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Judith Vale Newton, Carol Ann Weiss. *Skirting the Issue: Stories of Indiana's Historical Women Artists.* Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2004. xiv + 390 pp. $59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87195-177-9.

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Skirting the Issue combines two important art historical genres into one: the catalog and the biographical dictionary. Indeed, the book was associated with a traveling exhibition, "Creating History: Indiana's Historic Women Artists" (2004-06) and a companion DVD, *Out of the Shadows: Portraits of Historic Women Artists* (2006). Like a catalog, it includes contextual and biographical information about forty featured artists and provides high-quality, full-page color reproductions of prominent artworks. The book's true strength, however, lies in its painstakingly researched biographies of one-hundred historical women artists of Indiana.

A quick glance at the acknowledgments, bibliography, and notes reveals that the authors have done their homework. Judith Vale Newton, an Indianapolis attorney who has written extensively on Indiana and Midwestern visual arts, and Carol Ann Weiss, former visual arts editor and columnist for *Arts Indiana* magazine, made considerable use of manuscript and photograph collections of Indiana's state and local repositories and museums. In this regard, their work is invaluable to the study of the Midwestern visual arts from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century.

The opening chapter, "The Spirit of the Times," places Indiana women artists in a historical context, but not a historiographical context. The authors provide an overview of the socioeconomic, educational, and artistic expectations thrust upon women in the late nineteenth century. Unfortunately, Newton and Weiss do not define the "Indiana historical woman artist" in this introductory piece, or elsewhere in the book. This reader concludes that the category merely serves the authors' interest in including the most prominent women artists (associated with Indiana in some way–by birth, education, marriage, or residence) rather than furthering the notion of a community, social group, or intellectual cadre of Indiana's women artists.

The next seven chapters comprise biographical sketches (each from four to twelve pages in length) loosely joined by a common theme. "The Explorers" and "Flourishing at Home" introduce Indiana women who achieved national or regional prominence in the art world. Janet Payne Bowles, Olive Rush, Janet Scudder, Marie Goth, Ada Walters Shulz, and the Overbeck sisters dominate these chapters. "Balancing Acts" and "Quieted Voices" profile women artists within the context of marriage to another artist. Not surprisingly, these chapters primarily explore the careers of Herron Art Institute and Hoosier Group wives.

"Neither Dilettantes nor Dabblers" examines women artists who broke conventional genre boundaries, including portraitist Ruth Pratt Bobbs and abstract painter Margaret Stark. The final chapter, "The Teachers," celebrates the creative legacy of female art educators. The biographical sketches in each of these chapters are engaging and informative, though occasionally marred by unfortunate clichés. For instance, of the unmarried Overbeck sisters, Newton and Weiss write: "Their passions, it seemed were reserved for art" (p. 61). Furthermore, the biographical profiles resist the classification imposed by the chapter headings. The biographical vignettes left this reader eager for more information about the socioeconomic relationships among these women, their families, their teachers, their colleagues in the art world, and their audiences.

The biographical dictionary portion of this work occupies nearly one hundred pages. The entries, arranged by artist's last name with cross-indexing for maiden names, include the artist's primary occupation (e.g., painter, teacher, illustrator), birth and death dates, education and instructors, exhibitions, awards and honors, institutions represented, and professional memberships. Each entry, including those for artists profiled in the first portion of the book, concludes with a brief biographical note. Although the biographical dictionary appears not to include Indiana's female outsider or folk artists, it is a truly impressive and useful research tool.

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