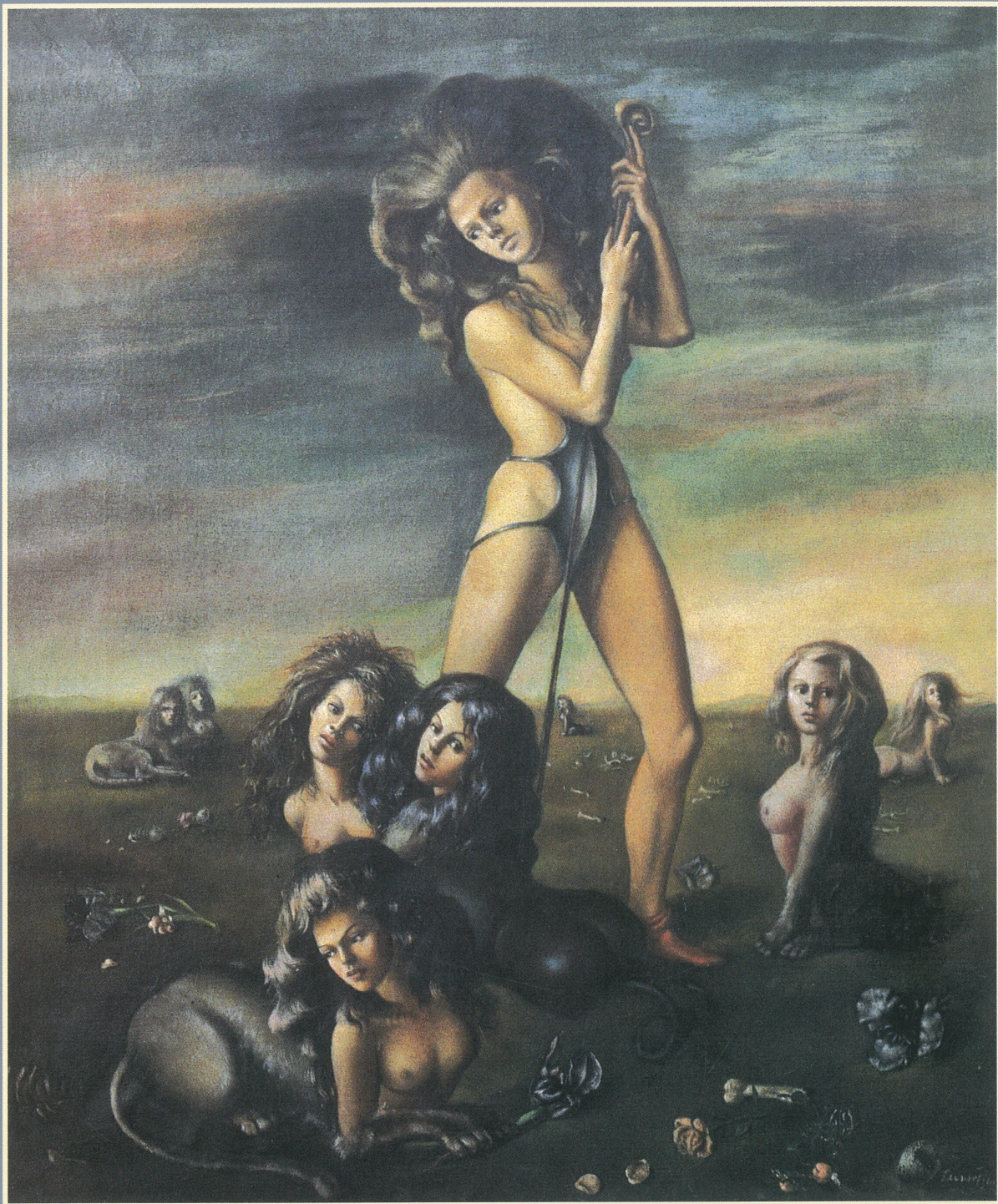


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THE WOMEN

ART OF THIS CENTURY: THE WOMEN

Siobhán M. Conaty
Guest Curator

Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center
East Hampton, New York

31 July - 31 October 1997

The Peggy Guggenheim Collection
Venice, Italy

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Cover

Leonor Fini
The Shepherdess of the Sphinxes, 1941
Oil on canvas, 18 3/16 x 15 1/16 inches
The Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice
Included in "Exhibition by 31 Women," 1943
Catalogue number 6

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Peggy Guggenheim and Max Ernst at Art of This Century, October 1942

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This exhibition is the culmination of research inspired by my association with the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, where the aid and advice of Philip Rylands, Deputy Director, and his associates Chiara Barbieri and Renata Rossini have been crucial to its genesis, planning, and implementation. I am deeply indebted to the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center for hosting the project under the aegis of the Stony Brook Foundation, State University of New York at Stony Brook; to the Rimrock Foundation for funding my initial research; to the Eugene V. and Clare E. Thaw Charitable Trust for contributing to catalogue production costs; and to the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation for providing the support that has enabled the exhibition to travel.

Among the many people who furthered my inquiries, the artists Virginia Admiral, Fannie Hillsmith, Buffie Johnson, and Hedda Sterne were especially generous with their time and relevant support material. I would also like to thank Amy Winter, Director of the Block Gallery at Northwestern University, for her enthusiasm and expertise in this area—she offered crucial information, helped locate works, and introduced me to scholars who were able to fill in the blanks of my research. Salomon Grimberg and Stephen Robeson-Miller willingly shared their extensive knowledge and guided me to important loans. David Porter's recollections of his association with Peggy Guggenheim and information on his own gallery enriched my investigation of the 1940s avant-garde. Judith Young Mallin provided a windfall of documentation, art work, and photographs from the Young-Mallin Archives, as well as vital encouragement. Other individuals whose help is gratefully acknowledged are Timothy Baum, Eric Brown, Ellin Burke, Jean De Niro, Terry Ehlers, Amy Ernst, Ann Gibson, Belinda Harding, Carolyn Harris, Ellen G. Landau, Laura Latman, Joan Marter, Christine McNamara, Margaret Molnar, Roy Nicholson, Monica Petzel, Adam Sheffer, Lowery S. Sims, Margaret Sinozich, Gary Snyder, Liza Stelle, Robert Storr, Anne Swartz, Karole Vail, Trine L. Vanderwall, Molly Vreeland, Patrick Walsh, Joan T. Washburn, and Deborah Wye.

I also appreciate the cooperation I received from the following organizations, several of which are also lenders to the exhibition: Robert Miller Gallery, Susan Teller Gallery, Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, Joan Washburn Gallery, Salander O'Reilly Gallery, Marguerite Roeder Gallery, Synder Fine Arts, Tibor de Nagy Gallery, The Suzy Frelinghuysen and George L.K. Morris Foundation, The Swiss Institute, New York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The Whitney Museum of American Art, The Newark Museum, The National Museum of Women in the Arts, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Museum of Women's Art, London, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Archives of American Art.

My sincere thanks to Mike Solomon of the Ossorio Foundation and Charlotte Park Brooks for providing encouragement and insight throughout this project, and to Helen A. Harrison, Director of the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, without whom it would not have evolved beyond a dinner-table discussion in Venice three years ago.

Siobhán M. Conaty
Guest Curator



Leonora Carrington, *The Horses of Lord Candlestick*, 1939. Included in "Exhibition by 31 Women," 1943. Catalogue number 3

FOREWORD

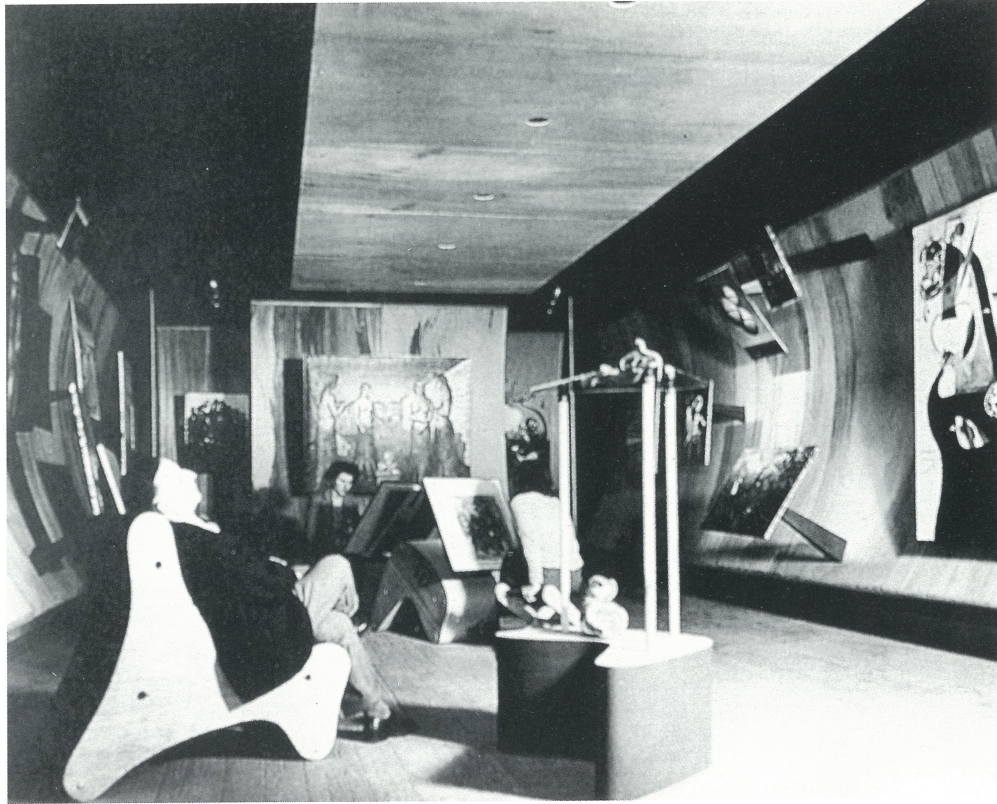
Since its inception in 1988, the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center has been dedicated to a dual program of historic preservation and scholarship. The property—the former home and studio of the Abstract Expressionist painters Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner—is a monument to two of the foremost twentieth century American artists and a major resource for the study of the milieu that nurtured and sustained them. Its educational program explores the genesis, ascendance, and continuing evolution of international modernism through lectures, seminars, and exhibitions such as this one.

When Siobhán Conaty broached the idea for **Art of This Century: The Women**, I was struck by both its originality and its appropriateness. Not only was Peggy Guggenheim a decisive figure in Pollock's career and an influence on Krasner's as well, but she also provided the financial backing for the purchase of the East Hampton homestead that now memorializes their lives and work. What better place to examine her role in fostering the avant-garde of which Jackson and Lee were leading members? Moreover, the emphasis on female artists allowed us to raise issues that Lee and her contemporaries confronted some fifty years ago and that continue to affect women in today's art world.

Another favorable aspect of the proposal was the opportunity to cooperate with the Peggy Guggenheim Collection—also a museum in a former residence (albeit of a very different character) where Pollock's presence looms large. Philip Rylands and his excellent staff were as enthusiastic about the idea as we were, and with Siobhán as liaison the project proceeded with unflinching cooperation and good will. Having interned at the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center while earning her Master's degree in Art History and Criticism from the State University of New York at Stony Brook, she subsequently had been an intern and employee at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, so she was familiar with both museums and knew their strengths and limitations. That understanding, together with Siobhán's scholarly acumen and personal commitment, ensured the project's success. It has been a pleasure to work with her, and our anticipation has been amply rewarded by the stimulating show and catalogue for which she is responsible.

The lenders and other contributors acknowledged in Siobhán's remarks have been most generous, not only with financial support, scholarly guidance, and art work but also in taking the time and trouble to identify pieces that were actually in one or the other of Peggy Guggenheim's all-women shows, comprising fully one-quarter of the present exhibition. The task was made all the more difficult by the fact that the 1945 show, "The Women," has no surviving checklist. Nevertheless the artists' personal records and the mention of titles in published reviews enabled us to find three of the exhibited works. With four pieces from "Exhibition by 31 Women" and a representative cross-section of comparable examples from the period, the show offers rare insight into the achievements of female artists and the challenges they faced as the art of this century reached the mid-point of its development.

Helen A. Harrison, Director
Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center



Peggy Guggenheim and Frederick Kiesler in the Surrealist Gallery, Art of This Century, 1942

PEGGY GUGGENHEIM AND ART OF THIS CENTURY

Philip Rylands

The Art of This Century Gallery in New York City is inseparable from Peggy Guggenheim's claim to a place in the history of twentieth century art. It opened in October 1942 and closed in May 1947. An inquiry into the Gallery's importance for this crucial moment in the development of American painting is tantamount to assessing Peggy's personal contribution to the ineffable grid of forces and influences that gave rise to Abstract Expressionism.

