INTRODUCTION

HISTORIES, SILENCES, AND STORIES

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In the spring of 1996 I issued a call for papers to be presented at a panel entitled "The Politics of Rediscovery: The Monograph and Feminist Art History" at the College Art Association's annual meeting the following February. The panel was to examine some of the theoretical and practical concerns facing feminist art history and its treatment of individual women artists. Specifically, it would suggest how in the mid-1990s a theoretical climate of poststructuralist skepticism about individuality, originality, and hierarchical privileging and categorization had inspired a shift from the monographic treatment of artists (books focusing on a single artist) to thematic treatment of art historical subjects and a broad-based approach to the field increasingly known as "visual culture" rather than "art history." The panel in 1997 would explore how women artists had been inscribed into art history, focusing on the work of five art historians.

Feminist art history since 1996 has been a fraught territory, grounded in the conflicting, or at least multivalent, goals of the previous twenty-five years. Feminist art history may be said to have begun in 1971 with Linda Nochlin's essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Published in a special issue of *Art News,* it has been reprinted many times.[1] Nochlin wrote the article after teaching a seminar on women in art at Vassar College, in which it had become imme-

diately and abundantly clear that there was no history of women in art, no list of important women, no bibliography of the study of their work.[2] It seemed necessary to write monographs on women artists as the research of early feminist art historians made their work visible. Yet a hesitancy in the field to maintain the monograph as central to art history might reflect, as Griselda Pollock suggested in 1996, an awareness that "we could not begin to speak of the women artists we would re-excavate from dusty basements and forgotten encyclopedias using the existing languages of art history or criticism."[3]

It has become apparent in the past thirty years that the attitudes and goals of art historians committed to a feminist view will not constitute a cohesive, comprehensive "feminist art history," for feminist interventions in the history of art take many different shapes. How will feminist art historians shape the achievements of the growing list of artists who are women? Exhibitions and resulting texts (for example, Linda Nochlin and Anne Sutherland Harris's *Women Artists 1550–1950*) have identified important female artists. Should the next goal be to place these artists within the styles and time periods of canonical art history? Or should another canon be created to encompass the goals and accomplishments of women artists? Is the notion of a canon itself to be trusted and maintained, or is the category of "canonical" inherently corrupt because of its masculinist roots?

Consider the canon: artists and works familiar and familiarly beloved, "inspired and divine," as the term in its theological meaning suggests. The implication of a canon is comforting: once we know it, we know all. Once we grasp the chronological sequence from the art of ancient Greece through the art of the cubist period and beyond, once we can name the "important" figures in each period, recognize their works, identify how their styles diverge from those of the past, name the artists who succeeded each other (repeating the pattern of the vanquished father and vanquishing son that Freud defined), we know our past. Art history students learn to recognize the relation between style and representative artist: impressionism and Monet, cubism and Picasso; each one makes the other. In tracing the history of these important artists, movements, and objects as a linear progression, the authors of the histories of art (H. W. Janson, Frederick Hartt) make the history of art accessible and knowable. We know our past. But do we?

Is it really possible that in 1962, when Janson published the first edition of his familiar *History of Art,* not one single woman was impor-

tant enough to be included?[4] Had none existed? In 1962 were we collectively (as represented by Janson) unaware of such a woman? Or, as Linda Nochlin suggested, did cultural preconceptions and stereotypes mean that the canon excluded women—not by conscious definition but by systematic exclusion from important institutions, opportunities, and societal roles?

By 1971 there was enough interest in the achievements of women for Linda Nochlin to propose and teach her course. But what materials would she use? Where would they come from? The goals of feminist art history must already have been clear. The first was to show how previous tellings of art history had been blind to the achievements of women. The next was to discover institutional reasons for women's different (ostensibly lesser) achievements in the visual arts. Then would follow the excavation of the histories of women artists of remarkable achievement and the addition of their work to the canon. It was time to find the female Caravaggio, Hals, Watteau, and Degas, to conduct an archaeological dig of women artists—to turn up their works, compare them to those of contemporaneous male artists, and construct compelling life stories. To be a famous female artist (retroactively, posthumously) requires a compelling life story or an attachment as wife, lover, sister, daughter, or devoted student to a male artist with a compelling life story. It is amusing to consider the multilayered connotations of the phrase "recovered female artist." Recovery is desirable, a shift from oblivion to recognition, yet the term implies prior disease as well.

In any event, by 1971 there was an audience for, and a perceived need for, the study of individual female artists from the "dawn of history," to use Janson's phrase, to the present day. The time for the female single-artist study had come. But the matter was not that simple.

