‘UNE FORCE IGNORÉE’: THREE NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH WOMEN ARTISTS

by

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Bachelor of Arts, 2011

Louisiana State University

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

College of Fine Arts

Texas Christian University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Spring

2022

APPROVAL

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Jessica Fripp for chairing my committee and guiding my research from beginning to end. Thank you to Dr. Babette Bohn for providing her professional judgment, invaluable feedback, encouragement, and warmth. Her example of excellence in art history has been the guidepost for this thesis and has shaped my research as a feminist scholar. I am thankful for Dr. Amy Freund's exceptional feedback, research suggestions, insight, and expertise. Thank you to Dr. Edith Peinado-Riley for your encouragement, listening ear, and strong feminist convictions. I cherish every moment spent in the VRL with you.

To Hailey Boutelle, my partner in this writing process, you have given me strength through the joys and sorrows of thesis. I am incredibly thankful to Phoebe Adams for her mentorship, friendship, and levity. To Catherine Rigby, Kelsey Turnage, Casey Seiler, and Amelia Rusbar, thank you for listening, for your encouragement, and support. Thank you to my parents, Pete and Elizabeth Schneider, and my brothers, Peter and Christopher Schneider, who have helped me in more ways than they can imagine.

This is a thesis about the power of women's relationships. I am indebted to the wonderful women who have supported, mentored, and guided me: Sheenu Jalla, Darbi Shanker, Angela Romero, Bridgitte Hessler, Sydney Levy, Amanda Harrison, Sabrina Chugani.

To my grandmothers, Olive Lussen and Gardner Kole, for their fortitude, strength, and love. I dedicate this thesis to your memory.

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Introduction

In her inaugural address as the founder of the Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculptures, Hélène Bertaux proclaimed, "The woman artist is an ignored, little-understood force, delayed in its rise! A social prejudice of sorts weighs upon her; and yet, every year, the number of women who dedicate themselves to art is swelling with fearsome speed."[1] In nineteenth-century France, the ideology alleging women's inferiority infiltrated the foundations of society, shaping institutions that deprived women access solely on account of their gender. As women artists operating in nineteenth-century France, Hélène Bertaux, Marie Bashkirtseff, and Suzanne Valadon bypassed institutional barriers to create alternative routes of access to artistic education, exhibition opportunities, and prestigious organizations. These women artists endured despite institutional neglect, inattention, and exclusion. In this thesis, I examine the ways in which they experienced the art world in nineteenth-century France. In investigating the lived experience of women artists, I address the boundaries of participation and the means they employed to deconstruct those barriers. The creation of women-only networks proved central to their survival and success. For Hélène Bertaux, Marie Bashkirtseff, and Suzanne Valadon, collaboration and collective action became invaluable tools in the deconstruction of institutionalized barriers. These three women artists simultaneously operated within and transformed society's expectations as women artists in nineteenth-century France.

In this thesis, I assess the artistic systems that dictated the boundaries of gender in nineteenth-century France and illuminate how these three women artists confronted patriarchal

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[1] Edouard Lepage, *Madame Léon Bertaux: Une Conquête Féministe* (Paris: J. Dangon, 1912), 61, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=njp.32101055883795&view=1up&seq=7&skin=2021. "Une force ignorée, méconnue, retardée dans son essor est celle de la femme artistse. Une espèce de préjugé social pèse encore sur elle, et, cependant chaque année, le nombre des femmes qui se vouent à l'art, va grossissant, avec une rapidité effrayante…"

institutions, created opportunities for themselves, and established networks of like-minded women in pursuit of equality with male artists. I identify a key component that enabled women artists of the nineteenth century to reclaim agency: the feminist practice of mentorship and network-building. The goal of this project is to examine how the cultivation of female-centric networks became critical in helping women navigate professional boundaries in the Third Republic.

Rather than focus on well-studied, nineteenth-century women, such as Mary Cassatt, Berthe Morisot, or Cecilia Beaux, I selected three women artists working in Paris in the latter half of the nineteenth century whose labors extended beyond their artistic creations in paint, marble, and bronze. I assembled the three case studies chronologically to reveal how their experiences mirrors the evolution of art market in fin de siècle France. Bertaux represents an adherence to traditional artistic institutions. While she organized women artists and created a space for expression, advocacy, and debate, her goal was women's admittance to the École des Beaux-Arts. Bashkirtseff's experiences express the shift to privatization in the art world and the prevalence of private art academies. Due to her experiences at the Académie Julian, she campaigned for equal access for women artists into academic education, and she recorded vital information in her journal about her lived experience as a woman artist. Finally, Valadon represents a complete rejection of the traditional as a self-taught model turned artist uninterested in engaging with the prevailing artistic institutions. She disrupted notions of respectability and agitated societal constructions of feminine gender identity. The diversity of their experiences and their encounters with institutional obstacles affirms the power of a society structured in gender inequality. Their engagement with the reigning artistic establishment differed according to both external factors like societal status and internal factors like artistic intention. By examining

Bertaux, Bashkirtseff, and Valadon's activities of resistance, I elucidate how women artists of the nineteenth century addressed their exclusion from existing institutions and created opportunity through collective agency.

Hélène Bertaux (1825-1909), born Josephine Charlotte Hélène Pilate on July 4, 1825, was a French sculptor who campaigned for women's rights.[2] Despite Bertaux's progressive political activity, out of the three artists included in this thesis, Bertaux adhered most closely to a traditional artistic career in nineteenth-century France, and she worked within the official structures of production and display. In the first case study, I examine how Bertaux exploited her institutional knowledge and political influence to construct feminine spaces. Due to her institutional adherence, I see depictions of French national identity and gender identity in Bertaux's sculptures. While women did exhibit at the annual government-sponsored Salon exhibition, admittance to the École and participation in their prestigious Prix de Rome competition was prohibited. Bertaux recognized an opportunity to create a space for women artists given their limited prospects for education, exhibition, and sale of their art. Her experience and success in creating women-only *ateliers* informed her strategy for her most comprehensive endeavor, the creation of the Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs in 1881.[3] Women artists had a limited number of exhibition opportunities, and the Union established an additional occasion to exhibit as a supplement to the annual Salon exhibition. The Union sought to provide a place for young women artists who had not yet accumulated the appropriate accolades or clout

[2] Tamar Garb, *Sisters of the Brush: Women's Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 7.

[3] Ibid., 4.

to exhibit in the Salon. In addition to the logistical and commercial benefits, the Union aimed to create a network of women artists standing together in solidarity.

The Union is an enduring character in my thesis as a new institution setting precedence for women's artistic organizations. Bertaux was the founder, and Marie Bashkirtseff, my second case study, was a member. Born Maria Konstantinova Bashkirtseva (1858-1884), Bashkirtseff was a Ukrainian painter and sculptor of aristocratic descent. Following a series of family scandals, Bashkirtseff's mother divorced her father and moved with her children to the south of France. From an early age, Bashkirtseff valued education and questioned the disparity of education between genders. When she and her mother moved to Paris, Bashkirtseff pursued artistic education at the Académie Julian where she studied for seven years.[4] I demonstrate how her access to education and her association with like-minded women enabled Bashkirtseff's identity construction. I examine how Bashkirtseff flexed facets of her gender identity and participated in self-fashioning in her artistic practice and her writing. While Bertaux worked within the system, Bashkirtseff's career ran parallel to artistic institutions. Ironically, she employed standard artistic tropes, adhering to academic standards to achieve her goal of self-aggrandizement and preservation.

Suzanne Valadon's (1865-1938) experience closely mirrored the lives of her male contemporaries with a failed marriage, a child born out of wedlock, and a torrid love affair with a younger lover, but Valadon's gender greatly impacted the perception and legacy of her activities. Instead of accepting Valadon's decisions as her own, contemporary critics hypersexualized her and vilified her actions. Valadon was born Marie-Clémentine on September 23, 1865, in

[4] Joëlle Bolloch, "Artist Biographies," *Women Artists in Paris, 1850-1900*, eds. Laurence Madeline, Bridget Alsdorf, Richard Kendall, Jane R. Becker, Vibeke Waallann Hansen, and Joëlle Bolloch (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 241.

Bessines-sur-Gartempe. Valadon's move to Paris proved to be formative in her development as an artist. Although Valadon began her artistic career as a model, she began drawing at an early age.[5]. Of the three artists that I study in this thesis, Valadon engaged the least with the prevailing artistic institutions; however, Bertaux's Union hosted a monographic exhibition for her following her death. The recounting of her early life and her foray into drawing is reminiscent of traditional male artists' biographies that dramatize artistic genius and discovery. In my final case study, I expose the forced connections, both in scholarship and in art, between Valadon and her male contemporaries, and I study her self-portraits and her portrayal of the female nude. I highlight aspects of how Valadon repossesses her agency in comparing her self-fashioning to male artists' depictions of her.

Despite their accomplishments, Bertaux, Bashkirtseff, and Valadon remained in a state of alterity. The parameters around the conception of "woman" were rearticulated legally in nineteenth-century France, establishing more firmly gender-based boundaries. Hélène Bertaux commented on the state of things: "Men imagined a place for themselves in society, sometimes as a coterie, from where once again, we (women) were systematically excluded."[6] These artists' activities fit into a broader narrative of French feminist activity in the nineteenth century. Central to understanding the systemic exclusion of women artists is a study of the structural conditions that dictated boundaries of gender and identity – both politically and culturally. I frame my research in feminist theory, social identity theory, gender theory and social history. I apply these

[5] June Rose, *Mistress of Montmartre: A Life of Suzanne Valadon* (London: Richard Cohen, 1998), 11-3.

[6] Lepage, *Madame Léon Bertaux: Une Conquête Féministe*, 61-2. "Les hommes ont imaginé, pour se faire valoir, de se mettre en société, quelquefois en coterie, d'où naguère encoure, nous étions systématiquement exlues."

theories to understand the formation of the feminine identity of the French woman artist and to situate her role within the context of the broader establishment. Combining this theoretical framework with historical context provides insight into how women artists could operate in tandem with structures of power that were actively excluding them.

Gender, Feminism, and Art in the Nineteenth Century

Several societal conditions and legal standards coalesced in nineteenth-century France creating an environment of great change. The romanticized ideal of moral equality of the French citizenry touted by the revolutionaries of 1789 was just that, a romantic notion that did not approach reality. The central tenets of democratic citizenship – freedom, autonomy, and equality – clashed with traditional cultural actualities that presupposed the inferiority of women.[7] Like gender, citizenship is a social construction with political objectives that both certified freedom but also restricted those rights according to gender and race. Within the context of granting equal rights of citizenship, every individual within a society will possess equal rights under the law.

Article 8 of Napoleon's Civil Code from 1804 stated that "every French citizen will enjoy civil rights," but this established a fictional equality.[8] Subsequent articles of the Code reflected Napoleon's personal opinions on women that displaced them as moral inferiors. The two recognized legal states for women under the Code were that of child and wife, subject to the absolute power of the father and husband. Emancipation from paternal authority occurred at 21 years of age where it transferred to the husband.[9] The Civil code stipulated that the wife was not an independent legal person, unable to go to court, enter contracts, possess property, acquire, or dispose of property. According to Article 213, "the husband owes protection to his wife, the wife

[7] Pnina Weber and Nira Yuval-Davis, "Women and the New Discourse of Citizenship," *Women, Citizenship and Difference*, (London: Zed Books, 1999), 1.

[8] Charles Béchet, ed., *Le Code Civil, Accompagné du texte annoté des lois qui ont abrogé ou modifié plusieurs de ses dispositions, et de l'indication de ses articles corrélatifs* (Paris: Brissot-Thivars, 1829), 2, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9659642v; Ute Gerhard, Valentine Meunier, and Ethan Rundell, "Civil Law and Gender in Nineteenth-Century Europe," *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, no. 43 (2016): 255, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26242553.

