

Thames & Hudson

1. Intellectual distortions which must be corrected to give a more adequate and accurate view of reality are the engaged feminist intellect (likewise, the engaged feminist intellect is the only way to achieve through the cultural-ideological "line" the specific "professionalism" to reveal bias and distortion in the dealing with the question of the role of formulating the crucial questions of the world). Thus, the so-called woman question, far from being a general and laughably provincial sub-issue of a generalised discipline, can become a catalyst for questioning the probing basic and "natural" assumptions of the other kinds of internal questioning, and in the process, paradigms established by radical approaches. The simple question like "Why have there been no women in the sciences?" can, if answered adequately, create a social

Women Artists

Edited by
Maureen Kelly

Linda
Nochlin
Reader



Women Artists

The

Edited by
Maura Reilly

Linda

Mehlin

Reader

With 230 illustrations



Thames & Hudson

Twenty-eight of the thirty essays in this book have been previously published over a period of forty-five years. While the author and editor have resisted the temptation to correct errors of fact or interpretation, it has not always been possible to include all of the illustrations that originally accompanied the essays.

First published in the United Kingdom in 2015 by
Thames & Hudson Ltd, 181A High Holborn,
London WC1V 7QX

Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader © 2015 Thames & Hudson
Essays © 2015 Linda Nochlin
Preface © 2015 Maura Reilly
Interview Linda Nochlin by Maura Reilly © 2015 Linda Nochlin
and Maura Reilly

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the
British Library

ISBN 978-0-500-23929-2

Printed and bound in China by C & C Offset Printing Co. Ltd

To find out about all our publications, please visit
www.thamesandhudson.com. There you can subscribe to
our e-newsletter, browse or download our current catalogue,
and buy any titles that are in print.

Contents

Preface page 7

A Dialogue with Linda Nochlin,
the Maverick She page 8

1970s

- 1 Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists? page 42
- 2 Miriam Schapiro: Recent Work page 69
- 3 Some Women Realists page 76
- 4 Women Artists after the French Revolution page 93

1980s

- 5 Florine Stettheimer: Rococo Subversive page 133
- 6 Nancy Graves: The Subversiveness of Sculpture page 153
- 7 Morris: ~~the~~ ~~Work~~ ~~Nurse~~ ~~The~~ Construction of Work
and Leisure in Impressionist Painting page 161
- 8 Zuka's ~~French Revolution~~: A Woman's Place is
Public Space page 174

1990s

- 9 Pornography as a Decorative Art: Joyce Kozloff's
Patterns of Desire page 180
- 10 Starting from Scratch: The Beginnings of Feminist
Art History page 188
- 11 Mary Cassatt's Modernity page 200
- 12 Sylvia Sleigh: Portraits of Women Artists and Writers page 220
- 13 Deborah Kass: Portrait of the Artist as
an Appropriator page 226

2000s

- 14 Jenny Saville: Floating in Gender Nirvana *page 230*
- 15 Mary Frank: Encounters *page 236*
- 16 Seeing Beneath the Surface (Kathleen Gilje) *page 252*
- 17 A Rage to Paint: Joan Mitchell and the Issue of
Femininity *page 261*
- 18 Sam Taylor-Wood: When the Stars Weep *page 274*
- 19 Alice Neel *page 282*
- 20 Unholy Postures: Kiki Smith and the Body *page 290*
- 21 Sarah Lucas: God is Dad *page 301*
- 22 "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"
Thirty Years After *page 311*
- 23 Women Artists Then and Now: Painting, Sculpture,
and the Image of the Self *page 322*
- 24 Cecily Brown: The Erotics of Touch *page 351*
- 25 Existence and Beading: The Work of Liza Lou *page 357*
- 26 Black, White, and Uncanny: Miwa Yanagi's *Fairy Tale* *page 373*
- 27 Old-Age Style: Late Louise Bourgeois *page 383*

2010s

- 28 Sophie Calle: Word, Image and the End of Ekphrasis *page 395*
- 29 Ellen Altfest: A New, New Realism *page 417*
- 30 Natalie Frank: The Dark Side of the Fairy Tale *page 426*

