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Entry: Studio Arts, Women In

The start of gender discrimination cannot be pinpointed, but the unequal application of resources and opportunities between men and women seemingly has permeated human society from the time the sexes were defined. Women were considered the weaker of the two sexual categories, and it was once widely thought that women were less capable than men of producing intelligent – let alone brilliant – works of art. Even when women were sparingly admitted to arts fellowships, the idea of the “woman artist” was somewhat oxymoronic. Women were presumed to be better in domestic arts, and studio arts were deemed the realm of men.

WHAT ARE STUDIO ARTS?

A *studio* is an artist's workroom. An *atelier* (French for “studio”) today refers to a collective where artists learn and improve under the guidance of a teacher who mentors them to higher levels of skill. (Sometimes “atelier” is used to describe a house of fashion design. Earlier connotations of the word referred to an artist and his assistants who together produced art under the chief artist's name.) Studio art, then, is work produced in studios or ateliers – drawings, paintings, prints; sculptures; photographs, film, digital images; texts and performance; glass- and metal-works; sound. The term excludes artistic works created in other settings (like classrooms or factories).

Most colleges and universities that offer degrees in studio arts offer the studio experience (a place where you work alone and daily on your art), guidance in preparing a portfolio, attention to exposing one's work to juries and other reviewers, and often, some art history, but academic art departments expect that majors sample several of the art forms named above, seldom allowing a concentration in just one. The atelier experience does not offer a degree, but instead allows the student to concentrate on developing skills in a single art form.

WHY FOCUS ON WOMEN'S STUDIO ARTS?

To be able to do or view women's art required activism. Compared to the opportunities available to men to practice, teach, and obtain funding for arts and art histories, women's opportunities were severely restricted. Women are just over one-half of all visual artists, and 53% of degree-holders of art, yet men dominate U.S. art departments (holding 80% of the positions), female artists earn a third of male artists' earnings, and grants for arts activities are overwhelmingly proffered to men (73%). Of the curated exhibits in art museums, 85% are devoted to men's art – women's work is displayed in only 15% of these, and minority women's in .003%. Of works actually acquired by museums, only 4% of these are women's artistic creations.

Activists have long used both protest and philanthropy in creative and unrelenting ways to address the long-term imbalance in the recognition of and support for men's and women's arts. Organizations formed to address this inequity through activism and philanthropy. Arguably the oldest and more prominent of these is The Pen and Brush Club, organized in the late 1800s by sister-painters Janet and Mary Lewis to promote women painters and sculptors (as well as writers, composers and performers). Founded by artists in 1971, The Women In the Arts Foundation has used protest, documentation of discrimination, and testimony in Washington DC to fight for greater equality for women artists (Founding documents are housed in Washington's Smithsonian Institution.) The Women's Caucus for Art came together in 1972 under the leadership of Ann Sutherland Harris, an art historian who founded this strongly feminist organization fighting for gender equality in the arts. The DC-based National Museum of Women in the Arts is dedicated solely to recognizing the work of women artists through exhibitions, educational programs, and a library/research center, and produces Women in the Arts Magazine, the only US magazine exclusively promoting women's achievements in visual, literary, and performing arts.

WHAT SOURCES EDUCATE ABOUT WOMEN'S ART AND WOMEN ARTISTS?

There is neither an agreed-upon women's artistic canon, nor a single historical trajectory of women's arts that can be pointed to as the established register of uniquely important literary, two-dimensional, or three-dimensional arts created by women. Yes, women toil at art, but women artists as a rule don't collectively dialogue to unify their work into a tradition or body of singular "women's arts." The women's/feminist movement sparked both activism and scholarship on women artists, and the rise of internet access has made the World Wide Web a place for organizing and disseminating collected material.

Thus, notable efforts to codify a body of women's studio arts contributions – and place searchable databases on publicly accessible internet sites – deserve recognition. One such is the Women Artists Archives National Directory (WAAND), whose Rutgers University organizers have created databases on archived papers and data on women who have been actively producing art at least since 1945. They hold no archives themselves, but collect information on archives, committing those data to three databases: a Repository of organizations working on women's arts; a Collections database describing the archival source material held about particular artists or artists' organizations; and the Entity database, a collection of basic information about artists and their personal and professional histories. As of this writing, however, the site reports a failure to be able to update due to cuts to the budget. The Varo Registry of Women Artists (began in 1996 and named for surrealist female painter Remedios Varo) provides web pages for participating artists' images and personal statements. Another group providing online resources is the Women in the Arts Foundation.

n.paradoxa is the most prominent academic journal focusing on women's art, and it does so in a global and feminist fashion. As for physical sites, the Washington, DC-based National Museum of Women in the Arts reports being "the only museum in the world dedicated exclusively to recognizing the contributions of women artists." Begun in the

1960s by collectors Wilhelmina and Wallace Holladay, the museum maintains Clara, a directory of female artists and holds archives on the women artists listed in the Clara database.

Some argue that in the 1970s and 1980s women made great strides in the art world, but others, like the Guerrilla Girls, an organization of feminist arts activists, might argue that progress is far from sufficient. Since 1985, their campaign has used street theater, posters, and other humorous and visible modes of focusing attention on sex biases in the arts.

FROM WHERE HAS WOMEN'S ART COME? WHERE IS IT GOING?

In times gone by, the rare successful woman in studio arts had close connections to sufficiently prominent others in the art world, or to the Christian church (predominantly, nuns). For example, 16th and 17th century artists Catharina van Hemessen, Marietta Robusti Tintoretto, Lavinia Fontana and Teresa del Po learned from or were apprenticed to their artist fathers. And when history speaks of Camille Claudel (lover to Rodin) and Sofonisba Anguissola (court painter to King Phillip of Spain) it tends to focus on their colorful lives but not their talents as artists in their own right, nor their significant contributions to the world of art. During the Renaissance, the rise of humanism (belief in the dignity of all people) was the likely cause of increased freedom of women to pursue studio arts, although women weren't in equal measure welcome to pursue career as artists (rather than craftswomen). With the rise of Academies for the training and promotion of artists, women's exclusion was calculable. In the Renaissance and Baroque periods women were rarely accepted into academies, as compared to men; women were not welcome to paint nudes (models were mainly male), and painting nudes is considered even today a crucial part of training. Thus, female artists' self portraits are important records in the history of women's art, for they show the artists using themselves as models, portraying their female selves as educated figures and not detached muses, and depicting the female nude as more than an object meant for subjugation by men's sexual eye. More opportunities for women opened in the late 19th century, as evidenced by the opening of Female School of England's Royal College of Art. In the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, which overwhelmingly displayed art made by men, had a Women's Pavilion displaying art from 1500 women's artists in 13 countries.

In the 20th century women's art and artists became more widely known still. For example, photographers Dorothea Lange and Annie Liebovitz became well known for capturing the American social landscape (albeit from quite different vantage points). However, the quest for equality in women's work in the arts has a Western (i.e., North American and European) bias, largely ignoring all but the most popular women artists of color (like Frida Kahlo, Faith Ringgold, and Kara Walker) who have reached acclaim sufficient enough to have their work displayed in iconic galleries open to the public. The November 2001 conference "Women Artists at the Millennium" gave rise to a book of the same name, and it exemplifies one of the more recent attempts to redress the inequalities that give rise to the under-recognition of artists who continue to fill varied categories of "other."

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