



Women Artists

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM
OF WOMEN IN THE ARTS

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By Susan Fisher Sterling

This handsome volume of works from The National Museum of Women in the Arts—the only museum in the world dedicated to recognizing the achievements of women artists—is a fascinating record of women's diverse accomplishments from the Renaissance to the present.

Since The National Museum of Women in the Arts opened to the public in Washington, D.C., in 1987, it has established a nationwide membership that is the third largest in the country. The museum's multifaceted treasures encompass paintings, sculpture, photographs, prints, and crafts produced over the past four centuries by an international array of renowned women artists. Included here, in full color, are works by Lavinia Fontana, Judith Leyster, Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun, Hester Bateman, Rosa Bonheur,

(continued on back flap)

282 full-color illustrations

(continued from front flap)

Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt, Camille Claudel, Berenice Abbott, Maria Montoya Martinez, Georgia O'Keeffe, Lee Krasner, and many more.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ALSO AVAILABLE FROM
ABBEVILLE PUBLISHING GROUP

Women Artists: An Illustrated History
By Nancy G. Heller • ISBN 1-55859-211-3

A TINY FOLIO™
ABBEVILLE PUBLISHING GROUP
488 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022

1-800-ARTBOOK (in U.S. only)
Available wherever fine books are sold.

ISBN 1-55859-890-1

UPC



7 15585 98901 4

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The National Museum of
Women in the Arts

Susan Fisher Sterling

A TINY FOLIO™
Abbeville Press Publishers
New York London Paris

Front cover: Detail of Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait Dedicated to Leon Trotsky*, 1937. See page 184.

Back cover: Mary Cassatt, *The Bath*, 1891. See page 102.

Spine: Abastenia Saint Eberle, *Untitled*, n.d. See page 128.

Frontispiece: Detail of Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun, *Portrait of Princess Belozersky*, 1798. See page 59.

Page 6: Exterior of The National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.

Page 10: Interior of the museum.

Page 14: Detail of Sofonisba Anguissola, *Double Portrait of a Lady and Her Daughter*, n.d. See page 18.

Page 17: Detail of Louise Moillon, *Bowl of Lemons and Oranges on a Box of Wood Shavings and Pomegranates*, n.d. See page 21.

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INTRODUCTION

Someone, I say, will remember us in the future.

Sappho, 640 B.C.

The history of all times, and of today especially,
teaches that . . . women will be forgotten if they
forget to think about themselves.

Louise Otto-Peters, 1849

Women have created art since earliest times. In the ancient world the Greeks celebrated the artworks of Aristarete, Eirene, Kalypso, and Thanmyris. Iaia of Cyzicus, who lived in Rome around 100 B.C., was famed as a painter and engraver of ivories whose portraits were valued beyond price.

During the Middle Ages the women of the church, from Saint Hilda of England (610–680) to Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), achieved renown for their learning, piety, and power. In the great abbeys they penned Latin verse, composed devotional music, and created illuminated manuscripts, vestments, and other precious objects for both church and state. Noblewomen, too, gained fame for their achievements as embroiderers and fine

artisans. The Bayeux tapestry—the famous depiction of William the Conqueror’s victory at the Battle of Hastings in 1066—is but one of many works created by women of the medieval court. Scores of ancient and medieval artists remain unknown, and in many instances it may be true that “anonymous was a woman.”

This volume of works from The National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA)—the only museum in the world dedicated to recognizing the achievements of women artists—is a record of women’s accomplishments from the Renaissance to the present. Paging through the collection, one experiences a revised history of art. Many of the artists represented in this Tiny Folio may not be known to you, and you will be tempted to ask why you have never heard of them. The answers to that question have much to do with how women have been viewed and valued throughout the history of Western society.

In 1893, at the opening of the magnificent Women’s Building at the World’s Columbian Exposition, Mrs. Potter Palmer and her Board of Lady Managers expressed the hope that their greatly prized, if temporary, building—dedicated to art, education, home, charity, science, and every branch of human endeavor—would spur the creation of a permanent Woman’s Memorial Building. Although this was not to be, one hundred years later that

dream is being realized at The National Museum of Women in the Arts. The museum has the unique mission of bringing “recognition to the achievements of women artists of all periods and nationalities by exhibiting, preserving, acquiring, and researching art by women and by educating the public concerning their achievements.” The museum fulfills this mandate by maintaining and displaying a permanent collection, presenting special exhibitions and performances, conducting educational programs, supporting a Library and Research Center, and serving a network of national and international chapters.

