

Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, *Nineteenth Century European Art*, 2nd edition
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Eighteenth-century Neoclassicism was centered in Rome, but its proponents came from all over Europe and its colonies, creating a truly cosmopolitan climate. Mengs and Winckelmann were from Germany; Vien came from France; and West from the British colonies in North America (he was born in Pennsylvania). A fourth major early Neoclassical artist, Angelica Kauffman (1741–1807), was born in Switzerland. The daughter of a painter, she spent much of her youth in Italy, where her father urged her to study Classical sculpture and the works of the Renaissance masters. While in Rome, in her early twenties, she befriended Winckelmann and painted his portrait. She also tried her hand at history painting, a genre rarely practiced by women, whose training precluded lessons in anatomy and drawing from live models. (Kauffman compensated for this deficiency by drawing from statuary.)

In 1766 Kauffman moved to England, where she had instant success as a portrait painter, becoming so respected as an artist that within two years she was asked to become a founding member of the Royal Academy. Her membership of that august group led her to return to history painting, but she soon found out, as had Reynolds, that the British public had little interest in historical subject matter, except when it could be used for decorative purposes. Kauffman began to make something of a specialty of compositions that could be reproduced by copyists for the purpose of decorating walls and ceilings in the palatial town houses and country estates of the British aristocracy (see below, page 70). At the same time, she saw to it that many of these

2-13 South side of the Ara Pacis, 13–9 BCE. Marble, height 61" (1.55 m). Rome.





2-14 **Angelica Kauffman**, *Zeuxis Selecting Models for his Painting of Helen of Troy*, c.1778. Oil on canvas, 31 x 43" (80.6 cm x 1.11 m).
Brown University Library, AnnMary Brown Memorial Collection, Providence, Rhode Island.



2-15 **Angelica Kauffman**, *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to her Children as her Treasures*, c.1785. Oil on canvas, 40 x 50" (1.01 cm x 1.27 m).
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia.

paintings were reproduced as prints, which could be framed and hung on the walls of middle-class homes. *Zeuxis Selecting Models for his Painting of Helen of Troy* (FIG. 2-14) is representative of Kauffman's decorative history paintings. Painted around 1778, it depicts a scene central to the theory and practice of idealism. According to the Roman writer Pliny the Elder, the ancient Greek painter Zeuxis was asked to paint a picture of the legendary Helen of Troy, paradigm of female beauty. To do so, he chose five beautiful virgins as models. From this group, he selected the most perfect features (nose, breasts, feet, etc.) of each, and amalgamated them into one ideal figure. (It was precisely this process of "selective naturalism" that was advocated by Mengs in his theoretical writings.) Yet while the subject of Kauffman's painting goes to the heart of Neoclassical art theory, its execution retains many of the characteristics of Rococo decorative painting. Though the figures occupy a relatively shallow space, Kauffman has exaggerated the *chiaroscuro* (light and dark contrast) of the painting to counteract their frieze-like arrangement. Rather than the crisp contours found in the works of Mengs and Vien, her figures have *sfumato* (fuzzy) outlines akin to the works of such sixteenth-century Italian painters as Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) and Antonio Allegri da Correggio (1494–1534). No doubt Kauffman, like West, made allowances for the conservative taste of her British clients, few of whom were ready for the severe Neoclassicism of Mengs and Vien. Indeed, the public appreciated the soft contours and svelte forms of her figures, which, according to a critic of the day, reflected the "softness natural to her sex."

That Kauffman was capable of bolder pictorial statements appears from some of the works she executed after she left England in 1781, to return to Italy, where she would spend the remainder of her life. *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to her Children as her Treasures* (FIG. 2-15) may serve as an example. Comparing it with *Zeuxis Selecting Models*, one sees immediately that the figures are more monumental, the contours crisper, and the composition simpler and better integrated. Like West's *Agrippina*, Kauffman's painting deals with an example, from Roman history, of female virtue. But while *Agrippina* exemplifies the honorable wife/widow, *Cornelia* embodies the worthiness of motherhood. Standing next to a seated woman, a friend, who shows off her gold jewels, Cornelia points to her two sons, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, as her greatest treasures. It is noteworthy that Kauffman, who had worked hard at carving out a niche for herself as a female painter in a male artistic world, still considered sons more important than daughters. Note that Cornelia does not seem to include her daughter Sempronia in her "treasures"; moreover, while the two boys appear to come home from school (Gaius is carrying a paper scroll in his hand), Sempronia is playing with the jewelry. Thus Kauffman in her art appears to confirm the stereotypes that she had tried so hard to overcome in her life.



