

JUDY CHICAGO
HERSTORY

**THE CITY OF
LADIES**

**NEW
MUSEUM**

THE CITY OF LADIES

As part of Judy Chicago's six-decade survey, the New Museum's Fourth Floor galleries present a special group installation, titled "The City of Ladies." Named after medieval writer and historiographer Christine de Pisan's 1405 *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* [The Book of the City of Ladies]—a proto-feminist catalogue of renowned women in history, including artists, inventors, warriors, scholars, and saints—"The City of Ladies" looks at Judy Chicago's practice in context. This show-within-a-show displays Chicago's work alongside artworks and archival materials by nearly ninety women and genderqueer artists, writers, and historical figures that she has placed within her own alternative canon—Hilma af Klint, Claude Cahun, Leonora Carrington, Elizabeth Catlett, Emily Dickinson, Artemisia Gentileschi, Zora Neale Hurston, Lois Mailou Jones, Frida Kahlo, Florine Stettheimer, Hildegard von Bingen, and Virginia Woolf, among others. Part expanded self-portrait and part revisionist historical archive, the installation is a testament to Chicago's manifold contributions as an activist, researcher, and cultural preservationist throughout her sixty-year career. It recalls her endeavors as both a pedagogue and an artist throughout numerous large-scale, long-term projects, including the Feminist Art Program (1971–72), "Womanhouse" (1972), *The Great Ladies Series* (1971–73), *The Reincarnation Triptych* (1973), *The Dinner Party* (1974–79), and the *Birth Project* (1980–85).

Combining significant artworks and source materials in a distinctive exploration of artistic influences and reverberations across history, "The City of Ladies" proposes a new model for

a solo exhibition—an "introspective" rather than a retrospective. Here, the artist is invited to create a personal museum, based on a model of historiography that is porous, hospitable, and reciprocal. In this display, Chicago's investment in abstraction and its capacity to catalog new forms of experiences reverberates with works by the likes of af Klint and Georgiana Houghton, who, in turn, anticipate the sublime expansiveness of Agnes Pelton and Georgia O'Keeffe. Chicago's pursuit of learning in communion with nature connects this sense of cosmic stupor to ecofeminist preoccupations, which also haunt the landscapes inhabited by the many chthonian divinities imagined by Surrealist painters like Carrington, Kahlo, Leonor Fini, and Dorothea Tanning. Avenging goddesses and powerful mothers stand sentinel to these secret worlds, celebrating matrilineal cultures of the past. New conceptions of the self emerge in the many self-portraits collected in this personal museum, which also traces traditions of identity shifting, playacting, and masking, as well as other fantasies, confessionals, and performances of gender and sexuality.

Encapsulating the disruptive spirit of artist-curated exhibitions and the transhistorical nature of Chicago's research interests, the installation—presented beneath the golden banners of Chicago's 2020 series *The Female Divine*—deploys a broad range of subject matter to create a personal cosmos in which artworks, documents, objects, and relics are connected across histories and biographies. In this atlas of affinities and intellectual predecessors, the voices of the multitude of artists Chicago has loved and championed coalesce with her own. As Chicago says, "If you bring Judy Chicago into the museum, you bring women's history into the museum."

Hilma af Klint

b. 1862, Solna, Sweden; d. 1944, Djursholm, Sweden

Group IX/UW, The Dove, no. 2, 1915

Oil on canvas

The Hilma af Klint Foundation

After her death in a streetcar accident at the age of eighty-one, the Swedish artist and mystic Hilma af Klint left behind hundreds of monumental abstract paintings and works on paper, predating the breakthroughs of canonical male abstract artists Kazimir Malevich, Vasily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, and František Kupka by several years. Further amplifying the astonishing volume of her life's work are the contents of her archive: over 20,000 pages of writings, 126 annotated notebooks, numerous sketchpads, a book manuscript, and a dictionary describing her own arcane linguistic systems. Af Klint's interests—an idiosyncratic blend of beliefs drawn from turn-of-the-century occultist movements and emergent scientific concepts of the cosmological and the microbial—take the form of mesmerizing abstractions, vivid celestial curves, and logarithmic geometries.

In 1896, af Klint and four female friends founded a spiritualist group known as “De Fem,” or the Five, thus beginning a lifelong research project on embodiments of the abstract. Together, the Five dedicated themselves to mediumship; they held regular séances in order to communicate with spiritual guides beyond the physical world, and extensively documented the instructions they received through automatic writings and drawings. It was during one of these séances, in 1905, that af Klint would receive a spiritual “commission” to create *The Paintings for the Temple* (1906–15), a 193-painting cycle of which the magnetic pink-purple *Group IX/UW, The Dove, no. 2* is part. By the time af Klint began *The Dove* series, however, she no longer felt that a spirit was acting through her; rather, af Klint believed she was receiving and interpreting messages herself. Drawing from Christian iconography and allegorical symbols—such as emblems for peace and unity, signs of the zodiac, and references to the legend of Saint George and the Dragon—the fourteen paintings that make up *The Dove* series are shaped by what is ultimately unknowable in the universe. **mw**

Eileen Agar

b. 1899, Buenos Aires, Argentina; d. 1991, London, UK

Photograph of rocks in Ploumanac’h, July 1936

Gelatin silver prints

Facsimiles

Tate

Dissatisfied with the traditional education she received at the Slade School of Arts in London, Eileen Agar traveled to Paris in 1929, where she met the Surrealists André Breton and Paul Éluard and began painting lessons with the Czech Cubist František Foltýn. During the 1930s, she began to incorporate natural objects in her works—such as shells, horns, and fossils—to explore combinations of forms, adopting collage as an ideal medium to create unexpected imagery. Though Agar displayed her work in the International Surrealist Exhibition in London in 1936—and was one of only a few women to be offered inclusion along with artists such as Leonor Fini, Méret Oppenheim, Dora Maar, and Toyen—she didn't formally identify as part of the Surrealist movement.

After the show, Agar journeyed to Brittany, France with Joseph Bard where she discovered the Ploumanac’h rock formations depicted in this series. Intrigued by their unusual shape, she described them as “enormous prehistoric monsters sleeping on the turf above the sea.” Using a Rolleiflex camera acquired on the trip, Agar explored the poetic and metamorphic quality of the rocks with a sense of humor—some of the pieces in the series are titled *Rockface, or Bum and Thumb Rock*—and approached them as natural *objets trouvés*. At Ploumanac’h she saw how the surreal already existed in the world, predating any attempts made by artists to visually produce it. These forms were not constructed but natural, captured like frozen relics sculpted by hazard, time, and erosion. These images resonate with Judy Chicago's experiments in her *Atmospheres* series, beginning in 1968, which treat the landscape as feminized and utopian. Both artists adopt a view of the natural world that is in harmony with humanity, anticipating the ecofeminist discussions of today. **lh**

Anni Albers

b. 1899, Berlin, Germany; d. 1994, Orange, CT

Matzah Cover, 1959

Bast fiber and metallic threads; metallic cellophane

The Jewish Museum, New York. Gift of Elaine

Lustig Cohen, 2021-63

Anni Albers—groundbreaking weaver, printmaker, and educator—is best known for her intricate wall hangings, fabrics, and designs, which combine a rigorous and instinctual grasp of materials with a formally radical study of color and composition. Although Albers (née Annelise Fleischmann) wanted to study painting when she enrolled at the Bauhaus in 1922, women were prevented from joining most of the school's courses, which included wall painting, carpentry, metalwork, and more, and were instead siloed in the school's weaving workshop. Despite this restriction, Albers devoted herself to weaving; it would become the field in which she would make her contribution to modernism. In 1933—two years after becoming head of the Bauhaus weaving workshop—Albers and her husband, the artist Josef Albers, fled Germany for the United States, and the Bauhaus shuttered under mounting Nazi antagonism. From 1933 until 1949, they would lead the art program at Black Mountain College in Asheville, North Carolina, modeling their interdisciplinary curriculum closely on the Bauhaus. Albers's 1965 book, *On Weaving*, a landmark history and argument for the reconsideration of accepted hierarchies between art and craft, was a key influence for Judy Chicago.

Following her tenure at Black Mountain College, Albers continued to experiment with fiber as a tool of communication. On occasion, Albers, who was raised in a secular Jewish household, experimented with forms of Judaica, developing Torah ark curtains for two synagogues with what she called “thread hieroglyphs,” and creating other ritual objects such as *Matzah Cover* (1959). This matzah cover, a textile meant to cover the three pieces of unleavened bread placed at the center of the Passover table, was commissioned for the designer Elaine Lustig Cohen and her husband Arthur Cohen, family friends of Albers. Emblazoned in gold metallic thread with the Hebrew word for “matzah,” and woven in horizontal and diagonal bands of gold, blue, and green fiber, this object makes use of modern design and craft to honor an ancient biblical story. **mw**

Lola Álvarez Bravo

b. 1907, Lagos de Moreno, Mexico; d. 1993, Mexico City, Mexico

Destello, Seguros, La República

[Glare, Seguros, La República], ca. 1960–70

Gelatin silver print

Courtesy Throckmorton Fine Art

Born Dolores Martínez, Lola Álvarez Bravo was introduced to the camera by her husband, Manuel Álvarez Bravo, whom she married in Mexico City in 1925. When they separated in 1934, Lola turned to photography to support herself and her son, winning her own space in the post-revolutionary artistic scene. Álvarez Bravo described her photographic work as a “chronicle of her country.” She wanted to transcend the ethnographic gaze and portray contemporary Mexico from a new perspective. She documented urban and social transformations—such as the struggles of indigenous people and rural workers traveling around the territory—and developed a personal style marked by her ability to capture informal moments of people's lives in carefully composed scenes using a large format camera.

As seen in this image of the Monumento a la Independencia of Mexico City—most commonly known by the name El Ángel, or the Angel—her formal aesthetic often bordered on abstraction, incorporating the play of light and shadow on surfaces as strong compositional elements. Through her skillful camera work, she transforms the static monument into a dynamic, awe-inspiring machine, animated by the spirit of the Mexican people. A strong believer in photography's capacity to empower Mexico's people, Álvarez Bravo ascribed a social role to her work beyond aesthetic experience, as evidenced in *Destello, Seguros, La República* (ca. 1960–70). With the aim of building a robust national photographic scene, she dedicated part of her life to teaching. From 1945 to 1960, Bravo directed the Taller Libre de Fotografía [Free Photography Workshop] at San Carlos Academy, where she cultivated a style of contemporary Mexican black-and-white photography. **lh**

Anna Atkins

b. 1799, Tonbridge, UK; d. 1871, Halstead, UK
Callithamnion gracillimum, ca. 1843–53
Cyanotype
Facsimile
Spencer Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach
Division of Art, Prints and Photographs,
The New York Public Library

In 1843, just two decades after the invention of the first photographic process, artist and botanist Anna Atkins published *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*. This groundbreaking volume—widely regarded as the first book to be illustrated entirely with photographic images and considered by some to be the first photographic work by a woman author—contains illustrations of different species of algae created using the cyanotype. Also known as the “blueprint” process, the cyanotype produces distinctive, blue-toned images and had only been discovered the preceding year by the English scientist Sir John Herschel. Merging the scientific pursuit of taxonomic identification with cutting-edge technology and an eye for aesthetic delectation, this book demonstrates that Atkins, who was not widely recognized during her lifetime, made significant and undeniable contributions to both the scientific and artistic fields.

In the cyanotype process, a surface sensitized with ferric ammonium citrate and potassium ferricyanide is exposed to UV light, synthesizing the Prussian blue compound and creating a cyan-tinted silhouette of any object placed on its surface. In *Callithamnion gracillimum* (ca. 1843–53), the cyanotype process has been used to capture an image of the titular species of red algae found primarily in marine environments. Simple to achieve, cyanotype can only recreate basic shapes or outlines and is not able to capture fine details or subtle tonal variations. Nevertheless, Atkins clearly identified a kind of poetry in employing a light-based process to capture images of photosynthetic organisms, whose simple and elegant geometries naturally lend themselves to this means of reproduction. Her cyanotypes are a methodical archive of nature’s creative power, reflecting an impulse to catalogue the profound wonder of the universe and the living beings that inhabit it. **iw**

Alice Austen

b. 1866, Staten Island, NY; d. 1952, Staten Island, NY
The Darned Club, 1891
Gelatin silver print
Facsimile

Daisy Elliott on a bicycle, ca. 1895
Gelatin silver print

Daisy Elliott posed on a bicycle, ca. 1895
Gelatin silver print

All works courtesy Historic Richmond Town

Alice Austen was raised in Staten Island by a large family that supported her artistic development. At ten, she began using her uncle’s camera to take photographs, which another uncle—a chemistry professor—taught her to develop. By early adulthood, Austen had established her own visual language for portraying everyday experience, though she chose to remain an “amateur” and did not pursue photography professionally. Her images often feature female friends and lovers, and provide representations of queer intimate relationships at a time when women rarely took photographs outside the studio. A feeling of homosocial affection permeates compositions like *The Darned Club* (1891), which features Austen and several close friends in a tender embrace.

Austen remained on Staten Island for her entire life and was an active participant in numerous community initiatives and social events. She was part of a group of women cyclists and collaborated with her friend Maria E. Ward, nicknamed Violet, on a book titled *Bicycling for Ladies* (1896). In the 1890s, widespread popularization of the bicycle was closely linked to women’s emancipation, as the new transportation method facilitated greater mobility and independence. Biking also led women to adopt a loose style of trousers called bloomers, a fashion development that scandalized conservatives. For Ward’s publication, Austen took instructional photographs of her lover Daisy Elliott mounting and riding a bicycle in bloomers, which were reproduced as hand-drawn illustrations. Throughout her photographic oeuvre and personal relationships, Austen articulated a woman-centered vision of daily life, resisting heteronormativity and social convention. **ld**

Djuna Barnes

b. 1892, Cornwall-on-Hudson, NY; d. 1982, New York, NY
The Book of Repulsive Women: 8 Rhythms and 5 Drawings, 1915
Publisher: Bruno Chap Books (New York)
Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Born in a log cabin to an eccentric family of artists and suffragists, Djuna Barnes gained prominence for her depictions of bohemian life in works of literature, illustration, and journalism. Regarded as a flâneuse who moved deftly between artistic circles in Greenwich Village and Paris, Barnes inhabited a milieu that included prominent Modernist figures like Gertrude Stein, Peggy Guggenheim, T.S. Eliot, and her close friend Mina Loy. Her most celebrated work, the novel *Nightwood* (1936), is one of the earliest depictions of an openly lesbian relationship in literature and draws heavily from the author’s tumultuous affair with silverpoint artist Thelma Wood.

The Book of Repulsive Women (1915) is Barnes’s first published volume, comprised of eight poems and five drawings. Set in the seedy underworld of 1910s New York City, the book depicts women transgressing the limits of respectable society. Figures including sex workers, cabaret performers, and lesbians traverse the city, engaging in unorthodox behavior. Featuring stylized, fantastical forms and lurid prose, the book recalls the Decadent movement of the late nineteenth century, which similarly repudiated conservative social mores. In her poem “Twilight of the Illicit,” often interpreted as an articulation of queer subjectivity, Barnes describes a subversive woman who personifies “the twilight powder of / A fire-wet dawn.” Embodying the excessive and abject, Barnes’s “repulsive” subjects represent a challenge to bourgeois order and traditional gender roles. **ld**

Simone de Beauvoir

b. 1908, Paris, France; d. 1986, Paris, France
Le deuxième sexe [The Second Sex], 1949
Publisher: Gallimard (Paris)
Two volumes
Private collection

Throughout a life spanning nearly the entire twentieth century, philosopher Simone de Beauvoir witnessed seismic shifts in women’s social position. Raised in a devout Catholic family, she traded religious doctrine for philosophy, becoming the youngest person ever to pass France’s fiercely competitive postgraduate philosophy exam, or *agrégation*. Over the course of her long career, she produced fiction, autobiography, theory, journalism, diaries, letters, and essays, all of which articulate her commitment to freedom and personal transformation.

Her 1949 treatise *Le deuxième sexe* [The Second Sex] is among the most influential works of feminist theory. Nearly a thousand pages long, the text unpacks millennia of mythmaking around femininity, tracing the roots of women’s historical oppression. Later compiled into a single book, it was originally published in two volumes, with cover art designed by French artist Mario Prassinos. Its oft-repeated line, “one is not born, but rather becomes, woman,” situates gender as socially constructed, rather than biologically determined—a revelation for women of Beauvoir’s generation. Foundational to subsequent feminists like Kate Millet, Judy Chicago, and Judith Butler, *Le deuxième sexe* represents an extraordinary contribution to twentieth century thought and political consciousness. For Chicago in particular, who read *Le deuxième sexe* during her “self-guided study tour of women’s history,” Beauvoir’s writings have been a major source of inspiration. This can be observed through Chicago’s late 1960s reevaluation of women’s history to more recent projects like *The End: A Meditation on Death and Extinction* (2012–18). **ld**

Otti Berger

b. 1898, Vörösmart, Hungary (now Zmajevac, Croatia); d. ca. 1944, Auschwitz Concentration Camp, Oświęcim, Poland

Fabric swatch book, ca. 1932–35

Black cardboard envelope with 21 textile samples
Zürcher Hochschule der Künste/Museum für Gestaltung Zürich/Designsammlung

The gifted weaver Otti Berger enrolled at the Bauhaus in Dessau in 1927, where she joined the school's weaving workshop. There, Berger developed a style characterized by bold colors, geometric forms, and the use of unconventional materials to create functional fabrics. After briefly teaching in the Bauhaus weaving workshop from 1931–32, Berger established her own textile studio in Berlin where she began to seek patents for her innovative textiles. Berger's many innovations included sound-absorbing, light-reflecting, and water- and tear-resistant technologies. Despite constant Nazi threat while running her atelier, Berger also designed collections for textile manufacturers in Germany and further afield. This fabric swatch book, produced while working as a contractor for Swiss interior design company Wohnbedarf AG, contains twenty-one pieces of fabric in various designs, colors, and weaves made from stabilized synthetic dyes and mercerized cotton. Significantly, after being denied fair remuneration for much of her commercial design work, evidence suggests that Berger was able to obtain copyrights for her designs for Wohnbedarf AG.

