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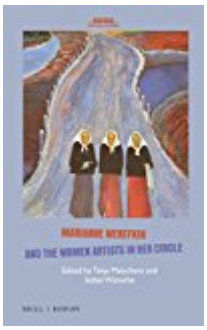

Tanja Malycheva, Isabel Wünsche. *Marianne Werefkin and the Women Artists in Her Circle.* Leiden and Boston: Rodopi - Brill, 2016. pgs $131.00, hardcover, ISBN 978-90-04-32897-6.

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This publication is based on the conference "Crossing Borders: Marianne Werefkin and the Cosmopolitan Women Artists in Her Circle," which took place in Bremen in 2014 at the Städtische Galerie Bietigheim-Bissingen and the Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum in conjunction with the exhibit "Marianne Werefkin: From the Blue Rider to the Great Bear." The book aims, first, to make visible the processes of creative interchange, and second, to show the development of a network of women artists; and last, to elucidate the obstacles and ambiguity of being a woman artist in the first decades of the twentieth century.

The Russian-born Marianne Werefkin (1860-1938), a famous expressionist artist, was a member of several artistic associations, such as the Germany-based Neue Künstlervereinigung München (New Artists' Association of Munich) and Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) and the Switzerland-based association Der Große Bär (The Great Bear). She powerfully played "with bold color combinations and forced perspectives" and was known for "her eye for nature and industrial structures, and her perceptive insights into people around her" (p. 22). Her art made her one of the most remarkable and noteworthy figures in the modernist art world of the first decades of the twentieth century. However, as this collection reveals, her path to recognition, both during her career and in her artistic afterlife, faced typical gender-based constraints.

The book is divided into four parts and contains sixteen chapters embracing a variety of topics. The editors outline the main focus of this collection and claim that "the essays not only trace their [women artists'] biographies and artistic developments, but also address their sense of self and their innovations in artistic production and performative practice, thus underlining their roles as architects and practitioners of modernism" (p. 3). The contributors offer an inspiring approach to art history, telling a story of network interactions and gender, societal, and political limitations on creativity and productivity.

I would like to place an emphasis on the two key frameworks employed by the editors of this volume that put the stress on the gender misbalance in the history of art. In doing so, I will not follow the order of the book but will instead rearrange it according to two themes, in order to accentuate their heuristic character for scholars who seek to develop gender art history. The first analyzes the limitations on women's artistic careers, and the second describes how women's artistic legacies can be promoted both by artists themselves and by contemporary scholars.

In the history of female art, the first, large narrative is about the difficulties that women artists face during their careers due to prescribed societal norms and roles. Werefkin is an example of the typical stereotypes about gender roles. She had to financially support her fellow painter and partner, Alexei Jawlensky, and beginning in 1896, she interrupted her artistic career for ten years to do so. Moreover, for years she had been tolerating her own ambiguous position as a nonmarried partner to Jawlensky, while taking care of his illegitimate child, who was born out of his long-lasting relationship with the chambermaid Helene Nesnakomoff.

Werefkin was not the only woman artist who fulfilled this unrecognized role as a helper and a comrade. Elisabeth Epstein, another heroine of this collection, "looked after Jawlensky during his stay in Paris in 1906" (p. 90). According to Isabel Wünsche, Emmy Scheyer also "patronized Jawlensky and strongly promoted his work after World War I" (p. 63). Moreover, as Laima Surgailienė-Laučkaitė shows in her article, the male counterparts often deliberately created conflict situations, provoking clashes between the women. Exploiting women's vulnerability, men artists claimed male dominance in professional relationships, as in the case, for example, of Ilya Repin and two of his students, Werefkin and Vera Abegg (p. 85). These seemingly insignificant episodes described in the book should be seen as a part of the systematic misuse of male power and privileges in a patriarchal society.

The ambiguity surrounding women's status in creative partnerships is one issue in the history of art that begs to be widely reconsidered. In her essay, Isabel Wünsche describes the case of the Swiss artist Sophie Taeuber and her unappreciated, but ever-present support of her husband, the world-renowned Dada artist Hans Arp. Her support was measured by not only financial and organizational help, but also by constant creative collaboration: "If he was curious as to how an effect would be perceived in another medium, she would grab her sewing kit and thimble and cheerfully and meticulously embroider away until exactly the desired effect had been achieved" (p. 60). Whereas a male artist would have been recognized as a co-author, Taeuber was seen by scholars as merely having achieved an "intuitive understanding of Arp" and his ideas (p. 60). This role deprived her of being considered among the Dada creators. Such co-authorship and the limits of the so-called assistance provided by women have long been a persistent topic in gender studies and the history of art. The most well-known example of such disregard for collaboration happened in the case of the architect Denise Scott-Brown and her husband, Robert Venturi, who received the prestigious architectural Pritzker prize in 1991. Scott-Brown's co-authorship was ignored by the committee.[1]

