Introduction

Mary D. Sheriff: Charting New Possibilities for Feminist Art History

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Abstract: The introduction presents key ideas in the work of Mary Sheriff that are taken up by contributors to this volume. It offers an account of Sheriff's contributions to the historiography of feminist art history, and a sense of the significance of her scholarship for feminist art history and eighteenth-century studies more broadly. The central themes of individual essays in this volume and many of the connections between them are also addressed here.

Keywords: historiography, gender, strategic reinterpretation, eighteenth century

> I have cast my lot with those women who have chosen to read things in their own way, who insist on their right to read and interpret differently. It is through those practices that I can imagine a new history of art, one that historicizes responsibly, and reinterprets responsibly in ways that speak to the present and future. It is my hope that the analysis of gender will be a driving force of that new art history.
>
> —Mary D. Sheriff[1]

"Strategic reinterpretation" is a way of looking at images with contemporary questions and concerns without giving up on the historical. It combines, as Mary Sheriff's work always did, historical rigor and imagination with the creativity needed to see beyond the received wisdom of traditional scholarship. Such reinterpretation requires close reading of texts, historical and otherwise, combined with sensitive visual analysis to unearth the subversive potential of texts and images where they might, on first sight, just confirm conventional expectations, especially

1 Sheriff, "Seeing Beyond the Norm," p. 182.

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regarding femininity and gender. It is in this spirit that several chapters in this volume engage meticulously with individual art works. The volume opens with a previously unpublished text by Mary Sheriff which offers a strategic reinterpretation of a selection of women's self-portraits, which, in her words manifest "the serious purpose of a woman artist."[2] Sheriff's essay sets the stage for those that follow, and functions as an overture for the rest of the volume, as it takes up three themes that emerge in the collected essays: interest in women's social worlds, the importance of historicizing gender, and the need to imagine new possibilities for feminist art history. Portraits of and by women are at the heart of this project as in much of Sheriff's own scholarship, yet the contributors also address, for example, genre painting, scientific illustration, animal portraiture, and fashion prints. As a group, these essays trace the dramatic social, political, and artistic changes, most notably in France, over the course of the "long" eighteenth century. Some essays explore biography, others take social networks and social structures as their focus. Gender as a historical formation is a principal concern of all the authors, while some place particular emphasis on its intersection with race, class, and sexuality. Finally, women's engagement with and their exclusion from artistic institutions are examined, along with the alternative paths that many women forged on their way to successful careers. All these essays are inspired by and respond to Mary Sheriff's wide-ranging scholarship.

This collection seeks to answer Sheriff's call for new disciplinary possibilities and novel ways of understanding the eighteenth century. Drawing on new research and recent developments in the field, it introduces new protagonists and fresh questions into the study of eighteenth-century art, history, and culture. The essays primarily focus on women as subjects and agents, though some also address men and gender or consider race and class as they intersect with gender. This comprehensive approach enables the authors to uncover and recount the lived experience and creative production of previously neglected historical figures and to attend to material that does not occupy the center of canonical art historical inquiry. While the essays find their point of overlap in the study of women and gender, they also move across distinct trajectories in the study of art and history, demonstrating the ways that feminist perspectives on disciplinary questions have become an essential part of the scholarly landscape.

Today there are many studies that address the history of women and use gender as a category of historical analysis, to borrow Scott's formulation. When it comes to art history, women have begun to appear in general surveys, and have been integrated into enough histories of patronage or of institutions like royal academies, that it is perhaps easy to take for granted that they have always been included in

2 Sheriff, "Overture: Women and Modes of Self-Portraiture," p. 56, see chapter 1 of this volume.

histories of art. In some ways such integration represents progress. However, the goal of feminist art history was never to "add women and stir," but to decenter dominant narratives.[3] To that end we still need dedicated studies—as Mary Sheriff understood so well when she wrote her groundbreaking book, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (1996). Scholarship that centers women continues to offer important analyses of the power relations that women faced across multiple axes. By critically tracing these dimensions of power, historical structures of exclusion can come into focus.