Unlike more famous Bauhaus weavers like Anni Albers and Gunta Stözl, whose legacies were, in part, secured by their successful emigration out of war-torn Germany, Berger's story diverges. As a foreign Jew, Berger was prohibited from practicing her profession by the Nazis in 1936. Even after fleeing to London, she struggled to find a professional foothold. Although Berger planned to escape to the United States with her partner, the architect Ludwig Hilberseimer, as had many of her Bauhaus peers (László Moholy-Nagy had promised Berger a management position at the textile workshop of the New Bauhaus in Chicago), she returned to her hometown Zmajevac from London in 1938 to care for her sick mother. As the destructive forces of World War II ravaged on, opportunities to emigrate grew thinner. From Zmajevac, Berger applied unsuccessfully for an exit visa to travel to the US. Berger, along with her older brother and sister-in-law were murdered in the gas chambers of Auschwitz; her younger brother Otto was the only member of her family to survive the Holocaust. **mw**

Annie Besant

b. 1847, London, UK; d. 1933, Madras (now Chennai), India

Pages from *Thought-Forms: A Record of Clairvoyant Investigation*, 1905 (1925 edition)

Publisher: Theosophical Publishing Society (London)

Private collection

Freethinker, social reformer, journalist, publisher and editor, atheist, birth control advocate, socialist, and theosophist, Annie Besant maintained many identities throughout her life and moved through many different social and political spheres. A member and eventual leader of the Theosophical Society—the international organization of mystic philosophers—Besant promoted a philosophy of interdisciplinarity, in which spiritual engagement and holistic living were seen as a balm to industrialization and the increasing fracturing of the social collective. In keeping with Theosophy's emphasis on the study of South and East Asian religious cultures, Besant began living primarily in India in 1893. There, she founded the Central Hindu College in Varanasi and was temporarily put under house arrest as a result of her advocacy for Indian self-rule.

During this period, Besant was inspired to develop a visual language for the representation of ideas, which she called "thought forms." Along with fellow theosophist C.W. Leadbeater, Besant published the formative occultist book *Thought-Forms* in 1905, a compendium of the pair's clairvoyant visual manifestations. According to theosophical teachings of the times, emotions and thoughts could be translated into colors and forms, visible only to those endowed with extraordinary clairvoyant capabilities. In this case, Besant and Leadbeater's abstract thoughts are visualized in a series of fifty-eight richly colored abstract watercolors, completed by a group of the authors' friends via dictation. Long overlooked as a pillar in the history of abstraction, the otherworldly illustrations—seen here in the form of loose sheets from the first color edition of the publication—reverberate with the excited pursuit of the unseeable, a testament to the authors' premise that "thoughts are things." **mw**

Hildegard von Bingen

b. ca. 1098, Bermersheim vor der Höhe, Germany; d. 1179, Bingen, Germany

Liber Divinorum Operum [The Book of Divine Works], 1163–74 (illuminated version, 1220–30)

Manuscript

Biblioteca Statale di Lucca

The mystic, polymath nun Saint Hildegard von Bingen was one of the most complex figures of the Middle Ages. She is most famous for the divine visions she experienced throughout her life which she preserved in three substantial illustrated volumes. Hildegard was a prodigious writer on topics such as medicine and natural history, and she composed poetry and hymns far ahead of their time. Hildegard was also a charismatic leader who built a large following, established two separate monasteries, and corresponded with popes and emperors who acknowledged her gifts and tolerated her sometimes unsolicited opinions on political and religious affairs. She is one of only four women to be named Doctor of the Church. The late twentieth century brought a robust wave of renewed study in Hildegard's work by feminist thinkers who have found remarkably contemporary ideas synthesized in her personal philosophy.

Born into a family of low nobility, she was reportedly sent to a monastery in Disibodenberg in southern Germany at the age of eight. Although her spiritual visions began early, she did not feel called to record and illustrate them until her forties. A group of collaborators assisted in transcribing these visions and producing the idiosyncratic illustrations that accompany them. Of the three volumes, the last and greatest, *Liber Divinorum Operum* [Book of Divine Works], was composed from approximately 1163 to 1174. The only surviving illustrated version is preserved in the state library in Lucca, Italy and was produced in the first fifty years after Hildegard's death. *Liber Divinorum Operum* is the most comprehensive summation of Hildegard's experience of receiving divine wisdom and outlines a cosmology where all aspects of creation are connected through divine love. One of Hildegard's most lasting theological concepts was that of *viriditas*, or viridity, which she used to express the connection between humans, God, and the natural world. Hildegard's ability to manipulate and transgress the patriarchal boundaries of theology, musical composition, and Church politics made her uniquely influential to women like Judy Chicago, who would include Hildegard in the thirty-nine place settings of *The Dinner Party* (1974–79). **gcm**

Rosa Bonheur

b. 1822, Bordeaux, France; d. 1899, Fontainebleau, France

Permission de travestissement accordée à Rosa Bonheur, par le préfet de Police Paris [Permission to cross-dress granted to Rosa Bonheur, by the prefect of the Paris Police], ca. 1850–62

Document

Facsimile

Private collection

Born in Bordeaux, artist Rosa Bonheur was trained by her father, a landscape painter and loyal adherent of the utopian socialist Saint Simonist movement, which promoted gender equality and women's education. Bonheur's reputation grew quickly with successive exhibitions at the Paris Salon, where she earned high praise for painting "almost like a man." By the mid-nineteenth century, Bonheur had established herself as the era's preeminent animal painter, renowned for detailed canvases depicting animals in motion, including *Ploughing in the Nivernais* (1849) and *The Horse Fair* (1852–55).

To avoid harassment at painting sites—including slaughterhouses, livestock markets, and farms—Bonheur needed to trade her skirts for more inconspicuous trousers. However, an 1800 French law had made it illegal for women to don masculine attire, unless officially granted a cross-dressing permit by the authorities. Bonheur was one of only a few women who obtained permission to wear pants in public, with the caveat that men's dress would not be permitted at "spectacles, balls or other public meeting places." Though enforcement of the law ceased by the early twentieth century, it was only officially repealed in 2013.

While Bonheur was widely respected by her peers, becoming the first female artist to receive the prestigious Legion of Honor, she often disregarded convention in order to live by her own principles. In addition to wearing trousers, she rode her horse astride, styled her hair short, smoked, and cohabitated for decades with a female life partner. Her life and work represent an early and rare example in Western art history of a woman achieving major commercial success while refusing to capitulate to normative social values. **LD**

Marianne Brandt

b. 1893, Chemnitz, Germany; d. 1983, Kirchberg, Germany

Untitled (Self Portrait with Jewelry for the Metal Party), 1929
Gelatin silver print
Facsimile
Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau

The designs for household objects that Marianne Brandt created at the Weimar Bauhaus—first as a student under László Moholy-Nagy and later as deputy head of the school's metal workshop—are canonical examples of the principles of modern industrial design. Her iconic metalwork household items—including ashtrays, lamps, and tea sets—incorporate elements of the then-emergent industrial and modernist movements, reflecting the revolutionary and iconoclastic spirit of the Bauhaus. Equally groundbreaking was Brandt's successful pursuit of a career in a male-dominated profession that was an unconventional choice for women at the time.

Less well-known than her industrial designs are Brandt's works in painting and photography; the fifty-odd photomontages she produced between 1924 and 1932 remained largely unseen until three decades after their creation. A frequent focus in her photomontages is the topic of the *Neue Frau* ("New Woman") ideal, then omnipresent in popular magazines. Brandt's self-portraits similarly play with feminine self-presentation in a manner more clearly aligned with industrial design than with the coquettish or seductive stylings of the preceding century. In this self-portrait taken in 1929, Brandt transforms herself into a proto-cyborg, adorned with a metallic disk worn on her head and a ball bearing clasped around her neck. Wearing a short haircut and a simple, monochromatic dress, Brandt models a new concept of femininity divorced from the pleasure of the male gaze and instead streamlined, efficient, and machinic. **iw**

Romaine Brooks

b. 1874, Rome, Italy; d. 1970, Nice, France

Una, Lady Troubridge, 1924
Oil on canvas
Smithsonian American Art Museum. Gift of the artist

Romaine Brooks was an American painter who lived primarily in Europe. She is best known for her captivating portraits of the artists, writers, bohemians, and aristocrats with whom she surrounded herself in the early part of the twentieth century. Many of these figures gathered in the salon organized by the writer Natalie Barney, with whom Brooks had a romantic partnership that lasted more than fifty years. Their circle included intellectuals such as Gertrude Stein, Isadora Duncan, Peggy Guggenheim, and Truman Capote, though Brooks mostly restricted her subjects to those closest to her, including Barney, the dancer Ida Rubinstein, and the painter Gluck, whose work is also included in this exhibition. Although her subdued figurative style is seemingly at odds with contemporaneous modernist movements—the gradations of gray in her palette were most often compared to those of Whistler—Brooks's work was groundbreaking in its documentation of a generation whose queerness was lived in a markedly open manner and who used fashion and language to play with gender identity in ways that were truly modern.

One of Brooks's most famous portraits was painted in 1924 of Una Vincenzo, Lady Troubridge. Troubridge was part of Brooks's larger social group, and the painter represented her as a stark, stylish figure in masculine attire. The monocle, high collar shirt, and tailored jacket capture Troubridge's aristocratic background and indicate the style favored by some lesbians in England at the time. Brooks did not intend for the portrait to be entirely flattering and the rigid, self-serious demeanor of the sitter caused significant tension in their friendship. Troubridge's longtime partner was the poet and novelist Radclyffe Hall, who wrote a variety of books including *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) which was banned for its lesbian themes. Brooks, Barney, and Hall all have their names included on the Heritage Floor of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974–79). **gcm**

Nannie Helen Burroughs

b. 1879, Orange, Virginia; d. 1961, Washington, DC

Nine African American women posed, standing, full length, with Nannie Burroughs holding banner reading, "Banner State Woman's National Baptist Convention," ca. 1905–15
Gelatin silver print
Facsimile
Library of Congress, Washington, DC

Nannie Helen Burroughs was an educator and religious leader who advocated for civil and women's rights in the early to mid-twentieth century. The daughter of parents born into slavery, Burroughs moved with her family to Washington, DC, where she studied to become a teacher. Though she excelled academically, she was rejected for jobs due to colorism and classism, an experience that inspired her to found the National Training School for Women and Girls in 1909, which prepared working-class African American women for careers beyond domestic service. Burroughs was also a leader within the Black women's club movement and contributed to initiatives dedicated to social justice and policy reform. She helped found the Women's Auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention (NBC), which became a locus in the fight for women's suffrage.

Pictured at the far left of a group of African American women, Burroughs holds up a sign that reads "Banner State Woman's National Baptist Convention." Though the precise date and context of the photograph are unknown, the women may have been participating in a suffrage parade, where intricately designed banners were a common feature. Burroughs was an ardent supporter of women's suffrage, describing the vote as Black women's "weapon of moral defense." Strongly committed to social change, Burroughs dedicated her life to Black women's advancement through her organizing activities, public speaking engagements, newspaper articles, and fundraising. Her outlook is perhaps best summed up in her school's motto: "We specialize in the wholly impossible." **LD**

Claude Cahun

b. 1894, Nantes, France; d. 1954, Saint Helier, Jersey, British Islands

Le Père [The Father], 1932
Gelatin silver print
Collection Alberta Pane, Paris

Artist, actress, writer, and photographer Claude Cahun—born Lucy Renée Mathilde Schwob—was one of interwar Paris's most daring and subversive figures. Like the artist's chosen pseudonym, which combines the gender-neutral forename "Claude" with the artist's mother's surname, Cahun's work was dedicated to consistent subversion of and experimentation with the strictly binary gender norms that were predominant in France at the time. Cahun is widely celebrated for her photographic self-portraits, wherein she used costumes and props to refute traditional expectations of identity and self-expression—a radical and iconoclastic practice that modeled a self liberated from the divisions and conventions governing gender and its expression.

In the 1920s, Cahun moved to Paris with her stepsister and lover Marcel Moore—born Suzanne Malherbe—where she became acquainted with André Breton, founder of the Surrealist group, and began to participate in Surrealist political demonstrations. Like many of her Surrealist peers, Cahun began to combine everyday and found materials to compose objects that suggest fetishes or totems. In the case of *Le père* [The Father] (1932), a photograph of a figure composed from beach detritus, Cahun's target is clearly patriarchal authority. The figure's anatomical details suggest gender multiplicity: a penis, composed from a stick, protrudes just above a vulva-like indentation in the sand between the figure's legs. This ephemeral puppet, made to be washed away by the tide, suggests the fragility that underlies archetypal masculinity. **iw**

Julia Margaret Cameron

b. 1815, Kolkata, India; d. 1879, Kalutara, British Ceylon (now Sri Lanka)

Rosalba (Cyllena Wilson), 1867

Albumen silver print from glass negative
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Museum purchase funded by the Brown Foundation Accessions Endowment Fund, The Manfred Heiting Collection, 2004.335

In 1863, at forty-eight years old, Julia Margaret Cameron received her first camera as a gift from her daughter and son-in-law, accompanied by the words, “It may amuse you, Mother, to try to photograph during your solitude...” In the years that followed, photography became far more than an amusement, as Cameron catapulted into the role of professional photographer and artist, and created some of the most indelible portrait photography of the Victorian era. Cameron preferred to use a soft focus and liked to incorporate scratches, smudges, and other traces of the artist’s process in her photographs. Imbued with a mesmerizing Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic and profound religiosity, these techniques speak to a belief in the emotional power of photography wholly original for her medium at the time. “I believe in other than mere conventional topographic photography—map-making and skeleton rendering of feature and form,” she wrote.

While Cameron’s photographs of male subjects usually portrayed Victorian luminaries and intellectuals, her female subjects were often friends, relatives, or household staff, costumed in the guise of literary, historical, or biblical figures, and posed to symbolize qualities such as innocence, virtue, wisdom, piety, or passion. In 1865, Cameron began a series of large-scale, close-up allegorical portraits including *Rosalba* (1867). In this bold portrait, Cameron captures Cyllena Wilson, her adopted child, who modeled for Cameron in a number of allegorical roles taken from Greek and Roman mythology. Her role as *Rosalba* is drawn from an 1849 play by Henry Taylor, a friend of Cameron’s, entitled *The Virgin Widow*, or *a Sicilian Summer*, a story about a young and beautiful Sicilian countess torn between duty and desire. Today, it could also be seen as an embodiment of photography’s power to allow for the crafting of a series of selves, or to disassemble womanhood—a theme that runs through the work of artists from Claude Cahun and Maya Deren to Judy Chicago. **MW**

Leonora Carrington

b. 1917, Clayton-le-Woods, UK; d. 2011, Mexico City, Mexico

The Giantess (The Guardian of the Egg), ca. 1947

Tempera on wood panel
Escobedo Collection, Mexico City

Populated with mythological creatures and esoteric references, Leonora Carrington’s paintings function as windows into otherworldly landscapes infused with magic. Born into a bourgeois British family, Carrington ran away to France after meeting the painter Max Ernst, who introduced her to a wide circle of avant-garde artists including Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Lee Miller, and Eileen Agar. When World War II broke out and Ernst, a German, was interned, Carrington suffered a mental breakdown and was institutionalized against her will by her father in Spain. She would later recount her psychotic episode and the abusive treatment she received at the mental hospital in her 1972 memoir *Down Below*. Determined to escape her family’s domineering control, Carrington fled to New York, then Mexico City, where she entered a community of expatriate artists that included Remedios Varo and Kati Horna, who would become close friends and supporters of her work. Departing from the male Surrealist portrayal of women as objects of desire, Carrington’s canvases present women-centered worlds that incorporate expansive influences, including the Celtic myths of her childhood, Jungian psychology, occultism, cabalistic literature, and the Popol Vuh, a sacred text of the K’iche’ people of Guatemala.

Her 1947 painting *The Giantess (The Guardian of the Egg)* features a monumental female figure shrouded in flowing drapery and a mane of wheat, clutching a small, speckled egg as wild geese soar around her. Created during the same period as the successive births of her two sons, *The Giantess* has been interpreted as a primordial goddess-like figure with the capacity to generate and protect life. While the egg is typically read as a symbol of fecundity, it may also refer to Carrington’s painting practice, as her preferred medium was egg tempera. Like many works in Carrington’s oeuvre, *The Giantess* attests to the creative power of woman as producer of life and art, and bearer of her own destiny. **LD**

Countess Virginia Oldoini Verasis di Castiglione

b. 1837, Florence, Italy; d. 1899, Paris, France

Scherzo di Follia, 1863–66 (printed 1940s)

Gelatin silver print from glass negative
Photograph by Pierre-Louis Pierson (b. 1822, Hinckange, France; d. 1913, Paris, France)
Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of George Davis, 1948, 48.188

Considered one her generation’s great beauties, the Countess di Castiglione was enlisted to plead the case of Italy’s unification at the court of Louis III, with whom she had a brief affair. When the Kingdom of Italy was established shortly thereafter, the countess took credit, though her influence remains the subject of debate. She promptly separated from her husband and spent her remaining years moving between Paris and Italy, fiercely guarding her independence and never remarrying.

Reportedly enamored with her own beauty, the countess commissioned over 400 images of herself in various costumes and poses, created over the course of forty years. She worked closely with the photographer Pierre-Louis Pierson in a collaborative partnership where she enjoyed control over content, mise-en-scène, camera angles, and image tinting. Unlike other nineteenth-century celebrities, the countess produced her photographs primarily for private use, rather than public consumption.

In *Scherzo di Follia* [Games of Madness], one of her most famous and enigmatic photographs, the countess gazes at the viewer through a black picture frame, her face partially obscured. The work’s title references Giuseppe Verdi’s opera *Un Ballo in Maschera* [A Masked Ball], thus connecting the artifice of photography and masquerade, both of which allow for experimentation with self-representation. The countess’s decades-long exploration of identity through performance for the camera has been interpreted as an important antecedent to the work of later artists like Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman. **LD**

Elizabeth Catlett

b. 1915, Washington, DC; d. 2012, Cuernavaca, Mexico

Nude Torso, ca. 1970

Orange marble
Private collection

American sculptor and printmaker Elizabeth Catlett’s interest in cross-cultural experiences—particularly following her relocation to Mexico in the 1940s—and her conviction that art be of service to the public made her an assertive pioneer among American artists of the mid-twentieth century. In her youth, Catlett was a student of the painter Grant Wood in Iowa and later attended the Art Institute of Chicago; at twenty-five, she won first prize in sculpture at a national exhibition of African American artists organized as part of the 1940 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The success and prominence Catlett achieved during her lifetime—a period when Black artists were largely precluded from receiving formal training, exhibiting in mainstream galleries, or finding support from art institutions—was certainly unprecedented. Her work’s resiliency stems from its consistent relevance and resonance in a rapidly shifting political landscape. She found a new audience in the 1960s with the development of the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Arts movements, and again in the 1970s and ’80s with the emergence of the women’s liberation movement.

