Pollock had his own studio. Joan Mitchell was financially independent and her paintings might be signs or (literally) measures of her privilege: her rich, monumental canvases and dynamic imagery are equal matches for her male counterparts in every sense. Mitchell acknowledged her inspiration in nature and, in her several untitled works in the show, revels in its colorful sensuality.

Although scale may suggest security and authority (most black artists of the period also worked small), it has nothing to do with quality or authenticity. Dorothy Dehner's jewel-like sculptures and drawings, for example, are crafted as if by a virtuoso goldsmith. Krasner achieves lavish intimacy in the Untitled webs of 1946 and 1948, and there is expansive joy in the confettiklike Shattered Color (1947). Betty Parsons's lovely, quirky, dark planar paintings like The Whale (1959) are similar in their confounding of figure and ground, and in their eccentricity and playfulness, to the works of William Baziotes.

Perle Fine, in The Wind and the Sea (1958), works through a stark, reduced palette to add grey, blue, and green accents. Her meandering, involuted gestural marks seem to interrogate the space of the canvas, as in Cubism, penetrating then returning to the shallow surface of the picture plane but without recourse to faceting. Rather, she depends upon an idiosyncratic broken and spiraling line that turns in upon itself. Forms Fugitive (1946; front cover), although not in either exhibit, is more akin to her work shown in "The Women," when she was a member of American Abstract Artists. Large flat areas of soft colors—mostly blues, blue-greens, and violets, with a bold slash of yellow—are washed onto the canvas and then overlaid with playful black lines and forms in the spirit of Klee and Miro. Born in Boston in 1908, Fine moved to New York in the twenties and followed the trajectory of her male colleagues: the Art Students League, Hans Hofmann's New York and Provincetown classes, Betty Parsons Gallery, and a move to the Springs in East Hampton in 1954. Also, during the forties, she was among the artists receiving stipends from Guggenheim Museum founding-director Hilla Rebay. Although she had more than 30 solo shows during her lifetime, her work has received little attention since her death in 1988.

This small sampling of women's artworks from the 1940s and 1950s stimulates an appetite and desire for more and larger exhibitions that would reconstruct an image and context for women of these pivotal moments in the art of a century now drawing to a close.

Amy Winter's article on Gertrud Parker appears in the Portraits section of this issue.

Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe
by Anne Middleton Wagner
University of California, 1996

Reviewed by Anne Swartz

In Three Artists (Three Women) Anne M. Wagner studies similarities in the lives of Georgia O'Keeffe, Lee Krasner, and Eva Hesse, using their biographies to illuminate their art. An ambitious project, it introduces a new approach to feminist art history—the use of superlative case studies in a comparative context, elucidating features to which several artists responded.

The choice of O'Keeffe, Krasner, and Hesse is felicitous: All three worked from their own content, were ambivalent about the designation "women artist," married artists with whom they had complex interpersonal and personal connections, and altered their art to ensure critical and commercial success. Additionally, they worked during a period of great transition for women artists (and for all artists); from modernism to postmodernism. Wagner, Professor of the History of Art, University of California, Berkeley, presents this series of considerations to broaden the current literature on each artist and create a series of parallels among them. As she notes in her introduction, their lives are nestled in the 20th century, with their most productive years occupying its central decades. Born in 1897, O'Keeffe studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and then at the Art Students League in New York City. She died in 1986, two years after Krasner's death at age 76. Krasner, a member of the American Abstract Artists, studied with Hans Hofmann, the German-born painter and teacher who provided the essential connection for young American artists to European modernism. Born in Germany in 1936 and struck down by a fatal brain tumor in 1970, Hesse fits in between O'Keeffe's and Krasner's longevity. A student at the Art Students League and then Yale School of Art, Hesse developed during her brief life a potent and influential body of work.

Each artist is given an almost 100-page chapter, parenthetically bound by a comparative analysis in chapters titled "Sex Differences" and "Making a Difference to Modernism: An Epilogue." Although the book is a reworking of previously published essays, its presentation in this form is still useful.

