

American
Women:
20th
Century



American Women: 20th Century originated more than a year ago with invitations being extended to a selected list of America's leading women artists. They, and others prominent in the field, were asked to recommend for inclusion in the exhibition an "up-and-coming" female artist who, in their opinion, was a bright star on the artistic horizon.

This exhibition, therefore, combining the work of the "established" and "new", reflects the scope and diversity of the creative production of our women artists from as early as 1916 (Georgia O'Keeffe's **Red and Green IV**) to Cecile Abish's work created on the front lawn of the Center only days before the exhibition opening.

This is not a protest show. But we readily admit that part of the motivation for its organization is to partially redress the wrongs perpetrated for generations against women artists through discriminatory practices.

Our principal aim, however, is to offer our viewing public the opportunity to share the marvelous vitality and excitement that emanates from and surrounds the work created by these artists. Viva la femme!! Viva la art!!

An exhibition of this nature is always dependent for its success on the efforts of many people. We are deeply indebted to the artists, their agents and galleries for the excellent cooperation they have so enthusiastically given. A special note of appreciation is due the many collectors and institutions who have generously loaned works to the exhibition.

Our thanks go to Ida Kohlmeyer for giving us valuable counsel and for writing the Introduction to this catalogue. Her stature as an artist and her perceptive insight has added immeasurably to the exhibition. Judy Geary, Registrar for the Center, has provided invaluable assistance in coordinating the many details involved in assembling the exhibition and in the preparations for the catalogue. Kirby Jeneson, Lee Thomas and the other members of the maintenance staff have made a special contribution by assisting with the receiving, uncrating and installation of the exhibition pieces.

Thanks, also, to Jack Wagner and the Nationwide Paper Company, Broadview, Illinois, for underwriting a substantial portion of the costs of the catalogue. Terry Feldman, of Feldman Printing, was very helpful with the myriad details involved in the catalogue preparation, design and printing. William Zemprelli of Ollendorff Fine Arts, New York, assisted greatly as transportation agent for the exhibition.

Lowell Adams
Director

Preface and Acknowledgements

Until the almost immediate past, women artists have been undiscovered, unexposed, underrated, underpaid, and underestimated. They have received, more or less, the same treatment in all branches of endeavor. John Stuart Mill, in his still viable **The Subjection of Women**¹ wrote, "In the case of women, each individual of the 'subject-class' is in a chronic state of bribery and intimidation combined". Although there have been laws on the books to assure equal rights to women, these have been largely administered by men who were either disinterested, anxious to maintain the status quo, or openly antagonistic. "Man must fear the effort woman is making to create herself, not to be born of Adam's rib".²

This state of affairs persisted until just yesterday. After demonstrations and near riots, the laws have now been fortified and clearly demand equality between the sexes.

The idea that women are weaker or lesser intellectually, emotionally and artistically has been the evaluation of females for centuries and any thinking to the contrary seemed unnatural. This prejudice extended very naturally to the estimate of women as creative artists. They received little encouragement from teachers, parents or husbands and had small hope of earning a living as artists . . . it was hard enough for men to do that. They received repeated rejections by gallery directors and if they succeeded in having their work shown, they usually received curtailed or hurried critical reviews.³ All this, plus their seeming non-existence to museum directors, silenced the voice of fifty percent of the American creative spirit. A remarkable feat but immoral and destructive. The established hierarchy could not conceive of women having sufficient dedication, determination and passion required to produce "real art".

But, in all truth, such discrimination was not totally accountable for all the traumas and disappointments of women artists, and I, for one, admit it. Deficiencies and mediocrity (which may in part be traced to discriminatory practices) were responsible for some rejections and disappointments. But vehement and justifiable indignation was aroused when critical evaluation was not dealt out equally to men artists. Then, too, there was that army of non-professional females, usually women with sufficient means to hire servants to handle their household duties who infiltrated where angels feared to tread. Many moderate talents were blown up over life-size, to the consternation of more deserving and less aggressive men and women, and to the confusion of an already perplexed and undiscerning public.