[9] Béchet, ed., *Le Code Civil*, 24.

obedience to her husband."[10] Women who were *marchandes publiques*, public merchants, found more freedom and possessed the legal authority to enter contracts and business without a husband's oversight or approval. Unmarried women were essentially ignored by the legal code.[11] Despite Napoleon's eventual removal, exile, and death, his set of laws impacted the legal status of women for decades, with the most affecting being the prohibition of divorce from 1816 to 1884.[12] In the case of women's rights in nineteenth-century France, the denial of equal rights to women lowered women in status not merely from person to object, but from moral equal to moral subordinate.[13] The state of their legal status led to organized activity in pursuit of women's suffrage and equity.

Modern feminist movements in France can be explained in the wave model as used by the United States and the United Kingdom. The first wave focused on women's suffrage and civic rights and spanned from the French Revolution of 1789 through the Third Republic, culminating in 1944 when French women won the right to vote. Second-wave feminism started in the 1940s and included an assessment of women's role in society and the guarantee of bodily autonomy. The third wave started in the 2000s and addresses a more intersectional view and engages in facets of postcolonial feminism. The current fourth wave engages with issues of

[10] Béchet, ed., *Le Code Civil*, 32.

[11] Ibid.; Ute Gerhard, Valentine Meunier, and Ethan Rundell, "Civil Code and Gender in Nineteenth-Century Europe," 259.

[12] Susan K. Foley, *Women in France since 1789: The Meanings of Difference*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 20-2.

[13] Linda LeMoncheck, *Dehumanizing Women: Treating Persons as Sex Objects*, New Feminist Perspectives Series, (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985), 24-7.

sexual harassment.[14] For my purposes, I focus on the feminist activities taking place during the first wave in the nineteenth century. Historian Karen Offen examines the introduction of the terms *féministe* and *féminisme* to the French vocabulary. She explains that "they offered a quick shorthand for referring to claims for women's rights and women's emancipation, and, more explicitly, to the overall project of challenging masculine domination – in the institutions, ideas, and practices that composed society and culture."[15] French feminists campaigned for equal rights and argued for recognition as fully embodied, rational individuals. During the Third Republic, feminists campaigned for changes to the Civil and Penal Codes, educational opportunities, the dissolution of government-managed prostitution, and improved economic conditions for women workers.

The activity towards achieving women's suffrage often intersected with the lobbying for access to the École des Beaux-Arts, with the same women participating in both pursuits. With the codification of difference and the gendering of citizenship in the new French republic, these

[14] Françoise Picq, "Feminism: Between a rewritten past and an uncertain future," *Cités* 9, no 1 (2002): 25-38, https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_CITE_009_0025--feminism-between-a-rewritten-past-and-an.htm.

[15] Karen Offen, "Feminism and the Republic," In *French Republic: History, Values, Debates*, ed. Edward Berenson, Vincent Duclert, and Christophe Prochansson (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2011) 289, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt7zbwr.35. The word *féminism*e is first attributed to Charles Fourier in as early as 1808. The word *féministe* was used by suffragist, Hubertine Auclert, in the 1870s to describe a group she joined as *comité féministe*. She proceeded to use the word *féminisme* to describe her work in a letter to the *Préfecture de las Seine* in 1882. Because of the prevalence of this word in association with suffragist activities and by suffragists in the same period as my study, I will use the term feminist to explain the activities of the artists Hélène Bertaux, Marie Bashkirtseff, and Suzanne Valadon. Given Marie Bashkirtseff's association with Hubertine Auclert and her publication *La Citoyenne*, the term feminist-centric networks and relationships is appropriate in describing their activities. By the time Edouard Lepage wrote Hélène Bertaux's biography in 1911, the usage of the word *féministe* was mainstream, and he titled his book *Madame Léon Bertaux: Une Conquête Féministe*. For more information, see Karen Offen's article "Sur l'origine des mots 'féminisme' et 'féministe.'"

exclusionary forces infiltrated the artistic community, undoing the access of women artists in the *ancien régime*.[16] The work of First Wave feminists overlapped both in activity and purpose with the pursuits of French women artists of the nineteenth century, often resulting in direct engagement and collaboration. The partnership between women artists and suffragettes was most visible in print with women artists contributing to feminist publications such as Marie Bashkirtseff's writing articles for Hubertine Auclert's newspaper, *La Citoyenne*.[17] In her book, *Sisters of the Brush,* Tamar Garb examines the various women's publications debuting in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The topics range from the traditional and conservative in *La Famille* to progressive and socialist in *La Solidarité.* The diverse points of view provided a view into the lives of French women.[18] Many of these feminist publications addressed women's role in the arts, as Garb states, "affirming their intellectual aspirations and congratulating their achievements."[19] The volatile environment that shaped the parameters of citizenship in the Third Republic privileged the masculine despite the circulation of feminist ideas in print. The role of

[16] Jean-Pierre Mouilleseaux, "David: A Classical Painter against the Academy and a Teacher of the French School," *The French Academy: Classicism and Its Antagonists,* ed. June Hargrove (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990), 131. The Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture was established in 1648 in Paris. Catherine Duchemin, a painter of still lives, was the first woman accepted into the French academy in 1663. After Duchemin's membership, seventeen other women gained membership, including only one sculptor. Her name was Dorotheé Massé, and she became a member of the Academie in 1680. The French Academy before the *Convention Nationale* abolished all academies in 1793 during the French revolution. For more information, see Antoine Schnapper's chapter "The Debut of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture" in *The French Academy: Classicism and Its Antagonists*.

[17] Marie Bashkirtseff, "Les Femmes Artistes," *La Citoyenne* 4 (Mar 6, 1881): 3-4.

[18] Garb, *Sisters of the Brush*, 56-8.

[19] Ibid., 57.

the woman artists was therefore shaped within and conditioned by ideologies of sexual difference.

Nineteenth-century art critic, Léon Lagrange's commentary demonstrates that gender difference remained central to exclusionary practices. Lagrange subscribed to the antiquated belief in women's lesser status associated with her body and biological inferiority. Women artists were relegated to the "lower" genres of still life and portraiture and "minor" mediums of pastels and watercolors according to their subordinate position in the gender hierarchy.[20] In the nineteenth century, the medical community aimed to prove this supposed difference scientifically. As Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock note in *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*: "The hey-day of this special characterization of women's art as biologically determined or as an extension of their domestic and refining role in society, quintessentially feminine, graceful, delicate, and decorate, is without a doubt the nineteenth century."[21] Doctors participated in studies in the mid-century to confirm their biases and believed that they had distinguished a difference in feminine intelligence.[22] Although their activities were fallacious, these legal, medical, and societal norms played a role in the creation of institutional barriers.

Despite the institutionalized bias, some societal conditions and practices allowed for artistic production regardless of gender. The flexibility in these attitudes reveals an inclination for the allowance of women artists. Women created art, attended private education, and exhibited at the Salon. They participated in smaller numbers than their male counterparts, and women

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[20] Léon Lagrange, "Du Rang des Femmes Dans Les Arts," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 8, no. 1 (October 1860): 30-43, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k203072c.

[21] Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2013), 9.

[22] Foley, *Women in France since 1789: The Meanings of Difference*, 28.

artists did not receive the same accolades and commissions. Bertaux, Bashkirtseff, and Valadon found ways to subvert social norms and establish artistic careers in their own right. In allying themselves with other women, Bertaux, Bashkirtseff, and Valadon increased their opportunity by establishing alternative routes of access to education and exhibition forums. They refused to tacitly engage with the institutions that dictated the boundaries of gender in nineteenth-century France. Bertaux, Bashkirtseff, and Valadon inspired change and created a space for women artists to share their experiences within a patriarchal society.

Hélène Bertaux: Union Organizer

Hélène Bertaux understood the power of collective agency as an instrument of change. Bertaux reimagined women's roles in the art institutions of nineteenth-century France through the creation of her female-centric organization, the Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs. She sought to erode the institutionalized gender bias that barred women's membership in the École des Beaux-Arts. In her efforts to acquire equality with Union activities, Bertaux aligned her cause with universal patriotic concerns and tapped into gendered stereotypes. She patterned the Union after the all-male organizations of her peers, and she catered her rhetoric to the men in charge by appealing to both reason and sentiment. This may seem counter-intuitive to her feminist motives, but as I will show, her actions are evidence of her knowledge of the hierarchal system and her keen diplomatic dexterity. In contemporary studies of this woman sculptor, scholars, such as Tamar Garb's, scholars most often engage with Bertaux's role as founder of the Union and neglect direct engagement with her art. I demonstrate that two of Bertaux's sculptures, *Jeune Gaulois Prisonnier* (fig. 1) and *Psyché sous l'empire du mystère* (fig. 2), demonstrate her ability to navigate the patriarchal system and advance access for women artists.

Although Bertaux spent the latter half of her career actively campaigning for women's inclusion in the École, she began her artistic career in a traditional manner. Bertaux's savviness stemmed from her early immersion in artistic pursuits. Bertaux first began her study of sculpture with her stepfather, Pierre Hébert. She left school at twelve years old and joined her stepfather's sculpture studio.[23] Much of what is known about Bertaux and her early life comes from Édouard

[23] Delia Gaze, ed., *Concise Dictionary of Women Artists* (New York & London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2001), 184, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tcu/detail.action?docID=1144678.

Lepage's 1912 biography, *Madame Léon Bertaux: Une Conquête Féministe*. An established trope that early biographers and scholars employed when writing about women artists was to frame the experiences of women artists in reference to their relationships with men, whether that be a father, uncle, or husband. Lepage utilized such devices in his biography of Bertaux – he valorized her origins as a child prodigy who preferred working in the studio to tedious domestic tasks with her mother.[24] Hélène Bertaux both followed and flouted the rules to achieve her goals. Bertaux was familiar with what was required to garner attention, and she appealed to the reigning powers. She operated with the understanding that she was an equal player in and contributor to the Paris art world at large. This is apparent in her selection of subject matter; the *Jeune Gaulois Prisonnier* and *Psyché sous l'empire du mystère* serve as material embodiments of nineteenth-century constructions of French identity.

The unstable politics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century caused uncertainty and anxiety for the French. With her 1867 sculpture, *Jeune Gaulois Prisonnier*, she selected the young prisoner as a signifier of France to curry favor with Napoleon III. Bertaux's choice of subject matter demonstrates her shrewdness and confidence in competing with male artists. She sculpted a solitary, male nude figure who stands against a marble plinth and bends at the waist, hunching under the pressure of his French identity. Even though the standing male nude sculpture referenced the idealized figures of Classical Greece, Bertaux's *Jeune Gaulois Prisonnier* signified a specific moment in time for post-revolutionary France where the French contested with the fragmentary nature of their national identity. Exhibited at the Salon of 1867 and purchased by the State in 1869, the *Jeune Gaulois Prisonnier* joined a litany of allegorical images employed by nineteenth-century French leaders who sought to garner legitimacy. As

[24] Lepage, *Madame Léon Bertaux: Une Conquête Féministe*, 17.

such scholars as Stephanie O'Rourke and Sarah C. Schaefer have addressed, this revolving door of emperors, kings, and presidents referenced disparate sources to produce a façade of authority and sovereignty.[25]

Central to their cause was the construction of a national identity for France. O'Rourke comments on the process of historical meaning-making employed by the French explaining that during the politically unstable decades after the Revolution of 1789, the French sought solace through "acts of collection, recomposition, layering, and accretion."[26] Ravaged by decades of instability, the French lacked connection with what it meant to be French. Through a targeted and well-cultivated campaign of artistic accumulation and creation, Napoleon Bonaparte endeavored to create a heroic history by claiming the Gallic legacy as his own.[27]

Napoleon III drew inspiration from his uncle, Napoleon Bonaparte, including the cultivation of a noble heritage through the reclamation of a Gallic lineage.[28] The Franks were out of the question due to their association with the French nobility and monarchy, leaving the Romans and the Gauls. When Napoleon III established the second French empire in 1852, he carefully fostered a persona and used art as one of the tools in his arsenal of identity formation.[29]

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[25] See also Stephanie O'Rourke's "The Sediments of history in Napoleonic France," and Sarah C. Schaefer's "Broken guardians: the *lamassu* and fragmented historical vision in nineteenth-century France."