The National Museum of Women in the Arts became a reality through the dedication of Wilhelmina Cole Holladay, with the help of countless individuals and organizations across the country. As collectors, Wilhelmina Cole Holladay and Wallace F. Holladay began to focus on art by women during the 1960s, when scholars were just beginning to uncover the rich and varied aspects of that cultural heritage. From the 1960s through the mid-1980s the Holladays assembled a core collection of over three hundred significant works by women artists.

In 1981 The National Museum of Women in the Arts was incorporated as a private, nonprofit institution. At the beginning it was a “museum without walls,” offering docent-led tours of the collection at the Holladay residence. Then, in 1983, the museum purchased a

landmark building—formerly the Masonic Temple of the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia—a few blocks from the White House in Washington. After four years of renovation, the museum opened to the public in the spring of 1987. The groundbreaking inaugural exhibition, *American Women Artists, 1830–1930*, demonstrated the contributions that women from Sarah Miriam Peale to Georgia O’Keeffe had made to the history of American art. It was at this time that the Holladays presented the majority of their collection as a seed donation to the museum. Many of the works from this core collection are reproduced within the pages of this volume, along with several works on loan to the museum from the Holladay collection.

Just one year earlier, in 1986, women artists had been included for the very first time in H. W. Janson’s *History of Art*, the standard textbook that has been used by generations of art history students. Women had at last been made part of the canon, although still in very small numbers: of the twenty-three hundred artists discussed in that massive tome, only nineteen were women. Conditions have improved since then, strengthened in part by the presence of the NMWA, along with the burgeoning of feminist scholarship, greater opportunities for contemporary women artists in the marketplace, and a higher concentration of female professors and curators.



Earlier artists such as Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun, Mary Cassatt, Camille Claudel, Frida Kahlo, and Georgia O'Keeffe have been the subject of major retrospectives, here and elsewhere. Contemporary artists—among them Helen Frankenthaler, Eva Hesse, Elizabeth Murray, Louise Nevelson, and Miriam Schapiro—have received significant attention as well. Women artists once were given exhibitions only late in life or posthumously, but now public recognition tends to come earlier. Still, there is much to be done.

Since its opening, The National Museum of Women in the Arts has acquired important works of art by Sofonisba Anguissola, Judith Leyster, Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun, Lilly Martin Spencer, Käthe Kollwitz, Frida Kahlo, Louise Dahl-Wolfe, Louise Nevelson, Dorothy Dehner, and many others; it has also received collections of Georgian silver by British silversmiths, miniatures on ivory by Eulabee Dix, and engravings by Grace Albee. The permanent collection now comprises well over twelve hundred paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, sculptures, ceramics, and other decorative objects. The museum also has created a Library and Research Center well known for its resources on women in the arts, including a fine collection of artists' books and archival materials on over fifteen thousand women artists. As the museum has grown, so has the range of its activities. In

1987 the museum commissioned an inaugural musical work by the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Ellen Taaffe Zwilich. Since then works by women composers, musicians, poets, playwrights, actors, choreographers, dancers, architects, and designers have been highlighted and documented by the museum's programs.

Noteworthy as well is the museum's grass-roots support. Since its inauguration, over 125,000 people have joined the NMWA, making it the third-largest museum in the United States in terms of membership. In response to this outpouring of interest, the museum has established a national network of state chapters, whose purpose is to offer state-level educational events, research programs, and exhibitions and to assist in the accumulation of resource materials for the Library and Research Center. There are currently eighteen chapters, with several more in formation.

The National Museum of Women in the Arts strives to integrate women into the historical mainstream of artistic achievement and to foster the visibility of contemporary women artists working in diverse disciplines. The more we know about women of the past and the more we work together to recognize women of the present, the greater will be the legacy for future generations to cherish.



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