Now, however, with the vast number of well educated, technically equipped women who have a mature conception and perception of what art is all about and with a justifiable determination to se-

Introduction

Ida Kohlmeyer

cure equal rights (not preferential treatment) the scene is changing before our eyes. How equalization of rights and opportunities for men and women in the world of art will affect women in their traditional roles as wife and mother remains to be seen. Perhaps the bread-winning and child-rearing henceforth will be a more joint effort between man and wife, which may be all to the good in our extremely matriarchal American family set-up.

Lowell Adams (may his tribe increase) and other museum heads in the United States who have bestirred themselves on behalf of women artists are the John Stuart Mills of our day. So far, their ranks are thin and they take their places among the heroic. One can easily list exhibitions which have been organized for the purpose of presenting to the world an accurate estimate of the distinguished work being done by women today and these date from just two years ago.⁴ As has happened in the past, European countries have sometimes waved banners for American artists before large scale approval has been given by American institutions to the same artists. Such an exhibition is **American Women Artists** now being held in Kunsthalle, Hamburg. The Whitney Museum aired works by women from its permanent collection in 1971 and has the distinction of having held more solo shows by women than any other Manhattan museum. However, its choices for such magnanimous gestures were such as O'Keeffe and Nevelson, the Amazons, so one cannot applaud the Whitney too enthusiastically for inordinate courage.

So **American Women: 20th Century** is not unique, but it is rare and even extraordinary in some aspects. For instance, one would not expect Peoria, Illinois to be the vanguard hailing the achievements of a minority, cultural group when so called art centers have not yet made similar gestures. Mr. Adams, along with his board, deserves unanimous applause.

The composition of the show is interesting. Mr. Adams invited a group of established artists who, in turn, were asked to select "up-and-coming" artists to fill out the ranks. The exhibitors were permitted to select what they wished to show. In so doing, Mr. Adams relinquished much of his control and personal taste and emphasized the female role in the venture. The list of exhibitors cannot be denied its authority in the enlarging field of distinguished female artists of America. Of course, some names are missing but this is unavoidable due to physical and financial limitations and sometimes inability of artists to cooperate.

The exhibition is contrapuntal, syncopated, varied, full of surprises. Sentimentality and sensationalism are absent. So is shallow virtuosity. A spirit of adventure pervades the show. There seems to be a dissatisfaction with merely "successful" products

and rather a desire and urgency to test limits, to search out the inevitable, to look into the future. Technology (a great leveler that blurs distinctions between the sexes) is evident, and is imaginatively combined with intuition. However, there is less concern in the exhibition with technology than with handmade objects. Whether this is universally so among women artists I cannot say. Anais Nin wrote "It was woman who reacted against the great dehumanization of man by industry, the machine".⁵

American Women: 20th Century is exceptional in its steady, high quality accomplishment. Influences are detectable in some of the works but who has not been guilty of emulating first loves? This is the way artists nurture themselves in their search for self which is the major concern of all artists. Individuality is the creative pulp which generates art or any other creative effort and is therefore the Holy grail.

It would be interesting to know how many spectators, without being so informed, would suspect that this exhibition was a one gender effort. And, of those, how many would guess the right sex. Art is sexless; the person who makes it does not and can not alter that fact. Such adjectives as lyrical, quiet, calm, tender, which are usually associated with work by women, cannot be used categorically so. If they were, which words would we use to describe Botticelli, Fragonard, Renoir, Redon and more recently men like Cy Frombley, Larry Poons (before his recent works) and even Hans Hofmann in those incredibly delicate canvases that look as if they had been painted by blind butterflies who inadvertently brushed their pigmented wings across their surfaces? Within the oeuvre of a single artist there may be examples that are virile (whatever that means), bombastic, forceful, opposed by gentler, more poetic ones. Do we say such artists are hermaphrodites, and do the characteristics traditionally attributed to the different sexes in any way alter the profundity, excellence or value of the work?

Do I protest too much? I do not think so.