The Gallery was located in two former tailor's shops on the top floor of 30 West 57th Street. Howard Putzel—who advised Peggy on art and became her secretary when she moved to New York—had suggested that she seek help from the Romanian-born architect Frederick Kiesler and she promptly acted on his advice. "Dear Mr Kiesler," she wrote on 26 February 1942 from her brownstone mansion on Beekman Place, "I want your help...."¹

It was characteristic of Peggy on this occasion that she readily took the advice of a respected friend, and that she thus unwittingly created an opportunity for Kiesler that was the culmination of almost twenty years of research into the interaction between architecture and art, and into the "continuity" that links art with the space around it, uniting the psychological and physical experiences of the spectator. Kiesler himself issued a statement on the occasion of the opening: "Primitive man knew no separate worlds of vision and of fact.... It is the principle of unity, primordial unity, the unity between man's creative consciousness and his daily environment which governs the presentation of paintings, sculptures, furnishings and enclosures in these four galleries."² He specifically referred to a "method of spatial-exhibition which I had begun to develop as far back as 1924, in Vienna."³ His installation for the four distinct exhibition spaces of Art of This Century was his best known achievement.⁴

Three rooms were for the permanent collection, and the fourth, the daylight gallery (daylight was otherwise excluded), was the selling gallery. The Cubist and abstract gallery had undulating canvas "walls," ultramarine in color, and floorboards painted turquoise. The biomorphic furniture—tables, chairs, benches and sculpture stands—harmonized with the curving canvas. The airy, ill-defined quality of the space was reinforced by the suspension of the paintings and sculptures on what Kiesler termed invisible columns—floor to ceiling wires. The removal of the picture frames was described by Kiesler as a "necessity." He was surely trying to create a relatively amorphous and anti-gravitational space appropriate to the Cubist and abstract visual language. But this, it seems, was to be in the service of the communicativeness of the art: "the result achieved—contrary to one's expectation—seems to be a much better possibility for concentrating the attention of the spectator on each painting and therefore a

¹ The letter is in the Kiesler archive. See Angelica Zander Rudenstine, *Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1985), 762. Jimmy Ernst wrote: "André Breton and Howard Putzel had persuaded Peggy that Frederick Kiesler was the ideal individual to create the physical setting for her gallery-museum" (*A Not-So-Still Life* [New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1984], 228). Howard Putzel—frequently and rightly characterized as one of the unsung heroes of this moment—went on to serve as a talent spotter and intermediary between Peggy and the young American artists to whom she seemed otherwise somewhat formidable, even unapproachable. For Putzel, who died aged 47 in 1945, see: Melvin Lader, "Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century: The Surrealist Milieu and the American Avant-garde," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Delaware, 1981, chapter IV; and Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995. According to Jimmy Ernst, Putzel's features appear in a detail of one of Max Ernst's paintings, *The Harmonious Breakfast (at Santa Monica)*: see Virginia M. Dortch, *Peggy Guggenheim and Her Friends* (Milan: Benetton, 1994), 132, fig. 55.

² Frederick J. Kiesler, "Note on Designing the Gallery," Kiesler Archive, collection Lillian Kiesler.

³ Kiesler, "Note." The reference to Vienna is footnoted with a checklist of Kiesler's commissions, beginning with the Theater and Music Festival of the City of Vienna, 1924. This gave the impression that Art of This Century was the climax of all that preceded it.

⁴ The Gallery has been described many times: Cynthia Goodman, "Frederick Kiesler: Designs for Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery," *Arts Magazine*, 51 (June 1977), 90-5; Peggy Guggenheim, *Out of This Century. Confessions of an Art Addict* (New York: Universe Books, 1979), 274-5; Lader, *op.cit.*, Chapter III; Angelica Zander Rudenstine, 762-99; Melvin P. Lader, "Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century," in *Peggy Guggenheim's Other Legacy*, catalog of the exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, 1987, 9-15; Cynthia Goodman, "The Art of Revolutionary Display Techniques," *op.cit.*



Surrealist gallery, Art of This Century, New York, 1942, detail of mounting devices

better chance for the painting to communicate its message.”

In the Surrealist Gallery the unframed paintings were cantilevered on what have often been described as sawn-off baseball bats,⁵ with universal joints so that the angle at which they were tipped was variable. The effect reinforced the tunnel sensation induced by the curved wooden walls and lowered, floating ceiling.

The third permanent collection space, the Kinetic Gallery, displayed works visible only in special circumstances, involving windows and spy holes: Duchamp's *Boite en Valise* (with the painting reproductions viewable on a conveyor belt set in motion by what Peggy called “a very beautiful spidery wheel”), Peggy's several works by Klee (visible on a “paternoster” set in motion when the viewer walked through a light beam), and André Breton's *Portrait of A.B.* Peggy recalled that the press had compared this gallery to Coney Island.

Throughout these galleries, the sense of enchantment and displacement, surprise and even terror (the periodic noise of an approaching express train in the Surrealist space, for example), convincingly evoked the ambience of the funfair.⁶ Finally the daylight gallery was a more conventional space, in which, however, Kiesler had used his considerable inventive skill to make furniture that would facilitate viewing additional works of art, whether for sale or not.

Peggy's collection was limited to the twentieth century—art of this century—

beginning with high analytical Cubism in 1911. It was numerically small but qualitatively high, with works of Cubism, European abstraction (Kandinsky, Suprematism, De Stijl), Futurism, Metaphysical Painting, Dada, Orphism, Surrealism, and Purism as well as sculpture by Brancusi, Arp, Giacometti, Laurens and others. Naturally it did not yet include the Abstract Expressionist and post-war European components that can be seen in the collection which exists today in its virtual entirety in Venice: 'virtual' because a number of works were sold or given away by Peggy in her lifetime. These include a 1913 Delaunay (Museum of Modern Art, New York), Kandinsky's *Dominant Curve* (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum) and, to name another at random, Vordemberge-Gildewart's *Composition in Yellow* (Tel-Aviv Museum).⁷

The dual function of Peggy's museum-gallery captures her position on the crossroads between a European past and an American future. The permanent collection in Kiesler's outlandish Abstract, Surrealist and Kinetic galleries was a further tessera in the mosaic of the New York artists' highly developed sensitivity to and knowledge of European art. The temporary exhibition space was the venue for the opportunities that Peggy provided for several of those same artists.

Individual works, available with a captivating immediacy thanks to Kiesler's environment, were more compelling than illustrations in *Minotaure* or *Cahiers d'Art*. Picasso's *The Studio*, for example, was admired by Robert Motherwell: ("perhaps the most important influence on my life in

those first ten years in New York").⁸ Artists flocked to see Miró's *Seated Woman II*,⁹ and Schwitters's *Merzbild*, with its encrusted objects, may have provoked Pollock and Krasner into similar experiments.¹⁰

More generally, Art of This Century was a meeting place, one of those hang-outs that become retrospectively sanctified by the avant-garde ambience. Yet owing to its aura of avant-garde European chic, it was perceived initially as a defeat for American art. Peggy Guggenheim was deeply imbued with European culture: she had spent almost half her life in France and England, and although she claimed to be an *ingenue* at the time she opened her London gallery, Guggenheim Jeune, in 1938 ("At that time I couldn't distinguish one thing in art from another. Marcel [Duchamp] tried to educate me."¹¹), the collection she subsequently made was the natural outcome of the milieu in which she had flourished since the early 1920s. The "American" artists who were included in Art of This Century's opening shows—Ferren, Calder, Vail, Cornell for example—were almost indistinguishable from the Europeans.

In retrospect it is inconceivable that it could have been otherwise. The perception that New York artists, either as a group or as individuals, constituted a viable avant-garde in the winter of 1942 or 1943 was hardly consciously formulated even among the artists themselves. If the stirrings of the idea, among people as different as Matter, Sweeney, Motherwell, Graham, Matta and Putzel, were beginning to emerge at about the time of Art of This Century's opening,

Peggy can hardly be blamed for being numb to it—she was madly in love with Max Ernst and very much under the influence of Breton and Duchamp.

The European dominance prevailed in the early shows. The "Exhibition by 31 Women" stands out as an exception with numbers of Americans of different modernist persuasions. Meanwhile the termination of the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project in December 1942 had put the New York artists out of work and initiated a period of financial anxiety the likes of which they had not experienced since the early '30s. For those wishing to earn money from the sale of their paintings, the market had been glutted by the influx of European masters and the distraction of the avant-garde dealers like Julien Levy and Pierre Matisse, or of collectors like Bernard and Becky Reis, in their favor. It was in this context that Pollock's biographers remarked on the uniqueness of Peggy Guggenheim:

...for a young, avant-garde American artist looking to make a living from painting, there was only one place to turn. Only one person who was a prominent collector and gallery owner with both the money and bravery (or eccentricity) to buy paintings from relatively unknown artists - even American artists. That person was Peggy Guggenheim.¹²

Peggy had met Pollock late in 1942, through Robert Motherwell or through James Johnson Sweeney, and in the early spring of 1943 he was invited, at Putzel's

⁵ The photographic documentation does not, to the present writer, corroborate this. See Rudenstine, 765, and the illustration at the left on page 10.

⁶ Alas this surely did not serve, as one might have hoped, to lure the masses and to break down their resistance to contemporary art—on the contrary it would have reinforced the sense of the risible, already well instilled in New York by the likes of Salvador Dalí. Giovanni Carandente has pointed to the probable link between Art of This Century's voyeuristic presentation of Duchamp's *Boite en Valise* and his *Etant donnés* which he began soon after (Giovanni Carandente, *Marcel Duchamp in chiaro*, Milan [Rizzoli], 1993, 46.).

⁷ Angelica Rudenstine published her award-winning catalog of the collection in 1985. "Peggy Guggenheim's Other Legacy" (see note 2 above) was an exhibition specifically concerned with Art of This Century and with the many works of art that Peggy had once owned but which she had given away. For example she gave twenty-seven works, including two Pollocks, to the Museum of Tel-Aviv in 1952.

⁸ Rudenstine, 622, note 6.

⁹ Barbara Rose, essay in *Miró in America*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1982.

¹⁰ Ellen G. Landau, *Jackson Pollock* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 174.

¹¹ Peggy Guggenheim, *Out of This Century* (New York and London: Universe Books/André Deutsch, 1979), 161.

¹² Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock. An American Saga* (New York: Clarkson and Potter Inc., 1989), 435.

suggestion, to contribute to her International Collage show, which opened April 16.¹³

Early in 1943 Peggy's always volatile circumstances changed. In March Max Ernst left her for Dorothea Tanning and Jimmy Ernst left to set up the Norlyst Gallery on West 56th Street. Matta replaced Max as Peggy's intermediary with the Surrealists and Putzel replaced Jimmy as secretary for the gallery. Putzel revived an idea originally proposed by Herbert Read for Peggy's London gallery, a Spring Salon for Young Artists. By this time, Pollock had the support of several members of Peggy's circle. Putzel himself selected works from Pollock's studio and brought them to Peggy's gallery. The jurors were Duchamp, Peggy, Mondrian, James Thrall Soby and Sweeney, and it was Mondrian's approval that secured Peggy's sympathetic attention, for the first time, to Pollock's painting.¹⁴ Peggy's unbridled patronage of Pollock was still some weeks away but this show marked her *volte face* in favor of American art.¹⁵ The show opened on May 18.

In July Pollock was placed under contract to Art of This Century, a one-man exhibition was planned for November and Peggy commissioned a mural-sized painting for the apartment she was to share with Kenneth McPherson at 155 East Sixty-first Street. The months that followed were unprecedentedly productive. Pollock left his menial employment at the Museum of Non-Objective Painting and devoted his time to painting the works that he would display in his first show. He prepared the huge canvas he was to paint for Peggy's apartment, but work on this stalled as he concentrated on his November show. Then, when the numerous reviews of the show were only qualified in their praise (or "probationary"¹⁶), his creative fire was momentarily doused.

[Pollock was] completely uninspired for days, getting more and more depressed. He then sent his wife Lee Krasner away to the country, hoping to feel more free, and that when he alone he might get a fresh idea. Lee came back and found him still sitting brooding, no progress made and nothing even attempted. Then suddenly one day, after weeks of hesitation, he began wildly splashing on paint and finished the whole thing in three hours.¹⁷

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this work in Pollock's career—it was his largest ever painting, and the physical and imaginative resources he needed were greater than any he had previously summoned.¹⁸ He successfully came to terms with the most compelling problem that the New York school faced—the problem of subject matter. He solved it with a rhythmic, all-over imagery that marked a break with the labored and fragmentary

¹³ See Naifeh and Smith, 429 (for Pollock's introduction to Peggy by Motherwell in October 1942), 442 (for the possibility that Sweeney brought Pollock's painting, if not Pollock himself to Peggy's attention as early as the spring of 1942), and 443 (for the attribution to Putzel of Pollock's invitation to submit a collage). Some other American artists invited to contribute to this show were David Hare, Balcomb Greene, Joseph Cornell, Ilya Bolotowsky, Gerome Kamrowski, I. Rice Pereira, Laurence Vail, Barbara Reis, Ad Reinhardt, Gypsy Rose Lee, William Baziotis, George L.K. Morris, A.E. Gallatin, Boris Margo.

¹⁴ Alfred Barr is sometimes erroneously listed among the jurors: this was not to be until the 1945 Spring Salon. It has been suggested that Mondrian goaded Peggy into accepting what was later known as *Stenographic Figure* (Museum of Modern Art, New York) in order to secure a trade-off—the admission into the show of a sculpture by Harry Holtzman. Jimmy Ernst (241-2) relates how Mondrian converted Peggy. Naifeh and Smith (443-6) gloss it with the Holtzman story.

¹⁵ "As soon as the competition was announced in *Art Digest*, the floodgates of Greenwich Village opened. Artists who had been locked out of the gallery world for years lined up outside 30 West Fifty-seventh Street with canvases under their arms" (Naifeh and Smith, 444). Rudenstine (774) reproduced the mimeographed checklist for the show, which consisted of 43 works by 33 artists, predominantly American and including Baziotis, Busa, Kamrowski, Lassaw, Motherwell and Reinhardt.

