

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

Washington

PAINTINGS BY WOMEN ARTISTS

April 17 to 23, 1972

JUDITH LEYSTER, Dutch, c. 1610-1660

Self-Portrait, c. 1635 (Gallery 49)

One of several well-known women painters in the seventeenth century, Judith Leyster must have been rather precocious, for in 1627, when she was seventeen years old, she was mentioned as working in Haarlem. A talented artist, she became a follower of Frans Hals, the city's most important portraitist, employing his lively expressions and vigorous brushwork. In discussing the similarity between Judith Leyster's paintings and those of Hals, the art historian R. H. Wilenski wrote in An Introduction to Dutch Art, first published in 1929, "Women painters, as everyone knows, mostly imitate the work of some man." !! Evidently, however, she was a feminist who believed in equal rights, because in 1635 she sued Hals for enticing an apprentice from her studio to his. In 1636 she married Jan Molenaer who, though he also was a follower of Hals, specialized in genre. After her marriage, Judith Leyster seems to have painted very little, which suggests that matrimony and the birth of two children limited her artistic activity.

ROSALBA CARRIERA, Venetian, 1675-1757

Allegory of Painting, 1720-1730 (Gallery G-7); Sir John Reade, Bart., 1739 (Gallery G-7)

The 1700s, a period when women began to be recognized as individuals, produced a number of female artists. Particularly outstanding was the pastelist Rosalba Carriera, an early exponent of the gentle rococo style. Never marrying, she seems to have been a careerist. Her home, presided over by her widowed mother, was a busy studio, to which her many sitters came. Rosalba was primarily responsible for the eighteenth-century vogue for pastel portraits and, by these, she gained international fame. Apart from trips to Paris (1720) and Vienna (1730), she spent her entire life in Venice. Yet her patrons were largely foreigners; many Englishmen on their Grand Tours of the continent sat to her for portraits. Only blindness in her late years (after 1745) brought an end to Rosalba Carriera's constant activity.

ÉLISABETH VIGÉE-LEBRUN, French, 1755-1842

The Marquise de Pezé and the Marquise de Rouget with Her Two Children, 1787, (Gallery 55); Portrait of a Lady, c.1789 (Gallery 56)

Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun was also among the numerous eighteenth-century women who enjoyed professional success. Trained by her father, the minor portraitist Louis Vigée, she was a recognized artist by the time she was twenty. After her marriage to Jean-Baptiste Lebrun in 1776, she became known as Madame Vigée-Lebrun. Her husband was an art dealer, and it was said that he married Élisabeth because he realized her paintings were valuable on the art market. The talented Vigée-Lebrun's fame was assured in 1779, when she received Marie Antoinette's patronage. After some opposition because of her sex, Madame Vigée-Lebrun was elected in 1783 to the Royal Academy through the queen's intervention. Primarily a painter of women and children, the artist idealized her models, making them the epitome of eighteenth-century sentiment and feminine charm. In 1789 when the Revolution broke out, Vigée-Lebrun, who admired court life, left France. Her husband stayed in Paris, and in 1794 they were divorced. Traveling for sixteen years in Italy, Austria, Russia, Germany, and England, the beautiful Vigée-Lebrun gained international acclaim. Finally in 1805, after Napoleon had established an empire, she returned to Paris. When she died at the age of eighty-seven, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun--according to her own count--had painted 877 pictures.

LEILA T. BAUMAN, American, active c.1870

Geese in Flight, c.1870 (Gallery 68); U. S. Mail Boat, c.1870 (Gallery 68)

A number of naïve painters working in the northeastern United States during the mid nineteenth century were women. Most of them, however, are virtually unknown artists, since no records about them have been found. Though untrained, they took up brushes occasionally to paint still lifes, portraits, or landscapes, using bright colors, severe contours, and meticulous details. Being primarily concerned with significant facts, they disregarded atmospheric perspective and modeling in light and shadow. Yet by repeating hard-edged forms in rhythmical successions, these naïve artists achieved attractive patterns.