In "How Images Got Their Gender: Masculinity and Femininity in the Visual Arts" (2004), Mary Sheriff addressed the centrality of critique to the feminist project.[4] This critique included reflection and self-criticism—operations of special importance given that feminist art historians have not always or consistently engaged issues around race, sexuality, or empire, as Sheriff noted almost twenty years ago, with her usual prescience.[5] That 2004 essay was the first time she forwarded the argument that the critique was not the end-point of the feminist project; rather, critique allows historians to consciously articulate both cultural conceptions of women (and men) and to trace how women and other artists engaged, used, and challenged these conceptions in their work and in their activity. Perhaps above all, in "Seeing Beyond the Norm," as in her work more generally, she offered ways out of what she called the "impasse of critique," when critique is the end goal rather than the means to an end.[6] Critical work that goes beyond critique calls for art historians to interrogate the assumptions of the discipline while reconstructing the history of women in the art world.

In an article published posthumously, "Pour l'histoire des femmes artistes: Historiographie, politique et théorie," Sheriff traced the tensions that arose in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries between the developing discipline of art history and the efforts to write the history of women artists.[7] One historical approach was based on *histoire particulière*, a form of historical study that looked to the domain of the social, to biographies, letters, diaries, and other "ego documents." It favored the inclusion of women and women artists, often as motivating forces. Meanwhile, canonical art history, which can be described as being based on

3 Nugent, "Celebrating Women Artists."

4 Sheriff, "How Images Got Their Gender," p. 149. She quotes Linda Nochlin: "Critique has always been at the heart of my project and remains there today. I do not conceive of a feminist art history as a positive approach to the field, a way of simply adding a token list of women painters and sculptors to the canon." And adds "And neither did other feminist art historians."

5 See page 147 noting the critique offered by scholars in African-American studies and page 161, "Complicating Gender in a Post-Colonial Age," in Sheriff, "How Images Got Their Gender."

6 Sheriff, "Seeing Beyond the Norm," p. 165.

7 Sheriff, "Pour l'histoire des femmes artistes."

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histoire générale or *histoire publique*, recorded only public events worthy of being remembered, and favored the achievements of men. As the so-called scientific, objective historical mode that prevailed for much of the twentieth century, the latter "generally" meant the exclusion of women from the dominant historical accounts. By the 1980s, the distinction between these two forms of history was overtaken by other methodologies and theoretical models (including structuralism, poststructuralism, and gender studies), generating additional erasures. Sheriff argued for a new methodology that draws on and includes biography, along with other lines of inquiry and analysis: "A history of women artists focused on a specific time and place can be generated from methods that are both sociological and particular, combining an analysis of social structures, artistic institutions, and woman's place within them, with an account of individual experiences and biographies," while also avoiding the trap of reading women's art solely as a reflection of their biography.[8]

The contributions to this volume embrace this approach: some address individual lives but place them in networks of relationships with women and men and in institutional settings. Several essays look beyond the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture in France or the Royal Academy in Great Britain, revealing many more women engaged with the visual arts.[9] While women were restricted in their access to these institutions, some still became members, took classes, worked in studios as students and assistants, attended lectures, commissioned work, and sought other arenas to pursue their careers. Further essays address ideas about gender, its formation, and how men and women experienced it. Still others consider the way later interpretive frameworks made it more difficult to understand how gender functioned distinctly in the eighteenth century as opposed to the present. These essays address the problem of erasure, in the past and more recently, by charting new approaches to women's lives and to gender that allow for a critical examination of older methodologies. The women addressed in this volume experienced their exclusion in distinct ways and, in telling their stories and describing their strategies of resistance, the essays contribute to the rewriting of art's histories.

Eighteenth-century studies is one of the areas in which feminist interventions have been particularly important, in which new subjects and perspectives have been added, changing the entire field. Especially during the 1980s and around the time of the *bicentenaire* of the French Revolution, feminist sociologists and historians, including Lynn Hunt, to name but one crucial example, significantly

8 She continues, "Quant à l'interprétation d'œuvres particulières exécutées par des femmes, elle pourrait s'appuyer sur un autre type d'approche qui ne privilégierait pas nécessairement l'intentionnalité ni la dimension biographique. Les deux démarches, bien que différentes, ne s'excluent pas l'une l'autre." Sheriff, "Pour l'histoire des femmes artistes," p. 103.

