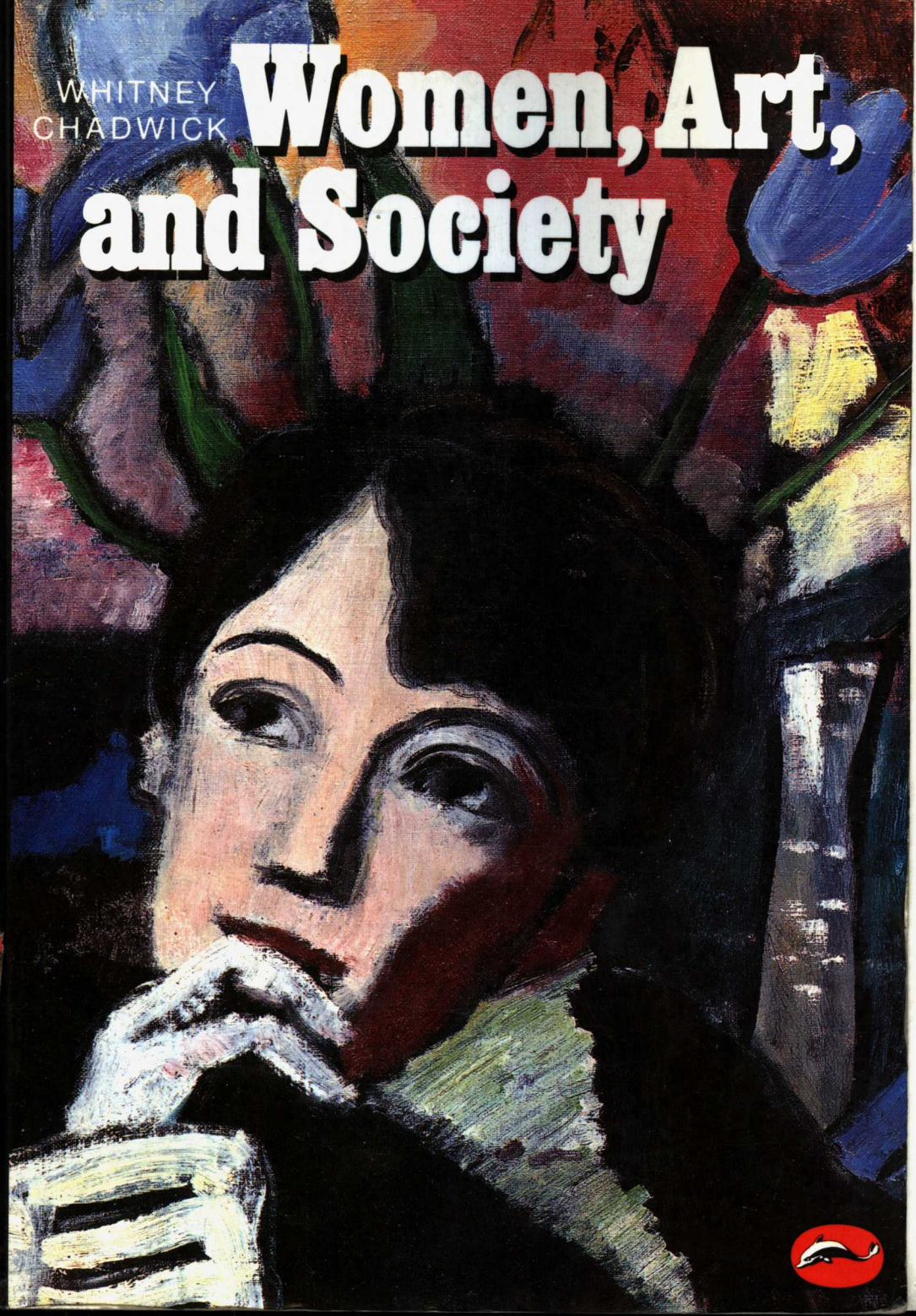
WHITNEY CHADWICK

Women, Art, and Society



WHITNEY CHADWICK

Women, Art, and Society

243 illustrations, 50 in colour

THAMES AND HUDSON

For Moira

This book is heavily indebted to the many feminist scholars whose work has charted this new art historical territory and to my students in the Women and Art course at San Francisco State University whose questions helped me shape and refine the material. Linda Nochlin, Moira Roth, and Lisa Tickner have read the manuscript and made many helpful suggestions. Jo Ann Bernstein, Cristelle Baskins, Susie Sutch, Pat Ferrero, Josephine Withers, Janet Kaplan, and Mira Schor offered valuable critical commentary on specific chapters. Darrell Garrison and George Levounis spent many hours checking bibliography and references. I am especially indebted to Nikos Stangos and the staff at Thames and Hudson who enthusiastically undertook this book and who have cheerfully coped with my hesitations and doubts as the manuscript expanded far beyond our original projections.

Set in Monophoto Bembo
Printed and bound in Singapore by C.S. Graphics

Contents

Preface

Among the founding members of the British Royal Academy in 1768 were two women, Angelica Kauffmann and Mary Moser. The fact that both were the daughters of foreigners, and that both were active in the group of male painters instrumental in forming the Royal Academy, no doubt facilitated their membership. Kauffmann, elected to the prestigious Academy of Saint Luke in Rome in 1765, was hailed as the successor to Van Dyke on her arrival in London in 1766. The foremost painter associated with the decorative and romantic strain of classicism, she was largely responsible for the spread of the Abbé Winckelmann's aesthetic theories in England and was credited, along with Gavin Hamilton and Benjamin West, with popularizing Neoclassicism there. Moser, whose reputation then rivalled Kauffmann's, was the daughter of George Moser, a Swiss enameller who was the first Keeper of the Royal Academy. A fashionable flower painter patronized by Queen Charlotte, she was one of only two floral painters accepted into the Academy. Yet when Johann Zoffany's group portrait celebrating the newly founded Royal Academy, *The Academicians of the Royal Academy* (1771–72) 1 appeared, Kauffmann and Moser were not among the artists casually grouped around the male models. There is no place for the two female academicians in the discussion about art which is taking place here. Women were barred from the study of the nude model which formed the basis for academic training and representation from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. After Kauffmann and Moser, they were barred