Bibliography: Linda Nochlin *page 437*

Artists' Biographies *page 447*

Acknowledgments *page 464*

Picture Credits *page 465*

Index *page 467*

Preface

There are few art historians who have been as influential, provocative and prolific as Linda Nochlin, the Lila Acheson Wallace Emerita Professor of Modern Art at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

Since the late 1960s, Nochlin has written and edited seventeen books and countless articles—many of which have been translated into other languages—as well as curated several groundbreaking exhibitions, from *Women Artists, 1550–1950* (co-curated with Ann Sutherland Harris) to *Global Feminisms* (co-curated with Maura Reilly). She is perhaps best known for her landmark 1971 article in *ARTNews*, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” a dramatic feminist rallying cry, in which she assessed the socio-cultural structures—access to art education, definitions of genius and greatness itself—that impacted not only the art produced by women historically but also their professional and art-historical status, as well. This canonical essay precipitated a paradigm shift within the discipline of art history, and as such her name has become inseparable from the phrase, “feminist art,” on a global scale.

Nochlin’s anthologies to date have tended to reproduce her essays about the representation of women by canonical male artists—Courbet, Seurat, Van Gogh, Degas, Manet, Géricault, Pissarro, and so on. Over the last five decades, however, she has consistently written and lectured about women artists. Most of these texts are scattered in journals, exhibition catalogues, and books, or were presented as lectures, or have not been published at all. For the first time, *Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader* brings together thirty of these essays about women artists and feminist art, dating from 1971 to the present.

The anthology begins with a dialogue between Nochlin and editor Maura Reilly, in which they discuss her childhood, early years at Vassar College, curated exhibitions, favorite women artists, definitions of feminist art, the status of women artists today, and tasks for the future. The essays are organized by publication date. Omitted are monographic essays on Dorothea Tanning, Kate Millet, Grace Hartigan, Malvina Hoffman, Catherine Murphy, Judy Pfaff and others, as well as a few thematic investigations. *Women Artists*, therefore, is not intended to be exhaustive, or to cover the entire field in any sense. The authors have left the essays as they originally appeared, despite the strong temptation to correct any errors of fact or mistakes of interpretation. The collection, then, hardly constitutes a “grand finale”; some of them will appear dated, as is inevitable for essays written at certain moments and in response to specific problems and situations that may no longer seem as urgent. So be it: that is the fate of most art history and art criticism, feminist or not. The authors hope these pieces can still be read with pleasure and profit, and will encourage some readers to reshape their views of women artists and their art.

A Dialogue with Linda Nochlin, the Maverick She

Maura Reilly: In 1988, you argued that “feminist art history is there to make trouble, to call into question, to ruffle feathers in the patriarchal dove-cotes.”¹ You have spent your entire professional career doing just that, making trouble, embodying the position of the maverick she, using it as a decided advantage. You have continually questioned academic assumptions in/around issues of gender, race and class—and, as such, have transformed not only the discipline of art history, but academic investigations in general. You have examined afresh the work of French painter and provocateur Gustave Courbet; redefined realism as an artistic style, from the 19th century to the present; revised art history to include women artists, and the analysis of representations of women by male canonical artists; have contributed enormously influential thematic essays—most spectacularly, your essay, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?”; and have produced countless monographic texts on women artists, most of which we’ve reproduced here. Among these many scholarly contributions, you have also curated several milestone exhibitions, including the landmark *Women Artists, 1550–1950* in 1976 [Los Angeles County Museum of Art], and, more recently, *Global Feminisms* in 2007 [Brooklyn Museum], among others. You have been unceasingly bold, intrepid, inspiring and influential. Your scholarship has been consistently transgressive, irreverent, and anti-establishment. What I want to know, is where did this all begin? How did you come to be someone with such an intellect, strong opinions, belief in yourself and in your voice—especially as a woman growing up in 30s/40s America, a period marked by overt sexism and strict gender roles. Shall we start with your childhood, growing up in Brooklyn, as an only child within a close-knit Jewish family?