[26] Stephanie O'Rourke, "The Sediments of history in Napoleonic France," *Word & Image* 37, no. 2 (2021): 18, https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2020.1866797.

[27] Michael Dietler, "'Our Ancestors the Gauls:' Archaeology, Ethnic Nationalism, and the Manipulation of Celtic Identity in Modern Europe," *American Anthropologist* 96, no. 3 (1994): 588, http://www.jstor.org/stable/682302.

[28] Ibid., 588.

[29] Ibid., 587-8.

Napoleon III drew a connection to Vercingetorix, the Gallic king who attempted to unite the Gauls against the Romans. Vercingetorix ultimately failed in his efforts, but nobly surrendered to Caesar.[30] By highlighting his heroism in defeat, the French found a relatable figure.

Bertaux tapped into this cultural narrative in choosing the subject matter for *Jeune Gaulois Prisonnier*. His full jawline, offset by a prominent chin and aquiline nose, highlights his youth. His furrowed brow and down-turned lips express concern and anxiety. This tension is echoed in his clamped hand and stiff shoulders. The source of his physical discomfort originates at his wrists clasped in chains. The apprehension evident in his frowning face, clenched fist, and hunched shoulders contrasts with his soft body and stylized crown of curls, perpetuating the sense of uneasiness. His look of defiance represented French resiliency amid adversity.

Bertaux's selection of the male nude figure conflicts with the general anxieties and potential threats such an activity would pose to the reputation of a woman artist at the time. The standard argument for women's exclusion from academic education was to protect their modesty and sensibilities from the life-drawing class. The prohibition of women's attendance to the life-drawing class signified a nearly insurmountable obstacle to their progress as an artist. The study of the nude form remained foundational to an artist's education at the École. The students studied the human skeleton and musculature from small models, plaster casts, classic sculptures, diagrams, drawings, and, as the name of the class suggests, living models. [31] In nineteenth-century France, the nude male form symbolized idealized manhood, as it did in Classical

[30] Janice Gross, "Revisiting 'Nos Ancêtres Les Gaulois:' Scripting and Postscripting Francophone Identity," *The French Review* 78, no. 5 (2005): 948–9, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25479983.

[31] Tamar Garb, *Bodies of Modernity: Figure and Flesh in Fin-de-Siècle France*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 61-5.

antiquity and its revival in the late eighteenth century.[32] Garb deconstructs the societal context to reveal the main psychological issue with women attending life-class. A woman artist painting a nude male figure upends the male gaze and threatens the masculine actors.[33] This fear was central to contemporary arguments against women's participation, as opponents to women's entry believed their inclusion would distract the "serious" study of male artists who would be compelled to assert their masculinity in the face of this challenge. Exact details do not survive as to where or how Bertaux was able to sculpt the nude male form for *Jeune Gaulois Prisonnier*. However, Bertaux ascribed to a more conservative nineteenth-century belief that women were more adept at upholding traditional French values through their artistic production. Contemporary critics, journalists, and artists (both men and women) debated over the believed "inherent" femininity of women artists.[34]

Given her professional successes, which included Salon entries, medals won, and state commissions, the prohibition of women's access to the École was a point of frustration. Bertaux exhibited at the Salon fifteen times before the creation of her Union in 1881.[35] She observed the

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[32] Garb, *Bodies of Modernity*, 56.

[33] Tamar Garb, "The Forbidden Gaze: Women Artists and the Male Nude in late nineteenth-century France," in *The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture since the Renaissance*, ed. Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 33-6.

[34] Tamar Garb, "'L'Art Féminin': The Formation of a Critical Category in Late Nineteenth-Century France," *Art History* 12, no. 1 (1989): 45-8, http://lib.tcu.edu/PURL/EZproxy_link.asp?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=cookie,ip,uid&db=a9h&AN=7344722&site=ehost-live.

[35] Maria Lamers de Vits, *Les Femmes Sculpteurs, Graveurs, & Leurs Œuvres*, (Paris: Referendum Littéraire Bibliothèque, 1905), 25, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k852994s. Bertaux exhibited at the following Salons: 1857, 1859, 1861, 1864, 1865, 1866, 1867, 1872, 1873, 1874, 1875, 1876, 1877, 1880, 1881, 1882, 1883, 1885, 1889. She received a medal in the following years: 1864, 1867, 1873, 1877, and 1889.

widespread experiences of other women artists directly through her activities as a sculpture teacher in her *ateliers d'études* where she taught young women. Due to the success of her educational efforts, Bertaux opened a sculpture school for women in 1879.[36] These activities solidified Bertaux's ambition to create a space for women. Bertaux exclaimed, "Should we draw the conclusion that women should abstain or resign ourselves to occupying an inferior place among artists? … We are this force and to demonstrate we must form a group…Let us gather to count ourselves, to defend ourselves! Let us be united for the faithful struggle. Let us call ourselves the Union of Women Painters and Sculptors."[37] In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the French government had officially commodified artistic production under the auspices of elevating an artist's role to a professional status.[38] A decree from January 11, 1883 by Jules Ferry, Ministre de l'instruction publique, defined the state's point of view that encouraged the professional status of artists and encouraged production. The State withdrew from the Salon to promote a market-oriented artistic production. In reality, the State wanted to promote competition and sale in the open market. Although they aimed to stimulate the economy, all-male societies, known as *cercles*, commandeered art patrons and commissions in their exclusive and prestigious environment. While the *cercle* existed before, in the second half of the nineteenth century, their role shifted to one of private exhibition forum. [39] These unofficial

[36] Gaze, ed., *Concise Dictionary of Women*, 186.

[37] Lepage, *Madame Léon Bertaux: Une Conquête Féministe*, 61-2. "Rassemblons-nous, afin de nous compter, de nous défendre! Soyons unies pour la loyale lutte! Appelons-nous l'Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs!"

[38] Tamar Garb, "Revising the Revisionists: The Formation of the Union Des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs," *Art Journal* 48, no. 1 (1989): 64, https://doi.org/10.2307/776922.

[39] Ibid., 66.

institutions placed limits on the success of women artists, perpetuating the inequity between genders. Focusing on finding a solution to this barrier, Bertaux created the Union as a comparable all-woman organization.

In May 1881, Bertaux formed her Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs. With great care, Bertaux articulated the purpose and governance structure in twenty-eight articles in an official, organizing documents, the *Statuts de l'Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs.* The first article articulates the goal of the organization: "The Association known as the Union of Women Painters and Sculptors aims to present and defend the general interests of women artists and to promote their talents, in particular by organizing annual exhibitions."[40] The first exhibition took place in January 1882, and the subsequent exhibitions occurred annually until their final one in 1965.[41] The Union's exhibitions, the *Salon des femmes*, did not ascribe to the artistic hierarchy of genres and exhibited paintings, sculptures, watercolors, drawings, miniatures, fans, porcelain, and decorative arts. This rejection of the hierarchy of media was likely both a feminist political strategy and a response to the Union membership. The *Salon des femmes* acted as an important commercial venue for women artists to show and sell their art. The Union did not receive commission on the works sold during the Salon.[42] Nine years after its creation, the Union touted 500 members and had received official sanction. In 1892, Sadi Carnot,

[40] Pierre Sanchez and Chantal Beauvalot, *Dictionnaire de l'Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs: Repertoire des Artistes et Liste de leurs Oeuvres, 1882-1965*, vol. 1 (Dijon: L'Échelle de Jacob, 2010), 31. "Article premier: L'Association dite l'*Union des Femmes Peintres et sculpteurs*, a pour but de représenter et défendre les intérêts généraux des femmes artistes, de produire leurs talents, notamment par l'organisation d'expositions annuelles.

[41] Ibid., 37-69. The exhibitions occurred annually apart from in 1940 and 1941. The total count of exhibitions hosted by the Union is eighty-one.

[42] Garb, *Sisters of the Brush*, 9-10.

the President of France, recognized the Union as a *utilité publique* in an official decree, *Décret de Reconnaissance d'Utilité publique de l'Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs*.[43]

As defined in article one of the Union's *Statuts*, the aspirational goal of the Union was to promote and defend the interests of women artists. Inspiration for the founding principles came directly from Bertaux due to her experiences as a woman artist and as an educator. The members elected Bertaux as president of the Union four times, and she held her position from 1882-1894 when Virginie Demont-Breton replaced her.[44] The change in leadership signified a conflict present among Union members. Bertaux's strategy was to cultivate solidarity while Demont-Breton focused on artistic quality.[45] Despite the internal conflict, Bertaux created space for the exchange of ideas and debate. After her time as president, Bertaux remained an active member of the Union and refocused her efforts on women's admittance to the École. Ultimately, Bertaux's tactics were successful and led to the École welcoming women in 1897.[46]

Bertaux observed the factors coalescing with the inception of the Union and the admittance of women to the École. *Psyché sous l'empire du mystère* is emblematic of Bertaux's fight against the patriarchal institutions of the nineteenth century. I assert that she selected Psyche as representative of her achievement and her hand in the transformation of women's role in the art world of nineteenth-century France. The 1889 marble sculpture represents a nude female from Greco-Roman mythology. Bertaux mixed naturalism and abstraction in Psyche's

[43] Garb, "'L'Art Féminin,'" 45; Pierre Sanchez and Chantal Beauvalot, *Dictionnaire de l'Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs*, vol. 1, 30.

[44] Garb, *Sisters of the Brush*, 7.

[45] Ibid., 17-8.

[46] Lepage, *Madame Léon Bertaux: Une Conquête Féministe*, 186.

elegant profile, smooth skin, idealized body, and stylized winged helmet. In her left hand, the sculpted figure holds a lamp that identifies her as Psyche, wife of Eros. Psyche stands in a contrapposto pose with a stiffened left leg holding her full weight. Her chin tilts forward casting her stoic gaze downward. The lack of emotion and movement in Psyche's countenance and body makes it difficult to discern what moment Bertaux depicts in the marble sculpture.

The myth of Psyche and Eros explores themes of love, sisterly relationships, and transformation. The story follows Psyche, a beautiful princess who attracts a slew of followers. Aphrodite learns of her beauty and out of jealousy sends her son, Eros, to commit an act of retribution against Psyche. Instead, Eros falls in love with Psyche and whisks her away to a palace where they live as husband and wife with one major caveat. Psyche is not to look upon Eros or know his identity. Envious of her good fortune, Psyche's sisters urge her to break her promise and look at her husband. She holds up an oil lamp to reveal his face and inadvertently spills the oil on Eros, waking him. Psyche goes in search of Eros and inadvertently ingratiates herself with Ceres and Hera. Aphrodite challenges Psyche to a series of trials to rejoin Eros. Psyche prevails; Zeus grants her immortality; and Psyche and Eros officially marry.[47] As Christine Downing examines in her book, *Psyche's Sisters: Reimagining the Meaning of Sisterhood*, the relationship dynamics of Psyche and her sisters prompt self-discovery and psychological advancement. Downing posits that the maturation process is uniquely enhanced under these sisterly conditions.[48] Despite her sisters' jealousy, Psyche benefitted from their

[47] Rhett Diessner and Kayla Burke, "The Beauty of the Psyche and Eros Myth: Integrating Aesthetics into Introduction to Psychology," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 45, no. 4 (2011): 100, https://doi.org/10.5406/jaesteduc.45.4.0097.

[48] Christine Downing, *Psyche's Sisters: Reimagining the Meaning of Sisterhood*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

involvement. Downing presents a realistic perspective and shies away from idealizing the power of sisterhood. The complex interests and activities taking place in Bertaux's Union mirrored the complicated interchange between Psyche and her sisters.