¹⁶ Naifeh and Smith, 466.

¹⁷ Guggenheim, 295-6. According to Naifeh and Smith (466ff), Pollock was driven by a deadline dictated by Peggy who was vexed that the painting had not been ready for the Art of This Century show: a January 1944 party given by Jean Connolly in the apartment that she and Peggy shared. Pollock completed the painting in a fifteen-hour stint the night before. The coincidence with the party is confirmed by Peggy, but Pollock clearly dated the painting on the canvas 43.

¹⁸ Rudenstine (775) quoted Lee Krasner, in conversation: "When Peggy commissioned that mural and gave him the contract it was enormously helpful; it was terribly important to have that kind of support."

character of his previous work. *Mural* was a premonition of the paintings he was to produce at the end of the decade, after Peggy's departure.

The closing of Art of This Century was to plunge the Pollocks into the sort of penury they had not experienced since the Federal Art Project had closed. Betty Parsons, who reluctantly showed his work after Peggy's departure, did not have Peggy's entrepreneurial zest. It was two years later, in 1949, that a combination of Clement Greenberg's solid support and the *Life* magazine article, with the question, "Jackson Pollock. Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?" launched Pollock's fame on its upward trajectory.

Art of This Century was important not just for its support of Pollock. In its four-and-a-half year existence, the gallery was the venue for the first American exhibition of Arp's sculpture, the first collage exhibition, the first American retrospective of Theo Van Doesburg, the first solo exhibitions of Hans Hofmann, Robert Motherwell, William Baziotes, Clyfford Still, Robert De Niro, and David Hare, and solo exhibitions given to Richard Pousette-Dart, Janet Sobel, Peter Busa, Mark Rothko and others. Each event represented a spur to production—precipitating, for example, Hofmann's return



Peggy Guggenheim with Jackson Pollock in front of *Mural*, circa 1944

to public exhibition after a long interval, and obliging Baziotès to overcome his lack of confidence — and each show was a forum for journalistic comment and for sales.

Peggy Guggenheim arrived in New York in the nick of time. By the early 1940s, social, political and cultural forces had already combined to fertilize the ground from which the new movement was to spring. According to Clement Greenberg, New York by 1940 “had caught up with Paris as Paris had not yet caught up with herself, and a group of relatively obscure American artists already possessed the fullest painting culture of their time.”¹⁹ For years before Peggy’s arrival, macro- and microcosmic processes contributing to Abstract Expressionism had been at work.

Peggy Guggenheim was even a latecomer among collectors of the European avant-garde who made their possessions accessible to the public: Alfred Stieglitz, Katherine Dreier, A.E. Gallatin, Solomon Guggenheim as well as the Museum of Modern Art all amply preceded her. And if Peggy was one of the last to join the party, she was also one of the first to leave. The New York School took shape in the art critical and public consciousness only after she had set out for Venice in the summer of 1947. She was present at the incubating phase but not at the birth.²⁰ Media and museum attention gathered around the Abstract Expressionists from 1947-48 onwards.

Peggy’s return to Europe was not without its own historical significance. The presentation of her collection at the 1948 Venice Biennale occasioned the first exhibition in Europe of paintings of several of the American artists whose work she had acquired in New York, including Pollock.²¹ But Venice was unquestionably marginal with respect to the center, whether this was Paris or New York. During her New York sojourn Peggy was an element in one of the most characteristic avant-gardes of the modernist epoch. It was a quintessential moment of becoming.²² A disparate group of artists during the forties developed a sense of shared goals; they redefined the subject matter of art and its component of social criticism or awareness; they developed a novel set of techniques and formats. Towards the end of the decade, certain reputations, most obviously Pollock’s, were affirmed, and critics openly professed that New York had usurped Paris’ leadership in contemporary artistic production.²³

Peggy had empowered the artists to whom she was so loyal, with her generosity, her vitality and enthusiasm. Most probably, to adapt Voltaire’s *bon mot* with regard to a rather higher personage, if Peggy had not existed it would have been necessary to invent her.

¹⁹ Clement Greenberg, “New York Painting Only Yesterday,” *Art News* LVI:4 (Summer 1956), 84; quoted in Irving Sandler, *op. cit.*, 25, at the end of his first chapter, “The Great Depression” which describes how this came about.

²⁰ Irving Sandler uses the notion of an incubation period with specific reference to the years 1946 and 1947 (*The Triumph of American Painting. A History of Abstract Expressionism*, New York: Harper & Row, 1976, 211).

²¹ See Philip Rylands, “Peggy Guggenheim a Venezia,” in *Spazialismo. Arte Astratta. Venezia 1959-1960*, catalog of the exhibition, Basilica Palladiana, Vicenza, October 1996-January 1997 (Venice, 1996), 108-15.

²² Diane Crane, “The Transformation of the Avant-Garde” (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987) 14.

²³ Clement Greenberg: “...the main premises of Western art have at last migrated to the United States” (from “Art Chronicle: The Decline of Cubism”, *Partisan Review* XV:3 [March 1948], 369).

ART OF THIS CENTURY: THE WOMEN

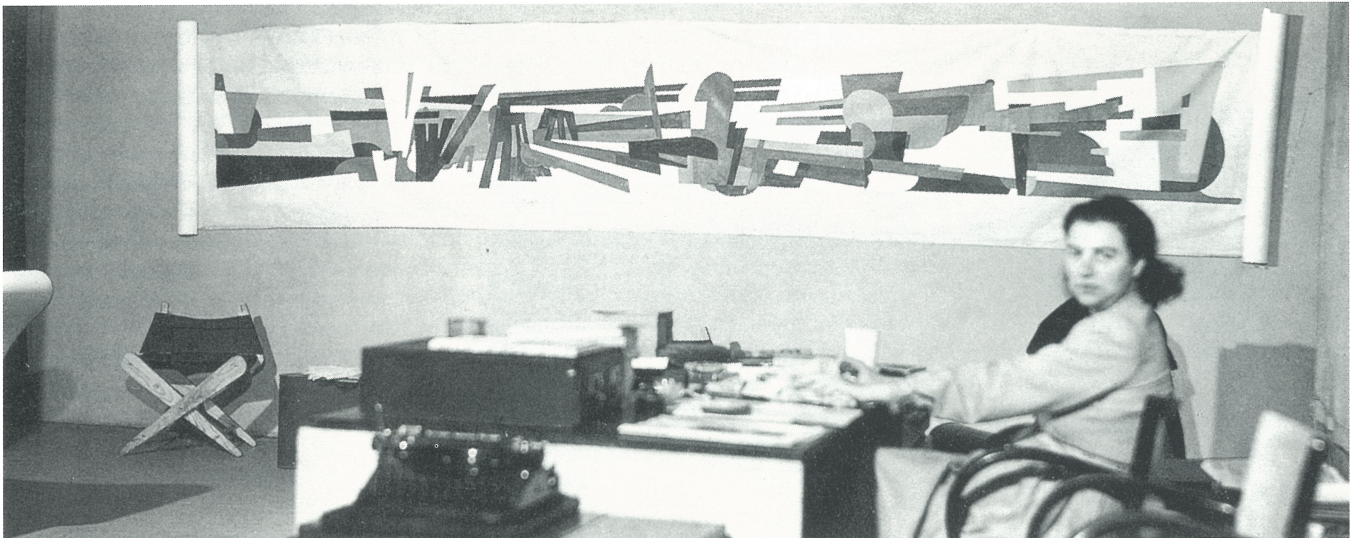
Siobhán M. Conaty

When Peggy Guggenheim's impact on twentieth century art is discussed, her achievements often take second place to her motivations, her incentives and her influences. In the New York art world of the 1940s, Guggenheim was renowned for her exciting and unusual shows at Art of This Century, but she was also well known for surrounding herself with exciting and unusual people who provided the inspiration for many of her exhibitions. Advisors like Marcel Duchamp, Piet Mondrian, and other European émigré artists, as well as her trusted gallery director, Howard Putzel, were instrumental in forming her taste and encouraging her to defy convention.

Two of Guggenheim's most controversial shows were dedicated specifically to the female members of the avant-garde. Both "Exhibition by 31 Women," from 5-31 January 1943, and "The Women," from 12 June - 7 July

1945 were ground-breaking events. Although vanguard women were by no means excluded from exhibitions at other venues, including the Museum of Modern Art and the commercial galleries of Pierre Matisse and Julien Levy, they were singled out for attention and appraisal at Art of This Century. The two shows mixed Europeans with Americans and well-known artists with lesser-knowns, presenting them in numbers that truly represented the female contribution to the modern movement. And the gallery's imprimatur was of no small value, especially to those on the brink of their careers. Martica Sawin has noted that "it was within the eccentric spaces of Art of This Century that the younger Americans began to be shown, first side by side with the Europeans, then in solo exhibitions, and it was [there] that the nucleus of the future New York School might first have been discerned by an alert viewer."¹

The importance of these two shows at Art of This Century can be appreciated in terms of both art history and sexual politics. Art historically, Guggenheim's gallery was the critical meeting place and the transitional space between the European and the American avant-garde. The New York School and Abstract Expressionism could not have developed without the mixture of ideas and styles that manifested themselves at Art of This Century. Guggenheim demonstrated her impartiality in the ongoing battle between the two dominant schools, Surrealism and abstraction, at the gallery's opening party by wearing a Surrealist earring by Yves Tanguy in one ear and an abstract earring by Alexander Calder in the other. Although she was renowned for her amorous liaisons, Guggenheim's impact on 20th century art has less to do with her personal connection with the artists than with her support for

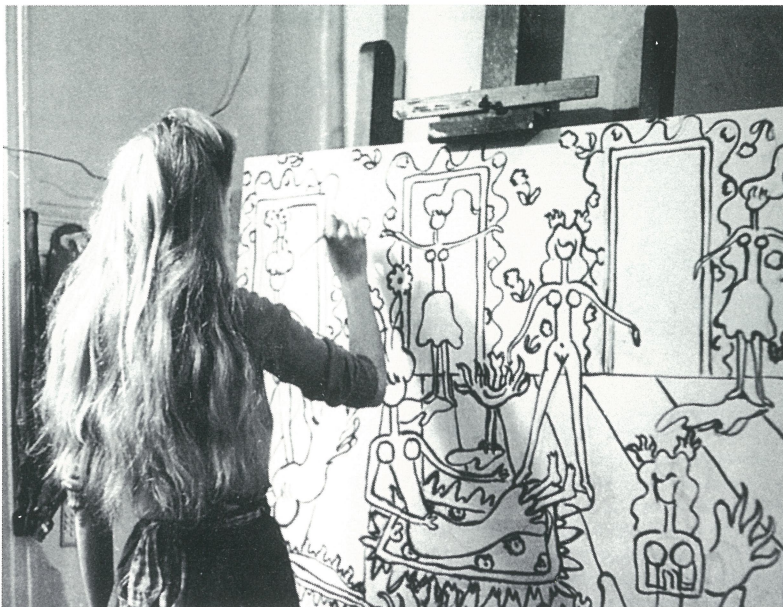


Peggy Guggenheim seated at her desk in her office at Art of This Century, 1946

¹ Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 235.



Hazel McKinley, Peggy's sister, 1941



Pegeen Vail, Peggy's daughter, circa 1943

the trends that would change the tide of modern art. As Sawin put it: "Whether by chance or intention, Guggenheim was, in effect, a constructor of history."²

Peggy Guggenheim's shows should also be considered in relation to the implications of all-female exhibitions. Art of This Century set the stage for the debate, which continues today, regarding the concept of a "women" show. Is it marginalization? Pejorative? In an ideal world the terms "women artists," "women's exhibition," or even a "women's museum" would be unnecessary, redundant, irrelevant. Yet if seen from a socio-cultural context, these exhibitions were necessary in order for female artists to achieve recognition. The separation of women was by no means an ideal solution to the inequities of the art world, but it was (and still is) an attempt to resolve a problem that is more social than aesthetic.

Whether Guggenheim was fully aware of the magnitude of these issues at the time is not relevant here. In the current exhibition—dedicated both to Guggenheim and to the women she represented—we can recognize the quality of aesthetic judgment and the artistic merit of the work shown at Art of This Century at a crucial point in art history. Representation by such an important gallery should not be underestimated as a decisive influence on the development of these artists' professional careers in New York City. Many of them were picked up by other prestigious galleries after being shown at Art of This Century, while others have since been recognized as crucial figures in the development of modern American art.

"EXHIBITION BY 31 WOMEN," 1943

According to Guggenheim's biographer, Jacqueline B. Weld, the idea for a show devoted exclusively to women came from Marcel Duchamp, who first suggested it when they were still in Europe. When Art of This Century opened in New York in the fall of 1942, Duchamp revived the idea and Guggenheim was receptive. As Weld explained,

²Sawin, 236.

