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PART III FINE ARTS

1. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN ART – MODERNISM AND ABSTRACTION IN THE PERIOD 1910-1925

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Abstract: *Abstraction in painting and sculpture developed simultaneously in several European capitals in the first decade of the 20th century. This phenomenon was, of course, inextricably linked to the formal developments of post-impressionism and cubism, implying the desire to separate from nature but also to give the resulting new art a deep spiritual content, thus becoming a characteristic of the modernist period. This paper analyzes the defining aspects of the development of abstraction in art at the beginning of the 20th century. On the one hand, we will present the way in which the visual language specific to modernism derived from the decorative arts, especially the textile one, and on the other hand, we will analyze the way in which the fashion currents that resulted from the geometric abstractions in art, have come to signify modernity, being able at the same time to evade social changes that have taken place, ultimately eroding the ideal of individual artistic freedom, so valued by modern artists since the beginning of the 20th century. We will seek to understand the role of women in modern artistic creation, both as producers of this new visual culture but also as signifiers of the meaning of everything that was created during this period. The present paper also refers to the change in the interpretation of the female body in art, moving from the previous status, seen as an erotic attack on the female form (e.g.: "Prostitutes" by Manet and Picasso, "Primitives" by Gauguin, "Nudes" of Matisse – who presented women as powerless and sexually subjugated), to stylistic and formal innovations.*
Key words: *modernism, art, femininity, fashion, design*

1. Introduction

The development of a set of practices and characteristics by which we understand the modern in art was gradual and coincided with the emergence of a first generation of women artists with more or less equal access to artistic training. However, the notion of the "avant-garde" as the dominant ideology of the artistic, the production of goods, and the stock exchange served to marginalize the female artist as surely as the guilds of the fifteenth century, as did the academies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There is no feminine Bohemia, no romantic legacy of the female artist against which we can measure the feats of a Suzanne Valadon or the psychoanalytic equivalence of artistic creativity and female sexuality. The identification of women with nature and imagery, with femininity in its instinctive, enigmatic, sexual, and destructive aspects, places women artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe, Emily Carr, Frida Kahlo, and Leonor Fini in a double, impossible-to-realize framework in which femininity and art become mutually canceling elements (Whitney Chadwick, 1997).

Another aspect of the early modernist myth, which has received increasing

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attention from feminist art historians and critics, concerns the extent to which major paintings - and sometimes sculptures - associated with the development of modern art, unite stylistic innovations with an erotic approach to the female form: Manet and Picasso's Prostitutes (Fig. 1), Gauguin's "primitives," Matisse's nudes (Fig. 2), etc. Modern artists from Renoir ("I paint with my sting") to Picasso ("Painting, this is real love") contributed to the fusion of the sexual with the artistic by equating creation with male sexual energy, presenting women as powerless and sexually subjugated (Carol Duncan, 2018).

In her article, *"Dominance and Virility in Avant-Garde Painting"* Carol Duncan traces the sexualization of creativity in Fauvist, Cubist, and German Expressionist work, and argues that the avant-garde myth of individual artistic freedom is based on gender differences and, implicitly, social inequalities. Reduced to carnality, the female subject is rendered helpless before the artist or viewer: "...her body is contorted according to the command of the erotic will of the male creator or viewer. Instead of a consuming femme-fatale, we see only a docile animal. The artist, in asserting his own sexual will, has annihilated everything human in his opponent" (Carol Duncan, 2018, p. 310).

1. Picasso, "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon"

2. Matisse, "Nud"

Duncan's essay points to a long history in which the representation of the female body has been offered solely for male visual pleasure. The subject of the nude in art brings together discourses of representation, morality, and female sexuality, but the persistent presentation of the nude female body as a subject of male visual pleasure, its commercial image, and its fetishized defense against castration fears, have left little room for explorations of female subjectivity, knowledge, and experience. The difficulty of distinguishing between overt sexuality (i.e., voyeurism, fetishism, and scopophilia) and other forms of looking, the question of female subjectivity, and the identification of the female body with nature, with instinctual life, have become important areas of inquiry for contemporary feminism. However, the roots of these investigations (if not their theoretical formulations) can be traced back to earlier generations of women artists.