Bertaux's knowledge of nineteenth-century artistic institutions coupled with her dedication to women's education and exhibition opportunity led her to create a union with the distinct goal of curating agency. Her efforts permeated all aspects of the nineteenth-century art world from the institution to the individual. Following her tenure as union president, the organization was a prominent and respected fixture and hosted exhibitions for eighty-one years.[49] Despite the decline of the École des Beaux-Arts, Bertaux's Union offered continued support and exhibition opportunity for women artists.

[49] Sanchez, *Dictionnaire de l'Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs*, 37-69.

Marie Bashkirtseff: Author and Activist

One individual who benefitted from Bertaux's efforts towards equity was Marie Bashkirtseff. From an early age, Marie Bashkirtseff valued education and questioned the diminished access for women. Bashkirtseff vocalized her opinions as an active member of Hélène Bertaux's Union and as a contributing writer to the suffragette publication *La Citoyenne*.[50] She advocated for women artists, particularly on the topic of their admittance to academic education. In allying herself with other women, Bashkirtseff increased her training and exhibition opportunities and proliferated feminist rhetoric. Yet while Bertaux worked within the system, Bashkirtseff participated parallel to the artistic institutions and took advantage of the growing opportunities for private arts education. The differences between Bertaux and Bashkirtseff's artistic experiences expose broader shifts in the art world from state-sponsored to private institutions at the end of the nineteenth century. As an ex-patriot living in France, the rules of society were less defined and less stringent for the Ukrainian artist. This along with her privileged economic status allowed her to pursue artistic education at a private school, the Académie Julian. Bashkirtseff pursued education with tenacity, as it proved to be an essential aspect in her self-fashioning as an artist. The woman Bashkirtseff presents in her self-portraits and journal entries exemplified her ideal character, and her voracious need for study was intimately linked to her quest for celebrity and self-preservation. She proclaimed herself her own heroine.[51] In fabricating her image through different media, Marie Bashkirtseff effectively

[50] Bashkirtseff, "Les Femmes Artistes," 3-4.

[51] Marie Bashkirtseff, *Journal de Marie Bashkirtseff*, ed. André Theuriet, vol. 1 (Paris: Charpentier, 1890), 61-62, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1131377. Journal entry from Saturday, July 17, 1874.

established a feminist legacy through her advocacy efforts, artistic production, and literary pursuits.

While this is primarily a thesis about women artists working in France, not every artist profiled here is of French origins. Marie Bashkirtseff, or Maria Konstantinova Bashkirtseva, was Ukrainian by birth. After her parents' separation, Bashkirtseff traveled with her mother to France at the age of eleven. They first arrived in Nice in 1871 before taking up permanent residency in Paris.[52] In Nice, Bashkirtseff began her journal. Bashkirtseff would maintain the ritual of daily diary entries until her death from tuberculosis in 1884.[53] Although the practice of writing in one's *journal intime* was a common ritual in which many privileged, young women participated, Bashkirtseff's journal was a tool in her arsenal of self-fashioning and preservation. Her careful self-curation reached its pinnacle when she went so far as to write a preface to her journal. In doing so, she revealed the importance she placed on self-categorization as an artist, a woman, and a celebrity. The preface demonstrated that she planned for the future publication and proliferation of her journal, that would happen in 1887, three years after her death.

Bashkirtseff was highly aware of her own mortality that led to an increased rate of artistic production and a particularly poignant approach to her journal. In the span of seven years, she created 100 paintings, over 100 drawings, and six sculptures, and approximately sixty artworks

[52] Colette Cosnier, *Marie Bashkirtseff: Un portrait sans retouches*, (Paris: Pierre Horay, 1985), 335; Enid Zimmerman, "The Mirror of Marie Bashkirtseff: Reflections about the Education of Women Art Students in the Nineteenth Century," *Studies in Art Education* 30, no. 3 (1989): 165-6, https://doi.org/10.2307/1320961.

[53] Zimmerman, "The Mirror of Marie Bashkirtseff: Reflections about the Education of Women Art Students in the Nineteenth Century," 166.

by Bashkirtseff survive.[54] She documented her declining health and detailed her diagnosis, "So this, then is what the matter is – I have consumption….I am quite calm, but I have a sense of strangeness at being the only one in the secret of my misfortune….Well, if I am granted ten years of life, and during those ten years love and fame, I shall be content to die at thirty."[55] Even when confronted with a terminal illness, Bashkirtseff's singular focus was on fame. A certain level of mythology surrounds Bashkirtseff's obsession with securing celebrity status. Bashkirtseff's mother received a prediction from a fortune teller claiming that her daughter would achieve stardom. Bashkirtseff would return to fortune tellers throughout her life to confirm these predictions: "I shall go to see Mother Jacob…the same who foretold that I should have a serious illness… Mother Jacob has predicted, from the cards, the most delightful things for me – a little mixed up, it is true. But what turns up with most persistence is that I am going to achieve a brilliant success, of which all the newspapers will talk; that I shall be a great genius…"[56] Enid Zimmerman associates this familial prophecy and Bashkirtseff's tuberculosis diagnosis with her frenetic pursuit of fame.[57]

Despite her prolific artistic production, art was not Bashkirtseff's first foray into securing stardom. Her original goal was to become a singer, but she lost her voice due to early symptoms of tuberculosis. As a young woman from a family of means, Bashkirtseff possessed certain

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[54] Zimmerman, "The Mirror of Marie Bashkirtseff: Reflections about the Education of Women Art Students in the Nineteenth Century," 165.

[55] Marie Bashkirtseff. *Marie Bashkirtseff: The Journal of a Young Artist, 1860-1884*, trans. Mary J. Serrano, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1919), 344-5. Journal Entry from Thursday, December 28, 1882.

[56] Ibid., 329. Journal Entry from Friday, September 1, 1882.

[57] Zimmerman, "The Mirror of Marie Bashkirtseff: Reflections about the Education of Women Art Students in the Nineteenth Century," 165.

advantages regarding education. She participated in a traditional, aristocratic course of study.[58] At the age of eighteen, Bashkirtseff joined the Académie Julian to begin her "serious" study of art. She believed that the *atelier Julian* was "the only one of any note here for women."[59] She articulated the devotion and discipline with which she approached her art in her journal entries: "I live only for my art; I go downstairs only to dine and talk with no one. I feel that I am passing through a new phase. Everything seems petty and uninteresting, everything except my work. Life, taken thus, may be beautiful."[60] Bashkirtseff's level of access to artistic education became an entrée to other facets of the art world providing entry into the Salon.

The Académie Julian was not unique in its business model. A multitude of education opportunities existed from the École to the *académie payant* to the *académie libre*. The *académies payantes*, the paying academies, grew in popularity and enrollment in the late nineteenth century due to their liberal entry standards and the appeal of renowned instructors who were often also teachers at the École des Beaux-Arts. The private academies profited from individuals who did not meet the admission requirements for the École.[61] In these academies and ateliers, women theoretically received traditional training regardless of their societal status and nationality, as long as they could pay tuition. As Tamar Garb has noted, the high tuition rates made admittance cost-prohibitive to non-wealthy women.[62]

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[58] Zimmerman, "The Mirror of Marie Bashkirtseff: Reflections about the Education of Women Art Students in the Nineteenth Century," 165.

[59] Bashkirtseff. *Marie Bashkirtseff: The Journal of a Young Artist, 1860-1884*, 160. Journal Entry from Tuesday, October 2, 1877.

[60] Ibid., 367. Journal Entry from Tuesday, May 8, 1883.

[61] Garb, *Sisters of the Brush*, 79-81.

[62] Ibid., 81.

The Académie Julian belonged to the category of *académies payantes* and opened in 1868 to prepare students for the École des Beaux-Arts' entrance exams. Although women were not admitted to the École at this time, Rodolphe Julian offered instruction to women. However, his motives were not strictly philanthropic, as Julian saw an opportunity to grow his Académie financially by adding more ateliers for women. Julian was a shrewd businessman. He strategically opened his ateliers around Paris near art galleries and aristocratic neighborhoods, and women paid significantly more than men. He originally had mixed studios, but upon receiving criticism in the press for this practice, he separated the studios by gender. Despite the gender segregation in the studios, women received the same training and experience as men studying at the Académie Julian, and they benefitted from the same instructors as the École des Beaux-Arts.[63]

Bashkirtseff joined the Académie Julian in 1877. The women's and men's studios were separate at this point, and Bashkirtseff would study primarily with Tony Robert-Fleury and Jules Joseph Lefebvre at the Académie Julian. Despite the progressive environment of this alternative institution, she received a rather traditional, academic education. Seemingly a tolerant alternative to the gender prohibitive environment of the École, Julian employed members of the Académie des beaux-arts, Prix de Rome winners, and, generally speaking, famous artists as instructors. These factors aided in the recruitment of wealthy, non-native French students. Bashkirtseff fit both categories as a Ukrainian woman of some means. While the famed instructors appealed to non-French students, a rejection of the academic style and the official artistic institutions was in motion in the broader Parisian art world. The great renunciation of the genre hierarchy by male

[63] Catherine Fehrer, introduction to *Overcoming all Obstacles*: *The Women of the Académie Julian*, by Gabriel P. Weisberg and Jane R. Becker (New York: Dahesh Museum of Art, 1999), 3.

artists began with Gustave Courbet's 1855 exhibit, the Salon des Refusés in 1863, and what became known as the Impressionist exhibitions.[64] Women artists' pursuit of academic education and access to the École conflicts with the rebuff of artistic institutions beginning mid-century. As Garb has noted, the École's policy change that extended entry to women in 1897 is suspect.[65] The irony of this achievement championed by Bertaux, discussed earlier, lies in the status of the Ecole and Salon at the conclusion of the nineteenth century, that calls into question whether women had truly achieved equality through their admission to an outmoded institution.

The Académie Julian provided artistic education in the midst of a rapidly changing Parisian art world, increased exhibition potential and Salon submissions of its students, and cultivated an informal network of women artists. Over its hundred years, the Académie Julian trained many renowned artists including Cecilia Beaux, Pierre Bonnard, Louise Catherine Breslau, Jean Dubuffet, Marcel Duchamp, Childe Hassam, Henri Matisse, Victorine Meurent, John Singer Sargent, Grant Wood, and Edouard Vuillard.[66] It was in this environment that Bashkirtseff solidified the vision of her future self as a famous artist. Bashkirtseff documented her feelings of fervor and conviction to an artistic career in her journal entries from her early days at the Académie Julian. Expressing her excitement, Bashkirtseff wrote, "From being a

[64] Juliet Wilson-Bareau, "The Salon Des Refusés of 1863: A New View," *The Burlington Magazine* 149, no. 1250 (2007): 312-15, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20074825.

[65] Garb, *Sisters of the Brush*, 69.

[66] "Académie Julian," Art Term, Tate, accessed April 3, 2022, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/academie-julian; Catherine Fehrer, "List of Students and Professors" in *The Julian Academy: Paris 1868-1939* (New York: Shepherd Gallery, 1989), 133-250; Catherine Fehrer, "Women at the Académie Julian in Paris," *The Burlington Magazine* 136, no. 1100 (1994): 757, http://www.jstor.org/stable/886272; Gabriel P. Weisberg and Jane R. Becker, *Overcoming all Obstacles: The Women of the Académie Julian* (New York: Dahesh Museum of Art, 1999), 4, 52, 69.

student, I began to be an artist. This sudden influx of power puts me beside myself with joy."[67] Bashkirtseff devoted herself to artistic study and worked seven hours at a time in the atelier, immersing herself in her craft.[68]

Upon the suggestion of Julian, Bashkirtseff painted *In the Studio* (fig. 3), oil on canvas painting from 1881, that depicts a life-painting class in one of his women's ateliers. The plan for this painting was two-fold; it was both an advertisement for his academy and a Salon submission for Bashkirtseff. Drama surrounded the creation of *In the Studio,* as Julian suggested that Bashkirtseff's classmate, Amélie Beaury-Saurel, sometimes described as her rival, paint a similar scene. Bashkirtseff detailed the tension and doubt she felt while participating in the stand-off with Beaury-Saurel in her journal. The story of their dynamic aids in understanding what happened in Julian's studios. However, rather than focusing on the rivalry – real or invented – I consider Bashkirtseff's painting as representative of her academic aspirations.