9 This approach has also been taken by Sarah Salomon in her recent book *Die Kunst der Außenseiter*, see especially her chapter 5 on the young artists, in particular women, at the *expositions de la jeunesse*.

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complicated notions of the public sphere by introducing the category of gender into its consideration.[10] They not only pointed to the opposition of public and private space as gendered, but have subsequently generated more nuanced perspectives on eighteenth-century and revolutionary notions of the public, audiences, and the reception of works of art and literature.[11] While some have challenged Habermas's optimistic notion of the bourgeois public sphere emerging over the course of the eighteenth century, others, notably Dena Goodman, argued against the German sociologist's opposition of public and private as false. Goodman demonstrated how the two spheres were interconnected in *Ancien régime* France, where critique was often articulated from the realm of the private. This view allowed her, and other feminist historians, to highlight the importance of women, for example in their role as *salonnières* for the republic of letters, an aspect that is also crucial to several essays in this volume. Building on these discussions, questions of diversity beyond gender have more recently been introduced into the study of eighteenth-century publics.[12]

Much of this work engaged the study of the Enlightenment's exclusions, particularly in relation to women, including that of Hunt and Sheriff and others who are contributors to this volume. Whereas thinkers in this period certainly proposed emancipatory new ideas and made a place for elite women in social venues, as hosts and participants as studied by Goodman and others, many continued to endorse women's exclusion from or marginalization within formal institutions.[13] As prominent philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau formulated ideas about gendered subjectivity, based on the assumption that social and intellectual differences are the natural result of anatomical differences, artists (both male and female) offered complex visions that at times confirmed and in other instances challenged such assumptions.[14] What is more, there were women like the Comtesse de Genlis, no less committed to education as an Enlightenment strategy, who opposed and undid Rousseau's dualistic views on gender.[15] Besides, the lives and subjectivities of actual

10 See most importantly Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*; Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere." Both are critically engaging with Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* as well as Hunt, *Family Romance*.

11 Goodman, "Public Sphere and Private Life"; and for her work on women in eighteenth-century France: *Going Public*, edited with Goldsmith; see also Goodman, *Becoming a Woman*.

12 See, for example, Mokre and Siim, *Negotiating Gender and Diversity*.

13 See Goodman, *Becoming a Woman*, and in the present volume, Hyde, Fend, and Hunt. Nina Rattner Gelbart has, however, shown for eighteenth-century women scientists that some were able to achieve inclusion to pursue their scientific endeavors in their own way: *Minerva's French Sisters*, and her essay for this volume.

14 For an overview see Outram, *The Enlightenment*, especially her chapter "Enlightenment Thinking about Gender."

15 Comtesse de Genlis, *Adèle et Théodore*.

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women and men hardly conformed to the gender ideals of certain philosophers. In this volume, Amy Freund for example, draws a nuanced picture of masculine subjectivity during the Enlightenment in her study of hunting portraits and shows how the artistic and philosophical reflection on human-animal relations was a way of thinking through emerging notions of the self.[16]

The critical work on the Enlightenment has continued, as art historians and historians have questioned the way eighteenth-century philosophers and scientists explored human difference. Recent studies have shown that the ideas and ideals of the Enlightenment were built on the assumption of European superiority establishing the idea of race as a way to understand and hierarchize human difference.[17] We use the term "Enlightenment" to characterize a period rather than celebrate it as the pinnacle of intellectual achievement. Nor do we consider the Enlightenment as a unitary movement or set of ideas.[18] We are well aware of the fact—and this has been an important feminist intervention—that many of the Enlightenment's laudable ideals (natural law, representative democracy, liberalism, and even equality) were not as inclusive as they seem and often systematically excluded large parts of the population (women, the poor). Moreover, the very association of reason with light implied a racial bias.[19] Indeed, we might pose the question, "What and who is the Enlightenment good for?" in an echo of Kant's important formulation, "What is Enlightenment?," particularly since most of the subjects of this volume would not have been seen as able to achieve the "intellectual maturity" he aspired to, nor access legal maturity.[20] In fact, during the Revolutionary era women and people who were enslaved repeatedly saw their access to rights denied and the integration of Blacks into the French body politic remained a contested issue even after the (temporary) abolition of slavery in 1794.