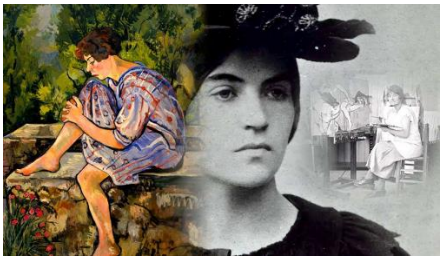
2. Modernist Representation of he Female Body

Marginalized in the aesthetic and political debates surrounding the modern art movements of the early decades of the 20th century, many women artists have turned to the female body as a central subject of female experience. While contemporary critics are divided on the issue of essentialism—the belief that there is no feminine essence somewhere within women's bodies—many women have instead chosen a theoretical practice that addresses the social construction of femininity and the psychoanalytic construction of sexual difference. As we become more aware of the fact that we do not have direct access to our own bodies - that the understanding and conceptualization of our bodies is structured by discourses

ranging from those of art to medicine to law - the work of earlier generations of women artists who addressed the interplay of gender, class, artistic conventions, and media in representations of the female body provides important precedents.

Susan Valadon and Modersohn-Becker were two of the first women artists to work extensively with the female nude. Their paintings provoke narratives that construct feminine identity through connections with nature and view women as controlled by emotions, sexual instincts, and biology in general. As for Susan Valadon and her nudes, critics have been unable to separate them from their status as signifiers for male creativity; instead, they have somehow annulled Valadon's femininity, granting her a pseudo-masculine identity, complete with "masculine power" and "virility." "And perhaps, in this disregard for logic," wrote Bernard Dorival, "in this inconsistency and indifference to contradiction, stands alone, femininity as the main feature in the art of Suzanne Valadon - the most virile - and the greatest of all women in painting" (apud Jeanine Warnod, 1981, p. 259).

Dorival's critical stance is similar to that taken by many of the twentieth-century critics who, omitting one of the two sexes, distinguished only between Suzanne Valadon and Grandmother and Little Girl Stepping into the Bath (1908). Regarded as the attributes and capacities of a nineteenth-century social ideology that emphasized separate spheres for men and women, they confidently asserted that "art has no sex." At the same time, they often granted canonical status to only a select few female artists, whose work was labeled "virile" (Fig. 3). However, Valadon's status in the eyes of Dorival and other contemporary critics was not sufficient to secure her place in histories of modern art, although she exhibited at the *Societe Nationale des Beaux-Arts*, *the Independants*, and private galleries such as *Berthe Weil* and *Bernheim-Jeune*.



3. Susan Valadon, "De la model la artist"

In the 1920s, her work was largely ignored. Valadon became an artist's model in the early 1880s, after working as a circus performer. Posing for Puvis de Chavannes, Toulouse Lautrec, Renoir, and others, she was part of the bohemian sexual libertinage of early 20th-century Parisian life. Her entry into the art world came not through education, for she was largely self-taught, but through her identification with a class of sexually available artists. Being an artists' model created an association that freed her from any lingering expectations of respectability and allowed her to enter into the easy relationships with other artists and her patrons that we rarely see in the careers of middle-class female artists of those years. Valadon's female nudes combine observation and knowledge of the female body, based on her experience as a model. By rejecting the static and timeless presentation of the monumental nude that dominated Western art, she emphasized context, the specific moment, and physical action.