In 1946, Catlett moved from the US to Cuernavaca, Mexico, where she associated herself with the artists of the Taller de Gráfica Popular, whose works were aligned with social and political ideals of the Mexican Revolution. In Mexico, Catlett further refined a figurative sculptural style inflected by abstraction while increasingly focusing on the experiences of the working classes and, in particular, of African American and Mexican women. Works like *Nude Torso* (ca. 1970) demonstrate the direct figurative representation and celebration of the feminine body that Catlett developed in response to the socially and politically engaged work she encountered in Cuernavaca. The sculpture’s linear simplicity is also the source of its strength, with limbless shoulders ending in sharp, rising points in a pose of defiant self-possession. It might suggest a modern take on a Paleolithic “Venus” statuette, an abstracted Nike, or other female deities from across art history. **IW**

Pop Chalee

b. 1906, Castle Gate, UT; d. 1993, Santa Fe, NM

Enchanted Forest, ca. 1950

Gouache on paper

Courtesy School for Advanced Research, Santa Fe. Indian Arts Fund purchase for the permanent collection, 1970

Pop Chalee, born Merina Lujan, was raised in Taos Pueblo, New Mexico, one of the oldest continuously inhabited Native American settlements in the United States. At the pueblo, her grandfather called her Pop Chalee, which means “blue flower” in the Tewa language, a name she retained throughout her career. After marrying and giving birth to two children, Chalee began formal artistic training at the Santa Fe Indian School, where she studied in educator Dorothy Dunn’s painting program, known as the Studio. Dunn encouraged her students to draw from their cultural backgrounds and promoted a technique known as “flat-style painting” inspired by Pueblo mural and pottery painting. Though some of her students found Dunn’s approach restrictive, Chalee flourished at the Studio, producing arresting works composed of strong lines and expressive color.

As a student, Chalee developed an affinity for fantastical nature scenes free of human life, and her 1950 work *Enchanted Forest* represents a characteristic example. While this body of work was in high demand for many years, it later fell out of favor due to its aesthetic resemblance to the 1946 Disney film *Bambi*, which similarly features vividly colored foliage, deer, and rabbits. In reality, it was Chalee who likely influenced Disney, as the animator had visited the Studio in the mid-1930s and reportedly bought one of Chalee’s deer paintings years before the release of *Bambi*. Unbothered by the art world’s fickleness, Chalee continued to paint every day of her long life, combining her artistic practice with tireless advocacy for Native American art and culture, which she contributed to through articles, lectures, performances, and outreach work. **LD**

Elizabeth S. Clarke

b. 1830, possibly near Monroeville, AL; d. unknown

Star of Bethlehem, ca. 1849

Cotton

Cincinnati Art Museum. Gift of Mrs. Cletus T. Palmer. 1985.250

The *Star of Bethlehem* was a popular pattern when this striking quilt was fabricated in the mid-nineteenth century in Alabama. Originally called the Mathematical Star, over time it took on other names—including the Lone Star during debate over the annexation of Texas and the future of the institution of slavery in America. Although records state that this particular *Star of Bethlehem* quilt can be attributed to Elizabeth Clarke, the great-aunt of the donor to the Cincinnati Art Museum collection, there is evidence otherwise. Sources, some anecdotal, assert that it was actually quilted by an enslaved woman known as Aunt Peggy of Burnt Corn, Alabama. Little is known about Aunt Peggy’s life, a testament to the limits of the archive as they are marked by the persistent historical omission of the lives of enslaved people. As such, despite extensive primary source research, Gladys-Marie Fry, a well-known scholar who published a famous study on quilts made by enslaved people in 1990, was only able to definitively identify a small number of quilts with their makers.

As is typical with the traditional *Star of Bethlehem* pattern, this quilt has a central eight-pointed star that extends to the edges of the quilt, and is bordered with green wedge-shaped swatches of cotton. Dozens of red and green rhomboid shapes coalesce across the composition, evoking a pulsating star twinkling in the sky. During the 1830s and 1840s, it was not unusual for quilts to be made this size and even larger. Sometimes they were displayed on special occasions; at other times, they were used to cover high beds stuffed with feather or straw. Remarkable in its composition and bold use of color and geometric form, the *Star of Bethlehem* (ca. 1849) expresses an approach to abstraction defined by its structural variation and innovative ways of looking at fabric, design, form, and function. **MW**

Attributed to Lovice Collins

b. ca. 1793; d. 1847, South Hadley, MA

Mourning Piece for Mrs. Ebenezer Collins, 1807

Watercolor, pencil, ink, silk thread, metallic thread, and chenille thread on silk and velvet with printed paper label

American Folk Art Museum, New York. Museum purchase, Eva and Morris Feld Folk Art Acquisition Fund, 1981.12.8

Mourning or memorial pictures—small-scale works produced by women to commemorate the lives of public figures as well as family members and friends—are an important indication of the role of women in transmitting social history and in popularizing and preserving artistic mediums often overlooked by men. Popularized in America in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, mourning pictures were most commonly produced on silk using watercolor, embroidery, or a combination of both. In the eighteenth century, as America’s middle-class grew, there was a dramatic increase in the number of private schools for adolescent girls, particularly in New England and the mid-Atlantic states. As part of what was considered a “respectable” education, middle-class women were expected to learn not only traditional academic disciplines, but also artistic skills like drawing, painting, embroidery, and other forms of textile work.

While some mourning pictures created during this period remain unattributed, others can be identified as the work of individual women in memory of a specific family member and even produced at a specific school. This particular mourning piece, dedicated to Mrs. Ebenezer Collins, was likely produced by her fourteen-year-old daughter Lovice Collins while she attended an academy run by Abby Wright in South Hadley, Massachusetts. This work is typical of the early nineteenth century, when the combination of watercolor and silk embroidery became most popular, and depicts the members of the family surrounding a large funerary urn clearly in the process of grieving. The iconography of mourning pictures was borrowed from Christian and classical traditions; imagery like the weeping willow and cypress trees can be found in many similar works. In Judy Chicago’s own work, in particular through ambitious series like the *Birth Project* (1980–85), she has sought to valorize the often-anonymous artistic production of women and combat the marginalization of textile work as craft, rather than fine art. **GCM**

Ithell Colquhoun

b. 1906, Shillong, India; d. 1988, Lamorna, UK

Alcove, 1946

Oil on board

Collection Dr. and Mrs. Richard Shillitoe

India-born British artist Ithell Colquhoun was a student of the arcane who from an early age explored the unconscious and contributed to the development of Surrealist artistic techniques like automatism. Even so, she had a fraught relationship with the British Surrealist Group, which was officially formed in 1936 with the inauguration of the International Surrealist Exhibition at London’s New Burlington Galleries. Colquhoun joined the group three years after its founding only to break with it one year later—a result of her disenchantment with the group’s increasingly political orientation as well as the condescension and sexism she experienced from its male members. Without the group’s support, Colquhoun independently developed a body of work that showcases a distinct and profound exploration of the subconscious, with particular attention to the defiant power of feminine sexuality; she also contributed to many prominent Surrealist exhibitions and publications.

The works Colquhoun produced in the 1940s, after moving to the county of Cornwall on England’s southwestern tip, reflect her increasing interest in occult and magic traditions. The writings of Aleister Crowley, the self-proclaimed prophet and ceremonial magician, were particularly influential to Colquhoun. In Colquhoun’s 1946 painting *Alcove*, for instance, a biomorphic proscenium opens onto a labial cave containing intertwining, chrysalid forms. At once evoking the theatrical and the psychosexual—and perhaps anticipating what Judy Chicago would later describe as the “central core” imagery that featured prominently in feminist art of the 1960s and ’70s—*Alcove* adapts Crowley’s frequent evocation of divine, feminine figures into a staging of symbolic imagery that seems to have emerged from the artist’s unconscious. **IW**

Imogen Cunningham

b. 1883, Portland, OR; d. 1976, San Francisco, CA

Gertrude Stein, Writer, 1935

Gelatin silver print

Photograph of Gertrude Stein (b. 1874, Allegheny, PA; d. 1946, Paris, France)

Facsimile

The Imogen Cunningham Trust

Imogen Cunningham is regarded as one of the preeminent portrait photographers of the twentieth century. Born in Oregon, she spent most of her life in the Pacific Northwest, where she became involved with the San Francisco-based Group f/64, a photography association that counted Ansel Adams and Edward Weston as members. The group rejected pictorialism in favor of sharp focus, careful framing, and great depth of field, often selecting scenes and objects from nature as subjects. While Cunningham's oeuvre captures diverse subject matter, including male nudes and botanical studies, she is perhaps best remembered for her portraits of leading twentieth-century figures, including artists Frida Kahlo, Morris Graves, Martha Graham, and Ruth Asawa.

Cunningham's portrait of the author Gertrude Stein is part of a series created during Stein's American lecture tour following the commercial success of her memoir *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933). The book recounts Stein's years in Paris, where the home she shared with her partner Toklas during the interwar period was a leading salon for avant-garde artists and writers such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ezra Pound. Cunningham was a longtime fan of Stein, having read her writing and attended her lectures, and considered her a "natural" in front of the camera. The photograph captures a collaboration between two women regarded as innovators in their fields; while Cunningham combined formal rigor and sensuality in her photographic oeuvre, Stein expanded the limits of language and genre through her experimental literary works and carefully crafted public persona. **LD**

Sonia Delaunay

b. 1885, Gradizhsk, Russian Empire (now Ukraine); d. 1979, Paris, France

Untitled gouache n. 1230, 1930

Gouache on paper

Private collection, courtesy Gió Marconi, Milan

When Sonia Delaunay moved to Paris in 1905, she found herself immersed in a highly experimental artistic scene in which Post-Impressionist and Symbolist painting were the dominant forces. It was, however, the experience of motherhood—specifically, that of creating a patchwork quilt for her infant son in 1911—that would inspire Delaunay to fully embrace abstraction as an artistic principle. Drawing on Ukrainian and Russian folk art and textile designs, Delaunay and her husband Robert developed what the couple called "Simultanism": a style of abstraction that emphasizes the transcendental effects of the interactions between colors. Simultanism considers the senses of rhythm, motion, and depth created by "simultaneous contrast," where colors appear different depending on the colors that surround them. Delaunay considered art and design to be inseparable disciplines; she extended her formal explorations to the realms of craft, fashion, and interior design, all developed and showcased in the couple's *Atelier Simultané*.

Like many of her contemporaries, Delaunay approached artistic experimentation as a means to reimagine the very categories of the sensible and representable, including the roles and precepts governing gender. Works like *Untitled gouache n. 1230* (1930) display her trademark use of concentric circles and offset tones to create a sense of chromatic dynamism, a formal quality often dismissed as overly expressive in much of twentieth century art criticism thanks to male critics' habitual rejection of the decorative or ornamental. **LD**

Maya Deren

b. 1917, Kyiv, Russian Empire (now Ukraine); d. 1961, New York, NY

At Land, 1944

16mm film transferred to HD video, black-and-white, silent; 14 min
Film-Makers' Cooperative

Considered the doyenne of American avant-garde cinema, Maya Deren is renowned for experimental films that manipulate the boundaries of space and time through intricate camerawork and editing. Born in Kyiv, Deren immigrated to the United States as a child to escape anti-Semitic persecution. Her early work as a personal secretary to choreographer Katherine Dunham instilled in Deren an interest in modern dance that permeates her films, with Deren often taking on roles of both performer and director. In addition to her filmmaking, Deren's contributions as a lecturer, writer, and programmer were instrumental in building an audience and discourse around avant-garde film in the United States. Insistent that film should become a unique artistic form by distinguishing itself from other media and Hollywood cinema, Deren was considered a foundational figure of experimental film, deeply influencing artists including Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, Carolee Schneemann, and Shirley Clarke.

In her 1944 film *At Land*, Deren is washed ashore by foaming waves. Upon awakening, she scales a pile of knotted driftwood and embarks on a journey across constantly shifting landscapes, from a formal dinner party to a country road, and back to the seaside. Shot in Amagansett, Long Island, the film tracks the protagonist's dreamlike dislocation, staging poetic choreography between the performer and the camera. Reflecting on the main character's odyssey, Deren asserts: "The problem of the individual, as the sole continuous element, is to relate herself to a fluid, apparently incoherent, universe." With its emphasis on altered states of consciousness and identity in flux, the film produces an oneiric exploration of a woman's interior experience. **LD**

Emily Dickinson

b. 1830, Amherst, MA; d. 1886, Amherst, MA

A woe of ecstasy, n.d.

Penciled poem draft

How soft a caterpillar steps, n.d.

Penciled poem draft

One sheet (fragment)

In this short life, ca. 1873

Penciled poem draft inscribed on the inside of a torn envelope flap
One sheet (fragment)

Look back on time with kindly eyes, ca. 1879

Penciled poem draft inscribed on the inside of a torn envelope
One sheet (fragment)

All works courtesy Emily Dickinson Collection, Archives & Special Collections, Frost Library, Amherst College

Though mostly unknown to the public during her lifetime, Emily Dickinson has since earned recognition as one of America's most influential poets. Born in Amherst, Dickinson never married or moved away from her family home, contributing to her characterization as a reclusive spinster, a mythology that has been challenged by scholars who emphasize her intense romantic friendships. While Dickinson was indeed private, she enjoyed close relationships with a small circle of friends and family, to whom she frequently sent poems through the mail. A prolific writer, Dickinson produced nearly 1,800 poems, but saw less than a dozen printed during her lifetime, due in part to her reticence to publish. Her poetic oeuvre, made public only after her death, reveals a passionate engagement with everyday life and the natural world.

The texts included here represent a selection of Dickinson's later work, written out on torn envelopes, paper fragments, and old stationery. Drafted during a period in which the writer entered middle age and encountered several personal tragedies, the fragments communicate an expressive urgency that exceeds the possibilities of standardized print editions. When transposed from the handwritten to the typeset page, her poems shapeshift, with altered punctuation subtly changing the meaning of her texts. Such modifications were one reason Dickinson avoided publishing her work in print. In their original form, Dickinson's pencil-drawn fragments offer immediate access to her creative process illustrating the full visual power of her poetic imagination. **LD**

Sophie Drinker

b. 1888, Haverford, PA; d. 1967, Philadelphia, PA

Music and Women: The Story of Women in their Relation to Music, 1948

Publisher: Coward-McCann, Inc. (New York)
Private collection

Sophie Drinker was a self-taught historian and musicologist dedicated to the reclamation of women's contributions to music history. Born into a high society Pennsylvania family, she and her husband Harry were known for hosting "singing parties," where groups of musically inclined guests gathered in their home to sing classical choral works. The Drinkers were passionate about the value of music in everyday life and prioritized amateur engagement over professional achievement.

Drinker's 1948 book *Music and Women* represents the first attempt to produce a comprehensive history of women's contributions to music, from the ancient era to the mid-twentieth century. She began working on the book after struggling to find music written for female choirs and compositions by women. Her financial privilege allowed her to source obscure, out-of-print books and seek the expertise of scholars like Mary Ritter Beard, a pioneering women's historian who insisted: "The narrative of history must be reopened, must be widened to take in the whole course of civilization." Drinker took up Beard's challenge with *Music and Women*, an expansive analysis of women's musical production across millennia, with over half of its pages dedicated to examples from pre-Christian and non-Western cultures. Drinker's primary emphasis is not on formal compositions, but the sounds of daily life and local tradition; she includes gong playing, funeral wailing, lullabies, and religious incantation. In many ways, Drinker's challenge to music history's male-dominance mirrors Judy Chicago's efforts to rewrite the art historical canon, and the artist has often acknowledged the influence that *Music and Women* has had on her formation. **LD**

Suzanne Duchamp

b. 1889, Blainville-Crevon, France; d. 1963, Neuilly-sur-Seine, France

Broken and Restored Multiplication, 1918–19

Oil and silver paper on canvas
Art Institute of Chicago. Gift of Mary P. Hines in memory of her mother, Frances W. Pick; through prior acquisitions of Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson, H.J. Willing, and Charles H. and Mary F.S. Worcester

One of the few women artists to take part in Paris Dada, Suzanne Duchamp pushed the boundaries of painting and the readymade, melding picture-making, collage, and language with machine-made materials and objects in highly original ways. Although Duchamp maintained an active fifty-year long career, during which her experiments encompassed poetry, abstraction, and the depiction of mechanistic forms (often labelled with cryptic and humorous inscriptions), her work has been long overshadowed by that of other Dadaists, including her brother, Marcel Duchamp. Marcel and Suzanne were close growing up; they both left home to study art, shared an interest in avant-garde developments, frequently exchanged letters, and even meant to collaborate on the production of Marcel's first readymade, *Bottle Rack* (1914), which he had asked her to inscribe.

Duchamp's virtuosic approach to material and form can be seen in the array of artworks she made during her Dada period, including *Broken and Restored Multiplication* (1918–19). In this striking amalgamation of text and image, Duchamp layers readymade materials with geometric forms and painted phrases, yielding a visual and verbal metaphor for breakage, chaos, and disorder. This imagery is characteristic of the Dadaists, whose work developed in response to the horrors of World War I. At the painting's center, the scaffolding of the Eiffel Tower is turned upside down. Below it is a modern cityscape, seen as if through a mirror; throughout the composition, metallic paint furthers the sense of fragmentation. Here, poetic phrases move up and down the surface of the canvas, furthering the effect of shattering and bursting ("The mirror would shatter/The scaffolding would totter/The balloons would fly away.../The stars would dim/etc...")—a profound representation of things upended. **MW**

Leonor Fini

b. 1907, Buenos Aires, Argentina; d. 1996, Paris, France

Divinité Chtonienne guettant le sommeil d'un jeune homme [Chthonian Deity Watching over the Sleep of a Young Man], 1946

Oil on canvas
Private collection

Working across painting, design, illustration, and literature, Leonor Fini was known as an iconoclastic artist who lived by her belief that "in any creativity there exists this element of revolt." Though she did not receive formal artistic training, Fini learned to paint by copying Old Masters in museums and studying cadavers at the morgue, influences that pervade her oeuvre. After moving to Paris at twenty-four, she became involved with the Surrealists and exhibited her work alongside theirs. However, she did not identify with the movement due to its misogynistic insistence on women's role as muse and object of desire. In contrast, her work highlights female power through figures that upset gender stereotypes; male subjects often appear seductive and vulnerable, while women take the form of wild beasts and witches with penetrating gazes.