But change is taking place at such speed at all levels in the world of art that had I been asked to write this introduction just a year ago, my approach would have had to be far more irascible, embittered, and filled with political tirade. I believe if I am asked to write an introduction a few years hence for a similar exhibition composition of which might be **accidentally** all female and not so prearranged, politics and sexual discrimination will not be issues. I would have preferred to evaluate this exhibition entirely on its aesthetic merits but under present circumstances I felt it important to dwell on historic and social facts so as to sharply focus a still uncommon event in the art world.

With tensions relaxing for women artists, one quickly forgets the Olympian efforts which were required to sustain them against society's unrelenting demands, lack of encouragement and opportunity, unfair competitive treatment, persistent fall-out from male chauvinism plus the energy, dedication and zeal implicit in a creative life. It is a sociological phenomenon that the long repressed are always ready and equipped to accept freedom when it finally comes. Moses appeared and witness the able, capable and brilliant leaders among blacks today.

Similarly, American women artists produced their leaders, and following close behind comes a generation of younger women, prepared, gifted, dedicated, buoyant, straight forward. (Beginnings are poignantly saturated with zest, courage and by necessity, originality.) **American Women: 20th Century** is a stunning assemblage of the productivity, creativity, and maturity of these women. And it is a cheering example of the expanding freedoms of our time.

The future looks clear, clean, uncluttered.