Linda Nochlin: Yes, I grew up in a secular, leftist, intellectual Jewish family, like so many in the neighborhood of Crown Heights in Brooklyn. Intellectual achievement, creation or appreciation of the arts—literature, music, painting, dance—were considered the highest goals, along with social justice. I understood that before I understood anything else. My father worked and my mother stayed home to raise me, but it was hardly “stereotypically patriarchal.” I was an only child and my mother shared all her intellectual and esthetic interests with me: she loved modern dance and we danced together; she was engaged with modern literature and read to me aloud from James Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist* when I was quite young. She listened to and played classical music and I listened with her. In some ways, I grew up in an extended family: my grandparents

and aunts and uncles played a big role in my formation. I was expected to participate in discussions of Gogol and Dostoyevsky when I was in high school, because that was what they found interesting. In no sense was I forced to read anything I didn't want to. Indeed, the whole idea of the "tiger mother" is repugnant to me. I engaged with art and literature because that was what the people around me were interested in.

MR: As a child, were there women whom you admired? And if so, who, and what was it about them specifically? What were your aspirations as a child/teenager?

LN: Yes, of course there were women whom I loved and admired, like my mother and my grandmother, my father's mother, who drove a car, did serious gardening, and was a deep-sea fisherwoman. But much as I loved and admired them, I knew quite early that I didn't want to stay at home and be only a wife and mother. You can love and admire someone without wanting to model your life on theirs: that's where I think the idea of a "role model" is deceptive. I admired Eleanor Roosevelt, certainly, and Martha Graham, but I don't think I necessarily wanted to be like them. My aspirations as a teenager were vague: I wanted to be a poet, a writer, an artist, a dancer—something like that. I never thought of being a scholar or an academic.

MR: At what point in your life, or at what age, did you realize that there was such a thing as inequality between the sexes?

LN: I think I realized that there was inequality quite early—and my reaction was outrage. In fact, I remember vividly my first act of proto-feminist critique in the realm of the visual. I must have been about six years old when I performed this act of desecration. Slowly and deliberately, I poked out the eyes of Tinker Bell in an expensively illustrated edition of *Peter Pan*. I still remember my feeling of excitement as the sharp point pierced through those blue, long-lashed orbs. I hoped it hurt, and I was both frightened and triumphant looking at the black holes in the expensive paper. I hated Tinker Bell—her weakness, her sickening sweetness, her helplessness, her wispy, evanescent body—so different from my sturdy plump one—her pale hair, her plea to her audience to approve of her. I was glad I had destroyed her baby blues. I continued my campaign of iconoclasm with my first-grade reader—*Linda and Larry*, it was called, and Larry was about a head taller than Linda and always the leader in whatever banal activity the two were called on to perform. "See Larry run. See Linda run. Run, Larry, run. Run, Linda, run..." etc. I successfully amputated Larry's head with blunt scissors on one page of the reader and cut off his legs in another: now they were equal and I was satisfied. (Freudians can make of this what they will!) These very deliberate acts of destruction were propelled not so much by rage as by a fierce sense of injustice. Why were women depicted as poofy, pretty, helpless weaklings, men as doughty leaders and doers? I read these stories and fairy tales with some pleasure, but also with a certain annoyance.

MR: Well, there is without doubt too much dependence on male saviors in fairy tales—be it the woodsman in “Red Riding Hood” or the handsome prince who rescues Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty, who are relatively passive figures wholly dependent on their beauty for happiness.

LN: Yeah, I guess I knew that my foot (already large) would never fit into that glass slipper! I liked children’s books with feisty heroines who did interesting things. Do not imagine that I was a precocious man-hater, or boy-hater: far from it. Among my favorite books were Booth Tarkington’s *Penrod* series and the wonderful *Otto of the Silver Hand*, written by Howard Pyle and illustrated by him with shady Dürer-esque engravings. I read Mark Twain’s *Life on the Mississippi*, with its strictly male cast of characters, three times in a row. What I hated was not men—my beloved grandfather was the one who most encouraged me in my intellectual and artistic pursuits—but rather the visual putting down of girls and women vis-à-vis a power situation in both high and popular culture, and I resorted to extreme measures when confronted by it.