Her 1946 painting *Divinité Chtonienne guettant le sommeil d'un jeune homme* [Chthonian Deity Watching over the Sleep of a Young Man] portrays a delicate young man lying supine before a black sphinx bedecked in feathers and jewels. The composition recalls Henry Fuseli's famous painting *The Nightmare* (1781), in which a demon sits atop a sleeping young woman whose arms and legs are spread in a gesture of unconscious submission. Fini reverses the gender roles, presenting the male nude as object of the viewer's desiring gaze, and the sphinx as a powerful agent, though—unlike the demon—her presence is not necessarily malevolent. Whereas the sphinx was typically portrayed as treacherous, in Fini's work she emerges as a triumphant force and symbol of women's potential for refusal and resistance. **LD**

Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven

b. 1874, Świnoujście, German Empire (now Poland); d. 1927, Paris, France

Portrait of Marcel Duchamp in *The Little Review* 9, no. 1 (Autumn 1922), pp. 40–41

Photo: Charles Sheeler

Facsimile

The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York

Regarded by many as the "mother of Dada," Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, known to many as "Baroness Elsa," or simply "the Baroness," is notable for her brazen approach to art and life. Her found object assemblages and experimental visual poems were precursors to Dada objects of the 1910s and '20s; and her sexually charged, often controversial performances prefigured feminist performance art by nearly half a century. An erstwhile vaudeville actress and chorus girl, the Baroness maintained her theatrical lifestyle through continual self-reinvention. She subverted gender roles and embraced androgyny and cross-dressing; she insisted upon living her life as art. Sauntering through the streets of New York City, Berlin, Munich, and Paris, the Baroness could be seen wearing tomato soup can bras, teaspoon earrings, and black lipstick. In possession of an aristocratic title through marriage but little wealth, she supported herself as a life model for art students, and made her first collages and assemblages from an assortment of found objects and refuse—materials that also became part of her outrageous outfits.

The Baroness also maintained a lively collaboration with Marcel Duchamp during these years, as they found themselves united in their witty Dada anti-aesthetic. The Baroness's relationship to Duchamp was purportedly both of obsessive desire ("Marcel is the man I want," she wrote in her notebooks) and tribute, as evidenced by her numerous assemblage "portraits" of him, like the one presented at the New Museum. In *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, recorded in a photograph by Charles Sheeler and published in the modernist magazine *The Little Review* in 1922, the Baroness displays her witticism and wry sense of modern identity, portraying Duchamp as a long stem wine glass filled with peacock feathers, a gear, wires, and a fishing lure. **MW**

Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn

b. 1881, London, UK; d. 1962, Ascona, Switzerland

Fröbe-Kapteyn's archive of archetypes, section dedicated to *The Great Mother*, 1927–34
Video slideshow from digitized items
The Warburg Institute, London. Formerly owned by the Eranos Foundation, established by Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn, Ascona, as part of the collection of the Eranos Archive for Research in Symbolism

The early twentieth-century spiritualist and researcher Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn dedicated her life to the study of esoteric, humanistic, and scientific forms of knowledge. In the early 1920s, Fröbe-Kapteyn settled in the Swiss town of Ascona, renowned for its natural beauty and history as a hub for political radicals and artists. Following an unsuccessful attempt at establishing a school for spiritual research in Ascona, Fröbe-Kapteyn sought to form an interdisciplinary research institute focused on world philosophy; the result was an influential annual lecture series known as the Eranos Conferences, initiated in 1933. For the next sixty-six years this annual lecture program would bring together an international roster of theologians, historians, scientists, and psychologists, who met to discuss topics ranging from Greek mythology, Indian art, Islam, and Jewish mysticism to physics, biology, and analytical psychology. Notable among these intellectuals was Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, who became an important collaborator of Fröbe-Kapteyn's as conferences began to intersect with Jung's research on archetypes and universal symbols.

In 1935, Fröbe-Kapteyn began to methodically collect and archive pictures exemplifying mythological, ritualistic, and symbolic archetypal themes as a complement to Jung's writings. (As she described it, she was "picture-hunting everywhere.") Formed by scouring libraries across Europe and purchasing photographs of ancient artworks, this archive of thousands of archetypal depictions would become known as the Eranos Archive, and later as ARAS (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism). In 1938, the Eranos Conference centered on the theme of "The Great Mother"; an accompanying exhibition included images from Fröbe-Kapteyn's collection of Aztec, Minoan, and Babylonian goddess statues, including those shown here in the form of a slideshow. Three decades later, feminist artists like Judy Chicago would return to the goddess figure as a means of intervention into the historic marginalization of women in Western culture. **mw**

Artemisia Gentileschi

b. 1593, Rome, Italy; d. ca. 1653, Naples, Italy
Saint Catherine of Alexandria, ca. 1620
Oil on canvas
Gallerie degli Uffizi

Artemisia Gentileschi rose to prominence during a period when artistic production in Italy was overwhelmingly dominated by male masters and their studios. Trained by her father, himself a respected painter, Gentileschi was one of the few female artists of her time who achieved significant recognition.

In response to the existential challenges to the Catholic church and its doctrines that had dominated the preceding century, artists aligned with the church in the early 1600s began to produce works that, on the one hand, depict highly dramatized and emotional biblical imagery and, on the other, employ a realism imbued with a renewed emotional immediacy and intensity. Gentileschi focused on the same biblical and mythological scenes that preoccupied many Baroque artists and made use of the same strong chiaroscuro, rich color, and dynamic compositions that were *de rigueur* in Baroque painting. However, her selection of strong, heroic, female protagonists allowed her to explore women's experiences and inner lives in a way that was highly uncommon at the time.

Gentileschi also inflected her works with aspects of her own life and experiences; for instance, she used herself as the model for her portrait of *Saint Catherine of Alexandria* (ca. 1620), the brilliant fourth-century theologian who was martyred for refusing to renounce her Christian faith and marry the Roman Emperor Maxentius. While nominally a depiction of a pious saint and so acceptable by the standards of the day, the portrait takes on additional weight given that at the age of seventeen Gentileschi had been raped by her mentor Agostino Tassi, which led to a highly publicized trial. Though found guilty, Tassi was released by the judge, who ordered Gentileschi to be tortured as a means of proving her honesty. This portrait might therefore be taken more indirectly as an analogue to Gentileschi's own persecution and an assertion of defiant autonomy. **lw**

Gluck

b. 1895, London, UK; d. 1978, Steyning, UK
Portrait of Miss E.M. Craig, 1920
Oil on board
Courtesy Piano Nobile, London

Born to an affluent Jewish family in London, the painter Gluck (born Hannah Gluckstein) defied familial expectations, choosing a life of creative freedom instead of marriage and children. In 1916, Gluck ran away to an artists' colony in Cornwall with a female lover named Craig, a formative event that catalyzed Gluck's artistic career. Newfound independence allowed Gluck to pursue a more conspicuous articulation of gender nonconformity, flouting convention by dressing in masculine clothes, smoking pipes, and openly taking female lovers. In official correspondence, the artist insisted on being called "Gluck, no prefix, suffix, or quotes," a preference that may have been inspired by Craig's similar adoption of a gender-neutral name. Though Gluck's family disapproved of the public legibility of Gluck's queer identity, they continued to provide financial support, making possible a life driven by personal and creative freedom.

Produced early in the artist's career, Gluck's *Portrait of Miss E. M. Craig* portrays the sitter wrapped in a fur-trimmed coat, held up by slender fingers laden with gold rings. A fellow artist, Craig lived and worked alongside Gluck for several years in shared studios, and they remained lifelong friends even after their romance ended. The understated canvas, small and painted in muted colors, testifies to the close relationship between two young artists committed to self-definition. Through intimate portraits and still lifes, Gluck offers a window into queer domestic life, a taboo and frequently censored subject in early twentieth-century culture. **ld**

Emma Goldman

b. 1869, Kovno, Russian Empire (now Kaunas, Lithuania); d. 1940, Toronto, Canada
Mother Earth IX, no. 7 (September 1914)
Ed. Emma Goldman. Cover illustration by Man Ray
Facsimile
Private collection

Born in present-day Lithuania to an Orthodox Jewish family, Emma Goldman emigrated to the United States in 1885 amid fears of Russian antisemitism. In New York, she became a labor activist and proponent of anarchism, a political theory that advocates for collectivity and consensus over the hierarchical authority and domination of the state. Known for her powerful speeches, Goldman established herself as America's most vocal anarchist, defending causes that many men in the movement deemed trivial, including sexual liberation, birth control, and marriage reform. Her early career as a nurse and midwife within local immigrant communities strongly informed her political program's feminist orientation.

In 1906, Goldman launched the magazine *Mother Earth*, through which she communicated her political ideology to a wider audience. *Mother Earth* became a platform for Goldman's brand of anarchism, which drew from European theoretical influences while also addressing social issues, particularly those urgent to women. Its title, charged with matriarchal and ecological meaning, references spring as a metaphor for societal rebirth and change. Articles explored labor politics, economic theory, women's emancipation, and police brutality. Known for her keen ability to speak across different classes, Goldman was successful in attracting public and financial support for her cause, a skill that earned her the ire of government officials. After over a decade of circulation, federal authorities banned *Mother Earth* in 1917 and targeted its subscriber list for investigation, demonstrating the publication's transgressive reputation. Goldman was deported to Russia two years later, her World War I anti-conscription efforts cited as treasonous. For the rest of her life she worked in exile and remained a fierce opponent of capitalist oppression and gender inequality. **ld**

Natalia Goncharova

b. 1881, Nagaevno, Russian Empire (now Russia); d. 1962, Paris, France

The Nativity, for Liturgy, 1915

Watercolor, gouache, and pencil on paper
Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Sydney Elliot Cohn, 100.1974

A crucial figure in the development of Modern art in Russia and beyond, Natalia Goncharova synthesized a deeply held affinity for the folk art and religious motifs of her upbringing with a Futurist impulse to craft unique visions of modernity—which she realized in painting, illustration, textile design, and book art. After progressing through the vanguard painterly styles of the time—including Cubism, Cubo-Futurism, and Neo-Primitivism—Goncharova and her husband and long-time collaborator Mikhail Larionov developed a style the couple termed “Rayonism,” which employed lively lines and vibrant colors to capture the kinetic energy of the modern, industrialized world. Among the most fluid and dynamic avant-gardists of her time, Goncharova participated in many of the short-lived but powerfully influential artists’ groups that sprung up in the tumultuous nineteen-tens. She co-founded both the Jack of Diamonds and Donkey’s Tail groups and participated in the influential 1912 exhibition of *Der Blaue Reiter* in Munich.

In 1914, Goncharova traveled to Paris to participate in the prestigious Salon d’Automne exhibition—a visit that was unexpectedly extended by the outbreak of World War I. In Paris, Goncharova created the stage designs for Sergei Diaghilev’s ballet-opera *Le Coq d’Or* [The Golden Cockerel] and, the following year, began work on a series of designs for what was to be Diaghilev’s follow-up ballet, a dramatization of the Russian Orthodox eucharist liturgy for which Léonide Massine and Igor Stravinsky were to respectively contribute the choreography and score. Though the project would go unrealized, the series of drawings Goncharova prepared for the ballet demonstrate a faux-naïf quality, including a flattened composite perspective—as seen in *The Nativity, for Liturgy* (1915)—that harkens back to proto-Renaissance painting and displays the enduring influence of Goncharova’s Orthodox Christian upbringing and her interest in folk art as a template for the future. **iw**

Martha Graham

b. 1894, Allegheny, PA; d. 1991, New York, NY

A Motion Picture Study of Martha Graham from her piece Lamentation, 1930

Costume by Martha Graham

Music by Louis Horst

Martha Graham Resources

Choreographer and dancer Martha Graham is widely regarded as one of the major innovators of modern dance. Building on the most basic elements of human movement—in particular, a conception of contraction and release derived from the action of breathing—Graham developed a groundbreaking approach to dance that made her one of the most influential figures in its modern history. Graham’s choreography emphasizes the expression of inner emotions through a vocabulary of powerful and dynamic movements that she considered explorations of the most fundamental human struggles, relationships, and circumstances. Collaborations with such artists as the composer Aaron Copland and the sculptor Isamu Noguchi made her an influential figure in the realm of modern art writ large. The renowned Martha Graham Dance Company, founded in 1926, has extended her influence to multiple generations of dancers and choreographers.

Considered one of Graham’s most iconic and influential choreographic works, *Lamentation*, first performed in 1930, is pivotal in the field of modern dance. The piece is performed by a single dancer—in the case of this filmed performance from 1943, Graham herself—in a seated position, who is draped in a stretchy, tubular fabric that covers the performer’s entire body and accentuates their movements. The fabric serves as both costume and prop, allowing the dancer to manipulate it to convey various emotional and physical states. *Lamentation* transforms its performer into a living sculpture that evokes a priestess, a goddess, or an archetypal mourning mother whose body expresses the internal experiences of grief and sorrow. **iw**

Alice Guy-Blaché

b. 1873, Saint-Mandé, France; d. 1968, Mahwah, NJ

La fée aux choux [The Cabbage Fairy], 1896

Film, black-and-white, silent; 1 min

Gaumont Pathé Archives

Widely acknowledged to be the first female film director and producer, Alice Guy-Blaché was a pioneer in early twentieth-century filmmaking. Her contributions to the field parallel those of Thomas Edison and the Lumière brothers in significance, though these male contemporaries remain much more well known. Over the course of her career, she produced over one thousand films and established and ran Solax, her own film studio in Fort Lee, New Jersey. At its height, Solax had an output of two films per week. Guy-Blaché experimented with techniques and practices that were advanced for her time, including sound synching, color tinting, deep-focus photography, and filming on location. At a time when films were silent, short, and rudimentary, Guy-Blaché was a trailblazer whose methodologies yielded complex interwoven storylines. As such, she is credited as the inventor of the role of the director as it has come to be defined today.

Guy-Blaché wrote, produced, and directed *La fée aux choux* [The Cabbage Fairy], her first film, in 1896. Shot on the back patio of the Gaumont laboratories—the still photography and early motion-picture studio in France where Guy-Blaché worked—the film incorporates many of the special effects that she had learned there from photographers such as Frédéric Dillaye. Based on the popular children’s legend about the origin of babies, this minute-long film portrays the “cabbage fairy,” who, dressed in an elaborate gown, plucks newborn babies from the proverbial cabbage patch. Subsequent films by Guy-Blaché continue to explore the themes of maternity and gender roles and are often pervaded by a slapstick sense of humor. **mm**

Florence Henri

b. 1893, New York, NY; d. 1982, Compiègne, France

Selbstporträt [Self-Portrait], 1928

Gelatin silver print

Facsimile

Courtesy Galleria Martini & Ronchetti

Born in New York, raised in Rome, and a student of art in Berlin, Paris, and Dessau, Florence Henri traced a geographic and disciplinary trajectory that made hers one of the early twentieth century’s most cogent voices articulating a new language of modernity. At the age of twenty, Henri moved to Berlin to study painting, where, in addition to meeting such influential painters as Vasily Kandinsky and Johann Walter-Kurau, she also encountered the emerging feminist paradigm of the *Neue Frau*—or “New Woman”—a modern identity liberated from bourgeois expectations of femininity. Henri went on to study under the painter André Lhote in Paris before eventually pursuing photography at the Bauhaus in Dessau, where she was exposed to the experimental formalism of the *Neues Sehen* [New Vision] movement, so named in 1927 by the painter and photographer László Moholy-Nagy.

With her turn to photography, Henri found a new vocabulary for crafting a fluid, metamorphic self. Her photographs frequently employ mirrors, industrial materials, and dynamic compositions to craft a new kind of self-portrait imbued with a modern ethos. Her photographs are also undeniably influenced by then-vanguard tastes and attitudes toward femininity. In one 1928 self-portrait, she captures herself interpolated into the clean, linear planes of her studio; she is dressed in neutral tones with the short, “masculine” haircut typical of the New Woman’s style. Placed between the artist and her reflection, a pair of testicular metal balls emphasizes the photograph as a constructed space where identity—and anatomy—are among a collection of signs to be dis- and reassembled. **iw**

Barbara Hepworth

b. 1903, Wakefield, UK; d. 1975, St. Ives, UK
Large and Small Form, 1945
Cornish elm
Fisher Art Foundation

Barbara Hepworth was a central figure among a group of British artists in the 1930s and '40s who were committed to a material-focused approach to abstract sculpture, crafting a new formal vocabulary for modern British art. Hepworth studied sculpture at the Leeds School of Art from 1920–21 and at the Royal College of Art from 1921–24, where she met fellow sculptor Henry Moore. In dialogue with Moore, Hepworth developed a style of direct carving that emphasizes the artist's hand and connection to her materials. Hepworth and Moore joined the so-called London Group—founded by a group of young modernists including Jacob Epstein, Wyndham Lewis, and Walter Sickert—in the 1930s. Along with the artist Ben Nicholson, they later became affiliated with the London-based Seven & Five Society, transforming what had been founded as a traditionalist, conservative group into one dedicated to the promotion of abstraction and modernism. Hepworth's work increasingly moved away from naturalistic representation and instead emphasized organic, volumetric forms and the interplay between positive and negative space. In 1939 she moved from London to the village of St. Ives in Cornwall, where she lived and worked until her death in 1975.

Carved from Cornish elm wood, *Large and Small Form* (1945) exemplifies Hepworth's gracefully economical formalism, harmoniously balancing positive and negative space within an oblong spheroid. Using forms derived from the natural world and imbued with a sense of organic growth, the sculpture—made to be seen in the round, rather than frontally—balances mass with inner and outer space, suggesting a cocoon, a womb, or, more abstractly, a state of inner contemplation. **mw**

Hannah Höch

b. 1889, Gotha, Germany; d. 1978, Berlin, Germany
Die Kokette 1 [The Coquette I], 1922–24
Collage on paper
Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen e.V. (ifa)

One of the most prominent artists associated with the Berlin Dada group, Hannah Höch was a pioneer both in the formal development of photomontage and in its use as a critical tool against Weimar Germany's political establishment, rampant consumerism, and outdated gender roles. Höch created her compositions by cutting and pasting together images extracted from newspapers and popular magazines, with a particular eye for imagery celebrating the fashionable emerging cultural type of the *Neue Frau*, or "New Woman." The title of what is perhaps Höch's best-known photomontage, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* [1919–20], wryly indicates the artist's attitude toward stereotypical women's roles. In keeping with this approach, Höch's photomontages often draw out the ambiguities of the then-new feminist ideal, cannily and presciently acknowledging identity as a set of signs received through images in popular media. Her compositions freely combine human, animal, and machine in humorous juxtapositions, re-contextualizations, and purposeful disproportion to produce blistering critiques of Weimar-era German culture. It was precisely these qualities that led the ascendant Nazi regime, in the early 1930s, to deem Höch's work "degenerate," a designation that caused her to largely withdraw from public life.

