Selected Papers)* (New York: George Braziller, 1979), pp. 185–212.
25. Aby Warburg's neologism first appears in "Dürer and Italian Antiquity," 1905; reprinted in Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 1999), pp. 729–31. For the evolution of this term, see Gertrude Bing, "A. M. Warburg," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965): 299–313.
26. Warburg's iconological project is Giorgio Agamben, "Aby Warburg and the Nameless Science," in *Potentialities*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 89–103.
27. Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "MoMA: Ordeal and Triumph on 53rd Street," *Studio International* 194, no. 1 (1978): 48–57.
28. Duncan, "The MoMA's Hot Mamas," *Art Journal* 48, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 171–78; reprinted in Duncan, *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 189–207.
29. This point draws on Laura Mulvey's feminist theory of cinematic spectatorship, which shows how irrespective of one's social gender the spectator position for a classic Hollywood film identifies the spectator with a masculine psychic position of desire, mastery, and sadism.
30. Duncan and Wallach, "Ordeal and Triumph on 53rd Street," p. 52.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 57.
32. Duncan, "The MoMA's Hot Mamas," p. 192.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
34. Griselda Pollock, "Cockfights and Other Parades: Gesture, Difference, and the Staging of Meaning in Three Paintings by Zoffany, Krasner, and Pollock," *Oxford Art Journal* 26, no. 2 (September 2003): 141–65.
35. Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on A Balinese Cockfight," in *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 412–53.
36. For more on geographies of art, see Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000).
37. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History XIV," 1940, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 263.
38. Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Sage Publications, 1994), p. 44. Citations from Benjamin, "Central Park," *New German Critique*, no. 34 (Winter 1985): 36.
39. Julia Kristeva, "Le Temps des femmes," 33/44: *Cahiers de recherche de sciences des textes et documents*, no. 5 (Winter 1979): 19; translated by Alice Jardine and Harry Blake in Toril Moi, ed., *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 210.