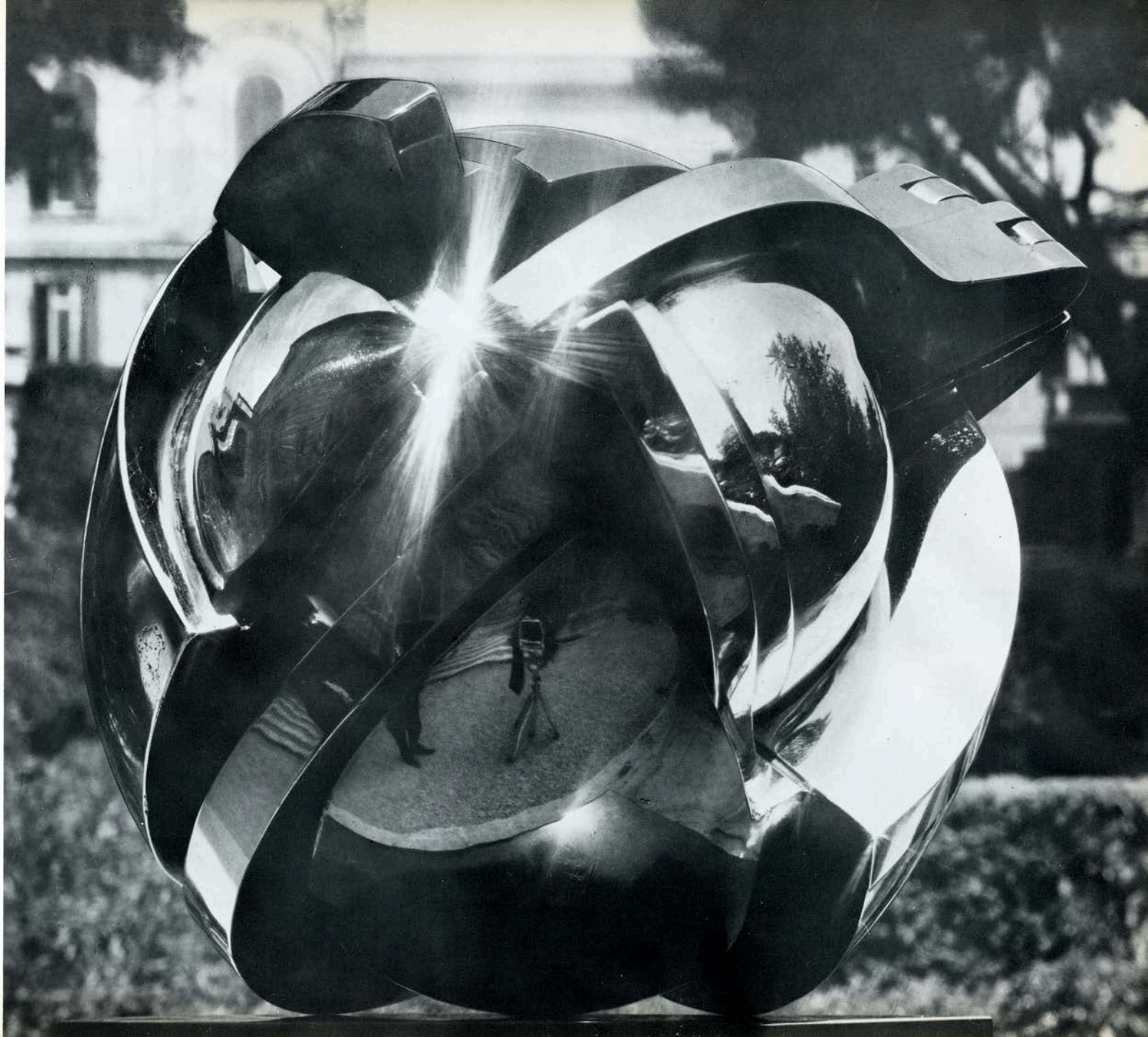
Ida Kohlmeyer
August, 1972

1. John Stuart Mill, **The Subjection of Women**, M.I.T. Press, 1869, P. 12.
2. **Diary of Anaiis Nin**, Vol. I., 1931-1934, The Swall Press and Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., N. Y. 1-276.
3. **Six Differentials in Art Exhibition Reviews**, a Statistical Study by June Wayne. Copyright by Tamarind Lithography Workshop Inc., 1972.
4. **Women**, North Carolina Museum of Art, 1972; **26 Contemporary Women Artists**, Newark Museum, 1971; **Women**, John M. Kohler Art Center, Sheboygan, Wis. 1971.
5. op. cit., **Diary of Anaiis Nin**, p. 276.



Luise Kaish

- left 41 VOYAGE II (cover)
stainless steel
22'' x 21'' x 8''
- opposite 42 IN THE BEGINNING #4
bronze
10'' x 11''



LUISE KAISH

40. VOYAGE I
stainless steel
28½" x 28" x 4½"
41. *VOYAGE II
stainless steel
22" x 21" x 8"
42. *IN THE BEGINNING #4
bronze
10" x 11"

Luise Kaish was born in Atlanta, Georgia. She studied at Syracuse University where she received her BFA and MFA in sculpture. She studied with Ivan Mestrovic and has worked in Taller Grafico, Escuela de Pintura y Escultura, Mexico, D. F.

One-Man Exhibitions: Five one man shows; represented by Staempfli Gallery, New York.

Group Exhibitions: Museum of Modern Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Whitney Museum, New York; New School, New York; International Biennial of Religious Art; University of Illinois Biennials; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York; Philadelphia Museum; Finch College Museum of Art. (partial listing)

Public Collections: Whitney Museum, New York; St. Paul Art Center, St. Paul, Minnesota; Jewish Museum, New York; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia; Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, New York; General Mills Corporation, Minnesota; Amoco Corporation, New York; Lowe Museum, Miami, Florida; private collections.

Commissioned Work: Container Corporation of America; Temple B'rith Kodesh, Rochester, New York; Holy Trinity Mission Seminary, Silver Springs, Maryland; Jewish Museum, New York; Temple Beth Shalom, Wilmington Delaware; Temple Israel, Westport, Connecticut; Syracuse University, New York.

Awards: Louis Comfort Tiffany Grant, Creative Sculpture; Guggenheim Fellowship Grant, Creative Sculpture; Rome Prize Fellowship, Sculpture.

IDA KOHLMMEYER

43. *STRIAE NO. 4
oil on linen
37½" x 49½"
44. *STRIAE NO. 5
oil on linen
53½" x 51"
45. *HORIZONTAL CRUX NO. 1
oil on linen
42" x 47½"

Ida Kohlmeyer was born in New Orleans. She studied at Newcomb College, New Orleans, Louisiana, where she received her BA and MFA degrees. Ms. Kohlmeyer has studied with Hans Hofman and Mark Rothko and has taught at Newcomb College. She is presently painting full time.