The concept of a women's show appealed to Peggy because of its daring. The bohemian world of art had room for women as mistresses or models but not as serious artists in their own right. Some women painters toiled in the shadow of well-known husbands or lovers and sacrificed their own opportunities to the careers of the men. Others simply couldn't get their work shown.³

To make the selections, Guggenheim set up a jury that included herself, Duchamp, Putzel, Max Ernst and his son, Jimmy, the critic James Johnson Sweeney, and James Thrall Soby, a curator at the Museum of Modern Art. The artists they chose, both European and American, were primarily Surrealists and abstractionists. Some were well established, but for quite a few this was their introduction to the American art scene. Best known to the public were the Surrealists like Meret Oppenheim (whose fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon had caused a sensation at the Museum of Modern Art's "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" show in 1936), Leonora Carrington, Leonor Fini, Kay Sage, and Frida Kahlo. Others were just beginning to attract notice: Suzy Frelinghuysen, Buffie Johnson, Jacqueline Lamba, Sonia Sekula, Esphyr Slobodkina, Hedda Sterne, and Dorothea Tanning, to name a few. Guggenheim also included the work of virtual unknowns, among them her seventeen year old daughter, Pegeen, and her sister, Hazel McKinley. And there were artists who had already made names for themselves, but not as painters or sculptors—Gypsy Rose Lee, a celebrated strip tease dancer, and Guggenheim's protégé Djuna Barnes, author of the recently published and highly acclaimed novel, *Nightwood*.

In a press release Guggenheim pointed out that the show was designed to dispel misconceptions. "Here then," she wrote, "is testimony to the fact that the creative ability of women is by no means restricted to the decorative vein, as could be deduced from the history of art by women throughout the ages."⁴ Rather than looking back, however, her survey focused on the present, illustrating women's substantial contributions to the most advanced art movements of the day. In Art of This Century's "Exhibition by 31 Women," the cutting edge of new Surrealist ideas and modern abstraction were juxtaposed on the gallery walls. The intentionally provocative show attempted to set the record straight with serious work, dispelling the myth that women's art is at best a decorative medium. Whether Guggenheim believed this wholeheartedly or considered herself to be a feminist is widely debated and is something we cannot know for certain, nor is it the central issue. What we do know is that she loved art, loved to be provocative, and surrounded herself with excellent advisors who pointed her in the right direction.

Four of the works in the current exhibition were actually included in Guggenheim's first "women" show. Hedda Sterne's⁵ collage used a technique she dubbed *papier déchiré et interpréter*, which she described as her personal Surrealist game. She would tear brown paper, place the torn pieces on a white background, then stare at them as one does at clouds until an image appeared, and finally fill in the interpreted image with pencil. At Art of This Century she exhibited *Katsonarock*, (catalogue number 24), in which the torn paper suggested feline creatures.⁶ Leonor Fini was living in Paris in the 1930's and exhibiting with the Surrealists but never became a member of the group. "A fiercely independent woman, [she was] unwilling to submit either to the group's shared goals or the pronouncements of André Breton....however, the irrational element in many of her paintings related to the Surrealist sensibility."⁷ Fini continued in the Surrealist vein with her sexually charged painting, *The Shepherdess of the Sphinxes* (catalogue number 6), depicting a provocatively-clad shepherdess surrounded by a group of female sphinxes who appear to have been feasting on bones and flowers—motifs with obvious genital sym-



Hedda Sterne, circa 1943



Hedda Sterne, *Katsonarock (Portrait of V.X.)*, 1941
Catalogue number 24

³Jacqueline B. Weld, *Peggy, The Wayward Guggenheim* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 235.

⁴The Peggy Guggenheim Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.

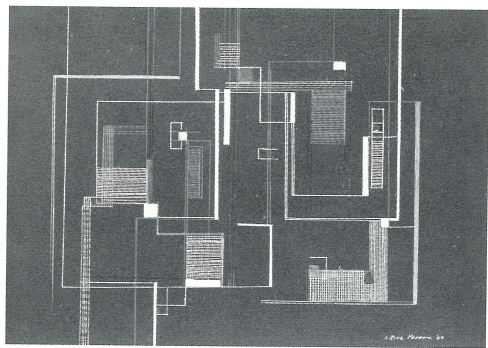
⁵Hedda Sterne was the only woman present in the well-known *Life* Magazine photograph—published in the January 15, 1951 issue—of "The Irascibles," a group of artists who protested the exhibition policy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

⁶Interview by the present author with Hedda Sterne, April 27, 1996.

⁷Nancy Heller, *Women Artists: An Illustrated History* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987), 159.



Kay Sage, 1943



Irene Rice Pereira, *Red and Blue*, 1940
Catalogue number 20

bolism. To represent Leonora Carrington, Peggy included a 1939 painting called *The Horses of Lord Candlestick* (catalogue number 3) that she had bought from the artist in Paris. It boils with the voluptuous and somewhat sinister energy of mythic horses cavorting in an ominous volcanic landscape.⁸ Kay Sage, an American artist who spent most of her early life in Europe, is a good example of the interchange between abstraction and surrealism. Her painting *At The Appointed Time*, 1942 (catalogue number 22), which was included in the “31 Women” show, is a combination of cool geometric structure and the infinite, unnatural spaces of Surrealism.

Frida Kahlo chose to show a 1940 *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair* (collection of the Museum of Modern Art, NY), in which the artist, dressed in men’s clothing, defiantly cuts off her long strands of beautiful hair—a well-chosen painting for an exhibition showcasing female artists in a man’s world. (In the current exhibition, Kahlo’s 1939 *Self-Portrait* drawing (catalogue number 11) depicts the seated artist at work, drawing with one hand while her other arm is multiplied into a number of different positions, perhaps representing the different states of mind during the creative process.) Bffie Johnson’s 1940 portrait of *Zenobia* (catalogue number 10) was painted during the artist’s trip to Haiti, a locale for which the Surrealists felt a singular affinity. There, in the sultry and exotic environment, Johnson ventured into the fantastic milieu of a non-western culture. Although it dates from slightly later than the piece she showed at *Art of This Century*, Dorothea Tanning’s *Asleep in The Deep*, 1947 (catalogue number 25), is representative of her earlier works, in which “the protagonists of her pictorial fantasies are women, sometimes perversely childish, often in the throes of some sexually suggestive action of transformation.”⁹ In this case, the isolated female figure is shown floating in a sea of dreams, partially submerged in an abstract “bed” with geometric elements and biomorphic forms suggestive of the female genitalia. Jacqueline Lamba’s 1942 work, *In Spite of Everything, Spring* (catalogue number 13), was painted after a particularly difficult year in the artist’s life. Following her divorce from André Breton, her ex-husband had burned many of the paintings that were in her Paris studio. In response to that cruel blow, this work is filled with darkness, loss, and destruction—yet there is also a hint of light, rebirth, and renewal in the depths of the tortured shapes and images that arose in Lamba’s anguished unconscious.

As for the abstractionists represented in the show, Irene Rice Pereira was already an established artist, having held her first one-person show in 1933 at the A.C.A. (American Contemporary Artists) Gallery. Works like *Red and Blue*, 1940 (catalogue number 20), are characteristic of her style in the early 1940’s, an unusual combination of geometry, symbolism, spiritualism, and industrial design. Pereira was one of several female artists, including Esphyr Slobodinka, Suzy Freylinghuysen, Lee Krasner, and Louise Nevelson, who were members of the American Abstract Artists (AAA), a group formed in 1936 to promote the acceptance of nonrepresentational art as the truly revolutionary expression of the twentieth century. Women played leading roles in this association from its very inception. Slobodkina, one of the founding members of AAA, was producing works such as *Desert Moon* 1941 (catalogue number 23) at the time of Peggy Guggenheim’s “31 Women” show. Slobodkina wrote of this time period:

I vaguely remember all the talk about the impossibility of finding a respectable place to show modern art. The Museum of Modern Art was already beginning to show its snobbish discrimination against home-grown products.... No crude domestic products were admitted. The Whitney Museum of American Art was even worse—they refused to admit that there was such a thing as a Modern Art movement in the USA.¹⁰

⁸ Leonora Carrington’s representation of these mythic horses can be found in both her paintings and her works of short fiction of that period. Carrington had been writing since the late 1930s with the publication of her short stories with Max Ernst’s collages. In 1941, while in New York, Carrington wrote a short story called “The Seventh Horse” which was published for the first time in *VVV 2-3* (New York, 1943), the same year as the “31 Women” exhibition.

⁹ Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists, 1550-1950*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1976), 338.

¹⁰ Esphyr Slobodkina, “Notes For a Biographer,” Chapter 53 of Volume II, quoted in *American Abstract Artists - Its Publications, Catalogs and Membership*, 1979.

Art of This Century was a venue where foreign and domestic art were given equal time. Artists like Frelinghuysen were able to show the new American direction of abstraction in works such as *Composition*, 1941 (catalogue number 7), a Cubist exploration of the still-life genre that finds drama in the juxtaposition of rich textures, shapes, volumes, and colors. Louise Nevelson was a pioneer in early abstract sculpture. Her 1945 terra cotta, *Moving/Static/Moving Figure* (catalogue number 18) is testimony to her approach at that time. Nevelson was interested in the abstracted human figure, and also in the variability of sculpture. In this piece, one of a series, she created forms that could be dismantled and reassembled.¹¹

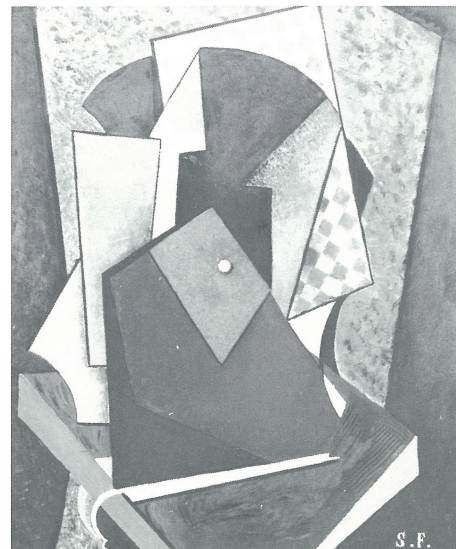
THE CRITICS' REACTION

Despite the sometimes equivocal tone of the reviews, Guggenheim was thrilled with the critical response she received for all her shows. The reviews for "31 Women" were a volatile blend of positive, negative, and tongue-in-cheek commentary. A favorably inclined *Art News* correspondent wrote that "Peggy Guggenheim's new place currently houses one of the more provocative shows...it would seem that already this gallery is living up to its promise of uncovering troublesome new talents." The article also touched on an issue that continues to trouble advocates of recognition for women, suggesting that "division of the sexes, or rather segregation of the female of the species, is ordinarily a dubious policy for an art show." But the writer was relieved to find that "this time however, there is no outbreak of watercolor or flower painting....Altogether the surprising thing about this show is how solid and serious the accomplishment is."¹²

In contrast, the *Art Digest* reviewer was disturbed at the prospect of female Surrealists: "Now that women are becoming serious about Surrealism, there is no telling where it will all end. An example of them



Louise Nevelson, *Moving/Static/Moving Figure*, ca. 1945
Catalogue number 18



Suzy Frelinghuysen, *Composition*, 1941
Catalogue number 7



Suzy Frelinghuysen, circa 1944

¹¹ See Laurie Lisle, *Louise Nevelson: A Passionate Life*, (New York: Washington Square Press, Simon & Schuster, 1990), 143.

¹² R.F. *Art News*, January 15, 1943.

exposing their subconscious may be viewed with alarm at Art of This Century.”¹³ The art critic Henry McBride, writing for the *New York Sun*, paid them a backhanded compliment:

These 31 women are better than any of the men Surrealists, save the original “great one.”¹⁴ This is logical now that one comes to think of it. Surrealism is about 70% hysterics, 20% literature, 5% good painting and 5% is just saying boo to the innocent public. There are, as we all know, plenty of men among the New York neurotics but we also know that there are still more women among them. Considering the statistics the doctors hand out, and considering the percentages listed above... it is obvious women ought to excel at Surrealism. At all events they do, hysterics insure a show.¹⁵

When Boffie Johnson asked the art critic James Stern of *Time* to review the show, he responded that there had never been a first rate woman artist and that women should stick to having babies; he then dismissed her by saying he had no time for thirty-one paintings by women. Johnson describes this incident as a turning point in her life, stating that she “became a feminist in 1943.” She began to research the history of female artists, from the ancient world to modern day, and set about proving Stern wrong.¹⁶ But instead, what she discovered was a “long list of restrictions that had been a part of every woman’s artistic pursuit.”¹⁷ She used this material for an article called



Kay Sage, *At the Appointed Time*, 1942. Catalogue number 22

¹³ H.B., *The Art Digest*, January 15, 1943.

¹⁴ The “great one’s” name is not mentioned in the review, but McBride was probably referring to the Surrealist then best known to the American public, Salvador Dalí.

¹⁵ Henry McBride, “Women Surrealists” *New York Sun*, January 18, 1943.

¹⁶ In 1988 Boffie Johnson published *Lady of The Beasts: Ancient Images of the Goddess and Her Sacred Animals* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988), the end product of years of dedicated research that began in 1943 with the investigation of women throughout the history of art.

¹⁷ Interview by the present author with Boffie Johnson, April 20, 1996.

