

Women on Their Own

By ROSALYN DREXLER | New York Times on Jan. 28, 1973

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Renoir Once More—Top to Bottom

By ROSALYN DREXLER



"The Oyster" (1895), by Renoir, at the Art Institute of Chicago.
The painting is in the reproduction gallery on second street.

It is not a Renoir who is being shown here, but a Renoir who is being shown as a woman. The painting, "The Oyster," is a reproduction of the original work by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, which is housed in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. The painting depicts a woman in a dark, patterned dress sitting on a white chair. She is looking towards the viewer with a slight smile. The background is a simple, light-colored wall. The painting is a reproduction of the original work, which is housed in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Leger, Easel Painting And Utopian Politics

By ROSALYN DREXLER



Fernand Léger (1881-1955).
A deep account for "the people."

Léger's social realism had a definite and distinctive style. He was a French painter, sculptor, and designer. He was a member of the Cubist movement and was known for his bold, geometric forms and bright colors. He was also a pioneer in the field of modern design and architecture. His work was characterized by a sense of rhythm and movement, and he was often referred to as the "king of the machine age."

German Expressionism: A Time for Reappraisal

By ROSALYN DREXLER

German Expressionism was a movement in the visual arts that emerged in Germany in the early 20th century. It was characterized by a focus on emotional experience and subjective perception, rather than on the objective representation of the external world. The movement was led by artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and Emil Nolde. It was a reaction against the traditional academic art of the 19th century and was influenced by the ideas of Sigmund Freud and the Symbolist movement.

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Women on their own. It is a phrase that has become a cliché, but it is also a reality. Women are no longer just the muses of men, but they are artists in their own right. They are working, creating, and contributing to the world of art. The question is not whether they are on their own, but how they are supported and recognized. The art world has long been a male-dominated space, but women are breaking through the barriers and making their voices heard. They are not just artists, but they are also mothers, daughters, and friends. They are complex individuals, and their art reflects that complexity. The time has come for a reappraisal of women's art, and for a recognition of their contributions to the world of art.

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WOMEN choose women? a sexist show! It's obscene!" a wellknown New York art dealer was heard to remark. He is just one in a legion of men in the arts throughout the centuries who did not think it obscene to exclude women from every phase of art—from life classes to the museums, But women have been working nevertheless, and the question, "Where are the women artists?" is at last answered. They are everywhere; they are strong; they are together; and they have come out.

The museums (before statistics proved otherwise) claimed that women were given a fair shake, and that work was chosen for quality alone. Women in the Arts, an extraordinary organization of 500 women artists, chose a committee of artists to approach the major museums in New York in an attempt to arrange a comprehensive exhibition for some of its

members. Only The New York Cultural Center found it an exciting and important enough idea to act on.

Now, on three floors of the museum, the painting and sculpture of over 100 women may be seen in the show, "Women Choose Women," through Feb. 18. Some of the women are already known to the public: Joan Mitchell, Alice Baber, Nell Blaine, Mary Frank. Others are fairly new. The exhibition covers a wide spectrum of styles, exploring almost all current art-isms. A show of this nature has never been done on such a scale before. And, I believe, this is the first exhibition of women artists not chosen by curators or museum officials, but by the women themselves with the advice of two leading women critics, and with the museum director merely acting as consultant.

It is true that, alone in her studio, each artist must still fight the battle for originality, vitality and truth, but how refreshing to know that the lines of communication are coming free, and the withering disregard of people in the arts toward women is changing to one of respectful attention. Neglect can kill the spirit. Art does not feed on itself alone. Flesh does feed on flesh. The thinner we get, the closer we are to the skeleton, and women have been the skeletons in men's closets for many a year, cannibalizing themselves for want of other nourishment.

Surprisingly or not so surprisingly, there was nothing explicitly pornographic in the show, and nothing one could call conceptual: there was a lovely plaster of paris bas-relief of a male and female nude by Sheila Milder called "Love in the Morning" (happy thought), and a strong painting, the double portrait of a nude male sex object served up, genitally and otherwise, on a background of blue and gold satin, by Martha Edelheit. The Edelheit painting was hung beside the wall which displayed a visibly pregnant nude by Alice Neel (for laughs?). Does this imply that if birds do it, bees do it, even pictures in the galleries do it?

The show has elegance and size. One outstanding example of this is a sculpture by Anita Margrill called "Blue Work." Standing 9 by 15 feet, it resembles a heavenly, frosted blue glass theatrical piece of Atlantic City, or a fallen angel marquee lit from within with shimmering cool, or a magic urinal for gradually shorter and thinner people.

There is wit in Lil Picard's construction, "Cosmetic Object," which utilizes lipsticks at each corner of a wooden box carrying a cargo of plastic bottles used to dispense liquid of some kind. The entire work resembles a modern death ship for beauty in the after-life. A charming "Picnic Box" by Gloria Graves provides the countryside too: the box's lid reveals an ideal setting for a miniature painted plaster picnic glued to a piece of checkered cloth. Both of these boxes are comments on the way we live—or think we ought to live.

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Leatrice Rose's painting, "Sink," masterfully conveys the mystery and beauty of simple objects, the ordinary everyday things we are so used to seeing, but never see—a sink, pipes, chair, shelf, window, towel, shadows. Small in size, 18 by 16 inches, it is a truly Zen work: no questions, no answers, only being.

Artists are prone to use words, as are dancers and parakeets, but with the artists the words are form, with or without sentence meaning—a word is a word unto itself. It can be used as an object trouve, decoration, or in concert with other words as the creative flow itself, resembling Oriental calligraphy. Elise Asher's "Children in the Backyard—A Poem," uses words in and on a plexiglass cube. This multi-layered cube-time capsule glimmers with captured light and is imbedded with bits of word shrapnel: the poem has exploded into the transparent heart of things. Claire Moore's "Untitled," oil on plastic, unfurls narrow pennants of words, some incomplete. It is cruel to use words that way, like scratches in a healing

wound. We try to read these delicate streamers, and they evoke the emotion and meaning of a poem.

Fay Lansner is a painter who is gifted with a richly female aura. On viewing painting done by her, one knows immediately that a woman has informed its sensibility. This does not mean that it is soft, for it is strong. It does not mean that it is sentimental, for it is graceful and sure. Her "Aerial 1" is a wholly satisfying work of art.

On the other hand, Audrey Flack's painting, "Jolie Madame," is a wholly satisfying painting in "drag." It is gorgeous, decadent, opulent and jeweled. It is vulgar and risky; a powerful comment on artificiality and the absurdity of the good life. This painting is one of the most beautiful ugly paintings I have ever seen.

There are so many more fine things to see in this show: Yvonne Jacquette's "A Quick Look at the Weather," which is a partial view of the infinite; Hannah Wilke's "Of Radishes and Flowers," a piece that hangs against the wall like many flattened rubbery lungs made into holey pink aprons. And Jane Kogan's remarkable "Interiorized Self Portrait," a combination of primitivism and surrealism; the ghosts of Otto Dix and Rousseau, the obsessional spirit of Lindner, must live in her, too. Strange, because this is a ravishing and powerful feminist work.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. The work of many fine women artists not in the show would also make a worthy contribution to the cultural life of the country. I hope this exhibition is only the beginning for Women in the Arts, and that the public will now be more aware of the diverse and original work being created by women.