

Discussions and Depictions of Women in H. W. Janson's *History of Art*, Fourth Edition

Paul E. Bolin

During the past twenty-five years there have been numerous highly charged and open criticisms levied against the field of art history. These accusations have been launched from a variety of fronts, both within and outside the discipline of art history (Simmons, 1990), with some of these critical questions and subsequent condemnation directed toward textbooks used to teach this subject in traditional courses that survey historical aspects of Western art. A primary criticism of these survey textbooks has been aimed at their lack of attention given to the important work of women artists. The manner in which these criticisms are treated by authors and editors of survey texts has definite ramifications for art education, a field in which pre-service teachers are often required to complete a very limited number of courses in art history beyond those that present monuments of Western art through the use of such textbooks. These volumes then become the foundation and source of information art teachers use to instruct their students in art history.

Criticisms of art history survey textbooks such as H. W. Janson's *History of Art* have been pointed out and discussed for more than 20 years (e.g., Hagaman, 1990; Luomala, 1982; Parker

& Pollock, 1981; Sloan, 1973). During this same period the work and influence of "rediscovered" (Petersen & Wilson, 1976, p. 2) women artists has been presented by many writers interested in questions related to feminist issues and art history. Beginning in the 1970s with writers such as Tufts (1974), Munsterberg (1975), Harris and Nochlin (1976), Petersen and Wilson (1976), and Greer (1979), continuing into the 1980s with Sherman and Holcomb (1981), Broude and Garrard (1982), Petteys (1985), Heller (1987), and Slatkin (1989), and now in the 1990s, as seen through the work of Chadwick (1990), Lippard (1990), Waller (1991), Tippett (1992), Broude and Garrard (1992), and LaDuke (1992), there has been a growing movement toward documenting biographical information on women artists. These books plus numerous journal articles and other publications of this period encourage one to consider critical issues concerning women and art history (e.g., Gouma-Peterson & Mathews, 1987; Nochlin, 1971; Nochlin, 1979; Nochlin, 1988). Yet, there has been little done to recognize specifically how authors and editors of survey texts in art history have responded to the many writings about women artists and feminist issues in art history. This paper is a step toward answering this question by examining ways in which women artists and depictions of women in art are treated in the most recent edition of Janson's *History of Art* (1991).

H. W. Janson's *History of Art* was first published in 1962. The book was expanded and revised in 1969, and a second edition of the volume was printed in 1977. Anthony Janson, son of the late-H. W. Janson, has been responsible for directing the third and fourth editions of *History of Art* (1986, 1991). Anthony Janson undoubtedly is familiar with the numerous publications about women artists and the plentiful critical writings that have been directed toward this text, and, in response, selected some well-recognized women artists to be included in the latest edition of *History of Art*. An examination of this textbook reveals specific discussion of twenty-eight artists who are new to the fourth edition. One-third of this total—nine artists—are women, giving this book "half again as many women as were in the previous edition" (Janson, 1991, p. 41).

This step toward recognizing the critical place that women

share in the artworld is noteworthy. Yet, there remains the question of whether such biographical study and cursory identification of often "neglected women artists" (Gouma-Peterson & Mathews, 1987, p. 326) addresses in a satisfactory manner a number of paramount concerns regarding the omission of women and feminist issues from the art historical content presented in art history survey texts. Some critical questions require consideration: Is there a fundamental problem in including women artists in the format of a standard survey of art history textbook? Can filling the recognized historical gaps with the names, depictions of artwork, and cursory discussion of women artists who have been overlooked and omitted from the art historical canon do justice to teaching about women artists? By what standard(s) are the choices made to include particular women in these texts, and at the same time to exclude others? And, given the criticisms of textbooks such as Janson's *History of Art*, how do the authors and editors of these texts treat the women artists and women depicted through the visual and verbal information they select to include?

The following is a list of the nine women artists that Anthony Janson has added to the fourth edition of this text: Sofonisba Anguissola, Camille Claudel, Nancy Graves, Angelica Kauffman, Käthe Kollwitz, Annette Lemieux, Paula Modersohn-Becker, Elizabeth Murray, and Susan Rothenberg. These women artists have been placed within the standard chronological format utilized by H.W. Janson, which reflects a particular way of thinking about history and art history. It is important to consider whether such a format for presenting women artists is a suitable arrangement for these discussions, yet the primary purpose of this investigation is not to directly analyze and critique the appropriateness of such an approach for the study of women in art history. This method has been called into question by writers such as Parker and Pollock (1981) and Gouma-Peterson and Mathews (1987).