The fact that O'Keeffe, Krasner, and Hesse married artists is what unites these women and, in fact, is a pivotal leitmotif to Wagner's discussion: that of "otherness" and the need for the woman artist to define herself and differentiate herself from her artist mate.

The section on O'Keeffe explores her unusual approach to her femininity. Acknowledging that the critical dialogue about O'Keeffe's work has centered on the connection between feminine and what she terms "its inevitable synonyms, the bodily and the sexual," (32) Wagner suggests that O'Keeffe resisted feminine definition with such force because its greatest proponent was Alfred Stieglitz, who later became her husband. Although her delicate floral images have been read as synecdoche for the female body, especially its genitalia—interpretations that the artist most wanted to diminish—Wagner posits that O'Keeffe's works were sites of transference, receptacles for the viewer's desires and projections. (43) The creative artist's role here is complex, and Wagner presents O'Keeffe as rebuffering the female associations of her work. There is rich material here in Wagner's extended meditations on Stieglitz's role and access to O'Keeffe and her art. What is lacking, however, is an examination of wifely complicity and a critique of Stieglitz's multifaceted involvement in her work.

Wagner writes of Krasner's complex, seemingly endless self-defining gestures in her roles as artist and wife and then executor of Jackson Pollock's estate and protector of his reputation. She views Krasner as everything Pollock was not; "the antithesis that confirms the thesis concerning modern male identity sites in his person." (137) She sees Krasner as the "neutral viewer," the "anonymous gallery goer," in the 1950 film...
on Pollock by Hans Namuth and Paul Falkenberg. Wagner notes the loaded implications here, considering Krasner as the ideal viewer, “the arbiter of the status of Pollock’s painting as art,” which the author views as confirmation of Krasner’s desire to remain central to any discussion/consideration of Pollock’s art. (130) Most curious here is the element of masquerade that Wagner promotes in reading Krasner’s art, which she uses as evidence for her proposition that the artist initially wanted to imply masculinity, and later demurely a feminine status. Although insightful, this perspective fails to acknowledge Krasner’s active role in fashioning herself. Based upon the evidence of the works and the unrelenting approach Krasner took to crafting her various identities, it does not seem constructive to view Krasner as simply involved in narcissistic self-subterfuge.

The author is at her best in the section on Hesse. Her critique is expansive, and she makes clear her privileging when she announces in the introduction that Hesse’s “artistic achievement is, I believe, the greatest of the three, and her reputation, thanks to recent retrospectives, is currently ascendant.” (3) An unusual reasoning process, thus, has been used here to organize the information, since such a point could be easily argued for the other artists as well.

Wagner provides an alternative reading of Krasner’s diaries, which scholars such as Anna C. Chave employ to see her as a wound. As with many interpretations that favor the abject, Chave’s reading of Hesse’s work has important elements, which Wagner perhaps dismisses too rapidly.1

Wagner sets up a metaphorical reading of a window, a central motif in Hesse’s drawings and painting throughout the sixties, recognizable for its gridlike or rectilinear format (1966, Fig. 1). The window is a phenomenological enclosure, unique because of its melding of absurd oppositions—a major element in Hesse’s art. By examining the window, Wagner argues, Hesse explored the notion of breaking boundaries, of combining absence and presence and transparency and permanence. Wagner notes the tense pleasure of windows: “The effects of these pictures encompass both the desire to see beyond the frame, and the fear of so doing.” (266)

Her reading of Hesse’s marital situation is, however, strangely skewed. Hesse’s intense but brief marriage to sculptor Tom Doyle, which lasted only from November 1961 until December 1965, was extremely important in that it helped her shift from two-dimensional painting into three-dimensional relief during their 1964-65 stay in Germany. Whereas Wagner at times reads Hesse’s diaries discreetly, as in her critique of the window image, she often over-reads them, using them as the only framing element for understanding Hesse’s marriage. Wagner remarks that, “Thus Doyle survives in Hesse’s papers (I think this is a fair statement about the papers, if not only Doyle) mainly as a catalyst of pain and insecurity.” (240) Doyle’s importance to Hesse is well documented, and Wagner’s dismissive treatment of him is unusual, especially in comparison to the consideration given Pollock and Stieglitz.