MR: Nevertheless, fairy tales have remained a longstanding fascination—that is, you’ve written extensive texts about the tales in the work of Kiki Smith, Miwa Yanagi, and Natalie Frank—all of which are included in this book. Now, moving on in your chronology...from 1947 to 51 you attended Vassar College, which was then an all-girls’ school, where you received a BA in philosophy (with a minor in Greek and art history). What were those undergraduate student years like for you?

LN: Yes, I graduated from Vassar in 1951. I had decided to go to an all-women’s college because all the smart women I knew (who could afford it or get a scholarship) went to Ivy League schools, mainly the so-called “Seven Sisters”: Vassar, Smith, Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe, Barnard, Mount Holyoke. Vassar was an eye-opening experience. The Vassar faculty was comprised of old-time lefties and feminists but, as a whole, my first-year teachers were not very good. But I learned a lot, anyway. I wrote a term paper for my introductory history class on Beatrice Webb and Fabian socialism, which I suppose was the first “feminist” text I ever produced.

MR: Moving from Crown Heights in Brooklyn to a quasi-suburban college campus in Poughkeepsie must have been quite a culture shock, I imagine.

LN: Actually, the big culture shock was some of the girls in my class. They were not Jewish, not “intellectual,” not from New York—and were quite waspy and only interested in dating. They knitted Argyle socks for their boyfriends, played bridge, and went to football games. They all wore gold bobby pins and camel-hair coats and Bermuda shorts. Some of them made debuts. This was truly another world for me. But I made

wonderful, interesting friends, was politically active, supporting Henry Wallace's presidential campaign with like-minded young women, wrote and published poetry, and met others who did the same. I went to a stimulating conference on the contemporary arts, organized partly by Phyllis Bronfman (later Lambert), where I saw Merce Cunningham perform with John Cage on the prepared piano. (I had seen Merce with Martha Graham in my high-school days, but this was something new and different.) I was asked to design sets for an early (American) performance of Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. Gradually, we all sorted ourselves out and I found good, great and inspiring teachers, some of them men but many of them women. The good thing about a women's college at the time was that women had a chance to do everything. I got onto the editorial board of the liberal newspaper, I participated in the theater, where women did lighting, carpentry and, of course, acting and directing. We were the heads of student government. We were not pushed to the margins because there were no gendered margins, so to speak; we were all there was.

MR: In a way, then, having grown up in a household in which your voice and intellect were encouraged, where you were quite coddled, you would have found the strong and independent women you met at Vassar quite "normal," right? I recall your telling me that there were no male chairs in the art history department until your husband [in 1975], and that you always thought that women ran the show at Vassar. However, you also said that you were often told that you "think like a man," as if women couldn't think, that women were fluttery and emotional. So at what stage did you realize that life outside of Vassar truly was a "man's world," that there was a glass ceiling, that there were firm societal expectations set upon most women?

LN: In the 1940s, Vassar was an institution with a serious feminist past and a history of brilliant, creative, and politically activist students like Elizabeth Bishop and Mary McCarthy. But in the late 1940s it succumbed to the postwar demand that women return to "Kinder, Küche, Kirche" [German slogan meaning "children, kitchen, church"]. Then, a well-publicized survey team of sociologists, psychologists and educational authorities known as the Mellon Committee came to Vassar and blighted the ambition of the women students, as well as denigrated women's potential for achievement, by declaring the college a "homosexual matriarchy" and women who dared to use their minds in competition with men as "overachievers." Yet here again, contradiction—fortunately—abided. In the classroom, our teachers—the better ones, male and female—encouraged us to strive, to excel, to explore, even if nothing much awaited most of us after graduation but marriage, parenthood, and membership of the Junior League of St. Louis or Scranton. For a term paper in my junior year social psychology course, I wrote a so-called "content analysis" paper about the women's magazines of the period—*Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and *The Woman's Home Companion*—thereby enabling myself to read