“Women in Art” and submitted it to the art magazines. But no one would print it, finding the subject of little interest even though it was timely, since several contemporary artists exhibiting at Art of This Century were discussed. This 1943 article—published for the first time in this catalogue—stands as an important precedent to Linda Nochlin’s groundbreaking 1971 essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” generally thought to be the first work of this type in the field.¹⁸

Generally, the reviews seemed to confirm the talent and the potential of these artists (though more than a few writers pointed out that many were the wives of more famous husbands).¹⁹ The significance of this show, the reviews, the publicity, lies in the change in public perception. Just two years earlier, some of these women were hardly given a chance in critical circles. In one of the more egregious examples, a 1941 review of Louise Nevelson’s work stated: “We learned that the artist was a woman in time to check our enthusiasm. Had it been otherwise, we might have hailed these sculptural expressions as by surely a great figure among moderns.”²⁰

“THE WOMEN,” 1945

The critical attention and notoriety garnered from the “Exhibition of 31 Women”²¹ paved the way for a second show in 1945 simply called “The Women,” which Peggy Guggenheim organized herself. She had been in correspondence with David Porter, a friend and fellow gallery owner in Washington DC, about the development of another all-female show. David Porter was working on a similar project for his gallery and the two shared ideas about the artists chosen for their shows. In fact many of the same artists exhibited in both shows, and Porter recalled Guggenheim’s telling him, “your show is mostly my show, I should get credit for it.”²²

The dominant trend in this second show was abstraction, with Surrealism now taking on a secondary role—thus reflecting the changing tide in the New York art scene at that time. The Surrealist influence was still present and quite strong, but in the years 1944-45 a subtle shift towards an Americanized vanguard became evident. Clement Greenberg, one of the primary supporters of this new American style, commended Guggenheim for her position in this burgeoning realm and “for her enterprise in presenting young and unrecognized artists.”²³ The additions to the roster of women artists in this second show indicated Art of This Century’s interest in showing these young, relatively unknown and yet promising abstract artists, including Virginia Admiral, Nell Blaine, Louise Bourgeois, Fannie Hillsmith, Lee Krasner²⁴, Anne Neagoe, Annie Harvey, Janet Sobel, Alice Trumbull Mason, Sonia Sekula, and Charmion von Wiegand. These artists represented the new wave maturing in New York as a result of the influx of European ideas assimilated by the American avant-garde.

Virginia Admiral’s *Blue Composition*, 1943-44 (catalogue number 1)—which was included in “The Women”—combines a powerful use of color, biomorphic forms, and abstract imagery that hovers between European precedents and the new developments in American abstraction.



Nell Blaine, 1944

¹⁸ Buffie Johnson’s article is reproduced in its entirety on pages 33-37. In a letter to the present author, she noted that “it concerns the embattled woman artist, though in those days you could never use such a provocative title.”

¹⁹ The better-known husbands of the 1943 exhibitors are: John Cage (Xenia Cage), George L.K. Morris (Suzy Frelinghuysen), Diego Rivera (Frida Kahlo), André Breton (Jacqueline Lamba), Yves Tanguy (Kay Sage), Saul Steinberg (Hedda Sterne), Jean Arp (Sophie Tauber-Arp), Jean Hélion (Pegeen Vail). In the 1945 show: Jackson Pollock (Lee Krasner), Robert Goldwater (Louise Bourgeois), Julien Levy (Muriel Streeter), Wolfgang Paalen (Alice Rahon). Virginia Admiral was married to the equally young and unknown painter Robert De Niro; their son Robert would later become a celebrated actor.

²⁰ *Cue*, October 14, 1941, 16.

²¹ Gallery papers do not include the financial records of the show. It seems the show was not considered successful in terms of sales, but rather in terms of publicity and exposure.

²² Interview by the present author with David Porter, April 6, 1997.

²³ Clement Greenberg, “Art,” *The Nation* 159, November 11, 1944, 498.

²⁴ Lee Krasner, Gypsy Rose Lee, and Loren MacIver were selected for the 1945 show but were not included because the works could not be secured in time. Peggy Guggenheim Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.



Alice Trumbull Mason, *Emergent Form*, 1945
Catalogue number 17



Muriel Streeter, circa 1957

Nell Blaine exhibited a 1944 painting called *Blue Pieces* (catalogue number 2), in which she combined her ideas of the abstract and the organic. She described her work at this time as “an extension of your blood and your body; it has the rhythm of nature.”²⁵ Alice Trumbull Mason (another founding member of the AAA) called her style “architectural abstraction.” Paintings such as *Emergent Form*, 1945 (catalogue number 17), demonstrate her progression from biomorphic abstraction to an increasingly geometric vocabulary. Fannie Hillsmith’s 1945 *Abstraction* (catalogue number 8) illustrates the qualities that led Clement Greenberg to describe her as a “most valuable native talent” with the ability to “grasp the identity of a picture most instinctively.”²⁶ The collage painting bears the stamp of synthetic Cubism but expands far beyond formal experimentation using abstract forms as a means of appealing to the viewer’s emotions. Lee Krasner’s work from this period places her as a pioneer in the early stages of the New York School. Like many other artists from these two shows, Krasner studied with Hans Hofmann, developing and absorbing Cubist concepts. Her untitled study for *Lavender #1*, 1942 (catalogue number 12), gives us insight into Krasner’s experimentation with spontaneity and rhythm within an abstracted format, and into the innate talent that prompted Hofmann’s ironic compliment: “This is so good you would not know it was done by a woman.”²⁷

Among the Surrealist works in “The Women” was Muriel Streeter Levy’s *Farmyard (The World War)*, 1945 (catalogue number 14). This disturbing image was a response to the horror of World War II.²⁸ A little girl sitting in a farmyard has just been startled by something we cannot see (it is outside the picture frame) and has a look of terror on her face. The child is surrounded by the vast and eerie emptiness of a barren landscape, yet her world is oddly claustrophobic. As an artist Streeter felt confined, cribbed in, and attributed her inhibitions in part by the taste and discernment of her husband, the art dealer Julien Levy.²⁹ “I never left any foreground in my paintings,” she said, “you were suddenly right into them—and a “little girl lost” theme ran through a lot of them.” Julia Thecla, a Chicago-based Surrealist, was brought to Guggenheim’s attention by David Porter in the early 1940s and was featured in both “women” shows at Art of This Century. Thecla’s 1945 painting, *Full Moon* (catalogue number 26), is characteristic of her haunting and mysterious works, which often explore her personal reality by delving into her dreams and unconscious. The figure, a self portrait, stands alone in a moonlit room, staring into a translucent sheet of glass propped on a miniature easel. The glass echoes the shape of a skylight, through which moonlight bathes the figure caught between her own reflection and the void above.

REVIEWS AND RECOGNITION

Critically, the 1945 show gained the attention of the press, but with less of the wry humor lavished on “Exhibition by 31 Women.” The concept of an artist who also happened to be a woman was no longer as startling by the mid 1940’s, and reviewers tended toward serious assessments of the work on its own merits. The Surrealist Magazine *WV* was beginning to cover the increasing number of female artists among their ranks, a fact that has been ascribed in part to Peggy’s influence. As Martica Sawin suggests in her book *Surrealists in Exile*, “it is interesting to note the increasing amount of space devoted to women artists in *WV* whereas they had been virtually absent from *Minotaure*.”³⁰ Some credit for this is due to Peggy Guggenheim and her January exhibit of 31 women artists, since most of *WV*’s choices were also in the Art of This Century Show.³¹ But a decade earlier the WPA’s Federal Art Project had already recognized female artists as the equals of their male colleagues. In

²⁵ Eleanor Munro, *Originals: American Women Artists* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), 268.

²⁶ Clement Greenberg, “Arts Reviews,” *Nation*, CLXIV, 18, May 3, 1947, 525.

²⁷ Barbara Rose, “American Great: Lee Krasner,” *Vogue*, June 1972, 121.

²⁸ According to Stephen Robeson-Miller, the work’s symbolism was explained to him by the artist. Letter to the present author, November 22, 1996.

²⁹ Frank Merking, “An artistic homecoming for Muriel Streeter” *The News-Times*, May 10, 1990.

³⁰ This European journal (1934-39) emphasized Surrealism, but also included those who were considered established masters of modern art and letters.

³¹ Sawin, 306.

an interview with Virginia Admiral she pointed out that there was no “cult of men” in the 1930s art world, and that the “macho-drinking scene” didn’t begin until the 1940s and ‘50s.³² As Karal Ann Marling has written: “New Deal rhetoric was fiercely egalitarian; hence, it did not seem inconsistent that female artists in actuality as well as in theory should have shared the spotlight with their male counterparts in the art world of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s presidency. By the same token, art critics of the ‘30s displayed no interest in assigning a special gender to the term ‘artist.’”³³

Why then were Art of This Century’s shows creating such a stir ten years later? By separating the women into their own category and sexualizing the term “artist,” Peggy and her advisors opened up a Pandora’s box of scrutiny and value judgments based on criteria other than the art itself. The 1943 show brought forth social and personal prejudices which might not have surfaced had the show been titled “31 Artists.” While there were the mocking references to “women and hysteria,” the reviewers consistently admitted that the quality of the art was quite good, thereby criticizing the artist and the art on two different levels—the aesthetic critique and the social commentary. But by 1945, the critical aim of the reviews shifted. The issue was no longer, can a woman be a good artist? Now the crucial question seemed to be, must a woman paint like a man in order to be a good artist?

Consider the following comments taken from reviews of the 1945 show. According to *Art News*:

The women who Peggy Guggenheim has picked for her string have definitely something on the ball. The most surprising trait here is an almost masculine vigor of ideas....To be sure Ronnie Elliott and Muriel Levy sound twilight romantic overtones, but the works as a whole balances satisfactorily in the Art of This Century Galleries promoting new conception



Julia Thecla, circa 1936



Julia Thecla, *Full Moon*, 1945. Catalogue number 26

³² Interview by the present author with Virginia Admiral, March 16, 1997.

³³ Helen A. Harrison and Karal Ann Marling, *7 American Women: The Depression Decade*, exhibition catalogue, Vassar College Art Gallery, January 1976.

of the weaker sex. Other all-female organizations should have a look-in at a show which is so refreshingly unladylike.³⁴

Emily Genauer of the *World-Telegram* thought it odd that “the abstractions and non-objectives hung at Art of This Century... are generally much more forceful than those by men over at the museum [of Modern Art], though of much the same character.”³⁵ And in *The New York Times*, Edward A. Jewell found “nothing save the catalogue to indicate that these artists are women. The work might as well been produced by ‘The Men.’”³⁶ Echoing Krasner’s experience in Hofmann’s class, Admiral also recalled one critic saying to her around this time, “your work is very good, it could almost have been done by a man.”³⁷

In one sense, such statements are meant to be accolades for the women, but on another level it promotes the idea that this “weaker sex” must toughen up, add some vigor or masculinity to their works lest they be called “ladylike,” apparently a negative attribute. Instead of focusing on the art itself, the reviewers have now expanded the criticism to include the issue of whether the artists paint like men or women. Once again this brings forth the problems that stem from analyzing artists by separation of sex and provokes the question that is still being grappled with today: Is there a masculine style as opposed to a feminine style of art? In the interviews with the surviving artists most responded with a simple “no.” Boffie Johnson, Hedda Sterne and Virginia Admiral all agreed that being in a

women’s show was not an issue, they were just happy to be exhibiting at a prestigious gallery like Art of This Century. In their own minds, the fact that they were female artists did not differentiate them from the male artists—it was just society’s rules of differentiation that were being applied from the outside.

It was the public, the critics, the historians who analyzed and searched for a difference. Meret Oppenheim, an exhibitor in the 1943 show, “did not approve of the notion that there exists a separate ‘women’s’ art. She claimed that the imagination is androgynous, though that does not mean that it is asexual.”³⁸ Fannie Hillsmith looks at this issue from a similar angle. In a panel discussion titled “Women Speak Out” at the Thorne Sagendorph Gallery in 1994, Hillsmith pointed out that claiming there was no difference was just “burying your head in the sand. As with women and male poets, there certainly are male and female characteristics that show up in art. And *vive la différence*.... But these differences are not absolute.”³⁹ In an interview with the present writer, Hillsmith was also quick to mention that she did not believe these differences are of significant consequence, they simply exist. Ultimately the judgement is simply about whether the art is good or bad, not whether it is male or female.

For many of these artists the rationale behind participating in the women shows was not artistic but practical. It was based on the fact that women were simply not getting the same representation as their male colleagues, so that the concept or even the neces-

sity of a serious “woman’s” show was political rather than aesthetically daring. Agreeing to be included at Art of This Century was based primarily on the artists’ desire to be associated with this renowned gallery, where the new young talents of the avant-garde were showcased. Indeed, the gallery’s program made it clear that the art scene was undergoing a significant shift in emphasis, from the Social Realist and American Scene subject matter that dominated the 1930s to the subjective, abstracted imagery emphasized in the 1940s. The combination of the changing political climate, the termination of the WPA, and the influx and influence of the European vanguard had decisively altered the direction of American art. In the post-war conservative era artists were no longer receiving support from the government, galleries could not absorb all the artists eager to make a living at their profession, and the conception of a woman’s role in society had changed dramatically.⁴⁰

In the final analysis, Peggy Guggenheim’s vital contribution to art and the ideas of the New York art world was her dedication to modern art and the artists. Her personal energy and dynamics carried over to her gallery dealings, thus creating the momentum that started the early careers of many pivotal artists. Years later Lee Krasner was asked to give her impressions of Guggenheim, and although the two women had their differences Krasner acknowledged Guggenheim’s singular contribution: “What one should say about Peggy, is, simply that she did it, that no matter what her motivations were, she did it.”⁴¹

³⁴ *Art News*, July 1-31, 1945.

³⁵ Emily Genauer, “This Week in Art,” *New York World-Telegram*, June 16, 1945.