from membership in the Royal Academy itself, until Annie Louise Swynnerton became an Associate Member in 1922 and Laura Knight was elected to full membership in 1936. Zoffany, whose painting is as much about the ideal of the academic artist as it is about the Royal Academicians, has included painted busts of the two women on the wall behind the model's platform. Kauffmann and Moser have become the objects of art rather than its producers; their place is with the bas-reliefs and plaster casts that are the objects of contemplation and inspiration for the male artists. They have become

1 Johann Zoffany *The Academicians of the Royal Academy* 1771–72 (detail)

representations, a term used today to denote not just painting and sculpture, but a wide range of imagery drawn from popular culture, media and photography, as well as the so-called fine arts.

Zoffany's painting, like many other works of art, conforms to widely held cultural assumptions about women which have subsumed women's interests under those of men and structured women's access to education and public life according to beliefs about what is "natural." It reiterates the marginal role traditionally ascribed to women artists in the history of painting and sculpture and affirms the female image as an object of male contemplation in a history of art commonly traced through "Old Masters" and "masterpieces."

The striking paradox of Zoffany's painting focuses attention on the dissimilar positioning of men and women in art history. In the early 1970s, feminist artists, critics, and historians began to question the assumptions which lay behind the masculinist claim for the universal values of a history of heroic art which happened to be produced by men and which had so systematically, it appeared, excluded women's productions from its mainstream, and so powerfully transformed the image of woman into one of possession and consumption. The resulting reexamination of women's lives as artists proceeded amidst debates about the relationship between gender, culture, and creativity. Why had art historians chosen to ignore the work of almost all women artists? Were successful women artists exceptional (perhaps to the point of deviance) or merely the tip of a hidden iceberg, submerged by the demand of patriarchal culture that women produce children, not art, and confine their activities to the domestic, not the public, sphere? Could, and should, women artists lay claim to "essential" gender differences that might be linked to the production of certain kinds of imagery? Could the creative process, and its results, be viewed as androgynous or genderless? Finally, what was the relationship between the "craft" and "fine" art traditions for women?