Die Kokette 1 [The Coquette I] (1922–24) is from a series entitled *Liebe* [Love] that satirizes conventional illustrations of love-stricken couples gazing into each other's eyes. In Höch's rendering of the clichéd scene, the women's face has been replaced with a floating mask, transforming her into a shapeshifting enchantress while nodding to modern femininity as a masquerade of images. The man's head, meanwhile, has been swapped for that of his dog; a humorous reversal that suggests that diminished intelligence is a prerequisite for the love-stricken suitor's fidelity. **lw**

Kati Horna

b. 1912, Budapest, Austro-Hungarian Empire (now Hungary); d. 2000, Mexico City, Mexico
Untitled, Mexico, 1962
Gelatin silver photomontage
Courtesy Estate of Kati Horna and Ruiz-Healy Art

Born to a Jewish family under the name Katalin Deutsch, Horna began her career in Europe before going into exile in Mexico to escape fascism. In the early 1930s, she studied in Berlin and engaged with the Bauhaus and New Objectivity movements. With the rise of Nazism in 1933, she returned to Budapest and studied photography with József Pécsi. In Paris, she was introduced to Surrealism and worked for Agence Photo, where she published her first photojournalistic assignments using experimental techniques like double exposure. In 1937, she relocated to Spain and dedicated herself to documenting the Civil War for Republican organizations and magazines like *Umbral*, where she became an editor and met her future husband, José Horna. In her coverage of the war, she employed methods like photomontage to center the unseen impacts of the war on women and children.

By 1939, the couple had fled to Mexico City, where they joined a vibrant community of exiles and local intellectuals. There, Horna started what would become a lifelong friendship with artists Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo, with whom she shared a fascination for the otherworldly that nurtured numerous collaborations.

In Mexico, Horna continued exploring photography from a feminist perspective. In 1962, she received commissions from magazines such as *Mujeres: Expresión Femenina* and the surrealist publication *S.NOB*, where she used techniques like double exposure and photomontage in visual essays focused on women. That same year, she created *Untitled, Mexico* (1962), which displays the dreamlike repetition of a fading eye achieved through varying exposure lengths. Although she always distanced herself from association with the avant-garde movement, this work aligns with Surrealism's psychological dimensions and experimental ethos, displaying a sense of cosmic stupor that connects her work to Carrington and Varo. **lh**

Georgiana Houghton

b. 1814, Las Palmas, Spain; d. 1884, London, UK
The Spiritual Crown of Annie Mary Howitt Watts, April 24, 1867
Watercolor and gouache laid on board with ink inscription on reverse
Collection Vivienne Roberts

Born in the Canary Islands in 1814 to British parents, Georgiana Houghton spent most of her life in Victorian-era London, a period which saw deep and sustained Christian religious revival, as well as the rise in a host of beliefs in supernatural forces and energies, occult theories, and other uncanny transmissions. Spiritualism, a movement that practiced communication with the dead through mediums, originated in upstate New York and was popularized in England in the 1850s, where it quickly saturated literary and artistic culture. For Houghton, a devout Christian and a trained artist, Spiritualism enabled her to maintain a closer relationship to God, even if her approach was not necessarily orthodox. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, she would translate her religious fervor into "spirit drawings," a series of extraordinarily layered and multifaceted abstract works on paper.

Houghton painted the watercolor *The Spiritual Crown of Annie Mary Howitt Watts* in 1867, shortly after she made her first mediumistic drawings. In 1865, Houghton—who had decided to devote her life to Spiritualism following the death of a sister—reported that she had come into contact with spiritual guides inhabiting a realm beyond the physical world. Led by her "invisible friends," Houghton transposed her spiritual encounters in highly distinctive automatic pencil drawings and, eventually, abstract watercolors. *The Spiritual Crown of Annie Mary Howitt Watts* is made of rhythmically layered curlicues of white and grey atop a mass of dense cranberry red, blue, and yellow lines. On the verso of the piece, an elaborate handwritten text describes the message of the work, which came, the artist declared, from spirits who simply directed her hand. Houghton's aim, as she wrote in her 1881 autobiography *Evenings at Home in Spiritual Séance*, was "to show 'What the Lord hath done for my soul' by granting me the Light now poured upon mankind by the restored power of communion with the unseen." **mw**

Zora Neale Hurston

b. 1891, Notasulga, AL; d. 1960, Fort Pierce, FL

Children dancing and girl rocking on porch, January/February 1929

16mm film transferred to HD video, black-and-white; 2:45 min

Courtesy the Zora Neale Hurston Trust and Moving Image Research Center, Library of Congress, Washington, DC

Zora Neale Hurston is considered one of the preeminent chroniclers of Black rural life across works of ethnography, fiction, journalism, oral history, and collected folklore. Raised in Florida, Hurston dedicated her career to capturing the richness of the South's African American folk culture. Though one of the key figures of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston's work was controversial during her lifetime. Leading Black cultural figures like Richard Wright accused her of pandering to white readers due to her use of dialect and frank portrayal of female sexuality, which was dismissed as insufficiently political. However, in the 1970s, a new generation of Black authors pushed against these claims, with Alice Walker playing a key role in the reevaluation of Hurston's legacy. Today, Hurston is remembered as one of the few authors of her era to explore the fullness of African American women's intimate lives and desires.

In addition to her literary work, Hurston was a trained ethnographer who studied at Barnard College with supervisor Franz Boas, the "father of American anthropology." Under Boas's tutelage, Hurston traveled to the South to conduct fieldwork, recording vernacular modes of self-expression and collecting folklore. Her documentation process incorporated the moving image, and some scholars believe her films represent the earliest footage shot by an African American woman. Capturing children's games, dances, religious ceremonies, and barbecues, Hurston's footage attests to the cultural significance of everyday practices and rituals. **LD**

Lois Mailou Jones

b. 1905, Boston, MA; d. 1998, Washington, DC

Self-Portrait, ca. 1937

Oil on canvas

Collection Quincy and Christy Lee

For nearly seven decades, Lois Mailou Jones—painter, teacher, intellectual—forged an eclectic artistic path, the profound influence of which linked generations of African American artists across the twentieth century, from the Harlem Renaissance through AfriCOBRA. Born in Boston to a middle-class family, Jones was the first Black graduate of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in 1927 and would later spend almost a half-century teaching art at Howard University, a hotbed of Black intellectual life in Washington, DC. Jones's artistic development was sustained in no small part by summertime sojourns in Harlem in the mid-1930s and '40s, a sabbatical in Paris from 1937–38, frequent visits to Haiti to teach, study, and paint, and trips across the African continent in the 1970s.

Throughout her career, Jones maintained an enduring engagement with African ceremonial motifs and aesthetics. During the 1930s and 1940s, as New York and Paris experienced a wellspring of intellectual and creative activity among artists, writers, and thinkers associated with the Harlem Renaissance and Négritude movements, traditional African plastic art forms, especially masks and textiles, were frequently positioned by peers in a forward vision of modernity. The self-portrait presented here is believed to have been painted during this fertile moment. Although Jones more obviously strives to locate a visual language for her diasporic encounters in other self-portraits, such as one from 1940 in which she dresses in a painter's smock and includes African ceremonial figurines, in this work she presents an unembellished image of herself. Posed in white clothes and red lipstick, Jones represents herself as confident and self-assured, linking her identity to her role as an artist. **MW**

Frida Kahlo

b. 1907, Mexico City, Mexico; d. 1954, Mexico City, Mexico

Wounded Deer, 1946

Oil on Masonite

Private collection

A major influence for second-wave feminist artists, Frida Kahlo is best known for self-portraits that translate raw emotional experience into fantastical landscapes populated with hybrid beings and powerful symbolism. Kahlo began painting while on bedrest following a near-fatal bus accident that left her with lifelong health issues. Her intimate canvases are deeply personal explorations of identity and bodily experience that draw from a range of influences including indigenous culture, vernacular art, devotional painting, and pre-Columbian mythology. Notoriously difficult to categorize, Kahlo's practice has been associated with Magical Realism and Surrealism, though the artist insisted on her independence, maintaining, "I painted my own reality."

In *Wounded Deer* (1946), Kahlo portrays herself with the body of an antlered buck, captured mid-leap in a forest of broken tree trunks clouded by an ominous, lightning-veined sky. Her body is riddled with arrows, a possible allusion to the martyred Saint Sebastian, patron of all who desire a holy death. Like many of Kahlo's paintings, *Wounded Deer* emphasizes the interconnectivity between human, plant, and animal life, and can also be read as a critique of man's exploitation of nature. In the work, bodily pain becomes a metaphor for other forms of injury, including ecological and colonial destruction. Kahlo made the painting shortly before traveling to New York to undergo an operation she hoped would cure her chronic back pain, though she was well aware of the high risk involved. In the bottom left corner next to her signature, she has written "CARMA," a reference to the Eastern concept of reincarnation and the possibility of life beyond the corporeal. **LD**

Gertrude Käsebier

b. 1852, Des Moines, IA; d. 1934, New York, NY

The Manger, 1899

Platinum print

Facsimile

Library of Congress, Washington, DC

At the turn of the twentieth century, a time when society frowned upon women entering any working profession at all, American portrait photographer Gertrude Käsebier was revered within her fiercely competitive field. Käsebier took up photography rather than painting in order to capture her three children while they were young. The artist recalled, "Art is long and childhood is fleeting, I soon discovered, and the children were losing their baby faces before I learned to paint portraits, so I chose a quicker medium." Käsebier soon gained recognition for her expressive and painterly portraits of mothers with children, which were embraced by both the fine art community and the commercial world. Throughout her career, her photographs were included in popular publications such as *Camera Work*, *Everybody's Magazine*, the *World's Work*, and *Ladies' Home Journal*, in addition to being showcased in exhibitions at the Camera Club of New York, the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, and the Philadelphia Photographic Salon.

After opening her own photography studio in New York in 1895, Käsebier became sought after for her portraits' distinctive use of light and shadow, simple backgrounds, and soft focus compositions. Many of her portraits from this period, such as *The Manger* (1899), recall traditional representations of the Virgin Mary with child in Christian iconography. Käsebier asked her friend, illustrator Frances Delehanty, to model for *The Manger*. In it, Delehanty holds a bundle of cloth swaddled to suggest an infant's body—although no infant was present. While Käsebier worked with motifs that fell within popular Victorian themes, she was also a pioneer of her time, both for her instrumental contribution to establishing photography as an accepted art form, as well as for setting an example of a woman succeeding in the professional realm. **MN**

Käthe Kollwitz

b. 1867, Königsberg, North German Confederation (now Kaliningrad, Russia); d. 1945, Moritzburg, Germany
Die Mütter [The Mothers], from *Krieg* [War] 1921–22 (published 1923)
Woodcut on paper
Brooklyn Museum. Carl H. de Silver Fund, 44.201.6

Working in painting, sculpture, drawing, and printmaking, Käthe Kollwitz created some of the most poignant depictions of the tragedies of war and the suffering of workers in the early part of the twentieth century. Her woodcut *Die Mütter* [The Mothers] (1921–22) is an emotionally intense image portraying a group of women crowded around a group of figures—including an infant and two small children, who peek out from behind their skirts. Forming a shield around the children, the figures convey the fear and grief that many women and children felt as families were ravaged by the physical and emotional impacts of World War I.

Produced as part of Kollwitz's *Krieg* [War] portfolio (published 1923), a grouping of seven woodcuts responding to the tragedies of World War I, *Die Mütter* also predicts the artist's preoccupation with representations of motherhood. In 1914, Kollwitz's own son, Peter, would be one of the millions of soldiers to die in battle. The pain of this tragedy, as well as the memories of the deaths of her two siblings during childhood, would dramatically impact her subsequent work. Kollwitz channeled her grief into a number of prints and sculptural works over the remaining years of her life, many of which likewise render the raw emotion of the figures in *Die Mütter*. In this body of work, Kollwitz's personal grief is a symbol of universal loss, regret, and reflection. **gcm**

Emma Kunz

b. 1892, Brittnau, Switzerland; d. 1963, Waldstatt, Switzerland
Work No. 003, n.d.
Colored pencil and oil pastel on blue graph paper
Emma Kunz Stiftung

Emma Kunz began working as a healer when she was eighteen, and from a young age, expressed an exceptional perceptual capacity. Even as a schoolchild in rural Switzerland, Kunz considered herself a researcher of the powers of energy and consciousness, applying her esoteric interests to the practices of telepathy and prophecy. Although Kunz found some success in her treatments—she was rumored to be able to make flowers bloom—she resolutely disagreed with the notion of miracles. Instead, she believed that anyone had the ability to trigger powers for personal transformation.

Despite never receiving a formal art education, in 1938, then in her mid-forties, Kunz began to produce astonishing geometric drawings, conceived as energy fields from which she could diagnose her patients during healing sessions. Although the complexity of Kunz's dense lines, circles, crosses, pyramids, and pulsating geometric shapes is dazzling, these works were never intended for aesthetic appreciation. Instead, they were meant to be meditative aids in the service of her calling. Throughout the process of creating the hundreds of symmetrical abstract drawings that comprise her body of work, she developed a mark-making technique using radiesthesia—a form of divination—in which she would utilize a pendulum to determine the placement of lines and the areas to be colored on meter-square graph paper. These preparatory sessions, used to produce the colorful and complex webs in pieces like *Work No. 003*, would sometimes last twenty-four hours. Mysterious and mystical, these highly stylized and mechanized drawings are encoded with advanced and immeasurable knowledge. As Kunz said herself, "My drawings are designed for the twenty-first century." **mw**

Dorothea Lange

b. 1895, Hoboken, NJ; 1965, San Francisco, CA
Shipyard Worker, Richmond, California, 1942
Gelatin silver print
Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase, 357.1995

Dorothea Lange is renowned for her groundbreaking photographs of the 1930s—most famously for *Migrant Mother* (1936), a striking and empathetic portrait that inspired pivotal public awareness of the lives of displaced families, sharecroppers, and migrant workers during the Great Depression. Completed while in the field as an employee of US government agencies and widely distributed, Lange's Depression-era photographs highlight her commitment to social justice and her faith in photography as a record of the human spirit.

Lange continued to work for government agencies and to publish photo essays on American life following the Great Depression, though they are lesser known in her oeuvre. During World War II, Lange turned her focus to the impact of the war, creating striking pictures for the US Office of War Information that exposed the horrors of Japanese internment camps. Following this assignment, which was withheld from circulation for the duration of the war—likely because her honest depictions threatened the government's rationale for internment—Lange, along with photographer Ansel Adams, did a piece for *Fortune Magazine* that documented the changing economic and industrial environment of California during wartime. Focusing on the shipyards of Richmond, CA, a wartime boomtown north of the photographer's home in Berkeley, Lange captured the moment of a fundamental shift in American labor. Transformed into a major shipbuilding destination, Richmond grew rapidly as thousands of women and people of color migrated for work while a huge swath of the white male labor force was at war. Of a series depicting shipyard workers breaking at the end of a shift, including *Shipyard Worker, Richmond, California* (1942), Lange wrote in her fieldnotes, "wartime shipyard construction brings women in the labor market." In this image, also referred to as *End of Shift 3:30*, an androgynous woman, bespeckled and dressed in loose striped trousers and a work jacket, descends from the shipyards at the end of a shift. She is a model for self-determination in the expression of gender made visible by a quickly changing economic landscape. **mw**

Edmonia Lewis

b. 1844, Greenbush (now Rensselaer), NY; d. 1907, London, UK
Urania, the Greek Muse of Astronomy, 1862
Graphite on paper
Facsimile
Oberlin College Archives

Edmonia Lewis was born in upstate New York to parents of African and Native American (Ojibwa) descent. Lewis was orphaned at a young age; though much is unknown about her early life, it is believed she was raised by maternal aunts near Niagara Falls, where the family sold handmade moccasins, baskets, and other souvenirs to tourists. She attended Oberlin College, then a center of abolitionism, but left without graduating due to racially motivated attacks. After beginning sculptural training in Boston, Lewis moved to Rome, where she became associated with a group of American women sculptors working in the city. Though, like them, she practiced in the predominant Neoclassical style, her subjects drew from her own background and included portraits of emancipated enslaved people, abolitionists, and Native American figures like Hiawatha, a precolonial indigenous leader mythologized in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's famous 1855 epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha*.

Urania, the Greek Muse of Astronomy (1862) is the only extant drawing from early in Lewis's career, produced while a teenage student at Oberlin in honor of a friend's wedding. Lewis worked on the drawing by candlelight, as evidenced by wax drippings next to the figure's face. Drawn from an engraving of a Roman statue, the work presages Lewis's turn to sculpture a few years later. *Urania*, with its references to astronomy, can also be read as an allusion to the abolition of slavery, as freedom seekers famously used the constellations to guide their flight northward. **ld**

Mina Loy

b. 1882, London, UK; d. 1966, Aspen, CO
Househunting, ca. 1950
Mixed-media assemblage
Collection Carolyn Burke

A poet and painter, Mina Loy led a peripatetic existence, traveling between London, Munich, Paris, Florence, and New York. Though raised by an Evangelical mother, Loy resisted conservative values, producing poems that frankly express female desire and the experience of childbirth. She was seen by her artistic circle as a prototypical “New Woman” of the early twentieth century, embracing mobility, free love, and an assertive presence in the public sphere. Though Loy was variously associated with the Italian Futurists, Dadaists, and Surrealists, her work did not aesthetically adhere to any particular movement. Throughout her work and life, Loy remained a vocal supporter of women’s emancipation, insisting in a 1914 *Feminist Manifesto* that “there is no half-measure... the only method is Absolute Demolition” of Victorian mores.

While remembered primarily for her poetry, Loy began creating assemblages later in her career, after moving to Stanton Street, around the corner from the New Museum. In *Househunting* (ca. 1950), Loy depicts a female figure crowned by a work basket filled with knitting needles, balls of yarn, and drying laundry. Naked babies dangle from her head and the background is dotted with dwellings of various shapes and sizes. Loy produced *Househunting* at a time when the Bowery, then an impoverished neighborhood, was undergoing transformations that uprooted many residents, including Loy herself. The work incorporates refuse gathered from the city streets, where Loy befriended those displaced by urban development, who affectionately called her “the Duchess.” With a cornucopia-like headdress and stalks of wheat at her breast, the central figure resembles Ceres, goddess of fertility and abundance. However, in the composition, her regality contrasts with the detritus surrounding her, reflecting Loy’s propensity for blurring high and low culture. Part of a larger body of work addressing housing scarcity and marginalization, *Househunting* communicates an experience of home as transient, unstable, and deeply marked by gender and class. **LD**

Dora Maar

b. 1907, Paris, France; d. 1997, Paris, France
Père Ubu, 1936
Gelatin silver print
The Bluff Collection

French-born photographer, artist, and Surrealist muse Dora Maar (born Henriette Theodora Markovitch) studied painting in Buenos Aires before returning to France in 1925. In Paris, Maar worked as a model for the photographer Man Ray, becoming embedded in the cultural milieu surrounding Surrealism. Perhaps best known during her lifetime for a near decade-long affair with Pablo Picasso—many of whose paintings and photographs Maar modeled for or otherwise inspired and whose creation of the painting *Guernica* in 1937 she famously captured in photographs—Maar established her own successful career in commercial photography, as well as a unique Surrealist vocabulary in her own studio and street photographs.