What if the whole construct of "remembered significant historical figure" was a corrupt construct of masculinist ideology? What if the whole scenario of institutional training—learning from a master, rejecting the style of that master to emerge significant in one's own right—was a masculine scenario unrelated to the experiences of women, impossible in the collective, collaborative social structures open to them? What if the linear progression from style to style in the time line was irrelevant because the artist's style was outside the dominant paradigm? What if the defining of each forgotten female artist in terms of her relation to some significant famous male artist was just

another instance of the traditional cultural practice of identifying women primarily in terms of their relation to men and therefore was undesirable to feminist art historians?

This book presents diverse voices speaking expertly about women artists and their historical treatment. There is not (nor can there be) consensus among art historians working from feminist perspectives about the form that work should take. Feminist art historical investigation takes place in a variety of formats, among them individual essays, sometimes gathered in valuable anthologies like those edited by Norma Broude and Mary Garrard and by Rosemary Betteron; surveys of women artists like those by Nancy Heller and Whitney Chadwick; and critical historical texts like those by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock. There are illuminating and useful single-artist studies like Lucy Lippard's monograph on Eva Hesse, Reine-Marie Paris's catalogue raisonné on Camille Claudel, and Hayden Herrera's book on Frida Kahlo.[5] But many single-artist studies (including those I mention) are theoretically or at least linguistically complicit with sexist, masculinist structures of traditional art history in their overreliance on biographical details to explain artwork, their trivializing use of women artists' first names, or their tendency to describe art by women primarily in terms of a male artist's proposed influence.[6]

My own work on Camille Claudel and Anna Golubkina proceeds from two different theoretical and rhetorical aims: my approach to Claudel is explicitly a critical feminist one, and my treatment of Golubkina is biographical and historical.[7] During the years that I worked on Claudel and Golubkina I taught a graduate seminar at Hunter College in New York City called "Gender and Difference in Art." My students and I frequently discussed the apparent conflict between feminist theory (largely skeptical of monographic treatments) and the need many historians felt to provide women artists with the visibility and status that a monograph can confer. We debated how the art historians we studied had reconciled (or not) the conflicts we saw. During these discussions I formulated the idea of approaching established art historians to ask them about their experiences with research, writing, and curating, as well as the critical reception of the artists they had chosen to study.

Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, in the introduction to their anthology *The Expanding Discourse,* clearly describe how feminist art history and poststructuralism can come into conflict.[8] They refer to

Roland Barthes's objection, in his influential essay "The Death of the Author," to interpretations that privilege the notion of the individual author. He argues:

> The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyranically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice. The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through that more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* "confiding" in us.[9]

Barthes then proposes that the cherished category "author" be replaced by that of "scriptor," whose function is to rearrange preexisting ideas, not to invent new themes.[10] Such a shift counters romantic notions of artistic creativity or originality as well as fundamentally dismantling the author as the source of writing. For Barthes, "The modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate."[11]

If we substitute the term *artist* for the term *author* in Barthes's text, it is easy to see why Barthes's theories might be worrisome to feminist art historians. Broude and Garrard note that "some art historians have observed that the death-of-the-author theories emerged, perhaps not fortuitously, just at the time when feminist scholars were attempting to gain a place for women artists within the historical canon."[12] Although there are problems in linking an artist's life to her work, the denial of any such linkage in Barthesian theory may be excessive and the cost to feminist art history too high. And poststructuralism has not been the only theory in which the practice of linking person and artwork is suspect and highly problematic; the same is true for psychoanalytic theory, as Griselda Pollock notes: "Of course I believe that there are producers of art works, highly intelligent and self-critical practitioners who devise their strategies and respond to their own personal, political and aesthetic promptings. But according to one major twentieth-century theory, that of psychoanalysis, we are not fully known or even knowable to ourselves."[13]

This conflict (between the understandable wish to reach, memorialize, and situate an individual and her productions and theoretical skep-

ticism about such a project) is symptomatic of the current situation of feminist art history. How do art historians negotiate it? What place is there for the single-artist study (as a feminist strategy) in the art history of postmodern times? Is there a way to reinvent the monograph and the one-person exhibition and disengage them from their masculinist predecessors, or is a desire to do so simply the manifestation of a nostalgia for less confused theoretical days in the production of art history?