In the Studio is immediately recognizable as a studio classroom setting with fifteen women students at their easels crowding the left-hand side of the frame. The composition captures the students engaged in the study of the male form, a young boy dressed as a shepherd. The detail with which Bashkirtseff articulates the scene mirrors the meticulous manner of her journal entries. She captured the dynamism of the environment while also providing insight on what was considered appropriate for women students' consumption. Nude models sat for life-study courses in the women's studio at the Académie Julian. As she explains in her journal entry from November 1, 1880, "Our studio now enjoys the same advantages as the studio of the men,

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[67] Bashkirtseff. *Marie Bashkirtseff: The Journal of a Young Artist, 1860-1884*, 308. Journal Entry from Sunday, January 13, 1882.

[68] "Marie Bashkirtseff," *The Art Amateur* 22, no. 2 (1890): 34, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25629073.

that is to say, we draw from the nude every day from the same model in the same pose as they do; consequently, we can now paint compositions of more importance than before."[69] Bashkirtseff also references this aspect of her education with the inclusion of nude paintings along the top border of the painting. She chose to include a young boy dressed as a shepherd who would likely be included in an academic, historical painting. Her decision not to paint a nude male model shows conflicting priorities and exposes her need to appeal to academic and societal standards.

Bashkirtseff's endeavors towards women's artistic education expanded after three years at the Académie Julian. In 1880, she met with Hubertine Auclert, a leader in the French suffragette movement, who encouraged Bashkirtseff to share her thoughts on the matter publicly. Hubertine Auclert was the leader of Les Droits des Femmes and an avowed feminist. Bashkirtseff turned to her for direction and inspiration. The result of this meeting was a vehemently written support of a woman's right to academic education entitled "Les Femmes Artistes" in *La Citoyenne*, Auclert's feminist newspaper, in March 1881.[70] Bashkirtseff published her argument under the pseudonym, Pauline Orell:

> We have drawing schools in the city, very sufficient for those who are destined for professional work…or two or three fashionable ateliers where young rich girls amuse themselves by making paintings. But what we need is the ability to work like men and not have to perform feats of strength to get what men simply have. We are asked with indulgent irony how many great female artists there have been. Well, gentlemen, there have been some, and it is surprising, given the enormous difficulties they have encountered.[71]

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[69] Bashkirtseff. *Marie Bashkirtseff: The Journal of a Young Artist, 1860-1884*, 245. Journal Entry from Monday, November 1, 1880.

[70] Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Signs* 14, no. 1 (1988): 126, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174664.

[71] Bashkirtseff, "Les Femmes Artistes," 3-4. "Nous avons des écoles de dessin de la ville très suffisantes pour celles qui se destinent à l'industrie… ou bien deux ou trois ateliers à la mode où

Her article foreshadows the groundbreaking article, "Why have there been no great women artists?" that Linda Nochlin would write ninety years later. In "Les Femmes Artistes," Bashkirtseff described the barriers as systemic rather than as a deficit in women's abilities.

Bashkirtseff continued her association with Auclert, provided money for the publication of *La Citoyenne*, frequently wrote and published articles, and attended gatherings of Les Droits des Femmes. Having exhibited at the Salon in 1880 and benefitted from academic instruction under Julian's tutelage, the prohibition of women's admission to the École enraged Bashkirtseff. These factors infiltrate her presentation of self in portraiture. In 1883, Bashkirtseff painted *Self-Portrait with Palette* (fig. 4). Both with composition and accoutrement, she engaged with classic self-portraiture tropes. At this point in her career, she had submitted to and exhibited at the Salon. With this portrait, she employed formal strategies and crafted an image of herself as a "great artist" in the most traditional sense.

Artists have used the palette as a prop in self-portraiture for centuries; however, the use of the palette in paintings by women artists holds more weight, as it legitimizes their actions and automatically associates them with male artists. Bashkirtseff participates in artistic self-fashioning, corroborating her professional achievements with the tools of the trade. She holds a palette and brushes. Her direct gaze communicates confidence and acuity of purpose. The sobriety of her stare combined with her sedate clothing exposes Bashkirtseff's earnestness in being taken seriously as a professional artist. Bashkirtseff's self-portrait references Jacques Louis

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les jeunes filles riches s'amusent à faire de la peinture. Mais ce qu'il nous faut, c'est la possibilité de travailler comme les hommes, et de pas avoir à exécuter des tours de force pour en arriver à avoir ce que les hommes ont tout simplement. On nous demande avec une indulgente ironie combien il y a eu de grandes artistes femmes. Eh! Messieurs, il y en a eu et c'est étonnant, vu les difficultés énormes qu'elles rencontrent."

David's *Self-Portrait* (fig. 5) from 1794. Their poses, expressions, and costumes express dedication to their roles as artists, and Bashkirtseff presents a more masculine version of herself. In comparison to another eighteenth-century example, Bashkirtseff's self-portrait differs from Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun's *Self-Portrait in a Straw Hat* (fig. 6) from 1782. Although Bashkirtseff and Vigée-Lebrun both gaze outward and hold the tools of their profession, Vigée-Lebrun dons the fashionable chemise gown, expensive baubles, and jaunty straw hat. Both the straw hat and the chemise gown represented Vigée-Lebrun's role as first painter and allegiance to her queen, Marie Antoinette. The result is an image of a woman artist that aligns with eighteenth-century expectations of femininity and aristocratic decorum.[72] Bashkirtseff's self-portrait presents the image of the traditional male artist and combines with the confidence of a modern woman artist, similarly, seen in Berthe Morisot's *Self-Portrait* (fig. 7) from 1855. Morisot's painting aligns with Bashkirtseff's intentional image as a serious artist with a palette and paint brush.

Bashkirtseff's self-representational art allowed her to explore her relationality to her chosen profession. She operated with awareness in forming her identity. Her diary, self-portraits, and dress functioned as both practice of self and to solidify her legacy and role as heroine.

> When there is no one for whom I can 'be', what I like best is solitude. My hair, knotted back like Psyche's is more auburn than ever. Woolen dress in that special white, becoming and graceful; lace fichu around my neck…. It is perhaps foolish to praise oneself so much: but people who write always describe their heroine and I am my own heroine. And it would be ridiculous to humiliate and diminish myself through false modesty.[73]

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[72] Mary Sheriff, "Portrait of the Artist," in *The Exceptional Woman: Élisabeth Vigée Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 180-220.

[73] Bashkirtseff, *Journal de Marie Bashkirtseff*, ed. André Theuriet, 61-62. Journal entry from Saturday, July 17, 1874. "Ce que j'aime le mieux quand il n'ya personne pour qui être, c'est la solitude. Mes cheveux, noués à la Psyché, sont plus roux que jamais. Robe de laine de ce blanc particulier, seyant et gracieux; un fichu de dentelle autour du cou…C'est peut-être bête de se louer tellement; mais les gens qui écrivent décrivent toujours leur héroïne, et je suis mon héroïne à moi. Et il serait ridicule de m'humilier et m'abaisser par une fausse modestie."

Seen through the lens of social identity theory, Bashkirtseff was participating in the activity of self-categorization and identification where she derived her sense of self according to existing social categories.[74] This is visible in her choice of pose and props in her *Self-Portrait with Palette.* According to Jan Stets and Peter Burke, social identity theory addresses intergroup dynamics, specifically how individuals perceive themselves as members of one group (the in-group) versus another group (the out-group).[75] In this case, the social category she hoped to align herself with was that of the male artist. Her misalignment with nineteenth-century gender norms relates to Bashkirtseff's desire to ally herself with the in-group of men in power. I posit that Bashkirtseff embraced fluidity and performed different gender characteristics partly due to men's artistic success and partly due to the specific praise she received at the Académie Julian.[76] Through her quest for acceptance as a serious artist operating on the same level as her male contemporaries, Bashkirtseff employed artistic tropes used by male artists. This is apparent in her *Self-Portrait with Palette*.

Bashkirtseff fashioned herself as a romantic figure destined for greatness. In 1879, Bashkirtseff proclaimed in her journal, "If my art does not soon bring me fame. I shall kill myself and end the whole matter at once…I shall give myself till thirty, for up to that age one

[74] Jan Stets and Peter Burke, "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2000): 224-5, https://doi.org/10.2307/2695870.

[75] Ibid., 226.

[76] Zimmerman, "The Mirror of Marie Bashkirtseff: Reflections about the Education of Women Art Students in the Nineteenth Century," 172, https://doi.org/10.2307/1320961. Bashkirtseff recorded in her journal that she received compliments that her painting "looked like a man's work."

may still hope to acquire fortune, or happiness, or glory, or whatever it is one desires."[77] What she did not realize at the time was that she was to be a tragic figure, a young and beautiful artist whose potential was cut short by illness. As the years progress, her journal entries expose early indicators of her tubercular state. In 1883, she wrote, "I…I cough a great deal and although I have not grown visibly thinner, I fear I am seriously ill."[78] The tragic nature of her final years influenced the tone and subject matter of her art.

Bashkirtseff's journal entries vacillate between the braggadocious and the doubtful. She relied heavily on praise from her teachers and Julian. Regarding her art production, she stated, "In short, I paint not so badly, but I think I should do better as a sculptor – I have certain conceptions of forms, gestures, attitudes – that cannot be expressed in color."[79] In the final year of her life, she created *Douleur de Nausicaa* (fig. 8), a bronze sculpture, now in the Musée d'Orsay. While her name means "burner of ships," Nausicaa, a young female character from Homer's *Odyssey*, represents unrequited love. I see this sculpture as an allegorical self-portrait of the doomed artist.

For Bashkirtseff, her choice of subject matter reveals her distress at her unfulfilled potential, as an artist and as an individual. She invested time and effort in crafting a romanticized persona through her art and her journal writing. Bashkirtseff detailed her moment of inspiration as she looked upon the figure modeled in clay, "My mind is full of my picture… it would make a charming Nausicaa. She has buried her face in her hands and is weeping; there is in her attitude

[77] Bashkirtseff. *Marie Bashkirtseff: The Journal of a Young Artist, 1860-1884*, 202. Journal Entry from Friday, January 10, 1879.

[78] Ibid., 358. Journal Entry from Sunday, April 1, 1883.

[79] Ibid., 331. Journal Entry from Wednesday, September 6, 1882.

so genuine an abandonment, a despair so complete, so naïve, so sincere, and so touching, that I am captivated by it."[80] Nausicaa stands as a solitary, nude figure with her head in her hands in despair. Her face is obscured, but the emotion is communicated. Despite the sadness conveyed through this gesture, her back is not bowed in grief.

Although Marie Bashkirtseff's life was shortened by illness, she was a prolific artist and author. By refusing to tacitly engage with the institutions that dictated the boundaries of gender in nineteenth-century France, Bashkirtseff crafted her own legacy with purpose and persistence. Bashkirtseff exhibited an acute self-awareness through her intentional manipulation of the self in self-portraiture and journal entry. Her hard work paid off and allowed for women artists to resist the artistic institution more actively.

[80] Bashkirtseff. *Marie Bashkirtseff: The Journal of a Young Artist, 1860-1884*, 355. Journal Entry from Thursday, March 22, 1883.

Suzanne Valadon: Model and Artist

Like Marie Bashkirtseff, Suzanne Valadon investigated the self and the role of women within the artistic community through self-portraiture and depictions of the nude female form. In her lifetime, Suzanne Valadon acquired many names – Marie-Clémentine, Maria, and Suzanne – and many titles– model, mother, and artist. Original and fiercely independent, Suzanne Valadon charted her path through the Parisian art scene out of necessity. Her biography is similar to her male contemporaries with a failed marriage, a child born out of wedlock with an unnamed father, and a sordid affair with a younger lover. These facets of her biography factored heavily in the critical reception and tainted the history written of her life. Instead of accepting Valadon's decisions as her own, contemporary critics hypersexualized her and vilified her actions. Valadon represents the final case study in my analysis of the evolution of the nineteenth-century Parisian art world. Valadon engaged the least with the prevailing, official artistic institutions, relying instead on relationships with fellow artists, models, and gallerists. Like Bashkirtseff, Valadon formed important informal social networks with her colleagues. Although Valadon was less focused on achieving fame and operated more independently from the artistic institutions than Bashkirtseff. I compare male artists' depictions of her to highlight how Valadon repossessed agency through self-fashioning. I study her artistic responses to those depictions in her portrayal of the nude female form and self-portraits.

