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The Women's Caucus for Art

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Canadian Committee on Women's History: Ann Leger Anderson, Department of History, University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.

Chesapeake Bay Area Group of Women's Historians: Hilda Smith, Department of History, University of Maryland, College Park 20742.

Chicago Women's History Group: Marlene Stein Wortman, 1331 East 50 Street, Chicago 60615.

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Southern Association of Women Historians: Rosemary Carroll, Department of History, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52402.


West Coast Association of Women Historians: Gretchen Schwenn, P.O. Box 1111, Berkeley, California 94701.

Women Historians of Greater Cleveland: Lois Scharf, Department of History, John Carroll University, University Heights, Ohio 44118.

Women Historians of the Midwest: Winifred Bolin, Box 80021, Como Station, St. Paul, Minnesota 55108.

Judith K. Brodsky

The Women's Caucus for Art

The Women's Caucus for Art is a national professional organization of over 1,000 women art historians, artists and curators. Historically speaking, the Caucus is of its time. Women in a number of academic societies have been establishing or have established caucuses in order to bring to bear more concerted action of their societies, chiefly to work against discrimination in the field and on improvement in the curriculum. The history of the Caucus reveals some of the intricate problems facing women in the attempt to gain equal status.

The Caucus came into being at the College Art Association's (CAA) 1972 meeting in San Francisco. It has not, however, remained within the College Art Association. The CAA in 1974 informed the Women's Caucus of the College Art Association, as it was then called, that it could no longer use that name. Allegedly, use of the name made CAA legally responsible for activities and actions undertaken by the Caucus. Since the members of the Caucus were all CAA members—working professionals and graduate students—the CAA position posed curious problems and suggested certain assumptions. One may surmise that the CAA saw the Caucus as a threat to the established order and tried, therefore, to limit its potential power within the CAA.

The Caucus, not to be deterred, assumed its present name and proceeded to become an independently incorporated organization with tax-free status. Its relationship with the CAA is complex but continuing. While women outside the CAA have been attracted to the Caucus—artists, especially—there is a high degree of overlap in membership. A number of the women most visible in CAA activities are on the Caucus board or actively support the Caucus in other ways.

After the Caucus had been organized, the CAA established a Committee on the Status of Women. The women chosen to head that Committee—Linda Nochlin Pommer and Sheila McNally—are Caucus members and have seen the Committee and the Caucus as a team rather than as separate, parallel entities. The Committee on the Status of Women and the Caucus
have jointly presented several proposals to further the position of women artists and art historians to the CAA board.

It should be pointed out that, while the outward stance of the CAA has not always been friendly, the organization has actually been quite responsive to the proposals initiated by the Caucus. The CAA gives space at its annual meetings to the Caucus for its own sessions and has published a page in the Art Journal devoted to Caucus matters. While these forums for women in art would not exist if the Caucus had not requested them, they came into being while the CAA could still be described as male-dominated. Today, the balance in CAA governance is much more equal, reflecting distribution of male and female members. The CAA board, which is made up of 24 members, now includes 11 women, and in November 1975 the board passed a Caucus resolution declaring that its future composition would reflect the membership's sex, geographical distribution and race.

With the increased visibility of women within the CAA and presumably with their increased power to end discrimination, one might argue that the Caucus has fulfilled its goal and therefore could dissolve. But the CAA, despite its increased responsiveness to and awareness of women, has many areas of concern. The Caucus, on the other hand, exists only to advance women in art and thus can initiate action in many more areas and in a much more intensive way than the CAA. It can also operate in the larger art world outside the CAA.

The Caucus’ basic functions came into being quite early in its existence. Under its first president, Ann Sutherland Harris, a newsletter, a job referral service, statistical surveys and women’s studies guides were begun. Mary D. Garrard, the next president, gave the Caucus its structure through by-laws and incorporation. She also established a National Advisory Board and helped initiate regional chapters.

The newsletter has become one of the basic resources for information on women in art, especially because of its cumulative publications section, a comprehensive listing of all books, articles, film strips, slide sets and catalogs covering the work of women artists, art historians and curators. The job referral service during the last year received 109 listings and sent out about 1,000 vitae.

The Caucus sponsored the first surveys in 1973 establishing the existence of discrimination against women in college art departments. The statistics revealed that women are not represented in art history departments in proportion to the number who have received the doctorate—especially at the higher ranks. A subsequent survey done in 1975 indicated that more are being hired at lower but not at higher ranks.

One of the goals of the Caucus has been to further women’s studies in art. Syllabi of courses on women in art were collected by Athena Tacha Spear and became the core of the book, Women’s Studies in Art and Art History, published by the Caucus in 1974. A second edition, prepared by Lola B. Gellman, appeared in 1975. The Caucus also sponsored and partly supported Mary Garrard in compiling a bibliography of available slides of work by women artists, published as Slides of Works by Women Artists: A Sourcebook in 1974. The Caucus is now giving support to S. DeRenne Coerr, who is working on an index of works by women in public collections; and also to Claire Sherman and Adele Holcomb, who are preparing a book on the lives and ideas of women art scholars. Plans are also underway to begin the compilation of a comprehensive bibliography on women in art.