The panelists and their subjects in 1997 were Katherine McIver (Lavinia Fontana), Sarah E. Webb (Gwen John), Barbara Bloemink (Florine Stettheimer), Gail Levin (Jo Nivison Hopper), and Amy Schlegel (Nancy Spero). These presenters spurred debate among audience members about artists like Artemisia Gentileschi, Camille Claudel, Frida Kahlo, Lee Krasner, Georgia O'Keeffe, and others whose careers (and lives) had been the subjects of highly acclaimed and popular single-artist studies. We asked general questions: "What other strategies are there for treating the work of women artists if we abandon single-artist studies?" "When there are so many monographs on male artists, shouldn't women artists be written about in that format too?" "Doesn't the single-artist study merely perpetuate the masculinist obsession with individual genius and originality, ignoring important feminist contributions like collaboration?" And members of the audience suggested both other women artists who would be appropriate subjects of discussion and other art historians whose work dealt with the questions we asked. The idea of this book began to take shape.

Shortly after the conference Sarah Webb and I began to discuss approaching art historians from our panel, as well as others, to contribute to a book on the role of the monograph in feminist art history. The art historians represented in this book do not offer a comprehensive examination of important female artists: Berthe Morisot, Georgia O'Keeffe, Frida Kahlo, Faith Ringgold, Barbara Kruger, and Cindy Sherman, among others, are not considered here. Further, the writers are not a cohesive group proceeding from a unified point of view. Rather, they and their subjects are an idiosyncratic and interesting group of *cases*. We made an effort to explore all media (painting, sculpture, photography, architecture, and performance); the disproportionate representation of painting and sculpture reflects art history's privileging of these media. We also wanted to cover a broad time span (from the Renaissance to the present) and to address artists of diverse cultural backgrounds.

We wanted a list of contributors who would be as important as the artists they studied. Rather than explicitly or implicitly privileging the artist subject of each essay over the writer, we formulated the book as one in which *both* the subject and the writer would be useful examples and eloquent voices in feminist art history. In some cases our system of choice privileged the author over the artist, so to speak: in other words, we approached authors whose work on feminist art history was relevant to our book's purpose. We were also concerned to explore artists whose work has a place in the ever changing and contested "canon" of art history and artists who had had monographs or significant essays written about their work and/or who had been the subjects of one-person shows. So we sought out the authors who had written the monographs or biographies of those artists.

As we discussed our project with the contributors, a second and unexpected layer of the subject emerged: behind the story of the artist involved was that of the art historian. All the authors expressed great interest (some seemed surprised at the level of their interest) in exploring how they had come to write about the artists they knew so well. We noted that all the art historians we had approached were female. Why was this? Why (the larger question) are nearly all monographs on women artists written by women? Many female art historians have written single-artist studies about male artists (among them Carol Armstrong on Degas, Linda Nochlin on Courbet, Dore Ashton on Picasso, and Lucy Lippard on Ad Reinhardt). Why is the reverse so rare, if not unheard of?[14] Does there still lurk an unspoken perception that while male artists are relevant to us all, female artists are important only to other women? Is it assumed that in writing about male artists one is writing about *art,* whereas in writing about women artists one is writing about *women*? At this point I thought of my own department chair, who, when I proposed a course entitled "Women Artists from Impressionism to the Present," strongly suggested that I offer it in the Women's Studies Department. He also doubted that there would be "enough women artists" to provide course material for an entire semester. Perhaps feminist art history had not achieved as much change as we had thought, or hoped.

In addition to all our authors' being female, all but one share the racial identity of their subjects. The exception, Melanie Herzog, who writes about the sculpture of Elizabeth Catlett, addresses the complications entailed in a white woman's writing about an artist of color. Is

there an unspoken assumption that an *identification* with one's subject is necessary for responsible art historical scholarship (an identification at the level of gender and race, at least)? Many of the contributors to this book discuss how their own lives and careers dovetailed with those of their chosen subjects, but it remains an open question whether this dovetailing is a necessary component of such writing.

While our title, *Singular Women,* clearly plays on words, in that we address many women artists, behind the title are serious methodological questions: How long can the category "exceptional woman" last? Why has it persisted for so long? Because there are (still) relatively few examples of women artists? How many more will have to be introduced as "exceptional" before the trope of singularity can give way to a more contextualizing rhetoric, grounded in acknowledging that there have been a great number of female artists and that many of them form a foundation for our work now?

The risk in describing each artist as a singular case is to make these women seem anomalies, aberrations, rather than examples, case studies of a larger phenomenon. But there is also a risk if we do not acknowledge that the circumstances of women artists differ. These artists do not necessarily share a universal set of experiences based on sex and gender roles.