Père Ubu (1936) is among Maar’s best-known works. The photograph is titled after the protagonist of Alfred Jarry’s absurdist play *Ubu Roi* [King Ubu] of 1896, an acerbic rejection of the authority figures of traditional French society at the time and an important reference work for both Dada and Surrealist artists. In the play, *Père* [Father] Ubu is a tyrannical figure who engages in various absurd and Machiavellian actions in order to seize power. In Maar’s rendering, this archetypal patriarch appears as an armadillo, with his claws raised to his snout as if in a gesture of simultaneous protection and intimidation. At once vampiric, pathetic, and undeniably phallic, this creature exemplifies the themes of transformation, exoticism, and absurdity that arose from Surrealist artists’ pursuit of the irrational and uncanny. **W**

Jeanne Mammen

b. 1890, Berlin, Germany; d. 1976, Berlin, Germany
Karneval [Carnival], ca. 1931
Watercolor and graphite on paper
Des Moines Art Center. Permanent Collections,
Gift of Dr. Joseph H. Seipp, Baltimore, MD,
1974.94

Often associated with Germany’s interwar New Objectivity style that infused realism with biting social criticism, painter and illustrator Jeanne Mammen emerged as a keen chronicler of Weimar-era culture and nightlife. Born in Berlin and raised in Paris, Mammen trained at art schools across Europe before returning to Berlin at the outbreak of World War I. There, Mammen traversed the city streets with her sketchbook in hand, capturing the heterogeneity of urban life. For a time, her work was in high demand, and she supported herself by selling illustrations to cultural magazines and designing movie posters. However, the rise of Nazism and labeling of modern art as “degenerate” led Mammen into a period of “internal emigration,” during which she retreated to her studio and painted in a Cubist style as a form of solidarity with artists targeted by the fascist regime.

In *Karneval* [Carnival], Mammen depicts a colorful scene of revelry featuring costumed figures engaged in ecstatic celebration at a crowded dance hall. Her nightlife illustrations highlight diverse modes of self-fashioning, with androgynous figures in menswear mingling with effeminate women draped in lace and furs. Mammen was one of the few artists of her era to depict Berlin’s vibrant lesbian social world and its multifarious backdrops, from public sites like women’s clubs and cabarets to private domestic spaces. While many other artists associated with New Objectivity tended to present a more cynical perspective of Weimar-era hedonism, Mammen’s portraits frequently focus on moments of tenderness, joy, intimacy, and desire, particularly between women. **LD**

Maria Martinez

b. 1887, San Ildefonso Pueblo, NM; d. 1980, San Ildefonso Pueblo, NM
Olla [Water Jar], ca. 1923
Ceramic
Brooklyn Museum. Gift of Graham and Megan Marks in memory of Barbara and Fred Marks,
2013.100.4

Of Tewa heritage, Maria Martinez was a prominent figure in the world of pottery art and a tribal member of the San Ildefonso Pueblo in the Rio Grande Valley of New Mexico. She gained distinction for her unique dung-fired pottery, creating highly valued black-on-black ware that influenced the transformation of Native American pottery from functional craft to fine art. In 1908, Martinez and her husband Julian Martinez began researching the original shapes of seventeenth-century black pots excavated from the ruined pueblo of the Tewa. The shards were jet and charcoal in color and some were polished, revealing a type of pottery not previously found in the Southwest. After years of experimentation, the couple produced their first black-on-black pieces in 1918, discovering a method to transform the iron-red color of polished clay pots into a shiny, cool black through a bonfire. For the production of each piece, Martinez mixed clay with volcanic ash and built the form with coils scraped using a gourd tool. Once the jar had dried, she polished its surface with a stone and Julian painted it with liquid clay using motifs of birds, serpents, and often the Avanyu, a Tewa guardian deity of water. During the firing process, the oxygen supply would be cut off, producing carbon smoke that turned the jar black.

Following Julian’s death in 1943, Martinez collaborated with her daughter-in-law Santana Roybal Martinez and son Popovi Da. She elevated her skills to an unmatched level among potters, inspiring many artists working with ceramics, such as Judy Chicago, who included Martinez on the Heritage Floor of *The Dinner Party* (1974–79). Together with family members, Martinez upheld the black-on-black pottery tradition, creating a legacy that simultaneously embraced the past and innovation. **LD**

Maria Martins

b. 1894, Campanha, Brazil; d. 1973, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Boiuna, 1942

Bronze

Collection OAS Art Museum of the Americas, Washington, DC. Gift of Nelson Rockefeller

Maria Martins enjoyed a comfortable upbringing as the daughter of a government minister in Campanha, Brazil. After a short-lived first marriage, she married Carlos Martins Pereira e Souza, a diplomat, following him as he took up posts in Ecuador, France, Denmark, Japan, and Belgium. Martins began her artistic training later in life and studied diverse techniques and traditions in the many countries where she lived. When Souza was made Brazilian ambassador to the United States, the couple settled in New York, and Martins began working on abstract sculptures that drew from mythology and sensual experience. During this prolific period, her medium of choice was bronze, which the Cubist sculptor Jacques Lipchitz taught her to cast using the lost-wax method. Around the same time, she became involved with Marcel Duchamp, André Breton, and the expat surrealist circle in New York, who admired Martins's abstract figuration and references to Brazilian folklore. She was given the nickname "sculptor of the tropics," a designation meant as praise, but reflective of the primitivist fantasies through which her work was read in the West.

Part of a larger series of sculptures drawing from indigenous Amazonian iconography, Martins's 1942 bronze *Boiuna* depicts a snake-like mythological figure called the "Mother of the Rivers," known for shapeshifting and terrorizing fisherman. Martins's interpretation merges the human and the fantastical, depicting the goddess with open lips and a gash between her legs studded with sharp teeth. Like many other works in Martins's oeuvre, *Boiuna* invests bronze with an erotic sensibility that positions female desire as a dangerously powerful force. **LD**

Mary Louise McLaughlin

b. 1847, Cincinnati, OH; d. 1939, Norwood, OH

"*Ali Baba*" Vase, 1880

Earthenware

Cincinnati Art Museum. Gift of the Estate of

Jane Gates Todd 2018.142

Mary Louise McLaughlin was an artist, writer, and pioneering figure in the history of American ceramics. Born into a wealthy family in Cincinnati, Ohio, McLaughlin studied a variety of artistic mediums at Cincinnati's School of Art and Design. She adopted painted ceramics as a medium in 1874 at a time when "china painting," as it was popularly known, had become an acceptable hobby for respectable young women in both England and the United States. McLaughlin, however, was more than a hobbyist. She intensely studied the materials and techniques of ceramic painting and was able to deduce the method of producing the complicated underglaze painting technique popular in France, a style she observed at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia where she exhibited her own over-painted ceramic work. McLaughlin constantly experimented with ground, slips, pigments, and firings, and kept meticulous notes of her tests. In 1877, she published the book *China Painting: A Practical Manual for the Use of Amateurs in the Decoration of Hard Porcelain*, a groundbreaking study of the medium written explicitly for an audience of women.

In 1879, McLaughlin established the Cincinnati Pottery Club, a collective of women who were devoted to the serious study and production of painted ceramics. In 1880, McLaughlin produced her most famous work, the "*Ali Baba*" Vase. The work stands at thirty-seven and a half inches high, which at the time was a record in America for underglaze painted ceramics. Aside from its scale, the work was remarkable for its Japanese inspired floral decoration and the loosely rendered ground. The work was famously followed by another monumental vase, the *Aladdin Vase*, created by McLaughlin's local rival, Maria Longworth Nichols Storer. McLaughlin's elevation of ceramics as a serious medium and rejection of the limitations placed on women creators were a direct inspiration for Judy Chicago's own interdisciplinary explorations throughout her career. **GCM**

Maria Sibylla Merian

b. 1647, Frankfurt, Germany; d. 1717, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Plate 5 from Metamorphosis Insectorum

Surinamensium [Dissertation in Insect Generations and Metamorphosis in Surinam], 1705 (second edition published posthumously, 1719)

Hand-colored engraving on paper
National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC. Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay

While studying in her stepfather's painting studio as a child, Maria Sibylla Merian began collecting and raising silkworms, combining at an early age her keen artistic sense with a budding scientific fascination. Merian would go on to become one of the first European naturalists to directly observe living insects, rather than working from preserved specimens. Whereas the culture of her time tended to associate insects with the devil, Merian was fascinated by their metamorphic life cycles.

In 1699, Merian and her young daughter set out on a months-long voyage by sea to the Dutch colony of Suriname in northern South America to document and illustrate new species of insects. Merian financed this pursuit, then unprecedented for a woman without a male companion, through the sale of 255 of her own paintings. The result of this two-year expedition was the publication, in 1705, of *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium*, a volume containing meticulously illustrated studies of indigenous Surinamese flora and fauna accompanied by descriptive texts in Latin and Dutch. The book's hand-colored plates illustrate ninety species of insects depicted quasi-naturalistically alongside the plants that make up their habitats. The book's fifth plate, for instance, depicts a Cassava plant—a common Surinamese crop—and the species of large, voracious caterpillar that plagued its farmers, as well as the brown speckled sphinx moth the caterpillar will eventually become; both are accompanied by a brown spotted garden boa. Though aiming at scientific accuracy, this illustration also takes clear artistic liberties by comingling species in a balanced composition and depicting multiple life stages of a given species in a single image. **IW**

Paula Modersohn-Becker

b. 1876, Dresden, Germany; d. 1907, Worpswede, Germany

Girl with a Baby among Birch Trees, 1905

Oil on cardboard

Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA. Gift of Margaret S. Travers in memory of Arnold F. Strauss, M.D., and Marjory Spindle Strauss, 94.21

Known for intimate portraits, rural landscapes, and still lifes, Paula Modersohn-Becker is credited as one of the earliest German artists to work in an Expressionist style. Born in Dresden, she later settled in Worpswede, an artists' colony that shunned academicism in favor of direct engagement with the natural environment. There, she married painter Otto Modersohn and formed lifelong friendships with sculptor Clara Westhoff and her husband, poet Rainer Maria Rilke. Stifled by the demands of family life and Worpswede's insular community, Modersohn-Becker made extended visits to Paris, where she encountered work by the French avant-garde and benefitted from the time and space to create independently.

Often credited as the first modern woman artist to paint nude and pregnant self-portraits, Modersohn-Becker is most widely known for her representations of women and children, often painted outdoors. In *Girl with a Baby among Birch Trees* (1905), the artist depicts an infant balanced on the lap of a young girl, whose mouth is agape as if cooing or singing to calm her charge. The portrait is typical of Modersohn-Becker's oeuvre, which not only depicts mothers, but also the wider care and kinship networks that structured rural communities. While other artists idealized the bond between women and children, Modersohn-Becker's canvases frankly acknowledge the discomfort and exhaustion that accompany childcare. Although Modersohn-Becker's work was overlooked during her own lifetime, she has since been recognized as a pioneering artist of her generation, charting new territory through bold subject matter and a singular style. **LD**

Louise Nevelson

b. 1899, Pereiaslav, Russian Empire (now Ukraine); d. 1988, New York, NY
Untitled, 1945
Painted terracotta, plaster
Courtesy Pace

Louise Nevelson (born Leah Berliawsky) is renowned for her elegant, room-sized sculptures constructed throughout the postwar period. Nevelson salvaged cast-off wood parts from New York City streets—oftentimes recognizable household objects and architectural ornamentation—and arranged them in modular crates that she stacked and painted in a unifying color. While drawn to rejected wood scraps for the memory imbued in their materiality and for their innate potential for reuse, her knowledge of wood was also personal. At the turn of the twentieth century, Nevelson's family escaped to Rockland, Maine from Russia—where the Tsarist Poltava Governorate had sanctioned violently repressive strictures on Jewish families. Before and after their escape, her father worked as a woodcutter and lumber merchant, and later opened a junkyard. As such, her compositions of street throwaways take on a deeper tenor: they are formal constructions linked to her own complex past. Echoing Abstract Expressionism and Color Field painting's fascination with scale, the use of non-traditional materials, and experimentation with bold formal gestures, Nevelson's innovative sculpture creates a richly sensuous environment, engulfing viewers in a boundless space of shadow, depth, mystery, and complexity.

Nevelson's untitled terracotta and plaster sculpture from 1945 predates her signature wooden stacked-grid wall reliefs, but registers her long-held fascination with monolithic forms. As with other examples of Nevelson's work in bronze and terracotta from the mid-1940s, this sculpture sifts the figure through a Cubist compositional sieve. Other pieces from this series have incised lines indicating facial features or body parts. As Nevelson, who is included on the Heritage Floor of Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974–79), shifted into creating large-scale scavenged wood sculptures, hallmarks of her untitled terracotta remained: in her forms there exists “a constant communication toward a oneness” and a drive “for that unity, for the harmony, and for the totality.” **mw**

Anaïs Nin

b. 1903, Neuilly-sur-Seine, France; d. 1977, Los Angeles, CA
This Hunger, 1945
Publisher: Gemor Press (New York)
Private collection

Considered one of the first prominent female authors of erotica, Anaïs Nin is best remembered for her diaries, which frankly explore the author's sexual desires and intimate, emotional life. Raised by Cuban parents between Europe and the United States, Nin settled in Paris before relocating to New York City during World War II. On both sides of the Atlantic, she formed friendships with literary and artistic figures including Henry Miller, Antonin Artaud, Edmund Wilson, and Maya Deren, some of whom were also lovers. Though Nin published with small presses throughout her life, her most famous work was released in the 1970s, garnering her a new audience of younger women. Judy Chicago was particularly close to Nin, an important mentor who affectionately called Chicago her “radical daughter.” The two women enjoyed a rich friendship colored by intellectual debate, and Chicago credits Nin with encouraging her to write her first autobiography, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (1975). For Chicago, Nin's writings gave “voice to the experiences of countless women” struggling against the “construct of femininity.”

Nin's 1945 book *This Hunger* was the first work in a planned series of connected novels that would eventually develop into *Cities of the Interior* (1959), Nin's roman-fléuve focused on the inner lives of several female characters. She released *This Hunger* through Gemor Press, a publishing house she founded and ran with her lover Gonzalo More out of a loft on MacDougal Street, where Nin typeset the books herself. *This Hunger*, illustrated with woodcuts by Nin's first husband Ian Hugo, follows four female characters struggling to free themselves from societal constraints through their work and relationships. Written in lilting prose, the novel renders women's unspoken desires and creative challenges in their full complexity. **LD**

Georgia O'Keeffe

b. 1887, Sun Prairie, WI; d. 1986, Santa Fe, NM
Black Iris, 1926
Oil on canvas
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1969, 69.278.1

A seminal figure of American Modernism, Georgia O'Keeffe is renowned for her representations of the natural landscape, particularly of the Southwest. Born in Wisconsin, she moved around the country studying and teaching art, until finally relocating to New York, where she split her time between Manhattan and the Adirondacks. Her early creative output is deeply intertwined with that of her husband, photographer and gallerist Alfred Stieglitz, who was instrumental in bringing European Modernism to the United States and helped steward O'Keeffe's career. Later in life, O'Keeffe moved to Taos, New Mexico, where she painted many of her most iconic canvases featuring sun-blached bones, desert flowers, and rolling canyons. One of the few women to achieve mainstream art world success in the early to mid-twentieth century, O'Keeffe had retrospectives during her lifetime at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art; and the Art Institute of Chicago.

Considered one of the artist's early masterpieces, *Black Iris* (1926) is part of a larger series of close-up floral abstractions. She captured the rare flower, which blooms for only two weeks a year, using rich colors and airy brushwork. Exposing an inner sanctum of layered petals, the canvas was interpreted as sexually charged by many viewers, though O'Keeffe repeatedly disavowed such readings of her work. O'Keeffe's flower paintings were particularly inspirational for Judy Chicago, who understood this body of work as an expression of femininity and bodily experience. Chicago noticed that O'Keeffe's paintings were often constructed around a “central core,” a compositional strategy that Chicago and many other feminist artists of the 1970s adopted in their own work. Though O'Keeffe did not align herself with the second-wave feminist movement, and refused the reproduction of *Black Iris* in Chicago's autobiography *Through the Flower*, she remained an influential figure for a younger generation of women artists like Chicago, who admired her fiercely independent artistic vision. **LD**

Méret Oppenheim

b. 1913, Berlin, Germany; d. 1985, Basel, Switzerland
Votive Picture (Strangling Angel), 1931
India ink and watercolor
Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano, Switzerland. Long-term loan courtesy private collection

In 1932, Méret Oppenheim—still in her teens—moved from her native Switzerland to Paris, where she became one of the few women welcomed into the overwhelmingly male circle of Surrealist artists. Four years later, her debut exhibition at the Galerie Marguerite Schulthess in Basel demonstrated her mastery of Surrealism's visual puns, erotic allusions, and anti-bourgeois sentiments through a series of sculptures composed of found objects placed into suggestive arrangements—for example, a pair of high-heeled shoes trussed like a roasted chicken. Perhaps most famously, Oppenheim's *Object* of 1936—a teacup, saucer, and spoon lined with speckled fur—caused a sensation when it debuted in an exhibition of Surrealist objects at Paris's Galerie Charles Ratton the same year.