In this study, examples of descriptive text and images are drawn from Janson's most recent edition of *History of Art* (1991), for the purpose of showing that although more extensive discussions and depictions of women are included in the present edition than in earlier ones, the women considered in the text are

often discussed in ways that misinform readers about the importance of women artists and how women are depicted in art. This paper is by no means exhaustive. It is intended to offer some specific instances to exemplify how Janson, to the detriment of women, has in some cases chosen to present, and at other times omit, information about women artists and depictions of women in art history.

Analysis of Text

Anthony Janson opens his discussion of Sofonisba Anguissola (c. 1535-1625) by indicating that she is the first woman artist to be "encountered [in the text] . . . since ancient Greece" (1991, p. 516). The author goes on to state that, "The vast majority of all artists remained anonymous until the 'Late Gothic' period, so that all but a few works specifically by women have proved impossible to identify. Women began to emerge as distinct artistic personalities about 1550" (p. 516). At this point Janson begins a short discussion of selected aspects of Anguissola's life and work. In doing so Janson fails to ask significant questions or address in any way why this societal transition occurred. It would be worthwhile to ask the following: What shifts in Western European society occurred around 1550 that brought about this apparent change in contemporary art and life? It must be remembered that this is a survey textbook, and contextual issues that would shed light on this question are quite complex. Yet, it seems this juncture of the book would be an appropriate occasion for Janson to raise critical questions and introduce some of the primary issues regarding the changing role and perception of women artists that occurred during the mid-sixteenth century. The opportunity, however, is passed over.

I believe Janson offers a disservice by not addressing a number of critical topics. Through his text Janson could assist readers in understanding more fully purposes of art history by raising some legitimate and necessary questions, such as those asked by Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin (1976). They write:

Why was the Renaissance almost over before any

women artists achieved enough fame for their works to be treasured and thus preserved and for their accomplishments to be noted by contemporary biographers? Why did women artists not reach the historical status of Giotto, so to speak, until almost two hundred fifty years after he had become prominent? What made it possible for a small but growing number of women to have successful careers as painters after 1550 but prevented them from having any significant impact before that date? (p. 13)

An exploration of the type of questions asked by Harris and Nochlin would contribute to an understanding of important content in art history by challenging us with questions about the past. Janson has suitable opportunity to introduce the type of questions students of art history and art education should be asking, yet Janson's silence in not broaching this subject is a significant omission from the text.

In his brief discussion of Sofonisba Anguissola, Janson chooses to focus on the artist's painting of her sister Minerva, that was completed about 1559. Janson describes Anguissola's work, and specifically *Minerva*, in the following way: Anguissola, "was at her best in more intimate paintings of her family, like the charming portrait she made of her sister Minerva" (p. 516). What connotations does the word "charming" carry? Would Janson employ this word in his writing to describe the work of a male artist? I have not located any such designation in the text. In Janson's discussion of Jacopo Tintoretto, which occurs directly following that of Sofonisba Anguissola, the writer describes Tintoretto as "an artist of prodigious energy and inventiveness" (p. 516). Later in the book, Correggio is described as "phenomenally gifted" (p. 520) and Frank Stella is called "brilliant" (p. 745). In Janson's text the status of "genius" is conferred upon no less than 15 men, including Hugo van der Goes (p. 433), Masaccio (p. 459), Michelangelo (p. 495), Raphael (p. 504), El Greco (p. 520), Pieter Bruegel the Elder (p. 543), Caravaggio (p. 549), Borromini (p. 560), Rembrandt (p. 574), Vermeer (p. 581), Velazquez (p. 582), Goya (p. 630), Cole (p. 647), van Gogh (p. 687), and Picasso (p. 726). No women artists discussed in Janson's text receive this label of distinction.

Furthermore, Janson describes George Bellows's *Stag at Sharkey's* as expressing "heroic energy" (p. 725) and Anselm Kiefer's painting *To the Unknown Painter* is characterized as "a powerful statement" (p. 755). Sofonisba Anguissola's work, on the other hand, is regarded by Janson as "charming."

Not all writers view Sofonisba Anguissola's *Minerva* in such a way. Art historian Nancy Heller, in her book *Women Artists: An Illustrated History* (1987), describes *Minerva* as "another exceptionally strong work" (p. 16). We are informed through language; the obvious as well as more obscure use of words and phrases directs us to consider and construct the world in certain specific ways. How we are presented with and thus interpret information about art and artists shapes our view of them. For this reason it is essential to acknowledge the powerful role that words play in forming one's perception of a particular artist or work of art. We must recognize the immense difference there is between, and the didactic implications that emerge from, regarding a painting such as Anguissola's *Minerva* as "exceptionally strong," the way Heller describes it, and "charming," as it is referred to by Janson.