This book is organized chronologically. Although chronology can rightly be criticized for implying a historical trajectory of progress, we explicitly reject this implication, instead offering chronology as an imperfect method whose principal benefit is to highlight real differences in historical moments, especially for the female condition within the art world. Simply put, the circumstances in which Artemisia Gentileschi worked and lived rightly place her early in history, and in our book. The degree to which she and her ambitions for an artistic career depended on her being the daughter of a painter, for example, distinguishes her from her nineteenth-century counterparts and even more from artists active in the twentieth century. Arguably, moreover, Gentileschi had more in common with male artists of her historical moment than with female artists of another. By contrast, the relative freedom of Florine Stettheimer, as an independently wealthy American of the 1920s, places her firmly in the twentieth century. By no means do we suggest that all women artists experienced greater freedom in the twentieth century or that all circumstances improved as centuries passed. But placing our artists in chronological order reflects our belief

that historical moment, as much as more idiosyncratic and personal circumstances, determined the experiences of each. Chronology also allows for a social history of art rather than a style-based one or one more insistently rooted in a belief that art making is independent of other social circumstances.

In addition, the relatively neutral device of chronological ordering leaves readers free to make their own connections between the essays on the basis of their needs and interests. This anthology will serve different purposes for different readers. Some will be attracted to the essays on well-known artists, like Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith Leyster, and Mary Cassatt. Others will be intrigued by less familiar figures, like Eleanor Agnes Raymond, Jo Nivison Hopper, and Clementina Hawarden. Still others will turn to specific writers whose scholarly work they know.

Despite the chronological arrangement, the essays can be fluidly grouped around several themes. Taken in total these themes represent the most frequent, and possibly most useful, ways in which the work of women artists has been described. One, represented by the work of Mary Garrard on Artemisia Gentileschi, Frima Fox Hofrichter on Judith Leyster, and Mary Sheriff on Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, is the puzzlingly superficial treatment of the work of some women artists, given their uncontested place in the canon of even the most conservative telling of art history. Gentileschi, Leyster, and Vigée-Lebrun have been valorized, canonized, and ultimately tokenized as "the" important female artist of their time period or their style. While Garrard, Hofrichter, and Sheriff applaud *in theory* the attention given to the artists they write about, those artists' role as "*the* significant female painter of the Italian Renaissance/the Dutch Golden Age/the French Rococo" makes it all too easy to ignore other female artists of those periods and sets apart Gentileschi, Leyster, and Vigée-Lebrun as oddities, historical anomalies, and sufficient examples of a further history that will remain unexplored. Garrard, Hofrichter, and Sheriff offer more nuanced views of these heavily mythologized artists.

Gentileschi and Leyster are nearly always described by art history texts as related integrally to particular male artists: Gentileschi to Caravaggio, Leyster to Frans Hals, and Vigée-Lebrun to Watteau and Fragonard. We need only turn to the fifth edition of *The History of Art*, by H. W. Janson and Anthony Janson (published in 2001 and completed by H. W. Janson's son Anthony Janson after the death of

his father), for representative treatments of Gentileschi, Leyster, and Vigée-Lebrun that underline dramatically the pitfalls of canonical writing. First, Gentileschi:

> The daughter of Caravaggio's follower Orazio Gentileschi (1563–1639), she was born in Rome and became one of the leading painters and personalities of her day. Her characteristic subjects are Bathsheba, the tragic object of King David's love, and Judith, who saved her people by beheading the Assyrian general Holofernes. Both subjects were popular during the Baroque era, which delighted in erotic and violent scenes. Artemisia's frequent depictions of these biblical heroines during her restless career suggest a fundamental ambivalence toward men that was rooted in her life, which was as turbulent as Caravaggio's. While Gentileschi's early paintings of Judith take her father's and Caravaggio's work as their departure, our example [*Judith and Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes,* c. 1625] is a fully mature, independent work.[15]

In their larger account of Caravaggio, Janson and Janson make no mention of Caravaggio's "turbulent" life, nor do they relate any of Caravaggio's subjects to his life. This contrast in discussions of the work of men and women artists is ubiquitous in survey texts and even, arguably, in more complex treatments. For many art historians, the details of women artists' lives provide much of the interpreted significance of their works, even when the same is not true of the male artists to whom they are compared. It is rare to find a description of the work of a female artist that does not involve a discussion of her life. Here are Janson and Janson on Judith Leyster: "Hals' virtuosity was such that it could not be imitated readily, and his followers were necessarily few. The most important among them was Judith Leyster (1609–1660). Like many women artists before modern times, her career was partially curtailed by motherhood. Leyster's enchanting *Boy Playing a Flute* (1630–1635) is her masterpiece."[16]