BERTHE MORISOT, French, 1841-1895

The Mother and Sister of the Artist, 1869-1870 (Gallery 89); In the Dining Room, 1886 (Gallery 88); Landscape, 1888 (Gallery 69, Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon); The Artist's Daughter with a Parakeet, 1890 (Gallery 88)

Coming from a well-to-do, cultured family, Berthe Morisot was educated to be a charming and accomplished lady. Thus, art was part of her training. When Berthe decided to become a professional painter, her enlightened parents did not oppose her, and in 1864 she exhibited at the Salon for the first time. While she belonged to a generation that still considered most women dilettantes, many of her masculine colleagues accepted her as their equal. In 1874 Berthe Morisot helped to organize the first impressionist exhibition and displayed her works there and also in most of the group's later shows. Her free brushwork, vibrant colors, and quivering light effects illustrate her stylistic affinity to the works of the other impressionists. In 1874 she married the younger brother of the painter Édouard Manet, Eugène; their only child, Julie, was often her mother's model.

MARY CASSATT, American, 1844-1926

Little Girl in a Blue Armchair, 1878 (Gallery 69, Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon); The Loge, 1882 (Gallery 86); Child in a Straw Hat, c.1886 (Gallery 69, Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon); Girl Arranging Her Hair, 1886 (Gallery 86); Woman with a Red Zinnia, 1891 (Gallery 88); The Boating Party, 1893/1894 (Gallery 86); Mother and Child, c.1905 (Gallery 86)

Born in Pittsburgh, Mary Cassatt came from a prominent family. When she told her banker father that she wanted to become an artist, he commented, "I would almost rather see you dead." Nonetheless, with the independent spirit she manifested throughout her life, she studied at the Pennsylvania Academy in Philadelphia (1861-1865) and later for a short period with a conservative teacher in Paris. She gained most of her artistic knowledge, however, by looking at the old masters' pictures which she saw on her European travels chaperoned by her mother. In 1874 she settled in Paris, just in time to be caught up in the impressionist movement. Among the progressive painters, Edgar Degas was her close friend and mentor. Thanks to him, in 1877 she was invited to join the impressionists; she was the only American to exhibit with the French impressionists. Mary Cassatt

devoted her life to work, never marrying. Throughout her career, she favored themes expressing the charm of womanhood and the sweetness of childhood, but her straightforward representation and bold designs keep her paintings from being sentimental. During her long residence in France, she returned to the United States on only three brief trips. In 1912 her eyesight began to fail, and in 1914 blindness compelled Mary Cassatt to stop painting.

MARIE LAURENCIN, French, 1885-1956

In the Park, 1924 (Gallery G-15); Girl with a Dove, 1928 (Gallery G-15)

In 1902 the Paris-born Marie Laurencin studied at the conservative Académie Humbert, where Georges Braque was also a pupil. They became friends, and in 1907 or '08 he took her to the "Bateau-Lavoir," the Montmartre tenement in which Picasso lived. Thus, she became acquainted with the radical painters and writers. For some years she was the mistress of Guillaume Apollinaire, the young poet who staunchly supported cubism, but just before the First World War she married a minor German painter. Although for a short while Marie Laurencin worked in a semi-cubist style, such an intellectual approach to art did not interest her for long. She preferred to people a hazy fantasy-world with fluttering dark-eyed girls painted in pale colors.

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE, American, born 1887

Cow's Skull with Red, 1931-1936 (Gallery 65, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, on loan from Georgia O'Keeffe)

Born in a Wisconsin farming community, Georgia O'Keeffe made up her mind to become an artist when she was only ten years old. After attending the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Students League in New York, she taught in Texas and studied with Arthur Dow at Teachers College, Columbia University. Dow, who had known Gauguin and was familiar with oriental art, emphasized principles of design. Perhaps under his influence, as early as 1915 O'Keeffe developed a type of abstraction that was entirely apart from European cubism. In 1924 she married the artist-photographer Alfred Stieglitz, who had exhibited her works at his avant-garde New York gallery, "291," in 1916. While Georgia O'Keeffe spent the winters in the east, after 1929 she summered in New Mexico and, following her husband's death, settled there in 1949. During the '30s many of O'Keeffe's paintings were representational. Yet, in rendering such desert objects as animals' skulls, worn by wind and bleached in the sun, this American pioneer of modernism depicted the bones with such crystalline clarity that they are removed from the ordinary world.