³⁶ E.A. Jewell, “The Women Again,” *The New York Times*, June 17, 1945.

³⁷ Admiral interview, March 16, 1997.

³⁸ Jon Ippolito, Exhibition Coordinator, “Meret Oppenheim: Beyond The Teacup,” Exhibition Brochure, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, June-September 1996.

³⁹ Excerpts from Fannie Hillsmith’s remarks appear on page 39.

⁴⁰ See Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1963) for a thorough documentation of the change in attitude, perception, and representation of women in the post-war era.

⁴¹ Lee Krasner, *New York*, October 17, 1971. Quoted in Virginia Dortch, *Peggy Guggenheim and Her Friends* (Milan: Berenice, 1994), 110.



Jacqueline Lamba, *In Spite of Everything, Spring*, 1942
Catalogue number 13



Valentine Hugo, *Premier projet pour un portrait d'André Breton*, 1934
Catalogue number 9



Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait*, 1939
Catalogue number 11



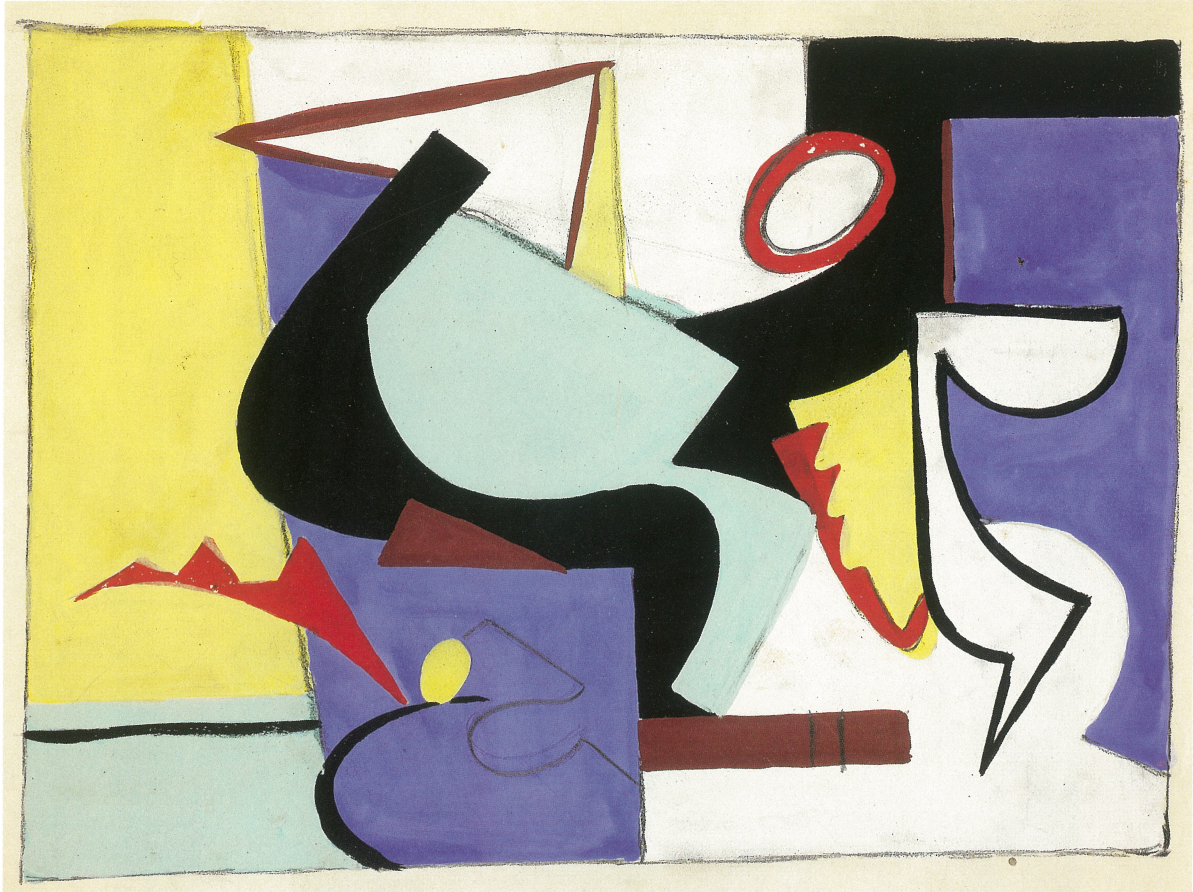
Virginia Admiral, *Blue Composition*, 1943-44
Catalogue number 1



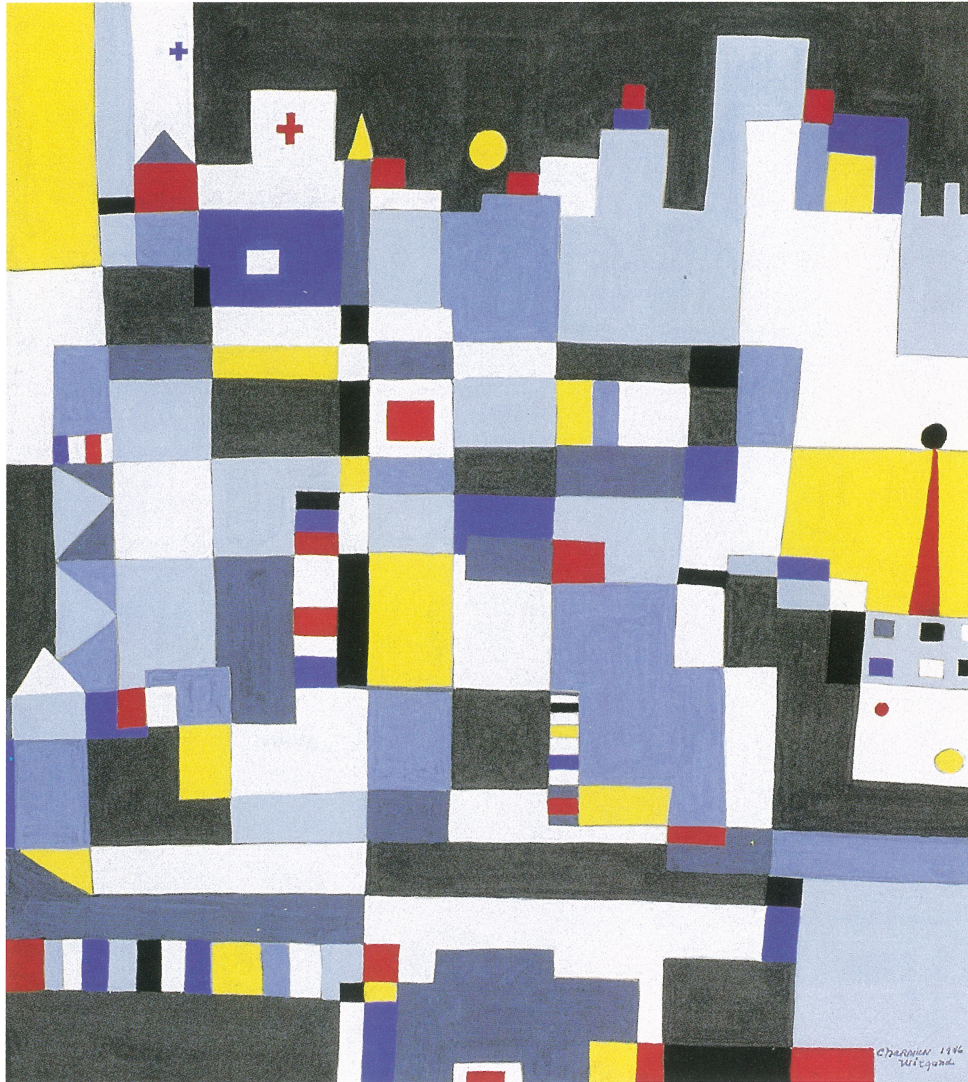
Esphyr Slobodkina, *Desert Moon*, 1941
Catalogue number 23



Dorothea Tanning, *Asleep in the Deep*, 1947
Catalogue number 25



Lee Krasner, *Untitled (study for Lavender #1)*, 1942
Catalogue number 12



Charmion von Wiegand, *Untitled*, 1946
Catalogue number 28



Nell Blaine, *Blue Pieces*, 1944
Catalogue number 2



Muriel Streeter Levy, *Farmyard (The World War)*, 1945
Catalogue number 14



Ronnie Elliott, *Collage Number 22*, 1947
Catalogue number 4

WOMEN IN ART (THE EMBATTLED WOMAN ARTIST)

Buffie Johnson, 1943

Creative fire arises from a certain quality of mind rather than of sex. Three thousand years ago women began to be creative artists. We have records of Greek women painting, and some of Sappho's beautiful fragments have been preserved. In literature [women] have produced some great works of art; Emily Bronte wrote a sublime novel, *Wuthering Heights*. This mountain crag of literature was scaled by a woman. The Range of Shakespeare, the Peaks of Milton, and the Heights of Bronte can nod respectfully to each other above the clouds. It is astonishing, then, that no woman can yet stand beside the great painters of the world.

Because there have been no geniuses among women painters, it has been assumed that they were not particularly gifted in painting. In view of the extraordinary and completely neglected painters we have rediscovered, and the signs of great talent emerging through the feminine emancipation of the last half century, a revaluation of women in painting is in order.

There have been some fascinating women painters throughout history, who have appeared on the horizon like astral phenomena, and as quickly disappeared. In ancient Egypt there was Alexandra, a painter's daughter, who worked for one of the Ptolemies. In fact [women] have taken up the brush throughout civilized times. One can mention Callioloioe, one of the first feminine artists mentioned in Greek literature, who traced the silhouette of her lover on the wall by candlelight the evening before he departed for the wars. She is a romantic figure, perhaps, rather than an artistic one. There were, however, more serious painters such as Timatata, also a painter's daughter, whose work was much praised by Pliny. There have been many beautiful feminine names in Greek Painting: Callioloioe, Calypsa, Hilena, Cirene. But so little of the painting of those early epochs has been preserved that we know them only by reputation.



Buffie Johnson, circa 1943

The elegant arts did not flourish in the military-minded civilization of Rome. A young lady named Laya, who lived about 100 B.C., made quite a profitable business of miniature painting, but as far as we know it was not until the establishment of the [Roman Catholic] Church that women took up the brush to produce important works of art. It began with nuns, like Catherine Vigri and Plantilla Melli, performing artistic tasks as well as religious duties within the convent walls. Women as a whole were becoming more adventurous. About this time, Betisia Gozzodini, like Plato's pupil Axiothea, dressed herself as a young man and attended the University of Bologna.

Apropos this penchant of young women for disguising themselves as boys, which so impressed Shakespeare, there is a delightful story of one Onorata Odiana of Castelleone who acquired a reputation as a painter at a very early age. She was commissioned by the Marquis Gabrino Vendolo, the tyrant of Cremona, to decorate his palace. While painting in one of the remote rooms she was attacked by a courtier, who evidently took her more seriously as a woman than as an artist. She stabbed him and fled. She was pursued by the Marquis' men but, disguised as a boy, she joined the army and quickly rose to a post of command. Later, she was pardoned, but she evidently enjoyed her extraordinary military life, for she remained a soldier for twenty years, continuing to paint meanwhile. She died defending her native town from the Venetians.

The Italians were proud of their gifted women, and under this encouragement there blossomed talents such as Sofonisba Anguissola, a prodigy at ten. Vasari, the great historian and critic of Renaissance painters, owned one of her drawings which he treasured in a folio devoted only to the greatest draughtsmen. Unlike most prodigies, she fulfilled her promise, and at twenty-seven her reputation earned her an invitation to the Spanish court of Phillip II. With a retinue of ten, she journeyed to Spain and painted the King's portrait, for which she received from him an enormous diamond and a most substantial sum of money. She became the court painter and general favorite. The King

arranged her marriage with an Italian nobleman, and presented her with a huge dowry and a dress laden with pearls.

As if this were not a sufficiently fabulous history, Sofonisba fell in love with and married a nobleman who captained the ship on which she was returning to Italy after the death of her [first] husband. Though she later lost her eyesight, she never lost her high spirits and lived to be a very old lady in Naples. She was visited there by Van Dyck, just before her death at eighty-seven. [Van Dyck] said that he learned more from conversations with her than from studying with either of his masters, one of whom, you may remember, was the great Flemish painter, Rubens. Her Spanish paintings have been lost, and we can only judge her by her early work and by contemporary critiques. Her self-portrait and the painting of herself with her two gifted sisters playing chess were described by Vasari as "glowing with mysterious life."

Tintoretto's daughter, Maria, became an excellent portrait painter, and it was very fashionable in Venice to sit for her. It was considered so curious to be painted by a woman. Maximilian invited her to be his court painter. Her father, however, used his influence to keep her by his side. She died at about twenty-eight, a remarkable talent that never fulfilled itself.

Closest to a truly great woman painter was Artemisia Gentileschi. She was also a painter's daughter and was taken by [her father] to the court of Charles I of England, where her painting was deservedly popular. The "David with the Head of Goliath" and the "Judith" are splendid examples of her elaborate and powerful compositions.... Her "Woman Caressing a Pigeon" is outstanding in Madrid's Prado, most select of museums. Those who would see for themselves may find her "Christ Among the Doctors" at the New-York Historical Society. She was influenced by her master, Reni, as were many great painters under the apprenticeship system.