The point is thus not to simply add women to the history of the Enlightenment, but to consider both its potential (including that of ideas formulated by women) as well as its blind spots and flip sides and to query some of its categories, as many historians and philosophers have done and continue to do. In a similar vein, feminist art historians have critically engaged with the categories that have dominated the

16 See Freund, "Thinking Animals: Dogs and Men in Eighteenth-Century French Hunting Art," chapter 5 in this volume.

17 Major recent studies include Gates and Curran, *Who's Black and Why?*, especially their introduction, pp. 3–43; Schaub and Sebastiani, *Race et histoire*; for art history see Lafont, *L'Art et la race*; Fend, *Fleshing Out Surfaces*; Bindman, *Ape to Apollo*.

18 This has been a key point of Outram's *The Enlightenment*, since its first edition (1995).

19 Lafont, *L'Art et la race*, p. 19.

20 Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra posed the question "Whose Enlightenment was it, anyway?" regarding the Atlantic world and the Enlightenment in the eponymous chapter of his book, *How to Write the History of the New World*. On Kant, see also Gates and Curran, *Who's Black and Why?*, pp. 41–42.

study of eighteenth-century art—such as the notion of the “Rococo”—and their outlook has substantially contributed to making artists associated with that label the subject of serious and historically grounded analysis. Mary Sheriff’s first book, *Fragonard: Art and Eroticism*, published in 1990, introduced questions of sexuality and the erotic into the study of the French artist and paved the way for more explicitly feminist perspectives in her later work.[21] Combining the analysis of the narratives of Fragonard’s paintings with that of his manner of painting, this study was one of the first to engage with brushwork in historical terms and beyond the traditional paradigm of style. This scholarly approach opened the path for a serious engagement with artists like Jean-Honoré Fragonard or François Boucher, still dismissed by a generation of social historians of art who too narrowly followed in the footsteps of those eighteenth-century critics who stamped the Rococo as frivolous. Critics like Denis Diderot or Étienne La Font de Saint-Yenne might have been progressive in many ways, but their art criticism was also highly gendered, as when they blamed women patrons or a culture of effeminacy for the failures of eighteenth-century art. Turning this argument around, scholars like Melissa Hyde and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth have altered the art historical assessment of Mme de Pompadour in highlighting her intellectual and artistic pursuits and her role as an active and insightful patron of the arts. Reading eighteenth-century art literature along with recent feminist theories of performativity, Hyde provided, for example, a new reading of Boucher’s portrait of *Mme de Pompadour at Her Toilette* that grounded the practice of making-up one’s face in the historical association of painting and *le fard* and a positive assessment of the seductive qualities of art, rather than dismissing it as false. This tack allows for an understanding of the staging of the *toilette* as a complex act of self-representation that is on a par with the self-reflexivity of Boucher’s portrait painting as such.[22] Lajer-Burcharth too contributed to rethinking Boucher’s artistic practice by reconsidering the court painter’s collaboration with Madame de Pompadour. She points to the role of private patronage and specifically that of Pompadour as a woman “constructing her image primarily as an individual” in the making of Boucher’s modernity,[23] thus also hinting at the complex entanglements of the private and the public in the eighteenth century. More recently redirecting the focus to questions of materiality, Lajer-Burcharth has investigated the role of the domestic—and of women—in the making of a modern culture of consumption and modern forms of subjectivity, an aspect she expands in this volume by looking at girls in interior spaces and raising the question of the formation of their subjectivity within the material world of Chardin’s

21 Most importantly in Sheriff’s books, *The Exceptional Woman* and *Moved By Love*. See also her 2017 article for *Perspective* which retraces an aspect of the historiography of feminist art history (see footnote 7).