Another topic implicitly raised by the authors and which should be made more explicit is the absence of gender mainstreaming. This is a strategy of an institutional and social support for women in order to make equality of opportunity possible. We can take a look at the educational infrastructure of the beginning of the twentieth century. As numerous scholars have already shown, Russian and east European women artists were lucky to have many opportunities to access professional artistic training. Moreover, a considerable number of Russian female artists, such as Natalia Gon-

charova, Alexandra Exter, and others, became influential in comparison to a far more modest number of their counterparts from western Europe.[2] However, in the twelfth chapter, devoted to the women artists in Latvia, Baiba Vanaga describes how seemingly equal opportunities had been gradually shrinking. In 1873, Elise von Jung-Stilling opened an art school in Riga. It was the first such school in the southern Baltic region; moreover, it had been established by a woman and had mostly female students. But by the beginning of 1915, when the school was headed by Vilhelms Purvītis, a male painter, men had become the majority, "with 50 female and 70 male students" (p. 222).

Simone Ewald presents a similar case with Elena Luksch-Makowsky. She began her promising artistic career in Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna's Workshops). During the period 1900-08, she became very successful. In order to ensure her future, she even tried to negotiate the boundaries of individual freedom with her husband, Richard Luksch. For instance, "she obtain[ed] from her future husband the written promise that after the wedding she would be able to visit Russia at any time—with or without his approval—and that the two of them would continue to work as independent artists of equal standing" (p. 180). However, after moving to Munich to accompany her husband, she found herself divorced and solely responsible for their three young sons. These conditions made it "impossible for her to fully concentrate on her artistic work" (p. 187). These two examples show that the patriarchal infrastructure continued to limit women's opportunities, no matter how successful or enthusiastic a woman artist may have been at the start of her career.

The second key narrative of this volume reveals the strategies that women artists employed in order to be recognized and/or to avoid excessive societal pressure, as well as those by scholars to make women's impact visible. In this respect, the book opens with a memoir by Bernd Fäthke, the curator of the first exhibition of Werefkin's work in 1980, and the publisher of the first comprehensive volume devoted to her. This personal history critically reframes experts' role who actively participated in building men-oriented museums and exhibition narratives. This kind of curator's memoirs and his self-reflective approach to the expertise are not new, but surely should be employed in a far larger scale in the contemporary scholarship.[3] Thoroughly documenting the growing, though somewhat belated, interest in Werefkin's legacy (he first proposed to study her works in 1969), Fäthke scrutinizes the institutional rigidity and hesitation to open her exhibition enhanced by patriarchal stereotypes. He also described the obstacles made by the Jawlensky's heirs: "He [Andreas, Jawlensky's son] agitatedly tried to convince me that Werefkin was not worth writing about" (p. 11).

For women artists, challenging gender norms became an important everyday practice. They had to undermine the pressure or to escape from direct competition with the increasingly chauvinistic and hierarchical world of male art professionals. To achieve this, one of the strategies was cross-dressing and participation in queer and nonconformist cultural movements such as ***Lebensreform*** (life reform) in the Locarno area in the first decades of the twentieth century (p. 133). This movement proposed the reform of men's and women's clothing, and offered to create new formats of self-representation. In this respect, the analysis of female artists' self-portraits proposed by Marina Dmitrieva in the ninth chapter and Olga Furman in the fourteenth is another step to promote the strategies of self-advocacy. According to Dmitrieva, Werefkin's self-portrait, with "the glowing red eyes fixated on the viewer, … bear[s] a clear resemblance to that divine energy referred to in the Renaissance as terribilità" (p. 131). This mixture of classical and overtly men-driven cultural stereotypes originating in the circle of Michelangelo with Expressionist stylistic vocabulary was a highly personalized answer to the soci-

etal pressure by the artist calling herself "neither man nor woman" (p. 99).

Another Russian-born artist, Natalia Goncharova, introduced the primordial beauty of the human body in her art works and "played the same role as Paul Gauguin played in France: she created new female aesthetics of body and beauty ... based on peasant folklore, on its rough plasticity" (p. 199). In the 1920s, she developed a matriarchal, energetic, and emancipated image of women. Her innovative approach to depicting the female body was used by female artists captivated by the vitality of neoprimitivism and neoarchaism. Gender-queer self-portraits and cross-dressing became the visual symbols of strategies used by women painters who aimed to present themselves as teachers and gurus to a larger circle of artists in Russia, Germany, and France, as well as to emphasize their active role in art networks.

Another especially promising approach in revealing productive strategies of female artists is to show how they participated in writing on the topic of art history, especially in developing the biographies of their partners and husbands. For instance, Kimberly A. Smith, in the chapter "Maria Marc's Letters," proposes to see Maria Marc's "Schreiberei" (Epistolary work), including "careful notes about the provenance of Franz's [Marc's] art," as an instrument that helped to promote Marc's legacy (p. 161). In modern society, such writings were seen as purely secondary and uncreative, as were the daily activities performed by women, such as secretarial work. But such activities were essential to shaping a male artistic profile, to making his art work visible to an ever-widening pool of art historians, journalists, and collectors.