Leaving aside the intriguing implication that motherhood ceased to curtail one's career upon the advent of modern times, Janson and Janson's insistence on the terms *imitated* and *followers* makes clear their assessment of Leyster's independent status. They make no mention of Hals's personal life. Their brief paragraph on the work of Vigée-Lebrun maintains that her portrait *The Duchesse de Pulignac* (1783) "has the eternally youthful loveliness of Fragonard's *Bathers*…a real-life counterpart to the poetic creatures in Watteau's *Pilgrimage to Cythera.*"[17]

Clearly her work maintains its canonical status only vis-à-vis the work of male painters of the rococo. The superficiality of Janson and Janson's treatment of Vigée-Lebrun is underscored by the all too common ploy of linking the beauty of a woman artist's work to the beauty of her person:

> It is from portraits that we can gain the clearest understanding of the French Rococo, for the transformation of the human form lies at the heart of the age. In portraits of the aristocracy, men were endowed with the illusion of character as a natural attribute of their station in life, stemming from their noble birth. But the finest achievements of Rococo portraiture were reserved for depictions of women, hardly a surprising fact in a society that idolized the cult of love and feminine beauty. Indeed, one of the finest practitioners in this vein was herself a beautiful woman: Marie-Louise-Elisabeth Vigee-Lebrun.[18]

What can be the point, in a survey of the history of art, of remarking on the physical appearance of a painter? Berthe Morisot was similarly described in the late-nineteenth-century press as having a beauty that justified her painting. For example, in a 1901 article the French critic Camille Mauclair pointed out that Morisot, in addition to being an admirable artist, was "herself a creature of penetrating beauty and an elevated soul."[19] Elsewhere in the same article Mauclair implied that for the ideal woman artist, beautiful work was inextricable from personal beauty, physical and moral.[20]

A second theme arising in the essays of this book is the need to redress the injustice of the erasure (by accident or design) of women artists from the history of art. Nancy Gruskin in her work on the architect Eleanor Agnes Raymond, Gladys-Marie Fry on Harriet Powers, Gail Levin on Jo Nivison Hopper, Barbara Bloemink on Florine Stettheimer, and Kristine Stiles on Carolee Schneemann—all mean to restore these women to a visibility denied them for reasons connected with their sex. Nancy Gruskin makes clear the unlikelihood of a woman's success in the male-dominated world of early-twentieth-century architecture; given the marginalization of architecture itself in the history of art, Raymond's invisibility seems all the more inevitable. In a similar vein, Gladys-Marie Fry traces the complicated history of quilt making: the art historical distinction (once clear, now crumbling) between art and craft has relegated the work of women to another space. If, as Judy Chicago suggests in her writings about *The Dinner Party*,[21] art history has forgotten work that involves collaboration or results in a usable ob-

ject, it is not surprising that quilt makers have been set apart as irrelevant. As Gladys-Marie Fry makes clear in her work here on the quilt maker Harriet Powers, the anonymity and diffidence of many such artists ensured them oblivion, and for Powers, an African American woman, there are racial implications as well to her status as a nearly unknown artist except in the specialized realm of quilt studies or work on female artists of color.

Gail Levin discusses the by no means accidental erasure of the work of Jo Nivison Hopper, the wife of Edward Hopper, whose career eclipsed her own as he gained the historical reputation and canonical status denied her. While marriage to a prominent painter might aid some female artists building a career, Levin argues that Jo Nivison Hopper's career was damaged by her marriage.

Barbara Bloemink investigates the similar erasure and silencing of Florine Stettheimer, who almost never sold her work (by her own wishes) and whose revelatory diaries, after her death, were purged by the sister who survived her. Bloemink also discusses the preference on the part of major museums to present exhibitions in a salable, appealing way, even if that means historical inaccuracies or omissions. The result, Bloemink argues, is the slighting of female artists whose lives and works lack commercial appeal because they cannot easily be made sensational and do not conform to expected stylistic trends.

Finally, Kristine Stiles traces the complex career and reception of the performance artist, painter, and filmmaker Carolee Schneemann. Stiles argues that Schneemann's insistence on an honest, explicit portrayal of the female body denied her any chance of commercial success, even though the feminist establishment canonized her as an artist. For Schneemann, as for Jo Hopper and Florine Stettheimer, the relationship with the reputation-building museum culture has been fraught—characterized by tokenism, deaccessioning, and a reluctance to place women artists in the forefront of a collection or exhibition schedule. One wonders at the curatorial and critical power structure that produced at the Guggenheim Museum and the National Gallery of Art a total of only six solo exhibitions by women artists in the years 1970–85 (three of them by Helen Frankenthaler!).[22]