A second and similar example of the way I believe language is used by Janson to misinform us about women artists is found in his discussion of Nancy Graves (born 1940) and her work. Janson describes Graves's sculpture *Trace* (1979-80) in the following manner: "The ribbonlike boughs of this seemingly elastic tree support a lacy foliage of steel mesh. Caught in its 'leaves' are a brightly colored ladder, kite frame, streamers, and ropes, which complete the gaily elegant effect" (p. 772). If this artwork had been executed by a male artist would Janson have described it as creating a "gaily elegant effect"? I think not. Janson refers to Frank Stella's *Empress of India* as "majestic" (p. 745). William Blake's *The Ancient of Days* is called a "memorable image" (p. 643). Joan Miro's *Composition* is labeled "striking" (p. 732). This is not the case with Nancy Graves's *Trace*. This sculpture by Graves should be described and discussed with words that enhance her credibility as an artist and cut to significant issues addressed through her work, rather than portraying it through phrases that bring to mind images of frailty, delicacy, and susceptibility. The description "gaily

elegant effect" by Janson does nothing to recognize the significance and power of this sculpture as one of Nancy Graves's many thought provoking works of art.

In writing about the seventeenth-century female artist Judith Leyster (1609-1660), Janson states: "Like many women artists before modern times, her career was partially curtailed by motherhood" (1991, p. 574). Does this statement imply that in "modern times" societal circumstances have been altered from how they were in the seventeenth century with regard to the curtailing of one's profession due to motherhood? Are women of "modern times" exempt from having their artistic pursuits constricted by choosing to be a parent? A look around the artworld, and society in general, shows that many women artists and women in all professions continue to have their careers not only curtailed but altered drastically and even ended by motherhood. It was true for Judith Leyster in the seventeenth century, and has been a way of life for thousands of other artists since that time. It is terribly naive and misleading for Janson to imply that the curtailment of professional activity because of motherhood was a phenomenon found only in days past, and does not occur in contemporary society.

Janson's disservice to women occurs not only through the choice of words he uses to discuss female artists, but also takes place through the selection of images employed to visually represent their work. For example, Janson's discussion of the life and work of Camille Claudel (1864-1943) focuses primarily on the artistic and personal relationship that occurred between her and Auguste Rodin. Janson offers that Claudel "emerged as an important artist in her own right" (p. 678), yet the subordinate position that Janson believes Claudel holds to Rodin is manifested in what Janson writes and depicts visually in his textbook. Janson believes that, "some of her [Claudel's] strongest pieces might be mistaken for his [Rodin's]" (p. 678). The implication of such a statement is that only a few of Camille Claudel's most impressive works would be worthy of being confused with the sculptures of Auguste Rodin. It is assumed through this view that Claudel's work as a whole could not approach the standard set by Rodin.

To augment his discussion of Camille Claudel, Janson included with the text one image of the artist's work. Janson chose to place within the book a visual representation of Claudel's sculpture *Ripe Age* (c. 1907). Janson describes this work in the following manner:

Ripe Age was begun at the time when she [Claudel] was being replaced in Rodin's affections by another woman, his long-time companion Rose Beuret. It shows Rodin, whose features are clearly recognizable, being led away with apparent reluctance by the other woman, who is portrayed as a sinister, shrouded figure. . . . The nude figure on the right is a self-portrait of the pleading Claudel. (p. 678)

This image shown in Janson's text clearly situates Camille Claudel in a subordinate position to that of Rodin. In this piece there is a powerful sense of abjection, as the image of Rodin seemingly steps away from the figure of Claudel, who is stripped bare, on her knees, arms outstretched, begging for Rodin's return.

Of the many sculptures that could have been included in the text, why has Janson selected this particular work? Was this piece chosen by Janson because it is the single sculpture that exemplifies the narrative content of Camille Claudel's work? Was it selected because it represents Claudel's finest artwork? Is *Ripe Age* considered most expressive of Claudel's artistic style? Or, could it be that this sculpture was included in the book because it, together with the written narrative, presents and reinforces the notion that the actions and artwork of Camille Claudel were and should be subordinate to those of Auguste Rodin? If it was Janson's desire to include a visual representation that matched his textual narrative about the association between Camille Claudel and Auguste Rodin, why did he not select to include one of Claudel's sculptural busts of Rodin, to strengthen the artistic connection between pupil and student? Art historian Nancy Heller (1987) took such an approach and achieved a successful link between Claudel and Rodin by showing a bronze bust, *Auguste Rodin*, that Claudel completed in 1892 (p. 107).