Rather than presenting the female body as a lush surface, isolated and

controlled by the male gaze, she emphasized awkward gestures and movements that were uniquely feminine. Valadon often placed her figures in specific domestic settings, surrounded by domestic images. Works like these represent a striking departure from the practices of her contemporaries, such as Renoir, who referred to his models as “beautiful fruits.” Her nudes are corpulent, heavy, and robust (Warnod, Jeanine, 1981). Although sensual, they stand in opposition to the archetypal woman and the fertile figures so prevalent in the avant-garde circles of Gauguin and the Fauves.

The shift from the seductive and devouring image of femininity created by symbolist painters and poets to an ideology of "natural femininity" that identified the female body with its biological nature was historically and culturally specific, as part of a backlash against feminism. Modest gains made by women in education and employment in France in the late 19th century provoked an intense anti-feminist backlash and culminated in the battle for control of reproductive rights in France. The indignation of demographers regarding the decline in the birth rate at the end of the 19th century was taken up in literary writings such as Zola's novel, La Fecondite (1899) which gave fictional form to a cult of growth and fertility: "There is no more glorious flowering, there is no more sacred symbol of the eternity of life than an infant at its mother's breast" (apud Juliet Mitchell, 1988, p. 61). The outcry was taken up by artists, including Gauguin, whose expressions of the "natural" body of the Tahitian woman reinforced early modernism's exaltation of the "natural" female body always subject to the metaphorical control of man.

Among the works of women artists associated with Expressionism, that of Paula Modersohn-Becker and Kathe Kollwitz most clearly reveals the conflict between modernist ideology and social reality. Caught between artistic and social conservatism and the influence of French modernism, Modersohn-Becker strove to produce images that embodied women in positions considered to be opposites. Kollwitz (1867-1945) was dedicated to an art with a radical social content unmatched in her time. Her choice of graphics, realism as a style, exclusive use of print media, and the production of humanitarian posters and leaflets all contributed to the subsequent devaluation of her work and the dismissal of her creations by art historians as "illustrated" and "propaganda".

Born in Dresden in 1876, Modersohn-Becker was the child of a middle-class family that encouraged her artistic interests until she showed signs of serious professional ambition. She first visited the Worpswede artists' community in northern Germany in the summer of 1897, where she began studying with Fritz Makensen. The Worpswede painters were nature painters in the Barbizon tradition. Encouraged by Julius Langbehn's eccentric book Rembrandt as a Teacher (1890) and by their interest in Nietzsche, Zola, Rembrandt, and Dürer, she embraced nature, the primitive simplicity of peasant life, and the purity of youth. Langbehn's book became the textbook for the "Volkish" movement, a utopian reaction against industrialization that celebrated the rural values of the peasantry. Becker cultivated the image of fertile motherhood found in J.J. Mutterecht and Bachofen (1861), reprinted in 1897 and widely circulated among artists and writers.

Surrounding the figures with flowers and foliage, Modersohn-Becker ignored conventional perspective and anecdotal detail to produce monumental images of

idealized motherhood: "On my knees, before her (motherhood) with humility," she wrote. Her diary records her ambivalence toward marriage, motherhood, and art. Following the pattern of Marie Bashkirtseff's diaries, Modersohn-Becker, unlike the former, had little sympathy for the emergence of the women's movement. Although Karl Scheffler's *The Misogynistic Woman and Art* (*Die Fraue und die Kunst*) was not published until 1908, after her death, his ideas were already generally accepted by the time Modersohn-Becker was developing as an artist. Scheffler believed that women were incapable of participating in cultural production because of their ties to nature and their lack of spiritual insight.