The Venetian Rosalba Carriera was the most famous pastelists of her period, 1675 to 1757. Her fame earned her invitations to the courts of France and Austria. The diary of her Paris sojourn is fascinating reading. Her

turbulent career ended in tragedy when the loss of her eyesight was followed quickly by the darkness of madness.

A goodly number of French women painted in the 18th century. Of these Vigée-Lebrun is the finest, and [she] equals any portrait painter of her period, standing close to the great Fragonard. It might be said that she had everything: beauty, talent, gaiety and extraordinary charm. She was a romantic figure in a period which accented glamour. She painted most of the sovereigns of Europe, and her friendship with Marie Antoinette, whom she painted many times, was a deep and sincere one. In reading her memoirs, one finds that her passion for painting increased with the years. As the daughter of a painter she was imbued with art from childhood.

Vigée-Lebrun said of her contemporary, Angelica Kauffman, that her drawings were Titianesque, and indeed she belongs in that great tradition. From the age of eleven she lived in Italy and studied widely. Later, in London, she became a tremendous social and artistic success, and a founding member of the [Royal] Academy. She is thought by some today to be a contender for the place as the greatest woman painter. She was a great friend of Goethe, who said of her: "No living painter excels her in dignity of in the delicate taste with which she handles a pencil."

More recently, in France, Rosa Bonheur rose to international fame. Although academic for our present tastes, she painted some fine pictures, far more acceptable than the popular "Horse Fair" which, because it contains a number of horses larger than life, caused an international sensation. Mary Cassatt, an American expatriate, and Berthe Morisot, the great-grand niece of Fragonard, were delightful Impressionist painters, properly revered in the Louvre and other European museums. Suzanne Valadon, mother of the later-famous Maurice Utrillo, was herself a painter with a rich palette and strong, almost violent sense of design. She was honored along with Toulouse-Lautrec and the other great artists of the late nineteenth century.

These women were good painters. They painted good pictures, indeed fine pictures, even a few magnificent pictures; but

not a single recognized masterpiece has come from a feminine brush. The reasons are not hard to find. They are not the popular reasons usually accepted and they are rapidly disappearing today.

Perhaps the most commonly asserted reason for this lack among women painters is women's "emotional instability." But creation in nature is spastic, it is not a steady stream but an ebb and flow. Human creation is similar, springing from brilliant flashes in which creative work is inspired. There is no reason why such flashes should not come to women as well as to men. Nor is women's position as the bearers of children a true explanation of their failure to achieve recognition. Maternal obligations have not prevented women from achieving greatness in other fields. More superficial is the observation that "genius overcomes all," with its glib conclusion that had there been a female painting genius nothing could have held her down. This sentimental notion is like the popular fancy that cold garrets and crusts of bread are essential to greatness in art. The last word on this foolishness was given by Corot. When asked to criticize the painting of a young artist, the French master inquired, "How much money have you?" The offended young man replied, "What difference does that make?" "All the difference in the world," Corot replied.

One cannot expect to keep integrity and paint as one should if one depends on public approval for a livelihood. Genius, Corot was saying, is not a strong tree forcing itself through a pavement, but a seed which needs fertile ground. Rarely, practically never before in history, has this vital fertile ground been available to women painters.

No, the true reasons lie in social history and the peculiar nature of the painter's art. Adverse circumstances and the law of averages have worked particularly hard against the appearance of a great woman painter. Genius does not spring from a vacuum. For each great male painter there have been hundreds of good male painters, thousands of fair male painters, and countless more-or-less professional male painters. Until recently, on the other hand, women painters have been very few, for the simple

reason that the social position of women made it virtually impossible for a woman to become a painter.

During the Renaissance, art was in great demand by the church and the great banking families. This demand produced a flowering of painters which included an unequalled number of geniuses. A similar situation occurred under the Guild system in Holland, and again in eighteenth century France. The law of averages proved itself again. It was operating to produce great painters, but it was not operating in favor of women. The social position of women was such that the opportunities for artistic attainment were extremely [limited]. Only ladies of quality had sufficient leisure or education to take up the arts. When they did turn their frustrated talents to writing or painting, they were likely to be greeted with derision unless they passed off their creations as mere social diversions. Regrettably true is Virginia Wolfe's observation on Dorothy Osborne, famed letter-writer of the seventeenth century: "Had she been born in 1827, Dorothy Osborne would have written novels; had she been born in 1527, she would never have written at all." This same Dorothy Osborne, herself a great literary talent, ridiculed the Duchess of Newcastle, who had so far forgotten her place as a woman as to write a play—and in verse, at that.

Yet since women did achieve greatness in writing, it is interesting to investigate what deterred them from [excelling] in paint. The most important reason, we believe, is the difference in tools. The basic tools of writing are sharpened by the normal education. One can easily acquire the feeling for words through conversation. Books, too, have usually been available even in remote places, so that the tradition of writing could penetrate almost everywhere. The technique of painting, on the other hand, is much harder to acquire. Painting requires years of apprenticeship and hard work for the acquisition of mere facility of expression. It is possible to be a part-time writer, but a painter cannot hope for success unless he devotes himself constantly to his work. In addition, the aesthetics in painting are more difficult to master. A would-be painter must start by

looking at paintings and these are available only at relatively few centers of culture. It is significant that we find the few women who painted throughout history have been almost exclusively the daughters or close relatives of artists, for only to them have the tools and methods been available.

The obstacles to painting are, happily, being swept aside by woman's new position in society. She paints today, not as a social grace, as in the last centuries, but as a full time, serious artist. Forty or fifty years ago women were curiosities in an art school. It is no longer considered improper for them to attend life class, to travel, and to live independently. Nor is it a matter for critical comment to find their pictures hanging in an exhibition.

Marie Laurencin occupied a place among the first emancipated women, side by side with those men who fought the painting revolution. The simplicity of her plastic statement and decorative quality made her popular. For all the femininity of her subjects, she knew quality of line, neat juxtaposition of color and value. She limited her methods, like her palette, to achieve the concentrated charm and direct appeal of primitive painting.

The accepted great American woman painter of today is, of course, Georgia O'Keeffe, wife of the dealer-photographer Alfred Stieglitz. She was a western girl, born in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, in 1887. She is the nucleus of a legend, a specialist in finely studied form. Like Laurencin, she has found that the limitations of a method create its style. When ten years old she calmly assured her friends that she would surely become an artist. She copied pansies and roses with tiny precision until criticized by her teacher for painting too small. In a temper, she promised from then on to paint flowers as large as possible.

Magic Realism has had an effect upon a great number of women painters today. It is, as defined by Alfred H. Barr Jr., a term "applied to the work of painters who by means of an exact realistic technique try to make plausible and convincing their improbably, dreamlike or fantastic visions." This approach seems a particularly happy one for women, perhaps because their visions have been unfamiliar to us and require a greater degree of precision to make them real. We



Leonor Fini, undated



Frida Kahlo, 1939

can situate Leonor Fini, Frida Kahlo, Leonora Carrington, Dorothea Tanning, Milena Barilli, and, to a lesser degree, Meraud de Guevera, in this group.

Leonor Fini, of Italian-Argentinean descent, working until recently in Paris, has had the greatest influence on her contemporaries. She has exhibited a freedom in invading the esoteric and erotic undreamed of twenty-five years ago. She paints in the grant tradition, in a peculiarly sombre mood full of dramatic intensity. Her fascinating, disorderly and fiery personality not only dominates her work, but she can be said to be the first woman painter to have seriously affected the work of several first rate men painters. She was once sent the canvas of a painter friend to criticize. She cut it into many small pieces and returned it with a note, saying: "I am sorry that I have not a larger envelope."

Frida Kahlo, twice the wife of the Mexican Diego Rivera, has an intense, savage personality. She will accept only such methods as she acquires by her own means. From this a special purity and individuality arises. Dressed in her voluminous Mexican Indian costumes, she traveled to Paris, where her work impressed the Surrealists. She was less impressed by them. She maintains a unique direction for which she herself is the sole compass. She paints self portraits continuously, with a wealth of confessional detail. Even her simplest still life is a form of self portrait and it is fortunate that her personality seems inexhaustibly varied and colorful.

Milena Barilli comes from a courtly tradition. She is a cousin of King Peter of Yugoslavia now living and working in America. With fine craftsmanship she applies detail with the naive perseverance of the early Florentines. She too paints "herself" repeatedly, her angels and nymphs all bearing the impress of Milena's own rather strange and elfin features. It is curious how this unabashed narcissism seems to pervade all the paintings by women of the Magic Realist "school."

Meraud de Guevera (formerly Meraud Guinness) and Leonora Carrington are both runaway girls from distinguished British families. Both, also, worked intimately with men painters who taught them a very

acceptable mastery of technique by which to present their original imagery, Meraud leaning to paint from that little-known genius and ex-paperhanger Tal Coat, Leonora from the Surrealist leader Max Ernst. Meraud de Guevera lends her sensitivity to the construction of pictures of great purity, with a rhythm at once severe and supple, while Leonora Carrington controls her unfettered imagination by carefully constructing design.

Two young and most promising Americans are Dorothea Tanning and Buffie Johnson. Dorothea Tanning, dressed in velvet pantalettes and a Lord Fauntleroy shirt, also paints herself and her dreams continuously. She is an incurable romantic and lives in a self-created atmosphere of the "Castle of the Otranto," while Buffie Johnson's flat in New York is so vividly Victorian that one must rub one's eyes to believe that this is the twentieth century. Buffie can say of her work: "If painting requires the full time devotion of a woman, then I am determined not even to sleep."

Women are symbols of the era. The graph of their position in society follows close to the line of cultural development. During the most civilized epochs, women have enjoyed the greatest freedom. The periods of great culture and progress, such as the Renaissance, gave them a more favored position, and, conversely, the Roman and Napoleonic eras subjugated women in much the same manner as Hitler has done. Women could not rise up against their oppressors because the oppressors were their fathers, husbands, lovers and the fathers of their children.

Now women are conquering every field and standing beside men. This is also happening in painting. The young painters mentioned above are being borne along on the great wave which carried women as well as men. From among these women and the many thousands who will follow them will certainly come great women painters who will be known, not as women painters, but simply as painters.



Dorothea Tanning, (center), 1945-46



Buffie Johnson, *Zenobia*, 1940
Catalogue number 10



Fannie Hillsmith, 1953

WOMEN SPEAK OUT

Fannie Hillsmith, 1994

Because of the smallness of the art world in the early days, critics' statements could be extravagant. My New York dealer was always telling me I was the best woman painter. He didn't give latitude or longitude.... Others narrowed it down to my being the best woman painter in New Hampshire. Such a comment was never made by my Boston art dealer who, by the way, was a woman. I never listened to any of this. I was out for bigger game. Anyway I was confused about where I was supposed to be best. What I wanted was to be part of history. I was slowly building up my career,... trying to think of a way to do something with Cubism that was personal. I became very much interested in combining American primitives and the curves and details of period pieces and placing them in a Cubist format....

The forties were a wonderful period in New York. Because of World War II painters and sculptors like Miró and Henry Moore were in town.... Being young I took being in the company of these geniuses for granted, but I did sense that these supertalents were a great breed, totally modest, utterly natural, friendly and sympathetic to young Americans and absolutely indifferent as to the sex of artists they admired. That was true of all the American artists I met then—de Kooning, Pollock, Stuart Davis, Milton Avery, Franz Kline....

I was a member of the American Abstract Artists who showed yearly in New York. They always got a fair amount of attention and were always well reviewed. Now that membership is very helpful among my credits.

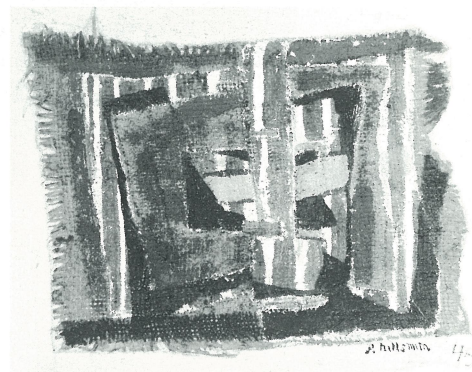
In the early '40s, Pollock and de Kooning burst on the world and everything changed. Suddenly there was a one hundred percent American art and that delighted critics and museum directors—and I mean one hundred per cent. Not a whisper of the past. One night after an art meeting I was waiting for a bus along with a curator from the Modern Museum. "It's the first time we've had something in the art world that isn't influenced by Europe," he said. "We must push it to the hilt." And so American Abstract Expressionism was born and gradually painters and sculptors like the American Abstract Artists, including me, were pushed on to the back burner. I remember leaving a party at the same time as Jackson Pollock. "How's your painting going," he said. I felt like saying, "well, it would be going a lot better if you hadn't invented drip."...

A friend of mine, Jane Thorne, planning her thesis at Radcliffe forty years ago wanted to write about the differences in the work of men and women. She approached two women artists. One was nationally famous and the big name in Boston. Both refused to cooperate, saying there was no difference. Well, that is burying your head in the sand. As with women and male poets, there certainly are male and female characteristics that show up in art. And *vive la différence!* On any jury I've served on, I'd say I was ninety per cent right in spotting the difference. Women are more into color and detail and men into more power of planes and depth. But these differences are not absolute. For instance Braque, a real he-man in his strength as a person and painter, used the delicate mauves and creams and off-whites that he could weave in among the strong structures of planes on his canvases....