22 Hyde, “The ‘Makeup’ of the Marquise,” pp. 453–75 and *Making Up the Rococo*.

23 Lajer-Burcharth, “Pompadour’s Dream,” p. 231.

paintings.[24] All essays assembled here follow the path of these innovative studies by shifting the perspective to other spaces and objects or strategically taking the viewpoint of historic women—be they artists, amatrices, or models—to provide new prospects on eighteenth-century art and culture.

Overture

We are pleased to open with a previously unpublished essay by Mary Sheriff, "Women and Modes of Self-Portraiture: Fashion, Motherhood, *Sensibilité*," which speaks to nearly all of the themes taken up in the essays that follow, delving into the self-portraits of several women, including Nisa Villers, Rose Ducreux, Geneviève Bouliar, and Hortense Haudebourt-Lescot, all of whom represented themselves as professional artists. They engaged conventions of femininity, including beauty, maternity, sensibility, and melancholy, and reworked them to their own ends. In addition, these artists self-consciously placed themselves in an artistic lineage of both women and men, highlighting their consciousness of their place in the contemporary art world. Sheriff's essay closes on an optimistic note, which underscores the importance of recovering the work of women artists as an essential foundation for the larger project of strategic reinterpretation: "It is through our collective efforts of recovery that we can once again bring their lives and works to the joyful light of recognition."[25] The chapters included in this volume engage this intention, recognizing subjects who have heretofore gone unacknowledged, to offer new readings of eighteenth-century art and cultural formations, and to forge new directions for the history of art.

Women's Social Worlds

Several contributors, historians as well as art historians, engage biography to reconstruct the lived experience of their subjects. As Nina Rattner Gelbart demonstrates, Madeleine Françoise Basseporte and Marie-Marguerite Biheron found professional success as artists and scientists outside of the Académie royale and through their relationship with each other and the scientific community in Paris. Being connected to powerful men and families could be a barrier for women and women of color due to the expectations, whether artistic or political, of elite society, as in the cases of Marie-Thérèse Reboul (Melissa Hyde) and Dido Elizabeth Belle Davinier (Jennifer Germann). Other essays, such as those by Mechthild Fend and

24 Lajer-Burcharth, *The Painter's Touch*.

25 Sheriff, "Women and Modes of Self-Portraiture," p. 95.

Paris Spies-Gans take into account women's "social worlds," in Lynn Hunt's words, or the networks that eighteenth-century women constructed, participated in, and represented in text and image as they pursued their lives and artistic practices.

In "The Woman Artist and the Uncovering of the Social World," Lynn Hunt notes that the idea of the social sciences and the investigation of society as an entity emerged at the end of the eighteenth century in relation to the period's dramatic and violent upheavals. She considers the question of the woman (or female) artist by investigating the visual representation of social relations, specifically those of Marie-Gabrielle Capet, Capet's teacher, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, and their broader circle.[26] Whereas Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard have been regarded as "exceptional," with all the attendant problems this term brings, Capet was more ordinary, working as an artist, copyist, and studio assistant. In Capet's *Studio Scene*, Hunt reads tensions between student and teacher, with Capet promoting herself as the active agent, commenting on the other actors through dress and fashion. Hunt demonstrates that Capet and other women artists made social relations visible, through their artworks, and helped the broader public make sense of the transformations of French society from the Bourbon monarchy to its restoration.

Paris Spies-Gans's essay, "'La touche d'une femme': Women Artists in the Age of Revolutions," offers related observations about how women artists' narrative paintings, and, to a lesser extent, their portraits "reflect on aspects and expectations of women's public and private lives."[27] Spies-Gans tracks the dramatically increasing activity of women artists at the Salon, noting that in France and England many more women publicly exhibited their work than has been traditionally acknowledged. Also contrary to conventional wisdom, they did not work predominantly in the so-called minor genres such as flower painting, but instead produced greater numbers of narrative paintings and portraiture. These genres were regarded as higher ranking and more sophisticated, indicating the ambition and artistic engagement of their makers. These generic choices offer a way for historians and art historians to understand how these artists conceptualized their relationship to the art world and to the public as citizen-artists who were also women.