Marie-Clémentine Valadon was born in Bessines-sur-Gartempe, west-central France, on September 23, 1865, to Marie-Magdelaine Célina Valadon and an unknown father. In 1866, the Valadon family moved to Paris in search of job opportunities.[81] Marie-Magdelaine Valadon and

[81] Marianne Le Morvan, "Chronology," *Suzanne Valadon: Model, Painter, Rebel*, (Philadelphia: The Barnes Foundation, 2021), 136.

her infant daughter first settled in Paris before moving to Montmartre, a Parisian neighborhood. The change of location proved to be formative in Valadon's development as an artist. Following the modernization of Paris, commonly known as Haussmannization, that took place from 1853 to 1870, a large portion of the working class fled to Montmartre after being evicted from their homes to make way for the broad boulevards.[82] Valadon and her mother lived in poverty, and her mother made a meager wage working as a laundress. After attending school at the Saint-Jean-de-Montmartre convent, she worked several jobs before starting her career as an artist's model at the age of fifteen.[83] Despite her meager beginnings, Valadon achieved commercial success in both the sale and exhibition of her paintings.

Valadon began drawing at an early age.[84] While Hélène Bertaux and Marie Bashkirtseff found artistic instruction in her stepfather's studio and at the Académie Julian respectively, Valadon was self-taught. She later found instruction and mentorship with Edgar Degas.[85] In an effort to explain away her "unfeminine" activities, both as a young girl and as an artist, Valadon's biographers and contemporary critics engaged with traditional male artists' biographical tropes that dramatize artistic genius and discovery. Even in a more modern recounting of Valadon's life from 1998, *Mistress of Montmartre,* June Rose vacillated between exaggerating Valadon's artistic abilities and her beauty. Rose states, "As a child, she sensed that she was special…Although she was immensely appealing with an oval face, dark-blue eyes and

[82] David P. Jordan, "The City: Baron Haussmann and Modern Paris," *The American Scholar* 61, no. 1 (1992): 99, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41211982.

[83] Le Morvan, "Chronology," 136.

[84] Rose, *Mistress of Montmartre: A Life of Suzanne Valadon*, 11-3.

[85] Ibid., 79-83.

cognac-coloured hair that would darken as she grew older, Marie-Clémentine was too much of a tomboy to bother about her appearance."[86] The preoccupation with Valadon's beauty and exceptionalism undermines Valadon's artistic success as a woman artist and leads to overly simplistic conclusions about her life. In 1880, Valadon started a seven year working relationship with artist Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. He employed Valadon for each figure in his painting, *The Sacred Grove, Beloved of the Arts and the Muses* (fig. 9). She shortened her name to Maria when she assumed the role of artist's model.[87] In Puvis de Chavannes' employ, Valadon learned of the salons, exhibition venues, and art dealers.

Much like it was for her male contemporaries, relationships with artists and art dealers in Montmartre proved pivotal to Valadon's career. One such relationship was between Valadon and Berthe Weill which spanned twenty years; Valadon exhibited at Weill's gallery from 1913 to 1933.[88] Like Valadon, Berthe Weill entered the Parisian art world out of economic necessity. As the fifth of seven children, Weill first started working as a teenager for Salvador Meyer, an *antiquaire*. After many years working for Meyer, Weill opened her own antique shop at the age of 32. Unfortunately, the endeavor was short-lived and unsuccessful. However, her failed business venture did not dampen her entrepreneurial drive. After cultivating a friendship with art critic, Claude-Roger Marx, Weill used her small dowry to open Galerie B. Weill in December 1901.[89] She selected 25 rue Victor Massé in Montmartre for her gallery space dedicated to

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[86] Rose, *Mistress of Montmartre: A Life of Suzanne Valadon*, 29.

[87] Ibid., 44-5.

[88] Ireson et al., *Suzanne Valadon: Model, Painter, Rebel*, 142-44.

[89] Charles Dellheim, *Belonging and Betrayal: How Jews Made the Art World Modern* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2021), 225-27.

modern art.[90] Little is known about the interactions between Valadon and Weill, but as residents of Montmartre, they likely interacted in similar circles. She earned the nickname, *La Merveille*, The Marvelous, for exhibiting André Derain, Amedeo Modigliani, and Maurice Utrillo, Valadon's son. Described as being "prickly and outspoken," Weill took chances and did not compromise. While this is simply conjecture, I like to think that Valadon and Weill found kinship through a shared sense of purpose as women working in a male-dominated industry. Suzanne Valadon exhibited at the Galerie B. Weill twenty-one times over a twenty-year period.[91]

Before Valadon's extensive professional relationship with Weill, she found economic freedom as an artist's model. Artistic institutions did not organize, govern, or educate model's on posing even at the height of the École's power. The École instituted standards regarding models, but models did not benefit from a collective body. However, societal norms articulated, shaped, and regulated the "praxis of the pose," and the model became a site for regulation and commodification. The societal status of the artist's model in nineteenth-century France was often dictated by gender, race, and ethnicity. The established categories – male, female, Jewish, Italian, Parisian, Black – became associated with a particular genres of painting. These stereotypes served the purpose in the popular imagination as a focus of anxieties concerning changes in the modern urban population.[92] Even though modeling paid relatively well, models encountered several barriers both logistically and morally.[93] Throughout the nineteenth century in France,

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[90] Dellheim, *Belonging and Betrayal: How Jews Made the Art World Modern*, 229.

[91] Ireson et al., *Suzanne Valadon: Model, Painter, Rebel*, 142-44.

[92] Susan Waller, *The Invention of the Model: Artists and Models in Paris, 1830-1870* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate: 2006), xiv-xv.

[93] Waller, *The Invention of the Model*, 63.

working-class women were consistently represented by the middle and upper classes as sexualized and sexually available.

Unfortunately, assumptions of immorality accompanied a woman's choice to model, regardless of their economic need or artistic interest. Much of what is written about Valadon's professional and personal relationships with these men is centered on salacious conjecture – who was sleeping with whom and who was the father of Valadon's baby?[94] This was an evergreen issue for women artists. These speculations minimize Valadon's accomplishments and distract from how she developed as an artist. When Valadon worked as a model for Puvis de Chavannes, he introduced her to Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and she soon began posing for him. She met other Impressionists at the Café de la Nouvelle-Athènes, but her closest and most formative connections with other artists were with Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Edgar Degas. Toulouse-Lautrec was credited with suggesting Valadon's name change from Maria to Suzanne, as she transitioned into her role as artist. He drew biblical inspiration from the story of Susanna who was implicated falsely of immorality by voyeurs.[95] The final name change, although given to her by Toulouse-Lautrec, signifies her final transformation into artist.

After Valadon showed Toulouse-Lautrec her drawings of Maurice Utrillo and her mother, Lautrec shared them with artists, François Gauzi and Federico Zandomeneghi. Upon their advice, Lautrec introduced Valadon and her drawings to Degas.[96] As her relationship with

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[94] Rose, *Mistress of Montmartre: A Life of Suzanne Valadon*, 90-5; Thérèse Diamand-Rosinsky, "Suzanne Valadon's many identities: Marie-Clémentine, "Biqui," or "Terrible Maria"?", In *Suzanne Valadon*, edited by Daniel Marchesseau, (Martigny, Switzerland: La Fondation, 1996), 59. For more on this topic, see Eunice Lipton's article, "Representing Sexuality in Women Artists' Biographies: The Cases of Suzanne Valadon and Victorine Meurent."

[95] Rose, *Mistress of Montmartre: A Life of Suzanne Valadon*, 86.

[96] Ibid., 79-83.

Lautrec deteriorated, Degas encouraged Valadon's artistic study and practice. Valadon's and Lautrec's weakening friendship presents itself in Lautrec's painting of her, *The Hangover* (fig. 10) where he depicted her chastened and displeased, seated alone bent over a glass of wine. This portrayal differs greatly from Lautrec's 1885 portrait of Valadon entitled *Madame Suzanne Valadon, artiste-peintre* (fig. 11), where the artist represented Valadon as a confident and chic woman.

Concurrent to Valadon's burgeoning career as an artist, the authority of the official artistic institutions and Salon waned. Ernest Meissonier, Auguste Rodin, Eugène Carrière, and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes separated from the Salon and founded the Société Nationale de Beaux-Arts. Hopeful and determined, Valadon petitioned Puvis, her former employer, to exhibit with the Société Nationale. Despite his initial bemusement – "What an idea…You have not had any training. Whose pupil are you? What will people say?" – they accepted five of Valadon's drawings, and she was the only woman to exhibit in the Société's first Salon.[97] Although Valadon benefited from her relationships with these men that provided entry points to exhibitions and education, the power relations between the male artist and female model shaped the narrative surrounding Valadon's life. Rosemary Betterton addresses the role of male spectatorship in the artist-model relationship and the disassociation that occurred to justify the painting of the female nude. She explains that "such a view renders invisible the relationships power and subordination involved when a male artist depicts the female body. It ignores or denies the difference between looking at the body of a woman and looking at a pile of fruit."[98]

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[97] Rose, *Mistress of Montmartre: A Life of Suzanne Valadon*, 109-110.

[98] Rosemary Betterton, "How Do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Work of Suzanne Valadon," *Feminist Review*, no. 19 (1985): 5, https://doi.org/10.2307/1394982.

Many scholars have examined the metaphoric association between the nude female model and an apple in a still life, applying a feminist lens.

Linda Nochlin, Rosemary Betterton, Carol Duncan, and April F. Masten address the desensitization to nudity that nineteenth-century male artists and critics participated in to justify their appreciation of the female nude.[99] The artistic establishment closely monitored and regulated the study of and painting of the female nude. The reasons were numerous – from safeguarding a woman's virtue to preserving the sanctitude of the artist's studio. Regardless of the rationale, a power dynamic existed between the clothed male artist and the objectified, nude female model.[100] The work by Laura Mulvey on film in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* provides additional insight into the interplay occurring between men and women, specifically the role of the woman to the masculine dominated spectator-audience in film. Mulvey explains how the structure of cinema supports scopophilia, pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual pleasure through sight, and ego libido, the narcissistic development of the ego through identification in the image seen. Film perpetuates the associative correspondence of active to male and passive to female translating to their roles as the male as the bearer of the look and woman as image. The active and passive roles occurred between the male artists behind the canvas and the female models on the platform. According to Mulvey, mainstream film is made

[99] Betterton, "How Do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Work of Suzanne Valadon," 3-24; Carol Duncan, "Domination and Virility in Vanguard Painting," in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (New York: Harper & Row, 1982); April F. Masten, "Model into Artist: The Changing Face of Art Historical Biography," *Women's* Studies 20, no. 1 (1992):17-41, https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.1992.9978924; Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

[100] Masten, "Model into Artist: The Changing Face of Art Historical Biography," 19, https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.1992.9978924.

for the male viewer who takes part in scopophilia with the female actors and ego libido with the male actors, envisioning themselves as the protagonist.[101] Despite the established power dynamics between male artist and female model, Valadon's paintings of the nude female form act as a tool in dismantling the dominant, objectifying force of the male gaze.