The third theme evident in the essays of this book is the continuing difficulty of writing about and describing work by women. Anne Higonnet, writing on Mary Cassatt; Amy Schlegel, on Nancy Spero;

Carol Mavor, on Clementina Hawarden; and Karen Bearor, on Irene Rice Pereira, all maintain an uneasy truce with the single-artist study. Mavor, Bearor, and Schlegel are concerned about the tendency of the monograph to privilege an appearance of coherence and a seamless historical narrative over a more honest telling in which gaps and contradictions play a role. Higonnet shows how two different approaches to Mary Cassatt and her historical importance, the single-artist study and the historical analysis, yield contradictory results. Each approach is valuable in its own way; the trouble lies only in confusing one project with another, or in hoping to gain all results from all investigations.

The themes that I have loosely outlined are, taken together, fundamental to feminist histories of art. Each of the essays exemplifies one or more of those themes as they have been played out in specific careers.

Ranging widely over approaches and concerns, these essays underscore the need for self-consciousness in choice of language and rhetorical implications by analyzing the descriptions that other scholars have given of women artists and their place in history. Some of these discussions are frankly accusatory; others implicitly admonish writers and warn readers to look carefully at language. Feminist art history's most valuable tool may well be its systematic probing of commonly accepted art historical description. For example, art historians often relate the significance of art made by women to events in those women's personal lives. Those who paint children are said to be painting their own children, painting their wished-for nonexistent children, or displaying their ambivalence about children. In contrast, male artists who paint children are said to be painting ideal love or perhaps only experimenting with a pastel crayon. Here is Janson and Janson's account of a sculpture by Camille Claudel:

> Much of her work is autobiographical. *Ripe Age* depicts a grisly Rodin, whose features are clearly recognizable, being led away with apparent reluctance by his longtime companion, Rose Beuret, whom Claudel sought to replace in his affections. Beuret is shown as a sinister, shrouded figure who first appears in Claudel's work as Clotho, one of the three Fates, ironically caught up in the web of life she has woven. The nude figure on the right is a self-portrait of the pleading Claudel, likewise evolved from an earlier work, *Entreaty.*[23]

Here, in contrast, is Janson and Janson's account of Rodin's work:

> *The Kiss*, an over-lifesize group in marble, also derives from *The Gates [of Hell]*. It was meant to be Dante's Paolo and Francesca, but Rodin rejected it as unsuitable. Evidently he realized that *The Kiss* shows the ill-fated pair succumbing to their illicit desire for each other here on earth, not as tortured souls in Hell. Knowing its original title helps us to understand a salient aspect of the group: passion reined in by hesitancy, for the embrace is not yet complete. Less powerful than *The Thinker,* it exploits another kind of artful unfinishedness. Rodin had been impressed by the struggle of Michelangelo's "Slaves" against the remnants of the blocks that imprison them: *The Kiss* was planned from the start to include the mass of roughhewn marble to which the lovers are attached, and which thus becomes symbolic of their earthbound passion. The contrast of textures emphasizes the veiled, sensuous softness of the bodies.[24]

Nowhere does Janson and Janson's description of Claudel's work reveal the hallmarks of serious art historical analysis. The authors make no mention of the material with which she worked or its effect on her work's psychological significance. They fail to compare her work to that of any other artist (except that of Rodin). We would be surprised, even outraged, if Janson and Janson described Rodin's *The Kiss* like this: "In this piece, sculpted when his affair with Camille Claudel was at its passionate height, Rodin presents clearly recognizable portraits of himself and his mistress. The desperation with which Rodin clings to Claudel's thigh indicates his growing insecurity about holding the interest of his young lover."

I do not mean to imply that Janson and Janson are unusual in their descriptions of women artists or make errors that other survey writers avoid. Their text exemplifies traditional art historical writing. *The History of Art,* as "the best-known and biggest-selling art survey in the English-speaking world,"[25] has unrivaled authority in shaping a large readership's perceptions of art and women's contribution to it. It points up a number of the pitfalls on women artists' path from oblivion to canonical status. What Claudine Mitchell calls the "trivializing elision of art and autobiography which so frequently operates in accounts of women's art" contrasts with the serious and more art historically grounded rhetoric used to describe male artists.[26]

The insistence on describing women artists in terms of linkages to the male artists who were their teachers or who influenced them in other ways undermines any vision of the female artist as independent. What