in good conscience what I usually felt guilty about as time-wasting. (Parenthetically, I must admit that then, as now, this feminist enjoys the occasional wallow in the slut-tish pleasures of popular culture: *US*, *In Touch*, *OK*, *Star*—I don't buy them, but if they are around, like *Vogue*, or *Elle* or *Allure*, I certainly will flip through them, by no means entirely uncritically but with a certain delicious, clandestine enjoyment.) My analysis uncovered the double message women's magazines of the 40s sent to their readers: on the one hand, there were the serious articles about major women activists and achievers like Eleanor Roosevelt or Dorothy Thompson or Amelia Earhart, presumably calculated to encourage their readership to do likewise. But the fiction they offered up for female consumption told a different story: in all cases, without exception, women who pursued careers, who didn't pay full attention to husbands and children and domestic affairs, were doomed and punished. Career girls who wanted to keep on working, who dared to compete with male partners, were cast into outer darkness—either they remained “old maids,” or lost their mates to more properly domesticated women. The message was clear, and cast in the guise of fiction it appealed more to the emotions or even the unconscious fears and doubts of the female audience at stake. Such fiction, like women's films at the time, reinforced the doxa of the day, and no doubt helped sell more houses, more washing machines and more table linen to the would-be model housewives and helpmeets that these magazines catered to. This project also opened my eyes to my still-hypothetical future. Although not yet a card-carrying feminist—and who was in those days, besides some shapeless, tweedy, old left-over suffragettes among the emeritae?—I knew from that time onward that I was not going to be one of those model domestic women. I despised and pitied them, and vowed inwardly that I would be different. Of course, there were other models for heterosexual women on view at the college—bohemian wives and mothers, or, in rare cases, married female instructors—but their fate was almost too awful to contemplate: women trying to finish their dissertations, write their poetry, or paint their pictures amid a shambles of urine-soaked diapers, unwashed dishes, and uncontrollable children. No, indeed.

MR: No, indeed! Instead, you decided to continue your education, attending Columbia in 1952 [Master's in English literature, 17th century, thesis on poet Richard Crashaw and Baroque imagery] and then, from 1953 to 63, you commuted to the Institute of Fine Arts to pursue your doctorate in art history, while also teaching part-time at Vassar, raising your daughter Jessie as a single mother after your husband, Philip Nochlin, died in 1960. During that time you also had a crucial Fulbright year in Paris, working on your dissertation, and writing a novel titled *Art and Life*, still unpublished, in your spare time. You were doing it all! As to your dissertation topic, why Gustave Courbet? I imagine that his unique combination of stylistic innovation and political engagement must have played a part—combined with, of course, a lifelong love of realism and painting.

LN: I first got involved with Courbet when I wrote a paper on French artists and the 1848 revolution at the Institute of Fine Arts [New York University] in the early 1950s. I had also taught early Netherlandish painting—Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden—at Vassar. I loved realist styles from the gut, as it were, because they refused the rhetoric of grandeur, the perfection and unity of the High Renaissance, in favor of a different kind of magic, that of the detail, the additive, the allure of the specific. Paradoxically, I also was drawn to Italian art of the 15th century—Fra Angelico, Pollaiuolo, Ghirlandaio, above all Piero—for different but related reasons, Piero because of my modernist proclivities. (What is good about art history is that it can support inconsistencies: you don't have to look down on Jan van Eyck if you love Piero della Francesca, and vice versa.) Then, later, I became interested in contemporary New Realism—Pearlstein, Alice Neel, Sylvia Mangold, Sylvia Sleigh, Rackstraw Downes, and so on—and curated a show of their work at Vassar called *Realism Now*, in 1967. My interest in realism sprang from multiple motivations—political, formal, personal; it culminated in a two-part article I wrote for *Art in America* in 1974: “The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law.” My interest in realism has never waned. I've taught several seminars on the subject, and have written extensively about women realists, including most recently a text on Ellen Altfest, included in this book.

MR: Tell me a bit about the years from 1963, the year you finished your doctorate, to 1970—which is to say, prior to your writing of “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” I know you married architectural historian Dick Pommer (in 1968), and had your second daughter, Daisy, in 1969, but what were you working on during that stage—in terms of scholarship?