Her experience as a model informed her paintings of the nude female form which stand in opposition to voyeuristic portrayals by her contemporaries. Edgar Degas and Pierre-Auguste Renoir frequented the dance halls, beer gardens, and brothels surveilled the denizens of the Parisian demimonde. These chroniclers of modern life derived satisfaction and a sense of superiority as residents of the moral high ground. In contrast, Valadon presented an honest portrayal of the working-class women whose socio-economic status and lived experiences were closest to her own. She did not sexualize or degrade her model colleagues. Valadon explored the nude female form in her early drawings and painted women in intimate, interior spaces, and stylized landscapes in the 1910s and 1920s. In *Joy of Life* (fig. 12) from 1911, Valadon constructs a scene with a young, nude male figure looking at a group of female bathers in a lush setting. She engaged with a subject often painted by male artists, such as Paul Cézanne's *The Large Bathers* (fig. 13) and Renoir's *Les grandes baigneuses* (fig. 14). She was intimately familiar with the subject matter, as she posed for Renoir as one of the bathers in *Les grandes baigneuses*. The scenes painted by male artists deny the voyeurism present in their works whereas Valadon directly and openly acknowledged it. She painted a solitary, nude man who stands off to the right in the composition. He crosses his arms across his chest and looks directly at the group of four nude women bathers. Sinuous tree trunks and branches frame the scene. A

[101] Laura Mulvey and Scott Mackenzie, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (UK 1975)," In *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, 1st ed., 364, University of California Press, 2014, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt5vk01n.109.

small open space separates the figures which highlights the differing roles of the man who looks and the women who are the objects of the look. In doing so, Valadon disrupted the masculinist narrative of Renoir's and Cezanne's works by including a nude male onlooker in the composition.

Valadon took invisible, prohibited, and invalidated figures of nineteenth-century Paris and made them visible. In *Nu couché* (fig. 15) from 1928, Valadon painted a blonde woman reclining on a pale green, patterned sofa. Unlike Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (fig. 16), the model's curved shoulders and posture reveal resistance to display. Her legs are crossed, and one arm covers her breasts. Like *Olympia*, she confronts the viewer with a direct stare, and her gaze betrays an awareness and a challenge. Despite being in a state of display, Valadon portrays her nude as self-possessed of mind and body. In doing so, Valadon's paintings of the female nude actively deconstruct the male gaze. I attribute her respectful representations more to her experience as a model and less specifically to her gender. In her article, "Artists and Models: Women in French Art from 1880 to 1930," Lane Gormley examines how artists portrayed women during this period. Commenting on Valadon's handling of the female form, Gormley concludes that Valadon's approach outstrips her male colleagues, moving beyond the societal constraints.[102] While Valadon's nudes still participate in the male gaze, her paintings take part in its deconstruction.

In 1919, Valadon painted a series profiling the same, unidentified, Black model. Valadon exhibited one of these paintings, *Vénus noire* (fig. 17) at the 1919 Salon d'Automne at the Grand

[102] Lane Gormley, "Artists and Models: Women in French Art from 1880 to 1930," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*5, no. 1 (1980): 47, https://doi.org/10.2307/3346303.

Palais des Champs-Élysées. [103] During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Black body became a site of layered meaning for the white voyeur. In her book, *The Age of Undress: Art, Fashion, and the Classical Ideal in the 1790s,* Amelia Rauser engages with psychoanalysis to explain the stark racial contrast depicted in art and fashion – "whiteness requires blackness" to articulate the purity of the whiteness and dispel feelings of abjection.[104] A famed example of this direct contract occurring on the canvas is Manet's *Olympia* with his inclusion of Laure. Pillars in the art historical community have studied the implications of Manet's modernizing composition. T.J. Clark, Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, Griselda Pollock, and more recently Denise Murrell contend with juxtaposition of Laure and Olympia.[105] As it relates to the French national identity, representations of Black bodies were used to reinforce the "superiority" of the French body politic in which Black people could not take part. In comparison to Laura Mulvey's interpretation of the role of spectator and object in the construction of the male gaze, bell hooks presents the perspective of Black women and the gaze. In "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," hooks critically assesses the state of Black women in film by reviewing the historical legacy of slavery and the power of the gaze. Traditionally, art has obscured the role of

[103] Nancy Ireson, ed., "Selected Exhibitions of Suzanne Valadon," *Suzanne Valadon: Model, Painter, Rebel*, (Philadelphia: The Barnes Foundation, 2021), 142. As a part of prep for the Suzanne Valadon exhibition at The Barnes Foundation, *Suzanne Valadon: Model, Painter, Rebel*, curator, Nancy Ireson, partnered with Paris-based archivist Marianne Le Morvan, founder, and director of the Archives Berthe Weill, to research and determine the identity of Valadon's Black model. The efforts are still underway, and her identity remains unknown. For more, see "Disrupting Tradition: Suzanne Valadon's *Black Venus*," in the exhibition catalog for *Suzanne Valadon: Model, Painter, Rebel*.

[104] Amelia Rauser, *The Age of Undress: Art, Fashion, and the Classical Ideal in the 1790s*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020), 135.

[105] Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, "Still Thinking about Olympia's Maid," *The Art Bulletin* 97, no. 4 (2015) 430-2, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43947753.

the Black woman, both as protagonist and spectator. She does not have a place in the scopophilic gaze between man and woman that takes place on the screen or the canvas.

In this context, Valadon's choice to paint a Black model, particularly in the allegorical role of Black Venus, calls into question her intent and whether she engaged with racial stereotypes in her portrayal, or her own experience living and working in Montmartre. As Denise Murrell observed in her study of Manet's *Olympia*, the northern neighborhoods of Paris where the Impressionists resided were home to a multiracial community.[106] Depicted in a diversity of media, representations of Black women in France served as an image to explore meanings of race and gender.

The Black Venus was a prevalent archetype in nineteenth-century art, and associated with the illustrations of blackness were colonial tropes, representations of nature, the "primitive," and the exotic. Slavery was abolished in 1848, and with this policy change, images of free Black individuals inundated nineteenth-century media.[107] Grigsby asserts that Manet's inclusion of Laure in *Olympia* represents a more perceptive consciousness of racial difference and France's colonial history for nineteenth-century viewers.[108] Although painted fifty-six years after *Olympia*, Valadon's *Vénus noire* contends with the same complex awareness generated by images of Black individuals.

In Valadon's *Vénus noire*, the Black nude female figure stands tall with gaze directed outward to the viewer. Her right hand assertively covers her genitals while her other hand rests

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[106] Denise Murrell, *Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), 9-10.

[107] Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, "Still Thinking about Olympia's Maid," 430-1.

[108] Ibid., 434.

on a white drapery. She wears a red headband across her brow and turquoise earrings. The red fabric is reminiscent of the Creole headwrap, an accessory appropriated by white women as fashion.[109] She is poised in an outdoor space. The background is made up of abstracted trees and vegetation. Murrell considers the setting of *Vénus noire* in a conversation entitled, "Disrupting Tradition: Suzanne Valadon's *Black Venus*, "I find it interesting that the background is not overtly tropical, which would have been a clear marker of ethnicity. However, the motif of the Black body in and as nature has been entwined with the dichotomy of nature versus culture since the seventeenth century, so it is difficult to view the setting as neutral ground."[110] In comparing the *Black Venus* to Valadon's other depictions of the nude form, her placement in nature contrasts with the intimate interior scenes populated by white bodies and rich fabrics, like *Nu à la draperie blanche* (fig. 18). While the figure appears confident in gaze and pose, she does not fit into the broader images of *la vie quotidienne.* Valadon intentionally explored these factors in an effort to problematize depictions of Black women and the gaze, especially considering the male-authored alternatives. Valadon's *Vénus noire* resides somewhere in between the exotic Black serving woman of the nineteenth century and Manet's figure of modernity with the Black model, Laure.[111] In her decision to paint this Black woman, Valadon engaged in what hooks

[109] Rauser, *The Age of Undress: Art, Fashion, and the Classical Ideal in the 1790s*, 140-2.

[110] Denise Murrell, "Disrupting Tradition: Suzanne Valadon's *Black Venus*," conversation with Adrienne L. Childs, Nancy Ireson, Lauren Jimerson, Denise Murrell, and Ebonie Pollock, *Suzanne Valadon: Model, Painter, Rebel*, (Philadelphia: The Barnes Foundation, 2021), 32.

[111] Murrell, *Posing Modernity*, 55-7. Eugène Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, Léon Bénouville's *Esther à l'Odalisque*, and Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Moorish Bath* exemplify the Orientalist genre painting where the artists employ the Black servant woman as a foil to the idealized white female body.

describes as “cultivating awareness” and “politicizing looking relations,” and she imbued the *Black Venus* with the potential for resistance. [112]

Valadon immersed herself in examining the role of self-fashioning and the gaze in paintings of herself. As Valadon assumed the role of artist, self-portraiture factored heavily in her artistic production. Her first known self-portrait is from 1883 at the age of eighteen (fig. 19). She continued this practice until 1931, seven years before her death (fig. 21). Instead of exhuming a hidden self that resides behind a façade or mask, Valadon explored the elements that are involved in the construction of the façade itself. She articulates an unashamed honesty in her examination of self. She includes the visual presence of the artist in many of her self-portraits, like Bashkirtseff. Even more pointedly, the palette and mirror appear in the work as a frequent motif (fig. 20). She participates in the demystification of, and the analytic demonstration of agency found at the easel as the artist. She documents her transformation from model to artist while acknowledging the duality of roles in the image. Each resides within the self. Through these ritualistic performances of self orchestrated on the canvas, Valadon affirmed her identity as an artist.

Suzanne Valadon insisted, in her own way, on equality in the art world. Beginning on the model’s platform made her uniquely adept at capturing the real bodies in front of her. In doing so, she presented an honest portrayal of the working-class woman whose socio-economic status precluded strict adherence to codes of conduct. Her paintings stand in opposition to voyeuristic portrayals by her contemporaries. Through her work, Valadon disrupted notions of respectability and agitated societal constructions of gender identity. Reflecting on her career in a conversation

[112] hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators,” 463, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvxcrv1h.54.

with art critic Francis Carco, Valadon proclaimed, “My work is finished and the only satisfaction I gain from it is that I have never surrendered, I have never betrayed anything that I believed in.”[113]

[113] Jennifer Higgie, *The Mirror and the Palette: Rebellion, Revolution, and Resilience Five Hundred Years of Women’s Self Portraits*, (New York: Pegasus Books, 2021).

Conclusion

Nineteenth-century French art is never far from the spotlight – whether in blockbuster exhibitions at leading American museums or through new approaches in scholarship, such as the reexamination Manet's *Olympia*. Despite its prevalence and popularity, women artists from this time period remain "an ignored, little-understood force," and an absence exists in this material since the 1990s.[114] This thesis redresses this gap by analyzing the accomplishments of three women artists practicing in France at the conclusion of the nineteenth century. By challenging the exclusionary institutional structures, policies, and practices; Hélène Bertaux, Marie Bashkirtseff, and Suzanne Valadon created their own systems of influence and ideology cultivated through female-centric networks. Hélène Bertaux utilized her privileged status and political influence to pave the way for women's access to formerly all-male artistic spaces; Marie Bashkirtseff took advantage of private education to solidify a legacy for herself; and Suzanne Valadon shirked the constraints of the artistic institution. A web of influence extends outward from Bertaux, Bashkirtseff, and Valadon, and outside of their immediate circles were a myriad of women artists, models, and gallerists. Replicating this approach of institutional analysis provides an opportunity to revisit and nuance the careers of women artists in the nineteenth century.

Rather than question their efficacy or success, examining women's engagement with or rejection of the establishment presents an opportunity to consider the practice of female institution building.[115] Although primarily used by American second wave feminists to assess

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[114] Lepage, *Madame Léon Bertaux,* 61."Une force ignorée, méconnue, retardée dans son essor est celle de la femme artistse. Une espèce de préjugé social pèse encore sur elle, et, cependant chaque année, le nombre des femmes qui se vouent à l'art, va grossissant, avec une rapidité effrayante…"

[115] Estelle Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930," *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 3 (1979) 513, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3177511.

women's political activities, the general framework that promotes the creation of all women organizations to effect political and cultural change applies here. By studying the relationships of women artists and their networks, a clearer picture emerges of the boundaries of participation and the strategies they used to create art anyway. This investigation provides a more complex view of women artists and the ways in which they harnessed their agency to effect change and can expand to include other members of the Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs, students at the Académie Julian, and colleagues of Suzanne Valadon. Together, these women artists are hardly "une force ignorée."