Wagner’s thesis of “otherness” is complicated for several reasons. She begins: “This is a book about three artists. In particular it concerns the character of their imagery, the paths of their careers, and the ways these were influenced, for good and ill, by one central circumstance: the fact that the artists were women.” (1) “Artists” and “women” are in her title, which she borrowed from Sylvia Plath’s 1962 poem, “Three Women,” but Wagner uses the term “woman artist” metonymically for “wife,” a device she does not explicitly acknowledge. The conjunction of artist, woman, and wife may justify connecting O’Keeffe, Krasner, and Hesse, but perhaps if the title read Three Artists (Three Wives), the book would have been a much easier narrative with which to contend. A book on three wives is not a problematic text when the theme is stated overtly. The absence here of the term “wife” makes the feminist aspect of the book convoluted and difficult. In each essay Wagner spends an inordinate amount of space discussing the reception of each artist’s work by her husband, her relationship to her husband, and her artistic self-image during marriage, separation, estrangement, or widowhood. All of these features are evident in chapter subheadings such as “O’Keeffe and Stieglitz,” “Femininity and Masquerade,” “Painter, Wife, and Woman,” “Widow,” “The Problem of Pollock and Krasner,” and “A Marriage in the Sixties.” Wagner remarks that her hypothesis is to explore whether or not “gender is an actively determinant factor in the production and reception of art,” a statement that only rings authentic with the book when female response to gender involves the social circumstances of being a wife. (4)

In her concluding chapter, Wagner addresses her concerns about marital relations and their relevance to the art and lives of these three women. The pieces finally coalesce. She states:

I wrote this book in an effort to address such questions in both specific and general terms. They concern Hesse and O’Keeffe, as well as Krasner, and how the art of each might be defined. They likewise involve Doyle and

Stieglitz and Pollock, albeit in different ways. Each instance, however, is one subset in a larger field of questions about the impact of social hierarchy and order, relationship and difference, in key instances of twentieth-century American art. (284-85)

If Wagner had announced this perspective from the outset, rather than as a summary point, her project would have been more accessible and logical.

Also problematic is Wagner’s curious redefinition of feminism. She does not view these artists or their work as feminist or even proto-feminist, despite her protestations to the contrary. Many women artists and art historians work outside the tenets of feminism. Interestingly, although Wagner purports to be engaging in a feminist dialogue, she seems at times to be engaged in a denial of feminism. For example, she remarks that “images are not transparent to social identity (or anything else).” (26) Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis noted the problem with promoting such a view: “Artists and critics falling into this category simply deny that their work or that of their subjects is embedded in a social context, or that art-making like being a woman, is a form of social practice.” Additionally, embracing a more expanded view of intentionality than is realistic or justified, Wagner contends: “Femininity can be assigned as well as claimed, avoided as well as celebrated, with an act of negation potentially as eloquent as affirmation.” (27) She elides gender with a level of choice that is overly convenient and simplistic, especially for women working during the central decades of this century. Even women as accomplished as O’Keeffe, Krasner, and Hesse would not have internalized such choices concerning their gender and, instead, would have had conflicted experiences as professional women. All three despised the limitations on women artists and the ghettoized treatment of their work. They had difficulty with the feminine side of themselves and with their relationship to other women artists. The feminist content in their art, what I view as the celebratory nature of all of their works about femaleness and life, reveals purposeful and productive tendencies with which Wagner has an uneasy association. As example, Wagner early on denies the format of her own project, when she remarks that “I do not consider the status of womanhood alone necessarily provides enough reason to group artists as objects of study.” (2) Yet, the “social and artistic factors” she offers to explain the linkage all have to do with the fact of their “womanhood.”

Finally, I came away from the book with-
out a clear understanding of the artists and their relationship(s) to modernism. Absent from the text is a clear definition of the many modernisms she describes and a discussion of how the category related to these artists. This lack seems particularly interesting given the prominence of this issue in the title. However, a review of the book's 130 illustrations (30 in color), few by spouses, confirms that the artists were significant contributors to mainstream American Modernism.