Unlike the professional women studied by Hunt and Spies-Gans, the activities of Marguerite Le Comte, the subject of the essay by Mechthild Fend, were defined by her status as an *amatrice*: an artist, friend, lover, and wife. These identities intermingled and reflected the social networks she contributed to in the worlds of art and philosophy in eighteenth-century France, as Fend elaborates in her essay "Marguerite Le Comte's Smile: Portrait of an *Amatrice*." Maurice Quentin de La Tour included Le

26 Similar issues have recently been also discussed by Léa Kuhn in her book chapter on Marie-Gabrielle Capet's "alternative genealogies" in *Gemalte Kunstgeschichte*.

27 Spies-Gans, "La touche d'une femme," p. 136, see chapter 3 in this volume.

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Comte's likeness in a collection of eighteen paintings (five depicting women) that he displayed as a group in the Salon of 1753. Le Comte's portrait does not present her as a conventional beauty, nor even as a woman intellectual. Instead, the artist highlights his own mark-making with visible strokes, especially on his sitter's cheeks, and her smile slightly reveals her teeth in an atypical presentation, both elements that Fend reads as a form of recognition by La Tour, an acknowledgment from one artist to another. Here, portraiture foregrounds the social connections that allowed Le Comte to flourish as an *amatrice* and print maker, a contributor to a broader artistic world. Indeed, a striking finding is that women and men built shared social worlds that functioned to include women, at least in extra-institutional settings.

In "Mlle Basseporte's *Jardin*, Mlle Biheron's *Cabinet*: Artist-Scientists and Their Spheres of Sociability," Nina Rattner Gelbart takes us beyond the typical confines of the Académie and Salon exhibition as well as that of the normative heterosexual arrangement to the realm of the sciences. Gelbart's study of Basseporte and Biheron, whose concerns intersect particularly with those of Hunt and Hyde, foregrounds the networks that women created in the pursuit of the studies of botany and biology rather than in the academic studio. She shows how those networks allowed at least some women, including these two, to maintain a fierce independence. Indeed, Basseporte trained other women, possibly including Marie-Thérèse Reboul (discussed by Hyde). This suggests that their never-married status allowed these and other women greater scope for action and self-definition.

Historicizing Gender

Another thread that runs through these essays is an analysis of gender as a social structure always in formation: this was true in the past as it is in the present. Nina Rattner Gelbart argues, for example, that rejection of "traditional gender expectations of their day" allowed Madeleine Françoise Basseporte and Marie-Marguerite Biheron to build independent, intellectually, and artistically productive lives.[28] Arguably, all of the artists under discussion in this volume subverted, or at least complicated, conventional gender expectations, in one way or another. Tracing the power of normative gender ideals, but also how they were contested, reveals the complexity of lived experience and representational practices. The ideas about gender presented in this text do not always align neatly but reveal the complexity of identity and subjectivity at different historical moments and in a variety of social and cultural milieus. These contradictions bring eighteenth-century lives and images closer to our present and our own lived experience.

28 See Gelbart, "Mlle Basseporte's *Jardin*, Mlle Biheron's *Cabinet*," p. 283, chapter 8 in this volume.

And gender intersects with other aspects of identity—age and race, for example. Race inflects gender as women of color and white women experience their identity as women in distinct ways. As Anne Lafont shows, women of color and white women in the Americas as well as in Europe drew on cultural formations and social relations that developed in West Africa, formed through the interactions between Africans and Europeans in this contact zone. Women like her subject, now known as Madeleine,[29] might have drawn on Senegalese and Creole marriage practices falling outside normative codes of white European femininity.