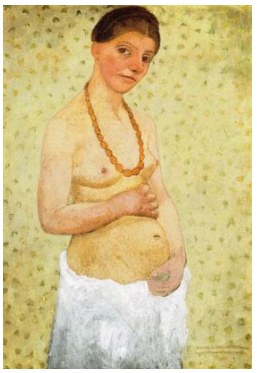
Modersohn-Becker's ambivalence about these ideas is reflected in an allegorical prose poem in which she recognizes artistry as a "masculine" ambition and remarks on the mutual exclusivity between sexual love and artistic success. Modersohn-Becker participated in her second group exhibition at the Bremen Kunsthalle in 1899, despite her director's attempts to discourage her. The negative critical response, which focused mainly on the work of the colony's female artists, prompted Modersohn-Becker to leave for Paris. There she entered the Colarossi Academy and visited galleries that displayed the works of Puvis de Chavannes, the Barbizon painters, Courbet, and Monet. Gradually rejecting the commitment of the artists in the Worpswede community and reacting to a crude naturalism, her work began to register influences from Rodin, Japanese art, Daumier, Millet, and other French painters.

Viewing Gauguin's retrospective exhibition in Paris in 1906 led Modersohn-Becker's figurative works to a search for primordial power through images of nature. Her nude self-portraits may be the first such oil paintings by a woman artist, but they reveal all the inherent contradictions of the female artist in attempting to insert her own image into existing artistic conventions (P. Mathews, 1991). Rejecting Gauguin's romantic nostalgia, she takes her painting to an extreme that blunts the sensuality normally attributed to the female flesh in Western art history. While her nudes reflect dreamy states of reverie or emerge from the image of an exotic space, the figures she creates dominate their surroundings. The immobility, monumentality, and generalized surfaces in these self-portrait nudes place them within the conventions that work to universalize the female nude as a transcendent image. At the same time, the close examination of the female body with its surfaces and the honest confrontation between woman and artist disrupt the conventions of the female nude, merging issues of femininity and creativity in new ways.

Modersohn-Becker's archetypal fertility images of 1906 and 1907, Mother and Child Lying, Nude, Mother with Child at Her Breast (Fig. 4), and Self-Portrait (Fig. 5), are closely related to Gauguin's paintings, such as The Day of Kneeling, God, but she includes the subject of fertility, giving it dignity, while collaborating with the ideology of the timeless and invariably "natural" woman. The subtext of violence and control that accompanies Gauguin's depictions of Tahitian women is absent from Modersohn-Becker's paintings. In many of Gauguin's paintings, Tahitian women reflect the unequal relationship with the male artist, as well as the feminine model in a colonized society that is unfair to them. His paintings connect women to nature through the repetition of colors, patterns, and contours; the crouching female figures are placed in a relationship of submission by the male

artist's downward gaze, and the implacability of women is reflected in their perspectiveless gazes on their own lives. Modersohn-Becker's death a few days after giving birth offers an ironic commentary on the gap between idealized motherhood and the biological realities of fecundity, placing motherhood in the bitterly concrete context of class and history (Juliet Mitchell, 1988).

4. Paulei Modersohn-Becker, ”Nursing mother”



5. Paulei Modersohn-Becker, ”Autoportret”

Kathe Kollwitz, in her lithograph Portraits of Misery III (Fig. 6) and in many others, shows that the task of being without material support is more a cause for pain than joy. Kathe Kollwitz was the first woman elected to the Prussian Academy of Arts in 1919 and the most important graphic artist of the first half of the 20th century. She was encouraged to draw as a child by her father. Her studies in Berlin and Munich were followed by a period of training in Konigsberg (now Karliningrad) under the guidance of the engraver Rudolph Maurer. In 1891, she married Dr. Karl Kollwitz and settled in Berlin where she came into contact with the industrial workers of Berlin through her practice. A socialist, feminist (founder of the Women's Arts Union [Frauen Kunstverband] in Berlin in 1913) and pacifist, she predominantly represents the themes of war, hatred, poverty, love, pain, death and struggle. Kollwitz's first major success came with a cycle of three etchings and three lithographs entitled The Weavers' Revolt (1895–1897), based on Gerhart Hauptmann's play The Weavers, which tells of the Silesian weavers' revolt of 1844.