Unlike her male peers, Oppenheim's allusions to sexuality and eroticism frequently subverted traditional gender roles, explored aspects of feminine desire, and masterfully inflected the shock of erotic subject matter with humor and irony. Even in her early work, such as *Votive Picture (Strangling Angel)* (1931)—made when Oppenheim was just eighteen—the artist was already radically imagining autonomy from the bounds of tradition. The watercolor, which shows a woman with claw-like nails strangling a newborn child, is a polemical statement against the biological functions that were expected to delimit a woman's life at the time. This is one of several early works wherein Oppenheim vociferously states her promise to herself to never have children—a commitment that would have been difficult to maintain in a period when birth control was mystified and often ineffective. While Oppenheim referred to the work as a form of “black magic”—a kind of talisman to help her avoid getting pregnant—it also expresses what she described as the “androgyny of the spirit” that would liberate both men and women and bring human creativity to an enhanced ideal. **lw**

Agnes Pelton

b. 1881, Stuttgart, Germany; d. 1961, Cathedral City, CA
Translation, 1931
Oil on canvas
Collection Fairfax Dorn and Marc Glimcher

Throughout her delicate canvases painted with shimmering stars, lotus flowers, flames, rays, and beams, the visionary painter Agnes Pelton communicates transcendental experience beyond theory—one of light, sky, and earth. Born to American parents in Germany, Pelton spent her adolescence in Brooklyn, where she later attended the Pratt Institute. Although raised in urban environments, Pelton would go on to choose a more isolated existence. From 1921 to 1932 she lived in an abandoned windmill near the ocean in Water Mill, New York, and then in the remote desert town of Cathedral City in Southern California. A theosophist, Pelton found a community after moving west with the Transcendental Painting Group (1938–41), which brought together a loosely affiliated group of Southwestern artists interested in non-objective, geometric abstraction. “Pelton used abstraction to convey personal meaning...,” says Judy Chicago, who considers Pelton’s abstractions to be a meaningful inspiration. “One of my theories is that until the advent of abstraction, women artists were not free to convey their experiences directly. Abstraction opened up the visual landscape for us to invent forms to convey our internal reality.”

During Pelton’s years in Cathedral City, she produced hundreds of sun-drenched mystical landscapes, otherworldly observations of land and sky, and luminescent abstractions, for which she is best known today. Theosophy figures heavily into these works, which contain many symbols associated with the religion. For Pelton, painting was a devotional practice. She built a meditation room and practiced rituals, which she used to further develop her abstractions; she copied symbols from theosophist Annie Besant’s *Thought Forms* (1905), also on view in this display. Pelton brings this perspective to *Translation* (1931). Pelton noted that this work was influenced by the death of her father, who she believed had passed from a difficult earthly existence into a better afterlife. The cocoon-like shape at the bottom of the canvas, she remarked, was “in a state of profound repose.” The quality of light in the work expresses this mood of poignant contemplation. As she wrote, “Light is the keynote of these pictures. Not as it plays on objects in the natural world, but through the space and forms, seen on the inner field of vision.” **MW**

Mary Richardson

b. ca. 1882, Canada; d. 1961, Hastings, UK
The Toilet of Venus (also known as the *Rokeby Venus*) by Diego Velázquez, with damage following its slashing with a meat cleaver by militant suffragette Mary Richardson, National Gallery, March 10, 1914
Exhibition print
Reproduced in *Illustrated London News*, March 14, 1914

Mary Richardson leaving for police court, March 10, 1914
Photo: Central Press Photos Limited
Exhibition print
Museum of London

Surveillance photograph of militant suffragettes, 1914
Photo: Criminal Record Office
Bromide print mounted on identification sheet
Exhibition print
National Portrait Gallery, London

Mary Richardson was an ardent supporter of women’s suffrage leader Emmeline Pankhurst, whose organization Women’s Social and Political Union, founded in 1903, advocated militant strategies for achieving the vote for women in England. Richardson, herself a radical suffragette, became a notorious figure when in 1914 she repeatedly slashed Diego Velázquez’s iconic painting *Rokeby Venus* (1647–51), in the collection of the National Gallery of Art, London. Richardson intended her action as a protest against Pankhurst’s recent arrest in Glasgow, arguing that “justice is an element of beauty as much as color and outline on canvas.”

While Richardson’s attack was the most widely reported, she was not the only British suffragette who pursued art vandalism as an activist method. Between May and July of the same year, at least fourteen other canvases were damaged, many of which depicted either authoritative, fully clothed male sitters or idealized female nudes—a contrast that speaks to the cultural values the suffragettes opposed. Judy Chicago has expressed a particular distaste for the *Rokeby Venus*, which she sees as symbolizing female passivity and sexual objectification.

Though destructive, the suffragettes’ militant actions were arguably key to the fight for voting rights. In 1918, certain classes of women gained the right to vote in the United Kingdom, and ten years later full suffrage was achieved. **LD**

Charlotte Salomon

b. 1917, Berlin, Germany; d. 1943, Auschwitz Concentration Camp, Oświęcim, Poland
Zelfportret [Self-portrait], 1940
Gouache on cardboard
Jewish Museum, Amsterdam

Charlotte Salomon was twenty-three years old, in exile in Villefranche-sur-Mer in southern France from the mounting threat of Nazi violence, when she painted her 1940 self-portrait. Her face solemn, her eyes chart the extraordinary range of emotions of one in a state of displacement. In 1943, at twenty-six years old and pregnant, Salomon would be imprisoned by the Nazis and transported to Auschwitz, where she was killed. It was in the course of this short and painful period between her exile in France and imprisonment at Auschwitz, that she was prompted to embark on “something wildly crazy”—a lightly fictionalized retelling of her family’s past and present as bourgeois German Jews in Weimar Germany, set amidst the swell of fascism.

Salomon’s heartbreaking family tale—of statelessness and exile, subjectivity, memory, and historical trauma—is documented in her monumental work, *Leben? oder Theater?* [Life? or Theater?], a narrative comprising 769 gouache paintings created after her escape from Berlin to France, between 1940 and 1942. A remarkable combination of illustration, text, and music, the theatrical, screenplay-like *Leben? oder Theater?* anticipates the graphic novel form, weaving together intimate personal stories with vivid depictions of modern Berlin—from cinema, opera, and cabaret, to engagements with artists such as Käthe Kollwitz, Vincent Van Gogh, and Edvard Munch. When Salomon finished this cycle she entrusted it to a family doctor, contending “it’s my whole life.” The work spent the remainder of the war in the doctor’s safekeeping; afterwards, it was returned—along with her self-portrait—to Salomon’s father and stepmother, who had survived the Holocaust in hiding in Amsterdam and had no knowledge of the existence of their daughter’s opus. Like *Leben? oder Theater?*, Salomon’s self-portrait is a record of a moment locked in time, but one that serves as a complex nexus between collective histories and personal stories, capturing with immediacy, somberness, and fear the unraveling of civilization in the twentieth century. **MW**

Margaret Sanger

b. 1879, Corning, NY; d. 1966, Tucson, AZ
The Woman Rebel 1, no. 1 (March 1914)
Edited by Margaret Sanger
Facsimile
The Margaret Sanger Papers, New York University

Margaret Sanger was one of eleven children born to Irish immigrants in New York. Her early career as a nurse on Manhattan’s Lower East Side revealed how poverty exacerbated the effects of repeated unplanned pregnancies, instilling in her the belief that women should have control over their fertility. Sanger quit nursing to focus full-time on birth control support, eventually becoming the country’s fiercest advocate for reproductive rights.

In 1914 Sanger published the magazine *The Woman Rebel* to provide family planning information to working-class women, who were particularly vulnerable to the impacts of unintended pregnancy. However, a series of federal anti-vice acts criminalized the circulation of “obscene” publications, which included materials about contraception. *The Woman Rebel* was quickly censored, and Sanger was charged with violating the law. She fled to Europe under false papers and remained abroad until she felt safe to return and stand trial a year later. As public opinion had tilted in her favor, charges against her were dropped, though she faced further arrests for her continued advocacy work post-trial. In subsequent years laws were changed, legitimizing Sanger’s work and allowing her to found Planned Parenthood, which remains America’s largest sexual and reproductive health care provider.

Though Sanger’s legacy is complex—her support for eugenics is now understood as scientific racism—the long-lasting impact of her birth control advocacy is undeniable. Changes to the laws regarding contraception are in part credited to her influential activism. Increased access to birth control is considered a major catalyst for American women’s entrance into the professional workforce and creative fields, though it continues to be the subject of intense political debate even today. **LD**

Augusta Savage

b. 1892, Green Cove Springs, FL; d. 1962, New York, NY

Lift Every Voice and Sing (The Harp), 1939

Bronze

Special Collections and University Archives, Thomas G. Carpenter Library, University of North Florida

Augusta Savage is regarded as one of the great artist-educator-activists of the Harlem Renaissance, throughout which she forged a pioneering career as a sculptor and a mentor to a formidable new generation of Black artists, including Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight. In the postwar era, her influence upon young artists continued, as evidenced by her inclusion in the Heritage Floor of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974–79). Savage moved to New York City from Florida in 1921 to study at the Cooper Union School of Art. In 1932, upon returning from a fellowship in Paris, the civically minded artist began to offer free art classes in her Harlem studio and helped to establish and direct the Harlem Community Art Center. Many of Savage's touchstone works are expressive portrait busts of Black figures, but her biggest and best-known piece is one that no longer exists.

In 1937, Savage received a commission from the New York World's Fair to create a sculpture for the international exposition. Inspired by James Weldon Johnson's song *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, written in 1900 and considered at the time to be the Black national anthem, Savage transformed his hymn into a monumental sculpture, retitled by fair organizers as *The Harp*. At nearly five meters tall, the mammoth plaster-cast object was finished to look like black basalt, from which a group of singers, meant to symbolize the strings of a harp—and the liberatory message of Johnson's work—rise like columns in graduated heights. The soundboard takes the form of an arm while a man kneels at the foot pedal to beckon the public into the ecstatic territory that *The Harp* constructs. Despite the acclaim the work garnered upon its debut in 1939, no funds were available to cast or store it. It was destroyed after the fair ended; left behind are only souvenir reproductions, including the bronze presented at the New Museum, to record the colossal power of this essential work of the Harlem Renaissance. **mw**

Ethel Smyth

b. 1858, Sidcup, UK; d. 1944, Woking, UK

The March of the Women, 1911

Score

Publisher: Breitkopf & Härtel (London)

Facsimile

Library of Congress, Washington, DC

Ethel Smyth was one of the UK's most successful female composers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After studying music composition in Leipzig, Smyth successfully attracted the support of influential female patrons, including Empress Eugénie de Montijo of France and members of the British aristocracy, some of whom may have been lovers. Over the course of her career, she composed orchestral music and several operas, which were staged in Europe and North America, an unusual accomplishment for a woman of her era. In 1903 her opera *Der Wald* [The Forest] was staged at the Metropolitan Opera, becoming the first—and until 2016, the only—opera composed by a woman in the company's performance history.

Alongside her musical career, Smyth was an ardent feminist and close friend of UK women's suffrage leader Emmeline Pankhurst, whose organization Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) sought the vote through "deeds, not words." In support of the cause, Smyth composed the movement's anthem *March of the Women* (1911), which called for women to "March, march, many as one. / Shoulder to shoulder and friend to friend." The WSPU encouraged militant action, and Smyth—a talented bowler—is credited with teaching suffragettes how to throw stones, a contribution to the movement that resulted in a short prison sentence. While incarcerated, Smyth conducted a rendition of the march sung by other imprisoned suffragettes, keeping time with her toothbrush. Throughout her life, she remained a vocal feminist who longed to see women "turn their minds to big and difficult jobs, not just to go on hugging the shore, afraid to put out to sea." **ld**

Varvara Stepanova

b. 1894, Kovno, Russian Empire (now Kaunas, Lithuania); d. 1958, Moscow, Russia

Pattern Design, ca. 1924

Gouache on paper

Sketch for Textile Design, 1924

Gouache on paper

Textile Design, 1924

Gouache on paper

Textile Design, 1924

Watercolor on paper

All works courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska, Zürich

Pioneering Russian artist and designer Varvara Stepanova was a significant contributor to the Constructivist movement, the principles of which she applied to her work in painting, textiles, graphic design, and photography. Across her artwork, theoretical writings, and her contributions to theater and film productions, Stepanova embraced the urgent commitment to social change and holistic reimagining of the world that followed the 1917 Russian Revolution, working on the principles that art should be a tool for societal transformation, that art should serve the masses, and that bourgeois traditions should be torn down, including both the artificial barriers between art and life and the gendered divisions within design. Frequently working in collaboration with her partner Alexander Rodchenko, Stepanova was highly influential in shaping the principles of modern design as they reached beyond Russia to Europe, the US, and Latin America.

Stepanova's textile designs epitomize Constructivist principles in their application of abstract geometric patterns, bold colors, and dynamic compositions. Two pattern designs from approximately 1924 exemplify these qualities: while chromatically exuberant, they are minimalistic, without ornamental embellishments. Composed from visually impactful geometric shapes and colors, they appeal to objectivity through their instant graphic legibility. The strong use of red and black in these patterns is not only visually striking, but also politically symbolic; red, the color of the Bolshevik flag, is a symbol of the socialist cause and the working class. These dazzling, high contrast patterns convey a sense of urgency, communicating the dynamic and revolutionary ethos of Stepanova's time. **lw**

Florine Stettheimer

b. 1871, Rochester, NY; d. 1944, New York, NY

Portrait of Myself, 1923

Oil on canvas laid on board

Art Properties, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts

Library, Columbia University

Gift of the Estate of Ettie Stettheimer, 1967

Andy Warhol's favorite artist, Florine Stettheimer was raised by a wealthy German-Jewish family in Gilded Age New York. She spent significant periods of her early life in Europe, where she was exposed to avant-garde art; she found particular inspiration in the interdisciplinary approach of the Ballet Russes, Sergei Diaghilev's dance company renowned for commissioning new compositions by Igor Stravinsky, Claude Debussy, and Erik Satie and dazzling production designs by Pablo Picasso, Vasily Kandinsky, and Léon Bakst. Stettheimer returned to New York at the outbreak of World War I and remained there for the rest of her life, capturing the city in celebratory portraits of popular venues, including the Henri Bendel department store and Broadway theaters. She also worked as a theatrical designer for Gertrude Stein's 1928 opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*, which she dressed in cellophane, tulle, and feathers. Together with her equally creative sisters Carrie and Ettie, Stettheimer was known for hosting lavish parties attended by key figures of the New York art world, including Marcel Duchamp, Georgia O'Keeffe, Carl van Vechten, and Alfred Stieglitz, who she also painted.

Throughout her career, Stettheimer regularly produced self-portraits, including a full body reclining nude—possibly the first in Western art history painted by a woman. In *Portrait of Myself* (1923), which the artist created in her early fifties, she presents herself perched on a scarlet sunbeam clad in a black cap and gauzy white dress. Rendered in the ecstatic color palette characteristic of her oeuvre, Stettheimer's self-portrait casts her as an ethereal being, reminiscent of the mayfly fluttering next to the sun in the painting's upper righthand corner. With a wry smile and luminous costume, Stettheimer embodies the effortless style of a free-wheeling flapper, oozing Jazz Age glamor. **ld**

Maria Longworth Nichols Storer

b. 1849, Cincinnati, OH; d. 1932, Paris, France
Vase, 1881
Earthenware, Limoges glaze line
Cincinnati Art Museum. Gift of Women's Art
Museum Association, 1881.43

Maria Longworth Nichols Storer was one of the most significant contributors to the elevation of ceramics as an artistic medium in the nineteenth century. An artist and entrepreneur who helped turn Cincinnati into a center of American ceramics, Storer was born into one of the wealthiest families in Cincinnati and grew up surrounded by a substantial art collection. She used her family's resources to pursue a variety of artistic pursuits from music to painting. Like her local rival, Mary Louise McLaughlin, whose work is also featured in "The City of Ladies," Storer studied ceramic painting at the School of Art and Design in Cincinnati under the tutelage of Benn Pitman, an influential figure in the American Arts and Crafts movement. Inspired by the French ceramics at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia and by the works of Japanese art in her family's own collection, Storer incorporated a wide range of international styles and techniques into her own ceramic creations.

Storer is perhaps best known for establishing Cincinnati's Rookwood Pottery Company, a place where a wide range of ceramic experimentation and production could take place. Under the direction of Storer and fellow ceramic painter Clara Nichols Chapman, the company was an artistic and commercial success and produced a range of functional and artistic design objects in a variety of styles. Rookwood employed hundreds of women in its design and production processes. Although Storer would eventually give up ownership of the company, it continued to operate successfully into the 1960s, was shuttered, and then revived in Cincinnati several decades later. Storer's own ceramics embraced the French barbotine technique which used wet clay slip to decorate ceramic vessels with sculptural detail. She countered McLaughlin's "Ali Baba" Vase (1880) with her own ambitious "Aladdin" Vase (1880–83), which exceeds its monumental predecessor in width if not height. In the 1881 vase on display here, Storer uses the barbotine technique to full effect, creating a decorative dragon which wraps around the body and neck of the vase. Judy Chicago has long admired the work of Storer and studied it in her own embrace of ceramics as a critical medium. **gcm**

Sophie Taeuber-Arp

b. 1889, Davos, Switzerland; d. 1943, Zürich, Switzerland
Pillowcase, 1921–24
Cotton
Stiftung Arp e.V., Berlin/Rolandswerth

Swiss artist Sophie Taeuber-Arp was a major figure in the development of abstraction who worked at the intersection of the fine and applied arts in the first decades of the twentieth century. Best known for her geometric textile designs and abstract paintings, Taeuber-Arp created costumes, masks, sets, and puppets for the legendary Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich, collaborating with other artists including her husband Jean (Hans) Arp, Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara, and Emmy Hennings. A former student at the Laban School in Zürich and a member of a Swiss association of professional dancers called the Schweizerischer Werkbund, Taeuber-Arp brought an expertise in dance to the Zürich Dada milieu, making a contribution to the development of modern dance as abstract movement performed to sound or poetry, rather than music. She likewise made numerous contributions to the modernist reimagining of the fields of illustration, interior design, and architecture.

Shortly after moving to Zürich in 1915, Taeuber-Arp began creating abstract geometric studies for textile works that she described as "concrete," seeking to collapse any distinction between fine art and utilitarian design. Her *Pillowcase* (1921–24) was created by hand through a combination of appliqué and embroidery. The design's boldly contrasting colors and dynamic arrangements demonstrate Taeuber-Arp's belief in the need to redesign the entire universe—in this case, from the launch pad of the bedroom—that animated so many avant-garde movements. Integrating art into everyday life was not only a hallmark of her approach, but a politically charged gesture of parity, demonstrating that practices typically deemed feminine could be as urgent and modern as the traditionally masculine realm of the "fine arts." **iw**

Dorothea Tanning

b. 1910, Galesburg, IL; d. 2012, New York, NY
Rêve de Luxe [Dream of Luxury], 1944
Oil on canvas
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven. Gift of
Thomas Fine Howard, 1955.59.4

Dorothea Tanning's enigmatic and dreamlike paintings, sculptures, and poetry made a significant contribution to both the exploration of the subconscious and the representation of feminine identity in early twentieth-century art. As a teenager in Galesburg, Illinois, Tanning worked as an assistant at a local library, where she developed a taste for fantasy and mythical literature and a desire to craft her own imagined worlds. By 1936, she had moved to New York to work as a freelance illustrator; it was there that she saw Alfred H. Barr Jr.'s *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* at the Museum of Modern Art, a watershed exhibition that included works by such Surrealist pioneers as René Magritte, Max Ernst, Méret Oppenheim, and Eileen Agar, among others. Struck by the profound affinity between the work on view in the exhibition and the fantastical style she had developed on her own, Tanning resolved to acquaint herself with the European Surrealists, many of whom were meanwhile being driven from Europe by the outbreak of the second World War. Tanning finally met Max Ernst in New York in 1942 when Ernst—seeking artwork to recommend for Peggy Guggenheim's *Exhibition by 31 Women* at her Art of This Century Gallery—visited Tanning's Manhattan studio.