For mixed-race women, such as Dido Elizabeth Belle Davinier, whose life is traced in Jennifer Germann's essay, "Imperial Family Portraits: Gender, Race, and Social Rank in the *Portrait of Dido Elizabeth Belle and Lady Elizabeth Murray*," traditional marriage and marriage arrangements seem to have been unimaginable by her guardian, demonstrating that normative gender ideals were charged by race in Georgian Britain. Germann explicitly mobilizes Sheriff's notion of strategic reinterpretation to provide a densely contextualized analysis of the unusual double portrait of Dido Elizabeth Belle and her cousin Lady Elizabeth Murray, two young women raised together by relatives at Kenwood House on the outskirts of London. Dido was the illegitimate daughter of a nephew of William Murray, Lord Mansfield and she was portrayed dressed *à la Turque* and with a cheeky gesture. Despite the historical and contemporary barriers Davinier faced, Germann takes this gesture as a starting point to bring out the potential subversiveness of the painting and to let the agency of the sitter come to the fore, and for letting her emerge from a careful reading of the few existing historic sources and a reinterpretation of the painting as a historical subject.

In "Chardin's Girls: The Ethics of Painting," Ewa Lajer-Burcharth pushes the well-known association of Chardin's paintings of children with the invention of childhood by addressing more specifically what it meant to be a girl and to become a woman in the eighteenth century. How did children form their subjectivity, particularly as they approached puberty and how was this gendered? Significantly, in analyzing Chardin's scenes of children engaged in game playing, Lajer-Burcharth notes that these images offer resistance to narrative, to pictorial conventions of both genre and portraiture, and, finally, to normative formations of gender. The pictured figures' refusal to comply reveals the internal production of the subject and the sense of self generated through touch, play, and engagement with things. Tracing philosophical ideas about subjectivity and its development, particularly Ann-Robert-Jacques Turgot's idea of the interior touch, Lajer-Burcharth argues that Chardin's paintings generate an ethics of looking that does not seek to violate or confine the newly forming subject pictured in his images.

29 See Lafont, *Une Africaine au Louvre*, pp. 14–19, and for the archival material that made it possible to name the previously anonymous woman in Benoist's portrait: Lévy, *Marie-Guillemine Laville-Leroulx*.

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Masculinity is in the foreground of Amy Freund's essay, "Thinking Animals: Dogs and Men in Eighteenth-Century French Hunting Art," as she addresses ideas about what it means to be a human in gendered terms through a consideration of popular, philosophical, and visual discourses about the hunting dog. Hunting portraits were particularly popular in the first half of the eighteenth century; these images featured men with hunting dogs and constructed a vision of elite masculinity. Challenging the conventional identification of nature with women, Freund instead argues that the association between men and dogs was built on an alternative vision of nature that stressed the power, intelligence, passion, courage, and devotion of dogs, and offered them as an analogy to the men they are pictured with. Images of dogs could substitute for these men, and portraits of hunting dogs solidified their status as named subjects. Over the century, there was a decline in this imagery but at its height and during a period of dramatic cultural change, these images contributed to the development of beliefs about elite masculinity.

Susan Siegfried's analysis, "Temporality and *Figures de mode*: Fashion, Costume, and Gender in Eighteenth-Century Drawings and Prints," shifts gender from the realm of persons or animals to things. In dialogue with Sheriff's essay on the intersections between modes of femininity and *la mode* in self-portraiture, Siegfried disrupts the comfortable equation between the fleetingness of fashion and frivolous femininity, by tracing the relationship between notions of time and history, costume and fashion, and arguing that men too were associated with fashion by the second half of the eighteenth century. In parallel to fashion, costume (via its relationship to the academically privileged drapery) was prioritized in academic discourse and aligned with masculinity, the monumental, and drawing. Notably, these developments emerged with the popularity of drawings and prints featuring the full-length female figure produced outside the confines of academic practice exemplified by the *figures de mode* of Jean-Honoré Fragonard. Fragonard's work emphasized the space of the studio and the momentariness of the pose, while engaging the techniques of academic drapery. The *Monument du Costume*, initiated by Johann Heinrich Eberts, sought to capture the contemporary for history and celebrate fashion's significance, revealing the fraught relationship between history, time, fashion, and gender. As this brief overview demonstrates, gender is opened up as a complicated historical configuration that was contested, revised, and at times subverted.