Following the success of The Weavers' Revolt (which proved politically effective when it was exhibited in 1898 and the Kaiser refused to award Kollwitz the gold medal she had won), Kollwitz was appointed to teach printmaking and nude studies at the Kunstlerinnenschule in Berlin (Juliet Mitchell, 1988). Her later focus on the theme of mother and child developed hand in hand with a series of personal tragedies that included the death of a son in World War I and the loss of a grandson in World War II. The documentation of the suffering resulting from war and poverty distanced Kollwitz from the expressions of individual pain found in the work of her contemporaries, Edvard Munch and James Ensor. She would soon dominate German Expressionism. “I am convinced,” she wrote in a 1908 diary entry, “that there must be an understanding between the artist and the people as there has always been in the best periods of history” (apud Juliet Mitchell, 1988, p. 37) (Fig. 7, *Self-portrait*).

6. Kathe Kollwitz
Portraits of Misery III ”Bread!”

7. Kathe Kollwitz
”Selfportrait”

Although very different in its social and political imperatives, the work of the British painter Gwen John (1876-1939) also challenges the scope of modernist ambitions. She knew Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Rodin and many other contemporary artists and was widely read, but Gwen John was not interested in the theoretical aspects of artistic movements. However, she contributed to the emergence of her own myths about herself as a female artist. Despite regular exhibitions, she, like Valadon, was until recently presented most often as an “unknown”, only to be rediscovered repeatedly by subsequent generations of curators and critics, always in relation to close male figures such as her brother Augustus John, whose work bears few similarities to hers, her lover, the sculptor Auguste Rodin, and her patron, the American John Quinn. Born and raised in Wales, Gwen John was educated at the Slade School in London and worked in Whistler's studio.

She went to France at the age of twenty-seven and remained there for the rest of her life. Her work bears superficial affinities with the work of Rodin, Puvis de Chavannes, Vuillard, Bonnard, Modigliani and Roualt, but her dry surfaces, restrained colour and patterned brushwork are closer to the paintings produced by London's Camden Town Group than to the French modernists. Her confidence in intimate subject matter was shaped by her early experiences at the Slade and her paintings, muted colour, discreet tone and formal arrangement, evoke powerful emotional responses. Their intimate appearance and personal subjects – often the figure of the artist herself seated on the edge of her bed, gazing intently into the mirror (Fig. 8 and Fig. 9) – also contributed to fueling a myth in which the life of the female artist is seen as providing the primary source of meaning for artistic creation.

8. G. John – ”Manner”

9. G. John – ”Girl in a blue dress”

3. Modern provocations

G. John first exhibited in 1900 at the New English Art Club, returning to Paris after that exhibition, partly to escape the influence of Augustus John. She supported herself by posing as a model, often for English female artists. She depicted distinct themes during this period, among them simple interiors, with light and isolated

female figures set against textured walls. These works capture specific moments full of light and atmosphere. The repetition of compositions over and over again is characteristic of her mature work, providing a means of investigation, which was also her primary concern as a painter. By the summer of 1904, John was also posing for Rodin. Her relationship with the sculptor belongs to the difficult history of women who, lacking family and social support in their endeavors, annexed their talents to male mentors and, as a result, diminished their own careers as artists. Rodin defined his own artistic genius in terms of sexuality, and his critics followed suit: they often noted that the period in which Rodin was caught up in the great passion of his life coincided with the creation of his most passionate works, directly linking the power of creation to his erotic force.

Among the women who were, however briefly, in the orbit of the sculptor Gwen John was Camille Claudel (1856 - 1920), who entered Rodin's studio as an assistant in 1883 and stayed to become a model, lover, and collaborator, so that her creative life was subsumed into a myth of romantic love in which the role of muse eclipsed that of artist. John's contemplative and dedicated life allowed her to live largely independently, coping with the social obligations imposed on most women of her class at that historical period, while Camille Claudel's later life was subject to the family control exercised by her brother, the poet Paul Claudel. Neither artist, however, escaped the later critical search for signs of the "essence of the feminine."