The salons opened by women were another source of institutional and infrastructural opportunities that largely served to benefit men. For instance, as Petra Lanfermann in the second chapter and Tanja Malycheva in the fifth, show, the salon established by Werefkin not only fostered the exchange of ideas (the project of New Artists' Association Munich arose there), but it attracted art patrons and museum directors, which again facilitated the promotion of male artists. The same issue is emphasized in the Hildegard Reinhardt's article, in which she analyzes Elisabeth Epstein and her role "as a mediator of the French-German cultural transfer" (p. 165), as she was the one who established the links between the Delaunay family in Paris and the Blue Rider artists based in Germany.

These types of activities, which engaged promotion and information on artistic legacy, often failed to be performed in the opposite direction. Male artists never promoted the works of their female counterparts. Indeed, the inability to produce artistic work was often caused by a lack of financial and/or organizational support, which, in turn, meant the lack of appreciation of women's artistic legacies. Indeed, the book contains many accounts of women who have been neglected by art historians and museum curators. For instance, as Carla Pellegrini Rocca reports in her essay, the biography and legacy of Italian artist Erma Bossi are practically unknown to art historians or the public. Moreover, despite the efforts and the growing number of art-historical studies devoted to women, the dissemination of information is still insufficient. For example, Emmy Hennings is described as "the only woman in the Dada circle" (p. 54). Although research exists on other Dada women, including Hanna Hoch, Suzanne Duchamp, and Céline Arnaud, such work apparently has not made the must-read list.[4]

In this collection, one can see the influence of sociological approaches such as assemblages and actor-network theories that have already been translated to the humanities by such thinkers as Giles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Bruno Latour. Applied to the history of art, they unveil a number of hidden and unofficial networks, and reveal the political, gender, and economic limitations that

women artists faced. Instead of focusing on great women artists' stories with an emphasis on productivity and sociological approaches, this book discloses a profound inequality in the dissemination of knowledge on women's activities, and their persistent underrecognition.

For instance, despite the new opportunities for education and commissions for women, modernist artistic production was, and still is, largely affected by scholarly discrimination. In this respect, even more attention to women artists in the history of art does not necessarily grant an accurate historical narrative. For instance, although well-known Russian artists Natalia Goncharova and Alexandra Exter, whom scholars have described as Amazons of the avant-garde and who were promoted equally to their male counterparts as among the most prominent artists of modernism,[5] their introduction has hardly led to recognition of other women artists and their roles in cultural life. Indeed, in Russia, the term "Amazons" gradually became a metaphor for wild creatures and muted any further critique of the male-centered history of art. Despite these artists' being recognized as the most influential figures in the Russian avant-garde movement as early as 1979, this has not led to a corresponding interest in the careers of the many women artists who followed, who produced socialist and nonconformist art fantastic in scale and intensity.[6] That is why the study of networks, interactions, and obstacles in women's careers offered in this collection is an inspiring and productive framework for further research and more systematic approaches to a gender-balanced history of art.

Notes

[1]. Denise Scott-Brown, "Room at the top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture," in *Architecture: A Place for Women*, ed. Ellen Perry Berkeley and Matilda McQuaid (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 237-246.

[2]. Marie-Jo Bonnet, *Les femmes artistes dans les avant-gardes* (Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 2006), 36, 47–52.

[3]. Janet Wollff, "Women at the Whitney, 1910-30 Feminism/Sociology/Aesthetics," in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. Bettia Messias Carbonell (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 478-490.

[4]. Ruth Hemus, *Dada's Women* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 84.

[5]. M. N. Yablonskaya, *Women Artists of Russia's New Age, 1900-1935* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), 6; John Bowlt and Matthew Drutt, eds., *Amazons of the Avant-garde: Alexandra Exter, Natalia Goncharova, Liubov Popova, Olga Rozanova, Varvara Stepanova, and Nadezhda Udaltsova* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2000).

[6]. Alla Vronskaya, "Urbanist Landscape: Militsa Prokhorova, Liubov' Zalesskaia, and the Emergence of Soviet Landscape Architecture," in *Women, Modernity, and Landscape Architecture,* ed. John Beardsley and Sonja Duempelmann (London: Routledge, 2015), 60-80. See also "Conference on Modernist Women Architects in the USSR" ("Henderni pytannia v mystetstvi, arkhitekturi ta mistobudubanni. Modernistki"), March 11-12, 2016, Urban Forms Center website, http://www.urbanforms.org.ua/ru/projects/female-modernists-conference/ (accessed March 3, 2017).

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