Feminism in the arts grew out of the contemporary women's movement; its first investigations relied heavily on sociological and political methodology. Early feminist analyses focused new attention on the work of remarkable women artists and on unequalled traditions of domestic and utilitarian production by women. They also revealed the way that women and their productions have been presented in a negative relation to creativity and high culture. They showed how the binary oppositions of Western thought—man/woman, nature/culture, analytic/intuitive—have been replicated within art history and used to reinforce sexual difference as a basis for

aesthetic valuations. Qualities associated with "femininity," such as "decorative," "precious," "miniature," "sentimental," "amateur," etc., have provided a set of negative characteristics against which to measure "high art."

A belief in a female nature or feminine essence, which could be revealed by stripping away layers of patriarchal culture and conditioning, dominated American feminist investigations during the early 1970s. The desire to reclaim women's histories, and to resituate women within the history of cultural production, led to an important focus on female creativity. It also directed attention to the categories—"art" and "artist"—through which the discipline of art history has structured knowledge. Originating in the description and classification of objects, and the identifying of a class of individuals known as "artists," art history has emphasized style, attribution, dating, authenticity, and the rediscovery of forgotten artists. Revering the individual artist as hero, it has maintained a conception of art as individual expression or as a reflection of preexistent social realities, often divorced from history and from the social conditions of production and circulation.

Art history concerns itself with the analysis of works of art; sexual difference has been shown to be inscribed in both the objects of its inquiry and the terms in which they are interpreted and discussed. If, as Lisa Tickner and others have recently argued, the production of meaning is inseparable from the production of power, "then feminism (a political ideology addressed to relations of power) and art history (or any discourse productive of knowledge) are more intimately connected than is popularly supposed." Early feminist investigations challenged art history's constructed categories of human production and its reverence for the individual (male) artist as hero. And they raised important questions about the categories within which cultural objects are arranged.

As some feminist art historians began to question the ahistoricity of writing about women artists as if gender were a more binding point of connection between women than class, race, and historical context, others found the isolation in which many women artists have worked, and their exclusion from the major movements through which traditional art history has plotted the course of Western art, insurmountable barriers to their reinscription in art history as it is conventionally understood. Again and again attempts to reevaluate the work of women artists, and to reassess the actual historical conditions under which they worked, have come in conflict with art

history's identification of art with the wealth, power, and privilege of the individuals and groups who commissioned or purchased it, and the men who wrote about it and identified with it.

After almost two decades of feminist writing about women in the arts, there remains a relatively small body of work in the history of Western art since the Middle Ages that can, with any certainty, be firmly identified with specific women artists. When women artists like Berthe Morisot, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Frida Kahlo have been admitted to the art historical canon, it has been under a banner of "greatness," and as exceptions. "Greatness," however, remains tied to specific forms of artistic lineage; isolated from the centers of artistic theory and from roles as teachers, few women have been able to directly bequeath their talent and experience to subsequent generations. Problems relating to attribution, the determination of authorship, and oeuvre, or its size and significance, remain unresolved for many women artists. Attempts to juggle domestic responsibilities with artistic production have often resulted in smaller bodies of work and smaller works than those produced by male contemporaries. Yet art history continues to prefer prodigious output and monumental scale or conception to the selective and the intimate. Finally, the historical and critical evaluation of women's art has proved to be inseparable from ideologies which define her place in Western culture generally.