Linda Nochlin has referred to as the "art historical apparatus" has placed the work of women artists in a linguistically and sociologically gendered space, separate (if only implicitly so) from that occupied by their male counterparts.[27] It is this implicit separation that Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock refer to in their statement that "the phrase 'woman artist' does not describe an artist of the female sex, but a kind of artist that is distinct and clearly different from the great artist. The term 'woman,' superficially a label for one of the two sexes, becomes synonymous with the social and psychological structures of femininity."[28]

In an art historical system that privileges painting over all other media, followed by sculpture and, more distantly, by photography and architecture, it is no surprise that the list of canonical female artists is dominated by painters. In this way Gentileschi's, Leyster's, and Cassatt's fame exists comfortably within the familiar structures of the preferred medium. And historically there have been many more women painters than women sculptors, photographers, or architects, for the simple reason that easel and paints might easily be set up unobtrusively in a bourgeois domestic setting, to be whisked away according to the demands of social or domestic life. It would have been much more difficult to produce life-size sculptures in bronze or photographs requiring expensive and exotic technology (although, as Julia Margaret Cameron, Clementina Hawarden, Dorothea Lange, Sally Mann, and Cindy Sherman show, women have long been accepted as important photographers). It would have been most difficult of all to create buildings, given the complexity of architectural training, the exclusivity of architects' offices, the need for wide contacts, and the importance of supervising construction, which took place in a public realm that did not welcome women.

As the Broude and Garrard anthologies of 1982, 1992, and 1994 show, feminism in art history has taken many forms: excavation, recovery, theoretical skepticism, activism. We want to ask, with this anthology, where feminist art history was in 2000: What were its issues? How did feminist art historians make their decisions to write about women artists, and how did those decisions affect their careers, their visions of the field, and the status of women artists in art history today? We wonder why women art historians write about women artists. Many of our authors have written about male artists as well. How do the issues differ (if they do) in a study of an artist who is female? Important to our conversations with these authors was the question of identification with

one's subject. It has been a common feature of canonical art history that certain writers identify with (and become identified by others with) their subjects—for example, Norman Mailer with Picasso, Kobena Mercer with Robert Mapplethorpe, Leo Steinberg with Michelangelo, Albert Elsen with Rodin. But how had our writers' involvement with their subjects (as women) evolved? Was it merely coincidental that the artists they wrote about were women, or did the writers always attach some importance to the specific artist's sex and perhaps identify with the artist partly on that level?

Our book asks questions; it does not provide answers. Each of our authors has an individual motivation for her work, and we have not attempted to connect the essays or offer an umbrella theory. The voices in the book differ as much as the subjects. Some of our authors produced their first work on their subjects twenty-five years ago (Gladys-Marie Fry, Mary Garrard, and Frima Fox Hofrichter); others just now have their first treatments of their subjects forthcoming in print (Nancy Gruskin, Amy Schlegel). The subjects of the various essays have been addressed in dissertations, monographs, one-person exhibitions, articles, panel discussions, and course materials. As our gathering of writers demonstrates, feminist art historians do not always agree with one another about the shape the field should take; we believe that this multivalence gives the book its greatest strength.

This collection suggests how we are building a new canon, one that is based, not on an uncontested "quality" (whose dubious groundings Lucy Lippard has discussed in *Mixed Blessings*),[29] but rather on a matrix of relations.[30] This matrix binds together author and artist in a way that reflects the profound connection between making and viewing art so often present in a scholarly investigation. In compiling this book we express the belief that the historical personages of artist and art historian are inextricably linked. If André Breton created Salvador Dalí and Dalí, Breton, what has been the relation between Mary Garrard and Artemisia Gentileschi or between Frima Fox Hofrichter and Judith Leyster? The artists and art historians represented in our list of readings enjoy a complex relationship, living in the reflected glory of one another's accomplishments.

Sarah Webb in her epilogue to this book meditates from the artist's perspective on the ways art history will make a woman's work visible, as text and image. She explores the descriptive strategies that might inscribe work made by women artists into an organic, changing canon,

allowing their work to be seen, discussed, and contextualized for the future. Our book includes two essays by scholars who have been personally acquainted with their subjects; rarely does a writer have such a relationship with the artist she chooses to study. We can imagine in a romantic way that artists from all times have been concerned with being written into history and the means by which that might be accomplished. Even if the art historian's task is not to follow an artist's imagined agenda, the writer can consider the artist's sense of her historical place when formulating her descriptions. The work of Amy Schlegel on Nancy Spero and of Kristine Stiles on Carolee Schneemann has been significantly shaped by their knowing how these women want to be described and remembered. Despite such interventions from artists themselves, however, each writer approaches her subject from a profoundly personal standpoint: no art historian is compelled to follow the narrative an artist sets out explicitly or implicitly. But those who study, describe, and contextualize the work of an artist who has made herself and her wishes accessible to a writer become poignantly aware of their responsibility to make visible what might have remained invisible, to offer context where there might have been isolation.