Born in Rochester, New York, in 1871, Florine Stettheimer was the youngest of five children in a prosperous German-Jewish family. She studied at the Art Students League in New York from 1892 to 1895 and then traveled to Europe with two of her sisters, taking painting lessons in Germany and visiting the great European museums. The outbreak of war in 1914 forced the Stettheimer sisters to return to New York, where the family home soon became famous as the social center of a group of avant-garde art dealers, dancers, musicians, artists, and writers.

Stettheimer's paintings from this period are bright, humorous sketches, full of personal symbolism, anecdote, and social satire. Her unique style was developed through rigorous academic training, but her paintings focus almost exclusively on the social environment in which she lived. The Studio Party (1917), like many of her other works, includes members of her social and artistic circle: Maurice Sterne, Gaston and Isabelle Lachaise, Albert Gleizes, Leo Stein, and her sisters. Protected by her wealth, she was not required to exhibit or sell, isolating herself from the professional art world.

Her personal wealth also protected her friend, Romaine Brooks, who was not forced to exhibit or sell her work, although she did both. Brooks, like Stettheimer, tied her painterly style to her environment, decorating her apartment with the muted black, white, and gray she chose for her palette. Born in Rome in 1874, Brooks spent most of her life in Paris, fleeing the physical and psychological cruelty she suffered at the hands of her mother and her mentally ill brother St. Mar, which she detailed in her unpublished autobiography, No Pleasant Memories. She met the wealthy American poet Natalie Barney, and although she only indirectly participated in the literary salon that made Barney famous, the two women collaborated to produce serious art.

Brooks has often been marginalized in the history of modern art because of

her decision to work primarily as a portraitist, but also because of her apparent disinterest in the innovations and stylistic movements that defined the modernist avant-garde. Although she has been presented as little influenced by the modernist ferment around her in 1910s Paris, her paintings suggest a dialogue with avant-garde tendencies. The painting The Balcony (1910) and Portrait of Jean Cocteau (1914), which depict the poet elegantly posing, cannot help but evoke comparisons with other accepted constructions in the history of modernism, such as Manet's Balcony (1868–69) and Robert Delaunay's Eiffel Tower (1910). Thus, attitudes and rituals that mark the social construction of femininity emerge in Brooks' paintings of young women looking out over the modern city.

We find here the trend of revolutionizing the self-portrait since 1924 through a series of works that visually articulate the relationship of the modern lesbian to contemporary medical literature on homosexuality, as well as to pictorial traditions that destabilize the categories of masculinity and femininity (Fig. 10). The emergence around 1900 of a cross-gender figure whose behavior and/or dress manifest elements commonly identified as “masculine” corresponded to an early twentieth-century medical model that constructed lesbianism around notions of perversion, disease, inversion, and paranoia. The ideology of the “third sex” advanced by pioneering sexologists such as Havelock Ellis and Kraft-Ebing was rooted in homophobic attitudes. These theories, although their merits are still debated, provided new models for artists and writers in the early twentieth century, allowing women to break with the asexual type of romantic friendship (Fig. 11).

10. Romaine Brooks, ”Autoportret”

11. Romaine Brooks, ”Baroana Emile DEnlarger”

Images of intellectually and physically strong femininity and that of the lesbian or New Woman of the early 20th century intersect in Brooks' paintings, based on images of transvestism. In *Self-Portrait* of 1923, she appears rigid, her face mask-like, her eyes shadowed by the brim of a top hat, with a gloved hand clasped in front of her. Her gaze is attentive, her costume stylish but severe. Combining themes of romantic independence and resistance, and the sartorial signs of wealth and independence, Brooks produces a powerful feminine image. Literary critic Susan Gubar wrote of Brooks's self-description as an outsider, "Byronic in... her revolt against social convention... an outsider marked by her shadowed forehead like Byron's Cain" (Alessandra Comini, 1982, p. 280).