As the inadequacies of methodologies based on the ideological and political conviction that women were more unified by the fact of being female, than divided by race, class, and history, were exposed, many feminist scholars turned to structuralism, psychoanalysis, and semiology for theoretical models. During the 1980s, scholars in these disciplines have challenged the humanist notion of a unified, rational and autonomous subject which has dominated study in the arts and humanities since the Renaissance. They have also emphasized that since the "real" nature of male and female cannot be determined, we are left with representations of gender. Since the category "woman" has been shown to be a fiction, feminist efforts have been increasingly directed toward dismantling this fiction and analyzing the ways that images produce meanings which are constantly circulated within the social formation.

The body of writings now referred to as postmodern or poststructural draws on the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and Emile Benveniste, the analysis of Marx and Louis Althusser, the psychoanalytic theory of Freud and Jacques Lacan, the

theories of discourse and power associated with Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida's critique of metaphysics. All forms of poststructuralism assume that meaning is constituted within language and is not the guaranteed expression of the subject who speaks it, and that there is no biologically determined set of emotional and psychological characteristics which are "essentially" masculine or feminine. Poststructuralist texts expose the role of language in deferring meaning and in constructing a subjectivity which is not fixed but is constantly negotiated through a whole range of forces—economic, social and political. They have undermined long cherished views of the writer or artist as a unique individual creating in the image of divine creation (in an unbroken chain that links father and son as in Michelangelo's God reaching toward Adam in the Sistine Chapel frescoes), and the work of art as reducible to a single "true" meaning. And they have demonstrated that one way that patriarchal power is structured is through men's control over the power of seeing women. As a result, new attitudes toward the relation between artist and work have begun to emerge, many of which have important implications for feminist analysis. Now artistic intention can be seen more clearly as just one of many often overlapping strands—ideological, economic, social, political—that make up the work of art, whether literary text, painting, or sculpture.

One result has been changes in the ways many feminist art historians think about art history itself. As an academic discipline, art history has structured its study of cultural artifacts within particular categories, privileging some forms of production over others and continually returning the focus to certain kinds of objects and the individuals who have produced them. The terms of its analysis are neither "neutral" nor "universal;" instead they reinforce widely held social values and beliefs and they inform a wide range of activities from teaching to publishing and the buying and selling of works of art.

The connection between meaning and power has occupied recent thinkers from Foucault to Frederick Jameson. Foucault's analysis of the way that power is exercised, not through open coercion, but through its investment in particular institutions and discourses, and the forms of knowledge that they produce, has raised many questions about the function of visual culture as a defining and regulating practice, and the place of women in it. His distinction between "total" and "general" history in his *Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) allows for a "general" history which does not focus on a single meaning. The

reliance of "general" history on "series, segmentations, limits, difference of level, time-lags, anachronistic survivals, possible types of relation," seems applicable to the feminist problematic of formulating a history which is responsive to women's specific experiences without positing a parallel history uniquely feminine and existing outside the dominant culture.

European, particularly French, psychoanalysts have written about women, not as producers of culture, but as signifiers of male privilege and power. Lacan's rereading of Freud stresses the linguistic structure of the unconscious and the acquisition of subjectivity at the point of the entry of the individual as a speaking subject into the symbolic order of language, laws, social processes, and institutions. The writings of Lacan and his followers have been concerned with a psychoanalytic explanation about how the subject is constructed in language and, by extension, in representation. The place assigned woman by Lacan is one of absence, of "otherness." Lacking the penis which signifies phallic power in patriarchal society and provides a speaking position for the male child, woman also lacks access to the symbolic order which structures language and meaning. In Lacan's view, she is destined "to be spoken" rather than to speak. This position of otherness in relation to language and power poses serious challenges to the woman artist who wishes to assume the role of speaking subject rather than accept that of object. Yet Lacan's views have proved to be important for those feminists who are interested in clarifying the positioning of woman in relation to dominant discourses (or differing ways that social institutions and processes are organized to give meaning to the world) and have provided the theoretical base for the work of a number of contemporary women artists, several of whom are discussed in the last chapter of this book. Moreover, the psychoanalytically oriented writings of Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and others, have posed the issue of woman's "otherness" from radically different bodily perspectives.