One-Man Exhibitions: The Glade Gallery, New Orleans, 1965, 1967, 1969, 1971; The Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1967; DuBose Gallery, Houston, Texas, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1972; Heath Gallery Atlanta, Georgia, 1969, 1971; The High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia, 1972; Indiana State University Art Department, Terre Haute, Indiana, 1972; Delgado Museum of Art, New Orleans, 1966, 1967; Ruth White Gallery, New York, 1965; Henri Gallery, Washington, D. C., 1966, 1968; Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1967; Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1968; Louisiana State University, Alexandria, Louisiana, 1969; Galerie Simonne Stern, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1971, 1972; Greenville County Museum, Greenville, South Carolina, 1967; Memphis Academy of Art, Memphis, Tennessee, 1967; Wofford College, Spartanburg, South Carolina, 1968; Marion Koogler McNay Art Institute, San Antonio, Texas, 1968; Pensacola Art Center, Pensacola, Florida, 1969.

Group Exhibitions: Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, BIENNIAL OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN PAINTING, 1967; Corcoran Biennial, AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS TRAVELING SHOW, 1965, 1967, 1968; Knoedler Galleries, New York, ART ACROSS AMERICA, 1965; High Museum, Atlanta, Georgia and Whitney Museum, New York, AN ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN AMERICAN PAINTING, 1966; Houston Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas, NEW ACQUISITIONS, 1967; Harvard University, Art Department, 1967; Yale University, Fine Arts Department, 1968; The Toledo Museum of Fine Arts, Toledo, Ohio, 1968; The Cleveland Institute of Art, Cleveland, Ohio, 1968; La Jolla Museum of Art, La Jolla, California, 1968; Bertha Schaefer Gallery, New York, 1969; 3rd Bienal de Arte Coltejer, Medellin, Colombia, S. A., 1972.

Public Collections: Delgado Museum of Art, New Orleans; Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, New York; Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts; Oklahoma Art Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Centro Artístico, Baranquilla, Colombia, S. A.; Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, South Carolina; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia; Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska; National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D. C.; Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia; Marion Koogler McNay Institute, San Antonio, Texas;

The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.; Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana.

Statement: "I used to worry about my work looking NOW, but not anymore. Anachronistic art is the product of only two ingredients - intellect and craft, and, wearing blinders. I'm not that way; I don't function like that. Now I am only anxious that my work attain its highest objective - communication, and never its lowest, which is decoration. "

LEE KRASNER

46. SHATTERED LIGHT, 1954
oil and collage on board
48" x 34"
47. *PRIMEVAL RESURGENCE, 1961
oil on canvas
76¼" x 57"
48. *TRANSITION, 1968
oil on canvas
68" x 100"
- Marlborough Gallery Inc.
New York

Lee Krasner was born in Brooklyn, New York. She studied at Cooper Union, Woman's Art School; at the National Academy of Design and at City College of New York. Ms. Krasner studied with Hans Hofmann, has participated in Federal Arts Project (mural), active in Artists Union and was employed as artist on WPA Federal Art Project Mural Division. In 1940 she exhibited with American Abstract Artists Group, in 1941 she was invited by John Graham to participate in exhibition FRENCH AND AMERICAN PAINTING, McMillan Gallery, New York. Ms. Krasner married Jackson Pollock on October 25, 1945. In 1959 she executed two mosaic murals for Uris Brother of New York.

One-Man Exhibitions: Whitechapel Gallery, London, 1965; The Arts Council of Great Britain, England; touring exhibition seen at museums in York, Hull, Nottingham, Newcastle, Manchester and Cardiff, 1966; University Art Gallery, The University of Alabama, 1967; Marlborough Gerson Gallery, New York, 1968; Marlborough Gallery, New York, Gallery Reese Palley, San Francisco, RECENT GOUACHES, 1969.