Reading Against the Grain

Susan Siegfried includes in her analysis drawings after contemporary dress and fashion plates, which are typically regarded as ephemeral and inconsequential. Yet, like all of the essays included here, Siegfried also reads against the grain to show how contemporary

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biases about what matters in art history can obscure important cultural formations in the past. Amy Freund's essay, for instance, brings attention to the cultural significance of an overlooked subgenre, animal portraits featuring hunting dogs, making visible an early eighteenth-century conception of masculinity. One thinks also of Spies-Gans's intervention concerning women's exhibition practices and their responses to institutional strictures, of Lajer-Burcharth's re-reading of canonical images by Chardin, which centers girls, or Fend's consideration of the (art historically) devalued figure of the *amatrice*. Fend presents the openly non-normative living arrangement between Marguerite Le Comte, her husband, and her lover as facilitating Le Comte's pursuit of an intellectual and artistic life. In Fend's account, this *ménage à trois*, shrugged off by some contemporaries and subsequent scholars as an insignificant libertine oddity, enabled her artistic practice and allowed her to be acclaimed in the company of fellow amateurs and by artists like Maurice Quentin de la Tour.

If Le Comte's personal relationships enabled her artistic practice and identity, these factors played out very differently for Marie-Thérèse Reboul, a painter of natural history subjects and a "forgotten" member of the Académie royale. Melissa Hyde argues in her essay, "Marie-Thérèse Reboul (Madame Vien): More than a Footnote in Art History," that Reboul's marriage to Marie-Joseph Vien both paved the way for and brought a halt to her independent success. Ultimately for Mme Vien, the marital connection was an obstacle for her ambitions due to her husband's prominent position as the "father" of French Neoclassicism during the second half of the eighteenth century. Hyde's essay also offers an important interpretive angle. By reading into the footnotes and against the grain, Hyde reconstructs Reboul's ambitions and brings new works to light to demonstrate that Reboul was a determined and respected artist in her own right. And she had a significant impact on her husband's work, in which her own hand was often hidden in plain sight. Hyde's approach makes visible an artist who has been relegated to the margins of art history. She points to gendered structures of power that facilitated Mme Vien's erasure while also recovering her history, arguing for the power of the footnote to change the dominant narrative.

Anne Lafont expands the interpretive possibilities for understanding the *Portrait of a Black Woman*, painted by Marie Guillemine de Laville-Leroulx Benoist. In "Madeleine of the Americas: Resituating Benoist's *Portrait of a Young Black Woman* in Colonial Art," Lafont shifts the emphasis from the artist to the sitter, and to African and American spaces rather than Parisian Salons, seeking to attenuate "the power of written history in favor of a speculative interpretation."[30] In so doing, she broadens the contexts for this portrayal and therefore its possible interpretations, displacing the Eurocentric structures of art history that privilege national histories,

30 Lafont, "Madeleine of the Americas," p. 359, see chapter 11 of this volume.

political geography, and style. This allows us to see the portrait from a possible vantage point of the sitter who may have been familiar with Senegalese and Creole marriage arrangements. More significantly, it allows us to imagine an Atlantic world that she traversed, one generated through the lived experience of Black women.

Conclusion: Looking Ahead

Mary Sheriff's efforts to chart new possibilities for feminist art history have left a substantial legacy. She understood and articulated the need to continue to write these histories, tracing women's lives and gendered structures of power as an ongoing project whose work may require perpetual interrogation. Indeed, in 2022 in the United States, the Dobbs decision and subsequent reversal of women's rights across the country exposed the fragility of feminist gains made since the Second Wave. The essays included here, organized into four sections—Art as Social Practice, Gender and Fashion, Women in Natural History, and Encounters in Portraiture—offer exciting new scholarly paths for feminist art history and for the study of the eighteenth century broadly. Rather than limiting themselves to what women could not do, the authors here explore what women did do, contributing to a new foundation of knowledge about both women's and men's lives. It is the ongoing collective effort of feminist scholarship that will continue to reshape the scholarly landscape and allow for new possibilities in art and in life, to reinterpret "in ways that speak to the present and future," as Sheriff herself said in the epigraph to this Introduction.

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