As a result of these and other theoretical developments, much recent scholarly writing has shifted attention away from the categories "art" and "artist" to broader issues concerning ideologies of gender, sexuality, and power. There can be no simple category defined as "feminist art history." There are only what Griselda Pollock has identified as "feminist interventions in the histories of art." Feminism cannot be integrated into the existing structures of art history because they leave intact the categories which have excluded

women from cultural significance. It can only be reformulated as a problematic within the contested field of art history.

Within feminism itself, there are now multiple approaches to these issues. Some feminists remain committed to identifying the ways that femininity is shown in representation, and others have replaced the search for an ahistorical and unchanging feminine "essence" with an analysis of gender as a socially constructed set of beliefs about masculinity and femininity. Still others have concentrated on psychoanalytic explanations which view femininity as the consequence of processes of sexual differentiation.

The implications of new ways of thinking about gender and representation have yet to be fully articulated and understood. The recent emphasis on dismantling all forms of knowledge sometimes appears to hold little promise for changing the realities of women's lives and the institutions which represent them. Julia Kristeva's argument that, "A woman cannot be; it is something which does not even belong in the order of being" and "it follows that a feminist practice can only be negative, at odds with what already exists so that we may say 'that's not it' and 'that's still not it,'" corresponds to a theoretical position held by many, but fails to resituate women in history.

The gradual integration of women's historical production with recent theoretical developments can be achieved only through a reexamination of the woman artist's relationship to dominant modes of production and representation in the light of a growing literature concerned with the production and intersection of gender, class, race, and representation. Issues of women's desire and sexual pleasure, and the situating of the feminine as mythic and historically specific, are being explored, as is the very important area of a female pleasure which does not rest exclusively on spectatorship.

This book provides a general introduction to the history of women's involvement in the visual arts. Focusing on women who have chosen to work professionally in painting, sculpture, or related media, and on the ideologies which have shaped production and representation for women, it seeks to identify major issues and new directions in research which might enrich the historical study of women artists, and to summarize the work which has been done to date. It concentrates on the intersection between women as producers of art and woman in representation because it is here that we can begin to unravel the discourses that construct and naturalize ideas about women and femininity at specific historical moments. It is also at the

intersection of production and representation that we can become most aware of what is not represented or spoken, the omissions and silences that reveal the power of cultural ideology.

The limitations of art history as a discipline have been articulated by other feminist art historians. Nevertheless, after almost two decades of feminist art historical writing, it is clear that critical issues of women's historical production remain unanswered. While many women artists have rejected feminism, and others have worked in media other than painting and sculpture, none has worked outside history. Although I am aware of the difficulty of organizing a book such as this in a way that avoids positing an alternative canon of "great" women artists based on assumptions and values which many of us have come to distrust, we must keep in mind the fact that it is the discipline of art history which has structured our access to women's contributions in specific ways.

As an introductory text, this book provides neither new biographical nor archival facts about women artists. Instead, it is entirely dependent on the research of others and seeks primarily to "reframe" the many issues raised by feminist research in the arts. Although the format of the World of Art Series does not allow individual footnotes, sources are acknowledged in the topical notes at the end of the text. Among the many problems confronting such a study is the question of how to "name" women artists. Although many writers have chosen to designate women by their given names rather than their patronyms, the use of familiar names has also been used to diminish women artists in relation to their male contemporaries. Thus I have adopted the more historically common form of address by patronym. The fathers of artist daughters are identified by full name while the daughters are most often referred to by family name; for example, Gentileschi refers to Artemisia Gentileschi, her father is called Orazio Gentileschi. The problem of naming is only the first of a complex set of issues having to do with women and language, and is explored in the next chapter on the writing of art history and women artists.