LN: I was, first of all, writing *Mathis at Colmar*, a slim volume about the Isenheim Altarpiece which I subtitled “a visual confrontation,” published by the Red Dust Press in 1963. This was ekphrasis rather than art history. (See my piece on Sophie Calle in this volume for more about ekphrasis and art.) Then I was busy collecting, editing and, in some cases, translating, the material for the “Sources and Documents” series edited by my professor, Peter Janson. I ended up with two volumes of readings on art by such 19th-century writers as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Fénéon, and many others, including the writings of the artists themselves: *Realism and Tradition in Art, 1848–1900* and *Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, 1874–1904*, both published in 1966. I then went on to write *Realism*, a volume in the Penguin series, “Style and Civilization,” of which I am still proud, if not entirely satisfied. And it was then that I met my inspiring future editor at Thames & Hudson, Nikos Stangos, who was involved in almost all my future publications with that house, to which I still remain faithful.

I also published several articles during that period starting with a controversial review of Joseph C Sloane's *Paul Marc Joseph Chenavard*, which appeared in *The Art Bulletin* in 1964. My study of Courbet's *Burial*, “Innovation and tradition in Courbet's *Burial at*

Ornans," appeared in *Essays in Honor of Walter Friedlaender* [Marsyas, Supplement II], published by New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, in 1965. In the same year, I published "Camille Pissarro: the unassuming eye" in *ARTnews*, and in 1967, "Gustave Courbet's *Meeting*: A Portrait of the Artist as a Wandering Jew," in *The Art Bulletin*; the latter won the Kingsley Porter Prize of 1948 for the best article in that publication by a writer under forty. In 1968, I curated the exhibition *Realism Now* at Vassar, with the help of my undergraduate students, and wrote the catalogue; both got some notice in the New York press, and artists and critics came up to Poughkeepsie to see the show. Finally, I published "The Invention of the Avant-Garde: France, 1830–1880," in *The Avant-Garde, Art News Annual XXXIV* in 1968, and then went on to do the research, and write, a long historical article about the birth and later vicissitudes of the museum. Titled "The Inhabitable Museum," it appeared in *ARTnews* in January 1970.

MR: And exactly one year later, in January 1971, you published "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," also in *ARTnews*. It was intended for publication in one of the earliest scholarly texts of the feminist movement, *Women in Sexist Society*,² in which it was published under a different title, "Why Are There No Great Women Artists?" But it appeared first as a richly illustrated article in a pioneering and controversial number of *ARTnews* (vol. 69, January 1971), dedicated to women's issues.

LN: The text was written during the early days of the Women's Liberation movement, and was at least partially based on research carried out the previous year when I had conducted the first seminar, at Vassar College, on women and art, in 1970.

MR: To put this into context, you taught the first class on women and art at Vassar, as you say, and then taught the course again that same year at Stanford, where you met Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro for the first time. You also saw *Womanhouse* while in California, and, as you make clear in your "Starting from Scratch" essay, included in this volume [p. 188], had mixed feelings about it. On a wider scale, also in 1970, the US underwent drastic political and cultural changes, all in favor of the women's movement—with events such as the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment) passing in the US House, the 50th Anniversary celebrations of the 19th Amendment, Bella Abzug's election to the House, and the publication of major feminist texts like Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful*, Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* and *Our Bodies Ourselves*, as well as the founding of the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee, and the Feminist Art Program at Fresno. Again, all of this in 1970. It must have been beyond exhilarating!

LN: Yes, it certainly was...and when I embarked on "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in 1970, there was no such thing as a feminist art history: like all other

forms of historical discourse, it had to be constructed. New materials had to be sought out, a theoretical basis put in place, a methodology gradually developed.

MR: Your essay "Starting from Scratch" captures beautifully what appeared to be a sense of urgency on the part of liberated women like yourselves, as you sought to intervene in and alter history itself. But was there a specific incident around that time that inspired you to write that essay?