Georgia Totto O'Keeffe is another artist who brought new reflections on the image of the modern woman to modern art. Despite the fact that her own body was often exposed to eroticized nude photographs taken by her husband, the famous photographer-artist, Alfred Stieglitz, made sure that the obsession with the female

body was always deciphered in her work. O'Keeffe's place in the history of modern American art, although much more secure than that of many other women artists, remains circumscribed by critical attempts to create a special category for her (Alessandra Comini, 1982).

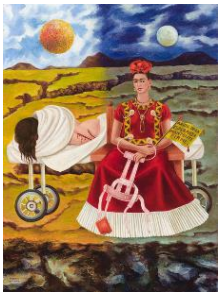
12. O'Keeffe
”Music pink and blue No. 2”

13. O'Keeffe
”Oriental poppies”

Her relationship with her colleagues in Stieglitz's circle, with whom she began living in 1919 - the painters Marsden Hartley, Charles Demuth, Arthur Dove, and the photographer Paul Strand - was often ambiguous. O'Keeffe chose to live much of her life away from New York, developing her paintings in relation to the vast and austere landscape of the American Southwest, especially the Abiqui area, New Mexico, where she moved permanently after Stieglitz's death in 1946. Born in 1887, O'Keeffe studied anatomical drawing with John Vanderpoel at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1905; two years later, she was in New York studying painting at the Art Students League. A rapid loss of interest in the academic styles derived from European models prompted her to leave to work as a commercial artist in Chicago. After attending a course on the principles of abstract design taught by Alan Bement - a follower of art teacher Arthur Wesley Dow) - she went on to teach Dow's principles in schools in Virginia, South Carolina and Texas.

Fridha Kahlo (1910-1954) is a dramatic example of the struggle for existence and artistic expression. She was a person constantly reinventing herself with various costumes and jewelry, all of which were backed by an inner image nourished by the pain of a body crippled in a wheelchair accident as a teenager. Her painting is invested with exceptional complexity and a disturbing narrative quality (Fig. 14 and Fig. 15).

14. Fridha Kahlo, ”Autoportr



15. Fridha Kahlo, ”Dizability 5”

4. Conclusions

Although in the 1930s, women artists came to Surrealism in large numbers, attracted by the movement’s anti-academic stance and its sanctioning of an art in which personal reality dominated. But they found themselves struggling for artistic maturity in the context of a movement that defined their role as one of confirming and completing a masculine creative cycle, which led to the metaphorical erasure of the subject/object polarity through violent attacks on the female image. Not surprisingly, most women ended up asserting their independence from Surrealism.

Almost without exception, women artists saw themselves as placed outside the circle of poets and painters who had drafted the Surrealist manifestos and formulated Surrealist theory.

Most were young women just beginning their artistic careers when they came to Paris; many of them only began mature work after leaving the Surrealist circle. They often came to surrealism through personal relationships with the men in the group, rather than through shared political or theoretical goals. Nevertheless, these women artists made significant contributions to the language of surrealism, replacing the male surrealists' love of sex, hallucinations, and erotic violence with an art of fantasy and narrative that moved, however tentatively, to reclaim women's place within male-dominated movements. Moreover, the image of the female body, conceived not as Other but as Self, anticipated a feminine poetics of the body—imagining and celebrating the organic, erotic, and maternal reality of the female body—themes that only fully emerged with the feminist movement of the 1970s.

Explanations for why so few women attempted to align themselves with abstract expressionism during its early years must be sought in the confluence of historical, artistic, and ideological forces in American modernism. For women artists associated with surrealism and expressionism, painting became a means of sustaining a dialogue with inner reality. Even though we are talking about a small number of women who approached abstract expressionism in their creation, they left a strong mark on the artistic manifestation of the time, adding elements of female psychology, never before seen in art, and opened the way to completing art with the dimension that had been less observed until then, namely, female personality and behavior.

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