12-23 **Rosa Bonheur**, *Plowing in the Nivernais Region*, 1849. Oil on canvas, 5'9" x 8'8" (1.75 x 2.64 m). Musée National du Château de Fontainebleau, Fontainebleau.

Courbet also painted a number of hunting scenes and animal paintings; but in this area he was surpassed by the most famous female painter of the nineteenth century,

Rosa Bonheur (1822–1899). Trained by her father, Bonheur made her reputation at the Salon of 1850–51 with *Plowing in the Nivernais Region* (FIG. 12-23). Like Courbet and Millet, whose *Stonebreakers* and *Sower* were shown at the same Salon, Bonheur focused on a rural theme, but her painting is more idyllic. Whereas Courbet and Millet emphasized the hardships and drudgery of peasant life, Bonheur lent it a rustic grandeur. Focusing on the oxen that strain to pull the heavy plow, she created a bucolic

12-24 **Rosa Bonheur**, *The Horse Fair*, 1853. Oil on canvas, 8' x 16'7" (2.45 x 5.05 m). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



scene that has a timeless and enduring quality. *Plowing in the Nivernais Region* is said to have been inspired by *La mare au diable* (The Haunted Pool; 1846), a popular novel about country life by the famous French writer Aurore Dudevant (1804–1876). Dudevant, a woman who used the masculine pen name George Sand, was certainly a role model for the younger Bonheur as a professional female artist. Through tireless self-promotion, she had managed to make her career in the masculine literary world.

Bonheur became especially famous after the exhibition of *The Horse Fair* (FIG. 12-24) at the Salon of 1853. The painting represents the biweekly horse market in Paris, where draft and work horses were bought and sold. The long, oblong canvas is filled with a throng of horses, some held by the reins, others ridden by handlers, who seem to have a difficult time keeping the jittery animals under control. Bonheur's painting is a tour de force of horse painting, since it represents the animals life-size, in different poses and seen from a variety of angles. To accomplish this feat, Bonheur made numerous trips to the horse market. Women were rarely seen at that eminently masculine event, and Bonheur is known to have dressed in pants (after obtain-

ing permission from the police) to avoid undue attention as well as to prevent her skirt and crinolines from getting soiled. The artist always claimed that, in wearing male clothes, she did not want to draw undue attention to herself, thus distancing herself from George Sand, who had courted notoriety by wearing pants and smoking cigars. Some art historians, nonetheless, believe that she has painted herself, right in the center of the *Horse Fair*, riding a horse like a man and dressed in a blue smock and a dark cap.

The Horse Fair, that enormous painting with its masculine subject, was intended to prove that women could do more than paint watercolors and flowers on porcelain—the usual genres of female artists exhibiting at the Salons of the period. What is more, *The Horse Fair* was painted with a force and bravura that suited the subject matter but which contrasted sharply with the genteel brushwork that marked most women's art of the period. Indeed, Bonheur was determined to make her reputation on masculine terms—to show that women, like men, could lay a claim to artistic "genius."

The Horse Fair became a sensation in its time, both on its own merits and because it was the work of a woman. The painting went on tour in Britain and North America

12-25 **Jean-François Millet**, *The Gleaners*, 1857. Oil on canvas, 33 x 44" (83.8 cm x 1.12 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.



and was widely available in reproduction. In 1887 it was bought by Cornelius Vanderbilt, who donated it to the newly founded Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



16-43 **Berthe Morisot**, *The Cradle*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 20 x 16" (51 x 41 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Women at the Impressionist Exhibitions

Women were not particularly well represented in the Impressionist exhibitions, but those who did participate equaled their male colleagues in the quality and quantity of the works they presented. This phenomenon paralleled the situation in the Salons, where, in the course of the

Third Republic, a small but growing number of professional women artists exhibited both paintings and sculptures.

Before 1870, with some notable exceptions, such as Rosa Bonheur (see page 287), women who participated in the Salon had been amateurs. They worked in the "lower" genres (landscape, portrait, still life) and used "lesser" media and techniques, such as porcelain painting, watercolor, and pastel. From the 1870s onward an increasing number of women, ambitious to succeed in the arts on masculine terms, painted in oils or produced large-scale bronze and marble sculptures.

The new professionalism of female artists was aided by the increased availability of professional training. Although women were barred from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, because life classes for both sexes were considered taboo, a number of private schools emerged to offer training to women artists. Perhaps the best-known among them was the so-called Académie Julian, founded in 1868 by Rodolphe Julian, which accepted both male and female students. A particularly innovative aspect of Julian's *atelier* was that women were allowed to draw and paint from nude models, even working alongside male students.