Figures

Figure 1. Hélène Bertaux. *Jeune Gaulois Prisonnier*. 1867. Marble. Musée d'arts de Nantes.

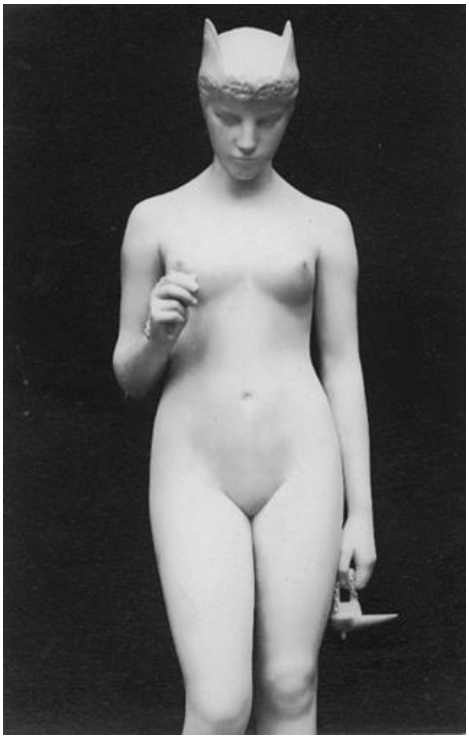

Figure 2. Hélène Bertaux. *Psyché sous l'empire du mystère*. 1889. Marble. Musée d'Orsay.

Figure 3. Marie Bashkirtseff. *In the Studio*. 1881. Oil on canvas. Dnipropetrovsk State Art Museum, Ukraine.

Figure 4. Marie Bashkirtseff. *Self-Portrait with Palette*. 1883. Oil on canvas. Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nice.

Figure 5. Jacques Louis David. *Self-Portrait*. 1794. Oil on canvas. Louvre Museum.

Figure 6. Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun. *Self-Portrait in a Straw Hat*. 1782. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art London.

Figure 7. Berthe Morisot. *Self-Portrait*. 1885. Oil on canvas. Musée Marmottan Monet.

Figure 8. Marie Bashkirtseff. *Douleur de Nausicaa*. 1884. Bronze. Musée d'Orsay.

Figure 9. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. *The Sacred Grove, Beloved of the Arts and the Muses*. 1884-1889. Oil on canvas. The Art Institute of Chicago.

Figure 10. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. *The Hangover*. 1887-1889. Oil on canvas. Harvard Art Museums, Fogg Museum.

Figure 11. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. *Madame Suzanne Valadon, artiste-peintre*. 1885. Oil on canvas. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

Figure 12. Suzanne Valadon. *Joy of Life*. 1911. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 13. Paul Cézanne. *The Large Bathers*. 1900-1906. Oil on canvas. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Figure 14. Pierre-Auguste Renoir. *Les grandes baigneuses*. 1884-1887. Oil on canvas. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

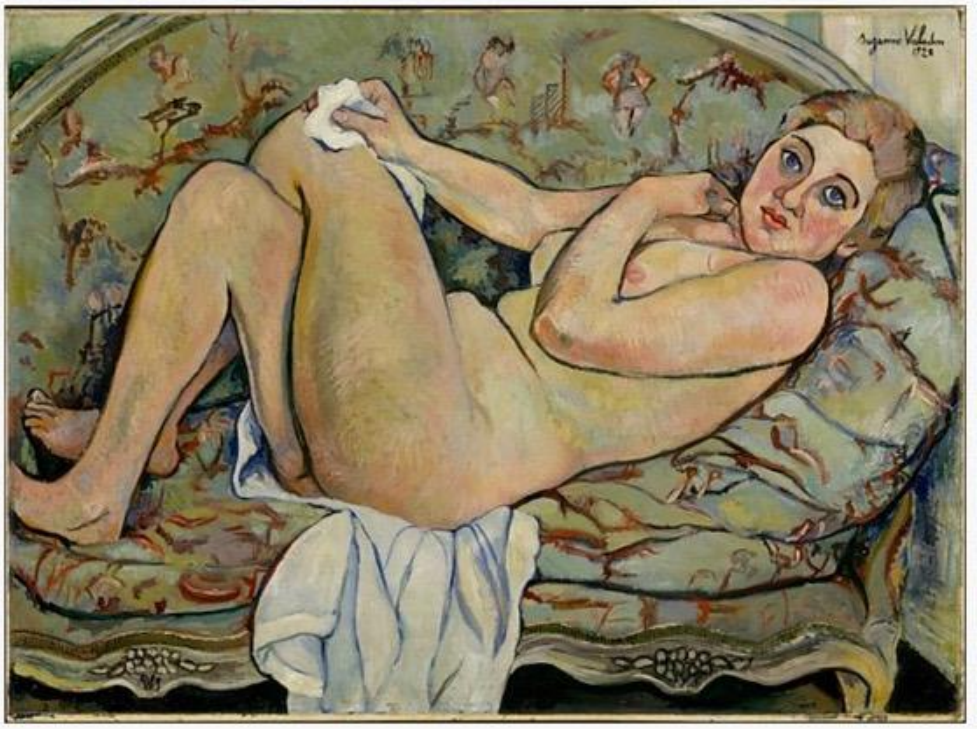

Figure 15. Suzanne Valadon. *Nu couché*. 1928. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 16. Édouard Manet. *Olympia*. 1863. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay.

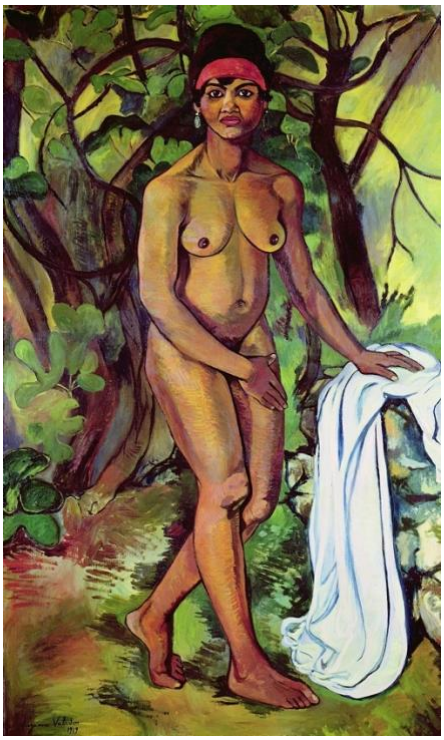

Figure 17. Suzanne Valadon. *Vénus noire*. 1919. Oil on canvas. Centre Pompidou.

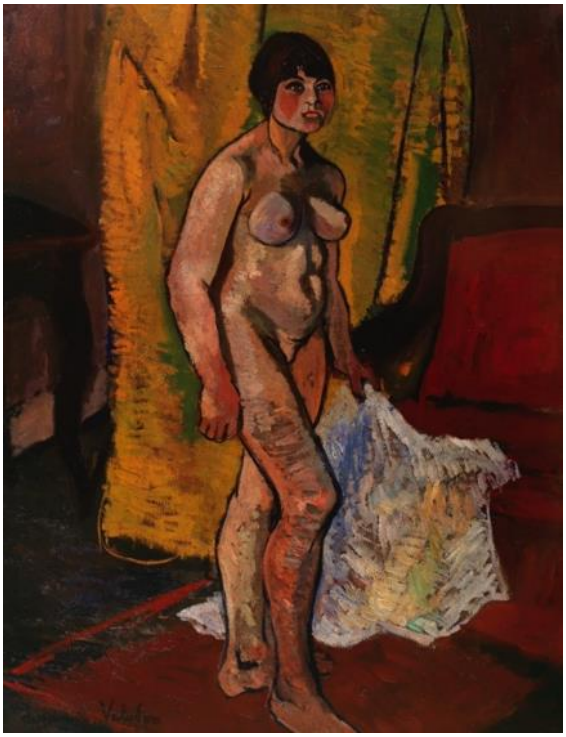

Figure 18. Suzanne Valadon. *Nu à la draperie blanche*. 1914. Oil on canvas. Musée Municipal Paul-Dini.

Figure 19. Suzanne Valadon. *Autoportrait*. 1883. Graphite, charcoal, and pastel on paper. Centre Pompidou.

Figure 20. Suzanne Valadon. *Autoportrait*. 1927. Oil on panel. Musée de Montmartre.

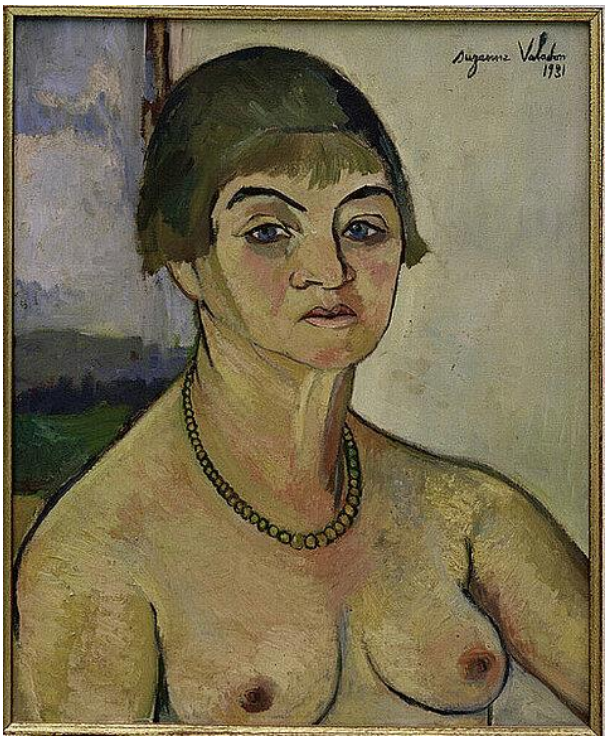

Figure 21. Suzanne Valadon. *Autoportrait aux seins nus*. 1931. Oil on canvas. Collection Bernardeau,
Paris.

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ABSTRACT

‘UNE FORCE IGNORÉE’: THREE NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH WOMEN ARTISTS

by

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Despite decades of rhetoric and revolution, the efforts to achieve equality did not extend to gender equality in nineteenth-century France. The ideology that presupposed women’s inferiority infiltrated the foundation of society, shaping institutions that deprived women access solely on account of their gender. Three women artists disrupted traditional constructions of gender identity and broke through social norms to establish artistic careers: Hélène Bertaux, Marie Bashkirtseff, and Suzanne Valadon. They bypassed institutional barriers to create alternative routes of access to artistic education and exhibition forums. This thesis addresses how these three women artists resisted the patriarchal institutions of artistic production in nineteenth-century France, created opportunities for themselves, and established networks of like-minded women in pursuit of equality during the Third Republic.

Hélène Bertaux, Marie Bashkirtseff, and Suzanne Valadon defied society’s expectations as women artists in nineteenth-century France. For Bertaux and Bashkirtseff, collaboration and collective action became invaluable tools in the deconstruction of institutionalized barriers. Bertaux organized women artists and created a space for expression, advocacy, and debate. Bashkirtseff was vocal in advocating for equal access for women artists into academic education, and she recorded vital information of her lived experience as a woman artist. By moving from model to artist, Valadon disrupted notions of respectability, agitated societal constructions of gender identity, and allied herself with woman gallerist, Berthe Weill. Each of these women relied on other women within the artistic community to act as advocates and create opportunity. By refusing to tacitly engage with the institutions that dictated the boundaries of gender in nineteenth-century France, Bertaux, Bashkirtseff, and Valadon created their own systems of influence and ideology cultivated through relationships of women. In examining their lives and works, I provide insight into how women artists engendered agency through collective action.