



Women Artists in Interwar France: Framing Femininities

By Paula J. Birnbaum

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Women Artists in Interwar France: Framing Femininities illuminates the importance of the Société des Femmes Artistes Modernes, more commonly known as FAM, and returns this group to its proper place in the history of modern art. In particular, this volume explores how FAM and its most famous members—Suzanne Valadon, Marie Laurencin, and Tamara de Lempicka—brought a new approach to the most prominent themes of female embodiment: the self-portrait, motherhood, and the female nude. These women reimagined art's conventions and changed the direction of both art history and the politics of their contemporary art world. FAM has been excluded from histories of modern art despite its prominence during the interwar years. Paula Birnbaum's study redresses this omission, contextualizing the group's legacy in light of the conservative politics of 1930s France. The group's artistic response to the reactionary views and images of women at the time is shown to be a key element in the narrative of modernist formalism. Although many FAM works are missing—one reason for the lack of attention paid to their efforts—Birnbaum's extensive research, through archives, press clippings, and first-hand interviews with artists' families, reclaims FAM as an important chapter in the history of art from the interwar years.

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Editorial Review

Review

A Yankee Book Peddler UK Core Title for 2011 'Ambitious and uniquely thorough in scope... a valuable contribution to the literature on motherhood and artistic production by women.' Anna Novakov, St. Mary's College of California, USA 'Drawing heavily on archival resources and feminist scholarship, Paula Birnbaum brings to light a rich cultural history of the interwar period often overlooked in histories of the avant-garde. The fact that the majority of artists will be unfamiliar to contemporary readers in no way undermines the importance of their collective endeavor, one that - carefully elucidated and beautifully illustrated in this handsome publication - sheds new light on issues of gender, modernity, female embodiment and diasporic identity during the interwar period.' Whitney Chadwick, author of *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* 'This book is an important contribution not only to a broader understanding of interwar French art, but also to the continuing need to research such hidden feminist histories.' Burlington Magazine 'The book provides the first history of Femmes Artistes Modernes (FAM), an exhibiting society established in 1930 and directed until its demise in 1938 by the artist Marie-Anne Camax-Zoegger. The Appendix, listing the names and biographical information of 181 FAM artists, is in itself a considerable contribution to scholarship. Moreover, the book is extensively illustrated, enabling analysis and comparison of previously unpublished works.' French Studies 'Women Artists in Interwar France not only restores to cultural visibility a number of women painters and sculptors who have been largely overlooked by historians of early-twentieth-century avant-gardist art, but also provides a critical framework through which to read a substantial body of art practice that does not readily conform to the stylistic and theoretical concerns of modernism as it has been canonically constituted. Informed by both primary archival research and key concepts in feminist scholarship, in this lavishly illustrated volume Paula Birnbaum illuminates the diverse representational strategies deployed by those women artists who exhibited with the Societe des femmes artistes modernes in their negotiation of both social and art critical constraints in the interwar period. The sustained interrogation of questions of femininity, modernity and (self-)representation in the work of these artists is made to seem all the more startling when set against a backdrop of rising nationalism and the resultant desire for state control over the female body in France during the 1920s and 1930s.' Woman's Art Journal 'Women Artists in Interwar France, by Paula J. Birnbaum, is an ambitious project aiming to recover the artistic lives and cultural achievements of members of a group called the Societe des Femmes Artistes Modernes (FAM), who exhibited in Paris between 1931 and 1938. By reconstructing this "little-known chapter in the history of French modernism," Birnbaum brings to light a rich socio-cultural history largely overlooked in histories of the avant-garde (p. xvii). Joining scholars working over the past four decades in gender and modernism studies, Birnbaum offers a fresh critique of women's contributions to visual culture between the wars, and attempts to unravel why so many of them have been excluded from the canon of art history. Her new book adds to a growing literature in this area.' H-France '... abundantly demonstrate[s] the importance of going beyond well-known artists, probing instead the social, economic and political contexts that defined what was and what was not available to women artists in general at particular places and times.' Art History

About the Author

Paula J. Birnbaum is Associate Professor and Program Director of Art History and Arts Management at the University of San Francisco, USA.

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