LN: I wrote "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" as the direct result of an incident that took place at a Vassar graduation in 1970. Gloria Steinem was the graduation speaker...she had been invited by my friend Brenda Feigen, who was then a graduating senior. Her brother Richard Feigen was there. He was a famous gallery person, the head of the Richard Feigen Gallery. Anyway, afterwards, Richard turned to me and said, "Linda, I would love to show women artists, but I can't find any good ones. Why are there no great women artists?" He actually asked me that question. I went home and thought about this issue for days. It haunted me. It made me think, because, first of all, it implied that there were no great women artists. Second, because it assumed this was a natural condition. It just lit up my mind. I am sure it was the catalyst that enabled me to put together a lot of things I had been thinking about, and stimulated me to do a great deal of further research in a variety of fields in order to "answer" the question and its implications, but his initial question started me off.

MR: Prior to this incident, had you ever asked yourself a similar question—as to why there were no "great" women artists—or musicians, or writers, for that matter?

LN: No, I hadn't. The thing about Vassar was that we'd always known there were women artists. Works by Georgia O'Keeffe, Kay Sage, Florine Stettheimer, Veira da Silva, Agnes Martin, and Joan Mitchell hung in the gallery. There were also women artists like Rosemary Beck teaching painting at Vassar; our sculpture teacher, Concetta Scaravaglione, who had been active in New Deal projects, was a woman, and a lot of contemporary women artists were invited to campus for lectures. I remember attending gallery talks by Loren MacIver, Irene Rice Pereira, and Grace Hartigan in the early 1950s, and they were memorable. As a sophomore I had thrust a poem into the hands of MacIver, and as a young teacher I remember being bowled over not just by Hartigan's work, but also by her tough, bohemian, unconventional persona. Even earlier, though, in my teens, my mother had shared with me her enthusiasm for women writers like Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Rebecca West, and Elinor Wylie. So I certainly knew that there were women artists. But I wasn't thinking in terms of men or women; I just included women in the group of people who made art. I just thought, there they were.

MR: So ultimately, then, it was the word “great” in Richard’s sentence that started you thinking about the historical circumstances of women as artists, prompting you to ask that intentionally provocative question. Did you have any idea at the time that the essay would ring down like a clarion call, or that it would challenge each new generation to assess changes and improvements in the conditions under which women artists work?

LN: I knew I had done something important. I wrote it under a kind of heady inspiration that was based on a great deal of previous thinking and knowledge, all of which surfaced as I wrote; each new element led me on to further investigation in a wide variety of fields; each discovery demanded further research. I hesitate to use the term “dialectical thinking” loosely, but I think of it as such; it was a truly exciting experience. I might tone down the rhetoric a little if I were writing a similar piece today, but somehow, at the time, it was necessary to the project.

MR: Around the same time that you were writing “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” in the early 1970s, you were also writing about Miriam Schapiro, Sylvia Sleigh, Dorothea Tanning, as well as thematic texts like “Some Women Realists” [p. 76], and “How Feminism in the Arts can Implement Cultural Change.”³ You also participated in a controversial forum titled “What is female imagery?,” in *Ms. Magazine* in 1975, along with Lucy Lippard, Arlene Raven, Joan Snyder, Eleanor Antin, and others—in which you were asked if women’s art was different from men’s. To which you argued against the concept of a “feminine sensibility,” postulating that women’s art was no more alike than men’s art, and that we should speak instead “of female styles, always in the plural”⁴—a position you have maintained till today. Simultaneously, you were organizing with Ann Sutherland Harris one of the most important exhibitions in the history of feminism, that is, *Women Artists: 1550–1950*, which was the first large-scale museum exhibition in the US dedicated exclusively to women artists from a historical perspective. The exhibition presented more than 150 works by eighty-four painters, from 16th-century miniatures to modern abstractions. In Ann Sutherland Harris’ acknowledgments in the catalogue, she describes the genesis of the show, explaining that the initial impetus came from a group of women artists in California. The process, as she describes it, is well worth repeating:

The idea for this exhibition emerged during the course of some informal after-dinner speeches following the symposium organized in connection with another exhibition, “Caravaggio and His Followers,” held at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1971. Kenneth Donahue told the story of women artists who came to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art demanding gallery space and exhibition time for women equal to that being given to male artists. During the course of subsequent meetings, when the work of distinguished women artists of the past