In closing, I'd like to say to any aspiring artists, "whether you make it or not, go for it. Whether you win or lose, it's worth it." And here's a little advice from Mark Rothko. I met him on the street in the mid-forties. "Oh, Mark," I said, "how wonderful to have a full page color ad in *Vogue*. That must have helped a lot." The fact that it was in color and not just in an art magazine was quite something. "No," he said, "I think it hindered." He was very dour.

"How is your painting going," he asked. "It takes so long to paint a big canvas," I said. "Oh," he brightened up, "just use a bigger brush. Goodbye."

Excerpts from a statement made during a panel discussion at the Thorne Sagendorph Gallery, New York, 16 October 1994.



Fannie Hillsmith, *Abstraction*, 1945
Catalogue number 8



Gypsy Rose Lee, mid 1940's

ART OF THIS CENTURY EXHIBITION ROSTERS

Artists included in both exhibitions are listed in italics.

Artists invited but not exhibited in "The Women" are underlined.

EXHIBITION BY 31 WOMEN

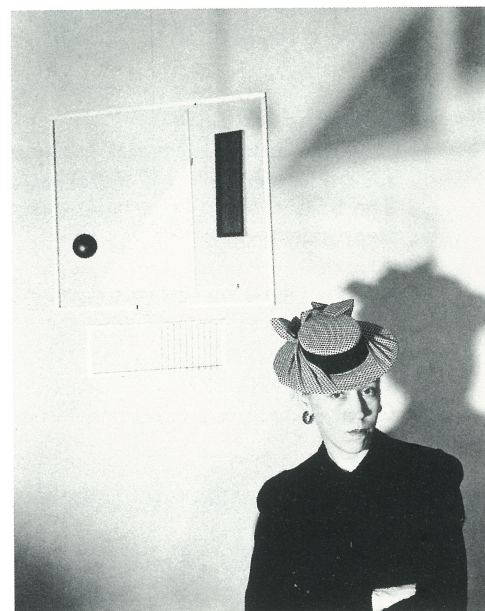
5 - 31 January 1943

Djuna Barnes
Xenia Cage
Leonora Carrington
Marie-Helene Vieira da Silva
Eyre da Lunux
Leonor Fini
Elsa Freytag von Loringhoven
Suzy Frelinghuysen
Meraud Guevera
Annie Harvey
Valentine Hugo
Buffie Johnson
Frida Kahlo
Jacqueline Lamba
Gypsy Rose Lee
Aline Meyer Liebman
Hazel McKinley
Milena
Louise Nevelson
Meret Oppenheim
Barbara Reis
Irene Rice Pereira
Kay Sage
Sonia Sekula
Gretchen Schoeninger
Esphyr Slobodkina
Hedda Sterne
Dorothea Tanning
Sophie Tauber-Arp
Julia Thecla
Pegeen Vail

THE WOMEN

12 June - 7 July 1945

Virginia Admiral
Nell Blaine
Louise Bourgeois
Xenia Cage
Leonora Carrington
Ronnie Elliott
Perle Fine
Annie Harvey
Fannie Hillsmith
Lenore Krassner
Jacqueline Lamba
Gypsy Rose Lee
Muriel (Streeter) Levy
Dolia Lorient
Loren MacIver
Alice Trumbull Mason
McKee
Peter Miller
Ann Neagoe
Alice (Rahon) Paalen
Helen Phillips
Patricia Phillips
Barbara Reis
Irene Rice Pereira
Kay Sage
Sonia Sekula
Janet Sobel
Hedda Sterne
Julia Thecla
Pegeen Vail
Isabelle Waldberg
Charmion von Wiegand
Catherine Yarrow



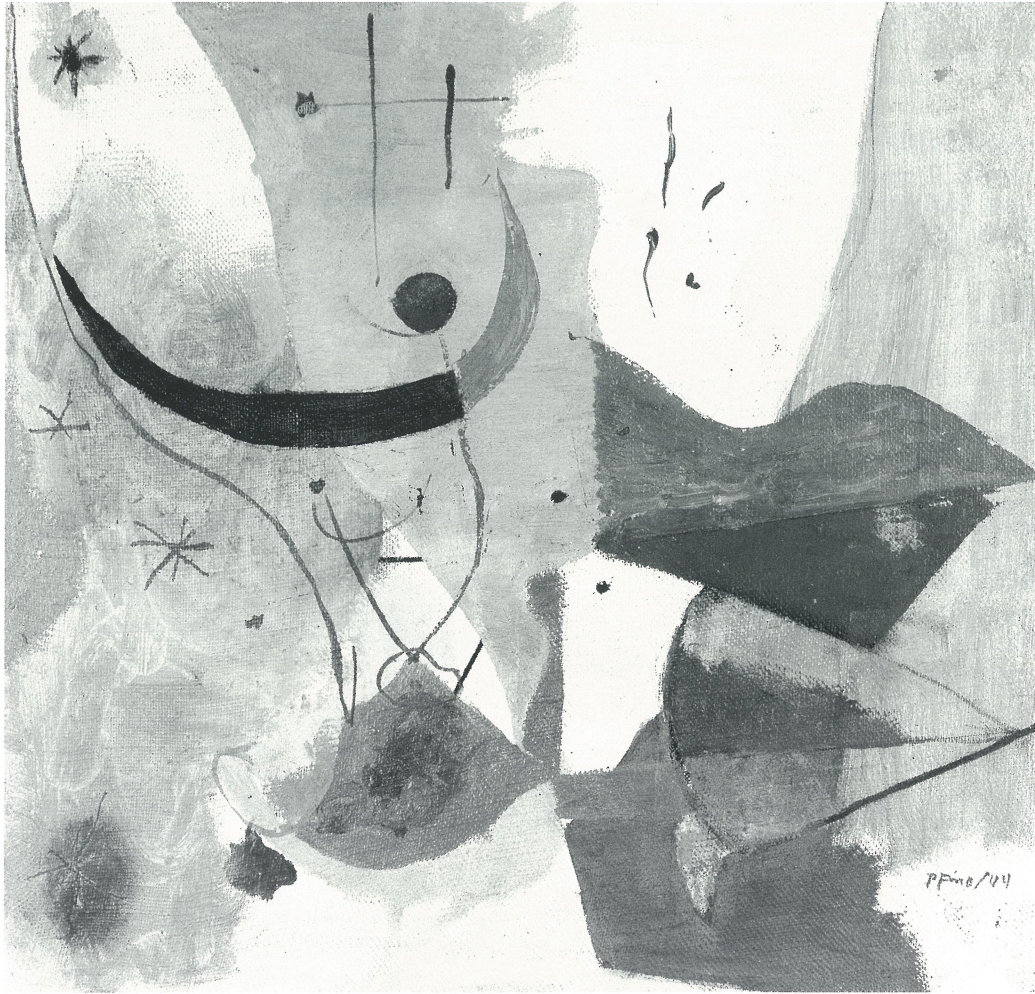
Xenia Cage in front of one of her wall hangings, 1942

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

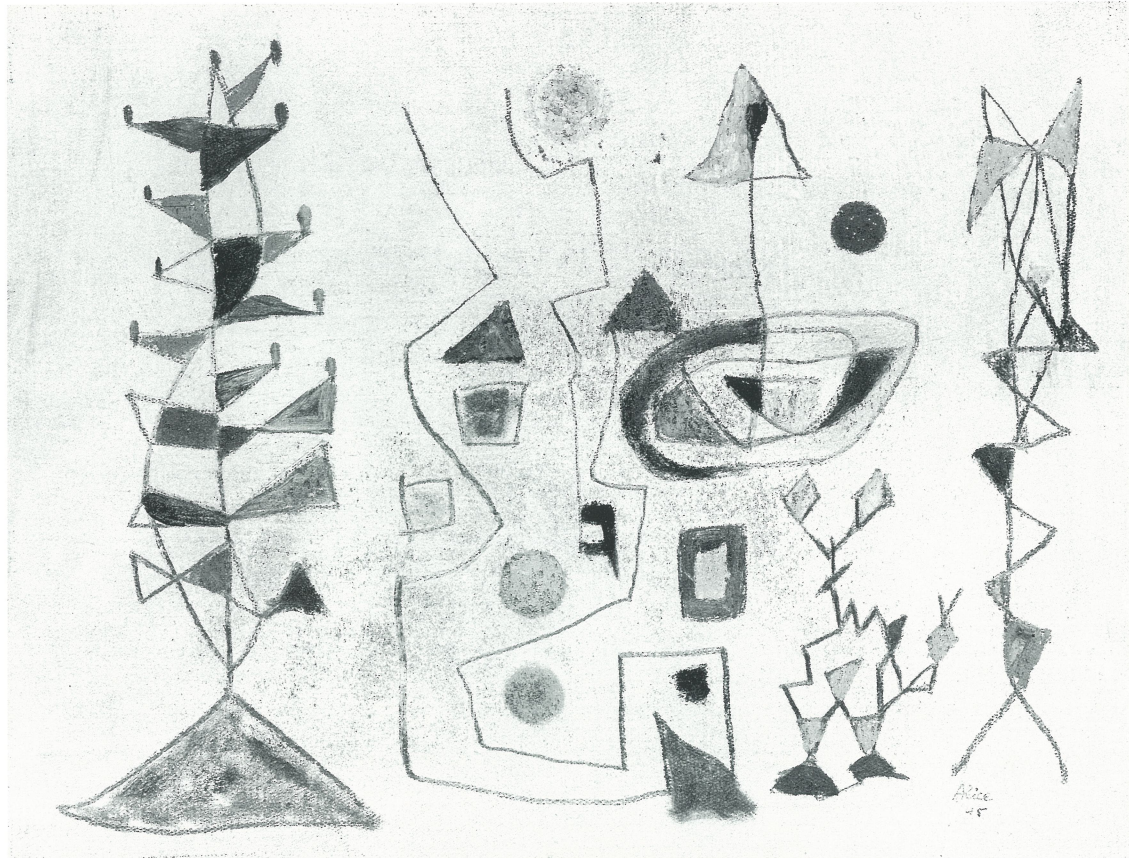
Pieces included in the original exhibitions at Art of This Century are marked with one asterisk (*) for those in "Exhibition by 31 Women" and two (**) for those in "The Women."

1. Virginia Admiral (born 1915)
***Blue Composition*, 1943-44
Oil on canvas, 36 x 30 inches
Lent by the artist
Color Plate, page 27
2. Nell Blaine (1922-1996)
***Blue Pieces*, 1944
Oil on canvas, 46 x 24 inches
Courtesy of Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York
Color Plate, page 31
3. Leonora Carrington (born 1917)
**The Horses of Lord Candlestick*, 1939
Oil on canvas, 23 1/2 x 36 inches
Lent by Karole Vail
Reproduced on page 6
4. Ronnie Elliott (1910-1982)
Collage Number 22, 1947
Gouache and fabrics on paper, 20 3/4 x 15 1/2 inches
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gift of John P. Knapp, 1982
Color Plate, page 32
5. Perle Fine (1905-1988)
Enigma, 1944
Oil on canvas, 10 1/8 x 10 1/2 inches
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Reproduced on page 44
6. Leonor Fini (1908-1996)
**The Shepherdess of the Sphinxes*, 1941
Oil on canvas, 18 3/16 x 15 1/16 inches
The Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice
Color Plate, Front Cover
7. Suzy Frelinghuysen (1911-1988)
Composition, 1941
Oil on masonite, 22 x 18 inches
Suzy Frelinghuysen and George L.K. Morris Foundation
Reproduced on page 19
8. Fannie Hillsmith (born 1911)
Abstraction, 1945
Oil and burlap on board, 8 x 10 inches
Courtesy Susan Teller Gallery, New York
Reproduced on page 39
9. Valentine Hugo (1890-1968)
Premier projet pour un portrait d'André Breton, 1934
Watercolor and pastel on paper, 15 7/8 x 12 7/8 inches
Lent by André Alexander Baum, New York
Color Plate, page 26
10. Buffie Johnson (born 1912)
Zenobia, 1940
Oil on canvas, 24 x 20 inches
Lent by the artist
Reproduced on page 37
11. Frida Kahlo (1907-1954)
Self-Portrait, 1939
Pencil and colored pencil on tracing paper,
11 3/4 x 8 1/4 inches
Private collection
Color Plate, page 26
12. Lee Krasner (1908-1984)
Untitled (study for Lavender #1), 1942
Gouache and pencil on paper, 11 x 14 inches
Courtesy of Robert Miller Gallery, New York
Color Plate, page 29
13. Jacqueline Lamba (1910-1993)
In Spite of Everything, Spring, 1942
Oil on canvas, 43 5/8 x 60 3/4 inches
Private collection
Color Plate, page 25
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***Farmyard (The World War)*, 1945
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Forget-Me-Nots, 1945
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Untitled, 1946
Gouache on board, 20 3/8 x 18 inches
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gift of Mrs.
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Perle Fine, *Enigma*, 1944
Catalogue number 5



Alice Rahon Paalen, *L'Arbe du Matin*, 1945
Catalogue number 19



Loren MacIver, *Forget-Me-Nots*, 1945
Catalogue number 15



Pegeen Vail, *At the Seaside*, 1945
Catalogue number 27



Loren MacIver, *Forget-Me-Nots*, 1945
Catalogue number 15



Pegeen Vail, *At the Seaside*, 1945
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