Of the female artists who exhibited at the Impressionist exhibitions, Berthe Morisot and the American expatriate painter Mary Cassatt are best known today. Morisot began her career as an amateur. Together with her sister Edma, she was trained by a private drawing teacher. Her connection to the professional art world was facilitated by her close relationship to Manet, whose brother she married in 1874.

It is a credit to Morisot's independent spirit that, against Manet's advice and that of her drawing teacher (who told Morisot's mother that she was wrong to "associate with madmen"), she submitted two paintings to the first Impressionist exhibition, even though her works had been exhibited at the Salons of the late 1860s. She went on to show at almost all the subsequent Impressionist exhibitions.

Morisot's works, like those of Cassatt, focus on the public and private lives of women, partly by choice and partly by necessity. In spite of a certain degree of emancipation, the movements of bourgeois women in the 1870s and 1880s remained restricted, and much of the subject matter painted by their male colleagues would have been outside their normal visual experience. Morisot's *The Cradle* (FIG. 16-43) is by far her best-known work. It shows a young woman (perhaps her sister Edma) seated next to a cradle, contemplating the sleeping baby inside. Although several male artists, including Millet, had treated the theme of mothers and infants, they had generally depicted peasant women rather than bourgeois mothers. The reason for this was, no doubt, that the nursery in nineteenth-century middle-class homes was an exclusively female space that was rarely visited by men. Indeed, it has been argued that to find visual equivalents for Morisot's work, one should turn not to traditional painting but to images in fashion



magazines, which show women in nurseries modeling the latest “indoor” wear (FIG. 16-44).

The novelty of Morisot’s subject matter is matched by that of her style. Like her male colleagues, Morisot seems to have felt that new subjects and ways of seeing demanded new and individual painterly approaches. She once wrote in her notebook: “What’s needed is new, personal sensations, and where to learn those?” She developed a free, loose touch that became increasingly personal as she matured as an artist.

Unlike Morisot, Mary Cassatt received a formal training, first at the Philadelphia Academy of Art, then in the private *ateliers* of Gérôme, Couture, and others. She also traveled throughout Europe before settling down in Paris in 1874. Like Morisot, she sought out subject matter that was both modern and feminine, and felt this called for a

16-44 *House Dress and Little Boy’s Suit*. Illustration in *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, June 1871. Wood engraving, 7 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 6 $\frac{7}{8}$ ” (19.5 x 17 cm). Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, Paris.



16-45 **Mary Cassatt**, *Woman in a Loge*, 1879. Oil on canvas, 31 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 23” (80.3 x 58.4 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art.



16-46 **Mary Cassatt**,
*Little Girl in a Blue
Armchair*, 1878. Oil on
canvas, 35 x 51 1/8"
(89.5 cm x 1.3 m).
National Gallery of Art,
Washington, DC.

new approach to painting. At the Salon of 1874 one of her works attracted the attention of Degas, who invited her to participate in the fourth Impressionist exhibition. Here she exhibited four works on a theme that would long preoccupy her, that of one or two women seated in a theater box. One of these paintings, *Woman in a Loge* (FIG. 16-45), shows a young woman at the opera before the performance, when the lights are still on. Behind her is a mirror-covered wall, in which we see the reflection of part of the curved balcony opposite her, dotted with spectators who are looking around the theater with their binoculars. The girl seems both excited and slightly uneasy, aware as she is of being on display. Dressed, perhaps for the first time, in a low-cut dress that is pulled down from the shoulder, she seems at once embarrassed about her nakedness and happy with the attention she attracts. Like Degas, Cassatt was interested in suggesting the effect of a casual glimpse. The cut-off arm and the unusual illumination, which brightens the side of the face while leaving eyes, nose, and mouth in shadow, resemble some of the effects seen in his work.

While Cassatt was fascinated with certain aspects of women's public life, like Morisot she was also interested in the depiction of women's private lives and in the related subject of the lives of children. Among her most striking paintings is *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair* (FIG. 16-46), also exhibited at the fourth Impressionist exhibition. It shows a little girl alone in a large room filled with several overstuffed blue armchairs. Her skirt pulled up, legs wide spread, she reclines on one of them in a pose that expresses boredom and a rebellion against "good manners." This is a

radically new image of childhood that evinces a degree of psychological insight not seen in earlier art. The perceptive insight into the child's mind is matched by a new way of representing the pictorial space. While the bird's-eye viewpoint suggests the way that we, adults, see the child, the device of cutting off the room near the bottom of the windows replicates the limited view that the child has of the room.