Throughout the book there are many instances that could be identified and discussed to show how Janson's choice of information and *employment* of language and images misinform us about the importance of women in art. Another, and final example, directs our attention toward information that Janson chose to *exclude* from discussion, and is an omission from his examination of Egyptian art. In the text, Janson's initial reference to pharaoh is followed directly by the masculine term "(king)" (1991, p. 97). Throughout Janson's discussion of Egyptian art, references to pharaoh are always given in the masculine (pp. 97, 101, 110). Such attribution to pharaoh, when placed only in masculine terms, fails to acknowledge what Nancy Luomala stated in her 1982 work, that "at least a half dozen female pharaohs have been recognized" (p. 27), with Queen Hatshepsut being the most famous.

The Funerary Temple of Queen Hatshepsut is mentioned and shown in Janson's book, but no information is given concerning the ruling influence of this Queen in ancient Egypt. Queen Nofretete (Nefertiti) is referred to in Janson's survey text, but only with regard to her being "Akhenaten's queen" (p. 114). According to Luomala (1982), the importance of female rulers such as Queen Hatshepsut and Queen Nefertiti has been overlooked by art historians. She argues that these distinguished Egyptian Queens must be given a more clear and prominent place within the study of hierarchical lineage in ancient Egypt. Luomala (1982) concludes:

Egyptian princesses and queens could assert their power visibly, like Hatshepsut or Nefertiti, or elect to function as the "power behind the pharaoh." In either case, Egyptians knew, as many art historians will not, that the Great Wife made whomever she married into a living king, whether brother or commoner. . . . Thus, if we are to interpret Egyptian art accurately, we must . . . remember to couch our thinking about Egyptian art in matrilineal terms. (p. 30)

How does Janson treat this information about the importance of the queen in Egyptian rule? During his discussion of the sculpture *Mycerinus and His Queen* (2599-2571 B.C.), Janson

has perfect opportunity to address issues of matrilineal rule in ancient Egypt. However, as he is poised at this crucial juncture of discussion, Janson side-steps this matter. Janson states: "Since the two [king and queen figures] are almost the same height, they afford an interesting comparison of male and female beauty as interpreted by one of the finest Old Kingdom sculptors" (1991, p. 105). The fact these male and female ruling figures are the same height may have little to do with the sculptor's interpretation of beauty, but rather their equal stature may well be the visual demonstration of the comparable position this couple held as rulers of ancient Egypt. Janson omits this information about the importance of women in Egyptian leadership, and bypasses an excellent opportunity to engage in meaningful discussion about this significant piece of art in Egyptian society. This appears to be another instance of an interpretive approach often used by Janson and others—that is, to focus attention on matters of formal beauty while disregarding the discussion of issues that involve contextual substance.

Conclusion

Several of the traditional structures that make up the field of art history are presently undergoing reappraisal. In some instances these inveterate institutions are being supplanted by alternative directions and descriptions of the discipline. Janson's *History of Art*, as it stands in its fourth edition, does little to reflect these alterations within the field of art history nor to bring about meaningful recognition of women artists, their art work, and the professional activities of current art historians who are writing about feminist issues in art history.

Without question, women in the past and currently have exercised a critical function within the history of art. In the words of Parker and Pollock (1981), "the evidence" to support this "is overwhelming" (p. xvii). This acknowledgment of the abundance and value of women in art is recognized by Janson and reflected through the expanding number of women presented in each subsequent edition of his text. However, the way Janson introduces this information misinforms the reader about serious contributions that women have made and continue to accomplish in the world of art.

The manner in which women artists and their art are treated by writers of art history survey textbooks is of consequence to art education. Art educators have as their primary responsibility the instruction of future generations about the role the visual arts play in society and in the lives of individuals. The information that art educators receive and internalize from art history survey texts will not be buried within the vast body of material that coalesces to form a teacher of art. It will reveal itself in the educational setting by the manner in which an educator treats the subject of art history. The knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about art history that art education students secure through contact with these art history survey books will be conveyed to their students in the future.

As teachers take an active role in presenting art history information to their students, these art educators must become knowledgeable of art history content and also recognize the manner in which this subject matter is presented to them and their students through the survey books employed to teach this subject. Students will then be equipped to, among other things, identify *attitudes* about women in art that are displayed through the *content* about women in art that is presented in these texts, and consider how these two outcomes sometimes do not mesh. As art education students become aware of how language and images are employed to shape their views of artists and artwork, they will see the potential hazard presented to them and their students through texts such as Janson's *History of Art*.