In contrast to the restricted and often infantilized roles forced upon women within the cultural milieu surrounding Surrealism, Tanning's female figures refute fixed and subservient identities. In more abstract works, like *Rêve de Luxe* [Dream of Luxury] (1944), Tanning draws on the visual language of Surrealism while consistently asserting her own perspective: depicting an open oyster shell lined with coin purses rather than pearls, the painting seems to playfully recognize and subvert its own vulgar symbolism, setting a canny precedent for the so-called "central core" imagery that would become a recurring motif in feminist art in the latter half of the twentieth century. **iw**

Toyen

b. 1902, Prague, Austro-Hungarian Empire (now Czech Republic); d. 1980, Paris, France
Illustration from *Erotická revue*, October 1930–
May 1931
Privately published (Prague)
Four deluxe volumes bound together
Courtesy Ubu Gallery, New York

A radical Czech Surrealist born in early twentieth-century Prague, Marie Čermínová preferred to use the gender-neutral mononym Toyen, which some scholars believe she adopted as a derivation of the French word for citizen, *citoyen*, or as a pun on *to já jen*, Czech for "to think oneself." Often seen wearing men's clothes and flaunting her sexual interest in women during her lifetime, Toyen, who famously referred to herself in Czech as a "malíř smutnej" [sad (male) painter], rebuffed conventional gender roles and expressed herself unreservedly in her sensuous works. The gender fluidity crucial to Toyen's image and the themes addressed by her work have led many to suggest that the artist could have been nonbinary, prior to the emergence of this term, and may not have chosen female pronouns if alive today—although this is the convention used among the few Toyen scholars, so is replicated here.

Toyen's preoccupation with the erotic was an unwavering constant, as suggested by the extensive arsenal of pornographic materials that she collected throughout her life. While illustrating erotica for a number of independent publications in the early 1930s, she partnered with her intimate collaborator, the Czech poet Jindřich Štyrský, to publish the serial imprint *Edice 69* [Editions 69] and the journal *Erorická*. Over the course of its short run, *Erorická revue* published a broad range of materials, in which essays on sex were accompanied by excerpts of Sigmund Freud, Czech folksongs, Arthur Rimbaud, Marquis de Sade, and André Breton, among many other contributions both contemporary and historical. Toyen's polished yet humorous pornographic drawings, such as the one presented here, range from orgy scenes and homoeroticism to women dreaming of penises, phallic chess pieces, and caricatured clowns with oversized genitals—a testament to the artist's fantastical imagination, and radical perspective on sex, gender, and desire that would go on to influence and inspire feminist artists like Judy Chicago in the 1970s. **mw**

Sojourner Truth

b. ca. 1797, Swartekill (now Rifton), New York; d. 1883, Battle Creek, Michigan

I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance, 1864

Unknown photographer
Albumen silver print from glass negative
Facsimile
Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Sojourner Truth, born Isabella Baumfree, emerged as one of the most influential leaders of the abolitionist and early women's suffrage movements in the United States. Born into slavery in upstate New York, Truth was sold to a succession of abusive slaveholders, the last of whom reneged on his promise to free her. A year before the New York State Gradual Emancipation Act was passed, Truth fled with her young daughter Sophia and later sued for the emancipation of her son Peter, who had been illegally sold into slavery in the South. After becoming a devout Christian, Truth changed her name, as she felt she had been called upon by God to preach against the institution of slavery. Though she never learned to read or write, her rousing speeches earned her a reputation as a powerful figure in the fight to end slavery, alongside compatriots Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison.

Truth also notably combined abolition work with women's rights advocacy from the position of having been subjected to both enslavement and sexist oppression. At the 1851 Woman's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, Truth delivered one of the most famous orations in American history, often remembered as her "Ain't I A Woman?" speech, though most historians consider it unlikely that Truth actually spoke those words. In this speech, she made the case for women's suffrage by pointing out how, as an enslaved woman, she performed "as much work as any man." Testifying from the perspective of lived experience, Truth's words offer an early incarnation of what today would be called intersectionality.

To fund her public speaking and advocacy work, Truth sold *cartes-de-visite*, which often feature the text "I sell the shadow to support the substance." Though she began her existence as the legal property of others, Truth took full ownership of her life, controlling the circulation of her image in support of the causes she preached. **LD**

Remedios Varo

b. 1908, Anglès, Spain; d. 1963, Mexico City, Mexico

Papilla Estelar [Celestial Pablum], 1958
Oil on board
FEMSA Collection

Many of Remedios Varo's detailed and fantastic paintings envision scenes reminiscent of mythological tales, executed with the precision of scientific illustrations. As a young person, Varo was enthralled by adventure stories and would regularly reproduce her father's architectural blueprints. She went on to study fine arts in Madrid and graduated in 1930. Fleeing political tensions around the Spanish Civil War, she moved to Paris in 1937 where she became acquainted with the Surrealist movement. Only a few years later, in 1941, she emigrated with scores of other artists from World War II-ravaged Europe to Mexico, where she remained for most of her life. At times struggling to make ends meet, Varo took jobs illustrating microscopic organisms for medical laboratories and designing stage sets and furniture. She was also commissioned to reproduce paintings by other artists—particularly works by Giorgio de Chirico, whose Metaphysical paintings share the enigmatic and mythic qualities of her own.

Much of Varo's work reveals her skill at giving form to psychic architectures that play host to mystical experiences or spiritual quests—perhaps inspired by Varo's interest in Eastern philosophical ideas of enlightenment as well as her own travels. For Varo, hermetic traditions were closely tied to women's intuitive capacities and creative powers. *Papilla Estelar* [Celestial Pablum] (1958) exemplifies the way in which her paintings reclaim creative powers for women while registering their social seclusion and need for spiritual self-preservation. Feeding a caged moon—often seen as a symbol of the feminine—with a cosmic porridge, the forlorn-looking female figure appears to be part mother, part alchemist, and might be understood to be nourishing her own connection to the universe through spiritual and mythic links. **MN**

Pablita Velarde

b. 1918, Santa Clara Pueblo, NM; d. 2006, Albuquerque, NM

Santa Cruz Women Before the Altar, 1933
Watercolor on paper
Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe

Pablita Velarde was born in Santa Clara Pueblo, an ancient village of the northern Rio Grande Valley. In the early 1930s, Velarde (born Tse Tsan) transferred to the Santa Fe Indian School where the art instructor Dorothy Dunn had established the Studio School. Velarde became the first woman of the inaugural graduating class of academically trained artists, developing her work in "flat style" painting, which Dunn championed. She specialized in subjects drawn from Pueblo community life, describing her work as "memory paintings"—a response to her concern about the rapid changes in Native lifestyles and a form of cultural preservation. Early in her career, Velarde used watercolor, as is shown in *Santa Cruz Women Before the Altar* (1933). Later, she incorporated other techniques including tempera, oils, and natural pigments that she collected and ground herself. In the 1940s, Velarde gained recognition when she was commissioned to paint a series of seventy works of traditional scenes of Pueblo culture for the Bandelier National Monument. In the 1960s, she published *Old Father Story Teller*, a collection of illustrated stories told by her father growing up at Santa Clara Pueblo.

Pursuing a career as a painter, Velarde refused to be censored by the conservative views of her community. Speaking on the impact of her decisions she said, "They thought I was a nut. They said, 'She'll never make it'. But I did. I showed them. (...) I've set examples for women in one way or the other. Just by doing it and not caring what anybody said to me about it." Velarde, her daughter Helen Hardin, and granddaughter Margarete Bagshaw comprise three generations of female painters. **LH**

Gerda Wegener

b. 1886, Grenaa, Denmark; d. 1940, Frederiksberg, Denmark

Portrait, possibly of Lili Elbe, ca. 1928
Watercolor
Wellcome Collection, London

Renowned for her exploration of gender and sexuality in the midst of the rapidly changing social attitudes of her time, Danish artist Gerda Wegener gained recognition for portraits and depictions of fashionable women imbued with the sensuality and glamour of the Art Nouveau, and later Art Deco, movements. Most notably, Wegener was a prescient and groundbreaking explorer of gender identity, creating images of gender-fluid and transgender subjects including her own spouse, Lili Elbe, whom Wegener married in 1904. Wegener created numerous portraits of Elbe as both a man and a woman. In this watercolor portrait, which is commonly accepted to depict Elbe, the subject appears as a paragon of 1920s feminine beauty, with a fashionable bob haircut, enjoying a drink in a café. A rose on the table before her redoubles the impression of soft, feminine beauty. Rather than endeavoring to capture an essentialist femininity, however, Wegener's portrait instead seems to play on the stylistic ethos of Art Nouveau and Art Deco: both movements emphasized outward beauty and aesthetic ornamentation and expressed a keen fascination with new possibilities.

After Elbe underwent several previously untested gender reassignment procedures between 1920 and '30—in Berlin under the care of Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld and in Dresden with Dr. Kurt Warnekros—her marriage to Wegener was forcibly annulled by the Danish courts, under whose law it was impossible for two women to be married to each other. Elbe's story was later adapted into David Ebershoff's novel *The Danish Girl* and a later film by the same title. **W**

Beatrice Wood

b. 1893, San Francisco, CA; d. 1998, Ojai, CA
Un peut d'eau dans du savon [A Little Water in Some Soap], 1917/1977
Glazed earthenware, heart-shaped bar of soap
Collection Francis M. Naumann and Marie T. Keller

Known affectionately as the “Mama of Dada,” Beatrice Wood worked in theater, publishing, painting, sculpture, and ceramics over the course of her century-long life. Though Wood was born into a wealthy family in San Francisco, she rebelled against upper class society’s expectations, ultimately choosing freedom over her inheritance. After moving to New York City, she became a friend and lover of artist Marcel Duchamp, and the two collaborated with author Henri-Pierre Roché on the influential 1917 Dadaist magazines *The Blind Man* and *Rongwrong*. A main fixture of collectors Louise and Walter Arensberg’s New York circle of avant-garde artists, Wood was known to enjoy provocation, eventually titling her autobiography *I Shock Myself*.

One of her most notorious works debuted in 1917 at the first exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York, which Duchamp helped organize. Wood’s painting *Un peut d'eau dans du savon* [A Little Water in Some Soap] depicted a nude woman’s hourglass-shaped torso with a bar of scallop-shaped soap placed between her legs “at a very tactical position,” to borrow Wood’s phrasing. Critics were outraged by the work, which was considered scandalous due to its allusion to female orgasm and “derangement” of canonical representations of the female nude. Though the original is lost, Wood created a new version of the work in 1977, when she was in her mid-eighties. Instead of painting, Wood fabricated the work in earthenware, replacing the shell-shaped cake of soap with a heart-shaped bar. The change in medium reflects Wood’s shift to ceramics; at the time of the work’s recreation she was an established studio potter renowned for her lusterware. In her later years, Wood frequently welcomed younger artists, including Judy Chicago, at her Ojai, California studio. Chicago saw Wood as an “exotic creature” whose oeuvre helped inspire her to question traditional hierarchies between art and craft. **LD**

Virginia Woolf

b. 1882, London, UK; d. 1941, Lewes, UK
Virginia Woolf photographed in her mother’s dress by Maurice Beck and Helen MacGregor, 1924
Originally published in *Vogue*, May 1926
Facsimile
Courtesy Condé Nast/Vogue Archive

Virginia Woolf is considered one of the foremost Modernist writers of the early twentieth century, best known for her novels *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *Orlando* (1928). She was a central figure in the Bloomsbury Group, an artistic and literary circle that included novelist E.M. Forster, painter Roger Fry, and Woolf’s sister, artist Vanessa Bell. An ardent supporter of women’s rights, Woolf articulated an influential feminist critique in her 1929 book *A Room of One’s Own*, which argued that social expectations impede women’s intellectual freedom and that an independent income and private workspace are necessary for creative production. This was still a prevalent issue in Judy Chicago’s era—when visiting artists, Chicago noticed that men could typically afford spacious studios, while women struggled to produce work in cramped kitchens and living rooms.

Like many feminist artists, Woolf frequently experimented with the politics of self-representation. In photographs taken for a 1926 issue of *Vogue*, she poses in an antique dress that belonged to her mother, whose death when Woolf was thirteen greatly affected Woolf and her siblings. Throughout their lives, Woolf and Bell were active amateur photographers who meticulously captured and archived private moments in albums. This often involved dressing up, which allowed them to play with the fluidity of identity, a theme that emerges throughout Woolf’s oeuvre, particularly in relation to gender. **LD**

Unica Zürn

b. 1916, Berlin, Germany; d. 1970, Paris, France
La Serpenta [The Serpent], 1957
Oil on panel
Courtesy Ubu Gallery, New York

A gifted but tortured artist, Unica Zürn is best known for her automatic drawings and anagrammatic poetry, as well as her photographic collaborations with Surrealist Hans Bellmer—her longtime partner until her tragic death by suicide in 1970. Zürn suffered throughout her life from various bouts of depression, but funneled her disquiet into her vital and obsessive artwork. Her confessional novel, *The Man of Jasmine*, published in 1967, provides an astonishing, if alarming, account of her experiences with mental illness, exposing an inner world populated with cryptograms and anagrams, signs and symbols. Zürn and Bellmer met at an exhibition in 1953 where Bellmer was presenting his macabre “doll” photographs, images that he conceived as anatomical anagrams. For years to come, he would use Zürn as a model and muse for his work, believing that Zürn had the verve that would bring his mangled, and often sadistic, images of dolls to life. (Upon meeting Zürn, Bellmer is reported to have said, “Here is the doll.”) Like many other Surrealists, Bellmer idealized “madness” as a state of unobstructed admission to the unconscious; in contrast, Zürn managed the pain of her hallucinations and paranoid delusions through writing and drawing.

As is the fate of many women in art and literature during this period, all too many accounts of Zürn’s life pathologize her mental illness and treat her biography as the sole means of analysis of her work. Zürn’s own anagrams and automatic drawings display an acute degree of imaginative intensity: monstrously distorted figures, mythic beings, and abstract lines multiply and divide into fanatical ornamentation. In some works, Zürn practiced the process of “entoptic graphomania,” in which she laid out dots on a sheet of paper and connected them with lines. In other phantasmagorical works, like the luminous oil painting *La Serpenta* [The Serpent] (1957), Zürn presents a pearlescent dreamworld, densely populated by a monstrous serpent and entwined with snakes, lizards, and flowers that curl into and out of patterned abstraction. While Zürn’s biography traces a life of illness and loss, her drawings—of chimeras, multiheaded hydras, omniscient phoenixes, apparitions with drifting eyes—attest to a spontaneous symbolic universe of awe and wonder. **MW**

Unknown artist

Stumpwork picture, late 17th century
Stumpwork and embroidery on silk panel
Private collection

Stumpwork, sometimes referred to as raised work, is an embroidery technique that was popularized in England during the early to mid-seventeenth century and imported to the US, and is still in use today. Characterized by its high relief, stumpwork is a method of creating three-dimensional embroideries using horsehair or wool felt padding. Fashionable among women in England during the period of the English Civil War (1642–51), stumpwork was so popular that vendors traveled the country selling semi-precious stones, colored silks, cord, ribbons, tassels, beads, and golden threads to decorate embroidered items which included objects as diverse as needlework pictures, raised-work boxes, purses and bags, and decorative cabinets, mirrors, and frames. As in this unattributed British stumpwork embroidery (many such examples from this period are unauthored), stumpwork pictures from the seventeenth century often present portraits of monarchs, flora and fauna, and allegorical or biblical scenes. Here, stitched in raised silk, a young woman is positioned in a pastoral setting, accompanied by a young shepherd, animals, and a blossoming pear tree and rose bush, as the sun emerges from the top edge.

Judy Chicago first explored stumpwork while preparing for *The Dinner Party* (1974–79), along with other techniques including appliqué, bargello, blackwork, crochet, cross stitch, drawn thread work, lace, patchwork, quilting, raised gold thread, ribbon work, satin and stem stitching, and whitework. Incorporated into Mary Wollstonecraft’s runner, stumpwork was used to portray the famous writer and proto-feminist giving birth to her daughter, the writer Mary Shelley. As Chicago described her subject and process, “Mary dying giving birth to Mary Shelley was one of the earliest images of birth I did, and it was so raw and graphic. And then it was transformed with all these needlework techniques.” **MW**

Unknown artist

Votes for Women Pennant, ca. 1917
Celluloid, felt
Museum of the City of New York. Gift of
Mrs. Edward C. Moen, 49.215.14

In the early twentieth century, artfully designed textiles became an important aesthetic tool in the fight for women's suffrage. With intricate detailing and carefully selected color schemes, banners and pennants were carried or worn at suffrage parades, where they symbolized a strong, united front. Employing traditional decorative arts like embroidery, suffrage textiles invest domestic craft with political meaning, situating the home as a site of activist labor.

The pennant on view in "The City of Ladies" was produced by the Women's Political Union (WPU), a group founded by suffragette Harriot Stanton Blatch, daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Blatch initiated the group in 1907 to recruit working-class American women into the suffrage movement, which was overwhelmingly middle-class. The WPU focused on amending the New York State Constitution to give women the vote, while also advocating more generally for women workers' rights and equal pay. The WPU later merged with Alice Paul and Lucy Burns's Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, becoming the National Woman's Party, which fought for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment once full suffrage was achieved federally in the United States in 1920.

The pennant's colors symbolize the WPU's more radical orientation, as purple and green were associated with British suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst and her militant Women's Social and Political Union, which encouraged civil disobedience. The figure blowing a clarion is a recurring motif in suffrage propaganda; stationed on the ramparts with a sword at her side and a helmet atop her head, she appears prepared for battle, while the glowing sun behind her implies the righteousness of her cause. **LD**

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