The Caucus has recently begun to work towards greater visibility for women artists. Recent statistics reveal that women artists still do not receive recognition for their work. When gender is hidden, as in juried shows, work by women comprises approximately a third of all work shown. In major galleries, however, fewer than 15 percent, and in museums, fewer than 5 percent of all one-person exhibitions are devoted to the work of women artists.

In response to discrimination against women artists, the Caucus is mounting an exhibition in cooperation with the Woman’s Building in Los Angeles during the CAA meetings there in February 1977. This exhibition has been prepared by 35 women curators, art historians, critics and artists from all over the United States. But even a show of works by 150 artists from more than 30 states, large as it may be, cannot be comprehensive.

The Caucus has been working in a number of direct ways to educate its members against discrimination in employment. It is currently concerned with the discrimination of insurance companies with regard to health benefits and pension plans. At the College Art Association 1975 meetings, the Caucus held a session in which women presented their own discrimination experiences, an account of which appears in the Feminist Art Journal (Fall 1975).

Finally, the Caucus provides a forum for exchange of ideas among women in art through the sessions organized at the College Art Association’s annual meetings. Los Angeles, the site of the 1977 meetings, is planning a city-wide celebration of women in art centered around the exhibition “Women Artists: 1550-1950” at the Los Angeles County Museum. On February 2, before the CAA meetings open, the Caucus will hold an all-day conference on Women in Art at the Woman’s Building and at the Los Angeles Hilton. Panels will include a session with Lucy Lippard; another on artists as humanists with Diane Burk, Cindy Nemser, Audrey Flack and Eleanor Antin; and a discussion of feminist criticism with Miriam Schapiro,
Further information about the activities of the Women's Caucus for Art may be obtained from the membership secretary. Johnnie Johnson, 1837 S. Halstead, Chicago, IL 60608. Dues are $7 for regular membership; $3 for unemployed, part time or student; $15 for an institutional membership. The newsletter requires no subscription other than membership. The second edition of Women's Studies in Art and Art History by Lola B. Gellman is available for $2 from Ms. Gellman, 14 Lakeside Dr., New Rochelle, NY 10801. Slides of Works by Women Artists: A Sourcebook is available from the compiler: Mary Garrard, 7010 Arrow Dr., Falls Church, VA 22042. A bibliography of women's studies in art is available for 75¢ from DeReene Coerr, 479 34th Ave., San Francisco, CA 94121.

Elizabeth H. Hagedam

Images of Women in Renaissance Literature: A Selected Bibliography of Scholarship

This bibliography offers a representative selection of scholarship on the image of woman in English literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As one would expect, a large percentage of the items listed here were published in the last five or six years, but a surprising number of significant, detailed studies of woman's place in Renaissance society were written in the early decades of this century. Moreover, the 17 studies that I have listed from the 1940s and 1950s are among the most valuable of the items that appear here—both in their scholarly concern for facts and in their imaginative application of those facts to literary problems. Much remains to be done, of course, but it is both reassuring and exciting to see how many fine scholars and critics have been working with the difficult problems that these cross-disciplinary studies present.

Even in 1976, however, too many students and teachers are under the misapprehension that there were no interesting woman authors in sixteenth- or seventeenth-century England. Just the opposite is true. Although their literary merits have yet to be fully evaluated, there are a great number of woman translators, poets, prose writers and playwrights to be studied. Among them are Jane Anger, Anne Finch, Margaret Cavendish, Mary Sidney, Susannah Centlivre, Alice Thornton, Anne Hutchinson, Dorothy Osborne and Katherine Philips. Few of their works are currently in print, and most anthologies of Renaissance literature (including Hershel Baker's new 962-page text, The Later Renaissance in England (Boston, 1975) omit them altogether. One can, however, find works by Renaissance women in the following anthologies: By a Woman Written: Literature from Six Centuries by and about Women, ed. Joan Goulianos (Baltimore, 1973); Poets of the 17th Century, Vol. 2, ed. John Broadbent (New York, 1974); and The World Split Open: Four Centuries of Woman Poets in England and America, ed. Louise Bernikow (New York, 1974).

In addition, Mary R. Mahl and Helene Koon have recently edited a collection of poetry and prose by medieval, Renaissance and eighteenth-century Englishwomen. Entitled The Female Spectator: English Women Writers before 1800 (Bloomington, Indiana, and Old Westbury, New York, 1977), this volume includes works by ten Renaissance women: Queen Elizabeth I, Elizabeth Grymeston, Aemelia Lanier, Bathsua Makin, Katherine Philips, and others.

The first section below lists the five studies of classical and medieval literature that

I should be most likely to recommend to a student interested in literary backgrounds to Renaissance works. The three bibliographies in that section will direct readers to other books and articles treating women in early literatures. The section on "Historical Perspectives on the Renaissance" lists works in which Renaissance thought is discussed in the context of the history of ideas in Western Europe. The last section treats the Renaissance itself, concentrating—as Renaissance scholars usually do—on the works of Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton. The list is selective, and I should be glad to provide further suggestions to anyone interested in more primary or secondary sources.

CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL STUDIES

Literature


Bibliographies