We must also look to the future. In all likelihood, during the next few years a fifth edition of Janson's *History of Art* will be published. This book will probably maintain its position as the central art history survey textbook, and will be used often in the academic preparation of art teachers. Who will be the women artists that Janson adds to the following edition of his text? How will these women and their art be selected and treated? Will students of art education be able to recognize, and challenge if necessary, how women artists are being examined in this book? At the present time we can only speculate about how these three questions might be addressed. Responses to the initial two questions, while important, are for the most part beyond our influence; Janson will select the particular women artists to

include in his text, and determine how they will be discussed. For those of us in art education our task centers on the third question. It is imperative that we assist our students in recognizing what is being taught to them through survey textbooks in art history, and equip these students with skills to examine critically and expose the beliefs and attitudes that are being presented along with the subject content of such books. An understanding of the underlying messages about women that are presented through texts such as Janson's *History of Art* is vital for the professional development of students in art education and for their future students to recognize, if society is to alter its perceptions of women artists in history and support the crucial value of women in contemporary art and life.

References

- Broude, N., & Garrard, M. D. (Eds.). (1982). *Feminism and art history: Questioning the litany*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Broude, N., & Garrard, M. D. (Eds.). (1992). *The expanding discourse: Feminism and art history*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Chadwick, W. (1990). *Women, art, and society*. New York: Thames and Hudson.
- Gouma-Peterson, T., & Mathews, P. (1987). The feminist critique of art history. *The Art Bulletin*, 69(3), 326-357.
- Greer, G. (1979). *The obstacle race: The fortunes of women painters and their work*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.
- Hagaman, S. (1990). Feminist inquiry in art history, art criticism, and aesthetics: An overview for art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 32(1), 27-35.
- Harris, A. S., & Nochlin, L. (1976). *Women artists: 1550-1950*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
- Heller, N. G. (1987). *Women artists: An illustrated history* (rev. ed.). New York: Abbeville Press.
- Janson, H. W. (1962). *History of art*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall and New York: Harry N. Abrams.

- Janson, H. W. (1977). *History of art* (2nd ed.). New York: Harry N. Abrams.
- Janson, H. W. (1986). *History of art* (3rd ed.) (revised and expanded by A. F. Janson). New York: H. N. Abrams and Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Janson, H. W. (1991). *History of art* (4th ed.) (revised and expanded by A. F. Janson). New York: Harry N. Abrams and Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- LaDuke, B. (1992). *Women artists: Multi-cultural visions*. Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press.
- Lippard, L. R. (1990). *Mixed blessings: New art in a multicultural America*. New York: Pantheon.
- Luomala, N. (1982). Matrilineal reinterpretation of some Egyptian sacred cows. In N. Broude, & M. D. Garrard (Eds.), *Feminism and art history: Questioning the litany* (pp. 19-31). New York: Harper & Row.
- Munsterberg, H. (1975). *A history of women artists*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter.
- Nochlin, L. (1971). Why have there been no great women artists? *Art News*, 69(9), 22-39; 67-71.
- Nochlin, L. (1979). Toward a juster vision: How feminism can change our ways of looking at art history. In J. Loeb (Ed.), *Feminist collage: Educating women in the visual arts* (pp. 3-13). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Nochlin, L. (1988). *Women, art, and power and other essays*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Parker, R., & Pollock, G. (1981). *Old mistresses: Women, art and ideology*. New York: Pantheon.
- Petersen, K., & Wilson, J. J. (1976). *Women artists: Recognition and reappraisal from the early middle ages to the twentieth century*. New York: New York University Press.
- Petteys, C. (1985). *Dictionary of women artists: An international dictionary of women artists born before 1900*. Boston: G. K. Hall.
- Sherman, C. R., & Holcomb, A. M. (Eds.). (1981). *Women as interpreters of the visual arts, 1820-1979*. Westport, C. T.: Greenwood Press.

- Simmons, S. (1990). Art history and art criticism: Changing voice(s) of authority. In L. Ettinger (Ed.), *Controversies in art and culture*. Eugene, OR: University of Oregon Department of Art Education.
- Slatkin, W. (1989). *Women artists in history* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Sloan, P. (1973). Teaching art history in the community college. In G. Battcock (Ed.), *New ideas in art education* (pp. 104-116). New York: E. P. Dutton.
- Tippett, M. (1992). *By a lady: Celebrating three centuries of art by Canadian women*. Toronto: Penguin.
- Tufts, E. (1974). *Our hidden heritage: Five centuries of women artists*. New York: Paddington Press.
- Waller, S. (1991). *Women artists in the modern era: A documentary history*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.