Much has been made lately of the generations of feminism (both in general and specifically in art historical feminism). Whether one calls the current moment third wave or postfeminism, there is much to be learned from examining one's motives in doing work, one's experiences in exposing the work to the world at large, and one's success at increasing the attention directed to subjects long obscured. Far from only criticizing what art history has done in the past vis-à-vis discussing the women artists in this book, we hope to present a stimulating array of approaches by which feminist art history can do its work in the future.

NOTES

1. For example, in Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

2. Linda Nochlin, untitled paper presented as part of a panel discussion, "Language and Desire," at Hunter College, New York, October 1997, held in conjunction with the exhibition "Text and Touch" at the Hunter College Art Galleries.

3. Griselda Pollock, preface to *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London: Routledge, 1996), xv.

4. H.W. Janson, *The History of Art: A Survey of the Major Visual Arts from the Dawn of History to the Present Day* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1962).

5. See Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard's *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (New York: IconEditions, 1992), and *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994); Rosemary Betteron's *Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media* (New York: Pandora, 1987); Nancy Heller's *Women Artists: An Illustrated History* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987); Whitney Chadwick's *Women, Art, and Society,* rev. ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997); Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock's *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon, 1981); Griselda Pollock's *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 1988), and *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Lucy Lippard's *Eva Hesse* (New York: New York University Press, 1976; New York: Da Capo Press, 1992); Reine-Marie Paris's *Camille Claudel* (Paris: Adam Biro, 1990); and Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983).

6. In my judgment, work by Hayden Herrera on Frida Kahlo (*Frida*) and Cecily Langdale on Gwen John (*Gwen John,* New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987) exhibits these problems.

7. Kristen Frederickson, "Gendered Expectations: The Critical Reception of the Life and Work of Camille Claudel" (Ph.D. diss., Bryn Mawr College, 1992; excerpts published in "Carving Out a Place: Gendered Critical Descriptions of Camille Claudel and Her Sculpture," *Word and Image* 12, no. 2 (1996): 161–74. To date, the published result of my monographic work is "Anna Semyonovna Golubkina: Sculptor of Russian Modernism," *Woman's Art Journal* 18, no. 1 (1997): 14–19.

8. Broude and Garrard, *The Expanding Discourse,* 4.

9. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Modern Criticism and Theory,* ed. David Lodge, rev. ed. (New York: Longman, 1999), 170.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Broude and Garrard, *The Expanding Discourse,* 4.

13. Pollock, preface to *Generations and Geographies,* xvi.

14. My own incomplete and unscientific survey has turned up only one monograph on a woman artist written by a man (men, actually, in collaboration; is this relevant, I wonder?), and that is *Sonia Delaunay: The Life of an Artist,* by Stanley Baron and Jacques Damase (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995). A second example would be Edward Lucie-Smith, *Judy Chicago: An American Vision* (Chicago: Watson Guptill, 2000). But that volume too is a joint effort, this time a collaboration with the artist herself, Judy Chicago.

15. H.W. Janson and Anthony Janson, *History of Art,* 5th ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 552.

16. Ibid., 582.
17. Ibid., 600.
18. Ibid., 616.
19. Camille Mauclair, "L'art des femmes peintres et sculpteurs," *La Revue* 39, no. 4 (1901): 523.
20. Ibid., 514–15.
21. Judy Chicago, *Beyond the Flower: The Autobiography of a Feminist Artist* (New York: Penguin, 1996).
22. Randy Rosen, *Making Their Mark: Women Artists Move into the Mainstream 1970–1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), 212–14.
23. Janson and Janson, *History of Art,* 737.
24. Ibid., 736.
25. Cited in "Publish and Flourish: With Paul Gottlieb at the Helm, the Harry N. Abrams Imprint Is Celebrating Its 50th Anniversary," *Art News* (December 1999), 52.
26. Claudine Mitchell, "Intellectuality and Sexuality: Camille Claudel, the Fin de Siècle Sculptress," *Art History* 12 (December 1989): 419.
27. Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power,* xiii.
28. Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses*, 114.
29. Lucy Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York: New Press, 2000).
30. See discussion of the notion of matrix in Griselda Pollock's "Inscriptions in the Feminine," in *Inside the Visible: In, of and from the Feminine,* ed. Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 67–88, and Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger's "The With-In-Visible Screen," in Zegher, *Inside the Visible,* 89–116.