Anne Wagner has provided a new direction for feminist art scholarship. She offers insight into the complexity of being a woman, wife, and artist for O'Keeffe, Krasner, and Hesse, a complexity still being acted out in the relationship of contemporary artist couples. Interestingly, with none of these artists is mother added to the mix.

NOTES


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Susie Cooper: An Elegant Affair
by Bryn Youds
Thames and Hudson, 1996

Our Boots: An Inuit Women's Art
by Jill Oakes and Rick Riewe
Thames and Hudson, 1995

Reviewed by Pamela Simpson

Both of these beautifully illustrated books are about the artistic creation of utilitarian objects: one documents the works of a sophisticated English designer whose experimental pottery represented elite taste in the mid-20th century; the other is about the traditional forms of footwear worn by the indigenous peoples of the Canadian Arctic.

Susie Cooper (1902-95), a prolific and highly successful ceramic designer, was born into a middle-class family near the great pottery-making center of Stoke-on-Trent. She attended a regional art school there and at age 20 began to work at a local pottery. She soon gained a reputation for her distinctive designs and was honored with her own back stamp: "Designed by Susie Cooper."

Frustrated by the tradition that had men designing shapes and women decorating them, Cooper opened her own company in 1929. It was not an auspicious year to start a new concern. The October Wall Street crash and subsequent international depression made for difficult times, but Cooper persevered and eventually built a successful business.

By the early 1930s she was receiving critical acclaim. In fact, several of her designs were considered icons of the period—especially her Leaping Deer pattern and her Kestrel tea and coffee pots (c. 1932-50; Fig. 1). The Kestrel, her first major design shape—an elongated bulbous form with a downward curved handle and an upward, soaring squared spout with a streamlined lid—was phenomenally popular.

Despite marriage in 1938 (to classically trained architect Cecil Barker), and the birth of their son Tim in 1943, Cooper continued to run her business, controlling everything from design to marketing. If anything, she became even more famous in the postwar 1950s and is considered among Britain's design elite.

In 1966 her company was bought by Wedgewood, but she continued to play a major role in the designs, not retiring until 1984, when she was 82. Meanwhile, honors accumulated: a retrospective at Sanderson's in 1978, the Order of the British Empire in 1979, and a retrospective at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1987. Several books and documentary films followed. She died in 1995, still working on design projects.

Cooper collaborated with her friend, design historian Bryn Youds, on the production of this book, although she did not live to see it published. Youds has written a fully detailed account of her career, but the pottery is the main focus of the book: A large-format slim volume (with just 90 pages); it includes 96 color illustrations, extensive documentation of pattern and shape types, and a chronology of her various back stamps. It seems primarily a book for collectors, like the similarly produced Clarice Cliff: The Bizarre Affair (1988) about her contemporary. Both complement Cheryl Buckley's more scholarly and feminist approach in the modestly produced Potters and Paintresses: Women Designers in the Pottery Industry 1870-1955 (1990).

The authors of Our Boots are interested primarily in ethnography and anthropology. Published in association with the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto, Our Boots carefully documents the Inuit craft of bootmaking. Jill Oakes, Professor of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba, lived among the Inuit and has done extensive fieldwork with aboriginal seamstresses, studying how they make clothing from animal skins. Rick Riewe, Professor of Zoology at Manitoba, has studied land use and domestic economy among the peoples of the central and western Canadian Arctic. During the past 25 years Oakes and Riewe have traveled the region, studied the culture, and interviewed the artisans, many of whose voices we hear in the book. This book is based on their fieldwork and analysis of some 5,000 pairs of boots made by Inuit women (Fig 2). They document regional diversity, discuss historical variations, and examine individual creativity.

The book begins with a historical overview of the region and thorough description of tools, materials, and construction techniques. The authors also discuss the fact that the boots are made exclusively by women and examine their cultural meaning in Inuit life. Elders pass the tradition on to younger women. Often a girl's first pair of