Art History and the Woman Artist

The origins of art history's focus on the personalities and work of exceptional individuals can be traced back to the early Renaissance desire to celebrate Italian cities and their achievements by focusing on their more remarkable male citizens. The first formulation of the new ideal of the artist as a learned man, and the work of art as the unique expression of a gifted individual, appears in Leon Battista Alberti's treatise, *On Painting*, first published in 1435. Modern art historical scholarship, beginning in the late eighteenth century and profoundly influenced by Idealist philosophy with its emphasis on the autonomy of the art object, has closely identified with this view of the artist as a solitary genius, his creativity mapped and given value in monographs and catalogues. Since the nineteenth century, art history has also been closely aligned with the establishing of authorship, which forms the basis of the economic valuing of works of Western art. Our language and our expectations about art have tended to rank art produced by women below that by men in "quality," and thus their work is often of lesser monetary value. This has profoundly influenced our knowledge and understanding of the contributions made by women to painting and sculpture. The number of women artists, well known in their own day, for whom no work now exists is a tantalizing indication of the vagaries of artistic attribution.

A review of attribution problems in the work of several women artists reveals one reason why any study of women artists must examine how art history is written and the assumptions that underly its hierarchies. Let us consider three paradigmatic cases from three centuries: Marietta Robusti, the sixteenth-century Venetian painter; Judith Leyster, the seventeenth-century Dutch painter; and a group of women artists prominent in the circle of Jacques-Louis David, the eighteenth-century French painter. Their stories not only elucidate the way that art history's emphasis on individual genius has distorted our understanding of workshop procedures and the nature of collaborative artistic production, they also illustrate the extent to which art history's close alliance with art market economics has

affected the attribution of women's art. They offer dramatic examples of the ways that expectations about gender affect the ways we literally see works of art.

Marietta Robusti was the eldest daughter of Jacopo Robusti, the Venetian painter better known as Tintoretto. Her birth, probably in 1560, was followed by those of three brothers and four sisters. Her sister Ottavia became a skilled needlewoman in the Benedictine nunnery of S. Amia di Castello; Robusti and her brothers Domenico and Marco (and possibly Giovanni Battista) entered the Tintoretto workshop as youths. It is known that she worked there more or less full-time for fifteen years and that her fame as a portrait painter spread as far as the courts of Spain and Austria. Her likeness of Jacopo Strada, Emperor Maximilian II's antiquarian, so impressed the emperor that she was invited first to his court as painter and subsequently to the court of Philip II of Spain. Her father refused to allow her to leave and instead found her a husband, Jacopo d'Augusta, the head of the Venetian silversmiths' guild, to whom she was betrothed on condition that she not leave Tintoretto's household in his lifetime. Four years later, at thirty, she died in childbirth.

The model of artistic production in Italy had shifted from that of crafts produced by skilled artisans to that of the work of art inspired by the genius of an individual creator. In sixteenth-century Venice, where the change occurred more slowly than in Florence and Rome, the family was still a unit of production (as well as consumption), and family businesses of all sorts were a common feature. Tintoretto's workshop, organized around the members of his immediate family, would have been classified as a craft under guild regulation. Similar to the dynastic family workshops of Veronese and Bellini in Venice, Pollaiuolo, Rossellino, and della Robbia in Florence, the workshop provides the context within which to examine Robusti's career (or what little we know of it). At the same time, that career is inextricably bound up with Tintoretto's, understood since the sixteenth century as the expression of an individual temperament.

As Tintoretto's daughter, Robusti's social and economic autonomy would have been no greater than those of other women of the artisan class. Nevertheless, remarks by Tintoretto's biographer Carlo Ridolfi about her musical skills and deportment, published in 1648, suggest that she was also part of a changing ideal of femininity that now emphasized musical and artistic skills for women, as well as some education. Other accounts of Tintoretto and his workshop offer a series of paradoxes with regard to a daughter whose hand was