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Review of *American Women Modernists: The Legacy of Robert Henri, 1910-1945* Edited by Marian Wardle

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American Women Modernists: The Legacy of Robert Henri, 1910-1945. Edited by Marian Wardle. Foreword by Campbell B. Gray. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Museum of Art; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005. xii + 274 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, index. \$34.95 paper.

There is a common tendency in art history to lump artists and art styles into simplified categories, and early-twentieth-century modernist art is no exception. While the term broadly encompassed the ideas of individuality and social diversity, it later became equated with abstract art and an aggressive style, dominated by men. In this book, Marian Wardle and six other female scholars set out to broaden the modern art parameters and reinsert some two hundred professional women artists into the picture. Because Robert Henri taught thousands of men and women over a thirty-five-year period, the unifying thread is this astute, modernist teacher

and, more importantly, the female students under his tutelage.

Wardle effectively lays the groundwork in the opening chapter by characterizing Henri as a teacher and describing the diversity of art being produced in American modernist society. The essays that follow introduce readers to the world of women artists beginning with the under-appreciated decorative arts and printmaking. Betsy Fahlman writes about the increased opportunities for women in art education tempered by the lack of expectation for their achievement, while Erika Doss explores women outside the classroom and social pressures such as marriage and child rearing and their impact on art careers. The final chapters discuss exhibition opportunities, the social and cultural context surrounding women, and their role in transforming American life. Also included is a list of four hundred biographies of women artists who studied under Henri.

The book successfully brings to light many unknown yet determined and talented women artists working in the years 1910 to 1945. It is abundantly and beautifully illustrated. Most important, it expands the scope of what is remembered as masculine modern art to include many unique and varied forms of artwork produced by women.

Based on the book's title, one might initially believe Henri heralded women, but this is not necessarily the case. While he encouraged his students to reject tradition, experience real life, and develop a sense of individual style, evidence indicates that Henri chose few women to include in his own exhibitions and that he was more supportive of his male students. Ultimately the success of these artists can be attributed to their own hard work and endurance; but in a world where women were new players, Henri can be credited for his progressive if indeterminate mentorship in their pursuit of art in a modernist light.

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